

Franklin County Office on Aging

Franklin County Board of Commissioners
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The Franklin County Board of Commissioners and the Franklin County Office on Aging join with the Messenger Newspapers in providing this update on aging issues in Franklin County.

Age Strong! Live Long! --- Volunteer

This year's Older Americans Month theme—Age Strong! Live Long!—recognizes the diversity and vitality of today's older Americans who span three generations. To celebrate these remarkable citizens the Franklin County Office on Aging recognizes retirees who volunteer at group meal sites and deliver food to homebound seniors; provide transportation for older adults who cannot drive; help with home repairs, shopping, errands. Older volunteers provide invaluable services as caregivers to family members and friends, and they play critical roles during natural disasters and emergencies by stepping in to help their neighbors and loved ones when they are needed the most and many other services.

This is a challenging time for our nation, when more and more people are in urgent need of help and as the senior population grows, so does the demand for services. Remarkably, with this increase in demand more older Americans themselves are supporting each other. Today's retirees are better educated and more financially secure than their predecessors and they are spending more time making significant contributions in their communities through civic and volunteer opportunities.

In fact, older Americans are a core component of service delivery to seniors. Their get-up-and-go and dedication encourages all of us do whatever we can to enhance the quality of life for older generations.

According to the Administration on Aging (AOA), volunteering is good for your health. Recent research findings demonstrate the positive relationship between good health and volunteering. People who volunteer have lower rates of heart disease and live longer. Additional studies have shown that people who volunteer are overall more physically and mentally fit than those who do not. When the mind and body are kept active, the chance for depression is greatly reduced and the onset of some types of dementia can be delayed. Volunteering makes one feel useful and productive thus allowing less time to dwell on individual circumstances.

This is a “win-win-win” situation, good for the volunteers, good for those they serve, and good for our nation’s economy and well being. There is great truth to the age-old axiom “It is by giving to others that we receive.”

How do I find the right volunteer opportunity?

First, determine your interests by asking these questions:

1. What causes or issues matter the most to me?
2. Do I want to volunteer for something that uses the skills I applied in my paying work or do I want to do something completely different?
3. What would I most like to learn by volunteering?
4. What don’t I want to do as a volunteer?
5. Do I want an outgoing, regularly-scheduled assignment, or a short-term assignment, or a one-time assignment?
6. Do I want to work alone or with a group? Or with a friend or family?
If a hindrance to volunteering is your fear of spending time away from the family — why not find opportunities designed with the family in mind?
7. Am I willing to participate in a training course or do I want to start my volunteer work immediately?
8. With what kind of people do I want to work — both in terms of who is receiving services and who my co-workers might be?
9. What should I expect when I contact an agency to apply to become a volunteer?
10. How do I find information about volunteer opportunities?

The answer to that last question is — locate an opportunity! There are many volunteer assignments available and you should take your time to find the one that best matches you.

- Search the internet or visit your local library to learn about one-time volunteer activities that may be a part of a nationwide initiative being held in our area.
Example: American Heart Association’s Walk for Wellness

- Check the local “volunteer center or bureau”. In Columbus, a similar organization is HandsOn Central Ohio (Call 2-1-1). These organizations serve as clearinghouses for information on volunteer opportunities.
- You can always call an agency and **ask** if they are looking for volunteers.
- If you cannot find an organization that does the work you most want to do, become the founder of a new agency. It always starts with one person with a vision ... maybe that’s you!

The annual celebration of Older Americans Month is our opportunity to recognize the contributions of older citizens and join them in providing services and support that empower the elderly. America's senior population is expected to number 71.5 million by 2030. The demand for volunteers with programs that improve health literacy, increase access to quality health services, offer food and nutrition services, provide financial and housing counseling, sponsor social activities and community engagement will be great. Will you answer the call?