

25 Ways for Teenagers to Help Others by Volunteering Cayuga County & Surrounding Area

Have you ever thought about volunteering your time to a local charity or community organization? There are many different reasons for you to start volunteering:

- To help others
- To get the job or into the college you want (community service makes a difference on job or college applications)
- To learn about an activity or organization that interests you
- To beat boredom or overcome a loss you have experienced
- To gain perspective on life
- To fulfill a personal mission
- To learn a skill
- To fulfill a requirement

Your reasons for volunteering are as individual as you are, but no matter what your reasons you can get a lot out of volunteering. You can learn about yourself, learn about others and meet a lot of interesting people by volunteering. You can help others as you help yourself.

One of the hardest parts of volunteering can be finding a volunteer opportunity that fits your personality. The following list will give you lots of different possibilities. You can also search the Web volunteer resources listed on page 5 or design your own volunteer activity as suggested on page 6. "**Living in Cayuga County- A Community Directory**" or at www.human-services.org has local options.

1. Homeless Shelters and Services

Chapel House is Cayuga County's homeless shelter. Individuals and families who are homeless stay in the shelter. The Auburn/Cayuga Homeless Task Force meets regularly to develop plans to address homelessness issues and obtain funding. Cayuga Seneca Community Action Agency provides case management and other services for the homeless. You can learn more about the problem of homelessness and ways you can help by contacting Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency (283-2030), Chapel House (255-2060), or Auburn Office of Planning & Economic Development at (255-4115).

2. Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

Food pantries serve poor people living in this community on a regular basis. Food pantries collect food, manage their inventory and distribute food to those in need. In addition to food pantries, free meals are provided daily in Auburn. Look in the Community Directory to find a list of food pantries and soup kitchens located in Cayuga County. In Skaneateles, contact Skaneateles Outreach at 685-0427 to see how you can be helpful.

3. Disabled Services

If you would like to volunteer to help people with disabilities, Cayuga County offers several possibilities. You could be a counselor at Freedom Camp which is a 4 week camp for children with disabilities held at Casey Park in Auburn – contact Freedom Recreational Services at 253-5465. Another way to help is to volunteer at Options for Independence (255-3447), Seneca Cayuga ARC (255-2285) or E. John Gavras Center (255-2746). Look for other volunteer opportunities to work with people with disabilities in the Community Directory.

4. Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity builds or renovates houses and sells them to low income people in local communities. Volunteers not only help others, but can learn a great deal about building houses by getting involved. Cayuga County Habitat for Humanity can be reached at 255-1427.

5. City and County Parks

Many parks offer volunteer opportunities, and in these programs you can try anything from educational programs to trail construction and maintenance. Contact Cayuga County Parks & Trails (253-5611) or Auburn Parks & Recreation (255-4120) and see what options are available.

6. Helping Others Learn

When you think about it, reading is one of the most important skills an individual can have. Many adults, however, have never learned how to read. Literacy volunteers act as tutors who help adults learn this important skill. Contact Literacy Volunteers of Cayuga County at 253-5241 to see if you can be a tutor. Your school may also need literacy tutors, contact the guidance office.

7. Hospital and Nursing Homes

Hospitals have volunteer programs to help patients both inside and outside the hospital. The volunteers programs allow participants to explore medical careers, gain work experience and help others. Contact Auburn Memorial Hospital at 255-7350 to learn about opportunities at the hospital. Nursing homes offer similar programs and to find a list look in the Community Directory.

8. Libraries

Many libraries need help reshelving books, running children's programs, making books available to the community, and so on. Contact Seymour Library(252-2571), Weedsport Library (834-6222), Aurora Free Library (364-8074), Fair Haven Public Library (947-5851), Hazard Library (364-7975), Port Byron Library (776-5694), Powers Library (497-1955), Springport Free Library (889-7766), Stewart B. Lang Memorial Library (626-2101), Elbridge Free Library (689-7111), Skaneateles Library (685-5135) or one of the school libraries to volunteer your services.

9. Senior Citizens Centers

Many senior citizen centers offer volunteer programs to provide friendship and community activities to senior citizens. If you would like working with senior citizens, call a senior citizen center or adult home in your neighborhood and see what kinds of volunteer programs they have available. The Community Directory has a listing of senior centers and housing.

10. Animal Shelter and Services

Animal shelters are generally non-profit organizations and therefore they welcome volunteers to help take care of animals, keep facilities clean and work with the public. Call Finger Lakes SPCA (253- 5841) or Animal Advocates of the Finger Lakes (651-0186) to see how you can help.

11. United Way

The United Way is a nationwide umbrella organization for thousands of charitable organizations. The United Way of Cayuga County raises over a million dollars and distributes it to local organizations. Contact United Way at 253-9741 to see if you can help with the campaign or in their office.

12. American Red Cross

The American Red Cross helps people in emergencies - whether it's half a million disaster victims or one sick child who needs blood. The Red Cross also prepares people to handle accidents and disasters. Call 252-9596 to learn more.

13. The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army provides social services, disaster services, and other activities for all ages. In Cayuga County, the Salvation Army runs a Soup Kitchen on Sundays and a food pantry during the week, call 253-0319 to volunteer.

14. Environmental Organizations

The Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District protects and enhances natural resources in Cayuga County. You can help the environment in many ways: by helping lobby on conservation issues, by leading hikes and other activities, or by lending a hand in projects. Contact the Soil and Water to find out how you can help them or to get a referral to other local environmental/conservation projects, call 252-4171

15. Political Campaigns

If it's an election year, there are thousands of opportunities to volunteer in political campaigns around the country. You can learn more than you imagine by helping a candidate win election. Pick a candidate whose ideas you believe in (either on the local, state or national level) and volunteer to be a part of his or her campaign. You can also pick an issue and work on that.

16. Youth and Children

Booker T. Washington Center in Auburn is a community center and offers an after school program with opportunities to tutor or mentor younger children, call at 253-3207. Another opportunity to work with children is through Y Pals, call the Auburn YMCA-WEIU at 253-5304. The Community Directory lists other organizations that provide services to children and youth.

17. Youth Court

If you are interested in learning how our legal system works and providing options for young people who make mistakes, check out Youth Court of Cayuga County by contacting Cayuga Counseling Services at 282-9785.

18. Smoking Cessation

Concerned about your health and those around you? Smoking is a major health risk and Cayuga County has a Tobacco Free Partnership, call 252-009 if you would like to volunteer on this issue. Reality Check is a youth organization that works on exposing the manipulative and deceptive marketing practices of the tobacco industry, call 252-4212 to get involved.

19. Join Others to Make the Community a Better Place

If you are concerned about racism and ways in which discrimination occurs, consider participating in Community Wide Dialogue which hosts discussion groups to discuss, articulate and identify steps towards racial healing in our community, call 252-8751. Or you might wish to become a youth member of the Auburn Human Right Commission, call 252-2929.

20. Churches

Many churches provide opportunities to volunteer to meet the needs of church members, the community and even those outside our community and country. Contact a church - there is a list in the Community Directory, and see what you can do to help.

21. Cultural Institutions

Cayuga County has several cultural institutions ranging from museums to theatre to community bands. There are many ways in which you can help these institutions and enjoy yourself at the same time. Consider contacting the Schweinfurth Art Center (255-1553), Cayuga Museum (253-8051), Harriet Tubman Home (252-2081), Merry-Go-Round Playhouse (255-1305), or Auburn Players Community Theatre at (253-4315).

22. Service Learning

Service Learning is a particular type of volunteering where there is a balance between learning goals and service outcomes. The Youth Service Learning Project offered Partnership for Results can help you design and find the right opportunity, call 730-5069. Check with your school to see if they offer service learning.

23. Coalitions

Participating in a coalition is a great way to engage in cooperative activity around a common cause or interest. Local coalitions that can provide volunteer opportunities include the Human Services Coalition (253-9743), Success by 6 (255-2746) and Auburn/Cayuga Homeless Task Force (255-4115). You can even form your own coalition to work on issues that are important to you.

24. Recreation/Sports

Recreation and sports are important to the well-being of many individuals, and you can volunteer as you engage in recreation or a sport. The Auburn YMCA-WEIU (253-5304), Champions for Life (252-9305) and Cato Meridian Recreation Center (626-6735) utilize volunteers in their programs. Your school may have a need for volunteers to assist in youth recreation programs. Bike races, walk-a-thons, competitive races – often for charitable causes – are another way to volunteer.

25. Clubs

Clubs often include service and volunteerism in their membership requirements and programming. 4-H offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension is one example (255-1183). School clubs and organizations may offer a service component or you may encourage them to add one.

Volunteer Resources on the Web:

www.human-services.org/

Human Services Coalition of Cayuga County website contains a searchable Community Directory and Volunteer Listings

<http://www.volunteermatch.org>

Volunteer Match is dedicated to putting you in touch with volunteer organizations in your area. You can enter the name of a group you'd like to know more about, search by your ZIP code, or browse all the available opportunities.

<http://servenet.org>

SERVEnet contains information on volunteering and community service opportunities.

<http://www.networkforgood.youthnoise.com/>

Network for Good is a nonprofit organization dedicated to using the Web to help people get more involved in their communities -- from volunteering and donating money, to speaking out on issues you care about.

Ideas for Volunteer Projects

- Organize a book drive for a local school, day care or library.
- Write, direct and star in a play for younger kids. The play could illustrate a positive message about staying in school or how to deal with negative peer pressure.
- Teach computer skills to younger kids or older adults at a senior center.
- Help the hungry and the homeless by making "Lend a Hand" kits with combs, toothbrushes, shampoos, compact mirrors, etc.
- Gather clothing from your neighbors and donate it to a local shelter.
- Adopt a "grand friend" and visit the nursing home.
- Pick up groceries or toiletries for an elderly person.
- Paint a mural over ugly graffiti.
- Help neighbors paint and repair their homes or clean up a vacant lot.
- Set up a buddy system for kids with special needs at your school.
- Bring toys to children in the hospital.
- Clean up trash along a river or in a park.
- Create a "Value of Diversity" day or program to educate parents, teachers and people in your community about all the cultures represented in your neighborhood. Put on skits, musical performances, and set up food booths from different countries.
- Provide "Teen Packs" for homeless shelters and facilities that house runaway teens. Fill them with the kinds of products and stuff teens really need.
- When you've learned a lot about what to do and what still needs to be done, go ahead and create a youth volunteer center to match teens in your area to community organizations that need volunteers.