

Soup Kitchens and Pantries: Not Just a Way to Volunteer During the Holidays

By: Allison Armijo



Volunteering at soup kitchens and pantries during the holidays, while somewhat helpful, is not as necessary as one might think. Although volunteering itself is gracious and should be done regularly, many people choose only to volunteer on Thanksgiving or Christmas as ways to express their gratitude for what they have; a way to give back to the community. Now, nothing is wrong with that image. In fact, it is admirable that people choose to take time out of their day to help those less fortunate. However, like most anything in the world, there are trade-offs for volunteering around the holidays.

Many large homeless shelter and volunteering organizations have put forth their opinions regarding people volunteering solely during the holidays. An article from *USA Today* features CEO of National Philanthropic Trust, Eileen Heisman, who explains how “It takes charities time and resources to train volunteers,...., and making a long-term commitment is the best way to help” (Why you shouldn't volunteer at a soup kitchen this Thanksgiving). Only volunteering once or twice a year does not create a greater impact that benefits anyone volunteering, or anyone who depends on your volunteering, for that matter. While that may sound paradoxical, volunteering at one place for one time does not create as big an impact as, say, volunteering regularly and building relationships and close ties with the people around you, as well as helping those less fortunate. Although there are emotional benefits to volunteering year-round, there are also many physical rewards that come with helping others.

Although most people only think about those less fortunate when they volunteer, the people who run the soup kitchens are just as overwhelmed when it comes to one-time-a-year volunteers. For example, Janet Poppendieck, author of *Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, delves into how, “It is this widespread diffusion of involvement, however limited, that allows the emergency food phenomenon to function as a ‘moral safety valve,’” (Sweet Charity?). By this, the author is showing the secret motivation that comes with volunteering, and why such volunteering only occurs once a year. While volunteering over a long span of time

reaps a one-time benefit for the person who helps, he or she may only be attracted during that time because of a “moral safety valve”. In short, they volunteer that one day a year to benefit themselves; improve their moral compass. Although that may sound cynical and untrue, the point can be made that the population of people who choose to volunteer might benefit more if they chose to volunteer on a regular basis. However, aside from the side of volunteers, the main goal of volunteering at these soup kitchens and pantries is to benefit the less fortunate.

Helping the less fortunate and appreciating them through distribution of food or any other activity, is a profound way to connect. Many people may volunteer to clear their moral consciences, but they do not think of who is benefiting from their contribution, and who is grateful for what they have done. In total, people should volunteer at soup kitchens and pantries year-round; not just to benefit themselves and feel good, but to spend time and connect with those less fortunate than they. This will not only ensure perspective for the volunteer but allow connections to be made that can engender profound epiphanies about how they should carry on life as itself, or how they should help others more often, not just on the holidays.

Resources:

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/first/p/poppendieck-charity.html?scp=45&sq=packing&st=cse>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2017/11/16/why-you-shouldnt-volunteer-soup-kitchen-thanksgiving/763097001/>