

HEALTH NOTES

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NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK!!



You've heard news reports about people who need assistance after a natural disaster, or animals in need... You've probably seen people who are living on the streets. What can you do about any of those things? Well, you can volunteer...

Volunteering has a positive impact on you as well as your community! It helps solve social problems and has a positive effect on your physical and mental health.

"People who do volunteer work are much less likely to suffer illness. The close interpersonal relationships and community involvement that occur with volunteer service are tailor-made to enhance the healing process."

-- *The Healing Power of Service*, by Edward V. Brown

Helping others in need is such an important part of the American set of values that many schools now require their students to spend a certain number of hours volunteering... looks good on your resume', regardless of your age...

Just ask people who volunteer, and most will tell you that the personal satisfaction they get from volunteering far exceeds the time they give – it also provides time for social interaction and building new relationships with people who have similar interests.

Volunteering isn't like going to school or your job: instead of being told what you have to do for the boss or teacher, you get to pick and choose what really interests you, and who or what is most deserving of your time.

According to national surveys, more than 25% of us (Americans) did volunteer work last year, and that number only reflects those 16 years and older, who volunteered with organizations such as schools, nonprofit agencies, hospitals and places of worship. We average 52 hours per year (many offer much more time!), most often working with religious groups, followed by education or youth services and social or community service groups.

The Value of Volunteerism

Whatever volunteers are doing, their personal contributions help others to connect with people and resources so that serious social problems are diminished, notes the Points of Light Foundation. The goal is to bring people together to solve many of the problems that face our communities, in a most economical way.

One study determined that the averaged value of volunteer time was just over \$18 per hour in the year 2005. Using that figure, the American volunteer force, representing nearly 3.4 billion volunteer hours (the equivalent of more than 1.7 million full-time employees) offered an estimated \$60.5 million in services!

Still not convinced it's worth the effort?....

- Volunteers are healthier: persons who volunteer have fewer medical problems than the population in general
- Volunteering increases one's physical agility: staying physically active reduces the incidence of heart disease, diabetes and premature death
- Volunteering increases mental well-being: improved self-esteem, increased endorphin production, enhanced immune systems reduce the stress of daily life, improve confidence and sense of achievement
- Volunteering increases cognitive function: this points to the "use it or lose it" theory – volunteer work keeps the brain engaged, and enhances social support networks that keep us in touch, involved.
- Volunteers learn new skills, develop new hobbies, and can boost career options by exploring new fields: in one survey, 94% of employers reported that volunteering can add skills and experience increasing value on-the-job; and 94% of the employees surveyed felt their volunteer experiences had helped them get their first job, improved their salary or aided in promotion.

Then, there are the benefits to the community... Remember, no man or woman is an island. People depend on each other. As commercialism and disruption of families break down traditional values, we all suffer the consequences... Volunteering is ultimately about helping others and having an impact on their wellbeing... what better way to improve your life and your community than by returning to society some of the benefits that society gives you?

Where do I sign up?

- Find what's right for you... recreation departments, churches, schools, animal rescue agencies, homeless shelters, a local retirement community all need your help
- What fits your schedule? – if you can't contribute a few hours each week, you might still take part in annual beach cleanup, walkathons to raise money for a good cause, etc.
- Search the internet, check your local phone directory under "volunteer", call an organization directly, ask friends and family for ideas...

www.pointsoflight.org

www.worldvolunteerweb.org

www.aoa.gov (US Administration on Aging)

www.getinvolved.gov/newsroom/press/factsheet_health

www.selfgrowth.com

www.kidshealth.org

1-800-Volunteer.org is a website and call center that provides help in matching interests, skills and opportunities to volunteer with local agencies... Call 'em!!