

Gaining that Feelgood factor

Campaign in north west shows you how improve your life

IT'S New Year and we're all determined to improve our lives. But what's the problem with a new gym membership, enrolling on a career course, or trying hypnotherapy to quit smoking? They all cost money. And after indulging over the festive period and in the January sales, most of us don't have the spare cash to fork out on resolutions that will probably hit the rocks by mid-January anyway. Yet there is another way. If you get down to your local Volunteer Centre, they'll show you how volunteering is an easy and cheap way to reach your New Year goals.

Spokeswoman Jane Heath, from Volunteer Centres, said: "There's a huge rush at the start of the year to join a gym or commit to new hobbies as we all make an effort to improve our lifestyles. But these activities involve long-term financial investment, and more often

than not we quickly lose interest even though we've committed a lot of money.

"Volunteering can help you achieve many popular resolutions – from getting fit to gaining new skills or spending more time with your loved ones. We've even got new research that shows almost 90 per cent of people would feel happier and more fulfilled if they were making a difference in their community.

"At your local Volunteer Centre, there's someone on hand to help you find the best volunteering opportunity to improve your life in 2007." So, if you're tired of making and breaking the same old resolutions, try something that comes with a much better guarantee of success. Here are a few ideas that may help you change your whole outlook on life. In the end, you may gain a greater sense of fulfilment and happiness.



● Get fit and lose weight

Instead of spending £50 a month on a gym membership you rarely use, get active in the great outdoors. By joining a BTCV Green Gym in your area and helping out with conservation and gardening activities, you can burn almost a third more calories in an hour than you would in a step aerobics class.

● Get less stressed

A course of acupuncture or regular massages are out of most people's budgets. Why not try volunteer counselling or mentoring? Providing a listening ear to someone genuinely in need of your time can be a good way to get a new perspective on your own problems and is a truly rewarding experience.

● Get a new career

If you can't afford a career break or training course, there are plenty of organisations that need your help. Writing a newsletter for a local charity can give you experience for a career in journalism, or organising fundraising activities can help you get a foot in the door in events management. If fashion is your dream job, why not help design the window displays or customise clothes for your local charity shop?

● Spend more time with people you love

A few pizzas, cinema tickets and drinks make for an expensive night out. Instead rally the family, escape the rat race and help out on a farm. Taking care of the animals is a fun way to spend time and bond with your loved ones.

● Take up a new hobby

Volunteering is a great way to make unaffordable hobbies a reality. Riding centres for disabled children want volunteers to help teach lessons and look after the horses; youth charities call for volunteers to teach adventure sports; while theatres need your help to work with groups of children on plays and musical productions, and even costume design.

For Your local Volunteer Centre, call 0845 347 9360 or www.volunteercentres.org

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