

# **A Guide to Volunteering**

## **Introduction**

Dear HB student,

Don't worry... this is not some ploy to make you guilty for not volunteering every waking hour of your life. I myself go through phases where volunteering is not on the top of my priority list. Whether you are reading this book because Ms. Hiedemann assigned it to you in CBL or because you feel like volunteering at a new place would be fun, I am glad you stumbled upon this guide. I am hoping that what you take away from it is that volunteering in fact is good for YOU! Yes, it helps the community and builds connections with others; however, it also broadens your own horizons and allows you to reap the tremendous health benefits of helping another person. (Yes, there are health benefits!) Let me introduce myself. My name is Caroline and this is my fifteenth and final year as a student at Hathaway Brown. Service has been a significant part of my life ever since I was seven years old and my parents signed me up for an event at my church to help make scarves for homeless people. I love sharing this passion of serving others with my friends and family, which is why I have had the honor these last four years to represent my class as one of the two Service Officers. I chose to write this guide because I wanted to share some of my experiences and reflections with you. This guide is intended to show you that you do not have to look far for an opportunity to volunteer, as there are opportunities all around you in the HB community. I hope that in reading this guide, you will be motivated to make volunteering an integral part of your experience at Hathaway Brown. Thank you and enjoy!

Caroline Bashour  
2013

## Chapter 1

### Why Do It? Why Not Do It? Everybody's Doing It.

I guess the impact that volunteering has on others is quite obvious. In essence, you are bringing joy to someone else. There are thousands, no, millions of ways to bring joy to others through volunteering, but I like to categorize them into two main groups: direct service and indirect service.

Let's start with direct service. A person needs help making his or her own life a little bit easier. This can be as big or small as you want! Maybe you are reading Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* to a child in the hospital, or simply picking up a math book when a peer drops it on the floor in the crowded HB hallways. Any way that you can step outside of yourself to realize the needs of another person, and then put those needs before your own is incredible.

A lot of people feel drawn to direct service because they feel like the difference they make creates an immediate result. An important thing to remember is your own safety always comes first. If a man in a white van tells you he lost his puppy and he needs your help, do NOT get in the car. There is no puppy. My brother told me a story from when he was in college about a homeless man he saw asking for money on the street. Now, I know many people are leery to give money to people on the street, which is perfectly normal, but my brother did something not only to help this man, but also to keep his own safety as a priority. Instead of giving the man money, my brother went to Subway and bought the man a sandwich! This action may seem bigger than others because my brother could have ignored the man without giving him a second thought. But just to be clear, all acts of kindness, big or small, do indeed count! One afternoon I was in the car with my mom when we saw cars driving into the next lane to avoid a wheelbarrow in the middle of the road. I truly felt like I made my mark on the community when my mother forced me get out of the safe car into the very busy street to unwillingly move the wheelbarrow out of the way.

Indirect service is a bit more complex. I like to think of this as helping another person achieve his or her own mission to help others. A perfect example of

this is the Class of 2013's Carnival Charity, Girls With Sole. This organization is designed to help girls of all ages living under difficult conditions to find comfort, safety, and self-confidence through exercise. The founder is a woman who herself was abused as a child and found solace in running. By helping the organization Girls With Sole, we are helping the founder to achieve her mission to help these girls.

An even more indirect (but still very important) way to volunteer is with organizations, which help smaller charities to achieve their missions. That sounds a bit vague. How about some examples? At the Cleveland Foodbank, thousands of pounds of food are sorted and packaged so that they may be distributed to other organizations that help alleviate hunger in smaller communities. Another example would be MedWish International (literally one of my favorite places ever), which similarly distributes medical supplies to other organizations that provide medical care to people in developing countries. In this case, you are helping someone achieve his or her mission, which is to help another person to achieve his or her mission, which is to help a person by making his or her life a little bit easier. It may be confusing, but just remember, you can be slightly removed from someone in need, and your aid can still get to that person.

There is also this idea that I like to call the Ripple Effect. The reason I call it the Ripple Effect is because when you help one person, it tends to help others in the community as well, like a ripple! (The name is genius, I know.) Perhaps you are tutoring inner-city children on a Saturday morning. Yes, you are transforming the child in ways probably neither of you even understand, but the benefits that the child then can present to his or her community are amazing! Perhaps you help a small girl to understand fractions, so she has the confidence to go help her friends when they are struggling. Perhaps you help a boy with his reading, and he can go home and read to his little brother. The chain of one act of kindness blows my mind. As the great Miley Cyrus once sang, "Just one spark starts a fire. With one little action, the chain reaction will never stop". Yes, I really did just quote Miley Cyrus. Whether you like her or not, she brings up a valid point. One little action can indeed trigger a plethora of other beneficial actions.

## Chapter 2

### Health Benefits. This Here is Science.

We would all be lying to ourselves if we were to say that we, as the volunteers, do not reap in any of the benefits of volunteering. In fact, some may argue that there are more benefits to the helper than to the person being helped. Have you ever experienced a sensation of pride and satisfaction with yourself after doing something to serve another person? Psychologist, James Baraz, refers to this feeling as “an even deeper level of well-being [for] a joyful, fulfilled life.”<sup>1</sup> The Dalai Lama calls it “selfish altruism”.<sup>2</sup> I know it as the *Helper’s High!*

In general, the impact volunteering has on you is incredible! Sociologist, Dr. Christine Carter, states that, “teens who are giving are happier and more active, involved, excited, and engaged than their less engaged counterparts. Generous behavior reduces adolescent depression and suicide risk.”<sup>3</sup> Dr. Carter’s reports here are specific to teenagers; however the benefits of volunteering can affect us at any age!

Let’s discuss the science behind this phenomenon. It’s time to get medical. According to Dr. Stephanie Brown, a professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University in New York, there are 19 reasons that volunteering is scientifically beneficial to your health. I have condensed her list to about three main reasons.

1. Reaching out to another person may push you out of your comfort zone, causing a response similar to fear. To overcome this “fear,” the body releases a hormone called oxytocin, as Dr. Brown calls the “compassion hormone”. Oxytocin buffers stress, by limiting your exposure to stress hormones including cortisol, while “increasing social trust and tranquility”.<sup>4</sup> I’m sure

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<sup>1</sup> Baraz, James, and Shoshana Alexander. "The Helper's High." *Big Ideas. Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*, 1 Feb. 2010. Web. 8 Nov. 2012. <[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the\\_helpers\\_high](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_helpers_high)>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Carter, Christine L. "What We Get When We Give." *Raising Happiness. Psychology Today*, 18 Feb. 2010. Web. 8 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/raising-happiness/201002/what-we-get-when-we-give>>.

<sup>4</sup> Barnett, Robert. "19 Healthy Reasons to Help Others." *Aol Healthy Living.MIND. The Huffington Post*, 27 Sept. 2011. Web. 8 Nov. 2012.

- you have experienced some level of stress at some point in your life. Stress is not only annoying because of its strange immediate side effects, but it can also cause long-term health complications. Any way that your body can naturally alleviate stress is very beneficial to your body. The “compassion hormone” is also released during childbirth; it allows the mother to bond with her child because, in simple terms, it pushes away any negativity or hostility. It also aids in cell repair and allows the cell to store nutrients and grow.<sup>5</sup>
2. According to Dr. Brown’s colleague, Dr. Stephen Post, also a professor of preventative medicine (and also former resident of Shaker Heights, Ohio), serving another person activates the mesolimbic system in the brain; “It’s an evolutionarily ancient, emotional part of the brain. When people just think about giving, the body doles out feel-good chemicals such as dopamine, which has a soothing effect, and possibly serotonin, one of the brain chemicals we treat depression with. They feel joy and delight--helper’s high.”<sup>6</sup> See, this Helper’s High business is the real deal!
  3. Amazingly, service is also really great for your immune system. This is shown through a study performed in 1988 at Harvard University. One group of students watched a video of Mother Teresa serving another person and the second group watched a video of people peeling potatoes (of all things to watch). Researchers conducting the experiment then took a sample of each student’s saliva. What they were looking for was the biomarker, immunoglobulin A, which would suggest strong immune function. The results showed that those who watched the video of Mother Teresa had significantly higher levels of immunoglobulin A in their saliva, meaning that their immune systems were more active.<sup>7</sup>

One key point to remember is that for you to actually reap in the benefits of volunteering, your efforts must be genuine. If you are volunteering because it is an obligation, it is no longer a true act of service. You might not experience the same benefit. In fact, the stress of feeling like you are forced to do something might be detrimental to your health. Another important reminder is to use your talents! When you have a special skill, you tend to have more confidence in specific

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<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/28/health-benefits-of-volunteering-helping-others\\_n\\_909713.html#s316118&title=Helpers\\_Live\\_Longer](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/28/health-benefits-of-volunteering-helping-others_n_909713.html#s316118&title=Helpers_Live_Longer)>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

activities. Do something you enjoy doing because it is not worth making yourself feel unhappy. This widens the range of the health benefits of volunteering.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Oh, the Places to Go!**

This next chapter includes brief summaries of just some of the placements of which HB has served.

#### **2100 Lakeside Men's Shelter**

Located in downtown Cleveland, this organization works 365 days a year to provide a hot meal to over 300 homeless men at night. 2100 Lakeside is a great place to volunteer because it targets both hunger and homelessness. When HB students go to 2100 Lakeside, we spend the entire time in the kitchen preparing trays of fresh hot meals. Serving the food is much like how the hot meals are served at HB: the residents file into a line to pick up a tray from a large window in the kitchen. To volunteer here, it is good to dress modestly, wear close-toed shoes, and make sure you can pull your hair back. If you are someone who really enjoys hands on volunteering, 2100 is a great way to go. It is so uplifting when the people at 2100 thank you for the meal. HB volunteers usually spend about three hours at 2100. If you are a bit leery of volunteering with homeless men, no worries! I have always felt extremely safe in 2100, especially because the volunteers stay in the kitchen behind the counter the whole time. Of course, if you would like to talk with the men, you are absolutely free to go into the dining room while they eat. Another bonus of volunteering at 2100 is they always let the volunteers eat what they are serving during a break and the food is always delicious!

### **Aspire**

Aspire is a program established in association with Hathaway Brown that works over the summer and a few sessions throughout the year to help promising Middle School girls. While at Aspire, these girls receive the tools, which help them excel at their own schools, that they probably would not receive in any other setting. If you are considering teaching as a profession, or maybe you like tutoring, this is a great placement because it targets education. Because we receive such wonderful opportunities at HB, the Aspire program is a really great way to return the wonderful gift of your education! I have only volunteered with Aspire one time at one of their special sessions during the year. At this session, the girls did an activity, which showed each girl which learning style is best for her. The strategies and tools taught through the Aspire program not only help these girls with their schoolwork, but they also inspire and empower these girls to achieve highly.

### **Cleveland Foodbank**

The Cleveland Foodbank is a volunteering placement that I like to call indirect service, as I discussed in Chapter 1. The Cleveland Foodbank alleviates hunger by distributing packaged food to other organizations around the Cleveland area, which are also devoted to helping those without enough food to eat. The amazing thing about the Cleveland Foodbank is that volunteers are so devoted to the organization that they make up for 30 people that the Cleveland Foodbank would have to hire for full-time work. To volunteer here, remember to wear closed-toed shoes and make sure that you do not have any nail polish and that you pull your hair back. To be honest, this is not my favorite place to volunteer. I love the mission of the Cleveland Foodbank, however I am more of a fan of what I previously called direct service; sometimes at the food bank, I find it difficult to see the difference I am making. Also on a less significant note, it always makes me hungry for whatever food we happen to be packaging that day.

## **Judson Retirement**

Judson Retirement is exactly what it sounds like, a retirement home! Spending time with the elderly may be a very fun and rewarding experience or it may be a test to your patience; it often depends upon the resident. Often people compare the approach to volunteering with the elderly people to the approach taken when babysitting. I am here to say that those people are WILDLY incorrect. Residents of retirement homes are people who have lived full lives and have experienced parts of life that you have not even thought about yet! Though the elderly may test your patience like a child might, it is crucial to treat them with respect, be polite, and have good manors. It is also important to dress modestly. Judson Retirement was my volunteering placement during my freshman year and I would play Bingo with the residents for two hours on Sundays. I remember one lady was very strict with the structure of the game. Other residents who struggled with playing the game would frustrate her. Though this woman often made the experience less than enjoyable, I also remember a lady who always seemed in good spirits; her positivity was contagious! She also always insisted I take a piece of her Bingo winnings, which was always candy.

### **MedWish International**

I could probably go on for hours discussing how much I love MedWish International. MedWish International, a non-profit organization, targets global health by collecting unused medical supplies from local hospitals that would otherwise be discarded. These supplies are then distributed to other organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders, which use them in developing countries, including Cambodia or Tanzania. I was first interested because I am interested in pursuing medicine and maybe studying Public Health. It is amazing to me to hold something like a tracheal tube, knowing that in a few months or even weeks, it will be helping a child, who normally would not have access to the supplies, to breathe more easily. A lot of what I do at MedWish is secondary sorting, taking inventory, and keeping the Ear, Nose, and Throat Section of the warehouse organized. To a lot of people, this may seem nitpicky and boring, however I find it a very relaxing environment. Other ways to get involved with MedWish include group sorts on Saturday mornings, which is when large groups of people come together to do initial sorts of the supplies. A fun event that MedWish hosts every year is called the BandAid Bash. This event is an auction to raise money for the organization and to build awareness about the issue of global health. They always have great free t-shirts that you receive if you volunteer at the event!

### **Ronald McDonald House**

The Ronald McDonald House has several programs devoted to bringing comfort and happiness to children. This one in particular provides housing to the families of children who are undergoing treatment for serious medical conditions. This program is especially helpful for families who travel long distances to receive care from the Cleveland hospitals. A way that HB has gotten involved with Ronald McDonald is by using the facilities at the housing center to make breakfast for the residents. Unfortunately, I have never volunteered at the Ronald McDonald House, however, HB students who have reflect that the atmosphere is very friendly and homey. However, they suggest going into a project at the Ronald McDonald House with the mindset that the families may be a bit subdued due to the background of their situations. Also be aware that asking personal questions about a family's situation is inappropriate because it might make the people in the family feel uncomfortable. If they want to open up to you, they will. If you struggle with finding topics to talk about when you are trying to avoid background questions, have no fear; lots of people experience the same struggle! Topics that are general enough to be appropriate with adults, as cliché as they seem, include the weather, sports, or even the activity you are doing. You can always start with a simple, "how are you doing today?" Finding topics to talk about with children is often easier because you can play games, talk about their favorite things, or simply draw pictures. These topics can apply anytime you feel like asking personal questions while volunteering would be inappropriate.

### **Conclusion**

I hope at this point you are thinking about the next time you will be able to volunteer. The good news is there are volunteering opportunities all around you! HB is a very good advocate for helping others. I believe this especially because we are a very blessed community. The best way to get started is through our Center for Civic Engagement. I like to think of it as the big umbrella for smaller projects at the school. Within the center, your class's Service Officers may plan service trips to some of the places I have suggested. A student may also lead a drive to collect donations for an organization that is special to her. In the past, students have collected nonperishable foods, gently used clothes, toiletry items, or even pet supplies. A student may also gather a group to participate in certain awareness projects such as walks or runs for charities, for example, Relay for Life. You are pretty much a free bird to instigate any kind of service you can imagine! Another center that involves a great deal of service is the Center for Global Citizenship. International trips to countries such as Cambodia, India, Nicaragua, Peru, and several others have a distinct focus to serving people in other countries. All these opportunities are in your hands at Hathaway Brown! It 's really quite exciting! I hope you consider participating in some of HB's volunteering opportunities because not only are you helping another person, but you are also helping yourself.