

Giving Back - Volunteering

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Giving Back

This past Sunday, my pastor said that two young missionaries from Japan working with our church community paid a remarkably high complement to our congregation. They said that they were really impressed with the volunteer spirit that the community has. I know that all organizations need volunteers, and I was curious to do a little research about the benefits of serving others. According to research at the Western Connecticut State University, the two greatest benefits are that volunteering connects us with others and it is good for our mind and spirit.

#1: Volunteering connects you to others

One of the better-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. Unpaid volunteers are often the glue that holds a community together.

Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place.

Even helping with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need. And volunteering is a two-way street: It can benefit you and your family as much as the cause you choose to help.

Dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills.

#2: Volunteering is good for your mind and body

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

Volunteering increases self-confidence. It can provide a healthy boost to your self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity. And the better you feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and future goals.

In addition, reducing the risk of depression is another important benefit of volunteering. A key risk factor for depression is social isolation. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against stress and depression when you're going through challenging times. Working with pets and other animals has also been shown to improve mood and reduce stress and anxiety.

Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy. It is good for your health at any age, but it's especially beneficial in older adults. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not, even when considering factors like the health of the participants. Volunteering has also been shown to lessen symptoms of chronic pain or heart disease.

I still remember my experience as a teenager traveling with my youth group from Kansas to volunteer at a church in Texas. We helped to repair and paint a preschool that the church was getting ready to reopen to the community. The work that we did could have been done in our own community but by spending a week in this Texas town, we had the opportunity to discover a new cultural reality. One of my friends stayed with a family that had a very humble home but they butchered one of their goats in honor of his visit.

I have volunteerism in my blood. When I was born, my parents were the directors for a Mennonite Voluntary Service Center (MVS) in a small town in Texas. I was born in a small hospital that was built by volunteers to support the local Hispanic parents who didn't have access to prenatal and delivery care for pregnant mothers. As pacifists, many Mennonites chose community MVS volunteer

programs as an alternate to being drafted during WWII. MVS still plays an integral role in transforming community social systems relating to health, education, immigration, food, housing and more.

Do you have a skill you could teach or share with a local nonprofit, or with a neighbor -- even a neighbor on the other side of the planet? Start by identifying a need or your passion. As a coach, I enjoy working with young adults as they figure out their next steps in marriage, career, and life. Consider volunteering as a family. Reach out and create something together!

For inspiration, read how several people found their passion to help others:

www.dailygood.org/story/3236/when-people-reach-out-to-help-their-neighbors-rosemary-cairns/

www.today.com/life/relationships/librarian-loans-wedding-dress-rentals-rcna155230

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If you would like to know more about what I offer as a coach, please visit my website: www.coachmyrna.org/

Find out more about creating better connections with Safe Conversations

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