

SPOKANE C.O.P.S. VOLUNTEERS: THE HEART AND SOUL OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING IN THE CITY OF SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

By Maurece Vulcano, Programs Manager, Spokane C.O.P.S.

The number of Americans who volunteer grew last year at the fastest rate in six years, according to a report by the Corporation for National and Community Service, defying the popular notion that hard economic times suppress civic participation. Spokane citizens have joined these ranks of volunteers in increasing numbers.

Let me spout a few statistics to show just how the volunteering has “caught on” as a really cool thing to do.

The report says that 63.4 million adult Americans—nearly 27 percent of the population—volunteered to help charitable causes last year. In total, volunteers donated about 8.1 billion hours of service, valued at nearly \$169-billion, says the report, which is based on annual and monthly surveys of roughly 100,000 Americans age 16 or older, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Washington State ranks #12 in the U.S. for volunteering rate with the median annual hours of 52. More than 31% of those volunteering in Washington State are 65 years or older, 42% are 47-65 years old, more than 30% are 16-24, and 37% are college age.

An increase in volunteer rates among women ages 45 to 54 and among married women helped fuel the rise in volunteer numbers. The report also found that a growing number of Americans – 20.7 million – are volunteering in less-formal ways, such as by helping neighbors solve a problem. In addition, a large number of jobless people may be volunteering to gain work experience. The tough economy has also inspired some people to be more sympathetic with the plight of others. One of my favorite quotes says, “we tilt toward problems, rather than away from them.”

In today's busy society, it can be hard to think about finding time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering are enormous, both to the volunteer, their family and the community. The right match can help the volunteer find friends, reach out to the community, learn new skills and even advance their career. Volunteering can even help protect your mental and physical health.

Okay, so I probably haven't told you anything new? But did you know that Spokane C.O.P.S. has been around since 1992 and has successfully operated 12 substations and 21 crime prevention programs for the community? Much of that success is due to our volunteers. They are often the glue that holds a community together. Our volunteers have allowed C.O.P.S. to connect to the Spokane community and make it a better place. We have found that by partnering with various agencies that provide work experience for seniors re-entering the workforce has been a blessing for both C.O.P.S. and the program participant. They get experience in their area of interest to hone their skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organization.

So what can you do about it? Get involved and give back to the community. Volunteering with Spokane C.O.P.S. can truly make a difference...and that feels good! Call 509-835-4572 or send me an email at mvulcano@spokanepolice.org for details on what is available with C.O.P.S. just for you!