



Why People Volunteer

People volunteer for a wide variety of reasons. Some motives are altruistic in that they involve a desire to help others. But others are wrongly considered "selfish" just because they also give something back to the volunteer. It is just fine to benefit from volunteering. In fact, the most successful forms of volunteering are an exchange—when the giver and the recipient both come away with something positive. This makes volunteering less an act of "charity," based on the paternalistic attitude of "we who have so much must give to those who have so little."

In some situations, the lines between volunteer and recipient blur so much it is hard to tell who is who. If a group of seven-year-olds visits a senior center after school, bringing a welcome diversion but also getting help with homework, does it matter whether the youngsters or the elders are the "volunteers"?

So when you think about why you want to volunteer and set about finding the best volunteer assign-

ment for you, consider the many possible motivations you can legitimately have. Here are some:

- to feel needed;
- to share a skill;
- to get to know a community;
- to demonstrate commitment to a cause or belief;
- to gain leadership skills;
- to act out a fantasy;
- to do your civic duty;
- because of pressure from a friend or relative;
- to keep busy for recognition;
- to repay a debt;
- to donate your professional skills;
- because there is no one else to do it;
- to have an impact;
- to learn something new;
- to fill up some free time;
- to help a friend or relative;
- for escape;
- to become an "insider;"
- because of guilt;
- to be challenged;
- to be a watchdog;
- to feel proud;
- to make new friends;
- to explore a career;
- to help someone;
- as therapy;
- to do something different from your job;
- for fun;
- for religious reasons;
- to earn academic credit;
- to keep skills alive;
- because an agency is nearby;
- to have an excuse to do what you love;
- to be able to criticize;
- to assure progress;
- to feel good;
- to be part of a team;
- to gain status;
- because you were asked to test yourself;
- to build your resume;
- to be an agent of change;
- because of personal experience with the problem, illness, or cause;
- or to stand up and be counted.

You will probably have some special reasons of your own. Remember that the motivations you have in selecting a place to offer your services may not be the reasons you stay. Once you're volunteering in a specific position, you will continue to serve as long as you feel that your efforts are accomplishing something, that your talents are appreciated, and that you make a difference. And if you also like the people with whom you work, so much the better!

