

Pay It Forward

Why do we volunteer or give back? What is our purpose? Do we get anything out of it? What's the point? We certainly don't earn money and it's time away from other activities we love to do or time away from our families. These are questions I asked myself once I found myself engrossed in volunteering at my son's school, helping out with the CAF, and my local parish.

My family was recently posted to Colorado Springs, Colorado during the summer of 2019 and like most spouses, I was unemployed. So I had to fill my time up since my son was at school and my husband was at work. I decided to volunteer as much as possible to keep boredom at bay. This decision gave me purpose for my four-year stay in Colorado Springs.

Between serving hot lunches two to three times a week at my son's school cafeteria, helping out with special events at the school, and offering my time for the MFS annual events, I pondered what's the point volunteering or giving back to the community? I had assumed that I personally wouldn't benefit. Aren't I helping others to have a better life, but not necessarily myself?

But I was wrong! After much thought and work in the community I realized there are three main reasons why volunteering and or giving back to the community is reciprocal and vital for any community to survive.

Firstly, it creates a sense of belonging. After moving to a new country and basically starting all over again, it is quite easy to feel isolated, depressed and frustrated. However, reaching out to others gives you the opportunity to be among others and allows you to use your gifts or talents for the betterment of the community. By sharing your time, you become a part of that community, create friendships, and build social resources.

Secondly, it fosters gratitude. I cannot express enough gratitude to MFS, my neighbourhood, and my son's school community. They reached out to help us integrate into the community so smoothly. There were countless people helping us by giving us tips on ways to live in the Colorado, the ins and outs, the best grocery stores to shop in, where the nearest Costco is, how to survive winters and where to get help if needed. If those great people never cared or wanted to reach out, I am certain we would be lost. Our lives would be upside down for sure and the move would have been rough and unpleasant. We must never go through life without showing our gratitude. To let people know that their unconditional kindness and helping hand was noticed and much appreciated, we encourage them to continue their good works. So, showing our gratitude is recognized by paying it forward. The resources that were given to us we could pass on to the next family that is posted to Colorado, for example, or we could give a hand to help run an event within our community. We demonstrate that we

appreciated all the help we received and we're here now showing that gratitude by helping back.

My last point brings my first point full circle. I am sure your familiar with this idea: the domino effect. We are all blocks that are placed in our specific positions and rely on each other to do out part and when we all work together everything falls into place keeping the community running smoothly and effortlessly. Having a sense of belonging and illustrating our gratitude keeps the blocks moving, creating a close-knit, strong community where we always know that it has our backs and we have theirs.

With warmth,

Clara Palmer