



A publication of the National Institute for Civic Enterprise
www.NICENetwork.org

HOW TO VOLUNTEER WITH YOUR FAMILY

If you would like to find an enjoyable and fulfilling way to spend time with your family, consider family volunteering. Imagine you and your family planting trees at the local Arbor Day event. Or maybe you'd enjoy helping out at the local furniture or food bank to help other families regain their dignity after a tragic fire or natural disaster. Contributing together offers a unique and meaningful way to spend time while also helping your community.

This article answers the questions:

Why should I spend time volunteering with my family?

How do I locate volunteer opportunities for my family?

Which organizations offer family volunteering?

How do I volunteer abroad with my family?

Why family volunteering?

The benefits of family volunteering are many. The rewards are invaluable. One story that brings this good advice home is from a man named Fran Heitzman who is the award-winning founder of Bridging, Inc., a furniture bank initiative in Minneapolis. Fran, at the seasoned age of 82, is still leading one of the largest furniture donation efforts in the country. Despite his age, the father of seven sons is still having an influence on the younger generation and families at Bridging.

Here's an excerpt from *The Power of One: The Unsung Everyday Heroes Rescuing America's Cities* about one a teen and his dad who volunteered at Bridging, Inc.

“Fran’s message to “get involved” has reached the younger generation, too. When he learned of a teen expelled from a local prep school, he convinced the boy’s father to bring him to the Bridging warehouse where he could learn “some discipline and appreciation for the plight of the needy.” When father and son showed up, Fran first assigned them out-door-duty trimming hedges. After a day of hard labor, the father confessed that it was the first time that he and his son ~~and~~ had actually spent meaningful time together. A week later, the boy came back on his own to help at *Bridging* and brought five friends with him. Fran says he’s not surprised that the boy’s grades zoomed to straight A’s and that his friends’ lives were also transformed. The prep school has since instituted a new teen volunteer program so that other privileged students can benefit from the *Bridging* experience.”

The teen gained a new perspective on what he’d been given in life and built a closer relationship with his father. While this is a dramatic example of what can happen with a family volunteer experience, it isn’t all that unusual. Family dynamics almost always improve when parents and kids spend time giving together.

22 of the best reasons to volunteer with your family

1. Families can participate together in special events (e.g., walk-a-thons) without having to leave the kids behind.
2. They gain a shared sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from giving back to the community.
3. They can discuss service and community issues and get to know one another better.
4. Volunteering creates positive role models for children and teens.
5. Volunteering can help families learn about their own community and social issues.
6. Volunteering promotes civic responsibility and enhances a family's sense of community.
7. Volunteering builds the self-confidence of family members.
8. Volunteering improves communication and support skills in the family and in the community.
9. Volunteering creates a history of family memories.
10. Volunteers meet people of diverse cultural and economic backgrounds.
11. Volunteers have an opportunity to use and share their time and talents.
12. Volunteering experiences carry over into other parts of the volunteers' lives.
13. Giving to others places a volunteer's own problems in perspective.

14. Volunteering forges special bonds between family members.
15. Volunteering helps children and teenagers to relate to other generations.
16. Volunteering gives families an opportunity to create new memories.
17. Volunteering makes families feel valued.
18. Volunteers network and make new social contacts.
19. Volunteer work shows families new ways to solve their own conflicts.
20. Volunteering gives families a sense of purpose or belonging.
21. Volunteering develops family pride.
22. Volunteering can relieve isolation (for newcomers, new parents, troubled teens, etc.).

Identifying volunteer opportunities for your family

Before you start your search, brainstorm with your family about how they would like to help. Would they like to work indoors or outdoors? Would they like to do hands-on work? Would they like to work close to home or perhaps volunteer in another country? Which issues interest them—homelessness, the environment, etc? Try to make sure that everyone in the family who is going to volunteer participates in the discussion. It may require compromise. Keep in mind that activities like office work are not good volunteer activities for a family. Look for options that engage everyone—helping to build a house with Habitat for Humanity, for example—where all can be involved.

There are several ways to go about finding a volunteer opportunity for your family:

- Read your local newspaper for volunteer needs in your community.
- Check with your church for upcoming scheduled volunteer outreach opportunities.
- Contact your local volunteer center.
- Search the Idealist nonprofit organization directory - www.idealists.org.
- Look up local opportunities on the web at GoVolunteer (www.govolunteer.com), 1-800-Volunteer.org, or VolunteerMatch.com.

These sites offer advice about engaging families in volunteering and offer good project ideas.

- Doing Good Together – www.doinggoodtogether.org
- Family Cares - www.familycares.org
- The Volunteer Family – www.thevolunteerfamily.org

Volunteer abroad with your family

Would you like a change from your typical family vacation? Consider taking a volunteer vacation. Imagine exploring new lands and cultures while making a difference in the world. Once you have decided to take a volunteer vacation there are several questions to address. Where would you like to visit? How long would you like to stay? How much free time would you like? You should also do background research on the organizations that offer volunteer vacations.

People interested in volunteer vacations should take the following steps:

- Study a project's purpose and inquire into the history and success of the project.
- Obtain brochures from the organization and visit their website to learn as much as you can about them. Make sure the interests of the organization are nonprofit in nature.
- Telephone the organization if you have any questions or uncertainties.
- Seek out references for this project or organization from prior participants.

Check with any of your local churches for mission outreach opportunities in other countries. In addition, here are several organizations that offer volunteer vacations around the world. Keep in mind that you and your family will have to pay program fees and airfare.

Cross Cultural Solutions

Amizade Volunteer Programs

Earthwatch Institute

Global Volunteers

The Global Village Program, Habitat for Humanity

CHOICE Humanitarian

The family institution is the building block
of our communities and nation.
The family shapes our children
and our society.

Volunteering as a family can bring your
family together. Try it!

About the Author

Debra Berg is a coach for nonprofit causes and leaders, an author, speaker, and the foremost authority on The New Civic America. In the nineties, her self-funded trek across America engaged over 100 citizen-inventors of social solutions to our toughest social challenges. In the process, she uncovered a new trend of nonprofit innovation and volunteerism. Now a respected expert and speaker, Debra has appeared in the *Chicago Sun Times* and on over seventy-five radio and TV talk shows. Her groundbreaking research is featured in her book, *The Power of One: The Unsung Everyday Heroes Rescuing America's Cities*.

The author holds two public policy degrees, the Certificate of Excellence in Nonprofit Administration, and is trained in social media promotion for nonprofits. Debra staffed the Watergate hearings on Capitol Hill and later served as an analyst for three state legislatures where she co-authored studies on education and social policy.

Debra is known as the "Cause Coach" by her clients. She works with new and existing causes to improve their visibility and viability. She is also the Charity Guide on *SelfGrowth.com*. In 2007, she launched the National Institute for Civic Enterprise, a national research and human services nonprofit network. Her numerous articles and e-books target civic/social entrepreneurs, donors, socially conscious businesses, and volunteers.

Debra Berg is available to inspire your organization as a speaker, to appear on radio/TV for an interview on the NICENetwork or her book, and to provide nonprofit coaching.

Phone: 1-888-753-3395
Email: debra@nicenetwork.org
Web Site: www.DebraBerg.com
www.NICENetwork.org
www.YourCauseCoach.com

Chat with Debra: @CauseCoach on Twitter and Facebook
DebraJBerg on LinkedIn.
Join the [NICENetwork LinkedIn Group](#).

Learn even more about volunteering for some of the best human service causes!

Visit www.NICENetwork.org



Copyright 2009 - Power of One Publishing, LLC - This article may not be modified in whole or in part without the express written permission of Power of One Publishing LLC. Otherwise, the receiver is free to disseminate this article in its entirety as long as it remains in the original pdf format and credit is given.