



# GOAL: Become A Volunteer

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## Introduction

A volunteer is someone who “works for free” or someone “working of their own free will.” People choose to volunteer for many reasons. Some people choose to do this because they want to help, and others hope that they might get jobs if they do their volunteer work with care. Parents often volunteer in their children’s classrooms or to help raise money for their children’s schools.

No matter the reason, becoming a volunteer helps many people feel good about themselves. There is something about ‘working for free’ that allows people to feel that they are making a positive difference in their community. Employers will often choose to hire someone who has volunteered for them because they have already proven themselves. Whatever the reason, becoming a volunteer will open new doors for you and you can bet that you will feel like you really did make a difference!

## Getting Started

Let’s look at some of the top reasons people choose to be a volunteer. After each reason, there is an example or small story. Check the box if the example matches what you want to get from the volunteer experience:

- You want to help at a place that is important to you. For example, you might choose to help your church because your religion is an important part of your life.
- You have been helped in some way by another volunteer or program and now, you want to give back to that same program. A man I know had a drinking problem and got help from an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program. Now, he volunteers his time at local AA meetings by making coffee and tea.
- You want to meet others, and maybe make new friends. When I was new to the county I now live in, I volunteered at my children’s school because I wanted to meet other people with children.

- You want to learn something new. My husband has always liked going to live plays, but was afraid to be on stage. He now volunteers for the local theatre company so he can learn about stage experience slowly.
- You hope that the volunteer experience will help you get a job. A senior at our local high school thinks she would love to work in a library some day. She will spend the summer with me, both to try it out and maybe, do a great job so she can be hired one day.

Which did you check above? Your reason or reasons for becoming a volunteer will help guide you along your way. People often have strengths in areas in which they already are interested, or, if they don't yet have the skills, getting them will seem easier because of your interest.

Now let's say that you checked all of the above. No problem! This just means you have many reasons to get out there and make a difference. Good for you. Maybe you didn't check any or you were not sure? That is fine, too, there are other reasons to want to become a volunteer.

Knowing why you want to volunteer is the first step of many you will take. The next thing to do is to look at the following list and check the things you think you are good at or check where you might need some improvement. The list below shows important (or 'key') characteristics that good volunteers have.

I Have These Skills	I Would Like to Improve These Skills	<b>Great Volunteers Have:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Social skills.</b> Good social skills means you are polite (using "please," "thank-you," etc.). It also means that you have the ability to know when someone is happy or upset without them telling you. Good social skills means you know how to start and end a conversation, and it means that people talking to you end their time with you feeling as happy or happier than when they started, and those people are hardly ever confused. Such a person listens more than they speak.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Organizational skills.</b> Someone who is organized can take notes about important things, keep a calendar or notebook to help them remember important dates and times, and remember who to ask when there is a question. In fact, someone with good organizational skills asks many questions, especially when he or she is new.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Basic math skills.</b> Many volunteer positions need someone who can count change and bills, use a calculator, handle money safely, or perhaps use a checkbook.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Basic reading and writing skills.</b> You may need to write messages for someone, read a volunteer handbook or make a list. You may be asked to read an employee handbook so that you know the rules and guidelines.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Basic computer skills.</b> People with basic skills can use a mouse, find an address on the internet and can use e-mail.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>Public speaking skills.</b> Are you comfortable speaking in front of a group? Some organizations need volunteers to go into the community and tell about what that organization does. If you're thinking of volunteering for your literacy services, this might be a good way to start.</p>
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There are many more skills and interests that could translate into a volunteer position. So now think of the other skills you already have or would like to develop (art skills, construction skills, cooking skills, good with animals, good with children, etc.):

I Have These Skills	I Would Like to Improve These Skills	Other Skills that I Already Have or Would Like to Improve:
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

As you search for volunteer positions, keep in mind your skills and interests so you can find a match that will make you happy and that is a good fit with your best qualities.

## Books & Materials

### Tools

These are things you will use on your way to becoming a volunteer...and continue to use! These items can be purchased at dollar stores, thrift stores, grocery stores and larger convenience stores.

- A notebook or pocket calendar
- Some pens or pencils
- A backpack or canvas tote bag to carry your calendar and other supplies

### Books & Workbooks

Check your literacy collection and/or talk to your literacy staff members first before buying these; they might already be in your library literacy collection and you can just borrow them:

Conversations for Work. This workbook and audio book offers you plenty of writing and listening opportunities. An English language learner, someone who has never had a job or someone needing extra help with social skills can listen to common workplace conversations. The workbook allows writing practice in filling out forms common to workplaces. You can find this book and even view and listen to parts of it at this link:

<http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=2680>

English for Work. This is another great book which allows listening, reading and writing practice. If you are an English language learner, the audio portion will allow you to listen in to common workplace situations. You can give it a test run at this website:

<http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=2910>

Math in Everyday Life. This workbook gives real-life practice in everyday math situations. You can view some of its pages at this website and then choose activities:

<http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=3670>

### Website

Volunteer Match is a great website for new and returning volunteers. This site is fairly advanced language-wise, but still is very helpful. Enter your zip code to find agencies asking for volunteers in your area and you can also watch a free one hour online class about *How to Be a Great Volunteer*. This 'webinar,' as online classes are often called, contains good material for the adult who is ready to progress professionally: <http://www.volunteermatch.org/volunteers/>

## Key Vocabulary

- ◆ Site – The place where you will do your work. “Eva’s job site was next to the city park.”
- ◆ Match – A good ‘match’ happens when a volunteer fits in well with her or his new volunteer site. Often, a good match happens when both the job site AND the volunteer share the same beliefs and goals. “Scott was really good at construction and because he also loved his church, he enjoyed helping to build the new pastor’s house.”
- ◆ Guidelines – A set of rules or expectations. “The library’s guidelines said that volunteers were supposed to wear long pants and a button-up shirt.”
- ◆ Dress Code – Tells what kinds of clothing can and can not be worn while working. “Celia read that she would have to wear tops with sleeves when she worked at the women’s shelter”
- ◆ Petty Cash – A small amount of money a job site keeps ready at all times, usually to buy small things, like office supplies. “Kip counted the school’s petty cash carefully before taking some money out to buy colored paper for the teacher.”
- ◆ Mission – The reason or purpose for an organization. “The mission of the women’s shelter is to find homes for women and children without places to live.”
- ◆ Organization – has more than one meaning:
  - 1) People joined together for a specific goal or purpose. It could be a library, a church, a center for people without homes, or any number of other places that use volunteers. “Richard worked for an organization that finds homes for stray cats and dogs.”
  - 2) The task and planning of something. “Because of her skills in organization, Tanya was in charge of the potluck.”
- ◆ Representative – Someone who is chosen to speak or act for others. “Tomas knew that as a representative of the library, he needed to be very polite to all people, even if someone became rude to him.”
- ◆ Policy – A plan that people use to help them make a decision or take an action. “Sameer knew school policy said that shorts were not allowed except during physical education class.”

## Reading Practice

- **In the Know.** In the Know is a series of books that give the learner at first easy and then harder reading passages on a wide range of topics of interest to adult learners, such as sports, leisure and health. Check your literacy collection for copies to check out. See parts of this book at this website:  
<http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=1520>
- **Literacy Tools Website.** <http://www.literacytools.ie/printExercisesGroup.cfm> -- This website has online and printable exercises. For reading exercises, go to this link. From here, you can choose topics of interest or follow this recommended path: once you are at the website, select “Skills” and then click on “Reading.” There will be several printable reading passages, which will help your reading and comprehension as well as give you important life information. Another option: go to this website and select “topics” and then “life coach.” Here is more reading practice, but reading practice as it relates to your

life path. Volunteering is often part of people's life paths, and these passages will help you understand your life and your choices more clearly.

## Writing Practice

- **3-Day Write-a-Thon.** For this activity, choose three hours in three days of the week. Try to make one of the days a weekend day, and choose three different times of day. During that time, keep notes about what you do. Spelling and grammar don't count! Give as many details as you can. The purpose of this activity is to get you writing without worry over grammar and spelling and to allow you and your tutor to look closely at your day. The things you do—making dinner, washing the laundry, taking a child to a doctor appointment, sending an email, gardening—often include things you are good at or enjoy doing. If you did something you don't like at all, write that in your note and make a sad face next to that activity. At the end of your write-a-thon, congratulate yourself. You just did quite a bit of writing and you can now see which things you like to do and which things you don't.

When you begin to look for a place to volunteer, you will be able to look at your notes and decide "is this something I do often and like to do?" For instance, if you love to garden, you might try to look for places that need this kind of help.

- **Create a Menu.** Everyone loves to eat! What do *you* like to eat? Make a list of the best foods you have ever eaten. Now, write a menu. Remember, a menu has several dishes to choose from. Try to use descriptive words that will make someone's mouth water when they read it. This is another fun activity that encourages writing, but lets you do it while thinking of something fun and delicious!

Bonus tip: Many places that use volunteers often need someone who can cook. I can't think of a single place where I have worked or volunteered that didn't "ooh" and "ahh" and smile when someone brought in cookies or cake. When my son was in the hospital, I stayed at a Ronald McDonald House. Every Tuesday, volunteers made soups and cornbread muffins for the people staying there.

## Games & Activities

- **Menu Math.** Go to a few local, favorite restaurants that have carry-out menus and ask for some. Now, pretend you are the cashier and take your tutor's order. Practice using a calculator and/or pencil and paper to add the items. Have the tutor ask questions about the menu items. Use fake money to count change back. (Fake money can be found at many dollar stores or drug stores such as Walgreen's or Rite Aid.) Your basic math skills will improve along with your reading as you help your tutor understand the menu.
- **Phone Etiquette Role-Play.** Etiquette means 'manners.' You can use your own cell phone for this activity. Have your tutor call you. Your job? To answer the phone with the

best manners you can. Pretend you are working for different kinds of places, and then use that place name in your first words to the caller. For example, if you are going to volunteer at an animal shelter, you might answer “Hello, Mount Shasta Animal Rescue, Shelly speaking.” Have your tutor be a happy customer and then when you feel ready, an angry customer. Knowing how to respond to angry or upset customers is a critical skill while working.

- **Boost Computer Skills.** Practice using a mouse and typing at this website: <http://www.pbclibrary.org/mousing>. You’ll find fun games to teach mouse control.
- **Practice Typing Skills.** Go to <http://www.powertyping.com/> to gain some typing skills. You can also set your lesson to music to encourage a natural rhythm. Barracuda is a really fun little game that is for the more advanced typist looking to increase words per minute.

### Real World Practice

- Go to places in your community that use volunteers. (Ideas: your church, a library, a shelter for animals or people, a nursing home, or your child’s or grandchild’s school.) Ask for a copy of volunteer guidelines. Bring the guidelines to your tutoring session and together read through them, noting and questions you might have and making a list of words you don’t know.
- Do you now have a good idea of the kind of place you would like to volunteer? If so, practice writing a letter of introduction, in which you explain who you are and what you would like to do for the organization. Then, review your letter for errors or areas that need more information.
- Set up an email account. Literacy staff can help you if a computer lab is a part of your literacy services. Or spend time at a library computer setting up an email account together. (See the “Write, send and receive e-mail” goal in this curriculum guide.)

### Independent Practice/Homework Ideas

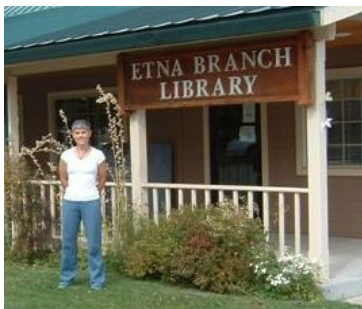
- Make flashcards of any vocabulary words you don’t know. Feel free to decorate the cards or paste pictures to help you remember. Vocabulary words can come from the “key vocabulary” above or from words you come across while doing the other activities.
- Hand-write a letter to a friend. These days, we are all used to simply calling our friends. This week, pick one or two friends or family members and write them a short letter. Be creative! You could make a card to go with it, copy a photograph and use it as a postcard or buy a funny card at the store. You will get more practice at writing, and there is not much that brings more cheer than getting mail.

- Go to <http://www.literacytools.ie/home.cfm>. This is an adult literacy website, filled with many exercises, games and other ways to learn about yourself. Start by taking a tour, and then let yourself go on a ‘website safari.’ You will gain practice in reading, thinking, computer skills and life skills -- all valuable skills in a good volunteer. You can turn on sound if listening is a better way for you to learn. Your job here? To explore!

## Milestones

- **Initial Effort** – The first few times you work on this goal, you will have an understanding of why you wish to volunteer and know which areas are your strengths and which areas need work.
- **Making Progress** – You will know you’re making progress because you have identified several places in your community where you could volunteer and their volunteer needs match your skills and interests. You have written a cover letter for the organizations you are interested in volunteering with and you have made a visit to at least two organizations and talked with the person in charge of selecting volunteers (often called the “volunteer coordinator”) to find out what’s expected of volunteers and what you can expect of the organization.
- **Accomplished** – You have selected the place you would like to volunteer. You have visited the site and have filled out any necessary forms. You may have taken a training and now you have begun to volunteer! Congratulations!

## Contributor’s Autobiography



**Jean Bury.** Hi! My name is Jean and I work as a librarian in one of the state’s northernmost counties—Siskiyou County. Before my work as a librarian, I was about to begin my second Master’s degree (in Psychology) so that I could work with young girls who had been assaulted. Then my son was born half-way through my pregnancy. My baby was very, very ill for many years. I couldn’t keep a job because, of course, I never knew ahead of time when he would go to the hospital again. I found myself jobless, out of money and feeling a little bit, well, useless.

So, I began to volunteer for disability organizations. I did everything from cleaning bathrooms, baking cookies for bake sales, driving people to meetings all the way to writing mini-courses on special education and tips for families caring for medically fragile infants. Along the way, I learned more than I thought I would, and met wonderful people. But besides those things, I chose to volunteer because I could make it better for the next person whose child was born ill. That has been the biggest reward.