

Today is [International Volunteer Day](#)! Please join us in recognizing the hundreds of Yukon volunteers who donate their time and effort to EMS, firefighting, sport and recreation, community events, and much more.

To mark the occasion, we chatted with a few volunteers from [Yukon Search and Rescue](#) (YSAR). In partnership with the RCMP and Emergency Measures Organization (EMO), YSAR provides search and rescue services across the territory.

We learned a lot from them – and we hope you will, too!

*

There are a lot of different roles within YSAR. Most volunteers are what *people in the know* would call “ground pounders.” These volunteers search on foot and, to do so, must maintain a certain level of training, particularly in navigation skills. Ground pounders also need a high level of awareness and attention to detail. For example, you need to be able to recognize certain evidence on the ground and be able to discern what is – and is not – a clue to a person’s whereabouts.

There are also command roles, such as the team leader – this person sits in the command post and relays information from the ground pounders to the RCMP and vice versa. There are also several administrative roles – YSAR needs people to do paperwork, apply for grants, and so on.

It’s probably best to hear the rest from the volunteers themselves, so without further ado, here are some words from YSAR volunteers!

YSAR SURVIVAL TIP

If you are going out on your own, be sure you complete a [Safe Travel Plan](#) and leave it with someone responsible.



Intrepid Reporters: What made you want to volunteer with YSAR?

Michael: The reason I do it is because I like getting out, and if I went missing, I would want to know that there are people looking for me. I’ve got two kids. Searches help bring closure to the family or help reunite the person with the family. I would want somebody doing that for me.

*

Alan has volunteered with YSAR for eight years.

Intrepid Reporters: Why did you decide to volunteer with YSAR?

Alan: I'm an outdoorsy guy and I love being out in the bush.

Alan also enjoys the social aspect of YSAR and said it's really the people who keep him coming back: "They're a fun bunch of folks to hang out with." With YSAR, Alan has had the opportunity to get out on the land and meet great people. It's rewarding in other, more humbling, ways, too.

"When we get out there and actually locate somebody based on the skills we practice, it's fantastic. You're making an impact in somebody's life and that impacts your own life as well."

For Alan, one particular search still stands out. "A couple years ago, we had a search up in Ross River. A little three-year-old boy wandered away from Mom and Dad." The boy, along with his dog, were missing for 24 hours. Luckily, it was fall, and it wasn't too cold outside. "He spent the night with that dog and we found him the next day."



"I'm a big tough guy, but I was crying. Tears all around. The little guy didn't even know he was lost. A search like that keeps you coming back."

Alan said that since Whitehorse and Yukon are typically full of outdoorsy people, it usually isn't too hard finding volunteers. However, there's a need for more "indoorsy" types to fill administrative roles. Overall, "YSAR is an enjoyable and rewarding place to volunteer."

*

Valerie was initially interested in volunteering with YSAR because the team wanted to start a mountain-bike based search group. This idea is still in development.

Valerie has found that her volunteer life and her work life are mutually reinforcing; the skills she learns at YSAR are applicable at work and vice versa. As a biologist, the skills she has to work in the field are useful for YSAR but also, practicing her YSAR skills (including navigation and GPS) keeps her safe while she's working in the bush. "I think about the terrain and what's going on."

Valerie said starting with YSAR isn't scary – so there's no reason to be daunted. New people are matched with an experienced volunteer, so that you always have a "mentor" to answer your questions and help you out!

*

Darryl has been with YSAR since the early days in 1992. “We’ve slowly evolved. At one point, we had just basic radios but now we have GPS, which was a huge step forward for navigation. We still have the original GPS – it makes your camera look tiny.”

Intrepid Reporters: Are there lots of training opportunities with YSAR?

Darryl: Later on this year, there’s a team leader course which is a weekend course – somebody to manage teams of four or five out in the field. He’s the one who sends the information back. And then there’s a tracking course, which is a lot of fun.

Darryl originally came to Whitehorse with the military, so volunteering with YSAR was a natural fit. He’s in charge of training, which he said is one of the most important things, since different training opportunities help keep the volunteers interested.

*

Heather is a paramedic with EMS and has been with YSAR for two years. She has a very strong interest in emergency services.

“It’s been good to make relationships with other people in the government, like Emergency Measures Organization and Fire Marshal’s Office.”



Heather has good timing to thank for her decision to join YSAR: “I’ve always been really interested in search and rescue, just the idea of it. When I moved up here it was the golden opportunity, I finally had the time to donate.”

Echoing some previous sentiments, Heather said her fellow YSAR volunteers are one of the main reasons she loves volunteering. “The people who volunteer are just good members of the community and they’re great to be friends with. That’s the draw for me, that’s what keeps me coming back.”

*

If you are interested in volunteering with YSAR, the best thing to do is attend a meeting and see what it’s all about. You can learn more about volunteering [here!](#)

Thank you to Michael, Alan, Darryl, Valerie, and Heather for chatting with us – and a big THANK YOU to all our CS volunteers!