



## WHO CARES?

### ***Who Cares?: Will Organizations and Communities Decide to Act?***<sup>1</sup>

Audio Track #6, *Canada Who Cares?*

Linda L. Graff and Paul B. Reed

**Paul Reed:** we mentioned strategic thinking and focused action, Linda. What do these look like in real concrete terms?

**Linda Graff:** there's work that organizations need to do. There's work that communities and their leaders need to do.

Speaking about the organizational aspect first. Organizational leaders need to understand the importance of the work volunteers do in their own organizations. With numbers likely to fall, and average volunteer engagements likely to shorten, it's absolutely critical that we stimulate the regeneration of voluntary action. Engaging skilled leaders who understand that managing volunteers needs to be done with a heightened sensitivity to both needs and limitations of contemporary volunteers.

We need to build infrastructure under volunteer programs, infrastructure that allows volunteering to be productive and rewarding. There's an essential lesson here that volunteering without infrastructure and programs without volunteers – either one without the other is likely to be a useless exercise.

Organizations need to redefine the role of volunteers. I want to give you a context for this one. I'm reminded of a conversation I had with a volunteer leader a number of years ago. He observed that we've invited millions and millions of volunteers to help and the essential miracle of our business is that they say, "Yeah." We've offered them the most boring, routine, monotonous, repetitive, mundane work and they've done it for us. At the same time what we've done is we've reserved the innovative and creative work for paid staff. My friend predicted that there will come a time when those two things will need to be reversed and I'm thinking that we're probably there. We may in fact need to rethink the division of labour between paid and unpaid and look for new ways to make the very best use of all of the resources available to us.

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<sup>1</sup> Graff, Linda L. And Paul B. Reed. 2007. *Who Cares?: Will Organizations and Communities Decide to Act?* Audio Track #6 of the Graff- Reed Conversations in the [Canada Who Cares? Project](#). Dundas, Ontario: Linda Graff And Associates Inc. Audio file available from: [www.CanadaWhoCares.ca](http://www.CanadaWhoCares.ca)

We're going to need to shift the architecture of volunteering. We often think that we've got recruitment problems. I hear agencies say that all the time: we can't recruit volunteers. I don't think there's an organization in the country that has a recruitment problem; what they've got is a job design problem.

In a trend that's very clear that we really haven't spoken about, volunteers are looking to gain more back for themselves in exchange for the time that they give in volunteering. What they're looking for varies as much as volunteers themselves. They're looking for skills; they're looking for broadening horizons; they want to meet new and different people; they want to feel productive; they want to feel like they make a tangible difference. We can't do this without knowing what volunteers want. And because they need to know their time is being used to good advantage we absolutely have to ensure that volunteers know that their work makes a difference. We need to help them see how their work connects with the mission of the organization and furthers the collective effort.

We've said this multiple times, but this is not just a volunteering issue – neither is this a voluntary organization problem. It's a community problem; taxes go up, property values go down, community centres close, grandmas go hungry. Sure this is stark, but it's a community issue and it's fixable.

Paul, talk to us about some of the challenges we're throwing out to communities and their leaders.

**Paul Reed:** to my eyes there are two key challenges to communities and their leaders.

One is that community organizations and civic leaders must persuasively demonstrate how and how much volunteering makes a difference. How it is the vitamins and minerals that communities simply must have to stay healthy. This matter of making the case for volunteers is sorely needed and long overdue and is a necessary basis for action.

The second initiative we're suggesting can be called community conversations - community conversations about volunteering in fact. These should entail people from every quarter and corner of their respective communities assembling to pool ideals and ideas for volunteering specifically in their community.

Obviously I've sketched these several initiatives only in the broadest of brush strokes. There are more specifics that can be mentioned depending on the distinctive features of individual communities.

**Linda Graff:** Paul, we've been having discussions about who cares? We've been talking about what volunteering is, how significant it is, how we can't be complacent about what's happening to it. In a nutshell, how might you summarize the discussion?

**Paul Reed:** we began with the question, Who cares? We've talked about those who we know care: volunteers and why what they do is so essential. We've talked about who should care about volunteering, and volunteering that may be under threat.

Volunteering matters: that's our key point. There's work to be done, though. We can't make assumptions that what's been there in the past is going to be there in the future.

One thing is certain here: we're making a choice in Canada even if we decide not to choose. Canadians and communities here may take seriously volunteering and its contributions to everyone – or not. In any event, we will all live out the consequences of creeping social change that has the potential to either enrich us all or erode the way of life that we all take for granted.

Is there an answer to the question, Who Cares? Time will tell.

\*\* Thank you to Volunteer Edmonton for production of the transcripts from the Graff-Reed Conversations.  
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