

Recruiting Volunteer Tutors

Type of Work

Volunteer tutors help adults learn to read using structured, proven methods. They generally work one-to-one, free of charge, and confidentially.

Training

Tutors must complete a basic course to learn to use the materials and to understand the ways adults learn. The tutor trainings are given frequently throughout the state, and they average 10-12 hours in length.

Cost

There is no charge for the training, but a small fee may be charged to cover the cost of materials, handouts, and refreshments. Local programs determine how much, if anything, is charged. Local service agencies or businesses may support the program by sponsoring workshops.

Value of Volunteer Time

Volunteers provide an organization with many intangible benefits that cannot be measured easily, such as labor, expertise, and community support. For this reason, it is difficult to put a dollar value on volunteer time.

However, organizations frequently need such a dollar value to measure and document the amount of service provided by volunteers. This amount is useful to organizations for recognition and demonstration of community support. According to the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), organizations can also use the value of volunteer services on financial statements, including internal and external statements, grant proposals, and annual reports. Please visit FASB's website, www.fasb.org/pdf/fas116.pdf for more information and for regulations on the use of the value of volunteer time on financial forms.

The value of volunteer time is calculated annually by Independent Sector with information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For 2006, the estimated dollar value of volunteer time is \$18.77 per hour. Please visit Independent Sector's website, www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html for more information.

Place of Work

An agreement will be made between tutor and learner as to the best place to meet for their private lesson. The location should be convenient and non-threatening for each member of the pair. Remember that schools may have been a place of failure for the learner, so consider libraries and churches. Sometimes banks and fire stations have been used.

Hours

Tutors should expect to work with their learners at least one hour per week for a minimum of one year. Some learners will progress much faster than others because of high motivation, higher level starting skills, and fewer outside distractions. Age and physical condition may also play a part. Tutors need to be flexible.

Learner Placement

The literacy coordinator should have information available about each learner and tutor and try to make a successful match. Tutors contact their learners and make arrangements for the initial meeting. If a match should prove unsatisfactory to either learner or tutor, the coordinator should endeavor to reassign them.

Qualifications

No professional teaching skills are necessary, but tutors should be willing to make the time commitment, have a great deal of patience, and have the ability to work with persons from different social strata. Young persons are often successful working with learners their own age. Prisoners, the homeless, welfare recipients, and former learners have all become successful tutors, and often can relate very well with other new learners.

Benefits

There is no salary, but materials and mileage may be tax deductible. The biggest benefit is the thrill of hearing that a young mother has been able to read a story to her child for the first time, or a man has been able to fill out his first job application!

Responsibilities

Tutors should begin and end each lesson on time. They should identify the learner's special interests and goals and make sure some time is spent in those areas. Encourage the learner to keep a list of short term goals, and see that these are addressed and accomplished.

Encourage the learner and praise his/her efforts. Accept each learner as he/she is. Keep accurate records of hours tutored along with learner progress and turn them in as required. If tutoring must be halted, advise the learner/tutor placement coordinator.

Warning

Tutors should be aware that adult learners often experience problems in their personal lives. Reading tutors should stick to their specialty and avoid becoming marriage counselors, psychiatrists, bankers, etc. They can best help in these additional areas by being supportive and developing a positive self concept and esteem in the learner. Tutors should refer learners for hearing and vision testing and to social services agencies if this is appropriate. Some learners have unrealistic learning expectations, and may think they can learn to read in a month or two. Tutors should explain that the process takes time, dedication, and effort. Tutors are there to help. Adult learners will start at the beginning and learn as quickly as they can.

The Literacy Resource Office has a well developed Volunteer Management Section in its lending library. Please see Appendix O.

Sample Volunteer Tutor Job Description

Title of Position: volunteer literacy tutor

Purpose of Position: to help an adult learn to read, write, and improve comprehension skills

Qualifications: dependable and prompt; interested in others and able to relate to them; respectful of confidentiality; flexible; friendly; patient; and optimistic. Sense of humor helpful!

Training: completion of a tutor training workshop. Additional in-service training will be offered at local, state, regional, and national workshops and conferences.

Place of Work: the local public library or one of the local tutoring sites

Time Commitment: A least one hour per week for a minimum of one year

Duties:

- Meet regularly and punctually
- Prepare each lesson to meet individual needs of the learner
- Provide encouragement and support to the learner by
 - a) listening to what he/she has to say
 - b) helping develop a positive attitude toward learning
 - c) being supportive rather than critical of mistakes
 - d) encouraging reading beyond the tutoring sessions
- Identify learner's special interest areas and integrate related materials
- Inform learner/tutor coordinator of problems encountered in tutoring sessions
- Inform literacy coordinator of special material and/or training needs

Reports Required:

- Keep accurate records of hours tutored
- Send monthly tutoring reports to local literacy program
- Turn in learner assessment and progress reports as required

Fringe Benefits: heightened perception of the world around you, deepened understanding of values and lifestyles different from your own, a broadened imagination for creative problem solving, and the knowledge that you are helping another individual, your community, your state, and your nation.