



Voluntourism: The Beginner's Guide to International Volunteering

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Volunteering: Why Doing Good Is Good for You

You Can Start Any Time

Being involved in philanthropic activities at a young age can pay dividends in personal growth, social responsibility and well-being throughout life, points out Tara Jones, chief revenue officer for Girl Scouts of Western Washington. “Former Girl Scouts are more active in community service and volunteer work than non-Girl Scouts,” she notes.

But don't worry if you missed out on the merit badges. Studies show volunteering at an older age has a significant positive effect on self-worth and purpose, which can help prolong a happier, healthier life.

Money *Can* Buy Happiness

It may seem as if the only way to feel fulfilled while volunteering is by being on the ground: planting trees, working phone banks. But giving cash—in the right way—can also boost your spirits. One 2013 study found that intentionally spending as little as \$5 to help others, called prosocial spending, led to a measurable increase in happiness.

Turns out, it's the act of giving and not the amount that's key. Another study found that people with disposable income are happier when that extra money is put toward doing good for others rather than spending it on personal indulgences.



Only **1/4** of Americans volunteer

...which means there are a few million people out there who may not have heard of the life-altering personal and societal rewards that await those who serve others.

Giving Reduces Loneliness

When Maryellen Gordon, a longtime New York City resident, moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, she found herself facing several life changes. Her journalistic skills were less in demand than she had expected they'd be in the smaller community, and her friend base shrank dramatically with the move. "I faced a real struggle getting used to a whole new life," she recalls. "I'm someone who needs structure and organization."

After searching for a way to keep herself occupied and to get more involved in her new community, Gordon volunteered with the League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization that focuses on voter registration, particularly in underserved communities.

Giving Reduces Loneliness

“I love that it allows me to do a lot of what I did as a journalist,” she says. “I get out in the community, I talk to people, I learn.” And because the organization partners with a variety of groups across the city, Gordon found that she was also rebuilding the ethnically and economically diverse social base she was missing since leaving New York City.

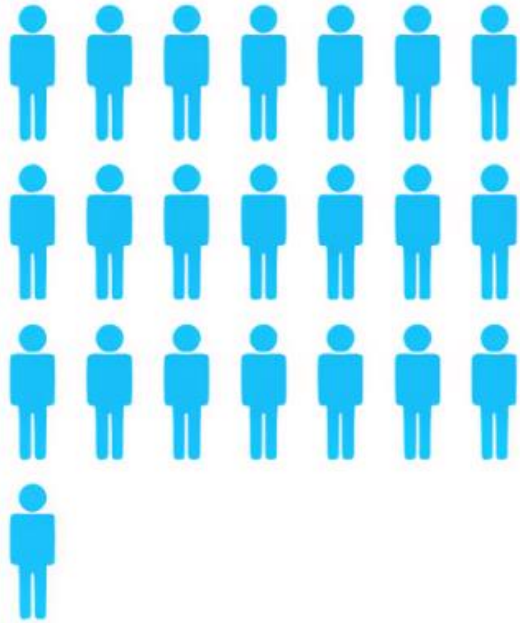
“I’ve formed friendships with all sorts of people around the city, and it’s provided insights I wouldn’t have had otherwise,” she says.

Sometimes, It's Good to Be Selfish

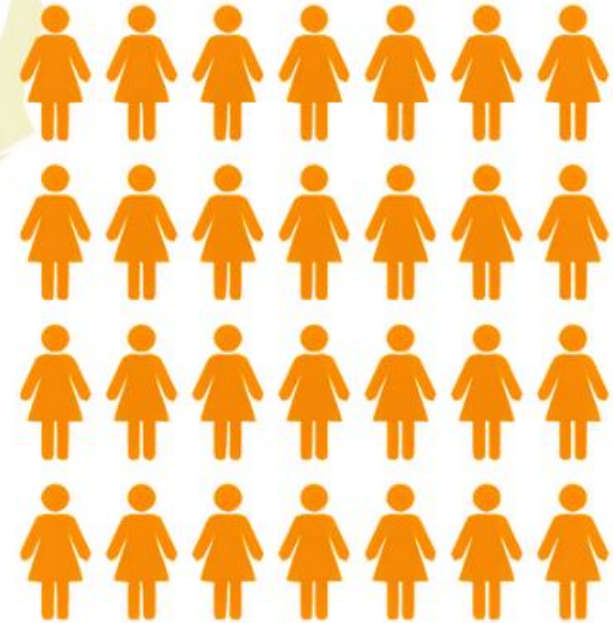
We're not all Mother Teresa's. Sometimes, the motivation behind doing for others has selfish elements—the opportunity to network, score auctioned items at a gala, or meet personal-fitness goals.

The Texas study found that while volunteering that focused on others, like reading to kids at the local library or putting together food kits at a shelter, resulted in greater health benefits, the health benefits to volunteers who were self-focused (on gaining resumé experience or supporting a political position) were almost as significant.

THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE OF VOLUNTEERING



Only **22%** of American men
and **28%** of American women
volunteer.



Leaning into Your Passions Can Give You Purpose

Sometimes, it's easy to figure out how to help others via an activity that brings you joy. If you love animals, working at a rescue shelter may be perfect. But your hobbies and side skills may come into play in unexpected ways. For me, making masks was a natural extension of my penchant for creating costumes for Comic-Con.

Pauline Nguyen, a chief of staff for Digital Consumer Solutions at Mastercard in New York City, turned her passion for healthy food into a volunteer gig with City Harvest, which rescues surplus food to help feed hungry New Yorkers. "I found I could use my food-prep experience in a meaningful way," she says. Nguyen began leading cooking demonstrations to teach food recipients how to use the produce and ingredients they were handing out. To date, she's donated more than 150 hours to the program.

Leaning into Your Passions Can Give You Purpose

Of course, helping others—whether it’s a one-off act of getting someone across the street, or a lifetime spent rescuing wildlife—isn’t a magic wand for happiness and peace of mind. Still, says Jones, “In times like these, our willingness to step outside of ourselves and act as our brother’s keeper can be empowering and enriching.”

The most frequently performed volunteer activities are:



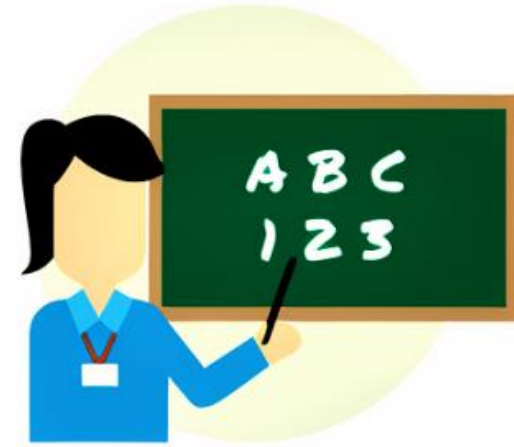
11%

Food servicing



10%

Fundraising



9%

Teaching

Volunteers put in the most hours with:



33%
Religious
organizations



25%
Educational &
youth services



14%
Social & community
services



Time is Money

The estimated value of the work of all 2014 American volunteers was **\$173 billion**.

Everyone Has a Story

When volunteering for a community in need, you come to realize that every person has a story - a story of who they are and how they came to be where they are. While it's important to remember that each person has their own unique narrative, it's just as important to respect, appreciate, and take the time to understand this narrative.

Whether volunteering at a nursing home, soup kitchen, or homeless shelter, acknowledging everyone's individual circumstances and stories makes for a more complete and fulfilling volunteer experience.

Small Changes Can Have a Big Impact

Okay, so painting a mural, pulling weeds, or donating clothes may not seem like much, but with the right mindset, these small actions can be seen to have far-reaching implications.

Think of it like this: painting a mural and pulling weeds contributes to the overall beautification of a community, while donating clothes might mean keeping someone warm for the winter. As a volunteer, you understand that simple actions can have a big impact.

DOING GOOD FEELS REALLY GOOD

Of people who volunteer:

25%

say it helps them manage a chronic illness.

94%

say it improves their mood.

95%

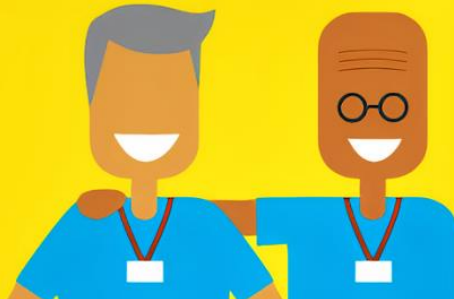
say it makes their community a better place.

78%

say it lowers their stress levels.

96%

say it enriches their sense of purpose in life.



But Motivation Matters

Volunteers live longer than non-volunteers. HOWEVER... people who volunteer for self-oriented, rather than "other"-oriented reasons, see no change in longevity.

Smiles Are Universal

If you've volunteered abroad or within a community unlike your own, you've probably figured out that smiling is part of a universal language. A simple smile can permeate language, cultural, economic, or other barriers and can relay the message that you care. When in doubt, flash those pearly whites.

Gratitude

Volunteering brings with it a deep appreciation of all that you have in life and helping those in need is a firm reminder of what really matters - like family, friends, and health. It's not uncommon for volunteers to see their own lives in a different light, perhaps taking notice of the small things or moments that bring them joy.

The More the Merrier

Adults 60+ who volunteer for two or more organizations see a 63% lower mortality rate compared to their non-volunteering counterparts.



SIX FOR SIX

A *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* study set out to see if volunteering improves 6 things:



Happiness



Life satisfaction



Self-esteem



Sense of control over life



Physical health



Depression symptoms

The study found it improved them ALL.



Time Is of the Essence

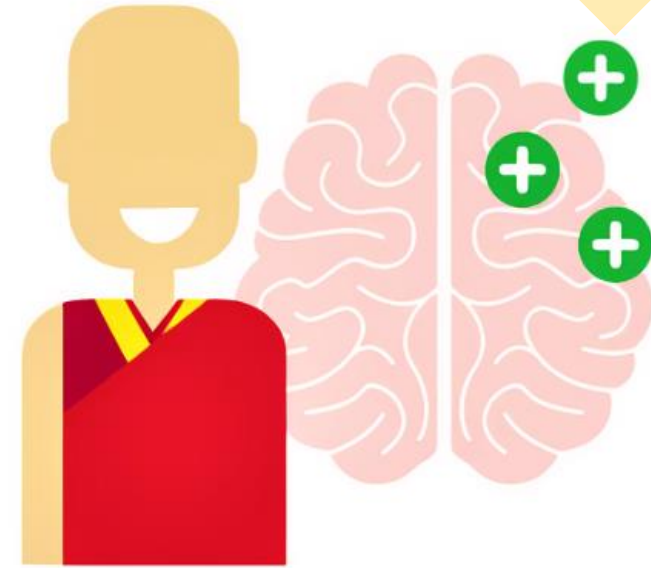
To experience the maximum health benefits of volunteering, researchers believe we need to hit a "volunteer threshold." This has been variously defined by different studies as volunteering :

- ✓ With **2 or more** organizations
- ✓ At least **40 hours** per year
- ✓ At least **100 hours** per year

It's All in Your Head

In 2008, scientists scanned the brain of a French Buddhist monk as he meditated on compassion for others.

The brain scan showed “an abnormally large capacity for happiness and a reduced propensity towards negativity.”



Giving is Receiving

One survey found that people who gave money to charity were **43%** more likely to consider themselves “very happy.”

Volunteering Is a Learning Experience




As a volunteer, you never stop learning. Developing new skills, discovering new passions, gaining new insights about yourself and the world around you - volunteering covers it all. Volunteering can mean learning about different communities, organizations, and fields, as well as learning more about yourself.

EXPERIENCE AN OFFICE WIN-WIN

WHEN COMPANIES ORGANIZE VOLUNTEER INITIATIVES...






Employees can expect to:

-  See a reduction in stress
-  Build teamwork and time-management skills
-  Develop positive feelings toward their employer



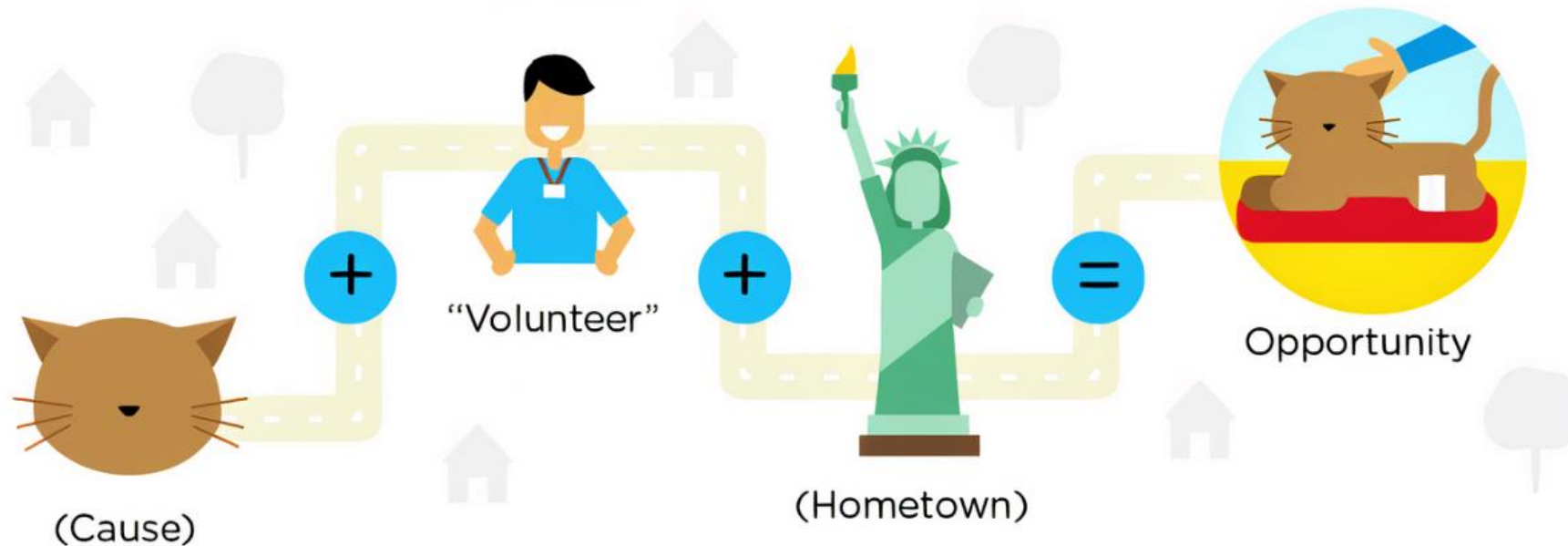
Employers can expect to:

-  Lower healthcare costs
-  See a boost in employee productivity
-  Build stronger colleague relationships

HOW TO GET STARTED

#1 SEARCH AND YOU SHALL FIND

In one simple Google search, you'll be shocked how many people and places in your community can use your talents, time and treasures. Go ahead, try it!



#2

BECOME A VOLUNTOURIST



In planning your next getaway, set aside a few days to give back to the local community. And don't be surprised when these become the most memorable days of your trip.

How We're Giving Back Abroad

The most popular volunteer activities for traveling Americans are:



15%

Working with Children



15%

Working in Education



14%

Environmental Protection & Recovery



10%

Wildlife Recovery or Habitat



10%

Local Job Creation or Economic Projects

Did You Know?

Long-term volunteering is easier and more affordable than you imagine. Many organizations offer free room and board in return for your service.



#3

GET UP CLOSE FROM ABROAD

You don't need a plane ticket or passport to make a difference abroad



For example, the Baan Unrak children's home in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, lets online donors throw a surprise ice cream party for all its 130 children with a donation of just \$50. They'll even send you photos of your fiesta!

Pleasure + Trust + Social Connection = Warm Glow

A National Institute of Health study found that donating to charity triggers sections of the brain associated with pleasure, trust and social connection, resulting in a “warm glow” sensation.



3 Things to Remember



You can make the maximum impact at places with minimal resources.



If you are volunteering your time, monetary donations should be optional, not mandatory.



The places most desperate for help won't have a website. Be a pioneer and discover one of them.

Once a Volunteer, Always a Volunteer

Putting aside the fact that doing good is scientifically proven to lead to more good deeds, volunteering is an experience that stays with you forever.

The fulfillment that comes with helping another human being, the satisfaction from knowing you've made a difference, and the good old fun factor, are just a few reasons once is never enough.



“ The best way to find yourself, is to lose yourself in the service of others. ”

-Gandhi

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