

GET OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

IN A NEW TREND, MORE AND MORE YOUNGSTERS IN INDIA ARE CHOOSING TO VOLUNTEER. **AADITI ISAAC** FINDS OUT WHAT INSPIRES THEM TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

The spirit of volunteering lies in challenging oneself positively and discovering one's inner strength. The past few years have witnessed a rise in the number of student-volunteers who are connecting with people, reaching out and helping selflessly. Also, schools, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs) are encouraging students to serve the community in various ways.

"Volunteering gives people a chance to experience and fulfil their desire to serve. Today, it is correctly understood as a physical involvement with a cause and not mere financial donations for one, which was how the earlier generations perceived it as being. Volunteering is not about helping the needy or the poor, but helping another fellow human being. This broadens its spectrum and makes it easier for the youth of the country to identify themselves with volunteering," says Vijay Ladha, honorary programme director, Bangalore Division, Make A Wish Foundation of India and jury member, Apeejay India Volunteer Awards 2011.

The rise in volunteering can be attributed to nuclear families and a virtual world, among other things. Against such a backdrop, the youth of the country find volunteering as a platform that connects them with humanity for real.

WHO IS A VOLUNTEER

A volunteer is a person who wishes to use his/her time, his/her skill-set, and knowledge-base for enhancing a cause and benefiting another human life with no expectation of return or remuneration.

Getting into volunteering involves a number of variables; the identification of a personal interest, search for NPOs who cater to that particular interest directly or indirectly and NPOs who seek the skill-set on a short-term basis.

"Important points that a would-be volunteer must keep in mind are, to be clear on his/her need vis-à-vis what the NGO/NPO can offer and what he/she will be left with at the end of the term of volunteering. It is important that one achieves what one sets out

to achieve, not leave a job incomplete," explains Ladha.

Ladha advises students to visit NPOs, understand their work ethics, needs, administration and approach, the way they interact with the management, other volunteers, staff, etc and assess and match the needs of the NPO with their own.

Talking about what volunteering involves and its advantages, Ladha says, "Volunteering involves working for a minimum of 100 hours or more in a particular area, after which the student gets a certificate from the NPO which can be highlighted in one's CV. Today, many organisations consider volunteering as a valuable experience and prefer to recruit people who have some volunteering experience in their organisations."

Archana Nair, a student of Lady Shri Ram College who has been volunteering for two-and-a-half years and is a volunteer with Leaders for Tomorrow, an NGO run by students in college campuses, says, "I wanted to do social work. Working with Leaders for Tomorrow has taught me lessons that I would otherwise never have learnt. I got into areas like management of people, leadership, personality development, researching for material, writing reports and organising events, all of which has increased my confidence and allowed me to channel my energies in a posi-



Volunteering as a platform connects one with humanity

tive manner. I came out of my comfort zone and got a realistic understanding of life."

"College life is a time when one should not only have opinions but also jump into action.

Through volunteering, one can highlight one's achievements as well as build one's personality and character. It is a win-win situation," she concludes.



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