RETURN TO VOCATIONS POST STROKE TOOLKIT:

VOLUNTEERING POST STROKE

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

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GETTING STARTED

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

There are many benefits to volunteering. Volunteering can be an opportunity to:

- learn new skills or practice skills that are related to recovery goals post stroke
- develop a sense of purpose
- give back to the community
- make connections with others who have experienced stroke
- gain work experience
- build one's resumé. A reference letter obtained after volunteering outlining the role and skills obtained may assist in resumé building.
- build confidence and self-esteem
- explore new interests
- gradually ease into returning to work

Lived Experience Perspective

"Volunteering made me feel good, very good, I am doing something for someone else. It kept me active. I was always on the go before my stroke. It makes me feel productive, that I am giving back."

– Maria

For more information about the benefits of volunteering post stroke visit:

Volunteering - Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
https://www.heartandstroke.ca/stroke/recovery-and-support/returning-to-work

Benefits of Volunteering - Stroke Association UK
https://www.stroke.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/benefits-volunteering

Volunteering after Stroke - Stroke Network of Southeastern Ontario
https://www.strokenetworkseo.ca/sites/strokenetworkseo.ca/files/volunteering_after_stroke_final.pdf

Front Line Advice

"Individuals should check with their disability insurance provider to make sure volunteering will not affect their eligibility for benefits."

-Regional Manager Employment Services, March of Dimes Canada

FINDING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The following resources can be great sources for volunteer opportunities.

Local Volunteer Centres:

- provide general information about volunteering, local volunteering opportunities and connect individuals to these opportunities
- provide information and support to people seeking to volunteer.
- To find a local volunteer centre visit:
  - Volunteer Canada https://volunteer.ca/ -
  - Call 211 or visit www.211.ca - Community Navigators will connect individuals with the local volunteer resource centre.

Stroke related organizations

- March of Dimes Canada https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/getinvolved/volunteer/volunteering
- Heart and Stroke https://www.heartandstroke.ca/how-you-can-help/volunteer
- Local hospitals and rehabilitation programs. Contact volunteer services directly.

Volunteer opportunity websites:

- Charity Village
- Neighbourhood Network (York Region)
- thehealthline.ca (search volunteer referral networks)
- United Way
- Volunteer Connection (Simcoe, Muskoka, Peterborough, Northumberland)
- Volunteer Barrie
- Volunteer Durham
- Volunteer Halton
- Volunteer Markham
- Volunteer MBC (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon)
- York Region.com
- City of Mississauga

Helpful Tips

When searching online volunteer databases:

- an individual can create a profile so that opportunities that match their interests will be sent directly to them.
- filter opportunities to identify those suitable for persons with a disability

Libraries - may have volunteer positions and have listings of local opportunities. Visit local library websites for more information.

Local media - radio, community TV, newspapers, community social media pages may advertise volunteer opportunities.

Community organizations such as schools, hospitals, food banks, churches, rotary clubs and local community/neighborhood associations. Visit their websites, social media pages or contact them directly.

FINDING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

It is important that the volunteer opportunity is a good fit. Some things to consider are:

- personal goals and interests, strengths and abilities
- the time commitment required by the volunteer position and the amount of time a person has available
- availability of transportation
- location, in terms of:
  - accessibility
  - distance from home as travel requirements will add to the time commitment
- police and background check requirements
- options for virtual opportunities
- costs associated with the role (e.g., purchase of uniform, travel, insurance)

For more information about finding the "right" volunteer opportunity visit these resources:

Volunteer Canada:

- Volunteer Quiz - matches volunteers with opportunities based on skills and interests
- Volunteer Etiquette Resource - Information on finding and applying for volunteer positions, and an overview of the recruitment process.
- Develop your passion and Skills Self-Assessment - tools matching skills and interest to volunteer ideas that connect to an individual's passion

Visit: [New to Volunteering - I Want to Volunteer - Volunteer Canada]

Questions to ask when choosing a volunteer opportunity: See volunteering section on this webpage. [https://www.heartandstroke.ca/stroke/recovery-and-support/returning-to-work]

Are You Ready to Return to Work? A self assessment for people recovering from stroke who are considering return to work or volunteer opportunities. It can be used to assess current abilities against the demands of a particular volunteer job. Visit: [https://cesnstroke.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Return-to-Work-Toolkit.pdf]

Lived Experience Perspective

"Find a volunteer position you will enjoy." – Hass

"Keep yourself open to things. Opportunities arise." – Ken

"Just get out there and try. Most people are supportive. I like to mix activities so I volunteer with stroke organizations as well as other organizations."– Scott

GETTING STARTED

The following considerations were identified via key informant interviews with individuals representing volunteer coordinators and recreation therapy.

- Health care providers can support a successful transition to volunteering by
  - opening the conversation about volunteering
  - Assessing skills and abilities to help identify appropriate volunteer opportunities
  - Assisting with goal setting and identifying small action steps to take

- Short term opportunities such as volunteering for a one-time or special event are a great way to get started and try out volunteering.

- Transportation can be a challenge and sometimes a barrier to volunteering. This was also identified by persons with lived experience as an important consideration when seeking out a volunteer opportunity.

Conversation starters for volunteering post stroke

- Abby, Recreation Therapist

- Explore interests by asking – What activities are you currently doing? What hobbies or interests do you enjoy?
- Have you thought about applying your skills to a volunteer role? (consider skills from previous employment roles, or personal interests)
- Are you looking for activities that are meaningful, or give you a sense of purpose?

Front-line Advice

"If someone is interested and ready to start, we will welcome them and can support them to try volunteering. They may not need to be years into their recovery to start volunteering."

-Volunteer Engagement Coordinator, March of Dimes Canada

"Find (or create) an opportunity that focuses on strengths and what you CAN do. Don't fall into the thought pattern that just because you can't do things the way you used to you don't have a valuable contribution to make."

-Ellen, SLP