

Benefits of Volunteerism

Research done by Carnegie Mellon University shows that volunteerism helps improve mood and may cause a release of the endorphins that are powerful antidotes to stress, a key to happiness and optimism and a way to combat feelings of helplessness and depression, promoting emotional well-being.

A national survey that led to the definition of the 'healthy-helper syndrome' showed two phases- one: an "immediate physical feel-good sensation," and the other: a sense of calmness and relaxation.

The research concluded that volunteers who experienced the 'healthy-helper syndrome' noticed an improvement in physical ailments as well as elevation of mood and feelings of well-being.

Other factors that influence the positive health effects of volunteering include:

1. The desire to volunteer, which can strengthen the volunteer's sense of control. Studies show that even when a volunteer doesn't particularly want to engage in volunteer work, they still reap positive health benefits if they continue the altruistic behavior.
2. Volunteering for something a person likes doing, which brings pleasure.
3. Consistency- the greatest health benefits appear to be reaped by those who do consistent, regular volunteer work.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING VOLUNTEERISM POSITIVE AND ENJOYABLE

- Encourage independence- give volunteer decision-making control in what and how projects are to be accomplished, whenever possible
- Give clear responsibilities.
- Break down complicated tasks into small, easy steps.
- Allow mistakes and reward efforts, even if results fall short of expectations.
- Increase volunteer's independence as proficiency with task is demonstrated.
- Be available to help if needed.

Source:

'Altruism and Health', MIND/BODY HEALTH, The Effects of Attitudes, Emotions and Relationships by Brent, Q. Hafen, Keith J. Karren, Kathryn J. Frandsen and N. Lee Smith