

Volunteering can help jobseekers boost skills

IF you are currently unemployed or on benefits should you consider volunteering? In last week's article we looked at how you can be on benefits and still volunteer so long as you do it in consultation with your benefits advisor and abide by the rules.

So can volunteering improve your job prospects? The short answer is 'it depends'. Research, and our own past experience here at the Volunteer Centre at OCVA (Oxford Community and Voluntary Action), shows that it's a case of being clear of what you want to get out of your experience. For example, if you want to get into retail, improve your people skills, get experience of cash handling and using EPOS systems, then you need to identify an opportunity that offers exactly that. Our volunteer match making site, oxonvolunteers.org, will help you find some fantastic volunteering opportunities that meet your specific requirements.

The other side of the equation is that you need to focus on skills that are in demand. Daiga Kamerāde, Research Fellow at the

Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham, says that for "volunteering to have a positive impact on an unemployed person's job prospects, they have to be presented with opportunities to get the specific skills and knowledge that 'employers are crying out for'."

Currently, there is a lot for demand for professionals with experience in social media, IT and accounting in the job market. If you want a more 'professional' or more specific volunteering experience to improve your chances in one of these sectors, we can help you with that too. For example, our Volunteer Co-ordinator has worked with unemployed students who want to develop their CV by finding appropriate volunteering experience. Recently, we worked with a student who has a master's degree and is currently doing the Association of Accounting Technicians level 4 qualification. We are in the process of placing her with at least 3 providers; this involves volunteering with each (one day per week by rota). In this way she will build up her portfolio and

experience a range of accounting roles and learn how to use different accounting systems. This experience is an essential part of her vocational AAT qualifications and will also help her develop her CV in order to secure a paid position. Even paid employment wouldn't necessarily offer this range and variety of experience.

A report by the Institute of Employment Studies found that volunteering directly developed employability skills such as communication skills, teamwork and social skills, especially for young volunteers. However, irrespective of whether or not you get specific work related volunteering experience, there are a number of other benefits to volunteering.

Volunteering can serve as a meaningful alternative by helping you maintain your self-worth and offering you important social contacts and networks.

To find out more, contact the Volunteer Centre at OCVA and we can book a support session. Visit ocva.org.uk, email: vol@ocva.org.uk or call 01865 251946.

VOLUNTARY VOICE

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