Why Get Involved In Your Community?

What is it that motivates someone to get involved in their community?
People get involved in working in their local communities for all manner of reasons. What would motivate you may be very different to what motivates others: personal experiences, protecting loved ones and/or others who have faced similar personal situations, or maybe just wanting life in their communities to be that much better.

This factsheet helps explain some of the reasons why people want to get involved, and outlines the benefits for them; their friends, families and communities as a consequence of this activity. It also highlights the particular benefits for young people in getting involved in their community.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but it might provide you with that little bit of inspiration that getting involved in your community is worthwhile, for everyone!!

It’s Not Just About Giving
Being actively involved in your community is not only about giving, even if that is your main motivation. For most people it’s an exchange of skills, knowledge and experience that can benefit the giver as much as it does the receiver.

Anyone and everyone can get involved. It doesn’t matter who you are, how old you are, what you believe in; there are contributions you can make that will make a difference.

What you get in return is both priceless and invaluable whatever stage of life you are at:

- **Meeting new people** – building new friendships, reducing isolation and loneliness (yours and others), developing ideas together.
- **Improving your English** – learning to communicate better with others in your community, practice your language skills, and improve your own prospects.
- **Experiencing different cultures** – find out who lives in your community, what their background is, and celebrate the things that make people different.
- **Improving relations between different communities in your area** – helping people work together by focussing upon a common purpose or goal.
- **Influencing change in your local area, making it a better place to live** – developing new ideas and approaches together that people can take pride in.
- **Building confidence, self-esteem and giving structure to life** – young, old, long-term unemployed; there are many people that need to develop a sense of self-worth.
- **Keep your skills up-to-date** – technology changes constantly, as do methods of working and the established best practice.
- **Easing yourself back into work** – maybe after bringing up a family, or after major bouts of illness; being able to re-build capacity a step at a time in a “safe environment”.
- **Trying out a new area of work** – looking for a change of job; testing out and/or developing your skills on activities you would like to do in the future.
- **Building up contacts to help you find a paid job** – meet local employers involved in community action, improve your CV, and get references.

And if you do it right …..helping people whilst having fun.
Why Should Young People Get Involved?

Life prospects have become increasingly tough for our young people, so finding different ways of improving their chances in a very competitive world is becoming more and more important. Many of the points listed above are of particular significance for young people, and here are more detailed explanations of some of the key ones:

- **To gain skills and experience to get a job**
  It can be hard to get a good job: you need a job to get experience, but you need experience to get a job. Being involved in your community can make your CV stand out to potential employers, and you can get relevant work experience. You can also gain important skills like how to interact with people, lead projects, and practical things like building websites. And don’t forget that many employers work closely with their communities.

- **To get into university, college, or an apprenticeship programme**
  Relevant experience can help you, particularly in getting onto those programmes that are specialized and/or only admit a few students. Find out what kinds of activities will help you get into your desired programme, and match them.

- **To help understand what it means to be an active citizen**
  Involvement with your community helps prepare people to become responsible and active citizens, who understand the challenges local people face and work to improve the quality of life through political and non-political processes. You can learn how to participate in a democratic society, how a community and its institutions work, and how citizens can together help address social problems. Involvement also shows other young people, and the wider community, that young people are important to building strong communities.

- **To make a difference**
  There is no lack of social and health issues affecting our communities and standing up for what you believe in can be an empowering experience. Even small actions like tutoring a younger child, being a buddy at school, or visiting an elderly person, can make a big difference in someone else’s life and enrich your own.

- **To make friends and expand their social network**
  Getting involved in an issue that you care about, means you’ll meet other people who share your interests and passions. Some will become new friends, but others may also be able to mentor, advise or support you in achieving your own future ambitions.

- **To avoid negative activities**
  Being involved keeps you busy on positive things that make a difference, meeting supportive adults, making new friends, and building skills to manage life: you might even run a group based on your own interests. Getting involved with drugs and alcohol, in anti-social behaviour, and ending up with a police record, can easily throw life off track and stop you reaching your future goals.

- **To gain recognition and respect**
  Doing something well and being recognized for your contributions feels great, and getting involved can help you grow as a person, build your confidence, discover your talents and become more awesome than you already are. Everyone needs a role model, so why not show others in your school, community and family the power of getting involved?

Further information and resources:

More on being active in your community: [https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved](https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved)

For further information, or to talk to us about why you might want to get more actively involved in your communities, contact Community Southwark’s Volunteering and Engagement Team on 020 7358 7020 or email engage@communitysouthwark.org.uk