PRESCRIPTION: Volunteering

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At the Alzheimer Society London & Middlesex, we have a team of over 240 volunteers who work compassionately and enthusiastically to help us achieve our mission to provide hope, relief and support as we partner with individuals and families throughout their journey with dementia. The impact that they make is enormous and the benefits for our clients and caregivers are many and varied. But volunteering also provides great benefits to the volunteer, including an expanded social network, improved physical health and fitness, education about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias and experience working directly with individuals with dementia.

However, recent studies are showing that there might be another great benefit to volunteering - reducing the risk of age-related diseases, such as Alzheimer’s disease. According to a study done at the University of Calgary, people who volunteer for at least one hour per week on a regular basis were 2.44 times less likely to develop dementia than seniors who did not volunteer. In fact, people who volunteer experience a decreased risk for developing cognitive problems even if they had other risk factors for cognitive impairment, such as smoking or being inactive. Volunteering also encourages the release of endorphins in the brain, which help to lower stress and keep the immune system working.

While there is no guaranteed way to prevent Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias, strategies such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle, being physically active and socializing can help keep mind and body healthy. Volunteering combines all of these factors, while helping to build confidence and self-esteem along with encouraging life-long learning to improve quality of life and healthy aging. It is a low cost prescription and easy to implement strategy that can greatly benefit the individual volunteer, the organization with which you volunteer and your community as a whole.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on volunteering at the Alzheimer Society London & Middlesex, contact Jennifer Hale, at 519-680-2404 ext 234 or jhale@alzheimerlondon.ca