



Volunteer Handbook

OPTiONS

PREMIER SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

WELCOME TO OPTIONS

Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to OPTIONS and thank you for your interest in volunteering! At OPTIONS, volunteers are the heartbeat of our organization. Your decision to dedicate your time, skills, and energy to our mission is truly appreciated and immensely valuable.

Your contributions have a direct and profound impact on the lives of people with disabilities. Through your volunteer efforts, you are not only assisting with day-to-day operations but also creating meaningful connections and fostering a sense of community and inclusion. Your remarkable commitment allowed us to allocate additional resources toward enhancing our programs and services, ultimately improving the quality of life for those we serve. Whether you're assisting with recreational activities, providing administrative support, or lending a helping hand at our events, your efforts make a difference. Your kindness, compassion, and dedication exemplify the spirit of volunteerism, and we are truly grateful for you.

This handbook serves as a comprehensive guide to help you navigate your volunteer journey with OPTIONS. It outlines the various opportunities available to you and provides essential information about our organization and the individuals we support. As you embark on this rewarding experience, we are committed to ensuring that your time with us is fulfilling and enriching. We want your volunteer experience to be not only impactful but also personally rewarding, as you gain valuable insights and skills while making a positive difference in the lives of others.

Thank you for choosing to be a part of the OPTIONS family. Together, we can continue to create a more inclusive and supportive community for individuals with disabilities.

Carrie Mercke
President and CEO



OUR MISSION

OPTIONS mission is to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities live and work in the community.

OUR PURPOSE

OPTIONS exists to provide people with disabilities such as Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, and Spina Bifida with meaningful daily activities to foster self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and opportunities to enjoy life.



ABOUT OPTIONS

OPTIONS is an independent, local non-profit agency (501c3) started in 1973 by parents looking for community based services for their children with disabilities. Although, we were founded in 1973, we continue to evolve, responding to the current needs of people we serve in our community.

For the last 50 years, OPTIONS has provided opportunities for people with disabilities to have rich, meaningful lives as integral members of our community. Our services focus on supporting each person's individual needs including where they want to live, work, learn, and socialize.

OPTIONS supports roughly 150 people in arranging and providing transportation, creating opportunities for community inclusion, developing relationships through a full range of employment programs, promotion of self-advocacy, and building independent living skills. Of that number, we support over 60 individuals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by providing in-home supports, managing their healthcare needs and assistance with finances. We also provide periodic support to individuals who live with their families.

OPTIONS has a variety of vocational and day programs to meet the needs of people with disabilities in our community.



OVERVIEW OF SERVICES

MAXIMIZING LIFE SKILLS



The philosophy of OPTIONS is to develop and improve the adaptive and behavioral skills needed for each person to maximize their potential. Each person's maximum potential is unknown and it differs from person to person. All staff strive to ensure that the individuals' needs are met so they may reach their fullest potential and independence. Some of the training skills provided including: money management, dining, vocational, personal care, and self help.

MEANINGFUL WORK AND ACTIVITIES



OPTIONS helps people with disabilities reach their employment goals through job placement and support. OPTIONS provides quality training and support services to ensure continued employment. Additionally, OPTIONS Enrichment Programs promote community involvement, education, and health and wellness. Participants have the opportunity to engage in activities and make friends.

SUPPORT BEYOND THE FAMILY



OPTIONS provides 24/7 hands on support for many participants. We have 3 community homes in the Hammond area. OPTIONS also has a Supported Independent Living program. This program assists people with disabilities to live in the community as independently as possible.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY



OPTIONS has a comprehensive Transportation Program that provides access to our community. Family members want their loved ones to have independence, develop life skills, and most importantly socialize with friends. Providing access to the community is the first step to building an inclusive community for people with disabilities. Access means that they can go to jobs, church, shopping, gyms, and local events. This inclusion provides purpose and a more fulfilling life.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



OPTIONS EVENTS

OPTIONS hosts a variety of events throughout the year, including the Employee Appreciation Luncheon, Be the Key Breakfast, Legislative Breakfast, campus parties, and dances. Held in the evenings, early mornings, or weekends, these events rely on volunteers for setup, decorations, food service, mailings, and engaging with participants.



ENRICHMENT

The OPTIONS Enrichment Program offers meaningful, engaging activities for people with disabilities through recreation and community involvement. Volunteers can assist with arts & crafts, fitness, educational sessions, sports, cooking classes, dance or Zumba, and field trips—supporting skill-building, social connection, and fun, whether regularly or for special events.



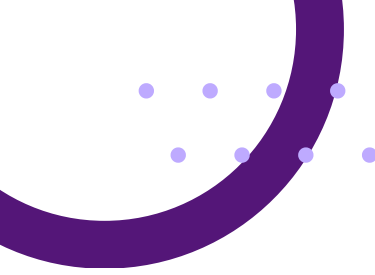
LEARNING GARDENS

OPTIONS Learning Gardens, established in 2020, uses therapeutic gardening to support individuals with disabilities. Volunteers can assist in the gardens or help facilitate activities with participants while promoting concepts like reduce, reuse, and recycle, farm-to-table practices, and healthy eating. The gardens are a hands-on, inclusive environment.



WEAVING STUDIO

The Weaving Studio Program at OPTIONS began in October 2012, inspired by a similar program in Germany and made possible by volunteer, Karen Pfiefer. What started as an enrichment activity has grown into a thriving business, providing meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities. Volunteers can support by assisting with sewing, organizing the studio, and sorting inventory alongside our Weaving Artists.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



FABULOUS FINDS

Fabulous Finds is a resale store in downtown Ponchatoula, established by OPTIONS to provide meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities. Open Monday – Saturday, volunteers can assist with sorting donations, hanging clothes, stocking merchandise, and supporting daily store operations alongside participants.



INTERNSHIPS

OPTIONS offers dynamic internship opportunities in Social Work, Human Resources, Marketing, and Kinesiology & Health Studies. Interns gain valuable hands-on experience that complements their education while supporting meaningful work with individuals with disabilities. These experiences are designed to build skills, strengthen professional development, and contribute to future career success.



GROUP PROJECTS

OPTIONS offers a variety of ways to get involved. Whether you're part of a church, school, social club, company, or organization, we welcome your group to participate in meaningful service opportunities. Contact us to learn how you can make a difference for men and women with disabilities.



BALLIN' 4 OPTIONS

Ballin' 4 OPTIONS is a basketball program that promotes healthy lifestyles, confidence, social connection, and community involvement. Volunteers can get involved by supporting game day operations through tickets, concessions, setup, and breakdown, or assisting throughout the summer by coaching and helping participants prepare for the big game.



VOLUNTEER POLICIES

By volunteering at OPTIONS you agree to abide by the following policies:

CODE OF CONDUCT

- As a volunteer with OPTIONS, it is imperative to uphold high standards of ethical and professional behavior at all times, whether within our premises, during volunteer shifts or activities, or when representing our organization in the community.
- We expect our volunteers to demonstrate respect, honesty, and integrity while fulfilling their duties and in their interactions with participants, staff, fellow volunteers, and community members.
- OPTIONS maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards racism, discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying. These unacceptable behaviors encompass offensive physical actions, public or individual humiliation, racial slurs or jokes, sexually explicit communication, unwelcome physical contact, unwanted sexual attention, and harassment based on various characteristics such as race, disability, gender, religion, and more. Any observed instances of such behavior must be reported to the Volunteer Coordinator immediately.
- Smoking is strictly prohibited within all OPTIONS buildings or work areas at any time. This includes the use of tobacco products, electronic smoking devices, and e-cigarettes.

SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF OPTIONS

Volunteers are not authorized to serve as official spokespersons for OPTIONS unless specifically designated by OPTIONS Chief Executive Officer. However, volunteers are strongly encouraged to advocate for the mission of OPTIONS in both formal and informal settings, excluding media interviews. In the event that volunteers are invited to speak about their volunteer experiences with OPTIONS at a formal gathering, they should promptly inform the Volunteer Coordinator.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES



RECORD KEEPING

OPTIONS takes responsibility for keeping record of volunteer hours. To assist volunteers with tracking their hours, Civic Champs Software training will be provided which allows a convenient means to log volunteer hours either from home or during their volunteer shifts. Hour logs should be turned in weekly by Thursday afternoon to ensure accurate and timely documentation. If you are unable to log hours digitally, paper logs will be provided.

UNDER THE AGE OF 18

Parental or guardian approval is necessary for volunteers under the age of 18. A Minor Volunteer Waiver is required prior to completing any volunteer activity. Independent volunteering is permitted for minors aged 16 and 17 subject to prior approval from the Volunteer Coordinator. Minors aged 10 to 15 must be accompanied by an adult for all volunteer activities, with approval from the Volunteer Coordinator.

COURT MANDATED HOURS

OPTIONS adheres to federal regulations and, as such, does not permit court-mandated community service.

CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK

In order to ensure the safety and well-being of OPTIONS participants, most volunteers will be required to undergo a criminal background check. Volunteers who decline to consent to this check may not be assigned certain tasks. Should a volunteer not pass the background check, they will be contacted directly to discuss alternative volunteer placements or potential refusal of assignment.





VOLUNTEER POLICIES

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

As a volunteer with OPTIONS, you acknowledge that throughout your service, you may encounter or have access to confidential information belonging to OPTIONS. This confidential information encompasses a wide array of data, including but not limited to trade secrets, medical and personal details of participants, service provisions, staff credentials, and business strategies.

You commit to maintaining the utmost confidentiality regarding OPTIONS' information, refraining from any disclosure or utilization unless essential for your designated responsibilities. This entails:

- Accessing confidential data solely for legitimate business or clinical purposes relevant to your role.
- Abstaining from any unauthorized disclosure, distribution, alteration, or destruction of OPTIONS confidential information.
- Ensuring the prevention of unauthorized access to confidential data and promptly reporting any such incidents to the OPTIONS Chief Executive Officer.
- Refraining from removing any records or confidential materials from the designated office space without explicit authorization from the Chief Executive Officer.

Your adherence to these confidentiality protocols is crucial to upholding the integrity and trustworthiness of our organization's operations.

QUID PRO QUO

At OPTIONS, we value the genuine spirit of volunteering and believe it should be driven solely by the desire to support our community and mission, rather than as a means for personal gain or exchange. We encourage volunteers to engage in activities that align with our organization's goals and values, fostering a culture of selfless service and altruism.

MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

State regulations hold volunteers to the same standard as employees. Building relationships with community members is important for the people that we support. However, care should be taken to maintain appropriate boundaries when building these relationships. Guidance should be sought from OPTIONS program staff about any activities with participants outside of your normal volunteer duties.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES

DRESS CODE

As representatives of the agency, volunteers share the responsibility with staff members to present a positive image to guests and the community. It is essential that volunteers dress appropriately for the conditions and requirements of their duties, refraining from wearing revealing apparel.



SOCIAL MEDIA

We encourage volunteers to share their experiences with OPTIONS among their friends, family, and networks. Find us on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. You're welcome to follow, like, and tag OPTIONS, and share photos and updates to highlight the fulfilling volunteering experiences we provide. However, please remember not to share photos without a participant's consent. Always ask for permission before including someone in a photo or posting it online.



ABSENTEEISM

If a volunteer cannot attend on their assigned volunteer day, please reach out to the site supervisor to notify them of your absence.



VOLUNTEER POLICIES

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse is the infliction of physical or mental injury or the causing of the deterioration of a participant:

- **General Abuse:** Overworked, Refusal of meals/water, participants not wearing safety glasses, Staff not following Infection Control/Universal Precautions when working with a participant.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Rape, Fondling, Exhibitionism, or Voyeurism (peeping tom).
- **Verbal Abuse:** Threats (I'm going to get you), Raising Voice (Shouting, Yelling), Judgmental Statements (Insults), or Cursing.
- **Punishment:** Time Out with Closed Door, Spanking, Beating, Hitting, Punching, Twisting limbs, Pinching, or Hair Pulling.

WHAT IS NEGLECT?

Neglect is the failure to provide the proper or necessary medical care, nutrition, or other care necessary for the participant's well-being:

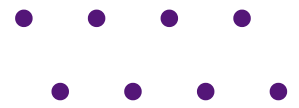
- **General Neglect:** Failure to give participants' medication, Participants not dressed properly (torn clothes), Exposure of anatomy, Failure to report any client injury or health issue.
- **Service Neglect:** Failure to provide participant supervision at all times unless written in the participant's IPP that they can function independently, Failure to provide and document participant training, and missing participant appointments without cause.
- **Environmental Neglect:** Failure to report any safety issue (vehicle or facility), not properly labeling chemicals or having MSDS sheets for all chemicals, not maintaining the environment according to OSHA standards (not cleaning the tub after each use).

WHAT IS EXPLOITATION?

Exploitation is the intentional expenditure or use of the property or assets of a person without the documented consent of the person, regardless of the value of said property.

- **Exploitation:** Borrowing money from participants, Asking participants to buy something for you, or Accepting gifts from participants.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES



WHAT IS DENIAL OF RIGHTS?

Denial of Rights – Each participant's rights are outlined in the OPTIONS Bill of Rights which each participant signs when he/she is admitted.

- **Denial of Rights:** Invading privacy, Reading mail without permission, Searching participant's purse, room etc. without permission, Denial of telephone calls, Talking about participants outside a professional setting.

Before any participant's rights are restricted or a plan is implemented to address an unwanted behavior, it must be discussed by the Interdisciplinary Team for that individual and then approved by the Behavior Intervention Committee and the Quality Enhancement Committee.

Participants will be physically restrained only when they are in danger of injuring themselves or others. In most cases, the area can be cleared so the participant has time and space to calm down without confrontation.

HOW TO TAKE ACTION

If you suspect or know of any violation of abuse, neglect, exploitation, denial of basic civil rights, or any of the above policies, you **must** report it immediately to OPTIONS President and CEO, Carrie Mercke, at 985-634-7769 or cmercke@options4u.org.



Volunteers are vital to the success of OPTIONS programs and services. We truly appreciate your decision to dedicate your time, skills, and energy to our mission. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of men and women with disabilities!

GET STARTED



**VOLUNTEER
RESOURCE HUB**



**CIVIC CHAMPS
ONBOARDING**

KEY CONTACTS

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