



Time on your hands? Unused energy? Untapped potential? Becoming a volunteer can be personally rewarding, and it means you can give something back to the community. Volunteering is not yet well developed in the UAE, but that's changing and there are many options listed here. If you know of other opportunities, get in touch via editor@AbuDhabiWeek.com and we'll update the list

Umbrella organisations

Volunteer in Abu Dhabi

About two months ago this group started to match would-be volunteers with opportunities to help out local charities, organisations “and generally any good cause you can think of.” To date VAD has supported a blood drive, designed a website for a special-needs school, raised awareness of Gulf for Good (the group organising adventure challenges to raise money for charities around the world) and found a graphic designer to help the Rashid Paediatric Therapy Centre with a new logo. There's a Facebook group with over 360 members at tinyurl.com/dxfl6x. Otherwise contact volunteerinabudhabi@gmail.com.

Takatof

The Emirates Foundation established Takatof two years ago to raise awareness of community needs and encourage individuals to participate in specific volunteering opportunities. It acts as a clearing house to connect people (especially young Emiratis) with relevant volunteer opportunities (especially those associated with official or public bodies). For instance, one programme involves volunteer teams renovating houses in the more disadvantaged areas of the Emirates; another does the same for schools, and there's also a hospital volunteer scheme at Sheikh Khalifa Medical City. Go to www.takatof.ae or call 02 698 8600.

Animal welfare

Feline Friends

There's a problem with stray cats in the capital. Feline Friends looks after sick and injured cats and kittens, rescues and rehomes strays, and promotes the control of street cats by sterilisation. It's run by volunteers who give time and/or money to help the cause. There's no office; all the volunteers work from home and via mobile phones, so please be patient if you're calling in ...Go to www.felinefriendsuae.com or call 050 582 2916.

Strays of Abu Dhabi

Dog rescue charity Strays of Abu Dhabi (SAD) is always in need of volunteers as suitable adoptive owners, but it also needs day-to-day help – dog-walking, training and temporary fostering prior to rehoming. In addition, people are needed to help with the administrative side, such as advertising, community work, postermaking, merchandise and so on. Email info@straysofabudhabi.com or call 050 130 7392.

Kids

Abu Dhabi Special Care Centre

The Centre was inaugurated in 1989 under the patronage of HH Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak to provide educational and developmental services to children with physical and mental disabilities. The professional work is of course done by specialists but the Centre is always keen for volunteers to help with the teaching. Incidentally, the Centre is also raising money through its Donate a Brick campaign to set up a purpose-built school for some 300 children with special needs – and the aim is to open the first academic year in January 2010, so it needs all the support it can get. The fundraising website is at goodheart.org; email contact@good-heart.org or phone 02 641 8418.

Future Centre

Abu Dhabi's Future Centre teaches life skills to special needs students, and it relies on volunteers as classroom assistants and sports teachers. Go to www.future-centre.com for more information.

Other

Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi

The EAAD is keen to have volunteers get involved in specific activities, particularly in work related to environmental education and awareness (speaking at schools, manning exhibition stands and so on). Outdoors, the major activities are beach cleaning programmes over the winter months; another recent clean-up was at Mina Port near the fishermen's wharf. Email customerservice@ead.ae to get on to on the volunteer list.

Faz'ah

Faz'ah is the programme for young UAE nationals engaged in voluntary work for activities at ADACH (Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage). Information: tinyurl.com/cbr7m8

Médecins Sans Frontières

The well-known non-profit emergency medical relief organisation relies on volunteers both for fundraising and to provide professional support on the ground so health professionals, administrators and others are always needed. For the less skilled there's always office work and awareness-raising to be done. Call 02 631 7645 or visit www.msfuae.org for more.

[caption] Takatof volunteers at Ajbaan School, Abu Dhabi

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