

PROJECT CHASM

Tips for Volunteers

Introduction

Volunteer work of any type is an opportunity to grow as both a professional and as an individual. Motivation for volunteering varies but reasons may include:

1. Specific curricular requirements
2. Humanistic commitments
3. Altruism
4. Spiritual values
5. Opportunities for professional experience
6. Thrill of activities outside of mainstream

Homeless Outreach

Working among the unsheltered homeless provides a unique opportunity to make a difference among some of the most marginalized in our society. The work is physically, emotionally, and mentally challenging. The challenges are enormous while the rewards are often heart-felt and life-changing.

Volunteer Preparation

Volunteers engaged in street-based homeless outreach need to be well prepared for their roles. The following “TIPS” will help keep you focused, enthusiastic and sane! They will also help insure that our outreach remains client-centered and outcome focused.

TIPS for Volunteers

Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers

- ① Commit yourself to being well prepared physically, emotionally, and spiritually
- ① Develop an awareness of the causes, experience, patterns and politics of homelessness
- ① Continually increase your knowledge about homelessness related health conditions and care.

TIPS for Volunteers

Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers

- ① Present yourself in a genuine and friendly manner.
- ① Avoid being judgmental. Remain objective.
- ① Be respectful of others' desire for privacy. Be assertive but not intrusive .
- ① Maintain confidentiality at all times.
- ① Keep your promises! Be trustworthy, reliable and predictable.

TIPS for Volunteers

Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers

- ⦿ Respect people as ends, not means. Never exploit clients for personal or agency gain.
- ⦿ Be advocates for improving client health. Reinforce good choices. Educate about harmful ones.
- ⦿ Do not attempt to intervene in any area in which you are not trained or authorized.

TIPS for Volunteers

Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers

- Refrain from imposing your moral or religious beliefs on others.
- Refrain from having social or emotional relationships with clients outside of work.
- Do not use your home to shelter clients.
- Do not accept cash from clients. Accept gifts only if culturally appropriate.

TIPS for Volunteers

Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers

- Refrain from giving clients personal gifts or cash.
- Never engage in sexual or illicit activity with clients.
- Do not bring alcohol or controlled drugs on street rounds.
- Never carry weapons on street rounds.

TIPS for Volunteers

Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers

- ① Do not withhold information from clients about resources from which they could benefit.
- ② Devote some of your time and energy to becoming an advocate at a public information or policy-making level.
- ③ Develop practices of self-care and renewal within and outside of your volunteer efforts.

Summary

Volunteering for Project CHASM can provide a rich and rewarding experience. You will witness both the best and the worst of the human condition. In addition, you will discover for yourself the true meaning of caring. Some of you will be motivated to do more, others will graciously decline further involvement. All of you will be touched in a way you never expected. Welcome to Project CHASM!

Summary

Adapted from the “Volunteer TIPS” of
Project MUSHROOM, Morgantown, WV.