

At some point or another in everyone's life, they have been told the same adage "one of the greatest gifts you can give is your time." The social, mental, emotional, and physical benefits of volunteering are widely known. Volunteering gives a sense of community, purpose, and passion to millions of people. While the call to volunteerism is strong for many, the thought of finding a way to "change the world" can seem daunting, but hope should not be lost. Becoming an active volunteer in your community is much easier than you think, and small steps can lead to your success. Here are three different ways you can get started:

1. Set aside time- College students and adults alike are busy, and it can't be expected for you to start volunteering 20 hours a week at a humane society out of the gate. This said if you truly want to work towards becoming an active volunteer you need to set aside time. Start with choosing an open block of space and commit yourself to keeping it open and for looking for an activity to fill it. It can seem daunting to commit to a year-long volunteering position, but setting aside even an hour or two per month will ensure that you follow through and will help slowly integrate volunteering into your schedule.
2. Find your passion- It may seem cliché, but finding something you love makes volunteer work much more enjoyable and worthwhile to you, and the organization you're helping. From hospitals to animal shelters and soup kitchens to fun runs, the options are endless. If you are passionate about something, odds are there is a charity that supports such a cause. If you're just beginning to volunteer, working in an area you are familiar with and passionate about makes the learning curve much shorter and more enjoyable. All volunteer work is good but volunteer work you enjoy is much more satisfying (and you're more likely to keep coming back).
3. Reach outside of your comfort zone- If you've been volunteering for a long time, or have tried volunteering in areas you are passionate about and just aren't feeling a connection, try something completely outside your comfort zone. The best volunteering I've ever done was something I didn't want to do (tutoring math bilingually in English and Spanish), and I debated whether or not I should back out for a long time before I started. I didn't think my skills would fit with the requirements, but because I forced myself to follow through, I ended up loving it and it was a large portion of why I am studying to become a teacher today. Just because you don't think you'll like something doesn't mean you can't try it. Going once or twice to try something new will never hurt.

These paths, while useful for those contemplating volunteering, are not the only ways to start being involved in charitable work. Reaching out directly to organizations can yield entirely new and unique volunteering opportunities not found on websites or in this article. The best advice I can give is to just *try*. Volunteering has been hands down the most rewarding thing I've done in my life, and I can guarantee you will find your right fit if you look around and explore.