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Volunteer shortage in North Hastings

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By Nate Smelle

In recent years community groups and not-for-profit organizations throughout North Hastings have been experiencing a shortage of volunteers. Considering these organizations rely on volunteers to provide the communities they serve with the programs and services they offer, if this shortage is not addressed many residents of North Hastings could soon have to settle for a diminished quality of life.

As the executive director at the Volunteer and Information Quinte, Brenda Snider understands how vital volunteers are to the people and communities they serve. With many volunteers in North Hastings approaching retirement, she is hoping that the next generation of community-minded citizens will step up to carry on this important legacy.

?Volunteers are the cornerstone to the success of programs and services delivered through not-for-profits,? said Snider.

?Volunteers not only give back to their community they ensure the longevity of programs and make a difference in a life. Volunteers also have the ability to learn new skills, share their skills and expertise, build resumes, explore career options, build social networks and gain references.?

In response to the shortage, she said VIQ continues to stress the important role volunteerism plays in fostering the health and social well-being of communities. Snider said every day they receive requests from agencies for volunteers to assist in program delivery. In many cases, she said programs solely depend on volunteers.

?Volunteering connects us to others and to our communities,? said Snider.

?It has a significant impact making our community a better place for those around us. Helping out with even the smallest tasks can make a difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need.?

Highlighting how rewarding the experience can be, Snider said volunteering has the potential to benefit the volunteers and their families just as much as they benefit the agencies they choose to help. When volunteers dedicate their time to an organization or cause, she said volunteers often end up expanding their own social networks and making new friends. Snider explained further that volunteering can also help people boost their social skills and assist them in reaching their personal goals.

?It is a great way to make new friends especially if you are new in the area and strengthen relationships with friends and family by spending time together doing a shared activity,? she said.

?It strengthens your connections to the community and widens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, resources in your community, and fun and enjoyable activities.?

Patricia Brooks is the volunteer coordinator at the North Hastings District Hospital Auxiliary. Without volunteers, she said their organization would cease to exist and the hospital would not have the opportunity to benefit from their efforts. Because of the lack of volunteers in North Hastings, Brooks said their organization has already been negatively affected. For example, she said they have been forced to keep their New To You resale store in Bancroft closed on Mondays at different times throughout the year.

?Volunteers are essential to all volunteer organizations,? said Brooks.

?Without these people many of these organizations will be forced to close the doors. These organizations benefit our community in many different ways ? from the food bank, to helping women in need, to hospice and the hospital and beyond.?

Some of the other organizations that have also been affected by this shortage include: Care North Hastings; Alzheimer Society, Hastings Centennial Manor, Lions Club, Bancroft Community Transit, VON Hastings Adult Day Services Hospice House, their new and used stores, North Hastings Community Trust; North Hastings Food Bank North Hastings Community Cupboard, North Hastings Pregnancy Care and several sports programs.

For more information on how to get involved with any of these organizations and/or others serving North Hastings visit Volunteer and Information Quinte online at www.viq.ca.