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## Happy Symptoms and joyful manifestations of a Serial Volunteer and Service Renderer

Since I was a young girl, I have enjoyed the way I feel when I give service. I remember my mother feeling overwhelmed with a project she was working on to provide dish towels for needy families. In those days, they were made of muslin that we would print with a pattern or picture. These particular dish towels were to be hand-painted with cloth paints. It took hours to do just one set of seven. She asked me if I would be willing to help her. I remember the pride I felt as an 11 year-old girl, in helping to complete this project with my mom, knowing that it would help others as well. I will never forget the experience.

Over the years, I have tried to teach the joy of service to my children, and now, grandchildren. One recent Christmas, my husband and I decided that instead of Christmas presents, we would do several acts of service, in behalf of each family member. We made hygiene kits for people involved in disasters around the world, we donated toys to Toys for Tots, we took canned food to our local Food Bank, as well as the Homeless shelter. We also raked the neighbor's leaves, made a rice pillow for an elderly neighbor and ended up serving Christmas Dinner on Christmas Day to homeless and needy families at our local Civic Center. It was one of the best Christmases we ever had and our children were touched with our gifts of love and service in their behalf.

**The University of California, San Diego reports that Service reduces stress and makes you healthier.**<sup>1</sup> “Experts report that when you focus on someone other than yourself, it interrupts usual tension-producing patterns. Moods and emotions, like optimism, joy, and control over one’s fate, [and] strengthen[s] the immune system.”

One year, my daughter asked if we would like to help her make sandwiches for a homeless shelter in her area. We all got together and spread out food items across our kitchen table. I think we had seven family members there to help. We not only made delicious sandwiches, but we made them into 40 sack lunches, complete with fruits, veggies, chips and a cookie. I remember how good we all felt that night. There was no complaining from children (or adults!) and we had a wonderful time together. The next morning, we delivered our lunches to the homeless shelter. They were so appreciative and asked if we would like to do it on a regular basis, which we happily did for quite some time. After that experience, we moved to a new home. As I thought about (and missed) our volunteer opportunity, I decided to contact our local food bank/homeless shelter. They were ecstatic that I called and told me some particular items they were in great need of. I made a few calls to friends and neighbors and before I knew it, I had a carload of food and dry goods to deliver. This began a weekly phone call to see what the needs were for the week, gathering of items, and delivery to the Food

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Bank. We all felt so good to be able to help others who weren't as fortunate as ourselves. It was truly a wonderful time for all of us involved.

Did you know that **Volunteering increases self-confidence and combats depression.**<sup>2</sup>

"Volunteering can provide a healthy boost to your self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity. And the better you feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and future goals.

"Reducing the risk of depression is another important benefit of volunteering. A key risk factor for depression is social isolation. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against stress and depression when you're going through challenging times."

Giving service and volunteering takes the focus off of YOU and puts in on another person or persons. We live in a world where WIIFM radio sometimes rules our lives! It's the "What's In It For Me?" station. As a senior citizen, I can really appreciate the benefits for me, as aging can sometimes bring about aches, pains and loneliness:

"Volunteering is good for your health at any age, but it's especially beneficial in older adults. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not, even when considering factors like the health of the participants. Volunteering has also been shown to lessen symptoms of chronic pain or heart disease."

**If you are looking for the "magic fix" to help you be happier and have greater satisfaction in life, then get out there and start doing something for someone! The more you give, the greater the benefits!**

*volunteering: the happiness effect:*

Helping others kindles happiness, as many studies have demonstrated. When researchers at the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteering and measures of happiness in a large group of American adults, they found the more people volunteered, the happier they were, according to a study in Social Science and Medicine. Compared with people who never volunteered, the odds of being "very happy" rose 7% among those who volunteer monthly and 12% for people who volunteer every two to four weeks. Among weekly volunteers, 16% felt very happy—a hike in happiness comparable to having an income of \$75,000–\$100,000 versus \$20,000, say the researchers. Giving time to religious organizations had the greatest impact.

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Adapted with permission from Simple Changes, Big Rewards: A Practical, Easy Guide for Healthy, Happy Living, a special health report published by Harvard Health Publications.

### **What are some things you can do to be happier, combat depression, and give more meaning to your life?**

How about volunteering at a soup kitchen, watching a neighbor's children to give her a break, taking a meal to someone who just had surgery, or even just sending a card to someone who is having challenges? What about helping at your local Elementary school, walking someone's dog, or getting involved with a local non-profit organization? Whatever your situation, anyone can serve! I have seen people from all walks of life helping and serving; some I have seen are homeless, some are dealing with a mental disability, some are in wheelchairs. Others are challenged with emotional and social phobias, but are still working side-by-side with folks because it helps them to feel better and takes them out of the equation for a bit.

I believe we all have a desire to help others, but we get so "stuck" in the routine of life that we sometimes are in a rut of just doing the same things day after day. If you haven't been helping another person on a regular basis, you are missing a wonderful opportunity to not only grow personally, but to help those who may be unable to help

themselves or need support without any strings attached. Weigh the costs (it doesn't cost anything but your effort) and give it a try! You could be the answer to someone's prayers today! The beautiful thing is that I have found a wonderful side-benefit from giving service and volunteering – I have met the most wonderful people who have become my life-long friends! You can't put a price on that!

author: tara chappell

<sup>1</sup><https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/involvement/community/reasons.html>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.helpguide.org/life/volunteer\\_opportunities\\_benefits\\_volunteering.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/life/volunteer_opportunities_benefits_volunteering.htm)

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