

## Community Services

Capital News: Volunteer Centre Column 2013 May 16

### Get healthy through volunteering

Did you know that volunteering can be good for your heart in more ways than one?

We typically think about how 'good' it makes us feel about ourselves and about the impact we are making in the lives of others.

It can also improve physical functioning that affects your heart as a muscle.

In a recent study in JAMA Pediatrics, as reported by Lindsay Abrams in The Atlantic on Feb 26, 2013, the benefits of giving back are compounded.

This BC-based study led by Dr. Hannah Schreier focused on grade ten students in a Vancouver high school who completed required volunteer hours that consisted of spending one hour a week helping elementary school students over a period of 10 weeks.

Risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including body mass index (obesity), inflammation, and cholesterol levels were measured at the beginning and end of each semester.

After 10 weeks, volunteering students recorded lower levels in each risk factor compared to a student control group who were on the waiting list to volunteer.

Improvement in students' mood, self-esteem and sense of altruism were also recorded. Researchers hypothesized that volunteering provided a protective quality that acted like a support network that youth at high risk for cardiovascular disease often lack.

What were the results? Teens who increased the most in empathy for others and helping behavior also reduced their cardiovascular risk factors the most.

I find this study very interesting because it places volunteerism, even for students who are 'voluntold', in the same benefit category as physical exercise.

"If we can engage adolescents in volunteering by making it a standard recommendation akin to physical activity or by incorporating it as a regular part of school curricula, we have the potential of reducing CV risk markers in these adolescents," wrote researchers (Cardiologytoday March 8, 2013).

### Links:

**The Atlantic.** Study: Volunteering May Improve Cardiovascular Health, [Lindsay Abrams](#) Feb 26 2013, 7:56 AM ET

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/02/study-volunteering-may-improve-cardiovascular-health/273484/> .

**Hannah Schreier, LinkedIn.**

Effect of volunteering on risk factors for cardiovascular disease in adolescents: a randomized controlled trial, [Schreier HM](#), [Schonert-Reichl KA](#), [Chen E](#). Abstract. [JAMA Pediatr.](#) 2013 Apr 1;167(4):327-32. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.1100.

**Helio.com, Cardiologytoday.** Volunteering: A unique approach to improve teen CV health; [Schreier HMC. JAMA Pediatr. 2013;doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.1100](#); March 8, 2013. <http://www.healio.com/cardiology/pediatric-cardiology/news/online/%7B17CC3927-58BC-493A-8AB1-99DB87DA88F4%7D/Volunteering-A-unique-approach-to-improve-teen-CV-health>

**Dawn Wilkinson**

**Community Services Manager**

**Kelowna Community Resources**

**Email. [informkelowna@kcr.ca](mailto:informkelowna@kcr.ca)**

**Phone. 250.763.8008 E. 24**

**Fax. 250.763.7608**

**Website. [www.kcr.ca](http://www.kcr.ca)**

**Address. 120 - 1735 Dolphin Avenue  
Kelowna, BC V1Y 8A6**