

Blog Post – Volunteer Canada Get Involved Web site - 2011

Baby Boomers - using your skills after retirement

Census data suggests the number of Canadians aged 55 to 64 has increased dramatically within the past five years. The baby boomers now approaching retirement are the fastest growing demographic in Canada and comprise nearly one third of the country's 32 million people. As boomers reach the tail end of the working population, this shift has major implications for the labour market with the need for the transfer of vital knowledge and skills. The shift also has implications for the non-profit and volunteer sector as boomers seek out ways to utilize their experience in meaningful and productive ways.

Baby boomers want to make an impact with their time and see the results of their efforts. Along with other volunteers, boomers want to make a difference and feel like their contributions are valued or important. Boomers want to maintain their health, remain active and connected to other people, especially when they retire from work or their children have all left home. Volunteering gives them a feeling that they are still helping other people and contributing to the community. A big trend in volunteering in the boomer age group is what is known as "skills-based volunteering. Retired professionals can volunteer their skills in a non-profit setting for example a retired accountant might contribute accounting skills to help an agency in need. A retired nurse or health professional may volunteer their time at a clinic.

Why volunteer after retirement?

1. Connection with community and other people:

Volunteering allows a volunteer to connect with the community and make it a better place to live. Dedicating time as a volunteer helps make new friends, expand networks, and boost social skills. Many who have retired and begun to volunteer have found that they derive many of the same benefits from volunteering as they did from their work experience. People say that they derive meaning and purpose from activities that help others live better lives. Volunteering gives structure to the day and provides an opportunity to connect socially with other volunteers as well as those that are being helped.

2. Volunteering is good for both mind and body

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health and may be one of the crucial keys to a longer life. Volunteering can provide a healthy boost to self-confidence and overall life satisfaction. Helping others and the community provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Being a volunteer can also give a sense of pride and identity, increasing the likelihood of having a positive view of life and the future. A person is in regular contact with others when volunteering which helps develop a support system which protects against stress and depression when you are undergoing changes and adjustments in life. Volunteering enhances health at all ages, but it is especially beneficial in older adults. Even when considering factors like the health of the participants, studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not. Volunteering has also been shown to reduce symptoms of chronic pain or heart disease.

3. Fun and accomplishment

Volunteer work can be a relaxing escape from everyday routines and a way to explore new interests. With family and career commitments, working adults often do not have the time to experiment and explore outside interests. After retirement many people discover they now have the leisure time to do the things they always wanted to do but never had the opportunity. Volunteering can provide renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into personal lives.

Service to others also creates feelings of appreciation for our communities and neighborhoods and gratitude for what we have when we see those less fortunate than we are. There is also the opportunity to provide role models for adult children and grandchildren the art of volunteering.

How to find the right volunteer opportunity?

There are many volunteer opportunities available for any background, skill level and interest. The solution is to find a volunteer position that is enjoyable and that you are capable of doing. It is also important to ensure that your commitment matches the needs of the organization. Check with your local volunteer center for available opportunities. Some considerations:

- Do you prefer to work alone or with others as part of a team?
- Are you better working in the background or do you prefer taking a more visible role?
- How much time are you willing to commit to a volunteer position or project?
- How much responsibility are you ready to take on?
- What skills can you bring a volunteer job? Think about learning new skills, if necessary.
- What causes are important to you? What are you passionate about?

Some volunteer web sites to get started:

Get Involved:

<http://www.getinvolved.ca/>

How boomers can use skills/to get involved

<http://www.carp.ca/volunteer/index.cfm>