

Volunteering After Stroke



Volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your community. It can also have a positive impact on your health. Those who volunteer may experience greater functional ability and lower rates of depression later in life.



BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING:

Maintain and improve old skills: Volunteering can help you build upon skills you already have and use them to benefit the greater community. If you have the experience of a sales person, volunteering could assist you in developing your public speaking, communication, and marketing skills.

Develop new skills: Employers often seek well-rounded individuals who have good teamwork and goal setting skills. Serving on a volunteer committee or board is a great way to learn group dynamics and teamwork. Serving as a committee chair increases leadership skill. Planning and implementing a major fund-raising event can develop goal setting, planning and budgeting skills. As well, many volunteering opportunities provide extensive training. For example, you could become a knowledgeable art historian while donating your time to a museum.

Practice skills: Volunteering offers opportunities to practice skills in a relatively risk-free environment. It is much more effective to practice a skill than to read about it or study it in a classroom. Volunteering is an excellent place to experiment, practice and try out new techniques and skills. You can build your self-confidence through practice.

Try out a new job: Volunteering offers you the chance to try out a new career without making a long-term commitment. It is also a great way to gain experience in a new field. Sometimes, you can volunteer directly at an organization that does the kind of work you are interested in. Your volunteer work might expose you to professional organizations or internships that could be of benefit to your career. Sometimes a volunteer experience can lead you to discover a skill or interest you were unaware of.

Network: Volunteering gives you the satisfaction of knowing you are benefitting your community by getting involved. You do not have to join a club or attend meetings. You can volunteer at a time that fits your schedule. You not only develop friends and professional relationships, you may also hear about job openings, gather insider employment information and develop great references.

Energize and/or relax: Volunteering gives you the satisfaction of knowing you are doing good and being involved in your community. If you feel strongly about something that is happening or not happening in your community, get involved. Encourage others to join with you and find new solutions to community problems. Sometimes we simply need a break in our routine, or an opportunity to create balance in our lives. The energy and sense of fulfillment gained through your volunteer experience can carry over to your personal life and may help to relieve tensions and foster new perspectives for old situations.

Gain work experience: Volunteering demonstrates workplace skills such as management skills, customer service skills and leadership skills that can be put on a resume. Work experience is work experience, with or without a paycheck. If you are developing new skills or thinking of pursuing a new career, volunteering can give you valuable, practical experience. Career counselors encourage job seekers to document their volunteer experiences.

HOW DO I START VOLUNTEERING?

You will have a richer and more enjoyable volunteering experience if you first take some time to identify your goals and interests. Start by thinking about why you want to volunteer. Also think about what you would enjoy doing. Volunteer opportunities that match both your goals and your interests are more likely to be fun and fulfilling for you.

Tips for getting started: First, ask yourself if there is something specific you want to do. Having answers to these questions will help you narrow down your search.

For example, do I want to:

- Make it better around where I live?
- Meet people who are different from me?
- Try something new?
- Do something with my spare time?
- See a different way of life and new places?
- Try out the type of work I might want to do as a paid job?
- Do more with my interests and hobbies?
- Do something I'm good at?

What is right for me? The key is to find a volunteer position that you would enjoy and are also capable of completing. It is also important to make sure that your commitment matches the organization's needs. Consider the following questions:

- What are my strengths and abilities? What skills do I bring to a volunteer job?
- Would I like to work with people or would I rather work in solitude?
- Am I better behind the scenes or do I prefer to take a more visible role?
- How much time am I willing to commit?
- How much responsibility am I ready to take on?
- What causes are important to me?

In your search for the right volunteer opportunity, don't limit yourself to just one organization or one specific type of job. Sometimes an opportunity looks great on paper, but the reality is quite different. Try to visit different organizations and get a feel for them. The more satisfaction you have as a volunteer, the better your contributions and the more likely you will continue.

WHERE DO I FIND VOLUNTEER OPPURTUNITIES?

- Hospitals, community health centers, community support agencies (e.g. VON)
- Community theaters, museums and monuments
- Libraries and senior centers
- Service organizations such as Rotary clubs, Kinsmen clubs
- Youth organizations, sports teams, and after-school programs
- Historical restorations and community parks and recreation
- Online databases such as:
 - www.volunteer.ca – Volunteer Canada: lists volunteer centres in Canada that can help you find a volunteer opportunity in your local area
 - www.ovcn.ca – Ontario Volunteer Centre Network: lists volunteer centers in Ontario to help you find a volunteer opportunity
 - www.charityvillage.ca – Charity Village: provides a search engine to assist you with finding volunteer opportunities

HOW DO I GET THE MOST OUT OF VOLUNTEERING?

You are donating your valuable time, so it is important that you enjoy and benefit from your volunteering. It is important that your volunteer position is a good match for you. To ensure this good match, it is important to communicate with the people that you are volunteering for.

Ask questions: You want to make sure that the experience is right for your skills, your goals, and the time you want to spend. If you have any questions, be sure to speak up. Ask about time commitments, training, expectations, who you will be working with and who to talk to if problems arise.

Know what is expected: Before starting, make sure you are comfortable with the organization, know what is expected, and understand the time commitment. Consider starting small so that you do not over commit yourself at first. Give yourself some flexibility to change your focus if needed.

Do not be afraid to make a change: Speak up if your experience is not what you expected. Do not force yourself into a bad fit. Talk to the organization about changing your focus or consider looking for another match.

Enjoy yourself: Most importantly, make sure you are having fun! The best volunteer experiences benefit both the volunteer and the organization. If you are not enjoying yourself, ask yourself why. Is it the tasks you are performing? The people you are working with? Or are you uncomfortable simply because the situation is new and unfamiliar? Pinpointing what's bothering you can help you decide how to proceed.

REFERENCES

Saisan, J., Smith, M., Kemp G. (August 2011) "Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits".

http://helpguide.org/life/volunteer_opportunities_benefits_volunteering.htm

Ten Professional Development Benefits of Volunteering (Everything I Learned in Life I Learned through Volunteering). Mary V. Merrill, LSW, Merrill Associates This article was first published in 2001 and is licensed under a Creative Commons License. It may be reproduced in its entirety provided that you give the original author credit.

World Volunteer Web "Benefits to Volunteering"

<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/resources/how-to-guides/volunteer/doc/benefits-of-volunteering.html>

This resource was developed by the members of the Southwestern Ontario Occupational Therapy Stroke Network in alignment with the Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations. Information was adapted with permission from various Provincial Resources. Inquiries can be made to swosn@lhsc.on.ca; Last Updated: July, 2024

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