

cause célèbre

Making a difference to others can enrich our lives in return. Here, four celebrity volunteers share with Bonnie Cleaver how giving is its own reward

Lend a helping hand to a good cause and you could help yourself to a longer, happier, healthier life, says Dr Stephen G. Post, who is the co-author of *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (Broadway Books, \$21.95) and director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics at Stony Brook University in New York.

"Whether we're looking at studies of older adults, middle-aged women or pre-teens, what we see is that self-giving behaviour places a halo effect over people's lives in terms of greater

longevity, lower rates of heart disease and better mental health," says Post.

The 'kindness kickback' occurs partly because focusing on others diverts our attention from our own problems. "It causes a shift from our preoccupation with ourselves and our concerns, bitterness, resentments and angers, which is a very healthy thing, and reduces stress-related wear and tear on the body," says Post. Add to that a greater sense of purpose, self-worth and new stress-buffering social connections, for a complete mind-body wellness boost.

PHOTOGRAPHY ALANA LANDSBERRY • STYLING OLIVIA WAUGH • HAIR & MAKE-UP DIDUSTING



Holly Brisley Since signing up to the Humpty Dumpty Foundation's Mt Kilimanjaro climb, actress Holly has noticed flow-on benefits.

Tell us about the Mt Kilimanjaro fundraising climb? The climb was originally the brainchild of politician Joe Hockey who came up with the idea to organise an adventure climb that ended up raising over \$1 million for the Humpty Dumpty Foundation. This year, everyone who takes part has to raise \$50,000, which will be used to buy medical equipment for children's hospitals across Australia.

Climbing Mt Kili – the highest mountain in Africa – is no easy feat. Do you have a training game plan? Late last year I signed up for twice-weekly sessions with a personal trainer, doing cardio, weights and lunges on different angles to prepare me for climbing the rocky terrain. I'm also planning hikes in the national parks around Sydney to build up my endurance.

Will mental preparation also play a part? My husband did the Kokoda Track a few years ago and he told me it's the mental stuff rather than the physical that gets you. Not everyone makes it to the top of Mt Kili, but the stories I've heard about the incredible view of the sun rising over the curvature of the earth will be my

motivation on the way up, as well as having a child I need to get home to! **How has being a part of something bigger than yourself affected you?** It's put things into perspective; any small worries I have are insignificant compared to what sick kids go through. On top of that I feel like I'm doing something worthwhile, which is very satisfying.

Would you agree that when you give, you receive? The weird thing is that since I put my hand up for this, so many amazing things have started happening to me. I'm a big believer in manifestation – that what you put out is what you get back – and it's like all the positive things I've been focusing on have brought new opportunities to other aspects of my life, like meeting some amazing people recently while filming in Queensland.

What's your advice for people who want to volunteer but don't know where to begin? A good starting point is to find a cause close to your heart, whether you know someone who's been through a particular thing or heard a story that tugs on your heartstrings, because that way you're already driven to help. ▶

The Humpty Dumpty Foundation's Mt Kilimanjaro trek runs from July 29 to August 10. To support Holly, visit www.everydayhero.com.au/holly_brisley. For more details, visit www.humpty.com.au.

Melissa Doyle Field trips to Mongolia and Armenia reminded *Sunrise* co-host and World Vision ambassador Melissa that we should all count our blessings.

You're involved with quite a few charities that help children. Was being a mother your impetus?

Having children did change my perspective – I think how lucky my kids are to be healthy and in a comfortable home, but in many countries that's not the average.

Tell us about your World Vision field trips.

We did two Guardian Angel campaigns where we put the call out to *Sunrise* viewers to knit blankets and jumpers, and I travelled to Mongolia and Armenia to distribute them in maternity wards and children's institutions. It was a real eye-opener – we know there are countries so much poorer than ours, but you can't be prepared for seeing it first-hand.

Sceptics challenge whether donating to developing countries makes any difference. What's your view?

My field trips showed me how every little bit of help makes a difference. We visited villages where World Vision money had been used to build things like wells, so people had access to fresh water. I also met my sponsor child in Mongolia, and saw how helping just one child can benefit the whole community.

How has volunteering enriched your life?

It has reinforced how blessed my life is. I think it's easy to dwell on the not-so-good bits, but we have to make a conscious effort to be grateful for what we have. For me one way of doing this is seeing how other people live. One family I met in Mongolia had to choose between food and firewood in winter. I'm so lucky I don't have to make those choices, and I hope I never lose that perspective.

Experts say helping others is the key to happiness.

What do you think? I think we all like to do things for others, whether it's helping someone across the road, holding the door open, or choosing a gift for a friend. It just makes you feel good. I think we've all got it in us [to give back], but taking that first step is often the hardest.

How do we take that first step?

It's a matter of finding what works for you. Some people are too busy to volunteer but can donate money. Others can give of their time whether it's helping out in a soup kitchen, doing meals on wheels or driving the elderly to appointments. There's all sorts of volunteer positions out there, you just have to look around.

This July, World Vision is launching the Vision 10,000 campaign, with a goal to sponsor 10,000 children over six weeks. For more information, visit www.worldvision.com.au.



PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GUBERT • STYLING JULIE RUSSELL • HAIR & MAKE-UP LAURA NOLAN

Jacinta Tynan As patron of SISTER2sister, *Sky News* presenter and author Jacinta believes making a difference to someone else's life is the ultimate way to validate your own existence.

SISTER2sister is one of the many great causes out there. What made you choose it? Working with disadvantaged teenage girls appealed to me because it's an age when you make decisions about who you are and what you want to do with your life. I thought, 'I've amassed enough life experience to help guide someone at that crucial juncture.'

Tell us about the work you've done so far? I was a Big Sister in 2006, which involved being a mentor to a Little Sister for a year. To help raise money, I got female writers to contribute to an anthology, *Some Girls Do: My Life as a Teenager* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.99). As a patron I also give talks, spread awareness and go on outings with the girls.

How did you find the experience of being a Big Sister? More daunting

than I thought it would be. My Little Sister was a tough nut who had walls up around her, but she's come a long way and is now studying at university. I can honestly say that every girl who comes into the program is changed, because it shows them another way and teaches them the past does not equal the future.

It's said the wellness benefits of volunteering are because it diverts our minds from our stresses. What do you think? Especially when I was single and before motherhood, volunteering was a welcome distraction from my own concerns. I recall one outing where the girls recorded their own version of a pop song. I arrived stressed and pre-occupied, but as soon as I saw the delight on their faces I was altered.

Experts talk about the 'helper's high', a euphoric sensation people get when helping others. Is this true for you? It's never a conscious thing but I do feel invigorated when I'm involved in the SISTER2sister program. You'd think being surrounded by people with dire life circumstances may have the opposite effect, but I always feel inspired and positive when I'm with them. I'm sure it's to do with an improved sense of wellbeing from making a difference to someone else's life. It validates our own existence and gives our life a sense of purpose.



PHOTOGRAPHY ALANA LANDSBERRY • STYLING OLIVIA WAUGH • HAIR & MAKE-UP DIDUSTING

To get involved in the SISTER2sister program in Sydney or Melbourne or to fundraise to help teenage girls at risk of abuse or neglect, visit www.lifechangingexperiences.org.



Natalie Gruzlewski

Ambassador for CanTeen and *Getaway* presenter, Natalie says being with young people with cancer has taught her resilience.

What inspired you to get behind CanTeen – is it a cause close to your heart?

Cancer does not discriminate, and most people know someone who has been affected by it. I lost my mother to cancer nearly three years ago and I know first-hand the devastating effects the disease has on lives. Even though this was not the reason I became involved, I now have a much more personal connection to the cause. Seeing young people go through a cancer experience is both heartbreaking and inspiring, so I wanted to help out.

Tell us about the work you do with CanTeen?

I have attended various CanTeen camps and recreation days to help staff and other volunteers and generally spend time with the members. I also help promote National Bandanna Day, CanTeen's largest annual fundraiser. Highlights for me are CanTeen summer camps on the Gold Coast, which have all been special in their own way.

Research shows helping others has psychological benefits, making us feel more connected, confident

and fulfilled. Is this true for you?

From my personal experience, volunteering does make me feel extremely fulfilled. It feels great to support these young people, and in return, I learn so much.

What have they taught you?

The members have taught me resilience. It is amazing how strong these young people are. Being around them is not only humbling, but also inspiring and motivating.

How has your volunteer work touched you personally or changed your outlook on life?

It helps to keep things in perspective. The members make me stop and think about life and realise just how lucky I am to be where I am.

Aside from volunteering or making a donation, are there any new ways we can help CanTeen?

Sony Foundation and CanTeen have recently launched the You Can campaign. By donating your old mobile phones, you can help raise funds to establish specialised youth cancer centres around Australia. Visit www.youcan.org.au.

As well as supporting National Bandanna Day this October, you can volunteer at CanTeen camps, programs and events. Visit canteen.org.au or call 1800 226 833.

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