

# *Volunteerism*

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THE "NEXT TO PERFECT" FORMULA FOR

SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEERING

A Handbook for Volunteers

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Independent School  
District 281

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# WELCOME TO THE HEART OF COMMUNITY LIFE...

## VOLUNTEERING

You!

Advocate

Advisory  
Volunteer

Friend to a  
Physically  
Disabled  
Person

Friend to  
a  
Child

Nursing  
Home  
Volunteer

Teen Clinic  
Volunteers

Child  
Care  
Helper

English as  
a second  
Language  
Volunteers

Recreation  
Leaders

Health  
Care  
Volunteer

Energy  
Assistance  
Volunteers

"Arts"  
Volunteers

Career  
Resource  
Volunteers

Clerical  
Volunteer

School  
Volunteers

THERE IS A PLACE FOR YOU!

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REFACE This booklet is entitled THE "NEXT TO PERFECT" FORMULA FOR SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEERING. We have attempted to outline the "ideal" components of successful volunteer experiences. However, it is important to recognize that no human interaction can be completely perfect. Some parts of this booklet have been designed to provide space for your individual notes to serve as a "hands-on" resource workbook. Each group or individual will want to creatively adapt this formula to his/her needs.

We have found volunteering to be fun, fabulous, frustrating, and fulfilling!

ENJOY!

Paula Beugen  
Mary Robinson  
Dawn Wanous

## O VERVIEW OF A VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

- o Initial contact with potential volunteer agency
- o Interview with volunteer supervisor
- o Preservice conference with volunteer supervisor
- o Training for volunteer experience
- o Initial volunteer-staff evaluation period
- o Documentation of volunteer experience
- o On-going volunteer, staff, and client communication and evaluation
- o Preparation for change
  - Staff notification
  - Client preparation
  - Experience assessment by client, volunteer, and staff
- o Progression to new experience

**W**HY VOLUNTEER ? There are as many different reasons for volunteering as there are volunteers. Understanding your goals for volunteering will allow you to use your talents most effectively. Some of these reasons are:

- o To experience the satisfaction of helping someone.
- o To have an opportunity for personal growth.
- o To develop new skills.
- o To document experience for future job or academic references.
- o To meet new people and make new friends.
- o To learn about your community.
- o To provide services not presently available to area residents.
- o To return a special service that has been offered to your family or friends in the past.
- o To participate in our democracy.
- o To set an example for other family members.
- o To explore career options.
- o To use time in a meaningful way.

**H**OW TO SELECT A POSITION: Choosing a volunteer position to meet your particular need is an important step in achieving a successful volunteer experience. While deciding what position suits your interests and availability, a good rule of thumb is to begin gradually and increase your commitment as you gain confidence and skill. Here are some criteria to consider when selecting a position:

- o What are your time schedules, talents, interests?
- o What age group do you most enjoy? (Elderly, adult, youth, pre-school, peer)
- o What is your work style? (Independent, one-to-one, small groups, large groups)
- o What kind of service do you prefer—direct or behind the scenes?
- o Do you like to lead or carry out services?
- o What level of responsibility do you feel you are capable of, ready for, and able to handle at this time?
- o What are your current personal circumstances and other obligations?
- o What do you really want to do?
- o Do you want a long or short term commitment?
- o Do you prefer working with people or do you prefer to work at tasks?



**W**HAT QUESTIONS DO I ASK WHEN I CALL TO LEARN ABOUT A VOLUNTEER POSITION? volunteers have many questions when considering a new volunteer position. You will want to think carefully about your own needs and expectations. Use this list as a basis to formulate your specific questions.

- o Are there volunteer opportunities in your organization?
- o How can I learn about available volunteer positions?
- o Is there any information you could send me about your organization or program?
- o Is it possible for me to observe the program?
- o Is there a person responsible for supervising volunteers? What is his/her name and telephone number?
- o Once I have an appointment with the volunteer coordinator, how do I get there, and where do I go? Is there a designated parking area for volunteers?
- o Who should I contact if I'm unable to keep this appointment?

This list may be incomplete. Develop additional questions to meet your specific needs.

**W**HAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK AT MY PRESERVICE\* CONFERENCE? It is important to meet with your supervisor before you begin your volunteer experience. You will be more comfortable if you discuss your talents and learn how they can be effectively applied to the volunteer position. Establishing positive communications at the outset will enable you to have a clear understanding of your responsibilities and commitments.

- o Please discuss possible job descriptions with me.
- o May I have a written copy of them?
- o What is the time commitment? (Over what time period, days and hours of the week, frequency, and flexibility)
- o What are the firm expectations?  
(Example: You must come once a week.)
- o What are the negotiable expectations?  
(Example: You may choose which day you find convenient to volunteer.)
- o Is there any information that I may encounter that you would consider confidential?
- o Please describe required training.
- o What will my work schedule be?
- o Is there a place for me to put my personal belongings?
- o Where is the lunch room, coffee room, rest room?
- o Whom do I notify if I must be absent?  
(Name and telephone number)
- o Will you introduce me to the secretary, administrator, or anyone else I might need to know.

**W**HAT INFORMATION SHOULD I OFFER AT MY PRE-SERVICE CONFERENCE? Sometimes it's difficult to know what to tell a supervisor at an interview. Your supervisor will appreciate knowing about your strengths, areas of interest, limitations, personal expectations, and long-range goals. This information will help him/her to give you opportunities to build your skills and experiences. Careful thought about what you would like to convey will help to use everyone's time effectively.

Here are the kinds of things you might want to share:

- o What skills you have to offer.
- o What you hope to gain.
- o Why you want to volunteer.
- o Your areas of special interest.
- o Your previous experience.
- o The length of time you plan to stay if things go as expected. (Weeks, months, years)
- o Convenient ways/times to be contacted.
- o Your firm expectations. (Example: I want to work with children. I can work in the morning.)
- o Your negotiable areas of responsibility. (Example: I can work any day of the week. I am flexible about the age of the children assigned to work with me.)

# **M**Y PRESERVICE CONFERENCE OUTLINE

- o My Firm Expectations:

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- o My Negotiable Expectations:

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- o My Questions:

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- o Skills I have to offer:

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- o What I hope to gain:

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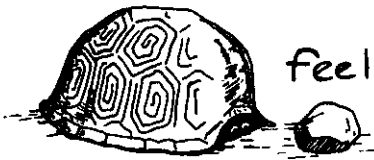
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# WHAT ARE SOME COMMON CONCERNS OF VOLUNTEERS?

People are often uneasy in new situations. It is normal to feel uncertain during a transition into a volunteer position. Training helps to prepare you for your responsibilities. You will begin to feel more comfortable and confident after you have some practical experience.

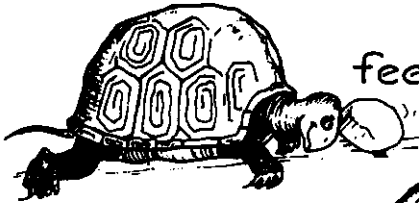
- o Will I be qualified and capable?  
Relevant training, effective communication, and experience lead to feeling more competent.
- o Will I be meeting a "real" need?  
Understanding how your task fits into the overall goal will help you recognize the value of your role.
- o Will I know how my role fits into the overall program?  
If you are not sure how your role fits the overall program, ASK.
- o Will there be sufficient training and support?  
Training and support are essential. Each volunteer must take responsibility to seek information, always clarifying that your resources are consistent with your supervisor's philosophy.
- o Will there be on-going communication between volunteers and staff?  
Responsibility for communication is a two-way street. Take the initiative when you feel the need to communicate.

There are many common feelings that volunteers share as they progress in the volunteer experience. The end result is usually a feeling of confidence that they have developed new skills and made a worthwhile contribution to their community.



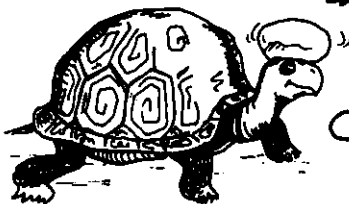
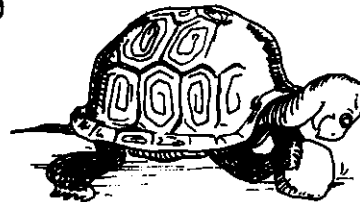
feeling very unable

feeling awkward  
but getting there



feeling more able

feeling skilled



Confidence feels  
Good!

Keith Egli

# WHAT ARE SOME COMMON QUESTIONS OF THE STAFF?

Because agencies place volunteers to provide necessary and valuable services, the quality of volunteer performance is important to them.

Some of their common questions are:

- o Will the volunteer be prompt and dependable?  
It will be reassuring to the staff if you clarify your work schedule and exchange phone numbers for emergency communications.
- o Will the volunteer respect confidential information?  
At your first meeting ask your supervisor what he/she considers to be confidential information.
- o Will the volunteer make hasty judgements about our agency/program?  
Give yourself time to understand the program. Realize that you may not always be aware of the complete professional plan. While hasty judgments are inappropriate, ask your supervisor questions to clarify your concerns. Recognize that in some situations it is impossible for your supervisor to share confidential information with you.
- o Will the volunteer be able to work compatibly with the supervisor?  
Careful placement with consideration given to interests, time, skills, and philosophy will usually assure compatibility between the volunteer and supervisor. Provisions for ongoing communication will strengthen rapport.

**E**VALUATION AS A TOOL FOR PROGRESS      Eval-  
uation helps you to see the progress you have  
made and hope to make toward your volunteer  
goals. It is a time to share rewarding experi-  
ences, to express concerns, and to agree upon a  
mutual plan for the future.

- o Here is some information you may wish to share:

Rewarding experiences.

Review of goals as they relate to clients,  
volunteers and supervisor.

Frustrations: An effective way to com-  
municate frustrations is to say: When  
\_\_\_\_\_ happens, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.

Desired changes in responsibilities and  
goals.

- o Here are some questions you may wish to ask:

What can I do to improve the quality of  
assistance I provide?

What can you, as my supervisor, do to  
help me be more effective in my position?

Could you provide me with background  
information, training, and/or materials  
in the area of \_\_\_\_\_.

How can we improve upon our current means  
of communication?



**W**HY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DOCUMENT VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE? It's hard to predict when a record of your volunteer experience will be important to you. Accurate record-keeping may seem bothersome or unimportant, but at some point in your life you may find a need to retrieve this information.

- o For tax deduction information. Check with IRS or a tax consultant. Important records to keep are mileage and sometimes out-of-pocket expenses.
- o For future school or employment reference purposes. Training, service hours, and evaluations provide relevant information when writing resumes.
- o For the information of the agency/program when they are assigning new volunteer positions. Past volunteer history often will be used as a tool for determining which volunteers will move into new levels of responsibility.
- o For agency/program statistical records. Volunteer agencies depend upon documentation as a tool for evaluation of services provided by volunteers. Funding for volunteer programs is often dependent upon statistical demonstration of the services provided.

**H**OW DO I DOCUMENT MY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE? There are many methods of documenting experiences. Agencies usually keep records of time, skills, and evaluations. Volunteers, however, should be responsible for keeping a personal folder which could include: copies of your job description, verification of training sessions attended, evaluations, certificates of recognition, thank you notes, news clippings, exit letters, and any other pertinent information.

Use the following pages to start documenting NOW!

HISTORY OF VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT

PROGRAM SERVED: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

\* VOLUNTEER POSITION: \_\_\_\_\_

STARTING DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ENDING DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL HOURS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

MONTHLY SERVICE HOURS

JAN: \_\_\_\_\_

JULY: \_\_\_\_\_

FEB: \_\_\_\_\_

AUGUST: \_\_\_\_\_

MARCH: \_\_\_\_\_

SEPT: \_\_\_\_\_

APRIL: \_\_\_\_\_

OCT: \_\_\_\_\_

MAY: \_\_\_\_\_

NOV: \_\_\_\_\_

JUNE: \_\_\_\_\_

DEC: \_\_\_\_\_

\* DOCUMENT EACH VOLUNTEER POSITION SEPARATELY

**TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TITLE OF SESSIONS ATTENDED</b>	<b>NO. OF HOURS</b>

**HISTORY OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

<b>DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE OR TASK PERFORMED</b>	<b>RESULTING SKILLS</b>



**M**OVING ON      The day will come when every volunteer will need to move on, whether it be due to a new volunteer position, a change of interest, or an actual move away. Because the separation process can be difficult, especially for the client, advance planning is helpful.

Advance planning really begins the day you start volunteering. You will help clients understand your commitment when you start if you say something like: "Hello \_\_\_\_\_, I'm Mary Brown and I will be helping you with \_\_\_\_\_ for the rest of the school year" or "I will be visiting you on Wednesdays. I'm not sure exactly how many weeks I will be coming, but I'm sure the time we share will be very special to us both."

When it's time to move on, notify the staff as soon as you know it will be necessary to leave. Prepare your client by telling him/her when your last day will be. Plan a gradual transition in your relationship.

#### ASK FOR AN EXIT INTERVIEW:

It is helpful to you as a volunteer to be aware of your accomplishments and skills. An exit evaluation with your supervisor will provide you with valuable information about your strengths and areas where you may wish to improve, and will assist you in developing future plans.

# GLOSSARY

- AGENCY:** The location where a volunteer is placed to perform a service. In this booklet, also interchangeable with "organization" and "program."
- CLIENT:** The person (or organization) to whom the volunteer provides service.
- PRESERVICE CONFERENCE:** The first meeting of a potential volunteer and a potential volunteer supervisor is to define mutual goals, guidelines, and responsibilities. Each person has the opportunity to accept or reject the placement.
- VOLUNTEER:** An individual who is providing a service to an agency by choice, without payment.
- VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR:** (Interchangeable with coordinator of volunteers, director of volunteers, or administrator of volunteers.)
- The person assigned by an agency to recruit, interview, orient, train, and/or place volunteers. (In some instances the volunteer coordinator also serves as the volunteer supervisor.)
- VOLUNTEER SUPERVISOR:** (Interchangeable with supervisor of the volunteer.) The individual to whom the volunteer is directly responsible for supervision, direction, and evaluation.

## A BOUT THE AUTHORS:

PAULA BEUGEN earned her B.A. in child psychology and social welfare (social work) at the University of Minnesota. As a community member she has served the Beth El Synagogue Nursery School, Give and Take Help Center, Hosterman Community School Council, North Suburban Child Care Committee, and the St. Louis Park Emergency Program. She is currently facilitator of District 281's Community Education and Services program, VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION, a local clearinghouse for school and community volunteers. She is a former member of the Advisory Committee of the Governor's Office of Volunteer Services and is an active member of the Minnesota Association of Volunteer Directors. Her other activities include: District 281 Bucket Brigade support coordinator, District 281 Minority Concerns Committee, Golden Valley Senior Citizens Advisory Committee, and other community and political organizational activities. She was a recipient of the Jefferson Award for outstanding public service to local community in 1978.

MARY ROBINSON earned her B.S. in nursing at the University of Minnesota. She is a member and past co-chairperson of the VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION advisory committee. She is currently the unpaid coordinator of volunteer services at St. Margaret Mary School. She is an active church volunteer and is a PACER volunteer, participating in the "Count Me In" puppetry project which encourages positive attitudes and promotes understanding of people with handicaps.

DAWN WANOUS earned her B.S. and M.A. in education from the University of Minnesota. Her interest in schools and volunteerism led her from organizing volunteer services in her local school to coordinating the District 281 program of the Bucket Brigade (a volunteer skill enrichment program for elementary school children). She

also served as a member of the Metropolitan Bucket Brigade Steering Committee and Speakers Bureau. Her other volunteer activities have included Sunday school teaching, political participation as a precinct chairperson, and direct service as a volunteer teaching English to foreign students. She is a current member of the advisory committee of VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION and past cochairperson, and is a member of a District 281 advisory committee on school board elections.



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