Article: Voluntary Work

Summary
This article looks at why you might want to do voluntary work, and the opportunities for doing this in the UK.

Introduction
Voluntary work is unpaid work that people do to help a particular organisation or cause, such as a charity or a voluntary body. Anything from managing the finances on a charity committee to repairing the football kit of a children’s team can be voluntary work.

Although some volunteers might be paid an allowance for the work they do, their reasons for doing it usually have nothing to do with making money.

Why do voluntary work?
People do voluntary work for all kinds of reasons. Some of the most common are to:

- gain useful work experience to help get a paid job - for example, doing some admin work for a charity while you are unemployed or at college can help you develop transferable skills and knowledge
- get a particular job or get onto a course. Some employers and course providers will want to see that you’ve developed relevant skills and knowledge through work experience, including as a volunteer.
- find out what a particular job would be like full-time - voluntary work can be a good way of finding out what a job is really like, before deciding to make a commitment to that career
- help a particular cause - giving time to an organisation can be just as valuable as giving money to them
- do something worthwhile and fulfilling, but not as a full-time job - such as helping people who are in need
- use different skills in new ways - for example, organising fund-raising and publicity events
- make new friends - voluntary work is a good way to meet people from different backgrounds who share a common interest

Types of voluntary work
There are two main types of voluntary work in the UK - residential and non-residential.

In residential work, the volunteer gives up a block of time (anything from a few days to several months) to do voluntary work for an organisation. This could be something like helping on an archaeological dig or going on holiday with a group of disabled children.

This kind of work doesn't usually take place locally, so the organisation normally provides board and lodging. Also, they might pay the volunteer's travel costs and a small living allowance. However, on some projects the volunteers have to pay their own way and find their own accommodation. Some people go back to volunteer on the same project year after year.

Non-residential work is the kind that most people do. Some people volunteer on a regular basis, perhaps working in a charity shop for one day a week or teaching adult literacy for a couple of hours on the same night every week. Others volunteer as and when they can, perhaps helping out on a local project for a couple of weekends.

Which types of organisation offer voluntary work?
A wide range of organisations need volunteers. Most are charities or other non-profit-making bodies. There are also opportunities to do voluntary work with public organisations, such as local authority social services departments or the prison service.

Some of the main types of organisation are:

- conservation organisations - where you help to protect the environment, for example, clearing litter, planting trees or surveying wildlife habitats
- organisations that support disabled people - voluntary work with people with physical or learning disabilities could
range from organising and going on a camping trip to helping out at a day centre
- advice and counselling - you could be helping to run a telephone help-line or you could be dealing with people face to face. These organisations might be helping people who have a variety of problems. Most will only take on volunteers who are willing to follow a training programme in counselling or advising.
- organisations that support older adults, many of whom live on their own or away from their family and friends in a residential home. Volunteers might visit older adults in their homes to help out, or work at day centres or clubs run for older adults.
- prisons - it's possible to volunteer to work with people while they are in prison
- charity shops - which rely on volunteers to collect donations, sort out the stock, serve customers and create window displays

There are many more types of voluntary work. Most organisations that need volunteers have clerical and fund-raising work to be done, and there are plenty of local projects that look for people who are willing to contribute some of their time.

Voluntary work and Jobseeker's Allowance

If you're unemployed and receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), doing voluntary work won't affect your benefits, as long as you:

- continue to look for a paid job
- are willing to give up your voluntary work to start a paid job
- aren't receiving any payment for your voluntary work

You're allowed to claim 'reasonable' expenses such as meals and travel from the organisation you volunteer for; this will not affect your benefit.

If you're getting JSA and are thinking of doing voluntary work, you should speak to your local Jobcentre Plus first to make sure your benefit won't be affected.

Organisations

- Volunteer Centres - in towns and cities across the country. They are like a jobcentre for voluntary work. They have a list of local voluntary opportunities and will try to match you up with something that interests you. You can search for your nearest office on the Volunteering England or Do-it websites.
- Citizens Advice Bureaux and public libraries often have information about local opportunities
- if you know which organisation you'd like to volunteer for, you can contact them directly and ask about opportunities

Further Information

Contacts

- **The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)**
  Address: Sedum House, Mallard Way, Doncaster DN4 8DB
  Tel: 01302 388883
  Email: information@tcv.org.uk
  Website: [www.tcv.org.uk](http://www.tcv.org.uk)

- **Volunteering England**
  Part of NCVO
  Address: Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL
  Tel: 020 7713 6161
  Email: ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk
  Website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)
• **Working for a Charity**  
  Managed by NCVO  
  Address: Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL  
  Tel: 020 7520 2512  
  Email: workingforacharity@ncvo-vol.org.uk  
  Website: [www.workingforacharity.org.uk](http://www.workingforacharity.org.uk)

• **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)**  
  Scottish enquiries  
  Address: Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB  
  Tel: 0131 4748000  
  Email: enquiries@scvo.org.uk  
  Website: [www.scvo.org.uk](http://www.scvo.org.uk)

• **National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)**  
  Address: The Tower, 2 Furnival Square, Sheffield S1 4QL  
  Tel: 0114 2786636  
  Email: navca@navca.org.uk  
  Website: [www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk)

• **Community Service Volunteers (CSV)**  
  Address: 237 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NJ  
  Tel: 020 7278 6601  
  Email: information@csv.org.uk  
  Website: [www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)

• **vInspired**  
  Volunteering opportunities  
  Address: 5th floor, Dean Bradley House, 52 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF  
  Tel: 020 7060 7000  
  Email: info@vinspired.com  
  Website: [vinspired.com](http://vinspired.com)

• **Step Together Volunteering**  
  Tel: 0117 955 9042  
  Email: enquiry@step-together.org.uk  
  Website: [www.wwv.org.uk](http://www.wwv.org.uk)

• **Do-it**  
  Volunteering made easy - a volunteering database run by charity YouthNet  
  Website: [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)

• **Volunteering - Guide**  
  UK government services and information  
  Website: [www.gov.uk/volunteering](http://www.gov.uk/volunteering)