7 Good Reasons to Give Back

Improve Your Health and the World Around You

According to the Giving USA Foundation, charitable giving in the United States reached an estimated $295 billion in 2006—a new record. The record-setting donations included $1.9 billion from Warren Buffett, paid as the first installment of his 20-year pledge of more than $30 billion to four different foundations. But you don’t have to be rich to make a difference. Millions of ordinary Americans—people who you pass on the street every day—also gave to charity, for the sake of making the world a better place, one dollar at a time.

Whether you donate money or time, giving back is beneficial—and not just for the recipients. Research has shown that the old adage, “it’s better to give than to receive” is true after all.

A Gallup survey on volunteering in the U.S.A. found that 52% of volunteers do it because they like doing something useful and helping others. Another 38% said they enjoy doing volunteer work and feeling good about themselves.

Besides feeling good about yourself for doing something for others, giving back is also good for your physical health. In a Canadian study, 85% of Ontario volunteers rated their health as “good,” compared to 79% of non-volunteers. Only 2% of volunteers reported “poor” health, one-third the amount of non-volunteers who reported the same health status.

Still other studies have shown a relationship between volunteering and increased self-esteem, with volunteers reporting both greater personal empowerment and better health. Doing for others may stimulate the release of endorphins, which has been linked to improved nervous and immune system functions, too.

Many people report a “high” from volunteering, similar to the good feelings that come from exercise. Others have found that volunteering can help fight depression. Helping others can help take your mind off your own problems and enable you to see the bigger picture. Once you see the difference you can make in another person’s life, your own problems can seem smaller and more manageable.

As more research is showing that people with fewer social contacts have shorter life spans than people with wide social circles, regardless of race, income level or other lifestyle factors. If you are lonely or live in an area far away from friends and family, volunteering is one way to build a social life and improve
your emotional and physical health at the same time.

Here are 7 More Reasons to Volunteer:

1. **Develop new skills.** Gaining skills, knowledge and expertise are common side effects of volunteering. Giving others your time brings you interesting and challenging opportunities that might not come along otherwise. This experience can be added to your resume and could result in a better paying job in the future.

2. **Make social connections.** Loneliness and boredom are common among retirees, students, and transplants to a new city. Volunteering can relieve this sense of social isolation and help you fill empty hours in the day.

3. **Give back to your community.** Doing something for the community you live in and returning the favor to those who have helped you are strong motivators. Everyone, rich or poor, takes from society, and volunteering is one way to show a sense of appreciation.

4. **Develop and grow as a person.** Volunteering is an excellent way to explore your likes and dislikes. If you’re interested in a new career, volunteer in the field first to see if you will actually like it. You may find a totally unrelated field is a much better fit for you, one you’d never consider if you hadn’t volunteered there first.

5. **Gain a new perspective.** Life can be hard and when you’re feeling down, your problems can seem insurmountable. Volunteering can offer a new perspective—seeing people who are worse off than you are, yet still hanging in there, can help you see your life in a whole new light.

6. **Know that you're needed.** Feeling needed and appreciated are important, and you may not get that appreciation from your paid work or home life where the things you do are expected or taken for granted. When you volunteer, you realize just how much you are truly needed. Meeting people who need your help is a strong incentive to continue—people are depending on you. If you don’t do it, who will?

7. **Boost your self-esteem.** Many volunteers experience a sense of increased self-esteem and greater self-worth. Helping others makes you feel good about yourself, because you’re doing something for someone that they couldn’t do for themselves.

Research has shown that the good feelings you experience when helping others may be just as important to your health as exercise and a healthy diet. But it’s the smile from a child or thankful person that shows you’re really making a difference in someone's life. And that’s the greatest feeling in the world.