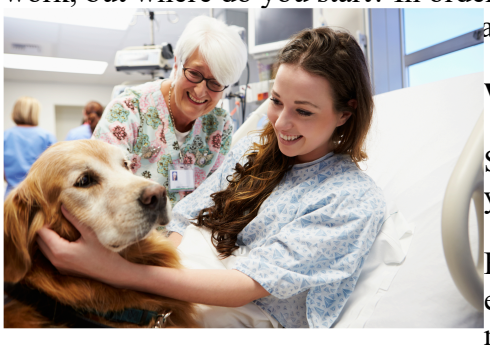
Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How to pick an organization to volunteer for

Volunteering has been shown to be as beneficial to volunteers as it is to the beneficiaries of all that hard work, but where do you start? In order to reap the most benefits and feel truly satisfied, you need to find a meaningful volunteer opportunity.



Where to begin

Start with some soul-searching and a self-assessment. What are you passionate about? Who do you want to help?

For some, the answer is obvious; for others, it's hard to focus. For example, if a family member has been affected by disease, you may be passionate about volunteering for an organization dedicated to finding a cure. On the other hand, you could be passionate about the plight of disaster victims, the environment, or abused animals.

It gets easier once you pick a cause, but you will still need to choose an organization among many. One way to narrow the field is to decide whether you want to get involved at the local, national, or international level.

From there, it's time to start researching the various organizations that match. Start with the Internet; AllforGood.org can help you find volunteer opportunities that match your specific interests and location. In Canada, the Volunteer Centre Network at Volunteer.ca is a great place to start. Next, check out your top charities' websites and Facebook pages to learn about their cultures and determine if any are a good fit for you.

Determining where you fit in

By now you should have narrowed the field down into several possibilities, all of which serve causes that are near and dear to you. Which one could use your unique talents?

The key now is to find a volunteer position that you would enjoy and that you have the capacity to perform, both in terms of skills and time. You'll need to also understand the organization's needs. For example, if you want to contribute web design skills and the organization has that covered but needs people to answer the phones, are you willing to shift gears and answer phones or would you prefer to keep looking?

A few other considerations can influence fit as well. For example, do you want to work in a team environment or in solitude? Do you want to be behind the scenes or in a higher profile role? How much responsibility do you want? How much time do you have to give? Another consideration involves fitting volunteering into your busy schedule. Some companies encourage their employees to volunteer and may even allow you to do so while on the clock.

Finding the right cause and a good fit are essential ingredients to a successful and fulfilling volunteer experience. Conduct a self-assessment and research your options, and check with your employer about any formal volunteer incentives it may have in place.

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