

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

<http://sportscommunity.com.au/resources/10-powerful-benefits-volunteer/#>

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Trusted guide to mental, emotional & social health

How Giving to Others Makes You Healthier and Happier

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 to reduce stress, find friends, reach out to the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career. Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. Learn more about the many benefits of .helping others and find tips on getting started

?Why volunteer

Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. Volunteering and helping others can help you 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 .others those in need and improve your health and happiness

Volunteering: The happiness effect

Helping others kindles happiness, as many studies have demonstrated. When researchers at the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteering and measures of happiness in a large group of American adults, they found the more people volunteered, the happier they were, according to a study in *Social Science and Medicine*. Compared with people who never volunteered, the odds of being “very happy” rose 7% among those who volunteer monthly and 12% for people who volunteer every two to four weeks. Among weekly volunteers, 16% felt very happy—a hike in happiness comparable to having an income of \$75,000–\$100,000 versus \$20,000, say the .researchers

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

Benefits of volunteering: 4 ways to feel healthier and happier

- i. Volunteering connects you to others
- ii. Volunteering is good for your mind and body
- iii. Volunteering can advance your career
- iv. Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life

Benefit 1: Volunteering connects you to others

One of the better-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 are new to an area. It strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighborhood 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 show them firsthand 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 provides many benefits to both mental and physical health

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. Older adults, especially those who have retired or lost a spouse, can find new meaning and direction in their lives by helping others. 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. Older volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen symptoms of chronic pain and reduce the risk of heart disease.

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 organization. You might feel more comfortable stretching your wings at work once you've honed these skills in a volunteer position first

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. For example, if you're interested in nursing, you could volunteer at a hospital or a nursing home

Your volunteer work might also expose you to professional organizations or internships that could be of benefit to your career

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 counselor 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 favorite cause as a volunteer advocate, while further developing

and improving your public speaking, communication, and .marketing skills

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 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

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

The 10 most powerful benefits of being a volunteer

There is a myth about volunteering that still remains front of mind for many when considering giving their valuable time, and that is that volunteering is all about giving when in fact quite the opposite is true. Volunteers stand to receive far more than they give and here are the many ways in which volunteers reap the rewards of their efforts in no particular order:

1. Gaining valuable experience and knowledge

Volunteering is a great way to get 'real life' experiences in many areas of human endeavour, this is particularly noteworthy for students who are often faced with the catch 22 of requiring experience to get a job but needing a job to get the experience. For example, students interested in digital media could offer their services to their local sports club to manage digital media assets such as websites and video production and in this way build a portfolio of work to be used to gain future employment. In fact, many clubs and organisations offer financial help to their volunteers to put them through formal training to get the skills required to help their club.

2. Networking

Networking is not a skill that is taught in schools and yet it is often the difference between those that make it to the top of their chosen occupations and those that do not. Volunteering offers exposure to other people that have skills or connections that you can benefit from in your own personal life or occupation.

3. Social benefits

Volunteering offers the opportunity to meet others and extend circles of friendship. Many volunteers have found their life partners or life long friends through the act of volunteering.

4. Becoming part of a community

One of the most difficult challenges for those seeking to start in a new country, state, city, town or community is to set up their support networks and gain valuable information about their new surroundings – where the doctors are, best places to eat, bank locations, bus services and so on. Volunteering, whether it is at the local sports club, the local lifesaving club or emergency services, offers an avenue for newcomers to feel a part of their new community.

5. Self esteem

For the majority of us, giving to others makes us feel good about ourselves. Volunteering allows us the opportunity to help others and along with that comes the sense that we are contributing to the communities in which we belong and to the lives of people in our communities and that in turn makes us feel better about who we are.

6. Balance

In a world where we often have to put ourselves first in order to get ahead, where our day-to-day challenges can make us self-centred and absorbed in our own lives, volunteering becomes a circuit breaker. Being a volunteer means you are helping others, that you're focused on the welfare of others for no reward apart from the satisfaction of doing so. This form of selflessness can provide the balance to being concerned with self and stop us from becoming too obsessed with the challenges of our own world that could lead to mental health issues such as stress and anxiety.

7. Direct impact

Many of us work in jobs where we do not see the end results of our actions. Volunteering offers us the opportunity to directly impact on a person or organisation through coaching, mentoring or contributing of skills. You may never get to speak to the customer that you send an invoice to as part of your job but every word you say as the coach of your junior basketball club will have a direct impact on the kids you coach.

8. Help organisations survive

Many organisations are dependant on volunteer resources to stay operational – local clubs, welfare and charity organisations, community theatres and so on. Your contribution as a volunteer could mean the difference between those organisations being able to hold events to raise funds and survive or go under.

9. Helping kids stay healthy and happy

Without volunteers, many of our local sports clubs simply would not exist and our kids, and generations to come would be deprived of the opportunities to keep fit and socialise and this would have disastrous ramifications in terms of health and wellbeing.

10. Saving a life

Yes this may seem dramatic but it is true. And this is not just the case for lifesavers or emergency service volunteers but can also apply to the many who work in charitable foundations or even sports clubs.

Sometimes the actions or words of a volunteer could mean a meal to provide the strength or the words to provide the strength to get through the day. Words that can inspire and provide direction to lost souls and convince them that they have alternatives. Volunteers not only change lives but they can save them.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the Liverpool Football Club of England to spend a day with them and see how they worked with their community. Liverpool is one of the most iconic sports organisations in the world and this all came about as a result of my volunteering for the Reagan Milstein Foundation (www.reaganmilsteinfoundation.com).

Never in my wildest dreams would I have expected such a gift beyond measure – just another example of what can happen when you give up your own time for the benefit of others.

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