



giving time

In a world where we are all too busy, giving your time can be a rewarding experience. However, before volunteering we need to think realistically about the time we have to give, and the type of activity that would most benefit the community.

The time volunteering takes up can vary greatly between the types of activities undertaken, so to ensure volunteering remains rewarding ask yourself some questions:

- ~ What issues or concerns are important to you? Marrying your interests to a specific cause will give more meaning to your volunteer experience.
- ~ Do you have specialist skills that can benefit an organisation?
- ~ Do you want to use your current skills and talents or try something new and different? Volunteering can provide an opportunity to further an interest that your current job or lifestyle doesn't offer.
- ~ How much time do you want to commit? Is this realistic? How will you manage this new commitment in your life?
- ~ Are there functions/activities that you don't want to do?
- ~ It's easy to get press ganged into doing something worthy, but unless you feel committed it may be hard to stick with. Thinking about it beforehand will help you be prepared to say 'no' if needed.
- ~ Do you want to do something at your workplace or in your free time?
- ~ What opportunities are available for workplace giving? Many charities run specific events for workplaces (eg the Cancer Council's biggest morning tea). Or you can start your own event such as Movember sponsorship, a fund raising event for the Make a Wish Foundation or Canteen, collecting food and clothes for The Smith Family. Your work place may also have a charitable foundation or perhaps you can get them interested in starting one if they don't. Many corporates operate a charitable foundation that you can contribute your time to.
- ~ Do you want to volunteer overseas? This type of volunteering can involve a major commitment in time, and while it may not be possible at this point in your life, it's something many people do as work winds down or they retire completely.
- ~ Don't be offended if the organisation seems to be interviewing you. Many put a lot of time and effort into their volunteers even employing specialist volunteer coordinators, and they want to get the right person.

Once you've chosen a likely charity or have a short list, it's important to make sure it is going to be a positive experience – for you and them. Some tips for getting it right are:

- ~ Does the organisation provide information on what they stand for – their mission, values and activities? You can find most of this information on the organisation's website, if not request some information to be sent to you or talk to someone at the organisation.
- ~ Do they have a job description? If the charity is disorganised or vague on your responsibilities you may find it a frustrating experience.
- ~ Will you get the training and support you need? Many of the roles being filled by volunteers are highly skilled and some such as help lines are emotionally demanding. Organisations such as Life Line and The Salvation Army for example offer comprehensive training to new volunteers and ongoing support.

For more information – refer to the Life Directions flyer on getting connected or visit www.ipac.com.au/lifedirections.