

Volunteer opportunities abound

By Kelvin Wee
Emerald Reporter

Editor's note: This story is part of a two-part series on student volunteer opportunities. Part one deals with off-campus volunteer opportunities; part two deals with on-campus volunteer opportunities.

Non-profit, service organizations in the Eugene/Springfield area depend almost exclusively on the support received from members of the community. And for most of these organizations, the support is not just monetary.

The need for volunteer services in the area is always growing. Organizations often need more people to help as they grow to serve the community better. As these organizations grow, they begin to look toward the University for the added support needed in order to provide their services.

Often, students are not sure which organization are best-suited to their talents. The Voluntary Action Center located in the Eugene YMCA specializes matching people with organizations where they can make a difference.

"We have at any given moment over 500 different volunteer opportunities in our files," said Charlotte Phipps, director of the Voluntary Action Center, "and we work with over 100 different agencies in the community."

The process a volunteer goes through before being referred to an agency is simple but precise. All volunteers who visit the office are individually counseled on their interests, skills and time commitments to determine with which organizations they are best suited to work.

These volunteers are then given two or three different referrals and are encouraged to visit each of the agencies to decide which one they would like to work with, Phipps explained.

"There is never a fee for anyone who wishes to become a volunteer and we are always working to get the word out to more students about our service," Phipps added.

The center is funded by United Way, the county Joint Social Service Fund and the YMCA, Phipps said. Because funding is less of a problem, the center is able to focus its attention on the main goal of matching volunteers with community agencies.

The center serves various different agencies in the community that deal with different social issues and problems. Opportunities for volunteers range from working with children, youths, handicapped and seniors, to agencies that deal with the arts and communications.

For more information, call 686-9622.

Organizations

For students who wish to work with animals, the Lane County Animal Regulation Authority has a continuous need for volunteers.

Lisa Moses, the regulation authority's volunteer coordinator said there is a number of opportunities available at the animal shelter.

"We have a program called the Pet Therapy Program, which is ideal because volunteers take the animals to visit with residents of nursing

homes, retirement centers and other facilities" whose residents cannot keep pets, Moses said.

The regulation authority also needs office volunteers and others interested in working in the animal shelter. The latter can involve taking care of the animals, maintenance in the kennels and help in the adoption process.

Moses added that the most important quality for a potential volunteer is a personal commitment to helping the animals and the ability to work independently.

Opportunities are also available in human services.

A popular agency providing services to community children is the Big Brother/Big Sister Program. The chapter in Eugene is the state's only nationally-recognized Big Brother/Big Sister program, and is separate from the program found on campus.

"We require a commitment of a year, and a weekly commitment of at least two hours, although we will accept a commitment of a school year from University students instead," said Diane Coats, program director.

The Big Brother/Big Sister program requires potential volunteers go through a thorough screening process, including application, orientation, personal interview, proof of valid insurance if the volunteer is driving, a visit to the volunteer's home, and even a police check. All this is to ensure the child will not be taken from a risk situation to be placed into another risk situation, Coats said.

Students can also spend their free time as friends to senior citizens in the community by working with centers like the Kaufman Senior Center. The center provides several opportunities for volunteers to share their knowledge.

"We are always open to new ideas and volunteers who want to work with us," said JoAnn Coker, the Kaufman Center's outreach worker. "We even encourage foreign students to come and tell us about the country and culture they are from."

Coker said that volunteers teach classes, help with the weekly Thursday slide programs, work with the meal programs, and help as drivers.

The field of human services also extends groups that educate on health and personal issues like AIDS, rape and the handicapped.

Shanti in Oregon is an volunteer-run organization that helps people with AIDS and AIDS-Related Complex.

Sheila Guilfoyle is the Shanti office coordinator and a part-time student at the University.

"There are so many opportunities for students with Shanti," Guilfoyle said, "and there are presently about eight students from the University working with us."

Shanti asks for a commitment of about four hours a week from its volunteers. They need help with office staffing and an emotional support program for people with AIDS, ARC and their loved ones, Guilfoyle explained. For more information about working with Shanti, call 342-5088.

Rape awareness and counseling is also a field many students volunteer their time for.

The Rape Crisis Network provides a hotline for abused women. The organization is run mostly by women who volunteer their time on hotline services and other fields.

"Most of our callers are women," said Lori Jirges, a community education volunteer with the network.

The Rape Crisis Network requires new volunteers to go through a training session after which they will work on the phone lines for three months. After that, volunteers can move on to support groups, community education and a self-defence education group, Jirges said.

The opportunities for volunteering off campus also extends to working with publications, support groups and information service groups.

Most organizations have their doors open to everyone interested.



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