

## Doing Good for Others this Holiday Season

### The Gift of Service



## HOLIDAY VOLUNTEERING

As we consider all that 2020 has presented us, it's easy to see that many around us need assistance and support. It may seem like there is little that we can do after hearing so much information about food scarcity issues, increasing unemployment rates, rising mental health concerns, substance abuse and a host of other issues that are impacting our world. But, the goal of this article is to assure you that if you want to make an impact with these challenges and other issues, all you need is a desire to serve and a plan of action. And the great thing about volunteering is that there is something for each of us! It does not matter if you are young or old, have a disability, have limited income or time, or have no clue how to get started. The first requirement to engage as a volunteer is that you have a heart to make a difference in the lives of others and this holiday season is a great time to start volunteering!

You may be considering volunteering because it's a good thing to do and you have the time, talent or resources to help others. Did you know that volunteering not only impacts those you set out to help, but benefits you too? Research has shown that people who volunteer are happier and healthier than those who don't. It may seem counter-intuitive to volunteer during these uncertain times, however, the more we give the happier we feel. These feelings of happiness produce hormones that reduce our stress levels, enhances our physical health and improve our mental, and emotional wellbeing. Volunteering is also an opportunity to establish meaningful connections with others, engage in fun activities that are mentally and physically stimulating and bring purpose to our lives. Volunteering may help you develop new skills, or provide you with greater insight, and improve your relationship skills. So, while you may be giving of your time and talents, you are also improving the quality of your life.

### Steps towards Becoming a Volunteer

Think about your talents, skills and interests. Start with what you know best to help you explore opportunities to volunteer. Your passions and talents will give you some ideas as to how you can serve others. Do you enjoy singing? Consider putting a smile on the faces of people residing in a senior living facility or in the hospital with your melodious singing. Love working with children? How about a zoom meeting, teaching or sharing a skill? Maybe you are an excellent cook. What a great skill to teach new mothers or individuals with disabilities. Volunteer to cook a homemade meal...who doesn't love to eat! Sometimes we take things that we do well and that come naturally to us for granted. Organizations can use those very talents. Donating and

distributing household goods, or toys to a recovery or children’s program could be a perfect way to help during this holiday season. No matter how big or small your talents and skills seem to you, they can be used to help improve someone else’s life. Even in situations where others may perceive a person’s disability or challenge with an addiction as a negative, volunteers can help others learn valuable skills and be a source of inspiration. With a little soul searching, you’re sure to come up with a list of strengths to start you on a path to volunteering.

It’s also important to know who you want to help and what your strengths are in order to narrow your decision with whom to volunteer. Do you prefer working with the elderly, children, teenagers, animals, women, individuals from other countries or those previously incarcerated? Or, do you prefer working one-on-one, with a team or a more hands-off approach such as online or over the telephone? Know what causes are important to you. It could be anything from climate change, domestic violence, literacy, feeding the hungry, animal rescues, mental health or human trafficking, to name a few.



[Find the Right Fit.](#) In addition to the factors listed above, decide the frequency and amount of time that you have to volunteer. Whether it’s daily, weekly, monthly or by project (i.e. Thanksgiving Turkey give-away or Back-to-School Fundraiser), most organizations will be happy to accommodate your schedule. By connecting to volunteer organizations that support a cause in which you believe and assuming the activities fit with your schedule, the odds that it will benefit others are increased. Also consider selecting a volunteer activity that you can do with your family; it will set an example and leave a lasting impression on your family members for years to come.

[Determine where there is need.](#) Sometimes it may be difficult to identify where to begin your volunteer journey because you may have so many interests. Volunteering with an organization that is in desperate need of help can be just as fulfilling as selecting a special interest volunteer activity. Realizing that you are a part of something bigger than yourself, is very rewarding when you are concerned with assisting those in need. Completing administrative or accounting responsibilities, setting up or breaking down events, and beautifying public and private spaces are examples of various tasks that you could volunteer to accomplish. Throughout the U.S. many food banks and food pantries are struggling to keep up with the need and are currently seeking volunteers to partner with them. Contact local churches, synagogues, shelters, schools, social service agencies or community organizations to find out what needs they have.

[If you don’t see it, create it.](#) Disappointed that there isn’t an organization to assist where you see a need? Think about ways in which you can begin to meet the need, even if it starts with you helping one person. The impact that you can have on that one person can be life-changing! Start within your neighborhood or your

community and partner with other like-minded individuals, service groups or faith-based organizations to develop a plan to address these needs. Noticed that children in your neighborhood need help with reading? Talk with parents and see how you can help and bring others along. Aware of several veterans in your community that are being overlooked? Seek national or local organizations first and then do what you feel is within your power to assist. For every cause that needs to be addressed, there is a volunteer opportunity waiting for someone to act on it. "Be the change that you want to see in the world!"

**Below are a few national and local Michigan organizations you can consider volunteering with:**

Local Michigan Volunteer Opportunities

**Forgotten Harvest** ([www.forgottenharvest.org](http://www.forgottenharvest.org)) provides families in need with fresh and nutritious food free of charge.

**Volunteers of American Michigan** ([www.voami.org](http://www.voami.org)) provides help for the homeless, food for the hungry, employment and shelter for veterans, housing for poor seniors and a helping hand for struggling families.

**Toys for Tots Michigan** – ([www.toysfortots.org](http://www.toysfortots.org)) provides toys to children in need.

**Home FurEver** – ([www.homeforever.com](http://www.homeforever.com)) a nonprofit that fosters and rescues canines.

**Michigan Department of Health & Human Services** – ([www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov)) community & volunteer opportunities with MDHHS's Community Resource program.

**Gleaners** – ([www.gcfb.org](http://www.gcfb.org)) – a Detroit food bank serving Southeastern Michiganders.

**Nextdoor** – ([www.nextdoor.com](http://www.nextdoor.com)) community app. that informs local communities about volunteer opportunities (information, and many other events) going on in your community.

National Volunteer Opportunities

**Volunteer Match** – ([www.volunteermatch.org/covid19](http://www.volunteermatch.org/covid19)) connects volunteers to virtual and onsite volunteer opportunities to communities impacted by COVID-19 and local volunteer opportunities.

**Feeding America** – ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)) the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization. Has volunteer opportunities throughout the U.S.

**Letters to Strangers** – ([www.letterstostrangers.org](http://www.letterstostrangers.org)) coordinates writing anonymous heartfelt letters to individuals between the ages of 13-24 who have mental health challenges.

**Elks -Adopt a Veteran** ([www.elks.org/vets/adoptaveteran](http://www.elks.org/vets/adoptaveteran)) local lodges adopt a veteran and contribute supplies, letters or gifts and spend time with the veteran.

**Salvation Army Angel Tree** – ([www.saangeltree.org](http://www.saangeltree.org)) provides Christmas gifts for hundred of children and senior adults around the country.



**Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling  
for you & your family.**

Call us- we're here to help **800.448.8326**