

Volunteers are involved in all aspects of Irish society supporting areas such as health, education, culture, social services, the environment and the arts.

Across Ireland, volunteers are engaged in delivering services and programmes that improve and enhance the life of our communities. About 1 million people in Ireland volunteer each year. If you want to join them but are unsure if it's for you and how to go about it, this leaflet aims to answer your questions.

Why should I volunteer?

People from all walks of life and backgrounds volunteer and do so for a variety of different reasons. One thing that they all have in common is that they all see the great benefits of volunteering. These include:

- Giving something back to your community or society
- Gaining new skills and enhancing existing skills
- Meeting new people with similar interests
- Gaining valuable experience – often with a view to gaining employment
- Feeling connected to your community
- Making a difference in someone's life
- Having fun with like-minded people

What kind of volunteering can I do?

The short answer is anything! There really is a volunteering opportunity to suit everyone's time and interests. Just a few examples of causes that often require volunteers include:

- Education
- Mental health
- Homelessness
- Animal welfare
- Older people
- Children and young people
- Health and hospitals
- Environment

Within any area, there is always a wide range of activity types such as:

Befriending – giving support and friendship to someone such as an older person in the community, people with disabilities or health problems or new arrivals to the country.

Education – tutoring people who need extra help, teaching English as a second language, helping students with a disability or someone recovering from injury.

Practical assistance – organisations often need volunteers to help out with more practical tasks such as DIY,

painting, gardening or driving.

Online – organisations often require support that you can do at home in your own time such as web design, creating a marketing plan, or looking after social media accounts.

Office work – helping out with administration, manning reception, organising finances or data collection.

Fundraising – raising much needed funds for charities through on street collections, volunteering in a charity shop, or even helping design a funding strategy for an organisation.

Short-Term – volunteering doesn't have to mean committing a huge amount of time over a long period. Many organisations need help with short-term or one-off specific projects and tasks.

The above list is by no means exhaustive but just an example of some of the more popular types of volunteering.

Is there anything I should consider before volunteering?

Volunteering can be a truly life changing experience but there are a number of things you should consider before volunteering.

Interests

is there anything that I am particularly interested in or passionate about? Volunteering is so much more rewarding when you are working in something you have a real passion for. You should volunteer for something you care about, not something you feel others expect you to do.

Time

how much time can I set aside to volunteer?

How long can I commit to a volunteer role?

Organisations can be very flexible but you should be sure about how much time you can really commit before you volunteer. There are a wide range of roles out there to suit your availability, including those that require a shorter time commitment.

Skills

what skills do I have that might benefit others? Are there any new skills I'd like to develop? This will help you choose a role that will benefit both you and the organisation.

How can I volunteer?

Once you've decided that you'd like to volunteer the next question is – how do I go about it? Luckily, we're here to help! There are two easy ways you can find a volunteering opportunity to suit you.

Online

Volunteer Ireland hosts the online database I-Vol, which is a bank of thousands of volunteering opportunities across Ireland. There you can search for a role by location, interest, skills or even keyword. If you find something you like,

you can apply online there and then. If you don't find something, you can register your interest with your local Volunteer Centre, who will get in touch with you to help you find something suitable. I-Vol can be accessed on our website www.volunteer.ie or as an app for your smartphone.

Local Volunteer Centres

There are 29 Volunteer Centres across Ireland. They work to match volunteers with suitable opportunities and organisations in your local area. You can call or email your local centre to discuss your needs and they will do their best

to place you in a suitable role or you can drop in to meet someone in person. See overleaf for a map of all Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services.

Anything else?

Remember to enjoy yourself! Volunteering can be a very rewarding experience but can also be hard work. Choose your role carefully to ensure it's something that

you will enjoy. It may take time to find the right role but don't give up – it's worth waiting for something that's right for you. Be aware that some roles require Garda vetting, interviews, references and/or training which may delay the process.

This is necessary to ensure the best possible experience for both you and the organisation. Your local Volunteer Centre is always there to support you – feel free to give them a call anytime.