

Giving Helps – You!

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from Susan Skog, “The Give-Back Solution: Create a Better World with Your Time, Talents and Travel (Whether You Have \$10 or \$10,000.”

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There's a deep wave of grassroots giving back sweeping the country. A surge of people across all age groups is volunteering like never before. But giving back doesn't mean that you don't get anything in return. Helping others reach for a new day rejuvenates us in ways that another margarita-soaked vacation, more stuff, a fatter resume, or a supersized house can't begin to. We want to feel useful. We want to find meaning. We want to feel this alive and on fire with possibility. Here are some ways serving others can serve you--from finding your true calling to improving your health to boosting your overall sense of joy.

Your Anxiety and Depression are Eased: We all know that giving back helps others but is there any benefit for those who are giving the help? Many have said they experience a potent euphoria known as "helper's high" when you're helping. The neural "glow" from helping others even shows up on MRI scans. Boston College researchers found that pain, depression, and disability in chronic pain patients decreased after volunteering. University of Texas and other researchers also find that volunteering eases depression while helping us reach greater states of happiness and hope.

This sense of usefulness, optimism and meaning can banish your brooding thoughts and clear out the cobwebs in your minds. Why? For one thing, giving back helps you stop fixating on your troubles and propels you to feel empowered and confident that you can make a difference.

Your Overall Health and Joy are Boosted: Giving is simply, powerful medicine. Research shows that teenagers who get turned on by service learning and volunteer work are much happier and more optimistic. They also get better grades and use drugs less. Volunteering even helps you live longer, according to University of California–Los Angeles researchers. When you're helping others your entire being undergoes a feel-good transformation, which boosts everything from your psychological outlook to heart and immune system. When you're generous, you're generous to yourself.

You Sharpen Your Job Skills and Attract Employers: Even as unemployment spikes in the country, we're seeing a surge in volunteering. What's going on? While we're seeking a job, we want to roll up our sleeves and make a difference. Now we have more time to give back – plus, that service keeps us optimistic that things will get better and primes us beautifully for our next, best job. Volunteering offers great experience, a chance to sharpen or learn new skills, and stay in the game – all increasingly desirable traits to any future employer. Additionally, people who volunteer are resourceful, creative, – and have incredible staying power on the job.

You Stay Hopeful and Optimistic: "I've never felt such an amazing sense of community," says Amanda Anderson-Green, a then twenty-five-year-old medical researcher from Seattle who spent three weeks on a Cross-Cultural Solutions volunteer vacation in Ghana through Travelocity's Travel for Good program.

She went to volunteer at a center with HIV-positive people and AIDS orphans. "I was struck by the simplicity of it. People talked with me as if I was their neighbor. They were so open, friendly, and accepting. They'd put their arms around me and thank me for coming." Now back in Seattle, she says, "I am still receiving the gifts from my trip. I knew I would have a rewarding adventure, but I had no idea how much going abroad would impact my views of community, happiness, and service here at home."

You Gain Appreciation for Other People and Places: Jonathan Orc thought Africa was a very bad place: hot, poor, full of sickness and dirt. But he fell in love with people in Mali while teaching English and helping build a school. "We arrived at night, but they had been waiting for us all day long....I felt that I belonged there, like they were just saving a spot for me in their village the whole time. Before, I used to see Africa as a crappy place, but now I see it as a paradise... Africa is a beautiful and extraordinary place that changed my life."