

Tips for Volunteering

Be selective

Think about what matters to you, and be selective about where you spend your time. Choosing opportunities that make you feel good while helping others builds stronger communities, and enriches your own life at the same time.

Choose carefully

United Way and community Volunteer Centers work with volunteers and local nonprofits to develop the best opportunities for youth, busy working adults and seniors to serve. When you work with your local Volunteer Center, you can feel comfortable about the quality and safety of the opportunity you choose and about the organization you donate your time to support.

Research causes that are important to you

Whether it's a specific health concern, education for children or a house that needs painting in your neighborhood, find out what cause is closest to your heart and make a difference.

Consider the skills you have to offer

Would you like to write an agency's newsletter? Or would you rather build a house? Find something you enjoy doing and enhance your skills through volunteering.

Learn something new

Volunteering can also teach you valuable new skills that you can use in other parts of your life. For example, learning how to handle crisis calls may help you communicate better.

Don't over-commit your schedule

Stick to a volunteering schedule that makes sense for you and leaves you time to enjoy the activity.

Consider volunteering as a family

Group volunteering is a wonderful way to bond with your family or co-workers. Not only will you create lasting memories, but you will help someone in need. *See also: Volunteering as a Family Tipsheet.*

Benefits of Volunteering

Whether it is important to you to solve a community problem, advance a worthy cause or to develop as a person, volunteering offers many benefits in appreciation for the gift of your time and expertise. Volunteering can help you:

- Make important networking contacts
- Learn or develop skills
- Teach your skills to others
- Enhance your résumé
- Gain work experience
- Build self-esteem and self-confidence
- Improve your health
- Meet new people
- Feel needed and valued
- Express gratitude for help you may have received in the past from an organization
- Communicate to others that you are ambitious, enthusiastic and care about the community
- Make a difference in someone's life

Volunteering as a Family

Today, families are finding new ways to spend time together—and volunteering is one way to do just that! There are many benefits for families that volunteer. Research has shown that volunteering as a family:

- Helps families learn about social issues.
- Provides positive role models and passes on family values to children.
- Provides new learning experiences and development of new skills for both children and adults.
- Provides quality time for the family to spend together.
- Increases interpersonal communication and the problem-solving abilities of family members.

Planning for your family

There are a variety of issues for your family to consider before making the commitment to volunteer together:

- Your family may want to start slowly. Consider a one-time or short-term volunteer activity before making a long-term commitment.
- Consider doing your volunteer activity with other family groups (PTAs, religious organizations, neighbors or workplace groups).
- Consider volunteering as a family, but individually at different times— to allow for everyone's schedule.
- Make a list of questions and preferences before contacting the volunteer agency (for ideas for family projects, see the list on this page).
- If volunteering with children, ask about any issues related to their needs or safety concerns.

During the volunteer project

- Once you are involved with your volunteer project, talk openly with your family—including even young children—about your experiences.
- Talk about your experiences on the drive home, during meals or whenever your family has time together. Both adults and children will benefit from the opportunity to discuss everyone's reactions to the volunteer activities.
- Let your volunteer coordinator know if your family has any special concerns or problems, and discuss how you can work together for a satisfactory solution. Share your positive experiences, too!
- Keep a journal with photos and stories of your family's volunteer activities. Share the journal with relatives, co-workers and friends.
- Have fun! It is not only allowed, but it should be a requirement!
- Be proud of what your family has accomplished. Your family's self-esteem will continue to climb as you move on to future projects.

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If you are a young person, there are many good reasons to get involved in volunteer and service learning opportunities. Here are a few for you to consider:

1. Volunteering can help you to explore your interests.

- If you like animals, you can help out at an animal shelter or at your nearest zoo.
- If you like working with kids, get involved at a summer camp or at a preschool program, or help younger students with their schoolwork.
- If you enjoy playing sports, play games with the kids at a Boys & Girls Club.
- If you like to cook, get together with friends and make dinner for the families at a soup kitchen or help out at a homeless shelter.
- If you enjoy sewing, you can make curtains or bedspreads for the families at a women's shelter or make lap robes & pillows for nursing home residents. If you know how to knit or crochet, you may enjoy making scarves and hats for people who are homeless.
- If you enjoy being outdoors, help your park district clean up a park or volunteer to help a neighbor plant flowers or mow the grass for your elderly neighbors.
- If you enjoy the performing arts, explore volunteer opportunities with a community theatre group.

2. Volunteering can help you learn about possible careers.

- If you think you'd like to work in the medical field, volunteer at a retirement or nursing home or with Hospice.
- If you're interested in teaching, spend time with younger children, helping them with their homework.
- If you're interested in science, consider volunteering at your local science museum or greenhouse.
- If you'd like a job in an office someday, offer to help with filing and data entry at a nonprofit organization.

3. You can meet people you might not ordinarily meet.

- By volunteering in a group, you'll meet other people with the same interests you have.
- If your grandparents have passed away or live far away and you don't get to see them often, you can become friends with a senior adult and adopt them as your "grandma" or "grandpa."
- By volunteering with an agency that helps refugees, you can meet people who have come here from other countries. You'll learn about their culture and help them adapt to life here.
- By volunteering with an agency that works with people with physical or mental challenges, you'll find out that they're not so different from you after all.

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4. Volunteer activities look good on college applications and work resumes.

- College admission staffs want to know who you are as a person. They want to know more about you than your high school grades and SAT score.
- Potential employers want to know if you show up on time, can take direction, are responsible, and work well with others. A good reference from an agency you've volunteered with can help them decide that you'd be a good employee.

5. It's fun.

- People who volunteer often say that they get more out of the experience than they give.
- Giving of your time and energy makes you feel good about yourself and raises your self-esteem.
- Working with other volunteers builds friendships.

6. You're sharing your talents and knowledge with others.

- You have skills, talents, knowledge, experience, personality and passion. Each of us is unique and has something to share with others.

7. By volunteering, you help to form a stronger community.

- Sometimes we look at the way the world is and think, "This isn't the way things are supposed to be." By volunteering, you can help make a positive change in the world.
- Each of us wants to live in a community where families are healthy and strong, where children are given the help they need to succeed in school, where people with disabilities and the elderly are able to live as independently as possible, and where people live in safe, supportive neighborhoods.
- By volunteering, you help to make those connections and help to make our community a better place to live, and you become part of the solution.