



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Champlain East
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Champlain Est
La santé mentale pour tous

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By helping others, volunteers help themselves

Submitted by: Angele D'Alessio, Mental Health Promoter

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Pediatrician Liela Denmark practiced medicine in Atlanta for 73 years. She retired at the age of 103 and lived for another 11 years. In addition to treating young patients in her office, she volunteered at a medical clinic, where she helped some of the city's poorest children, for more than 50 years. When she died in 2012, people celebrated her dedication to helping others. They believed it had contributed to her longevity -- and evidence suggests they were right.

Research shows that by helping others, volunteers are helping themselves.

Stephanie Brown, an associate professor of psychiatry and psychology at [Stony Brook University's Renaissance School of Medicine](#), has done extensive research on the psychosocial benefits of volunteering, especially among older adults. Her [research](#) has shown that older volunteers have a 25 percent decrease in the risk of early death compared to people who don't volunteer.

It's not clear why volunteering helps people live longer, but Brown and others believe so-called helping behaviour leads to feelings of usefulness and competence as well as providing social integration and support. This improves volunteers' ability to regulate stress which, in turn, helps them resist disease.

Not only do volunteers live longer than others, they are also healthier. In a five-year study conducted by researchers from the University of Calgary and several other institutions, seniors who volunteered for at least one hour a week were 2.4 times less likely to develop dementia than those who didn't.



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"It turns out that getting everything but the paycheque is actually what makes you more healthy and makes you more happy about your life," University of Calgary psychology professor Yannick Griep, who led the study, [told the CBC](#).

Furthermore, because volunteer work often involves physical activity, volunteers tend to have healthy blood pressure, a lower risk of heart disease and less chronic pain.

There are many options available to individuals interested in volunteering. Most organizations welcome the help of volunteers, and that includes Canadian Mental Health Association Champlain East, which is dedicated to enhancing and promoting mental health through advocacy, education and various services.

"Volunteers play an important role in our organization," said Angela Warren, Manager, Public Education with CMHA Champlain East. "Their contributions are invaluable."

Should you be interested in volunteer opportunities with CMHA Champlain East, please contact Angela Warren at warrena@cmha-east.on.ca.

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our web site at www.cmha-east.on.ca.