



# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

# MISSION STATEMENT

To create an environment of opportunities where Head Start and Early Head Start children and families are empowered to change their lives.

## HOW VOLUNTEERS BENEFIT RUCD

From young adults to retirees, volunteers play a vital role in the life of RUCD Head Start. Volunteers who provide leadership, education, support, and advocacy are the heart and strength of this dynamic organization and have been since its inception in 1966.

Volunteers help RUCD satisfy the matching or cost-sharing requirement. Head Start and Early Head Start funds come directly from the federal government. However, the government does not provide all the funds needed to operate the programs. They expect that 20% of the funds come from in-kind contributions, which are non-monetary donations of time, space, or materials. This means no money is exchanged, but the donation is valued at the rate the program would typically pay for the service. For example, a dollar amount for a parent helping in the classroom would be assigned at a rate equal to that of a teacher aide.

Volunteers become trained to step into whatever the organization needs.

Examples of ways one could volunteer or donate include storytelling and supervising play activities, participating in recruitment and partnership events, helping with health screening, or assisting with food preparation.

By participating in all aspects of Head Start, volunteers enable RUCD to live out its mission so that services and outreach can remain strong.



## **HOW RUCD BENEFITS VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers are provided ongoing support and encouragement. They receive training to develop skills and discover different interests. Volunteers have opportunities to utilize their expertise in meaningful ways. RUCD is happy to provide a reference when volunteers apply for paid work, housing, education, or other volunteer positions.

# POLICIES & GUIDELINES

## INTEREST FORM

To help ensure our organization is a good fit, individuals who wish to volunteer must complete the interest form available on our website at [www.rucd.org](http://www.rucd.org)

## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE

In Head Start classrooms, we use positive behavior guidance to support children's social and emotional development. This means helping children learn appropriate behaviors through clear expectations, encouragement, and consistent routines. Volunteers can support this by modeling respectful behavior, noticing and praising positive actions, and gently redirecting challenging behavior. We avoid punishment and instead focus on teaching children what to do, using patience, kindness, and understanding. If you're ever unsure how to respond to a situation, ask a teacher or staff member for guidance.

## REPORTABLE INCIDENTS

As a volunteer, it's important to help prevent reportable incidents by always following classroom safety guidelines and staying within sight and sound of a staff member. Reportable incidents include injuries, suspected abuse or neglect, missing children, or releasing a child to someone not authorized. Child maltreatment includes any form of harm or mistreatment such as grabbing or pulling a child roughly, using a raised voice, making threats, or any behavior that could cause fear or injury. To avoid these, never be alone with a child, don't lift or carry children, and always treat children with kindness and respect. If you see something concerning or aren't sure what to do, alert a staff member right away.

# POLICIES & GUIDELINES

## ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

RUCD is committed to providing an environment that encourages the use of computers and electronic communications as essential tools to support its work. All persons who use RUCD computers and electronic communications systems, including, but not limited to, e-mail and access to the internet, are subject to RUCD's computer and internet use policy. Each person is responsible for ensuring that technology is used only for RUCD business and in a manner that:

- is responsible, professional, and legal;
- does not compromise the confidentiality of proprietary or other sensitive information;
- does not compromise the security of RUCD's computer resources.

Those using the system do not have a personal privacy right in any matter created, received, sent, or stored on RUCD's computer resources, whether or not the matter is designated as private or confidential.

## TRAINING

Training is required for all volunteer positions. Volunteer training begins with a standard orientation. Certain volunteers will continue with a specialized training specific to their volunteer duties.

## DOCUMENTING CONTRIBUTIONS

Staff will assist volunteers to document contributions of time, space, or materials using the In-Kind Pro app or RUCD in-kind form.

# POLICIES & GUIDELINES

## BUILDING SECURITY

Individuals must be accompanied by a staff member at all times while volunteering at an RUCD facility. Key fobs and/or keys are not issued to volunteers for security reasons.

## HARASSMENT POLICY

Any unwanted behavior or language based on gender, color, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, marital status, age, national origin, or any other forms of individual diversity is considered harassment. RUCD respects each person's right to their dispositions, beliefs, and values. Immediately report any harassment to a staff member. If a staff member is the offending party, it should be brought to the Executive Director or to a member of the board. All complaints will be dealt with in a timely manner.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

We expect all volunteers to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of staff, families, and other volunteers. Any information that a volunteer hears or reads about its participants, employees, interns, or donors, that is not otherwise publicly available, constitutes confidential information.

- ▶ All information about children and families receiving services from RUCD is confidential.
- ▶ No information may be shared with any person or organization outside RUCD without the prior written permission of the family.
- ▶ Volunteers should strive to protect the privacy of children and families in the program and should view or print confidential family information only when it is necessary to do so to better serve the family.

# POLICIES & GUIDELINES

## DRESS CODE

Clothing should be modest, respectful and appropriate for carrying out volunteer duties.

Extremely tight fitting clothes, low cut necklines, clothing with holes and/or stains, mini skirts, leggings-worn uncovered, and short shorts are not appropriate.

When considering how to dress appropriately, volunteers should be mindful that RUCD works with children and families.

If personal dress conflicts with a positive work environment or an individual's ability to perform assigned tasks, the volunteer will be encouraged to identify appropriate solutions. An environment of mutual cooperation, tolerance and respect is RUCD's goal.

## CODE OF CONDUCT

Each individual has the responsibility to adhere to the Code of Conduct and to report any suspected violations promptly. Contact information for administrative staff can be found on RUCD's website at [www.rucd.org](http://www.rucd.org). The Director of Operations shall be responsible for ensuring that all complaints about unethical or illegal conduct are investigated and resolved. The Director of Operations will advise the Executive Director and/or the Board of Directors of all complaints and their resolution.

# POLICIES & GUIDELINES

## **SOLVING AGENCY PROBLEMS & GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

RUCD has an open door policy and encourages volunteers to share their questions, concerns, and suggestions with program staff. If a problem cannot be solved through informal discussion, volunteers should put their grievance in writing and submit it to one of the following appropriate persons. If the grievance is with another volunteer, intern, or employee, submit your grievance to the Director of Operations. However, if the grievance is with the Executive Director, submit your grievance to the Board Chair.

If allegations of serious misconduct are brought against a volunteer, that person may be placed on leave. During this period, an initial investigation by the Executive Director or a designee will determine whether to reinstate, terminate, or continue to allow the person to continue as an RUCD volunteer. Further investigation may be needed to make this decision.

It is important to RUCD that any conduct that interferes with or adversely affects a volunteer is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action ranging from a warning to immediate discharge. Depending on the conduct, disciplinary action may be taken in a variety of ways, including but not limited to verbal or written warnings, disciplinary probation, suspension or termination.

It is contrary to the values of RUCD for anyone to retaliate against any individual who in good faith reports an ethics violation, or a suspected violation of law, such as a complaint of discrimination, or suspected fraud. An employee, board member, or volunteer who retaliates against someone who has reported a violation in good faith is subject to discipline up to and including separation of service.

# TIPS FOR SUCCESS

## 1. COMMUNICATION

The first step is to always keep the dialogue going. Before arriving at your destination, talk to your host a lot and ask questions about work hours, what you'll be doing, length of stay and what your accommodation will be. Be clear about any expectations you have and be transparent and honest from the start.

While you're volunteering, it's also very important to talk with your host about any problems that may arise or anything you're unhappy with. Giving and receiving feedback is always encouraged. Many times the solution to a problem is a good conversation.

## 2. PROACTIVITY

Being proactive during your work exchange is key. Hosts like to see when volunteers pay attention and take initiative. Once you know which tasks are yours to perform, don't wait for directions or orders... take action.

## 3. COMMITMENT

When you fill an open volunteer position, you are committing to helping your host. This includes paying attention to your work schedule, being on time, giving attention and assistance to guests whenever necessary, and completing your assigned tasks in the most productive way possible.

# TIPS FOR SUCCESS

## 4. EMPATHY

Empathy is very important for any harmonious relationship. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and act out of solidarity. Hosts, their guests, and the other volunteers you'll meet during your experience are also people confronting their fears and going after their dreams, just like you. If a problem arises, always put yourself in their shoes before you react.

## 5. AVAILABILITY

Respond to your host's messages, explain any other commitments or obligations (if you will be doing another activity or job besides volunteering), demonstrate a willingness to help and perform different tasks, finish your length of stay as agreed and don't ever leave your host hanging.

## 6. FOCUS ON THE WAYS OF THE CULTURE

One of the greatest riches that we have is culture, and cultural diversity is what makes the world so special. Culture can change from neighborhood to city to state to country, and can distinguish itself on language, cuisine, leisure activities, family life, community traditions, and more.

Therefore, while volunteering, remember that you are in a place with a culture different from yours and that it needs to be treated with total respect. When it comes to culture, there is no right or wrong, just differences.

