

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 15-21

Northern NJ National Volunteer Week is April 15 to 21, 2012 . This year's theme is "Celebrating People in Action". It is the time to recognize and celebrate the men, women and youth who dedicate themselves to taking action and solving problems in their communities, and to call on every American 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.

Out of this current economic crisis, there is a movement growing, an interest in civic engagement, a great appetite by Americans to pull together to help their neighbors here and around the world.

National Volunteer Week was established in 1974 and has grown exponentially each subsequent year, with literally thousands of volunteer projects and special events scheduled throughout the week.

To volunteer means to perform or offer to perform a service of one's own free will; to do charitable or helpful work without pay.

Volunteering 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", where people help people they know—maybe a member of their church, maybe the senior next door—volunteers address a wide range of problems.

Perhaps the first and biggest benefit people get from volunteering is the satisfaction of incorporating service into their lives and making a difference in their

community and country. The intangible benefits alone—such as pride, satisfaction and accomplishment—are worthwhile reasons to serve. In addition, when people share their time and talents, they solve problems, strengthen communities, improve lives, and connect to others.

The estimated dollar value of a volunteer's time is \$21.79 per hour, according to the latest statistics from the Independent Sector, a nonpartisan coalition of charities, foundations and corporate giving programs. Volunteer service to the community has a dramatic positive impact to the economy. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) estimates that volunteers donate an average of 8 billion hours yearly—this is equivalent to over \$169 billion in contributed service.

Over the past two decades there has been a growing body of research that indicates volunteering provides individual health benefits in addition to social benefits. This research, which is presented by CNCS in a report entitled “The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent 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. Comparisons of the health benefits of volunteering for different age groups have also shown that older volunteers are the most likely to receive greater benefits from volunteering, whether because they are more likely to face higher incidence of illness or because volunteering provides them with physical and social activity and a sense of purpose at a time when their social roles are changing. Some of these findings also indicate that volunteers who devote a “considerable” amount of time to volunteer activities (about 100 hours per year) are most likely to exhibit positive health outcomes.

Volunteering also has social rewards. College graduates or business people looking for new opportunities or career changes 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. Employers often seek well-rounded individuals who have good team work and goal setting skills. Serving on a volunteer committee or board is a great way to learn group dynamics and team work, as well as increase facilitation skills.

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.

Individual volunteer opportunities, group projects, at-home projects, family friendly volunteering, student or school volunteer ideas—the Volunteer Center can help individuals choose an activity that is a good match for their particular talents, interests and time availability.

The Volunteer Center maintains up-to-date listings of volunteer projects suitable for students and youth groups which will be particularly helpful to those seeking to fulfill community service requirements. Visitors to the **BergenVolunTEENS** page on the Center's website can get ideas about volunteer projects, learn about national days of service and search for specific volunteer jobs available in and around Bergen County. The site also links to many other youth volunteer-related websites. The address is www.bergenvolunteers.org/teens, or log onto the bergenvolunteers.org site and click on the BergenVolunTEENS button.

The Center also works with companies that want to become engaged in the community through its **Northern New Jersey Business Volunteer Council**.

Bergen LEADS is a year-long learning and leadership program for adults who live or work in Bergen County. Participants learn about Bergen County's unique challenges and assets, discover their own leadership strengths and potential and use this information to give back to the community. Further information about Bergen LEADS can be found at www.bergenleads.org.

People age 55 and older can respond to needs in the community and share their skills through **RSVP**. Some volunteers are retired, some not, but all are very actively engaged in projects dealing with literacy, poverty and senior issues.

The Volunteer Center sponsors several direct-service programs. Its two mentoring programs, **Mentoring Moms** and **Mentoring Youth**, are beginning their 6-week spring trainings during Volunteer Week—Moms begin Monday April 16; Youth on Wednesday April 18. Mentoring Moms needs women who can make a difference in the lives of overwhelmed mothers and their children. Mentoring Youth needs men and women to provide guidance, friendship and support to children who are confronted with social, emotional and behavioral challenges. Registration for either program can be made by calling 201-489-9454. The **Chore Handyman Service** volunteers perform minor home repairs that keep senior citizen and disabled homeowners safe in their own homes.

For further information about becoming a volunteer with the Volunteer Center or referral to other agencies, 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 provides, upon request, the 2012 Guide to Volunteering, a comprehensive directory listing hundreds of volunteer positions and a wealth of other ideas for service to your community.

Volunteers inspire by example. During Volunteer Week 2012, resolve to do good and feel good by volunteering.

Founded by the Junior League in 1966, the Volunteer Center of Bergen County strengthens the community by connecting people with opportunities to serve, operating direct service volunteer programs, building capacity for effective volunteering, and participating in strategic partnerships that meet community needs

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