

For the Classroom Teacher: Realizing Results with Your Senior Volunteer

Here are some suggestions from a variety of senior volunteer projects, including strategies and tips that can support good results in your work with volunteers.

Great Beginnings: An Orientation Meeting

Please plan some time up front to begin your relationship with the volunteer. A thorough exchange of information will provide a good foundation for your work together. Exchange information about:

- Project goals and job description
- Volunteer/ teacher responsibilities
- Record-keeping: What kind of reporting is required of you and the volunteer?
- Communication preferences about assignments and strategies (*see Sustaining High Quality Service*, below)
- Your volunteer's characteristics: What can you learn about background, educational experiences, skills, passions, and preferences?
- Good student matches: What are the volunteer's preferences and what student characteristics seem like a productive match?
- Work space and conditions: What will suit the volunteer? Are there any physical conditions or limitations?
- Important instructions about fire drills, safety routines, and other school policies

Pre-service and Ongoing Training

All RSVP and FGP projects strive to provide adequate and ongoing training to volunteers through site staff, local experts, project partners, or national training resources. But no training will be as effective as the on-site learning directly related to your classroom, curriculum, and teaching strategies. Senior volunteers will sometimes have less background and familiarity with school settings than student teachers, but they are just as eager to learn from you. Volunteers also appreciate being included in any training or professional development offered by the school which is relevant to their service.

The training your volunteer has received (or will receive) includes:

Completed	Upcoming	Broad training topic
_____	_____	Child development
_____	_____	Basic literacy tutoring skills
_____	_____	Mentoring strategies
_____	_____	Behavior management
_____	_____	Legal issues in working with children
_____	_____	Other: _____

In rare cases, volunteers begin service out of sync with our training calendar. If you see an “X” here _____, this volunteer has received minimal training so far, primarily because of scheduling. We hope you will be able to assist with close supervision at the outset, but please know that we are working to provide appropriate training as soon as possible.

Sustaining High Quality Service

There are many ways that teachers communicate with volunteers over time, and more than one method will enrich their service. Here are some examples of successful communication systems from other projects that you can consider:

- School information folder containing school calendar, contact sheet, sign-in and record-keeping procedures—updated as necessary
- Assignment folder with written work instructions from you, updated according to your planning practice
- Student tracking folders that contain running records and observations about each student’s work
- Daily or weekly check-ins—brief conversations to review, revise, and clarify tasks
- Scheduled reflection meetings (weekly/monthly), with time for problem-solving
- Volunteer team meetings, providing a place/time for volunteers within the same school to support each other

Retaining Volunteers

Since volunteers give their time, a thoughtful and regular approach to rewarding them will do a great deal to retain their enthusiasm and commitment. Volunteers report that they always appreciate the following rewards:

- Appreciation from the children, expressed through drawings, letters, or other hand-made tokens
- Oral praise and thanks from you and the staff (as often as you feel it, both privately and publicly)
- Inclusion in school culture and events—training, meetings, planning teams, special events/projects, field trips, newsletter mailings—regarding them as part of the team
- Opportunities to meet families of children they serve
- Recognition at special school and community events

Special Considerations

A few issues somewhat unique to seniors are worth consideration:

- Find out how the senior prefers to be addressed, as sometimes nicknames like “Granny Mott” are loved—sometimes not; it’s important to ask.
- Gain familiarity with volunteers’ transportation methods; your volunteer may welcome help arranging alternatives in cases of bad weather
- Provide seniors with information about school health issues of concern to them—including preventive programs, practices, or resources at your school.
- Share and update your calendars often (school assemblies and trips, senior appointments) to maintain a positive routine for the children