

Volunteering

(November 2020)

Volunteering takes many forms and is performed by a wide range of people. Opportunities range from working in administrative or commercial capacities, to practical support, campaigning, fundraising, advice and counseling. Some people offer support to individuals and groups or to people with illnesses or disabilities. Others volunteer on an as-needed basis, such as in response to a natural disaster.

Many volunteers are trained in the areas they choose to work in, such as in health, education, or emergency rescue.

Volunteering is about people working on behalf of others to promote good or to improve the quality of life, without being motivated by financial or material gain. Volunteering adds to the overall economy, by reducing the burden on government spending, as well as to social outcomes, such as, building more stable communities. Students and graduates who get involved in volunteering gain valuable work experience and skills.

Why Volunteer

- Volunteering offers many varied and interesting opportunities and giving your time freely to benefit others is intrinsically rewarding. Remember you have lots to offer in terms of your personal qualities and abilities. Some of the benefits include:
- Work experience – even if you are not very altruistic, volunteering offers you a ‘safe’ environment in which to test out certain career areas and becoming a volunteer may be a necessary part of your career plan. It may be a prerequisite for some careers, for example, teaching, social work, the charity sector, and environmental conservation. Indeed all types of employers view volunteering as valuable evidence of personal development, commitment and reliability. It is an opportunity to enhance your CV and it may give you the advantage over other candidates at the recruitment and selection stage as you progress in your career.
- Skills – you can develop many practical skills as well as transferrable skills, such as, communication, interpersonal, self-reliance, time management and problem solving.
- Meeting new people - volunteering helps to widen your social circle and to network, by meeting people from different communities, backgrounds and age groups, as well as students from other degree courses and universities. It also helps you to learn more about life and community outside of university.
- Improving confidence and feeling of self-worth - being an important part of a team or being highly valued by people you are working with can do wonders for your self-esteem.

Types of Work

Typical types of work are categorised on the National Volunteer Development Agency website www.volunteer.ie/ (see also <https://www.studentvolunteer.ie/TUDublin> and include residential and non-residential opportunities in Ireland, as well as overseas opportunities, as follows:

- **Adult education:** wide-ranging opportunities include one-to-one literacy, English language classes for asylum seekers, educational programmes in museums and facilitating group work.
- **Animals:** you can volunteer together with your own animal in 'pet-facilitated therapy', assist with the care of abandoned animals, or undertake interpretative work at the zoo.
- **Arts, culture and media:** work in the field of amateur drama, become a tour guide in a library, produce or present your own radio show, or do anything else creative you like.

- Campaigning and awareness-raising – there are opportunities on a range of issues including marketing, public relations and hands-on campaigning, from health to environmentalism.
- **Children and young people:** lots of different opportunities include childminding, play-working, youth leading, working with young people at risk, educational programmes, children's rights, mentoring, homework clubs, the guide and scout movement, etc.
- **Fundraising:** One day street collections or help with ongoing fundraising strategies,
- **Health and disability** - a variety of opportunities working with people who are ill or disabled, either mentally and physically (or both), including companionship, assisting with practical skills, recreational activities and complementary therapies.
- **Help lines** – there are many volunteer-operated telephone help lines, dealing with issues as diverse as parenting, violence, mental health, consumer affairs, and legal issues.
- **Management** - all voluntary and community organisations have a voluntary management committee or board of directors, and many look for people with particular talents, including legal, financial and other management skills.
- **Office-based work** - include receptionist, administrative, library workers and graphic design.
- **Older people** - befriending, assisting and entertaining older people in hospitals or clubs, as well as visiting them in their own homes
- **Social work** – opportunities for a variety of work in the areas of homelessness, the prison service, asylum seekers, domestic violence, hospices, drugs and victim support.
- **Practical work** - from hairdressing to driving, gardening, maintenance to planting trees - practically anything!
- **Retail** – includes charity shops, as well as travelling stalls, fair trade establishments and coffee shops in museums and hospitals.
- **Sports and recreation:** combining your love of sports, such as football or swimming, with your voluntary work!
- **Virtual Volunteering:** in whole or in part, over the internet, sometimes known as online volunteering or cyber service e.g. create, design or maintain a website; proof read; translate documents; submit articles; supply email answering service; research.

Some Issues to Consider

Many voluntary organisations try to match your skills and knowledge to their needs. In most cases you may have to attend an interview or fill out an application form. Vetting procedures may be undertaken in the interests of children and 'at risk' populations, which the organisation has a legal responsibility to consider. Before going ahead there are some questions and issues you may need to consider, such as:

- Researching the areas and causes that are important to you.
- Considering what you have to offer in terms of your skills, interests and personality.
- Looking at groups or organisations that work with issues you feel strongly about
- Looking for a charity or volunteer group with a job profile that suits your aims. If you wish to develop a particular skill you may also need to find out if it incorporates supervision or appraisal sessions to assess your development.
- Considering how much time you can realistically spare, as some opportunities may require regular and sustained involvement.
 - Asking for written information about the charity's programmes, finances and credentials and making sure that you are comfortable with the organisations fundraising methods and policies on expenditure and management of funds. Application of best practice and policy in terms of safeguarding and protection of children and vulnerable adults and also on

employment rights. See guidelines on www.volunteer.ie and <https://www.gov.uk/browse/housing-local-services>

Volunteering Overseas

- Volunteering overseas has all the benefits of volunteering in Ireland as well as providing the opportunity to experience a new culture and country.
- You should bear in mind that it will take longer to organise a volunteer placement overseas so make sure that you allow yourself enough time.
- Types of work include conservation, construction, education, youth work, social and community work and healthcare.
- You will find that most overseas placements will require you to pay something towards taking part, sometimes called a 'donation'. This is usually to cover accommodation, food, travel within the country and insurance; flight costs may not always be included.
- Some placements can be quite pricey so it makes sense to shop around. The amount that you require for your placement will probably mean that you will have to do some fundraising.
- Voluntary organisations should be able to help you with fundraising by providing ideas and suggesting possible sources of funds.
- The length of placements varies; it is unusual to find placements that last longer than twelve months and those that do are usually for specialist roles such as medics and engineers.
- Get everything in writing and if possible speak to someone; a student or graduate who has worked with the organisation recently in relation to:
 - the travel arrangements
 - accommodation details
 - work details – hours, payment and supports and what they do to help if there is an emergency
 - insurance - does it cover repatriation if you become ill? Does it cover personal injury? Have you seen a copy of the policy to check the cover?
 - The values of the organisation
 - Payment. Find out where the money goes. How much goes on travel, accommodation, administration?
 - Who is the organisation benefiting?
 - If the interests of the local population being served? Will your activities be welcomed by the local people?
 - In the last analysis, if you receive too many vague or unsatisfactory answers to these questions, think twice about going. It's your own choice but as in all transactions, let the buyer beware!