

Green Portage: Volunteering – Infinite Opportunities and Ways to Help

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I'm not sure who in my childhood told me this, but it stuck with me, regardless: "You can't complain about something unless you're willing to do something about it." (Family members, you may now begin wrestling for credit.) There is, of course, no shortage of problems one can complain about today. In fact, it might be easy to feel overwhelmed by how large some of these problems are. To attempt to solve them at a broad level is great—but sometimes the best way to see the impact is to act at a local level.

Volunteering is simply giving of one's time and resources; it is not a new phenomenon. Evidence of volunteering to help individuals in need can be found as early as 4000 BC in Egypt (Brittingham & Pezullo, 1990). But today, we have more ways than ever before to engage with organizations. Volunteering is simply one component of the practice of philanthropy, which refers to giving any type of resource (time, services, physical property, etc.) to benefit others.

I'm an animal-lover, a nature-lover and I lost a family member to Alzheimer's. These things informed the "problems" I care most about right now. I care about more issues than those, but I am sticking to three at the moment because, like so many people, I am busy. That's a choice I make to keep things manageable.

That's the great part about volunteering— you can make a choice! You don't have to do everything. You don't have to do it all the time. I hope, in less busy times, to become more involved in other issues that matter to me. But for my schedule right now, I try to focus my efforts in three areas so I can be as effective as possible in those spaces. It is important to remember that from the eyes of the organization for which you volunteer, most help is welcome. Just try to make sure you match your knowledge, skills, and capabilities to the organization.

Without sounding too boastful, I'm pretty great at making cookies (for dogs). I'm also a (really slow) runner and spend most of my days doing administrative tasks. Oh, I also used to be a mascot. So when the opportunity presents itself, I lend a hand by creating documents and doing data analysis. I'll sign up for any charitable 5k someone asks me to, so long as it is not held between November and March. I can also put on a pretty great dog-treat bake sale when necessary... and if someone needs a mascot, that's on the table, too.

Getting involved locally enables you to have a front-row seat to the progress you hope to create. In the case of the Portage APL, my husband and I were lucky enough to provide a home to two cats from that shelter, but wanted to do more. Our involvement with the Portage Park District began when I saw a sign advertising the opportunity to clean up an area being developed for a new park near our home. It was as simple as driving by a sign, visiting their website, and registering to help. My husband and I are both involved—we both do trail clean up, in addition to some other tasks (that may involve a mascot). We anticipate having a long-term relationship with these incredible organizations and we try to do what we can to help them move forward.

There are many ways for you to play to your strengths while helping others. You can do any of the following (and more): read to kids in an after-school program, work at a ReStore location (Habitat for Humanity) or help build homes, bust out your inner foodie for bake sales, engage in roadside trash cleanup, walk, run, or cycle to raise funds (for Alzheimer's, cancer, MS, diabetes, other diseases), donate food and supplies to a local animal shelter, plant trees, serve food to the homeless, drive people to vote, go on motorcycle runs to honor a fallen friend or

veteran, create gift baskets for a scholarship raffle, or canvass for a person seeking election... there are options for everyone. In doing so, you will be part of the solution to the problem you are concerned about.

If you're not doing those things now, consider getting started! The opportunities to contribute are quite literally endless—find an organization and be part of the solution to whatever problem you think needs help being solved. Consider what you care most about helping with, and know that you can't do it all. Are you hoping to help a specific population of people or are plants or animals what piques your concern? If you prefer not to structure it that way, you could think about the type of concern you have— literacy, science, poverty, conservation, human rights, history, social justice or one of the many diseases that rob us of our loved ones far too young. The hardest thing about this is selecting which of these things concerns you most.

Also consider how you can help. If you have a special skill, is there an organization that could use your expertise? If you don't feel you have a special skill, don't be discouraged—service organizations are often willing to provide training or task-based instructions to enable you to provide assistance and learn something new in the process. If you don't have time, consider how you can volunteer some of your resources (ahem, supplies, equipment, or dollars) instead. Many local organizations also sponsor events such as golf outings and wine tastings—don't be afraid to utilize your talent at putting or sipping wine to support a good cause! If you act locally, you will have a better chance to see the change you hoped would come.

If, perhaps, like me you enjoy taking advantage of the amazing green space offered by the Portage Park District or want to work to improve the lives of animals, consider getting involved in one of these two local organizations:

Portage Park District: 330-297-7728 www.portageparkdistrict.org

- Upcoming events: Tinkers Creek Greenway History Hike (parking across from 624 Ravenna Rd., Streetsboro, 11/4/18 at 1pm); Portage Trail Walkers (535 Cleveland Rd., Ravenna, 12/15/18 at 9am)
- Other events: Environmental Awards Dinner, Headwaters Adventure Race (run, bike, kayak), Wild Hikes Challenge

Portage Animal Protective League: 330-296-4022 <http://www.portageapl.org/>

- Upcoming events: Barktober 5k and 1 mile walk (Kent State University Campus, 10/27/18); Paws To Taste (wine tasting at the KSU Hotel and Conference Center, 11/17/18); Photos with Santa Claws (Portage APL Shelter, 12/8/18)
- Other Events: Golf Outing, Car Show, Spring Raffle/Auction Celebration