



A Handbook for Parents and Community Volunteers in Our Schools



OTTAWA
NETWORK FOR
EDUCATION



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OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Volunteers Make All the Difference	1
ONFE - Ottawa Volunteers in Education	2
For Many Years...	3
The Role of the Volunteer	4
Volunteer Opportunities	6
Confidentiality, Disclosure and Behaviour	8
Tips for Volunteers	9
Orientation and Training	12
The Volunteer and the School	13
Volunteer Rights	14
Volunteer Responsibilities	15
Safety and Personal Safety	16
Liability	17
Review of Individual Placements	18
Volunteer Self-Evaluation	19
Notes	20

The material in this handbook has been compiled and adapted using national and international sources involved with volunteer services to schools.



**“If we succeed in giving the love of learning,
the learning itself is sure to follow.”**

-Sir John Lubbock

VOLUNTEERS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

By choosing to become a school volunteer, you have joined the increasing number of Canadians committed to the enrichment of our educational system. We hope that sharing your skills and experience with our students will give you the satisfaction of knowing that you are playing an important part on their journey of learning and, in doing so, investing in their future.

Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.”

Thank you for your gift of time.

This handbook was made possible with the generous support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Ottawa Network for Education (ONFE) facilitates

dialogue and action to support public education in our community - from Kindergarten to PhD. In partnership with local school boards, colleges, universities and other stakeholders, ONFE develops and implements initiatives that leverage community resources to support student success. ONFE has played a lead role in developing over forty innovative education programs since its inception in 1985.

Collaboration is key to all ONFE activities. The Ottawa Volunteers in Education (OVIE) program, bringing together volunteers, schools and students, illustrates the ONFE spirit of collaboration. The OVIE program enriches and enhances a student's learning experience - it is a significant investment in our future.

Our volunteers are passionate, dedicated and committed to student success.

Volunteering to help a student is one of the most fulfilling ways to be part of your community. ONFE knows that caring members of the community, of all ages and cultures, can make an immense contribution to children in our schools. OVIE provides a matching service to link community volunteers with the needs of individual students and teachers in participating school boards.

MISSION:

To foster community collaboration in supporting school-based activities designed to enhance the personal and academic development of students.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

- To increase the participation of community volunteers in order to enhance school-based activities and academic learning within the Ottawa region
- To improve risk management through a revised screening process
- To develop school/community/business partnerships in order to recruit volunteers with specialized skills and/or interests
- To provide a professional, supportive volunteer management system for program delivery and the maintenance of current volunteers

You can make a difference in a child's life! A little extra help from tutors once a week could help a student understand new concepts in language and math. Mentors can boost a child's self-esteem. Sharing your passion for a career or hobby can influence a child's career aspirations. The list goes on...

FOR MANY YEARS...

... volunteers and paid workers have shared the workplace in non-profit organizations and public institutions. In a few cases, volunteers provide the core services and programs, supported by paid staff. However, in most cases the situation is reversed: paid staff are the primary service providers and their work is complemented and extended by that of volunteers.

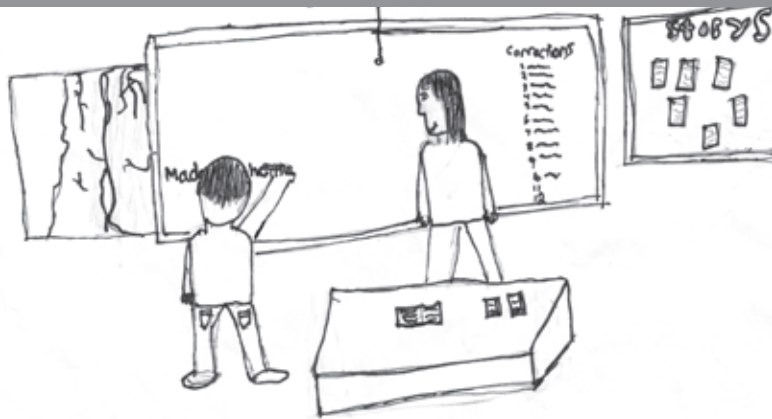
During the last three decades, schools have traditionally incorporated parents as volunteers, particularly in classroom assistance at the kindergarten/primary level, in libraries, sports programs and on class trips. These parent volunteers continue to provide tremendous support to all facets of school life. Due to socio-economic changes and various other factors, however, many schools are now experiencing a decrease in parental volunteering. At the same time, schools are being challenged by the increasing demands on educational institutions as well as by the consolidation and limiting of paid staff and support services. Simultaneously, there is a greater awareness of the many advantages for schools and communities to develop and strengthen meaningful partnerships.

Living in such an environment, we have become aware of the many additional resources within our school neighbourhoods. Members of the community (retirees, seniors, university students, men and women on long-term disability as well as corporate volunteers) have a great variety of skills and interests. They also have accumulated knowledge through many years of life experiences. Aspects of curriculum and classroom teaching/learning are being enhanced and enriched by the services of these Community Volunteers. Positive intergenerational and multicultural relationships are developed as students are offered supplementary opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, to be encouraged in their learning and to gain additional information and insights offered from such a wide variety of people who represent the community.

These conditions demand that we identify and clarify the role of volunteers, the relationship of the volunteers to paid staff and their place within the school.



Volunteers do not replace staff and are not placed in activities which rely solely on the volunteer.



THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTEER

A volunteer is an individual who undertakes an activity or service by choice or in service to an individual, or individuals, through organizations without salary or wage.

VOLUNTEERS SHALL:

- not be placed in activities which rely solely on volunteers
- always work in teacher-directed or teacher-supervised activities
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of students and teachers
- honour the commitment to the school, class, group or individual
- accept the teacher's methods of implementing school policies, standards and the curriculum
- support the teacher's efforts in promoting positive student behaviour
- report any concerns to the teacher

A VOLUNTEER:

- offers extra help and support for designated groups or individuals at the request of the teacher and under the teacher's direction
- cares, nurtures and supports children and youth
- offers opportunities to enrich programs

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

- Students gain exposure to a wide range of life experiences, which adds to a positive learning environment.
- Students receive more individual attention, support and encouragement. This helps them to overcome obstacles, increase motivation and develop self-confidence.
- Students benefit from expanded services in libraries, labs, lunch rooms and other non-classroom activities.

BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

- Teachers can delegate tasks for the provision of extra help and support for designated groups or individuals.
- Teachers can expand programs to meet the changing needs of their students.
- New experiences, interests and skills are brought to the classroom by the volunteers.

BENEFITS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Volunteers derive satisfaction from making an important contribution to the school community.
- Volunteers receive recognition, affection and respect of students and staff for their contribution.
- University and college volunteers apply classroom experience toward career choices and post-graduate studies.
- Volunteers develop new skills, new opportunities for networking and new friendships.

BENEFITS FOR THE SCHOOL

- The presence of the school in the community is enhanced when volunteers become advocates for the children and the staff.
- Positive partnerships between school and community are effective public relations tools.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer tasks will vary depending on the needs of the particular school. The following are some typical examples of areas where volunteers are needed:

General Classroom Assistance > Volunteers are assigned to a specific teacher and carry out various tasks depending on a teacher's needs (assisting with learning activities, oral reading, creating displays, helping young children with their clothing, playground supervision).

Remedial/Special Education > Volunteers provide assistance to learning disabled students in reading, language skills and math.

Tutoring > Volunteers work with students individually or in small groups to assist in key subject areas such as communication and numeracy.

Mentoring > Volunteers work directly one-to-one with students to provide friendly support, increase motivation, encourage attendance and help prevent "drop-outs."

Math and Science > Volunteers with proficiencies in these subject areas offer valuable support in Intermediate and Secondary schools.

Languages > Volunteers with total fluency in French support French Immersion programs. Volunteers also assist in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

Electives/Enrichment > Volunteers introduce and demonstrate their skills in Art, Drama, Music, Computers, Business and other areas so that students can experience "hands-on" learning.

Resource Speakers > Volunteers speak on a topic of interest to the class, either career or project oriented. Subjects might include careers, travel, adventure, special projects and interests.

School Clubs > Volunteers with specialized experience assist with school clubs (chess, computers, drama, science, etc.).

Trips, Excursions and Special Days > Volunteers can assist staff by accompanying students on excursions and by assisting at special events such as track and field or play days.

Library Assistant > A busy library needs volunteers to assist students to locate materials, prepare library cards, repair books, help with circulation tasks and re-shelve books.

Office Assistant > Volunteers assist with filing, copying, telephoning and related office tasks.

Early Literacy > This program is for Junior and Senior Kindergarten children and is implemented by trained volunteer readers.

Computer Literacy > Volunteers assist students in classrooms and in computer labs to help students develop and improve their computer skills.

School Council > Both parents and members of the community are eligible to serve on School Councils.

Fundraising > Volunteers are actively involved in a variety of fundraising initiatives that provide extra money for special school projects.



CONFIDENTIALITY

While volunteering in a school you may learn personal information about a student's background, learning abilities or social difficulties. It is important to respect every student's privacy and keep all such information strictly confidential. When discussing volunteer experiences with your family or friends, omit any confidential information about students, including their names.

DISCLOSURE

If a student discloses an incident of abuse or the volunteer has reasonable grounds to suspect abuse, the volunteer must report this information to the immediate supervising teacher and/or to the Principal. Volunteers must be aware of the fact that all employees of the Board have a statutory duty to report suspected cases of abuse of students under 16 years of age to the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa-Carleton (*Child and Services Act*).

BEHAVIOUR

Every classroom has its own character depending on the mix of students and the personal style of the teacher. The teacher is solely responsible for all matters related to behaviour and discipline. The volunteer helps to make the teacher aware of any concerns about student behaviour. It is important for the volunteer to support the teacher's efforts in promoting positive behaviour.

"Children have never been good at listening to their elders but they have never failed to imitate them." - James Baldwin

TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Working with Staff

As a volunteer, you will be part of a team of adults providing resources for student learning. Understanding the role of the staff members, their responsibilities, their personalities and their teaching styles will help you complement, with your skills and interests, the needs of the students and the school.

BE RESPECTFUL

It is very important that you always recognize and support the position of the teacher in front of the students. The teacher is the authority.

BE CLEAR ABOUT TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Never hesitate to ask further questions or directions if you are unclear about the procedures, the specific activity or the role you have been given.

PRACTICE FLEXIBILITY

There will be many times when weather, special occasions, illness or other events require adjustments to the regular activity or class time. Being part of the team requires a willingness to adjust to unforeseen changes.

HONOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

Be discreet and trustworthy with confidential matters relating to classroom and students. Only request information about students that will help you work with them. Never share names or incidents with people outside the school.

KEEP YOUR COMMITMENT

Be prompt and dependable, keeping to the agreed time and days. Alert the staff to upcoming absences in advance.

KEEP COMMUNICATION LINES OPEN

At a time that is convenient for both of you, ask for feedback that will improve effectiveness and provide feedback that will help the teacher's planning.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC

Let your enthusiasm, personal commitment and energy be contagious! Tell others about the volunteer program and about the good work paid staff do. Be a continuous promoter.

TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Working with Students

You will want to create a positive, warm learning environment when working with students. Remember, it will take time and patience for you both to feel comfortable and friendly. By simply being yourself, you will be taking the first step toward building the desired relationship. Some of the following points may also help as you begin to work with students.

A NAME IS VERY IMPORTANT

Make sure you pronounce the student's name the way he/she requests. Learn to spell his/her name correctly. Make sure the student knows and can pronounce your name. You might write it down for him/her, if it is a difficult name.

BE WARM AND FRIENDLY

Spend a few minutes making light conversation before you begin. Show interest in what students do and tell you. You are a very important listener - with a smile and a thank you, you can accomplish miracles.

SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

Tell the student something about yourself and your family. He/she will want to know that you are a friend too. Share experiences of interest to the student with whom you are working.

BE RESPECTFUL

Treat the individual in the same manner you wish to be treated.

RESPECT EACH OTHER'S PRIVACY

Keep confidences, unless it is something vital for the teacher to know. Even then, handle this very carefully and thus avoid student distrust of you and the teacher.

BE PATIENT

Students may be having difficulty with a subject and don't need any additional pressure. Although the progress may be slow, you will begin to notice some gains in time.

BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCES

Give the child time to think and organize what he/she wants to say.

BE HONEST

Never make a promise to a child that you cannot fulfill. Your approach and attitude will aid in developing trust.

EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES

Let students know that making mistakes is a part of the learning process. Do not be afraid of making mistakes yourself.

ADMIT WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW AN ANSWER

We can't know everything all the time. Feel free to ask the student or the teacher for help whenever you need it.

BE POSITIVE WITH STUDENTS

Use tact and positive comments. Remember attentiveness and effort can be as important as performance. Praise the student honestly and frequently. Let him/her know you expected success by saying "I knew you could do it."

ACCEPT THE STUDENT JUST AS HE/SHE IS

You are not responsible for evaluating a student's abilities, progress or behaviour. Be as nonjudgmental as possible.

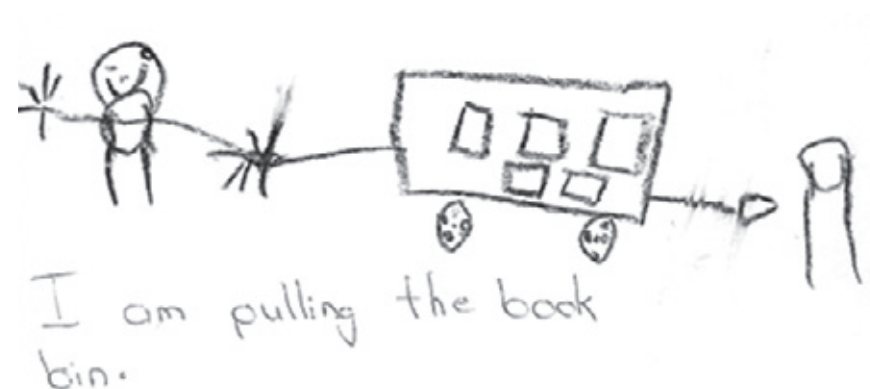
LET THE STUDENT TALK OUT PROBLEMS

If a student is upset, you need not solve the problem; however, by listening and talking, you let him/her know you care.

KEEP YOUR COMMITMENT

Students look forward to your coming. If you know you will be gone, tell them in advance. Keep your promises - students never forget.

Maintain a sense of humour!



ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

Orientation

Volunteers perform at their best when they are given encouragement and permitted to operate in an atmosphere of mutual respect and clear communication. Orientation is essential and may be conducted individually or in a group. Orientation with the In-School Coordinator will generally include an overview of the major school policies and procedures that will apply to the school volunteer, as well as a guided tour of the school to familiarize the volunteer with the school office, the staff and the school facilities. An introduction to the class or group with whom the volunteer will be working will provide an opportunity to become familiar with the working environment. The volunteer may be asked to sign the School/Community Volunteer Agreement.

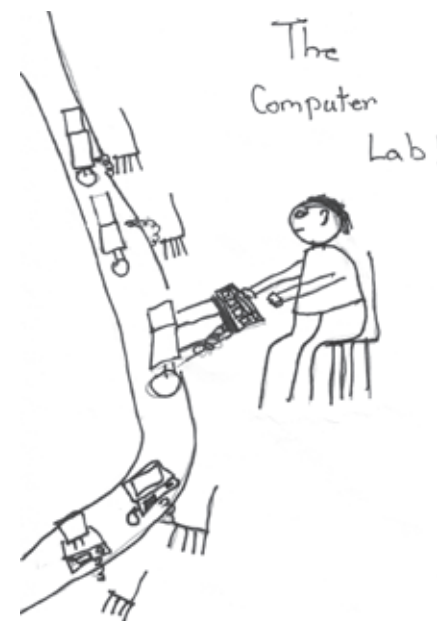


Training

Volunteers are encouraged to participate in workshops and training opportunities, which are offered by several Boards in the area. Topics of current interest to educators can help put into perspective the tasks of the volunteer in the classroom as well as an opportunity to look at the bigger picture of educational issues in our province.

THE VOLUNTEER AND THE SCHOOL

- The Principal has the final and overall responsibility for the school including volunteers.
- The Principal may designate a staff member as the In-School Volunteer Coordinator.
- Volunteers must observe the school's operational and administrative policies.
- Problems and complaints are always solved in the school, not in the community. Questions and problems that the teacher and volunteer are not able to resolve satisfactorily should be directed to the Principal and/or the In-School Volunteer Coordinator.
- The teacher and the volunteer should understand that the placement will be on a trial basis until both are confident that the assignment is appropriate.
- The time commitment and responsibilities of the assignment should be understood by both the volunteer and the teacher.
- Volunteers should not be left alone in an isolated area of the school. The teacher is always responsible for the students and volunteers.
- Volunteering at a school is a privilege that may be withdrawn by the Principal at his/her discretion.



RIGHTS

A volunteer has the right to:

- be properly interviewed, selected and provided with a job description
- be offered a position that is worthwhile and challenging, and that will promote learning and growth
- be given information about administrative structures and insurance
- expect that her/his tasks have been planned
- orientation, initial and ongoing training
- receive support from the designated supervisor
- be treated as a non-paid staff member and given appropriate recognition
- be kept informed about what is happening in the organization
- be trusted with necessary confidential information
- be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses only if previously arranged with the teacher



RESPONSIBILITIES

A volunteer has the responsibility to:

- choose an organization he/she can respect and support and be sincere in the offer of service
- accept only a volunteer position he/she believes and feels will meet his/her skills, interests and available time
- ensure he/she understands the policies and structures of the organization
- prepare for each work assignment, follow organizational guidelines and use time wisely
- acknowledge the need for training and participate fully
- consult with the supervisor when unclear on policy or action and provide constructive feedback which will improve effectiveness
- work as a team member, understanding the function of paid staff and staying within the bounds of the volunteer's position
- keep abreast of organizational changes
- respect confidentiality
- honour the commitment to be there on time - students and teachers depend on you



SAFETY

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to have knowledge of:

- sign-in procedures
- fire drill routines - planned exits, alternate exits, outside gathering sites
- emergency evacuation procedures
- location of health room, first aid stations
- lunchroom volunteers require information about student allergies
- student medical conditions (where relevant)

The volunteer should seek additional information from the teacher, the In-School Coordinator or the Principal about:

- volunteer supervision on school outings
- volunteer driving of students for school activities

In addition to Board coverage, volunteer drivers should review their own personal insurance coverage with their automobile insurance broker.

PERSONAL SAFETY

When working alone with a child, always ensure that you are within sight of other people. On those occasions when you are working alone in a room with a child, always keep the door open.

Young children often enjoy sitting very close or even snuggling while you are reading with them. For your and their personal security, always sit on separate chairs while sharing a book and never hug a child nor allow them to sit on your lap. Your greatest gift to them is the feeling of security, trust and encouragement.

LIABILITY

The four Boards in this jurisdiction (OCSB, OCDSB, CECCE and CEPEO) are covered with liability insurance by the Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE). The policy in each Board states that volunteer workers are covered for General Liability "while they are acting within the scope of their duties as defined by the school board."

"General Liability Insurance is designed to protect a person or an entity (such as a school board) against any legal responsibility arising out of a negligent act or a failure to act as a prudent person would have acted, which results in bodily injury or property damage to another party".

Reference: OSBIE - www.osbie.on.ca



REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENTS

Criteria for positive placements include:

- reliability
- punctuality
- initiative
- relationship with students
- relationship with staff
- contribution to the class

Placement reviews could include:

Self Evaluation > helps individuals to maintain strengths and improve weaknesses. It is important to evaluate ourselves and our performance.

Informal and Ongoing Feedback > occurs through day-to-day discussion between volunteer and staff. With good communication between staff and the volunteer, this type of evaluation will fall naturally into place. The decision as to whether or not a second or third type of evaluation is made will depend on individual circumstances.

Semi-formal Evaluation > occurs through pre-arranged meetings between staff and the volunteer. Discussions might cover the volunteer's particular strengths as well as any areas requiring improvement.

Formal Written Evaluation > some groups of volunteers, such as university students, will need written documentation and evaluation to provide a record of their in-school experiences that support applications to specific programs of study and/or job applications.

VOLUNTEER SELF-EVALUATION

- Do I make myself helpful by offering my services to the teacher when there is an obvious need for help?
- Do I give the teacher adequate notice of absences by reporting them to the office before the day begins?
- Do I address legitimate complaints through proper channels?
- Do I have good communication with the teacher?
- Do I accept constructive criticism and suggestions without becoming emotionally upset?
- Do I try to maintain a friendly attitude toward all?
- Do I emphasize the times when students behave well and minimize the times when they fail to do so?
- Do I plan for the activity that I have been assigned thoroughly, haphazardly, or not at all?
- Do I observe closely so as to know the student's likes, dislikes, preferences, enthusiasms?
- Do I really listen to what students have to say?
- Do I find opportunities for giving students choices or do I tell them what to do at all times?
- Do I give too much help to students rather than allowing them time to think?
- Do I ask questions when I don't understand my assignment?

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Name _____

Address _____

Home Telephone _____

Email Address _____

Name of School _____

School Address _____

Telephone _____

Principal _____

In-School Volunteer Coordinator _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Teachers _____

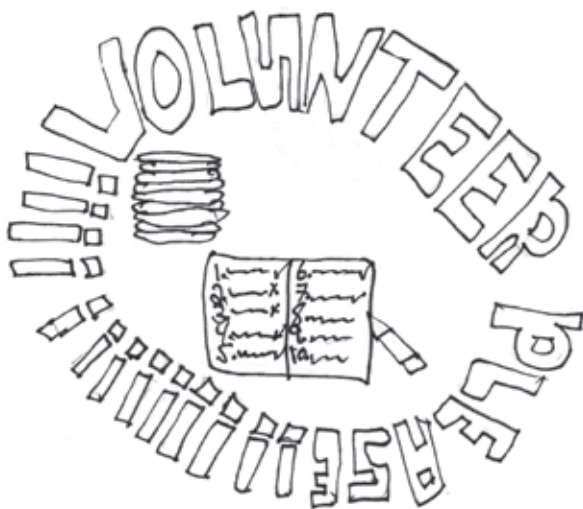
OTTAWA VOLUNTEERS IN EDUCATION

If you know of family members, friends and/or people in your community who have the skills, talents and interests that would be valued by staff and students, encourage them to contact OVIE to discuss possibilities for placements.

Ottawa Volunteers in Education

Email: volunteers@onfe-rope.ca

Website: www.onfe-rope.ca/OVIE



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