

Volunteers Answering The Call: Building Healthier, More Vibrant Communities

By Dawn Ericson-Taylor, Volunteer Resources Manager

As we celebrate National Volunteer Month, we honor and recognize the contributions of our corps of 1200+ committed volunteers. Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands relies on volunteers to help us successfully fulfill our mission. Our volunteers continue to be our partners-in-service to our consumers and community, assisting us to deliver programs and advocacy.

Communities across the Cape & Islands are in need. Residents are struggling to meet the costs of utilities, food, and—especially—housing. Many who are experiencing economic hardships depend on services and programs such as food banks and Meals-on-Wheels.

Volunteers serving on our Board of Directors & Advisory Councils aid us in identifying and addressing the needs and challenges of our aging neighbors in the tri-county area. Our Money Management volunteers help our consumers stretch every last penny of their monthly budget. Meals-on-Wheels volunteers are answering the call to meet the rapidly expanding demand for this vital program. Our Long Term Care Ombudsmen advocate for adequate care, while facilities experience workforce shortages. All of our volunteers are helping to improve the health and quality of life for older adults, offering real solutions, and turning their service into real action.

[Leadership for Educational Equity](#) (LEE) is a community service organization that believes “volunteering is transformative: lives within the community have the potential to be permanently and positively altered, but volunteering can positively change the life of the volunteer as well.” LEE affiliates work on issues of equity and youth, but their insights into volunteering are equally true for those striving to ensure equity and equitable access in aging.

Some of the benefits of becoming civically involved through community service that LEE has identified include:

1. Investing in your community strengthens your community.

Volunteering brings people from all walks of life together to work towards a common goal. Through the investment of volunteering, we foster meaningful relationships, crucial community growth, trust in others, and vital understanding about individual journeys existing in a community. These elements create harmony and strength, and when many work together to support and build these principles, a community can begin to thrive.

2. Acts of service improve quality of life.

By volunteering, we can help improve the quality of life in our communities and create a more vibrant and supportive environment for everyone by providing invaluable services. In performing these acts of service, a phenomenon known as “volunteer therapy” can:

- Strengthen your body

- Lift your mood
- Lengthen your lifespan
- Improve heart health
- Reduce anxiety and depression

3. Volunteering bolsters the community, the organizations, and you.

Volunteering provides an opportunity to give back to the community in both tangible and intangible ways. Volunteering offers invaluable experiences that can help to strengthen a sense of purpose, belonging, and connection to our communities. In addition, volunteers gain skills, knowledge and experience from their volunteer service.

Volunteering can help to fill gaps in areas such as finances, physical labor, emotional support, and other functions that are vital to an organization's mission and, through their involvement, help raise awareness about the organization and the issues it is addressing. This awareness can help increase an organization's capacity to take on new projects and initiatives.

4. Raise awareness of the issues underlying the need for change.

Many communities today are reeling from issues that need more awareness and action to rectify them. Volunteering is an invaluable way to raise that awareness and create positive change on a local and global level. It allows us to get involved in our communities, take an active role in fighting for justice, and bring attention to important issues that are often overlooked.

5. Equity-minded involvement raises diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in your community.

Volunteering immediately connects you with your local community through service and it can spark a great sense of social responsibility that allows you to broaden your equity mindset to other communities. Stepping out of your comfort zone and joining with people from all walks of life increases understanding and creates a collaborative space that respects and values all individuals. Through their work, volunteers not only demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion, but also create a foundation and standard of mutual respect that can have a strong, lasting impact on the community.

Healthy, vibrant communities are those who are supported by a diverse group of civic minded individuals, having the power to change lives, and communities for the better.

Thank you, volunteers!