

My Thoughts on Volunteering

Volunteer work has changed my life and made me a better person. I came to this country when I was just 8 years old. I didn't speak English, let alone know how to write. I was shy, nervous, and like any 8 year old, dazzled by everything I came in contact with. My first encounter with volunteering was in middle school on a yearbook project. A teacher suggested I volunteer. She said it would be good for me. I rolled my eyes back in my head and muttered something in half English and Vietnamese. Anyway, I went ahead and volunteered. This event transformed my life! I met many new friends and made a quantum leap from a shy kid to an unselfish and responsible part of my new community.

Since that first experience, I have volunteered on several other projects. One very enriching experience was through a project sponsored by the Pearl City Elks Lodge. This organization supports the Homeless Veteran's Shelter in Kalaeloa. We gathered up member donated clothing and other useful articles. We then sorted and packaged the items. Next, we distributed these items to the needy people in the shelter. Just to see the smiles on these veteran's faces, many who had served in Vietnam way before my time, was a thrill. When they found out I was Vietnamese, it was like I was one of the family. I was definitely humbled. I continue to do volunteer work at my high school. This work helps me connect with the school and I meet a broad range of other students giving their time and energy like I do. But, the best thing is, volunteer work makes you feel good about yourself. That is why I encourage others to volunteer. To me there is no better way to connect with reality and give something back without asking for something in return.

Typically through life's journey, we all have our plates full. Where is the time to do this and where is the time to do that? Volunteering is the last thing that enters our minds. Picking up a can of paint and a paint brush to rid the neighborhood of graffiti can be filled with other personal benefits, not just benefits to the community. For example, we learn that there are several kinds of paint. We learn that a roller may be a better tool. We learn that getting dirty somehow makes us feel clean. And maybe most important, we learn there are many like-minded people helping out without asking for a thing in return. Volunteer and it may set you free!