

Volunteerism and *emerit* Professional Certification in Sports Management

The Manitoba Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Council is a provincial organization with a wide range of programs including leadership development (e.g., coaching and officiating), education and training, organized sports, and event management. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for the Aboriginal people of Manitoba. One of the ways it works to achieve this mission is through promoting and encouraging volunteerism.

“We are trying to highlight the opportunities in volunteerism through sport,” explains Norman Ettawacappo, Executive Director of the Council.

As Ettawacappo says, most sports rely heavily on volunteers to survive, for coaches, officials, chaperones, even the running of many programs.

“As an administrator, I do the planning, but the actual delivery is done by volunteers,” Ettawacappo continues. “They sit on committees, on boards, they chaperone, coach, and more.”

Ettawacappo believes it’s important to help youth not only have the experience in a sports framework but to recognize that the skills being learned as a volunteer can be transferred to other areas.

“Volunteers are doing event management functions,” he notes. “They are doing transportation, food service, accommodation, or competition duties, including officiating, security, and spectator services.”

Ettawacappo emphasizes that not only are young volunteers learning skills they can apply elsewhere in life, they are gaining other great benefits. As a volunteer in many events, young people have a chance to meet other people from many different backgrounds, from different parts of the province, and even from across the country.

“You meet so many different people but you may have similar issues and challenges,” he notes.

Although the Council’s focus is on Aboriginal youth, Ettawacappo strongly supports the encouragement of volunteerism as a way to help all youth develop experience and skills they can use in other facets of their lives. At the same time, the volunteers help the sports organizations stay alive and vital.

Just as volunteering for sports events helps develop skills for other areas, Ettawacappo sees the skills needed for sports organizations matching closely to event management skills. This made it a logical step for him to obtain special event coordinator and special event manager *emerit* professional certification through MTEC. He now has two other people taking special events coordinator certification.

“The certification gives you formal knowledge about how to operate an event,” he explains. “Before, we did it based on experience but now there are more technical and reporting requirements so we need to be more professional about how we plan, develop, and implement.”

emerit professional recognition is based on the hospitality industry but the skills learned can be transferred readily to sports administration. Not only do sports events need to be planned and run like any large event, those involved need other skills including customer service skills to work with athletes, volunteers, and spectators.

Eventually, Ettawacappo would like to see volunteers take the recognition programs but for now he is happy to have any volunteer without certification share their knowledge and experiences. In the end, the Council is helping to develop a cadre of young Aboriginal people who through their training or volunteer experience will have new skills to take beyond the world of sport.