

# A Springboard to Tomorrow

Creating Volunteer Programs for Young People  
that Encourage the Development of Skills

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VOLUNTARY ACTION

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## Introducing this guide

THEORISTS IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT HAVE LONG STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE of providing young people with realistic experiences that will allow them to better understand both themselves and the world of salaried work. With today's youth poised to enter a job market dramatically different from that of a generation ago, the need for such experiences is greater now than ever before. Volunteer work offers great potential in addressing this need.

As young people prepare to make the transition from school to the workplace, they can gain enormous advantages from volunteering. It provides them with opportunities for personal growth, practical work experience and skills development. Grounded in the ethic of social responsibility, volunteering is also a form of education for citizenship that young people will carry over to their adult civic life.

In the tough economic times of the 1990s, voluntary organizations across the country are obliged to meet growing needs with shrinking resources. It is thus vital to ensure an adequate corps of trained volunteers in our communities. Although their potential has been largely untapped to date, young people have a lot to offer as volunteers.

The ultimate aim of this book is to encourage more youth involvement in Canadian voluntary organizations. Given their mandate to promote volunteerism at the community level, volunteer centres are seen as the primary target audience. As the hub of a broad network of local organizations, volunteer centres are in an excellent position to champion this cause. Many are already doing that.

The information provided in this guide will, hopefully, also prove useful to voluntary organizations interested either in developing a volunteer program specifically for young people or in integrating more youth volunteers into existing programs. The suggestions are relevant both to young people who approach an organization on their own and to students who are involved in community work as part of a school-based program.

The framework proposed here for creating youth volunteer programs focuses on the development of skills as the 'hook' for attracting youth volunteers. Advice is offered on how to help young people cultivate specific skills that can be transferred to the labour market. While specifically designed for young people in the 16-to-24 age bracket, the approach proposed could, in fact, be used for volunteers in any age group.

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JL

# 1

## Today's Youth: the Economic and Social Context

### **Economic forces shaping the future for youth**

YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY FACE UNPRECEDENTED PRESSURES AS THEY PREPARE for the future. Entry into the labour market has become very challenging in the 1990s, and jobs are far less secure. Many occupations have been altered in significant ways, and some traditional jobs have already disappeared. Constant change now characterizes the job market.

The unemployment rate for the 16-to-24 age group is much higher than for older Canadians. Jobs are particularly hard to find for those who have few skills. The need for unskilled workers has already declined so drastically that there are scarcely enough jobs for adults, much less for young people who have had little chance to develop skills.

Only a few decades ago, most young people could find work quickly. The standard of living was on the rise, and their prospects were generally bright, even if they had not had extensive schooling. As long as they were competent and hard-working, their jobs seemed as solid as bedrock. However, the economy and the labour market have changed radically since then — and this trend is expected to continue at an even faster pace.

Technological advance, increasing global competition, shifts in the demand for goods and services, and changes in business practices will have a major impact on tomorrow's job market. The workplace of the future will demand highly skilled and creative workers who are flexible enough to adapt to constant change. It is now taken for granted that the workers of the future will have to change jobs, even occupations, at least several times during their working lives.

Another striking feature of the new economic environment is the need for lifelong learning. To keep up with change and remain employable, virtually everyone will have to continue acquiring new knowledge and skills. The days when education ended with graduation are gone.

Today's workplace is already demanding a higher level of skills — and a different set of skills. More and more jobs require employees who can communicate effectively, work well in a team context, make sound decisions, solve problems and demonstrate creativity.

Opportunities for a 'job with a future' are rapidly shrinking for those who lack the

requisite skills. Without relevant skills, young people will have limited job choices and may face low wages, dead-end jobs, and possibly even chronic unemployment.

On the other hand, new doors are opening for those with the right skills. The link between skills and opportunities is more critical than ever before. Skills are now seen as vital for young people to make a successful transition into the new work environment and to stay employed in a volatile economy.

### **Social factors affecting young people**

The conditions of adolescence and early adulthood are very different from previous generations. In the past, an agricultural and early industrial society required huge numbers of workers, and people were absorbed into the labour force at a very young age.

In modern society, young people have many more years of formal education. The period of youth has increasingly become defined as a time to prepare for entrance into the world of adulthood and employment. Yet, while society compels young people to defer their entry into adult roles, it offers little for them to do in the intervening years. There is no doubt that this perception of youth as a waiting period has influenced what young people are expected to do in our society and has severely restricted the social roles they are allowed to play. The experiences open to young people are very limited. There are few opportunities to take on responsibilities, do meaningful work and make a positive contribution to the community. As a result, most young people are isolated from the productive tasks of society.

Ironically, it is precisely at this point in their life that young people begin to define their self-worth in terms of what they are able to do and what kind of impact they have on their surroundings. For this reason, young people urgently need to explore alternatives that will be available to them as adults. By denying them a meaningful role in our society, we prolong their dependence, undermine their self-esteem, and impair their capacity to take action. Society asks them to take on a nebulous future without the proper preparation.

In addition, many of the messages that young people get from the community are negative. According to the popular stereotype, young people are self-absorbed, aimless, resistant to authority, apathetic, and devoid of concern for anyone beyond their immediate circle of peers. The media emphasis on youth crime and violence has also fuelled this negative image of young people in general. Most adults probably do not hold such unfair and prejudiced views of young people. However, research shows clearly that the vast majority of young people think that they do. And, it is likely that this perception has been an added disincentive to young people to become more involved in their community.

Because of these social factors, young people are a volunteer resource that remains largely untapped to date. Yet, experience has shown that the problem is not a lack of willingness to get involved on the part of young people. When respected for their abilities and given the proper support, most young people are, in fact, keen to become active in their community.



## 2

# Young People and Volunteerism

### **Young people as a community resource**

FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, THE ADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATING youth volunteers are immediate and practical. With the proper training and support, there is virtually no limit to what young people are able to do. Collectively, they can make an enormous contribution to the community as a whole.

Whether they serve as front-line volunteers or on committees and boards, young people are valuable assets to our organizations. In addition to their immense energy and enthusiasm, they offer creative ideas and new perspectives. They can also offer input and feedback on programs that provide service to young people. Benefits to the organizations make the investment of time well worthwhile.

If we provide settings where something important depends on their efforts, we show young people that they deserve a significant place in our society. We offer them the opportunity to prove their potential and to use their abilities in ways that are both meaningful to them and useful to our organizations.

Also, when young people channel their talents into helping others and solving community problems, they build personal commitment to their community and to the welfare of its citizens. Through volunteering, they gain a deeper understanding of their own stake in the broader community.

Success feeds on itself. As young people learn new skills, become more competent, and receive recognition for their achievements, they will likely want to get more involved. In encouraging young people to volunteer, we are helping to build the habits and attitudes of good citizens and thus developing a new generation of volunteers. The possibilities are exciting, and the promise is enormous.

### **The potential of volunteer work**

To become competent and responsible adults, young people need opportunities to explore various roles, to learn how to make good decisions and solve problems, to test their judgment under pressure, and to take on leadership roles. Positive, practical experiences are needed for young people to develop strong self-concepts.

Volunteer work can fill the vacuum of experience for young people and thus help

bridge the gulf between formal education and paid work. 'Hands-on' experience as a volunteer can lead to new perspectives and insights that are unlikely to come from textbooks and lectures. It could also give young people the edge when it comes to winning a scholarship or getting into a post-secondary program which restricts enrolment to the most qualified students. Also, some colleges and universities now recognize skills acquired through volunteer work for academic credit.

The National Survey of Volunteer Activity in Canada of 1987 showed that 90 per cent of youth volunteers felt that they had gained skills and/or knowledge in their volunteer roles. As volunteers, young people have a wide range of opportunities to acquire practical knowledge and valuable skills. They have the chance to discover their strengths, display their talents and master new skills. Equally important, young people can learn their personal limits and recognize which skills they need to develop further.

Volunteer work is an excellent way to develop interests and skills for future employment in many areas — public relations, finance, organizational management, education and training, science and technology, arts and culture, sports and recreation, law and justice — not just in social and health services. In fact, volunteering offers a broader spectrum of possibilities for young people than paid jobs. Since voluntary organizations are active in countless areas, the opportunities are almost limitless.

The Conference Board of Canada, together with many other experts, has predicted that employment growth in the 1990s will be primarily in service industries. Job prospects are expected to be particularly good in health and social services (to meet the needs of the aging baby boom population) and in education and training (to meet the need for upgraded skills and reorientation to new careers).

Since there are many volunteer opportunities in these areas, volunteer work is clearly a viable way for young people to gain relevant skills and work experience. In addition, the trend to a service economy means a greater emphasis on 'people skills'. And, what could be a better way to hone these skills than volunteering.

Since more and more employers now accept volunteering as a valid part of work history, volunteer experiences have become marketable in employment settings. Volunteering can thus help young people make a smoother transition to the world of paid work, to a new type of job or to a new career. It also has the potential of improving access to meaningful employment. (To be meaningful, a job must allow us to use our potential and have personal value to us.)

In addition to helping young people get the qualifications they need to find entry-level employment in an area of interest, volunteer work can improve their future prospects in the labour market. It can help make life-long learning an integral part of their adult life.

Given its tremendous potential, volunteer work could be particularly valuable to young people 'at risk'. Because of socio-economic disadvantage, disabilities, or alienation from mainstream culture, certain young people are at greater risk of being lost to society as productive individuals. Their prospects for the future, both as workers and as involved citizens, could become more promising

through positive volunteer experiences.

### **Benefits to young people of volunteering**

Volunteer work is amazingly versatile in that it allows individuals to accomplish multiple objectives, both altruistic and pragmatic. In giving their time to help others, young people are also able to help themselves.

Volunteers and professionals in the field have long felt that volunteer work fosters personal, social, and intellectual development in young people. It can also help young people in future job searches and job interviews. A growing body of research now supports this experience.

The following are examples of the many potential benefits that volunteering offers young people:

#### *Personal growth*

- a positive self-image, increased self-esteem and self-confidence
- increased sense of personal worth and competence; a sense of usefulness, of purpose, of doing something worthwhile
- better understanding of themselves (self-awareness); knowledge of personal abilities, strengths and interests as well as weaknesses and limitations; discovery of hidden talents
- more readiness to accept responsibility, take up challenges and initiatives
- increased ability to manage their own affairs and to persevere even when things are challenging (self-discipline)
- increased ability to work cooperatively with others
- increased comfort with new people and confidence in social interactions
- exposure to new situations, new people and new experiences that can lead to new knowledge and understanding
- openness to explore new roles and situations
- a sense of autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency
- increased ability to influence the direction of their own lives

#### *Social awareness*

- increased understanding of their relationship with the 'human community', encouraging the development of a conscious set of personal values and beliefs
- increased knowledge and understanding of others; capacity to empathize
- increased concern for the welfare of others
- better understanding of cultural and individual differences through exposure to people of diverse backgrounds, races, ages, and abilities
- new insights into equity and social issues
- recognition of the intrinsic value of volunteer work
- a sense of being connected with the greater community; increased loyalty to the community
- more committed to being socially responsible
- increased likelihood of becoming an active citizen and serving the community in the future

### *Work experience*

- `hands on' learning experiences and normal daily work interactions
- practical knowledge of how organizations work and the various structures within them
- experience in working with others at various levels
- insight into the realities of the world of work (for example, recognition that even the most exciting jobs involve some boring tasks)
- opportunity to demonstrate potential
- `qualifications' and experience (that is, a documented work history) to develop a personal résumé or to improve chances of getting accepted into a college or university program
- opportunity to explore interests and try out various roles without having to commit themselves irrevocably
- expanded awareness of career options
- opportunity to experience activities that are related to an occupation of interest (career exploration)
- contacts and potential references to broaden employment possibilities in the future

### *Skills development*

- reinforcement of `self-management' or `work readiness' skills (for example, managing time, assuming responsibility, capacity to see a task through to completion)
- strengthening of existing skills through practice and experience
- development of new work-related skills
- refinement of interpersonal skills through working and communicating with others
- experience in decision-making and problem-solving
- opportunities to develop leadership potential
- interest in continuing to acquire new skills and an increased ability to learn from experience (known as `life-long learning skills')

### 3

## Skills: Building Blocks to the Future

### Understanding skills

'SKILLS' IS A SHORTHAND TERM FOR THE WHOLE SET OF TALENTS, TRAITS and practical knowledge that each of us possesses. Skills are specialized abilities to do things well — the expertise that allows us to use our knowledge readily and effectively to perform a given task.

Rooted in talent or aptitude, skills are developed through a variety of life experiences such as formal education, training, paid work, volunteer work, leisure activities, even our home and family life. Skills are not static; existing skills can be sharpened and new skills learned through practice and experience.

Some skills are closely related to personality or character traits in that they seem to be an intrinsic part of an individual's nature. However, if a trait can be developed further, it can legitimately be considered to be a skill. For example, we can learn to become more organized or to improve our performance in stressful situations.

Regardless of age, we all have our own unique set of skills which build our self-confidence and add to our self-esteem. Certain skills give us a lot of personal satisfaction, and these tend to be the ones that we are best at. To be enjoyable, any job we undertake must allow us to use a high proportion of such skills.

### The concept of skills transfer

Skills are critical to functioning in the world of work, and they are directly related to productivity and job satisfaction. Many skills are not limited to a single type of job, occupation or work setting. Known as *transferable skills*, these can be applied in a wide variety of contexts and tasks.

Most of the skills valued in the today's labour market cut a wide swath across many occupational boundaries and work situations. For example, the ability to communicate effectively in writing is valued in business, government, educational institutions and voluntary organizations alike.

Transferable skills provide a base that enables a person to adapt to new activities, new work situations or even an entirely new type of job with relative ease (that is, with a minimum of preparation and training). For example, the organizational skills used to coordinate a fundraising event for a community charity are

relevant to, and thus transferable to, a wide variety of positions in the salaried workplace.

Skills are used in varying combinations to accomplish specific tasks. If two tasks have elements of a skill in common, mastering one task should help you learn the second.

Transferable skills increase an individual's employability, or capacity to find a job. They are thus *marketable*.

### **Essential skills sought by employers today**

Some skills have a higher 'transfer value' than others. These are the ones that employers and labour leaders judge to be the most crucial, regardless of the employment setting and the precise nature of the job.

After consulting with a broad spectrum of representatives from business, education, labour and government, The Conference Board of Canada's Corporate Council on Education has identified the types of skills that are considered essential for the workforce of the 1990s and beyond. The same views are echoed in recent international reports (cited in the resource list).

The *generic skills* that employers deem to be the most critical for the labour force of today and tomorrow are:

- effective oral and written communication
- logical and critical thinking
- creativity
- the ability to work well with others
- self-confidence and initiative
- energy and desire to get the job done
- a well developed sense of responsibility for one's actions
- eagerness to learn and to grow, both personally and professionally

In addition, current literature stresses the need for workers who are able to cope with and adapt to new challenges in the workplace resulting from rapid technological and organizational change. It is also assumed that computer literacy will be a pre-requisite for most jobs in the future.

### **Categories of skills**

In order to understand more fully the array of possibilities, we need to examine skills in greater detail. It should be noted, however, that there is no generally accepted method — or even terminology — for identifying and categorizing skills. Because of this, there is a tendency for different people to call the same thing by a different name. Also, some specialists group skills very broadly, while others prefer to dissect skills very finely.

It is important to bear in mind that each skill represents a continuum with many levels of difficulty and complexity (known as the 'skills dimension'). Individuals have different levels of competence in a given skill, and different positions will require different levels of a given skill.

Skills can be divided into three major categories, as follows.

### *Core skills*

Core skills form the foundation for a wide variety of tasks and are essential for competence in these tasks. All of these skills are basic in the sense that they are needed by virtually everyone in workplace in the 1990s.

Core skills lie in the area of reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication, thinking, memory, social skills, motor coordination and self-management.

### *Transferable skills*

Transferable skills are a higher order than core skills. Since they are needed in wide variety of jobs in many different organizations, these skills can be transferred from one work setting to another. Thus, workplace skills are, by definition, *marketable*.

Transferable skills relate to such areas as interpersonal relations, oral communication, written communication, teaching, supervising, leadership, organizing people or things, problem-solving, analyzing, creative thinking, and computer literacy.

Every job requires its unique combination of transferable skills, or 'skill clusters'. For example, to work in community relations, you would need interpersonal skills, oral communication skills, creative thinking skills, persuading skills and probably also advanced writing and public speaking skills.

### *Job-specific skills*

Job-specific skills enable a person to undertake tasks related to a particular job or occupation. These skills are generally not transferable (at least not in a broad sense) because they are closely tied to the content of a particular job, to established standards and specifications, or to specialized knowledge.

Three examples are: the operation of a data analysis system which was custom-designed for an organization, the application of specialized knowledge to the development of a new technology, and the identification of specific symptoms related to physical or mental health.

*Please refer to Appendix A for a more comprehensive listing of 'core' and 'transferable' skills, as well as information on the origins of the classification scheme used in this guide.*

## 4

# Developing Skills Through Volunteer Work

### **The link between volunteering and learning**

LEARNING INVOLVES ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND VALUES. THIS can be achieved through formal education, training, practical experience or self-education. Learning is always highly personal and idiosyncratic. It depends on both the potential of the learning environment and the willingness of the individual to take advantage of it.

A new body of research suggests that volunteer work can be a powerful tool in providing useful and enjoyable learning experiences. Most notably, Paul Ilsley (cited in the resource list) has shown that learning is a critical element of volunteering today. For many volunteers, this is what makes all their effort rewarding. And, the quality of the learning experience, as perceived by the volunteers, is closely linked to their level of commitment and length of service.

Whether consciously or not, most volunteers are motivated by opportunities for personal growth and knowledge and by the chance to try new skills and activities in a relatively risk-free environment. Indeed, volunteers today are becoming more aware that volunteer work can help them develop valuable job skills that can be transferred to labour market. Such enlightened self-interest is being encouraged by volunteer centres and others voluntary organizations in recognition of the fact that most volunteers are motivated by a variety of incentives.

The opportunity to build skills and gain practical knowledge can thus be a powerful magnet to attract and retain volunteers — particularly young people.

### **Maximizing opportunities to develop skills**

“Experience is the best teacher”. While there is certainly truth in this adage, learning does not necessarily happen simply because one puts in time. Careful planning and nurturing are usually needed. So, what a motivated individual can get from volunteer service will depend on the quality of the program and the type of support received.

When voluntary organizations create a *healthy learning climate* for their volunteers, the potential for increasing knowledge and developing skills is enormous. Young people, in particular, need challenging and relevant opportunities to



polish existing skills and develop new ones so that they can fortify the foundation for their future.

Differences in interest and ability make volunteers suitable for different tasks. The volunteer job must be meaningful to the volunteer. Satisfaction will be the highest when the assigned role is judged by the volunteer to be useful on a personal level and valued by the organization.

To ensure that young people are placed in *appropriate volunteer roles*, it is important to assess the knowledge, skills and interests that each individual brings to the job. If you explore all options for placement, you can match a volunteers' strengths and interests with the organization's needs and potential. Try to find the most suitable way to use their creative and inquiring minds and take full advantage of their unique talents. You might also consider developing new assignments to allow youth volunteers to develop specific skills.

A key to this approach is to bring the concept of skills into consciousness. Most people take their skills for granted and use a whole host of skills regularly without being aware that they even possess them. Yet *awareness of existing skills* by itself will increase an individual's self-confidence.

When you help your youth volunteers to recognize the skills that they already possess and to see how these might be further developed, you increase their chances for learning and personal growth. Show them how to identify the skills that they could acquire, would like to develop or need to hone in order to achieve their career goals. It is equally important for young people to know which skills they enjoy using and which give them the greatest satisfaction. Also, if young people are aware that certain skills are highly marketable, they will have an added incentive to develop those skills and to use them in tackling new tasks.

To help your youth volunteers unlock their own potential, it is critical to encourage them to *build specific skills* and to assist them in planning their learning. Try to be as flexible as possible and allow them to modify their tasks as their needs and interests change.

*Effective training* will provide volunteers with the skills and knowledge they need to accomplish their assigned tasks. It should be designed to fit with the individual volunteer's abilities, interests, needs, and learning style.

Training that is structured and progressive (incremental) allows volunteers to move continually through higher levels of skills acquisition. Ideally, skills should be taught in a way that goes beyond a given job and prepares the trainee to take on new tasks at a later point.

It is important to *measure specific gains* along the way. Try to encourage your youth volunteers to assess their own perceptions as to what skills they have developed. Get them thinking about future assignments that might develop their skills further. And, wherever possible, try to increase opportunities for young people to become involved in planning and decision-making in your organization.

The learning dimension can be reinforced by encouraging young people to *interpret their volunteer experience*. (This process, known as 'reflection' is an integral part of the concept of service learning for students). You may wish to set aside

time for the youth volunteers to talk about their experiences, either individually or in a group. Invite them to express what they have learned (that is, what they can do now that they would not have been able to do before). Discuss learning goals and encourage self-assessment of skills and interests. This will help bring their learning to a conscious level.

### **Developing a skills profile for volunteer positions**

Whether for a volunteer or a salaried employee, a typical description of a position explains the purpose and the role in the context of the organization, indicates the level of responsibility and outlines the major tasks and responsibilities of the position.

However, if your aim is to cultivate learning and skills development, a much more detailed approach is needed. After breaking the position down into its component parts, analyze each activity to identify what types of skills and knowledge are central (that is, the minimum level of skills needed to perform the tasks). Then, determine which skills a volunteer could develop through training, whether pre-service, in-service or on-the-job. By listing these two sets of skills, you can create a skills profile for each position or task.

When considering which skills could be developed in a given assignment, you might want to highlight the skills that could be readily transferred to the labour market. (For skills with a high transfer value, see p 9 above, “The concept of skills transfer”.) This could make your skills profile a more powerful tool.

*For examples of skills profiles for volunteer positions, see Appendix B.*

## 5

### Managing Youth Volunteers: Keys to Success

#### **Creating the right environment**

TO BE SUCCESSFUL, A YOUTH VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MUST BE GROUNDED IN the philosophy that young people are valuable resources and can make a significant contribution to the organization and the clientele it serves. Youth volunteers must be treated with genuine *respect and trust*.

Everyone involved must regard young people as competent, maturing individuals who need to become more independent to prepare for their future responsibilities. Young people's involvement with adults must always be collegial, never patronizing or paternalistic. And, this is possible only when adults have faith that young people can make good decisions and carry out tasks responsibly. (Even well intentioned adults often find it difficult to give up the notion that they 'know what is best' for young people and have to fight the urge to intervene and dominate.)

For a volunteer program to be receptive to young people, a *climate of support* is critical. Young people need structure and guidance but not excessive supervision. While young people want clear instructions on what is expected of them, they also need the freedom to explore areas that were not planned in advance. They should be encouraged to try new things and to take chances.

It is also critical that young people be given assignments that meet real needs and have real consequences — not redundant, menial tasks or 'make work' projects. Wherever possible, young people should be offered a range of options so that they can choose a *meaningful and challenging position* that best meets their needs, interests and abilities. This includes developmental assignments that are designed to build their skills and give them opportunities for advancement.

Youth volunteers should be *active partners* in the process of developing or refining a youth program. Their feedback and suggestions should be encouraged on an on-going basis. Invite them to talk about their motivations, goals and feelings and to discuss their accomplishments and their problems. Encourage them to take the initiative and give them experience in decision-making. And wherever appropriate, involve them in program design and management.

To make your program even more appealing to young people, help your volunteers to discover their individual interests and talents, to recognize the skills they

currently possess, and to understand how these might be used to help individuals, groups or causes. Let them know about the range of skills that could be acquired through volunteer jobs. Brainstorm ways in which they could develop their skills.

Youth volunteers must be recruited, placed, motivated, trained and supported in roles that are appropriate to their interests and abilities. Whatever their background, experience and potential, they all need to feel a *sense of accomplishment* and receive *recognition* for their efforts. To do this, careful planning is necessary.

### **The crucial role of the program leader or supervisor**

Experience shows that the choice of leader for a youth volunteer program or supervisor for youth volunteers is crucial to success. This individual's attitude towards young people will permeate everything that goes on.

What should you look for in a potential program leader or supervisor for youth volunteers? The following qualities are clearly desirable:

- genuine respect for young people
- belief that young people can make a real contribution
- acceptance of individual, social and cultural differences
- respect for diverse perspectives and opinions
- ability to listen without judging and advise without preaching
- patience.

The skills required to work with youth volunteers are essentially the same as those for working with any other age groups: the ability to relate well with others, to communicate effectively and to motivate and empower others to perform well, in addition to specific skills in volunteer management. However, an extra measure of commitment and understanding is needed when dealing with young people.

Program leaders or supervisors must be supportive and sensitive to the pressures that young people are under today. They should also be on guard against negative attitudes towards young people in general within the organization and try to combat such prejudice wherever it appears.

They also need to be able to involve young people in positive ways. They should have the skills to help youth volunteers to build self-esteem and confidence, identify their personal goals and determine ways to reach them. Ideally, they should get to know each youth volunteer on a personal basis. This will allow them to see the potential of each young person and to provide the most appropriate opportunities and tools for self-development.

Young people tend to respond positively in situations where roles are clearly defined and power is shared. They are at a point in life when they need to assume greater responsibility in activities they are involved in. Given that youth is a time of experimentation, an understanding program leader or supervisor can have a tremendous impact on how the 'experiments' turn out for all stakeholders. Ideally, the program leader or supervisor should play a role similar to that of a coach or mentor.

## **Recruiting youth volunteers**

A powerful way to recruit young people as volunteers is to emphasize the link between volunteering and personal growth and work experience. (The brochure in Appendix C, entitled *Volunteer to a Career*, is a good example of this approach to recruitment.) Your appeal will be even stronger if you focus more specifically on the potential for developing skills.

Because of the enormous potential that volunteering offers, all segments of the youth population should be actively encouraged to participate. For young people who are used to a steady diet of failure in life, volunteering provides opportunities for achievement, success and recognition. For those who excel in academic and extracurricular activities, volunteer work can offer new challenges which demand a new set of skills.

A youth volunteer program should aim to attract a group of volunteers that is as varied as possible: honour students as well as early school leavers; young people from all socio-economic, ethnocultural and racial backgrounds; young people who have disabilities and special needs. Part of the power of the volunteer experience for young people is working with age-peers with whom they might not associate otherwise.

In targeting young people as volunteers, you will want to liaise with local schools and youth-serving agencies (in particular, employment and career development agencies). This will allow you to share valuable knowledge and expertise with key organizations. You might even be able to reach an agreement to share responsibility for youth volunteer program.

## **Placing youth volunteers**

Few young people will be scared off by a challenge if they know that they will have sufficient support in facing it. Some will even be keen to tackle a tough job and receive the added satisfaction that would come from doing it successfully. As with all volunteers, the key is to find out what will appeal to them and suit their personal needs.

If you have a variety of volunteer roles available, it will be easier for you to recruit and retain young people in various stages of personal development and with different talents. In some cases, this may be as simple as parcelling the work to ensure that potential participants do not feel frozen out by lack of skills or experience.

As noted previously, it is essential to provide interesting and challenging work, not just routine tasks. Try to choose or develop assignments that are of limited duration and, if possible, have a definite product at the end. If a volunteer has specialized interests and skills to offer, you may be able to negotiate for a special project.

Ideally, you should involve your youth volunteers in planning their tasks. Begin by assessing the knowledge, skills and experience that each individual brings to the job. Then, identify the qualifications (knowledge, types of work skills and qualities) that are required for a volunteer to do the job well and what skills could be developed.

Find out whether they prefer to work on their own or as part of a team. Since peer

relations can be very important, some young people may be much happier working with other youth volunteers.

Placing young people in volunteer positions means placing the 'right' person in the 'right' assignment. Everyone has something important to offer if you find the right match.

### **Legal and liability issues specific to young people**

If you are just beginning your youth volunteer program, you will want to check into your organization's insurance policy for volunteers. Is the coverage appropriate for youth volunteers?

Are there conditions that would mean age restrictions for assignments? Some volunteer positions in your organization may be restricted to young people of a certain age, typically sixteen or eighteen. If this is the case, you may wish to verify the rationale behind any age restrictions to ensure that younger volunteers are not being needlessly left out.

You will also need to look into the issue of parental consent. Your organization should have a policy on this. Parental consent forms are usually required only if the volunteer is under 16 years of age, although some organizations use age of majority as the cut-off point.

For information on the principles of risk management and on legal and liability issues that apply to all volunteers regardless of age, such as police checks and driving record, you may wish to consult Linda Graff's *By Definition* (cited in the bibliography).

### **Orientation and training**

It is essential for all involved to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. You will need to define the specific tasks involved, clarify all duties, identify the supervisor and the level of supervision, and discuss working conditions. Ideally, the position description and training plan should be developed or reviewed and signed by both the volunteer and the supervisor before the assignment begins. If expectations on both sides are explicit, there should be no surprises later on.

Orientation serves to prepare volunteers for their first day on the assignment. The process is intended to ensure that the volunteers understand the context into which they are fitting and how to function within that context. Orientation can be done individually or in a group with other new volunteers. (Young people may be more comfortable with peers.) For youth volunteers, orientation should include an introduction to voluntary action in general.

During the orientation session, the goals, priorities and structure of the organization are explained. The overall project and the volunteer's specific role are described. The direct supervisor, staff members and volunteers with whom they are working directly are identified. The work schedule and the nature of supervision (daily debriefings, weekly meetings, monthly reports) are discussed. You might wish to consider asking them to list everything they would like to know before they take on their new role.

Training is more specialized and more detailed. Its goal is to equip volunteers with

knowledge and skills they need to do their assignment effectively and, ideally, have a rewarding experience. It may take place before they take up their new role (pre-service training) or after they have begun the assignment (in-service training). Training takes time but the effort invested is well spent.

Specific skills and knowledge are taught in a step-by-step process. Begin by diagnosing the training needs of the volunteer in relation to the requirements of the volunteer position (*ie*, knowledge, a more advanced generic skill or a job-specific skill). The next step is to establish training goals and specific learning objectives that state what the volunteers will be required to do and what level of accomplishment is required. The training schedule should be realistic yet flexible.

It is also important to find out what approaches to learning work best for the individual volunteer. Some people work best with systematic instruction; others gain the most from the work experience itself. Some learn best from informal conversations with staff members and other volunteers; others prefer to study a manual on their own. Ideally, all of these options should be available.

The training method(s) should be selected carefully. These could include: audio-visual presentations, lectures, manuals, printed hand-outs, simulations or role-playing to allow practice of skills, panel discussions or small groups discussions. A combination of approaches is usually the most effective.

Training should be viewed as an on-going process. After your youth volunteers become familiar with their assigned tasks, consider offering them more advanced training. This would allow them to assume more responsibility, take on additional or new tasks and hone their skills.

### **Supervision and support**

The purpose of supervision is to provide guidance, encouragement, support and occasional on-the-job training. Supervision may be viewed as a process of defining and maintaining effective working relationships.

Young people do not necessarily need any more or less supervision than other volunteers. The amount required does not depend on age but rather on the nature of the work to be done and the skills that the individual brings to that role. Some assignments require little supervision by definition. Others involve special situations which demand a higher level or different kind of supervision (for example, a placement that is highly unstructured, has minimum routine and requires considerable personal judgement).

Generally speaking, supervision is closer at the beginning. Then, a decision is made as to what level of supervision is necessary on a on-going basis given the nature of the assignment and the volunteer's initial performance.

It is important to be clear as to who has responsibility for supervising individual volunteers. Otherwise, young people may receive too much, too little or inconsistent supervision — any of which may cause confusion or anxiety. The supervisor could be a staff member, an experienced adult volunteer or another youth who serves as a team leader.

The type of supervision should also be defined (e.g., observation, working as a member of a team; working independently). Supervision can be done in many

different ways: pre-work meetings, post-work debriefings, on-site, regular phone calls or on the request of the volunteer. Ideally, volunteers should have ample opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, discuss problems and successes and develop professional contacts. Make it obvious that you value their opinions and want to know their concerns.

Initially, some youth volunteers may be a bit overwhelmed, especially if this is a first experience at a `job' of any sort. As noted earlier, many young people have been conditioned to be passive and dependent and may thus be reluctant to take on responsibility. Peer coaches could be very effective in these cases.

To allow youth volunteers to see the results of their efforts, it is important to establish realistic goals against which achievement can be measured. You might also consider creating self-assessment tools to help young people to assess their own readiness to perform each task and to identify the skills they are developing.

Interaction with peers can be very important to young people — to share volunteer experiences (both successes and difficulties), to call on each other for support and advice and to increase their sense of belonging to a greater effort. This can also be an opportunity to socialize and make new friends. Group meetings where youth volunteers get together informally with their supervisors can be effective.

When you take time for supervision on an ongoing basis, you can usually anticipate problems early. If problems do arise, they should be dealt with openly, sensitively and constructively. Clarify the nature of the problem and then troubleshoot.

Experience has also shown that youth volunteers work better where the limits of their roles are carefully defined but a fair amount of flexibility is allowed. As a general rule, supervision should never restrict the creativity and initiative of youth volunteers.

### **Assessment of performance**

Regular feedback and re-assessment of goals and expectations are vital. Ongoing dialogue will ensure that the needs of both the volunteer and the receiving organization are being met. Is the experience interesting and suitably challenging for the volunteer? Is the level of support appropriate? Would further training be useful? Are both parties deriving the expected benefits and meeting their obligations?

For youth volunteers, each assignment should be viewed as an opportunity for exploration — a time for young people to find out what they are good at (and perhaps also what they are not good at). Feedback, both formal and informal, allows volunteers to measure their performance against the standards set by your organization. However, it is important to bear in mind that young people need encouragement and positive reinforcement. They should experience successes and feel a sense of accomplishment.

The most obvious factor to evaluate is the quality of the volunteer's work. But equally important are less tangible factors such as the degree to which the volunteer assumes and handles responsibility, and demonstrated confidence in



doing the job. It is helpful to use examples to illustrate comments whenever possible.

More formal evaluation of volunteers is usually done at the end of an assignment or at specified intervals. Normally, this takes the form of a written assessment of performance, followed by a meeting with the volunteer. You may find it useful to ask the volunteer to do a self-appraisal before your meeting. (The *Summary of Volunteer Experience* and the *Evaluation of Volunteer Experience* forms in Appendix C could be used for this purpose.)

### **Recognition of youth volunteers**

As with all volunteers, young people should be rewarded for responsible behaviour and identified as making a valuable contribution.

Whether tangible like the omnipresent T-shirt or intangible, recognition is critical to the success of a youth program. This can take many different forms. A positive letter of recommendation, for example, can be an important source of recognition for a youth volunteer.

Even if they are shy about receiving attention and praise, young people both need and appreciate it. When their efforts are recognised, their self-esteem gets a boost. Believing that their efforts matter will motivate them to stay involved. So, try to celebrate successes whenever they occur.

### **Documenting volunteer work**

It is important to keep a record of key information on each young person's experience in the volunteer workplace. This will serve as a reference for their future searches for paid employment.

Your records should include: documentation on responsibilities, specific tasks, amount of time worked, dates, and performance (accomplishments and strengths). Ideally, a list of the skills developed would also be included. These documents should be signed by their direct supervisor or by the manager of volunteers. A copy can then be given to the volunteers when they end an assignment or leave the volunteer position, along with a letter of reference.

A *letter of reference* is a summary of the responsibilities carried out by the volunteer and an assessment of how effective the volunteer was in fulfilling those duties. If you provide details on the skills that were polished or picked up in the position, this will be a more powerful tool for your youth volunteers in their future job searches. This approach also reinforces the concept of the transferability of skills developed in a volunteer position with prospective employers. (A sample of a letter of reference that focuses on skills can be found in Appendix C.)

### **The Volunteer Career Portfolio**

To further help your youth volunteers prepare for the future, you could encourage them to maintain a portfolio of their volunteer career. Ideally, this should include:

- the position description for each assignment
- the skills profile for these positions, if available

- performance appraisals and written progress reports
- letters of reference
- samples of their work
- a statement on training received
- a summary of their experience in each volunteer assignment or position.

You could also encourage youth volunteers to do written evaluations of their volunteer experiences (that is, the skills used, the new skills and knowledge acquired, special challenges of the position, observations and feelings) to add to their portfolio.

At the end of the assignment or specified time period, you may also wish to invite your youth volunteers to prepare a brief report on the skills they developed, the knowledge they acquired and the challenges they confronted. If the volunteer agrees, this could be passed on to other volunteers, as well as serving as a record for the volunteers themselves.

Where secondary students are involved, you should also encourage your volunteers to file performance appraisals and other key documents in their *school achievement file*. (Many ministries of education have initiated a policy of maintaining such records.)

All of these activities could prove to be very useful to young people in the future. The documentation gathered becomes their personal 'archives', or data bank, which then forms the basis for developing résumés, preparing applications for employment and getting ready for job interviews.

Please see Appendix C for a model of a *Summary of Volunteer Experience* form and an *Evaluation of Volunteer Experience* form. You might consider giving copies of these forms to your youth volunteers to make it easier for them to document their experience.

## 6 Summing Up

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AN INVALUABLE ASSET TO ANY COMMUNITY. WHEN their talents, energy and creativity are channelled into community organizations, young people from all backgrounds can make a significant contribution. When treated with respect, valued as resources and given the appropriate support, they can take on almost any type of volunteer role.

Volunteering offers great potential in helping young people build the base for a successful entry into the labour market and into adult civic life. It is a proven way for young people to:

- add to their stockpile of job-related skills;
- gain practical knowledge and experience;
- achieve personal satisfaction and success;
- develop a sense of belonging and commitment to their community; and
- learn the skills necessary to become active citizens in the future.

Both for young people and the organizations receiving them, volunteer work offers a gold mine of possibilities. As a society, we all have a stake in nurturing this kind of involvement. Young people are our future — and their future lies in the present.

## APPENDIX

### A

## Inventory of Marketable Skills

THE FOLLOWING IS AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY THE KEY SKILLS THAT CAN BE developed through volunteer work. All of these skills are generic in the sense that they are required for a wide variety of jobs in the labour market. Skills related to specialized types of jobs or specific occupations have not been included, although they may be relevant to some volunteer positions.

Please note that the lists of `core' and `transferable' skills are not necessarily exhaustive. Also, any of the skills cited below can be dissected more finely.

There is, as yet, no generally accepted method for identifying and classifying workplace skills. However, several frameworks for classifying skills have been published, and there is great interest in continuing this work to advance policy in the area of skills development in Canada, the USA and Great Britain.

The scheme developed for this guide is unique, although it owes much to the thinking on this subject that has gone beforehand. (For the key sources, see the references in the bibliography to the work of Sidney Fine, RN Bolles, Howard Figler, Bernard Haldane, Anthony Carnevale, and Neil Yeager.)

## Core Skills

*Core skills are the basic skills needed to work and learn in the workplace of the 1990s and beyond. They form the foundation necessary to find and keep almost every kind of job today. And, they will likely be the entry-level skills for most positions in the labour market of the future.*

*Young people who are still developing the core skills are able to become more proficient through volunteering. Young people who have already acquired a reasonable level of proficiency in these skills will have the opportunity to polish them in their volunteer assignments.*

*It must also be recognized that, because of disabilities or special needs, some young people may have great difficulty acquiring certain skills. In these cases, special accommodations will have to be made to ensure that these individuals have the support they require to be successful in volunteer positions. (For further guidance in this area, please see Bridges to the Future: Supported Programs for Volunteers with Special Needs, which is cited in Section II of the Resource List.)*

### *Reading skills*

- interprets and understands written information aimed at a general audience, including schedules and basic manuals
- able to identify the essential ideas and relevant facts in a written text

### *Writing skills*

- able to present information, thoughts and ideas in written form
- able to record information accurately and completely
- able to draft letters and instructions
- able to edit texts to ensure proper spelling, syntax and grammar

### *Numeracy skills*

- performs basic computations
- uses basic math concepts in practical situations (eg, measurement, percentages, ratio and proportion)
- able to make reasonable estimates
- understands graphs and charts
- able to handle cash and do stock inventories

### *Speaking skills*

- organizes and presents information or ideas in a clear and concise way
- communicates messages in a way appropriate to the situation and the listeners
- participates effectively in conversations and discussions
- gives and receives directions and instructions effectively

### *Listening skills*

- knows how to listen to others effectively
- open to the ideas and perspectives of others (ie, can listen to and evaluate them)

without feeling defensive)

### *Social skills*

- relates well to both peers and superiors in familiar and new situations
- able to work cooperatively with others
- treats others with respect; avoids demeaning words and actions
- able to demonstrate friendliness and politeness
- able to interpret the body language of others

### *Thinking skills*

- understands ideas and assimilates new information with relative ease
- uses logic to draw conclusions, predict results and evaluate ideas
- makes sound decisions and judgements
- evaluates alternative courses of action critically
- able to analyze problems and find solutions
- able to infer the meaning of unknown vocabulary
- uses imagination and ingenuity; able to think creatively
- able to use foresight and be resourceful
- able to learn from experience and use this knowledge in other contexts

### *Memory skills*

- remembers information and details on a short-term and long-term basis
- able to follow multi-stepped instructions

### *Motor skills*

- manual dexterity and agility
- hand-eye coordination
- physical coordination

### *Self-management skills*

- thorough and reliable (*ie*, has good work habits)
- self-discipline; motivation and drive to get the job done
- works well without supervision
- keeps emotions and impulses under control
- self-confidence
- able to manage time well
- able to plan and complete projects
- able to set goals and priorities in personal and work situations
- shows initiative and able to solve problems independently
- takes responsibility for and accepts consequences of own action
- recognizes when to ask for assistance
- accepts authority
- able to accept constructive criticism
- able to remain calm and to cope with deadline pressures
- develops coping strategies to deal with new or stressful situations
- self-awareness (insight into personal feelings, needs, abilities, strengths and

- values)
- moral reasoning skills

## **Transferable Skills**

*Transferable skills are a higher order than core skills. They are required for a wide variety of jobs and can be transferred from one task, job or workplace to another. Transferable skills are thus very marketable.*

*Each job requires its own unique combination of skills. The skill set required for a given job will cut across these skill categories and possibly even within the categories. In addition, some position demand the use of specific skills at a higher level than others.*

*The following is the spectrum of new skills that young people could acquire through volunteer work.*

### ***People skills***

#### *Interpersonal skills*

- able to interact successfully with others (co-workers, supervisors and clients)
- knows how to express feelings warmly and sensitively
- gives and receives feedback in a constructive manner
- `hears' what is said and implied
- knows how to interpret and use body language
- knows how to use tact and diplomacy
- recognizes and values the uniqueness of individuals
- works well with a wide variety of people: males and females; people from other social, educational, religious, cultural and racial backgrounds; individuals who have disabilities or special needs

#### *Teamwork skills*

- shows respect for the perspectives, ideas and opinions of others
- works cooperatively with others
- contributes to team or committee efforts with ideas and suggestions

#### *Oral communication skills*

- presents information and ideas clearly and concisely, with content and style appropriate for the audience (whether one-to-one or in a group)
- presents opinions and ideas in an open, unprejudicial way
- responds effectively without preparation in spontaneous situations (able to `think on feet')

#### *Public speaking skills*

- able to make a formal presentation
- presents ideas, positions and problems in an interesting way
- maintains poise in public appearances

#### *Counselling skills*

- responds to what others have said in a non-judgemental way ('active listening')
- builds trust and openness with others
- able to demonstrate empathy
- able to help others to understand themselves better and to build self-esteem
- able to help others to solve their problems
- gives sound advice in an effective way

#### *Coaching/mentoring skills*

- works and communicates with others to satisfy their needs and expectations
- gives appropriate advice in a persuasive way
- gives feedback in a constructive way
- helps others to increase their knowledge or skills

#### *Teaching/training skills*

- able to help others acquire knowledge and learn specific skills
- able to motivate people to learn new things and to perform well
- able to adjust content and teaching style to the audience
- able to create an effective learning environment

#### *Supervising skills*

- identifies and uses human resources as effectively as possible
- motivates individuals to perform well
- able to coordinate the assignment of tasks appropriately
- delegates responsibilities and establishes an appropriate system of accountability
- able to monitor progress and assess the quality of job performance
- engenders trust and respect
- able to build effective teams

#### *Leadership skills*

- motivates and empowers others to act
- involves others without coercing or cajoling
- promotes open discussion and involvement of all participants, while not dominating
- able to facilitate and manage group interactions
- able to delegate effectively
- able to gain cooperation from unreceptive people
- able to run a formal meeting well
- challenges existing policies and procedures in a responsible manner

#### *Persuading skills*

- communicates effectively in both oral and written form to justify a position or influence decisions
- effective spokesperson for the organization; able to explain goals and activities in a way appropriate to the audience
- able to sell products



- able to promote idea
- effective in lobbying for change
- able to recruit individuals in a proactive way
- able to build and maintain good relations with other organizations
- able to attract financial support (e.g., fund-raising for a voluntary organization)

#### *Negotiating skills*

- able to negotiate skilfully
- knows how and when to make compromises

#### *Mediation skills*

- able to resolve conflict that stems from divergent perspectives or interests
- helps those with opposite viewpoints reach mutual agreement (through consensus or compromise); encourages give and take from both sides
- able to deal with conflict in an open, honest and positive way; can persuade others to agree to disagree or can find a compromise position that both sides can live with

#### *Interviewing skills*

- asks and responds to questions effectively
- able to make others feel relaxed and create a feeling of trust

#### *Client service skills*

- builds a relationship of mutual trust with clients
- able to understand or perceive clients' needs
- gives or finds appropriate services
- helps individuals develop new attitudes/skills
- helps clients cope with stressful situations
- acts as an advocate for clients
- develops ways (tailored to individual needs) to help people reach personal goals
- able to handle complaints and concerns

#### *Care-giving skills*

- able to identify and respond appropriately to the need for care, counselling, treatment or therapy
- patient and empathetic with others
- sensitive care of people who are sick or elderly or who have severe disabilities
- custodial care (eg, feeding, washing)
- able to perform CPR and administer first aid

#### *Mind skills*

##### *Analytical/logical thinking skills*

- able to draw specific conclusions from a set of general observations (*ie*, deductive reasoning)
- able to draw general conclusions from set of specific facts (*ie*, inductive reasoning)

- able to identify an appropriate framework for analysis and evaluation
- examines data to understand inter-relationships and correlations
- able to compare and contrast details and options
- able to synthesize information and ideas

#### *Critical thinking skills*

- able to review different points of view or ideas and make objective judgements
- able to examine underlying assumptions
- able to formulate a question, analyze a problem or define a situation with clarity, accuracy and fair-mindedness
- investigates all possible solutions to a problem, weighing the pros and cons
- able to review or develop policy and programs

#### *Creative thinking skills*

- able use imagination and intuition freely
- able to suspend logical thinking and judgement to find new paths for action
- able to generate new ideas, invent new things, create new images or designs
- able to conceive new interpretations and to combine ideas or information in new ways
- able to solve an unstructured problem
- designs new approaches to solve existing problems
- able to make connections between seemingly unrelated things
- able to reshape goals to reveal new possibilities
- able to use wit and humour effectively

#### *Problem-solving skills*

- able to clarify the nature of a problem, evaluate alternatives, propose viable solutions and determine the outcome of the various options

#### *Decision-making skills*

- able to identify all possible options, weigh the pros and cons, assess feasibility and choose the most viable option

#### *Planning skills*

- able to plan agendas, projects, events and programs
- able to determine the need for action
- able to lay out a step-by-step process for achieving a goal
- establishes objectives and needs, evaluates options, chooses best option
- analyses all the requirements (i.e., human, financial and material resources) to accomplish specific goals
- establishes a realistic timetable

#### *Organizational skills*

- able to organize information, people or things in a systematic way
- breaks down an activity into component tasks and coordinates resources (human and financial; assigns appropriate people) to undertake them

- able to establish priorities
- understands the inter-relationship between the parts of a whole
- develops or streamlines procedures
- monitors progress and effectiveness
- operates effectively within an established organizational system

### ***Applied or practical skills***

#### *Advanced writing skills*

- able to communicate in writing for maximum impact
- able to select, interpret, organize and synthesize key ideas
- able to adjust style, form and content to a particular audience
- able to draft non-routine correspondence and complex reports
- able to write in a creative way for the general public (eg, publicity and advertising material)
- able to edit a written text to ensure that the message is as clear, concise and accurate as possible

#### *Research skills*

- able to design research projects
- able to define the scope of a topic
- develops appropriate methodology and implements the plan
- knows how to find and collect relevant background information
- able to identify people who have information relevant to the task
- collects and compiles data
- able to analyze data, summarize findings and write a report
- attention to detail; observation skills

#### *Administrative/clerical skills*

- operates computers and other office equipment
- able to do word processing and data entry
- compiles basic information
- designs and maintains filing and control systems
- general office work

#### *Financial skills*

- keeps accurate financial records
- able to manage a budget (*ie*, preparing sound budgets and monitoring expenses)
- able to establish and maintain accounting and auditing procedures
- able to compile financial and other numerical data
- able to prepare financial statements and reports
- able to interpret financial reports and audited statements
- able to calculate GST and other taxes
- able to monitor inventory flow

#### *Language skills*

- knowledge of languages other than the one dominant in the group

- functionally bilingual (*eg*, knows French or English as a second language)
- able to translate or interpret in a given language(s)
- able to communicate in sign language

#### *Computer literacy skills*

- understands the basic functions of the computer
- able to operate a word processing system
- able to manipulate data in a computer
- able to operate special application software
- able to use electronic mail systems
- able to access a computer internet system
- able to learn new software with relative ease

#### *Technological skills*

- understands technical systems and operates effectively within them (*eg*, computers)
- understands technical specifications; reads technical manuals with ease
- maintains computer or other systems; regulates controls; analyzes potential malfunctions; troubleshoots for potential problems
- able to suggest modifications to an existing system or design a new system to improve performance

#### *Performing skills*

- able to make presentations for video or television in an interesting way
- able to entertain, amuse and inspire an audience
- able to act, sing or play an instrument in public

#### *Artistic skills*

- able to draw diagrams and illustrations
- uses colour and design creatively
- able to design displays and public relations material (print or video)

#### *Perceptual skills*

- able to visualize new formats and shapes
- able to estimate physical space

#### *Mechanical skills*

- able to install, operate and monitor the performance of equipment and mechanical devices
- able to repair mechanical devices
- possesses hand skills

#### *Adaptability skills*

- capacity to adapt to new situations and settings and to tolerate change well
- ability to work in ambiguous and flexible environments; tolerance for ambiguity

- flexibility to adapt to the needs of the moment
- a positive attitude towards change; sees change as a challenge rather than as a problem

APPENDIX  
B  
The Skills Profile  
**Examples for selected volunteer positions**

A SKILLS PROFILE IS A LIST OF SKILLS THAT CAN BE DEVELOPED IN A GIVEN assignment. The following are examples of skills profiles for a variety of volunteer positions that could be filled by young people.

These examples are based on the transferable skills outlined in the *Inventory of Marketable Skills* in Appendix A. In some cases, it may be useful to break the skill categories into their component parts.

In some volunteer positions, young people may also have the opportunity to acquire more specialized skills relevant to a particular type of job or occupation. Where this is the case, the job-specific skills should also be added to the skills profile.

## **Committee or Board Member Skills Profile**

- TeamWork skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral communication skills
- Analytical skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Creative thinking skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills
- Planning skills
- Organizational skills

## **Youth Program Leader Skills Profile**

- Leadership skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral communication skills
- Coaching and mentoring skills
- Teamwork skills
- Teaching and training skills
- Supervising skills
- Planning skills
- Organizational skills
- Creative thinking skills
- Decision-making skills
- Problem-solving skills

## **Informatics Assistant Skills Profile**

- Computer literacy skills
- Technological skills
- Analytical skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Decision-making skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Creative thinking skills

## **Research Assistant Skills Profile**

- Research skills
- Analytical skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Planning skills
- Organizational skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Advanced Writing skills
- Computer literacy skills

## **Bookkeeping or Financial Assistant Skills Profile**

- Financial skills
- Analytical skills
- Decision-making skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Computer literacy skills
- Organizational skills

## **Special Events Co-ordinator Skills Profile**

- Planning skills
- Organizational skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamwork skills
- Supervising skills
- Creative thinking skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills

## **Children's Sports Coach Skills Profile**

- Coaching and mentoring skills
- Teaching and training skills
- Leadership skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral communications skills
- Supervising skills
- Planning skills
- Organizational skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills

## **Publicity Assistant Skills Profile**

- Creative thinking skills
- Advanced writing skills
- Oral communication skills
- Planning skills
- Organizational skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills
- Persuading skills
- Public speaking skills



## APPENDIX

### C

## The Volunteer Career Portfolio

### Sample documents

A VOLUNTEER CAREER PORTFOLIO IS A PERSONAL RECORD OF AN individual's experiences as a volunteer. Information is compiled for each assignment. This data bank can then be used as the basis for writing a resume or preparing for a job interview .

Two important types of documents included in this portfolio are the *Summary of Volunteer Experience* and the *Evaluation of Volunteer Experience*. You may wish to consider using the samples as models for forms to give to your youth volunteers to simplify their process of record-keeping.

A sample of a letter of reference that focuses on skills is also included.

# Summary of Volunteer Experience

**Name of volunteer**

**Address**

**Telephone**

**Organization**

**Position Title**

**Dates of Service**

**Total hours worked**

**Major functions of the position**

**Accomplishments**

**Skills developed (see skills profile for position if available)**

**Specific training (if applicable)**

**Date**

**Supervisor's signature**

**Supervisor's title**

# Evaluation of Volunteer Experience

**Name of volunteer**

**Organization**

**Position Title**

**I would rate the quality of the experience:**

excellent

good

fair

poor

**What I found most rewarding about this experience:**

**What I found difficult and why:**

**Strengths I brought to the position:**

**Skills I used:**

**New skills and knowledge I gained:**

**Skills I enjoyed using:**

**How this experience benefitted me:**

**Skills I'd like to develop further:**

**Other volunteer roles I'd like to try:**

## Sample of a letter of reference

Anytown General Hospital  
Anytown, Canada  
Z9Z 9Z9

December 10, 1994

To whom it may concern:



Alyssa Lapointe managed the hospital's gift shop from June 1993 until November 1994. In addition to supervising a staff of 15 volunteers, she was responsible for recommending new sales items and for controlling the inventory.

During her 18 months at the gift shop, Ms Lapointe demonstrated her potential in many areas. Her interpersonal and communication skills allowed her to build a team of dedicated volunteer workers. She assigned tasks in an appropriate way, and was always flexible enough to accommodate the needs of her fellow volunteers. Using her excellent analytical and organizational skills, she streamlined the purchasing process and designed a new system for inventory control .

Ms Lapointe has been a definite asset to our organization. I am confident that she would do well in a wide variety of jobs .

Yours sincerely,

Sylvie Johnson  
Manager of Volunteers

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Volunteer to a Career</b></p> <hr/>  <p>Manitoba Education and Training</p> <p>Youth Career Development Programs Public Service Volunteers </p>	<p><b>Need experience?</b></p> <p>Times are tough for those entering the job market. You need experience to get a job, but you need a job to get experience. Dealing with this cycle can be frustrating and disappointing.</p> <p><b>Why not try volunteering?</b></p> <p>Volunteering is the job search tool of the 90's – a viable addition to your resume. More and more employers value volunteer work and ask about it when hiring staff.</p> <p><b>A unique experience!</b></p> <p><b>Volunteers In Public Service</b> places people in career-related volunteer positions within provincial government departments and agencies. Positions are created to match your skills, personal schedule and interests with departmental needs. Assignments are special projects and specific tasks that are part-time, short-term and flexible.</p>	<p><i>Volunteering can help you</i> ...Especially if you are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a student</li> <li>● young and inexperienced unemployed</li> <li>● re-entering the workforce looking for a career change</li> <li>● needing to fulfill a school requirement</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>You can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● gain practical work experience . develop or sharpen your marketable skills</li> <li>● explore possible career choices</li> <li>● make important job contacts</li> <li>● experience success and accomplishment</li> </ul>
<p><b>APPENDIX</b></p> <p><b>D</b></p> <p><b>Example of a brochure for recruiting youth volunteers</b></p>	<p><b>You could be a:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● researcher, writer, conference coordinator</li> <li>● speaker, trainer, client supporter</li> <li>● library clerk, office assistant, special project worker</li> <li>● computer operator, technologist, laboratory aide</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● You could be placed in one of any number of positions geared to your occupational pursuits</li> </ul> <p><b>You will receive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a personal interview</li> <li>● orientation, on-the-job training, and supervision</li> <li>● an opportunity for performance feedback</li> <li>● a letter of reference</li> <li>● recognition for your efforts</li> </ul> <p><b>And there's more...</b></p> <p>The program also offers assistance with resume-writing, interviewing and job-search techniques.</p>	<p><b>To explore your career potential, contact:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Volunteers In Public Service</b> Main Floor 114 Gerry Street Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1G1</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>945-3556</b> in Winnipeg</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1-800-282-8069</b> Toll-Free in Manitoba</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>A volunteer's experience is more than worthwhile... it's worth a job!</i></b></p>

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