

SEPTEMBER 2025

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: EMPOWERING TEENS TO VOLUNTEER IN THEIR COMMUNITIES



ENGAGE **nwa**

TEEN VOLUNTEERING
TOOLKIT

■ **WELCOMING WEEK NWA
& THE LEARNS ACT: ROLE
OF LIBRARIES**

■ **WHY SHOULD YOUNG
PEOPLE VOLUNTEER?**

■ **THE VARIOUS WAYS TO
VOLUNTEER**

■ **PREPARING FOR
VOLUNTEERING**

■ **FINDING OPPORTUNITIES**

This toolkit is a resource for young people who want to be active volunteers and for those organizations who support teen volunteering in our region.

**‘SERVICE TO OTHERS
IS THE RENT YOU PAY
FOR YOUR ROOM HERE
ON EARTH.’**

MUHAMMAD ALI



WELCOMING WEEK NWA & THE LEARNS ACT

Welcoming Week NWA 2025 will unite students, families, businesses, and community leaders across Northwest Arkansas to celebrate service, leadership, curiosity and belonging.

Throughout September, events will be held at high schools, libraries, community centers and more throughout Northwest Arkansas. Programming will support high school students and their families in understanding the LEARNS Act's 75-hour community service graduation requirement while connecting them to community resources.

Supporters and Partners will have the opportunity to co-create meaningful, visible, and impactful experiences for youth and families across the region.



LIBRARY AS AN INFO & CONNECTION HUB

Libraries have always been more than places to borrow books—they are trusted bridges that connect people to knowledge, to one another, and to a sense of belonging.

Schools are the places that students spend most of their day and the institutions that will be key partners to support the volunteering requirement.

As Welcoming Week NWA aligns with the LEARNS Act's 75-hour civic engagement and volunteering requirement for Arkansas high school students, libraries and schools have a timely and powerful role to play.

- Display themed books & media highlighting volunteering, youth leadership and civic engagement
- Share information about volunteering in the library and with other local partners
- Feature student volunteer voices and testimonials
- Display Welcoming Week NWA event schedule
- Share information about the LEARNS Act volunteering requirement
- Promote local volunteering and civic engagement opportunities
- Offer multilingual family support resources
- Host a community fair in partnership with Engage NWA
- Let library teen volunteers take over your social media for 1 to 2 hours
- Host a panel with teens who volunteer to share about their experiences
- Partner with local nonprofits to host a drop in volunteer sign up session
- Offer resume writing and skill-building clinics

[AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION WELCOMING WEEK TOOLKIT](#)

Preparing to Volunteer: Teens

Volunteering is more than showing up—it's about showing up well. With care, with questions, with readiness to listen and learn. Whether it's about preparing a teen to get ready to serve, or an organization opening doors to youth, here are a few things to reflect on before the work begins.

For Teens: Invite Curiosity, Commitment & Reflection.

1. Why do I want to volunteer?

Is it for mandatory school hours, to try something new, to meet people, to make change? All reasons are valid.

2. What do I bring?

Your time, your energy, your ideas, your tech skills, your language, your kindness.

3. What do I need to know? Ask early so you are ready on Day 1.

Ask about expectations: What should I wear? Will I be trained? Who do I check in with? Is there a schedule or code of conduct?

4. Am I ready to listen and adapt?

Every community is different; ask questions. Be willing to help with what's needed, not just what's easy.

5. How will I reflect on my experience?

Jot down what moved you. What surprised you. What made you proud. Share your experiences with friends and family; don't forget to log your experience as required and politely ask for references to share in the future!

Preparing to Volunteer: Orgs

For Organizations: Prepare a Place Where Youth Can Thrive

Teen volunteers bring new energy and fresh eyes—but they’re also still learning. Thoughtful preparation helps youth feel welcomed, trusted, and respected.

1. Offer a Warm Welcome and Clear Expectations

Teens need to know they matter and what’s expected. Share a short orientation, walk through tasks, introduce them to staff, and offer a contact for questions.

2. Match Roles with Strengths

Got a teen who’s a social media whiz? A future nurse? A quiet organizer? Ask about their interests and find ways to connect them to meaningful tasks—not just “busy work.”

3. Model Mutual Respect

Avoid talking down or over-explaining. Teens notice. Invite their ideas. Encourage reflection. Show them their voice matters as much as their hands.

4. Offer Feedback & Growth

Let them know what they did well, and where they can grow. A little encouragement can go a long way. So can a handwritten thank-you note and offering a reference letter.

5. Create Space for Learning, Not Just Doing

Offer background on your mission. Let youth ask questions. Invite them to team debriefs or reflections. This helps them connect their service to the bigger picture.

WHY SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE VOLUNTEER?



REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

Volunteering is like unlocking a bonus level in life. You get hands-on experience—whether you're organizing a community event, helping kids learn to read, or planting trees. You're building skills (like teamwork, leadership, communication) that no textbook can teach, and yes, they **do** look great on college and job apps.

YOU LEARN WHAT SCHOOL CANNOT TEACH

Ever wonder what really matters in the world? Volunteering introduces you to issues like hunger, justice, or climate action—not as a headline, but as a human story. You start to see what kind of change-maker you could be, and what kind of world we can create **together**

YOU GET TO 'MATTER'

Sometimes the world makes teens feel small, like you don't have a say. Volunteering flips that script. You're not waiting to be "older" to make a difference—you're already doing it. One hour, one person, one act of kindness at a time

WHY SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE VOLUNTEER?

NEW FRIENDS, NEW EXPERIENCES

Volunteering connects you with people you might never meet otherwise—elders, artists, immigrants, activists, little kids with big dreams. It's like joining a squad with shared purpose and real heart. And yes, some of your best friendships may start at that food drive or park cleanup.

IT FEELS GREAT TO DO GOOD!

Science agrees: helping others boosts your mood, lowers stress, and gives you that “I’m part of something bigger” feeling. Volunteering isn’t just giving—it’s also **getting** joy, clarity, and that rare sense of grounded pride.

YOU CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU CARE ABOUT

Volunteering is a backstage pass to the world of possibility. Want to be a nurse? Try a hospital program. Love animals? Help at a shelter. Passionate about fairness? Join a voter registration drive. You don’t have to have it all figured out—but giving your time helps you listen to what matters to **you**.



**‘NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF
THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED INDIVIDUALS
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT IS
THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.’**

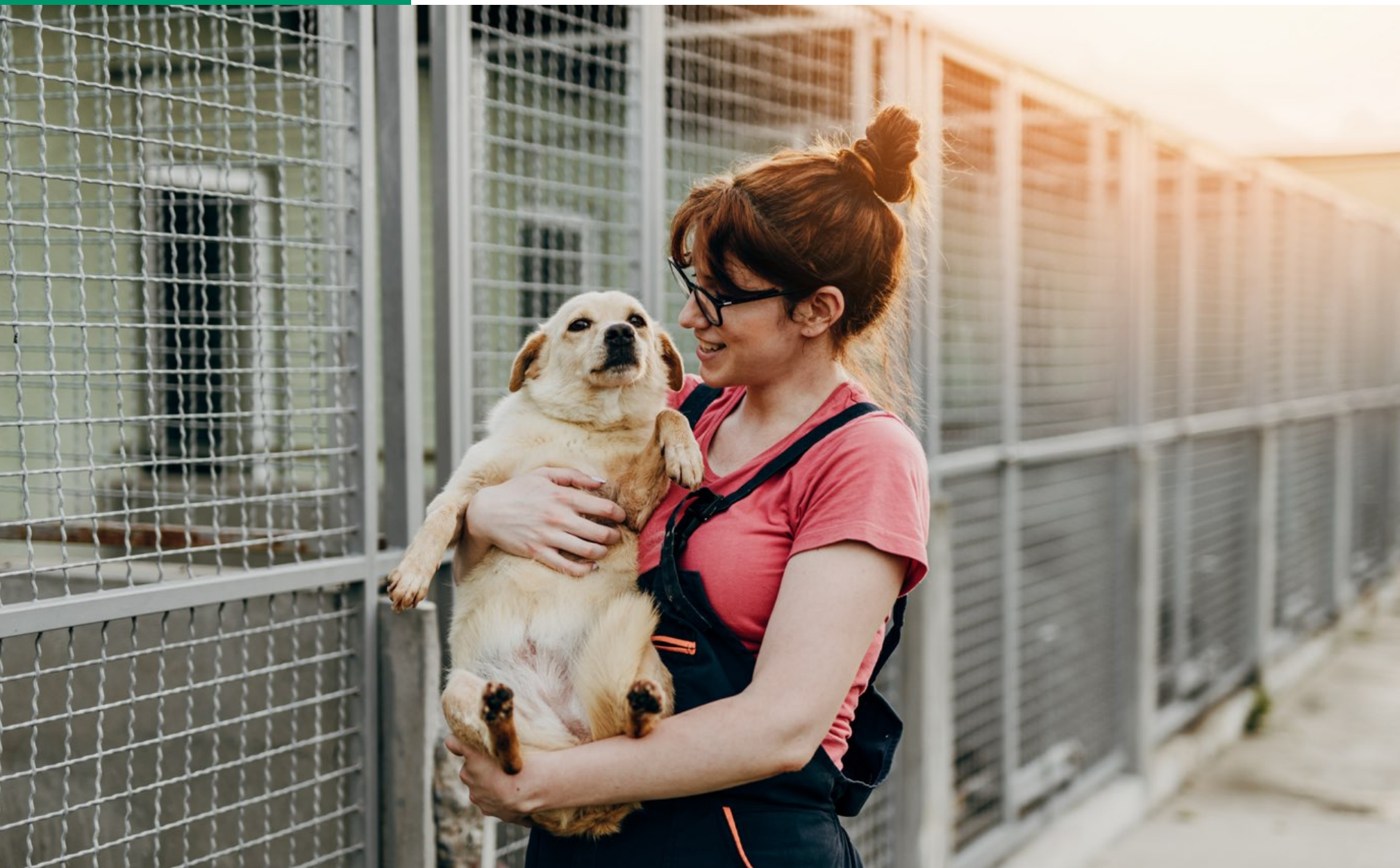
MARGARET MEAD



WAYS TO VOLUNTEER

Volunteering isn't one-size-fits-all—it's more like a patchwork quilt stitched from your passions, talents, and questions about the world. Whether you're quiet or outgoing, into sports or storytelling, there's a place for you.

Here are some ways to jump in, with examples and vibes that match different personalities:



TIPS TO GET STARTED

- What do I enjoy doing already?
- What do I care about?
- What makes me passionate enough to act on?

There is no right way to serve - just begin volunteering where you are and where you live!

ANIMAL CARE & SUPPORT

Best for: The compassionate caretaker, the Dr. Doolittle type, the animal whisperer.

Examples:

Walk dogs or socialize cats at a local shelter

Help out at wildlife rehab centers

Foster pets if your family can host

Run an animal food or blanket drive

Why it's powerful: Animals heal hearts. You'll gain responsibility, empathy, and unconditional tail wags.

MORE WAYS TO VOLUNTEER

CREATIVE VOLUNTEERING

Best for: The visionary, the doodler-in-class, the playlist-maker, the TikTok editor.

Examples:

Design flyers or social media posts for a local nonprofit

Lead an art activity at a kids' shelter

Paint murals that tell community stories

Create a zine on mental health awareness

Why it's powerful: Arts have always been a bridge—between generations, cultures, emotions.

TUTORING & MENTORING

Best for: The natural teacher, a patient person, the listener, the person who is able to explain things in a cool way.

Examples:

Help younger students with homework at the library

Mentor a middle schooler through Big Brothers Big Sisters

Lead a peer study group for AP classes or ACT prep

Read aloud to kids in shelters or community centers

Why it's powerful: You become a ripple-maker. One teen helping one child can impact a whole family—and you grow your own confidence along the way.



MORE WAYS TO VOLUNTEER

ENVIRONMENT & OUTDOOR SERVICE

Best for: The nature-lover, the hiker, the hands-in-the-dirt type.

Examples:

Plant trees with a local conservation group

Join a community garden crew

Clean up parks or rivers with your city's green team

Help organize a recycling or composting initiative at school

Why it's powerful: The Earth needs protectors—and being outside helps you feel grounded, literally. Plus, this kind of work is perfect for kinetic energy and fresh air thinkers.

INTERGENERATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

Best for: The good listener, the old soul, the teen who loves vintage fashion and stories.

Examples:

Visit with elders in a nursing home

Teach tech basics to seniors (like how to text or use Zoom!)

Help archive oral histories or digitize family photos

Record a podcast with elder storytellers

Why it's powerful: Elders carry wisdom. Building these bonds reminds us that community is a circle, not a line—and your presence is a gift.



MORE WAYS TO VOLUNTEER

FOOD & SHELTER SUPPORT

Best for: The helper, the hands-on, the “let me carry that for you” kind of teen.

Examples:

Prep and serve meals at a soup kitchen

Stock shelves at a local food pantry

Organize a winter coat or hygiene drive

Volunteer at a shelter sorting donations or greeting guests

Why it's powerful: You see immediate impact—warm meals, full backpacks, someone feeling seen. It's service with heart and hustle.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & JUSTICE

Best for: The activist, the researcher, the one with strong opinions and a big heart.

Examples:

- Help register voters or staff a polling place
- Intern with a nonprofit focused on social justice
- Organize a youth-led town hall or forum
- Create awareness campaigns on social media

Why it's powerful: Democracy needs your voice. Whether you're writing, speaking, or showing up, you help shape the world teens are inheriting.



**LIFE'S MOST PERSISTENT & URGENT
QUESTION IS 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR
OTHERS?'**

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING



**TEEN VOLUNTEERING
TOOLKIT**

Finding Opportunities

Some ideas...

- School and Guidance Counselors
- Online Platforms and Volunteer Hubs like GivePulse; United Way of NWA
- Northwest Arkansas Food Bank
- Trailmix NWA
- Immerse Arkansas
- Canopy Northwest Arkansas
- Mercy Hospital
- Arkansas Children's Hospital
- American Red Cross
- Young Life NWA
- Church
- Welcoming Week NWA 2025 Community Fairs
 - Sept 26@ SHS
 - TBD, Benton County

CONNECT WITH US!

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