

Volunteering – why, what, when, where and how?

Scratch the surface of most people and underneath you will find a volunteer – from keeping an eye out for a neighbour and putting out their bins to working just about full time for a voluntary organisation and everything in between. We are a nation of volunteers, but often with not enough time to do as much as we'd like. So, if you want to do more, or something different.....how do you go about it?

Why volunteer?

Because you can do something good in the world, make a difference, help to change lives, make a mark, make the world a better and happier place, bring about change, save the world!

But also, because it is good for you – it makes you feel fulfilled, that you are useful and valued, allows you to use your skills and talents, enables you to learn, grow and become more skilled – and critically, volunteering has been shown to be one of the five factors which contribute to human happiness!

Can you afford not to volunteer?

What?

This is the big question. You need to consider what you skills, talents, qualifications, preferences, interests, experience you can offer. Don't be modest – everyone has a lot to offer, and the things organisations are looking for in volunteers are often those we most often overlook – reliability, flexibility, good timekeeping, honesty, an ability to learn, enthusiasm, etc.

'What' also encompasses what opportunities are out there that I would like to do. So think about the things you like doing – working with people, animals, on committees, alone, in teams, etc. And also think about what you don't like doing – you will not be a great volunteer unless you are playing to your strengths and preferences. Be open and creative – just because you have no experience of working on committees does not mean you would not make a great committee member, and conversely, just because you are a qualified nurse or teacher does not mean you have to work in a school or hospital – or even with people!

When?

Decide what is right for you – what time of day (or night), weekends or weekdays, regularly or irregularly, in Summer only or all year round, and so on. There are many, many opportunities for volunteering, so make sure you find the one that fits your needs best.

Where?

Where do you want to volunteer? In a school, a hospital, a prison, a shop, in an office, outdoors, indoors, etc. Volunteers work all over – even a single organisation such as National Trust <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/ways-to-volunteer/> can offer a list of volunteering opportunities far too long to fit on this page.

How?

The best way of finding out is by using google or another search engine – put in volunteering and a few other words which reflect your interests – children, animals, environment, outdoors, etc. and see what comes up. Alternatively, try www.do-it.org.uk www.volunteering.org.uk www.voluntarycentreservices.org.uk www.vso.org.uk www.reachskills.org.uk

Good luck!