

# Life after layoff? Try volunteering

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If you are out of work, there is a way you can network, learn new skills and stay motivated. Volunteering may not pay money, but it can demonstrate a community commitment that could impress a potential employer.

Jim Hazen, a business analyst, and Ron Harding, a surveyor, have been volunteering at the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina since losing their jobs.

"It's very depressing (being laid off) and you do need something to look forward to, and this was as good a place as any," Hazen said.

Being laid off "is not a good feeling, but if you dwell on that all day, what's the positive of the day?" Harding said.

Donating your time can also help you stay positive during what can be a stressful time.

"How many 'honey-do' projects can you do?" Harding said.

North Carolina's 9.7 percent unemployment rate in January was the 6th highest nationwide, and the state saw the largest jump in joblessness in the U.S. in the past year – a 4.7 percentage point increase. However, high unemployment has helped the Food Bank, on some days, double the amount of volunteers.

"It's a good place to come each day (and) to look forward to coming each day," Hazen said.

"It seems like any time you're down on your own situation, if you help somebody else, it kind of helps them out or makes you feel a lot better too," Harding said.

Joann Miller says she never had time to volunteer, but when she lost her marketing job, it was the first thing she thought about doing. Rex Hospital, 4420 Lake Boone Trail in Raleigh, has helped her learn that unemployment isn't the end of the world. Volunteering with cancer patients has a way of bringing perspective, Miller says.

"It takes you outside of yourself and let's you interact with people and think about things that are important," Miller said.

Rex used to get five volunteer applications a week, but now it gets at least five a day.

"They want to stay in a routine and stay on a schedule and make a difference, so it's not focused on their situation and what they're going through," said Melinda Scott, Rex Hospital volunteer coordinator.

For at least two volunteers at Rex, volunteer work has led to a full-time job.

"I think putting yourself out there and doing interesting things certainly could lead to something," Miller said.

For people looking to make a career change, hospital officials say volunteering is a great way to break into healthcare – one of the few job fields still hiring.

"They're looking to gain new skills. We're getting a lot of people who want to brush up on even just their clerical skills," Scott said.

Plus, volunteering just makes you feel better.

"You feel like you're contributing more if you are doing something," Harding said.

"That's part of the value of being a volunteer, you know you're doing something worth while," Hazen said.

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