

Volunteering



Change Your World

By Steve Fife

Change Your World

I was a lucky kid; my parents introduced me to volunteering when I was seven. My family would travel to different nursing homes and put on musical presentations for the residents. I also distinctly remember complaining about getting up early on a Saturday morning to prepare, having no realization at that age how much this lifelong habit would affect the path my life would follow.

From nursing homes to restoring covered bridges to serving on local and national boards and committees, to volunteering at a local aquarium - community service has impacted my life and helped me to author my own experience. That aquarium I was talking about started with helping in the gift shop and education program. Before I knew it I was feeding and training seals, and going back to school to start a new career as a marine educator.

From new experiences to new skills and opportunities, to finding my way in new communities, volunteering has changed my world. The people I have met are the best; many have become lifelong, reliable and caring friends.

Above and beyond all these reasons to volunteer, is the element of how it makes you feel to do it. I urge you to try it! Nothing improves a bad day as much as the great feeling you get when you know you are truly making a positive difference in someone's life. It will change your world. You can count on it!

Jeanne Meggison
Director, Volunteer! York County at United Way

? What is Volunteering?

Some have said that a volunteer, “does something good for some one else without expecting anything in return.” But that’s just the beginning.

Volunteering is ... using your time and abilities to help others.

Volunteering is ... helping to make your community better for everyone.

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” – Anne Frank

Volunteering is ... learning new skills.

Volunteering is ... having fun.

Volunteering is ... making friends.

Volunteering is ... acting on that feeling you get when you see someone in need.

Volunteering is ... making a difference.

Volunteering means something different to everyone. The only way to find out what it means to you is to get out and do it.

“It’s amazing what one can do when one doesn’t know what one can do.”
- Garfield the Cat (creator Jim Davis)

Why Should You Volunteer?

Did you know that more than half the teenagers in the United States volunteer? All kinds of people volunteer, doing just about anything you can think of. The world is a better place when everyone gets involved. Being a volunteer doesn't take very much time, or any special skills. Youth, like you, make especially good volunteers.

- You have a whole lot of energy.

- You have fresh ideas.

- You are inspirational and influential. You can change the way others think, and the way others act.

There are a lot of young people. Almost one quarter of the total population of Maine is under 18 years old. Imagine how much could get done if every one of you volunteered just a few hours a month.





Where Should You Volunteer?

Before you jump in and start volunteering, take a few minutes to think about why you would like to volunteer, and what kind of volunteering you'd like to do. This will help you to make the best out of the experience.

First, take the time to figure out what interests you:

What do you see in your community that concerns you?

What catches your interest?

What do you like to do?

What would you like to learn to do?

You should enjoy volunteering, and you should get something out of it. So make sure that whatever you end up doing will fit your own interests.



“Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth.”
- Mohammed Ali

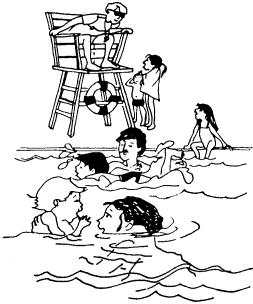
When deciding what you would like to do as a volunteer, it’s also important to consider a few other things:

How much time can I devote to volunteering?

What can I offer to the cause I’m volunteering for?

What do I want to get from my volunteer experience?

Will I enjoy it?



By taking the time to consider these things before you start, your entire volunteer experience will be better. The rest of this booklet is designed to help you answer some of these questions and get you on your way to volunteering.

“But where shall I start? The world is so vast. I shall start with the country I know best, my own. But my country is so very large. I had better start with my town ... No, my home. No, my family. Never mind. I shall start with myself.”
- Elie Wiesel



Your Neighborhood

You want to volunteer, but you don't think you can do anything without some transportation? You don't need to go very far to get involved. Look around your neighborhood, you'll be amazed by how much there is to do.

Do you have elderly or disabled neighbors? Ask if there's anything you can do for them.

- Mow their lawn.
- Shovel their driveway.
- Wash some dishes or do laundry.
- Help them with shopping.

Any little thing can be a great help to them. Just a little time and effort go a long way!

You could offer to babysit for a few hours even if someone can't afford to pay you. Help someone paint their house or wash their windows. Some people can't do these things on their own, but with someone to help they're easy.

“Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day.” - Sally Koch



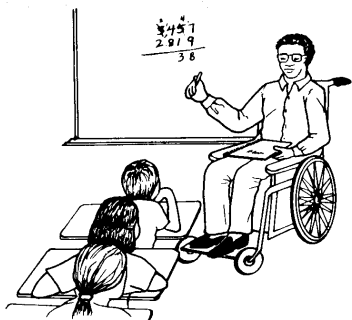
You can get some friends together to rake leaves or plant trees. Or you can clean up an empty lot; just picking up litter is volunteering. Maybe your family can help organize a neighborhood picnic or party.

One of the most important things you can do in your neighborhood is be friendly. Say hello and wave to people. Get to know the people next door, whether they're your age or your grandparents' age. If you see someone who looks like they need help, give them a hand. Not only are you making a new friend, you're making a difference in someone's life.

There's no limit to what you can do right where you live. In some neighborhoods volunteers have built their own playground, restored a park, or put in a sidewalk.



The secret to volunteering is to look around you and see what needs to be done. Then come up with a way you can help.



Your School

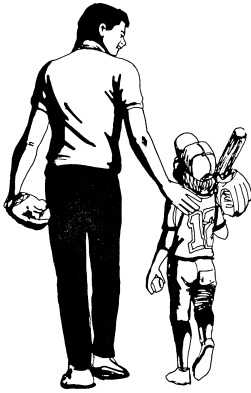
You probably already spend a lot of time at school studying, but how much time do you spend helping out there? It may not be your favorite place, but you can make it better.

One of the best ways to volunteer at school is to help someone else with their work. Ask a teacher if there's a tutoring program at your school. If not, maybe you could start one.

You may also be able to volunteer at the school library or office. Talk to someone who works there to see if they could use your help.

Another way to get involved at your school is to become active in your student government. This is not only a way to make a difference at your school but is great leadership experience for later in life.

“We must adopt the mentality that we are not only the leaders of tomorrow for tomorrow may be too late. We are the leaders of today.” - Miguel Bocanegra,
Middle College High School



Get involved with your school's theater or arts program or help out with a sports team. You don't have to be a good artist or athlete to volunteer, you just have to enjoy doing it. These are great ways to practice things you already like to do and to help others at the same time.

Drug and alcohol abuse programs are very important in schools, and students are a vital part of these programs. Many schools have a peer counseling program or student groups trying to prevent drug abuse and dating violence. Find out what groups exist at your school.

If there's a group that interests you, go to a few meetings. If there's something you're interested in but there isn't a group already, consider starting one. Students have started many clubs that make a big difference in their community.



Even if you don't find anything to interest you at your school, there are often clubs or resources that can help you find volunteer opportunities. Find out if your school has a Key Club, Interact Club or other service organization, or if your guidance office has a list of places to volunteer.



The Larger Community

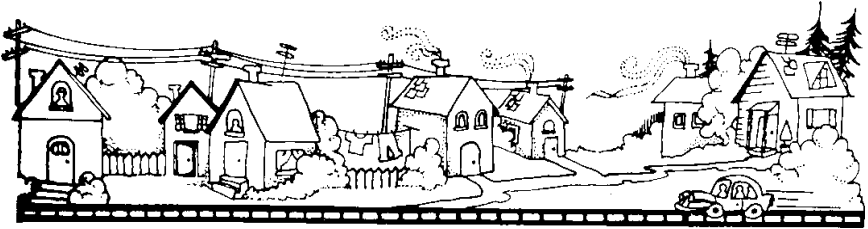
Don't want to spend any more time at school or you'd like to help somewhere else? Don't worry, there are plenty of activities within your town that you can do!

If you're just getting started and know what you'd like to do, go to an organization and see if they need your help. Some examples of good places to try are:

- Nursing Homes
- Soup Kitchens
- Public Libraries
- Child Care Centers
- Churches
- Food Pantries
- Homeless Shelters
- Community Centers
- Chambers of Commerce
- Community Theaters

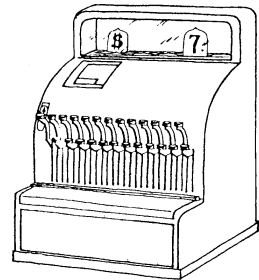
If you're not sure what you'd like to do, then local volunteer centers are often good places to start. The list of places that need help goes on and on. Maybe you can already think of a place that you would like to volunteer.

“No one can go back and make a brand new start. Anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.” - Anonymous



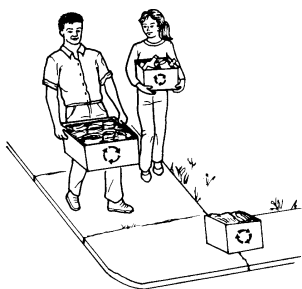
A few special examples are hospitals and fire departments. They often involve specific training and some long-term responsibility. If you're willing to commit, it's worth the effort. Just make sure to talk with one of their volunteers ahead of time so you know what you're getting into.

Another possibility is to find out what is in your area for volunteer groups, such as literacy volunteers or disaster relief. A few others to try include charity fund raisers and political campaigns.



Every town has a unique blend of places to volunteer, you just need to find the one that's right for you.

“In class, we study the big questions. At the homeless shelter, we live the big questions.”
- Elane Rankin, Georgetown Univ.

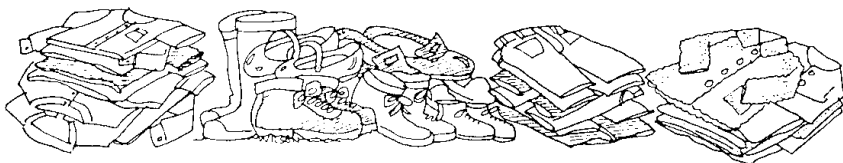


Volunteering as a Group

There are also many opportunities for groups to volunteer. This could be a group or team that you are a part of or maybe you would just like to get some friends together.

One way to get your group involved is to organize or participate in a collection drive. Many organizations are constantly looking for donations, and you can help them collect just about anything. Some popular items include:

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| √ Books | √ Toys |
| √ Canned Food | √ Clothing |
| √ School Supplies | √ Winter Coats |
| √ Hats | √ Gloves |

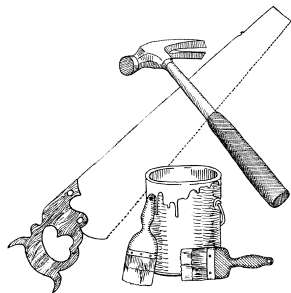


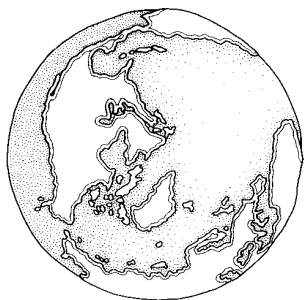
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead

An activity like this doesn’t have to take a lot of effort, but be sure to plan ahead. Libraries and food pantries are good places to start, or you can get in touch with one of the many organizations that run seasonal drives like Toys for Tots or Coats for Kids.

Most people have probably participated in bottle drives, but fund-raisers are really only limited by the time and imagination that you’re willing to put into them. They make great projects for groups! They can range from collecting pennies to bake sales, craft sales to car washes. There are often road races or other sporting events, like a basketball shoot-out, bowl-a-thon, or bike trek that are fund-raisers for a good cause.

A few other ideas for your group include working with Habitat for Humanity, organizing a party or show for a nursing home or volunteering at a Special Olympics event. If you want to involve a large group be sure to get permission from the organization before starting. Leave plenty of time for planning and carrying out your project.





The World We Live In

Many people find that saving the Earth is great motivation for volunteering. Just like people, the environment needs our help too.

While it may not seem very exciting, cleanups are a good way to get started. Just think of how much nicer your favorite park, beach or hiking trail would be if there wasn't any litter. There are a number of organized events, like the Maine Coastal CleanUp, but it's also important that you help keep the environment clean all the time.



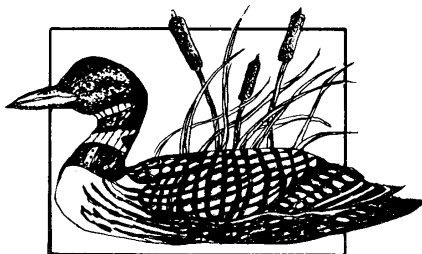
Wouldn't it be nice if, instead of having to pick up after other people, no one littered in the first place? If you see someone throwing trash on the ground, mention to them how bad it is for the environment.

“May you remember that though the roads we take can sometimes be difficult, those are often the ones that lead to the most beautiful views.” - Douglas Pagels

This type of advocacy is a way that youth can really make an impact. From getting your classmates to think about the environment to writing letters to your local legislator, the way to save the environment in the long run is to convince other people that it's the right thing to do.

If you'd rather get your hands dirty, there are always places, like nature preserves and land trusts, looking for volunteers. At many places volunteers do a lot of the trail maintenance, wildlife monitoring, guided tours, and even the research.

If working with animals is what you'd prefer, then shelters, animal rescues, and wildlife rehabilitation centers are almost always looking for volunteers and exist in many communities.





A few last tips

Many places are just starting to involve youth as volunteers. Some of them don't have much experience working with youth, have had bad experiences, or are frightened by the stereotypes surrounding youth. It's up to you to convince them that they've made the right decision.

When you first approach an organization it's often a good idea to bring along a parent or adult who knows you well. This can even be done the first few times you volunteer there, just until the people get to know you.

Volunteering is a process. It takes time and patience. If you're volunteering for an organization, becoming involved doesn't happen over night. They often require an application, references and an interview, much like applying for a job. When organizing a project on your own, it will take a lot of planning to make everything go smoothly.

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”
- William James

Volunteering is good practice for your future in the working world and it means accepting some responsibility. You should not only complete the tasks assigned to you, but be respectful and helpful as well. It also means you should get training, respect, and recognition in return for all the hard work you do.

Volunteering is serious business as well as being fun. Many agencies rely on their volunteers to get the work done, and a lot of people rely on the work that they do.

Volunteering can open up a whole new world...people often find that once they start, they want to keep volunteering forever. Volunteering has also led some people into new and exciting careers. Be open minded.

It *is* possible to have a bad experience as a volunteer. This doesn't mean you should give up. Sometimes it just doesn't work out and it's best to try somewhere else.

Don't wait for someone to ask! Pick up the phone and start volunteering. If you're not sure how to begin call your local volunteer center to get more information.

“Our nation became great not because of what the government did, but because of what its people did.” - George Romney



Numbers to Call and Places to Find Out More

A quick look in the phone book should help you find most of the places, like libraries, nursing homes, and animal shelters, listed throughout this booklet. You could also try asking for ideas at your school, church or town hall. There are places to volunteer in every town, you just have to go out and find them.

If you're having trouble finding a phone number, or if you don't know where to begin, you can call your local volunteer center.

In Southern Maine your best bet is Volunteer! York County at United Way of York County in Kennebunk. They list nearly 400 volunteer - opportunities throughout York County. You can find out more or get in touch with them by going to www.uwycme.org/GetConnected.htm or calling **985-6869** or **800-794-6869**



Other volunteer centers can be found by going to the Points of Light Foundation website (www.pointsoflight.org) and searching by ZIP code for your home town, or by calling **1-800-VOLUNTEER**.

You can also try VolunteerMatch (www.volunteermatch.org) which lists almost 40,000 opportunities across the country.

Points of Light Foundation is a great place to find out more about volunteering. There are also a few other websites where you can learn more about what volunteers are doing across the country:

Learn and Serve America www.learnandserve.org

SERVEnet www.servenet.org

Idealist.org www.idealists.org

Do Something www.dosomething.org

Volunteer Maine www.volunteermaine.org

If you've ever thought that you can't accomplish a lot just because you're young, then there are some books out there that you might want to check out. Volunteer! York County has a lending library with some that make a good start:

Catch the Spirit, by Susan K. Perry has 20 stories of youth who have won the Prudential Spirit of Community Award.

The Kid's Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference by Barbara A. Lewis.

Volunteers in Action by Brian O'Connell and Ann Brown O'Connell.

There are also many national organizations that are dedicated to community service ranging from occasional volunteering to full time service. This is just a few of them:

Learn and Serve America

Youth Volunteer Corps of America

Camp Fire USA

Junior Achievement

4-H

Key Club

YMCA

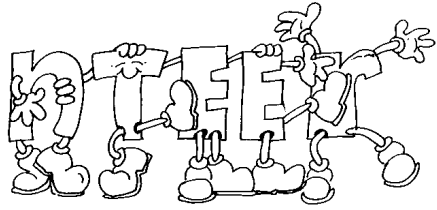
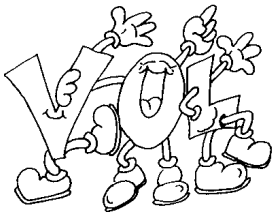
Habitat for Humanity

USA Freedom Corps

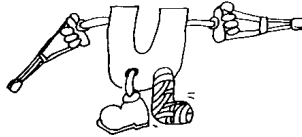
American Red Cross

This booklet was put together by Steve Fife while he volunteered full time for a year during 2002-2003 as a Maine Communities for Children Americorps*VISTA with United Way of York County. If you have enjoyed it please feel free to make copies. It is also available by contacting Volunteer! York County at United Way at 207-985-6869 or can be downloaded from www.uwycme.org.

“Unless someone like you cares a whole
awful lot, nothing is going to get better.
It’s not.”
- Dr. Seuss, “The Lorax”



ALL WE NEED IS U!



Volunteer!
YORK COUNTY

