

One Brick DC

Making Volunteer Work Good for Everyone

BY KENDRA LANGDON JUSKUS

DC is overflowing with community-based nonprofits. They distribute clothes. They feed the elderly. They clean up parks. They teach neighborhood youth how to dance, write, garden and play music. But what happens when even the best nonprofits find themselves short-staffed and in need of volunteers? One Brick DC steps in to help.

"It's hard for nonprofits to find a consistent group of people who know how the procedures work," says Lindsay Reishman, who started One Brick's DC chapter. "We make it easy for busy working professionals to volunteer in the community. We're a liaison between the two."

One Brick began in 2001 in San Francisco and has since expanded to New York, Chicago and, in 2006, Washington, DC. In each city, One Brick reaches out to local nonprofits on the one hand, and develops a network of volunteers on the other. When a nonprofit needs volunteers for an event or activity the call goes out to One Brick volunteers, who then choose what they want to help with.

To attract volunteers, One Brick emphasizes the fun, social aspects of service, as well as the ease of volunteering. Many individuals shy away from volunteer service, because the organization's needs seem overwhelming. But instead of requiring an ongoing, regular volunteer commitment from an already busy working professional, One Brick lets volunteers choose from a variety of volunteer opportunities according to what day or location or activity is best for them.

"We make it easy and fun for the volunteers," explains Reishman. "People can volunteer on any given weekend without having to commit an extensive amount of time."

Seasoned One Brick participants who agree to take on a little more responsibility than the average volunteer, organize activities and work-

ers so that the organization's responsibilities are sufficiently covered. Volunteer hours are kept short – usually a few hours on a weekend morning or weekday evening – and are followed by a get-together at a local eatery so that One Brick volunteers can meet and build friendships.

The philosophy seems to be working. Since its inception last year, One Brick DC has signed up 3,100 volunteers and logged 6,000 volunteer hours – one of the fastest starts a One Brick chapter has seen. It routinely offers 10 to 12 volunteer opportunities a month, working most frequently with the Capital Area Food Bank, Bread for the City, Kids Enjoy Exercise Now (KEEN) and DC Central Kitchen. The organization received an award from Bread for the City for its committed service.

Organizations that work with One Brick on a routine basis also appreciate that after a few repeat events, they need to do very little training and orientation for the volunteers. According to Reishman, that fact makes for "ease on both sides of the equation."

On a recent bright December morning, nearly 30 One Brick DC volunteers rushed around a cold, dark Capital Area Food Bank warehouse, sorting food and distributing it into bags to be delivered to DC seniors. Once the packing of the bags was finished, the volunteers hurried about sweeping, rearranging tables, collecting garbage and stacking crates. The morning's activities were finished in no time.

McKenzie Clement, who is volunteering with One Brick for only the second time, declares it to be a great experience. "People should give it a try," she says. "Everyone's very friendly."

As if to prove that point, volunteers begin calling to one another. They gather into a group, chat about the morning's work and happily begin making plans for lunch.

To learn more about One Brick DC, or to get involved, visit www.onebrick.org. ■



One Brick DC volunteers gather at the Capital Area Food Bank.



Greater Washington
Urban League

Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.

Empower Yourself by Owning a Home!

Receive Up to \$70,000 in Home
Purchase Assistance Through the D.C.
Homebuyers Assistance Program



Qualified Applicants can receive assistance for down payment and closing costs to purchase single-family houses, condominiums, or cooperative units.

You may qualify if:

You are head of a household and first-time home buyer

You are a low-to-moderate income resident, based on income eligibility guidelines

The home you want to purchase is located within the District

For more information call:
202-265-8200 Ext. 228
or visit our website at www.gwul.org

Funded by the DC Department of Housing
and Community Development
Adrian Fenty, Mayor

