

BLUE ZONES

"After you're older, two things are possibly more important than any others: health and money." – Helen Gurley Brown

It's National Volunteer Month, time to volunteer with purpose



More than 50 people volunteered for a beach cleanup at Lowdermilk Park with Blue Zones Project-STARability Foundation, and Young Professionals of Naples.

Sebastien Saitta
Blue Zones Project-Southwest Florida

Greek philosopher Aristotle said that the essence of life is to "serve others and to do good."

Stated over 2,300 years ago, the concept of volunteering and giving back is hardly new. In fact, the idea of serving others is even ingrained in our biology to help us live longer and happier.

A four-year study recently published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that adults over 50 who volunteer for at least 100 hours a year (about two hours per week) have a substantially reduced risk of mortality and developing physical limitations, higher levels of subsequent physical activity, and improved sense of well-being later on compared to individuals who do not volunteer. This study lends to the tried and true notion that when you give, you also receive.

There is a slight catch, though. A 2012 study in the journal of Health Psychology found that those volunteers whose motives were self-centered had a mortality risk similar to non-volunteers. In other words, don't volunteer just to live longer, look good or even polish up that resume. Instead, volunteer with true intention and purpose of helping others.

"We have been fortunate to have so many volunteers who truly want to better our community and help others live longer, healthier lives," said Rafael Campo, engagement lead and volunteer coordinator at Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. "This pandemic has shown the selflessness of people who still seek opportunities to help others despite experiencing their own struggles."

Recently, more than 50 volunteers gathered in a conjoined effort with Blue Zones Project, STARability Foundation, and Young Professionals of Naples to pick up hundreds of pounds of



Madison McNally from STARability Foundation provides instruction for beach cleanup volunteers. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

trash around Lowdermilk Park.

"There is nothing glamorous about picking up a bunch of trash in the hot sun," said Rafael. "Volunteers were there to help make sure our beaches and our community remain a clean place to live, work, and play for everyone."

For Blue Zones Project restaurant and retail food committee co-chair, Denise Pancyrz, volunteering with the project perfectly aligns with her purpose and mission in life to help others live healthier through diet and lifestyle. Once a diabetic herself, Denise devotes her time to helping others recover from diabetes and is a national coach, speaker, and author of The Virgin Diabetic.

"I'm living proof that proper nutrition was able to heal me," says Denise. "Volunteering on the restaurant and retail food committee to help others make healthier eating choices makes it a win-win."

Downshift and Move Naturally are two of the Blue Zones Power 9 principles followed by the longest-lived people in the world, and garden-

ing is one of the best ways to follow these two principles.

For Kara Laufer, Director of Business Development at Naples Botanical Garden, volunteering her time on the Blue Zones Project leadership committee is the perfect match for helping people connect with nature, de-stress, and move naturally.

"Through volunteering, I have met amazing, inspiring individuals who are living life with zest and purpose," she says.

Volunteering with a purpose can also involve giving indirect assistance to those in service to others. This is particularly true for hospital volunteers who help the hospital run smoothly and allow doctors and nurses to spend their time focusing on providing the best healthcare for their patients. NCH Healthcare System has a volunteer program with over 1100 volunteers supporting their vision and mission.

For more information on volunteering at NCH, visit nchmd.org.

Blue Zones Project also works with many nonprofits that depend on volunteers to fulfill their mission and purpose. To connect with these organizations or to volunteer with Blue Zones Project, contact Rafael.Capo@sharecare.com. Blue Zones Project thanks and proudly recognizes our champion volunteers who give of their time and talent to make Southwest Florida a happier and healthier place to live. To view highlights of those who serve their community with Blue Zones Project, visit info.bluezonesproject.com/swflchampion.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.

"The great gift of Easter is hope."
-Basil Hume

Join us on Easter Sunday!

7:00 am Sunrise Service
8:00 am Traditional Service
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