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## How to succeed at volunteering – for youth

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**Audience:** Youth volunteers (grade 7 and up), parents, teachers and others working with youth.

### What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the offering of your time, energy and skills of your own free will. Volunteering will help you gain new skills and experiences that will look great on your resume. You can make new friends, try new things and, most of all, you'll have fun!

To be successful at volunteering you should be prepared and know what to expect. You need to know what you want and what you can give to find the best volunteer position for you.

### Know yourself

Make lists of what you **have to give** as a volunteer by asking yourself:

- What qualities/skills do I have to offer?
- What are my strengths?
- What do I value?
- What are my interests?

Make lists of what you **want to gain** from your volunteer position by asking yourself:

- What skills do I want to develop or work on?
- What would I like to try or learn?
- What careers would I like to explore?
- What community issues would I like to work on?

When you are making your lists, make **NO WAY** ones as well. That way you will also know what you definitely don't want to do as a volunteer.

### Know your limits

Once you have recognized what you have to give to an agency and what you want to get in return, you need to decide your limits.

### **Time**

- What is your schedule like?
- How much time do you have to give?
- Can you make a long term commitment?

### **Resources**

- What resources do you have? For example, a volunteer position may require you to buy a uniform. Do you have the money to do that? They may need you to own special supplies.
- What will be your method of travel? For example, will you walk to your job, get a ride, or take a bus?

### **Know your options**

- There are many agencies to volunteer for, so research your options. You may need to try a few volunteer positions before you find the right one for you.
- The lists you have made will help you to narrow down your choices. The agencies you choose should match what you want.
- Not all agencies will accept youth volunteers due to age restrictions. There will also be different commitment expectations at each agency.
- Choose agencies that know how to work with youth volunteers and who will treat you with respect and as an equal.
- Ideas for finding volunteer opportunities: volunteer centres, family/friends, teachers, the Internet or libraries.

If you are having trouble deciding what position you want, start small. Don't disappoint yourself by taking on something that you can't finish.

### **Know what to expect when you are ready to start**

#### **Applying**

- Agencies usually require you to fill out an application form to become a volunteer.
- Double check your application to make sure it is complete before you send it in.
- If you are under 18, your parents will probably have to sign your application.
- It is always a good idea to attach a recent resume to your application.

## Screening and reference checks

- Agencies have different screening processes depending on the volunteer position. A **criminal records check** is a common screening process that involves filling out a form and taking it to your local police or RCMP station (there may be a fee, depending on the agency). At the station, they will check for any prior police records and send you a printout of your record. Then, you can take this printout to the agency.
- Most agencies will ask you for **personal references**. You will provide them with the names and phone numbers of a few adults who know you well such as teachers, coaches, neighbours or people you baby-sit for. The agency then contacts your references with questions about your skills and abilities.

## Interviews

- Dress appropriately. You don't have to buy a whole new outfit for the interview, but remember: no jeans, rips or frays.
- They will ask you a lot of questions, so be prepared to talk about yourself—politely and honestly. A volunteer interview can last anywhere from 10 minutes to over an hour.
- Ask questions to show you are interested. Examples of questions to ask: Is there a trial period for volunteers? Can I see the area where I will spend my time? What supplies will I need? Who is my supervisor? How many youth volunteers do you have?

## Orientation and Training

- An orientation will help you to become familiar with the agency.
- Training will teach you what you need to know to do your job.
- Orientation and training might be done together or separately, and may come in the form of handouts, information sessions or workshops.

## Supervision

- As a volunteer, you will have a supervisor. Your supervisor might be the agency's volunteer co-ordinator or someone else.
- Your supervisor is there for you to learn from. You should go to him or her if you need help or have a concern.
- Your supervisor will evaluate the work you are doing and give you constructive feedback.

## Know what to expect once you are involved

All volunteers have rights and responsibilities when it comes to their positions. Your **rights** as a youth volunteer are:

- to receive proper screening, interviewing, orientation, training and supervision
- to be involved, heard, respected and treated as an equal

- to be given a job that is meaningful and challenging
- to be given constructive feedback

Your **responsibilities** as a youth volunteer are:

- to be on time
- to do what you said you would do
- to be a positive team member
- to let your supervisor know if you are having problems
- to be mature and honest when it is time to leave your position

### **Know when to quit**

It's important to remember that it is okay to leave a volunteer position if it's not the right one for you. It might not be the right job if:

- you're not challenged
- it's not what you wanted
- you're not treated properly
- you no longer have the time

If you are going to quit your volunteer position, you need to give proper notice and talk to your supervisor. Proper notice means that instead of just leaving or not coming in, you tell him or her, either in person or with a letter, that you are leaving your job at least two weeks before you quit. Explain why this isn't the position for you—your supervisor may have suggestions for another one!

If it is time to quit, don't be discouraged. The right volunteer position for you is out there!

## References and resources

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## Acknowledgement

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