

## Volunteering offers 'many psychological benefits'

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Despite the pressures of high school, teens are making time to volunteer their services – and do they ever love it! Some students go as far to say that their contribution is more valuable to them than it is to those whom they are assisting.

Shamin Mohamed Jr., 18, dedicates endless hours to the Children's AIDS Health Program ([letsstopaids.org](http://letsstopaids.org)). As president of the organization, he will be traveling to South Africa this summer to assist hundreds of AIDS orphans with medication and educational workshops.

Mohamed Jr. said that helping others makes him feel high-spirited.

"There are many psychological benefits to volunteering," he said. "Knowing that you have the power to bring change improves your self-esteem."

In spite of the stress, Mohamed Jr. is feeling great. "It sometimes does get overwhelming, but it also teaches me to stay level-headed. My work keeps me energetic," Mohamed explained.

Mohsin Jeelani, a grade 12 student at the Islamic Foundation School in Scarborough, has a similar outlook. Along with many other activities, he regularly volunteers for the Hot Soup Days hosted by the Islamic Foundation Mosque. While most teens opt to spend their Saturday mornings sleeping in, Jeelani spends the weekends helping to provide nutritious meals for needy families.

"It makes me happy that I am able to make a difference in someone's life," said the Scarborough youth.

In addition to dedicating his time to worthy causes, Jeelani is a well experienced fundraiser. The \$10,000 he raised for the tsunami victims in 2004 was a great achievement. Jeelani feels that his fundraising helped to keep him mentally active while providing him with a heightened sense of well-being.

"Instead of watching TV, I felt good knowing that I hadn't been selfish with my time. I believe that volunteering has made me a better person," said Jeelani, adding that volunteering gives him a sense of optimism and inner satisfaction. "I look forward to each day in anticipation of what surprises my community work will bring!"

In general, for these students, the benefits of volunteering are immeasurable. They have developed positive attitudes while learning how to cope with challenges.

As Mohamed Jr. remarked, "youth really should get involved. Do something you like and you'll notice a difference for sure!"

*Nadia Warsi is a grade 10 student at an Islamic school in Toronto. She is an avid advocate of strengthening the youth voice. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, gardening and tutoring, and she hopes to pursue a career in medical research. Read more about this topic at [thestar.com/globalvoices](http://thestar.com/globalvoices).*

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