

## **Volunteering: How Helping Others Helps You**

Volunteering has a positive effect on your community — and it's good for you too. Ben, a college freshman who did volunteer fund-raising work, calls it “a win-win situation.” He says, “You feel good because you're helping others, and the others feel good because they're getting help.”

Volunteering can help you learn more about yourself and even put you on a path to your future career.

### **Reasons to Volunteer**

Giving back to your community is valuable in itself, but helping others also offers many benefits. For example, it can help you learn more about yourself and even put you on a path to your future career. Learn more about the reasons to volunteer below.

#### **Gain Valuable Life Experiences and Skills**

Whether you build houses for the homeless or mail flyers for a local politician, you can experience the real world through hands-on work. And you can explore your major or career interests at the same time.

For example, as a premed freshman, Gregory spent his summer volunteering at a local health clinic. He picked a clinic in an area with a lot of Spanish speakers so he could practice his language skills while observing medical workers. He also found time to ask the doctors questions.

#### **Meet Interesting People**

Both the people you are helping and your fellow volunteers can give you new insights. No matter what groups of people you're working with, you'll find that they have information and ways of looking at the world that can broaden your horizons.

#### **Get Academic Credit**

Some high schools offer academic credit for volunteer work through service learning — a program that offers hands-on learning through service to the community. To find out if your school offers service learning, talk to your school counselor.

#### **Show Colleges You're Committed**

Your volunteer work illustrates your interests and character. When you list your volunteer work on your college applications, you show admission officers the value you'll bring to their campus community.

## **Make a Difference**

It's eye-opening to realize that doing even small things can have a big impact on others. Rhea, a college sophomore, still remembers a visit she made to a senior home with a choir when she was in middle school. "An elderly man in a wheelchair looked up at me after the last strains of 'Frosty the Snowman' and said in a gravelly voice, 'You've made my day. This means so much.'" She recalls, "No one had ever thanked me in such a way for doing something so small, and a stranger no less!"

## **How to Get Involved**

Organizations everywhere need volunteers. Here are some ways to get started:

- Call programs based in your community and ask if they need help.
- Visit your town's website. It may list volunteer opportunities in your area.
- Contact a local museum or other cultural institutions or get in touch with similar organizations that can point you in the right direction.
- Ask libraries, religious organizations and community colleges if they sponsor any volunteer groups.
- Check out the following websites to learn more about causes and to find volunteer opportunities near you:
  - [United We Serve](#)
  - [Network for Good](#)
  - [Idealist](#)
  - [VolunteerMatch](#)
  - [DoSomething.org](#)

## **Before You Volunteer**

To get the most out of your experience, ask yourself these questions before you get involved with an organization:

- What have I done in the past that I've enjoyed?
- What do I want to do as a volunteer — and what would I rule out doing?
- How much time can I commit?
- What talents or skills can I offer?
- What kinds of people do I want to work with?
- What would I most like to learn by volunteering?