

VOLUNTEERING IS GOOD FOR YOU!

How Wellness Benefits Can Be Seen and Reported in an Extension Program

AUTHORS:

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GOAL

UF/IFAS Extension reports outcomes of volunteer programs as number of trained volunteers, volunteer hours served, dollar value of those hours, full-time equivalents, number of clients served, knowledge gained, and practices adopted. However, the wellness outcomes of volunteerism, and long-term impacts, may be better reported by Extension.

UF/IFAS Extension Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinators in two Florida counties wanted to measure the impacts of social and wellness benefits of volunteerism to see if these benefits could be impactful in Extension programming reporting. There are many relationships in Extension volunteer programs that could be measured (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Relationships among Extension volunteer programs.

EXTENSION ↔ VOLUNTEER

VOLUNTEER ↔ VOLUNTEER

VOLUNTEER ↔ COMMUNITY

EXTENSION ↔ COMMUNITY

METHODS

This project was approved by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research and was conducted in the fall of 2018. An online survey was used to measure the potential influence that volunteering has on active volunteers' perceived well-being. UF/IFAS Extension Florida Master Gardener Volunteers were asked to rate their level of agreement related to potential impacts realized from volunteering on a Likert-type scale. Volunteers were also asked to provide responses to open-ended questions to allow for descriptions of impact. Of the 210 volunteers that received the survey, 167 volunteers completed the survey providing an 80% response rate.

CONCLUSION

Volunteerism is not only essential to many Extension programs, it is an essential component in the lives of the volunteers. The benefits volunteers gain from their volunteer service are measured far beyond what we traditionally report, but the opportunity is there for us to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between Extension and volunteers.

RESULTS

The results below outline the wellness benefits reported by UF/IFAS Extension Florida Master Gardener Volunteers based on the areas of impact measured in the 2018 survey for Hillsborough and Polk counties..

74%
REDUCED
stress levels

73%
INCREASED
self-esteem

71%
INCREASED ABILITY
to research information

70%
ENABLED THEM
to help others in the community

63%
ENABLED THEM
to be part of a group and meet
other gardeners

57%
IMPROVED
mental health

52%
FELT
physically healthier

44%
GAINED CONFIDENCE
in using new technology
(such as social media, internet, webinars, and online applications)

37%
MADE NEW CONTACTS
that might help with business,
career, and paid work

27%
HELPED THEM RECOVER
from a loss or disappointment

Opportunities exist for volunteer coordinators to identify the benefits volunteers receive, which may include:

- wellness
- physical activity
- nutrition
- stress
- employment
- digital literacy
- belonging

Faculty and volunteer coordinators may use results to report:

- wellness outcomes to stakeholders,
- improve volunteer programs,
- maintain effective advisory committees,
- obtain financial support,
- partner with other organizations,
- promote a supportive workplace culture,
- and assist with program planning, marketing, and communication of efforts.

