**How to get the most out of your volunteering**

Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore your interests and passions. It helps you gain valuable real-world experience in a subject area that you are interested in. It is your chance to develop new skills that may expand your professional experience and explore new opportunities.

**Things to consider when thinking about volunteering**

Why I want to volunteer and what am I looking to get out of it?

**Is it because I want to:**

* **Have an impact on my local community and where I live**
* **Meet people who are different from me**
* **Try something new**
* **Do something with my free time**
* **Have a go at the type of work I might want to do as a full-time job**
* **Do more with my interests and hobbies**

**Other things to consider**

* **Would I like to work with people, animals or would I rather work alone?**
* **Am I better behind the scenes or do I prefer to take a more visible role?** Do you want to be the front face of an organisation, this may be in a charity shop in a customer service role or supporting events? However, you may be the person in the background that is happy to help the organisation and its service tick over by entering data on a data base or being a trustee for a local charity.
* **Your skills** - Ensure that you have the skills required to do the role and that they fit with your motivation. When carrying out some roles you may find that it isn’t?
* **Time -** Decide how much time you can give as a volunteer. Remember your other responsibilities such as any work, sport or family commitments. How much flexibility there is in the role?
* **Travel and other expenses –** in an ideal world you should not be out of pocket when volunteering however some organisations do not havebudgets that allow for volunteer expenses. If you need to claim back your expenses find out first if the organisation is able to reimburse your expenses
* **How you will travel to and from the location** – is the place that you want to volunteer accessible by public transport or do you need your own car? Some places may not be easily accessible for example you may want to volunteer on a farm however, there are not any buses and you would need a car or motor bike to get their easily
* **You’re donating your valuable time,** so it’s important that you enjoy and benefit from your volunteering. It’s important to make sure that your volunteer position is a good fit and to communicate with the people you’re working with in the volunteer organisation.
* **Ask questions.** You want to make sure that the experience is right for your skills, your goals, and the time you want to spend. If you have any questions, be sure to speak up. Questions might be about time commitment, if there’s any training involved and who you will be working with.
* **Make sure you know what’s expected.** Before starting, make sure you are comfortable with the organisation, know what is expected,and understand the time commitment. Consider starting small so that you don’t over commityourself at first. Give yourself some flexibility to change your focus if needed.
* **Don’t be afraid to make a change.** Speak up if your experience isn’t what you expected. Don’t force yourself into a bad fit. Talk to the organisation about changing your focus or consider looking for another match.
* **Enjoy yourself.** Most importantly, make sure you’re having fun! The best volunteer experiences benefit both the volunteer and the organisation. If you’re not enjoying yourself, ask yourself why. Is it the tasks you’re performing? The people you’re working with? Or are you uncomfortable simply because the situation is new and familiar? Pinpointing what’s bothering you can help you decide how to proceed.

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