

7. Working with Volunteers, Practicum and Work Experience Students

Volunteers:

The Society promotes the participation of volunteers in enhancing the quality of its services for the following reasons:

- (a) To provide support to individuals, above and beyond that of paid supporters;
- (b) Volunteers are both a possible source of companionship and a way of teaching people about developing relationships;
- (c) Some of the people we serve have identified the need for volunteers as a goal;
- (d) As a non-profit society, Spectrum utilizes volunteers in a variety of roles besides direct support to individuals, including the Board of Directors, committees, assistance with special projects, and fundraising.

Volunteer or friend?

Volunteers are different from friends in that a volunteer relationship is conditional, where a friendship is not. Volunteers provide a service, where a friendship is a reciprocal relationship between two people and follows a more natural development. Volunteers have assigned duties, hours, and responsibilities, where friends typically do not. See Policy #6: Facilitating Friendships.

Some things which support the work of volunteers are:

- (i) As when working with families or friends, clarity of expectations for both parties makes successful relationships more probable. Different volunteers have different expectations, as do the individuals they intend to spend time with and the staff who are supporting the individual. A meeting between the volunteer and the supervisor should be arranged as soon as possible after the identification of a volunteer relationship. Expectations should be made clear at the beginning of the relationship and as soon as possible if changes occur;
- (ii) Many volunteers prefer to assist with a single activity (ie. swimming), while others simply prefer to come for a certain period of time (ie. every second Sunday afternoon).

Practicum and Work Experience Students

A number of different educational institutions and organizations apply to use our programs as sites for experiential learning. As much as possible we feel a duty to support these students, for several reasons:

- (a) Access to new ideas about supporting people with disabilities in the community;
- (b) To provide extra support for those we work with;
- (c) To promote inclusive, community-based supports to adults with disabilities;
- (d) As a possible source of trained support staff.

Each organization that provides us with students has different ideas about the responsibilities of the student and the practicum / work experience site and the supervisor. The most profitable exchanges for both the practicum students and Spectrum have involved the following:

- (i) Permission of the individuals and/or families to have a practicum / work experience student involved in their lives, including their written consent for participation in any research projects, if applicable.
- (ii) A single site supervisor, preferably a staff or manager with at least two years experience with the organization.
- (iii) A meeting with the student, site supervisor and instructor within the first two weeks. At this time goals and deadlines should be set as to what the student will receive and what Spectrum will receive and how the practicum / work experience will be monitored. The relationship should be profitable for both parties. Terms of reference should be defined to ensure that everyone is talking about the same things (definition of inclusion, etc.) and has the same expectations (regarding feedback, etc.). If possible, discrete tasks for the student and supervisor should be given at this time.
- (iv) Clarification of limitations, insurance, policy and procedures as necessary.

While practicum and work experience students may carry out some of the same tasks as support staff, Spectrum may not use them in lieu of an employee. It is expected that practicum and work experience students will be familiar with and abide by the policies and procedures of Spectrum Society.

Policy

Every effort will be made by management and staff of Spectrum to support the work of volunteers, practicum and work experience students who want to spend time with persons served.

- (a) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students will be required to sign a Volunteer Job Description that specifies the duties, scope of responsibility, supervision, and assessment of performance relating to their volunteer assignment.

- (b) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students will have access to the Society's Policy and Procedures Manual and to in-house training provided by the Society, as approved by the supervisor.
- (c) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students may receive reimbursement for expenses directly related to their involvement in the program, with prior approval by the supervisor.
- (d) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students may be used to augment existing staff support, but they will not be used as relief staff.
- (e) Unless otherwise approved by the Manager, volunteers, practicum and work experience students will not administer medications, drive Society-owned vehicles or have access to confidential files.
- (f) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students will be required to read and sign the Society's Code of Conduct, and will be required to complete a Criminal Records Search.
- (g) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students will be supervised by an employee of Spectrum at all times, unless otherwise approved by the supervisor and, where applicable, by the individual or his/her representative.
- (h) Volunteers, practicum and work experience students who wish to use their hours for credit will be required to:
 - (i) Complete a volunteer application form
 - (ii) Participate in an orientation as arranged by the supervisor
 - (iii) Track their hours and activities as requested by the supervisor
- (i) The supervisor will assume responsibility for ensuring volunteers are kept informed of relevant successes, problems and social events they might like to attend.

Procedure

When a volunteer, practicum or work experience student comes to Spectrum, our goal is to get through the necessary paperwork in the most efficient way so they can get started with their assignment. The following steps are intended to assist personnel to facilitate the successful entry of a volunteer, practicum or work experience student into one of Spectrum's programs:

Note: these steps may not apply to practicum students from post-secondary programs that Spectrum has an established partnership with, where the screening of students has been reviewed and approved by a Director in consultation with the post-secondary program.

- (a) Individuals wishing to volunteer at Spectrum, or to complete a practicum or work experience placement with us, should put their request in writing and submit it to H/R.
 - i) Applicants will be asked to supply the names and contact information of two references. If the applicant is known to Spectrum (eg. a personal referral from a current employee, or a student from a reputable college program), then personal references will be accepted. If the applicant is not known to us, then we will request two work references. H/R will conduct reference checks.
 - ii) H/R will determine whether a personal interview is required and conduct the interview or delegate this task.
- (b) H/R will pre-screen potential volunteers, practicum or work experience students, and will then notify managers of programs where the applicant may be a good fit.
- (c) If a possible placement is identified, H/R will notify the applicant and refer him/her to the supervisor for a meet and greet. Unless otherwise approved by H/R, the initial meeting should take place at the office, during office hours, and not at the home.
 - i) The supervisor may decide to interview the applicant, with the involvement of persons served and/or families as appropriate.
 - ii) The supervisor will determine whether the applicant is a suitable match and will notify H/R of their decision.
- (d) H/R will meet with the individual and go through the necessary paperwork: signed job description, code of conduct, consent for criminal records search.
- (e) The supervisor will be responsible for ensuring that the volunteer, practicum or work experience student has a suitable orientation to the program.
- (f) The supervisor will be responsible for notifying H/R when the volunteer, practicum or work experience student's term is completed.