The mental health benefits of volunteerism

The dialogue surrounding volunteerism typically focuses on how others can benefit from our efforts. However, years of research have demonstrated that volunteers do not just help the communities that they serve—people who volunteer actually experience a boost in their own mental health. For example, volunteering has been linked to the following benefits:

- **Stress reduction:** Research links volunteering to lower rates of depression and anxiety, as the act of giving to others stimulates the release of dopamine. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter which improves our mood and generates a sense of calmness. Volunteering can also contribute to a sense of meaning and appreciation, both given and received, which also helps to reduce stress.

- **Happiness:** Volunteering can help generate feelings of happiness and satisfaction. For example, one study conducted in 2020 found that those who volunteered reported being more satisfied with their lives, and having better overall mental health, than those who did not volunteer.

- **Confidence:** Volunteering for a cause that is meaningful to you also creates an opportunity to enhance self-confidence and self-esteem. It can bolster your connections to the community, lending to a sense of personal pride and identity. The better you feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and your future.

- **Purpose:** Volunteering can give you a sense of purpose when you are feeling aimless. Dedicating time and energy to an important cause can give you direction and help you find new meaning in life. It can also take your mind off of your own challenges, while keeping you mentally stimulated.