



# Volunteering: the benefits and the opportunities

**Volunteering is an invaluable stepping stone to entering or advancing in the workforce, offering a range of personal and professional benefits. It provides a unique opportunity to gain experience, develop transferable skills, and build a stronger, more compelling resume.**

**By volunteering, individuals can grow in confidence, expand their professional network, and explore potential career paths in a low-pressure environment.**

**Every volunteer experience is unique, offering individuals the chance to:**

- **Gain practical experience** to showcase how you can apply your knowledge and skills.
- **Develop transferable skills** and experiences that apply across industries.
- **Test out career options** by gaining firsthand exposure to different roles and organisations helping you clarify the right environment and role for you.
- **Demonstrate commitment and initiative**, qualities employers highly value as volunteering demonstrates that you are proactive and have a strong work ethic.
- **Build a support network of professionals** and peers who can provide guidance, mentoring, references, and opportunities.
- **Gain confidence in your abilities** by stepping out of your comfort zone and trying new things.
- **Make a meaningful impact**, giving you a sense of purpose and fulfilment by supporting the local community.
- **Strengthen your people skills**; while meeting and engaging with diverse groups, you will gain not only social confidence but new perspectives.
- **Improve your self-worth and self-esteem** by being valued for your contributions and accomplishments for the greater good.
- **Positively supports your wellbeing** as it combats isolation, creates positive connections, provides a sense of purpose and helps build resilience.



Volunteering is an excellent way to develop or strengthen key skills that employers value, such as:

- **Communication:** Engaging with diverse groups of people sharpens interpersonal and professional communication skills.
- **Teamwork:** Collaborating with others in a shared mission fosters an understanding of group dynamics and effective collaboration.
- **Problem-solving:** Volunteering often involves navigating unexpected challenges, helping you build resilience and critical thinking abilities.
- **Leadership:** Taking on responsibilities in a volunteer role can enhance your leadership potential and project management skills.

**These skills are highly transferable and provide a solid foundation for success in the workplace.**

## Tips for choosing the right volunteer opportunity

### 1. Choose something you're passionate about

Select a volunteer opportunity that aligns with your interests or values. When you're passionate about the cause, it won't feel like work as you'll enjoy the experience while making a difference. For example, if you love animals, consider working with an animal shelter; if you're passionate about the environment, look for conservation projects. Volunteering in an area you care about can also help you explore potential career paths.

### 2. Be open to new experiences

There are countless volunteer opportunities you can access covering a wide range of tasks from befriending to admin support; community gardening to photography.

### 3. Look for local

Start by exploring what's available in your own community. You could visit your local library, check community noticeboards, read the events section in a newspaper, or search online for opportunities nearby. Many local charities, schools, and community centres welcome volunteers. Choosing local reduces travel time and makes it easier to stay committed.

### 4. Consider well-known organisations

If you're unsure where to start, look into reputable charities and nonprofit organisations with established volunteer programmes. Examples include the RSPCA (animal welfare), British Heart Foundation (health), or Oxfam (global development). These organisations often have structured roles and support systems, making it easier for you to get involved and make a meaningful impact, as well as potential access to training.





## 5. Volunteer with friends or family

Ask your friends or family members about causes they support or places they've volunteered. Sharing the experience with people you know can make it even more rewarding. Not only will you enjoy quality time together, but you'll also encourage each other to stay engaged and committed. Volunteering as a group can be especially fun during events like charity runs, community clean-ups, or holiday food drives.

## 6. Match your skills and goals

Think about your strengths, skills, and what you hope to gain from volunteering. For example, if you're good at organising, look for event planning roles. If you want to build social confidence, choose opportunities that involve interacting with others, such as befriending or public outreach. Matching your skills with a cause ensures you feel confident in your role and helps you achieve personal growth.

## 7. Start small

If you're new to volunteering, begin with short-term commitments or one-off events to see what interests you most. This approach allows you to explore different causes without feeling overwhelmed. Once you find a role or organisation you love, you can expand your involvement.

## 8. Research the organisation

Before committing, learn about the organisation's mission, values, and activities. Make sure their goals align with your own and that the volunteer role feels meaningful to you. Check their website or attend an orientation session to understand their expectations and how you can contribute.

## 9. Look for flexible opportunities

If you have a busy schedule, prioritise volunteer roles that offer flexibility. Some organisations allow you to volunteer remotely or on weekends, while others may have evening shifts or one-off projects. Flexible opportunities ensure you can balance volunteering with your other responsibilities.

## 10. Don't be afraid to ask questions

When considering a volunteer role, don't hesitate to ask questions. Clarify your responsibilities, time commitment, and the skills required. Understanding what's expected ensures you'll feel prepared and motivated to make the most of the experience.

By taking the time to choose a volunteer opportunity that fits your interests, goals, and lifestyle, you'll set yourself up for a fulfilling and impactful experience while giving back to the community.

## 11. Credible resume and meaningful contributions

Volunteering can be a valuable way to address gaps in employment by showing you're proactive and socially responsible. However, it's equally important to choose volunteer opportunities that are personally meaningful and purposeful, beyond just enhancing your resume. Volunteering often involves challenges that require dedication, motivation, and resilience, making it a rewarding experience that builds both character and skills.

## 12. Potential pathways to employment

Volunteering can lead to paid employment by providing access to training, resources, and insider knowledge about an organisation.

Many organisations offer volunteers workshops and skill-building opportunities that enhance employability. As a volunteer, you're often the first to learn about job openings and gain insight into workplace culture, making it easier to transition to a paid role. Employers value the commitment and initiative shown by volunteers, as it demonstrates genuine interest in the organisation.



**Remember:** Volunteering is an investment in your personal and professional growth. It offers a unique opportunity to build skills, gain practical experience, and demonstrate your motivation and compassion. Volunteer work can enhance your employability and set you apart from other candidates.

By dedicating time to a cause, you not only contribute to your community but also lay the foundation for future career success, whether you're entering a new field, or strengthening your skill set. Volunteering is a valuable use of your time that benefits both your career and personal growth.



The following websites are great resources to help you find volunteering opportunities across various fields and locations in the UK.

**CharityJob** primarily lists jobs within the charity sector but also features volunteering roles across a variety of causes.

[charityjob.co.uk/volunteer-jobs](https://charityjob.co.uk/volunteer-jobs)

**Do-it.org** is one of the UK's largest volunteering databases, offering a wide range of opportunities across various sectors and locations.

[doit.life](https://doit.life)

**Involve** (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) lists opportunities and resources related to volunteering in the UK, with a particular focus on local community projects.

[involve.org.uk](https://involve.org.uk)

**NCVO** (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) provides guidance on volunteering, including resources to help you find opportunities and connect with charities.

[ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteering-opportunities/](https://ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteering-opportunities/)

**Reach Volunteering** connects skilled volunteers with nonprofit organisations in need of expertise, especially in roles requiring professional skills.

[reachvolunteering.org.uk](https://reachvolunteering.org.uk)



**Royal Voluntary Service** offers a variety of volunteering opportunities across the UK, enabling individuals to make a difference particularly in health and social care, supporting vulnerable people, and helping local services.

[royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/volunteering/](https://royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/volunteering/)

**The Volunteer Centre** offers information and listings of volunteer roles across different regions in the UK, often tailored to specific communities.

[volunteerfriends.org.uk](https://volunteerfriends.org.uk)

**TimeBank** supports a variety of volunteering initiatives and features both local and national opportunities.

[timebanking.org](https://timebanking.org)

**Volunteering Matters** focuses on helping individuals and communities to connect through volunteering, with a variety of roles across the UK.

[volunteeringmatters.org.uk](https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk)



### Your rights as a volunteer

The UK government's volunteering page on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) provides a comprehensive guide to getting involved in volunteering. It offers information on how to find volunteer opportunities, the benefits of volunteering, and how to make a difference in your community.

The page also highlights various ways to volunteer, whether in local organisations, through charities, or even abroad. Additionally, it covers legal aspects, such as insurance and volunteering rights, and includes resources for those looking to volunteer in specific sectors like health, education, or the environment. It's a helpful starting point for anyone interested in volunteering in the UK.



**Find out more**

[mentalhealth-uk.org/into-work](https://mentalhealth-uk.org/into-work)