

2024 2025 VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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Volunteers are a very important part of the Hope Center for Autism. Volunteer opportunities are available for parents, community members and students of various ages.

VOLUNTEER JOBS AT HOPE

- Create materials for teachers to use in the classroom
- Provide educational assistance to students.
- Plan, prepare and implement various fundraisers including securing donations Answer phones – script will be provided with important information
- Assist with fundraising and awareness events
- Represent the Hope Center at community events

VOLUNTEER POLICIES

All Volunteers must

- Have their driver's license scanned at The Hope Center.
- Must successfully complete a volunteer form and volunteer training every year.
- Volunteers are expected to respect the privacy of all children and keep observations, experiences and information confidential.
- Sign a confidentiality agreement
- Complete a photo release form
- Always wear a badge while on campus or attending a school activity.
- o Persons on campus who are not wearing a badge must be directed to the front office immediately.
- Volunteers must respect and follow activities as outlined by the school staff.
- Volunteers should never be alone with a child unless the volunteer is the parent or guardian of that child.
- Volunteers may not photograph any student on school property.
- Volunteers must put cell phones, mechanical devices and pagers on silent/vibrate when working in the school or during a school activity.
- Volunteers are expected to respect the privacy of all children and keep observations, experiences and information confidential.
- Sign in and out daily
- Participate in training in the characteristics of autism and evidence-based strategies to be used with students.
- If a student is in crisis volunteers will leave the room for the dignity of the child and the safety of the volunteer.
- Volunteers will not engage in any restraint procedures with students.
- Volunteers will not discipline students in any way – students have behavior intervention plans that require in-depth training.
- If a volunteer is unable to consistently follow the direction of the school staff, he/she will be asked to leave the school.

BACKGROUND CHECK

All Volunteers at the School or at any activity where students are present must go through the level one or level two background clearance procedures at their own expense prior to volunteering.

Level 1 Volunteer

- Must be under the direct, visual supervision of a Hope Center for Autism employee at all times.
- Service on campus during school hours
- Cannot be the only adult with a group of children. Cannot be alone with children.

Level 2 Volunteer

- Service on campus during non-school hours and all off campus service.
- Must undergo a background screening every two years. It is the volunteer's responsibility to update the screening when needed.
- Volunteers will be responsible for all fees associated with background checks.
- Can be the only adult with a group of children. Cannot be alone with a single child.



VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

Volunteers must always

- ☐ Sign in and out in the front office daily
- ☐ Maintain a consistent schedule
- ☐ work under the supervision of a district employee and are never to meet a child alone. **Level 1** volunteers must be in line of sight of a school employee, and never left alone with any children.
- ☐ **Level 2** volunteers may be one adult with multiple children, but never alone with a single child. Volunteers must check in and out.
- ☐ Volunteers are expected to wear their name badge at all times while on campus or working with students in the community.
- ☐ The teacher oversees the classroom and any discipline that is required.
- ☐ If a volunteer witnesses' inappropriate student behavior or a violation of school policy, it should be reported to the teacher/staff member.
- ☐ Volunteers will act in accordance with the Student Conduct and Discipline Code, including dress code, language and overall behavior.
- ☐ Volunteers are expected to be dressed appropriately at all times.
 - ☐ Shirts must cover the torso and should not be low cut.
 - ☐ Jewelry is not recommended when working with students.
 - ☐ Wear comfortable, preferably closed toe shoes when working with students.
- ☐ Volunteers are expected to maintain strict confidentiality with any student information they access while performing their duties.

VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

Name: _____ Application Date: _____

Present Address:

_____ Phone: _____

_____ Alt Phone: _____

Email

Address: _____

If you are involved in an emergency when volunteering, who should be contacted:

Name _____ Phone Number _____

I would like to volunteer on

☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday

☐ Mornings (9-11) ☐ Afternoons (1-3) ☐ Home volunteer activities

Type of volunteer work you are interested in

☐ Clerical ☐ Create/Assemble classroom materials ☐ Read/Play with students Maintenance

☐ Fundraising ☐ Marketing of program ☐ other _____

As a volunteer at The Hope Center for Autism/The Hope Academy for Autism I agree to abide by the policies and procedures. I understand that I will be volunteering at my own risk and that the organization, its employees and affiliates cannot assume any responsibility or any liability for any accident, injury or health problem which may arise from any volunteer work I perform with the organization. I agree that all the work I do is on a voluntary basis.

Signature Date

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

HISTORY OF HOPE

- Hope opened its doors in 2002 first as a private school in Jensen Beach and then in 2004 as a public charter school. The school was the dream of a few parents who knew their children needed more intensive intervention to be successful in less restrictive settings.
- In 2012 the school moved to Indian Street and expanded from a handful of students to 25 students in prekindergarten through 2nd grade.
- In 2018, third grade was added, and Next Step was born.
 - Next Step is a social group for teens and young adults with autism and related disabilities.
- Mental health counseling, social skills instruction, parent support is available through Next Step.
- In 2019 the Hope Academy public charter school for students in 3rd – 8th grade was opened.
- In August 2020, Hope moved to its current location on Willoughby Boulevard.
- In 2021 the SAILS program (Students achieving independent living skills) began at Hope as a collaboration between Hope and the Martin County School District serving students 18-22 years of age who have deferred their diploma but required language enriched support to be independent adults contributing to our community.
- In 2022, Hope will begin the school year with 90 students in prekindergarten – 8th grade, 9 classrooms and the SAILS and Next Step programs
- Students at Hope apply throughout the year. All students are eligible for exceptional student education services as determined by a Martin County School District evaluation team.
- Students are chosen through a grade match lottery process.
- Our goal is to prepare our students to transition to less restrictive settings. When a student is demonstrating grade appropriate academic and behavioral expectations, he /she will be recommended to transition to a less restrictive setting.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

- Autism is a brain-based pervasive developmental disability.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention based on data from 2018, estimates autism's prevalence for 8-year-old children in the United States to be 1 in 44.
- Autism occurs among all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.
- Autism occurs almost 4 times more commonly among boys than among girls.
- Although that fact comes from the CDC survey, anecdotal evidence among autistic adults, particularly women, indicate that girls are less likely to be identified or diagnosed with autism in their youth and that the prevalence rate for autism occurring is higher.
- Referrals for diagnosis for girls are closer to 10 to 1, although this is improving through advocacy!
- Among children identified with autism who had IQ scores available, about one-third (35.2%) also had intellectual disability.
- While there is no medical detection or known cure for autism, many children have shown significant improvement resulting from early diagnosis and use of effective interventions.

AUTISM MYTHS

- Autism is a result of bad parenting or refrigerator moms.
- Individuals with autism have no sense of humor.
- Autistic people have no empathy or lack feelings.
- Individuals with autism do not want to communicate.
- Individuals on the autism spectrum who are non-verbal are intellectually disabled.

VOLUNTEER ETHICS

- I must respect the rights, dignity, and worth of each person and will be respectful in my interactions with participants
- I will recognize and celebrate the diversity of character and abilities of all people.
- I will conduct myself ethically, obey all school expectations, and act in good faith at all times.
- I will not harass, threaten, discriminate against, or intentionally embarrass or insult others.
- I will not say or do anything that is harmful or offensive
- I will respect the participants' right to not be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable
- I will not be on the school campus when I am under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- I must place the emotional and physical wellbeing and safety of each participant above all other considerations
- I will speak up for others if I witness any form of abuse
- I will not misuse or disclose confidential participant information and will respect the privacy of our participants.
- I will lead by example, displaying high standards of behavior including using positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, criticism or anger

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

- Most Americans will experience a disability some time during the course of their lives, and about 50 million Americans report having a disability. Disabilities can affect people in different ways, even when one person has the same type of disability as another person.
- Positive language empowers. People's first language is used to speak appropriately and respectfully about an individual with a disability. People's first language emphasizes the person first, not the disability.
- For example, when referring to a person with a disability, refer to the person first by using phrases such as: "a person who ..." , "a person with ..." or, "person who has..."
- Some people with autism prefer not to use 'People first language' . It is important to respect their decision and if in doubt, ask how the individual would prefer to be addressed.

IMPORTANT TIPS

- All individuals with autism spectrum disorder are unique.
 - They present varying degrees of challenges as well as a variety of strengths. The important thing is to be patient, understanding, and positive in your interactions.
 - The ultimate goal is for the individual to have FUN!
- Challenges you might see:
 - Need for consistency and routine, structure, and clear expectations
 - Difficulty with transitions (moving from one activity to another or changing subjects or activities)
 - Communication challenges, both expressive and receptive, difficulty understanding idioms, sarcasm, jokes.
 - Challenge understanding nonverbal communication (body language, facial expressions)
 - Sensory needs: hypo or hypersensitive to:
 - sounds (fire drills, dogs barking, loud voices)
 - temperature (may easily overheat -some also have issues with medication reactions causing temperature regulation issues)
 - touch – may not want to be touched
 - Touching lightly may be alerting
 - auditory processing speed - say it once and then wait for the individual to process what was said. If you interrupt and speak while the individual is processing,
 - he/she will have to begin the processing again
 - Easily distracted: short attention span
 - hyperactivity, poor concentration due to visual and auditory distractions, or
 - internal thoughts/self-talk.
 - Self- stimulatory behaviors
 - repetitive body movements (hand flapping, rocking, etc.)
 - repetitive vocalizations (repeating the same things over and over, babbling
 - type repetitive sounds),
 - Social challenges
 - inconsistent eye contact
 - non-responsive to name
 - unaware of personal space
 - difficulty with perspective taking and understanding emotions.
 - Motivation
 - may need extrinsic motivators to participate and follow directions (could
 - involve just praise, high five, etc.)
 - Individuals with autism are often not SOCIALLY motivated which means
 - that we must pair tangible reinforcers (foods, toys, et.) with social praise so
 - the individual learns the value of social praise.
 - Difficulty problem solving, planning ahead, understanding others' actions
 - Poor impulse control.
 - Lack of awareness for danger
 - may wander off (often going to a highly preferred activity/area)

- Special abilities you may see
 - May have hidden potential with activities involving pattern recognition,
 - logical reasoning, and irregularities in data
 - Ability to retain concrete concepts, rules, sequences, and patterns
 - Strong visual skills
 - Computer and technology skills
 - Intense concentration or focus, especially on a preferred activity or area of
 - interest
 - Vast knowledge of specific areas of interests
 - Provide a fresh & useful way of seeing the world
- People with ASD are usually visual learners therefore SHOW instead of TELL.
 - Use “my turn” ...” your turn” . Visuals
 - Grab their attention before giving an instruction
 - Get down at their eye level then give the instruction coupled with gestures or visuals to increase understanding.
 - Motivate by using special interests in your instruction.
 - For example, if a child loves Finding Nemo, you may sort pictures of Nemo and Dory
 - If needed, use exaggerated facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice to support receptive understanding of your message/instruction
- Reinforce positive behavior
 - Motivate by using high levels of praise.
 - Celebrate even the smallest accomplishments.
- Provide structure and consistency organize your time together so the child knows the sequence of activities/stations over the course of the session
 - Use a timer
 - Give a 2 minute warning prior to an activity ending
 - Remember that people with autism are looking for ways for the world to make sense to them. One way to find sense in the world is to have
 - consistency which can result in an insistence on routines and repetitive behaviors because the expectations are clear and therefore, the fear of the unknown is eliminated.
 - Allow for a short break, and then return to play/instruction.
 - First WORK then Video games
- Things to Avoid
 - perfume
 - cell phones ringing (turn off or on vibrate)
 - peanuts
 - If you are unable to come on a scheduled day, please call the school so that the students can be prepared for your absence. Students look forward to seeing their mentors and don’ t always understand that life happens, and changes may be beyond your control.
 - Keep a schedule – arrive the same time and day. Changing days and times may be necessary, but if so, make sure that you provide a calendar for the student(s) when you are going to be present. Be real. Our students are learning social expectations. If a student burps out loud, explain a better way to release gas or that it is polite to say “excuse me” . Don’ t just let your mentee get away with behavior that is NOT age appropriate or acceptable. These are important learning experiences – don’ t let them get away!

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE?

You will be positive role model to your mentee

- The relationship to be one directional, at least to start
 - One directional relationship can be a lot of work. You are doing all of the prompting and initiating, but in time, with modeling, your mentee may begin to initiate in his/her own way
- Some change will happen
- To support your mentee in reaching their goals
- To experience some frustration as a mentor
- To be busy
- To make some impact in your mentee's life

DO NOT EXPECT

- To “reform” or “save” your mentee
- Your mentee to confide in you or trust you, at least to start
- Great change quickly
- Your goals to mirror your mentee's goals for themselves
- That you will be “best-friends-at first-sight”
- Your mentee to schedule meetings or to develop plans
- To know about or understand the impact you have made

STAGES OF DEVELOPING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Stage One: Your First Meeting

- Introduce yourself with confidence and a smile!
- Learn how to pronounce your mentee's name •
- Tell your mentee about yourself and ask questions about your mentee
 - Find a way to connect with your mentee around his/her interests
- Your mentee may take a while to warm up to you.
- Be patient, nonjudgmental, and open
- Remain positive and end on a good note!

Stage Two: Enhancing Stage

- exploring interests in depth, setting goals, and offering yourself as a resource to your mentee. The goals you set can be personal in nature, career-oriented, academics-focused, or anything else that your mentee has in mind.
- Remember – this is a time for your mentee to talk about their ambitions; not an opportunity for you to impose your goals onto them.

Stage Three: Sustaining

- Trust has been established and conversation is more comfortable, personal, and open. Working on goals might be a central focus of the relationship.

- You and your mentee may struggle to live up to the expectations you agreed to at the start of the relationship.
 - If this happens, you might renegotiate the terms of your relationship by evaluating what you have accomplished, what new goals you have, and how you would like to work on them together.

Stage Four: Transitioning

Change can be a scary thing, but changes can be easier to tolerate with preparation. A good way to prepare for a relationship transition with your mentee is to talk about it! Celebrate how much you have accomplished and remind your mentee how much time remains. Closure means ending the relationship on a good note, celebrating the time you have spent together, and clarifying your relationship moving forward. Make sure you are both on the same page.

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING MENTEES

- Students that work with volunteers outside of the classroom setting or without staff present will... Demonstrate the ability to use the Five-point scale to determine when to request a break Have a consistent means of communication
 - Demonstrate the ability to manage age-appropriate self-care needs
 - Refrained from demonstrating Self injurious or aggressive behavior for at least 2 months

Thank you for volunteering and helping us to bring HOPE to people with autism in our community!