

HOPE

Helping Others Through Purpose & Engagement

A Handbook for Volunteers Living with SCI

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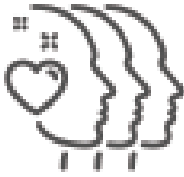
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This information is based on the HOPE manual developed for individuals with a brain injury, funded by a Craig grant.

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THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING



Well-being

When a person has a sense of purpose, copes with stress, works productively, and makes a contribution to the community (World Health Organization⁴).

Helping others has been associated with improved health, happiness, self-esteem, reduced stress, and decreased depression⁴. It has also been linked to fewer hospital readmissions and development of secondary conditions⁵. These are areas that people often have difficulty with after spinal cord injury (SCI) .

“I get back more than I give” is a common response from those who volunteer. As one individual has said, “Volunteering has given me a sense of value and purpose again.”²

So, what are the benefits of volunteering for you? They could include:

- Connecting to others
- Improving your sense of well-being
- Improving your physical health
- Evaluating your future work options
- Finding enjoyment
- Being an agent of change in your community



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A VOLUNTEER



Volunteering is defined as an altruistic activity, which means being helpful to other people without expecting to be paid.

Volunteering can help you to develop new skills, meet new people and have fun. It can also help you feel good about yourself.

Volunteering is typically more flexible than what you might be used to with working. It may be a one-time experience or it may be an on-going experience, such as answering the phones one day a week for a local charity. There is a wide variety of volunteer positions and organizations who need volunteers, so you can choose what you want to do based on your interests, passions, and what works best to fit your needs.

SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEERING AFTER SCI



Many different factors and life experiences contribute to your ability to be a successful volunteer. Experiences you have as an employee, parent, military veteran, friend, or community leader carry over into your role as a volunteer. Through these roles you have developed work habits, knowledge, experience, and skills that can be valuable to organizations. Volunteering offers you the opportunity to use your knowledge, skills and talents, in a flexible and less stressful environment where you can make a difference in the lives of others.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEERING AFTER SCI



Here are some general considerations to think through that may be helpful to you in your volunteer placement:

Environmental Considerations:

- Can I access the building and spaces I need while I am there? (bathrooms, break rooms, work spaces, etc.)
- Does the building have accessible parking close to the entries/exits?
- Is the organization accessible or close by public transportation routes?
- Can I modify the workspace to accommodate my physical limitations?

Task/Duty Considerations:

- Review the responsibilities of the positions and job duties.
- Can I modify tasks to accommodate impaired function?
- What adaptive equipment can I use?
- Can I complete tasks/duties from a seated level?
- Is there someone I can pair up with to assist with the physical aspects if I cannot complete them independently?
- Do I need to consider scheduling and pace of position to accommodate weight shift, fatigue, and self-care?

YOUR RIGHTS AS A VOLUNTEER



As a volunteer, you have certain rights and responsibilities. It is important for both you and your supervisor to know these rights and responsibilities².

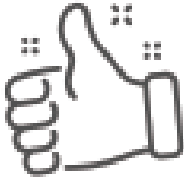
You Have the Right

- To receive the orientation, training, and supervision needed to do your job effectively
- To be given meaningful work
- To share your concerns, feedback, and suggestions in an appropriate manner
- To be treated with respect, and to feel valued and appreciated
- To advocate for yourself. There may be times when you need to let your needs be known, or to let someone know that there is a problem
- To receive feedback on your work and suggestions for improvement
- To be given as much notice as possible about changes that affect your assignment
- To expect that your time will be used effectively
- To ask questions

You Have the Responsibility

- To fulfill your commitments
- To foster good communication
- To act in a professional and respectful manner
- To represent the organization positively in the community
- To follow organizational policies and procedures
- To maintain appropriate confidentiality
- To make others aware of changes in your schedule and/or ability to complete your work
- To follow all safety instructions and any other specific guidelines outlined for you
- To be honest about your skills, knowledge, motivation, and limitations

SUMMARY



The benefits of volunteering can improve both your mental and physical health. We hope this manual will be a good resource for you as you begin the next phase of this journey. Volunteering requires effort, time, and dedication. It also offers you social connection, an improved sense of wellbeing, reduced stress, and a new sense of purpose in your life. We encourage you to use this handbook as you start volunteering to provide you with information and support to make the transition into this role a little bit easier and so that you can be a more successful volunteer.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- ***Etiquette Guide for Disabilities:*** <https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

References

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MY VOLUNTEER PLAN

Name of Agency: _____

Agency Address: _____

Name of Supervisor: _____

Agency Phone Number: _____

Other Important People Involved with my Volunteer Plan: _____

My Role and Duties: _____

Schedule: _____



Notes



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