THE Teenager's GUIDE to the Real World

♦ Design Your Life
♦ Control Your Destiny
♦ Understand Yourself
♦ Plan a Successful Future

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This is an online resource for the book *The Teenager's Guide to the Real World* by Marshall Brain, ISBN 1-9657430-3-9. The online resources are offered as a free supplement to the book. They help you access the huge library of material for teenager's available on the Web. For more information on the book please click here.

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20 Ways for Teenagers to Help Other People by Volunteering

Have you ever thought about volunteering your time to a local charity or community organization? There are many different reasons for you to start volunteering:

- To help others
- To learn about an activity or organization that interests you
- To beat boredom (if you find yourself sitting around the house feeling totally bored, volunteering in an activity you enjoy can be a great way to change things)
- To overcome a loss you have experienced (one of the best ways to help yourself in a time of loss is to help others)
- To gain perspective on life (there is no better way to understand your blessings than to help people in need)

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Your reasons for volunteering are as individual as you are, but no matter what your reasons you can get a lot out of volunteering. You can learn about yourself, learn about others and meet a lot of interesting people by volunteering. You can help others as you help yourself.

For more information on volunteering in general and the advantages of volunteering, see this site.

One of the hardest parts of volunteering can be finding a volunteering opportunity that fits your personality. The following list will give you lots of different ideas and will show you many different possibilities. Look in your local area until you find a volunteer position that works for you.

1. **Homeless Shelters**
   If you live in a city of any size, then there is at least one homeless

shelter that helps homeless people with meals, beds and other services. Most homeless shelters welcome volunteers and have a variety of programs through which you can get involved. You might help prepare or distribute meals, work behind the scenes in the business office, help organize a food drive to stock the pantry, etc. You can learn more about the problem of homelessness and ways you can help by looking at this site. Look in the phone book for a local homeless shelter if you are interested.

2. **Food Banks**

   Food banks often work with homeless shelters, but they also serve poor people living in the community (especially around the holidays). Food banks collect food, manage their inventory and distribute food to those in need. The following link shows you the different volunteer opportunities available at food banks around the country:

   - Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana

   Any food bank will offer similar opportunities in your area. Look in the phone book for a local food bank if you are interested.

3. **The Guideposts Sweater Project**

   If you would like something to do in your spare time at home, one innovative way to volunteer is to get involved in The Guideposts Sweater Project, sponsored by Guideposts magazine. People around the country knit sweaters that are then sent to needy children around the world. This article gives you a description of the project and a pattern for the sweaters. Don't know how to knit? Not a problem, because the article also links to sites that teach you how!

4. **Ronald McDonald House**

   There are Ronald McDonald Houses around the country - almost every major city has one. The idea behind all Ronald McDonald Houses is very important. When a child is seriously ill, the child is frequently treated for long periods of time at a hospital or university medical center. Many families have to travel long distances to get to the hospital, and "where to stay" becomes a problem. Staying at a hotel becomes extremely expensive, and a hotel can be a lonely and sterile place. Ronald McDonald Houses provide a low-cost "home-away-from-home" for parents and children to stay during treatment. Volunteers help prepare meals, talk to families, take care of the house and so on. The programs offered at the Dallas Ronald McDonald House are typical, and you can read about volunteer opportunities there. Then call the Ronald McDonald House in your area to find out more.

5. **Special Olympics**

   As described on the web site for Special Olympics International, "Special Olympics is an international program of year-round sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with mental retardation." The site also describes a wide variety of volunteer activities, including sports training, fund raising, administrative help, competition planning and staffing, etc. Look in the phone book for a local office or search the Special Olympics Web Site for more information.

6. **Habitat for Humanities**

Habitat for Humanities builds and gives houses to poor people in local communities. Volunteers not only help others, but can learn a great deal about building houses by getting involved. See the Habitat for Humanities web site for more information. Call the national office or your local office for information about volunteer programs in your area.

7. **State Parks**
   Many state parks offer volunteer programs, and in these programs you can try anything from educational programs to trail construction and maintenance. This site for the North Carolina State Park system shows some of the possibilities available. Contact a state park near you and see what options are available if you are interested.
8. **City Programs**
   Most large cities offer a wide range of volunteer opportunities. Look in the phone book and call around to see what might be available where you live. [Do not be discouraged if your first few calls seem to hit a brick wall. Many city governments are large and fairly disorganized. Keep calling around until you find someone who understands what you are talking about and who is willing to help.]
9. **Helping Others Learn to Read**
   When you think about it, reading is one of the most important skills an adult can have. Many adults, however, have never learned how to read. Literacy volunteers act as tutors who help illiterate children and adults learn this important skill. There is probably a literacy program in your area. See also Reading Is Fundamental (RIF).
10. **Hospitals**
    Many hospitals have volunteer programs to help patients both inside and outside the hospital. This page for the Summit Medical Center is typical. The volunteers programs allow participants to explore medical careers and gain work experience. Contact local hospitals to learn more about opportunities in your area.
11. **Libraries**
    Many libraries need help reshelving books, running children's programs, making books available to the community, and so on. This program specifically for teens at Phoenix Public Libraries trains teen volunteers to assist library staff and the public during the Summer Reading Program. Contact a local library for volunteer opportunities in your area.
12. **Senior Citizens Centers**
    Many senior citizen centers offer volunteer programs to provide friendship and community activities to senior citizens. If you would like working with senior citizens, call a senior citizen center in your neighborhood and see what kinds of volunteer programs they have available.
13. **Animal Shelters**
    Many animal shelters are non-profit or government organizations, and therefore they welcome volunteers to help take care of animals, keep facilities clean and work with the public. Call a local animal shelter for more information.

14. **United Way**
    The United Way is a nationwide umbrella organization for thousands of charitable organizations. The United Way raises billions of dollars and distributes it to these charities. There are local United way affiliates across the country and they need volunteers. Contact your local affiliate for more information.
15. **Red Cross**
    The American Red Cross helps people in emergencies - whether it's half a million disaster victims or one sick child who needs blood. Volunteer opportunities exist across the country. Contact your local Red Cross for more information.
16. **Salvation Army**
    The Salvation Army provides social services, rehabilitation centers, disaster services, worship opportunities, character building activities for all ages and character building groups and activities for all ages. Volunteer opportunities exist across the country.
17. **Environmental Organizations**
    The Sierra Club (and numerous other environmental groups) encourages volunteer support to help with environmental activities. You can help in many ways: by helping lobby on conservation issues, by leading hikes and other activities, or by lending a hand at the Chapter Office. Contact the local office of an environmental organization near you. See also the Earth Day site.
18. **Political Campaigns**
    If it's an election year, there are thousands of opportunities to volunteer in political campaigns around the country. You can learn more than you imagine by helping a candidate win election. This article talks about some of the options. Pick a candidate whose ideas you believe in (either on the local, state or national level) and volunteer to be a part of his or her campaign.
19. **800 Number Volunteer**
    Many 800 help-lines rely on volunteers to staff the phones and handle other tasks. If there is an 800 phone bank in your area, you may be able to volunteer to help out.
20. **Web site creation**
    Many small charities and organizations do not yet have web sites. You can help by learning how to create a web site and volunteering your services. You could also raise money to pay for the web site, or seek help from a local company in the form of a donation. When creating a web site for a charity, *you will want to take care to listen **very** carefully to the people who work for the charity to understand exactly what they want their web site to look and feel like.* This will be extremely important to them, and you should be willing to change and improve the site to match their mental image. See this page for information on creating web sites.

Other Links