

WHY VOLUNTEER?

Volunteering also gives teens an opportunity to experience situations that occur in the workplace, such as having to work as part of a team. They see what people have to do in certain jobs and the conditions in which they have to work. This helps them eliminate what they can't see themselves doing and drill down to what they really want to do.

Plus, volunteer work can impress a future employer. It indicates that the individual has empathy for others, has gained some real-life experience outside of school and is prepared to step outside of their comfort zone to achieve goals. They may also learn specific skills while volunteering that look good on a resume.

Volunteer work is certainly a testament to a teenager's character that he or she is willing to work to bring about change. Volunteering is where young people can learn what they are passionate about. It is where they find confidence and develop skills that will serve them for many years ahead.

People choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. For some it offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around them. For others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge. Regardless of the motivation, what unites them all is that they find it both challenging and rewarding.

Below are some of the reasons people choose to volunteer. For some it provides an opportunity to:

- give something back to an organisation that has impacted on a person's life, either directly or indirectly
- make a difference to the lives of others
- help the environment
- help others less fortunate or without a voice
- feel valued and part of a team
- spend quality time away from work or a busy lifestyle
- gain confidence and self-esteem.

For some, volunteering can be a route to employment, or a chance to try something new which may lead to a career change. From this perspective, volunteering can be a way of:

- gaining new skills, knowledge and experience
- developing existing skills and knowledge
- enhancing a CV
- improving one's employment prospects
- gaining an accreditation
- using one's professional skills and knowledge to benefit others (usually described as pro bono).

For others, volunteering appeals because of its social benefits. These include:

- meeting new people and making new friends
- a chance to socialise
- getting to know the local community.

There are numerous reasons why the returns far outweigh the time you invest, especially during lean times. I'll point out just five reasons you should consider making volunteering a part of your everyday life.

1. Volunteers live longer and are healthier.

Volunteers are happier and healthier than non-volunteers. During later life, volunteering is even more beneficial for one's health than exercising and eating well. Older people who volunteer remain physically functional longer, have more robust psychological well-being, and live longer. However, older people who volunteer are almost always people who volunteered earlier in life. Health and longevity gains from volunteering come from establishing meaningful volunteer roles before you retire and continuing to volunteer once you arrive in your later years.

2. Volunteering establishes strong relationships.

Despite all of the online connections that are available at our fingertips, people are lonelier now than ever before. Indeed, a 2010 AARP study reported that prevalence of [loneliness](#) is at an all time high, with about one in three adults age 45 or older categorized as lonely. Online connections, while useful for maintaining existing relationships, are not very helpful in establishing lasting, new ones. Working alongside people who feel as strongly as you do about supporting a particular cause creates a path to developing strong relationships with others. It isn't just beneficial for making new friendships either. Volunteering alongside other members of your family strengthens family bonds based in "doing" your values. And these benefits have a ripple effect. Children who volunteer with their parents are more likely to become adults who volunteer.

3. Volunteering is good for your [career](#).

People who volunteer make more money, partially because the relationships people create while volunteering can be leveraged for financial benefit. In 1973, a John's Hopkins Sociologist named Mark Granovetter described the important role of "weak ties." Weak ties are those relationships that are outside of one's close-knit [social network](#). These relationships are important because they provide access to new information and opportunities. People in your close network provide redundant information—they are already participating in the same kinds of activities and know the same people. Volunteering has long been viewed as a way to create new "weak tie" connections that lead to career opportunities. Volunteering in your current career industry—or an area you'd like to transition into—is an especially effective way to leverage social connections for career gain.

4. Volunteering is good for society.

Many businesses, and almost all mission-driven organizations, are successful only if they maintain a strong volunteer workforce. In fact, places like museums, social service organizations, and faith-based organizations often rely on more volunteers than paid workers to meet their [goals](#) and fulfill their mission. These businesses are committed to doing good things for society. They pick up the pieces where government programs leave off, and by volunteering for these organizations, you participate in helping our society meet the needs of people from all walks of life. For example, The Borgen Project, a campaign committed to addressing the problem of global poverty, relies on volunteers who commit several hours a week for a period of six months or longer, to help with raising awareness, fundraising and mobilization of human and fiscal resources. With the help of volunteers, the Borgen Project has

been very successful in raising awareness and influencing legislation to actively make positive changes that directly affect the lives of the world's poorest citizens.

5. Volunteering gives you a sense of purpose.

Although it is not well-understood why volunteering provides such a profound health benefit, a key factor is assumed to be that volunteering serves to express and facilitate opportunities to carry out one's sense of purpose. The very nature of volunteering means choosing to work without being paid for it. As a result, people choose to spend their time on issues they feel strongly about. If you are greatly concerned about the treatment and well-being of animals, for example, volunteering at an animal shelter will help you address a social problem that is meaningful to you.