Volunteering

Volunteers are people who provide a service that benefits the community. They do this of their own free will and without financial payment. Volunteer work is usually performed in the not-for-profit sector.

Why Volunteer?

The benefits to the volunteer are many, including:

- Developing skills and experience.
- Testing your vocational direction.
- Demonstrating your commitment to your chosen field.
- Exploring new career opportunities.
- Developing networks.
- Making friends.
- Building your confidence.
- Pursuing a hobby or special interest.
- Developing greater understanding of people whose life is different to yours.
- Gaining a reference.
- Making a contribution to society.

In some fields of work such as social work, youth work and counselling, participating in volunteer work is an essential prerequisite to gaining employment. In others, such as environmental work, volunteering will demonstrate your commitment to the field.

What Do Volunteers Do?

Some popular areas of volunteering for students are:

- Education: mentoring, tutoring, coaching, teaching English, assisting with school holiday programs.
- Community, welfare and health: telephone counselling, advocacy, social support, assisting with therapy programs, fundraising.

- Environment: campaigning, biological research, tree planting and conservation work.
- Arts and cultural activities: museum guide, performing, assisting with exhibitions and festivals.
- Human rights and social justice: campaigning, public education, advocacy.
- Sports: coaching, committee work, fundraising.
- Media: working in community radio and television, writing educational and promotional materials.

There are many opportunities for students to be involved in volunteer work at RMIT. This can be one-off activities like helping out at Open Day or Orientation, or ongoing activities like demonstrating science activities at secondary schools and assisting with student clubs and societies.

Information on volunteer programs at RMIT can be seen on the RMIT LEAD website, see: www.rmit.edu.au/lead

Commitment Required

Volunteers need to be prepared to make a commitment. This can be negotiated between the volunteer and the organisation. Reliability and punctuality are just as important in volunteer work as in paid employment. As a volunteer you have the right to appropriate training and support and a clear job description.

International Volunteering

There are countless opportunities for engaging in volunteer programs overseas—humanitarian aid, conservation, education, agriculture, health, engineering. There are even organisations that specifically target students as volunteers.

If living and working in another culture is of interest to you, volunteering offers an opportunity to work side-by- side with local people in a way that working as a highly-paid expatriate cannot. It is an opportunity to develop independence, resilience and resourcefulness and is often life-changing.

Some programs are for short periods that can fit in with university vacation periods or they may be open ended. Others require a commitment of a year or two for people with specific skills and experience.

You may be required to cover the costs of placement and support and some programs will pay you a small sum equivalent to the local rates of pay.

Think about your motivation for volunteering overseas. Living conditions are likely to be significantly different to what you are used to so it is important to do your homework to be prepared.

Further information

See the Resumes section on our Jobs and Career advice web pages

www.rmit.edu.au/students/life-and-work-opportunities/jobs-and-career-advice

Updated January 2018

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