

# Youth support for volunteerism

## Playing a key role in the future



Anyone who thinks young people are doing little to help their community should talk to Leslie Oliver. As the executive director of YOUTHVolunteer, a non-profit organization that works with youths ages 14 to 24 throughout Alberta, she knows a thing or two about youth and has the experience to back it up.

Formally trained as a teacher and having volunteered since she was a youth herself, Oliver found herself transitioning into her role very easily.

"It made sense," she says. "I love working with youth. I love seeing youth engaged in what's meaningful to them and just taking action."

In fact, the 2007 Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, a report that sheds light on how Canadians give back to their community, shows that youth are indeed taking action by becoming involved in their communities.

The survey results reveal that 58 per cent of youth ages 15 to 24 volunteer.

Oliver's role at the organization is to help facilitate change and mentor youth with big ideas to take action through volunteerism.

She explains that part of her mandate is to encourage and educate youth about the benefits and importance of volunteerism, but realized early on that a general lecture on why youth should be involved in volunteering wasn't effective.

"It works best when you talk about something that matters to them," she explains.

She describes one of the presentations she does for the organization called the Take Action Series.

"We talk about volunteerism by wrapping it around an issue that's passionate to youth, whether it be climate change, the Millennium goals or healthy living," she says, adding that the Millennium goals are eight goals set by the United Nations that range from eradicating poverty to combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

"I talk to them about what local youth and organizations are doing and encourage them to think about how to collaborate with existing organizations."

For the younger crowd, Oliver offers a presentation that outlines the basics behind volunteerism and how to find youth-specific opportunities.

Along with the presentations, another important part of Oliver's role at Alberta's YOUTHVolunteer is networking with

other organizations for potential collaboration. But with only a handful of staff, Oliver admits it can be difficult to take part in as many projects as she would like.

"It's completely youth-run. They are responsible for making some key decisions, and my role is more collaborative," Oliver explains.

Youth interested in volunteering can visit Alberta's YOUTHVolunteer website at [www.youthvolunteer.ca](http://www.youthvolunteer.ca).

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