

Benefits come for seniors who volunteer

When 54 volunteers recently planted trees on the campus of the Jenkins Senior Living Community in Baltimore, young folks weren't the only ones who lent a helping hand. Ten of the seniors who live in the Jenkins community served as hosts and hostesses – greeting guests and encouraging them in their work.

“It made those people planting trees feel very welcome and every senior left feeling very fulfilled in themselves,” said Robin Rich, director of community-based services at Jenkins, which is run by Catholic Charities. “They were grateful to be able to serve others.”

Volunteering in the senior years provides a lot of great benefits, according to Ms. Rich. Not only does it help the wider community, but it gives a psychological boost to the seniors themselves, she said.

“We forget that when people get older, they, too, need to feel a part of what's going on – reaching out to others,” said Ms. Rich. “Life doesn't end because you get old; it takes different tracts.”

Seniors have a wide range of experience and wisdom that can benefit others, Ms. Rich said.

“They have so much to offer,” she explained. “Older seniors are often more patient and relaxed.”

For seniors, there's “nothing worse” than to feel useless, Ms. Rich said.

Volunteering provides a means of applying talents for the good of others. For those who have lost a spouse or loved one, volunteering also is a way to help lift spirits. It can help seniors who have a lot of time on their hands with nothing to do.

“Any day you can smile and laugh is a good day,” Ms. Rich said. “If you're sitting around not enjoying life, it helps to do something for others. You get more from volunteering than you give.”

Ms. Rich advised seniors who are thinking about volunteering for the first time to think about where their skills and passions lie. Then they have to step forward and make a call.

“We find that it’s often our seniors who are our most committed volunteers,” she said. “They have the time, and they have something valuable to offer.”