

Jan 30, 2015

For Immediate Release:

Is the Future of Volunteering at Risk?

Just released Statistics Canada 2013 General Social Survey - Giving Volunteering and Participating shows rates have decreased by half a million volunteers since 2010

January 30, 2015, Ottawa ON – Findings from the most comprehensive study on giving and volunteering reveal that Canadians continue to be generous by volunteering close to 2 billion hours in 2013. However, the survey also indicates that 12.7 million Canadians volunteered in 2013 compared to 13.3 million in 2010. What does this mean for the future of volunteering in Canada?

According to Paula Speevak, President and CEO of Volunteer Canada “although the numbers are down, they provide clarity for organizations and communities. This information sheds light on where organizations need to focus their volunteer engagement strategies.”

The information also tells us that the volunteer landscape has changed.

Youth (15 to 19 years) are more engaged with 66% volunteering an average of 110 hours per year. While some youth engagement (20%) is due to mandatory community service, Volunteer Canada believes that youth want to make a difference – which is great for the future of volunteering. They are highly motivated to be active global citizens and often volunteer to gain experience and build skills.

While the volunteer rate decreases with age, older adults (55 and over) continue to contribute the most (39%) of all hours. Volunteer Canada recognizes that these numbers are extremely positive, yet they also raise the question, namely, will subsequent generations be volunteering in the same way given the multiple demands on their time? An opportunity exists to expose people throughout their lifecycle to volunteering in order to ensure healthy and resilient communities into the future.

Notably, Canadians between the ages of 35 to 44 saw a 6% drop in their volunteer rate. This is not a surprise considering that this age group has multiple demands on their time. Many are balancing careers with raising families, and increasingly providing care for elderly parents and other extended family members. A promising practice however that has been growing over the past decade is employer-supported volunteering (ESV). ESV gives employees the opportunity to volunteer through their workplace and often during working hours. In order to promote volunteer participation, Volunteer Canada encourages employers to integrate employer-supported volunteering into their corporate social responsibility strategies.

Volunteer Canada recognizes that community involvement is varied and diverse and does not always fall into the traditional definition of volunteering. Consequently, Canadians are involved in their communities in a multitude of ways that may not be captured in this survey.

Volunteer Canada provides national leadership and expertise on volunteerism in Canada. We aim to increase the participation, quality and diversity of volunteer experiences in Canada in order to help build healthy and resilient communities. We work with volunteer centres, not-for-profits, businesses, governments and educational institutions to build their individual and collective capacity to promote, celebrate and support volunteerism.

The 2013 General Social Survey - Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS GVP) is the sixth iteration of a series of surveys that began with the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating in 1997. The survey was last conducted in 2010 and is the result of a partnership of the following federal government departments and voluntary sector organizations: Canadian Heritage, Employment and Social Development Canada, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Canada Revenue Agency, Statistics Canada, Imagine Canada and Volunteer Canada.

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