

Volunteers discover how helping others helps yourself

Anjali Hazari

familypost@scmp.com (mailto:familypost@scmp.com)

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Within the next few days, students will have ended their school year and packed for holidays in exotic destinations, visits to home countries, summer camps, internships and part-time jobs. But long summer days can sometimes stretch with boredom. For teenagers whose college applications loom on the horizon, volunteering is a way to fill some of those sweltering days.

Research by Lewis Friedland and Shauna Morimoto shows that one of the important reasons many young people undertake civic engagement is to build a resume for college admission - 'resume-padding'. This is the case whether they are aiming for a world famous university or the local technical college. Almost all the young people interviewed expected or at least hoped to better their lives, and linked this to college education. A majority linked their hopes for college admission to service.

The checklist for gaining admission to reputed universities is long, with good grades easily topping the list. However, extracurricular activities such as sports, involvement in clubs such as debating and model UN certainly look good on a resume. Similarly, doing community service confers certain character traits upon students that set them apart and present them as individuals who would be willing to contribute in making the university campus a better place.

Where can Hong Kong students volunteer this summer? It is always recommended that students volunteer in areas where their own aptitude and interests lie, so that they find the experience enriching.

If they like animals, there is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or the Hong Kong Dog Rescue, which welcome volunteers to help with a range of work, including dog walking, animal care support, humane education, kennel keeping and helping find permanent homes for the animals. Riding for the Disabled Association regularly seeks volunteers to help disabled horse-riders, by walking with them or leading them.

If a student enjoys spending time with children, Mother's Choice is an option. The charity needs volunteers to help take care of babies and small children and to teach them English, drama, arts and crafts.

Then there are organisations such as the WWF. Volunteers are needed to help with fundraising projects and office work. Another such organisation which **seeks volunteers to raise awareness of epilepsy** in Hong Kong is **Enlighten - Action for Epilepsy**.

An organisation that aims to find lasting solutions to poverty and suffering is Oxfam. Volunteers can participate in various types of service, subject to their knowledge, interest and availability, including: administrative support, translation, editing, fundraising events, advocacy campaigns, public education programmes, and running their second-hand shop. Thousands of volunteers have assisted at its key events, such as the Trailwalker, Rice Sale and Musical Marathon.

A recent study by DoSomething.org, one of the largest US organisations that help teens take action on causes they care about, reports that admission officers place a high value on a student's long-term involvement in a cause or organisation because they demonstrate the stellar qualities of commitment and perseverance.

When college admissions officers review an application, they get an idea of that student's sense of self, his or her resourcefulness and intellectual vitality. And volunteering touches on all three of these areas, says James Montoya, who has been involved in the admissions process at several universities, including Stanford.

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