

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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Do Good, Feel Good. Volunteering Provides Benefits for All National Volunteer Week is April 6 - 12

Northern NJ The 2014 National Volunteer Week is April 6-12. This year's theme, "Celebrate Service" is about inspiring, recognizing and encouraging people to seek out imaginative ways to engage in their communities. The week calls on every citizen to do his or her part to sustain the growing spirit of service to the community, whether by committing hours or dollars to the cause.

National Volunteer Week is about taking action and encouraging individuals and groups in the community to be at the center of social change—discovering and actively demonstrating their collective power to make a difference. Established in 1974, the week has grown exponentially each subsequent year, with literally thousands of volunteer projects and special events scheduled throughout.

Volunteering – performing a service of one's own free will, without pay – is the hallmark of a healthy, active society. Whether it is done through a school, religious, governmental or social organization (or less formally through the concept of "neighboring"), volunteers address a wide range of problems.

People who volunteer feel an increased sense of pride, satisfaction and accomplishment by making a positive difference in their community. And, when people share their time and talents, they solve problems, strengthen communities, improve lives, and connect to others.

Volunteer service has a dramatic positive impact on the economy. The estimated dollar value of a volunteer's time is \$22.14 per hour (IndependentSector.org); the

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) estimates that volunteers donate an average of 8 billion hours yearly—equivalent to more than \$171 billion in contributed service!

Over the past two decades there has been a growing body of research that indicates volunteering provides real health benefits to individuals who volunteer, as well as social and workplace benefits.

A 2013 review, published in *BMC Public Health*, found that helping others on a regular basis—like serving food in a soup kitchen or reading to the blind—can reduce early mortality rates by 22%, compared to rates in people who don't participate in volunteer activities. The review also revealed that volunteers benefit from reduced rates of depression and an increased sense of life satisfaction and well-being—doing good, it seems, made them feel good. Other benefits include lower risk of dementia from increased social contact and reduced loneliness.

In its 2013 Health and Volunteering Study, UnitedHealth Group looked at its own employee volunteers and the impact their employee volunteer program had, not only on the communities they serve, but on their employees' health and the overall the health of the company. Employers directly see the benefits of physically and mentally healthier employees; healthier employees drive down the cost of health and promote higher productivity. Employees who volunteer bring more refined job skills to the workplace—effective time management and strong people and teamwork skills. Volunteering with colleagues creates stronger, more collaborative relationships which add value in any work setting. Goodwill is generated in a company that offers volunteer programs in the workplace, and this drives positive results directly to the bottom line.

Volunteering also has social rewards. College graduates or business people looking for new opportunities can volunteer in the community and meet new people, some of whom may be influential community leaders. Volunteering helps to retain and sharpen old skills as well as develop new ones.

For those thinking of a career change, volunteering is a perfect way to explore new fields. Volunteering can be energizing and renewing, especially when it involves a personal interest or hobby. The fulfillment derived from knowing that one is doing good and being involved in the community can relieve tensions and give different perspectives

on old situations. Strategic thinking, change management and conflict resolution skills can be learned by working in a volunteer setting. Volunteering can create leaders.

The Volunteer Center of Bergen County can help match individuals with opportunities to volunteer. The Volunteer Center provides a multitude of choices at hundreds of community agencies. The Center can provide individual volunteer opportunities, group and at-home project ideas, as well as information for students and youth groups interested in volunteering - particularly helpful to those seeking to fulfill community service requirements. For more information about this and other youth-oriented volunteer projects, click “Youth Services” on the Center’s website:

www.bergenvolunteers.org.

For a family-friendly volunteer option, the Volunteer Center will present a **Family Volunteer Day** on Saturday, April 12th. The event will be held at the Fair Lawn Farm site of MEVO (Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization); families will be needed to prepare soil, build raised beds and spread mulch to get this 1-acre farm ready for planting. Go to bergenvolunteers.org for more information.

During Volunteer Week, The Center’s **Business Volunteer Connect** will present *All in a Day’s Work*, a county-wide week of service for volunteers from businesses large and small. There will be dozens of projects from which to choose—from landscaping and painting, to client interaction with seniors and children. Visit businessvolunteerconnect.org for more information

To encourage a deeper level of community engagement and build civic leaders, the Volunteer Center offers **Bergen LEADS**, a year-long community leadership program for adults in Bergen County. Participants learn about Bergen County’s unique challenges and assets, discover their own leadership style and work collaboratively with classmates and alumni to make Bergen County a better place. Further information about Bergen LEADS and applications for the Class of 2015 can be found at bergenleads.org.

In addition to recruiting volunteers for more than 300 local non-profits, the Volunteer Center also has three programs which utilize volunteers. The **Chore Service** uses volunteers to perform minor home repairs to keep senior citizens and disabled homeowners safe in their own homes. Its two mentoring programs, **Mentoring Moms** and **Mentoring Youth**, train and supervise adult mentors for overwhelmed moms and for

children with social, emotional and behavioral challenges. Training for Mentoring Moms begins Monday, April 7 and for Mentoring Youth on Wednesday, April 30. Registration for either program can be made by calling 201-489-9454.

For further information about all of the Volunteer Center's programs and becoming a volunteer, call the Center at (201) 489-9454, or visit its website at www.bergenvolunteers.org and search the online database for the most current information and volunteer positions. The Center also publishes an annual *Guide to Volunteering*, a comprehensive directory listing hundreds of volunteer positions.

Those interested in helping with Hurricane Sandy Long Term Recovery projects can also check at www.bergenvolunteers.org

Do Good. Feel Good. Volunteer!

The Volunteer Center of Bergen County strengthens the community by connecting people through service and developing civic leaders.

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