MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS, E.O.C EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Volunteer Handbook



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WELCOME 1-2

Philosophy 2

Program Goal 2

PROGRAM DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT 3

Classroom Volunteer 3

Regular Volunteer 3

A Good Volunteer is 4

Ways to Volunteer 5

PROGRAM CONTENT AREAS 6

Early Childhood Development Services 6

Parent and Community Engagement 7

HEAD START POLICIES 7

Confidentiality 7

Disabilities 7

Discipline 8

Drug-Free Workplace 8

Illness 8

Smoking Policy 8

Dress Code 8

Health Cards 8

Eating Practices 9

Telephones 9

ABC 9

Nondiscrimination Statement 10

VOLUNTEERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME

You are now part of a dedicated group of community members who have pledged their time and talents to support the preschool children in our Head Start program. Volunteers come from every section of our community, and each of you brings unique strengths that enrich our work.

We offer a wide range of volunteer opportunities, including classroom support, center-based activities, clerical assistance, and participation on committees focused on recruitment, outreach, and specialized services. Some volunteers share special skills at individual centers, while others work in groups on service projects that benefit multiple sites.

Our volunteer team includes students, senior citizens, parents, and community members. Every one of you is a valued part of our program. Although you serve without pay, you receive an intangible reward often called "psychic income"—the satisfaction that comes from contributing meaningful "In-Kind" service that helps make Head Start a success.

Many volunteers find that they gain more joy and personal fulfillment than they ever expected. We understand you may have questions about volunteer procedures, so we have prepared guidelines to support your experience.

After your initial interview with the site supervisor, you will receive an assignment that matches both your interests and the program's needs. We will work with you to identify the most convenient time and location for your service.

If you are assigned to a center, your Center Coordinator or classroom teacher will serve as your supervisor. They will help you make use of any special skills or interests you bring. Some volunteers may be supervised by other team supervisors. On your first day, please sign in upon entering the facility and report to your assigned supervisor. Afterward, you will be shown your work area. On subsequent days, report directly to the work site after signing in.

Please make every effort to arrive on time, allowing a few minutes to check in before the day's activities begin. If you are ill or unable to attend, please call the site. They will notify the appropriate staff and arrange for a substitute if needed.

Please dress appropriately for the assigned duties. If you are in the classroom, wear comfortable clothing and shoes—preschoolers are active, busy, and engaged in a variety of play-based learning experiences.

If you have not signed in for a month and have not contacted the supervisor, your volunteer placement may be reassigned. For classrooms, our goal is to maintain at least three adults in the classroom, typically two paid staff and one volunteer, often a community member, student, or parent; therefore, your attendance is very important.

We are grateful for your commitment to our program and the children we serve. Your time, energy, and dedication strengthen our mission and help create a safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environment for every child.

The Human Resources Department and Parent Engagement Coordinator are responsible for training all volunteers. Volunteers assigned to classroom settings will also receive additional orientation and ongoing guidance from the Center Coordinator and teaching staff. Monthly parent meetings and in-service training sessions are also available as learning resources and as part of continued development.

This is an exciting opportunity, and we are committed to learning and growing together. We strive to create warm, welcoming, and friendly centers. Head Start is a structured family-centered program, and we value a relaxed, respectful, and pleasant atmosphere that embraces all individuals.

To support your learning, we will provide access to the Personnel Policies and Procedures, as well as other written resources. We also encourage you to explore additional reading on Early Childhood Development and Education. Please ask the Parent Engagement Coordinator for assistance if needed. You will receive regular updates and communication through newsletters, phone calls, and occasional in-person meetings to ensure you remain informed and supported.

Every volunteer brings unique talents that enrich the classroom experience. If you have a craft idea, a special story, a music activity, or another contribution you would like to share, please discuss it with your supervising teacher in advance to determine whether it can be incorporated into the lesson plan.

Training will vary depending on the assigned position. Maintaining a safe, healthy, and supportive environment for children is our highest priority. You will receive instruction on special topics such as emergency preparedness. In the event of any classroom emergency—physical or emotional—please notify the teacher in charge immediately. Classroom teachers are trained in all emergency policies and procedures and will provide direction. They can also offer guidance in challenging behavior situations.

Please feel free to discuss any concerns or questions with the Center Coordinator or assigned supervisor. As a volunteer, you are one of our strongest connections to the community. We encourage you to share your positive experiences with Head Start within the community, including with friends and neighbors, to help promote continued awareness and support for the program and its services.

Philosophy

We believe that volunteer services increase a person's knowledge and understanding of the overall program. The involvement of community members and parents builds a broad base of advocates for Early Head Start and Head Start.

Program Goal

The goal of the volunteer component is to improve and expand the services provided by MCAEOC Head Start by involving individuals representing all facets of the areas served.

As a classroom volunteer, you can:

- Sign the Sign-In and Volunteer In-Kind forms (on all visits).
- Spend your first visit observing the children, staff, and environment.
- Establish a rapport with staff and children.
- Learn as many names as possible.
- Participate in mealtime with the children.
- Attend field trips, parties, and special events.

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

If you volunteer on a regular basis, you will need an up-to-date volunteer file. This will include a volunteer application, reference checks, a copy of an application for child abuse and neglect, a central registry check, a copy of a current health card, a signed oath of confidentiality, a volunteer job description, and a record of volunteer training. Proof of a criminal record check is also necessary for volunteers.

Since Head Start is a program designed to develop the whole child, it is essential that all learning experiences and services be coordinated with staff. This will eliminate too many demands on the child at one time.

Considerations:

1. *If you are unable to attend a scheduled time, please inform the supervisor or Center Coordinator.*
2. *Statements about a child should never be made in front of the child or other children. It is equally important to refrain from talking about program observations outside the center.*

A Good Volunteer Is:

Someone neat...but not dressy
Someone happy and helpful...but not too helpful
Someone PROMPT and DEPENDABLE
Someone aware and ready to ACT

The Qualifications of a Good Volunteer:

Friendly, warm personality
Ability to work with young children
Emotionally mature
Understands and likes children
Completed volunteer orientation
Committed to serve as a volunteer for a specific time

Hallmarks of a Volunteer:

Good listening skills
Enjoy children
Friendly, warm, and happy
Good communication skills
Understanding
Sympathetic
Ask meaningful, purposeful questions
Willingness to learn policies
Cooperate with leadership

Volunteers are an important part of Head Start. They improve and expand services and help meet the required non-federal share of matching funds for the Head Start grant. Volunteers are welcome to participate in all service areas of Head Start. They are required to complete a structured orientation, similar to employees. An application, drug screening, criminal background checks, and other screenings must be completed before volunteering.

Ways to Volunteer

Every parent has something valuable to share!

Classroom Support

☐ Greet children as they arrive each morning.
☐ Read to a child or a small group of children.
☐ Listen to a child "read" or tell a story.
☐ Share books, pictures, or educational materials.
☐ Assist teachers with learning centers and daily classroom routines.
☐ Help reduce children's waiting time by assisting with transitions and activities.
☐ Teach songs, finger plays, or simple games.
☐ Help children learn to use classroom tools safely.

Classroom Preparation

☐ Prepare classroom materials and learning activities.
☐ Organize classroom supplies.
☐ Set up art projects and activity centers.
☐ Help prepare classrooms for daily activities and special events.

Mealtime & Daily Routines

☐ Help children prepare tables for meals.
☐ Encourage conversation and learning during mealtimes.

Outdoor Learning & Field Trips

☐ Assist teachers on the playground.
☐ Help with outdoor learning activities and gardening projects.
☐ Assist teachers and staff during field trips.
☐ Help promote playground safety.

Health & Safety

☐ Assist with health, vision, hearing, or developmental screenings (as appropriate).
☐ Help maintain a safe environment for children.

Special Events & Family Engagement

☐ Help plan and prepare for family engagement activities and special events.
☐ Assist during Fatherhood Engagement activities.
☐ Help capture approved photos during events and activities.
☐ Welcome and assist families during special events.

Parent Leadership & Community Involvement

☐ Serve on the Policy Council or Parent Committee.
☐ Attend and support parent meetings.
☐ Encourage other parents and family members to become involved in Head Start.
☐ Help recruit father figures and male role models to participate.
☐ Help educate the community about the Head Start program.
☐ Connect families with community resources and services.

PROGRAM CONTENT AREAS

Early Childhood Development Services

Each family enrolled in Head Start is encouraged to be actively involved in the following Early Childhood Development Services

- Health and Developmental Services
  - Parents are urged and encouraged to have their child's physical and dental examinations before the child starts school.
  - Children with special needs receive the same services.
  - Health and dental activities are planned for the children.
  - Head Start works with the family to establish and/or maintain ongoing health and dental care.
- Child Health and Safety
  - Employees are trained to respond to medical and dental emergencies.
  - Policies are in place to prevent the spread of contagious diseases and address child safety issues.
- Child Nutrition
  - Meals served in the Head Start Center are planned to meet one-third of a child's daily nutritional needs.
  - Children, staff, and volunteers eat together family style and share the same menu.
  - Nutritional and educational activities are provided for parents and children to promote good eating habits.
- Child Mental Health
  - Activities, services, and referrals are provided to promote positive mental health.
  - Activities are provided for children to help them develop language, social, intellectual, emotional, and physical skills.
  - Employees work to help children develop confidence, self-discipline, and a positive self-image.
  - Activities are provided to help parents increase their knowledge of child development and early childhood education.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Family Partnerships
    - Parents are recognized as primary advocates and educators for their children. They are also encouraged to become involved in program policy making, educational activities, and community advocacy.
    - Family Service Advocates work with families to help them identify needs and strengths. They help families develop goals and access community services.
- Community Partnerships
    - Head Start staff work closely with community agencies to improve the delivery of community services to families and facilitate the transition of children into Head Start and public schools.
    - Employees work to help children develop confidence, self-discipline, and a positive self-image.
    - Activities are provided to help parents increase their knowledge of child development and early childhood education.

HEAD START POLICIES

- Confidentiality
  All information given by the parents or guardians of a child (either verbal or written) is kept confidential. Records are not accessible to unauthorized persons. Children's records are kept in a locked file cabinet except when staff or authorized personnel (i.e., licensing or evaluation teams) are reviewing records as needed to perform their assigned duties.
- Disabilities
  In accordance with Section 504/ADA, (Americans with Disabilities Act). MCAEOC Head Start does not discriminate on the basis of a disability. The Disability Manager is designated to ensure compliance with Section 504/ADA.

- Discipline:
  Physical discipline is not administered to any Head Start child.
  For the safety and well-being of all children, unacceptable social behavior will not be tolerated in the program. Staffing meetings regarding children with behavioral concerns will be held as necessary. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend the staffing.

- Drug-Free Workplace:
  MCAEOC Head Start is committed to providing a drug-free workplace. Unlawful manufacturing, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance is prohibited in any Head Start workplace and considered inappropriate behavior and grounds for involuntary termination of the volunteer assignment.

- Illness:
  If you are unable to volunteer at a scheduled time, please contact your supervisor.

- Smoking Policy
  Mississippi County E.O.C. Early Childhood Education Department shall provide a smoke- and tobacco-free environment. Head Start programs strictly prohibit smoking in all program areas. This includes classrooms, staff offices, kitchens, restrooms, meeting rooms, hallways, outdoor play spaces, and any vehicles used to transport children. In short, smoking is not permitted anywhere on MCAEOC premises, vehicles, etc.

- Dress Code:
  Employees are required to dress in a manner appropriate to their position, respectful of specific occasions, and consistent with all safety considerations. Professionalism is always expected, and personal appearance should support a positive, welcoming, and safe learning environment.

- Health Cards
  All staff and regular volunteers are required to have a TB screening with updates every 2 years. Failure to provide and maintain a TB screening could result in suspension of volunteer placement until a screening is provided.

- Eating Practices

  Eating and drinking, except as part of a regular meal or snack, is not permitted in the children's presence and will be limited to scheduled break periods and designated areas. Staff will be expected to eat lunch with the children. Mealtimes are teaching time, too. Children and staff are to serve lunch "Family Style", with everyone (this includes staff) seated at the tables, having every item placed on their plate, whether eaten or not.

- Telephones

  Telephones are installed for agency use. Personal telephone calls should not be made on agency equipment, except in emergencies. *The use of cellular phones is prohibited in the Head Start Centers.*

ABC REGULATION on RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

- No religious activities may occur during any ABC day, and no ABC funds may be used to support religious services, prayer, religious rituals, instruction, or programming at any time.

NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

For all other FNS nutrition assistance programs, State or local agencies, and their sub-recipients, must post the following Nondiscrimination Statement:

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the agency (state or local) where they applied for benefits.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information request-ed in the form.

To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington,
D.C. 20250-9410;fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(2) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

Civil Rights - Nondiscrimination Responsibilities