

Dear Eramelinda,

Thank you for writing. Your comments and views are appreciated. The NDP certainly supports increased study and support of volunteerism in Canada. Volunteering exemplifies the best in Canadian values—compassion and community, caring and giving. This is strongly endorsed by a recent Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating reporting that nearly 12 million Canadians volunteer 2 billion hours each year to non-profit and charitable organizations.

The New Democratic Party understands volunteerism and has a proud history of New Democrats being involved in all aspects of our society including health, education, social services, youth, sports and recreation, culture, the arts and the environment

In 2006, Canada's New Democrats supported Bill S-204 on the National Philanthropy Day. Regrettably Bill S-204 did not receive Royal Assent before Parliament recessed for the summer months that year. This type of legislation is necessary, because it would pay tribute to volunteers as a precious resource in our communities, would help to provide an incentive for greater charitable giving by Canadians and is certainly one the New Democrats support. Volunteers represent a vital component of many community services and definitely deserve to be honoured in this way.

On December 5, 2007, NDP MP Paul Dewar was joined by community representatives to table a motion in support of volunteerism in Canada. Dewar was joined by Ruth MacKenzie (President, Volunteer Canada), Al Hatton (President and CEO, United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada), Michael Allen (CEO, United Way/Centraide Ottawa), Barbara McInnes (President and CEO, Community Foundation of Ottawa) and Larissa Silver (Executive Director, Volunteer Ottawa). They all expressed their support for Dewar's motion.

New Democrats have also been there when Stephen Harper's Conservatives have moved to undermine volunteerism in Canada. In 2007 Heritage Minister Bev Oda refused to release a positive audit report on important volunteer programs that were axed the previous year under her watch. The Summative Evaluation, obtained by NDP MP Charlie Angus clearly showed that the Community Participation Programs (CPP) including the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) were necessary, useful, and cost-effective.

The audit, undertaken as a routine procedure for programs of this nature, would normally be made public. However, the positive review stands in stark contrast to Conservative rhetoric that claimed their funding cuts were targeted at programs that were "wasteful", "inefficient" and "out of touch with average Canadians." Therefore the report was only discovered as the result of an access to information request.

The report, written in November 2006, clearly shows that in addition to being very active, the programs were successfully providing support to a voluntary sector under "considerable stress." Further, the report states that the lack of support for volunteer organizations in Canada is "impacting on their ability to provide service to Canadians." Angus demanded Oda explain the gap between the reality presented in the report and Conservative spin with respect to the CVI.

The NDP will continue to support recognition both of volunteers and volunteerism in Canada. Again, I appreciate your feedback as it is important to me in my role as federal NDP Leader. All the best.

Sincerely,

Jack Layton, MP (Toronto-Danforth)
Leader, Canada's New Democrats