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SASH DEERFIELD VALLEY (802)464-0438 & SASH CORA B. WHITNEY (802)442-9920

The Health Benefits of Volunteering for Older Americans

Besides the intrinsic rewards of helping others, volunteering promotes good physical and mental health and helps seniors pursue their passions in retirement.

5 Reasons Volunteerism is Great for Seniors

As a volunteer, retirement can afford you the chance to work on a project or issue that is important to you – simply for the passion of it, rather than a paycheck. Seniors have a unique set of skills and knowledge to offer as volunteers: a lifetime of experience can help you help others in a myriad of ways, from mentoring and tutoring younger generations, to providing career guidance, to offering companionship and care

Volunteerism isn't just beneficial for those being helped – research shows that volunteering confers mental and physical health benefits for those doing the helping. It also fosters positive social and family relationships and contributes to a positive image of seniors as a healthy part of our society. Here are just a handful of reasons volunteer activity is beneficial:

1. **It helps bridge the generation gap.** Young people are often encouraged to volunteer as a way to broaden their horizons, improve their college prospects, build resumes and help others while doing it. Seniors who volunteer have a unique opportunity to work with and assist younger generations – and learn from them too.

2. **It helps change the way people think about older adults.** By using their talents and skills out in the world in a variety of ways, seniors demonstrate that they are active, involved and essential to a healthy community.
3. **It is good for mental health and can help prevent Alzheimer's.** The National Institute on aging has reported that participating in social leisure activities and meaningful, productive activities such as volunteering may lower the risk of health problems in seniors, including dementia, as well as improving longevity. Being a volunteer can help keep the brain and the body active, which contributes to continuing cognitive health, according to numerous studies.

4. It helps prevent senior isolation and depression.

In addition to getting seniors out of the house and into the community, volunteering has a positive effect on psychological wellness: according to the Corporation for National Community Service, those who volunteer experience greater life satisfaction, a sense of purpose and accomplishment, more stress resilience, and lower rates of depression.

5. It promotes healthy physical activity.

Volunteering can be good for keeping the body active, whether you're building houses for Habitat for Humanity, helping with a local sports team, or walking around your favorite museum as a volunteer docent. Maintaining a healthy level of fitness as we age helps ward off disease, injury and even dementia.

However you decide to spend your time volunteering. It's important to look for opportunities that fit your schedule. Many retirees find activities that are flexible and fit into their schedules. Other people are able to volunteer 20 hours a week and still find time to partake in other activities.

Find an activity you are passionate about. Volunteering is best for all

parties involved when you are doing something you enjoy. It's never too late to get started. Whether you just retired or are in your later years there is an opportunity out there for you.

If you're looking for volunteer opportunities for yourself, or a senior loved one, you don't have to look far. There are numerous resources out there. Contact SASH Coordinators Marianne Almeda and Becky Arbella for more information about volunteering in your community.

marianne.almeda@shireshousing.org 464-0438

becky.arbella@shireshousing.org 442-9920

12 New Monthly Health Habits for 2018

January Eat vegetables with your snack or meal at least 3 times per day.

February Cut your processed sugar in ½ or out all together.

March Drink your water! 64-oz every single day.

April Get your sweat on most days of the week. Just 20 minutes a day will count.

May Stop eating foods with hydrogenated oils, trans fats, high fructose corn syrup.

June Get at least 8- hours sleep every day.

July Go meatless at least one day per week. Eat more vegetarian sources of protein.

August Meditate or sit in silence 10 minutes every day.

September Eat more fiber filling foods. Raw carrots, sweet potatoes, avocado, rolled oats, apples, oranges, air popped popcorn to name a few.

October Eat good fats! Get your Omega 3's with foods like salmon, sardines, walnuts, peanut butter, pumpkin seeds, and yogurt.

November Stretch your muscles and do Yoga.

December Be grateful. Gratitude is good for your health. Practice it daily.

Let us encourage and inspire one another for strength, health, happiness, and determination for the coming year. Don't just go through this next year, grow through it!

Try applying these habits into your daily routine and you will see how a lot of small changes add up!

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