



YWCA CANBERRA

# Online Mentoring for Women

## Volunteering

Volunteering can without a doubt be a life changing experience. It can provide a chance to act on your passions and to develop new skills and areas of expertise. It can also build connections to your community whether you see that as being local, national or global and introduce you to some of the friends that will support you throughout the rest of your life.

It should also be noted that sometimes volunteering can be hard work. For example, if you volunteer on a crisis helpline then the work won't always be fun, but with the right support and motivation it can be very rewarding. There will also be days when you'll need to work hard to meet your volunteer commitments. While volunteering might be optional, once you've made the decision to volunteer keeping your commitments shouldn't be.

So, with that brief nod to the upsides and downsides of volunteering, what are the things you might want to think about if you're considering volunteering?

### **What is it that you are passionate about?**

Reading the Values and Strengths reflective learning module on this site might be a useful way of considering this. Volunteering in line with your values will help your heart to sing and on days where the commitment feels more like an obligation than joy, the alignment will make it easier to keep your commitments.

It is generally agreed that supporters of a cause or organisation can give one of three things: time, talent or treasure. Volunteering is generally seen as being in the first two categories time and/or talent, but of course if your talent is fund raising then it might well be that donating your time and talent leads to the creation of treasure.

### **What do you have to offer?**

Different organisations or causes need different things, but regardless of what you've got to give there is almost undoubtedly someone who would welcome your contribution.

### **Time**

There are any number of volunteer activities that can be done by almost any of us and primarily take time. Selling raffle tickets at a fundraising function is one. Standing at an information stall or stuffing envelopes are two more.

### **Talent**

Most community organisations need the same skills as a business or public service department, and while some employ staff to undertake these tasks, some rely on volunteers.

Remember that what you have to offer doesn't necessarily have to be what the organisation does. If you're passionate about the arts but don't have an artistic bone in your body, you may find that an arts organisation needs volunteers to usher at events, be board members, undertake PR work or any number of other things.

### **What would you like to get?**

This may seem like an odd question, surely volunteering is about giving rather than receiving, but it really does need to be about both.

At the point at which your volunteer commitments only seem to take and never seem to give, it might be time to reconsider the commitment. Volunteering isn't a form of punishment and it is entirely appropriate to think that there might be personal benefits as well.

If your volunteering aligns closely with your values, then the most obvious thing you'll get is that warm fuzzy feeling from having done something good.

It may also be that you want to develop new skills. Volunteering for a committee that already has some expertise on it, but needs more members or enthusiastic learners can be a good way to pick up new skills. Smaller organisations with big dreams are often a good way to stretch yourself, particularly if you like to learn new things by doing. It may be that if there is no one else to do it, simply by volunteering you can have the chance to do any number of things.

### **What questions should you ask?**

If you are thinking about volunteering it may be useful to ask the organisation the following questions:

- Do you have a policy on volunteers?
- Will I get an induction?
- Am I covered under your insurance?
- How will my work be supervised and supported?

There aren't really any wrong answers to these questions. But each of the answers, whether a formal and comprehensive policy statement, or an informal 'what you need' and 'we all just work together', tells you important things about the organisation you might be joining.

Consider whether the answers work for you, and whether you think you'll enjoy volunteering in the environment they describe.

### **Further resources**

If you want more information about volunteer opportunities, good practice in volunteering or almost anything related to volunteering a good place to look is:

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au)

Wherever your volunteering leads you we wish you all the best.

