

A discussion of innovative, activity based recommendations for the professional retiree.

The New Professional Person's Retirement Lifestyle

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**THE NEW PROFESSIONAL
PERSON'S RETIREMENT
LIFESTYLE**

CHAPTER 4: VOLUNTEERISM - GIVE SOMETHING BACK

The way I see it, if you are a professional retiree, or are in the contemplation stage, you've probably got many valuable life skill experiences behind you that you can share.

When I think about the spirit of volunteerism, I'm reminded of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter and their long-term support for Habitat for Humanity International (www.habitat.org). When the Carters left the Whitehouse rather unexpectedly, they were determined to continue their work in the community and fight for social justice. Their involvement with Habitat has led to homebuilding projects worldwide.

Speaking from my professional experience as a veteran teacher, there is nothing more rewarding than teaching another individual. This is especially meaningful when you have personal knowledge to share.

Edgar Bronfman, in his book *The Third Act* (G.P.Putnam's Sons, 2002), describes the process as "giving back." The subjects in his book indicated that volunteering expands horizons, bolsters personal growth, provides enormous self-

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satisfaction, increases your circle of acquaintances and support, and is just plain fun.

Do you enjoy working with people and look forward to helping others? Do you have the desire to keep on learning? If you answered yes to these questions, then it sounds to me as if you should be a volunteer.

The AARP has said that thirty-eight percent of Americans over sixty-five have expressed willingness to volunteer but simply don't know where to turn. Well folks, here are some suggestions:

Habitat For Humanity International

(www.habitat.org)

Habitat is a non-profit organization whose ultimate goals are the reduction of homelessness and the eradication of poverty types of housing. And, they have been tremendously successful.

Since their inception in 1975, Habitat has been able to house more than 625,000 people in 3000 communities both domestically and in other countries. The reality is that the homeowner participants become partners in the projects.

The construction and rehabilitation of the houses is accomplished through donations of labor, materials, and money.

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The homeowners purchase the properties with mortgages that feature affordable no-interest loans. Further, the homes are sold on a no-profit basis. The deal is that the homeowners contribute their time in the construction and renovation of their homes as well as other, future projects. They may put in hundreds of hours of their own labor. Competent, well-trained people supervise all projects.

The selection of potential homeowners is need based, along with their commitment to Habitat as a partner.

If you are somewhat handy, or interested in being trained, log onto the Habitat website and click on the link that will search for the closest affiliate.

World Hunger Relief Inc. (*worldhungerrelief.org*)

Volunteers and professionals in this organization are deeply committed to ending world hunger by assisting those who need help with this basic need. Intensive training is provided in natural and sustainable farming techniques along with conserving and sharing resources.

More than three hundred interns in twenty countries have been trained in farming and re-forestation. Major projects have been undertaken in Haiti, Guatemala, and Kenya.

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The organization is based in Waco, Texas. Volunteer openings are listed at the website.

Cross-Cultural Solutions (*crossculturalsolutions.org*)

This is a non-profit international volunteer organization that promotes cultural understanding. Volunteers work side by side with locals in the following countries: Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Peru, Russia, Tanzania, and Thailand. One of the intended goals of for the volunteer is to gain a new perspective of the world and a renewed sense of personal growth. A fee is charged for participants, which goes toward the operation of the organization. Work includes teaching, daycare, and the creation of small business.

Literacy Volunteers (Local)

One of the most rewarding ways to volunteer is by becoming a literacy volunteer for a school system. Depending upon where you do this, the task may be as simple as reading a story to young school age children. Primary responsibilities might be to encourage enhancement of the students' reading skills. During my years as a teacher, these wonderful people served a variety of roles. Responsibilities included assisting in mathematics

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groups, acting as job coaches, and teaching life skills classes (banking, cooking, housekeeping). The New Haven Connecticut Public Schools has a program called the School Volunteers for New Haven, Inc. A goal for these volunteers is to improve the student's attitude towards school. Volunteers are recruited from retirees, professionals, trades people, business people and working people in general. Some of the responsibilities include mentoring younger at risk children. They also assist in arts, music, and science projects. Many even speak at career fairs. Some of these people are library assistants and classroom tutors.

Contact your local board of education to get the ball rolling. It is important to note here that no special skills are required. And, with all the emphasis these days on boosting standardized test scores, your help is needed more than ever.

Literacy Volunteers of America

(www.literacyvolunteers.org)

This agency provides literacy services to people who have severe needs. A major thrust here is to offer individuals opportunities to become independent, productive members of society. Local, state, and regional providers are fully networked. This affords greater opportunities for skill enhancement in the

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areas of reading, writing, English proficiency, problem solving and technology. In addition, instructional approaches are individualized to better serve students. Technology is used in an effort to make that learning more consistent.

Contact them through the website or call 1-315-422-9121.

Proliteracy Worldwide (*proliteracy.org*)

This is a literacy advocacy organization that addresses issues on a national level. They sponsor programs that help adults acquire important literacy skills. You can utilize drop down menus to find opportunities in your area.

International Executive Service Corps (*iesc.org*)

If you are a retired executive, you may be interested in sharing your knowledge with businesses in developing nations and in emerging democracies worldwide. By doing so you assist in the creation of a sustainable knowledge base, which encourages these firms to be more independent, and at the same time, you promote globalization. The Corps helps to strengthen non-government support organizations.

Services offered by IESC include managerial and technical assistance, market research studies, and access to financing and business planning.

SCORE - Service Corps of Retired Executives

(www.score.org)

Presently there are 10,500 retired and working professional volunteers in the SCORE network from around the world. They provide free business counseling and advice as a public service to all types of businesses, in all stages of development. Their responsibilities include virtual volunteering (more about this technique below) and e-mail counseling. Obviously, the use of a computer is a prerequisite for this organization.

VolunteerMatch *(volunteermatch.org)*

This is a nonprofit online service dedicated to finding you a great place to volunteer. Simply type in your zip code to find local volunteer opportunities matching your interests and schedule. The site features 31,000 organizations with 32,000 openings. As of this writing, they have made almost 2,000,000 referrals. This simple, effective service has already generated hundreds of thousands of volunteer referrals nationwide.

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A relatively new component to VolunteerMatch is their link to Virtual Volunteering, a form of volunteerism that allows anyone to contribute their expertise without leaving home or office. More about this follows in the section below on Virtual Volunteering.

Servenet.org

A very complete list of volunteer organizations is presented. You can choose among organizations that most interest you. All you need to do is type in your zip code and search what is available in your area.

Big Brother/Big Sister (*www.bbbsa.org*)

Since its founding in 1904, the major impetus of this organization has been youth mentoring. In 1977 both programs merged and their national headquarters was established in Philadelphia. Today, BBBSA concentrates on one-to-one mentoring relationships between adult volunteers and children. Most of the children in the program are from single parent families. At present, there are 500 programs around the country. In a study funded by the UPS, results indicated that sixty-four percent of the students developed more positive attitudes toward

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school, while fifty-eight percent achieved higher grades, and sixty percent noted improved relationships. Most parents of these children will agree that students do look forward to attending school. In fact, there are noticeably less unexcused absences and less of a chance of having to repeat a grade.

Most major cities house a Big Brother/Big Sister chapter. Make sure that you check out their wonderful website.

National Senior Service Corps (www.seniorcorps.org)

Over the last thirty years, the Corps has placed more than a half million volunteers in nationwide assignments through a network of projects. In order to participate in any of the Corps programs you must be at least fifty-five years of age. They really do try to individualize placements by utilizing the talents of older Americans.

The National Senior Service Corps controls three major programs:

1. The Foster Grandparent Program focuses their efforts on children with special or exceptional needs. This may include contributing support to children who are victims of abuse and neglect, tutoring children who have reading delays, counseling

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troubled teenagers and young mothers, and helping children with more severe disabilities such as physical impairments.

Most foster grandparents serve about twenty hours per week, four hours a day, Monday through Friday. They must be sixty years of age or older and have a limited income. As of this writing they receive \$2.65 per hour, which serves as a basic stipend. They also receive reimbursement for transportation, some meals during service, an annual physical examination, and insurance while on duty. In fiscal year 2001, over 30,000 Foster Grandparents tended to the needs of 275,000 young people.

I can tell you that these volunteers had an incredible impact on the self-esteem of the children that I taught. This was particularly evident where kids had little parental involvement in their lives.

2. The Senior Companion Program places volunteers with adults needing extra assistance in the community, such as a frail older person. The volunteer must be over the age of sixty and be able to volunteer twenty hours per week. As with Foster Grandparents, certain income restrictions apply. The hourly stipend is the same. The Senior Companion website, which is

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linked through Seniorcorps, offers links to all of the state and local chapter.

3. The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is one stop shopping for senior volunteers offering endless opportunities. Volunteers over fifty-five can be placed where their former career and life skills are needed. Flexible hours are featured.

The great thing about the Senior Corps is that it affords you opportunities to learn new skills. For example, some volunteers learn how to be effective tutors to young children. Some may organize community watch programs or environmental protection projects. Others may assist nonprofit organization boards with planning or resource development. The host agency provides all appropriate training.

Benefits of participating in the Senior Corps include helping your community, helping yourself, and receiving a small stipend.

To find out more information about the Corps, go to their website or call 1-800-424-8867.

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Volunteer-in-Parks (National Park Service)

(www.nps.gov/volunteer)

The primary purpose of this program is to provide a vehicle through which the Park Service can accept and utilize voluntary help and services from the public. The Park Service attempts to find ways to meet the desires of the VIP while at the same time meeting its needs

Volunteers are accepted from the public without regard to race, creed, religion, age (a most significant consideration for us), sex, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability.

Park volunteers are very important to the NPS. Each year about 122,000 volunteers donate about 4,500,000 hours of service. They preserve and protect America's natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

Compensation for the types of service rendered varies. If you enjoy camping, you may be entitled to a free campsite. You may also receive free uniforms or residence. You may even receive a meal allowance. Some of the positions I looked into seem to offer a higher level of compensation for more extended periods of service.

Volunteer openings are clearly posted and described in detail on the NPS website. Examples of openings include interpreters,

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ambassadors, trail volunteers, guides, campground hosts, carpenters, tour guides, gardeners, visitor assistants, naturalists, and outreach volunteers. Available openings are posted at the appropriate National Park.

Depending on the position that is open, several weeks of training may be required. During that process, you learn much about the cultural history of the area you'll be working in, as well as the geology, ecology, and techniques for program preparation. You may even learn about public relations. It may be necessary to shadow a ranger or naturalist.

The campground hosts usually work four days per week, with their day beginning early. Their duties may involve trail clearing, dealing with entrance fee procedures, and keeping campsites presentable.

Most VIPs say that feel a great sense of satisfaction being able to return something to the National Park Service after many years of enjoying the parks. This service becomes even more meaningful in the face of decreasing resources and staff.

Since I've been camping in the National Park system for thirty-five years, I can personally attest to the dramatic difference those wonderful volunteers make in keeping our national treasures in beautiful condition. Here is a wonderful

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example of how you can make a meaningful contribution to an important resource.

Additional websites that will provide you with information on these positions are the Forest Service (*fs.fed.us* - click on "employment" and then "volunteers"), and the Bureau of Land Management (*www.blm.gov*) Here are some specific examples of support services that VIPs provide:

- Yosemite National Park, California - Volunteers for the Astronomy Club at the park lead park visitors on stargazing events. Their generosity gives visitors a better understanding of the night sky.
- Mammoth Caves National Park, Kentucky - Each summer, forty volunteers participate in a cave restoration process in conjunction with the National Speleological Society. Their work includes renovation passageways and outdated lighting systems as well as cleaning cave formations and improving habitats for rare and endangered species.
- Everglades National Park, Florida - During the winter months volunteers at this park work at controlling invasive plant species throughout the park. This work

has resulted in the restoration of diverse flora and fauna and has positively impacted the ecosystems in that area.

- Arches National Park, Utah - Volunteers here share their passion and knowledge for nature by leading visitors on walks throughout the hiking trails. They point out many of the park's details and pinpoint the spectacular views of canyons, mountains, and rivers.

Passport in Time Program (National Forest Service)(passportintime.com)(800-281-9176)

Here's a great opportunity for volunteers to make a significant difference in the preservation and restoration of historic sites around the country. The Passport in Time Program affords unique opportunities for people of all ages to work and learn alongside professional archaeologists and historians. It is, most definitely, a hands-on approach to preserving the nation's past. Many of the volunteers are RV'rs who combine their love of travel with a desire to help. Most projects last from two days to two weeks. Some last up to two months. College credits can be obtained in some cases. People with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

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A fee PTT Traveler newsletter is published in March and September listing new projects with information (including duration, lodging and locations), reports, and photos of completed goals.

Accommodations vary widely according to the specific project. They can range from the most primitive camping to staying in motels (at the volunteer's expense). Many projects can accommodate RVs, often with hookups provided.

Prospective volunteers need to consider that they may face all types of weather conditions while participating in projects. Indeed, the PIT activities can be adventurous.

Examples of the nature of PIT projects include a 2000 documentation study of Ancient Pueblo people in Arizona's Kaibab National Forest, an excavation in Wyoming of an American Indian site, and a restoration of a turn-of-the-century log building in Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota. They have also excavated a silver mine in Missouri and unearthed a prehistoric stone cache in California.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Volunteer

Clearinghouse (www.lrn.usace.army.mil/volunteer)

(800-865-8337)

The Volunteer Clearinghouse attempts to match volunteers' needs and talents with the many projects the Corps undertakes. It cares for at least twelve million acres of land and water at four hundred sixty lakes across the United States. Most projects involve maintaining the recreation areas and protecting the natural resources.

Volunteer opportunities include trail building and maintenance, developing computer programs, photography, being a campground host, building wildlife habitats, working at the visitor centers, giving interpretive tours, presenting educational programs, and assisting in the development of archery ranges.

More than 70,000 volunteers have participated in the many projects that the Corps has undertaken.

If you log onto the Corps website, you can search state-by-state for available opportunities.

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Peace Corps (www.peacecorps.gov)

When Lillian Carter, mother of the then president elect, joined the Peace Corps in 1966 at age sixty-eight, she was an aberration. The Peace Corps of that era was a youthful enterprise; only one percent of its volunteers were over fifty.

Times have certainly changed. Ten percent of the volunteers are over fifty. Many of the volunteers are retirees just like you seeking altruistic adventures.

Lauren Mitchell, the recruitment director of the Denver office, feels that older people make fantastic volunteers in that they offer a lot of expertise, maturity, and experience. Mitchell says, "They still think of it as being on your hands out in the fields. But now we do a lot of business advising, and teaching with computers." She feels that older volunteers are considered an invaluable asset. "Younger volunteers in the group really depend on them a lot for guidance," Mitchell says. "Many of today's senior volunteers had just started families when the Peace Corps began and did not have the opportunity to join," Mitchell said. "Now their kids are out of the house, they're healthy and financially stable. I couldn't do it then. Now I can."

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Lillian Carter, who died in 1983, served as a Peace Corps nurse in India for two years. Her letters told of increasing joy in her work.

The Peace Corps is not alone in enjoying a surge of interest by older volunteers. Its domestic counterpart, AmeriCorps, hopes to expand senior programs that now encompass 500,000 volunteers.

Specific work assignments generally are made after a volunteer reaches the overseas country. Peace Corps leaders may generally divert older volunteers away from physically demanding tasks.

In many countries being an older person can have advantages. There is respect for age and reverence for maturity.

AmeriCorps/Vista (*www.americorps.gov*)

(1-800-942-2677)

Similar in nature to IESC, Americorps networks more than 2100 agencies involving more than 50,000 Americans yearly in service to these nonprofits. These volunteers help meet crucial needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. Also included here are public and faith based agencies. Their youth programs revolve around teaching and mentoring,

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technology instruction, and the conducting of after school programs. Their environmental programs feature maintenance of parks and streams, and response to community disasters.

By the way, Americorps provides grants to Habitat For Humanity, the American Red Cross, and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Approximately three quarters of the AmeriCorps grant funding goes to State Commissions while the other quarter goes to national nonprofits that operate in more than one state.

AmeriCorps/Vista members have been helping to bring individuals and communities out of poverty for more than thirty-five years. The number of volunteers participating in their 1200 local programs was about 6000. If you log onto their website, you can view a list of current programs by state.

AmeriCorps*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) is a full time residential program for men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four that lasts for a period of ten months. The types of projects volunteers participate in include public health and safety and disaster relief.

Americorps members serve in teams of ten to fifteen. Be reminded that if you are interested in becoming a member you'll be asked to commit to a ten to twelve month period of service

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either full or part time. Full time members are eligible to receive stipend awards to pay for college, graduate school, or to pay back college loans. You can also receive an annual living allowance.

Global Volunteers (www.globalvolunteers.org) (1-800-487-10740)

Global Volunteers sends teams to work on community projects in nineteen nations year-round. No special skills are necessary. Tax-deductible service program fees cover food, lodging, ground transportation, and project expenses. Airfare is not included. The following examples represent some of the recent projects.

- * A two-week project in Costa Rica was completed which involved the renovation and organization of a high school public library. The group included students, a lawyer, a computer engineer and several teachers. They worked shoulder to shoulder with local adults and high school students. During their free time they hiked, swam, toured the forests, and visited an active volcano.
- * Volunteers were needed to teach English at a summer camp in Crete. The students, who rarely had a chance to

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practice speaking English, were from several local villages. Informal classes consisted of crafts, songs and games.

* Workers on a Blackfoot Reservation in Browning, Montana, installed playground equipment, repaired rooms, provided computer training and worked with youths at a detention center.

Shriners (*www.shrinershq.org*) (800-237-5055)

The Shrines support many philanthropic causes. In 1920 they formed the Shriners Hospital for crippled children. Soon after they built twenty-two other orthopedic children hospitals around the country to support such problems or injuries as clubfoot, scoliosis, and cerebral palsy. In 1962 they expanded their services to include children suffering from severe burns. To date, the organization has helped more than 650,000 children. One of the key features of these hospitals is that all the care and rehabilitation is provided totally without charge to any patient under the age of eighteen. Most of their money comes from donations or fund raising. This is a great organization to belong to if you are a member of the Good Sam Club and you have an RV. Many members travel around the country to the various

events. The Shriners are looking for volunteers with expertise in all areas.

Heifer International (*heifer.org*) (800-422-0474)

In the 1930's, while a civil war raged in Spain, Dan West, a mid-western farmer, decided to help families there by giving out milk to hungry children. He felt that what was needed was a cow more than a cup of milk. In this fashion hungry families could continue to feed themselves through a sustainable lifestyle. In return, they could help another family become self-reliant by passing on to them one of their gift animal's female calves.

Heifer animals offer hungry families around the world a way to feed themselves and become more self-reliant. Children receive nutritious milk or eggs, and communities go beyond meeting immediate needs to fulfilling dreams. Farmers also learn sound agricultural techniques.

This idea has caught on to the point that families in 115 countries have enjoyed better health, more income and the joy of helping others.

Heifer maintains regional centers around the country that can provide you with educational resources and materials. They can

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also answer your questions about volunteering, study tours, and ways to involve your church or community organization. Call the toll free number to find the closest regional office.

Volunteers play an integral role in Heifer's effort to alleviate poverty and hunger and promote nutrition and well-being.

You can volunteer at the following:

- One of three Heifer learning centers at the following locations: Heifer Ranch, Perryville, Arkansas; Overlook Farm, Rutland, Massachusetts; Ceres Center, Ceres, California
- One of Heifer's Regional Centers
- Speaking at a church or community group or company
- International Volunteer Opportunities - concentrating on helping families around the world in need with a fresh start
- Study Tours - travel and learn by visiting a Heifer project worldwide

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Other volunteer opportunities include participating in one of the following:

- Community Representatives - A volunteer from a geographical area will address any person or group (including schools) that would like to know more about Heifer.
- Media Volunteers - Writers may be needed for the media.
- Organizational Representative - These volunteers represent Heifer in a specific group such as a church, the Lions, Kiwanis, or Rotary Club even a 4-H Club.

There are many opportunities for full-time volunteers at the Learning Centers. Full-timers go for a week to a year and receive housing and a monthly stipend.

Here's an example of a Heifer success story:

In drought ravaged eastern Guatemala, women and girls are responsible for gathering enough water for their families and animals. This involves many trips to the nearest source while balancing twenty-pound jugs on their heads. In an effort to ease this laborious chore, Heifer has been sending goats and volunteers to the area. A goat may only drink one gallon of water per day as opposed to a single cow that would consume

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eighteen gallons. Further, goats are better adapted to the rocky highlands of the area and eat less food. As a result of this effort, the children are spending more time in school and the number of children quitting school has been reduced.

My wife and I have begun volunteering for Heifer. We have been doing presentations at various schools to promote their "Read to Feed" (readtofeed.org) program. Students actually see that they are changing the world in a positive way. They read a variety of books and follow a specific curriculum. Literacy skills are enhanced by the activities. Fundraising goals are set and sponsors pledge money based on the amount of books that these students read. Finally, they decide which animals to symbolically purchase for struggling families.

For more details about Heifer go to the website.

Farm Sanctuary (farmsanctuary.org) (607-583-2041)

If you love animals and have a passion for animal rights, you may be interested in Farm Sanctuary. A major goal is the protection and rescue of farms animals. They operate a coast-to-coast network of shelters that specialize in adoption. They seek to educate millions of people like you, about farm animal suffering. They've actually been able to enact legislation

regarding farm animal practices. Volunteer opportunities include participating in various farm chores or helping out with administrative tasks.

AARP Driver Safety Program (*aarp.org/life/drive/*)
(888-227-7669)

In Chapter 1 of this book I suggested that you might be interested in sharpening your driving skills through the AARP Driver Safety Program. Well, they could surely use your services as a volunteer in this program. In fact, the program could not readily exist without its volunteers.

AARP provides its volunteers reimbursement for facilitating courses as well as a thorough orientation and training program. Openings include Coordinator positions as well as instructors.

Participants in this program gain a strong sense of satisfaction knowing that they have contributed to the health, safety, and happiness of others in their community.

Virtual Volunteering

If you enjoy working on your computer and really have it in your heart to be a volunteer, why not do it virtually.

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Basically speaking, this type of volunteer service takes place on the Internet. And, it comes in many forms. Agencies really do benefit from virtual volunteering as it encourages expansion of their programs by allowing for more volunteer participation and the creation of new areas to work in.

If you are physically incapacitated, have transportation issues, or have time constraints, this venue may open up a whole new world of volunteering opportunities for you. In addition, you can even virtually volunteer at your place of work. Of course, you'll need to be somewhat proficient with your computer in order to be successful here.

Serviceleader.org is a great site to explore and learn about virtual volunteering resources. Past online assignments include various research projects, newsletter editing, graphic design, researching elected officials, translation, and proofreading. Examples of categories of volunteers are as follows:

Technical assistance participants do task based assignments (research, consulting, proofreading, translation) while direct contact volunteers have contact with the client or service rep (mentoring, language instruction). An informal volunteer simply supplies informal support without training.

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Another terrific opportunity for virtual volunteering is Elder Wisdom Circle (elderwisdomcircle.org). Basically, the goal here is to share the infinite elder knowledge and wisdom its volunteers have accumulated. That said, an interested party could seek advice on any topic. Responses are offered through e-mail.

The only criteria you must meet to join the Wisdom Circle, is that you must be at least sixty years of age. If you check out the website, it becomes immediately apparent that people of all backgrounds and levels of education participate as volunteers.

As previously indicated, VolunteerMatch (volunteermatch.org) offers a large number of links for virtual volunteering. Simply click on a link and you will be presented with a description and contact information to any of the hundreds of postings. Some of the many categories include health and medicine, sports and recreation, disabled, women, religion, computers, and children and youth.

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