



Volunteering in Retirement One Man's Volunteer Journey

Jennifer Rovet, CPRC

Your retirement day has arrived. Job and career demands are gone and you can now do the many things you never had time for before. However, you may now find yourself at a loss wondering what to do with all the time you now have available.

Because people are living healthier and longer lives, one's retirement years can be quite long too. Without a plan and less daily structure, many retirees struggle filling their days, staying connected, and finding purpose in their lives.

For many, volunteering offers the perfect solution.

According to the Oxford English dictionary, the definition of a volunteer is "A person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task." The key words in this definition are **'freely offers'**. There is something so special when people selflessly offer to assist, help or mentor others, in their own time and own free will.

Research has shown that volunteering has many health benefits beyond just helping others. Volunteering in retirement not only improves physical well-being by keeping you fit, it has many emotional benefits such as preventing isolation, boosting self-esteem, improving cognitive resilience, and staving off any depression that may occur. Volunteering also lets you leave a legacy.

There are numerous ways to volunteer your time and many resources to help you find one that is right for you. Just google 'volunteer in retirement' and over 72 million search results pop up. The possibilities are endless. The key though is finding a volunteer activity that is suited to your particular set of values and abilities.

David Evershed is one retiree who has had a very successful retirement of more than 21 years. When he retired from his management consultant practice, he found purpose and gained enormous pleasure by volunteering at Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO). CESO is an international economic development organization where semi-retired or retired professionals share their skills and expertise with others in Canada and overseas, to grow businesses for stronger economies and better lives. For both David and his wife, CESO has offered them the unique opportunity of staying active while seeing the world to mentor others

in a variety of different countries and cultures. CESO has given them a reason to get out of bed each day.

I had the pleasure of meeting David Evershed six years ago. He has always been someone I enjoyed sitting down with for a coffee or a brief chat. A wise and gentle man, he always regaled me with his amazing stories. At a recent coffee chat, I learned more about David's early years at CESO and how volunteering changed his life.

Here is part of our conversation ...

Me: *How long have you been retired?*

David: *Approximately 21 years.*

Me: *What was the first thing you wanted to do when you retired?*

David: *At the time of my retirement I had my own business (with a partner). This allowed me to gradually slow down over a couple of years. We stopped promotion and business development and slowly the daily demands dropped off.*

Because of this I did not have a definite retirement date and I remember that I looked forward to escaping the daily grind. But I quickly found that I was uncomfortable having nothing to do and some cabin fever set in. It was then that I started exploring what I could be doing as I was not ready for the rocking chair.

Me: *How did you hear about CESO and what got you going on your volunteer journey?*

David: *While on vacation in Barbados I was invited to a party by a fellow vacationer. At this party I met an elderly Barbadian gentleman and we talked a lot about our life experiences. At the end of the evening he asked me whether I had heard of CESO. I hadn't. He gave me a Toronto address and upon my return, I followed up.*

It was serendipitous as the previous year I had gone to New York to explore the possibilities of our company doing international assignments. As a little company it was almost impossible to break into the market so I had to give up on the idea. This is what precipitated both my wife and I becoming CESO volunteer advisors and we have been involved in one way and another up to the present day.

Me: *What has volunteering with CESO provided for you all these years?*

David: *My wife and I often wonder what we would have been doing all these years had we not found CESO. Volunteering with CESO has been very rewarding. While I am no longer going on assignments because of age, I volunteer in-house and I continue to maintain contact with my clients through SKYPE, email, telephone etc. I get much satisfaction in seeing their organizations grow and knowing that I played a small part in the progress they have made.*

Being exposed to people from many countries is very rewarding. You quickly find that the people you are working with are bright and industrious and in the end despite some cultural differences we find we have so much in common.

As a volunteer there is a lot of joy to be derived from helping others who are not as fortunate. I have found that most of the people I worked with in a range of countries were knowledgeable and had a clear understanding of their mandate. We were able to assist them in building their capacity to better deliver their urgently needed services. Over the years I have derived a great

sense of happiness seeing their organizations mature and grow. I have also been able to make lasting friendships with people from all around the world.

Me: *Do you or have you volunteered anywhere else?*

David: *Most of my other volunteering has involved not-for-profit roles as board directors.*

Me: *Do you have any advice to other retirees who are looking into or thinking about volunteering?*

David: *While I would never advise anyone as to what they should do when they retire, I can emphatically state that it is imperative that you find something that stimulates, challenges and interests you. The alternative of sitting in your rocking chair to me is a no no! This can quickly lead to one deteriorating both physically and mentally. While one does not want the stress of a full-time job, you do need a reason for getting up in the morning. I strongly believe that manageable stress keeps you alive. Therefore, I believe that one has to strive to work hard at being involved and active.*

While I have chosen to work as a volunteer for CESO and to work in other countries, it may not be the right fit for some people. There are many ways that one can find volunteer opportunities in one's local community. I repeat that it doesn't matter what you do but try to find something that gives you satisfaction in using your skills and experience to help others.

David's volunteer story is just one of thousands. When considering your own volunteering path, think about what you enjoy, what causes or charities are close to your heart, and what tasks you are best suited for. If you are not sure where to start, try speaking with friends and family or seek a retirement coach. Hopefully your experience will be like David's so that you can also achieve 20 meaningful years of making a difference in the lives of others. You, too, can leave a lasting legacy.