

Six reasons people want to volunteer and seven reasons why they don't

(including those we don't want to admit!)

For people interested in volunteering, today is a good time to be alive.

There are lots of opportunities available and they are more and more diverse, appealing to people with different interests and personalities. This is a good thing, as research shows that volunteering is related to better overall physical health, lower stress, and improved mood. The purpose of volunteering is not however to live longer or decrease stress; it's to make the world a better place!

Volunteering is so clearly a win-win, offering benefits for the volunteer and for society more broadly.

Indeed, a recent analysis of the well-being of the 37 countries in the OECD* stated that given this virtuous circle it is crucial to **'open up volunteering opportunities to a wider range of people.'**

How are we doing? The numbers vary depending on where and how it is measured, but around **20% of people are 'regular' volunteers** (at least once a month)**.

*Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**22% in the UK, 17% in OECD countries combined.



**6 reasons
people
choose to
volunteer**

There are many reasons people choose to volunteer.
Six of the most frequently cited are the following:

1

I want to feel useful.

2

I want to give something back.

3

I want to feel a part of something larger than myself.

4

I want to meet new people.

5

I want to learn new skills.

6

I want to contribute to a specific cause that I care deeply about.

These should be celebrated and we are lucky to live in a world where these are part of what motivates people.



**7 reasons
people
don't!**

20/80

Despite these reasons, if 20% of people volunteer consistently, that means that 80% do not!

Given the double benefits of volunteering for the individual and society **we should be doing everything we can to make volunteering as accessible as possible.** To do that, we need to address the various points of resistance people express about volunteering.

1 Time

I don't have the time. *I hate to say that, because I know there are so many worthy causes that need help, but I already feel overwhelmed by everything I have to do.*

We hear you! Fortunately, there are now more and more ways to make a difference that don't take a lot of time. Micro-volunteering, for instance, harnesses the efforts of many people doing small tasks (which each takes a few minutes to a few hours) for a larger project. Check out skillsforchange.com for example.

2 Commitment

I'm afraid once I commit, I'll be asked for more than I want to give. *I know the need is there, but I'm already stretched for time as it is.*

Yes, the guilt can feel real! Even if many organisations respect your level of commitment, it's crucial to be clear from the start. Spots of Time (spotsoftime.org) offers 'bite-size ways' to volunteer, no guilt needed.

3 Independence

I'm not a 'team' person. *I like to be on my own and I don't really want to be a part of a group.*

Volunteering as part of a group can be a rewarding experience, but it's not for everyone. People who prefer to be on their own can look into crowd-acting (crowd-acting.org), where individual actions come together to create big impact.

4 Guilt

I'm so sensitive seeing homeless people and poor children. *I know this sounds horrible, but I feel unfairly lucky and don't need more reminders!*

There are many ways to help that don't involve seeing extreme examples of hardship. Several new initiatives (like deedmob.com) provide thousands of ways to volunteer that correspond to your strengths and interests.

5 Discomfort

I don't want to feel uncomfortable. *If I'm volunteering with people in need, like someone who is homeless, or ill, or someone who has a handicap, I'm afraid I may not know how to act.*

No judgment here. There are many people who are comfortable working in such situations and thank goodness for them! For others, online volunteering (onlinevolunteering.org) is worth looking into as it offers opportunities to use a range of skills such as writing, design, and translation.

6 Uncertainty

I don't know what I'll be asked to do.

Distributing flyers, serving soup, or asking people for money aren't my cup of tea. I don't want to be a prima dona, but I'd like to do something that I'm actually good at.

Organisations are increasingly matching volunteers' skill-sets with identified needs. You can choose specific actions that match your interests. Check out volunteermatch.org and Doit.life for more.

7 Impact

I don't want to be disappointed. I want to volunteer to make a difference, and yet what if I feel like I'm not really making any difference, or at least not really seeing it?

Seeing the impact of your action is a key factor in maintaining motivation. Micro-lending sites like kiva.org are great choices here as you can see the person you're helping and your impact in a concrete way.

These reasons exist whether we like them or not.

And quite frankly, to some extent it doesn't matter if they're 'legitimate' or not. If they are preventing people from engaging in feeling the satisfaction of contribution and making the world a better place, it is worth devoting serious thought to overcoming these obstacles.

We must not forget that 4 out of 5 people have *not* chosen to engage in regular volunteering.

20/80

Do we need a new way of helping?

Make-your-own-cupcake volunteering! Small, super-personalised projects that are easy and fun to do.

We call these projects **maacs (for massively accessible actions for change).**

A maac takes a person's interests and concerns to create projects that give a good dose of purpose and pleasure. For example, an interest in juggling and a concern about lack of friendliness in the city could become a maac of "Juggling for Smiles" outside the local train station.

Interests:		Concerns:		Maac:
Juggling	+	Lack of friendliness	=	'Juggling for Smiles' session outside the local train station
Harry Potter	+	Loneliness in the elderly	=	Reading Harry Potter to an elderly neighbour
Tapas	+	Implicit sexism	=	'Tapas for Tough Guys' video series

What makes maacs work

The time you want.

Maac projects are by definition small, easy-to-do projects. You decide how much time you want to commit in coming up with your project. It can be as simple as putting a food collection box in your apartment building or organising monthly cooking classes for widowers.

Based on your interests. On your own terms.

In designing your own mini-project, there is no potential discomfort or uncertainty about what you'll be asked to do. You decide the kind of project that will bring you the right dose of pleasure and meaning.

With or without others.

Your project can be as solo or social as you wish, from writing a blog about edible insects (on your own) to organising a covid-friendly neighborhood treasure hunt (hello neighbours ;-).

Satisfaction guaranteed.

Maacs are designed for their impact not only on the world, but also on you. Seeing the impact on the world provides *you* with an important boost of satisfaction which is key for sustainable change.