

Volunteering – Something to Tantalise Every Teenager

There are all sorts of reasons to encourage your child to consider volunteering. This article explains why volunteering is so beneficial, outlines the types of opportunities available and provides tips on how young people can find suitable placements.

Why volunteer?

Volunteering can give your son or daughter the opportunity to:

- do something productive, expand their outlook and meet new people
- develop their self-confidence – particularly important if they've been out of education, training or work for a while
- develop some useful skills – not just the obvious ones (communication, teamwork, independence and so on), but perhaps more specific skills such as horticulture, ICT or counselling
- find out whether they're suited to a certain career
- boost their prospects – they'll have something positive to put on their CV or in their UCAS personal statement and to talk about in interviews; they may also get a reference or achieve a qualification
- gain experience; for some types of work – archaeology or social work, for instance – they'll need relevant experience to stand a chance of getting a training place or paid employment in that area
- develop compassion, empathy, respect ... in other words, become a better person to be around!

What's out there?

There are far too many opportunities to list, but your son or daughter could consider:

- work in the community – anything from helping at a shelter for people who are homeless to working on hospital radio
- practical work – archaeological digs, nature conservation or ecological fieldwork
- raising funds/campaigning – collecting money on flag days, working in a charity shop, organising fundraising events or helping to build a website for a good cause.

It could be a one-off event (such as marshalling at a charity race), a regular commitment (a

weekly swimming session for children with disabilities, for instance), an intensive project (e.g. helping at a residential retreat) or part of a gap year (working on an organic farm in Australia or at an orphanage in India).

What to choose?

Encourage your son or daughter to ask themselves some searching questions.

- What is their main motivation to volunteer?
- Do they have a commitment to a particular cause?
- What sort of activity would suit their personality, skills and aptitudes?
- Where do they want to volunteer – up the road or in Outer Mongolia?
- How much time do they have to commit?

When considering the options, they should find out what support, supervision and training will be available. It's also important that they get a clear idea of any costs involved. If going abroad, what about flights, insurance, visas and project fees? These costs can be considerable. In some cases, expenses and/or pocket money is paid, and food and accommodation are provided.

How to get started?

Your son or daughter could volunteer through an organisation they belong to (perhaps their school/college, Scouts or Guides), through a charity or voluntary organisation, or off their own bat – shopping for an elderly neighbour or setting up their own community project. The [National Citizen Service](#) in England offers those aged 15-17 a chance to take part in adventurous and social activities during the holidays. Volunteering is also a key element of [The Duke of Edinburgh's Award](#).

There's no shortage of information on volunteering. Most towns and cities have volunteer centres and there are plenty of useful websites. A good starting point is to search for suitable opportunities through www.do-it.org.uk or [Volunteering Matters](#). To find out about volunteering abroad, your son or daughter could look at information through organisations such as the [International Citizen Service](#), [World Service Enquiry](#) or one of the many organisations that provide projects for gap year students. Advice on how to volunteer safely overseas is available on [GOV.UK](#).

As a parent it can sometimes be frustrating trying to get your teenager interested in anything, but with all the opportunities out there, there's bound to be something to spark a response.

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