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**WAYS TO CREATE
FUN PROJECTS FOR
YOUTH VOLUNTEERS**



Youth Central is a Calgary-based non-profit organization with a mission to inspire, engage and celebrate youth through community participation. Youth Central achieves its mission by way of nine innovative programs, each with a different focus on youth engagement. The programs are primarily aimed at youth between the ages of 12 and 18.

At Youth Central, we have spent over 20 years working with and engaging youth in meaningful volunteer opportunities. The tips provided in this document are best practices we learned while facilitating the Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) program.



The YVC program began in 1993 and is Youth Central's largest program. The purpose of YVC is to provide team-based volunteer opportunities to young people in partnership with over 150 community agencies and events. YVC recruits youth volunteers through in-school presentations, word-of-mouth, online, and in the community. Youth sign up to become volunteers on our website and then sign up for volunteer projects. These projects are offered via our partner agencies and community associations. YVC brings together youth volunteers and non-profits and community agencies.

If you look at this document and think, "We could use some help," then please contact us. We want to help you! You could become a partner agency, take one of our workshops, or even hire us to consult with your organization.

We are so excited to share these best practices and look forward to hearing your success stories!

P. A. Hume

**Penny Hume
Executive Director**

For more information on Youth Central or to become a partner, please contact us at info@youthcentral.com. To learn more about our workshops and consulting services please visit <http://youthcentral.com/consulting/>

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R-E-S-P-E-C-T



Youth want to volunteer and help their community. They bring energy and a positive attitude to any volunteer project. Embrace this, be excited when they arrive, and treat them like people. Ask them questions and take interest in who they are. If they require support, ask how you can help. By showing youth respect, you open the door to a positive relationship.

Example: The Food for Peace Society cooks and serves monthly vegetarian dinners at the Calgary Drop In and Rehab Centre (DI). From the moment volunteers walk into the kitchen at the DI, they are greeted by the Food for Peace staff members who try to remember the names and faces of returning volunteers and start off every shift by thanking the youth group. Throughout the project, staff members offer guidance and support to new volunteers by showing them how to safely cut the vegetables while getting to know each new volunteer.



2

ORIENTATION: INFORMATION, EXPLANATION, AND EXPECTATIONS

Plan for a well detailed orientation that reviews information about the project and organization, an explanation of the tasks the volunteers will be doing, and the expectations you have of these volunteers. Displeasure in volunteers is often related to a lack of explanation and expectations. Take the time to inform your volunteers of what your organization does, why they are here and what is required of them. By doing this, you give them the background required to become properly invested in the work.

Example: Heritage Park always provides orientations and a handbook (for those that cannot attend the orientation) for each of their special events that require large groups of volunteers. The information presented covers everything from transit/parking, tasks at each volunteer station, dress codes, meal/break times, and other organization policies and expectations.



3

START THE PROJECT OFF RIGHT: ICEBREAKERS

An icebreaker is a perfect way to bring together your volunteers and get them motivated before volunteering. Icebreakers energize volunteers but they also provide an opportunity to get to know one another. Choose an icebreaker appropriate for your project and the group of youth you'll be working with.

Two examples of icebreakers we use with volunteers at the start of a project are:

All about Me: Have participants randomly select a partner from the group. Give partners five minutes to tell the person everything they think is important about themselves. The trick is that they cannot speak, they must communicate through actions. Once the time is up, their partner will introduce them to the group, and share the details about them (verbally). After they are done their partner may need an opportunity to correct anything they misinterpreted!

Pass the Name: This icebreaker is ideal for a large group. Have each participant shake another person's hand and say their names. Once they shake hands they switch names, so if Kara shook hands with Denise, then Kara would introduce herself as Denise to the next person. You keep shaking hands and passing on names, until someone gets their name back to them. Tip: If you have multiple volunteers with the same name, it's a good idea to include the initial of their last name.

Resources:

http://www.jubed.com/youth_ministry/9-Icebreakers-Thatll-Leave-Your-Group-Buzzing

http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf

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TEAM-BASED ACTIVITIES

Team-based activities offer youth opportunities to develop social skills. These new connections motivate youth to work hard and complete the task at hand. When working alone, youth often feel separated which leads to being bored. Find ways to keep groups of youth working together. Separating the larger group into smaller working groups is encouraged.

Example: Special events at the Calgary Zoo (eg. Zoolights, Easter Eggstravaganza) usually have multiple activity stations. The Calgary Zoo places a few youth at each station to work together. Youth Central Team Leaders will organize these groups so that everyone has the opportunity to meet and get to know someone new.



5

HAVE ENOUGH THINGS TO DO

Motivated youth work hard and they work fast! Organizers are often surprised at how quickly youth work. Make sure you have enough for them to do. Many project organizers have back up activities or games on hand just in case the volunteers finish their work early.

Example: Inn from the Cold provides a sheet of tasks for the meal service shifts. Volunteers can then check off a task they have completed and move on to the next one.

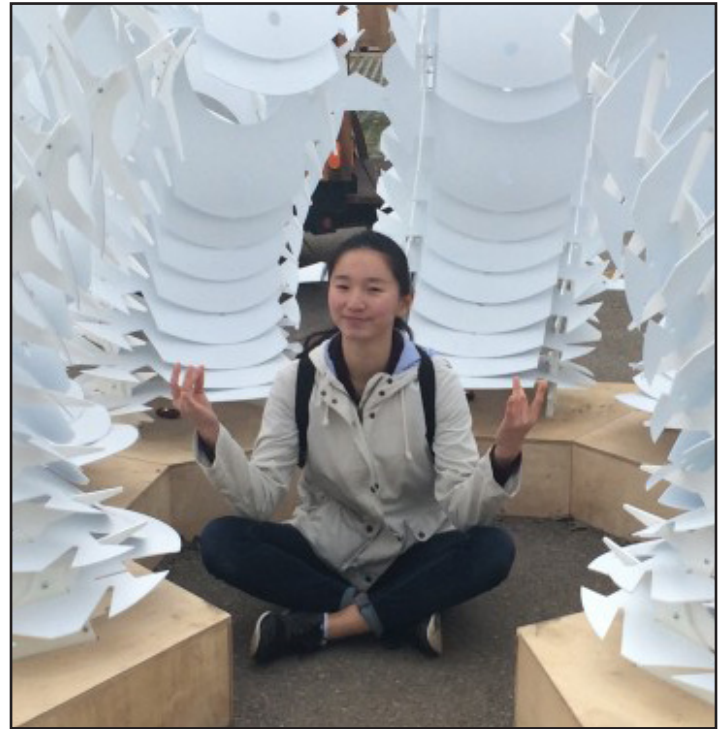
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FIND THE TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Volunteering teaches youth valuable skills. Take the time to highlight the skills they are learning and provide feedback on how they can improve. If possible, offer suggestions on how youth can further develop the skills they are learning.

Example: Beakerhead, an organization that runs an annual week-long celebration of art, science, and engineering, provides opportunities for volunteers to learn how science and engineering are a part of everyday life during their volunteer shift.

Depending on the task and location, volunteers get hands-on demonstrations and the ability to speak to professionals in the arts and science fields.



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HAVE ADULTS AND YOUTH WORK TOGETHER

Organizers often keep adults and youth volunteers apart, but you should find ways to get them working together. It helps to create a sense of community and understanding. Youth energize adults, and adults provide positive mentorship to youth.

Example: Every year in November and December, Youth Central volunteers have the opportunity to play Santa's helpers by decorating various senior's centres for the holidays. Some of the locations pair the volunteers with the elderly residents to work together to decorate the facility. This provides a platform for the young volunteers and seniors to get to know one another and share their favourite holiday moments.



FEED ME

Food, delicious food. Go above and beyond with a designated break time and/or break area. A snack is appropriate for shorter (under three hours) volunteer projects, but anything over four hours should offer a meal as well as a break. If possible, please consider dietary restrictions.

Example: Volunteers who work the lunch shift at the Salvation Army's Centre of Hope have the ability to help prepare meals/snacks and serve lunch to clients during their four hour shift. After volunteers finish serving lunch to clients, they have the opportunity to take a break and enjoy lunch as well.



9

WRAP-UP ACTIVITY

Much like an icebreaker, a wrap up activity is an opportunity to bring together the group and reflect on the day. Wrap up activities are more reflective and highlight the lessons learned throughout the day.



Two examples of wrap-up activities we use at the end of a project are:

What? So What? Now What?

Ask participants to respond to the following questions in any format you choose.

- **What? Describe what happened, what you saw & felt, the interactions you had.**
- **So What? Did you make a difference? Why or why not? What impact did you have?**
- **Now What? What more needs to be done? What will you do? Did this change you?**

Sentence Stems

Ask participants to finish sentences that you start, either verbally or on paper.

- **Today I hope...**
- **Today I am most anxious about...**
- **Today I felt...**
- **Today I was surprised by...**
- **Today I learned...**

10 WHAT'S NEXT?

Youth volunteers often become connected to causes, organizations, and people. Your volunteer project may have unlocked a desire to assist in an ongoing role. If your organization or community association is able to take on youth volunteers throughout the year, highlight these opportunities at the end of the project. Give a description of this role and offer support in the application process.

Example: Many of the community associations Youth Central supports are great at advertising volunteer projects within the neighbourhood at the end of volunteer shifts. The volunteers who sign up for these projects usually live within or close to these communities and are looking for opportunities closer to home.



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