6 reasons why volunteering is important (and awesome!)

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The college admissions process is, to put it mildly, stressful. Not only do we as students study tirelessly to keep an appealing GPA, trudge through hours of standardized testing, and find the time to somehow attend a hundred club meetings in a week, but now we have to devote our last few spare hours doing volunteer work? What?! Please, I don’t have time for that!

At least, that’s what I used to think when I spent my summers begrudgingly volunteering at a local thrift shop. Yeah. Try spending eight hours organizing donations without air conditioning in the middle of central Florida for five days straight, and then talk to me about your enthusiasm for volunteer work. Anybody up for the challenge? Mhm. That’s what I thought. So, the question remains: why bother volunteering?

When it comes to service work, it’s important to realize that, similar to an actual career, not all volunteer positions fit everyone. It’s one thing to just log hundreds of hours for the sake of mildly impressing a college admissions officer, but the actual goal should be maximizing your utility. Let’s face it: We’re high school students. We’re busy; even if we’re procrastinating, we’re busy. Volunteering isn’t exactly at the top of anyone’s priority list, so finding a non-profit organization that clicks with you is the first step to enjoying (tolerating?) volunteering.

As I mentioned earlier, I spent a couple of summers hastily completing my school’s volunteer requirements at a local thrift shop. I did not care for it at all, and I only showed up so the volunteer coordinator would sign my hours sheet. It wasn’t until the summer before my junior year that I found out just how enjoyable volunteering could be when I began working for a local vet hospital. So, if you’re in the same position as I was, try out different organizations. Don’t just settle for an organization to rack up the hours. There’s a lot more to volunteering than that!

**1. Gaining New Experiences and Insights**

Volunteering allows students to get involved with new things and develop technical, social, and academic skills that couldn’t be learned in a classroom environment. Whether you’re helping out at your local library or tutoring underprivileged kids, volunteering allows you to experience different environments and situations.

I know that a lot of us, as competitive, college-obsessed, sleep-deprived students, get lost in the quantity of volunteer work, but it’s crucial to take a step back from the number games. Instead of boasting about how many hours you’ve piled up, why not talk about the things you’ve done? Volunteering brings out new interests, hobbies, and opinions; moreover, volunteering expands students’ horizons. As **Ashley**, a rising senior, who volunteers with numerous organizations and clubs, puts it, “If your volunteering experiences can give you something to write or think about for your college essays, then I say it’s done something good for you as a person, and it’ll help you overall in your college admissions process…it should mean something to you!”

**2. Giving Back and Helping Others**

Admit it: you’re pretty lucky. You’re working your way through your high school education with intentions to move on to post-secondary education. You assumedly have a roof over your head, food to eat, and clothes to wear. Even if you don’t have the “best” of those, you’ve got them. Volunteers create better environments for others; they create healthier communities, and they brighten lives. **Jill**, another rising senior, has been playing the piano for more than a decade and the flute for seven. She volunteers by performing in concerts for senior citizens. “We always talk with them after our concerts, and their stories are very humbling. They make me realize that I’m actually very lucky to know how to read and play music. They always tell us how great we sound and how they wish that they spent the time in their youth to learn an instrument.” As a volunteer, she’s been able to give back to the community that fostered her musical talents.

**3. Creating Connections with People**

No matter the age, building relationships with people is crucial. Not only does the volunteer work you do as a student show who you are as a person, but it reflects many positive character traits that potential employers and admissions officers want to see. Volunteering allows you to meet a wide variety of people from all sorts of walks of life.

Networking is an amazing benefit of volunteering, and students learn professional skills and have access to a breadth of knowledge from their co-volunteers. **Jasmine**, a fellow rising senior, volunteers at her local free clinic, where she’s the assistant administrative coordinator. “Some of the doctors and volunteers there have become my mentors, letting me shadow them or giving me general life advice about interacting with people and education. Interacting with new types of people, though extremely difficult, has developed my people skills.” Through her volunteer work, she’s not only become an integral part of the clinic itself, but she’s gained a lot of valuable insights, skills, and experiences.

**4. A Sense of Accomplishment**

Volunteering isn’t one of the most plush, easy, or glamorous of jobs, but it is one of the most beneficial and uplifting. While no monetary compensation is received, many will tell you that their work and experiences gained as a volunteer were worth way more than any money they could have gotten from another line of work.

Think of it like this: volunteering is done on a person’s own accord. It’s taking some time out of your day and helping others. Volunteer work makes us feel good. It builds self-confidence and lifts up the spirits. As **Jill**puts it, “students these days are getting caught up in the number of hours they store up doing something that they don’t care about, and not only is the meaning behind the actions lost, but the charity becomes a chore. So yes, do it, but do what you want to do and because you want to do it.” That couldn’t be truer. It’s crucial to have a strong connection to your volunteer work. Basically, you get out of it what you put into it.

**5. Building Career Options**

Charity work gives students opportunities to test out a desired career path. Concurrently, it gives them an edge on their resume. Getting involved with an organization that shares similar ideals and interests is an important step for students. At a young and pretty inexperienced age, volunteering is an excellent gateway to the workforce.

By gaining new experiences and creating new connections, volunteers are able to better visualize themselves in that field and explore the daunting question: can I see myself doing this for life? And, even if the organization you do get involved with has nothing to do with your intended career path, it might end up surprising you. While I wasn’t such a fan of my early high school summers of volunteering, I was still able to make the most out of my situation by learning how to problem solve, work more efficiently, and deal with unwanted environments. Even though I know that I don’t want to follow a similar career path, I strengthened a lot of skills necessary for my own future career. So, take a chance by getting outside of the beloved comfort zone through volunteer work.

**6. The Dreaded College Admissions Process**

As if I would end this article without going back to this hot mess. Unfortunately for us, we live in a pretty competitive world. College admissions has become much more than GPAs, test scores, and letters of recommendations. You, as a highly motivated and worried college-bound student, already know that. Volunteering, while it won’t raise your GPA or add 20 points to your SAT score, will give you a plethora of other things, like experiences, connections, and most importantly, a voice.

So, get out there and get involved. Stop stressing about the number of hours, and start having fun. Yes, volunteering can be fun. Don’t worry; I was surprised too. Remember: volunteer work is meant to be more than what most make it out to be. Your high school years are stressful. Don’t let something as constructive and vital slip through the cracks!