



WHO ARE OUR VOLUNTEERS?

Martin Lominy, Supervisor of educational and clientele services

Our society changes with each generation as does volunteering. Today, volunteer work is not only about giving ones time but also gaining experience.

The generation of retired volunteers who stayed several years, motivated by the desire to learn and share, is coming to an end. Retirees of the 'baby-boomer' generation are less interested in volunteering. However, the number of volunteers at the museum has not decreased. On the contrary, the increasing demand has made it necessary for us to develop new staff management policies. It is simply the volunteers who have changed.

At the moment, almost 60% of our volunteers are university students and recent immigrants. What they have in common is the search for employment. The other 40% is made up of retired professionals, adults interested in the arts and high school students who are required to participate in voluntary work as part of their curriculum. Another interesting fact is that 99% of our volunteers happen to be women!

It seems that volunteering is becoming increasingly popular with university students who are often looking for work placements. Many art history and museum studies students find that they are unable to find employment in their field without previous work experience. It is the same situation for graduates who face the harsh economic realities cultural institutions. Those who are unable to find employment are often forced to reconsider their career choice.

Recent immigrants face even more difficulties in finding work in their domain. Even with professional qualifications, they are often refused work due to their lack of work experience in Quebec or because they are still improving their level of French. Therefore, many immigrants are searching for opportunities to gain experience whilst practicing their language skills. In Saint-Laurent, almost 50% of the population is considered as recent immigrants.

In each case, the solution is volunteer work. **Around 50% of our volunteers seeking work find employment in a related field following their museum experience.** The majority of our volunteers stay no longer than six months to a year, just what is necessary to start their career. However, they are extremely motivated and work hard. Some students are also recruited as interns for a period of three months.

As a result, the museum continues to welcome volunteers but with a new approach that matches current needs. Our volunteers in search of employment hope to acquire a solid and diversified experience. However, they do not simply wish to study and observe but also to participate and put their skills quickly into practice. Therefore, over the last few years, the museum has added, to the theoretical training, meetings with experts, craftsmen and artists as well as practical exercises.

Fewer volunteers wish to specialize and tend to be interested in several tasks. Therefore, the traditional positions of guide-interpreter and workshop animator are still offered, but with the possibility of varying the tasks or occupying additional positions such as museum technician or front desk receptionist. Some projects are even reserved for qualified volunteers.

In addition, the museum currently awards the title of 'great volunteer' for outstanding commitment. Traditionally, it was necessary to work for over one year to be eligible for the prize. However, as the most recent volunteers generally stay for less then a year, the museum may adjust the selection criteria in order to reward short term work.

In conclusion, the Musée des maîtres et artisans du Québec continues to respond to the needs of its volunteers to offer a stimulating and enriching experience which benefits us all.