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Institute for
Volunteering
Research

Everyone's at it...

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**Volunteering has something to offer everyone.
 Read on to find out more...**



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Volunteering: Get as much as you give

Volunteering is basically any activity carried out without payment that benefits others – and also benefits you. The chances are that you have already done some voluntary work; you just might not call it volunteering.

Whatever you do as a volunteer – undertaking administrative tasks in an office, organising campaigns, befriending

someone, doing the shopping for sick neighbours – the chances are that you will get out as much as you put in.

Here is what some volunteers got out of it. Some are old, some young, some disabled, some from black and minority ethnic communities, some with criminal records. All have something to say about volunteering.

"I enjoy it a lot. I feel now that I am contributing something to the community . . . and that keeps me going. I am not a sponger, I am helping people."

"I'm starting new links rather than being isolated with a disability."

"It gives you a bit of an interest. If I go out socialising with people then I have something to talk about."

"It gives you a kind of social life. It may be the only time that you get out and about."

Volunteering: Think again

Sometimes people think about volunteering but are put off by various fears or worries. Let's set the record straight...

There's nothing in it for me...

Think again. Volunteering offers a variety of benefits, such as:

- **The chance to meet new people:** Volunteering is a great way of meeting new people and making friends.

- **Experience:** Volunteering can help provide you with valuable work experience – you can try out new career paths or fill gaps in your CV. Alternatively, volunteering can offer something different to paid work.

"I meet lots of people and it makes you appreciate all the good things that are there."

"The social skills I have gained have changed me – I have learnt social skills and networking skills and they are very important"

- **Skills:** You can get new skills through volunteering, such as:
 - Practical work skills
 - IT skills
 - Communication skills
 - Team work skills
 - Time management skills
 - Business and management skills
- **Training:** Many volunteering-involving organisations offer training and some allow you to gain nationally recognised qualifications.
- **A confidence boost:** The chances are that through volunteering your confidence will increase. Realising that other people value and benefit from your skills and experiences can be a huge boost.

- **It's fun:** Volunteering is an enjoyable experience – and just doing something that helps other people or the local community makes you feel good.

Make sure you think about why you want to volunteer, and talk about it to the organisation you are thinking of volunteering for. This will help the organisation to match their opportunities to your needs – which makes it more likely that you will be happy in your volunteering and so stay longer!

“On the whole volunteers are happier – it is important to me to feel that I have been of use today”

People like me don't volunteer...

Yes they do! All sorts of people volunteer. Whatever your age, background, skills or experience – everyone has something to offer.

But voluntary activities don't interest me...

Don't be too sure. The choice is enormous – chances are that whatever you like doing, there's a volunteering opportunity to match.

Thinking about what interests you, what you enjoy doing, what you want to learn, what skills you need, or what issues are close to your heart, is a good starting point for thinking about what you might do as a volunteer.

Volunteering takes up too much time...

Generally volunteers can give as much or as little time as they want. However, some organisations do ask for regular time commitments. Working out how much time you are able and willing to give will help you decide which organisation you want to get involved in.

"I feel that I can contribute and that I am doing something useful The big thing is to feel useful."

I don't think I have got the right skills or experiences...

If you sat down and listed all the skills or experiences that you have to offer, you'd probably be quite surprised at how long the list is. Don't just think of formal qualifications; think about anything you are good at – from doing people's hair and make-up, through to car maintenance or singing. Then find an organisation that is looking for volunteers with those skills – there are plenty out there!

"I am on medication for depression – this kind of work gives me an incentive to get out of the house."

I'm too old, or too young, to volunteer...

You can volunteer at any age. Due to the type of work they do, some organisations do have age limits, but most don't.

I might risk losing my benefits...

Most people in receipt of welfare benefits can volunteer without jeopardising their benefits. However, you can only be paid expenses incurred, and if you receive Job Seekers' Allowance then you should be willing and able to take up a job at one week's notice, and able to attend an interview at 48 hours' notice.

You can always check out the regulations by looking at the WK1 booklet on (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk>), or calling the VE information line on 0800 028 3304.

Organisations won't be interested when they see I have a criminal record...

Many will! Having a conviction does not make you unsuitable for voluntary work, though the type of volunteering available might depend on your conviction, and on the organisation. Organisations can only ask about unspent convictions, unless you are working with vulnerable clients. If your volunteer work does involve contact with vulnerable clients, then most organisations will have to run police checks.

Organisations should have an equal opportunities policy in place – but unfortunately some don't. They should also treat your personal details with confidentiality – they are bound to do so under the Data Protection Act. If you are concerned about these issues, you could speak to someone at your local Volunteer Centre (see below), or you could contact Nacro – the crime reduction charity (tel: 020 7840 6464 or email helpline@nacro.org.uk)

Organisations are not physically accessible...

All organisations should be accessible. However, some organisations are better at this than others. It is better to discuss what access and support needs you have with the organisation.. If an organisation is not prepared to make 'reasonable adjustments' then you can

either discuss this with your local Volunteer Centre (see below), or decide that you would rather give your time to another organisation.

You may be able to get additional support for your volunteering from the organisation or through your local Volunteer Centre; a growing number now have supported volunteering schemes.

"I saw what happened through the system, so when I started volunteering I could see what should have happened. I can really relate to young people – I know what they are going through."

I once contacted an organisation about volunteering but they never got back to me...

Most organisations will respond quickly to any offers to volunteer. But many are struggling for resources and so might not be able to. If this happens to you, don't be put off. Call them back, or approach another organisation.

"It broke up my day and gave me something to look forward to."

I was put off when I was told I'd have to have an interview...

It's generally more of a chat than an interview. Usually an organisation will want to meet you before you start volunteering with them, and it also gives you a chance for you to check whether the opportunity they are offering is right for you.

"I would be bored stiff if I wasn't taking part in such activities - I have variety, every day I am doing something different."

I tried it before, but was given boring activities...

Most organisations will try to give their volunteers a variety of different activities to do. If you're not happy with yours, speak to your supervisor and ask for a new or more challenging role.

Volunteers aren't properly looked after...

Volunteers are greatly valued. Most organisations will have a Volunteer Policy stating, for example, exactly what support volunteers are entitled to. So, whether it comes from paid staff or other volunteers, you can expect to receive support from the organisation you volunteer for. But policies do differ between organisations so it might be worth checking this out before you decide whether or not to get involved.

I don't know how to find out about volunteering...

There is lots of information available on volunteering. The list below gives some key contacts if you want to find out more.

"When you get here you get lots of help and support from other volunteers."

Volunteering: Getting involved

Volunteer Centres

Volunteer Centres act as a 'one-stop shop' for volunteers. They can tell you what voluntary work is available in your local area and put you in touch with local organisations. You can also discuss with them what you want to do, and you can get advice from them on any issues to do with volunteering.

To find your local Volunteer Centre look at the 'About Volunteering' page on: www.do-it.org.uk, call Volunteering England on 0845 305 6779, or visit www.volunteering.org.uk.

"Voluntary work is a good thing because you are not only helping yourself, you are helping other people in the community, you are seeing people being happy, meeting new people and that is the way it should be."

Do-It

Do-It is a searchable internet database of hundreds of local volunteering opportunities across the UK. Find them online at www.do-it.org.uk

TimeBank

If you register with TimeBank, they will match your interests and skills to volunteering opportunities in your area. You can register online at: www.TimeBank.org.uk or by calling: 0845 601 4008

Public libraries

There's probably a noticeboard or a file of information on voluntary work in your local public library – ask at the desk if you can see it. There are several

published directories of voluntary work, and most libraries will have at least one of these in the reference or careers section. *The Voluntary Agencies Directory* is particularly useful if you know exactly what you want to do, as it has an excellent index of all types of organisation.

"It is about helping the community – putting back into the community."

"Getting into volunteering gets you recognised, gets new skills and confidence, and gets you to practice things."

Colleagues, neighbours and friends

Just asking people you know about who they volunteer for or the organisations that they know of can be a great place to start.

Individual organisations

If you know what organisation you would like to volunteer for, then you can approach them directly.

The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR)

This leaflet is based on the findings of research undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research and funded by the Community Fund.

The quotes and stories within this leaflet came out of the research.

All of the people depicted in the photographs, however, are models – it should not be assumed that any individual depicted has any association with the stories given.

“At the time I joined I had very little experience on my CV, I just had my university experience but needed more. I needed more experience and so I joined [the organisation].”

“It certainly helped me develop communication skills and speak to people. It also helped me to be more social and get out of my own comfort zone.”

“After I have completed a job, I feel satisfied that I have done it for the public, I have been working for the community and I feel that I have done something worthwhile.”