

THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING!

April 19-25 is National Volunteer Week set aside to thank all volunteers everywhere. The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre is fortunate to have a core of dedicated, diligent and fun-loving volunteers we couldn't do without. On behalf of the Board and Staff, a great big THANK YOU!

Why volunteer?

With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering can be enormous. Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. The right match can help you to find friends, connect with the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career.

Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. It can reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a huge amount of time out of your busy day. Giving in even simple ways can help those in need and improve your health and happiness.

Benefits of volunteering:

1. Volunteering connects you to others
2. Volunteering is good for your mind and body
3. Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life

Benefit 1: Volunteering connects you to others

One of the more well-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Even helping out 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.

Make new friends and contacts

One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, especially if you are new to an area. It strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighbourhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

Increase your social and relationship skills

While some people are naturally outgoing, others are shy and have a hard time meeting new people. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice and develop your social skills, since you are meeting regularly with a group of people with common interests. Once you have momentum, it's easier to branch out and make more friends and contacts.

Benefit 2: Volunteering is good for your mind and body

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety. The social contact aspect of helping and working with others can have a profound effect on your overall psychological well-being. Nothing relieves stress better than a meaningful connection to another person. Working with pets and other animals has also been shown to improve mood and reduce stress and anxiety.

Volunteering combats depression. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against depression.

Volunteering makes you happy. By measuring hormones and brain activity, researchers have discovered that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to give to others. The more we give, the happier we feel.

Volunteering increases self-confidence. 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.

Volunteering provides a sense of purpose. Older adults, especially those who have retired or lost a spouse, can find new meaning and direction in their lives by helping others. Whatever your age or life situation, volunteering can help take your mind off your own worries, keep you mentally stimulated, and add more zest to your life.

Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not. Older volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen symptoms of chronic pain and reduce the risk of heart disease.

I have limited mobility—can I still volunteer?

People with disabilities or chronic health conditions can still benefit greatly from volunteering. In fact, research has shown that adults with disabilities or health conditions ranging from hearing and vision loss to heart disease, diabetes or digestive disorders all show improvement after volunteering.

Whether due to a disability, a lack of transportation, or time constraints, many people choose to volunteer their time via phone or computer. In today's digital age, many organizations need help with writing, graphic design, email, and other web-based tasks.

Benefit 3: Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life

Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore your interests and passions. Doing volunteer work, you find meaningful and interesting opportunities that can be a relaxing, energizing escape from your day-to-day routine of work, school, or family commitments. Volunteering also provides you with renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into your personal and professional life.

While learning new skills can be beneficial to many, it's not a requirement for a fulfilling volunteer experience. Bear in mind that the most valuable assets you can bring to any volunteer effort are compassion, an open mind, a willingness to pitch in wherever needed, and a positive attitude.

Consider your goals and interests

You will have a richer and more enjoyable volunteering experience if you first take some time to identify your goals and interests. Think about why you want to volunteer. What would you enjoy doing? The opportunities that match both your goals and your interests are most likely to be fun and fulfilling.

If this article has encouraged you to volunteer, we are always looking for more volunteers to participate in our numerous special events and art exhibitions.

We look forward to seeing our returning volunteers and meeting new interested people. Until then, please stay safe and healthy!

Patti Knipe
Volunteer Relations Chair

Sources: Jeanne Segal, Ph.D
 Lawrence Robinson
 Worldwide Web