

**Mary Barroll:** Welcome to CharityVillage Connects, I'm your host Mary Barroll.

***(SFX: Hummingbird flying and tone)***

**Mary Barroll:** That's the sound of a hummingbird pollinating our world and making it a better place. The hummingbird is CharityVillage's logo, because we strive, like the industrious hummingbird to make connections across the non-profit sector and help make positive change. Over this series of podcasts, we'll explore topics that are vital to the non-profit sector in Canada. Topics like diversity, equity and inclusion, mental health in the workplace, the gap in female representation in leadership and many other subjects crucial to the sector. We'll offer insight that will help you make sense of your life as a non-profit professional, make connections to help navigate challenges and support your organization to deliver on its mission.

***Transition music***

**Mary Barroll:** In this episode...

***News clips***

Global news <https://www.msn.com/en-ca/money/other/critical-shortage-of-volunteers-impacts-non-profits/vi-AA16MDbC?ocid=socialshare>

In: 0:01 "Well, staffing shortages...heavily on volunteers." Out 0:08

CBC news <https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/canada/volunteer-shortage-forces-some-groups-to-cut-back-services/vi-AA16I4Hx?ocid=socialshare>

In: 0:39 "according to recent...services are suffering." Out: 0:53

Global news <https://globalnews.ca/video/9388511/edmonton-charities-struggle-with-ongoing-volunteer-shortage/>

In: 00:18 "since the pandemic...in their own space" Out: 00:43

**Mary Barroll:** A perfect storm is threatening the very foundation of Canada's non-profit sector. Between the pandemic and shifting demographics that include an aging population, a majority of Canadian nonprofits are now facing a severe volunteer shortage. This lack of volunteers has led to the cancellation and suspension of critical programming and, in some cases, the closure of entire organizations. And with

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

58% of Canadian nonprofits operated entirely by volunteers, it's clear that the sector can't afford to ignore this looming crisis. In this episode of CharityVillage Connects, we'll explore why so many sector volunteers simply didn't return post-pandemic, how current trends are impacting volunteerism in Canada, and what organizations can do to not only retain the volunteers they have, but to also to welcome and encourage younger and more diverse groups to step forward.

**Heather Johnson:** So there was both an implosion and an explosion happening in Canada's volunteer sector at the exact same time. You had some essential services needing more people, more paid and unpaid folks to deliver those essential services. And then you had other services that were completely shuttered with no idea of when or if they would reopen.

**Dr. Megan Conway:** I began hearing of anecdotal stories across the country of organizations, small grassroots community organizations, hospitals, and in all various places across the country indicating that they have had difficulty having volunteers return to volunteering, and approximately 60% of organizations have indicated difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

**Lisa Mort-Putland:** We have become more individualistic as a community. So there was a time when we used to send out a broad message, we need help and everyone would say, I can do that. Now people are saying, I'm absolutely willing to help. I'm absolutely able to help. But helping has to be better than what I was doing during COVID.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** I think one way that volunteering will evolve in the future is that as economic conditions continue to improve, we'll see a lot more companies wanting to engage with social projects and particularly looking for ways that they can partner with non-profits around employee volunteering.

**Lori:** I think organizations have been kind of floating for a while. I don't think that they have been in front of their communities. I think they have been reactive. Well, I may get in trouble for this one, but I believe that we need to be a lot more proactive,

### ***Transition music***

**Don (Co-Host):** After serving the community for more than 50 years, last autumn, Meals On Wheels shut down its program in South Surrey and White Rock, B.C. According to a spokesperson for the organization

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

overseeing the meal service, a severe shortage of volunteers was to blame. A CBC news report covering the staffing challenges faced by non-profit programs in British Columbia pointed to several key factors contributing to the demise of this and other volunteer-dependent services in the province. These included pandemic-related health and safety concerns, and post-covid, the rising costs of fuel, childcare, and criminal record background checks. A 2022 study by the Ontario Non-Profit Network confirms that conditions aren't much better in Canada's most populous province. Under the ominous heading, VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT RETURNING, the report states that sixty-two per cent of organizations have lost volunteers, with the greatest impact felt by health, sports, and faith organizations. Of those surveyed for the ONN study, over half reported difficulties recruiting new volunteers, and 40 percent noted challenges convincing previous ones to return.

**Mary Barroll:** Reflecting the seriousness of this crisis, Volunteer Canada has initiated a national action strategy for volunteerism. This ambitious undertaking clearly acknowledges that how non-profits engage with volunteers has to change. The strategy's goal, according to the organization, is to create, quote, "an anchor for the next generation of inclusive participation and volunteering in Canada."

Dr. Megan Conway is President and CEO of Volunteer Canada. I began my conversation with her by asking for a snapshot of the current state of volunteerism in Canada, and about the alarming reports indicating that the volunteer shortage is leading some organizations to limit their operations, or even close down entirely.

**Megan Conway:** Beginning in the later part of the fall in 2022, I began hearing of anecdotal stories across the country of organizations, small grassroots community organizations, hospitals, and in all various places across the country indicating that they have had difficulty having volunteers return to volunteering. That was validated in the November 2022 Business Conditions Survey by Statistics Canada that indicated that approximately 60% of organizations have indicated difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers. And correspondingly, there's been approximately 30% of organizations that have had to change or close programs or the entire organization itself has had to shut down because of the difficulty in finding volunteers. From January onwards in this calendar year, it's been a bit of a nonstop drum, where either the media in different communities has been calling or organizations themselves have been reaching out and saying, we're really struggling to find volunteers, can you help us?

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

I think we're seeing a perfect storm at this moment in time where there's a high demand on frontline community organizations like food banks shelters, even recreational programming in communities like soccer clubs and hockey organizations they're not finding people to volunteer and there's a corresponding impact then on service delivery, whether it's a two-year waitlist to participate in a program like Girl Guides on the West Coast or Meals on Wheels programs completely shutting.

**Mary Barroll:** For Dr. Conway, COVID-19 caused the already-cracking pillar of volunteerism to collapse, with the shock waves continuing to spread even as we emerge from the pandemic.

**Megan Conway:** So one of the things we've heard anecdotally is that people are reprioritizing coming out of the pandemic. We're hearing things like the cost of living being high and that there are barriers to participation that may be greater than they were historically. So, if you're having to ensure you're able to put food on the table, you may not have as much time to go out and volunteer. That's a significant issue, I think. Costs of police record checks in some jurisdictions are still high, and that's a barrier to participation. People's time is not what it was. I think there's a complexity to modern life I've got two small children, I'm constantly kind of buzzing in terms of what's on the go. There's a high level of commitment in time and other resources required to make that work for individuals. I think we've prided ourselves as a country of people who participate. Approximately 80% pre-COVID, that's coming back to the general social survey of giving, volunteering, and participation data from 2018. 80% of people volunteered either formally or informally. We've seen anecdotally a decrease in that. We know that older people have historically been the ones to give a huge amount of their time. There may not be as many older people, older adults who volunteer, but they give large amounts of time. And we're hearing from research done from places like Volunteer Victoria, for instance, that older adults have greater concerns around COVID and their own personal health and safety. So they're not coming back to volunteering in the same ways.

**Mary Barroll:** Along with the volunteers themselves, another invaluable component of the non-profit sector has disappeared or been disrupted over the last few years: managers of Canada's volunteer workforce. To find out what's changed for these important connections between volunteers and organizations, I spoke with Heather Johnson, she's president of PAVRO, which stands for Professional Association of Volunteer Leaders, Ontario.

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

**Heather Johnson:** Certainly people's abilities to volunteer as they once did have changed. And change is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does mean an adaptation, both by the organization, the leaders of volunteers, and the volunteers themselves.

There's that huge change and challenge that's occurring. And that trickled all the way down through the staff levels, definitely to the leaders of volunteers, to volunteer managers. They were dramatically impacted during the pandemic. It's estimated that one in two leaders of volunteers was either redeployed, had their hours reduced, or were laid off during the pandemic. So there was both an implosion and an explosion happening in Canada's volunteer sector at the exact same time. You had some essential services needing more people, more paid and unpaid folks to deliver those essential services. And then you had other services that were completely shuttered with no idea of when or if they would reopen. And if they were to reopen, would they look the same?

And the challenge around what happened with our leaders of volunteers is a challenging one for me because we lost a lot of folks. There was that change. Some organizations for financial reasons or others made the decision that at this time, maybe we don't need our volunteer managers. And they moved on and found other work. And some have moved into completely different sectors.

And this is a bit of a challenge for me because on one hand, we've lost that fantastic skill set and that history and that knowledge from this body of professionals. But on the other hand, it's a validation of the skills and the talents that these people have, that this truly is a profession, and that those skills are in demand in other sectors.

**Mary Barroll:** Of course, it's more than just skill sets that are being lost when professional volunteer managers leave an organization, as Heather Johnson goes on to explain.

**Heather Johnson:** So the loss of volunteer engagement professionals, has greatly impacted volunteer programs because, suddenly the individual or individuals with whom most volunteers first encountered, the person who perhaps onboarded them, maintained those regular communications and advocated for them for volunteers up the organizational chain is gone.

So in my role as the director of a volunteer center, I'm hearing from community who are saying, I'm calling organizations and no one's responding or no one's answering, no responding to my email or no

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

one's picking up the phone. And in some cases, there just isn't anyone there to do that. And in other cases, you've gone from maybe a larger department to much smaller ones. So they just don't have the capacity.

The biggest thing though from that loss of knowledge is that the foundation of every successful volunteer program is relationships, it's that relationship building. And with the loss of sort of your chief relationship person or your volunteer manager, it's left many volunteers without that direct point of contact within the organization.

**Mary Barroll:** Heather Johnson also makes the argument that the world has changed post-pandemic, and simply re-hiring volunteer managers isn't enough.

**Heather Johnson:** It's more than just bringing back your leader of volunteers or bringing back volunteers themselves. It's ensuring that the roles, that volunteer roles are valued within an organization, that the role of the volunteer professional is valued. That's everything from decent work, appropriate wages, support for ongoing professional development, support within your budget for your volunteer program altogether. I myself have been in roles where when I brought up, and said, so what's the volunteer budget? They're like, oh, I didn't think about that. Other places that's very inherent and that's part of the advocacy work that we continue to do here at PAVRO around those bringing that forward. But it also means that funders, all levels of funders and senior leadership, including boards of directors, really need to commit.

### **Transition music**

### **News clip**

Global news <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zznvuSJ8Yyl>

In: 1:12 "That age bracket between...in need of volunteers." Out: 1:40

**Don (Co-Host):** In an article for Imagine Canada published earlier this year, Emily Jensen examined some of the macro trends, including the volunteer shortage, that continue to impact charities and non-profits in 2023. Inflation and high interest rates are still threatening to push the economy into recession, and could produce a knock-on effect in terms of declining corporate earnings and stock prices. These declines, in turn, will likely squeeze the portfolios of foundations and endowment funds dependent on

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

investments in the market. Inflation can also lead to increased operating costs and demand for services, while at the same time driving down donations. Emily Jensen notes that this convergence of economic issues is being particularly felt by food security organizations, with one survey predicting a 60% increase in demand for food banks and other food charities this year. Another important trend for the sector is the significant increase in immigration levels announced by the federal government, a move triggered partly by widespread labour shortages and the country's aging population. According to the article, immigrants make up 47% of the nonprofit workforce, with 50% of immigrant women employed in Canada working in the sector.

**Mary Barroll:** Canada's aging population is affecting both immigration levels, and the drop in volunteerism as older people left the sector in droves during the pandemic. When I asked Lisa Mort-Putland, a certified volunteer administrator and executive director of [Volunteer Victoria](#), for her views on what organizations should do to bring back their senior volunteers, she began with a surprising statistic.

**Lisa Mort-Putland:** So this again is really fascinating for those of us that are in the business every day. The number one demographic of volunteers are youth. More youth volunteer than any other group of age group. But they're able to give fewer hours. So older adults tend to give far more hours.

We have become more individualistic as a community. So there was a time when we used to send out a broad message, we need help and everyone would say, I can do that. Now people are saying, I'm absolutely willing to help. I'm absolutely able to help. But helping has to be better than what I was doing during COVID. So one of the quotes I like to use, because it really hit home for me, was a wonderful volunteer that said, volunteering has to be better than my book. I've learned to sit down and relax and read a great book and to connect with friends. So volunteering has to be better than that. And for volunteer managers and for people in the volunteer-led community who are rephrasing how they recruit volunteers, our best suggestion is to say what is the recruitment journey, what does it feel like, and what does it look like, is it too much trouble, is it difficult to do, do you still have an application form where the person has to print it off at home? Getting that many of us don't have printers anymore. So they're very simple things that are really barriers to volunteering. And so many, many organizations became experts at volunteer retention. But they weren't very good at volunteer recruitment. And so

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

now we're saying this is an opportunity to really think through, how are you recruiting and supporting people from the minute they apply to the minute they decide to volunteer? And we have a great example from an organization that took down their volunteer application off their website and put up a very simple inquiry form. And the inquiry form garnished about three times the number of inquiries than the application form, and it's counterintuitive. Things have to be simpler.

**Mary Barroll:** I asked Lisa Mort-Putland to explain what the barriers were to volunteering and giving back to their communities in terms of different demographics – and what organizations can do to remove some of those obstacles.

**Lisa Mort-Putland:** So, there are a few statistical things that we know. The number of international students registering at post-secondary and high schools in Canada dropped anywhere between 13 and 17%. That means that the feeder pool into volunteerism is much smaller than it was before the pandemic. So, youth are

astounding volunteers, but there are fewer of them than there were perhaps before. The other challenge with youth that we're now beginning to recognize is geography. So, the students that traveled to a destination school used to connect to volunteering through that school. Now many youth are stayed home to study.

So, the opportunities to volunteer are in their hometowns, not in their school locations. But we know that most students learn about volunteering through leadership groups, and most organizations will recruit volunteers through schools. So that younger demographic needs some new connections, some new ways of learning about volunteering.

And then there's the middle demographic, which are people who have been impacted by the cost of living, which means that they may be working more hours. And during the pandemic, we saw lots of individuals who work in the gig economy volunteering for the first time. They had a taste of it. They loved it. They were super engaged. And then the economy switched again.

And so time and the cost of volunteering, which we often take for granted, but again, if you're gonna volunteer at an event and you have to take an afternoon off work, what is that cost? For people who are genuinely in the space where volunteering is something that they cannot contemplate because they are

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*



already engaged in community, helping with family, working. And so sometimes we have to think differently about how we describe volunteering and community building, that it doesn't have to be a formal commitment to something all the time. So there's opportunities in workplace, in corporate volunteering, in working connected to volunteering, in activities that are connected to our work.

And then also helping people recognize that volunteering is also a strategy to help them. So not just giving back to community, which is what everybody wants to do, but that also we have to be okay with language that says volunteering is strategic. It's about building networks. It's about building workplace skills. It's about furthering our careers.

And so in a space where people say, I have a limited amount of time, we want people to think strategically. And then we also want people who are already involved in volunteerism, but never think about it. They're already taking their kids to every activity they can think of and are helping without recognizing that it's volunteerism and community building.

To think about how they use that activity strategically and layer that well. And newcomers will often say, I wanna be part of a community. And we all sort of say, well, start where you are, start in your neighborhood, start with your family, start with schools, there are no bad reasons to volunteer, but there may be some that are more useful when time and money and resources are limited. And so we really wanna help people. That's why it's always helpful, we think, to sit down with someone who can help you with advising, to think through your volunteering strategies. It isn't difficult to find a place to volunteer, but it's often difficult to find the right place for someone to volunteer at their stage of life, and to meet their volunteering needs.

### *Transition music*

### *News clip*

Global news <https://globalnews.ca/video/rd/f4b79e58-0deb-11ee-b667-0242ac110004/?iwsourc=c>

In: 00:43 "When I was born...bigger country." Out: 01:10

**Mary Barroll:** Even before the pandemic, it was clear to volunteer recruiters in the non-profit sector that the status quo wouldn't hold for much longer. That the kind of volunteerism defined by older, middle-class white people – what the philanthropist.ca has termed "a practice of privilege" -- was no longer

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

sustainable. For some, the traditional culture that surrounds volunteering has a built-in bias that discourages participation by low-income individuals, people with disabilities, new Canadians, and other marginalized groups. Many of these roadblocks are based on a kind of closed network in which new volunteers are recruited by knowing someone helping out at a non-profit – be it a friend, neighbour or relative -- with a similar background as their own. Someone who is helping open doors for a new generation of volunteers is Raaj Chatterjee, the CEO and Founder of Meaningful Work. His organization, which creates unique volunteer opportunities for individuals, non-profits, and companies looking to build a purpose-driven culture, was founded on a personal experience that stretches back to his childhood.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** So my journey with volunteering started quite early. I used to live in Ontario, particularly the Hamilton area, where I went to elementary school. And something changed in our family life where we actually had to move to Vancouver, as a young kid.

Part of that was an uprooting of my whole community in Ontario. And one of the ways that our family decided to start building community was actually through volunteering. And my parents, were new immigrants to Canada at the time as well. And one of the ways that they started to get involved was joining up at the local film festival, where they showed different movies. And they brought us along as well. So that's where I started to get into volunteering, I used to run the projector up there.

**Mary Barroll:** Raaj joined a non-profit board at a young age, an opportunity which provided inspiration for the eventual creation of his own organization.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** I realized that people want to give back, but really sometimes struggle to find that first place to give back to. And that's really what led to the birth of MeaningfulWork, just realizing that nonprofits are going through these huge demographic transitions. Were going through really insane sorts of technological challenges as well and adaptations and that's somewhere where young professionals can make an impact with the skill sets that they have. So MeaningfulWork really came out of that need on both sides of the non-profit side on the corporate, and also on the volunteer side as well.

**Mary Barroll:** The struggle for young people to find their footing in volunteering means removing barriers to their involvement, as Raaj Chatterjee explains.

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

**Raaj Chatterjee:** I've spoken to many young people, especially those in high school, those in university, as well as part of this journey in MeaningfulWork. Some of those barriers are one, just not knowing about the organizations that are in their community. I think we are all maybe familiar with some of the larger organizations that are national, but sometimes those organizations that are more specific to a particular community often go a bit unheard of. Being able to reach out to the local university or the local school and just like getting your organization out there is part of what we also help some of our partner organizations do. And so I think that's one thing just getting your voice out there and also creating an environment that's really comfortable for youth to join.

Really it's about creating a welcoming space for youth. Sometimes youth don't feel welcome in an organization and don't feel like they can express their strengths or make an impact. So just creating that pipeline for youth.

Companies do it all the time with their co-op students and internships. And so thinking about ways where we can embed that whole journey as a volunteer into an organizational volunteer retention strategy is something that can be done to help sort of solve some of these challenges.

**Mary Barroll:** I asked Raaj Chatterjee to expand on this last point, where non-profits could model youth engagement strategies borrowed from the for-profit world.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** We're also employers of co-op students. We've employed, I believe, over 30 co-op students in the three years that we've been active. So we have some experience. Other companies that we work with also follow that model. I've been a co-op student for about two years myself when I was going through undergrad. So something that I loved about the co-op experience was getting that hands-on work experience and being able to actually make an impact in my industry.

One of the really neat things about co-op programs is that there is funding available from the federal government to subsidize co-ops and internships for new grads, as well as for existing students. So nonprofits can take advantage of that funding if they want to enroll with the co-op process itself. But I think part of that is giving real responsibilities. I studied engineering and I was able to work as a real engineer.

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

And that just gave me so much breadth and confidence that I was able to go out and do my own thing afterwards. And so it doesn't have to be a paid co-op, but it could be a volunteer position, but really having access to some sort of mentorship that an experienced nonprofit could offer, maybe from their board or their staff. And just making sure that there's support, but there's also that level of responsibility investment to your volunteer. And those are some of the things that co-op programs do really well.

**Mary Barroll:** Raaj Chatterjee also points out that youth bring a certain expertise when it comes to new technology that more established non-profits may want to take advantage of.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** Sometimes the software, internal software tools that nonprofits or organizations use, young people have strong opinions on those. So something that we learned, the hard way is just our project management tools are a bit outdated and we needed to update to Notion, which youth in our organization were really enjoying. So just keeping an eye on those and not that you should be switching your tech stack all the time because that creates a lot of confusion, but definitely taking input. If you're about to use a new software tool for say your project management or for your documentation, maybe consulting with some of the youth that use these tools at school and at work is a great approach. Some of the tools I love include Notion, and that's a great way to just really centralize all the information in your organization. Slack is another great tool for messaging and just keeping everyone in the loop rather than using email, for example, and many youth are on Slack already. Discord is a really interesting one too, which a lot of youth use to join communities. And so these are some of our favorite tools that we use in our organization as well.

**Mary Barroll:** According to Raaj Chatterjee, another important factor for attracting younger volunteers to a non-profit organization is a meaningful Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy that reflects their own social justice values.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** DEI is super important for young folks right now because they're a bit more educated on DEI issues, that's what I find, there's been more recent talk about racism and gender discrimination and a lot of these issues that are really coming up to the forefront for youth. So when they do move into an organization, whether for work or for volunteering, they do expect to see action on DEI. So something we do at MeaningfulWork is we provide some DEI workshops for nonprofits and specifically

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

to the nonprofit sector. And those have been really interesting. I think nonprofits, like their culture is a bit more geared towards DEI, I would say, as opposed to the corporate, just in the work that we do. So I think nonprofits have a great advantage because they serve people with lived experience in a lot of these different minority groups as well. So I think there's a wealth of knowledge that many organizations have that they don't realize that they do. In addition to working on continuing to engage with the people that they serve and making sure that work is done equitably, they can also bring some of those learnings into their volunteers and especially young people who are maybe more vulnerable than adults, for example. And I think something that doesn't come up enough is just how are young people different from other volunteers and what are some specific accommodations that young people might need in addition to creating D&I for other groups that are in your organization as well too. So that's something that many organizations are still learning, but I think it's a worthwhile journey for sure.

### ***Transition music***

**Don (Co-Host):** Increasingly, non-profit organizations are engaging people who want to volunteer their skills and time via the Internet. According to Volunteer Canada, “Virtual volunteering,” provides a flexible work schedule that is not limited by location, physical ability, or other employment commitments. Time spent can be one-time or short-term, depending on the task or project -- for example, writing a single blog or designing a website. Longer term opportunities may include tutoring a student over the school year, creating a non-profit business or marketing plan, or connecting by phone with an isolated senior or adult with disability. Volunteer Canada also notes that virtual volunteering, like its in-person counterpart, can employ either your professional skills, or non work-related skills that you may wish to develop further.

**Mary Barroll:** One of the questions asked in a recent Carlton University survey on Volunteer Recruitment was about the most effective methods of attracting new people who want to give back. By far the most common response, at 63%, was “word of mouth.” The next closest response, way back at 29%, was via social media or other online campaigns. So does this suggest, as we mentioned earlier in this episode, that volunteer recruitment is still largely based on a closed-circuit form of networking? One that overlooks large groups of people not traditionally associated with contributing their time at non-profit organizations? Lori Gotlieb has some thoughts on this and what she sees as other antiquated

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

approaches the sector needs to shake off if it truly wants to rebuild a robust volunteer base. She's a volunteer management expert who consults with non-profit organizations on volunteer engagement and strategic planning.

**Lori Gotlieb:** I think organizations have been, kind of floating for a while. I don't think that they have been in front of their communities. I think they have been reactive. Well, I may get in trouble for this one, but I believe that we need to be a lot more proactive, organizations, some don't even survive without volunteers.

So how did we get to that point where we lose organizations completely, because there was not that kind of strategic planning? We have learned lessons from the pandemic, but what we need to be doing is looking at, okay, so we need to be a lot more proactive. You have the intergenerational situation going on, you have technology going on. All these things came together, and I think the pandemic just put the microscope on it. We've been moving to technology for a long time, and nonprofits have not. So that has been a huge gap that we need to look at. There's no reason why nonprofit organizations are not as socially active on platforms as profits are.

The world has changed. AI is changing things. The organizational websites are so outdated in many ways, and that's the face, that's the address of the organization. And the younger generation, when they're interested in doing volunteering, go immediately to the website. They don't wanna talk to anybody yet, and they're gonna do their own shopping, just like they learned how to shop when they were in the middle of the pandemic. And so if we don't have the dressing out there and it looks good, then we're shooting ourselves in the foot and organizations are failing and or closing or can't get volunteers, or the volunteer program is not being seen as the valuable asset that it is. I always see volunteerism and the volunteer program as the jewel and the crown, but right now it's struggling.

**Mary Barroll:** Lori Gotlieb believes that engaging with potential volunteers of a more mature age in 2023 involves a lot more than just seeing if they fit into a few, narrowly defined categories within the organization. Here she describes what it might take to retain and attract older volunteers.

**Lori Gotlieb:** So what I'm hearing, and what I'm seeing is, I'm not done working, I'm done working for someone. I want to be able to have that flexibility. And the value of this is there's a serious amount of

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

skills out there that are not being looked at from an organizational standpoint, from volunteering standpoint, we're still a bit in the old model, here are the 10 things we need volunteers to do, fit into a slot, and if you don't fit into the slot, then we don't need you.

And that's somewhere where I go, no, that needs to be blown up. We need to look at what skills the older volunteer can bring to the organization and turn it into a bit of a partnership, collaborative effort.

**Mary Barroll:** Lori Gotlieb also highlights a more proactive approach to engaging younger volunteers.

**Lori Gotlieb:** The younger volunteers agreed their life is on their phone, if their head's not down, then they're asleep. They're engaged and they wanna be engaged, they want to see impact. They want to see how they're gonna be able to make a difference. So where we used to do things like recognition of volunteers, was we had the party, we had the barbecue, we had the certificate, we had the swag. Now to respond to what's going on, we need to look at meaningful ways for that specific group that you're working with.

So, volunteer programs have to take a step back and look at who are our volunteers, how do we engage them, how do we bring them in? And then how do we engage them in a way that's meaningful to them, but also selling their stories to the community. So it's a bit of a cycle. Like I have a marketing background that says it's the five Ps, what's the product? How are we promoting it? What's the cost? What's the price? We don't look at that with volunteers, and the price is getting much higher. The cost of living and the cost of time, and the cost of gas and the cost of parking, and the cost of food all has an effect on volunteerism. So we have to look at things a little bit more creatively and at minimum build this kind of a hybrid program.

Not that different than what's going on in the employment world. Recently there has been articles about employers reaching out to past employees going, why did you leave? We need to know so we can better manage our staff. We need to be doing the same thing. We need to look more at what's going on out there, otherwise nonprofits, there's going to be this great divide that's gonna happen.

**Mary Barroll:** Two themes that Lori Gotlieb often returns to are the importance of marketing your organization properly, and looking for ways that some volunteering opportunities can be reimaged.

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

**Lori Gottlieb:** There's low hanging fruit as to what volunteers need to be doing. And then there's other things that need to be creative. So I know during the pandemic or recently, one of the organizations I was talking to says, we can't get Meals on Wheels, and there's really not much you can do about that.

Like, you'll do the best you can, but then maybe you need to re-look at how are we going to serve that community? Because you may not get drivers back with the gas prices, what is the economic effect and what is the human effect? So if we can't get the volunteers to do the program, we have to look at the program. I think that's a fundamental difference, where it used to be, you know, this is what we sell, this is our widget, this is what it is that we do, and now we have to look at can we shift things around? Can that same volunteer opportunity be led into something else? I'll give you an example. Can friendly visiting move to online friendly visiting easily? Of course it can. So here's level number two, what about a social group where we're teaching skills to people that are home bound, a knitting club, a cooking club, a book club, taking it to that next layer, where now these people who have skills can now share those skills virtually, they can do it from anywhere. So it's just taking that more of a creative approach and not recruiting volunteers, but marketing, we have to look at it with a marketing lens, not a recruitment lens.

### ***Transition music***

**Mary Barroll:** With so many trends and shifts occurring all at once – or so it seems – predicting the future of volunteering in Canada with any certainty is like trying to build on a quicksand. Will the alarming drop in volunteerism continue? Are non-profits ready for the challenges we've discussed in this episode? And are there reasons for optimism, assuming organizations are willing to embrace the changes we see all around us?

To get a sense of where those on the frontlines think we're headed, I asked each of our guests to do a bit of crystal ball gazing and share their worries, and hopes, for volunteering in the coming years. Here's Dr. Megan Conway of Volunteer Canada with her thoughts.

**Dr. Megan Conway:** I hope we can find ways to invest in volunteer infrastructure in Canada and that we are in the year 2035 talking about Canada as being a leading country of those that participate and contribute and are involved in charities, nonprofits and their communities in all sorts of different ways. So that would be my optimistic slant on things. I would hope that there's ways we can find significant

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*



investments that support people to return to volunteering, that make the participation pathways clear and evident. I think they're not totally clear and evident now for many, many individuals.

I hate thinking about the future through negative lenses, but I think that we do have an opportunity and I've said this before, but we have a once in a generation opportunity to reimagine what volunteering looks like now and in the future. But I think it requires us to actually come to the table and talk about what participation looks like. We've talked a lot about the future of work. We need to think about what the future of volunteering looks like in this country and what the kinds of policy supports are that will enable that in ways that allow everyone to contribute and participate and be celebrated for their contributions.

**Mary Barroll:** Heather Johnson, President of Professional Administrators of Volunteer Resources can envision a future of volunteer sharing amongst organizations. Here she explains how that might work.

**Heather Johnson:** Perhaps there are organizations who are doing similar work in your area where perhaps you can volunteer share. Sometimes you've got folks who would like to volunteer multiple days. And because you have such a demand for your services, you're trying to be as equitable as possible. Maybe you had to think, you know what, I can really only have one individual come out two times a week for two shifts or whatever it is. But maybe there's another organization that does similar work that could use that extra shift. So I think part of it is building up your networks, being connected and not thinking these are my volunteers. These are my organization's volunteers. No, they're our community's volunteers and adopt a vision of ours, and make people available because that will build up community, that will build up networks. Doesn't necessarily mean that the volunteer is going to jump ship and go and do more with the other organization. They probably won't because that's becoming meaningful for them if they're looking to do multiple days and your organization on its own isn't able to do that. So look at that volunteer sharing if there's a way to do that. Communicate the changes in volunteer availability or interest or whatever to your senior leadership. Don't just assume that they know, tell them.

**Mary Barroll:** Will we see a democratization of volunteering in the future, a kind of power shift away from the traditional top-down leadership in many non-profit organizations? Lisa Mort Putland of Volunteer Victoria thinks so.

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

**Lisa Mort-Putland:** We are now seeing a democracy emerging in volunteerism where volunteers have more power to ask for what they need and what they want and for organizations to shift their practices to be more responsive. And I think that's exciting. I also think that this is an opportunity for us to think about volunteerism not as an act of kindness, but as an act of strategy in communities. We're seeing climate change, we're seeing devastating floods and fires that we recognize and the pandemic taught us all the importance of community and how in our times of need there is always a volunteer, whether that be someone formally trained and assessed and put into a community or whether it be a neighbour who says, I see you, that has become more important and that we've learned that there are tools and strategies that are needed to ensure that kindness and that responsiveness continues in community. And I think there's opportunities for us to listen to each other and talk more, for us to build some policy and practice, to think through what volunteerism looks like and also the messages that volunteering has shifted. There is a shortage of volunteering for some volunteer positions but there isn't a shortage of people wanting to be kind and wanting to give back to community. They just want to do it differently.

**Mary Barroll:** If barriers should be broken down *within* non-profits, could the same be said of greater cooperation and resource sharing with partners *outside* the sector, specifically with for-profit organizations looking to connect with social projects? That's a future of volunteering Raaj Chatterjee of MeaningfulWork would definitely like to see.

**Raaj Chatterjee:** There's a trend right now, which is the Canada Purpose Economy Project, and it's really looking at ways that we can help companies to embrace a social purpose. And part of that social purpose includes partnerships and building strong partnerships with non-profit organizations who are really bringing that purpose to life through their work. And I think one way that volunteering will evolve in the future is that as economic conditions continue to improve, we'll see a lot more companies wanting to engage with social projects and particularly looking for ways that they can partner with non-profits around employee volunteering and also not just transactional exchange but also more deeper connections and joining together some of their business operations with what non-profits are doing and finding those kind of really interesting partnerships. So I think nonprofits can definitely start to explore those, and it can start small, it could start with just a really small agile startup. And so just being prepared for more collaboration with governments, with other nonprofits, I believe the future of volunteering is going to be more about helping people find their own individual purposes and helping

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

people to really find organizations where they can fulfill those individual purposes. And I think that's where the future is heading, both from a non-profit side and also from a corporate side. So just being ready for that shift. And that doesn't mean you have to stop what you're doing today, but it's more about asking your people and being in touch with the people that you work with about, -why are they here? What are some reasons that motivate them to give back? And really honing in on that and knowing your people so that you can continue to bring others around that mission that you're dragging forward into the world.

**Mary Barroll:** Lori Gotlieb is adamant that the old ways of managing volunteers are rapidly coming to an end. For her, things like embracing technology and engaging younger, more diverse groups will be absolutely essential for sustaining non-profit work.

**Lori Gotlieb:** What was, is not anymore and what it's going to be, I don't know whether we will fully understand it. I think volunteer roles will shift. I do think that there's going to be a fundamental shift in what volunteers do. So that core business of manning a gift shop, waiting rooms, and having volunteers, I think there's going to be some fundamental shift in the face-to-face world. I think there's gonna be humongous amount of opportunity for volunteers to connect to community through technology. I think that in the next five years, volunteer programs will be more state-of-the-art, less foundational, you know, like we just wanna help people but be more critical to the work that organizations need to do. Because as funding is dropping, volunteerism always goes up. You know, it's this cycle. When money goes down, volunteerism goes up. So I think that we're going to have that fundamental shift.

Volunteerism comes from different perspectives. Some of it is cultural, some of it is parental, nature versus nurture. I think that the concept of community engagement needs to start at a young age. So the young volunteer is critical to the older volunteer because it doesn't start up in the sixties or fifties. It starts small. It could be informal, but it has to start young. So I think it's critical and I think it's always been a missed opportunity for many organizations. There's always been a struggle because with younger volunteers, whether it's school age, or young professionals, square peg, round hole.

We need volunteers here. Here's an opportunity and we're gonna move quicker and faster into the technology world, you can see people aren't going back to work. Employers are trying to get them back to work and they can't. Because it's turned into this fundamental right of I wanna work from home and

*The contents of this document are both privileged and confidential and may not be disclosed or reproduced without the express authorization of the author, Everything Podcasts ©2021. All rights reserved*

it has a lot of economic benefits. It's the same thing with volunteering. So the younger volunteer is important, but we need to understand what they want, the one thing that I think has gotta be consistent is that there's somebody who is the conductor of that program. There needs to be a leader of volunteers because it is a huge program that is supported by a minimal team.

### *Transition music*

**Mary Barroll:** I'd like to thank our guests for joining us and sharing their thoughts and suggestions about addressing Canada's volunteer shortage.

To hear the complete interviews from this episode, be sure to visit our website [CharityVillage.com/podcasts](https://CharityVillage.com/podcasts), where you'll also find additional information and show notes on this and other topics. Charity Village is proud to be *the* Canadian source for non-profit news, employment services, crowdfunding, e-learning, HR resources and tools, and so much more. Visit us today at [charityvillage.com](https://charityvillage.com).

On the next CharityVillage Connects podcast:

When Edgar Villanueva's book, *Decolonizing Wealth*, was first published in 2018, it sparked heated conversations about the role of philanthropy in upholding colonial structures and injustices. Since then, important questions have continued to be raised about the role of philanthropy in Canadian society, and how it can evolve to be a force of good for the future. With the recent changes to the disbursement quota and the regulation around funding non-qualified donees, the rise in community-centred fundraising, and the revelations around the chronic lack of funding to Indigenous, Black, and Women's organizations and causes, it's clear that "philanthropy" as we've known it is ready for a shake up.

The Changing Nature of Philanthropy – next time on CharityVillage Connects.

I'm Mary Barroll. Thanks for listening.