

# **Volunteer Work Should Be Banned**

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Volunteering is a wonderful way to see the real world through our own eyes, and a path to becoming a bigger and better person. But I also think that volunteering should be banned! Perhaps, that sounds strange to most of you. So today, I'd like to tell you about my experiences which created this dilemma of mine.

From April to August last year, I studied at the University of Victoria in Canada as an ESL student. In my ESL class, it was mandatory to volunteer at least 24 hours. From what I knew, I had always thought volunteering meant helping poorer people. So, I was a little surprised that a rich country like Canada would have a need for volunteers.

Nevertheless, I was pretty excited to have an opportunity to volunteer outside of Japan. I started off at the 2008 World Field Hockey Olympic Qualifying Tournament. While working, I learned a lot through talking with people of various ages and religions. After fulfilling the 24-hour requirement, I continued to volunteer with other organizations too, such as at the Jazz Festival, at a Japanese Garden, and on a family farm. I had so much fun and also had some heart-warming experiences.

My host mother and her friends also did a lot of volunteer work. It seemed to be very popular in Victoria. But while many people gave their time for free, I also saw many people in the morning lining up for food in front of a church and people sleeping on the street at night. When I saw them begging for money after my volunteer work, I thought these people could've done the work instead of me. Why couldn't they get the free lunch and drinks, or the free tickets and T-shirts, or the luxurious one-night stay

at the farm-house, like I did? Instead of just giving money to these unfortunate people, isn't it better to give them a job?

Homelessness was one of the biggest issues in Victoria in spite of many employable people being on welfare. Often these people desperately go from place to place looking for work. The jobs they could be doing are being done by volunteers who don't actually need the money. Of course, the organizations are happy; they're getting necessary work done for nothing.

People need to feel that they are needed and that they are valuable. This sense of individual value can make a huge difference to the whole of the community. If people don't have a sense of optimism and ask themselves; "Do other people really need me?", you wind up with a situation where a lot of people are just sitting back waiting for someone to take care of them. It's not fair to them and the society will surely suffer.

Communities need people who say; "Look at me! I have a job! I'm really making a difference... people need me!" Whether it be a town, a city, or even a country... communities run under that philosophy will be much happier and healthier in the long run.

After facing the homelessness problem firsthand in Canada, I started to become more aware of what is around me. I realized there were many homeless people even in my hometown Toyama. On your way home today, please go and look around the big train stations in Tokyo. You will notice many of them stranded out there. It's sad, but true.

I became interested in social welfare policies around the world, and I read that Norway and some other countries follow the philosophy of encouraging residents to be independent. In Norway, efforts have been made to decrease unfairness and poverty, encourage independence, and to give the residents a chance to participate in the

society.

Norway changed its practice of giving handouts to focusing on job creation and job re-allocation. The government took an active role in a variety of job programs. This readjustment has paid off. Last year, in 2008, Norway's unemployment rate was 2.4% which was nearly half of Japan's. And from the standard of living survey, in 2006 by the United Nations, while Japan was 7<sup>th</sup>, Norway was #1.

Not every country will be able to achieve the same success as Norway. However, certainly something can be learned from what they did. Governments should give homeless people a job and a chance to become independent. And let's not forget what individuals can do. For me, when I volunteer I will choose work which helps out people who really need it.

The word "volunteering" means a lot of things, anything from helping out poorer people, to even working at events for free. You may have thought that any "volunteering" is obviously a great thing to do. That is somewhat true, but actually there are many issues to think about. I have learned that working for free can have unintended results.

Every issue has both pros and cons. I'm not trying to say "Don't do anything." I know there are many people waiting for your help. But if you are planning to volunteer, I hope you will think twice about it before you take action so that you can make the best decision. Each of us can make a difference. YES, WE all CAN. Thank you.