

Service Learning and Volunteering

Welcome and thank you for volunteering with Leisure Education for Exceptional People (LEEP). The following information has been collected to help make your volunteer/service learning experience go more smoothly and to answer any questions you may have as a new volunteer. We will briefly cover LEEP as an organization, explain programs that are offered, and review expectations as a volunteer. For the continuing success of LEEP, we rely on the support from our volunteers/service learning students.

LEEP recruits volunteers through local universities, schools, civic organizations, clubs, churches, greek organizations, and the community. Regardless of where our volunteers come from or why they volunteer, each volunteer will leave with an experience that will enrich both their lives and the lives of their clients.

What is LEEP?

LEEP was established in 1978 and is a non-profit, United Way agency that provides recreational opportunities for people with developmental disabilities in the greater Mankato area. LEEP provides recreation and leisure opportunities in an effort to enhance our participants' quality of life, teach lifelong leisure skills, and assist with inclusion into existing community programs, building awareness of the abilities of all people.

What are the benefits of volunteering with LEEP?

When you volunteer with LEEP, you are getting a valuable work experience, as well as gaining exposure to a fun and exciting diverse group of individuals. The biggest benefit is that you will have improved the quality of life for someone else, if even for an hour. And we hope that you learn something about yourself that you can use in other aspects of life.

What kind of time commitment is LEEP looking for?

Because LEEP has such a strong relationship with local schools, we ask that volunteers spend at least 15 hours per semester volunteering with preferably the same programs. This allows for the opportunity to become comfortable with the programs and to build relationships with the participants. We ask that you let us know up front how many hours you would like to volunteer and we will then work with you to fit your needs.

What is my role as a volunteer?

Depending on the program that you volunteer for, your duties and responsibilities vary. As a volunteer, your role is to be a friendly, supportive figure to the participants by encouraging positive social interactions between all participants. Some duties may include setting up/getting supplies ready for the program, working one to one or in a small group with LEEP participants, leading an activity (if comfortable), cleaning up after program, etc. LEEP staff will assist you with each program. The most important thing is for both the participants and the volunteers to have an enjoyable experience that benefit all.

Will I be solely in charge of groups or individuals?

No. Staff will be at each activity to supervise clients and assist volunteers with any concerns they have. If you are ever in an uncomfortable situation, let staff know right away. There is the opportunity to demonstrate or teach any special talents and skills that you may have especially regarding Special Olympics, Drop-Ins, etc.

Who are LEEP Participants?

LEEP participants have some form of mental retardation and may have physical disabilities and/or mental illness. LEEP serves individuals with developmental disabilities over the age of eight years, however the agency's largest population are adults. Clients may live independently, in a group home, an adult foster care setting, with family members, or in a supervised living situation. There are approximately 550 people who participate in LEEP programs throughout the year, many of whom participate on a weekly basis.

Program Cancellations?

In case of inclement weather, LEEP is very cautious. Should we cancel any event, we will leave a message on the voicemail announcing any changes or cancellations and also try to contact our volunteers. We will also place an announcement on the local Mankato radio stations 99.1 and 96.7. If you are ever in question, please give LEEP a call at (507) 387-5122.

What if I (volunteer) need to cancel?

If you are scheduled to volunteer and are unable to attend, please call and give us as much notice as possible. This allows us to find someone else to help out or gives us time to adapt our program if needed.

What about confidentiality?

We ask that any information you learn about a participant remain confidential. Even data as simple as a client's name is sensitive information and should not be

shared with others. Trust is established with participants when they feel safe to share freely. This relates to information about fellow volunteers and staff members as well. Help us maintain a safe, trusting environment.

We discourage volunteers from giving out personal information to participants, such as phone numbers or addresses. If this becomes a concern, please talk to LEEP staff about it. We also encourage volunteers not to accept or exchange gifts with participants. Often these seem harmless, but we have found that future problems are avoided by maintaining boundaries.

Will I need to keep track of my volunteer hours?

LEEP asks every volunteer to complete a volunteer time card. LEEP Staff will sign their card after every activity. Once a volunteer has completed their volunteer experience, they should return their time card to LEEP. If students need to complete any paperwork of their own (ex. for a class), they may do so at this time. Because LEEP receives community funding, it is very important for us to track volunteer hours with these time cards. Also, once you have completed your volunteer experience, LEEP will ask you to complete an evaluation form. We value feedback from our volunteers and will use the information gathered to improve our future volunteers' experiences.

How should I act when working with participants?

Every participant is different, just like everyone you know is different. Some just need someone to hang out with and talk to, some need more one-to-one care, and some need a little of both. There is no one right way to act. Just be yourself and realize that the participants are people who have the same needs and wants as all of us.

How do I address people with disabilities?

Speak of the person first, then the disability. We do this to emphasize abilities, not limitations. Do not label people as a part of a disability - don't say the disabled, say "people with disabilities." Some examples would include:

<i>Say...</i>	<i>Instead of...</i>
person with a disability.....	disabled or handicapped
person who has.....	afflicted, suffers from
developmental delay.....	slow person with
retardation.....	retarded

General Etiquette

Communication

Believe that you can communicate. You may not be an expert but you can gesture, write a note, read body language.

It is OK to ask most questions regarding a person's disability as long as it has to do with you serving them better. Ex. "It would be helpful for me to know what type of vision problems you have. Would you mind telling me what they are?"

Be yourself. This means talking, laughing, and giving positive/negative feedback about behaviors and actions just as you would with anyone else.

When talking to a person with a disability, talk directly to that individual, not the parent or interpreter who may be present. Treat adults as adults. Speak of the person first, then the disability.

Listen attentively when talking to people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish. Ask questions and clarify until you understand. Rephrase a question with different words when necessary and ask questions that require short answers or a nod. Repeat what you have heard to make sure you understand. Don't pretend to understand if you don't.

If talking with a person using a wheelchair for any length of time, try to place yourself at their eye level. This will avoid stiff necks and "talking down" to the person.

When greeting someone with a visual disability, identify yourself and those who may be accompanying you. When ending a conversation, let them know you are leaving, don't just walk away.

Respect

- ✓ Honor each person with unconditional positive regard. This means that no matter who they are, you respect them and believe in their right to life and leisure.
- ✓ Avoid being overprotective or over helpful. Avoid pity.
- ✓ Establish a friendly environment where people value each other. Acceptance by the instructor first, is often a prerequisite to acceptance by other participants. Role model.

Assistance

- ✓ Model appropriate behavior and positive interactions.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to offer assistance, however don't automatically give help unless the person clearly needs and wants help. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Respect the person's right to do as much as possible independently.
- ✓ Don't move a wheelchair, crutches or other assistive devices out of the reach of a person who uses them. Also, don't push someone in a wheelchair without getting prior approval.
- ✓ Never distract or pet a guide dog without the owner's permission.
- ✓ When walking with people who are visually impaired, allow them to take your arm and give verbal directions if appropriate. When giving assistance on stairs or seating, guide their hand to the banister or arm of the chair.
- ✓ Allow participants the right to choose activities and participate as independently as possible.

Adaptations

- ✓ Explain directions in multiple ways. Use verbal explanation, model the desired behavior, do hand over hand instructions when necessary, and/or re-explain and break down directions into smaller steps.
- ✓ Value both full and partial participation. Don't expect perfect finished projects or performance. Participating in the group is often an accomplishment in itself for the participant.
- ✓ Behavior is not limited but redirected. Think of it as not doing "more", but doing "different".
- ✓ Place the participant with higher needs (easily distracted) in the center of the group. When placed at the end or outer edge, the individual tends to withdraw themselves, become distracted or wander away. When placed in the middle of the group, the participant will be more attentive and observe other participants modeling appropriate behavior.
- ✓ Whenever in doubt, ask the participant with the disability how they would like to be treated. They know themselves better than anybody else and will tell what they want.
- ✓ Make adaptations to games/programs by making minor changes in the rules or procedures for the individual or the group, so success can be achieved by all.

This may mean that participants can double dribble during a basketball game, etc. An option would also be to make individual projects, group/team projects.

How do I deal with a behavior incident?

As a volunteer, you will never be alone with the participants. If a participant is not following directions, name calling, or any other behavior incident, please let the LEEP staff know immediately and they will deal with the situation. We want our volunteers to have the best possible experience and would prefer our staff to deal with disciplinary actions.

What if a participant gets hurt during an activity?

Again, please let the LEEP staff know immediately and they will attend to the injury. LEEP's policy is that we only do basic first aid procedures. If a participant needs more care than we can provide, we will call their staff/guardian or 911 for an ambulance depending on the immediate need.

For both the behavior incident and the accident, LEEP has a form that will need to be completed by the LEEP staff. When they complete these forms, they may ask for more information from our volunteers.

What if I am unsure of how to handle a situation?

If you ever have a question or don't know how to handle a certain situation that may arise, please ask the LEEP Program Staff. If you don't feel comfortable asking the Program Staff, please feel free to call the Executive Director at the LEEP Office at (507) 387-5122.