

Looking for Volunteers!

Greetings readers! My name is Gillian Smith, and I would like to introduce myself in my new position as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Lillooet and Area Library Association. I am very excited about this program and imagine it benefitting people from all walks of life in the Lillooet and area communities in so many ways. The United Way is providing funding for this program, and we'd like to thank them and all the local people who have donated to them.

At a recent event, "At The Table", where 56 people came together to measure the health of our local social sector, we were reminded that many people in our community wear different hats, both in their paid positions and as volunteers themselves. It was also made clear how important it is for us all to network: to know who is doing what in our social sector, to avoid doubling up services, but also to help and support each other in our work.

Perhaps you'll think of someone you know, or a group of people I could contact, or perhaps you yourself may want to volunteer. You can volunteer anywhere from 1 - 4 hours/week or month, or even casually. Volunteers help clients at the Library, our town's safe, accessible and free public space.

The main purpose of the Volunteer Program is to recruit, train, support and retain volunteers from our community to work with clients, in three streams:

- Basic reading and writing skills (including filling out forms)
- Digital literacy (help with computers, digital devices, social media, and so on)
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) / conversational skills

Literacy is defined as *the ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities, at home, at work, and in the community - to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society* (International Adult Literacy Survey, 2003).

Many of us take this skill for granted. However many of us know someone who is uncomfortable with reading, not just books, but important sources of information such as manuals, forms from government agencies, online instructions, and so on. Think of what it must be like, how it might feel, to not be able to read, or write something that is being required; this often leads to feelings of isolation, depression, low self esteem and low self worth. Helping someone improve their reading and writing skills, whether they are local or a new Canadian, is of endless benefit to society as a whole.

The same can be said for helping someone with a computer task; maybe an elderly person was given an iPad as a gift, and while most people under 40 can learn to use

one almost instantly, getting one on one help from a friendly face can help prevent hours of frustration.

So much can be said about the power and positivity of volunteering, and while being a volunteer is clearly an act of generosity and altruism, its benefits to the volunteer themselves are invaluable:

- volunteering provides a sense of purpose
- volunteering creates new connections
- volunteering exercises one's social skills
- volunteering provides valuable work experience
- volunteering combats depression and counteracts the effects of stress, anger and anxiety

Check out this interesting fact: "By measuring hormones and brain activity, researchers have discovered that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to give to others. The more we give, the happier we feel." (J. Segal, Ph.D. and L. Robinson, 2018; Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits. Help Guide.org)

Keep this in mind with the coming New Year and new resolutions. Whether your list will have things to do to improve your own life, or ways to give back to the community, volunteering is a win-win!

Please feel free to contact me should you have any ideas or thoughts about the program, or if you yourself are interested in volunteering. Remember, it can be casual, monthly or weekly, but even an hour would be a wonderful contribution to someone's life!

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