

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is a great way to gain valuable experience, to develop new skills, meet new people, to do something worthwhile and to improve our employability. There are volunteering projects out there to suit everyone, from a few hours per week in your local community to spending years on development projects in underdeveloped countries. Either way – check out the information in this section which includes:

- Reasons for becoming a volunteer.
- Tips for volunteers.
- Types of voluntary work to suit your subject area.
- Information on volunteering in Ireland.
- Information on volunteering abroad.

Why Volunteer?

Even after graduating from your certificate, diploma or degree you may still be uncertain about what you want to do next. You may want to travel abroad or get experience in a career area before specialising. You may also be motivated by the opportunity to make life better for others or to ‘give something back’.

Volunteering takes on many shapes and forms, from a few minutes a week to taking over your life and can be done both here in Ireland and overseas.

Reasons for Volunteering

Volunteering can:

- Help you to stand out from the crowd, and will show employers that you’ve got drive and initiative. Make sure you include it on your CV – volunteering gives you a competitive edge and can increase your employability.
- Provide employers with evidence of interpersonal skills (communication, delegation and people management) and self-reliance skills, all of which can be either obtained or enhanced through voluntary work experience. If you have led a volunteer project, you are likely to have developed leadership, time management, entrepreneurship, decision-making and problem solving skills.
- Help you to develop a network with which you can discuss your career ideas. Take advantage of the opportunity to get advice and information from people working in a field which interests you.
- Help you to consider, or develop long term goals and enhance emotional maturity.
- Gives you experience not easily found in a paid position.
- Helps you gain skills and experience that you don’t have but are necessary to get the job you want; and remember.....Voluntary work should be rewarding and fun!

Tips for Volunteering

- Research the causes or issues important to you – look at groups or organisations that work with issues you feel strongly about.
- Consider the skills you have to offer – incorporate aspects of your personality e.g. interest in outdoor work.

- Yearning to learn something – acquire a new skill for example volunteering to work on the newsletter for the local homeless shelter will improve your editing and writing skills. If you wish to obtain something in particular from volunteering, look at a charity or volunteering group with :
 - A job specification that sets out what you do.
 - Supervision/Appraisal sessions to assess your work i.e. how are you developing.
- Combine your goals – look for opportunities that help to achieve other personal goals e.g. if you want to lose a few pounds, choose an activity with young children or manual work.
- Don't over commit your schedule – better to start out slowly than to commit yourself to a schedule you can't or don't want to fulfil. Maybe start out on limited number of hours until you get the feel of things e.g. few hours helping to feed deserted pets at an animal sanctuary?
- Non-Profit Organisations may have questions too – be aware you may have to attend an interview or fill out an application form. This is usually undertaken in the interest of children and 'at risk' populations with whom the organisation have a legal responsibility to consider.
- Virtual Volunteering – Yes it does exist
- Give voice to your heart through your giving and volunteering!

“Bring your heart and your sense of humour to your volunteer service, along with your enthusiastic spirit, which in itself is a priceless gift. What you get back will be immeasurable”
- Find out first – ask for written information about the charity's programme, finance and their authorities. Make certain you are comfortable with their fundraising methods and expenditure of funds. Remember it is unlawful for charities to promote political views. Get in touch with returned or previous volunteers.
- Enjoy yourself!

Types of Voluntary Work for Different Course Areas

- **Art and Design:** youth and community centres, art galleries.
- **Drama:** youth and community groups, prisons
- **Media, Journalism, Marketing:** promotion, advertising and reporting for various organisations.
- **Architects, Engineers, Construction:** Overseas projects for NGOs
- **Food Scientists, Hospitality Management, and Culinary Arts:** With the NGOs you could learn about food production, ethnic cooking on a budget, and nutritional issues which affect the indigenous populations of countries such as Africa.
- **Tourism:** Camp counsellors in the US and Australia and numerous opportunities with both USIT and APSO in Third World countries
- **Leisure Management:** Community Games, coaching for soccer and GAA teams, overseeing youth clubs, after school programmes, summer and Easter camps. Those of you wishing to get onto the Higher Diploma in teaching programme this may be an eye catcher for the universities.
- **Music:** Retirement centres, homes for the elderly, church choirs.
- **Computers:** Virtual volunteering, visit www.serviceleader.org/vv/forvolts.htm
- **Languages:** Not the obvious “let's au-pair in France for the summer”, but other summer camps or overseas projects where your language of study is spoken. Impress employers with more than your compulsory placement abroad; show that you have a genuine interest in the language, culture and country. Also don't forget about business development.
- **Social Care:** Demonstrates that you are not just fulfilling your compulsory work experience for college.
- **Environmental Health:** Conservation activities in Ireland or abroad.

SUMMER WORK

Summer work is a great way to earn some much needed cash and to develop skills which will make you more employable when you leave university or college.

Ideally you might want to get a summer job related to the career area you plan to enter when you finish studying. This will give you an opportunity to find out what the work is really like and whether or not it's for you.

If you're not sure what to do once you leave college, summer work experience will enable you to explore different career areas.

Even work which isn't directly related to your career plans will improve your employment prospects. Students with work experience are more attractive to employers because they have developed transferable skills such as communications, leadership, teamwork and initiative.

So how do you find a Summer Job?

Many summer jobs are never advertised, so it's up to you to go out there and find them! Here's how:

- Tell everyone that you are looking for work – relatives, neighbours, friends or family – they may have useful contacts in your field that could talk to you and give you useful advice.
- Talk to people in the industry and ask for advice about how to secure work – use any contacts you have.
- Follow up on contacts that anyone gives you.
- Talk to your teachers – tell them about your plans and see if they have any contacts.
- Contact companies early – don't leave it until June.
- Consider small and medium sized employers, not just large employers/multinationals.
- Target specific companies that you would be interested in working for, and make contact with them. Make a phone call to find out whether they have any summer work available before you send in a CV. Always tailor your CV and cover letter to the company/position for which you are applying. This approach will be more successful than sending out hundreds of general CVs and cover letters.

The Kompass Directory is a good place to start identifying companies relevant to your career area. The directory is available in most libraries and also in the ILac Centre library. Part of the directory is also available at www.kompass.com where you can do a search under Ireland, products and services and put in a relevant keyword e.g. Information Technology. This search will then generate a list of all the companies in Ireland who work in your career area, with links to their websites and e-mail addresses.