

Simplified Speech #082 – Volunteering

Episode description

Some people like to donate their free time to help clean the streets. Some people want to go to other countries to build affordable housing. Some people like to care for the elderly. All of these are worthy forms of volunteering. In this Simplified Speech episode, hosts Andrew and Kassy take you through the various interesting kinds of volunteering.

Fun fact

Since 1961, a US government organization called the Peace Corps has sent over 235,000 people to more than 141 countries.

Expressions included in the study guide

- A good cause
- To give back
- Knee-deep
- To go a long way
- Two sides to every coin
- To pat [oneself] on the back



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Andrew: Hey, Kassy, how's it going?

Kassy: I'm doing well, Andrew, how about you?

Andrew: I'm doing pretty well myself. Kassy, I'm excited for this topic today because I think it's one that we'll have lots to talk about. We're going to discuss volunteering today, volunteering. And to give a quick definition of volunteering, it's an activity where you donate your time by working for free for some kind of greater good, right? You could be working for a charity, or ...

Kassy: Build schools or clean up oceans or beaches with trash or teach something to children or elderly in a community.

Andrew: Take a dog for a walk from the dog shelter. Any kind of good activity that you are doing for free, we call volunteering, right? Even parents can volunteer at their children's schools. I guess it's any, any type of labour that you're doing, but you're not getting paid for, we can call volunteering. And that is the topic for today's Simplified Speech episode.

Andrew: So, listeners, if you don't know what Simplified Speech is, I will quickly explain it to you here. It is just the Culips series where we have completely natural English conversations, but we talk a little bit slower than we do in our everyday lives. And we have a study guide for this episode as well, guys. It is available to download on our website, Culips.com, and we recommend that you follow along with the study guide while you listen to us here today. So if you'd like to do that, hit pause, go to Culips.com, download it, and then tune back in.

Andrew: Let's get into it, volunteering. I'm a little bit ashamed. I don't really do any volunteer work these days. Do you?

Kassy: Um, yeah, don't be ashamed. I think everybody has, uh, you know, their ups and downs with their time. Uh, right now, I do not volunteer, but I'm looking into volunteering in the new year. I've already got some ideas.

Andrew: OK. I also often think about volunteering, because. really, when you think about it, it's a good thing to do. right? You can benefit society by helping the elderly or helping children or helping people in need. It's just a good thing to do, I think, right?

Kassy: Yeah, it's a good way to help your community and then also help your spirit as well, right? You feel really good when you donate your time and energy for **a good cause**.

Andrew: Mmhmm. Since Kassy and I both live in South Korea, one of the common ways for English-speaking foreigners who live in South Korea to volunteer is to teach English, right? This is something that we can do quite easily **to give back** to the community. So I have some colleagues who donate their time by helping North Korean refugees assimilate into modern life by teaching them English.

Kassy: Yeah, that's actually what I'm considering doing, but not for North Koreans. I live in the southern part of Korea where I'm not sure there are a lot of North Koreans living there, but there are a lot of factory workers from Southeast Asia, India, Uzbekistan. And they also really wanna learn English. And there's a big community where I'm living right now. And I'd love **to give back** and teach a class or two.

Andrew: Yeah, I've thought about also teaching some free classes, maybe to disadvantaged children. Or another thing that I would like to do is walk dogs.

Kassy: Oh, like from an animal shelter?

Andrew: From like an animal shelter.

Kassy: I've done that. It's really nice. However, getting the dogs out of the cage is so scary.

Andrew: Oh, yeah?

Kassy: You don't know them. So you think, oh my gosh, are they going to bite me? Do they have rabies? But after they're out of the cage, it's a lovely experience.

Andrew: Right. Yeah, that could be kind of frightening. I always assume that there would be somebody working there that would help you.

Kassy: I don't know about in every country, but here it is very lax. These dogs never get out of their cages. I mean, not in every place maybe, but ...

Andrew: Maybe shelter to shelter is different. OK. But, yeah, that's something that I thought about is walking dogs, because I would like to have a pet dog but, Kassy, you are here in my apartment right now and you can see that it's quite small. There's not really enough space here for, for a dog, is there?

Kassy: I mean, it's bigger than their cage in the shelter.

Andrew: True, true. What about back home, where we're from in North America, in Canada, in the USA? What are some popular volunteer activities? Let's start in your country, in the USA. What do people do?

Kassy: I mean, I guess the most cliché thing I can think of is volunteering in soup kitchens for homeless shelters.

Andrew: OK.

Kassy: Cliché meaning if you see it in a movie or read it a book, a lot of times it's volunteering in soup kitchens.

Andrew: Yes, and a soup kitchen is kind of the name, the nickname, for a facility for homeless people, right? Where they can come and eat. And sometimes there's even rooms where they can sleep, too. And it's usually, not always, but usually associated with a Christian charity, like maybe it's a church that operates the soup kitchen.

Kassy: Yes, that's right. A lot of volunteer activities in the US are run by some Christian or religious organization.

Andrew: Mmhmm. Yeah, it's definitely, definitely common to see that. So I would agree that in Canada, too, a lot of people volunteer at soup kitchens and homeless facilities, especially around the holiday time and in the winter. I think during the holidays, Christmas, people are a little more generous.

Kassy: Yeah, they wanna spread the good cheer.

Andrew: Spread the good cheer. Yeah. Thinking of the winter, another thing that some people in Canada do during the winter to volunteer is to help elderly people by clearing the snow from their driveway.

Kassy: Mmm. That's excellent. In your hometown, how deep does this snow get?

Andrew: Every winter is different. And I feel like it's changing a little bit. There's less snow than there used to be. But, yeah, if we get a winter storm, it could be **knee-deep**, up to your knee, maybe.

Kassy: Can you imagine an old person trying to shovel a **knee-deep** amount of snow?

Andrew: Yeah. It's difficult. And I remember my father would always go and shovel our neighbours' driveway, because they were elderly and had some difficulties getting up and down their driveway to their house. So he would always do that. And I thought that was a nice thing to do. And other people in our neighbourhood would also help out their neighbours. So it's kind of more of an informal volunteering, right, but still volunteering.

Kassy: That's the cool part about volunteering, right? Uh, you don't have to have a lot of money or have an extreme amount of time or sacrifice, you can do even just little things in your community and it makes a big difference.

Andrew: Even just picking up some trash while you're on a walk, right?

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: To make your park a little bit more beautiful, to make your community a little bit more beautiful. This **goes a long way**.

Kassy: Mmhmm.

Andrew: Now, we were also discussing just before we hit record some of the negative things about volunteering, because there's always **two sides to every coin**, right?

Kassy: That's right, Andrew.

Andrew: And sometimes, even though people have good intentions, there can be some negative consequences to volunteering. And we were specifically talking about overseas volunteering.

Kassy: Yeah, we were talking about how in the US and Canada, especially, young ... Youth, so middle schoolers or high schoolers, will travel to developing countries such as Mexico or South America in the pretext of building a house or school or cleaning up some community area. But a lot of the times, it's pretty much kind of like a winter break or a spring break, just going there, goof off with your friends.

Andrew: Yeah, I'm thinking of a lot of my friends from my hometown went to a Christian school. There's nothing wrong with the school. It was a very good school. But every spring, they went to a country in Central America to volunteer, and they built a cinderblock house. That was what the kids would go there to do. They'd go down to this Central American country, build a house, and then come back home. But now that I think about it, in retrospect, I don't think they were being very helpful. It was kind of just, like, them **patting themselves on the back**, like, oh, we went down there and we built this home for these poor people.

Kassy: We changed their lives.

Andrew: We changed their lives. It's like they're feeling good about themselves. But I wonder, maybe this is just me being cynical, but I really wonder how helpful that is, in the end.

Kassy: Yeah, if you take the money that they spent, each of them spent, on their plane ticket and their accommodation, food, and you gather that, and then find a way to send that money directly to that community, to hire someone from their community to use that money in a useful way. It could go so much further than having everybody come down there for 1 or 2 weeks.

Andrew: Yes, I, I kind of think that's the case. I guess, from the school's perspective, they're trying to teach the students about the world, right? And show them that there are areas of the world where people have less compared to what we have in Canada. So from that point of view, it's probably also a good thing.

Kassy: Mmhmm. Spreading knowledge.

Andrew: Mmhmm, some first-hand experience that the world is, you know, a different place for different people. So it could be good. But I wonder, maybe, perhaps, some of our listeners live in some of these communities and have had volunteer groups come in. I wonder what their experience would be like?

Kassy: Yeah, I'd be really interested to know how you feel about this topic.

Andrew: Yeah, definitely. You could send us an email to contact@Culips.com and let us know. It could enlighten us.

Andrew: Kassy, I have a question for you just before we wrap up here, and that is about the Peace Corps, a very famous organization in the USA that, I believe, is all about volunteering. Is this true?

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. Um, it's about ... The people who volunteer to be in the Peace Corps, they have to commit all of their time and energy for, I think it's a year or 2-year contract. The difference between what we were just talking about, going down to a community for just a week or two, the difference between that and the Peace Corps is you are really immersing yourself in the culture, and you're trying to bring change inside the community. People do Peace Corps through variety of different roles: doctors, teachers, lawyers.

Andrew: Maybe you could clear this up for me, because I'm not really sure about this aspect of the Peace Corps, but it's my understanding that it's somehow connected to the American military. Is this true?

Kassy: No. So, the name Peace Corps might sound like, you know, military corps, but it's not related. But it is funded and managed by the US government.

Andrew: Aha, so it's a government program.

Kassy: Yeah. Trying to spread good relations through the US, like ties with other countries and the US.

Andrew: OK. The relationship between America and some of the other countries worldwide.

Kassy: Yeah. And people who volunteer in the Peace Corps, you know, they really want to do it **to give back**. But also after they, if they complete their, you know, 1- or 2-year mission, it gives them opportunities to advance within US government if they want a job in politics or maybe non-profit work.

Andrew: Mmm, OK, and can anybody do it? Or do you have to apply and be accepted?

Kassy: You have to apply and be accepted. And I heard it can be very hardcore. The competition these days is pretty high, even though the pay is extremely low, um, because it's a really intense program that has a lot of benefits and it has a lot of connections that you can make and really see some change in the world.

Andrew: Well, that's an awesome opportunity for Americans, then. I don't think in Canada we have a Peace Corps or any, any similar international service. I know that we have a domestic government volunteer program called Katimavik where youth can apply for this program and they're placed in a different community in Canada.

Andrew: And it's usually kind of a cultural exchange, too, because, you know, in Canada, we have three big, kind of, ethnic communities. We have the English-speaking Canadians, French-speaking Canadians, and also the First Nations people. So maybe if you are from Vancouver, you would go to someplace in Quebec and have a kind of French-English exchange. Or if you are from Montreal and you applied to this program, maybe you would go to Vancouver. And so it's kind of a way to volunteer for different organizations in the country, but also to gain some sort of Canadian cultural experience.

Andrew: And I had a couple of friends who did this during their first year in university. So they were my friends for the first year, and then I never saw them again, 'cause they went to the Katimavik program. And I don't know if they returned to university the next year, or if they just stayed volunteering forever. Perhaps they're still volunteering now, who knows?

Kassy: Wow, that sounds really cool. I don't know if we have a program like that in the US. But it'd be helpful, you know, like, building connections within your own country. It seems like the US is so divided, even amongst ourselves. We could learn a lot from Canada with that program.

Andrew: Absolutely.

Andrew: Well, listeners, I think we'll wrap it up here for today, but feel free to send us a message and let us know about your thoughts on this topic, volunteering. We would love to know what you have to say.

Andrew: As well, you can follow us on social media. We are on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and YouTube. You name it, we're there. You can find us by searching for the Culips English Podcast.

Andrew: And, finally, don't forget to check out our website, Culips.com. That's where you can get the study guide for this episode and also find all of our previous episodes. There are over 500 episodes, oh my god, on our website, Culips.com. So please check it out.

Andrew: We'll be back soon with another new episode and we'll talk to you then. Good bye.

Kassy: Catch you later.

Detailed Explanations

A good cause

Idiom

In this episode, our hosts talk about volunteering and giving time to **a good cause**. **A good cause** is something meant to create a positive change in society. It's a good action that will make the planet a better place. We can all agree that pollution is bad for the planet, so fighting against pollution is an example of **a good cause**. Another similar expression is **a worthy cause**.

Here are a couple more examples with **a good cause**:

Lucy: Do you have any plans for the weekend?

Sean: Not really.

Lucy: Would you like to come to a fundraiser with me? It's for **a good cause**.

Sean: Oh, really? What's the cause?

Lucy: We're raising money to be able to send schoolchildren from low-income families to a special summer camp.

Sean: Cool. That is a pretty **good cause**. Count me in.

Alicia: I find my teenage son is a bit lost. He doesn't really know what to do with his time.

Muriel: Maybe you should tell him to look into volunteering.

Alicia: Oh, I hadn't thought of that.

Muriel: I think it does wonders for people when they're working for **a good cause**.

Alicia: I agree. Do you have any suggestions?

To give back

Phrasal verb

A key aspect of volunteering is the idea of **giving back** to society. From the day we are born, we depend on other people to help us in life. However, there comes a certain point when you are old enough and capable enough to help others, too. That's what it means **to give back**. You can **give back** to your community, your country, and your family.

Here are a couple more examples with **to give back**:

Jiseon: Do you have any role models?

Billy: There's a hockey player I really like. His name is P.K. Subban.

Jiseon: A hockey player? What's so special about him?

Billy: Philanthropy. Right after signing a big contract with Montreal, he donated \$10 million to a local children's hospital.

Jiseon: Wow, that's a lot.

Billy: I know. He **gave so much back** to the community.

Jiseon: I agree. He's a pretty good role model.

Carmen: Is it true you're taking your parents to France this summer?

Elaine: Yes. It's going to be fun.

Carmen: Does that mean you're paying for everything?

Elaine: Of course.

Carmen: What made you want to do that?

Elaine: My parents have always been there for me. It's only normal **to give back**. They paid for me to have a good education, and now I have a good job. I'm so grateful for their support.

Knee-deep

Adjective

In this episode, Andrew talks about his father shovelling snow for his elderly neighbours because the snow would be **knee-deep**. If you are **knee-deep** in snow, that's a lot of snow. Literally, it means the snow is about knee high from the ground. However, you can use this expression in other situations. You can also say you are **knee-deep** in work, **knee-deep** into watching a TV show, or **knee-deep** in trouble.

Here are a couple more examples with **knee-deep**:

Claude: Are you coming out for drinks after work?

Juana: I can't.

Claude: Why not? It'll be fun.

Juana: I'm **knee-deep** in paperwork. If I don't get it finished tonight, I'll be in big trouble.

Claude: I get it. Do you want some help, then?

Jeff: How was your camping trip?

George: It was amazing.

Jeff: What was so great about it?

George: I just love sleeping out in the wild, and we did a lot of hiking in the forest.

Jeff: That doesn't sound enjoyable.

George: Walking around **knee-deep** in swamp water for hours? That's heaven to me.

To go a long way

Idiom

In this episode, Andrew says that simply picking up trash while walking can **go a long way** into making your community look nicer. When a small act has a big impact, you can say it **goes a long way**. A common English expression is a little kindness **goes a long way**. That means being nice to people can have great benefits later on. Knowing this expression can **go a long way**!

Here are a couple more examples with **to go a long way**:

Andy: Nice bag. Where did you buy it?

Sophia: I got it at this cool shop downtown.

Andy: Sweet. How much was it?

Sophia: Only \$50.

Andy: What? Bags like that usually go for \$200.

Sophia: I know. Actually, I wasn't even looking to buy anything. But I had a great conversation with the owner, and she really liked me. She offered me the bag at a really reduced price.

Andy: Yeah, being nice to people **goes a long way**. Kindness repays kindness.

Eric: Congratulations on getting your law degree!

Claudia: Thanks!

Eric: I remember only a year ago you were thinking of quitting. What changed?

Claudia: I went into the head professor's office one day and told him how I was thinking of giving up. He told me that it would be a shame if I were to quit, because I was the student who showed the most potential.

Eric: That must have been nice to hear.

Claudia: It was. I guess I only needed a little encouragement.

Eric: A little encouragement can **go a long way**.

Two sides to every coin

Idiom

In this episode, our hosts begin talking about the positive aspects of volunteering, but later acknowledge that there are negative aspects, too. So Andrew says there's always **two sides to every coin**. He means there's good and bad in the same situation. Think of a normal coin. In English, we say heads and tails when flipping a coin. Both sides are opposites even though they are both on the same coin. Saying there are **two sides to every coin** is knowing you need to see both sides to fully understand the situation. Another similar expression is to say there are **two sides to every story**. If you are arguing with a friend, that friend has one version of the story and you have another.

Here are a couple more examples with **two sides to every coin**:

Olga: I heard you're no longer working at the flower shop. That's too bad.

Jay: Yeah, I wasn't happy at the time. But, hey, there are **two sides to every coin**.

Olga: What do you mean?

Jay: Even though I didn't like working there, since then I opened my own flower shop. I'm much happier now.

Hugo: This is terrible. My flight to Italy got cancelled.

Weili: Are you going to get reimbursed?

Hugo: Yes. That's not too bad, I guess.

Weili: For sure. There are **two sides to every coin**. You can use that money to travel locally. You've always told me that's something you wanted to do. Now is your chance.

To pat [oneself] on the back

Idiom

In this episode, Andrew talks about volunteers **patting themselves on the back** because they think they have done a good thing. **To pat [oneself] on the back** means to congratulate yourself. That can be seen as arrogant or too proud of yourself, because usually you would **pat someone else on the back** to congratulate them.

Depending on the context, **to pat [oneself] on the back** can be positive or negative. If you are talking to a friend who has just done something good, you can tell them **to pat themselves on the back**. However, if someone is talking too proudly about some achievement, you can tell them not **to pat themselves on the back** too hard.

Here are a couple more examples with **to pat [oneself] on the back**:

Guy: Did you see the new basketball video I posted? I destroyed the other team.

Laurie: This video? Don't **pat yourself on the back** too hard.

Guy: Why do you say that?

Laurie: You're a 20-year-old college player competing against high school students. That's not a fair match.

Lynn: Hey, Clyde. Am I wrong, or do you look different?

Clyde: I hope so. I lost 30 kilos in the past year.

Lynn: Wow, that's a lot.

Clyde: And I ran my first marathon, too. It's been a pretty good year for me.

Lynn: Congratulations! You should **pat yourself on the back** for that. It's quite the achievement.

Quiz

1. What does to go a long way mean?

- a) to travel far away
- b) to volunteer
- c) to have a lasting impact
- d) to help someone

2. Which of the following is NOT a good example of to give back?

- a) to do something nice for your parents and grandparents
- b) to volunteer in your community
- c) to return a t-shirt you bought
- d) to donate bedding to a homeless shelter

3. True or false? To pat [oneself] on the back is always a bad thing.

- a) true
- b) false

4. What does two sides to every coin mean?

- a) two unrelated situations
- b) two different situations regarding the same topic
- c) two people who disagree
- d) two coins used to buy something

5. Which of the following does NOT apply to the expression knee-deep?

- a) you have a lot of homework to do
- b) there is about 70 centimetres of snow outside
- c) you are in a significant amount of trouble with your parents
- d) you have a bad scar on your knee

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What volunteering experience do you have?
2. If you are responsible for hiring new employees, how much importance would you put on whether someone has a lot of volunteering experience or not?
3. Do you think volunteering should be mandatory for students? Why or why not?
4. To you, what is the main difference between volunteering that helps people and volunteering that helps animals?
5. How do you feel about religious organizations being heavily involved in volunteering activities?

Quiz Answers

1. c 2. c 3. b 4. b 5. d

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