



# Volunteer Training Manual

*A Guide for Volunteers in  
Near North/Cabrini Green, Uptown and  
Washington Park*

*“Improving the life opportunities of inner-city youth through  
long-term comprehensive programming.”*



## **Mission:**

*Chicago Youth Programs, Inc! seeks to improve the life opportunities for low-income, inner-city youth of all ages through comprehensive, long-term programming.*

# Chicago Youth Programs Overview

## **History**

Chicago Youth Programs, Inc! (CYP) is an award-winning, innovative program created by Northwestern University medical students in 1984. CYP currently offers services in three underserved communities: Cabrini Green, Washington Park, and Uptown. The Cabrini Green Youth Program (CGYP) started in 1984, the Washington Park Youth Program (WPYP) was founded in 1995, and the Uptown Community Youth Program (UCYP) began in 1998.

## **Purpose**

Chicago Youth Programs, Inc! (CYP) recognizes that there are many obstacles to inner-city children's social, cognitive, emotional, and physical growth. Individuals overcome these challenges through exposure to positive opportunities. A child's success in life is directly correlated with their living environment and their access to services. While a child's living environment cannot necessarily be altered, his/her access to services can increase.

CYP therefore serves inner-city youth that do not have access to social services due to location, poverty, or availability. CYP strives to improve the life opportunities of at-risk youth through a comprehensive approach aimed at developing their overall capabilities. CYP serves children long-term to ensure consistent and positive role modeling and includes:

- Education
- Mentoring
- Recreation
- Preventative Health Care
- Scholarship and Career Assistance

## **Approach**

- **Comprehensive Programming**  
Over 600 volunteers staff 51 innovative programs which provide role models, one-on-one tutoring, arts and cultural activities, career guidance, pre-school activities, parent training, recreational opportunities, and quality health care.
- **Health Combined with Human Services**  
CYP provides a free health clinic through Children's Memorial Hospital staffed by volunteer physicians. CYP stresses the importance of providing holistic services.
- **Long-Term Measurable Outcomes**  
CYP enrolls youth as early as pre-school and provides programs to keep them engaged in activities throughout childhood and adolescence. CYP monitors long-term outcomes on each participant and includes school completion, teen birth rates, criminal conviction, and placement into higher education.
- **Efficiency**  
CYP keeps overhead and administrative costs to a minimum by utilizing volunteers and donated space. CYP relies heavily on the skills and leadership of its volunteers to run effective programs. CYP has also never paid for program space. This ensures that all funds are channeled directly to programming.

## **Participant Profile**

### **Youth and Families**

- CYP serves 450 youth in Cabrini Green, Washington Park, and Uptown – 300 of these youth receive comprehensive services and are involved in an average of three activities per week.
- 50% of CYP participants live with one parent; 43% live with neither natural parent.
- 25% of 3-7 year olds were born addicted to drugs.
- 88% of our families have incomes below with 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the poverty line, with most falling 50% below with poverty line.
- Youth served in Cabrini Green and Washington Park are 99% African American. Youth served in Uptown are 90% African American with the remaining 10% ethnically diverse.

### **Volunteers**

- CYP utilizes approximately 400 weekly volunteers.
- 70% of volunteers are in the process of completing an undergraduate or graduate degree.
- 30% of volunteers are professionals.
- 82% of volunteers have consistently volunteered for over 3 years with CYP.
- CYP volunteers log approximately 25,600 volunteer hours each year.

## Expectations of Volunteers

### **Commitment**

- Volunteers are expected to commit to volunteering on a weekly basis for one academic year.

### **Attendance**

- Volunteers are expected to attend programs consistently each week. It is only through consistent attendance that youth and volunteers benefit from the experience. Attendance is recorded.
- Please arrive at the program site 10 minutes early to ensure that programs can begin on time.
- If you are unable to attend a program, you are expected to contact the Program Director at least 3 hours before the program begins.
- Volunteers who do not attend programs consistently will be asked to step down from a volunteer role.

### **Respect**

- Volunteers are expected to pay all youth and parents the same respect they expect in return.
- It is also very important for volunteers to lead by example by showing youth how they expect them to act with volunteers' own behavior.
- Personal space must be respected as well. While volunteers should accompany youth outside of the program area, they should never be alone in a room with a child, particularly a bathroom.

### **Discipline**

- Volunteers are expected to reinforce rules to youth by providing a basic level of discipline.
- Should a volunteer need assistance in controlling a child, the lines of authority are as follows:
  1. Contact the Volunteer Program Coordinator.
  2. If the Volunteer Program Coordinator is not able to handle the situation, contact the Parent Program Assistant.
  3. As a last resort, contact the Program Director.

### **Resignations**

- Should you be unable to complete your commitment of one year to CYP, please contact the Program Director immediately.

## Expectations of Youth Participants

### **Attitude and Respect**

- Youth are expected to come to programs with positive attitudes. Bad attitudes are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- Youth must respect volunteers, Volunteer Program Coordinators, Program Directors, and speakers by listening and not arguing, threatening, shouting or complaining.
- Youth are also expected to respect other youth.

### **Attendance**

- Youth must attend educational programs (tutoring) every week.
- The youth attendance policy is as follows:
  - First unexcused absence: reminder from Program Director
  - Second unexcused absence: phone call from Program Director
  - Third unexcused absence: one month suspension from programs
- Should a child receive an unexcused absence at educational programs, they will not be allowed to participate in recreational programs for the week and will receive a call home.
- Youth will only be excused if the Program Director has received a phone call prior to the specific program.

### **Facilities**

- We are in donated space so youth are expected to respect that space at the risk of losing out privileges at that facility. However, most mentoring programs will be held at the CYP site.
- There is no running allowed inside at any time.
- Youth may not use the vending machines at any time (snacks are always provided).
- An adult must accompany youth outside of the program area at all times (bathroom breaks, water breaks).

### **Foul Language**

- Swearing and obscene language is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

### **Expectations of Parents**

**Parents must work with Chicago Youth Programs and the Program Directors in order for children to gain the most from the program.**

Specific parent responsibilities:

- Contact the Program Director if your child will be absent.
- Discuss program rules with your children so that they know what to expect.
- Support the Program Director's actions so that interventions are consistent.
- Make sure that your child leaves the house early enough to get to the program on time.
- Discuss any problems or concerns directly with the Program Director so that they can be solved quickly.
- Notify the Program Director of any changes (physical, emotional) that your children may be experiencing.
- Notify the Program Director of any allergies or illnesses your children may have.
- Reinforce positive attitudes and behaviors CYP teaches children.
- Update the Program Director immediately if your phone number or address changes.

**It is important to remember that CYP's programs are most effective when families are committed to participating in multiple programs for multiple years.**

### **Tips for Talking to Parents**

The purpose of calling parents before beginning your time with your youth is to introduce yourself and learn more about the child and family that you will be working with. In addition, parents need to know who their child is spending time with and it is important for them to be involved in their child's experience.

### **Things to remember:**

- Parents are interested to talk to and meet the people their child interact with on a regular basis.
- Parents often have many other things that they are worrying about besides their child's mentor – be patient and persistent.
- Developing a relationship with your youth's parents now will allow you to have a productive relationship with the child in the future.
- Parents can help you become an effective tutor/mentor by giving you a look at the child's life outside of tutoring – you can better tailor your efforts towards your child's needs.

### **The First Phone Call**

- Introduce yourself as \_\_\_\_\_'s tutor/mentor with Chicago Youth Programs on (day of the week) .
- Let the parent know your purpose for calling – to introduce yourself because you will be working with their child once a week and to learn a little more about the child.
- Give your background – where you work/go to school, what your interests are.
- Questions to ask about the child:
  - How long has he/she been involved with CYP?
  - How has school been going so far (and in past years)?
  - What are the child's strengths and weaknesses?
  - Where do you want your child to focus their time (i.e., where does the child need the most help)?
  - What are your child's interests outside of school?
  - What are the parents' expectations of the program?
- If you feel comfortable, feel free to give the parent your phone number.

## **Helpful Hints**

- Always be a positive and encouraging role model in your interaction with youth. Do not participate in or encourage rowdy behavior such as chasing, wrestling, tickling, etc.
- Praise children for positive behavior.
- Activities such as piggyback rides are contagious – when one child gets one, every other child wants one – so don't do it.
- Profanity and other inappropriate language are unacceptable.
- Enforce the rules. Ask the Volunteer Program Coordinator to assist you if necessary.
- Interaction with youth outside of regular CYP programs is encouraged, but only with the approval of the Program Director and the child's parents.
- Understand that there are CYP participants who have special needs. Please make the effort to inquire of those needs.
- Always be a source of encouragement, not pity. Focus on the youth's strengths and encourage him/her to take pride in accomplishments, take responsibility for actions, and continue to grow and develop in a positive way.
- Be consistent and firm.
- Be patient and work at the child's level.
- Take frequent breaks. Children generally have short attention spans and oftentimes need to engage themselves in a different activity in order to concentrate on their work.
- Have specific, realistic goals for yourself and the youth.
- Begin and end each session with an activity that is fun and with which the child is successful.
- Work on small segments of material at a time.
- Use creative, novel ways of reviewing and teaching new information.
- If at any time you feel frustrated with a child, stop what you are doing. Your relationship with your child is much more important than a child's individual success/mastery.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How can I get my child to open up to me?**

Some kids need time to open up while others are very outgoing and willing to talk immediately. Try to come to your initial sessions with questions about things you would like to learn about the child. Avoid yes-or-no questions. If you ask enough questions, you will eventually hit on a topic the child likes to talk about. Most of all, be patient. Children have to build up trust before they are willing to open up so be consistent and supportive to provide an environment where the child feels safe opening up.

### **Why won't my child attend program consistently?**

There are often many other things going on in a child's life besides tutoring. These may include school, family problems, and low parent involvement. While CYP makes every effort to ensure that youth attend programs consistently, there are many things out of our control.

Two things you can do to prevent or alleviate this problem are maintaining clear communication with the child's family and communicate consistently with Program Directors. If you are able to build a relationship with a child from the beginning, that child will probably have more desire to attend programs. By communicating with Program Directors you can learn more about what may be going on with your child and his/her family.

### **What is the most effective way of improving a child's behavior?**

Many people's first reaction to misbehavior in a child is to scold the child and tell them not to do the action again. This tells the child what NOT to do, but not what they SHOULD do. In addition, by giving attention to misbehavior, you are essentially telling the child that they get the most specialized attention when they act out. If the child is seeking attention, they will continue to do negative behaviors to get the attention that you give them from discipline.

Instead, there are three things you should do when a child does not behave: 1) tell them what they should not do, 2) tell them why they should not do that action, 3) tell them what you would like them to do. In addition, it is extremely effective to positively reinforce their positive behaviors. This tells children what you expect from them and provides them with unexpected positive attention, thereby building their self-esteem. If a child won't stop talking to his/her friend, tell them clearly that you don't want them to talk while you are working because you won't be able to complete the work for the day and learn something new. Tell them what you would prefer for them to do (i.e., work quietly with you and ask questions). Then, when you catch the child working like you asked them to, immediately reinforce that behavior by saying something like, "Thanks for doing your work so quietly. We'll be able to get a lot done today."

### **What do I do if a child tells me something in confidence?**

Everyone needs sounding boards and confidants with whom they can share secrets, dreams, fantasies, and personal information without fear of betrayal. Such relationships are an important part of healthy emotional and social development.

When a young person asks if they can tell you something in confidence, never promise to keep something secret until you know what it is about and what the ramifications might be. Instead, you might say something like, "I'm not sure if I will be able to keep what you want to tell me a secret or not since I'm not sure what you're going to say. But I'll be glad to listen and try to help you with whatever you're dealing with. If it's something that can stay between us, that's the way it will be. But I also have a responsibility to you and other people if what we're talking about is illegal or could lead to someone getting hurt. Would you like to tell me at least in general what's on your mind? Maybe we can figure out what the next steps will be."

If a young person tells you something that could result in someone being hurt including child abuse, if they report something illegal, or if other harm could come from your keeping it secret, you have a responsibility to make sure the appropriate parties are notified within a fairly short time frame. Report such things to the Program Director quickly.

Try never to betray the trust of young people who confide in you. If you can ethically, morally, and legally keep their secrets, do so. In situations where others need to know and the confidence cannot be kept between the two of you, let the young person know and try to involve them in sharing the information with others who need to be informed.

### **What are some things I can do to help youth understand that this is as much their activity as my activity?**

How much ownership young people feel for a youth program or activity often depends on how much control they have over what happens and the degree to which adults actually allow it to be their activity. The younger youth are, the less experience they have, and the newer the activity is the more adult ownership and control is necessary. Conversely, the older the youth are, the more experienced they are, and the more familiar the activity is, the more opportunities they should have for youth ownership and control.

#### **Tips:**

If you want kids to feel that an activity is as much their activity as your activity, you need to involve them in making rules for the program. The fewer adult-decided rules you have, the better. You may have to impose a few "ground rules" to assure everyone's health and safety, but you can involve kids in deciding any other rules needed by the group. State rules positively in terms of what you want to see happen rather than what you don't want to see happen (e.g., instead of "No hitting", say "Keep your hands to yourself.")

Rushing in and taking over when kids aren't carrying out their responsibilities as well as we think they should is one of the worst things adults can do when we are concerned about youth feeling ownership for an activity. With younger kids, you will need to make sure the responsibilities they are taking on are appropriate for their abilities, but teenagers who are able to plan and be responsible for an activity are also usually capable of carrying it through to completion.

### **How can I support accomplishments and give encouragement without having to give prizes or rewards every time for everything?**

Tangible rewards are external ways of motivating youth. They can be used selectively to build a sense of internal motivation in youth. This is accomplished through another behavior modification principle called paired association. When a young person receives a tangible reward for an accomplishment, this reward leads to a sense of pleasure. If rewards are given selectively and only periodically for stellar behaviors and accomplishments, the youth is likely to begin to feel good about him/herself even in the absence of the tangible reward.

#### **Tips:**

Teach new behaviors with continuous rewards. Maintain behaviors with fewer regular rewards. When teaching a brand new skill it is a good practice to reward any and all efforts toward mastering the skill. Even the crudest effort may be rewarded. After the child gains a level of mastery, provide rewards for more difficult tasks. Be careful not to be too stingy or lavish with praise or recognition. Rewarding behavior too infrequently when a child is trying to learn a skill can lead to "ratio strain" (the child has to accomplish too many things before they receive any reward or recognition).

Explain and praise every reward: If a reward is not tied to a specific behavior and the reason for receiving the reward is not explained in explicit detail, then the reward will not have any effect on the future occurrence of that behavior. For this reason, any youth who receives a reward, whether tangible or intangible, should receive an explanation of why they received that reward.

Reward the effort, not the outcome: The effort, not the final result, is often the thing that should be rewarded. Try listing the behaviors you want to promote in getting to the end result. Find a way to count or track these behaviors and reward these behaviors rather than the end result. If you are looking to improve math performance, it is wiser to reward the number of homework problems successfully solved than to go directly to rewarding a high grade on the final exam.

### **How can I make things more fun and exciting for my child?**

Different people are motivated by different things. Some are motivated most by the opportunity to develop friendships, socialize with other people and be part of a group.

This group tends to enjoy team activities and activities where they have a chance to interact with other people. Others are motivated more by opportunities to achieve things and reach goals. Kids who are motivated by achievement tend to enjoy competitive activities and activities where they can be recognized for their accomplishments. Still others are most motivated by opportunities for leadership. They enjoy activities where they can be “in charge” of something. The key to making things fun and exciting is figuring out what the kids you work with find motivating and varying what you do to keep things fresh.

Tips:

**KISS – Keep It Short and Stimulating:** A key to success in making things fun and exciting is to stop activities at the height of engagement – before kids get tired of it and start to disengage.

Use a lot of variety/ Be creative with routine things: For example, if you have a roll call, ask kids to respond in a different way each time. Rather than always shouting “Here!”, they might instead say what their favorite food is.

Be relevant to their interests: If kids are more interested in talking to each other than in listening to you, try an activity where they discuss the topic with a partner and report back to the group. Or if they are more interested in what happened at school today than in what is planned for your activity, you want to take a few minutes to let them “process” the school activity and then bridge or help them see the link between what they did in school and what they are going to do next.

### **Am I making a difference?**

It is often hard to tell if you are making a difference. Working with youth is like watching a child get taller – you don’t see any difference from day to day, but over time there is a clear difference the child’s height from year to year. You are helping a child grow emotionally and socially. Any quality time you are able to provide will ultimately make a difference as long as you are consistent and supportive.

## **Chicago Youth Programs Staff**

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