

Health Benefits for Volunteering

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Source: Grimm, R., Spring, K and Dietz, N, (2007) *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*, The Office of Research and Policy Development Corporation for National and Community Service. www.nationalservice.org

Recruiting and working with volunteers in Extension is always an excellent means to extend our community outreach. The 4-H and Horticulture programs thrive on the use of volunteers. A recent report of research findings focused on the health benefits of volunteering shares the following findings. The full report can be found at www.nationalservice.gov. The number of volunteers 65 and over is expected to increase 50 percent over the next 13 years, according to numbers projected by the US Census data, and continue for several years to follow for these “baby boomers.” These suggested benefits, especially targeting older volunteers, might be useful in your next recruitment presentation or newsletter.

Older Volunteers are more likely to gain health benefits.

Volunteers, 60 and over, gain greater health benefits, such as improved physical and mental health. Researchers have found there is a “volunteer threshold” for the relationships between frequency of volunteering and the health benefits. However, across the studies, the definition of this amount of volunteering that has generated benefits has varied between: 1) volunteering with two or more organizations; 2) 100 hours or more of volunteer activity annually; or 3) at least 40 hours of volunteering.

Volunteering leads to greater life satisfaction and lower rates of depression.

Findings from several studies provide evidence that volunteering has a positive effect on the social psychological factors, such as sense of purpose and accomplishment and enhances one’s social support systems buffering stress and thus reducing disease risk. One reported study by Musick and Wilson(2005) revealed the depression in older adults was less for those who served as volunteers.

Individuals who volunteer live longer.

Researcher has found in analyses of longitudinal data, those individuals who volunteer during earlier years of study have lower mortality rates at the second wave of study, even when factors of physical health, age, gender or socioeconomic status is taken into control. Also, several studies reported that those with chronic illnesses benefit.

State volunteer rate is strongly connected with the physical health of the states’ population.

The report, using data from U.S. Census Bureau and the Center for Disease Control, provided findings that states with a high volunteer rate also have lower rates of mortality and incidences of heart disease 9age-adjusted). Florida has one of the lowest reported rates (less than 20%) for volunteering.