



DID YOU KNOW?

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR ST. JOHN AMBULANCE MEMBERS

DID YOU KNOW that volunteering without being physically present at the organization's work site and conducting activities over the internet (in whole or in part) is defined as *virtual volunteering*?

As governments cut back on the direct provision of various services, organizations have felt the pressure to do more with less funding which has led to an increase in the demand for volunteers. At the same time, volunteering numbers have declined. The kind of volunteers that are coming forward, and their reasons for volunteering, are changing as well. Many of today's volunteers are looking for more well-defined, time-limited volunteer opportunities that let them use existing skills and help them acquire new ones.

As a result of these pressures on volunteer supply and demand, the concept of virtual volunteering has become attractive, allowing whole new groups of potential volunteers – people with disabilities, those with home-based obligations, or those who live too far away to come into an office – to volunteer.

It appears from the research done that while the potential for virtual volunteering might be great, it has not yet become a common feature of volunteering. By definition, the virtual volunteer depends on the use of computers and Internet – typically focusing on Internet and computer-related applications.

Who are the virtual volunteers? These volunteers are newer to volunteering and more likely to be found by direct approach. However, virtual volunteers are really no different from their on-site counterparts in terms of their dependability and the quality of the work they produce.

Although the number of volunteers taking on virtual volunteering positions is very small, research shows that there are a large number of potential volunteers willing to take on such positions. The problem is not so much one of supply as it is of demand. However, it may be that demand for virtual volunteers will never be as large as many expected, organizations still require volunteers to work face-to-face with clients, help run fundraising events, help out in the office, sit on boards of directors, etc.

The potential for virtual volunteering in the future is considerable. For example, as the use of information and communications technology grows in the voluntary sector, so does the number of tasks that require gathering and disseminating information, and communicating with stakeholders via e-mail and Web sites. Volunteers using computers and the Internet can do much of this work away from the organization's premises. The administrative, direct service, and fundraising tasks currently carried out by on-site volunteers can easily be adapted to virtual volunteering positions. Assignments such as desktop publishing, Web sites, and research are also on the list of tasks that can and are being undertaken by virtual volunteers.

Virtual volunteering can be another face to volunteering in our organization.

The above information has been taken from the Volunteer Canada and Canadian Centre/Philanthropy website