



Connection through service: Volunteering ideas for busy people

The needs of our neighbours and communities grow in times of crisis. We saw this as coronavirus spread across the country. Small businesses have struggled to survive and charities have tried to maintain the commitment to their mission. Many of us continue to deal with the stress and anxiety that comes with such uncertain times.

Helping others and helping ourselves could be an ideal antidote for the ongoing worry and uncertainty.

But how can you volunteer when time is short and the demands of work and family life continue to mount up?

The good news is that with a little creativity and some technological savvy, there are plenty of ways to make a difference even if time is scarce. Here are a few suggestions.

Volunteer virtually. Consider sites like [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), [UN Volunteers](https://www.un.org/volunteers/), or [DO-IT](https://www.do-it.org/) which match opportunities to your skills, interests and availability, and can be done from anywhere. For those that are really short on time, consider micro-volunteering, a recent trend that allows volunteers to complete small tasks online that help complete larger projects. Consider [Be My Eyes](https://www.bemyeyes.org/) that helps bring sight to blind or low vision people.

Supporting local restaurants. Ordering take away a little more often may not fit your classic definition of volunteerism, but it might keep restaurant staff busy while business returns to normal. If that feels a little too self-serving, consider calling in an order for those who might be more in need.

Be a friend. Loneliness is becoming an increasing trend in the older population. You can help combat the toxic effects of loneliness by signing up to the friendship services run by [AgeUK](#). The service offers local face-to-face befriending as well as telephone friendship.

Clean up the neighbourhood. Litter picking is a great way to get some fresh air and freshen up your environment. It requires minimal equipment and can literally start on your doorstep. But do remember to take care as you clean up.

Foster a pet. Fostering can be a great way to fill a growing need in your community. Speak with your local [RSPCA](#) or [Dog's Trust](#) to see if you can welcome a furry friend into your home.

Pick up the phone. Check with local charities and small businesses to see what they need. Due to coronavirus some may have had to lay off staff and be looking for help with short term daily tasks, like making phone calls or updating customer mailing lists.

Get others involved. Your community-minded efforts don't have to be a solo act. Video conferencing technologies like Zoom or Skype are a quick way to get a group together. Jump online with your friends or extended family and choose a volunteering activity you can do together.

Maintaining strong social connections has a direct positive effect on your emotional health and can also help create the network you need to keep you optimistic as uncertainty lingers.

The key? Don't overthink it. Volunteering, much like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder.

But if you're somehow giving freely of your time, money, or talents then you're likely to help your community in a significant time of need and improve your own health and well-being in the process.

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