

Make a Change Become a Volunteer!





Volunteers are involved in virtually every aspect of society including health, education, social services, youth, sports and recreation, culture, the arts and the environment. There are countless ways to volunteer and thousands of organisations seeking volunteers. Volunteers are united by one simple ambition – the desire to help others.

Volunteering is a great way of connecting with your community, learning new skills and gaining valuable work experience. No matter what your interests or availability, everyone can volunteer. Volunteer Ireland and the Union of Students in Ireland have created this guide to inform and inspire you - and help you get started!

10 Reasons to Volunteer



1. GIVE SOMETHING BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY

There is a powerful feeling associated with helping others and playing your part in making your community and society a better place to live in.

2. GAIN VALUABLE TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE, WHICH MAY LEAD TO PAID EMPLOYMENT

Volunteering can allow you to gain valuable experience, which can help you take that all-important first step on the career ladder after graduation. It also allows you to polish your professional skills, the basics of being reliable and punctual.

3. MAKE USE OF SPECIAL INTERESTS, SKILLS AND TALENTS

Are you a social media junkie? Or an IT wizard? Community groups and charities can benefit from your expertise. Share your knowledge and skills with a not-for-profit organisation and put your know-how to great use!

4. MEET NEW PEOPLE

Volunteering with a charitable society in your college or university can be a great way of meeting people from outside your course and social circle.

5. EXPLORE AN AREA OF WORK YOU ARE CONSIDERING AS A CAREER

Now is the time to test the water! Find a volunteering role in an area or position of interest and see whether it works for you.

6. EXPAND YOUR NETWORK – MAKE NEW PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

Volunteering is a great way of meeting people and making new friends with similar interests. Build connections with community groups and not-for-profit organisations.

7. BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Volunteering will bring you into contact with new people in challenging and rewarding situations. Volunteering can help you become more self-assured in social and professional environments.

8. LEARN NEW SKILLS AND/OR DEVELOP NEW INTERESTS

Add new skills and expertise to your CV by volunteering. Explore new areas and activities – you never know, you might end up discovering a new passion!

9. HONE YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Hone your leadership skills. As a volunteer, you may be presented with opportunities to supervise others or manage a project -invaluable professional skills that will really add to your CV.

10. MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

How can I Volunteer?



There are countless ways to volunteer. Below are some examples to help you to discover how you can volunteer!

THE ELDERLY

Most opportunities to volunteer in this field take place during the daytime and are with elderly people who may be frail or experiencing some levels of dementia. You can volunteer by helping at a care centre, delivering 'meals on wheels' or library books or through home visits.

OFFICE WORK

Many organisations have an ongoing need for volunteers to do office administration such as reception duties and research. Others need volunteers to support publicity campaigns, media relations or fundraising drives.

ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNING

Many non-profit organisations campaign and lobby for their cause, be it local, national or global. Volunteers can support organisations through writing publicity material, designing campaigns, social media management, putting up posters, handing out flyers and letter/email writing.

RESIDENTIAL VOLUNTEERING

You may wish to get involved in voluntary work on a residential basis. This will involve a period of 'live in' with the organisation. Residential opportunities can last from one week to several months or more.

VOLUNTEER FROM YOUR HOME

Virtual volunteering has become a very popular way for students to help community groups and charities. If you have expertise or skills in IT, graphic design, film-making, copy-writing or social media, this could be ideal for you!

GET PRACTICAL! – HANDS-ON VOLUNTEERING

Sometimes the best antidote to a day's studying is to get your hands dirty! Help a local charity with a painting project, take part in a community clean up, there are lots of practical team projects that would hugely benefit from YOUR help!

CONSERVATION / ENVIRONMENT

Help make your community cleaner! Conservation volunteers repair footpaths, create nature trails, help out at a community garden, clear rubbish from canals – the list goes on and on!

ON CAMPUS

There are lots of ways to start volunteering without even leaving your campus! Why not check if your college has a charitable society that suits your interests? You could also get involved with a student-led fundraising initiative or perhaps even start your own!

SHAKE A BUCKET! – FUNDRAISING

In a time of budget and funding cuts and increasing financial pressure for charities and community groups, fundraising is becoming increasingly important. Most organisations rely on volunteer fundraisers and there are many, many opportunities available to raise some funds for a great cause.

OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERING

Spend a summer helping children in India, take a holiday with a difference building homes in Moldova – there are lots of Irish organisations that organise volunteering trips abroad. Unsure of how you will spend the summer? Or thinking about a gap year? Spend an inspiring summer volunteering; it will stay with you for life!

FINDING THE RIGHT ROLE FOR YOU

There are volunteering opportunities to suit all interests and availability. After you have thought about why you would like to volunteer and what type of volunteering activity might suit you, the following questions will help you to focus on what volunteering role would suit you best:

COMMITMENT

How much time can I spare for volunteering?

Remember your other commitments (study, hobbies, employment) and try not to over commit yourself!

What period of time can you commit to volunteering? – e.g. one day, a month, a year.

What days and times are you free?

INTEREST

Do you prefer working with people or not?

If you want to work with people, have you identified a particular group of people with whom you would like to volunteer? – e.g. young people, the elderly, families, homeless people, people with a physical disability or learning difficulty.

Would you prefer doing something practical (i.e. with your hands) or volunteering in an office environment?

What skills or interests do you have?

Volunteering FAQs



WHAT IF I NEED TO QUIT THE VOLUNTARY POSITION?

Be up front and honest with the organisation you volunteer with – if you feel that you are no longer in a position to volunteer, give the organisation adequate notice to allow them to find a replacement. If you start with an organisation as a long term volunteer, many charities will have a trial period to allow for this. It's worth remembering too that if a volunteering activity doesn't turn out as you'd expected, there are limitless other opportunities to try. Volunteer Centres and volunteer.ie are there for support and can help to ensure a volunteering role is right for you.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL I BE EXPECTED TO COMMIT?

Every volunteering opportunity is different and every organisation will have different requirements. Opportunities can vary from once off volunteering roles to long-term roles with a bigger time commitment. If you have never volunteered before and are worried about committing to a role, there are hundreds of once off volunteering opportunities available at volunteer.ie. Once you give it a try, you won't want to stop!

ARE EXPENSES COVERED?

Volunteers are not paid for the hours they give to an organisation; volunteering is something you do for free. Ideally however, you should not find yourself out-of-pocket for the volunteering you do. Where out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed, you will be required to keep a record of lunch and travel receipts. If you are unsure as to whether an organisation you are volunteering covers expenses, why not ask the supervisor or volunteer co-ordinator?

HOW DO I START VOLUNTEERING?

A good starting point is to speak to your college or university volunteering service. Usually based within your Careers Service, students' union or student support service, your volunteer co-ordinator should be able to provide you with details of volunteering positions within the institution, students' union and local community.

You can also visit www.volunteer.ie to browse volunteering opportunities and find your nearest Volunteer Centre. Volunteer Centres will work with you to help find a suitable volunteering role to match your interests and availability.

WILL I HAVE TO BE GARDA VETTED? HOW LONG DOES THIS TAKE?

Garda Vetting is not a requirement for all volunteering positions. Typically, Garda Vetting is only a legal requirement when you are volunteering with children or vulnerable adults. Where Garda Vetting is necessary, the organisation you are volunteering with will guide you through the process and manage the application submission. Typically, a waiting period of 6-12 weeks can be expected for Garda Vetting.

Case Studies



JONATHAN MORAN, TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Jonathan began volunteering when he started studying in Trinity College Dublin. Jonathan had always been interested in volunteering but struggled to find a charity that would suit him in his hometown. Jonathan signed up to the St. Vincent de Paul Society in TCD during Freshers'Week.

Trinity St Vincent de Paul is an entirely student-run division of the organisation, operating within Trinity College Dublin and supporting the local area of Inner City Dublin. The Society runs over 20 weekly activities, including soup runs, homework clubs, flat decorating, activities with adults with intellectual disabilities and weekly fundraising meetings to organise events around college.

Jonathan organised a Sports Day in November 2012 in Trinity's Sports Centre for all the children from St Vincent de Paul's various activities. The kids took part in various sporting activities such as racing, spud and spoon races, football and gymnastics. Every child won a medal, helping to improve their child's self-confidence and self-esteem while also placing an emphasis on fun in sport rather than competition.

Volunteering has been a really positive experience for Jonathan. He said "I have loved working on many of the volunteering projects over the past four years with Trinity VdP... It is a fantastic feeling to help someone in need. It's very difficult to explain. The easiest way to describe it is when I do bad, I feel bad and when I do good, I feel good."

Jonathan has also found volunteering to be a useful addition for his CV. He said "I will mention volunteering on my CV, as if I would not have much else to put on it. Perhaps volunteering will benefit me in some way in the eyes of a potential employer. I know if I was an employer I would look favourably upon those who volunteer.'

"I have acquired a huge amount of life-skills from volunteering and met the most inspiring and motivational people who I now may call my friends. I have learned and gained more from volunteering than I could have ever hoped to learn through college."



NICOLE O'CONNOR, UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Nicole has been involved with volunteering for a few years. Last year, she did a lot of administration and management work through volunteering on sports committees as Chairperson for Camogie and Secretary for Ladies Gaelic Football. She spent the two last summers volunteering in the Belfast Summer Schemes for Mencap. This year, she volunteered as a Class Rep with the Students' Union, voicing students' concerns on

courses and improving communication between her classmates and faculty members. She has also taken the role of Ambassador for Volunteer Now and she has been the Northern Ireland Regional Officer for the Impact Committee.

As part of her role with Volunteer Now, she was selected to sit on the Impact Committee in England and to take part in The Impact Conference, which brings together students from across the UK on a discussion to inspire, inform and drive student volunteering forward.

Since she started volunteering, Nicole has developed her self-confidence and organisational skills which has been very useful for her studies, part-time job and everyday life.

Through volunteering, Nicole gets a huge sense of achievement knowing that she is dedicating her own time and energy to a cause or to a project she believes in and supports. She has met people with similar interests to her and made many strong friendships with people from a wide range of backgrounds.

Nicole started to volunteer to gain experience and develop skills to highlight on her CV. She said “My volunteering experiences are central on my CV, they back up all the points I say about myself and at interviews I have found that employers are always interested to hear about the different opportunities I have had. As I want to work with children, experience is crucial. Employers and universities always ask for a certain amount of experience with children and I am constantly building on my experience through volunteering.”

Nicole has also found volunteering has become a significant part of her life, she said “Volunteering should become second nature to students. Volunteering is free, it shouldn't cost you anything but your time. You have nothing to lose, only experience, friends and skills to gain.”



EILISH BARRY, NUI GALWAY

Eilish volunteered with Hand in Hand in November 2012 as part of a Redo a Room' project. Hand in Hand is a Children's Cancer Society that supports families in the West of Ireland through their fight against Cancer. The organisation supports families in the west of Ireland who are affected by childhood cancer by giving them access to professional service providers. By availing of the organisation's services, families find they have more precious time to spend with their children rather than trying to keep on top of household chores.

Eilish first heard about Hand in Hand through the Galway Volunteer Centre. She was instantly interested in the Redo a Room Project, she said: “I really wanted to get involved because it sounded like so much fun to completely makeover a room and I liked the fact that we were directly making this little girl's life a happier one. I thought about how much I would have loved a room makeover when I was a child so I was excited to see her reaction.”

The makeover took place in a house in Galway city. Eilish was one of six volunteers helping out with the project. Her role was to source the accessories needed for the makeover from local businesses. She also took part in the makeover of the girl's playroom.

Eilish found volunteering to be a positive and exciting experience. She said "I would encourage anyone who is thinking of volunteering to go for it. I had so much fun volunteering with Hand in Hand and met some great people. There are loads of opportunities out there so you can find a charity or project that suits you."

Eilish has added her volunteering experience to her CV, she said "I have it on my CV that I have volunteered, as employers like to see more than just academic history. I guess that volunteering shows that you work well with people."



CIARA TREACY, NUI GALWAY

Ciara Treacy is studying Public and Social Policy in NUI Galway. After completing her first year at the University, Ciara felt disappointed with her lack of participation in activities outside of her course. As Ciara began her second year, she resolved to change this and become more involved with student societies and volunteering opportunities.

Ciara decided to become a Student Connect Mentor for incoming first year students at NUI Galway, leading students on a tour of the campus and offering support and guidance to help them to adapt to University life. Ciara really enjoyed the experience, she said "The day helped boost my confidence significantly and I met my group the next week to answer any follow up questions. Throughout the year I was contacted a number of times by students in my group through text message and email regarding matters such as registration and purchasing second hand books."

Ciara was keen to get involved in the student run 'Sin Newspaper' as she has a strong interest in journalism and would like to pursue a career in the field after graduating. Ciara's passion for student matters also guaranteed that volunteering with Sin would be a perfect fit. Ciara thoroughly enjoyed the experience, she said 'I attended meetings and regularly contributed to the newspaper by writing news and opinion pieces on matters which affected students, such as student fees and events happening on campus... I would like to think I have helped students become more informed about their University through my work for the newspaper.'

Now in her final year, Ciara has become even more involved in volunteering and has become a Student Connect Mentor Leader based on her positive experiences last year. She is also the Beauty and Fashion editor of Sin, and is part of the Students Union Welfare Group. Aside from volunteering at NUIG, in the past Ciara has also volunteered for the COPE foundation in promoting their Halloween programme for children. More recently, Ciara's own experience with Meningitis inspired her to run the Flora Mini Marathon last Summer in aid of ACT For Meningitis and raised €130 for the charity. She also did a mini marathon in aid of the Galway Simon Community a few weeks afterwards.

As an ALIVE intern this year, Ciara would encourage students to consider giving volunteering a try, she said “I have no qualms in recommending involvement in the ALIVE programme to everyone as it did wonders for me and made me enjoy college life a lot more. I have always had a fun time volunteering and have met a lot of new people in the process, which is really what college is about in my opinion (as well as the educational aspect of course!).”

JEAN MARSH, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

Jean has volunteered with uLink Peer Support in University College Cork for two years running. Peer Support is a programme where second or higher year students deliver a support service to first year students. When Jean began studying, she benefited from a great Peer Supporter and then wanted to show her gratitude by becoming someone that makes a big difference to someone else’s life.

Throughout the two years, Jean’s role has consisted of having a group of first year students brought for a campus tour on Orientation Day. After orientation, Jean kept in contact with her linked first year students through email, giving them advice on college work and college life. Jean has also volunteered with the Steering Group, a group that gather Peer Supporters of each school within the college. She has helped with the coordination of major events and took part in the students’ Union’s Mental Health Week and Peer Support Week with the Promotional Group.

Volunteering has benefited Jean in many ways. As she says herself: “My problem solving skills are much quicker, and when I’m faced with a problem now I’m much more methodical about how I deal with it and how I think it out. Helping other people with their problems means I’ve more experience in dealing with them, and it means I take a step back, take a second to take in the whole picture, and am much quicker at being able to prioritise things that need to be done. Not to mention my listening skills have improved greatly!”

Jean also found volunteering to be more than just a means of improving skills and experience, she says “All the volunteering I have done through college and through other things I am involved in has led to some of the best experiences in my life. I have had memories etched into the back of my eyelids because of how epic they have been, and I did all of these things for free, expecting nothing back, but getting so much back in return. It is not about doing something for your C.V., it is all about being the difference that other people may have been to you, and seeing how others change your life incomprehensibly, and finding out new amazing things about yourself along the way.”

The **Union of Students in Ireland** represents 354,000 students across the island. We are a membership organisation and our members are our affiliated students' unions around the island, North and South. Website: www.usi.ie Contact: info@usi.ie

Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development agency and a support body for all local Volunteer Centres in Ireland. Our vision is every person connected to and participating in their communities to build a better Irish society. Volunteer Ireland works to increase awareness of, access to and quality in volunteering in Ireland.
www.volunteer.ie

Campus Engage is a national network set up to promote of civic engagement activities in Irish higher education. It is open to all universities and Institutes of Technology staff, students, community organisations in Ireland.

The network aims to strengthen community-campus relationships through volunteering, community-based research, community-based learning and knowledge exchange. If you would like to access information on all partner institutions log onto:
www.campusengage.ie

