Skills are now the focus of any employment search. Employers want to see skills on your resume and in your covering letter; you make employment decisions based on the skills you have acquired or want to acquire. In today’s competitive labour market it can be challenging to develop marketable skills and gain experience. However, upon closer examination there are many opportunities. One area that is often overlooked is volunteering.

The primary benefits of volunteering are fourfold:

1. **Career Exploration**: Volunteering affords an opportunity to investigate a career area and discover the skills necessary for success in that field. This is a chance to answer questions such as “Is this what I want to do? And do I fit in here?” Volunteering offers a hands-on approach to self-assessment and is an easy way to explore career choices while in university or prior to looking for employment in a new field.

2. **Develop Skills and Gain Experience**: How do I get a job without experience and experience without a job? Easy, volunteer! Most volunteer positions offer the same opportunity to develop skills as paid positions. You can develop the communication, interpersonal, organizational, problem solving, and computer skills, among countless others, that employers are looking for. For many positions and careers, the only way to get started is through volunteer work.

3. **Develop and Cultivate Contacts**: The majority of all work opportunities are never advertised. With this in mind, it is clear that you must either be in the right place at the right time or have contacts who can alert you to openings before they are advertised. In addition to actual openings, contacts can also provide the critical information regarding career areas that allow for informed and intelligent career choices. An important way to develop contacts while making a valuable contribution to an organization is by volunteering.

4. **Participate in Your Community**: In these busy times, it is easy to neglect the community in which we live. Volunteering affords us the opportunity to give back to the organizations that have supported us or that have selflessly given to others. Through this practice we can strengthen both our community and ourselves. That accomplishment can provide an important sense of satisfaction and allow us to balance personal and professional needs.

**WHERE CAN I FIND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES?**

The short answer is everywhere, but a few good places to start looking are:

- You can access volunteer postings on-line through our website at [http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/career-centre-online](http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/career-centre-online) or in person at the Career Centre.

- The UTM Career Centre Volunteer Resources Section: This section is filled with a wide variety of current opportunities. The opportunities have been conveniently categorized to allow you to target the area that best fits your skill and career development needs.

- Get Experience Fair: Attend the Get Experience Fair at UTM in September. Full details are available at [http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/get-experience-fair](http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/get-experience-fair)

- The Career Centre Library: Many of the same resources that provide links to the labour market can provide the links you need to find a volunteer opportunity in your area of interest. You can approach an organization directly and inquire about the availability of a volunteer opportunity. It may be possible with some organizations to design your own position. As with any employment search, the most important factor is research and preparation. Make sure you refer to the guides in the Career Resource Library since they can help you develop strategies and techniques for getting the volunteer work you are looking for. Try some of the resources listed below to give you information on some of the opportunities.
Community Services in Peel Directory: http://www.pinet.on.ca/csd.htm

Canadian professional associations (go to http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/professional-associations, and click on “Comprehensive listing of Canadian professional associations”)

The Canadian Environmental Directory can be found in the Career Centre library (2003) edition or go to https://earthdirectory.net/canada or https://earthdirectory.net/canada. You can also access ECO Portal for a range of environmental groups and organizations in Canada. http://www.planetfriendly.net/ecoportal.html

- CharityVillage.com: http://www.charityvillage.com
- Overseas Volunteer Information:
  UTM Career Centre has a number of relevant resources:
  - What in the World is Going On? A guide for Canadians wishing to work, volunteer, or study in other countries
  - The Canadian Guide to Working and Living Overseas
  - Volunteer Vacations
  - Goinglobal found on the Career Learning Network under the Resources tab https://cln.utoronto.ca/home.htm

The UTM International Education Centre can help in locating international volunteer opportunities and provide invaluable support in making the necessary arrangements for living abroad:

Davis Building, Room 2071.
Tel: (905) 569-4716
http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/international

- Volunteer Centres
  Volunteer MBC (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon) http://www.volunteermbc.org
  Volunteer Centre of Burlington-Oakville http://volunteerhalton.ca/vhome
  City of Toronto http://www.volunteertoronto.ca

A FEW IMPORTANT TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND...
- Set clear and realistic goals for your volunteer experiences. Remember that you are trying to meet specific career exploration, skills development, contact development and community goals.
- As with any search for employment, the preparation and research that you undertake is crucial. Without adequate information, you are unlikely to find what you are looking for.
- Tailor your volunteer position to your specific needs and wants.
- Take your commitment seriously. The organization is relying on you to show up for all of your shifts for the complete time you’ve agreed to.
- Have some fun! Volunteering can provide you with skills, contacts and opportunities. It can also provide an enormous amount of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Please note that this information is subject to change. It is best to refer to the original sources for the most up-to-date information. (Updated May 2018)