

What is volunteering and why do it?

Volunteering is giving your time without being paid and is a great way to help others as well as yourself. People undertake voluntary work for all sorts of reasons. Voluntary work can make the world a better place, but there are also benefits for you as a volunteer. Consider some of the following reasons for volunteering. If your reason is not listed it doesn't mean it is less important.

To 'put something back': whether you want to help others, improve your local community, or support a good cause on a national scale, volunteering enables you to contribute in a way that paid work does not always allow.

To make new friends: joining the volunteering community is a good way to meet like-minded individuals who share the same values as you, as well as introducing you to people from a range of backgrounds whom you might not otherwise come into contact with. Volunteering can be fun!

Improve your CV: the new skills and further work experience gained through voluntary work can be particularly useful when building your CV or completing a job application form, especially if you have been out of paid employment for a while.

To increase confidence: meeting new people, developing new skills and encountering new challenges will boost your confidence and you will be valued for doing something for others which in turn increases your self-worth.

To improve your health: research has shown that voluntary work can strengthen your immune system and lead to a sense of heightened well-being.

Improve job prospects: volunteering is valued by employers, as it shows that you are flexible, willing to work and that money is not your only motivation. If you have not worked for a while, volunteering could help you take the first step more easily.

Give you a chance to try something new: volunteering is one of the best ways of trying out new jobs without the risk of being sacked if you are no good at it! If you are looking for a different job, volunteering is a good way of seeing whether you would like to do it more long term. It also puts you in the right place to hear of job vacancies before they are advertised and possibly gives you the opportunity to take a qualification.

What kind of voluntary work can you do?

Almost anything you can think of, although not all of it will necessarily be available on your doorstep. Detailed below are some types of voluntary work, but remember *there is more out there than we can list here ...*

Health and Social care: includes helping the elderly, hospital visiting, counselling for organisations like Relate, Cruse or The Samaritans, prison visiting, assisting at a daycentre for people with disabilities.

Community Work: includes working at a Citizen's Advice Bureau, being a school governor, youth work, volunteer tutoring.

Environmental and Conservation: includes working for bodies like The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds or a local Wildlife Trust, being a volunteer warden, clearing footpaths and planting trees.

Arts and Heritage: includes working for bodies like The National Trust, getting involved in restoring and maintaining old buildings, working in a museum.

Sports and Recreational: volunteer roles include coaching, administration, refereeing, driving and management.

Animal Welfare: includes fundraising, running shops, clinics or welfare centres, looking after animals until new homes are found, dog walking, habitat improvement, public relations and campaign co-ordination.

Campaign Volunteering: includes campaigning, lobbying, fundraising and publicising for organisations on behalf of a charity, voluntary group or pressure group.

Administration and Organisation: every organisation needs 'backroom' people to keep things running smoothly, whether this involves maintaining paperwork, selling tickets, producing newsletters or other administrative tasks.

What do you need to consider?

- What do you hope to get out of volunteering, for example meeting new people or gaining new skills?
- Decide on the amount of time you can devote to volunteering – how much time can you give and when can you give it?
- What skills or experience can you offer?
- Think about what kind of voluntary work appeals to you – do you, for example, enjoy working with people, or are there certain activities you like doing?
- Are there particular organisations you would like to support because of what they stand for?
- Will the voluntary work you are considering involve travel to different locations and, if so, how will you get there?
- What support and/or training will you receive in the work you will be doing? Will you have the opportunity to acquire any new qualifications?
- Will there be any financial implications? Will you be paid any expenses you incur, or could volunteering affect any state benefit that you are currently receiving? Jobcentre Plus can give you information about doing voluntary work whilst claiming benefits.
- What impact will volunteering have on your existing commitments? Be sure to consider any family, job, study or leisure commitments.

Does it affect my benefits?

Volunteering is unpaid, but sometimes expenses can be paid and these *may* be classed an income if you are in receipt of means-tested benefits.

You must always check with your local Jobcentre Plus office if you are in receipt of welfare benefits.

Where can I find out more?

Phone or call in at your nearest volunteer bureau, the address of which is listed below:

Bournemouth Council for Voluntary Service Boscombe Link 3-5 Palmerston Road Bournemouth, BH1 4HN Tel: 01202 466130 contactus@bournemouthcvs.org.uk www.bournemouthcvs.org.uk	Dorchester Volunteer Centre 1 Colliton Walk Dorchester, DT1 1TZ Tel: 01305 269214 enquiries@volunteerbureau.org www.volunteerbureau.org
Christchurch Volunteer Centre c/o Christchurch Library Druitt Building, High Street Christchurch, BH23 1AW Tel: 01202 475663 cvb@freenet.co.uk	Island Volunteers for You (IVY) 19 Easton Street Portland DT5 1BS Tel: 01305 823789 Island.volunteers@virgin.net
Poole Volunteer Centre 54 Lagland Street, Poole, BH15 1QG Tel: 01202 675100 vc@poolecvs.co.uk www.poolevolunteercentre.org.uk	Weymouth Community Volunteers Unit 46, Colwell Shopping Centre School Street Weymouth, DT4 8NJ Tel: 01305 830255 info@wcv.org.uk

Volunteer Points are kiosks with a keyboard and large touch screen which have been placed in rural communities to make it easier for people to access information about volunteering in their local area. There are currently 4 in Dorset:

Life Wheels - Wareham	Tel: 01929 552623
LymeNet - Lyme Regis	Tel: 01297 444570
The Co-op - Bridport	Tel: 01308 421541
The Co-op - Bargates Christchurch	Tel: 01202 479734

Public libraries may have a notice board or file detailing opportunities. Local hospitals are usually keen to take on plenty of volunteers. Social Services Departments can often advise on where to volunteer. You can also use the internet to learn more about volunteering and can even offer your services online. Take a look at the following web sites:

www.volunteering.org.uk: the national volunteer development organisation for England, covering all aspects of volunteering, including a wealth of information on volunteering overseas. Tel: 0845 305 6979

www.do-it.org.uk: an Internet database of local volunteering opportunities in the UK. Search by postcode, type of work and type of organisation. Tel: 020 7226 8008

www.timebank.org.uk: register with TimeBank and your interests and skills will be matched to the voluntary work opportunities in your locality. Tel: 0845 456 1668

www.vso.org.uk: opportunities overseas. Tel: 020 8780 7200