

The symbiotics of volunteering

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When I told the manager of the old age home my pianist and I would do a Christmas show for free to cheer-up the residents who stayed in over the holiday period, she thought I was joking and asked: “But why?” “Well, why not?” I said.

I was working for the public broadcaster, travelled a lot and volunteering helped me to reconnect with home. I did this for a number of years for three of the local old age homes. The experience encouraged me to grow empathy, and not be so unsettled with seeing ageing, loneliness and bodily decline, but instead do something positive. It prepared me well for later when we had to see someone close to us to the end of her journey.

In this case, volunteering had a very personal benefit, but increasingly its value as a key driver for career development, is also being recognised. A South African study conducted by the University of South Africa found that volunteering has a positive impact on our psychology as it raises our self-awareness and increases our open-mindedness about other cultures and socio-economic groups. A 2016 [Deloitte Impact Survey](#) into volunteering

indicated that employers are more likely to choose a candidate with volunteering experience, that skilled based volunteering improves communication skills, strengthens accountability and commitment helps build strong character, which may make it easier for people to move into leadership roles.

Interestingly, local research by Corporate Social Investment consultancy Trialogue indicates that Non Profit Organisations are most interested in benefitting from company fundraising, collection drives and give-as-you-earn initiatives, and are less interested in company-organised volunteering initiatives. This might be because of, what we can call, the classic Mandela Day-syndrome, where the hype and corporates being able to say “we were there too”, is more important than the real needs of the cause. But if approached correctly, there is both great personal growth and social value that can be extracted from volunteering. Programmes such as the Impophomo Food Security Programme where the MMI Volunteers are involved or even the A re sebetse programme recently launched by the City of Joburg, all contribute immensely to the wellbeing of our society.

Although there is a trend of declining volunteerism across the world, Africa and South Africa is bucking this trend. The Charities Aid Foundation World Giving Index shows that there has been a decline of 1% between 2015 and 2016 in people volunteering their time across the world; South Africa however has improved on its five year average by 6% over all in the giving index. It now ranks number 18 on volunteering out of 132 countries that participate in the index.

MMI Holdings is proud to be one of the organisations that encourage employees to volunteer their time to their communities. Volunteerism forms an important component of our contribution to the financial wellness of communities and the MMI employee value proposition. Through the [Forgood platform](#), MMI encourages employees to volunteer their time, donate goods, and offer their skills to a wide range of non-profit organisations. The platform encourages MMI Volunteers to work with communities so they can direct the solutions for their needs, instead of giving communities what is assumed is needed.

Many MMI employees however also contribute directly to their communities and we encourage this as well. Often the MMI Foundation programmes do not reach all the communities in which our employees live and there is a desire and sense of obligation from our people to make their direct contribution to their own communities. Whether it is through being an organiser of a neighbourhood watch programme, collecting goods for the needy or providing extra lessons to children in the community, our people are participating actively in their communities and making a difference.

MMI will be recognising all these efforts at the MMI Lesedi Awards on 16 November 2017. Follow [@MMIHoldings](#) on Twitter.

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