

## Volunteering and Mental Health



We likely are all aware of the fact that volunteering our time in service of others can make a positive difference in the world. What we might not realize, is that volunteerism can yield a number of direct benefits to our physical and mental health. In this newsletter, we will be discussing and highlighting the ways that volunteering in a human service capacity can provide a great boost to our own wellbeing.

### What do we Mean by “Volunteering?”

Volunteerism encompasses a multitude of different activities. We are volunteering when we are giving our time and effort to something without a formal requirement to do so. We are donating our efforts to a cause we feel is worthwhile. Generally, volunteerism centres around humanitarian causes. For the purposes of this newsletter, we will define volunteering as conducting work for the benefit of others outside our family, without payment.



### Are there Physical Benefits to Volunteerism?



Heck yes there are! Consider the fact that volunteerism has been shown through research to reduce risk of heart disease, reduce chronic pain, stave off high blood pressure, improve cognitive functioning, and much more. The most impressive figure? Those who spend time volunteering have reduced mortality rates! There are many reasons for these positive indicators accompanying volunteering, but one of the most important ones is that volunteering can help keep us active and connected. For these reasons, volunteerism can be especially important for older people, and can help improve their longevity!



### Volunteering and Catholicity

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” (John 3:18)

“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” (Acts 20:35)

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

The calls for us to give what we are able and to come to the aid of the needy and the vulnerable are abundant within the Bible. When we give of ourselves to help others, we make a positive impact in the world, and also gain perspective on our many blessings.

How Volunteerism affects our Mental Health



Volunteerism can work wonders for a person’s mental health. It has been shown to be associated with increased feelings of relaxation. Volunteering can help increase feelings of happiness. Further, those who spend time volunteering have been shown to experience lower levels of depression and anxiety. It’s also important to remember that volunteering with those who are less fortunate than ourselves helps us to build our own feelings of gratitude. Gratitude, as we know, can have immense benefits to our mental health. The bottom line? People who spend time volunteering are happier than those who don’t.

It Goes Even Deeper!

We’ve heard about the many health benefits that can come from volunteering, but we can gain other benefits that we may find even more meaningful. Volunteering in ways that are rewarding to us provides us with a deepened sense of purpose. We feel as if we are having a positive impact on others and this helps to give our lives meaning.



People who volunteer report higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. This can be especially important for older people, especially as they transition into retirement. Being listless, and feeling we lack purpose isn’t good for anyone. Volunteerism can get us into a regular routine in a manageable and very healthy way.

Put Volunteering to Work for You!

Find your Vision

Consider the social causes that you feel most strongly about. Once you identify some of these passions, you can find your passion project!

Find your Strengths

Think of your list of skills and strengths. This will help you consider how you can be most effective with the time you spend volunteering.

Set your own Pace

As we begin volunteering, we have opportunities to set our own schedule. Set out your volunteering goals at a sustainable pace.

Bring Friends Along!

Your volunteerism doesn’t have to be a solitary project! Get in touch with your friends and see if they’re interested in joining you!

Ask at Church

If you’re having trouble seeking out volunteer opportunities, consider connecting with leaders at your church. Someone will know of a good opportunity.

Consider some Staples

Opportunities change often, but we can often find ways to volunteer at hospitals, animal shelters, homeless shelters, and retirement homes.

Try Something New!

Maybe there’s an opportunity to volunteer that’s unfamiliar to you. Consider giving it a try! You may find it quite interesting!

Be Patient!

We may feel guilty, as if we aren’t giving enough. Remember to remain patient with yourself. There’s only so much of us to go around!