



Homework House

Volunteer Orientation Packet

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Introduction

Welcome to the Homework House of Holyoke! We are excited to have you choose to volunteer with our program. This orientation is intended to provide helpful, general information about our program and your role as a volunteer. Inside you will find information on policies, procedures and general program guidelines. It is not possible to cover every policy, procedure, program, event or situation in the handbook, therefore, feel free to contact a site supervisor for more specific information. We look forward to working with you, knowing that together we will make our community a better place.

Mission

Homework House strengthens our community by promoting educational success through free, individualized tutoring and mentoring for children at-risk.

Who Are We?

At Homework House of Holyoke, we aim to establish hope through education after school. Initiated in a pilot phase in February 2006, by Sisters of St. Joseph Jane Morrissey and Maureen Broughan, our after-school program follows the design of free, individualized homework help established by Barbara Abouchar in 1992 in a poor neighborhood in Orange CA.

We are a non-profit organization which provides free academic tutoring and mentoring to students who are having difficulty in school and are at-risk for academic failure. This program provides a caring and positive environment to students willing to make a commitment to improve their academic skills.

Volunteers donate their time to tutor the students and serve as positive role models. They have made a commitment to make a difference in the life of a child through academic assistance.

Who Are Our Students?

Our students come to us from the Holyoke Public Schools. They are generally from Kelly, Lawrence and Peck Full Service Community Schools but we accept students from all the city's schools. Holyoke, as a district, has only 21% of third graders reading at grade level. Our students are generally reading below grade



level, at-risk for failure, from low income families and often live in homes where English is a second language. Their parents are unable to help with homework. They are referred to us by teachers, counselors or by the parents themselves.



Homework House Volunteer Tutor Job Description

OBJECTIVE

To assist students enrolled in Kindergarten through 6th grade with homework completion and improvement of reading and math skills. The volunteer will also act to enhance self-esteem and confidence in the student through encouragement and positive reinforcement.

To build a positive and supportive relationship that will engage and motivate students to work towards improvement of ability and effort in all academic subjects, attitude about school and academic achievement.

LOCATION

54 North Summer Street and 340 Chestnut Street, Holyoke MA 01040

RESPONSIBILITIES

Participate in initial orientation session.

Attend tutoring sessions as scheduled. If an absence is anticipated, notify Education Coordinator or Site Supervisor.

Sign in when you arrive at your assigned Homework House location.

Assist students in reading, writing and math skills, in cooperation with HH staff.

Guide students in problem solving and completion of assignments.

Maintain student-focused, positive role-model behavior at all times. **No cell phones, please.**

Take initiative and pursue opportunities to interact positively with students during non-academic time periods (i.e. snack and game time).

Complete "Student Daily Report" after each session.

Discuss learner and/or program concerns with Site Supervisor.

QUALIFICATIONS

Patience and enthusiasm. Ability to effectively communicate sensitivity, respect and understanding of the needs of underachieving students. Ability to establish and maintain a trusting and positive working relationship with students. Accepting of people from different cultures, backgrounds and ages.

Commitment to bettering lives through education. **(No previous teaching experience necessary.)**

COMMITMENT

Attend training and orientation programs. Participate in 2-3 hours of tutoring per week. Attend follow-up workshops and tutor meetings as required. **Agree to volunteer for at least 3 months or one semester.**

TRAINING/SUPPORT

Orientation and localized trainings as necessary.

BENEFITS

Receive relevant experience for careers in education, childcare, and literacy related fields. Gain

satisfaction while helping someone else succeed. Contribute to your community. Achieve a broader cultural understanding and exchange. Develop fun and rewarding relationships. Participate in a successful program with other active, interesting volunteers. Fulfill course requirements including practicum, internships and service learning projects. Have fun!

VOLUNTEER SUPERVISOR

Jennifer McCarthy, Director of Programs email: jmccarthy@homeworkhouseholyoke.org

PROGRAM WEBSITE

www.homeworkhouseholyoke.org

What We Need From YOU

Our program is successful because of the tutors like you, who volunteer their time. We need tutors who can be positive role models and have the ability to relate and communicate with school age children. We need volunteers who want to mentor students and **be friendly but not friends**. We want volunteers to relate to students in a positive manner, in action, language and attire, giving them your full attention. We want tutors to interact with students, not just monitor their homework. Many of the students who come to HH have challenging school days and perhaps, challenging home lives. We need tutors who are able **to remain positive and professional** in the face of sometimes challenging situations. It is our mission that students who participate in the program will feel safe, affirmed and cared for while at HH. When they do, the learning will take care of itself.



The Routine

Each student at Homework House has a folder which contains: a Daily Report, their grade level, their reading level (which may be different than their grade level), a pack of High Frequency Sight Words (not all students will have these), and a list of suggested remedial activities for reading and for math. These remedial activities are specifically designed to align with the sequence of the Holyoke Public Schools curriculum.

When students come in, they will have a snack. They are required to eat the snack in the designated snack area, at the designated time. There is no food allowed in the classrooms. After snack, they will report to their assigned volunteer (assigned by the site supervisor) and begin work on the day's assignment. Some students will have homework and others will work on academic and community-building work as assigned by the site supervisor. Have the student complete the assignments, with your assistance.

Once homework is complete, you will lead a remedial activity, either with all your students or individually, in reading and math. It could be something as simple as multiplication flash cards or reading to them/ them reading to you or something from the list in the folder. Most students will also need to be working on their pack of High Frequency Sight Words. They need to identify the word (without sounding it out), be able to spell the word (without looking at it) and use the word in a sentence. If it is a new pack of words,



start with just having the student identify them. Then as the student becomes more comfortable with them, add on the spelling and sentence activities. Each time you review the words with the student, please indicate the date on the back of their name card in the pack.

The students are required to complete a MINIMUM of 30 minutes of remedial reading and 30 minutes of remedial math, no exceptions! Regardless of whether the student had homework, academic activities MUST continue until 4:30 p.m.

After 4:30 p.m., there are games available in each classroom for the students to play with you and other students. The site supervisors may choose to allow the students to go outside, weather permitting. Please continue to interact with the students during this time. It is a great opportunity to get to know your students and to mentor them in a casual, low stress manner.

Also, please require the students to clean up after themselves. When they come in, hang up coats and backpacks on hooks or on chairs. There should not be coats and bags strewn everywhere. If they take out a game, they must put it neatly back in the box before taking out another one. Pick up trash, put away pencils, and push in your chair... We need to teach them this is how you live in a community.

The Daily Report

At the end of the academic time, fill out a Daily Report for each of your students. Please fill out the report as completely and in as much detail as possible. The site supervisors use this report to uncover concerns about students and their progress in our program. **If the student was fully cooperative through the academic time**, draw a star or place a sticker at the end of the row. If not fully cooperative, discuss with the student any behavior changes that could have earned him or her a star or sticker. Please **do not give stars or stickers to students who have not fully cooperated with you**, this is a great learning opportunity for students of all ages. Once a student gets 4 stars or stickers, they are allowed to visit our prize closet. When they go to the prize closet, students must be accompanied by a volunteer.

Student Behavior

There are Behavior Guidelines posted in each classroom that have been discussed with students and their parents. We expect students to treat you, our staff and other students with respect. **Please use these Behavior Guidelines to discuss appropriate behavior with the students** on an individual basis. Use positive statements whenever possible: For example, instead of saying "stop running", say "walk, please" or instead of "stop doing that", say "let's stay focused". It is best to have the student identify for themselves which of the Behavior Guidelines they are choosing to ignore and discuss how to make a better choice. At no time is a student to be physically restrained in any way. If you are having behavior challenge with a student that you feel you cannot handle, do not hesitate to have a staff member intervene.



General Tutoring Tips

Most people feel some apprehension when meeting new people and experiencing new situations. Relax - some anxiety is normal. In time, you and the students you work with will



become comfortable with each other as you develop a working relationship.

The following information suggests ways in which you can develop confidence and skills as a volunteer for Homework House. Remember that the staff is always available to explore these suggestions and new ones with you.

CONNECT--Make sure you learn your students' name and pronounce it the way he or she wants it pronounced. Make sure your student knows your name and can pronounce it properly. Find commonalities between you and the students with whom you work. Family, work, and hobbies are some subjects you might explore. Understand your student in terms of her/his background and values. These may be different from yours. Be a role model and mentor—be yourself and encourage the students to do the same. Be honest, open, and communicative.

RESERVE JUDGMENT--At first, your students may not greet you warmly and may be distrustful or indifferent. Don't take it personally. Such reactions are often reflections of other worries, fears, and problems. In time, as people learn more about each other, trust and rapport develop.

SET BOUNDARIES--Know your limits and be open with others about them. Sometimes people want more time, attention, or other resources than we have or are able to give. Always acknowledge feelings—yours and theirs. Understand that saying "No" is okay. Students may ask to walk around, play games or see their friends. Remember your goals and stick to them. You are not expected to solve problems for your students, but rather to encourage them to focus on their strengths and options and build on them. Focus on gains and not losses.

LISTEN WELL--Many times your greatest gift to someone is attentive listening. It can be difficult to give your students your full attention but the reward of being a good listener is that you learn more about the person with whom you are working. It is also important to keep confidences and make no promises you can't keep.

BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE--Praise your student honestly and frequently. Remember attentiveness and effort are as important as performance.

BE A ROLE MODEL--Act as a role model for all students through your dress and behavior.

WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER?--It is alright for a tutor not to know the answer to a question or problem. We have found that it gives the students reassurance that even adults don't have all the answers. It is not uncommon for several tutors to work together to solve a

student's math problem. If you are not sure about an answer, encourage the student to ask his/her teacher for assistance and to let you know the outcome.

SHOULD I GIVE THEM THE ANSWER?--For some students, it may be very difficult to find the answer to a question or to solve problems because he/she lacks the necessary comprehension, time management and reading skills. Instead of giving the answer, tutors are encouraged to outline in the text where an answer may be found, read out loud to the students or have the student read with assistance from the tutor to find the answer. It may also be helpful to go step by step in solving math problems and to have the student review the chapter where s/he is having difficulty. Again, the student who has problems reading is going to have difficulty solving math problems.

BE REALISTIC--Look for small steps and successes. Setbacks happen often when progress is being made. Just remember, "I am making a difference."

CHANGE TAKES TIME--You might not be able to see immediate results from your contributions as a volunteer but as time goes on you will realize that you will touch the lives of not only the students you serve, but also the people around you. Never become discouraged because your gift as a volunteer is cherished and does make a difference.

Other Important Information

- At 340 Chestnut, you may park in the parking lot off of Franklin Street and enter the building through the upper level door on Chestnut Street. At 54 North Summer, please park in the lot behind the school next door.
- Please arrive on time and **sign in** every day you are here. We require accurate records of who is in the building each day and use these sign-in sheets to take attendance.
- **Please do not give students your personal contact information** nor ask them for theirs. **Do not contact any student outside of Homework House.**
- Do not use your cell phone while at Homework House, keep it put away. Do not allow a student to use your cell phone.
- Please call or email Jennifer at 413-887-2012 or jmccarthy@homeworkhouseholyokey.org in advance if you will be unable to attend your scheduled session.
- Report any and all concerns to the site supervisor assigned to your classroom.

You're never too old,
too wacky, too wild,
to pick up a book
and read to a child.

-Dr. Seuss