Get What You Give

Peta B Stapleton, Dr, Bond University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/peta_stapleton/17/
Is your fruit bowl always overflowing with this season’s newest produce? Are your sneaker’s well used? Are youavant about seeing your GP for an annual check-up? If you answered yes to all of these questions you’re on your way to ensuring your health and wellbeing is in top shape. But we have one more questions: When was the last time you did something selfless to help someone else? If you’re unable to answer this, you may be missing out on important physical and mental health rewards.

Why? Altruisic acts – doing good for others without any expectation of reward – can significantly boost your health and wellbeing, reports a growing body of research. In fact, volunteering may even help you live longer: compared to those who don’t, found a new study published by the American Psychological Association. Assistant Professor at Bond University, clinical psychologist and positive psychology expert, Dr flea Stables, agrees with the scientific research that claims volunteering can improve everything from your mood to your level of confidence.
GET WHAT YOU GIVE

It’s the worst paid job in the world, but volunteering delivers vast health dividends, writes Erin Kisby

symptoms of chronic pain and possibly even heart disease. “I saw so much value in volunteering that over the years I have recommended clients give it a go,” says Dr Stapleton. What makes volunteering so beneficial? It’s two-fold. Firstly, on a physiological level, when you do something good, hormones are released in the brain that give you a good feeling,” Dr Stapleton says. “On a mental level, when you take the focus off yourself to do something nice for others, you stop negative thought patterns and instead tell yourself you did something good, and as a result, you feel good.”

That translates to a matrix of interlinked benefits. “When you know you’ve done something to help someone else it puts a spring in your step and when you feel good, physically and mentally, your self-esteem and self-confidence gets a boost, too,” according to Dr Stapleton.

But, there’s a catch, the research says, and Dr Stapleton concurs.

Vida’s story

“My family is from the Philippines, and I came to Australia when I was young, so I’ve always been aware of how lucky I am. And volunteering has always been something I’ve been interested in doing. During my early university years I proposed: managed a charity fashion parade for the Look Good... Feel Better program. And then two years ago I spent two months at an orphanage in Uganda where I reconstructed a kitchen, renovated a classroom, and church, spent time with the children and built a basketball court.

Particularly after my experience in Uganda I realised that nothing can make me happier and more fulfilled than knowing I’ve made a difference.”

In person’s life I feel my spare time is best spent helping others and I always want to do more. “We are so lucky to live in a country like Australia and to have access to the facilities, opportunities and the lifestyle that we do here. You can’t sweat the small stuff when there is so much more out there to live for and appreciate.”

“Each Thursday for three to four hours I drive in a van helping OzHarvest, a non-denominational charity that rescues excess food, which would otherwise be discarded, to give to charities in need. A driver and I help collect the food from bakeries, cafes and catering companies around Sydney and then offload it to the charities.

“I first heard about OzHarvest through their association with TV show MasterChef and was very impressed with the organisation, as it’s very unique in its approach to helping the community. I simply jumped on their website, filled out a volunteer form and sent it through. They contacted me soon after and asked me to come in for an interview and meet and to discuss various activities I could do with them, I wanted to do something regular so when the Thursday run became available, I took this on.”

“Being a volunteer is something you’ve been thinking about, first step is to just do it. Take an hour to contact volunteer organisations. Once you get the ball rolling, and start contacting organisations, the rest of the journey becomes easy. It’s aware that the ‘most attractive charities may be full’ when it comes to volunteers.”

Want to know more?

OzHarvest delivers roughly 380,000 meals per month with a fleet of 12 vans, around Sydney, Canberra, Newcastle, Adelaide and Brisbane. To find out how you can help visit ozharvest.org

www.womenshealthandfitness.com.au
Melanie’s story

“My family lives interstate and while I have a great circle of friends, we are at a similar age, with very similar backgrounds and interests. I wanted an opportunity to meet people that aren’t exactly the same as me.

“I’ve been part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program for two years and even though my ‘Little Sister’ Taryn, now 10, has officially ‘graduated’, I’m still in regular contact with her.

“The Big Brothers Big Sisters is a wonderful not-for-profit organisation that matches vulnerable young people it itself with volunteer mentors (Littles). The Big Brothers and Big Sisters act as positive role models for the Littles, and regularly spend time with their Little.

“While each case is very different, the ultimate aim is to empower vulnerable young people to reach their potential and make positive changes in their thinking and behaviour, building self-worth and trust in their relationships, both at home and at school.

“Having a bestfriend is hard, but it remains having some great role models in my life at that time. These people showed me that you can achieve anything if you really want it and are willing to work hard to achieve it. I decided to volunteer on the hope that I could offer that to someone else.

“I also wanted to broaden my own perspective. Spending time with Taryn helps me to put things in perspective. Taryn faces some real challenges in her life, but doesn’t let these things get her down. She’s always smiling.

“Taryn and I would often exercise together when we hung out; it can be exhausting trying to keep up with a teenager! I also mean, get to do things that I wouldn’t normally do, like rollerblading or playing bowling. There’s also a great sense of fulfillment that comes with being a Big Sister. Taryn and I connected almost straight away, and when she confides in me or asks my advice about something, I feel so privileged that such a remarkable young person trusts me and values my opinion. I also feel a sense of pride when I see Taryn doing things that she didn’t do before we were matched.

“Taryn really surprised me to know that I’ve given her something that she might not otherwise have had. It’s often very simple things that many of us would take for granted, like a hot chocolate and a chat, or some quiet time at my house or at a book shop.

“Volunteering is also a great way to widen your social circle – I’ve met other Big Brothers and Big Sisters through the program and I suspect for a lot of young, single professionals, it’s easy for life to become quite self-centered. Which mine certainly had. I enjoy the sense of responsibility that comes with being a Big Sister and doing something that’s not all about me.”

Want to get involved?

“Looking for more about how you can help support young people achieve their true potential, make a donation or become involved, visit bigbrothersbigsisters.org.au

Alicia’s story

“In September, 2011, I had a minor stroke and am now dependent on a wheelchair and other aids for mobility, and I was recently diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. You’ll think this would slow me down but the satisfaction I get from helping others gives me a reason to get out of bed every day.

“As a high school student, I often participated in school-arranged community services but I didn’t really become an independent volunteer until I was about 26, this was when I moved to Queensland, from NSW, to be with family after a divorce.

“Surfing the net at an internet cafe for a job one day, the supervisor struck up a conversation with me and suggested I consider volunteering to build a network in the town. I was then introduced to the administrator manager of the Harvey Bay Family Centre. The following week I started as a part-time volunteer receptionist, and spent almost four years with the organisation.

“The Family Centre is a non-counselling service, parent aide program for carers with young children and a few other programs related to family needs, and often clients would stop me in the street and introduce me to their friends or family, or the girl from the Family Centre. Even though I was mostly answering phones and greeting clients at reception, they still associated me with a positive part of their life. It was very rewarding to know I was part of a team that was making a difference to people in my community.

“It took a break from volunteering after the birth of my second child, but once I started school I really felt like something was missing from my life. I was looking for something that suited my personality when I read a tweet on Twitter about a homeless man needing help to put on a BBQ for homeless people. That was how I met Grant, the police guy, Richards.

“Having been homeless once myself I knew the barriers it posed for people and I was so inspired by Grant I offered to help. I arranged a few things for his BBQ and look along donations of my own.

“Grant and I met up again a short time after the BBQ to discuss continuing the work he was doing, and that’s how we formed Meals Helping Mates. Now with a team of about 10 members and great support from the community we hold twice to four BBQs a year to feed those in need, as well as supplying basic needs like clothing and toiletries. But most of all it’s an opportunity to talk to people and hear their stories. I love nothing more than connecting people with the right services and organisations to help them change their situation.

“My whole family, husband and two sons, are also involved and help at the BBQ’s, too.”

You can make a difference

According to the latest numbers from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 165,000 Australians are homeless. To help make a difference visit mateshelpingmates.blogspot.com.au
Clare’s story

There’s nothing like the energy you feel when you get up in the morning knowing that today, you’re going to help save or change a life. It’s energizing and motivates you across every aspect of your life. It is fulfillment at its best.

For more than 11 years I’ve volunteered my support and skills to the Baio Pite Hospital in Dili, the capital city of Timor-Leste (East Timor).

The hospital was founded in 1999 by Dr Don Murphy to serve the immediate needs of a population affected by the humanitarian crisis. It’s now a comprehensive community healthcare service that struggles under the weight of its own success. It battles to find money to fund its free, essential healthcare services, which include maternal and infant care, child health, vaccinations, TB and malaria treatments, HIV diagnosis, inpatient and domiciliary services. The clinic also provides training for local healthcare workers.

“Help the best way I can by providing fundraising support and media exposure, and coordinating the transport of seriously ill Timorese to Australia for life-saving health care that’s not available in their home country. For many, this Operation Lifeline initiative is their only hope of survival.”

From the time patients leave Dili, everything they experience can be terrifying, including medical equipment and procedures they undergo, so we do everything we can to make them feel safe and comfortable.

“Many don’t have a family to look after them as if they were part of their own family. My role is to coordinate their care, and to take them to and from the hospital for treatment. I don’t speak their language and they don’t speak mine but the bond we share is incredible and every time I put them on the plane for home there are always tears of joy that they’re going home to a new healthy life and sadness that we will most likely never see each other again. “

Over the years, there have been many individuals, including my elderly next-door neighbour, and organisations that have taken the privilege of supporting. One family I’ve been dedicated to helping for the past 10 years is the Mills, who have two daughters, Bethany and Leanne, and the two children in Australia who have been diagnosed with a rare disorder. During this time, I have worked closely with others to help raise money so the girls could travel to France for surgery they desperately needed to stay alive. And in 2010, I also supported the AMF Nurses, physiotherapists working with children with severe disabilities in Timor-Leste. We ran a campaign to raise money to buy a car to enable them to provide treatment for children in their homes. The nurses not only have a car, they have a driver who can take them to remote regions in safety and a fully functioning clinic, as well.

“The benefits of volunteering have been enormous. I’m of the belief that you don’t have to be a doctor to save or change the lives of people as need, you just have to care enough to do what you can to help.”

Want to help?

The Baio Pite Hospital needs all the help it can get. For as little as $10 you can help provide a hospital bed for a day for the many sick patients Dr Don Murphy and his team care for. Donate to the Baio Pite Hospital by visiting mycause.com.au, Baio Pite Hospital.

START YOUR OWN VOLUNTEERING STORY

Want to volunteer?

GoVolunteer, Australia’s first not-for-profit volunteer recruitment website, helps you take the first step to becoming a volunteer. To find opportunities near where you live or work that match your interests and the time you have available, search the GoVolunteer database, by logging on to www.govolunteer.com.au

www.womenhealthandfitness.com.au