VOLUNTEER TO GAIN SKILLS & EXPERIENCE

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A volunteer role can help you to gain new skills and experience, connect with people, and supercharge your existing talents, all while giving back to the community.

Volunteer experience is highly regarded by employers and will help make your next job application stand out!

Find the right opportunity

There are lots of volunteer opportunities available, but to find the right position, you should analyse your existing skills, and find out what skills employers want to help you identify the gaps. The following questions can help you narrow your options:

- What causes are important to you?
- What skills can you bring and what skills are they looking for?
- What are your interests?
- Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?
- How would this help your career?
- How much time are you willing to commit?

Searching for volunteer work

Some organisations you could approach include: clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, non-profit organisations, schools, community and religious organisations, local government agencies, college research projects and research laboratories.

Positions range from hotline counsellors, hospital and teacher's aides to political campaigners, legal aides, web designing, and reception/administration. Don't limit your volunteer search to these positions or organisations. Most organisations enthusiastically accept volunteers. Take the initiative – express your interest and offer your time.

Start with searching the following websites:

— **Volunteer at JCU**
https://www.jcu.edu.au/careers-and-employability/students/job-search/on-campus-opportunities

— **Volunteering North Queensland (Townsville)**
http://www.vnq.org.au/

— **FNQ Volunteers (Cairns)**
http://fnqvolunteers.org.au/

— **Seek Volunteer**

https://www.volunteer.com.au/

— **Go Volunteer**
www.govolunteer.com.au

— **Conservation Volunteers Australia**
http://www.conservationvolunteers.com.au

— **Qld Government information on Volunteering**
https://www.qld.gov.au/community/community-organisations-volunteering/volunteering/

— **JCU CareerHub**
https://careerhub.jcu.edu.au/ (voluntary and paid work listed on CareerHub)

*Check out our discipline specific Career Snapshots for volunteering opportunities related to your course.

Optimise volunteering

Make sure you know what's expected. Before starting, make sure you are comfortable with the organisation, know what is expected of you, including your time commitment. Consider starting small so that you don't over commit yourself at first. Give yourself some flexibility to change your focus if needed.

Ask questions. If the role is in your area of study, find out industry knowledge such as, what are key issues currently face the profession? How is the field changing? What ethical issues are of concern today?

In addition to learning what the typical day is like for these professionals, find out about the steps they took to reach their current role, and what tips they might have for you in gaining employment.

Take the initiative. Tactfully ask to do more, once you have effectively mastered your tasks, demonstrated competence and shown your dependability.

Be professional. Volunteer work should be taken seriously. You will be counted on to fill a special need. Be visible by doing your job well; actions speak louder than words. Develop and demonstrate professionalism, ethics, etiquette, and consideration of others; in your behaviour towards co-workers and clients; your communication (written, online and verbal); and in your dress, punctuality and general attitude.

These qualities make a positive impression with the staff and may serve you well in the future when seeking referees.

Don't be afraid to make a change. Speak up if your experience isn't what you expected. Talk to the organisation about changing your focus or consider looking for another match.

Record your experience

There are several methods for adding experience to your resume. The most common is to create heading in your resume titled "Volunteer Experience" and include specific information about the role, skills you have developed and quantifiable results.

For example:

- "Organised and promoted blood drive which collected 35 litres of blood over a two-day event" - *Tells a potential employer what you did and how successful you were at it.*

- "Planned, ordered and prepared lunch and dinners to serve 350" - *Shows organisational skills.*

Know your rights

Unlike paid workers, volunteer workers are not covered by award conditions or workplace agreements. But, volunteers do have rights, some of which are written into legislation.

As a volunteer you have the right to:

- accurate and truthful information about the organisation

- look at the organisation's volunteer policy and other policy documents affecting your work

- interviews and selection processes that are free of bias

- agreed working hours

- an agreed job description

- be properly trained to do the job

- a healthy and safe work environment

- be covered by adequate insurance provided by the organisation you work for

- reimbursement for any pre-agreed money you spend on behalf of the organisation in the course of your work

- effective grievance procedures

- not be used during an industrial dispute to perform work usually done by a paid worker

- confidentiality, your personal information being managed according to the *Privacy Act 1988.*

You can visit the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) website for more information about your rights as a volunteer.

Benefits for volunteers

Volunteering is all about making a difference in your community; it also benefits you personally as it offers the chance to:

- act on your values, passions and interests
- make new friendships and create professional networks
- gain work experience and learn new skills
- enjoy new social and cultural experiences
- develop personally and build confidence
- enjoy better physical and mental health as studies show volunteering makes us healthier and happier
- challenge yourself in a supportive environment
- help your community
- have fun!