

The VOLUNTEER FACTOR

Lifting Communities

VOLUNTEER
BÉNÉVOLES
CANADA

National Volunteer Week: April 7-13, 2019 • volunteer.ca/nvw2019 • #NVW2019



Volunteers have a passion for getting involved. Volunteering is a selfless act; a person gives freely of their time, knowledge, experience, and passion to help others, without expecting anything in return. For the volunteer, the value is in receiving more than you give; it is an opportunity to develop and share skills and find deep, meaningful personal connections. Volunteering creates social and economic value for all.

This National Volunteer Week – April 7 to 13, I would like to acknowledge and extend a sincere thank you to the valuable volunteers for their ongoing contributions to our community. Your work truly leaves a positive impact for generations to come. The phenomenal success of the local programs, events and community initiatives is a reflection of the ever increasing dedication and enthusiasm of over 1500 volunteers. Thank you for the work you have done and the difference you make.

Let's celebrate our most valuable commodity – volunteers!

Sincerely,
Mayor Rick Bonnette



Volunteering can be good for your health

Volunteering is often its own reward. Helping others can be just as beneficial to the people doing the helping as it is for the people being helped.

Though it can sometimes be hard to find time to volunteer, a close look at some of the various health benefits of volunteering may compel adults and children alike to find the time they need to volunteer.

Veteran volunteers may have long suspected they're happier when they volunteer, and research suggests that's true. A study from researchers at the London School of Economics that was published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine* found that the more people volunteered, the happier they were. The researchers compared people who never volunteered to people who did, finding that the odds of being "very happy" rose by 7 percent among people who volunteered monthly. Those odds increased by 12 per cent among people who volunteered every two to four weeks.

Psychologists have long known that social interaction can improve mental health. *Psychology Today* notes that interacting with others decreases feelings of depression while increasing feelings of well-being. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, exposing volunteers to people with shared interests. That can be especially valuable to people who are new to a community, helping them to avoid feelings of loneliness after moving to an area where they have no pre-existing social network.

Volunteering that requires social interaction can produce long-term health benefits that can have a profound impact on quality of life as men and women age. A recent study published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* focused on participants without dementia who were involved in a highly interactive discussion group. Researchers compared those participants to others who participated in Tai Chi or walking or were part of a control group that did not receive any interventions. The former group exhibited improved cognitive function, and MRIs indicated they increased their brain volumes after being involved in the discussion group. Larger brain volume has been linked to a lower risk of dementia. Many volunteering opportunities require routine interaction with others, potentially providing significant, long-term health benefits as a result.

While volunteering is a selfless act, volunteers may be benefitting in ways that can improve their lives in both the short- and long-term.