

# Volunteerism



Social Planning Council  
of Cambridge and North Dumfries

Social Issues Advisory Committee  
of Cambridge

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Many nonprofit and community based organizations rely heavily on volunteers to help meet their mandates. Volunteers play a number of roles within organizations including leadership roles on committees and boards as well as front line service delivery roles. Volunteerism was identified as an important social issue in Cambridge through several public meetings hosted by the Social Planning Council in 2001.

The Social Issues Advisory (SIA) Committee of Cambridge provides a medium for discussion of social issues, unmet needs, and community capacities. The SIA develops recommendations to pass on to local decision makers from the information coming forward.

As volunteers are critical to the sustainability of so many social programs, the Social Issues Advisory Committee felt compelled to include a discussion on volunteerism in its work. The SIA hosted a community forum on volunteerism on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Included in this report is a summary of the discussion that took place from each of the four working groups formed at the forum. Each group discussed these three questions: "What supports or resources are available?"<sup>1</sup>; "What are the issues/what do we need?"; and, "What action needs to take place?".

The SIA Core Facilitating Group took the forum discussion summaries and highlighted some recurring themes. Forum participants were then invited back to a subsequent meeting to provide input into recommendations.

The themes generated from the forum discussion were used to create the framework for this paper. They include

- Flexibility,
- Volunteer Management,
- Volunteering Supports,
- Coordination & Links, and
- Youth Volunteers.

The Social Planning Council endorses this report and is committed to further discussion to pursue action on its recommendations. The SIA Committee and the Social Planning Council believe that other organizations identified in the report will do the same.

**BACKGROUND:** There are a number of national trends in volunteerism that may impact how organizations plan to involve volunteers in the future.

The 1997 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, showed that while almost a third of Canadians volunteer, "the 8% of all Canadians who are 'major volunteers' provide 72% of all volunteer hours."<sup>2</sup>

When updated in 2000, the same survey revealed that, "...there has been a decline in the percentage of people who volunteer since 1997. Meanwhile, those who are involved in giving and volunteering appear to be doing more. Canadian donors are giving larger average donations and volunteers are increasing the average amount of time they contribute. Although the total number of charitable dollars given has increased, the total number of volunteer hours provided has declined.

In 2000, charitable and non-profit organizations were relying on a somewhat smaller core group of people to provide the bulk of charitable dollars and volunteer hours." That report also notes that, "such reliance on a small minority of the population to provide the bulk of volunteer time and charitable donations may be a source of vulnerability for charitable and non-profit organizations and the people they serve. Any decline in number among this small core group of contributors could have dramatic repercussions."<sup>3</sup>

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## What supports & resources are available?

Cambridge has many resources that can be used to promote, support, and enhance volunteering in our community. The following are the local supports and resources brainstormed by forum participants:

- Cambridge Volunteer Bureau offers volunteer coordination, volunteer management information and policy & procedures manuals, training support
- several available web seminars and workshops (as well as software for volunteer management)
- participants in programs and their families (lots of useful experience)
- seniors
- the size of our community is an asset – it is big enough to have many valuable volunteer resources but small enough to be manageable
- Community Development Workers
- neighborhood groups (and networking between them)
- wide demographic pool from which to draw
- many community based programs – all across Cambridge (the large non-profit & public sector base provides increased opportunities for volunteering)
- government programs, grants
- many community-based programs -can pull from existing agencies, service clubs, & schools whose members already know about volunteering
- various school programs, co-op opportunities, and the mandated 40 hours of volunteering for high-school students
- great networking and cooperation in our area
- politicians offer local support (e.g. Mayor's Walk for Volunteerism)
- service clubs, churches
- access to post-secondary volunteer and management courses (at Conestoga & WLU)

**BACKGROUND:** Volunteerism is a core goal of the City of Cambridge's Strategic Plan (*Our Common Future*) developed in 1994.<sup>4</sup>

When progress on the Strategic Plan was evaluated in 1999 it was found that "there has been a changing role of volunteers... [with] shorter time commitments and more responsibility for volunteers, many volunteers want a short-term commitment and specific roles to enhance their skills, volunteers are often doing (or expected to do) work previously done by a paid employee, with many government cutbacks volunteers are expected to take on staff roles, and staff must take on a lot more volunteering to keep up."<sup>5</sup>

## Theme - Flexibility

The need for flexibility was an umbrella theme through much of the forum discussion – whether it was with youth volunteering arrangements, managing and supporting volunteers within an agency, or employers encouraging their employees to volunteer. Below are the comments made by forum participants.

**BACKGROUND:** There is certainly a need for flexibility between working and volunteering. "Most volunteers are employed. In 2000, approximately 67% of volunteers were employed (compared with 65% in 1997), 30% were not in the labour force, and 4% were unemployed."<sup>6</sup>

There is also encouraging evidence that "Employer support for volunteering may be increasing. In 2000, more than one-quarter of employed volunteers (27%) reported receiving approval from their employer to modify their hours of work in order to volunteer (compared with 22% in 1997), and 22% reported receiving recognition from their employer for their volunteer work (compared with 14% in 1997)."<sup>7</sup>

### What are the issues?

- flexibility
- major trend of decreasing individual capacity to volunteer
- major trend of a need for increased volunteer management capacity in agencies while at the same time there actually appears to be a decreasing capacity to undertake quality volunteer management

### What do we need?

- outreach to capture those who are not currently involved in volunteering
- be creative in recruiting volunteers

### What action needs to take place?

- more flexibility is needed
- partnering with local business
- make use of your current volunteers to bring in more volunteers

## Theme - Volunteer Management

There is a need for enhanced volunteer management including volunteer training, policy development, risk management and police checks. Below are the comments made by forum participants.

**BACKGROUND:** Although specific reasons were not given, according to the *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, & Participating*, "Volunteers in 2000 were less likely to be involved in certain types of activities. Fewer volunteers reported canvassing, campaigning or fundraising (40% compared with 44% in 1997)."<sup>8</sup>

### What are the issues?

- cost (such as for adequate software or resources)
- liability (many agencies are unaware of their liability or have limited or no ability to pay liability insurance)
- changing liability standards
- risk management
- matching volunteers and opportunities
- better understanding of the process of recruiting, training, managing, & supporting volunteers
- opportunities for support and training for short term volunteers
- a great deal more complexity in the issues and management today compared to years before

### What do we need?

- increase education concerning liability
- funding should match expectations
- ability to keep pace
- need for more financial assistance
- flexibility in time (short term vs. long term)
- be aware of changes in legislation guidelines
- agencies need to take some more time to task focus

### What action needs to take place?

- liability/risk management learning opportunities or consultations offered by the Volunteer Bureau, insurance companies, lawyers, etc., possibly taking place within volunteer organizations
- need to standardize costs for volunteer supports such as police checks
- Volunteer Cambridge have volunteer coordinators on site in community centres to recruit and train community members as volunteers

## Theme - Volunteering Supports

Volunteer forum participants had considerable concern with the barriers that hinder people from volunteering or volunteering more often or more effectively. There is a need for further supports for volunteers such as childcare, transportation, accessibility adaptations, police checks, volunteering incentives, etc. Below are the comments made by forum participants.

**BACKGROUND:** Not everyone volunteers equally – many people do not volunteer because there are barriers (psychological, financial, or logistical).

"Higher levels of household income increase the likelihood of volunteering. Only 17% of people with household incomes under \$20,000 volunteered, compared with 39% of those with incomes of \$100,000 or more.

At the same time, ...volunteers reporting the lowest levels of household income gave the most time, in hours, in 2000 (207 hours, on average)."<sup>9</sup>

### What are the issues?

- lack of transportation
- child care difficulties
- expense compensation
- police checks (issues of length of time; cost of the checks and whether the cost is reimbursed to the volunteer; mandatory vs. voluntary; lack of consistency among organizations)

### What do we need?

- affordable transportation options (including options other than just the bus such as cabs)
- Sunday transportation
- planners should "walk the walk" (e.g. go through what volunteers have to go through, especially with transit)
- need more communication with the Grand River Transit (GRT) and Volunteer Cambridge to negotiate public transit partnerships
- affordable child care programs so parents can volunteer
- compensation for out-of-pocket expenses ("It shouldn't cost to be a volunteer")
- police checks (need standardization; funding to pay consistent cost; commitment to risk management on the part of agencies)
- physical barriers removed for people with disabilities (e.g. auditory streetlight signals, ramps and other access improvements)

**BACKGROUNDER:** According to the local District Health Council presentation at the June 4<sup>th</sup> forum on volunteerism:

- “Agencies [in long term care] are dealing with an older, larger more impaired (physically & mentally) and needier client pool;
- Agencies are dealing with an older, smaller, needier, choosier volunteer pool that seems unwilling to make long term commitment;
- Agencies have insufficient staff time/funds to recruit, train, support and retain volunteers;
- Staff are involved in balancing their time between serving the needs of clients and volunteers but can’t find the time to do the extra training/specialized recruitment and quality control they feel are necessary
- Risk management issues arise especially when service is provided in a private home where staff are not on hand to assist the volunteer;
- There is increasing difficulty recruiting volunteers for certain jobs such as kitchen work, administrative work, or work that requires a long-term commitment.”<sup>10</sup>

### What action needs to take place?

- need standardization of police checks procedure for non-profit organizations (Waterloo Regional Police should not charge for police checks for non-profits)
- City needs to ensure that City-owned buildings and programs are accessible. SPC and Cambridge Access Awareness Committee should continue to advocate for Universal Design.
- volunteerism should be recognized by the government through tax deductions for volunteering
- government funding for volunteer coordinators at non-profit agencies
- volunteer opportunities should pay attention to the needs of each volunteer

## Theme - Coordination & Links

Coordination, linkages, and partnerships often ensure the success of volunteering on a community and individual agency level. This upper-level structure involves volunteers, agencies, businesses, government, and volunteer coordination agencies such as the Volunteer Bureau. The following are the comments made by forum participants:

### What action needs to take place?

- need education and promotion about volunteerism there is a need for continued symposiums and forums groups in order to share successes and facilitate necessary networks and partnerships
- profile individual volunteers in the local papers

- youth need to be included in the community placement program
- need networking and information sharing, specifically concerning planning and implementation strategies (SPC or Volunteer Cambridge could start this up)
- look into “Ontario Works community placement” links with the Regional Social Services Department (linking with case workers; list opportunities to do training to enhance job opportunities) - the SPC could investigate the linking of these roles
- businesses can set aside space for volunteer training (WHIMIS, First Aid, and computer training) - could be negotiated by individual agencies as needed and/or spearheaded by Volunteer Cambridge
- be proactive – negotiate partnerships with businesses (e.g. transit for tickets, video store exchange movies for volunteering)
- develop a barter system (or “preferred status” privileges/discounts if you volunteer for an organization/childcare)
- children’s sports registration forms could include linkage/volunteering questions about whether a parent will drive or volunteer in other ways (setting up a network of drivers and volunteers)
- Volunteer Cambridge – do an education campaign to the business sector to support volunteering (e.g. transit/taxi/video stores/ sports groups - approach a variety of businesses and see what bartering/partnerships they could undertake)

## Theme - Youth Volunteers

Youth are the leaders and volunteers of tomorrow – and in many cases, the leaders and volunteers of today as well. Forum participants felt there was a need to be flexible and creative in attracting and involving youth in volunteering. The following are participant’s comments:

### What are the issues?

- the school boards do not have standardized procedures for placing or screening high school volunteers
- unbalanced base of volunteers (too many young teens rather than the whole spectrum of youth)
- volunteers are “forced” to “volunteer”
- increase in training costs
- sometimes the volunteer arrangements are not mutually beneficial
- increased frustration and stress on coordinators and trainers of volunteers
- an increased pressure to take kids as volunteers
- there is often no true commitment by the mandated volunteers

**BACKGROUNDER:** Youth volunteers provide a wealth of support to a large number of activities in their community. But volunteering is extremely valuable for the youth who volunteer as well. As the local District Health Council found in 2001, “for youth, volunteering provides exposure to the human diversity that exists in our society, while also demonstrating that great satisfaction can be derived from being useful to others. Volunteering can also help youth determine their suitability for careers in the health and human services, and volunteering gives them some hands-on experience that may improve their attractiveness to potential employers and training programs.”<sup>11</sup>

However, in the 2001 Youth Opinion Survey in Cambridge, it was noted that “some youth have a lot of commitments already - homework, work, sports and other responsibilities” and this may be a barrier to volunteering.<sup>12</sup>

### What do we need?

- education – volunteer fairs for schools
- revisit the intent of the high-school mandated volunteering program
- evaluate effectiveness and outcomes of “forced volunteering”
- increase sharing between organizations regarding how to work between school, government, and non-profit systems
- build in a focus on sustainability

### What action needs to take place?

- revisit the intent, evaluate outcomes, and set up an adequate support system (ongoing – training – matching) for the high-school mandated volunteering program (by school boards, Volunteer Bureau, & City of Cambridge)
- hold volunteer fairs at schools (by school boards, Volunteer Bureau, & City of Cambridge)

## Recommendations

The SIA Core Facilitating Group took forum discussion summaries and highlighted some recurring themes. Forum participants were then invited back to a subsequent meeting to have input into recommendations.

### To the Chamber of Commerce

- That the Chamber work with local business, agencies and organizations in Cambridge to provide flexible opportunities for people to volunteer in the community.
- That the Chamber work with the City of Cambridge to create a corporate volunteer award, based on size of company with nominations from the community.

- That the Chamber of Commerce work with the Volunteer Bureau to enhance corporate volunteerism by provide opportunities for corporations to network, share expertise, and success in promoting volunteerism in their organization; and that the Chamber work with local media to share stories of successful corporate volunteer strategies with the public.

### To the City

- That the City of Cambridge take a leadership role in promoting the importance of volunteerism through the development of a corporate volunteer policy for staff.
- That the City’s Community Services Department provide in-kind contributions such as space, staff, and resources to support the Volunteer Bureau in developing a volunteer network in Cambridge.

### To the United Way

- That the United Way develop and provide strategies and/or guidelines to local organizations to assist with volunteer management. Financial support is needed to allow agencies to address volunteering barriers such as childcare, transportation, accessibility, police checks, etc.
- That the United Way work with the City of Cambridge and Volunteer Bureau to spearhead a series of meetings with Cambridge non-profit boards of directors. These would be an opportunity to discuss sustainability of volunteers in the non-profit sector.

### To the Volunteer Bureau

- That the Volunteer Bureau in partnership with the City, be encouraged to provide generic training such as risk management, policy development, board governance.
- That the Volunteer Bureau continue to be a leader in promoting volunteerism and keep on challenging themselves and others to be creative and flexible.
- That the Volunteer Bureau develop and coordinate a volunteer network to: identify and address emerging volunteer management issues (e.g. special needs, youth); address the networking needs of volunteer coordinators; share volunteer program successes, and collectively address barriers to volunteerism (such as childcare, transportation, accessibility, police checks, etc.).

### To the School Boards

- That both school boards work with the Volunteer Bureau and local agencies to assess the mandatory volunteering component for high school students to ensure that each placement is a meaningful experience for both the student volunteers and the supervising agencies.

This issue paper was compiled by Dan Vandebelt, Wendy Adema, & Kristine Allison with input from the Cambridge Social Issues Advisory Committee and forum participants. It is published and copyrighted by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. Quotations from this paper may be used provided that proper and complete citations are included.

This issue paper is a summary of the discussions that occurred at the June 4<sup>th</sup> 2002 public forum on volunteerism in Cambridge.

The Social Issues Advisory (SIA) Committee of Cambridge tracks the pulse of our community. It provides a public forum for discussion of social service issues, unmet needs, community capacities, etc. Relevant information is then forwarded regularly to City Council and the United Way. Recommendations are formulated on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the social issues that are brought up.

The SIA is a committee of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and is funded by the City of Cambridge and the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

The SIA will continue to host a series of similar community forums on identified social issues.

The Social Planning Council has also published other research reports on topics such as:

- Poverty & Basic Needs Forum, & Childcare Forum Issue Papers
- Social Issues & Trends in Cambridge,
- Proposed Shelter & Housing Supports Best Practices,
- Disability Demographics,
- Poverty Demographics,
- Quality of Life in Waterloo Region,
- Human Services Sector Issues,
- Our Common Future visioning progress report,

For more information about this paper or about other related research, please contact:

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## **Recommendations continued**

### **To Non-Profit Agencies**

- That agencies be creative and flexible in providing volunteer opportunities in order to increase the number of volunteers and better support existing volunteers (i.e. address barriers with childcare, transportation, accessibility, police checks, etc.)
- That agencies develop strategies to promote more opportunities and experiences for youth.
- That agencies explore creative options to support volunteers and remove barriers (for example hiring a volunteer coordinator through short-term employment initiatives - HRDC Section 25, etc).

### **To the Social Planning Council**

- That the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, in partnership with the Volunteer Bureau, gather local data on the status of volunteerism in Cambridge. This project could look at the role of volunteerism and local volunteer capacity building.

<sup>1</sup> The list of resources that are included in each theme area are not exhaustive but reflect discussion that took place at the public forum.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, M.H. & Febraro, A. R. "Much comes from the few: The thin base of support for charitable and nonprofit organizations." *Research Bulletin*, 6(2), (Spring 1999) Toronto: Canadian Centre for Philanthropy.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, M.H., McKeown, L., & Roberts, K. "Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating", August 2001, Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>4</sup> The first objective of the plan is that "Cambridge will have strong community leadership through partnerships, volunteerism, and innovation." City of Cambridge, *Our Common Future information pamphlet*, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> *Our Common Future, Our Progress, Progress Report to Cambridge City Council*, January 2000, Gloria DeSantis & Carol Trainor, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, and City of Cambridge.

<sup>6</sup> Labour force status includes three categories: employed (working), unemployed (looking for work), or not in the labour force (neither working nor looking for work).

<sup>7</sup> Hall, M.H., McKeown, L., & Roberts, K., August 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, M.H., McKeown, L., & Roberts, K., August 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, M.H., McKeown, L., & Roberts, K., August 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Waterloo Region Wellington Dufferin District Health Council, presentation at June 4<sup>th</sup> 2002 Volunteerism forum by Susan Burns, "A Precious Resource Under Pressure: Volunteers in Service to Long-Term Care Agencies, July 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Waterloo Region Wellington Dufferin District Health Council, "Volunteers in Service to Long-Term Care Agencies: A Precious Resource Under Pressure" July 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Safe & Sound, "Youth Opinion Survey 2001", presentation at June 4<sup>th</sup> 2002 Volunteerism forum by Kathryn Barrett