

# VOLUNTEER: REAP BENEFITS OF HELPING OTHERS

## Nola Brown

Want to make some new friends, increase your physical activity, learn new skills, help someone in need? Volunteering could be just your thing. As they say, "Try it; you might like it."

We all know volunteering is a great way to meet people and make new friends but did you also know, according to research, there is a direct link between volunteering and better health?

A recent study by UnitedHealth Group, the Optimum Institute and Mashable reported 78% of those in the study said volunteering helped lower their stress level. And a whopping 94% said it helped improve their moods. Who among us doesn't need to improve our mood every now and then?

A separate study titled "The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research," stated those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer.

You say you have plenty of friends, are always in a good mood and the picture of good health. That's great! Lots of worthy local organizations would love to have someone just like you around to spread the joy. Plus, you never know, you could even learn



something new while giving of your time and talents.

Is there a skill you have always wanted to learn? Finding the perfect volunteer opportunity could be a great way to get that experience.

Volunteering provides immense networking options and many volunteers have even found employment as a result of their service.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteers have a 27% higher likelihood of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers; volunteers without a high school diploma have a 51% higher likelihood of finding employment and volunteers living in rural areas have a 55% higher likelihood of finding employment.

Perhaps getting a job is the last thing on your list of things to do. That's okay, there is no better reason to

volunteer than simply wanting to help others.

Volunteers are a vital part of every community, filling unpaid roles large and small. Many non-profits could not provide much needed services without people just like you – good folks who just want to help. It is likely you have volunteered before and know all about the "Happiness Effect."

Researchers at the London School of Economics found the more people volunteered, the happier they were. In fact, compared with people who never volunteered the odds of being "very happy" rose 7% among those who volunteered monthly and rose 12% for those who volunteered every two to four weeks.

Sold on the idea of giving volunteerism a try? There are thousands

of organizations that would love to welcome you.

Perhaps one of simplest ways to find hundreds of volunteer needs and get connected to the one of most interest to you, is to visit [www.volunteerkansas.org](http://www.volunteerkansas.org).

Volunteer Kansas' website is free and volunteer opportunities are constantly being added. Simply register as a volunteer on the site, choose a volunteer opportunity from those listed and apply to volunteer.

Someone from the organization you choose with will contact you and start you on your journey to becoming healthier, happier and wiser.

*Nola Brown is the director of Volunteer Kansas. Reach her at [nbrown@northrockinc.com](mailto:nbrown@northrockinc.com)*

## FINDING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

There's a volunteer opportunity to fit any interest and any schedule.

To find a volunteer opportunity that appeals to you:

[volunteerkansas.org](http://volunteerkansas.org) lists opportunities statewide, both one-time events and on-going projects.

United Way of the Plains Volun-

teer Center lists opportunities for all ages. [unitedwayoftheplains.org](http://unitedwayoftheplains.org)

RSVP offers volunteer opportunities for people 60-plus.

Sedgwick County – 316-660-5134.

Butler County – 316-775-0500.

Harvey County – 316-284-6870.

