

Efforts underway to get immigrants to volunteer

By LAUREN BIRD

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The Greater Fredericton Volunteer Centre partnered with Volunteer Canada and Manulife Financial to host a workshop in the city this week focusing on getting immigrants involved in volunteering.

A 2010 survey completed by Statistics Canada showed only 39 per cent of immigrants volunteered compared with 49 per cent of people born in this country.

"There are sort of two guides to help newcomers. One is for organization; we'll provide sort of a list of best practices in what to be aware of when engaging new-comers," said Jeff Richardson, the co-ordinator of volunteers and community development at the Greater Fredericton Volunteer Centre.

"And the plan is for newcomers themselves, things to consider and know before you go into the volunteer sector and start working at different organizations ... Those tools are designed to help volunteers find the right fit and build community while giving back to their new community."

Several new Canadians cited a lack of time or awareness as reasons for not getting involved in volunteering. The partnership aimed to remedy that.

"The Multicultural Association (of Fredericton) is really excited about it because volunteering is such a strong way for new comers to build essential skills that they can put on their resume — they're experiencing the community and then they have skills that they can use on the job site," Richardson said.



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Getting others to pitch in: Above, from left, are: Jeff Bond, manager of programs and training with Volunteer Canada; Cindy Pope, York Street Train station event co-ordinator; and Jeff Richardson, co-ordinator with Greater Fredericton Volunteer Centre. Their organizations banded together for a workshop designed to encourage immigrants to do volunteer work in the community.

It was the first workshop of that nature in Fredericton said Richardson.

"We recognized a need in the city," he said.

The volunteer centre opened in April as a result of the need. It strives not only to get new Canadians involved, but also members of the community who have come back to the city or even someone from the general area.

"It's about exploring what's out there and exploring the new opportunities for organizations. I'd have (the

organizations) really articulate clearly what the (volunteer) opportunity is and what's expected," Richardson said.

"We try to match people looking for volunteer opportunities with the right opportunities in the community, regardless of whether they're newcomers or not."

In the last four months, Richardson said, the program has been working well.

"We've had a lot of enquirers, both

from people looking for volunteers and from people looking for volunteer opportunities."

He said the Fredericton Community Kitchen needed a group of volunteers recently, and the centre arranged for the student union group at the University of New Brunswick to help.

"They went down on very short notice to the Fredericton Community Kitchen and had a really good experience they hadn't been asked to do anything like that before," he said.

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