

Four excellent reasons to volunteer

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any nonprofit organization. Lucky for us, volunteers reap satisfaction by volunteering and becoming involved in our community. Not sure how volunteering can be a personal benefit to you? Here are four reasons to give a little time to a nonprofit organization every week.



Amanda Burt

1. Growth

By volunteering with an ongoing program, you will witness growth and change. Whether working with children who are learning to read or adults whose lives need stabilizing, volunteers can actually watch clients evolve over time. This reinforces the volunteer's own sense of worthiness and vitality in the program.

2. Enrichment

There's nothing more fulfilling than realizing how much of an impact a volunteer can make. Volunteers working together to build a children's playground or low-cost housing for needy families can later visit these sites and see how the project has enriched the neighborhood. Just a few hours of helping can turn into a lifetime of opportunity, which is one of the greatest benefits of volunteering.

3. Learning

Volunteer opportunities often allow people to try new activities or learn new skills. For example, when an accountant volunteers to help cook a holiday dinner at a homeless shelter, he walks away with not only a few cooking tips, but also knowledge of how to keep food at a safe temperature and how to serve large groups.

4. Friendships

When like-minded people get together, friendships are formed. After working on a volunteer project for a few weeks, it's not uncommon for volunteers to exchange phone numbers or social media information. By giving just a few hours a week, lifetime friendships may be established.

Ready to get involved? The United Way needs more than 900 community volunteers for "Make a Difference Day" on Friday and Saturday. Bring your co-workers, church group or family.

Locally, Mohawk Industries has supported Make a Difference Day with project funding for more than 11 years. Make A Difference Day is the most encompassing national day of helping others — a celebration of neighbors helping neighbors. Everyone can participate. Created by USA Weekend magazine, Make A Difference Day is an annual event that takes place on the fourth Saturday of every October. Here are the local projects for this year:

■ Color the Gym at the Northwest Georgia Family Crisis Center

Volunteers are needed to

prep and paint the gym at the Northwest Georgia Family Crisis Center. Volunteers must be 18.

■ Butterflies and Birds at Fort Mountain

Volunteer to plant native wildflowers to attract butterflies and birds at the Big Rock Nature Trail at Fort Mountain State Park. Make butterfly boxes and bird houses, paint benches and railings, and trim existing shrubbery. Place timber steps in the trail so it will be an easier walk, currently there is unstable footing. Volunteers are also needed to clear debris along the creek area to open the view. Additional sitting capacity will be created near the creek and garden.

■ Painting the women's shelter at Carter Hope Center

Volunteers are needed to repaint the inside of two women's houses at Carter Hope Center. Tasks will include applying paint by rollers and brushes to walls of common areas and bedrooms. Walls will be spackled, sanded, cleaned and taped off in advance by the residents. All volunteers must be at least 18.

■ Build a rock climbing wall at the Boy & Girls Club

The completion of this project will provide access for more than 2,00 Boys & Girls Club members to an on-site climbing wall. Volunteers are needed to install the rock climbing wall, paint, complete yard work and do landscaping at the Carl Rollins Boys & Girls Club.

■ Lawn Extravaganza at Mercy's Door

Help spruce up three residential homes for foster chil-

dren. Volunteers are needed to mulch, remove fallen limbs, build a storage shed and sort donations. This project is designed by the Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta.

■ Build a Learning Garden at Dawnvale Elementary School

Volunteers are needed to mulch, install weather stations, plant monkey grass, rebuild a pond and install educational signs.

■ Chatsworth Nature Explorer Classroom

The classroom is at the corner of Elm Street and Highway 411 in downtown Chatsworth. Volunteers are needed to install bushes that will attract butterflies, and hang butterfly houses.

■ Conasauga Watershed Cleanup

This year, the event will take place at six locations; 1. Conasauga River at Lower King's Bridge/Norton Bridge, 2. Conasauga River at Highway 2 bridge, 3. Conasauga River at Carlton Petty Road bridge, 4. Holly Creek, Murray County, on the Chattahoochee National Forest, 5. Mill Creek tributary in the city of Dalton, and 6. Coahulla Creek at Prater's Mill. All ages are welcome. Kids 13 and younger should have adult supervision.

To register for Make a Difference Day or to find out more about year-round service, visit volunteernwga.org, where you will find more than 80 opportunities in Whitfield and Murray counties.

Amanda Burt is president of United Way of Northwest Georgia.