



Scouts and UN Volunteers mobilize against COVID-19 around the world.

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Three things to consider before volunteering

As COVID-19 continues to spread globally, we are witnessing an unprecedented surge in the number of volunteers working to bring relief to communities in need. While volunteering itself isn't new, finding the right fit and purpose is crucial in ensuring that we contribute positively to the causes we feel connected with.

Volunteering in the time of a global pandemic

According to a report by [United Nations Volunteers](#), efforts of the more than 1 billion volunteers around the world are equal to that of [109 million full-time dedicated volunteers](#) working around the world working to improve the lives and livelihoods of their fellow human beings. Of the 1 billion, only 30% are engaged formally through organizations, associations, and groups such as the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#), UNV, or [World Organization of the Scout Movement](#), one of the world's largest youth movements.

The act of volunteering is tied to a central purpose: putting the needs of others first. If there is a silver lining to focus on during this dark storm, it could be this reminder of the inherent good in humanity when faced with crisis; how we pull together and help one another. Currently, all of us — from staying home to volunteering — are demonstrating that acting for others is a common universal value.

Becoming a volunteer is fairly simple but there are three things required:

1. A high level of commitment and focus

Volunteering during highly stressful and intense periods such as a global pandemic requires an important trait: a high level of commitment. To truly be of service to others, one has to be prepared to carve out a significant portion of time and energy on a continuous or consistent basis, especially if the help is being rendered to those working on the frontlines. This is because consistency is essential when volunteering, as it enables medical personnel to continue to do their work without interruption.

Medical personnel are working around the clock to keep this disease at bay, and they can't do this alone. All around the world, volunteer emergency medical teams have been mobilized to support COVID-19 patients everywhere. Thousands of retired medical staff are returning to work as volunteers to provide support to their communities.

Stories are also emerging throughout the media of volunteers cleaning hospital rooms, providing meals for medical staff, caring for their children, sewing personal protective suits, and supplying hospitals with face masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and other protective gear.

All of these citizen volunteers dove headfirst into getting things done, but also committed a significant number of hours in their days to support front-line staff.

2. Understanding the needs of those we serve

Before serving others, we should be certain about what they need. Being able to identify the needs of the community and adapt to deliver is a strength that formal movements have provided in enabling effective voluntary action.

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For example, in the Central African Republic, United Nations Volunteers — assigned as [public information officers](#) in radio stations with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Mission in CAR — are ensuring that residents who can't read or write have the information needed in order to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

There are over 54 million scouts worldwide in 171 national organizations that are governed by WOSM. When looking at community volunteering around the world, thousands of scouts are taking action in their communities by [providing rations and groceries for the elderly](#), the homeless, and [providing handwashing facilities to the urban poor](#) as well as others who are

unable to support themselves.

There are activities that have been carefully understood as critical. Addressing such needs ensures higher impact and reach to people who are in need of assistance.

3. Agility and adaptability

A huge challenge volunteers are facing currently is adhering to social distancing while trying to reach out to those in need. Opportunities for volunteering digitally provide an otherwise unexplored avenue to address needs from an emotional and psychological well-being perspective.

For example, WOSM's [Jamboree on the Internet](#) event — which was organized as a rapid response to engage young people around the world to respond to this crisis — is a digital platform that provides opportunities for young people to share their experiences, display talents, learn new skills, understand different cultures, meet new friends globally, and join virtual discussions relevant to today's challenges.

UNV in Peru has also called for [20,000 young people](#) to support its first massive digital volunteering campaign, where volunteers are assigned to call 30 senior citizens every day in an effort to provide emotional and communication support to them. Volunteers will also be tasked with identifying and reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Such online community initiatives are expanding to address critical needs, such as providing mental health support through online counseling and 24-hour hotline numbers for those at higher risk of domestic violence.

Beyond COVID-19

Apart from these three key factors, COVID-19 has taught us that all it takes to make a difference in this world is a willing and determined heart driven by compassion and empathy. Tie this with certain skill sets and abilities, and you have a winning formula to make an actual difference. In the end, it isn't about how much you do, but how your actions are impacting others.

Find out about volunteering opportunities by exploring [World Scouting](#) and [UN Volunteers](#), or opt to connect with local volunteer groups in your community.

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