

KNOX COUNTY HOMELESS COALITION – VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT



home help hope
Knox County Homeless Coalition

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Thank you for your interest in volunteering for the Knox County Homeless Coalition! Below you will find some general guidelines to follow, while working with us. We hope that your experience with us will be safe and rewarding—for both you and the clients you interact with!

VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

RESPECT AND TOLERANCE

1. Please be respectful of everyone present, including clients, staff, and other volunteers.
2. Remember that everyone is different. Try not to impose your values onto clients. Instead, listen as openly as you can. Be curious. Ask questions. Never blame/shame/pass judgment on clients who express opinions, beliefs or preferences that are different than yours.
3. Try not to give advice, unless a client asks you to. When a client shares, it is best to just listen and/or to validate the client's feelings. If you really want to give advice, when the client has not solicited it, then ask for the client's permission, first, and respect his/her response, whatever it is.
4. An important part of being respectful is keeping conversation topics appropriate. In general, we trust you to use your best judgment when speaking with clients. If you are unsure about the appropriateness of a conversation topic, then ask the Volunteer Coordinator or another staff person.
5. Our clients are all under high levels of stress and many also struggle with mental health challenges. Please keep this in mind. Do not personalize comments that seem negative. Try to be patient. If a client behaves in a way that feels inappropriate, then talk to him/her about it and/or ask for support from a staff member.

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BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are extremely important, especially with clients who are in crisis. Note that all clients are considered to be “in crisis,” before they get housed. Many different boundary issues can arise, when working at the shelter or offsite with clients. Below are just a few boundaries that are important to keep in mind:

1. Please **never** give clients money. If you feel strongly that a client needs money for something (i.e. a phone card, food, a prescription co-pay, etc.), then inform a staff person. The staff person will pass your message along to a supervisor and/or the client’s case manager; or the staff person may refer you to the client’s case manager, directly.
2. Do not bring clients into your home. If you meet a client offsite, be sure that the reason for meeting is appropriate and that the meeting is held in a space that is public.
3. Be cautious about transporting clients, when transportation is not part of your agreed upon volunteer activity. If you do transport a client, make sure that the Volunteer Coordinator has copies of your current, valid driver’s license and registration.
4. Keep physical contact to a minimum. Many people are not comfortable with being touched. If you do want to touch a client (i.e. to pat the person’s shoulder, or to give the person a brief hug), then **always** ask the client’s permission, first, and be sure that the touch is appropriate.
5. Whenever you are asked or inclined to do something that you feel unsure about or uncomfortable with, **trust your gut instinct**. If something feels wrong, then it probably is. So, stop whatever you are doing. **BEFORE** you move forward with the questionable activity, refer to these program guidelines and reach out to the Volunteer Coordinator or another staff person for feedback.

Please remember that care, respect and a willingness to ask questions can go a long way. Clients are usually pretty understanding about rules and boundaries, if you communicate about the rules and boundaries in a way that is respectful and open. Even if all you communicate is that you are unsure and that you need to consult with someone, clients will usually appreciate your willingness to be direct with them. Being kind and direct communicates to the client that you respect him/her as an adult and that you trust his/her ability to participate with you in the decision making process.

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RESPONSIBILITY

1. Dress as clean and neat as possible.
2. If you commit to a volunteer activity, then please do your best to follow through on that commitment. If you have to cancel or be late for a volunteer activity, then try to give 24 hours' notice.
3. Work safely; follow all food, equipment and building guidelines.
4. Do not give out personal information. If you ever feel uncomfortable with a client, then seek the support of a staff person.
5. Always try to meet with clients in public places and do your best to keep staff or others in sight or in earshot.
6. **If you are sitting with a client who is agitated, then make sure that others can see you and that you have a clear path to an exit.**
7. If you do meet a client in an environment that is not easy to exit and/or is private, with no one else in sight or in earshot (i.e. if you are transporting a client in your personal vehicle), then ALWAYS keep a cell phone on and easily accessible. If you do not have a working cell phone and are often alone with clients, then please speak with the Volunteer Coordinator. She can loan you a track phone to keep on your person, in case there is an emergency.

If you ever feel physically unsafe—or if you believe that a client is unsafe—then immediately CALL 911. If you are concerned about a client's mental health (i.e. if you are concerned that the client may be suicidal), then call the local Crisis Hotline at: 888-568-1112.

If you have any questions about the guidelines outlined above, then please contact Evelyn Donnelly, the Volunteer Coordinator, at (207) 593-8151. If s/he is unavailable and your question is time-sensitive, then you can call Sydney Barnhart, the Coordinator of Program Development, at (818) 331-4014.

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AGREEMENT

1. I read and understand the duties and guidelines stated in the Volunteer Expectations.
2. I understand and will strive to act in a manner consistent with the Knox County Homeless Coalition Mission.
3. I recognize that volunteers are supervised by the staff person managing the volunteer program.
4. I understand that food, donated items, supplies, and storage space of Knox County Homeless Coalition and its partners are to be used only as directed by the staff person managing the program.
5. If unable to work during a previously agreed upon time, then I will contact the Volunteer Coordinator at: (207) 593-8151.
6. I understand that I am not to give out my last name, address, or telephone number to guests.
7. I understand that I must refer requests for financial assistance to the Volunteer Coordinator or to the Case Manager on Duty.
8. Any information shared between clients, volunteers and staff is to be kept confidential.
9. If a client seems likely to harm him/herself, another person, or Knox County Homeless Coalition property, then I will contact a staff person immediately. If a staff person is not available, then I will call 911.
10. I understand that if I (or any volunteer) have been asked to leave the premises, for any reason, then prior to returning to volunteer, I will need to meet with the Executive Director.

I have read the above guidelines and policies and agree to follow them.

(Printed Name of Volunteer)

(Signature of Volunteer)

(Date)

(Printed Name of Staff Witness)

(Signature of Staff Witness)

(Date)