Volunteer . . . and Thrive!

There is no doubt that society benefits greatly from the activities of volunteers. Hospitals, service groups, congregations of all faiths, and non-profit organizations depend on their work and dedication.

But volunteers themselves also benefit by their volunteering:

✦ 79 percent believe their interpersonal skills (understanding people better, motivating others, dealing with difficult situations) improved due to their volunteer work.
✦ 68 percent say they developed better communication skills.
✦ 23 percent see volunteering as an opportunity to acquire job-related skills and improve job opportunities. In fact, 28 percent of unemployed volunteers say that volunteering helped them obtain a job in the past, and 62 percent believe volunteering will help them find a job in the future!

Recent research indicates that helping others is a true win-win situation. It may even slow the aging process in ways that lead to a higher quality of life for older adults.

In one study, women ages 60 to 86 volunteered to help children in Baltimore public schools with their reading. Most signed on for this work because they loved children and wanted to help. After two years, 44 percent felt stronger, cane use decreased in 50 percent of the users, and TV viewing dropped 18 percent – all indicators of a better quality of life.

With the new year right around the corner, resolve to do yourself and your community a favor by becoming a volunteer. A phone call will get you started, and the rewards for those you serve and for yourself could be life-long.

December 5 Is International Volunteer Day

Prayer: Gracious God, you have showered me with blessings. Is it now my turn to reach out to help someone else? Show me, Lord, how this is a possibility. Amen.

How to Become a Volunteer

There are wonderful volunteer opportunities for teens, college students, business executives, homemakers, and retirees. If you have never before volunteered but are thinking of becoming a volunteer at a place of worship, a hospital or other organization, these steps should make getting started more comfortable for you:

1. Decide where you’d like to volunteer. List two or three places that align with your interests and are easy to reach. Check them on the Internet, and find their phone numbers.

2. With paper and pencil handy, phone your preferences and ask for volunteer services. (Phoning usually gets better results than emailing.) Try to call between 9 - 11 a.m. when it’s more likely that someone will be able to help you. Indicate your interests and your reason for volunteering. Be ready to answer specific questions.

3. Note what you’ll need to complete to become a volunteer – paperwork, orientations, screenings, training. Write down times, places, and phone numbers you might need.

4. Begin completing what’s needed.

There are many different ways to help. At Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital, for example, volunteers are needed to help with recreation crafts (sewing), in the office as clerks, by delivering patient flowers and mail, at the Health & Wellness Center, at the information desk – and in so many ways!

Most places that need volunteers offer a wide variety of ways to help. It’s likely that with just a little research and one or two phone calls, you’ll find something you will enjoy and which you will find deeply rewarding.

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