

Community Involvement

How involved are we? We are involved, but need new approaches for continued involvement. Every day across Headwaters, people contribute their time, knowledge and money to help others. Citizens identified volunteerism as the number one factor for community well-being in HCIA's 2008 survey. Yet non-profit and charitable organizations have expressed growing concern about decreased volunteer participation and community donations.

>>The contributions of time and money to support the work of charities and non-profit organizations and the help that we offer directly to others all combine to define and shape the communities and environments in which we live.<< Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2007

Volunteering and Donating Although community members express a genuine desire to contribute, they face a number of real barriers – especially lack of time and inability to make a long-term commitment. Other barriers include not being asked, not knowing how to become involved, and the financial costs associated with volunteering. Also, local not-for-profits fear that economic and other personal pressures may be eroding the community's "goodwill".

Caledon Community Services (CCS) engages over 350 volunteers who donate more than 30,000 hours annually to its various programs. Volunteers include professionals, high-school students, retirees and entire families. CCS attributes much of its success to its volunteer management program. It employs two trained volunteer managers who work individually with potential volunteers to create opportunities that draw on each volunteer's particular skills and passions.

Find Volunteer Opportunities Online

Neither Caledon nor Dufferin have a volunteer centre to help recruit and co-ordinate volunteers. However, technology is helping to resolve that deficit. Use of the internet to find volunteer opportunities is slowly increasing among Canadians (to 10% in 2007 from 8% in 2003)*. In May 2003, seven community service agencies in Caledon established **Volunteer Caledon** (volunteer-caledon.org), to promote volunteerism by matching people with volunteer opportunities. Since then, the site has attracted almost 90,000 visitors. In 2010, Trillium funding was used to begin expanding this initiative into Dufferin.

*Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, Stats Canada, 2007



Bill Rea, Caledon Citizen

Our ability to interact "more often and more meaningfully with others in respect of civic issues – will help to build stronger communities and a more unified civic nation."

Overcoming the Barriers Given the many challenges, successful approaches to recruiting volunteers need to accommodate people's busy lives by being more customized to the individual needs of volunteers¹, and to recognize that what motivates baby boomers to contribute may differ from what captivates younger generations². Professional associations, such as PAVR-O (Professional Administrators of Volunteer Resources – Ontario), and area colleges offer useful resources and certificate programs on the subject.

Voter Turnout at Municipal Elections

Municipality	2010	2006
Caledon	43.2%	34.7%
Dufferin (Average)	39.2%	35%
Ontario	44.1%	41.3%

Voting Becoming actively informed about political issues and taking action through voting in municipal, provincial and federal elections are important acts of civic engagement that influence community well-being. Although local voter turnout improved in the last municipal election, it is still below the provincial average.

Residents Team Up with Orangeville for Neighbourhood Ice Rinks

Take a dad with a passion for hockey, a group of equally keen neighbours, add town recreation staff with a "can-do" attitude, and you get a neighbourhood ice rink at Fendley Park. After being approached by a parent, town staff developed a proposal for volunteer-supported outdoor rinks that was endorsed by council. As news of this policy spread, the recreation department was approached by two other neighbourhood groups wanting to do the same. By working together, citizens and town staff were able to expand access to a free source of recreational fun.

Community Dialogue Resilient communities engage their citizens in meaningful conversations about how to improve the quality of their lives. Citizens want to make this contribution, but participants in HCIA's 2008 focus groups told us town hall meetings are not enough because they don't tend to attract young people or minorities³.

Beyond Town Halls Citizen study circles and social media are other promising approaches to meaningful citizen engagement. Study circles have been used effectively in hundreds of communities to find solutions to difficult public issues. They work by creating a non-judgmental setting for conversations among a diverse group of citizens who share opinions honestly while seeking to understand other points of view.

Civic engagement and volunteering are closely tied to just about every facet of community life. Engaged citizens help keep communities safe, they play an active role in shaping political and policy decisions, and they are stewards of their environment. Becoming an engaged citizen has economic benefits too: better networks equal better opportunity. And being engaged equates with a sense of belonging within a community. Volunteering and civic engagement are vital to a robust, connected community.

¹Recruitment Insights, Successful Techniques, Energize: Especially for Leaders of Volunteers, energizeinc.com/wisdom/recruit/techniques.html

²The Next Generation of Canadian Giving, November 2010

³Citizen Opinion about Community Well-Being and Proposed Reports, HCIA, 2009, pg 9

Anecdotally, our region's experience mirrors the following trends:

- 86% of the Ontario population (15 yrs+) made a donation to a charitable or non-profit organization in 2007 – a decrease from 90% in 2003
- 47% of the Ontario population (15 yrs+) volunteered in 2007 – a decrease from 50% in 2003
- the bulk of money donated and time volunteered come from a small group of citizens: 21% of Canadians account for 82% of the total value of donations, and 12% of Canadians account for 78% of all volunteer hours.

Source: Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, Stats Canada, 2007

How can we work together to improve volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement?