Volunteering for Happiness and Health

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Why Do People Volunteer?
Being happy plays an important role in health and many people find happiness in volunteering. Dr. Albert Schweitzer once said: ‘the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve’. A study done by Argyle in 1998 identified volunteering as the second greatest source of joy. Dancing was first.1

Many people worldwide participate in volunteer work. In America, more young people volunteer than vote, and in Australia, approximately 4.4 million people contribute around 701 million hours of their time per year in volunteering.2 (In W.A. alone, surf life saving volunteers spend about 60,000 hours patrolling beaches each year.)3 Volunteering is estimated to be worth more than $10 billion to the Australian economy.2

Reasons people decide to volunteer include:
• wanting to help people;
• to improve conditions in society/environment;
• to meet people;
• to pass the time;
• for enjoyment/ fun;
• to keep active;
• to increase skills; and
• to improve chances of getting paid employment.

The reasons people volunteer vary but the most common reason across all age groups is to ‘improve society and environment’.4 While self-development possibilities are usually more important to younger people then to older adults, volunteering can bring direct and indirect benefits to a community and help to improve social and economic conditions5.

Benefits of Volunteering
Volunteering is often seen in terms of the benefits volunteers bring to those they help but more recently many have become aware of the benefits to the volunteers themselves. Volunteers may benefit economically from their volunteer work. Lonsdale’s research indicates volunteer work has immense benefits for many individuals. There is a vast range of volunteer programs available and many opportunities for a diverse number of individuals to participate. There are various reasons why volunteering may make individuals happy. Some people may just enjoy helping others. Some feel good that they have set a goal and achieved it through their volunteer work, and others may find their volunteer work useful for their own future endeavours. So, if you want to be happy try volunteering.

References
2 Green, K. ‘Giving up your time to help others can improve health and fitness. But new research has found volunteering could boost your love life’, The Sunday Times: Body + Soul, March 5, 2006, pg 11.
3 Woods, S, ‘Lifesavers go on patrol in $7m community service’, The West Australian.
7 Options on display at the volunteer expo’, Goldfields express, 19/25 May 2006, p.3.
10 Nelson, B 2006, ‘Commentary: While kids are off, put’em to work’, The Daily Record, pg1.
15 Li, Y 2004, ‘Volunteering and mental health: Benefits of engagement or social selection?’, Purdue University, p.4054.