

The Surprising Benefits of Volunteering

written by Anna Swanson

With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering are enormous to you, your family, and your community. The right match can help you reduce stress, find friends, connect with the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career. Pemi-Baker Community Health is offering a FREE Hospice volunteer training in June.

Why volunteer?

Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. Giving time to others can reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. Volunteering is an easy way to explore your interests and passions. Think about why you want to volunteer. What would you enjoy doing? Do you want to improve the neighborhood where you live; meet people who are different than you; challenge yourself with something new in your spare time; see a different way of life or new places; have a go at the type of work you might want as a full-time job or simply share a hobby you're good at while making a difference in the lives of others?

While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a large amount of time out; most of Pemi-Baker's volunteers give 2-3 hours, a few times a month.

Pemi-Baker Community Health offers many avenues for volunteering. A majority of their volunteers help with Hospice patients in the community. Wendy Lund, one of PBCH's volunteers, visits and stays with Brian when his wife needs to get groceries or do other errands. Wendy reads to Brian or just enjoys bird watching with him while drinking their morning coffee. The benefits are twofold; Wendy is not only helping Brian but also supporting his family and caregivers by giving them that much needed respite.

Other volunteers with Pemi-Baker Community Health sing and play instruments or visit with their therapy dogs. Resa Cirrincione recently shared a volunteer moment that was very heartwarming.

"When I was a hospice volunteer I would ask permission to bring my small Sheltie, Honey, my therapy dog. Everyone always said "yes" and they loved her. She was so good with the patients. She would sit on their laps or lie next to them in the bed and let them snuggle or pet her fur and pat her head. She knew what they needed and she always gave unconditional love.

One day I heard one of my former hospice patients, John, was not doing well, so I brought Honey over for a visit. John's son was there and John was sleeping in his recliner. I called his name and touched his hand, but there was no response. John's son explained that he didn't wake up much anymore.

I scooped Honey up and gently put her in John's lap. Immediately his arms went around her and he hugged her close to his chest without opening his eyes. He knew she was there! Honey lay very still and then softly licked his hand, nestled her head against his chest and just rested there with him. When John's arms relaxed and we knew he had fallen into a deep sleep, I put Honey on the floor and she lay at the side of his chair until it was time to go. We heard later that John passed that night, and I was so grateful that Honey had brought him some comfort one last time."

Pemi-Baker is offering a Free Hospice Volunteer Training Program in June. This is a great chance to explore, learn, and ask questions about volunteering. Classes will be held on Tuesday afternoons, 2-4pm, June 4th through July 2nd (5 weeks). Please visit our website for more information or contact Lisa Fortson, MSW, our Hospice and Palliative Care Supervisor to register. www.pbhha.org | 603-536-2232 | info@pbhha.org

"The brightest stars are those who shine for the benefit of others"-Anonymous