



**W**elcome to the world of volunteerism and community service! Whether you're an experienced volunteer or looking to participate in service projects for the first time, many benefits and opportunities await you. Volunteerism provides people with the opportunity to enjoy new experiences, meet new people, learn new skills, and put ideas and talents to work. Most importantly, volunteerism allows people to make a difference in their community.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a federal government agency whose mission is to protect human health and the natural environment. EPA's Office of Solid Waste (OSW) is committed to ensuring the responsible management of hazardous and nonhazardous waste. OSW's goals are to conserve resources by preventing waste, reduce waste that can-

# The ABCs of Volunteering

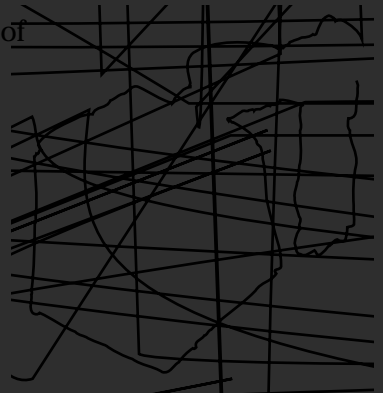
When selecting a volunteer opportunity, consider the following criteria:


- The types of activities are you good at and like to do.
- What you would most like to learn by volunteering.
- Whether you want an ongoing, regularly scheduled assignment, a short-term assignment, or a one-time assignment.
- Whether you want to work alone, with a group, or with a friend or family members.
- What kind of people you want to work with—both in terms of who is receiving services and who your co-workers might be.
- Whether you are willing to participate in a training course or want to start your volunteer work immediately.

If you've decided you want to help out with the issue of solid waste, including waste reduction, recycling, composting, or household hazardous waste, consider contacting the following types of organizations:

- Your municipality's solid waste management program, recycling centers, or special household hazardous waste collection sites.
- The Master Composter, Master Recycler, or Master Gardener program in your community.
- The 4-H or Cooperative Extension offices in your local community or your state.
- The local Volunteer Office in your community.
- Local college or university environmental groups.
- National environmental organizations with branches in your area.
- Local environmental groups.
- Organizations listed in the Resources section of this booklet.

To find these groups, use the local phone book or the Internet, call specific organizations and ask whether they are looking for volunteers, and check community bulletin boards, local newspapers, and specialty magazines.





When Lisa Heller and her student volunteers at the University of Richmond organized their first “recycle sale” in 1999, they had no idea how popular it would be. What started as a small campus event has now blossomed into a national effort, with programs springing up at college campuses nationwide and the initiative being featured in *The New York Times* and *People* magazine.

Now operating under the guidance of Heller’s nonprofit organization known as “Dump and Run,” these volunteer-run events recover valuable items students hastily discard at the end of the school year and resell them to new students in the fall. “Merchandise” at these sales runs the gamut from televisions, VCRs, and computers to furniture, designer clothes, and unused toiletries. Profits from the sales, as well as any unsold items, are donated to charity.

Student volunteers print flyers to promote the event, place collection boxes in common areas, and use rental trucks to collect and transport the materials to a storage facility on campus. Volunteers sort donations into categories and then organize and hold the yard sale.

Although the program is enjoying great success and is normally well-received, student volunteers at Richmond pointed out several challenges:

- Many people assume that if items are trash to them, they’re trash to everyone, and they don’t bother to put perfectly good, useful items into the donation boxes.
- The most common item that students donate is clothes. It is important to educate the community that other items are also salvageable.
- The community supports the recycle sales, but some university public relations staff members might be sensitive to bad press about how wasteful their students are.

## **Learn Shop, Inc.: Montgomery County, Maryland**

With the mad rush to leave school on the last day of classes, students often leave unneeded items in their lockers. To prevent these materials from ending up in landfills, 35 middle schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, agreed to participate in an annual effort to recover and reuse items abandoned in lockers and give them to needy students elsewhere.

### **Contact:**

Rev. Kevin and Louise Newcomer  
Learn Shop, Inc.  
PO. Box 1754  
Wheaton, MD 20915-1754  
Phone: 301 942-1074  
Fax: 301 942-1329

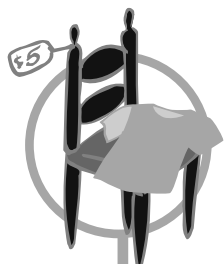
Program organizer Louise Newcomer created the “Drive for Locker Supplies” program, which she sees as a creative way to address both environmental and educational issues. After the last day of classes in 1999, she organized local volunteers—including some students—to return to schools to clean out what remained in students’ lockers. In the program’s first year, volunteers collected an estimated \$50,000 worth of notebooks, pencils, calculators, and other miscellaneous items, including a closet full of unclaimed coats.

The school system provides packaging supplies and storage facilities for the recovered items. Newcomer arranges to transport the usable goods to underprivileged students in other states. “Many people don’t realize that schools less than an hour away do not have even the most basic items such as paper, pencils, and rulers,” Newcomer said. Newcomer also sends some supplies to other countries, such as Nicaragua and the Phillipines.

“We’re helping students in other schools, helping our own schools divert massive quantities of trash from the sanitation system—which reduces their disposal costs—and we’re helping the environment by preventing waste,” Newcomer said.

Although this endeavor is the first of its kind in any public school system, Newcomer believes the program could easily be replicated in schools across the country because they all experience the same glut of “trash” at the school year’s end.





## The RACORSE Network and Home CARES: Oakland, California

As a surgical nurse in Oakland, California, Liisa Nenonen was dismayed by the amount of waste generated by the medical community and wondered how it could be recovered and reused. In 1994, Nenonen established RACORSE (Recycling, Allocation, and Conservation of Operating Room Supplies and Equipment).

One of the organization's most successful programs is Home CARES (Collection & Redistribution of Equipment and Supplies). Volunteers from this program collect new and used home health care and medical equipment and supplies donated by hospitals, doctors offices, and individuals—everything from hospital beds to walking canes. Nenonen and her volunteers then distribute these items to uninsured, disadvantaged, ill, and elderly people.

### Contact:

Liisa Nenonen  
RACORSE Network  
2619 Broadway Room 207  
Oakland, CA 94612

Phone: 510 251-2273

According to Nenonen, the program's success lies in the quantity of supplies that exist and the lack of adequate disposal methods. Nenonen explained that once someone has recovered from an illness or died, many families are unsure of what to do with their loved one's medical equipment. Many popular donation agencies frequently will not accept medical equipment. Because such a great demand exists, Home CARES is inundated with supplies.

A network of volunteers help make Home CARES a success. Some manage donation sites, while others help run the office. In addition, more than 300 occupational therapists volunteer on behalf of their clients to pick up equipment from the donation center. In the future, Nenonen hopes additional volunteers will assist picking up and delivering equipment.

In addition to running the Home CARES program, RACORSE also donates excess medical supplies to international relief organizations and recovers discarded surgical containers for art classes in inner-city schools in a project that Nenonen calls "School Saves."





Whether it's glass, rubber, wood, paper, pencils, or a variety of other materials, Chicago communities depend on the Creative Reuse Warehouse—staffed by volunteers—to meet their art supply needs in an environmentally friendly fashion.

Donated primarily by nearby industries that would otherwise throw these items away, the art supplies are usually leftover, imperfect, or overstocked items. Volunteers play a key role in oper-

Volunteers from the Allen County Homemakers Association (ACHA) worked with its environmental committee to educate K-5 students about recycling during Kentucky's 1999 Clean-Up Week.

A team of five retired teachers delivered short presentations on the benefits of recycling to more than 50 classrooms and 1,500 students during the week. They also explained the types of materials that could be recycled locally. In addition, volunteers taught the students about the value of reusing materials, including the importance of sharing items with others, particularly those in need.

The students got an A for their efforts. Through informal classroom evaluations, 90 percent of students demonstrated an increased awareness of the importance of recycling and could name the types of recyclables collected at the local recycling center.

Volunteers were confident that their reuse and recycling messages would extend beyond the classroom, too. "The kids get so excited," said volunteer Patty Hogue. "They will go home and talk to their parents about recycling tonight." The homemakers also prepared parents' packets consisting of free collection bags and e i-Vhe vktic- ularly1lc(20(tic-) ]JT\*0001 Tiy9.8(")-50c s..7(ling tonight.) 1

classr,te7T]ss(l-) ]TJT\* (too)59.7(.sv) 19.7(e)0(r8.2 TD[(med



In 1995, Linda Vereen had an idea to motivate her community, save the environment, and provide an incentive for local students to stay in school. The project itself was not unusual—collecting and selling aluminum cans—but Vereen never imagined the project would be so successful.

The project began as a small effort—Vereen collected one bag of cans from her neighbors to recycle. Word spread and Vereen soon became inundated with cans. After approaching a local aluminum manufacturer, Vereen secured large donation containers and arranged for the company to buy back the cans from the community.

Within a short time, Vereen and her growing network of supporters collected 250,000 cans. Since the project's inception, more than 7 million cans have been recycled and "Cans for Kids" has raised \$60,000 for local students.

All of the money raised from this venture is donated via scholarships to graduating high school seniors. According to Vereen, "The scholarship is intended to encourage students to stay in school and inspire them to continue on to college."

But the benefits of the program are even more widespread. Originally, the county provided a recycling collection bin for the community, but Cans for Kids offered more bins in more accessible places, superceding the need for the county's service and saving the county money.

Despite the apparent success of the program, there have been many challenges, Vereen said. "Since we give all of our money to the students, we don't have any funds for advertising and outreach," she said.

Several volunteer clearinghouses are working to change that by helping the organ-

Volunteers for the Midlands division of Keep America Beautiful (KAB) engage in a number of creative projects designed to reduce the amount of waste deposited in local landfills. Two of the most successful examples are featured below.

*Telephone Book Recycling*



group of dedicated volunteers at Evergreen State College successfully launched the school's first composting initiative in 1998. Today, the Evergreen Compost Project, which collects and processes organic wastes generated on campus, is still run entirely by student volunteers.

Students performed all the legwork to establish a composting facility on the campus, including:

- Facilitating forums to evaluate residents' needs.
- Characterizing the campus' organic waste stream.
- Preparing a cost analysis of various composting options and comparing them to current landfill practices.

# City of Tucson/Pj1 TrT\*(f(TD(s)Tj1 TrT\*wa671.177 Tm/.6

Residents from the city of Tucson and the larger area of Pima County, Arizona, are more than just participants in the city's recycling program—they *are* the recycling program. Not only did volunteers in this community start the initial recycling program, but they also initiated a household hazardous waste (HHW) collection program.

The idea for HHW collection began in Tucson in 1986 when a group of citizen volunteers joined together to protect children's health and the environment from hazardous materials. The volunteers held their first collection in the parking lot of the Tucson Convention Center.

Due to the overwhelming participation and interest in the program, the Pima County Department of Environmental Quality stepped in to lend support and launched the official HHW program in 1989. The county created several permanent staff positions to operate the program, and in 1990, it opened a permanent collection facility for the community. To further increase participation, the county later opened several satellite collection sites throughout the Tucson metropolitan area.

Volunteers still play a vital role in implementing the program. In fact, in recent years, more than 170 volunteers participated—either by greeting people at the collection sites, helping people unload their vehicles, or processing materials for recycling, reuse, redistribution, and safe treatment and disposal. In addition to their on-site work, volunteers provide education programs to public school children and civic groups. By encouraging people to take leftover HHW to collection sites for recycling, reuse, redistribution, or proper disposal, and educating people about the use of safer alternatives whenever possible, volunteers try to instill a responsible approach to managing HHW.

It isn't easy being green—especially for retired people and seniors. That's why the Retired and Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Spokane County mobilized volunteers to educate and assist seniors and disabled individuals with proper disposal of household hazardous waste (HHW).

## Contact:

Susan Russell  
RSVP of Spokane County  
507 N. Harvard  
Spokane, WA 99201-0898

Phone: 509 344-7787

Fax: 509 343-4096

Web site:

[www.ymcaspokane.org/  
rsvp.htm](http://www.ymcaspokane.org/rsvp.htm)

E-mail:

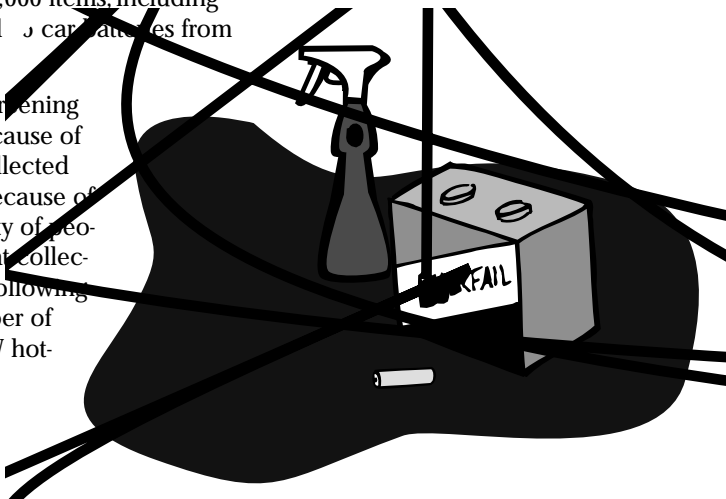
[rsvp@ymcaspokane.org](mailto:rsvp@ymcaspokane.org)

According to RSVP coordinator Susan Russell, seniors generally have the largest accumulation of HHW because they frequently remain at the same residence for many years and might be unable to transport this waste easily to a collection site. Accumulating these products presents environmental and safety hazards, including accidental poisoning and fire damage.

In response to this situation, RSVP teamed up with the county health and solid waste departments to sponsor the first "Spring House Greening." An intergenerational team of RSVP members worked in conjunction with other volunteers to inform elderly residents about identifying HHW. During the "greening" event, volunteers visited homes and collected common household wastes such as batteries, antifreeze, insecticides, paints, cleaners, and disinfectants. RSVP's 2000 event reached 9,000 households and 70,000 people. Volunteers collected 2.5

tons of HHW, or about 9,000 items, including 718 gallons of paint and 300 car batteries from 150 households.

The Spring House Greening succeeded not only because of the number of items collected door-to-door, but also because of the number and diversity of people dropping off HHW at collection sites in the weeks following the event and the number of people calling the HHW hotline for information increased substantially.





**Action**



profits, educational institutions, local and state governments, and others to extend their reach and further their effect on communities. The Corporation for National Service currently has three main service initiatives—Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps, and the National Senior Service Corps—as well partnerships with other national organizations.

**Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement (EASI)**

PO. Box 250  
Catlett, VA 22019-0250  
Phone: 540 788-3274  
Fax: 540 788-9301  
<[www.easi.org](http://www.easi.org)>

EASI's mission is to build, promote, and utilize the environmental ethic, expertise, and commitment of older adults to expand citizen involvement in protecting and caring for the environment. In addition to providing information on senior environmental programs, EASI publishes a quarterly newsletter as well as a resource guide to national projects.

st..m5sug

Ivf and 2609139 www.T\*Massac59.amshus9.8(viTDs mission is to NE.ild,)\*-130.Tw[(.(O) (Suite C50 TDe

## Points of Light Foundation

**EPA's Office of Solid Waste**

**Backyard composting:** The practice of collecting leftover kitchen scraps and

**Recycling:** Collecting, sorting, processing, and con-



