

20 Ways to Volunteer

1. Homeless Shelters

Most homeless shelters welcome volunteers and have a variety of programs through which you can get involved. You might help prepare or distribute meals, work behind the scenes in the business office, help organize a food drive to stock the pantry, etc. Look in the phone book for a local homeless shelter if you are interested.

2. Food Banks

Food banks often work with homeless shelters, but they also serve poor people living in the community (especially around the holidays). Food banks collect food, manage their inventory, and distribute food to those in need.

3. The Guideposts Sweater Project

Sponsored by Guideposts magazine. People around the country knit sweaters that are then sent to needy children around the world.

4. Ronald McDonald House

Ronald McDonald Houses provide a low-cost "home-away-from-home" for parents and children to stay during medical treatment. Volunteers help prepare meals, talk to families, take care of the house, and so on. Call the Ronald McDonald House in your area to find out more.

5. Special Olympics

The website describes a wide variety of volunteer activities, including sports training, fund raising, administrative help, competition planning and staffing, etc. Look in the phone book for a local office or search the Special Olympics Web Site for more information.

6. Habitat for Humanities

Habitat for Humanities builds and gives houses to poor people in local communities. Call your local office for information about volunteer programs in your area.

7. State Parks

Many state parks offer volunteer programs, where you can try anything from educational programs to trail construction and maintenance. Contact a state park near you and see what options are available.

8. City Programs

Most large cities offer a wide range of volunteer opportunities. Look in the phone book and call around to see what might be available where you live.

9. Helping Others Learn to Read

Literacy volunteers act as tutors who help illiterate children and adults learn this important skill.

10. Hospitals

Many hospitals have volunteer programs to help patients both inside and outside the hospital. The volunteer programs allow participants to explore medical careers and gain work experience. Contact local hospitals to learn more about opportunities in your area.

11. Libraries

Many libraries need help re-shelving books, running children's programs, making books available to the community, and so on.

20 Ways to Volunteer

12. Senior Citizens Centers

Many senior citizen centers offer volunteer programs to provide friendship and community activities to senior citizens. If you would like working with senior citizens, call a senior citizen center in your neighborhood and see what volunteer programs they have available.

13. Animal Shelters

Many animal shelters are non-profit or government organizations, and therefore they welcome volunteers to help take care of animals, keep facilities clean and work with the public. Call a local animal shelter for more information.

14. United Way

The United Way is a nationwide umbrella organization for thousands of charitable organizations. There are local United way affiliates across the country and they need volunteers.

15. Red Cross

The American Red Cross helps people in emergencies - whether it's half a million disaster victims or one sick child who needs blood. Volunteer opportunities exist across the country. Contact your local Red Cross for more information.

16. Salvation Army

The Salvation Army provides social services, rehabilitation centers, disaster services, worship opportunities, character building activities for all ages, and character building groups for all ages. Volunteer opportunities exist across the country.

17. Environmental Organizations

You can help in many ways: by helping lobby on conservation issues, by leading hikes, and other activities, or by lending a hand at the Chapter Office. Contact the local office of an environmental organization near you.

18. Political Campaigns

If it's an election year, there are thousands of opportunities to volunteer in political campaigns around the country. You can learn more than you imagine by helping a candidate win election. Pick a candidate whose ideas you believe in (either on the local, state, or national level) and volunteer to be a part of his or her campaign.

19. 800 Number Volunteer

Many 800 help-lines rely on volunteers to staff the phones and handle other tasks. If there is an 800 phone bank in your area, you may be able to volunteer to help out.

20. Website creation

Many small charities and organizations do not yet have websites. When creating a website for a charity, you will want to take care to listen very carefully to the people who work for the charity to understand exactly what they want their website to look and feel like.