



MEDWAY VOLUNTEER NETWORK

Guide for Volunteers

Volunteering your time

If you're considering volunteering your time, you'll quickly discover there are so many volunteering opportunities to choose from here in Medway – so it's important you find the right one for you.

Here are some key points you might want to consider when making your decision about where to volunteer your time:

➤ **Pick an issue you really care about**

What are some community problems that concern you? If your concerns include broad issues, like health or poverty, you may want to narrow it down to specific parts of the problem (e.g. cancer or homelessness).

➤ **Be Aware Of Your Needs**

One of the most important considerations you should think about before volunteering are your needs:

What's your motivation for doing this and what would you like to gain from your volunteering experience? This answer varies from person to person and no answer is wrong. For some it offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around them. For others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge. There are lots of reasons people volunteer; and organisations are always grateful for the support and simply find it helpful to understand your personal motivation for volunteering.

How much time can you offer? For many people the biggest barrier to volunteering is a busy schedule. However there is no minimum time requirement - you can put in an hour a day, an hour a month, or an hour a year. Look for times in your routine where you are not busy, or you could combine volunteering with your existing activities like family time or your hobby (e.g. photography, gardening, reading etc.).

If you are under 18 you will need to let the organisation you are considering helping know; some organisations have set age limits for their volunteers.

➤ **Consider the location of the volunteering opportunity**

Remember to pick a convenient location - sticking with a volunteer opportunity will be hard if getting there is difficult for you. Don't forget, that some organisations have 'remote working' systems – so if undertaking a volunteer role from home would suit you it might be worth asking the organisation about this.

➤ **Will you enjoy the volunteering role?**

Remember to pick something that you think will be fun, fulfilling and enjoyable.



Benefits of volunteering

The one thing volunteering is not, is 'giving your time for nothing'.

Regardless of your reason for giving your time, volunteering can offer a wealth of benefits – both to you and those who you are helping.



➤ **Become part of a unique community**

- Volunteers are the essential foundation of voluntary and community activities taking place every day in Medway. Common and shared experiences help to build the 'Medway Volunteer Network'. On Medway Voluntary Action's website (www.mva.org.uk/volunteering) you will find a range of online communities that you can join and you can also read some of Medway volunteers' stories
- '*Where volunteering begins*' is a national You Tube campaign – it shares stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, and gives an insight into the diverse range of volunteering opportunities available, and the different people who give their time. The link for this online campaign is: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLr1h22g_ZoT7751f_U4Q5R8ob2sihLQf3

➤ **Improved Mental and Physical Health**

There is increasing evidence to show that volunteering has a positive impact on mental and physical wellbeing. The right match can help to reduce stress, provide mental stimulation, find friends, reach out to the community, provide a sense of purpose, learn new skills and increase activity.

The NHS also recognises the benefits of volunteering and you can read some of their research around this on their website (link: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/volunteering/Pages/Whyvolunteer.aspx>)



➤ **Making new friends and an opportunity to socialise**

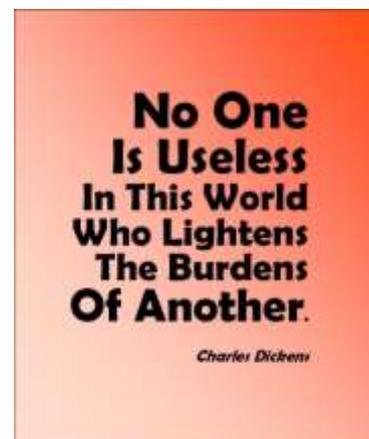
One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, especially if you are new to an area. It strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, community resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

➤ **Gaining career experience and new skills**

Volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice important skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organisation. You might also feel more comfortable stretching your wings at work once you've honed these skills in a volunteer position first.

➤ **Personal enjoyment & fulfilment**

Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore your interests and passions. Doing volunteer work you find meaningful and interesting can be a relaxing, energizing escape from your day-to-day routine of work, school, or family commitments. Volunteering also provides you with renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into your personal and professional life.



Getting the most out of volunteering

You're donating your valuable time, so it's important that you enjoy and benefit from your volunteering. To help get the best from your time volunteering, some useful things to remember include:

Ask questions. You want to make sure that the experience is right for your skills, your goals, and the time you want to spend.

Make sure you know what's expected. You should be comfortable with the organisation and understand the time commitment. If necessary, start with a small time commitment and build in some flexibility to change your commitment or focus if needed.



Don't be afraid to make a change. Don't feel compelled to stick with a volunteer role you're not enjoying – talk to your organisation about how you're feeling and they may be able to help you change your focus or look for a different organisation that's a better fit.

Enjoy yourself. The best volunteer experiences benefit both the volunteer and the organisation. If you're not enjoying yourself, try to identify why and then talk to your organisation to decide how you could proceed.

Recognise what makes a 'good' volunteering experience with an organisation. For example:

- You should be thanked for your time
- For larger organisations you should receive an official welcome or a more formal induction
- You should have the opportunity to say what you would like to do
- You should be given a clear understanding of what you are doing, when and how often
- You should be given a named contact for support and help
- You can stop volunteering when you want
- You should be able to ask for out of pocket expenses
- You should be covered by their insurance where applicable
- You can't be asked to do or support any illegal activity

Understand your rights. You don't have a contract of employment as a volunteer, so you don't have the same rights as an employee or worker. However, you should ideally be given a volunteer agreement from your organisation. The volunteer agreement isn't compulsory, but sets out what you can expect from the organisation you're volunteering for. It doesn't form a contract between you and the organisation. A volunteer agreement generally explains:

- The level of supervision and support you can expect from the organisation
- What training you'll receive
- Whether you're covered under the organisation's employer or public liability insurance
- Health and safety issues
- Any expenses the organisation will cover
- Any expectations the organisation has of you in your volunteering role.

The government advise that you can volunteer and still claim Benefits provided:

- The only money you get from volunteering is to cover expenses, like travel costs
- You continue to meet the conditions of the benefit you get.