

Rise in volunteers adds some cheer amid dim economy

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PORTLAND, Ore. -- The markets may be down, but the number of people volunteering is way up.

Cicily Traudt and her 9-year-old daughter spent Monday volunteering at the Children's Book Bank. Making sure children have books to read this holiday season is a cause close to Cicily.

"I love to books to death," said Cicily.

But instead of donating money to the Children's Book Bank, Cicily is donating time.

"I don't have a lot of finances to give right now so I feel good about being able to come down here and do this," explained Cicily.

And Cicily is not alone. Charities are seeking a spike in the number of people volunteering this holiday season. Just this last weekend hundreds of volunteers packed Hosford Middle School in Southeast Portland to give it a bright new coat of paint.

Most of the volunteers were not even students at the school.

The non-profit group Hands On Greater Portland says with 80 volunteer projects already scheduled this month, there is no shortage of helpers.

"They may not have the financial resource to give to the Hands On Greater Program and to another no profit but they're wanting to give their time," said Dwight Adkins, Assistant Director for Hands On Greater Portland.

The organization reports a nearly 5 percent increase in volunteers this year over last. Many of those volunteers are people like Stephanie Baker who, recently out of a job, found herself with a lot of time to give.

"I leave feeling like I did something productive and helpful with my day instead of just surfing job websites," said Stephanie. And, you never know, volunteering has been known to lead to paying jobs.

Stephanie pointed out, "You could be sitting next to someone sorting books who knows somebody who knows somebody."

It's a chance to make a difference in the lives of others and our own without even paying a dime.

And we need to keep in mind, the need for volunteers continues well after the holiday season is over. \

Hands On Greater Portland is now taking pledges from people to volunteer this spring and summer.