

## Why Volunteer?

Volunteering can help you make friends, learn new skills, advance your career, and even feel happier and healthier

The benefits of volunteering can be enormous – volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, **but the benefits can be even greater for you**. The right match can help you to find friends, connect with the community, learn new skills, and **even advance your career**.

Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. It can reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, **volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a huge amount of time out of your busy day**. Giving in even simple ways can help those in need and improve your health and happiness.

### Four Benefits of volunteering to feel healthier and happier

#### Benefit 1: Volunteering connects you to others

One of the more well-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. 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 organizations 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.

#### 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 have not spent a lot of time in an area. It 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.

#### Increase 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

Children watch everything you do. By giving back to the community, you'll 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 organizations in the community and find resources and activities for your children and family.

#### Benefit 2: Volunteering is good for your mind and body

Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety. The social contact aspect of helping and working with others can have a profound effect on your overall psychological well-being. Nothing relieves stress better than a meaningful connection to

another person. Working with pets and other animals has also been shown to improve mood and reduce stress and anxiety.

Volunteering combats depression. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against depression.

Volunteering makes you happy. By measuring hormones and brain activity, researchers have discovered that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to give to others. The more we give, the happier we feel.

Volunteering increases self-confidence. 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 provides a sense of purpose. Whatever your age or life situation, volunteering can help take your mind off your own worries, keep you mentally stimulated, and add more zest to your life.

Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not.

Many people choose to volunteer their time via phone or computer. In today's digital age, many organisations need help with writing, graphic design, email, and other web-based tasks.

### **Benefit 3: Volunteering can advance your career**

If you're considering a new career, volunteering can help you get experience in your area of interest and meet people in the field. Even if you're 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've honed these skills in a volunteer position first.

#### **Teaching 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 at a museum.

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 can raise awareness for your favourite cause as a volunteer advocate, while further developing and improving your public speaking, communication, and marketing skills.

#### **Gaining 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 organization that does the kind of work you're interested in.

Your volunteer work might also expose you to professional organizations that could benefit your career.

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

#### **Benefit 4: Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life**

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, energizing escape from your day-to-day routine. Volunteering also provides you with renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into your personal and professional life.

#### **Consider your goals and interests**

You will have a richer and more enjoyable volunteering experience if you first take some time to identify your goals and interests. Think about why you want to volunteer. What would you enjoy doing? The opportunities that match both your goals and your interests are most likely to be fun and fulfilling.

#### **Tips for getting started**

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

For example, do I want...

...to improve the neighbourhood where I live

...to meet people who are different than 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 as a full-time job

...to do more with my interests and hobbies

...to share something I'm good at

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

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

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

- Would you like to work with adults, children, 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?
- What skills can you bring to a volunteer job?
- What causes are important to you?

Don't limit yourself to just one organization or one specific type of job. Sometimes an opportunity looks great on paper, but the reality is quite different. Try to visit different organizations and get a feel for what they are like and if you click with other staff and volunteers.

#### Where to find volunteer opportunities

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- Community theatres, museums, and monuments
- Libraries
- Service organizations such as Lions Clubs or Rotary Clubs
- Local animal shelters, rescue organisations, or wildlife centres
- Youth organizations, sports teams, and after-school programs
- Historical restorations, national parks, and conservation organisations

#### How much time should you volunteer?

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Volunteering doesn't have to take over your life to be beneficial. In fact, research shows that just two to three hours per week, or about 100 hours a year, can confer the most benefits—to both you and your chosen cause. The important thing is to volunteer only the amount of time that feels comfortable to you. Volunteering should feel like a fun and rewarding hobby, not another chore on your to-do list.

#### Getting the most out of volunteering

You're donating your valuable time, so it's important that you enjoy and benefit from your volunteering. To make sure that your volunteer position is a good fit:

**Ask questions.** You want to make sure that the experience is right for your skills, your goals, and the time you want to spend. Sample questions for your volunteer coordinator might address your time commitment, if there's any training involved, who you will be working with, and what to do if you have questions during your experience.

**Make sure you know what's expected.** You should be comfortable with the organisation and understand the time commitment. Consider starting small so that you don't over commit yourself at first. Give yourself some flexibility to change your focus if needed.

**Don't be afraid to make a change.** Don't force yourself into a bad fit or feel compelled to stick with a volunteer role you dislike. Talk to the organisation about changing your focus or look for a different organization that's a better fit.

**Enjoy yourself.** The best volunteer experiences benefit both the volunteer and the organisation. If you're not enjoying yourself, ask yourself why. Is it the tasks you're performing? The people you're working with? Or are you uncomfortable simply because the situation is new and unfamiliar? Pinpointing what's bothering you can help you decide how to proceed.