

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Wendy Shone, from the WRVS, looks at the benefits of volunteering and how it can lead to a healthier life.

Volunteering involves giving your time freely to do something as informal as shopping for a housebound neighbour or volunteering for a charity to stand on a street corner with a collecting box.

There are volunteering opportunities available for everyone and not just for the young, fit and healthy. The type of activity is also very varied. Examples include dog walking, telephone support, counselling and archiving, to helping in a day centre, clearance work alongside waterways, IT and driving.

How it benefits people and the community

For an individual, volunteering offers access to a wider range of opportunities than most people experience during a lifetime of paid employment. For older people, volunteering offers the chance to remain engaged with the wider community, using skills from a lifetime of experience or the opportunity to pursue a hobby or interest. For the wider community, volunteering demonstrates what a difference people can make to their neighbourhood and local residents.

What are the benefits for the volunteer?

- Experience – volunteers benefit from the opportunity to try something new or use existing skills to benefit a cash-strapped project. For students or the unemployed, volunteering can offer the chance to get involved in an activity which might better equip them for future employment. Employers believe that volunteering can add to skills. If already in employment, volunteering can make use of existing skills learned in the workplace or encourage pursuit of a different career path.
- Training – many voluntary groups can offer volunteers training for the tasks they undertake, e.g. food handling, MIDAS training for driving a minibus, how to use a till in a shop and computer skills.
- Friendship – with other volunteers and towards others, accompanied by a sense of fulfilment and of having done something beneficial and worthwhile.
- Purpose – unemployment or retirement can leave people feeling depressed. Volunteering can promote a sense of purpose and help re-build confidence and self-esteem.