

Keep the spirit of giving alive



The start of a new year often means one thing — a new year's resolution.

Whether it's about getting in shape or saving money, your intentions are meant to have a positive impact on your life. So why not start with volunteering?

Volunteering provides the opportunity to give back to the community and enhance the lives of others — mentoring elementary kids in an after-school program, using your sewing skills to help make baby clothes for low-income families or answering the phones for a helpline — are just a few examples of how you can help your community.

The benefits don't stop there.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, volunteering promotes personal growth and self-esteem. Helping others and learning new things allows you to feel good about yourself and keep you connected to others. You can also reduce your stress levels by volunteering because you focus on someone other than yourself, thereby interrupting usual tension-producing patterns and reducing stress-related hormones.

Other perks like gaining professional experience, setting a good example for family and making new friends all result from volunteering.

With so many

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JANICE BELL



PHOTO BY JASON FRANSON

PRETTY COOL: Cold, in fact. A pedestrian walks past a frost-covered window on Whyte Avenue during our never-ending cold snap. Relief, alas, is nowhere in sight.

organizations in the city, the search for the right volunteer experience can be daunting.

"The most important step that needs to be taken before embarking on a volunteer search is to know what you want to do and how much time you would like to commit," says Janice Bell, director of Volunteer Edmonton.

If you're looking for instant results, the Internet

is a great way to start. Volunteer Edmonton's own website, www.volunteeredmonton.com, provides access to a number of different websites that list opportunities. Govolunteer.ca, along with online classified forums and job sites like Jobshark, are just a few of the many websites that list volunteer opportunities where visitors can search according to location, type and organization.

Another quick and easy option is dialing 211. This is a free, 24-hour phone number that can be called within

Edmonton and Strathcona (482-INFO if calling from outside those areas). Operators provide program and service information related to a wide range of community-related programs and events, including volunteer opportunities.

Newspapers also provide a wealth of opportunities. Free publications often feature sections or listings specific to a community-area or events-related volunteer opportunities. Give your local community league a call to find out more about opportunities close to home.

Students looking to expand their experience can browse their school's website to view volunteer opportunities or speak to a campus advisor.

If none of the above suggestions yield a promising opportunity, the next best step is to ask around. With approximately 47 per cent of Albertans volunteering, chances are a neighbour, co-worker or friend volunteers. Find out how they started, what organization they volunteer for and what kind of work they do.

Researching your options now and taking the time to find the right opportunity for you will be time well spent when you find a rewarding and meaningful volunteer experience.

"It's a win-win situation," says Bell. "You're helping the community, and gaining new skills and experiences. There's no better way to start the New Year than with volunteering."

For more information or suggestions for story ideas, please contact Evelyn Pham, communications co-ordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com.