

TAKE CENTRE STAGE Volunteer Your Time

by Eramelinda Boquer



Too much time on your hands because there is not enough work? Well you can do one of two things. Complain about it endlessly to your fellow artists, or put that time and energy to good use and Volunteer!

For the past three years, I have been working with local and national community groups on a movement called "*Initiative to Increase Volunteerism in Canada*". We have been urging governments on all levels to do more to encourage all Canadians to put time aside each week and commit to community service.

This includes these four main points:

1. Increase the tax credit for charitable donations,
2. Recognize and quantify the time given by an organization or a volunteer, to a charitable organization as a tax credit.
3. Provide incentives for all schools to include volunteer projects in their curricula.
4. Municipal governments should open volunteer offices in each district for the promotion and training of volunteers to assist the needs of the community to serve existing organizations in that community or create new ones to meet their needs.

I've received many letters of support from leaders across the country, including one from recently re-elected to her fourth term - Parc Extension City Councilor **Mary Deros** - who has agreed to a pilot project in Parc Ex for a volunteer office to assist community projects.

When it comes to community leadership, we all have to do our part

too. You cannot just vote for a leader once every four years and think: "That's it, my job is done!" You need to demonstrate as much community commitment from yourself as you expect from your leaders. With the economy in bad shape and social service budgets being slashed everywhere, it is our community and charity groups that must pick up the slack.

With such a strain on existing volunteer groups, and with the same faces beginning to suffer burn out, each one of us needs to give more. Whether it is time or energy or money – we need to be part of the solution. Instead of complaining endlessly about problems, or wasting your time twittering and texting, watching TV or playing video games, you can use that time to help an elderly neighbor with their groceries or join a neighborhood watch program, or become a Scout or Guide leader or Big Brother/Sister.

If you have more time, then find a cause that's dear to you and join up: collect food for a food bank, help feed children in economically challenged areas, collect funds for your favorite community group, etc. Basically, give more and you will feel better. The end result: "*Spare time*" becomes "*care time*" that you can give to your community. It will be very much appreciated, you'll feel good....and everyone benefits!

And here's an excellent example. ACTRA Montreal Member **Sylvia Stewart** took volunteering to the extreme. She jumped (safely) off a building for a good cause. Way to go Sylvia!

ACTRA Montreal Member Sylvia Stewart Jumps Off Building for a Good Cause



Sylvia Stewart rappelling for charity

On Sept 22nd, 2009, ACTRA member **Sylvia Stewart** rappelled off a 26 storey building for charity (approx. 400 feet). Sylvia took part in an annual nationwide event put on by Easter Seals in the effort to raise money for disabled children and their families. "I walked by the building all summer long and read the poster every time I passed, thinking that I could do it. So I did. I joined 2 weeks before the event and raised the minimum amount within days mostly by harassing people to give to my charity. I thought it would be a great way to combine my love of action and charitable giving."

Sylvia believes that everyone has the capacity to make a difference in another person's life. Sylvia Says, "I have always given privately but I realise that by giving publically, I can inspire others to give. The message is that you don't have to be a billionaire to be a philanthropist."



Sylvia Stewart at the ACTRA Montreal 2009 AGM