



For Immediate Release — Friday, November 20, 2015

## **University of Lethbridge launches UVolunteer program in conjunction with Volunteer Lethbridge**

The University of Lethbridge and Volunteer Lethbridge announced a new initiative today that will increase the awareness of volunteer opportunities for students in the Lethbridge community, as well as create more pathways for local organizations to access student volunteers.

Launched at the University's annual Volunteer Fair, UVolunteer sets in motion a comprehensive plan that coordinates all the student volunteer activity on campus.

"It is formalizing that relationship between the University of Lethbridge and Volunteer Lethbridge and putting it into action, as well as creating an awareness and process by which students can get their eyes into the community and the opportunities that exist for them," says Volunteer Lethbridge Executive Director Diana Sim. "It also is a means to get local organizations to consider what a volunteer might be able to do for them and open them up to looking at volunteerism in a different way."

The U of L and Volunteer Lethbridge forged a partnership just over two years ago that saw the local organization move its offices into the University's Dr. Foster James Penny Building in downtown Lethbridge. At that time, U of L President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Mike Mahon recognized the many students who were already embracing volunteer experiences and saw the formalization of a partnership as a way to further enhance the University's presence in the community.

"This partnership has been very beneficial to both our students and the citizens of Lethbridge," says Mahon. "While student volunteers gain opportunities to add experiential learning to the skills they acquire while going to school, local organizations are able to tap into their energy and serve the community in an even more impactful manner."

Third-year management student Tiffany Herrell is the program coordinator for the student volunteer initiative, working in a co-op position funded by the University. Having started volunteering as a child with her family, it was only natural that she would continue to do so while at the U of L.

“I think the values of giving back to the community and collectivism are central to many students here at the U of L,” says Herrell. “It also really gives students an opportunity to gain skills and experience outside a formal educational setting. These skills can be very valuable because often times, students don’t have that work experience when they are trying to enter the workforce.”

One of the key aspects of the UVolunteer initiative is a module on the program’s website that allows volunteers to record their volunteer experiences.

“Currently, we have a large portion of our student population that is volunteering but they have no way to track the volunteer hours they are putting in,” says Herrell. “This will give them a tool to track those hours and create a history of all the places at which they’ve worked.”

It will also give the University measurable data on the impact of its students in the community; something that Sim predicts will be eye-opening.

“I think a lot of people will be surprised to see just how many students are involved, and how many hours they are actually giving back to the community,” she says.

Students interested in learning more about the UVolunteer initiative are urged to visit the program’s website: [volunteerlethbridge.com/uvolunteer](http://volunteerlethbridge.com/uvolunteer).

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