



Aging Wisely With Linda

Consultations/Consulting • Counseling/Coaching
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Volunteering: Good for Your Health & Spirit!

Years ago, I directed an Alzheimer's Respite program and my most dedicated volunteer was a retired nurse with the patience of a saint. Esther was volunteering into her 90s and always took the most anxious participant to companion with for the entire afternoon. When I asked her why she volunteered she said it gave her life a sense of purpose; she was learning new skills and said since volunteering she had less pain from arthritis and felt healthier. She said she felt she was getting far more than she was giving.



The Data on Volunteering

The Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency, says that a quarter of individuals over age 55 volunteer. AARP's Experience Corps reports that 97% of the volunteers they surveyed said that volunteering gave them a sense of purpose.

Recent research has shown the health benefits of volunteering include lowering mortality, decreasing depression levels, reducing blood pressure, increasing functional abilities, and diminishing the risk of heart disease. Some of this can be attributed to being more active, which is one of the highest contributors to good health and positive aging. However, volunteering also lowers stress -- a significant factor in disease.

Other benefits of volunteering are increased social connections, which are important as we age and friends and family move away or die. Social isolation increases mortality and other health-related problems. Many volunteers report that these activities are fulfilling and increase a sense of happiness. Others report they have learned new skills and some have gone on to take part-time paying positions within the organization they had assignments.

An article in the Harvard Business Review reported that volunteering your time makes you feel like you have more time. It also said that those who donate to charity feel wealthier than those who don't.



A Path to Volunteering

I have volunteered since I was a teenager, which reminds me to encourage children to do such – it builds character and empathy, and opens doors to future careers. I am not sure how I personally stepped into this being a life value – possibly because my parents were both involved in Scouting and church activities. I can tell you that my personal experiences as an adult volunteering with homeless organizations and participating in mission trips (both domestic and international) have added to my sense of gratitude and expanded my awareness of how much “love” is valued in cultures and peoples that have far less than most of us.

If you are not connected and looking for a place to volunteer, there are hundreds of organizations in desperate need for your time and skills. It is important to find a placement that gives you joy and sense of purpose. There are several national websites that will match your skills with needs in your community. Two of those are [Volunteer Match](#) and [Moving Worlds](#) (international opportunities). If you are concerned with Covid, Volunteer Match includes virtual opportunities for volunteering. Of course, belonging to a service club like Rotary is also a way to expand your touch, both locally and internationally.

We have the Village movement in Contra Costa, Alameda, and San Francisco. These grass roots organizations, created by seniors and predominately run by volunteers, assist all in continuing to live in their own homes and communities as they age. To find a Village near you, conduct a national search through [Village to Village Network](#) .

Your health, soul, community, and world will be enriched as you reach out to help others in the smallest ways. What a better world we would have if we all volunteered just 4 hours a week!

Affirmation: “I give of my time and talents to the community at least once a month.”

Resources:

[Volunteer Match](#)

[International Volunteer HQ](#)

[Moving Worlds](#)

[Village to Village Network](#)