



Volunteers: The Lifeblood of Your Ministry!

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- *Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.... You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.*
~Martin Luther King, Jr.

How Do You Recruit Volunteers?

- Share the **vision** and **stories** of how this ministry impacts families and volunteer to get volunteers and leaders to join you. Make it personal! Shoulder tapping – bulletins don't typically work!
- Casting **vision** - CRUCIAL! Why do you need volunteers for your ministry? “SOAR exists to help families to SOAR in their local and faith communities.” By providing buddies for individuals with special needs, we can better help them engage with the lessons and come to know Jesus!
- Be **passionate** when sharing volunteer opportunities
- **Empowering** people to volunteer is all about helping them imagine their ability to fill a role
- **Story-based** vs need-based recruitment
 - Millennials especially want to be a part of things that create change, not to “fill holes”
 - Remove “filling holes” from your vocabulary – this mindset is a temporary fix and does not have a people-focused mindset!
 - Share stories of life change & belonging when discussing your ministry with future volunteers
- Build a **leadership team**: At first, may only be 2-3 people. They share the vision and passion and help determine the ministry strategies and promoting the ministry vision.
- **PRAY! PRAY! PRAY!** Pick a time every day for your entire team to pray together for your ministry, for your volunteers, and for your families. Pick huge God-sized goals to pray for and pray through those to allow God to answer those prayers!
- Recruit the **youth ministry** – they can be your best and most faithful volunteers – offer community service hours!

- Partner with a **local university** – students pursuing degrees in special education, early childhood education, or family ministry.
- **ICNU** - Actively observe other people in your church for characteristics that would make effective volunteers or leaders in your area and then share with them… I see in you (ICNU) someone who has a gift of… (your observations about their giftset) and then ask them to pray about serving with you and talk with them in a week or two about it. This is the most effective way to get volunteers and these are the ones who stick and stay for the long haul! Examples of this include:
 - “I see in you (ICNU)….”
 - “I think you would be great at ….”
 - “Would you be willing to pray about serving as a ….. and talk more about what that might look like in a week or two?”
 - **Focuses on their skills, giftsets, and how they are already equipped**
 - **“Can you be a friend?”** – this is the heart of what it takes to be a buddy. We can provide all the other information you need
- **Ministry visibility** – have participants of the ministry serve in the church and increase the awareness of the ministry.
- Partner with **local high school groups** and **organizations**: National Honor Society, leadership groups, sports teams, etc. are often looking for community service hour opportunities.
- Encourage **volunteers to recruit their friends** to serve with them! Watch your participants recruit! – Your participants recognize who has a heart for those with special needs. Watch who they approach at church and invite them to join your ministry!
- **Tables/Fairs** – not as effective typically, but can be helpful. Focus on creating a story and a “why” for ministry, not highlighting your needs
- **All volunteers should go through an application, background check (if over 18 y/o), and training prior to serving. Safety and security are a MUST for your ministry!**
- **Scout** current volunteers for passion & commitment to your vision & engagement in their walk with God
 - It is WAY easier to grow someone’s skill level than their commitment level
 - Skill improvement is equipping with more knowledge and experience (external factors), but commitment is only grown internally
 - Look for volunteers who have been bought in over time (a few months at least), not new volunteers – need time to determine if this enthusiasm is because it’s a new and exciting role – plus it helps them to learn the DNA of your ministry and to fully embrace your vision
- Recruit leaders because of their **gifts and passions**, not because of your ministry’s needs
 - SOAR Volunteer encouragement leader recruited out of a passion for encouraging others, not because we initially recognized it was an area that could be volunteer-led
 - A HUGE way for God to grow your ministry, as other people have convictions and passions for this community that might complement your own or expand your reach in ministry
 - Have a specific role you’re needing to fill? Look for someone who is bought into that aspect of your ministry, don’t try to force a talented volunteer into being passionate about it; this may take time, but be patient, it is easier to wait than to train several volunteers that don’t stick

- Recruit your **replacement**
 - A HUGE way for God to grow your ministry, as other people have convictions and passions for this community that
 - What should be your weekly goal? Make yourself unnecessary - frees you up to encourage volunteers, welcome families, jump into a role if someone cancels, and allows the ministry to go on without you at the same quality if you suddenly are unable to come)
 - Also equips other leaders to do special needs ministry full-time Grace's passion for planting churches/campuses, but also good to equip leaders to help other churches start ministries of their own
 - Think ahead. Our church hopes to plant 100 churches in the next 20 years, so we are always on the lookout for volunteers who would love to do my job one day at a future site.

Students: The Secret Sauce to Your Success!

- Many churches and ministry forums underestimate the student population and their volunteer potential
 - Students want to make a difference, and many grew up in inclusive environments, so working with individuals with special needs comes naturally to them
 - Challenge students to step up, and they typically will do so and blow away your expectations - treat them the same way you would an adult volunteer
- **Focus on building up youth teams**
 - 90% of SOAR's weekend buddies are students
 - No age minimum, but we prefer for young students to buddy with someone else the first few years (more for the comfort level of the teachers in the class than for the volunteer themselves!) – don't put young buddies with participants who are bigger/older than them whenever possible
- **Benefit of student volunteers?**
 - Students recruit their peers really well
 - Community-focused generation – love serving together
 - Most of our student volunteers were recruited by another student and fell in love with the ministry
- **Give students leadership opportunities**
 - Build opportunities for students to become leaders in your ministry
 - Apprentice program – showing a group of students one aspect of special needs ministry a semester, becoming experts on special needs ministry
- **Empowering future ministry**
 - This is the age where many students will realize what they want to spend their lives doing
 - Help them envision special needs ministry, and you can help build up the leaders that will do special needs ministry in 5 or 10 years
 - Greatest growth opportunity for special needs ministry in the US and world

How Do You Retain Volunteers?

- Volunteers stay in ministry not because they are well-trained, but because they see their purpose and impact.
- The purpose is understood when you vision cast well – remind them often why they are there (do this constantly, not only when they are recruited)
- The impact is understood when you appreciate volunteers and recognize what they bring to your ministry team

- **Appreciate:** Find ways to appreciate your volunteers – kind words, birthday cards, some simple volunteer appreciation gift each month (i.e., graham cracker, marshmallow, Hershey chocolate in a baggie with a note “We need ‘smore’ volunteers like you!”) Regularly thank your volunteers for serving!
 - Do something monthly (keep it simple)
 - Puns & Candy are a safe bet & inexpensive – Pinterest is a great resource for this
 - Not your forte? This is easy to delegate to someone who loves appreciating people
 - **Make it personal** - While ministry-wide appreciation makes a difference, a personal touch is infinitely more impactful – Easter thank you cards
 - Incorporate the **volunteer’s love language** into the way you appreciate them (ONLY ONE OF THESE COSTS MONEY)
 - **Words of Affirmation** – thank you notes, affirm them when you give them their assignment
 - **Quality Time** – time out to coffee, lunch, have a small group over for dinner if appropriate - doesn’t need to be on the ministry budget, many who appreciate time are willing to pay for their own items
 - **Gifts** – coffee, candy, gift cards for big projects/super-dedicated volunteers
 - **Acts of Service** – offer to help them with things they have coming up, serve alongside them if in a role that prepares for other events
 - **Touch** – tricky at church, but side hugs, shoulder pats, high fives, and handshakes are typically acceptable and do make a difference
 - Thank volunteers who cancel on time
- **Spiritual Encouragement:** Shepherding volunteers doesn’t happen unless you incorporate spiritual encouragement!!!
 - **Pray regularly** for & with your volunteers
 - Harness phone notifications! 5:10 prayer alarm, calendar reminders for prayer
 - If a volunteer shares a prayer request with you, pray right then over them
 - Text volunteers you are praying for with what you are praying for them during the week
 - Encourage volunteers to **attend service** each weekend
 - We ALL need to be filled up with the Spirit to serve well (YOU TOO!)
 - Occasionally OK to watch service after, but better to worship with the church family
 - Students – occasionally OK with attending weeknight student ministry instead of Sunday
 - **Incorporate spiritual components** into programming when possible
 - Quarterly Training – devotional at the beginning each time
 - Devotionals at all leadership meetings
 - Have a team huddle for a short devotional and prayer time before serving on a weekend – pray for one another and for the participants prior to serving - promotes family/team feel as well – don’t forget to reinforce your vision
- **Become a Family:** Treat volunteers like they are part of the family, ask how their week was, their vacation, how the big test went. When they know you really care about them, they will buy into the ministry.
- **Match skills and passions:** When recruiting and assigning volunteers, find a role that fits their skills and passions instead of fitting them into a “hole” in your ministry. This creates volunteers who are passionate about what they do with a lower likelihood of burnout.
- **Value volunteers like people, not like a number!** Also, let them use their head and heart, and YOU handle all of the hard stuff!

Why is Training Volunteers Important?

- It's not enough to help a volunteer see they are capable of being a part of your ministry, you also need to give them the tools to succeed with the individuals they are working with. This is where training volunteers come into play.
- Give them techniques to be successful and not to be fearful.
- It's important to keep in mind that training volunteers is not accomplished once. Training is best when you offer additional opportunities to build skills, and coach volunteers along the way.
- Help people realize that they do not need experience with special needs to serve, just a heart to serve! "Can you be a friend?"
- Use case scenarios to train; this allows volunteers to learn by working through real scenarios they will experience on the weekend.
 - Use this training for all new volunteers
 - Hour-long training gives principles and policies in the first half, then moves to the application through scenarios that we discuss in the second half
 - In the scenario discussions, focus on the techniques they get right (boosts the confidence of new volunteers), and correct/add techniques that would be helpful
- Allow opportunities to shadow experienced volunteers
 - Required for most new volunteers - unless they've served at camp/are very experienced with special needs
 - Ensure the volunteer that they are shadowing knows they are there to follow them, encourage them to ask questions, and engage with the participant
 - This is a helpful way to gauge future leaders – watch them build up new volunteers! Helpful to have a student shadow a student and have an adult shadow an adult
- Offer opportunities for response – **buddy assessments**
 - Half sheet asking about the good, bad, and ugly of the service
 - Creates opportunity for follow-up during the week, encouraging volunteers who had a hard service and helping them grow their skills
 - Helpful in tracking participant behavior shifts, as well as knowing what's going on in the lives of your volunteers
 - The most important element of these assessments is the prayer question – we pray weekly for volunteers by name who fill this out!
- Check out some of SOAR's training videos on YouTube: SOARSpecialNeeds

Who Needs Training?

- Security, church greeters, information desk volunteers (whoever may be in contact with first-time visitors)
- Children's Ministry and Student Ministry volunteers/teachers
- Special Needs Volunteers/Buddies

What is an Inclusive Church?

Inclusive Church:

- Basically what that means is that we want all of our individuals with special needs to feel that they are valued and as important as every other individual that comes into Grace Church

- Inclusive classrooms are places where all students are VITAL members of the classroom, feel a connection to their peers, and have access to meaningful 'general' education curriculum, but may need to receive support to succeed
- **Create a culture of acceptance** – give disability visibility in church events. Allow it to be seen from the stage or from the pulpit.
- **No one ever ages out of your special needs programming.**
- The Golden Rule of support: support others the way you would want to be supported

What is the role of a buddy?

Buddy Roles:

- To share the love of Jesus with your individual
- To ensure the safety of the individual
- To be a guide on the side
- To allow for independence when appropriate
- To help the individual get the most out of the teacher-generated curriculum
- Encourage your individual to interact with their peers
- Focus on their abilities, not disabilities
- Be positive – especially when talking with parents
- Never be isolated 1:1 alone

Showing Affection

Proper use of affection:

- Many individuals with special needs love to show affection with hugs, kissing, and sitting in your lap.
- Buddies should only give side hugs, high-fives, and fist bumps
- Do not allow the kissing, no frontal hugs, and no lap sitting.

Special Needs Helpful Considerations

General considerations for individuals with special needs

- Listen to what parents say about his abilities and needs; ask questions if you need more information than the parents give
- Identify their abilities and strengths – find activities they can achieve
- Give short clear instructions
- Use extra patience
- Be encouraging and give praise frequently
- Be firm with limits which are set to provide safety to the individual and others
- Limit choices to 1 to 3 specific activities/items
- Help them if they are frustrated, but let them do what they are able to do themselves
- Engage them in activities with their peers
- Play – have fun! Enjoy yourself!
- Don't talk about the individual in front of them as if they are not there or in front of other people
- Teach other children/students to be accepting and loving by setting a good example

- Accept an individual as a child of God who is uniquely and wonderfully made!

Crisis Prevention Techniques

Be proactive – act before the behavior is out of control!

- **Be empathetic:** pay attention (get down on their level and talk in a calm quiet voice)
- **Clarifying messages:** repeat what they are expressing to show that you understand how they are feeling
 - Ask them to tell you what they want or show you what they want
- **Sensory stimulation:** the individual may need a sensory break (deep pressure, swing or spinning, quiet/sensory room, take a walk)
- **Set and enforce reasonable limits:** set limits clearly and give choices (if/then or first/then statements)
- **Ignore challenging questions:** redirect the individual when possible
- **Avoid overreacting:** remain calm (walk with the individual or try distracting them/re-engaging them)
- **Use physical techniques as a last resort:** call for help first! Use the least restrictive method of intervention possible – used only when there is a threat of harm to themselves or others
- **A reminder of reinforcement:** if they are “working” towards something (something they want or like)

What Does Training Include?

- Ministry vision and goals
- Role of the buddy
- How to handle behaviors: Crisis Prevention Techniques
- Comprehensive – ongoing – after initial training recommend at least a bi-annual if not quarterly training for your volunteers – prevents vision leak!

Train Your Volunteers:

- Offer **higher-level training** for committed volunteers
- **Nonviolent Crisis Intervention** training by **CPI** – expensive, but helpful (instructor certification more cost-effective)
 - For SOAR, this training (with holds) is required for leaders/coordinators, and the de-escalation techniques are highly encouraged to all volunteers who have served for 6 months or longer
- **Gracefully correct/improve** volunteer’s techniques
 - Watch volunteers interact with their participants, and offer feedback
 - Reinforce good interactions - point out good interventions and interactions whenever possible
 - When correcting a technique, use a sandwich - point out a way they do their job well, offer the correction, then express another way they do what they do well
 - Typically unhelpful to correct mid-behavior, but the sooner the better - don’t correct a technique that was used weeks after it occurred
 - Kids volunteers giving feedback – welcome concerns and feedback from kids volunteers in an inclusive setting, but encourage them to call you mid-behavior next time if there is a concern with how it’s being dealt with – easier to work with a buddy when you saw the interaction yourself

- **Quarterly buddy gathering** – opportunity to grow skills 4 times a year
 - Dual-purpose event – focus on improving skills, while also encouraging community – Again – PREVENTS VISION LEAK!
 - Use the games/social aspects as a tie-in to the lesson itself
 - Nonverbal communication – nonverbal telephone
 - Discussing ministry values – incorporate worship into session, pray for one another, encourage fun, opportunity to be outward-focused
 - Limit setting – played three rounds of a game, one without rules/limits, one with too many, and one with a good balance
 - You don't need a big budget/any budget to do these events successfully – do it between meal times, offer a Christmas cookie exchange, or find inexpensive/free games to play

How to Resolve a Toxic Volunteer Environment:

- Difficult, but possible, and remarkably important
- **Possible cause:** Culture of obligation – Make volunteers feel they are obligated to serve

How do you resolve it?

- **Apologize** if you are in the wrong
 - Do not shift blame to others; better to own it
 - Seek forgiveness from volunteers and pray for wisdom on how to correct the situation
- **Seek to understand** the volunteers
 - Regardless of whether or not a volunteer has been wronged, they feel like they have been in this situation – focus on letting them vent before offering solutions
 - Think as a volunteer would think, not as a ministry leader (ex. Staffing buddies, less frustrating on you when you recognize the busy-ness of their schedules instead of lamenting losing another volunteer for the weekend)
- Create change quickly
 - Volunteers appreciate when they see you are quick to be better
 - Be open about fixing the process if it's a big issue
- **Seek feedback** often
 - Return to the concerned volunteer(s) often and ask for their feedback on the issue
 - **Clarifying messages:** repeat what they are expressing to show that you understand how they are feeling
 - Ask them to tell you what they want or show you what they want

Resources:

- **Websites:**
 - SOARspecialneeds.org
 - Irrestiblechurch.org (Joni & Friends) Also download books!
 - KeyMinistry.org
 - Joniandfriends.org
 - Pure-ministries.com
 - AbilityMinistry.com

Special Needs Ministry Notes:

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