

# Doing good is good for you: Volunteer adolescents enjoy healthier hearts

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Giving back through volunteering is good for your heart, even at a young age, according to University of British Columbia researchers.

For their study, published today in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*, researchers from UBC's Faculty of Education and Department of Psychology wanted to find out how volunteering might impact physical health among adolescents.

"It was encouraging to see how a social intervention to support members of the community also improved the health of adolescents," says Hannah Schreier, who conducted this research during her doctoral studies at UBC.

Researchers split 106 Grade 10 [students](#) from an urban, inner-city Vancouver high school into two groups – a group that volunteered regularly for 10 weeks and a group that was wait-listed for volunteer activities. The researchers measured the students' [body mass index](#) (BMI), inflammation and [cholesterol levels](#) before and after the study. They also assessed the students' self-esteem, mental health, mood, and empathy.

The volunteer group of students spent one hour per week working with elementary school children in after-school programs in their neighborhood. After 10 weeks they had lower levels of inflammation and cholesterol and lower BMIs than the students who were wait-listed.

"The volunteers who reported the greatest increases in empathy, altruistic behaviour and mental health were the ones who also saw the greatest improvements in their cardiovascular [health](#)," says Schreier, now a postdoctoral fellow at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

Cardiovascular disease is one of the leading causes of mortality in Canada and the United States. The first signs of the disease can begin to appear during adolescence. Previous studies show that [psychosocial factors](#), such as stress, depression and wellbeing, play a role in the disease.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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