

Volunteering as you age



Volunteering is great for building strong social connections and enriching your life. It's a powerful way to contribute to the greater good.

You can find your sense of purpose when volunteering. Your contribution can make a big difference to a lot of people who need help.

And there are so many ways you can give back to your community. For example, you could volunteer at your local library, food bank, or even the zoo.

Volunteering can make you happy and healthy

Helping others and contributing to your community is good for your health and happiness.

Volunteering provides physical, mental, and social benefits. It can improve your quality of life and give you a sense of belonging. Many studies have found a strong link between happiness and volunteering. People over 70 who volunteer experience improved mental health.

Adults over the age of 50 who volunteer on a regular basis are also less likely to develop high blood pressure.

Where to find volunteering opportunities

Volunteer work is on offer all over Australia. There's a good chance you'll find a role that matches what you're interested in.

- Visit your local volunteering organisation, or search GoVolunteer, the Volunteering Australia database.
- SEEK Volunteer is another big database of voluntary jobs. It operates in partnership with Volunteering Australia.
- If you're interested in volunteering for a particular organisation, check their website for more information about the roles on offer.
- If you are feeling adventurous you can also try volunteering abroad or have a volunteer vacation.

Volunteering for older people

Many organisations value older volunteers as mentors and role models. Here are just a few larger organisations that have a good reputation with older people:

- COTA Australia (Council on the Ageing)
- Heart Foundation
- Meals on Wheels
- Cancer Council
- Grey Nomads
- Farm Army
- Seniors & Aged Care Volunteering Organisations | GoVolunteer

Older people are often the backbone of volunteer programs run by local councils and community centres. If you'd like to be more involved with your community, contact your local council.



Types of volunteering

There are many different types of voluntary roles. For example, short-term, long-term, and one-time volunteering options. Your schedule, interests, and preferences should help you choose a role.

If uncertain, start with a small commitment. This is a good way to try volunteering. It can also give you a better idea about the kind of voluntary position that might be the right fit for you.

Short term volunteering also gives you the chance to explore your interests and passions. It can lead to self-discovery, helping you to identify your strengths.

How to start volunteering

- Assess how much time you can realistically commit to volunteering.
- Make a list of your skills, or skills you want to learn.
- Identify areas of interest. What issues or causes appeal to you? What activities make you feel most fulfilled?
- Research different volunteering opportunities and organisations. Look for positions that match your interests and values.
- Explore the roles and responsibilities of each opportunity.
- Check if the organisation provides training for volunteers. This can help you build new skills and feel more confident in your role.
- Consider the level of support available from the organisation. Having a mentor can be helpful.
- Research how the organisation measures and communicates its impact. This matters if you want a role where you can see the results of your efforts.
- Is there a trial period for finding out if a role is the right fit for you?
- Volunteering should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Taking the time to choose the right role will also help you to connect with more like-minded people.

How to understand if volunteering is right for you

It's a good idea to reflect on any volunteering experience. It doesn't matter if it's a one-off or short-term role. Your time is valuable.

Even when you've found the right role, reflecting on it is important. This can ensure it remains meaningful. Reflection also lets you celebrate your achievements.

Volunteering environments may change over time. If a long-term voluntary role is no longer a fulfilling experience, find a new one that motivates you. There will always be good opportunities available to you.



References

Anderson, N. D., Damianakis, T., Kröger, E., Wagner, L. M., Dawson, D. R., Binns, M. A., Bernstein, S., Caspi, E., Cook, S. L., & The BRAVO Team. (2014). The benefits associated with volunteering among seniors: A critical review and recommendations for future research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(6), 1505–1533. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-35224-001>

Tabassum F, Mohan J, Smith P. (2016). Association of volunteering with mental well-being: a lifecourse of a national population-based longitudinal study in the UK. *BMJ Open*, 6(8), e011327. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/8/e011327>

Sneed, R. S., & Cohen, S. (2013). A prospective study of volunteerism and hypertension risk in older adults. *Psychology and Aging*, 28(2), 578–586. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2013-21685-006>

Volunteer Forever. (2023, October). Volunteer abroad opportunities for seniors and retirees. https://www.volunteerforever.com/article_post/volunteer-abroad-opportunities-for-seniors-and-retirees/

How to use this information

LiveUp provides free information to help you make informed decisions about your health. This information is for general and educational purposes only, is not intended to provide a comprehensive guide, and does not replace medical advice.

Everyone is different, so some of these tips may work better for you than others. You should use your own judgment and seek medical advice when applying this information to yourself, to determine if it is suitable in your circumstances. Your use of, or reliance on, this information is solely at your own risk. Independent Living Assessment Incorporated is not responsible or liable for any injury, loss, or damage caused as a result of your use of, or reliance on, this information.



Scan the QR code for more helpful articles and downloadable exercise sheets on the LiveUp website.

Contact us

Website: liveup.org.au

Email: support@liveup.org.au

Phone: 1800 951 971

Facebook: facebook.com/LiveUpAus

LiveUp is a healthy ageing initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.