

## Volunteer Profile

### Mary Thomson, BA, MSW

Mary Thomson knows how to use volunteer experiences in every way possible. Whether it is for career or personal development, she recognizes these experiences as being worthwhile tools. Through Mary's educational path and her career as a Mental Health Social Worker, she has found her volunteer experiences to be effective in various aspects of her life. Read on to see how Mary was able to gain from her volunteering.

As a university student, Mary's volunteer experiences included working with an art group that taught a class of elementary-aged children with learning disabilities. This was an appropriate choice for Mary as it combined her studies in Fine Art as well as her keen interest in Art Therapy. It also gave Mary a first-hand opportunity to really solidify whether she wanted to pursue a career in Art Therapy or as an Art Teacher. The experience of teaching this class allowed Mary to recognize what career areas she was drawn to inevitably leading her to the informed and confident decision to enroll in the MSW program at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Mary has also participated in a number of community orchestras that have served as an excellent creative outlet. This involvement also enabled Mary to develop skills by improving her teamwork and problem-solving abilities. While working with the art group she discovered the importance of planning and programming activities based on the need of the individual. She also developed an awareness of her strong interpersonal and communication skills through positive feedback regarding her teaching skills.

Since finishing her education, Mary has participated in additional volunteer activities. These include participating in the "Talking Books" program at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind as a narrator and monitor as well as providing educational workshops at her church. These experiences have played a part in Mary's career development by improving her technical and people management skills. In addition, Mary recognizes that having these volunteer experiences on her résumé demonstrates "interest, initiative and a creative and holistic perspective on life – good for social work."

Mary's volunteer roles have the combined theme of helping people through developing others' skills, presenting new ideas or the sharing of music. Personally, Mary identifies an increase in confidence, exposure to tasks that are diverse from her employment and developing transferable skills as just a few of the personal development advantages she has gained.

Mary can tell Laurier students from personal experience that when examining particular career paths, volunteering can be an excellent way to increase your knowledge and awareness of careers. As well, it can be an ideal way to learn and help you grow as a person.