

VOLUNTEER CANADA: DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF VOLUNTEERISM

Every year, in communities across Canada, more than 7.5 million Canadians volunteer their skills and energy to improve the lives of others.

Celebrating and promoting the efforts of these dedicated volunteers is the role of Volunteer Canada, the national centre for volunteerism. By delivering programs and special projects, Volunteer Canada helps communities develop volunteer action while facilitating and strengthening the work of its partner volunteer centres. The organization also provides leadership on issues and trends in the Canadian volunteer movement.

Volunteer Canada works closely with provincial centres, including the federation of 109 volunteer centres in Québec, and local volunteer centres throughout the country. Volunteer Canada members include national charities, associations, non-governmental organizations, corporations and individuals. Volunteer Canada seeks to promote quality volunteerism, strengthen communities and develop capacity in the voluntary sector to engage citizens as volunteers.

One of Volunteer Canada's most important programs focuses on the protection of volunteers and the people they assist. Through the Safe Steps Volunteer Screening Program, Volunteer Canada helps organizations across the country develop and implement effective screening processes to ensure the safety of individuals and communities.

In Ontario, Volunteer Canada has taken a leadership role in **the Ontario Screening Initiative** (OSI), a three-year project designed to increase awareness of the need and the benefits of volunteer screening. The **Ontario Screening Initiative** promotes Volunteer Canada's Safe Steps Volunteer Screening Program as an effective way for organizations to keep children and vulnerable adults safe.

Ontario's community organizations have a legal and moral obligation to protect the people who use volunteer services. Screening helps organizations meet that obligation – it enables them to take responsibility for their impact on the community.

Through its partner volunteer centres, Volunteer Canada helps organizations design customized screening processes to keep participants safe. In addition to resources, local volunteer centres provide training workshops and organizational consultations on how and why screening works.

For more information call Volunteer Canada at 1 800 670-0401 or visit www.volunteer.ca.

SCREENING IS ABOUT TAKING SAFE STEPS

The **Ontario Screening Initiative** (OSI) is a community-based project designed to help volunteer groups safeguard children and vulnerable adults. Throughout the province, community organizations are working together to develop ways to reduce the risk of harm to their participants. The OSI promotes the value and benefits of screening through customized training workshops, resources and public education. These resources help volunteer groups build the commitment and skill to adopt important screening practices such as reference checks and adequate training, monitoring and supervision.

The OSI is committed to helping organizations adopt positive attitudes and behaviours about the screening of volunteers. It does that by promoting the use of Volunteer Canada's Safe Steps Volunteer Screening Program.

The OSI also provides:

- information on how other groups screen their volunteers;
- workshops and workbooks to help organizations choose the process that best meets their needs;
- a list of resources on Volunteer Canada's Web site to help organizations develop evaluation processes, adopt policies and understand the legalities behind screening.

Delivering the benefits of the OSI

It is the responsibility of the **Ontario Screening Initiative Consortium** to ensure OSI resources are available to volunteer organizations across the province. The Consortium includes leaders from the Anglican, Catholic, United and Unitarian faith communities, the Ontario Community Support Association, The Ontario Rural Council, Parks & Recreation Ontario and the Sport Alliance of Ontario. Members share their screening experience and respond to common challenges, as well as champion screening within their sector by developing strategies to address the needs of each of their specific membership constituencies.

The leadership of the Consortium, along with the grassroots approach of **the Ontario Screening Initiative**, support the development of screening policies, practices and resources that build on existing expertise to successfully address the screening issues faced by community groups in Ontario.

FOLLOW THE STEPS TO SAFER PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAMS

Volunteers are the heart of Parks & Recreation Ontario. Through their actions, their concern and their care, volunteers supply the energy that keeps our programs running. They help people across the province to participate in recreational activities in our parks, playgrounds and community facilities.

Parks & Recreation Ontario is a non-profit corporation dedicated to improving the quality of life, health, and well-being of people, communities and environments in Ontario. Because we rely so much on volunteers, a big part of our responsibility is to provide leadership and support to our members on issues related to volunteering.

Through the **Ontario Screening Initiative (OSI)**, we're helping each and every group that serves children and vulnerable adults establish a screening process for volunteers. We want such a process to become standard operating procedure. Like the OSI, our goal is to keep our citizens and communities safer.

Parks & Recreation Ontario members work with children, vulnerable adults and other community members to provide opportunities for play, leisure and therapeutic recreation, and enjoyment of our natural spaces. A screening process can help each of us fulfil our moral, legal and social obligation to keep participants safe. Screening puts in place good risk management practices, brings about a more consistent human resources policy and reduces the possibility of harm.

Most organizations already follow steps to place the right volunteer into the most appropriate positions. For those who do not yet have a screening process in place, now is the perfect time to get assistance through the OSI.

- In the fall of 2001, Parks & Recreation Ontario will offer screening workshops to their members to help them determine the screening steps appropriate for their organization.
- Volunteer Canada has customized screening workbooks and a network of volunteer centres to deliver screening workshops that will help your group take simple steps towards providing safer parks and recreation programs.
- The OSI provides one-on-one consultation to selected municipal parks and recreation programs in Ontario to assist them in developing their screening policies.

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SPORT ALLIANCE OF ONTARIO: FOLLOWING THE STEPS TO SAFER SPORT

Every year, more than 2.3 million Ontario residents participate in sports programs and activities. They are assisted by some 600,000 volunteers who drive children to games, make phone calls, coach teams and do whatever is necessary to keep Ontario active.

These volunteers connect individuals with fun and healthy physical activities. Through their actions, attention and care, volunteers supply much of the energy that keeps the province's sport programs running.

We know this because the Sport Alliance of Ontario is a non-profit alliance of members from provincial sport organizations, parks and recreation agencies, and schools. Our mission is to protect and promote what's important to people participating in sport. Our objective is to make each person's experience of sport the best that it can be.

Working with the **Ontario Screening Initiative (OSI)**, the Sport Alliance of Ontario is helping groups that serve children or vulnerable adults to establish a screening process for volunteers. Our goal is to make that process standard operating procedure, thereby keeping our citizens and communities safer.

Sport Alliance of Ontario members deliver many different programs to children and vulnerable adults. A screening process will help each of us fulfil our moral, legal and social obligation to keep participants safe. Screening puts in place good risk management practices, brings about a more consistent human resources policy and reduces the possibility of harm.

Many organizations already follow sound steps to place the right volunteer into the right position. For those who do not yet have a screening policy in place, now is the perfect time to get assistance through the OSI.

- In the fall of 2001, the Sport Alliance of Ontario will offer screening workshops to their members to help them determine the screening steps appropriate for their organization.
- Volunteer Canada has customized screening workbooks and a network of volunteer centres to deliver screening workshops that will help your group take simple steps towards providing safer sports programs and activities.
- The OSI provides one-on-one consultation to selected provincial sport organizations in Ontario to assist them in developing their screening policies.

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VOLUNTEER CANADA SCREENING RESOURCES

The following resources were developed by Volunteer Canada to assist non-profit organizations understand volunteer screening and begin to develop appropriate screening practices. Consultants and trainers from volunteer centres across Ontario use these resources when delivering screening workshops and providing one-on-one consultation to recreation and sport organizations through the **Ontario Screening Initiative**.

Safe Steps : A Volunteer Screening Process

- has been developed for individuals in public service and not-for-profit organizations who are in charge of setting policy or will be directly involved with the screening process at the national, provincial or local level;
- is a practical guide for members of organizations who want to proceed from the theory of screening to the practical application;
- advocates the 10-step process for screening and how to use a combination of those steps in different situations to ensure the safety of participants and to protect your organization and volunteers.

Safe Steps: A Volunteer Screening Process for Recreation and Sport Workbook

- has been developed specifically for individuals in recreation and sport who are in charge of setting policy or are directly involved with the screening process;
- advocates a 10-step process for screening that can assist organizations in the recruitment, selection and management of volunteers and staff;
- is a practical, hands-on guide for recreation and sport organizations that want to proceed from the theory of screening to its practical application;
- includes samples and exercises.

Screening in Faith

- developed for individuals in faith communities who are responsible for setting policy or directly involved with the screening and recruitment of volunteers at the national, provincial or local level concerning recruitment of volunteers;
- is a practical, hands-on guide for organizations that want to proceed from the theory of screening to its practical application;
- includes samples and exercises.

Taking Care : Screening for Community Support Organizations

- developed specifically for individuals within community support organizations who are in charge of setting policy or who are directly involved with the screening process;
- is a practical, hands-on guide for organizations that want to proceed from the theory of screening to its practical application;
- includes samples and exercises.

Duty of Care Video:

- provides an introduction and overview of the needs to screen staff and volunteers in positions of trust with vulnerable individuals (15 min.);
- includes interviews with representatives of the RCMP and organizations which routinely screen staff;
- is ideal for presentations to executives and boards of directors.

WHAT IS A VOLUNTEER CENTRE?

A volunteer centre is a non-profit organization or program dedicated to advocating and supporting the needs of volunteers, as well as the agencies that require volunteer help. While other organizations contribute to our national heritage of volunteering through their programs and outreach, volunteer centres represent the broadest membership. A volunteer centre's membership may include organizations working in human and social services, health care, education, the arts, sport and recreation – regardless of their sources of funding.

Volunteer centres are the experts in working effectively with volunteers. They help **Ontario Screening Initiative** participants by providing consultation and workshops on screening.

Today, each of the more than 200 volunteer centres in Canada provide common services as well as a unique mix of programs and services to fit the needs of the surrounding community.

Volunteer centres provide the following services:

1. promoting volunteerism;
2. management consulting on volunteer programs;
3. recruiting, interviewing and referring volunteers to community agencies and organizations;
4. training volunteers and managers of volunteers;
5. advocacy on issues related to volunteerism and volunteer programs.

For more information about volunteer centres, visit www.volunteer.ca.

SPORT ALLIANCE Q's AND A's

Q Why should sport organizations screen their volunteers?

A Sport organizations provide programs and opportunities to many vulnerable participants. All organizations delivering programs have a legal, moral and ethical obligation to appropriately screen the people who work for them, including volunteers. Organizations that screen volunteers take responsibility for their actions in the community.

Q Should all volunteers be screened?

A Ideally, all applicants should go through a screening process. However, the most important positions to screen are those where a person works with children or vulnerable adults. Each position has a different level of risk. Determining the risk in a particular position is an important part of the screening process.

Q Won't we lose some of our volunteers because of screening?

A Most people understand and appreciate the need for screening measures that are reasonable and related specifically to the position they will hold. If participants are vulnerable and at risk, and if people are going to be alone with them in settings that may put them further at risk, then intensive and intrusive screening measures are justified. This must be clearly explained to volunteers.

Also, remember that screening should be based on the position, not the applicant. In other words, you shouldn't screen a person differently because you don't like the way they look or because you don't know them as well as another volunteer.

Q Screening sounds great. As an organization, where do we begin?

A Thanks to the Ontario Screening Initiative, it's simpler than you think. Working with its partner volunteer centres in Ontario, Volunteer Canada has resources and workshops to make it easier for organizations to put a screening process in place. The resources will help your group understand the principles of screening and help you determine what steps are best for you.

For more information call 1 800 670-0401 or visit www.volunteer.ca.

PARKS AND RECREATION Q's AND A's

Q Why should parks and recreation organizations screen their volunteers?

A Like all organizations that deliver programs and opportunities to vulnerable people, parks and recreation organizations have a legal and moral responsibility to protect the people they assist. Organizations that screen volunteers take responsibility for their actions in the community.

Q Should all volunteers be screened?

A Ideally, all candidates should go through a screening process. However, the most important positions to screen are those where a person works with children or vulnerable adults. Each position has a different level of risk. Determining the risk in a particular position is an important part of the screening process.

Q Won't we lose some of our volunteers because they are afraid of screening?

A Most people understand and appreciate the need for screening measures that are reasonable and related specifically to the position they will hold. If participants are vulnerable and at risk, and if people are going to be alone with them in settings that may put them further at risk, then intensive and intrusive screening measures are justified. This must be clearly explained to volunteers.

Also, remember that screening should be based on the position, not the applicant. In other words, you shouldn't screen a person differently because you don't like the way they look or because you don't know them as well as another volunteer.

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PUTTING POLICY INTO PLACE

The **Ontario Screening Initiative** is about helping organizations change behaviours and practices around screening. For many organizations, that means being prepared to change what they believe. Most often, organizations find that the beliefs or ideals that emerge through this process are best articulated in policies designed to guide practices. The starting point is policy development.

As we move into the 21st century, the need for non-profit organizations to be clear about what they do and how they do it is greater than ever. Increasing pressure from financial supporters, expanding competition and a growing demand for accountability –all make it imperative that organizations adopt higher standards.

As a result, non-profit organizations are choosing to develop policies to govern their day-to-day operations. They are finding that such policies are an indispensable tool to achieve their goals. Volunteer Canada supports the increased use of policies and provides consultation services through local volunteer centres to organizations committed to adopting screening policies. A list of policy development resources can be found on the Volunteer Canada Web site.

Policies bring clarity, rules and boundaries that can help an organization prevent losses and improve its position in the event of legal action. Without a policy to guide actions and decisions, organizations can create risks that may be greater than they are willing to bear.

Effective policies require commitment. Depending on the complexity of an organization's programs, and the amount of work already done, developing policies may mean a great deal of work. These suggestions will help:

- If a lot of policies need to be written, approach the task in a systematic manner, listing the areas and topics that require policies. Note which are most urgent or pressing (for reasons such as risk), then simply work through them in an orderly fashion.
- Be aware that preparing a full set of policies may take a number of years. Organizations should not feel pressured to accomplish the task in too short a time.
- Remember that policy development is an ongoing process. The sector is changing so rapidly that new standards, new perspectives, new information, and new priorities all require policy consideration on a routine basis.

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DUTY OF CARE

The duty of care is the legal obligation to take reasonable care to protect someone from harm. It is the fundamental principle behind the **Ontario Screening Initiative**.

To fulfil the duty of care, **organizations** must take reasonable care to protect the safety, dignity and rights of the individuals they assist, the staff of the organization, the community-at-large and the organization itself. This moral and ethical obligation applies to all organizations, large or small.

Organizations fulfil the duty of care obligation by:

- maintaining safe and secure premises;
- offering effective, meaningful, useful and safe programs and services;
- selecting and hiring individuals who are competent and will assist participants, other staff or members of the community-at-large.

A matter of duty

Every **individual** involved in the provision of programs and services, no matter the level, owes the duty of care to:

- participants in the programs of the organization;
- staff members, including volunteers and anyone else who performs work or undertakes services for the organization;
- the community-at-large;
- the organization itself.