



VOLUNTEERISM FOR CHILDREN

Board of Christian Outreach

2024

VOLUNTEERISM IS IMPORTANT

In church, we are taught the importance of helping those in need. Positively impacting and helping others can be personally and spiritually rewarding. It fosters belonging and community. It builds relationships with people, creating a support network.

Volunteers gain benefits that enrich their lives. They experience positive mental and emotional health benefits contributes to well-being, reduces stress, and promotes happiness and contentment. They have a better self-image. They become more generous of their time and talents.

Volunteerism is not something that is talked about only in church. It is more than simply writing a check and letting someone else to the real work. Surely, volunteerism is something we want to teach our children.

TEACHING VOLUNTEERISM IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Volunteerism is on the decline across the country. According to IVolunteer International (*The Decline in Volunteerism: A Statistical Overview*, April 18, 2024), younger generations, especially Millennials and Generation Z, are volunteering less than previous generations.

In *How and Why Your Child Should Start Volunteering: Teach your child to love helping others in need*, Scholastic Parent says that helping children learn to be responsible citizens is only one reason to teach volunteerism.

Kids who volunteer are more successful in school. They learn essential skills like time management, “long-range planning, working in groups, interacting with people who are different from themselves, and defining and solving complex problems.”

Volunteering allows children to gain a new perspective on the world, and they learn they can make a difference. This, in turn, helps them feel less overwhelmed by the problems that they see in the daily news.

Kids for whom volunteering is an important part of their lives are more confident and empathetic. They have learned great leadership skills that translate to all walks of life.

The word "volunteering" may not make much sense to a young child, but even children as young as three can learn the value of helping people and places in need. Now is the time to start a lifelong, year-round commitment to giving.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Here are some helpful ways to get your child involved in community service:

- *Be a giving role model*
Children love to copy their parents, so let them follow your lead as a volunteer. When a parent or guardian is involved, the child often looks forward to the activity even more. A community cleanup is a great way to get the whole family involved, no matter the age. The best part is that your child can see an immediate impact when a littered street or park is suddenly clean.
- *Find something fun*
Community service shouldn't be a chore. Find something that interests your child, something that fits his/her passion. Many children love animals, so find an animal shelter or wildlife rescue that needs donations of food or towels. If a child likes crafts, Google craft ideas to find appropriate projects that can be donated.
- *Start small*
For young children, starting small might mean taking ten minutes during a family outing to pick up trash. For teens, this might mean one hour at a soup kitchen on a Tuesday night. Starting small makes volunteering seem easy without it becoming a burden or taking time away from other interests.
- *Find something easy*
A volunteer project can be as easy as going to a store to buy a toy and then dropping it off at a local agency.
- *Make it part of the family schedule*
Between school, work, sports and events, and church, family life is busy. The trick is to build volunteering into the family schedule so that it becomes a priority. Making it part of the family routine instills the notion that your family values giving its time to helping those in need.
- *Let your child be part of the decision-making*
Make sure that your children have a say in the activity your family chooses, so that they get even more out of the experience and develop a sense of ownership.
- *Create your own opportunity*
Some parents struggle to find organizations that allow young children to participate as volunteers, due to age restrictions or other requirements. "But there are things that you can do with children—even young ones," says Dr. Amy D'Unger, chair of the

Board of Directors for Compassionate Kids, Inc. A few options that you can do with your child include fund raising, such as a walkathon, a lemonade stand or bringing a Unicef can with you when you trick-or-treat.

- *Think beyond volunteering*
Beyond traditional community service opportunities, take your child on a field trip to expose them to an important social issue, such as homelessness, animal rescue or saving the environment. By showing children who and what needs help, you can open the door that invites them to begin to think of solutions and imagine how they can make a difference.
- *Learn from other generations*
Senior centers are great options for older children to visit and spend time talking, reading or even watching TV with Seniors whose relatives may not live nearby. Another way to interact with and learn from older generations is to deliver meals to homebound individuals through Meals on Wheels, which even has the opportunity in some cities to do your deliveries on bike instead of in the car. "From a senior's standpoint, they do not usually see anyone during the day, and a visit from a lively, smiling child makes all the difference in the world," says Enid Borden, president and CEO of Meals on Wheels Association of America. "From the child's perspective, they get the chance to talk to and learn from the very people who raised us, fought our wars, taught our schools and built our country's history."
- *Enlist your friends and family*
Once you catch the giving spirit, consider asking your family and friends to join in. You can build care packages for the troops overseas or for homeless shelter residents. You or your child can call Grandma, Grandpa and any aunts and uncles and ask each one to pick up sample-size toiletries or other items that would go nicely in a package. When everyone is on board, your child can see how important giving is to the family at large.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VOLUNTEERISM, COMMUNITY SERVICE, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING?

Both volunteerism and community service benefit the community. Volunteerism is typically driven by personal passion, but community service has taken on the nuance of being mandated by authority – a school or the courts.

Community service learning comes from school settings and takes volunteerism to a deeper level. It is a strategy that integrates service with learning. Children are encouraged to reflect on their service experience. They are encouraged to identify the needs of the recipients of the service and to think about how they were helped – what was the impact of this service. Children should also be encouraged to think about how they felt during

the experience. Community service learning is a process that helps children move to an understanding of how they can influence the world around them in positive, loving ways.

Why is community service learning important for a child? It develops:

- an increased sense of social responsibility and an appetite for “doing unto others.”
- a global sense of society while exposing children to diversity and multiculturalism.
- interpersonal and communication skills.

Sometimes, all a parent has to do is to ask a child, “How do you think the person you were helping feels now?” or “How did doing this make you feel?” or “What does it mean to pass the gift of love along?”

NEED SOME IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED?

- Actively participate in Board of Christian Outreach drives.
- Start your own food drive. Every time you go to the supermarket, ask your child to buy one can of appropriate food. Place it in a special place at home. When the Board of Christian Outreach runs a food drive, have your child drop the cans off.
- Make baked goods for a meal delivery services or other agency (The Board of Christian Outreach has a list of local agencies).
- Plan an activity at a senior center that involves crafts that are simple for young children and allow for ample interaction between the kids and residents. Relational activities are always the most meaningful for a child (or anyone else).
- Check with local nursing homes for “toddler days.”
- Contact nonprofit organizations you like and ask how you can help. “Volunteer Opportunities” can be found on our website. It lists all local non-profit agencies that want volunteer help. Some like young people to volunteer.
- Select no-longer-wanted toys and gently used board games and take them to Goodwill for donation. Be sure to go inside so your child can see what happens to those donations. Similarly, collect old books and donate them to the library.
- Organize a board game night at your local nursing home. Gather your friends and favorite classic games and plan a fun afternoon.
- Make “Birthday Boxes.” Put cake mix, frosting, candles, and a few toys in a box. Then donate them to a local food pantry for those families in need of a birthday cake. Ask a local bakery for a plain white box and let your child decorate it with drawings, stickers, or old birthday cards.
- Create gift cards for Seniors
- Decorate placemats for Meals on Wheels.
- Pack a shoe box with toys for children in the hospital.
- Create anonymous get well soon cards for hospital patients.
- Go to the dollar store for supplies and make holiday bags.

- Make gratitude baskets. A “basket” can be a box or paper bag. Fill it with baked cookies and bring it to the local fire department. Fire fighters love to meet children who donate gifts, and they’ll always accept treats.
- Good at sewing or knitting? Start a knitting group with friends and donate homemade blankets to people in need.
- Offer to rake leaves, shovel the walk, or do housework for an elderly neighbor.
- Teach computer skills to the elderly.
- Become a volunteer tutor. If you excel in a particular subject, share that knowledge with other kids who are struggling.
- Make holiday decorations for an agency – pumpkins, Thanksgiving turkeys, winter snow flakes, autumn leaves, spring flowers, or Christmas decorations.
- Collect sleep-away camp items for kids participating in BOCO-supported Norwalk summer camper program.
- If you have a tag sale, sell lemonade and donate the proceeds. Be sure to write, “Proceeds will be donated to XYZ” on the sign.
- Make no-sew toys for dogs at PAWS.
- Plant flowers (crocuses are ideal and need no special care) at a nursing home.
- Collect gently used and outgrown sports equipment and donate them to a local agency.
- Read to residents at a nursing home.
- Organize a toiletries drive for a homeless shelter.
- Donate outgrown prom dresses to Person to Person.
- Be a homework helper or tutor at a local after-school program.
- Mow the lawn of an elderly neighbor.
- Volunteer in a local soup kitchen.
- Volunteer to give music lessons to people in your community. We know one middle school girl who was a piano player. She gathered a friend who was a dancer and two friends who sang. They put on a show once a month at a local nursing home.
- Offer your help taking registrations, handing out water bottles, cleaning up after, or other administrative tasks for an event. It might not feel as glamorous, but this volunteer work is actually really helpful to non-profits!
- Give music lessons to children in after-school programs.
- Stamford Museum and Nature Center – farm animal care, clerical and computer work, help with special events.
- Volunteer at a local Boys and Girls Club.
- Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens – everything from weeding to trail maintenance, helping with events.
- SoundWaters – for students 15 years and older. Assist educators or participate in your own research.
- Check out <https://www.volunteermatch.org> and specify Norwalk, CT. Lists volunteer opportunities.
- Play bridge with Seniors at assisted living complexes and nursing homes.
- Offer to help at the church. Students often mistakenly think that volunteering for activities through a church does not help their application to private schools or colleges. Nothing could be further from the truth.

AFTERWORD

Parents often think that volunteerism helps when it comes to private school and college admissions. That's not necessarily true.

Yes, schools pay careful attention to a student's extra-class activities. But what they want is a student who demonstrates serious interest in that activity. There is a real difference between a student who worked at a nursing home for an hour when in the 9th grade and a student who has volunteered in some capacity for an hour every month for the past three years.

While admissions officers certainly will not think poorly of any form of volunteerism, they work hard to discern a candidate's level and depth of commitment. They pay attention to length of service, unusual service endeavors, activities that require uncommon initiative, and demonstrated leadership. Service is often a leading decision-making factor after GPA and high-stakes test (ISEE, SSAT, ACT, SAT) scores.