## Service Tips

These guidelines will help you have a safer and more effective experience as a volunteer.

#### Be aware of your environment:

Remember you are a helper, a learner, and a visitor. The organization with which you are working has specific ways of interacting and getting things done. Be aware of these particularities and act appropriately. Do not assume you know how to do things or know more than the people who are there everyday.

#### Find out about the agency's history:

The more you know about what the organization does and the clientele it serves the more effective your efforts will be.

#### Establish a contact person:

Know who will be working on the project with you and a phone number to reach them. If they are expecting you at a certain time, be prompt and ready to work. This person should also be available to answer any questions you may have.

#### Follow a work ethic:

Remember your agreement to serve is a commitment to the agency. You will establish relationships with the agency clientele and they will look forward to seeing you. Agency staff will value the service you provide and count on your help. If you are going to be late or are unable to attend please call your contact person as soon as possible. Consider carefully the reason you might have for missing your meeting.

#### Follow the organizations policies and procedures:

Be familiar with the specifics of your job. Gain a clear understanding of any rules you need to follow. Also ask about any liability of which you need to be aware. (Does the agency provide volunteer insurance?)

#### Understand the need for confidentiality:

Becoming personally involved with the agency clientele is a rewarding experience, but remember you may be dealing with sensitive information that is not to leave the agency. If there is any question as to whether you should share information.... **DO NOT!**

Speak with contact person about their confidentiality policy. Additionally do not feel pressured to share personal information with clients.

#### Dress appropriately and sensibly:

Blending in with the community doesn't mean dressing poorly, it implies dressing smart, "that is to be neat, clean and safe." Wear clothing that affords you modesty, comfort, flexibility and agility.

#### Avoid carrying personal items that may identify you as an outsider:

These Items can cause you to be easily identified as an outsider. There also may not be any place for you to keep your personal items. Develop a community safety net of resources in your assigned areas. Find people, places and things in the area that can be of assistance in times of crisis or need. For example, know the location of phones and twenty-four hour stores. Here are some other ideas to insure your safety:

#### Above all, use common sense!

Give the phone number of your agency and a schedule of your hours to a roommate, friend, or relative.

Familiarize yourself with local police or security

Be aware of your instincts. Trust your gut feeling!

Don't leave visible items in your car's interior.

Work in pairs, if possible.

Stay informed of issues affecting the area in which you serve.

Do not borrow from or lend money to clients or staff of the agency.

Do not give out your home address or telephone number.

Take extra special precautions when going to sites at night.

Never use alcohol or drugs on site. Please respect the smoking policy of the agency.

Be sensitive to your own needs and limitations. Maintain an appropriate level of distance from those at the site and don't counsel clients unless you are trained to do so.

Don't expect to know all the answers. It is okay to admit that you don't know something. If faced with a question you are not familiar with try to get the answers or direct someone to the proper person that can provide an answer.

Don't hesitate to report an incident that makes you uncomfortable.

Be aware of sexual harassment policies and what forms sexual harassment can take. It is unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances, either verbal or physical. It refers to behavior which is not welcome, personally offensive, and which debilitates morale. Be clear about what is and is not considered appropriate behavior.

All incidents (real or perceived) should be reported to the The Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement.