

VOLUNTEERISM *is Part of a Balanced Education*

Volunteer Edmonton has paired with Edmonton's Child to bring our readers regular features that address issues of volunteerism.

By: *Volunteer Edmonton*

Students gearing up to go back to school are ready to tackle core subjects like math and science but what about volunteerism? Volunteering adds another dimension to your child's life by providing them with the opportunity to make a difference, learn about community needs and issues, take on responsibility and gain self-confidence. Teenagers who volunteer also benefit by building their resume with relevant work experience that could count toward scholarships and awards.

"Involving children as volunteers is a great way to show them the importance of helping others," explains Janice Bell, director of Volunteer Edmonton. "If you'd like to teach your child about poverty or the importance of taking care of the environment, encourage your child to volunteer by helping pack school supplies for low-income families or picking up litter around the neighbourhood. It will leave them with a lasting impression of how they can make a real difference in their community."

Statistics Canada shows that participation in volunteering during the formative years of childhood may encourage children to take on more community involvement activities once they grow up. Parents looking to involve their child should also think about becoming a volunteer themselves, since many organizations welcome families who wish to volunteer in groups. It's also a chance to set a positive example, while making the most out of the time you spend with your children.

There are many areas to explore: from healthcare to environmental to social services, sports and the arts. Finding the right volunteer opportunity starts with finding out what interests your child. Keep in mind that there are some organizations that are unable to accept volunteers under the age of fourteen due to the kind of services provided, but a little bit of research into the organizations that do offer child-friendly volunteer positions should yield valuable results.

You can visit Volunteer Edmonton's own website, www.volunteeredmonton.com, to gain access to a number of different websites that list opportunities. There's even a youth-specific organization called Alberta's YOUTH Volunteer! that connects youth ages 14 to 24 to volunteer opportunities. They list youth-friendly volunteer positions on their website, along with current events happening around the province that are of interest to this demographic.

If you don't have access to the Internet, another quick and easy option is dialing 211. This is a free-of-charge, 24-hour phone number that can be called within the Edmonton (482-INFO if calling from outside of Edmonton). Operators provide program and service information regarding a wide range of community-related programs and events, including volunteer opportunities.

A few hours a week or a month can make a difference in both your child's life and the community. "Your child is helping the community, and gaining new skills and experiences, while nonprofit/voluntary organizations and their clients are benefiting from volunteer contributions that will help them deliver much needed programs and services — it's a win-win situation," says Bell.

Volunteer Edmonton is a program of The Support Network. For more information, please contact Evelyn Pham at (780) 732-6655. Visit www.volunteeredmonton.com to find out how you can get involved.

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