

WHY VOLUNTEER?

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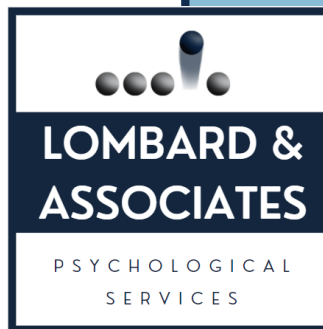


7 BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING THAT WILL INSPIRE YOU TO TAKE ACTION

The 'Why'?

The benefits of volunteering can last a lifetime—not only for those who you are helping, but for you as well.

If you are on the fence about diving into a new volunteer experience or have doubts about whether or not volunteering is right for you, you might find yourself surprised at just how much you can gain from taking the plunge.



What is Volunteering?

Volunteering means giving your time and abilities to aid others (usually a nonprofit organization) without the want of financial compensation. Put simply, volunteering is a service to your community.

Many non-profit organizations rely on volunteers to accomplish day-to-day objectives and to reach long-term goals. Miles4Migrants, for instance, relied solely on volunteer hours for their first few years of operation. Most nonprofits would not be able to do the important work they do without the power of volunteer work.

Nothing gets done by one person alone, which means we have to band together to make the changes we want to see in the world. Volunteerism has indeed been the fuel to the fires of change both on international and local fronts. Volunteering your time, skills, and resources is one of the most powerful ways to make a difference, to help others, and as it turns out, to enhance your wellbeing.



7 Benefits of Volunteering

While you won't get paid for your community service, volunteering comes with a lot of other benefits to boot. Donating your time, energy, and possibly resources can be just as rewarding for you as for those you are helping. Here are some ways volunteering can affect you positively:

1. Meet New People and Build Community

Everyone loves new friends! Being a part of a team with a common goal will help you form bonds with strangers that can be life-changing. Volunteering inherently means helping people, and that means you'll be creating meaningful relationships with others and increasing your social interactions. Volunteering provides a unique opportunity: it connects people with very specific shared values. And the values may not be what you think. In addition to likely having shared concerns for children, sustainable living, healthy eating, or whatever project you're working on, volunteers are also people who also share things like a willingness to step outside their comfort zone, an openness to spending time on a community effort, a proclivity for engaging in team-oriented activities, and a desire to contribute to the well-being of others.

You're sure to meet people and make new friends that share common interests, values, and outlooks. Building a community in which you are all working together towards common future goals will nurture your sense of belonging and purpose and expand your support system. This social benefit of volunteering grows into a bunch of other benefits that we'll continue to explore in this list!



2. Gain Knowledge of Other Ways of Life

Volunteering might take you to a new part of your community you have never been to before. It can give you the opportunity to bring people into your social network you otherwise wouldn't get to meet and learn from those who come from different places. This experience can expand your understanding of others.

Learning about cultures that are different from one of your upbringing will increase your social flexibility and expand your world-view. It will also raise awareness of the issues that other people deal with and will increase important social skills like empathy.

3. Sense of Purpose and Become Happier

What an amazing reason to do something! Who doesn't want to become happier?! Volunteering has been shown to give you a sense of accomplishment and to increase feelings of happiness. How you may ask?

Throughout your life you've developed social and professional skills that promote your personal achievement.

Using those skills for a wider, communal impact can be even more fulfilling. Volunteering will enrich your life and give you a broader purpose and can give you a boost of motivation.

Researchers also posit that it's the social connections you make while volunteering (as we've mentioned) that help increase your feelings of happiness.

Feeling like you are a purposeful role of your community will make you feel...da da dum... HAPPY! Volunteering is indeed a known mechanism to help fight all sorts of mental issues like depression, anxiety, stress, and anger.



You make a living by what you get.
You make a life by what you give
- Winston Churchill



4. Boost Your Self-Esteem

That's right! Spending time as a volunteer has been shown to improve your self-esteem! The more opportunities you take to learn new skills and gain knowledge, the more fully you will develop as a person. And what safer space to develop those skills than in a context of service? Stepping out of your comfort zone and building new skills is the best way to develop your self-esteem. Volunteering will increase your sense of pride and thus, your self-confidence! When you challenge yourself through volunteering and receive appreciation from others, it can make you feel better emotionally and mentally. Plus, who has time to think negative thoughts about yourself when you're out saving the world?!

5. Advance Your Career by Improving Job Prospects

Gear up! This one's a big one! Volunteering will offer you skills that can be used throughout your career development. If you are wanting to change to a new career, especially a new environmental or social impact job, volunteering in that new field can help you develop the skills and knowledge you will need. When you have a volunteering experience to add to your resume, you stand out over job candidates who don't take the time to give back to society. Volunteering highlights your character, passion, and determination!

Through your volunteer experiences, you have a chance to show that you're interested in things bigger than yourself, and you are willing to take action to make the changes you want in the world—and that will always help you shine through the competition. Plus, volunteering can also give you a better understanding of the issues you are working with and discover where there are gaps in the field. This knowledge can prepare you to enter a new field of work or, for those with an entrepreneurial spirit, volunteering may lead to developing your next business idea or inspire you to start a nonprofit yourself!

6. Accrue the Health Benefits of Volunteering

It's true! There are many physical benefits that come from volunteering, and most important is that it can help reduce stress! Spending meaningful time with others can reduce stress and the health effects it has on our bodies. Reduced stress translates into several physical health benefits. You'll sleep better, get sick less often, and even prevent heart disease! In fact, some studies have even found lower mortality rates in volunteers vs non-volunteers in older adults. This makes sense because as we give our attention to others, we take our attention off of our own problems and concerns. It can also put our stresses into perspective and feel more gratitude in our day-to-day lives. Volunteer work can also be an outlet for the frustrations you feel about certain issues and will leave you with a sense of agency and empowerment. Worried about climate change? Do something about it!

The Good & Bad of Volunteering

PROS

- Meet new people and develop lasting relationships.
- Increase your happiness and better your mental health.
- Learn new skills and increase your brain function and self-esteem.
- Stand out on job applications and further your career.
- Decrease your stress and accrue the health benefits.
- Do good in the world and help make a difference.

CONS

- Can be time-consuming.
- Some tasks can be repetitive depending on the volunteer role.
- Might take multiple attempts to find the right fit for you.

7. Increase Your Brain Functioning

Every volunteer opportunity has its own set of tasks, and some of those might require you to learn new skill sets and challenge yourself. This means you'll be keeping your brain busy and limber! Volunteering has been shown to increase your ability for problem solving, increase your long-term and short-term memory, and reduce your risk of developing age-related diseases such as Alzheimer's.

It's time to get started!

SOURCES:

- Why Volunteer? <https://growensemble.com/why-volunteer/>

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

- Where do you want to start?
- What considerations you need to make?
- Why do you want to do it?