



## Empathy Building Activity Ideas

Empathy activities should encourage volunteers to go beyond feeling sympathy for those they are serving. To feel more connected, volunteers need to truly understand what life feels like for the people they are serving.

1. **Walking in Their Shoes** – Bring in footwear of those being served. Have volunteers discuss how they imagine the person wearing those shoes experiences life. What happens during their day? What problems do they experience? What brings them joy? Encourage volunteers to seek to understand those they are serving and see how valid their perceptions were.
2. **A Day in the Life** – Have volunteers complete the “Day in the Life” worksheet with what they can learn from research and/or their perceptions. During their volunteer project, encourage them to determine if their conclusions were accurate.
3. **Anchor Chart** – Although anchor charts are generally used with children, they can also work with older groups. Take one very large sheet of paper or have each individual create their own. Have volunteers place pictures and/or words describing life and faith for those they will serve. Words can be based on research and/or perceptions. Have volunteers adjust their charts as needed during their service. Discuss the original ideas and the changes made.
4. **Could I Do It?** –
  - Give volunteers the average weekly or monthly “income” of the people they will serve. Have them use ads to attempt to find housing, food, etc. on their “budget”. How hard is it to meet essential needs?
  - Take volunteers to the market. Have them buy enough food to feed their “family” nutritiously on their “budget”. Food purchased can be donated to those in need.
  - Have volunteers carry an average water container or participate in an activity that makes daily life challenging for those they serve.
5. **A Day Without** – Have volunteers go a day without a felt need of the people they are about to serve. What happens when the volunteers go without shoes, coats, food or some other felt need for a day? What if they had to go without for a week, a month, or a year? How would they feel compared to their current life where they possess the item(s) every day? What new problems would they have? How would it impact their faith?
6. **Empathy Building Books** – Have volunteers read and discuss books written by someone who lived in/with the same circumstances as those to be served. During their service, have volunteers discover how life is similar or different from that of the author.

7. **Memento Boxes** – Create real or realistic memento boxes for some of the various people being served. Have volunteers bring in their personal memento boxes. Discuss how the boxes are similar and/or different. What do the boxes reveal about circumstances, emotions, and faith?
8. **Through My Eyes** – Have volunteers create a piece of art reflecting how they believe the people they are about to serve see their lives. After service, have volunteers create a second piece of art reflecting new information they learned while serving.
9. **Immersion Experiences** – Consider setting up an immersion experience for volunteers as part of their service. *Dialog in the Dark* is an excellent example of a brief immersion in the world of the blind. Consider involving recipients of service in planning and implementing the immersion experience.
10. **What Will We Eat?** – Serve volunteers a typical meal eaten by those they are about to serve. Discuss what they think they have learned just from eating the meal. As they serve, encourage them to seek information that changes or adds to what they thought they knew.