

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMING

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Editor's Note: *Sadie is the Activity Director at Villa Scalabrini Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Northlake, IL, and she sent us these volunteer ideas that have worked for their volunteer program. Thanks, Sadie, for sharing these ideas!*

■ IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS AND SET YOUR GOALS

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR VOLUNTEERS?

- Help with 1:1 visits
- Help with activities
- Help with small clubs/groups of residents
- Help with administrative assistance

WHAT AGE GROUPS ARE YOU TRYING TO RECRUIT?

WHAT TIME COMMITMENT ARE YOU ASKING FOR?

Determining your needs is no easy task. Take into consideration your facility size, cognitive and physical abilities of your residents, enthusiasm of your staff, and desires of your residents. What is it they want? How happy are your staff, and would they appreciate a classroom of youngsters assisting with the Tuesday morning craft project? It is hard to imagine caregivers who do not appreciate volunteers. But it is also difficult to pair up good staff with the right volunteers. Some staff work better with adults, some with groups, and some work well with one or two students at a time. A good team has a variety of strengths and weaknesses divided among its team members. Identifying the needs of your residents and staff is the first piece to the volunteer puzzle.

Set your goals. You have made objective observations of your facility and staff. Start small. Make a specific goal such as "In 90 days, XYZ facility expects to have 5 adult 1:1 volunteers and a youth group of 5 or more student volunteers." Now, an objective is in writing. It doesn't matter what your numbers are. It matters that you and your team have a goal to work towards.

■ NAME YOUR PROGRAMS

Activity Shadowing Volunteers or Activity Volunteers - If you have 2 staff members and 45 residents that love kids, create a program. Younger volunteers often come in groups and can shadow the Activity Staff. Make a flyer for an Activity Shadowing Program or Activity Volunteers. The flyer you create can be a marketing piece for schools, relatives of residents, and youth group leaders in the area. Here's an example:

ACTIVITY SHADOWING PROGRAM

At XYZ Nursing and Retirement Community, we enjoy seeing a variety of faces. We offer local youth opportunities to work with the residents through our volunteer program. By participating in the Activity Shadowing Program, youth have an opportunity to experience what it feels like to give unselfishly to elders. They understand what altruism means and can provide our residents with the enthusiasm and love they deserve. Our youth volunteers can visit XYZ in a group and assist our Activity Staff during activities like exercise, reminiscence group, bingo, and parties. The residents adore the young faces and look forward to seeing them on a regular basis.

If this sounds like an interesting opportunity for your agency or school, please contact Jane Smith at 234-5678.

Tender Loving Care (TLC) Volunteers or Grandparents' Program - What if you have enough residents and staff to necessitate another program? Create a 1:1 program for community members wishing to visit residents. Make a flyer on your company letterhead and explain what you need and how the volunteers will benefit from this experience.

Intern Volunteers - This program is directed to students at colleges and universities. The flyer can be sent to professors who have students that need to fulfill a time requirement. It offers students opportunities to lead small clubs or groups once or twice a week.

Most facilities lump all volunteers into one category. It is easier to recruit volunteers when you know what you are looking for, and you can tell potential volunteers exactly how they can benefit.

■ WHO ARE YOUR VOLUNTEERS?

Activity Shadowing Volunteers or Activity Volunteers - This is a program designed to aid your Activity Staff. It accomplishes 2 things. First, it enables your Activity Assistants to better meet the needs of your residents and second, many seniors love children. Younger volunteers (ages

10 - 15) stimulate residents to smile, participate, and reminisce about their own families.* Some facilities have policies that require all volunteers to be 14. There is something to be said about younger volunteers and their enthusiasm as well. Meet with the principal at a local elementary school. Propose that students participate in an intergenerational program. The Activity Director, Resident Council President, and Activity Assistant can provide a thorough orientation. Students can be responsible for stimulating the resident physically in an exercise program using props (i.e., balls, streamers, paper plates) and mentally by choosing one resident with whom to have a discussion or to reminisce.

The best part of this program may be a pool of kids for the summer volunteer program. Plus, the children develop a tolerance, respect, and love for the elderly. As Activity Directors, you are encouraging young volunteers to be more involved, be better listeners, and be compassionate and respectful. And state surveyors love intergenerational programs, too.

**All youth under the age of 18 should have signed consent forms from their parents or guardians before beginning to volunteer.*

Tender Loving Care (TLC) Volunteers or Grandparents' Program - These volunteers can come from community members, small youth groups, or individuals needing to fulfill a volunteer time commitment. Take a copy of your census and pick out your most needy residents (with little or no community support). Work out schedules that accommodate everyone's needs. One visit is better than no visit.

People from the community are usually fulfilling some emotional or social void of their own. They often come in looking for opportunities to help someone. Bring them together with residents who need that kind of support. Introduce them, point out their common interests, and try to facilitate a good connection. These are special volunteers, and they can make your residents feel like they have someone, something, in the community, a tie.

Some nursing facilities are connected to retirement communities. Residents at retirement facilities often have extra time on their hands. They are untapped resources. Ask to attend a Resident Council meeting at the retirement center and hand out information sheets regarding the program. Remember, you are selling the idea of being a nursing facility volunteer to people who fear placement in a nursing home. Call it the Companion Program and tell the residents

that some people need spiritual and emotional support. Ask them to volunteer at least 15 minutes 2-3 times per month.

Intern Volunteers - Internships of students from colleges and universities have multiple rewards for residents, staff, and students. An intern is a trained student who not only wants to learn, but has chosen a field of study in a helping profession. You have a student who can lead a small group 1-2 times per week (depending on the time commitment). You also have someone who may return to see you once his education is over, looking for a job. A well-trained volunteer may turn out to be a well-trained employee, possessing the compassion you desire and the intelligence you require.

Key Point: When establishing a relationship with schools, colleges, or universities, nurture the relationship with the volunteer. Guide him, provide a thorough orientation, and above all, praise, praise, praise! The real relationship is with teachers and professors. You can go to volunteer fairs and try to entice students to your facility, but a better bet is to maintain a friendship or working relationship with the people requiring the volunteer hours. Then you get opportunities semester after semester to recruit volunteers.

■ ORIENTATION

Youth - Speak slowly and clearly and remind them disrespectful behavior is unacceptable. Make a reward program for your volunteers (i.e., volunteer most helpful to a resident or a unit wins a prize).

Adults - Provide written information regarding the various forms of dementia present in your facility. Discuss the importance of confidentiality and your facility policies on trips. Offer them opportunities to ask questions. Be available for assistance or guidance in the future.

Interns - In addition to the above information, ask the volunteer to observe groups. Show him how to approach, gather, and praise the residents.

■ WELCOME THEM!

A volunteer sign-in sheet is essential. Place it at the reception desk. Provide nametags, identifying volunteers to staff and residents. And celebrate each volunteer's work by praising his efforts. Observe groups and interactions, offering thanks and praise. **CF**