



**school on wheels inc.**  
Tutoring Homeless Children Since 1993

# **Volunteer Handbook**



Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to School on Wheels!

We are delighted to have you on our team. Since 1993, volunteers have been a critical and valuable resource for our students. Caring enough to volunteer and share your time and talents with our students is a generous act that will make an enormous difference in a young person's life. I hope your volunteer experience with us is fulfilling, meaningful and positive.

We have developed this handbook to provide you with information, resources and helpful hints as you begin your journey as a volunteer. You will find important information about School on Wheels' policies and procedures, your role as a volunteer tutor, and how best you can help your student.

Every child needs an education in order to have hope and a chance for success. The homeless child is no exception. Your consistency and presence will give your student encouragement and a belief that their education is not only crucial, but also possible despite their circumstances. Thank you again for volunteering with us.

I'm glad you've chosen to be a member of the School on Wheels team.

With deep appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine Meek". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Catherine Meek  
Executive Director

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## 1. School on Wheels, Inc.: Our Mission and Services

The mission of School on Wheels, Inc. is to enhance educational opportunities for homeless children from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Our goal is to shrink the gaps in the education of these children so they can overcome the statistics that would condemn them to a life of poverty. We are dedicated to providing quality educational assistance to homeless children who live in shelters, motels, group homes, cars, or on the street.

School on Wheels, Inc. helps break down the barriers that prevent homeless children from receiving the education they need and deserve. We bring the message to homeless children that they are cared about and important. We are a consistent support system for them at a time of great stress and fear.

Founded in 1993 by Agnes Stevens, a former elementary school teacher with 30 years of experience, we have grown from three volunteers serving a single shelter to thousands of volunteers dedicating their time to touching and improving the lives of homeless children in the hundreds of locations we serve throughout Southern California. School on Wheels, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. We receive no government funding and are supported entirely by foundation grants, corporate donations and individual contributions.

Our services include:

- **One-on-one tutoring:** This is the heart of our program. Volunteers, like you, who come from all backgrounds and professions with one agenda only: to reach out to a child, to teach, to mentor, and to assist in their educational life.
- **Backpacks and school supplies:** Something tangible for a child to hold onto. The potential of clean paper and colored pencils is a powerful talisman for children with so little else in their lives.
- **Locating paperwork for school enrollment:** We help parents fill out the necessary paperwork and gather records such as birth certificates, immunization records and transfer papers from previous schools, without which their children may be denied admission.
- **Digital Learning and other programs:** School on Wheels has a Digital Learning initiative that empowers our tutors to harness the power of technology. Combined with traditional in-person tutoring methods, digital learning tools engage students in the learning process and teach important 21st Century skills that they will use for the rest of their lives.
- **School uniforms and bus tokens:** We work with partners to supply school uniforms and bus tokens so our students can get to school.
- **Scholarships:** We award scholarships to students to break down the barriers between them and a quality education. These scholarships may be used for any level of college,

trade school, arts/music programs, sports programs, educational summer programs or enrichment classes.

## 2. What It Means To Be a Homeless Child

Homeless children are very much like other children their age. They are individuals and have their own personalities, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, and ways of seeing things. Some are gifted and some have learning problems. Most are good in some subjects, and not so good in others. Like other children, they have mixed feelings about homework, but most of them want to do well and succeed in school. Like all children, homeless children respond to their immediate circumstances, to opportunities, and to the relationships they have with their families and friends.

Homeless children also have certain experiences that are unique to being homeless. Their lives are chaotic; they have no stability; every day, they fear their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing will not be met; they may be made fun of in school. All of this can lead to social and emotional difficulties and affect how they respond to you, to school, to other children, to their environment, and most importantly, to their feelings about themselves.

Homeless children live in shelters, motels, parks, cars, and sometimes on the streets. These living conditions impose certain rules and limitations that other children do not have in their lives. Ordinary activities - coming home from school, checking the refrigerator for a snack, flipping on television, participating in after-school activities, maintaining lasting friendships, wearing the right clothes, having privacy – are all limited or impossible for the homeless child.

Homeless children face many obstacles to learning. Recent figures estimate that 13% of homeless children in this country do not attend school.<sup>1</sup> Of those who do, they experience four times the rate of developmental delay as other children and are twice as likely to repeat a grade. Homeless children suffer from illness four times as often as other children do. Earaches, asthma attacks, stomach problems, and colds can afflict a homeless child on a chronic basis.

Frequent relocations, illness, hunger, lack of parental support and transportation represent some of the barriers to their education. It can take between two and four weeks to have a child re-enrolled in school after moving to a new area. As a result, students can miss as much as 36 weeks of school – almost an entire academic year. And each new school means different books, different approaches to learning; each move brings different resources and different friends. Learning their way around a new place on top of the basic learning they are supposed to be doing can be overwhelming. Between their absences and their adjustment periods, children can - and do - fall behind very quickly. Many have not learned certain basic skills.

Homeless children have limited resources to complete their homework. Unlike other children, a homeless student lacks a quiet space to read a book or complete a school assignment. Shelters can be noisy during the afternoon and evening hours. Siblings may be competing for a parent's attention, thus limiting the student's ability to ask for educational guidance. Transportation to and from the local library is often difficult and, in some cases, shelters restrict off-site visits.

Homeless children sometimes have trouble focusing on their studies. Common problems of

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, 2009.

homeless children are a lack of adequate sleep and insufficient nourishment. Some students travel long distances to and from school, adding to their daily stress. As a result, students may find it difficult to concentrate on classroom work.

The major causes of homelessness include:

- Lack of affordable housing or home loss
- Sudden unemployment or lack of adequate employment
- Family violence or abuse
- Substance abuse by one or more parents
- Serious illness of parent(s)

The percentage of children who are homeless is greater today than any time since the Great Depression. In California, this is due to the lack of affordable housing. Families with children represent one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population. Regardless of the reasons for homelessness, School on Wheels, Inc. believes that all children should be given the same opportunities, especially in terms of learning and education.

Our “About Us” section at [www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org) lists several web sites that provide additional information regarding homelessness.

### **3. Volunteer Expectations and Requirements**

We ask that you take your commitment as a School on Wheels volunteer seriously, and we will also take our commitment to you seriously. School on Wheels, Inc. has certain requirements and commitments that we ask of all our volunteers.

As a School on Wheels volunteer, you commit to:

- Tutor a homeless child a minimum of at least one hour a week for one year.
- Record all tutoring hours and activities via our online database.
- Be consistent, on time, prepared and dependable for your student.
- Complete the tutor application and training process.
- Use the Digital Learning, Academic Program and/or the BUS Program on our online Volunteer Resources page to fill in the educational gaps of your student.
- Communicate with your coordinator at least monthly.

To support you as a volunteer, School on Wheels, Inc. commits to:

- Regular communications from your coordinator
- On-going workshops, training and support
- Monthly e-newsletter updating you with news and success stories from our organization and your region
- Weekly Tutor News emails highlighting resources and events
- Access to learning materials, supplies and books
- Access to expert advisors, as needed

## 4. Role of School on Wheels Volunteer Tutors

The role of School on Wheels volunteer tutors is to encourage students to understand that learning and keeping up with their education is their sole job at this time in their lives. As a volunteer tutor, you may help your student in one or a variety of subjects. You may be there simply to encourage the child to develop self-confidence in a particular subject.

You will find that tutoring a child is a very gratifying experience. The one hour a week that you commit to your student creates an opportunity for you to make a real difference. Your consistency and presence gives the child hope, encouragement, and a belief that a sound education is not only crucial but also possible, despite difficult circumstances.

Homeless students become hopeful about catching up on the skills they have missed, and they develop a sense of self-worth from knowing that a tutor is coming just for them each week. Your help and support means more to your student than you realize. The fact that you care enough to reach out sends a message of hope and possibility. You can make a lasting impact on a child's life and help them discover a world of opportunities.

Most School on Wheels tutors are matched one-on-one with a homeless child. Others, however, are placed in group tutoring sites. At these sites, volunteers tutor in groups and may work with different children from week to week. While this handbook is written with the one-on-one match in mind, the contents also applies to group tutoring situations.

Merriam-Webster defines a tutor as a person charged with the instruction and guidance of another. A tutor has a multi-faceted role as a mentor, a teacher, a coach and a role model. This is not an easy role; it requires commitment, consistency and hard work. A mentor believes in the unlimited potential of her/his student, even when they don't. A teacher guides and inspires a love of learning, regardless of the student's current skill level. A coach instructs and encourages their student to improve, no matter their circumstances. A role model exemplifies the kind of behaviors and skills that will help their student understand the importance of learning.

You also have to understand what your role is not. A tutor is not a:

- **Substitute parent:** Volunteer tutors are not expected to play the role of a parent. Show that you genuinely care and provide ongoing support without overstepping your boundaries as a tutor. You are there to help them improve their learning skills and to provide support and encouragement.
- **Disciplinarian:** Setting limits and using positive reinforcement can have a beneficial impact on a child, but tutors do not become involved in punitive discipline of any type. This is the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian or, in some situations, the location staff.
- **Therapist:** Be aware of your limitations. You are not a therapist or a counselor. If your student shares a problem with you that requires professional intervention, such as substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse, and/or depression, let them know that you

would like them to talk with someone better equipped to provide help. Follow-up with your coordinator as discussed in Section 6: Policies and Procedures.

We have learned over the years that certain things work, and don't work, with our students.

#### *What Works*

- Communicating and active listening. You may be the only person in your student's life who truly listens to them. By listening, you can help foster their self-esteem, confidence and pride.
- Encouraging and praising any effort or improvement. Homeless children are often stigmatized, ignored or given up as hopeless. By focusing on and recognizing their skills, talents, and strengths, you can turn that around. You cannot praise them too much or too often.
- Believing in your student's ability to succeed. Your student needs people in their life who believe in them. You can support and encourage them to believe in themselves and their abilities.
- Recognizing your limitations and having realistic expectations. Change is hard for all of us. You cannot expect your student to change overnight; it will take time for that to happen. You are planting a seed; give it a chance to grow.
- Being sensitive and accepting of differences. This may be the first time you have been in a homeless shelter, worked with a homeless child, or interacted with a particular culture. Accept the differences. Cultural diversity, life experiences and situations combine to create your student's point of view.
- Being flexible. Your student's life is chaotic at best. If they don't show up for tutoring, don't be discouraged or take it personally. They may not have slept the night before; they may have been disciplined; their mother may have forgotten.
- Staying committed and reliable. Keep to your word and your tutoring commitment. Many homeless children are filled with feelings of betrayal and abandonment. It's important to treat them with respect and kindness.

#### *What Doesn't Work*

- Passing judgment, criticizing, or comparing your student to others.
- Labeling, diagnosing, or analyzing their behaviors.
- Probing into their lives.
- Dismissing, using silent treatment or using other punishments.
- Lecturing your student.
- Demanding changes or giving ultimatums.

## 5. Trauma

Many of you may tutor at a domestic violence shelter while volunteering with School on Wheels, so the information that follows will be very important to understand. However, no matter where you tutor, this information will help you create a positive and safe tutoring environment for your students. The students in our program have experienced and may still be experiencing varying levels of trauma. This can range from the trauma that simply comes with experiencing homelessness to abuse, neglect and witnessing violence. Although every situation is different, we believe our volunteers should have a basic understanding of the trauma our students may experience, how it might manifest itself in their behavior and what you can do to prepare for and handle situations that may arise stemming from this trauma.

Trauma-inducing violence can take many forms. It can be threatened or actual and can cause physical and psychological harm. Trauma can also be caused by exposure to violence, which is being within sight or sound of violence. The trauma that results from violence or exposure to violence can be long-lasting and detrimental to a child's development.

Children and youth who are victims of either direct violence or exposure to violence may be impacted in many ways. It can adversely affect their:

- Emotional development
- Social functioning
- Ability to learn and function in school
- Moral development
- Ability to negotiate intimate relationships as adults

In particular, children exposed to family violence are more likely to develop social, emotional, psychological and or behavioral problems than those who are not. Recent research indicates that children who witness domestic violence show more anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, anger and temperament problems than children who do not witness violence in the home.

So, what might this look like during a tutoring session? Behaviorally, trauma can manifest itself in a variety of ways that, at times, might seem contradictory. Every child deals with trauma differently. The following are some examples of what you might see but, again, not all students who have experienced trauma will act in these ways.

At tutoring sessions, you may witness or hear about your student:

- Acting out or withdrawing
- Refusing to go to school
- Caretaking; acting as a parent substitute
- Lying to avoid confrontation
- Excessively seeking attention
- Being overly manipulative or dependent

While children and youth who have not been traumatized can also exhibit any combination of these behaviors and characteristics, experiencing trauma at a young age increases the likelihood of symptomatic behavior.

Older students may want to talk about their traumatic experiences. If your student does start disclosing information about abuse or witnessing violence, be there as a supportive listener without asking further questions. Remember we are not trained counselors and don't know the appropriate follow-up questions to ask. However, it never hurts to listen, and your student might simply need to talk. When your session is over, immediately contact your regional coordinator to report what happened and ensure the student receives appropriate support. If your regional coordinator is unavailable, and you feel that your student might be in immediate danger, speak with someone at the location who would be equipped to handle the situation. Oftentimes, if the location is a domestic violence shelter, the information is already known and has been reported. If your student is not in immediate danger, School on Wheels' staff will follow up with the appropriate location staff member and call child services if necessary.

When working with students - especially in domestic violence shelters - always be aware of how your actions and language might be perceived by a child who has had negative experiences. Slightly raising your voice or even a well-intentioned pat on the back might be viewed in a negative or threatening way.

At your interview during the application process, your coordinator will discuss these types of situations with you to ensure a good tutor-student match. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable tutoring a student in a domestic violence shelter, or would prefer to tutor in a different setting, please let your coordinator know.

## 6. Mandatory Safety Policies and Procedures

We have formulated simple but mandatory safety policies for our School on Wheels volunteers. The policies and procedures are directed towards one-on-one tutoring, but they also apply to group tutoring and general situations. These policies come from our experience working with the homeless and are designed not only to ensure the safety of our students but also to protect our volunteers from the possibility of misunderstandings and, at worst, false accusations. Please read them carefully and ask your coordinator if you have questions or need clarification. If you do not follow these policies, you will be dismissed as a volunteer.

### **1. Work with your student only in a public area and within view and earshot of at least one other tutor or a designated staff member at your location.**

The public area may be within a shelter, a public library, or another public tutoring location designated by School on Wheels, Inc. You may not tutor in the student's room or living unit or other private living areas. In most shelters, you will be placed in a public place with at least one other tutor. In smaller shelters where there are very few students, the other people within view and earshot may be shelter staff or other shelter residents.

### **2. Establish healthy boundaries and exhibit professional behavior, including refraining from physical contact or inappropriate language with your student.**

It is important for the safety of our students and volunteers to establish clear boundaries during tutoring sessions. These boundaries include not asking personal questions or divulging personal details. You are there as a positive role model for your students and should always exhibit professional behavior.

Encouragement for your student, beyond verbal praise, is most appropriately shown through expressive body language and high fives. We ask that in your role as a volunteer you refrain from initiating other forms of physical contact with your student.

If your student initiates a hug, it's okay to hug back. It is not appropriate, however, for your student to sit on your lap even if they initiated this act. If your student tries to sit on your lap while working, explain that you are not allowed, but you would be happy to sit beside them to help them with their work.

### **3. Ensure the confidentiality of students, their families, and all other families at the location(s) where you volunteer.**

Obtain written consent if you want to contact your student's teacher. Speaking with your student's teacher will give you an idea of how you can best help your student. It also lets the teacher know that an adult is concerned and is helping the student learn. Talk to your coordinator about how you do this. We have a School on Wheels Release Form for the parent/legal guardian to sign that allows us to contact the school. You are not allowed to contact the teacher without prior permission from the parent/legal guardian.

Photographing students is only allowed with the permission of the student, parent and location staff. Photographs should never be posted on the Internet (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) or otherwise be transmitted electronically (email, text message, etc.).

**4. Immediately report any information that would suggest child abuse occurring at this time in your student's life.**

Report information to your regional coordinator. If you cannot reach someone from School on Wheels and feel that a student is in immediate danger, report it to a staff member at the location where you tutor. We have a team of specialists who will discuss the case immediately and follow through with authorities, if needed. You will be included in the process for input and support.

**5. Strictly follow the School on Wheels Field Trip Procedures if you would like to participate in an activity with your student outside of the regular tutoring session.**

Tutors who have been meeting with their student for more than three months and who wish to take them on field trips, must do so along with at least one other tutor and student. If you are not transporting your student but meeting up at the field trip site, there must be at least one other tutor and student present. Talk to your coordinator about how best to arrange this.

Contact your coordinator to request our official form for field trip permission and proof of insurance. The form must be approved and signed by the parent/legal guardian as well as your coordinator, and School on Wheels, Inc. must have a copy for our files prior to the field trip. Without the executed permission form, the student CANNOT leave the shelter/location.

**6. Record the details of your tutoring sessions via the School on Wheels online database.**

This is to ensure the safety of our students. Without a record of logged sessions, we are unable to track where and when our students are being tutored and are unable to follow up on possible issues and concerns. This is a mandatory part of being a volunteer in our program. This policy is also for the protection of you, the volunteer. In the event of an incident, the logged sessions are the only evidence we have of what occurred. We also use this system to follow your sessions, see how your students are progressing, and respond to any needs you or your student might have.

## 7. General Procedures

### Commitment

- **Be consistent in your tutoring sessions.** Providing the students we tutor with consistency and structure will help them focus on their education.
- **Use the School on Wheels Programs provided on the Volunteer Resources page of our website:** Academic, BUS, Digital Learning and Summer programs.
- **Attend the mandatory Advanced Tutor Training 2-3 months after you begin tutoring.** This training is intended to help strengthen tutoring skills to better serve our students.

### Communication

- **Notify your student's parent/legal guardian or location staff if you will be late or miss a session.** If you cannot reach either party, call your regional coordinator. You must report any permanent schedule changes to your coordinator.
- **Wear your School on Wheels badge and give your student/family your contact information.** Your badge helps identify you as a volunteer to staff and families.
- **Connect with your regional coordinator on a regular basis, at least once per month.** Make sure to follow up with your regional coordinator when he/she reaches out to you. If your student moves into permanent housing, let your coordinator know. Alternate tutoring locations must also be pre-approved by your regional coordinator.

### Respect

- **Learn your location's rules and regulations and follow them at all times.** Your coordinator will orient you and answer any questions you may have.
- **Limit gift giving to special occasions and always get parent/guardian approval.**
- **Be sensitive and respectful of differences.** This may be the first time you have been in a homeless shelter, worked with a homeless child, or interacted with a particular culture. Accept the differences. Cultural diversity, life experiences and situations combine to create your student's point of view.

**Failure to comply with our procedures or safety policies may lead to termination from our program.**

## 8. Your First Tutoring Session

If you are a first-time tutor, you may have many questions about your initial meeting with your student. Please be assured that you will never attend a first session on your own. Either your regional coordinator or a tutor coordinator will meet you at the shelter to give you a tour of the facility and introduce you to your student, parent/legal guardian, and shelter staff. Your coordinator will also familiarize you with the shelter rules and regulations, parking amenities and available resources.

In many cases, the student waits excitedly for the arrival of their new tutor near the front of the shelter. Some children may be a little shy at first, while others will be outgoing. The one thing the children all have in common is that they want you to get to know them. With that in mind, relax and take the opportunity to learn as much as you can about your student!

The coordinator will bring the Tutor/Parent-Legal Guardian/Student Partnership Agreement to the first session and make sure that the parent/legal guardian, you and your student read and sign the form. This form details the commitment expected from each person involved.

Your coordinator may also bring a paper assessment (or direct you to an online assessment) to do with your student in order to identify learning gaps in math and English language arts. These assessments are important: not only do they assist with tutoring, they help our program to track student progress. Your coordinator will answer any questions about the assessments at the first session.

While there is no universal approach to tutoring, there are some basic guidelines to help you get started. The relationship with your student is based on mutual respect and will grow over time. Here are some tips for your first session and ways for you to start on your tutoring journey:

- Introduce yourself to your student and to your student's parent/legal guardian. Remind the student that you are there to work together to improve their skills.
- Clear the desk or table of any distracting materials.
- Sit next to your student, not across the table. This will allow you to work with them from the same visual perspective.
- Take some time to learn about your student's interests such as movies, sports activities and favorite reading materials. Also, encourage your student to discover things about you. Remember, this is a give-and-take relationship. The Getting to Know You Questionnaire is a fun and informative way to begin.
- If the student is currently attending school, encourage them to bring their backpack and show you any homework in progress. This lets you know the current assignments due and determine any needed school supplies.
- Assess the student's understanding and grasp of the basic skills needed to complete the

assignment. For example, if the student is having trouble with multiplication, you may need to find out if the problem involves a lack of addition skills or poor number recognition. It may also be helpful to check if there is an understanding of basic multiplication operations. A paper or online assessment can help to determine what skills need work. (<https://www.schoolonwheels.org/academic-program/>)

- If the student is resistant to doing homework, you may want to read with them or ask them to tell you a story. Even better, try to find out the cause of the resistance. They may be embarrassed about their lack of understanding or knowledge of the subject. In that case, consider starting at a lower level and help them learn that level first. For example, if they can't read at Level 4, start reading with them at Level 3. Again, our Academic Program assessments may be useful.
- Some students are very quiet, and it is important to be aware of their body language. Often, students let you know in subtle ways what they are thinking, how they are feeling, and whether or not they understand the concepts you are tutoring.
- Our program runs year round, even if the student is on break from school during the summer or holiday season. During this time, there are different activities you can introduce to your student. For example, word games and math puzzles provide a fun way to engage a child. Studies have shown that children who practice skills they already know are more prepared for the next school year than those who do not.

At the conclusion of each of your first several sessions, remind the student and the parent/legal guardian what day and time you will return the following week. This is also a good time to reinforce your commitment to your student's learning and provide positive reinforcement.

## 9. Educational Programs and Resources

School on Wheels, Inc. provides you, the tutor, with many valuable tools in the Digital Learning, Academic and BUS Program sections of our online Volunteer Resources Page. If your student is in kindergarten through 7<sup>th</sup> grade, our Academic Program will help you assess their academic level and choose activities to help you meet your student's needs. The BUS (Believe, Understand, Succeed) Program was designed for our students in 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade with the goal of helping our youth understand and explore their options after high school. The Digital Learning Program is for students of all ages and includes an adaptive learning component. The follow-up Introductory and Advanced Tutor Trainings will introduce you to these very important and helpful programs.

We are constantly developing new programs to help you fill in the academic gaps of your students. We will keep you updated about ways to incorporate technology into your sessions and about new programs you can use throughout the year. We have additional programs for the summer, as well as college and career resources. In the meantime, please explore the wealth of resources we have in the Volunteer Resources section of our website ([www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org)).

## 10. Online Database System

### Mandatory Logging Policy and Online Database System

As part of your role as a volunteer, we ask that you document all volunteer hours via our online database. If you are a tutor coordinator (TC), your role may also include ensuring the tutors under your supervision are logging on a weekly basis. If you tutor in addition to being a TC, please record your session hours along with your TC hours.

Logging is an extremely important, mandatory part of being a volunteer in our program. Tutors who are not logging will be terminated after sufficient warnings and attempts to contact. To understand the importance of this, you should be familiar with the reasons for this policy:

- For the safety and protection of our students and volunteers, we have to know who is tutoring and where and when they are tutoring.
- If you don't record your time, we don't know you are tutoring or if the student needs a new tutor.
- Funders and donors require this data, and we can be denied funding if we are not able to show it.

The system is also used to follow tutor sessions and see how they are progressing. Your regional coordinator is always available to answer any questions you may have regarding this process. We appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you again for your commitment to making a difference in the life of a homeless child, and welcome to School on Wheels, Inc.

## **Addenda**

### **Non-Discrimination Policy**

We reach out and provide services to all homeless children. School on Wheels, Inc. has not, does not, and will not discriminate with respect to gender, race, color, religion, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation or any other classification protected by applicable state or federal discrimination laws, whether in regard to employment or to those to whom we provide services.

### **Harassment Policy**

School on Wheels, Inc. is committed to an environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Harassment of any sort, whether it be verbal, physical, or visual, and on any basis, whether it be race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, citizenship, ancestry, disability, marital status, familial status, military status, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, whether at School on Wheels, Inc. or in other work-related settings, such as volunteer meetings, nonprofit client sites or social events.

Harassing conduct includes, but is not limited to the following: epithets, slurs, denigrating jokes, or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating, or hostile acts; and displays or circulation in the workplace of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group and that: (i) has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment; (ii) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance; or (iii) otherwise adversely affects an individual's employment opportunities or work experience.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment constitutes discrimination and is illegal. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when, for example: (i) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or ability to provide volunteer services; (ii) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions or selection for volunteer opportunities affecting such individual; or (iii) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Sexual harassment may involve individuals of the same or different sex and may include a range of behaviors including, for example: words, signs, jokes, pranks, sexual propositions, sexual innuendo, suggestive comments, foul or obscene language, intimidation, physical contact, or violence.

Particular caution and judgment must be exercised in any romantic and/or sexual relationships between and among School on Wheels employees, representatives of non-profit clients and volunteers because it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between consensual and unwelcome situations.

### **Responsibility and Reporting**

Employees and volunteers share the responsibility for assuring that, by their behavior, the equal opportunity policies are effective and apply uniformly to everyone. Any employee who becomes aware of an incident of harassment, whether by witnessing the incident or being told of it, must report the incident to his or her immediate supervisor or any management representative, including members of the board of directors, with whom he or she feels comfortable. Any volunteer who becomes aware of an incident of harassment must report the incident to a member of the School on Wheels staff.

Any complaints will be investigated thoroughly and promptly. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent practical and appropriate under the circumstances. School on Wheels, Inc. will take appropriate action to remedy the situation. Any employee found to have harassed a fellow employee, representative of a client or volunteer will be subject to severe disciplinary action up to and including termination. Any volunteer found to have harassed a fellow volunteer, representative of a client or employee will no longer be permitted to participate in School on Wheels projects or activities.

No adverse employment action will be taken against any employee or volunteer for making a good-faith report of alleged harassment. Retaliation is a serious violation of School on Wheels policy. Any employee found to have engaged in retaliation will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination. Concerns about attempted retaliation should be raised (and will be handled) in the same manner as any other concern about equal opportunity rights.

School on Wheels, Inc. accepts no liability for the harassment of an employee, representative of a client or volunteer by another employee or volunteer. An individual who in any way harasses another employee, representative of a client or volunteer is personally liable for such actions and their consequences. School on Wheels, Inc. will normally not provide legal, financial, or any other assistance to an individual accused of harassment if a legal complaint is filed.

## Frequently Asked Questions

What is my first step to becoming a tutor after I complete the application process?

Your regional coordinator or tutor coordinator will contact you to arrange your first session.

I would like to become a tutor coordinator at my shelter. What should I do?

All of our tutor coordinators are volunteers, so please contact your regional coordinator to discuss the next steps.

What if I need to take a vacation and cannot meet with my student?

If you know you will be gone for more than two weeks in a row, please inform your student directly, as well as your coordinator. Remember to log any missed sessions in our online database system, including the reason for the cancellation. Remember to log any missed sessions in our online database system, including the reason for the cancellation.

My student has missed two tutoring sessions in a row and I am frustrated. What can I do?

Please contact your coordinator to discuss the situation. Depending on the circumstances of the child, it may be necessary to match you with a new student.

What happens when my student leaves their location?

When your student leaves, please contact your coordinator and let them know. You may be assigned a new student, or, alternatively, you will have the option of continuing to work with your student at their new location. If your student moves into permanent housing, you have the option of working with them for six months or until the end of the school year, whichever is longer. After that time, if you want to continue with your student, you must sign a release form, and you will no longer be considered a School on Wheels volunteer when you are working with that student.

My student does not always concentrate at or enjoy our tutoring sessions. What can I do?

It is important to remember that our students are living in difficult circumstances, and you will find they will not be focused or ready to learn at some sessions. It is important to be patient and to encourage and reinforce good behavior. If you feel your student has a discipline problem that needs to be addressed further, please contact your coordinator for assistance.

My student has a medical issue, physical disability or learning disability. What do I do?

Prior to meeting your student, you will be informed of any medical issues or disabilities we are aware of. If you suspect they have further issues that interfere with your sessions, please let your coordinator know so we can discuss this with the child's parent/legal guardian. Do not attempt to diagnose the student or approach the student's parent/legal guardian directly.

May I tutor more than one hour per week?

Yes! While we only require one hour per week commitment, you are more than welcome to tutor as often as your and your student's schedule allows. Please double check with the student's parent/legal guardian regarding extra hours.

My student is doing exceptionally well and I would like to reward them with a gift. Is this allowed?

Yes, but we ask you to restrict any gifts to special occasions such as birthdays, holidays and graduation. Expensive gifts are discouraged; also, please check with location staff and your student's parent/legal guardian for any restrictions regarding gift-giving.

Am I allowed to take my student on a field trip?

Unless a shelter has specific rules regarding field trips, yes, field trips are allowed. Tutors who have been meeting with their students for more than three months and wish to take them on field trips must do so with at least one other tutor and student. Even if you are not transporting (i.e. meeting up at the field trip site), there should be at least one other tutor and student present at all times. However, before a student can leave a shelter, a permission form must be signed by the parent/legal guardian and the regional coordinator, and you must also provide proof of insurance. A child is not allowed to leave the shelter until this paperwork has been completed. Talk to your coordinator about how best to arrange this.

Can my child become a School on Wheels tutor?

We encourage youth twelve years and older to join their parent(s) at a location. The youth must fill out an application, view our online orientation and complete the training process. A parent or legal guardian must accompany the child to each tutoring session. Your coordinator will arrange the student match. Please note that children aged 12-15 do not need to be fingerprinted. Teens who are 16 years or older do not need parent/guardian supervision to tutor and must complete the application process on their own.

Why do I need to be fingerprinted for School on Wheels, Inc. when I completed the process for another organization?

Agencies are not allowed to share fingerprint data with one another. Therefore, if you apply to tutor, the Live Scan process must be completed again.