



Canada 150 Volunteer Awards: Voices from the Field

Traditions are important. They are stories, beliefs, rituals and customs that are passed from one generation to the next. They provide opportunities for relationship building, connection, community and growth. It is an annual tradition that recipients of Canada's Volunteer Award come together to share their knowledge, experience, and ideas about how to engage and inspire others to contribute in their community. And such was the case with the 2017 Canada Volunteer Awards.

Traditions also evolve over time. Such is also the case with the 2017 Awards. They carried the traditions of the past, while setting a path for the future. Taking advantage of Canada's 150th Anniversary, 2017 was the first year that a full-day discussion forum was held where not only recipients could share their stories, but their supporters, alumni, and stakeholder representatives were also given the opportunity to join in the discussions and share their experiences and what they saw as trends and best practices in volunteering across Canada. It was also the year that a Canada's Volunteer Awards alumni network was proposed and discussed as a way to support volunteers across Canada into the future.

On December 6, 2017, past and present stakeholders, Canada's Volunteer Awards alumni, and 2017 Award recipients came together at a discussion forum to share their views related to the past, present and future of volunteering related to the four Canada 150 Anniversary themes:

1. Engaging and Inspiring Youth;
2. Reaffirming the Importance of Strong Environmental Stewardship;
3. Promoting a Diverse and Inclusive Canada; and
4. Supporting Efforts Towards National Reconciliation of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians.

The dialogue was passionate as everyone contributed their thoughts and ideas. What follows is a recounting of thoughts, ideas, and experiences that recipients and stakeholders shared during a series of dialogue sessions on those themes.

Building Connection and Communities Through Volunteering: The Bigger Picture

Canada and the world are undergoing a period of broad and rapid social and geopolitical change: generational transfer, demographic shifts, the rise of technology and artificial intelligence, urbanisation, increased social, economic and technological divides, to name but a few. A social by-product of these changes is increased isolation. There are people with social networks who still feel a lack of a personal connection with others.

"As we volunteer,
we've seen more
smiles in town, making
more people happy."
Bill Britton – Business
Leader - Prairies

Our environment, health and sense of community are intrinsically interconnected. Communities where people feel a sense of belonging are healthier and safer; and they are places where people contribute more talent, time, and make more financial contributions. In a country where we are seeing a shift in the sense of belonging and connection, what are ways that we can continue to build communities where people feel a sense of belonging and connection, and want to contribute their time, and what role can volunteering contribute to addressing this growing need for connection? A major challenge will be to come up with a compelling narrative that will inspire people to get involved.



There is a relationship between volunteer time and a sense of belonging as well as, social, interpersonal, political inclusion, and community engagement – whether through arts and culture, religious practice, or other means. Everything starts from a common goal, a common passion. It doesn't matter whether it's in the area of sports or going into a community to volunteer. Each person brings his or her skills to a project, regardless of differences. It is the skills that bring people together because it's people's strengths, inputs and ideas that are valued. And people will come back because the project or the act of volunteering brings them back. It provides a structure that values inclusion and values the skills people bring. In the exchange, everyone benefits from the friendship, knowledge, and the mentorship that develops among individuals when they work to reach a common goal.

The more we are able to bring people together to break isolation, the better. The challenge is how we do that. We have to look at the way we deploy services, build intergenerational connections, develop trust, break barriers; we need to value what is common and respect what is different. We must be accommodating and flexible, explore ideas by asking questions and not presume that we know the answer. We have to be open and engaging to a variety of volunteers and not impose our limits on them.

In terms of the impact, we have to continue moving beyond simply calculating the economic value of volunteering in terms of time in hours. We have to think more broadly about what its true value is, and what it is we want to celebrate. What is the value to an individual in terms of developing skills? What is the value to an organization that builds its capacity? What is the value to a neighbourhood that becomes closer and more connected? What is the value in terms of building confidence in individuals, lifelong friendships, and so on? And in building a just and caring society in Canada, what is the value?

An Iceberg Metaphor

“Like an iceberg, we see volunteers as they show-up every day – their clothes, their ethnicity, their actions... but we do not notice what is below water: deep values. We must not only pay attention to what is visible to us but remember to also explore what we don't see – and that is huge. It is the universal quest for meaning. Everyone seeks meaning in their life. It may be philosophical, spiritual, or it may be something else, but there is a quest for meaning that we do not even realise we are looking for. So, we must remember to continuously reconnect with what inspires us, what has us put so much energy, heart, and love into our volunteer work. Thinking about someone, about a cause, wanting to act. When we talk about changing the image of volunteering, perhaps we may consider the iceberg.”

Rita Rachele Dandavino, Chantiers Jeunesse

Engaging and Inspiring Youth

Youth gain a lot personally from their experience engaging in a youth volunteer project. They are given a voice and are proud to contribute to an observable result. Their participation becomes a seed that grows over time. They often aren't aware in the moment of the contribution they're making to their community or to themselves, but years later we hear of how the experience changed their lives and has contributed to gaining employment elsewhere in fields not necessarily related to the project. That's powerful. It's worth more than just the hours given at the time.

Youth and Required Volunteering

In most communities across the country, young people are required to volunteer for a charity or organization of their choice, either through school, university, or work programs. Through this experience, they learn the value of volunteering and also have an opportunity to figure out where they want to volunteer and what social programs they want to volunteer for.

To help increase access to these kinds of opportunities, businesses and organizations should provide access to information for youth to know what opportunities are available, such as a national volunteer platform or website. This can be done through schools and school boards, teachers, and parents in order to not only connect them to information, but to also ensure that they receive it at the right time.

Orientation at universities can inform youth on what is available on campus and where to volunteer. It should also provide an opportunity for students to connect to the world by making sure they have access to information on what is happening internationally. This may encourage them to eventually go to another city or country to connect with others, have fun, and continue to make a difference. International students can also get involved by making a difference, contributing and being part of a broader community.

Youth and Deliberate Volunteering

In contrast to required volunteering, there are young people who become encouraged to volunteer by hearing of the experiences and leadership of others as they pass their lessons learned to the next generation. As they grow up in the community and become a bigger part of it, they learn about the importance of their contribution. They learn that the payback is not just financial, but also multi-dimensional, including: environmental, self-worth and a greater appreciation of their own values and purpose.

On the Land Program in the North

“Environmental awareness can be brought to the individual level. At-risk kids appreciate the value of community and their own value as they become motivated by using the land, hunting, giving back to their community. Their appreciation for the environment also grows.”

Joavee Etuangat, Ilisaqsivik Society

It’s important to take into consideration youths’ comfort level when encouraging them to volunteer, and provide them with ongoing support and mentoring. Being at different social and emotional stages of development than adults, young people need to know that they are in a safe space, so they can feel free to make choices, immerse themselves in experiences that may take them outside of their comfort zone, process and validate the intellectual and emotional impact of their experiences, and learn to fit in. When this has been done right, youth have often emerged changed and empowered from their volunteering experiences.

Success in doing this has been to make volunteering experiences for young people social by including peers and family. Introducing youth to organisations that mean something to them, their family, friends or community, or linking experiences to something that they are interested in, often helps encourage them to stay with it. Once they have built new and sustainable relationships with peers or community organizations, they will often grow with them over their lifetime. So, organizations and communities must help youth feel that they belong by really acknowledging and empowering them. Give them decision-making opportunities and allow them to take ownership of their decisions.

It’s also important that inspiration be generated from within – through empowerment. Similar to adults, young people respond well to passion, connection, authenticity and purpose. It’s important to share the mission, purpose, and the value they bring as volunteers. Introducing youth to community challenges at a young age and inviting them to come up with solutions has often been very rewarding, and at times life-changing. We often hear stories where young people have found different ways to get results than adults, because they haven’t been constrained by socially constructed reasons why something cannot be done. When adults have stepped aside and allowed young people to take on leadership roles and perhaps do things a little differently, youth have invariably taken ownership of their decisions, actions, mistakes, and successes. They have learned from these experiences and carry them forward in their lives forever.

Alongside empowerment, it is also important to provide young people with access to mentorship opportunities– someone supporting and helping them. This can help a lot in supporting youth in decision-making and taking ownership of their decisions. But, at the same time, having someone be a partner to them so that if things go wrong, they have someone to advise them and take some of the responsibility. This encourages them to learn about risk-taking and consequences in a safe space.

“My little daughter started volunteering me for everything. I started volunteering because I wanted to spend as much time as possible with my kids. It’s been now 25 years.”
Deborah Morrow – Community Leader – British Columbia and the North

Experience has also shown that youth and young adults want tangible

opportunities for advancement and growth to better themselves, use their skills, and to learn for their future. They may also not have certain skillsets, so being given opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills while keeping an eye on the future has also been empowering for youth. Linking volunteer experiences to skills-building and future goals that youth care about has often made volunteering more meaningful and helped them move toward career or other life aspirations. Situations where youth have been provided opportunities for peer-to-peer mentorship (youth learning from other youth) and growing from these opportunities has also helped young people feel that they are contributing to the growth and development of their own community.

Reducing Barriers to Youth Volunteering

In addition to providing opportunities, we must also work to reduce barriers to participation in youth volunteering. Some of the more obvious barriers are financial and language. For some young people – those who people think never want to volunteer or are uninterested – it could be because they have challenges at home that are not obvious, such as insufficient food, family financial struggles, or the duty to care for their siblings. While they may look like they're the ones who seem not to be interested, it's more that they can't. Some other barriers are things that many take for granted, like having a driver's license or accessing public transportation.

We must also change the way we use the language of volunteering when speaking to young people to make it more accessible. For example, consider using "youth leader" over "volunteer" as some kids don't want to hear about volunteering. They love feeling that they are a leader, because nobody else thinks of them as such. Instead of asking "Will you volunteer with me?", one can say "I could really use your help". That seems to be much more inviting and acceptable.

Reaffirming the Importance of Strong Environmental Stewardship

It is important that environmental stewardship be included in volunteer work moving forward, either through the way events are organized, or to reflect the type of political demands or changes expressed by society. To help make this happen, volunteers need to see themselves as civic participants in democracy, need to organize within our communities, and distribute leadership. It will also be essential to identify political champions in communities as well, if stronger government regulations or interventions on environmental issues are wanted.

Political Champions

"There is a group of volunteers in Ottawa South that have organized their own community group to focus on environmental issues. They started as a group of volunteers at Ecology Ottawa, but because they were neighbors they decided to start their own community group and focus on talking to their local politicians, and it's led to positive political outcomes."

Antony Garoufalis-Auger, Ecology Ottawa

Stewardship and Individual Action Toward Sustainability

At the individual level, volunteers see the day-to-day difference they make in communities. It's what motivates them. From an environmental sustainability perspective, volunteering transforms people. It changes the way they see life, their buying power, and how they consume. People become more responsible and educated consumers by volunteering and committing to causes. In volunteering, values are reflected by individual decisions and actions – whether it's by carpooling, recycling, composting, or other personal decisions related to environmental sustainability. Together, these individual actions make a difference and volunteers become an example in the community and influence others.

Environmental Stewardship

“When you look at recycling or composting or bringing your waste to areas – like, hazardous waste to areas where it is properly disposed of – you’re taking your time to do something that has a benefit to society. This comes from a place of stewardship and is an important use of people’s time that is going to have to be done by almost everybody in society at some point. So that’s got to be encouraged, valorized and appreciated by society.”

Green Chair Recycling

Volunteering can also have an impact on environmental sustainability at the collective level. It provides opportunities to bring diverse societal actors together – environmental, economic, social, etc. – to collaborate on issues and work toward a common goal. This collaboration brings benefits to communities beyond simply working through the issues. It helps create a culture of learning and openness, which contribute to healthier and more connected communities as well.

A good part of the innovation required for environmental as well as social sustainability will include figuring out how to maximize the combined efforts of diverse individuals and groups. Building sustainable initiatives will require building a strong sense of belonging and ownership within communities, as well as creating mechanisms and structures that will generate money that can be redistributed. This brings positive benefits for all of the actors who participate, as well as communities and their members.

Don't think that if you are from a small town, you can't be successful...
I'm from a little town, with a big heart!
Marie-Claire Ivanski -
Community Leader - Ontario

Organizational Action Toward Sustainability

At the organizational level, the shift needs to be around values and creating a corporate mindset that values environmental sustainability. It's important to inspire organizations to build corporate philosophies that appreciate that this land is a gift. Young people need to continue to be informed about the importance of environmental sustainability and see how it can be applied to their own organization and the way they do business. Eventually, this can lead to identifying opportunities for volunteering related to environmental sustainability within their organization, across organizations, and within the community, and to developing a philosophy of giving back to the community.

Finding ways to support organizations with direct resources and incentives (not necessarily financial) to support them in meeting targets around recruiting and supporting volunteers in environmental sustainability is also a strategy. This could be similar to something that exists currently in Manitoba with the volunteer disability support program. Volunteers can get a \$100 a month without losing disability tax credits.

Also, along these lines, organizations should be provided, where reasonable, with the proper resources and additional support to encourage individual and collective volunteer initiatives in promoting environmental sustainability, such as tree planting. This can develop a philosophy for innovation in environmental sustainability by supporting people driven by a desire to contribute in this area.

Youth and Sustainability

Many youth are involved in environmental issues and climate change. Part of this may have to do with the way young people get their information. Based on research, they have greater access to information from outside of Canada than the baby boomer generation. Because of the information that young people are getting, they see that the stakes are high for their generation and there is more of an interest in doing something about it. Often this is through political advocacy, but through other important forms of volunteering as well. Local action is very important to influence global issues, but small actions locally (in our daily lives to get concrete results) are also important as not to become abstract discourse. Both are important and must be recognized accordingly.

We must continue to educate youth and communities about sustainability and taking ownership for their actions. If everybody is on the same page and knows to do the same things, it can amplify and we all start doing better. Building community gardens in schools and expanding them to communities, cities, and municipalities is an example. Positive peer pressure can also lead to small actions that can have a big impact by highlighting and raising awareness of things that we value, such as creating a caring community or inspiring a zero-waste society.

Promoting a Diverse and Inclusive Canada

The real power of having diversity at any table is the range of views, perspectives, and lived experiences that it provides. Volunteering is a good way to connect different segments of the community in a way that is meaningful to them. Whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, from a big city or small town, regardless of language facility or ability; when we make our skills available to work together, people develop greater understanding and respect, and this becomes transferred to society in general.

Volunteers are often the source of diversity in sectors typically less diverse. We start by building on a foundation of similarity and learn to respect differences. From there we build trust and that leads to breaking down barriers. For volunteerism and our society to stay relevant, there is a need to shift and adapt, and authentically listen to those many voices. Creating the space for this to happen provides an opportunity for experimentation and innovation.

“We need to have fun when making a difference.”
Valérie Toupin-Dubé -
Community Leader - Quebec

The Value of the Learning Mindset

A focus on learning is a critical strategy needed when looking to incorporate more diversity into community volunteering. Without a focus on learning, a volunteer’s success is limited. If a volunteer isn’t learning, they won’t get the personal return they are looking for, and they won’t want to continue. This affects sustainability, because we need volunteers to want to continue, to want to come back.

People learn in different ways: through a combination of reading, seeing, doing, etc. This can look like almost anything: an entrance interview, a conversation between a community member and a volunteer, a mentoring relationship, job shadowing, or a variety of other experiences. When we consider volunteering as contributing to building confidence, skills, or a sense of community, it’s not only the service a volunteer provides, but it’s what that experience does for the volunteer as well.

Learning is also important in finding the right “fit” for a volunteer, which then helps build greater empowerment. Being curious, exploring what a volunteer’s skills are, finding a role that fits those skills, and then getting them into the right spot will make the volunteer’s experience more meaningful, which in turn becomes a benefit to society as well. Bringing this learning mindset helps us consider and embrace a broader spectrum of engagement, whether it’s people or types of activities.

While considering “fit” of volunteers and experiences is important, it’s also critical to respect the diversity that occurs over the period of a volunteer’s life. We cannot expect people to continuously contribute the same way throughout their lives. This aspect of diversity must be respected, otherwise we will lose our volunteers, or they will become discouraged if the task doesn’t meet their ability to contribute at a given point in time.

Learning can also play an important contribution in relationship-building and social perception. Sometimes, because of the diversity in a group or volunteer project, negative things happen. In most cases these are unintentional and the result of misunderstandings. When these things happen, they need to be addressed in constructive ways so that people aren’t left feeling discouraged.

People succeed in comfortable environments. By bringing a learning perspective, we can create safe spaces where people feel comfortable discussing challenges and problems, and then their ability to overcome obstacles in the future increases.

How do you make a failure,
an opportunity?
Prakash Amarasooriya -
Emerging Leader - Ontario

Focusing on the Positives

“Let’s say you have volunteers of different nationalities or cultures. At the end of the project, you could consider having a potluck to say thank you and talk about some of the positive things that happened, and also some of the things that maybe weren’t so positive that can be improved on – from a learning perspective, not blame – so the next time they come back to volunteer with your group, it’s more enjoyable and more comfortable. You can also do this through an exit interview, thanking the volunteer and highlighting what went well.”

Volunteering and New Canadians

For newcomers, becoming connected to a new community through volunteering is a very powerful and significant vehicle for connection and contribution.

For new Canadians, their first exposure to volunteering in Canada is during their moment of entry. When they experience people volunteering to help them get settled, they see that volunteering is part of Canadian culture; it’s part of what we do. We talk about Canada being such a polite country, and part of that is through volunteering and wanting to help other people. As new people come in, hopefully this is being imprinted on them and they will also volunteer as newcomers and it will continue to spread.

“I have 3 passports from 3 different countries, from South Sudan, Kenya, and Canada, actually I don’t have one from Canada yet. I came here as a refugee through the WUSC program which changes lives.”
Akuechbeny Kuol – Emerging Leader
– British Columbia and the North

The value of networking through volunteering is very powerful, particularly for new Canadians. Very few jobs are actually posted on job boards – it’s who you know. New Canadians bring knowledge and skills with them. Perhaps they have been a nurse, or they’ve worked in an oil field, or a variety of different things. When they get to Canada, their skillset may not be recognized here, so they can’t be employed in their area of expertise. That doesn’t mean their knowledge and skill isn’t important and they can’t be used in other ways. By networking and applying their skills through their volunteer work, new Canadians can build credibility and it can become an entry point to get references and find other opportunities. This can really be a step up and make it easier for them. Hopefully it contributes to their development and to them getting gainful employment since they need it in order to have the time and confidence to continue volunteering. It becomes a positively reinforcing cycle. Creating a pairing system can support this idea. As new volunteers come in they are paired with somebody with experience that they can learn from. This then becomes something they can do for the next person as well.

The potential contribution of international students should not be forgotten. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we don’t often involve them in community volunteering. Knowing that 65 to 85 percent of them would like to stay after school, perhaps we need to start reaching out to them to bring them in, so that while they are in school, they don’t only contribute to the community financially through their school fees and other expenses, but socially as well.

Language, Culture, Diversity, and Trust

Language and culture can sometimes get in the way of building trust and bringing diversity into community volunteering.

The Complexity of Language

“When we use the term “friend”, it has different meanings in different cultures and languages. In some cultures, if we say: “You know, you want that person to be your friend”, it means you’re going to then lend them money. If we just throw out words and don’t expand upon them, then that person can pull back and not trust. We need to find ways to overcome that. So, to gain trust and build positive relationships, we need to realize that we need to explain some of the language and concepts that we use as new people come in; not take it for granted that we all understand the same thing.”

When we take a learning perspective, and engage in learning conversations, we can isolate the language barrier and pair people with somebody who can either help translate or help them navigate through a multi-language or multi-cultural event. It’s not insurmountable.

Building Trust and Breaking Barriers

“A few years back, I noticed that some immigrant men would come to settle their families in Canada and then return to their home country. This got me curious. I wanted to find out why they would come, settle their families, and then leave. Particularly when I discovered that when fathers leave the community, it is the children that suffer.

“So, I got curious, and in my curiosity discovered that some immigrant men are afraid of police. Because Canada is seen as a country where women have complete freedom and can behave the way they like, men feel like that they have lost their authority. And for some men who come from countries where, when you see police coming your way you run in the opposite direction, a feeling of loss of authority compounds the issue.

“I decided to try and do something about it. I went to a female police officer in our community to see if she could help me get police to come and talk to the men in the community. I wanted them to see that the police are our friends, not our enemies. As well, I got our city counsellor to donate the community centre, and got grocery stores to donate food, so that we could make food that is acceptable for different cultures: including Halal, and for those who don’t eat pork.

“So now, every three months, we have a breakfast with the Winnipeg police where men talk about what they have been taught about police and get to ask questions. The police answer them, and they start to build new relationships. And the police benefit as well. They have been wanting to find a way to reach out to men in the community.

“So now we have created the time and space for this to happen; for men from different cultural groups to learn from each other. They’re learning that being a man from another culture does not mean you have lost total authority over your family, marriage, and wife. They are seeing that this culture is just a new way of building relationships and letting others know that family is important.”

Deborah Olukoju,

2015 Community Leader Award recipient from the Prairies

The Power of Ownership and Positive Recruitment

Organisations such as foundations need to ensure that they are reflective of their community and create space for people to see themselves in their activities. They need to conduct business and shape their communications in a way that allows people from different backgrounds to see themselves in the work and

feel collective ownership. Creating space for people to see themselves in what they are doing may require not only a shift in the concept of volunteering, but an overall shift in how we work. Admittedly, it's not easy and there's no silver bullet.

To reach out and get more diversity within our volunteer networks and projects, we need to get people talking about their positive experiences. Put it out there and say, "Hey, listen, if you enjoyed your experience with us, if you wouldn't mind chatting about it on Twitter or Facebook or with your friends," because word of mouth is the most powerful tool. If you really want people to come back, then talk about it. When we go somewhere and have a fantastic meal or a great beverage, the first thing we do is tell our friends about it and then we try to get them to come with us the next time. That's a strategy we can use to help create more volunteers and overcome some of the obstacles and barriers.

Supporting Efforts Toward National Reconciliation of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians

There is positive forward movement that traditional roles can play in strengthening communities, particularly in the deliberate efforts for co-development and co-creation. There are always ways to connect. And, at the end of the day, we're all Canadians. There is a need to find a way to remember our collective national identities, and to leverage them in different ways. We're Canadians in different ways, so, how do we all get through this world together?

There is tremendous value in having cultural exchanges to build bridges that allow going beyond language and culture, which are often seen as barriers. They are important, but they shouldn't stop the conversations from happening and incorporating elements like land claim arrangements, working towards common goals, and building bridges, into those conversations.

When having these co-development conversations, it is important to acknowledge the culture and values that all sides bring, such as respect and the importance of community and family. These are values that ground who we are as Canadians. We need to have knowledge of our own and other communities and take the time to listen. We, as Canadians, need to learn from each other, listen to our stories, share the knowledge. Closing divides through education and learning is another important strategy. There are so many ways to incorporate Indigenous experiences and conversations into educational and life experiences so that they become a conduit of information to others.

"Through education, we can change the world."
Akuechbeny Kuol -Emerging Leader - British Columbia and the North

Stella's Circle

"Last year, we had our Annual General Meeting. I am, and always have been, really interested in the indigenous community and how much we can learn. So, I wanted to have a land claim acknowledgement, which is not generally typical in the province, although it's becoming such. But I didn't feel comfortable in giving it. I was nervous, and I didn't want to say the wrong thing. About the week before the AGM, we're in Newfoundland on the land of the Beothuk. And a member of the Indigenous community said to me, "Well, you know, in Newfoundland we call it 'Beothuk', but really, it's supposed to 'Bee-o-tok,'" which sent me totally over the edge, because I thought if I get up at our AGM and say "Bee-o-tok" when we've been pronouncing it as "Beothuk" for so long, then what are people going to think? So, I called-up the Native Friendship Centre in St. John's and invited them to come and do the land acknowledgment, and they were so grateful and gracious and wonderful and did that, and it's opened up a whole relationship. We've done smudging ceremonies, we've done blanket exercises...."

Volunteering can bridge intergenerational gaps within Indigenous communities and support the transfer of knowledge across generations in both directions. Youth can be a conduit for information to parents. For example, the work being done in educating youth around food and composting, or the use of smoke detectors. Young people then turn around and educate parents.

Ensure that volunteers, as well as existing and new leaders are as inclusive and as representative as possible of the communities and organizations they are serving, and are grounded in, and working toward a common goal for the community.

Food for Thought - Manitoba

“Non-Indigenous, low income senior women volunteer to cook high school lunches which youth then serve for volunteer hours. The elder women and youth learn together over cooking and serving and engage with each other while eating their meal before serving. Families also come in to eat together, contributing to family unification.”

Fundraising for a Sports Dome

“This project was taken up by different clubs and individuals working together towards a mutual goal. By building a place for youth and elders to exercise, we were working to build a stronger, healthier community. We raised half the budget and asked the city for the rest. Everyone took ownership of the project and was proud of the shared accomplishment. Because we worked together we now feel like a family.”

Cultural Program - Saskatoon

“Non-Indigenous youth from group homes engage with non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth to learn traditional skills such as beading, regalia, and harvesting animals. A result of the way this program is structured, some families regain custody of their children.”

Inuit Organisation

“A community outreach program where Inuit employees reach out to their Inuit communities to help address community social issues. The door is always open to remind the community that they are always open for healing and togetherness. This is an important statement for the community to grow together and become stronger.”

Youth may not know the value of healing or may not be ready

“Their lack of life experience can hinder their moving forward. It is important to encourage them. There is a shyness; a fear they may have to talk about the trauma. Changing the title from “healing” may make it more inviting to them, reduce the implication that something is wrong with them and reduce the stigma.”

Supporting an awareness of Indigenous communities is a precursor to leveraging resources more equitably. When we create policies for Canadians, we need to recognize that some Canadians may be affected to a greater degree than others, especially impoverished and isolated communities – many of which are Indigenous.

Because communities find resources, knowledge and support within their own communities, it is important to foster engagement amongst Indigenous populations. For example, there is a lack of multi-year funding for Indigenous populations and it is a challenge to have to apply for multiple grants every year. The technology that makes it easy for others is not always available. Indigenous populations are often last to receive it.

We need to build up our own (Indigenous) population and communities – such as by learning and spreading knowledge regarding how to apply for funds within the community and throughout other organizations, provide mentoring opportunities, empower ourselves to find and develop the resources within our

communities, while we also engage and communicate outside of the communities.

In Closing

At the end of the day, as participants left to go home from the Discussion Forum, they were thanked for the work they have done and reminded that they earned their awards and that Canada's communities remain grateful for their tireless contributions. Their parting words stood as important messages to remember.

We need to think beyond a concept of volunteering as benevolence and service to volunteering also being a way of shaping communities and collectively having a neighbourhood and community vision and working on that together. People are doing great things for their communities by mobilizing their social networks, but also in their day-to-day decisions and the things they do to act upon their values and some of these important activities aren't recognised or easily measured.

We must not forget Indigenous peoples – their past, their present, and our collective future. True impact is everlasting impact. We must take the things that have been discussed at this Forum and remember that it's the small actions that make a difference. We must make an effort to keep the conversations going by reaching out to each other and leveraging our new networks; those will be the changes that matter.

We must also form a great network that continues to share information, to meet up, and we must continue to promote, broaden and strengthen volunteering in our communities. We have to stay connected virtually so we can continue to solve problems together, share tools with each other, take microscopes to issues and inform policy, and think about how we can tackle current issues together.

Whatever the future we create for volunteerism, it is important that we think of it as an ecosystem in communities. We must consider a variety of ways that might encourage people to continue volunteering their time in a changing way. We need to expand our understanding of what a volunteer looks like. We need to make space for all types of people and the idea that you can volunteer from wherever you are. As volunteering evolves, it will be important to recognize that contributing to the greater good can take the form of individual choices and being part of a collective. Embracing and celebrating all those actions and making space for the individual to innovate within our organisations - that will serve us well into the future.

Why do people give? Because someone asked them to.

Canada 150 Volunteer Awards - Voices from the Field

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