

## CoSIDA's Volunteer 15 Program:

### 8 Tips to Help You Find Volunteer Activities & Services



*By Megan Hardin, Southwestern*

*University/CoSIDA Goodwill & Wellness Committee member*

I think Nike said it best, and the phrase can sum this up in three little words: Just do it! It really doesn't matter what you do or who you help, just extend a hand. I just want to share with you seven or eight tips to hopefully get you thinking outside the box when considering volunteering ideas and opportunities.

1. **Start researching volunteer opportunities or thinking about ways you might contribute outside of the holiday season.** December is a lot quieter and may be an easy opportunity to find time in your schedule to volunteer, but there will most likely be more need and opportunities after the holidays.
2. **Think small and look around you.** You might discover that you are needed right in your own neighborhood. Making lasagna for someone who just lost their job can be just as impactful as volunteering elsewhere. Maybe there is a homebound elderly couple needing some help with household chores, taking down decorations or just a simple knock on the door and friendly "hello" once a week to make sure everything's OK? What about a family that could use some babysitting help or organizing a litter clean-up?
3. **Contact a local church, faith community, day care or nursing home and ask how you can help.** This is how I got my start and many congregations have close relationships with community service organizations and tend to know what its most pressing needs are. Even if you're not the religious type, simply say, "I'm not a member of your [congregation/church/etc.], but I'm looking for a respected service organization in the area. Do you have any suggestions or a way I can help?"

Day cares and nursing homes always have activities going on during the holidays and would love help. I know at my kids' day care they needed someone to play Santa, our men's basketball team put in new pea gravel on the playground, and I have volunteered to take school pictures as a fund raiser. One thing we tend to forget is that, for many communities, we have a very unique skill set that people may not be able to afford but would love to utilize. Volunteering to take holiday pictures or film the Christmas Pageant or design the flyer for the food or toy drive. Make holiday cards or posters to take to the nursing homes to decorate their rooms.

4. **Talk to your fraternities, sororities and SAAC and see what they are up to.** Many have service projects going on throughout the year that you can help out with and it also gives insight into what is going on around your campus.
5. **The various national databases on the Web let you search for volunteer opportunities by location, but don't include every option available.** Search online (or the old-fashioned way by the Yellow Pages and phone) to see if your community has something like a Volunteer Center or HandsOn Action Center. These resources are positioned to connect you with organizations looking for community help

and many have their own online listings of local volunteer opportunities.

6. **If you *really* want to find an opportunity at the spur of the moment, search for a “fill-in-the-blank”-a-thon.** Walk-a-thons, 5K Walk/Runs or check the community board at Starbucks when you are waiting on your coffee. They are a way to get an introduction to a cause or nonprofit organization and a way to get involved.
7. **Make it a competition.** We all like competition and coming out on top, so some schools have implemented contests between athletic teams as to who can log the most hours volunteering. Our conference, the SCAC, this season pitted the SCAC schools against each other for the “Change for the Better” initiative. Maybe you want to set up a competition between the SIDs within your conference to see who can log the most hours and the winner gets a free round to golf at CoSIDA15 convention - courtesy of the others!
8. **Cover it but also jump in!** When you go to take pictures of your team doing a project, drop your cameras and join ‘em!

The bottom line is just reach out! You are rarely, if ever, going to be told ‘No, we don’t need your help.’ Get creative, find something you love doing or a group that brings a smile to your face.

This never fails: I go intending to help make someone else’s day a little better and it always turns out that I leave feeling blessed.