



## **VOLUNTEERING AND ITS SURPRISING BENEFITS – HELPING OTHERS WHILE HELPING YOURSELF**

With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering are enormous to you, your family, and your community. The right match can help you find friends, reach out to the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career. Volunteering can also help protect your mental and physical health. Learn more about the many benefits of volunteering and find tips on getting started as a volunteer.

### **BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING 1: Volunteering connects you to others**

One of the better-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. Unpaid volunteers are often the glue that holds a community together. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Even helping out with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organisations in need.

And volunteering is a two-way street: it can benefit you and your family as much as the cause you choose to help. Dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills.

### **Volunteering helps you make new friends and contacts**

One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new

people, especially if you are new to an area. Volunteering also strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighbourhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

### **Volunteering increases your social and relationship skills**

While some people are naturally outgoing, others are shy and have a hard time meeting new people. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice and develop your social skills, since you are meeting regularly with a group of people with common interests. Once you have momentum, it's easier to branch out and make more friends and contacts.

### **Volunteering as a family**

While it might be a challenge to coordinate everyone's schedules, volunteering as a family has many worthwhile benefits. Children watch everything we do. By giving back to the community, you show them first-hand how volunteering makes a difference and how good it feels to help other people and animals and enact change. It's also a valuable way for you to get to know organisations in the community and find resources and activities for your children and family.

## **BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING 2**

### **Volunteering is good for your mind and body**

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

**Volunteering increases self-confidence.** Volunteering can provide a healthy boost to your self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity. And the better you feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and future goals.

**Volunteering combats depression.** Reducing the risk of depression is another important benefit of volunteering. A key risk factor for depression is social isolation. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against stress and depression when you're going through challenging times. [Working with pets](#) and other animals has also been shown to improve mood and reduce stress and anxiety.

**Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy.** Volunteering is good for your health at any age, but it's especially beneficial in older adults. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not, even when considering factors like the health of the participants. Volunteering has also been shown to lessen symptoms of chronic pain or heart disease.

## **BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING 3:**

### **Volunteering can advance your career**

If you are considering a new career, volunteering can help you get experience in your area of interest and meet people in the field. Even if you are not planning on

changing careers, volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice important skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organisation. You might feel more comfortable stretching your wings at work once you have honed these skills in a volunteer position first.

### **Volunteering can provide career experience**

Volunteering offers you the chance to try out a new career without making a long-term commitment. It is also a great way to gain experience in a new field. In some fields, you can volunteer directly at an organisation that does the kind of work you are interested in. For example, if you are interested in nursing, you could volunteer at a hospital or a nursing home. Your volunteer work might also expose you to professional organisations or internships that could be of benefit to your career.

### **Volunteering can teach you valuable job skills**

Just because volunteer work is unpaid does not mean the skills you learn are basic. Many volunteering opportunities provide extensive training. For example, you could become an experienced crisis counsellor while volunteering for a women's shelter or a knowledgeable art historian while donating your time as a museum docent.

Volunteering can also help you build upon skills you already have and use them to benefit the greater community. For instance, if you hold a successful sales position, you raise awareness for your favourite cause as a volunteer advocate, while further developing and improving your public speaking, communication, and marketing skills.

### **When it comes to volunteering, passion and positivity are the only requirements**

While learning new skills can be beneficial to many, it's not a requirement for a fulfilling volunteer experience. Bear in mind that the most valuable skills you can bring to any volunteer effort are compassion, an open mind, a willingness to do whatever is needed, and a positive attitude.

### **BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING 4:**

#### **Volunteering brings fun and fulfilment to your life**

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Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore your interests and passions. Doing volunteer work you find meaningful and interesting can be a relaxing, energising escape from your day-to-day routine of work, school, or family commitments. Volunteering also provides you with renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into your personal and professional life.

Many people volunteer in order to make time for hobbies outside of work as well. For instance, if you have a desk job and long to spend time outdoors, you might consider volunteering to help plant a community garden, walk dogs for an animal shelter, or help out at a children's camp.

## **Consider your goals and interests when volunteering**

You will have a richer and more enjoyable volunteering experience if you first take some time to identify your goals and interests. Start by thinking about why you want to volunteer. Also think about what you would enjoy doing. Volunteer opportunities that match both your goals and your interests are most likely to be fun and fulfilling for you.

### **Tips for Getting Started Volunteering**

First, ask yourself if there is something specific you want to do.

For example, do I want...

...to make it better around where I live  
...to meet people who are different from me  
...to try something new  
...to do something with my spare time  
...to see a different way of life and new places  
...to have a go at the type of work I might want to do as a full-time job ...to do more with my interests and hobbies ...to do something I'm good at

The best way to volunteer is to match your personality and interests. Having answers to these questions will help you narrow down your search.

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### **How to find the right volunteer opportunity**

There are numerous volunteer opportunities available. The key is to find a volunteer position that you would enjoy and are capable of doing. It is also important to make sure that your commitment matches the organisation's needs. The following questions can help you narrow your options:

- Would you like to work with adults, children, or animals, or remotely from home?
- Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?
- Are you better behind the scenes or do you prefer to take a more visible role?

- How much time are you willing to commit?
- How much responsibility are you ready to take on?
- What skills can you bring a volunteer job?
- What causes are important to you?

Adapted with permission from Simple Changes, Big Rewards: A Practical, Easy Guide for Healthy, Happy Living, a special health report published by Harvard Health Publications.

