

## **STUDENTS' VOLUNTEERING IN CANADA: SOCIAL AND PERSONAL DIMENSIONS**

*This article explains who volunteers are and what volunteering is. It represents leading reasons for volunteering and casts light on why people, especially young volunteers are interested in such activities. It discusses the rates of volunteering, the number of hours dedicated by age group. It takes a brief look at improving employability skills that can be used at work.*

*Based on previous research on volunteerism, we can see that the voluntary organizations have been affected the society very diversely and deeply. Volunteering is viewed as a form of social capital, with particular reference to the role of volunteering in promoting social inclusion, assisting marginalized social groups, its relationship to other forms of civic participation and unpaid work, creating a civil society, social action, in community building and community renewal. The character of the cooperation of the sector with all kinds of other key social players such as government, business, communities and people as individuals has given the voluntary sector strong power to affect the society as a whole.*

**Keywords:** volunteers, volunteering, Canada, career and professional development, skills, charity.

Every day, Canadians contribute both their money and time to improve the well-being of their communities. Their financial donations help a variety of causes, such as ensuring shelters, social services organizations and food banks are able to deliver their services, universities and hospitals are able to advance medical research, and political, religious and environmental groups can have their voices heard.

Who are volunteers? Volunteers are persons aged 15 and over who did any activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization, at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. This includes any unpaid help provided to schools, religious organizations, sports or community associations. What is volunteering? Volunteering is the ultimate expression of human relationships – people acting on behalf of their communities, because of a desire to contribute and help. As a result, volunteers tend to be highly engaged and committed to the outcomes of their work. Volunteering is democratic – each volunteering day can be seen as an active vote towards what the volunteer believes their world should look like. Volunteering has many faces – specialist international volunteers, youth volunteers, national volunteers who give time for their own countries. Volunteers are everywhere. Informal community volunteers already do so much in developing countries as trainers, carers and healthcare workers amongst neighbors.

According to the 2000 NSGVP (National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating), people volunteered for many different reasons. Most people volunteered for altruistic reasons - because they cared about the cause or issue involved, because they had been personally affected by the cause and wanted to give something back, or because of their religious beliefs. Others volunteered with benefits in mind - to improve their job skills, to challenge themselves, and to explore their abilities. Many people volunteered for a combination of reasons.

**Employment situation and aspirations** can influence volunteer motivations:

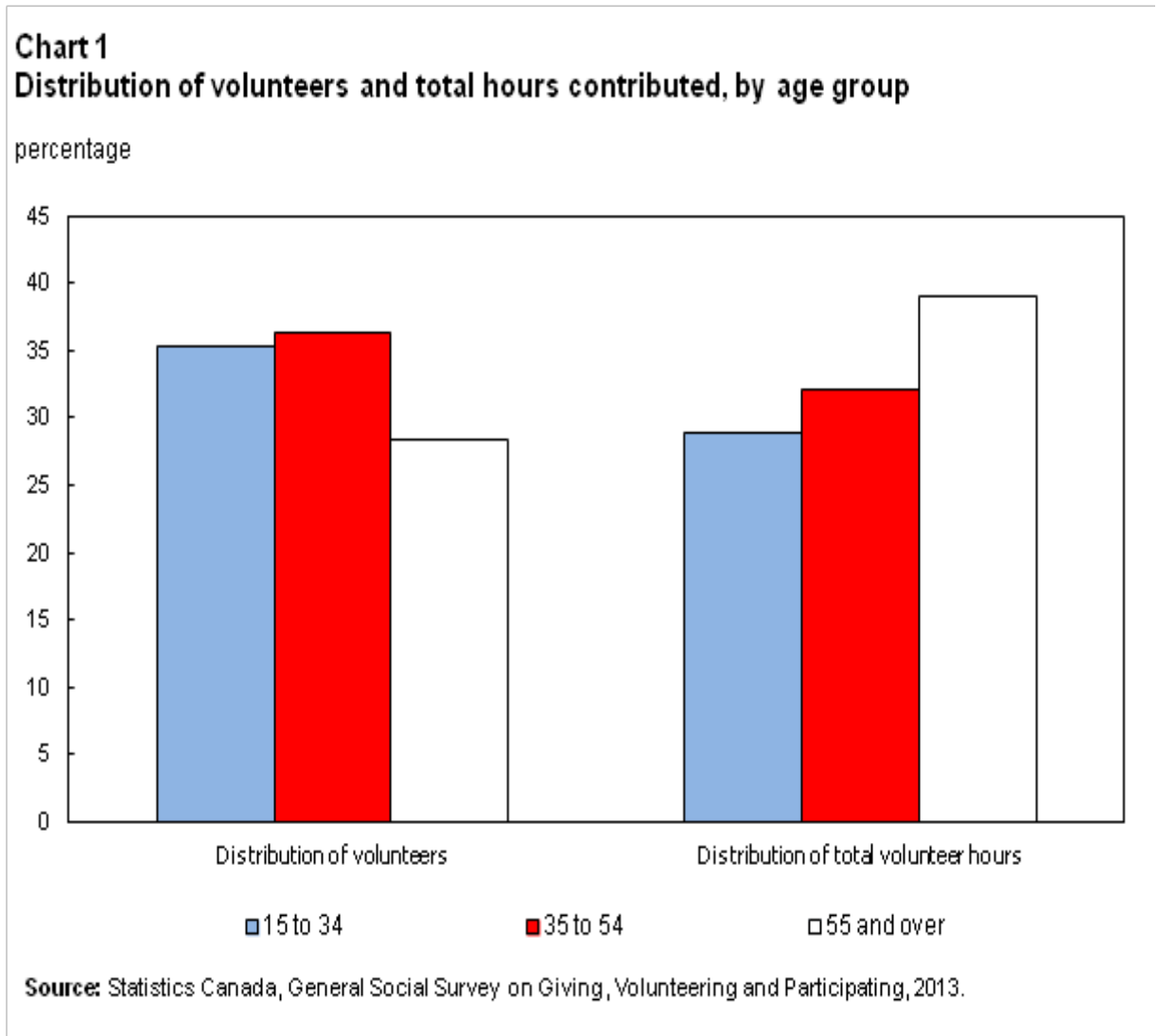
- Nearly two thirds (62%) of unemployed volunteers believed that volunteering would increase their chances of finding a job. This jumped to 78% among unemployed youth.
- Almost one quarter of unemployed youth (24%) said that volunteering had actually helped them find employment.
- More than one third (37%) of those who were employed said that they thought volunteering gave them new skills that could be directly applied to the workplace. This increased to 49% among employed youth [5].

**Men and women had somewhat different motivations.** The top motivation for both men and women was belief in the cause. Women, however, were more likely than men to volunteer to explore their personal strengths (62% versus 52% of male volunteers), while men were more likely than women to volunteer because their friends volunteered (33% of male volunteers versus 28% of female volunteers) [4].

**Younger volunteers** were more likely to say they volunteered to explore their personal strengths (71% of volunteers aged 15 to 24 and 63% of volunteers aged 25 to 34). The importance of this motivation declined steadily with age. Volunteers aged 15 to 24 were also far more likely than volunteers in any other age group to say they got involved because their friends volunteered (42%).

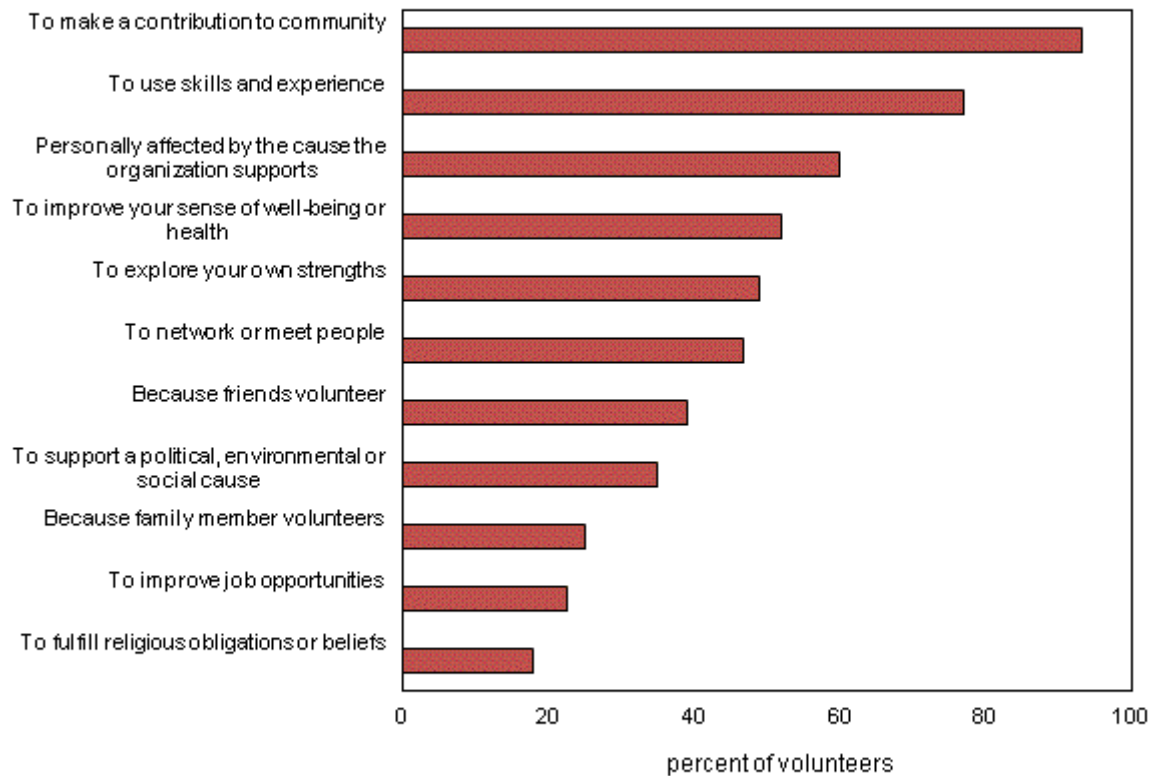
**Older volunteers** were more likely to be motivated by a desire to fulfill religious obligations. Indeed, this motivation rose steadily with age, from only 19% of volunteers between the ages of 15 to 24, to fully half (50%) of those aged 65 and older [4].

A previous Canadian study has shown that people who were involved in community activities in their childhood or adolescence have a greater tendency to become adults who are involved in more kinds of civic activities like formal and informal volunteering, political organizations, and service clubs community associations, and so on [2].



When asked about the reasons for volunteering, the vast majority (93%) said they wanted to contribute to the well-being of their community (Chart 2). Other common reasons included the desire to use their skills and experience (77%), because they were personally affected by the cause (60%), and to improve their own sense of well-being (52%) [2].

**Chart 2**  
**Making a contribution to the community: Leading reason for volunteering**



**Note:** Reasons for volunteering with the organization to which the volunteer gave the most hours (main organization). Volunteers were able to give multiple reasons for volunteering; therefore, responses will not total 100%.  
**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

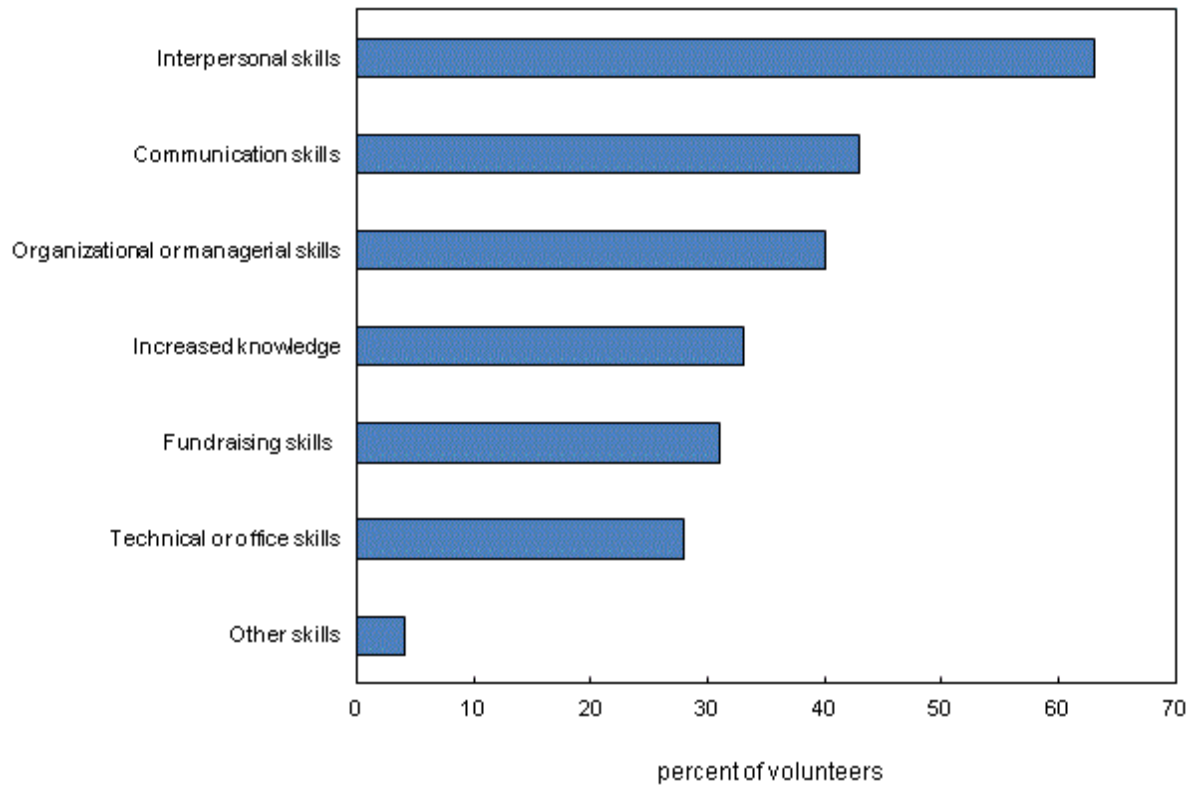
Besides benefiting communities, the act of volunteering can have a positive impact on volunteers’ overall wellbeing and health, as well as improving their skills and knowledge, and expanding work experience. Most volunteers stated that volunteering gave them a chance to acquire or improve their skills. Ranking the highest was interpersonal skills (63%), followed by communication skills (43%) and organizational and managerial skills (40%) (Chart 3). Gaining knowledge in such areas as health, environmental causes, and women’s issues, were also rewards of volunteering, with one-third (33%) of volunteers reporting this benefit [3].

Overall, younger volunteers, those under 35 years, were more likely to state that they had acquired skills through volunteering. This may not be surprising since their work experience, both unpaid and paid, would be more limited than older

volunteers. In addition, older volunteers may choose to volunteer in an area where they can apply their previous work experience and skills [3].

**Chart 3**

**Improvement of skills through volunteering**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Skills volunteers can learn outside the classroom that can be used at university or work:

***interpersonal skills and communication*** –

- ✓ the ability to explain what you mean in a clear and concise way through written and spoken means;
- ✓ to listen and relate to other people;
- ✓ to act upon key information/instruction;

**sub skills:** (listening actively, speaking clearly and directly, empathizing, establishing and using networks, being assertive, sharing information);

***organizational skills*** –

- ✓ being organized and methodical;
- ✓ being able to plan work to meet deadlines and targets;

- ✓ monitoring progress to ensure you are on track to meet a deadline;
- ✓ being able to manage stress;

**sub skills:** (managing time and priorities, being resourceful, establishing clear projects and goals, developing a vision and a plan to accompany it, collecting, analyzing, and organizing information).

*technical or office skills* – being able to use data and mathematics to support evidence or demonstrate a point;

**Sub skills:** (using mathematics, including budgeting and financial management; to solve problems; understanding and using charts and graphs; estimating and guessing).

In addition to these, we strongly believe that with the help of volunteering people develop even more practical knowledge and employability skills, such as:

*problem-solving skills* –

- ✓ the ability to understand a problem by breaking it down into smaller parts, identifying the key issues and implications;
- ✓ identifying solutions;
- ✓ to apply your knowledge from many different areas to solving a task;

**Sub skills:** (developing creative, innovative solutions; developing practical solutions

thinking logically; solving problems in teams; applying a range of strategies to solve problems; generating a range of options; identifying opportunities not obvious to others)

*Using your initiative and being self-motivated* –

- ✓ having new ideas of your own which can be made into a reality;
- ✓ showing a strong personal drive and not waiting to be told to do things;

**Sub skills:** (having a personal vision and goals; evaluating and monitoring your own performance; taking responsibility; developing a long-term vision; translating ideas into action; taking initiative and making decisions).

**Team working** – working well with other people, including people from different disciplines, backgrounds, and expertise, in order to accomplish a task or goal.

**Sub skills:** (working as an individual and as a team member; knowing how to define roles; identifying the strengths of the team members; giving and receiving feedback; coordinating tasks with others, brainstorming).

**Learning and adaptation** –

- ✓ being enthusiastic about your work
- ✓ being able to identify ways to learn from your mistakes

**Sub skills:** (managing your own learning; adapting to new situations; having enthusiasm for ongoing learning; being open to new ideas and techniques; being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills).

**Negotiation skills** - taking on board other people's feelings and expressing your own requirements in an unemotional, clear fashion to achieve a positive outcome.

**Sub skills:** (negotiating responsively; organizing arguments; persuading effectively; applying evaluation criteria).

**Valuing diversity and difference** –

- ✓ knowing the value of diversity and what it can bring;
- ✓ understanding and being considerate of the different needs of different people;

**Sub skills:** (working with people irrespective of differences in age, gender, race, religion, or political persuasion; respecting cultural differences).

Volunteering allows students to get involved with new things and develop technical, social, and academic skills that couldn't be learned in a classroom environment [1]. People can work to improve the lives of others at soup kitchens, shelters, food pantries or health clinics to get a sense of how well they have it as compared to others in their community. They can learn what it means to care for others and provide a service for someone who is needy, so they can give back to the community and put aside their own needs. Whether you're helping out at your local library or tutoring underprivileged kids, volunteering allows you to experience

different environments and situations. Students get to learn about the world of work, build great work-related values and mature socially through volunteering.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

**Підгаєцька А.В.** Студентське волонтерство у Канаді: соціальний та особистий аспект

*Дана стаття дає визначення поняттям волонтер і волонтерство. Вона пояснює основні причини, що спонукають людей до волонтерства, особливо молодих людей, прилучатися до такого роду діяльності. У статті означено співвідношення вікових груп волонтерів з кількістю годин, котрі вони присвчують волонтерству на добровільних засадах. Також у статті розглянуто основні вміння, які вдосконалюються завдяки волонтерству, та які можуть стати у нагоді при працевлаштування або ж виконанні своїх обов'язків як на роботі, так і в навчанні.*



*Покладаючись на попередні дослідження волонтерства, зроблено висновок, що благодійні організації значно впливають на розвиток суспільства. Праця на добродійних засадах розглядається як форма соціального капіталовкладення, що сприяє соціальній інтеграції, підвищенню громадської ініціативи та взаємодопомоги.*