



Volunteer Onboarding Plan

Camp Sunshine

Atlanta, Georgia

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Introduction

Camp Sunshine engages hundreds of youth participants in summer camps and other family programs across Georgia. With a professional staff of only ten members, volunteers play a vital role in the successful implementation of programming. Camp Sunshine relies on committed volunteers to deliver its mission of “enriching the lives of Georgia’s children with cancer and their families through recreational, educational, and support programs” (Camp Sunshine, 2017a). Potential volunteers must be at least 21 years old and have a high school diploma or higher degree, desire to work with children, strength and endurance required to maintain consistent supervision of children, ability to be a positive member of a team, adaptability, and the visual and auditory ability to identify and respond to environmental and other hazards related to programming. Volunteers complete an application which includes references, a background check, and a series of interviews (Camp Sunshine, 2017b). Before each camp season, a needs assessment takes place. This needs assessment determines the number of new staff that will be needed for the upcoming camp season based on the returning staff from previous camp seasons. This allows for the identification of any specialized skills and abilities needed to fill volunteer roles.

To initiate and set the stage for a positive volunteer experience, a well-planned onboarding process is necessary. An effective formal onboarding process allows the organization to provide volunteers with policies, procedures, and compliance requirements. This process also allows for everyone to get on the same page and leads to a shared vision. A well-planned onboarding process helps with increased job satisfaction, increased performance, and increased retention among volunteers. Camp Sunshine’s onboarding process will utilize what Talya N. Bauer (2010) calls “the building blocks of successful onboarding,” or the Four C’s: compliance,

clarification, culture, and connection. Although the Four C's were designed with paid employees in mind, the framework is also relevant to onboarding volunteers. In the case of Camp Sunshine, where volunteers are relied heavily upon in order to fulfill its mission, the Four C's provide a structured and valid method for engaging new volunteers and preparing them efficiently for their roles. This paper will explore each of the Four C's in depth and discuss how together they form a comprehensive onboarding plan for Camp Sunshine.

Compliance

The first component of the onboarding plan encompasses compliance items including "basic legal and policy-related rules and regulations" (Bauer, 2010, p.2). Some onboarding components are better suited to occur during the recruitment phase (Bauer, 2010). For Camp Sunshine, much of the compliance aspects of onboarding will occur during volunteer recruitment. During the recruitment process, it will be made clear that both criminal background checks and proof of necessary certifications (first aid, food handlers, or other medical certifications) will be needed. Criminal background checks for staff and volunteers is a requirement for accreditation with the American Camp Association (American Camp Association, 2016). Furthermore, as Camp Sunshine works with medically fragile young people, many of the volunteers come from the medical field. To ensure proper care and support are given to the campers, individuals who volunteer to help with the medical care will need to provide appropriate proof of education and experience before being accepted as a medical care volunteer.

It is important that volunteers are aware of the policies and regulations at Camp Sunshine and have easy access to them. Therefore, in their welcome kit, volunteers will be given a binder that includes a comprehensive list of all camp policies and regulations. Each volunteer will also be provided with a name tag to be worn while on campus that includes important phone numbers

and an emergency policies guideline on the back. In addition, upon arrival at Camp Sunshine, new volunteers will be given a general tour of the entire campus. Special emphasis will be placed on the location of emergency and medical equipment, evacuation routes and protocols, and locations that may be off-limits to certain groups. During orientation, new and old volunteers, along with staff, will role play common situations to practice response policies. These strategies are included in the onboarding plan to ensure the safety of all campers, staff, and volunteers while enjoying the Camp Sunshine experience.

Clarification

Once compliance has been covered, volunteers will be given official titles as “camp counselors.” This title reflects the responsibility and content of the position, rather than the pay category (Ellis, 2014). Camp counselors will be provided with a job description document, similar to the one shown in *The Volunteer Recruitment Book* (Ellis, 2014, p. 17). This document will provide an overview of essential elements of the position, as described by Ellis (2014), such as the purpose, responsibilities, outcomes and goals, training plan, and time frame. In order to drive full volunteer engagement, creators of the camp counselor job description will keep in mind Murphy’s (2012) “H.A.R.D. goals” framework. Camp counselors will be challenged with responsibilities and goals that are heartfelt, vividly described, critical, and so challenging that they test their limits (Murphy, 2012). In addition to the job description, camp counselors will also receive a document and chart briefly explaining the roles of paid staff members and leaders in order to provide further clarity. Having these documents in writing and readily available will help ensure volunteer counselors thoroughly understand the expectations of their roles and the organizational structure of Camp Sunshine.

Culture

In the next phase of the plan, when teaching organizational culture, the most important factors are 1) revealing a vision, 2) setting high performance expectations, and 3) caring for fellow workers (Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008). On its (2017) website, Camp Sunshine's vision statement clearly expresses the goals and attitudes present within this organization: "The lives of children with cancer will be restored and strengthened by the embrace of our Camp Sunshine community." The following list of values provide extra insight to the culture of Camp Sunshine: 1) a community of support for children and families, 2) trust and accountability, 3) inclusivity and respect, 4) a nurturing, compassionate, and safe environment, and 5) fun (Camp Sunshine, 2017a).

Throughout training, all activities will stem from and constantly return to the core values and vision statement. Volunteers will be provided with their own copy of Camp Sunshine's vision statement and reminded daily of the organization's goals and mission. Staff and trainers will model the desired traits, and each volunteer will be expected to embody the qualities of support, trust, community, respect, compassion, and joy. Embracing these qualities will contribute to the informal culture of positivity and pride in the organization. In order for volunteers to be the most motivated to join the Camp Sunshine culture, they must feel passionate about the cause. By participating in an introductory mission statement activity, volunteers will work to align their own personal core motivational drive to those of the camp. While it is extremely important for volunteers to embody Camp Sunshine's vision, it is perhaps even more important to have an alignment between personal values and organizational values (McKee, J. & McKee, T., 2012).

Volunteers of the 21st century are not looking to simply make a contribution, they want to make a difference (McKee, J. & McKee, T. 2012). Therefore, volunteers will be provided

models and guidelines of what is expected while allowing some free reign over how to achieve the expected outcome. Volunteers will be held to high standards through an accountability system in which progress will be reported regularly. The accountability system will include both qualitative and quantitative evidence towards progress and will be individualized based on the volunteer's individual goals. Through both goal setting and accountability, volunteers will be onboarded to Camp Sunshine's culture.

Connection

The final component of the onboarding plan is establishing connection. A sense of connection between volunteers and other members of the organization and community is important to the overall success and sustainability of the program. Connection can look like having a sense of trust and purpose, feeling comfortable, working with others to solve problems, and feeling confident to make an impact in the work environment. To promote connectedness at Camp Sunshine, the staff and the volunteers will spend time together to get to know each other prior to campers arriving. Conversations, icebreakers, and other cooperative games will be utilized to establish initial connection. Next, volunteers will be assimilated to the program by being assigned a mentor (Key & Jeyasekar, 2012). Mentors are returning volunteers who can assist newcomers in navigating the camp experience and serve as a designated and trusted resource of information when needed.

In addition to establishing this connection between volunteers and staff, both new and old, relationship-building with the youth being served will also be targeted. This will be achieved by spending quality time together and engaging in conversations or activities based on common interests. Building these connections will help ensure Camp Sunshine maintains a loving atmosphere and fulfills its mission, but will also serve as a future recruitment advantage.

Volunteers who feel deeply connected to the camp are likely to spread the word and refer new volunteers to the program (Ellis, 2004).

Conclusion

Camp Sunshine changes lives by creating joyful memories for youth with cancer and their families. These enriching experiences would not be possible without the contributions of dedicated volunteers. This onboarding plan, with emphasis on compliance, clarification, culture, and connection, helps to ensure that volunteers feel knowledgeable, prepared, and enthusiastic about their journey with Camp Sunshine.

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