

What's in it for me?

Reap the benefits of volunteering

It's better to give than to receive. If you've ever been on the giving end of a Christmas or birthday present, you know it's true.

And if you've ever been a volunteer, you know the rewards are even greater.

Take it from Kristina Paider, an expert giver. After Hurricane Katrina, Kristina led a group of 150 to help build homes in New Orleans. She's volunteered at food banks and taught life-skills courses at a homeless shelter in Los Angeles. And following 9/11, she provided trauma support at Ground Zero in New York City and co-wrote the best-selling book "Unbreakable Spirit: Rising Above the Impossible."

Why does she do it? Like many, Kristina donates her time and talents because she feels it's the right thing to do. But volunteering, she says, is actually all about the volunteer. "I feel like the lucky one. I feel like I've gotten the gift," she insists.

And it's true – volunteering offers a host of emotional, social and even physical benefits, including those listed here.



Volunteer Kristina Paider (center, in black) worked with New York City firefighters to provide trauma support following 9/11.

1. Perspective.



Tornado cleanup, in Hokes Bluff, Ala.



Landscaping in Rock Island, Ill.

Volunteering takes you outside your own world. You're a part of something larger than yourself. Whether you're serving food at a soup kitchen or singing Christmas carols to nursing home residents, you're seeing what life's like for those less fortunate.

2. Gratitude.



Fundraising in Merced, Calif.

Volunteering is not only a great reminder of how fortunate we are, says Kristina. It's the exchange of gratitude that's truly special. "You feel gratitude for your own life, and you receive gratitude from the people you're helping."

3. Wealth.



Donating to food pantry in Tulsa, Okla.

It's true; volunteering will make you rich! "In helping others, you experience your own true wealth," says Kristina, "and that's a far more important currency than money."

4. Happiness.



Bagging snacks for seniors in Owasso, Okla.

Helping others makes you feel good, plain and simple. Says Kristina, "It's a way to experience richness in life that can be compared to no other." And according to the Corporation for National and Community Service, research shows that volunteering better overall health and well-being.

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— volunteer and author
Kristina Paider, California

5. People.



Beach cleanup in Twin Falls, Idaho



Donating diapers in Tulsa, Okla.

When you participate in an organized volunteer activity, you're exposed to experiences and people you wouldn't have met otherwise. You'll bond with other volunteers and expand your social circle with new friendships.

Not sure where or how to start? Good news! Modern Woodmen makes volunteering easy. Local chapters and youth service clubs offer a variety of opportunities to help out in your community. Contact your local Modern Woodmen representative to find out how you can get involved.
by Leah Christensen

Busting reasons against volunteering

"I'm too busy." It's a common excuse, but is it really valid? "Not having time is code for 'It's not a priority,'" says volunteer and author, Kristina Paider, "and we need a priority review." We make time for things we value. Consider rearranging your schedule to make time – even if it's only one hour a week – to volunteer.

"I don't know how to get started." If you're not sure where to go or what cause to support, you're not alone. Many people shy away from volunteering because they don't know where to start. You can start by contacting your local Modern Woodmen representative, who can fill you in on Modern Woodmen volunteer opportunities in your community.

"I'm probably not qualified." You don't need to be an expert chef to serve a meal at a soup kitchen. Do you feel more comfortable working behind the scenes? Volunteering can be as simple as unpacking and sorting food at a food bank. "We all have a gift to give," says Kristina.

"I can't afford to donate money." You don't have to. You can volunteer through Modern Woodmen's local chapters and youth service clubs by giving time instead of cash. Contact your local Modern Woodmen representative to discuss opportunities in your community.