

# ***Providing Independent Living Support: Training for Senior Corps Volunteers***

## **Module 2**

### **Becoming an Effective Care Partner: Helping Volunteers Recognize Benefits to Themselves**

*Providing Independent Living  
Support:  
**Benefits of Service to  
Volunteers***



Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# PROVIDING INDEPENDENT LIVING SUPPORT: TRAINING FOR SENIOR CORPS VOLUNTEERS

## Module 2: Becoming an Effective Care Partner: Helping Volunteers Recognize Benefits to Themselves

### *Introduction*

Studies have shown that there are significant benefits to seniors who volunteer. This 60-75-minute session will describe some of the research findings on mental and physical health benefits of volunteering, and offer tips for maintaining health and enthusiasm for volunteering. In addition to a short lecture, the session includes a brief warm-up exercise to help participants get to know each other, a more extensive small group exercise, and a self-care worksheet.

### **Objectives**

By the end of the session participants will further their understanding of:

- Why many people choose to volunteer
- The mental, social and physical health benefits of volunteering
- Tips and strategies for maintaining their physical and mental health

### **Visual Aids (PowerPoint) and Facilitator's Notes**

If you are using the PowerPoint slides included with this curriculum, Facilitator's Notes are provided under each slide (to see them, select "View...Notes Page" from PowerPoint's main menu). These notes provide the same information as the Facilitator's Notes included in this document, however, they are not as detailed; the PowerPoint Facilitator's Notes are primarily main points for the presenter.

**If you do *not* use the PowerPoint slides**, we suggest you create other visual aids such as handouts or transparencies, or copy the information on easel paper and post it for participants. Duplicating the information on these two slides will be the most helpful: Slide 6 (exercise instructions) and Slide 10 (self-care worksheet instructions).



### **Handouts**

The handouts for this session follow the facilitator's notes and instructions. Handouts 1-3 should be distributed during the session; this symbol in the Facilitator's Notes will cue you as to when: 📄. Handouts 4-6 can be handed out at the end of the session.

1. Why Did You Volunteer?
2. Benefits of Volunteering Worksheet
3. Self Care Worksheet
4. Issue Brief: The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research
5. Additional Resources: Benefits of Service to Volunteers
6. Training Feedback Survey

## Session Outline

Discussion Topic	Estimated Time	Method/Activity	Slide Numbers
<b>I. Welcome and Introduction</b>	<b>15 min.</b>		<b>1</b>
A. Learning Objectives	2	Lecture	<b>2</b>
B. Trends in Volunteering	3	Lecture	<b>3</b>
C. Warm up: Why Did You volunteer? 📄 <i>Why Did You Volunteer?</i>	10	Individual, Pairs Large group callout	<b>4</b>
<b>II. Health Benefits of Volunteering</b>	<b>35 min.</b>		
A. General Health Benefits and Number of Hours Served	5	Lecture	<b>5</b>
B. Exercise: What are the health benefits of volunteering? 📄 <i>Benefits of Volunteering Worksheet</i>	25	Small group (3-4 participants) exercise	<b>6-7</b>
C. The Research on Volunteering: Older Adult Volunteers	5	Lecture	<b>8</b>
<b>III. Staying Healthy</b>	<b>20 min.</b>		
A. Signs that You Might Need a Break	5	Lecture	<b>No slide</b>
B. Tips and Strategies for Maintaining Health and Enthusiasm	5	Large group callout	<b>9</b>
C. Creating your Self-Care Plan 📄 <i>Self Care Worksheet</i>	10	Individual, Pairs	<b>10</b>
<b>IV. Closing</b> 📄 <i>Issue Brief: The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research</i> 📄 <i>Additional Resources: Benefits of Service to Volunteers</i> 📄 <i>Training Feedback Survey</i>	<b>5 min.</b>	Lecture and Feedback	<b>11-13</b>

# Facilitator's Notes and Instructions

Providing Independent Living Support:  
**Benefits of Service to Volunteers**



Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## I. Welcome and Introduction

Show slide 1 – the title slide.

Explain the purpose of this training session: Studies have shown that there are significant benefits for seniors who volunteer. This session will allow participants to share volunteer experiences from their own lives, review results of some of these studies, and talk about tips for maintaining health during service.

### A. Learning Objectives

Show slide 2.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the session participants will further their understanding of:

- Why many people choose to volunteer
- The mental, social and physical health benefits of volunteering
- Tips and strategies for maintaining their physical and mental health

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Read the learning objectives to the group. By the end of the session participants will further their understanding of:

- Why many people choose to volunteer
- The mental, social and physical health benefits of volunteering
- Tips and strategies for maintaining their physical and mental health

Tell participants you will be distributing additional information and resources on the material you are covering at the end of the session.

### B. Trends in Volunteering

Show slide 3.

**TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERING**

- American volunteer rates are growing.
- States with the highest volunteer rates are: Minnesota, Utah, Nebraska, Kansas, and Alaska!



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Volunteers, are part of an important growing trend in the United States.

- Americans are volunteering at high and increasing rates. For example, the adult volunteer rate has increased by 6% from 1989 (20.4%) to 2006 (26.7%). In addition, about two-thirds of people who volunteer one year will return to volunteer the next.
- The growth in volunteering has been led by teenagers, Baby Boomers, and seniors.
- The states with the highest volunteer rates in 2007 were Utah, Nebraska, Minnesota, Alaska, and Kansas.

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service (2007)

## C. WARM UP: Why Did You Volunteer?

Show slide 4.

### WHY DO YOU VOLUNTEER?

*Why did you choose independent living services?*



 Distribute the handout *Why Did You Volunteer?* Ask participants to take a minute to jot down some notes to the questions.

Question 2: Why did you decide to volunteer? Ask someone in the group to assist you by writing answers on easel paper. Then ask the group to share why they choose to volunteer, and why they volunteered for this type of service in particular.

If time permits, you may want to ask trainees where they have volunteered previously (in what type of service). This helps the group get to know each other.

Once you have the reasons listed on the easel paper, reinforce what the participants have said.

The United Way came up with this list of reasons people volunteer, some or all of which your participants may have listed. Share these reasons with the group, if not already noted during the discussion:

- Learn or develop skills
- Teach your skills to others
- Build self-esteem and self-confidence
- Improve your health
- Meet new people
- Feel needed and valued
- Express gratitude for help you may have received in the past from an organization
- Communicate to others that you are ambitious, enthusiastic and care about the community
- Make a difference in someone's life

Source: United Way (2007)



**TIP: HAVE A WARM-UP ACTIVITY IN MIND.** If participants don't know each other, they may be shy about speaking up at first. Start the warm up by sharing a story about your own volunteering experience. See the *Facilitator's Guide* for more ideas on warm-up activities.

Question 3 (Training Expectations): What do you want to know before you leave today? Ask the group to tear off the bottom section of the handout with question 3 (or if you prefer, have them turn in the whole sheet). Let them know you will respond to these questions later in the session. Later, when participants are working in groups during the exercise, read over their questions so you can prepare yourself to answer them during the session or at the end.

## II. Health Benefits of Volunteering

### A. General Health Benefits and the Number of Hours Served

Show slide 5.

**HOURS OF SERVICE AND HEALTH BENEFITS**

- Volunteers should serve at least 1-2 hours per week, or about 100 hours a year, to show health benefits.



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Research studies have been conducted to see if there are health and social benefits to volunteers. There have been studies following volunteers over a period of time, and comparison studies of similar groups of volunteers and non-volunteers. In general, studies found that volunteers serving at least 1 to 2 hours per week show health benefits. However, this does not mean the more hours served, the greater the health benefits. At a certain number of hours, the health benefits do not increase further. For example, volunteers who served about 100 hours a year were most likely to show health benefits, but volunteers who served *more* than 100 hours a year did not show any additional health benefits.

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service (2007)



**TIP: PRIORITIZE WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO YOUR GROUP'S NEEDS.**

For example, you may wish to spend less time on the health benefits of volunteering and more time helping volunteers think about issues that may come up with clients that could be stressful (all of the other modules address potential situations on some level). Or, consider using the *Self Care Worksheet* to discuss ways that volunteers can reduce stress, and reiterate the importance of maintaining balance between personal needs and the needs of others. See the *Facilitator's Guide* for more tips on modifying the workshop agenda.

## B. EXERCISE: What are the general health benefits of volunteering?

So, what are the general health benefits? The following exercise will reinforce what participants already know through experience, and allow them to share and learn from each other. During the debriefing, the facilitator will add information about benefits. The whole exercise, including debriefing, should take about 20-25 minutes.



**YOU WILL NEED:** Three large poster-size sheets of paper, such as easel paper; tape or tacks to post the paper on the wall; and at least three markers. Title the poster sheets “Mental Health,” “Social Health (Social Support),” and “Physical Health.” Tack/tape up the posters in different parts of the room with markers placed by each sheet.

 Optional: Distribute the handout, Benefits of Volunteering Worksheet, to each participant.

Show slide 6.

### EXERCISE: BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

1. Divide into three relatively even groups.
2. Your group will visit each poster. Discuss and record your thoughts about the benefits for that category.
  - ✓ Review the answers already written.
  - ✓ Put a star next to ones your group agrees with.
  - ✓ Add additional benefits.
3. When time is called, move to the next poster until your group has visited all three.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask the participants to divide into three groups. Explain that they will be contributing their own ideas on health benefits. Participants should try to add new benefits, not health benefits that may have already been discussed during the warm-up activity. Each group will get about 5 minutes at each poster. (Alternatively, you could assign each group to one poster only, which would allow more time for debrief discussion.)
2. Explain that for mental health, we mean emotional or psychological health. For social health, or social support, we are talking about our connection to other people. For physical health, we mean bodily health and function.
3. Ask each of the three groups to begin by going to a different poster. During their time at the posters, they will discuss and record their thoughts about the benefits according to each category. Each group should review the answers already written on the poster (if any), add a star next to ones they agree with, and add any additional benefits. After 5 minutes, call “time” and ask the groups to move to the next poster. Repeat so that each group has had a chance to visit all three posters. When the third “time” is called, have everyone go back to their seats so you can discuss (debrief).

### EXERCISE: BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

1. Divide into three relatively even groups.
2. Your group will visit each poster. Discuss and record your thoughts about the benefits for that category.
  - ✓ Review the answers already written.
  - ✓ Put a star next to ones your group agrees with.
  - ✓ Add additional benefits.
3. When time is called, move to the next poster until your group has visited all three.

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## DEBRIEF

Go through each of the posters and note those items with 2-3 stars; these are the areas that most/all of the participants understood to be a benefit of volunteering. Validate all responses and ask for clarification where needed.

As you go through each poster, tell participants about the following benefits if they have not already been noted on the posters. These are benefits that studies found in volunteers who served at least 1 to 2 hours per week:

### Mental Health:

- *A sense of purpose or meaning in life*
- *A personal sense of accomplishment*
- *Increased life satisfaction:* one study found that volunteering was more strongly tied to life satisfaction than working for a paycheck. Another study found volunteers reported greater life satisfaction than non-volunteers, and older volunteers reported greater increases in life satisfaction than did younger volunteers.
- *Lower rates of depression:* for volunteers over the age of 65, research found lower rates of depression. One study found that for some adults in mid-life, depression prevented them from volunteering, but among older adults, depression was one reason they volunteered— to make up for other losses in their lives.
- *Sense of well being*
- *“Successful Aging”:* Areas include gaining pleasure from daily activities; feeling that you can make a positive difference, having a purpose in life and a sense of accomplishment; looking forward to each new day; and maintaining high self-esteem.



**TIP: USE YOUR PROJECT AS AN EXAMPLE.** You may want to use your own project's statistics and findings about volunteer benefits. What do your volunteers say about their experience? If you can make the time, ask a seasoned volunteer to come to the workshop to share stories about their volunteering journey.

### EXERCISE: BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

1. Divide into three relatively even groups.
2. Your group will visit each poster. Discuss and record your thoughts about the benefits for that category.
  - ✓ Review the answers already written.
  - ✓ Put a star next to ones your group agrees with.
  - ✓ Add additional benefits.
3. When time is called, move to the next poster until your group has visited all three.

### Social Health/Social Support:

- *Feeling that someone is looking out for your welfare*
- *Camaraderie and friendship among volunteers: friends made while volunteering provide support and alleviate stress. Strengthened social ties can provide protection from feelings of isolation and help reduce stress, and this is especially important during difficult times.*
- These additional social benefits have been cited:  
*Increased trust in others* as you get out in the community;  
*Increased social and political participation* (if not already involved); *increased knowledge of and ability to contribute to strengthening your community.*

### Physical Health:

- *Perceived (self-reported) improved physical health: One study found volunteers reported better physical health than non-volunteers, and older volunteers reported greater positive changes in their physical health than did younger volunteers. Another study found that people over age 70 who volunteered at least 100 hours had less of a decline in self-reported health seven years later than non-volunteers.*
- *Higher functional ability: Functional ability is defined as “the ability to do the following without help: go out to a movie, attend church or a meeting, or visit friends; walk up and down stairs; walk half a mile; do heavy work around the house.”*
- *Greater longevity; lower mortality rates. Consistently, studies find that volunteers have lower rates of mortality than their non-volunteering peers. For example, one study found that volunteers who served at two or more organizations had a 44% lower mortality rate over five years than those who did not volunteer. The study found this to be true after adjusting for age, health habits, and social support, and found that volunteering contributed to lower mortality rates even more than perceived social support or religious involvement. Another study of 75 year-old volunteers found they were 2/3 less likely to report bad health and 1/3 less likely to die after two years.*

In addition, some studies have found that some volunteers with chronic or serious illness show these health benefits:

- *Decline in pain intensity*
- *Decreased levels of disability*
- *Decreased levels of depression*
- *Greater sense of purpose*

One study found that volunteers suffering from chronic pain who served as peer volunteers for others also suffering from chronic pain experienced declines in the intensity of their pain, and decreased levels of disability and depression. Another looked at people with post-coronary artery disease who volunteered after a heart attack, and found that they reported a greater sense of purpose and decreased levels of depression.

## RECAP

Show slide 7, which is an abbreviated list of the mental, social, and physical health benefits listed previously. Be sure to congratulate participants on a job well done, and ask them if they are surprised by how much they already knew about the benefits of volunteering.

Sources: Corporation for National and Community Service (2007, 2001), Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service (1998).

### HEALTH BENEFITS: RECAP

- **Mental Health:** purpose, sense of accomplishment, life satisfaction
- **Social Health (social support):** camaraderie, social network, connection to community
- **Physical Health:** perceived health, higher functional ability, greater longevity

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## C. The Research on Volunteering: Older Adult Volunteers

Show slide 8.

Research shows that older adults (60+) are more likely to receive greater benefits from volunteering than younger volunteers. Volunteers age 65 and up tend to have greater longevity, lower likelihood of depression and heart disease, and higher functional ability.

According to research compiled by the Corporation for National and Community Service: “Older individuals who volunteer demonstrate greater health benefits than do younger volunteers, due in part to the fact that volunteer activities by older individuals are more likely to provide them with a purposeful social role.”

Sources: Corporation for National and Community Service (2007, 2001).

### RESEARCH RESULTS: OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEERS

- Volunteers age 60+ show improved physical and mental health and greater life satisfaction.
- Volunteers age 65 and up tend to have greater longevity, lower likelihood of depression and heart disease, and higher functional ability.



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### III. Staying Healthy

Tell participants that as they are giving to others, they should not neglect their own needs: “To maximize the health benefits of volunteering, maintain a proper balance in your life; that is, take time for yourself, take care of your health, spend time with your family and friends. Don’t overdue it; ask for help if you need it.”

#### A. Signs that You Might Need a Break

Remind participants that people in need can drain your energy and emotional reserves. Many of their problems are serious and taxing for all involved. Sometimes this leads to “compassion fatigue” in caregivers, with symptoms that result from the ongoing stress of caregiving. It is important to be aware of your own behavior and feelings and get the rest and support you need.

Large group callout: “What might be some signs that indicate you need to take a break or get some help?” Validate all responses and mention the following if participants have not:

- You feel grumpy and argumentative.
- You are overly concerned or involved with the client. You feel you may be violating volunteer-client boundaries.
- You are crying or relating personal problems to the client.
- You find you are “way over” your volunteer hours.
- You feel run-down or “burnt out.” You feel mentally and physically tired.
- You feel isolated from others. You may feel apathetic or sad.
- You are bottling up your emotions.

Sources: Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, National Senior Corps Association.



**TIP: HELP VOLUNTEERS SET LIMITS.** It is not easy to say “no” to someone in need! Sometimes “burnout” happens because a volunteer is unable to turn down a client’s request, even when saying “yes” is well beyond the call of duty. Help your volunteers prepare for this possibility by discussing boundaries and limits. Module 4 includes a reflection activity called “Setting Limits” that offers some strategies. You may want to use that activity in place of, or in addition to, the reflection activity offered in this module.

## B. Tips and Strategies for Maintaining Health and Enthusiasm

Large group callout: “So what do you need to do to take care of yourself? What do you do if you feel you’re burning out?”

Validate responses first, and *then* show slide 9. Add these tips to what participants have already mentioned as key strategies:

### TIPS FOR MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH AND ENTHUSIASM

- Know yourself.
- Share with others.
- Acknowledge your limitations and ask for help.
- Take care of yourself!

**Know yourself.** Look out for yourself. Avoid choosing your most hectic days to volunteer, and don’t compare yourself to other volunteers. Schedule time and days to volunteer that work best for you, as well as the number of clients you can serve. Don’t overdue it.

**Share with others.** Attend and share at monthly service meetings. Talk with your supervisor to get suggestions and support for any problems you might be experiencing. Chances are, if you are having this difficulty, so are other volunteers!

**Acknowledge your limitations and ask for help.** Avoid trying to be “super human”. If you feel you are in over your head, admit it. Don’t wait. Take advantage of training opportunities to enhance your skills and learn from others.

**Take care of yourself.** Schedule time for yourself; eat right and take your vitamins; exercise; get enough sleep; laugh; practice your spiritual tradition; pray, meditate, or keep a journal.

Source: National Senior Corps Association

## C. Creating your Self Care Plan

Show slide 10.

 Distribute the handout *Self Care Worksheet*. This short activity will give participants an opportunity to discover the status of their current supportive practices and share with a partner. The worksheet is for the participants’ own use and will not be collected.

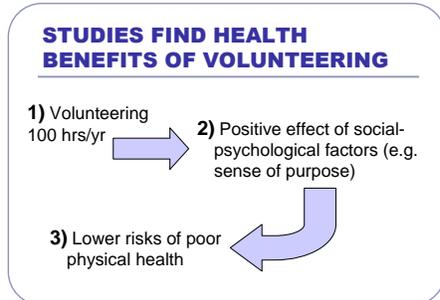
Ask participants to take a few minutes and fill out the worksheet. They should: (1) answer the items in the table; (2) identify one area where they might want to improve/get help; and (3) share with another participant, who might also have some good ideas.

### SELF CARE WORKSHEET

1. Individually, take a minute and review the current status of your support system. For each item, check (✓) “yes”, “sometimes” or “not really”.
2. Choose **one** that you would like to improve and identify what you will do.
3. Share with a partner what you plan to do and who will help you.

## IV. Closing

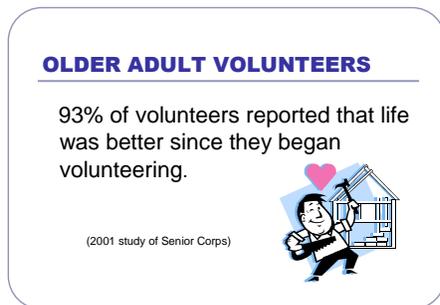
Show slide 11.



Summarize how volunteering benefits volunteers...First, volunteers serve a certain amount of time regularly. Second, the research and your experiences show that volunteering has a positive effect of social-psychological factors or improved mental health (e.g., an enhanced sense of purpose, accomplishment, or well being due to getting involved in the community). Third, that enhanced sense of purpose or well being can contribute to lower risks of poor physical health.

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service (2007)

Show slide 12.



A 2001 study of Senior Corps volunteers found that the vast majority (93%) reported that life was better since they began volunteering. Those who lived alone reported higher overall quality of life scores than others. Two quotes from volunteers surveyed for the study:

- *"I'm so much happier since I began to volunteer."*
- *"This is one of the most rewarding, exciting, and fulfilling things I have done."*

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service (2001)



**TIP: ANTICIPATE RESOURCES PARTICIPANTS WILL NEED.** Do most of your volunteers have internet access? If not, consider printing out a few of the more relevant pages from websites included in the "additional resources" handout and distributing hard copies.

Show slide 13.

### LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

*"Findings regarding the health benefits of volunteering indicate...the very act of volunteering may allow individuals to maintain their independence as they grow older and will likely face increased health challenges."*

The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research.  
CNCS. April 2007.

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Tell participants that it is time to end the session, and ask if they have any further questions. Try to address any remaining questions listed on the slips of paper you collected from the Warm-Up activity (question 3). If questions can not be answered at this time, let participants know when and how some of those issues will be handled (e.g., next session, via a phone call within the week, handout you will drop in mail, etc.). Note other resources available to participants, such as your program handbook, a supervisor available to answer questions, later trainings that will be held, or web resources listed on the handout.

Leave them with this last quote from one of the studies: "Findings regarding the health benefits of volunteering indicate...the very act of volunteering may allow individuals to maintain their independence as they grow older and will likely face increased health challenges." That is, helping others remain independent now may very well help you remain independent longer.

 Distribute the remaining three handouts: *Issue Brief: The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research, Additional Resources*, and the *Training Feedback Survey*. *Additional Resources: Benefits of Service to Volunteers* includes references for the research you have been quoting and helpful website links for more information on volunteering and maintaining health. The *Issue Brief* nicely summarizes much of the research on benefits to volunteers.

Tell participants that the session is over, and you would very much appreciate hearing their thoughts via the *Training Feedback Survey*. Let participants know their responses are confidential and anonymous and indicate where you would like them to place the completed surveys. Thank everyone for coming.



**TIP: HOW DID YOU DO?** Use the Feedback Survey (see Handouts) to find out what worked and what didn't during the session. Participants may not be shy about telling you, but giving them the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey may yield more honest answers and allows participants who are more verbally reticent another way to communicate.

## **References for Module 2: Becoming an Effective Care Partner: Helping Volunteers Recognize Benefits to Themselves**

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## ***Handouts***

The following handouts are included in this module:

1. Why Did You Volunteer?
2. Benefits of Volunteering Worksheet
3. Self Care Worksheet
4. Issue Brief: The Health Benefits of Volunteering:  
A Review of Recent Research
5. Additional Resources: Benefits of Service to Volunteers
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*Providing Independent Living  
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Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Why Did You Volunteer?

**Think about your previous and current volunteering experience...**

*Take a minute to jot down a few notes to the following questions.*

*You will not be asked to turn this sheet in, but be ready to share with the group.*



1. Have you volunteered before? If so, where? For how long?

2. Why did you decide to volunteer now? Why did you choose independent living services?

.....

3. What do you need to know before you go home today?

## Benefits of Volunteering Worksheet



### Brainstorm Exercise:

1. Your group will visit each poster (Mental Health, Physical Health, and Social Health/Support).
2. Discuss and record your group's thoughts on each of the posters, according to each category. What are the mental, physical, and social health benefits of volunteering?
3. When time is called, move to the next poster. Review the answers already written. Put a star next to ones your group agrees with and add any new ones.

*Optional: Jot down your own notes in the table below.*

<b>BENEFITS</b>		
<b>Mental health</b> (emotional, psychological)	<b>Physical health</b> (bodily health and function)	<b>Social health/support</b> (connection to other people)

## Self Care Worksheet

A. Individually, take a minute and review the current status of your support system. For each item, check ✓ “yes”, “sometimes” or “not really”.

	Yes!	Sometimes	Not really
<b>Volunteer Support</b>			
1. I have a person or group with whom I can share my feelings about my volunteer experiences.			
2. I plan to attend the volunteer meetings and trainings.			
3. I know my limits; I know how many days and clients I would like to serve.			
4. I will talk to my supervisor about concerns and questions that come up.			
<b>Maintaining Life Balance</b>			
5. I get 30 minutes of exercise (walking, gardening) every day.			
6. I am eating well. I eat fruits and vegetables, get enough protein and whole grain products and drink lots of water.			
7. I get enough sleep each night.			
8. I know when I am overwhelmed or over tired and I ask for help.			
9. I make time for the activities I really enjoy.			
10. I take the time I need to reflect, relax, and enjoy a little solitude.			

B. Note which items you checked “Not really”. Choose **one** that you would like to improve and identify what you will do:

One thing I will do to make sure I support myself in service to others: \_\_\_\_\_

The person who could help me is: \_\_\_\_\_

C. In pairs, tell your partner what you plan to do and who will help you.

### OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

*Here are some longevity secrets from people age 85+: Keep your sense of humor; be optimistic; play bridge or do another activity that keeps your mind active and focused; maintain close friendships; have a sense of purpose; be altruistic; play music; play tennis (exercise); pray instead of worrying. (From: “10 Secrets of a Good Long Life”, AARP, July August 2005.)*

*Consider approaching someone you have gotten to know today about becoming monthly “check-in partners”.*

# The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research



*Over the past two decades, a growing body of research indicates that volunteering provides not just social benefits, but individual health benefits as well. This research has established a strong relationship between volunteering and health: those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer. Some key findings from this research, along with an analysis of the relationship between volunteering and incidence of mortality and heart disease at the state level, are presented here. A more comprehensive review of this research can be found in the full report, "The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research", which can be downloaded at [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org).*

## KEY FINDINGS

**Older volunteers are most likely to receive greater health benefits from volunteering.**

Research has found that volunteering provides older adults, (those age 60 or older), with greater benefits than younger volunteers. These benefits include improved physical and mental health and greater life satisfaction. In addition, while depression may serve as a barrier to volunteer participation in mid-life adults, it is a catalyst for volunteering among older adults, who may seek to compensate for role changes and attenuated social relations that occur with aging. (Li and Ferraro, 2006; Van Willigen, 2000)

**Volunteers must meet a "volunteering threshold" to receive significant health benefits.**

When considering the relationship of the

frequency of volunteering to improved health benefits, researchers have found that there is a "volunteering threshold" for health benefits. That is to say, volunteers must be engaged in a certain amount of volunteering in order to derive health benefits from the volunteer activities. Once that threshold is met, no additional health benefits are acquired by doing volunteering more. The definition of considerable volunteering has been variously defined by these studies as 1) volunteering with two or more organizations; 2) 100 hours or more of volunteer activities per year; and 3) at least 40 hours of volunteering per year. (Oman et al., 1999; Lum and Lightfoot, 2005; Luoh and Herzog, 2002; Musick et al., 1999)

**Volunteering leads to greater life satisfaction and lower rates of depression.**

Evidence indicates that volunteering has a positive effect on social psychological fac-

*(Continued)*

tors, such as a personal sense of purpose and accomplishment, and enhances a person's social networks to buffer stress and reduce disease risk. (Herzog et al., 1998; Greenfield and Marks, 2004; Harlow and Cantor, 1996) According to one study, when older adults volunteered in 1986, they experienced lower rates of depression in 1994. (Musick and Wilson, 2003)

### **Volunteering and physical well-being are part of a positive reinforcing cycle.**

A study of longitudinal data from the Americans' Changing Lives survey found that those who volunteered in 1986 reported higher levels of happiness, life-satisfaction, self-esteem, a sense of control over life, and physical health in 1989, while those in 1986 who reported higher levels of happiness, life-satisfaction, self-esteem, a sense of control over life, and physical health were more likely to volunteer in 1989. (Thoits and Hewitt, 2001)

### **Evidence suggests the possibility that the best way to prevent poor health in the future, which could be a barrier to volunteering, is to volunteer.**

A number of studies demonstrate that those individuals who volunteer at an earlier point experience greater functional ability and better health outcomes later in life, even when the studies control for other factors, such as socioeconomic status

and previous illness. (Moen et al., 1992; Lum and Lightfoot, 2005; Luoh and Herzog, 2002; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003)

### **Individuals who volunteer live longer.**

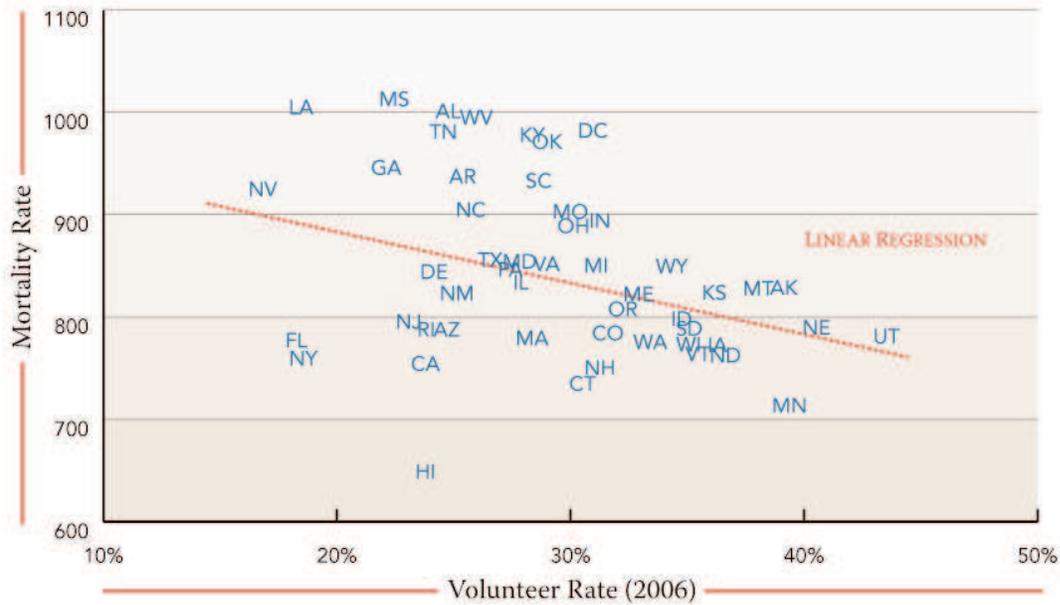
Several longitudinal studies have found that those individuals who volunteer during the first wave of the survey have lower mortality rates at the second wave of the survey, even when taking into account such factors as physical health, age, socioeconomic status and gender. (Sabin, 1993; Rogers, 1996; Musick et al., 1999)

Researchers have also found that when patients with chronic or serious illness volunteer, they receive benefits beyond what can be achieved through medical care. (Arnstein et al., 2002; Sullivan and Sullivan, 1997)

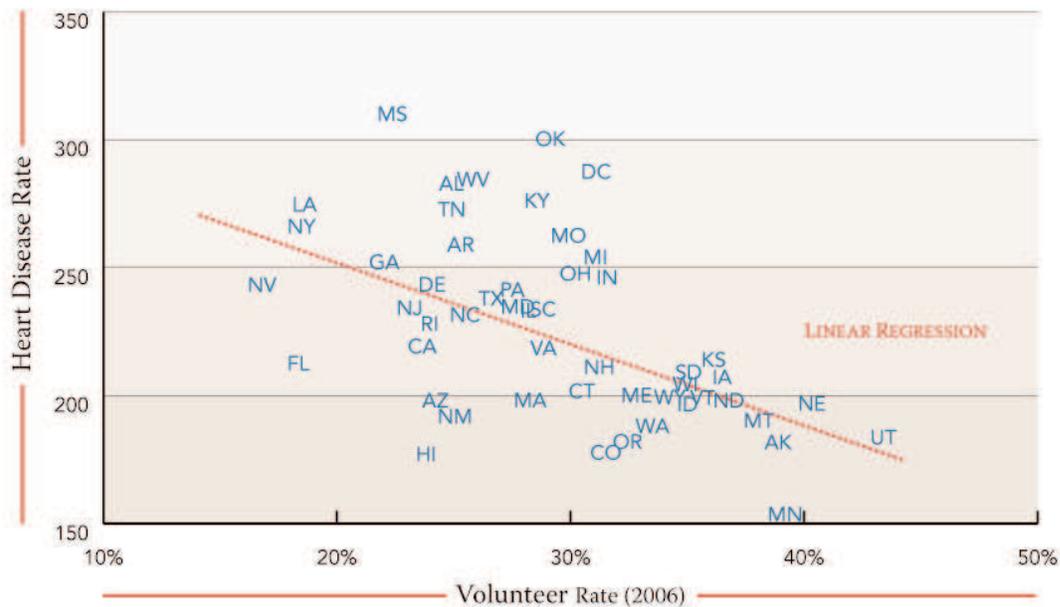
### **State volunteer rates is strongly connected with the physical health of the states' population.**

Using health and volunteering data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Center for Disease Control, we find that states with a high volunteer rate also have lower rates of mortality and incidences of heart disease. When comparing states, a general trend shows that health problems are more prevalent in states where volunteer rates are lowest.

## 2006 VOLUNTEER RATE VS. AGE-ADJUSTED MORTALITY RATE



## 2006 VOLUNTEER RATE VS. AGE-ADJUSTED INCIDENCE OF HEART DISEASE



## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Studies of the relationship between volunteering and health demonstrate that there is a significant relationship between volunteering and good health: when older adults volunteer, they not only help their community but also experience better health in later years, whether in terms of greater longevity, higher functional ability, or lower rates of depression. These findings are particularly relevant today as Baby Boomers—the generation of 77 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964—reach the age typically associated with retirement. We know that Baby Boomers in their late 40s to mid-50s are volunteering at a higher rate than earlier generations did at the same age. However, efforts should be made to not only maintain current levels of volunteering among Baby Boomers, but to keep those Baby Boomers who already volunteer, serving in the future by providing substantial, challenging, and fulfilling volunteer experiences. The results

of such efforts will not only help solve community problems, but simultaneously enhance the health of the growing number of older adults.

## CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Corporation for National and Community Service improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year, the Corporation provides opportunities for more than 2 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Together with USA Freedom Corps, the Corporation is working to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America. For more information, visit [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

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<sup>1</sup>The state volunteer rates were calculated from the 2004–2006 September Volunteer Supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS). Age-adjusted mortality and heart disease rates were taken from National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 54 No. 13, April 19, 2006, Table 29, available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/pdf/mortality/nvsr54\\_13\\_t29.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/pdf/mortality/nvsr54_13_t29.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Both reports, *Keeping Baby Boomers Volunteering* and *Volunteer Growth in America*, can be downloaded at the Corporation's website: [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

*April 2007*

## **Additional Resources: Benefits of Service to Volunteers**

Are you interested in learning more about the topics covered in this workshop? You may find the following online resources helpful. References consulted for this module are also included in this handout.

**The Food and Nutrition Information Center**, located at the National Agricultural Library at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, includes over 2000 links to current and reliable nutrition information. This section of the website is devoted to senior consumers and covers topics such as food safety, healthy eating and recipes, Meals on Wheels, and how normal aging changes such as sense of taste can affect nutrition, among others:

[http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=4&tax\\_level=3&tax\\_subject=358&topic\\_id=1612&level3\\_id=5954&level4\\_id=0&level5\\_id=0&placement\\_default=0](http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=4&tax_level=3&tax_subject=358&topic_id=1612&level3_id=5954&level4_id=0&level5_id=0&placement_default=0).

**Mental Health America** is a nonprofit dedicated to promoting mental wellness. Its website contains information on various mental health topics, including: disorders, treatments, and medications; circumstances that can threaten mental health such as bullying, grief, and surviving trauma; and where to find help: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>.

**NIHSeniorHealth.gov**, sponsored by National Institutes on Health, is designed for seniors who want to stay informed on a wide range of health and aging issues, including Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, eating and exercising well, decreasing risk of falling, and Medicare prescription drug coverage: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/>.

**Samaritan Health Services** provides accessible, easy to read health information and tips for wellness on a variety of topics: <http://samhealth.staywellsolutionsonline.com/>.

The **Senior Corps** website at the Corporation for National and Community Service provides information for volunteers and other interested individuals and organizations that want to get involved and stay informed: <http://www.seniorcorps.gov/>.

**Senior Journal** is online news for senior citizens and senior volunteers, sponsored by Senior Corps: <http://seniorjournal.com/Volunteers.htm>.

**VolunteerMatch** is "a leader in the nonprofit world dedicated to helping everyone find a great place to volunteer." The website offers a variety of services for non-profits and volunteers: <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>.

## **Module References**

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## Training Feedback Survey

Please help us improve our training sessions by providing feedback on the training you attended. Thank you!

Training/Session Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

Program you serve with:  SCP  RSVP  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please rate this session using the following scale:**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The subject matter was presented effectively.					
2. The facilitator was knowledgeable.					
3. The facilitator responded to questions.					
4. There were enough opportunities for discussion.					
5. The written materials are useful.					
6. The session met my expectations.					
7. As a result of this training, I gained new knowledge applicable to my volunteer assignment.					
8. I plan to apply what I learned at this session.					

9. What did you like best about this session?

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10. What would have improved this session?

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**Thank You! Your feedback will help us to improve our training!**