

WHEN IT'S COOL TO BE KIND

Introduction

Focus

Every year an army of volunteers gives Canadian society something for nothing. What motivates people to act with such generosity? This *News in Review* story examines the role of volunteering in Canada and the reasons why it's cool to be kind.

Did you know . . .

Guelph is the volunteer capital of Canada, with 70 per cent of its citizens participating in volunteer work; Kingston is second at 62 per cent (*Guelph Mercury*, August 29, 2008).

They do it because they care. Day in and day out, from coast to coast to coast, scores of Canadians give society something for nothing. They do this out of an innate sense of compassion and concern for the wellbeing of others. They are Canada's volunteers.

According to Volunteer Canada (www.volunteer.ca), 12 million Canadians volunteer for some time over the course of a year. That's 30 per cent of the population! The more avid volunteers give over 150 hours of their time per year. They work in soup kitchens and food banks. They coach soccer and baseball. They raise money for the arthritis society and the cancer society. They work in animal shelters and community centres. They do these things out of the goodness of their heart. Essentially their efforts transform our nation into a hub of kindness.

Volunteering is the benevolent underground economy of our society. Volunteers provide millions of hours of unpaid labour for Canadian charitable and humanitarian organizations. Without the fine work of these people the disenfranchised would be virtually forgotten, the sick would feel abandoned, and recreational activities would be practically non-existent. Canadians simply take for granted the fact that volunteer organizations exist. Maybe it's time to take stock of how critical a role volunteers play in making Canada one of the kindest, most compassionate nations in the world.

In Ontario alone, 45 000 non-profit organizations provide 800 million hours of unpaid labour for charitable organizations. Half of those organizations are run entirely by volunteers (*Toronto Star*, May 5, 2008).

Schools and businesses place volunteering high on their agendas. In all of Canada's provinces and territories, elementary and secondary students are encouraged to volunteer. In Ontario, graduation from secondary school is contingent on completing 40 hours of volunteer work. Companies are also joining the volunteer parade. Over 55 per cent of companies now offer paid leave for volunteering. For example, Microsoft provides 40 hours of paid volunteer time per year for their employees. There are scores of other companies doing the same thing. Finally, in a survey of 18- to 26-year-olds, 62 per cent said they wanted to work for companies that allowed them to pursue volunteer opportunities as part of their employment (*Toronto Star*, March 13, 2008). Clearly, volunteerism is valued and embraced in Canada.

Volunteer Canada defines volunteering as "the most fundamental act of citizenship and philanthropy in our society. It is the offering of time, energy, and skills of one's own free will" (www.volunteer.ca). In other words, volunteering is a gift, freely and willingly given, with the goal of making our society better for everyone. This gift comes with no strings attached.

Questions

1. How many Canadians per year participate in volunteer work?
2. What kind of work do volunteers do?
3. Explain the expression "volunteering is the benevolent underground economy of Canadian society."
4. What would society be like without volunteers?
5. What role does volunteering play in schools and in the business world?
6. Why is volunteering considered to be a gift?
7. Describe any volunteer work that you do or have done.

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Video Review

Further Research

To discover more stories about being cool to be kind, visit the cbc.ca Web site at www.cbc.ca/national/blog/special_feature/cool_to_be_kind/.

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. What does "*Dans la rue*" mean?

2. Who is Pops? _____

3. What event led to the founding of *Dans la rue*?

4. How successful has *Dans la rue* been over its 20-year history? Provide examples.

5. What is Marc Surprenant's dream job? How has *Dans la rue* helped him move toward his dream?

6. How old is Jenny Flett? _____

7. What service did Flett provide for the community of Fort Chipewyan?

8. How many babies has Jenny Flett delivered over the years? _____

9. Why was the service she provided so important to her community?

10. How busy was Flett at her volunteer job?

11. Describe Flett's last delivery. How old was she when she delivered the baby? How much did the baby weigh?

12. Who is Harold Jacobs?

13. Why did the community feel the need to step in and help Jacobs and his parents?

14. What role did Bill Foley play in helping Jacobs and his parents?

15. Describe how the community chipped in to make sure that Jacobs' van worked properly.

16. What is the nickname for Jacobs' van?

17. Describe how Jacobs' mother feels about the gift from the community.

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Profiles

Did you know...
c2bk is a popular short form for the cool-to-be-kind movement.

When the producers of CBC's *The National* put out a request for stories about people who are exceedingly generous in their communities, they were flooded with e-mails, letters, and phone calls. Once they sifted through the plethora of candidates, they decided to focus on a few key individuals and groups. The profiles listed below are based on *The National's* series "Cool to be Kind."

Fr. Emmett Johns – Montreal, QC

After experiencing what many Christians would call a "dark night of the soul," Fr. Emmett Johns had an epiphany that would change his life and the lives of Montreal's street youth. The epiphany was the light that pulled Johns out of depression. It was an inner call to provide "help without judgment" for wayward youth living on the streets of Montreal. In 1988, Johns took out a personal loan for \$10 000, bought a van, and began cruising the downtown core looking for youth in need of direction. He would offer those he encountered hot dogs and a drink. More importantly he would offer them a compassionate interaction that let them know they were valued. Soon the youth began referring to the priest as Pops, and *Dans la rue* (www.danslarue.com) was born. Within five years, Pops opened a 20-bed emergency shelter called the Bunker for youth between the ages of 12 and 19. Four years after that he opened the Chez Pops Day Centre, a multifaceted facility that offers high school credits, psychological counselling, employment, and recreational activities to young people. Today *Dans la rue* has an annual budget of \$3-million and provides support for an estimated 50 000 street youth each year. Pops, who turned 80 in 2008, has created an enduring testament to the power of compassion.

Harold Jacobs – Badger, NL

The people of Badger, Newfoundland, found themselves in a bit of a quandary. Harold Jacobs, a 44-year-old man with cerebral palsy, had suddenly stopped coming out to local events. People knew that the wheelchair-bound Jacobs had to be transported in his parents' car wherever he went. What they didn't know was how difficult it had become for Jacobs' mom and dad, Velma and Dave, to get him to outings around town. Velma had to have hip replacement surgery, and Dave had suffered four heart attacks over the years. They just couldn't get their son in and out of the car anymore without putting their own health at risk. So Jacobs was stuck at home, sitting in front of the television. When Badger's mayor, Bill Foley, learned of the Jacobs' predicament, he turned to the community for support. First he was able to find an old van. Next he was able to get local mechanics to fix the vehicle and make it wheelchair accessible. The community chipped in with donations and, within a relatively short period, Jacobs was on the road in what the locals started calling Harold's Hummer. The people of Badger spared Jacobs the pain of isolation and welcomed him back into the community through their generosity.

Helen Anderson – Dartmouth, NS

For over 20 years, Helen Anderson has been organizing dances for people with mental and physical disabilities. Working through over 40 group homes and many individual families, Anderson has provided a dance a month for almost 200 people from September to May. Social workers and group home administrators see the dances as an essential service. The mentally and physically challenged of Dartmouth have very few opportunities to socialize; this makes the dances the

highlight of the social calendar for many. Anderson leads a small group of volunteers who do everything they can to make the dances go off without a hitch—sometimes even paying for supplies out of their own pockets. Anderson says that her priority, and the priority of all the volunteers, is to ensure that the people coming to the dances have an opportunity to feel appreciated and cared for in a dignified and energized social setting.

Abbas Jahangiri – Toronto, ON

They say that everyone living on the streets of downtown Toronto knows Abbas Jahangiri, the owner of the famous El Mocambo night club. Jahangiri, a wealthy 39-year-old businessman, made himself known to the homeless of the city after a woman changed his life. That woman was Mother Teresa—a Catholic nun revered around the world for her works of compassion and mercy with the poor of Calcutta, India. After amassing wealth in real estate, Jahangiri learned the story of Mother Teresa—and everything changed. His yellow Hummer changed from a status icon to a vehicle of compassion. Every night at 2 a.m., Jahangiri leaves the El Mocambo and cruises the downtown streets, visiting homeless people and offering them tea and sandwiches. More than anything, he offers them companionship and an escape from the loneliness of a homeless life. According to Jahangiri, he has embraced the teachings of Mother Teresa—including a vow of poverty. He says that all the proceeds of his businesses go to helping the poor.

Jenny Flett – Fort Chipewyan, AB

For over 60 years, Jenny Flett served as the midwife for the community of Fort Chipewyan. She delivered 487 babies. No babies or mothers died under Flett's watch—a relative miracle given that some of the babies were born in remote locations in extreme weather conditions in homes that didn't have electricity. And

she did all this without collecting a penny from anyone. She did it because she loved the work and the people she worked for. Typically she would spend up to 10 days with the mothers and their babies after the birth. It was a labour of love from which she never profited. In December 2008, over 300 guests gathered for a party in Fort McMurray to celebrate Jenny Flett's 100th birthday. Among the guests were entire families who came into the world under the watchful eyes of the woman they call the mother of Fort Chipewyan.

CIBC Wood Gundy – Vancouver, BC

The Caring for Kids (www.caringforkids.org) program has been providing breakfast for grade-school kids at five inner city Vancouver schools for over a decade. What makes this program unique is the fact that the program didn't emerge from a school board meeting or from a coalition of religious organizations. Instead it was born in the Vancouver Bentall offices of CIBC Wood Gundy when a group of brokers started looking for ways to help kids in their community. When they learned that some children were going to school hungry every day, they put their efforts into founding a breakfast program. Every December, as part of the CIBC's Miracle Day, the brokers contribute one day's salary to Caring for Kids. CIBC matches their donations and, over the past five years, raised \$1.2-million for the program. The catalysts behind the program have been brokers Tom Porteous and Jeff Watchorn. Both men have dedicated a generous amount of their time and their money to the project since its inception. Drawing on the success of Caring for Kids, the two men and their colleagues have started an after-school program called Kids Safe that gives children a safe place to play and take part in activities once the school day is done. What started as a conversation among a group of brokers has turned into a very real example of generosity and kindness.

Activity

Complete this organizer for the stories you have just read.

The hero or heroes of the story	The person or people who benefit	Major accomplishments of the hero or heroes

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Fact Sheet: It's healthy to be kind

What scholars and health officials say:

- A British study surveyed over 100 communities and found that those with the best quality of life have a high level of volunteerism. The people in the “best” category experienced better health, less crime, and were more satisfied with their lives.
- The Red Cross says volunteering releases endorphins—a naturally occurring chemical that the body generates to alleviate pain and stress. Some medical professionals even point to something called the “helpers’ high”—a combination of endorphin-induced euphoria followed by a period of satisfying calm. The release of endorphins also makes the person practising kindness less aware of physical pain.
- The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care claims that acting kindly through volunteering strengthens the immune system. Blood pressure is better as is one’s overall physical health.
- Acts of kindness significantly reduce feelings of depression, improve social relationships, decrease feelings of anger and hostility, and help people to feel connected with others. Depression, anger, and isolation all carry with them physical side effects like increased

bodily stress, poor breathing, high blood pressure, over-consumption of food or drinks, and ulcers.

- From an emotional standpoint, volunteering and acting with kindness increase a person’s sense of self-worth and confidence. They encourage an optimistic outlook on life with a corresponding increase in altruistic (unselfish or charitable) behaviour. Kind people tend to be happier.
- A 1999 University of Michigan study claims that volunteering may help people to live a longer life.

In general, volunteering:

- builds skills that may come in handy when seeking employment
- acts as an expression of things that are valuable and meaningful to us

The numbers:

- Over 30 per cent of Canadians participate in some kind of volunteer work through charitable and non-profit organizations.
- Most volunteers give over 150 hours of their time per year to the organizations with which they are affiliated.

Sources: www.actsofkindness.org;
Alliston Herald, March 28, 2008

Activity

Use the information from the fact sheet and write a newspaper article about the health benefits of being kind.

Length of article: 300-500 words

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Altruism vs. Egoism

For millennia philosophers have wondered if people are naturally inclined to act out of selfish-interest or out of a sense of concern for the wellbeing of others. This study of human nature has involved many philosophers, from the ancient to the modern era. This debate heated up in a profound way in the 17th and 18th centuries when philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Joseph Butler weighed in on the topic.

Egoism

On the one hand, the school of egoism contends that human beings are naturally inclined to act out of their own self-interest. In other words, if it is good for me, I'm going to do it, regardless of its impact on others. In his landmark book, *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes claimed that humans are naturally inclined to aggression. The human goal is to rule over others; to reach the summit of the social hierarchy through competition, greed, and, where necessary, anti-social behaviour. According to Hobbes, life is a "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" affair that requires individuals to be always on guard for what is best for them. Even when people seemingly cooperate with others they are still acting out of self-interest. Acts of kindness are framed as being altruistic to soothe the psyche of the individual—which still amounts to selfishness.

Questions

1. Describe Thomas Hobbes' perspective.
2. Describe Joseph Butler's perspective.
3. What do you think? Are people more prone to egoism or altruism? Defend your position with examples.
4. Are you yourself more prone to egoism or altruism? Why?

Altruism

On the other hand, the school of altruism contends that humans are naturally inclined to do what's best for self and others. In *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, Joseph Butler responds to the argument put forward by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. While Butler agrees that humans do act out of self-interest, they also act out of a sense of benevolence and compassion. According to Butler, human nature can be seen in terms of a hierarchy, with conscience at the top and selfishness at the bottom. A person's conscience guides them to consider the wellbeing of others as part of the way they encounter the world. Conscience is the conduit to which the true experience of real human nature can occur. He claims that doing a good deed is naturally motivated and originates in the conscience. People simply want to help others, not for their own sake, but for the sake of building the relationships that bring so much meaning and purpose to human life. In other words, by striving to help others, you are building relationships and, in building relationships, you are ascending the hierarchy via your conscience.

Source: Flaherty, Peter, et al. *Philosophy: Questions and Theories*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2003.

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A Human Nature Thought Experiment

The Prisoner's Dilemma

In 1950, Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher were asked to lead a study looking into game theory (the analysis of a situation where there are conflicting interests among those involved). The overall hope of the researchers, and their employer, the Rand Corporation, was to devise strategies to deal with the threat of global nuclear war. If the study could deliver a strategy, Rand could sell their work to the U.S. government. Game theory can be very complex, but Rand researcher Albert Tucker was able to make the theory a little more understandable when he created "The Prisoner's Dilemma" for a lecture he gave to a group of Stanford University psychologists. The dilemma goes something like this: Imagine you and a friend have been up to no good. You have taken part in a string of neighbourhood robberies, and now

the police have you and your friend in custody. Your friend is in a different interrogation room, and the police officer interrogating you is looking for answers. Because this scenario isn't real, we can share a few other details with you by way of reviewing your choices:

- You can tell the police officer everything. If your friend stays silent, you'll go free and your friend will go to jail for a year.
- You can tell the police everything and your friend can tell the police everything. In this case you will both go to jail for six months.
- You can stay silent and hope your friend stays silent. If this happens, you both stand to be sentenced to three months in prison for the one robbery that got you arrested in the first place.

Source: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>)

Activity

In a group of four, review "The Prisoner's Dilemma" and answer the following questions:

- Which option would you choose? Explain your answer to the group.
- What motivated you to make that choice?
- "The Prisoner's Dilemma" is designed to reveal something about human nature. Do the answers given by your group show that you are more naturally inclined to do what's best for yourself or what's best for your friend in the interrogation room down the hall? Discuss this question with your fellow group members.

An Altruistic Variation on "The Prisoner's Dilemma"

You and a friend are watching television. The station you are watching goes to a news item that shows a family shelter that is housing people who have lost their homes due to a downturn in the economy. The news anchor points out

that the families at the shelter are in desperate need of winter clothing and non-perishable food items. You and your friend both come from families that have plenty of winter clothing and lots of excess canned food. What will you do? Let's review your choices:

- You can mobilize your family and

gather up a pile of winter clothing and non-perishable food items while your friend does nothing. In this case, you will outfit two families with winter clothing and provide enough food to four families for a week. Your friend will have to live with the fact that he/she did nothing.

- You can do nothing and your friend can mobilize his/her family to gather

up clothes and food. In this case, your friend's family will help two families stay warm in the winter and feed four families for a week. You will have to live with the fact that you did nothing.

- You can both mobilize your families. In this case, four families will be outfitted in winter clothing and eight families will have enough food two weeks.

Activity

In the same groups that you formed earlier, answer the following questions:

- What is the difference between this scenario and the previous one? How do the differences affect your decisions?
- Which option would you choose? Explain your answer to the group.
- What motivated you to do what you decided to do?
- What do the answers given by your group say about human nature?

Reflection

In your experience are people generally motivated by self-interest or compassion?

Answer this question in a reflection paragraph (150-250 words).

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Kindness Quotes

Read the following quotes and complete the activity that follows.

If you haven't any charity in your heart,
you have the worst kind of heart trouble.
— Bob Hope

Never look down on anybody unless
you're helping him up. — Jesse Jackson

It's nice to be important, but it's more
important to be nice. — Author unknown

If you want others to be happy, practise
compassion. If you want to be happy,
practise compassion. — Dalai Lama

Never miss an opportunity to make
others happy, even if you have to leave
them alone in order to do it. — Author
unknown

Kindness is the language which the deaf
can hear and the blind can see. — Mark
Twain

Wherever there is a human being,
there is an opportunity for a kindness.
— Seneca

When I was young, I admired clever
people. Now that I am old, I admire kind
people. — Abraham Joshua Heschel

You can't live a perfect day without
doing something for someone who will
never be able to repay you. — John
Wooden

Kindness, like a boomerang, always
returns. — Author unknown

The best portion of a good man's life:
his little, nameless, unremembered
acts of kindness and love. — William
Wordsworth

You cannot do a kindness too soon, for
you never know how soon it will be too
late. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Be kind, for everyone you meet is
fighting a hard battle. — Plato

The kindest word in all the world is
the unkind word, unsaid. — Author
unknown

One can pay back the loan of gold, but
one dies forever in debt to those who are
kind. — Malayan proverb

The best way to knock the chip off your
neighbor's shoulder is to pat him on the
back. — Author unknown

Kindness is the greatest wisdom. —
Author unknown

Love someone who doesn't deserve
it. — Author unknown

The more sympathy you give, the less
you need. — Malcolm S. Forbes

The greatest good you can do for another
is not just to share your riches but to
reveal to him his own. — Benjamin
Disraeli

If you step on people in this life, you're
going to come back as a cockroach.
— Willie Davis

Activity

1. Circle three quotes that you most agree with.
2. Pick 10 quotes and create a kindness quote collage. Put the word *kindness* in the centre of the page and then surround the word with your 10 favourite quotes. Be prepared to explain your choices.

WHEN IT'S COOL TO BE KIND

Activity: Taking Stock

One of the highest levels of volunteerism and pure philanthropy in our society occurs in our schools. Did you know that all those clubs, sports, and events that happen at your school are organized by volunteers? Those volunteers are you and your teachers. Seriously! Teachers are generally only responsible for teaching; anything they do beyond the classroom is volunteer work. No other profession is as volunteer focused. Essentially, schools are structured in such a way that the volunteer work of teachers is as valued as what they do in the classroom.

How is your school doing?

- Form a group of three or four.
- Make a list of clubs, sports, and events that take place at your school.
- Next to each item indicate the names of the students and teachers who make the club, sport, or event possible.
- As a group, rank the items from most philanthropic to least philanthropic. Philanthropy is the act of donating time, effort, money, and/or goods to a charitable or needy cause. Everything that goes on at your school is philanthropic in some respect; sports teams improve school spirit and improve people's sense of teamwork, food drives help the needy in the community, and dances help bring people in the school community together.
- Write your top 10 philanthropic items on a piece of chart paper or on the board. Defend your list in front of the class. Keep it friendly though—remember that we're dealing with philanthropy here!

Extension Activity

Consider visiting the Volunteer Canada Web site (<http://volunteer.ca/en/en-home>) and adding photos and videos of volunteer activities in your school or community.

Reflection

What can I do to get more involved at school or in my community?

Specifically identify two or three volunteer opportunities that you think you would like to pursue. Explain why these volunteer opportunities appeal to you.

Length of reflection: 150-200 words