

## Why individuals volunteer

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### Highlights

- In 2013, 91% of non-metro volunteers wanted to make a contribution to their community.
- Three other reasons for volunteering that were mentioned by over 50% of volunteers were
  - wanting to develop and to use their skills;
  - they were personally affected by the cause for which they are volunteering; and
  - wanting to improve their own level of health and well-being.
- Volunteers were most likely to say they acquired interpersonal and communication skills.
- 54% of volunteers participated in fundraising and 48% participated in organizing events.

### Why look at the reasons for volunteering?

Understanding the reasons that individuals choose to volunteer and understanding the skills they attain may help organizations to recruit and to retain their volunteers. Volunteers shape communities by contributing time and skills to a wide range of community activities. The participation of volunteers strengthens the trust, solidarity and reciprocity within communities.

In this FactSheet, we focus on the 2013 patterns of “formal volunteering”<sup>1</sup> in non-metro<sup>2</sup> Ontario. The pattern by age group and a comparison to metro Ontario is shown in an on-line [Appendix](#).

### Findings

Volunteers noted many reasons why they volunteer. In 2013, 91% of non-metro volunteers were helping in order to make a contribution to their community (Figure 1). Other top reasons were:

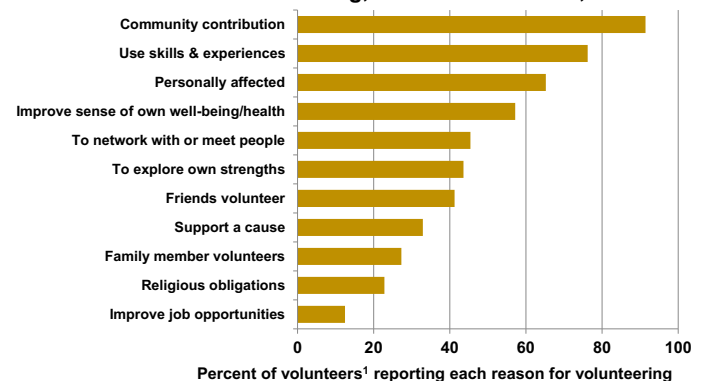
- 76% wanted to use their skills or experiences;
- 65% were personally affected by the cause for which they were volunteering;
- 57% wanted to improve their own sense of well-being or health;
- 45% wanted to network with or meet people; and
- 44% wanted to explore their own strengths.

In terms of the skills acquired from volunteering, 54% indicated they acquired skills in interpersonal relationships (Figure 2). About 40% indicated they

acquired communication<sup>3</sup> skills. Being able to increase one’s knowledge of issues<sup>4</sup> was mentioned by 35% of volunteers. Also, 33% said they gained organizational<sup>5</sup> skills from their volunteering activity.

**Figure 1**

91% of volunteers listed “community contribution” as one of the reasons for volunteering, non-metro<sup>2</sup> Ontario, 2013



1. Specifically, formal volunteering which is unpaid work for a group or organization.  
2. Non-CMA is outside a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). See “Overview of Ontario’s rural geography” (June, 2013) (<http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/file.aspx?id=1c38f15e-df4e-41a8-9c4d-7ad02cf55b0b>)  
Source: Statistics Canada. General Social Survey Giving, Volunteering & Participating, 2013.

Volunteers contributed unpaid work to a variety of groups and organizations. In 2013, 22% of formal volunteers spent a majority of their time helping with sports, physical fitness, recreation, community clubs and service clubs<sup>6</sup> (Figure 3). The second largest

<sup>3</sup> This includes public speaking, writing, public relations, conducting meetings, etc.

<sup>4</sup> This includes increased knowledge of subjects such as health, women’s or political issues, criminal justice, the environment, etc.

<sup>5</sup> This includes organizational or managerial skills such as how to organize people or money, to be a leader, to plan or to run an organization, etc.

<sup>6</sup> For definitions, see pages 47-51 in Statistics Canada. (2009) **Satellite Account of Non-profit Institutions and**

<sup>1</sup> That is unpaid work for a group or organization

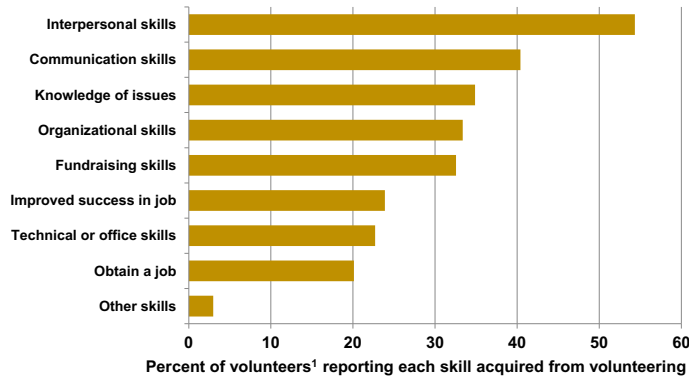
<sup>2</sup> Non-CMA is outside a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). See “Overview of Ontario’s rural geography” (June, 2013) (<http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/file.aspx?id=1c38f15e-df4e-41a8-9c4d-7ad02cf55b0b>).

group of organizations for which individuals spent a majority of their time was religious organizations (18% of non-metro volunteers). The third largest group was social service organizations<sup>7</sup> (17%).

Within these organizations, volunteers were involved in a wide range of activities. In 2013, 54% of non-metro volunteers participated in fundraising, 48% participated in organizing activities and events and 41% participated on a committee or board (Figure 4).

**Figure 2**

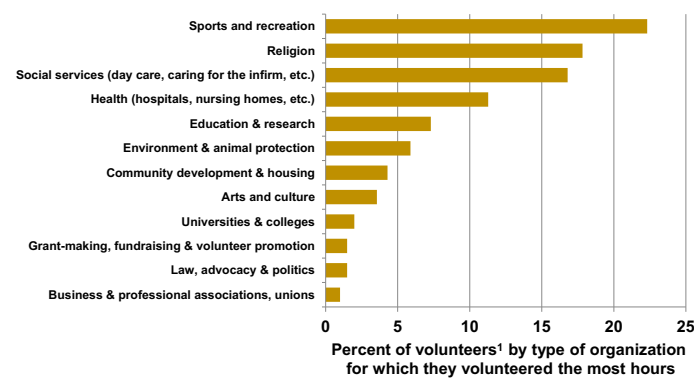
**54% of volunteers listed acquiring "interpersonal" skills from volunteering, non-metro<sup>2</sup> Ontario, 2013**



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 Source: Statistics Canada. General Social Survey Giving, Volunteering & Participating, 2013.

**Figure 3**

**22% of volunteers spent their most time volunteering for a sports or recreation organization, non-metro<sup>2</sup> Ontario, 2013**



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 Source: Statistics Canada. General Social Survey Giving, Volunteering & Participating, 2013.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the lack of time (mentioned by 61% of the volunteers) and the inability to make a long-term commitment (mentioned by 51%) were the major reasons why present volunteers felt they were unable to volunteer more time (Figure 5).

Interestingly, 27% of present volunteers said that "no one asked" them to volunteer more. And importantly,

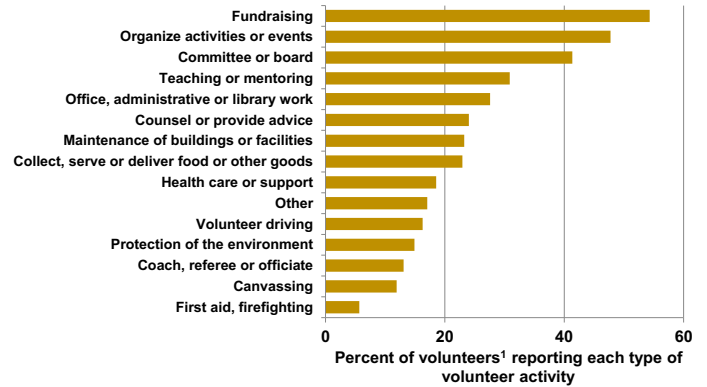
**Volunteering** (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 13-015) (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/13-015-x/13-015-x2009000-eng.htm>).

<sup>7</sup> This includes day care, youth services, family services, services for the handicapped and the elderly, emergency and relief services, income support services, etc.

8% were not interested in further volunteering due to a previous unsatisfactory experience.

**Figure 4**

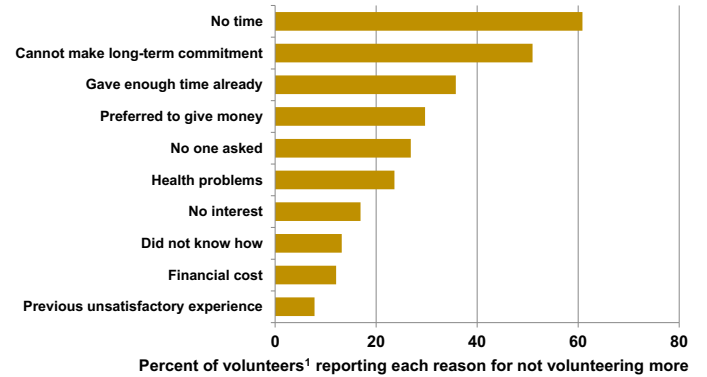
**54% of volunteers are involved in fundraising, non-metro<sup>2</sup> Ontario, 2013**



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 Source: Statistics Canada. General Social Survey Giving, Volunteering & Participating, 2013.

**Figure 5**

**61% of volunteers listed "no time" as the reason for not volunteering more, non-metro<sup>2</sup> Ontario, 2013**



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 Source: Statistics Canada. General Social Survey Giving, Volunteering & Participating, 2013.

**Summary**

Individuals volunteer their time and energy for a variety of reasons (Figure 1) and they attain a variety of skills from this activity (Figure 2).

Understanding these reasons for volunteering and understanding the skills they attain may help organizations to recruit and to retain their volunteers.

In 2013, 91% of non-metro volunteers were volunteering to make a contribution to their community.

Volunteers were most likely to mention that the skills they acquired were developing their inter-personal skills and developing their communication skills.

Rural Ontario Institute gratefully acknowledges the work of Ray Bollman in preparing this edition of *Focus on Rural Ontario*. Questions on data sources can be directed to RayD.Bollman@sasktel.net. Any comments or discussions can be directed to [NRagelie@RuralOntarioinstitute.ca](mailto:NRagelie@RuralOntarioinstitute.ca).