



You Grow When You Volunteer

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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The organization called "Volunteering England" states:

"We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation."

From the time I was a small child in rural Saskatchewan, I understood that volunteering is an important part of life. The first hamburger I ever cooked was in the curling rink. My mother had us setting up tables for church functions. We canvassed for charities and entertained at the nursing home.

Sometimes volunteering involves visiting with a shut-in, teaching an immigrant to speak English or coaching a sports team. Sometimes it requires a commitment which results in a life-changing experience.

Last year I was in Atlanta, Georgia and visited the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. President Carter's mother was known as "Miss Lillian". When she was 68 years of age she was a widow whose children had moved away from home. She was bored and feeling that she didn't have a purpose. She decided to apply to work as a volunteer in India through the Peace Corps.

She said, "I put in my application but I just knew the children were not going to let me go. It was a joke, me going to the Peace Corps - really ridiculous. But they let me down! .Nobody said 'Don't do it' so I had to go, you see, to keep from losing face with my children".

After two years, however, (when she was 70 years of age) she said that this was "the greatest thing that ever happened to me. It took two years out of my life but it was wonderful, the most meaningful experience of my life. I was so fulfilled".

And the results reached further than Miss Lillian might have imagined. Her son, Jimmy Carter, who is now in his 80s continues to work diligently with *Habitat for Humanity* and his family members are volunteers in various activities.

You see volunteering is not just about you or the people you serve. It is also about your family and the example you set for them. Like a stone that is cast into a pond - there are ripple effects that influence those around you.

My grandparents were volunteers and my grandchildren are volunteers! It's intergenerational!

What are you doing in the world of volunteering that will help you to grow as an individual?