

'Tis the Season to Give the Gift of Yourself – as a Volunteer



The holiday season is a great time of the year to take stock of the gratitude you feel in life. It can also be a wonderful time of year to give back, and with December 5th being [International Volunteer Day](#), it's a perfect time to consider ways in which we can give of ourselves to make the season a little richer for others.

Opportunities for volunteering can include activities such as participating in toy drives, community involvement, mentoring a child or teen, and assisting in the delivery of hospice care.

According to the [Mayo Clinic Health System](#), volunteering has health benefits for all ages. Those benefits include:

- **Improved physical and mental health.** Volunteering can keep people moving and thinking, which help improve mental and physical well-being for all ages – especially adults ages 60 and older. People who volunteer report better health than non-volunteers. They also show lower rates of depression and anxiety, especially among those 65 and older. Spending time in service to others can bring about feelings of meaning and appreciation while helping to reduce stress. Those benefits can result in lower incidents of health problems such as heart disease, stroke, depression, and general illness.
- **A sense of purpose.** When volunteers can do work that helps others with essential everyday activities, they achieve a boost in life satisfaction and self-esteem.



- **Put special talents to use.** Perhaps you have a naturally cheery disposition that lends itself to being a greeter at a healthcare facility. Or maybe your love of crafting can help create blankets, sweaters, or hats for those in need. Making the most of a special talent through volunteering can be a great way to enrich your life, and the lives of others.
- **Nurture new and existing relationships.** Volunteer work can offer the opportunity for social interaction and help forge relationships that are based on common interests. Simply put, volunteering can be helpful for making friends.

Volunteering can be as simple as spending time assisting your local Toys For Tots coordinator or deploying your greatest skills of compassion

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as a hospice volunteer with an organization such as [Intrepid USA](#).

Becoming a hospice volunteer is an opportunity to make a real difference for individuals and families during critical moments in their lives. Volunteering can be truly rewarding while also making a positive impact on another person's life. While hospice volunteers are close with people receiving hospice care, they are not involved in direct care activities. Their focus instead is on companionship and camaraderie.

There are many ways to donate your time and talents. If you feel more at home with furry friends, there are animal rescue groups that need people to spend time with rescued pups and cats. Local Humane Societies offer programs that pair people of all ages with rescue animals in need of positive and loving contact.

Often, rescue groups will try to establish a level of comfort for these potential pets by pairing them with a volunteer who will simply read to the animals, offering a friendly, soothing voice to ease their anxiety or fears.

A recent [study](#) published in Applied Animal Behaviour Science found that dogs who listened to audiobooks spent more of their time at ease and resting as opposed to displaying vigilant behavior than when they are exposed to all other auditory conditions.

Organizations such as the [Red Cross](#) offer also unique volunteer opportunities.

Red Cross volunteers play a vital role in that organization's blood donation efforts. They are often in search of volunteers to work at blood drives, schedule appointments and transport donated blood. They seek licensed drivers to

transport donations from blood drives and labs to local hospitals. They also look for blood drive ambassadors to greet donors, help them feel at home and express gratitude.

But the list of volunteer opportunities is truly endless. Some chances to contribute to your local community can include:

- **Food banks and shelters** If you'd like to go beyond donating to a canned food drive or giving a check to a local shelter, there are plenty of opportunities. Many food banks ask volunteers to do things like supervise and restock public food shelves, or even take part in community gardening projects.
- **Community centers** Especially in larger cities, there can be a wide range of opportunities, including mentoring or tutoring school-age children, leading arts and crafts classes, or even helping with maintenance projects.
- **Craft-related organizations** You can make a difference in your community from the comfort of your own home doing something you love to do. Many groups like [Project Linus](#), [Knots of Love](#), and [Operation Gratitude](#) collect handmade blankets and hats to donate to newborn babies, the unhoused, and others in need.
- **Online groups** The internet has made it possible for volunteers to support people across the country right from their living rooms. You can do things like research, writing, making art, transcribing, and supporting a crisis text line. A quick search for online volunteer activities will turn up several good options.

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- **Political organizations** Passionate about a local candidate? Contact their campaign to pass out flyers to community members, or text people about their platform.
- **Civil and human rights organizations**
This can involve driving people without their own mode of transportation to appointments or workplaces or helping them navigate public transportation.
- **Houses of worship** Some individuals may find it rewarding to donate time and talent to faith-adjacent projects in the area.
- **Parks and recreation departments**
Local Parks and Recreation Departments may need people to coach teams, serve as umpires or officials for local sports leagues. Other avenues to investigate - perhaps they need assistance with spring cleanups or maintaining picnic areas.
- **Public libraries** Your local library may need help with cleaning and sorting materials, displays, or helping to raise money for library programming.

No matter your interest or the level to which you want to be involved, there are many fulfilling options for all interests and passions. And regardless of the season, volunteering can be a most wonderful gift.