**Summer Volunteer Guidelines**

*Welcome* to Stepping Stones & thank you for joining our volunteer team!

Founded in 1963, Stepping Stones’ mission is to increase independence, improve lives and promote inclusion for children, teens and adults with disabilities. Each year, Stepping Stones welcomes over 1,000 volunteers like you to help uphold this great mission! Stepping Stones is a nonprofit, United Way partner agency with four locations serving the Greater Cincinnati area.

**Given Campus – Summer Day Camp** - *(5650 Given Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45243)*

**Parking:** Volunteers are to park in the lot by the lake, across the street from main campus. Please report to the Volunteer Tent adjacent to the parking lot to check in and receive your group assignment.

**Summer Day Camp Times:** Volunteers should plan to be at camp from 9:00 am-3:30 pm each day. On the first day of volunteering, new and returning volunteers must attend training at Lake Lodge (adjacent to the parking lot) and should be seated and ready to begin promptly at 8:30 a.m.

**Volunteer Responsibilities**

All volunteers at Stepping Stones should have a sincere desire to help people with disabilities. A positive attitude and sensitivity are required in order to be an effective volunteer. Please read and review “Essential Functions of a Volunteer” that is included at the end of this packet.

Examples of volunteer responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- In the event of an absence, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator by email: Volunteer@SteppingStonesOhio.org
- Sign in/log in with staff upon arrival
- Welcome participants as they arrive at programs
- Always demonstrate appropriate behavior and a respectful attitude
- Exercise caution and good judgment
- Support and interact with participants during program activities
- Help with setup and cleanup of program activities
- Support participants as they move between program activities
- Augment oversight by ensuring that no participants are left unattended
- Notify staff immediately if you notice that a participant is unattended
- If you have been partnered with a specific participant, stay with him/her until staff gives you different direction
- Listen to and follow staff direction carefully; if you ever feel uncomfortable with any task, please let staff know immediately
- Ask for help and direction when needed

**Policies and Procedures**

**Warnings and Dismissals**

Warnings or dismissals can be given for breaking any rules in this handbook or for any behavior deemed inappropriate by Stepping Stones staff. Although staff have the right to dismiss a volunteer at any time, policy states that volunteers will be dismissed following three warnings. The three warnings could include but are not limited to the items below:

- Taking any photos or recordings (visual or audio) of participants
- Picking up or carrying participants (including piggy-back rides)
- Using cell phones while volunteering
- Posting comments on social media about specific participants
- Possessing and/or using drugs or alcohol
- Smoking
- Willful neglect of a participant
- Fighting or using undue force with a participant, staff member or other volunteer
- Leaving the grounds during program hours without prior agreement with the Volunteer Coordinator
- Stealing
Bullying and Sexual Abuse
Stepping Stones has a zero tolerance policy for bullying and sexual abuse. Following any report of bullying or sexual abuse, Stepping Stones will initiate an appropriate investigation.

Background Checks
Background checks are completed on all volunteers age 16 and up.

Confidentiality
All information about Stepping Stones’ participants is confidential. Never talk about participants on social media networks or release any private information to friends, neighbors, etc. Never ask participants or parents for their phone numbers.

Group Assignments and Transfer
Volunteers will be assigned to groups based upon age, experience and specific needs (number of participants in a group, etc.) Although we will do our best to place you in your preferred group, this is not always possible. Please be patient, flexible and willing to get to know new participants! Any volunteer wishing to transfer from his/her assigned area must see the Volunteer Coordinator. We will always try to accommodate your wishes; however, we encourage you to stay with your assigned group.

Dress Code
Dress in comfortable clothing that is weather appropriate for being both indoors and outdoors with closed-toe gym shoes. Keep in mind that as a volunteer, you will be very active throughout the day! No spaghetti straps, belly-bearing tops or shirts with inappropriate branding or images. Shorts must be of an appropriate length. For summer camp, be sure to bring a swimsuit one piece for females and swim trunks for males) and towel.

Personal Possessions
Volunteers who wish to bring personal possessions (i.e. cell phones, money, glasses, jewelry, etc.) are directly responsible for those items. Stepping Stones will not be held responsible for any lost, damaged or broken personal items. It is highly suggested that you leave personal items locked in your vehicle or at home.

Cellular Phones
Volunteers are not permitted to use personal cell phones while volunteering at Stepping Stones. While cell phones have become an important part of daily life, they are a big distraction that can potentially create an unsafe situation during programs. Cell phones must be kept either in your vehicle (strongly suggested) or backpack. Program staff can direct volunteers to agency telephones that may be used only as necessary. Personal cell phones should not be used to engage participants.

Food and Beverages
Bring a packed lunch that can be stored without refrigeration. Please bring a water bottle as well.

Do not share or trade food with participants. They can have food allergies or special dietary needs that you are not aware of.

Volunteer Hours
All volunteer hours are accessible through the Better Impact software and your “My Impact” profile. If your school/organization requires a signed certificate of hours earned, please email us at Volunteer@SteppingStonesOhio.Org.

Questions?
Email us at Volunteer@SteppingStonesOhio.Org and our Volunteer Services team will respond promptly!
Introduction to Developmental Disabilities

The individuals that you will be helping at Stepping Stones have varying levels of developmental disabilities. When talking about disabilities, we use ‘People First Language.’ For example, you would say that someone uses a wheelchair rather than that they are wheelchair-bound. Also, try to avoid words that have obvious negative connotations. We do not use the R-word or other language that could be offensive. If you have questions about this, visit www.inclusionproject.org or ask a staff member.

Over the next couple of pages you will get an overview of some of the developmental disabilities that you may encounter when getting to know participants in our programs. It is important to keep in mind that the disability does not define the person, and therefore each person will display these traits differently. Just like meeting any new person in your life, it will take some time to get to know their likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. If you have questions about how you can best support the participants in your group, please ask a staff member.

‘People First Language’ means putting the person first in word and thought.
Emphasize the person rather than the disability. For example, say “person with a disability,” rather than “disabled person.” Examples are:

Use “uses a wheelchair”
instead of “wheelchair bound.”
Use “has a disability”
instead of “handicapped” or “disabled.”
Use “has autism”
instead of “autistic.”

Intellectual Disability

Definition: Includes below average intellectual function & lack of daily living skills.

Traits: Anxiety around unexpected change, possible self-injurious behaviors, short attention span, talks on a favorite subject even if others interject.* May be over or under-sensitive to sensory input.

How Can You Help? Tell participants about the daily schedule, support individual in needed areas and be patient.

Down Syndrome

Definition: A syndrome caused by a genetic abnormality in chromosome 21.

Traits: May be stubborn, possible intellectual disability ranging from mild to severe. Many individuals with Down syndrome are very loving and trusting.

How can You help? Give clear expectations, be patient and offer choices.

“What does it mean to be over or under-sensitive to sensory input?”

* Sensory input includes anything that affects your senses (light, smell, sound, touch, and taste.) To understand what it is like to be oversensitive to sensory input, pay close attention to all the sounds and lights around you right now. Do you hear the background noise that you wouldn’t normally pay attention to (fan blowing, lawn mower, computer buzzing, keyboard typing, etc.)? For someone who is oversensitive to this input, all of this background noise will be at the center of their attention, making it difficult (or even painful) to focus on anything else. For someone who is under-sensitive to this input, they may need a higher intensity of it to even perceive it at all.

Cerebral Palsy

Definition: An abnormality of motor function caused by damage to the brain. Three types are spastic (tight muscle tone), athetoid (uncontrollable fluctuations or writhing movements) and hypotonic (flaccid or weak and floppy muscle tone).

Traits: May utilize assistive devices such as wheelchairs, braces or communication devices. There are not necessarily any specific cognitive traits.

How Can You Help? Assist with fine and gross motor coordination during activities (may need help grasping markers, throwing balls, etc.) Do not treat individuals like they are babies or as though they cannot understand you.
**Autism Spectrum Disorder**

**Definition:** A spectrum of disorders characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication and unusual/repetitive behavior.

**Traits:** Perseveration (showing an obsessive interest in one item, activity, idea or person). Repetitive self-stimulatory behavior (i.e. rocking back and forth, flapping hands, etc.). Difficulty with changes in routine or during transition. May be nonverbal, *under or oversensitive to sensory input and have difficulty with typical rules of social interaction (i.e. eye contact, appropriate comments, taking turns, etc.)*

**How can You help?** Use count-downs when transitioning between activities. Use “first/then” statements, such as “First, we are going to the playground. Then, we can eat lunch.” Respect boundaries. The participant may not like close contact, such as hugs or direct eye contact.

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**

**Definition:** An anxiety disorder characterized by unreasonable thoughts and fears that lead one to do repetitive behaviors, often centering on themes.

**Traits:** Repetitive behaviors, often have obsessive thoughts.

**How can You help?** Be supportive! Do not ridicule the individual for any repetitive behaviors.

**Again, keep in mind that the disability does not define the person!**

For example, if you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism. Each new individual you meet with autism will be a completely different person than the other. The individuals that you will be supporting have the same needs and wants as you. Expect the most out of our participants rather than accepting less than their best.

**Communication**

The individuals that you will meet at Stepping Stones may have different ways of communicating. Some speak verbally, but you may meet others who are nonverbal. Being nonverbal does not mean a participant doesn’t have anything to say or cannot understand you. People who are nonverbal understand what others are saying, but respond using different methods of communication. Always speak naturally, listen carefully and be considerate of the extra time it may take for a response.

Here are some methods of communication that you may encounter.

- Sign Language
- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
- iPads or Other Technology

**Behaviors**

Behavior is communication. When a participant acts out or becomes frustrated, we must recognize that they are trying to communicate something to us. If you notice that the individual you are supporting is becoming upset or begins to act out, let a staff member know immediately. All staff have been through training to know exactly what to do in these situations. It is never your responsibility to intervene when these behaviors arise. With that said, please be respectful of the individual’s privacy during these vulnerable and difficult moments. Focus your attention on other ways that you can help the group and do not make any negative comments.

**Mobility**

If you are helping an individual who uses a wheelchair, please remember the following:

- **Before you begin to move, always double check that all seatbelts are securely fastened and in place.**
- Always ask the participant if they are ready to move before you begin pushing them in their wheelchair.
- Pay attention for any surrounding hazards. (i.e. cracks in the pavement, backpacks on the floor, wet grass, mud, etc.)
- Always walk backward down hills. If you would like a staff member to demonstrate this for you before you do it, please ask.
- Keep wheelchair or adaptive equipment within reach of the participant when not in use. Do not sit in or lean onto wheelchairs.
Health & Safety Guidelines

Medication
If you need medication (including over-the-counter medication) while volunteering, it must be kept locked in the nurses’ station. If prescribed, EpiPens and inhalers must remain on your person in a fanny pack at all times.

Safety Measures
• If you are partnered with a specific participant, **NEVER** leave that participant alone.
• In the event of a participant having an accident or injury, notify program staff immediately.
• Report any injury to yourself to your group leaders and see the nurse.
• Always know the first and last name of the participant that you are with.

Emergency Guidelines and Procedures

Waterfront Guidelines:
• All participants, staff and volunteers must wear lifejackets at all times when at ponds or lakes.
• Never enter the dock or fenced-in areas around the lakes without a certified lifeguard present.

Emergency Procedures
Stepping Stones utilizes a code system when notifying staff of an emergency. These codes are only called by staff. When a code has been called, please listen closely and follow staff direction.

  - **Code Purple:** Missing participant. Listen to staff direction on how you can best help at that time.
  - **Code Orange:** Fire emergency. Follow staff direction and help your group get to a designated fire-safe location.
Stepping Stones practices monthly fire drills that you may be present for while volunteering.
  - **Code Grey:** Severe weather. Listen to staff and help your group get to the designated indoor shelter.
  - **Code Black:** Tornado. Staff will direct you and the group to a tornado-safe location. We practice monthly tornado drills that you may be present for.
  - **Code Blue:** Water emergency. Listen closely to direction from lifeguards.

Volunteer Check List - What to bring:
- Backpack
- Water Bottle
- Packed lunch
- Swimsuit and towel
- Wrist watch (optional but encouraged)
- EpiPen/Inhaler as needed
- Comfortable, weather appropriate clothing (volunteers will be indoors and outdoors)
- Comfortable, closed-toe gym shoes

Essential Functions of a Volunteer - Individual must:
• Be 13 Years or older
• Be able to follow directions and perform assigned duties
• Be able to model appropriate behavior
• Be aware of surroundings as they pertain to the health and safety those we serve
• Be able to safely travel across uneven or steep terrain while assisting other individuals to safely navigate the same areas
• Possess a genuine interest in the overall well-being of participants
• Possess the ability to engage in socially appropriate interaction
• Possess strong communication skills