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Volunteer Handbook
2022-2023

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WELCOME VOLUNTEERS

We're Glad You're Here!

We are so grateful for our volunteer tutors. Really grateful. Your commitment and service make it possible for us to support the students. Thank you for believing in our work and for making time to be here. This is an incredibly challenging time for all of us, and particularly for our students. We thank you for raising your hand to help lend support.

Bridge the Gap (BTG) is a culture of community and inclusion, so we hope you'll feel like part of the family as we work together in encouraging our students to grow. ***If you approach students with enthusiasm, patience, and a steadfast belief in their abilities, you will leave an impact on their attitudes toward learning, and their belief in themselves.***

We hope you enjoy spending time with our young learners. Just remember that, like anything else, tutoring takes practice. We're always learning, and we're always striving for improvement. Each day brings something new, and we ask that you be flexible and meet students where they are on that day. Be positive, and make it fun whenever possible!

This Volunteer Handbook is a guide to help volunteers in understanding the policies and expectations of BTG. It will relay our history, philosophy, practices, policies, procedures and programs and is intended to serve as a reference throughout the year. If something comes up that can't be addressed with good judgment, common sense and thoughtful consideration, please reach out to the Director of Intervention or any one of the staff.

You got this. Go volunteers!

ABOUT BRIDGE THE GAP

Our Mission and Values

The mission of BTG is to provide educational, social and emotional resources to underserved students in Marin City and Southern Marin.

Bridge the Gap Core Values:

- We believe that education is the greatest equalizer in closing achievement gaps.
- We instill an expectation of college completion throughout its programming.
- We collaborate with community partners to support youth; together our collective impact is greater than that of anyone.
- We believe that given the right support, all students can have the opportunity to go to, and through, college.
- We believe that **education can change a community and change lives.**

Our History: 25+ Years

In 1995, Pastor Fred Small had a vision around providing educational support for the young people in his congregation through tutoring. It began with providing academic help to a few students after school at the church. With the belief that education can change lives, create equity and change a community, he joined efforts with colleagues Bob Hunter and Denni Brusseau to develop a community-based program that is now Bridge the Gap.

More than 25 years later, we have grown from serving 6 students to offering an expansive program that serves well over 400 students, from Kindergarten through college, with a team of amazing educators and nearly 150 volunteers.

CONTACT INFORMATION

BTG High School Program

Tamalpais High School Student Center
700 Miller Avenue
Mill Valley CA 94941

BTG K-8 Program

Dr. Martin Luther King Junior Academy

Elementary Campus:

636 Nevada Street
Sausalito, CA 94965

Middle School Campus:

200 Phillips Drive
Marin City, CA 94965

BTG Contacts

Ruth Castillo

Director of Intervention

ruthcastillo@btgcollegeprep.org

OUR PROGRAMS

Volunteer Opportunities

We at Bridge the Gap are extremely grateful to our devoted volunteer tutors who provide academic support and mentoring for our students. We are always looking for positive and enthusiastic volunteers to join our BTG family. There is no prerequisite other than the ability to commit to a weekly schedule, patience, flexibility, compassion, willingness to attend training and a desire to inspire students to do their best and reach their potential!

K-8th After School Program

Students attend the afterschool program on both the elementary and middle school campuses, Monday through Friday, from approximately 3:00 to 6:00 pm. Volunteers will

be directed by teachers, and may be tasked with individual or small group support and homework help.

9th-12th After School Program

Tam High students attend our high school tutoring program for help with homework, preparing for tests and completing all college and scholarship applications.

One-on-One Evening Program

2nd - 8th graders are matched with an individual tutor at the beginning of the school year. Students attend twice per week. (Volunteers can choose to participate once or twice per week.) Pairs focus on reading, academic support, and homework completion. Volunteers are directed by the BTG Director of Intervention. Program times: Mondays through Thursdays, 6:00 to 7:30 pm.

APPLICATION PROCESS

We encourage all of you to spread the word about BTG to confident and capable friends and family members who may want to apply to our program as a volunteer! You are our best and most authentic source of public relations, so talk up BTG!

Step One. All prospective volunteers must complete an online or written **application** as the first step. After we receive the application, you will get a follow up call or email from the Director of Intervention.

Please note that the **minimum age for BTGCP volunteers is high school Freshman**. We may make exceptions for mature middle schoolers who want to volunteer.

What happens next?

Interview

A brief, casual phone or in-person chat to assess eligibility, fit and program placement.

Background Check

All volunteers over 18 must complete an online Sterling Verified Volunteer background check before working with students.

Health Screening for TB

All volunteers over 18 in California must complete a TB risk assessment, and TB testing if deemed necessary, before working in person with school-aged children. By law, the risk assessment form must be administered by a healthcare professional.

Volunteer Waiver

A simple form outlining the basic tenets of your volunteerism; must be signed by a parent if under 18.

Transportation Waiver

A completed transportation form, valid driver's license and proof of insurance is needed in the event you ever need to transport a student in your personal vehicle.

Placement Notification

We will contact you with placement possibilities. We try our absolute best to accommodate the volunteers that apply to BTG, but please understand that an application does not guarantee placement.

Volunteer Orientation

We generally conduct a volunteer orientation session in the fall before programs begin. This will provide an overview of BTG and our goals as an organization, instruction on how to guide the academic intervention, as well as information about your role as a volunteer. We will arrange additional training as needed, and as time permits.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERING

The Basics

Build a rapport and make a connection.

Relationships built over time will lead to trust, and students are far more inclined to try when they're working with someone they feel comfortable with and who is there for them. Tell them about yourself and try to find common ground or shared interests. Showing students that you genuinely care about them and their lives goes a long way.

Be a positive and consistent source of encouragement.

We try to model a growth mindset with our BTG students, so be sure to offer specific praise for any glimmer of effort or progress. Stay positive and reinforce what they do well. Focus on the process of learning vs. generalized praise. We want them to understand that learning is a continual process of growth, and that mistakes are an inevitable part of that growth. Challenges help all of us learn. "Great job!" isn't nearly as

effective as “You worked so hard on that revision. As a result, the story is more clear and interesting!”

Meet students where they are. Then make a plan.

Students at BTG are at all levels academically. Understand where they fall and what skills need improvement. If working on a specific assignment or project, help them break it down into manageable parts so they’re not overwhelmed. You can ease anxiety by mapping it out and helping them see the steps needed to work toward completion. Encourage them to do their best.

Be engaged during reading.

Reading with fluency and comprehension is such a critical skill for students of all ages. Make sure students decipher any difficult vocabulary. Use context clues to help them understand or look up the meaning. Reading aloud, pointing to words for younger children and questioning (“what does that mean?”, “what do you think will happen next?”) all go a long way in helping students progress. Make any time with a book more productive by asking questions about setting, plot and characters; add a “picture walk” for younger readers and have them describe what they see. Stop periodically to summarize what they’ve read. Also, reading aloud helps refine writing skills. Saying a sentence out loud helps illustrate any problems with awkward phrasing or grammar.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERING

The Basics (continued)

Use questions to guide them to the answer.

You can help students build independence and confidence by allowing them to recognize solutions for themselves. Ask probing questions and offer up suggestions or strategies they can use to find answers (Khan Academy is a great resource). Asking questions is the best way to get them to look for solutions. “What punctuation should go at the end of this sentence?”, “Where can you look to find more details to support that point?”. When you want to make suggestions, be gentle and explain the reasons for each change. For questions about spelling, encourage them to try and take it one syllable at a time vs. doing it for them.

Do your best to make it fun. Humor helps.

Don’t make homework drudgery. It’s up to all of us to demonstrate a love of learning for our students. We can show them that the process of improving their work can be fun

and something to be proud of. Find a personal connection to the subject or assignment they're working on and chat about it. Be understanding if a student isn't a fan of school, but balance that with your own take on learning and improving and how good it can make you feel. Be as interactive as you can and show interest in what they're doing. Keeping a sense of humor may help make tasks seem less daunting.

Sometimes it may not seem like it, but your support matters.

Just showing up and showing you care means a lot to our students. Don't assume that your presence doesn't matter if you don't get a positive response or any gestures of gratitude right away. Your kindness and support does get noticed, and hopefully, over time, you will build trust and be able to break through to those with a tougher shell. Being here and showing an interest in students' lives is a crucial piece of the volunteer support we aim to provide at BTG. It's not just about the tutoring. Thank you, you are appreciated!

Common Challenges

The student gets distracted easily and can't focus.

The most common thing we hear during the program centers around distraction and lack of focus and/or motivation. Many times, distractions come into play because the student simply doesn't understand the assignment or have confidence that they can do it. Assure them that you're there to help and make sure they know what they're being asked to do. If the room or nearby students are distracting, move to a quieter location. Remind students of the goal and tie it to a timetable; "let's do 5 more problems, then we can take a break". If they have a lot of energy, do some running around or jumping jacks before getting down to work. Rewards (game time, playing outside, stickers) are ok and can help offer incentive. Be encouraging and seek help from teachers when you need it.

The student is being disruptive or disrespectful.

Sometimes this is an unfortunate reality we see during program time. There are many reasons a student can have a rough day, be it personal struggles at school or home to too much sugar and everything in between. If a gentle reminder that they need to focus, behave appropriately and be a respectful part of the community doesn't work, ask for help. The BTG staff will take the steps necessary to try and have a student "reset". In the case that a student just can't cooperate, they will likely be sent home for that day. It's important to remember that sometimes the most disruptive students are the ones who need our understanding and love the most.

The student has difficulty learning.

At BTG, we work with students where they are. Some have learning differences and many are performing below their grade level. In every situation, provide encouragement, acknowledge strengths and maintain (and express) confidence that they can achieve at a high level. It may take a while to get there, but assure them that they can do it.

Replace notions of “I can’t do this”, with “You can’t do this **yet**”. Provide opportunities for “little wins” as much as you can to boost confidence. It will help to strategize with the teacher/program coordinator to come up with ways to work with students who struggle. Please ask!

VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Attendance

Attendance and being on time is important to the success of our programs. Volunteers should notify the Volunteer Manager in advance (call/text/email) if they’ll be late or absent asap. If unable to be here, please do your best to find a substitute. More than 3 unexcused absences (meaning without prior notification) may lead to program removal.

Commitment

While we require at least one year of commitment, we encourage and strive for long lasting relationships. We recognize that schedules and activities change, but we hope you see your commitment to BTG as a priority. Remember that building a relationship with your student may take time, so try to be flexible and patient!

Communication

Whenever staff sends you an email, please be sure and respond when asked. It’s the surest way to let us know you’ve received and understood the content. Email is our primary method of communication with volunteers, so please *check your inbox often* for important BTG notifications!

Confidentiality

Each volunteer is responsible for safeguarding confidential information obtained during their volunteerism. During your time here, you may have access to confidential information regarding the students or BTG. Access to such information is on a “need-to-know” basis, must be authorized and should not be discussed outside BTG.

When on Zoom...

Please make sure you have a stable connection and have a neutral backdrop. Volunteers represent BTG and should present a positive image, so please dress appropriately and be respectful of the environments on the other side of the camera. We are guests in our students' homes, so we should all honor that and recognize that this is a big deal for some kids!

Student Safety

This happens rarely, but if you ever have a worry about unsafe behavior or concern for a student's safety, please tell a BTG staff member asap. We are all held by a statute of mandated reporting, so be sure and let someone know if you hear, read or believe for any reason that a student wants to hurt themselves or others. Also, for students' privacy and safety, you are not to post or share photographs of students without permission.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Community Service Hours

Volunteers needing certification of required community service hours must present all forms to the Volunteer Manager. We'll verify your hours and sign as needed. Thanks for choosing us for your service!

Transportation of Students

If a volunteer wants to drive their own vehicle to transport students, they'll first need to be first authorized to drive by signing a Transportation Waiver and providing a valid Driver's License and proof of insurance. Please contact the Director of Intervention if you want to drive a student.

Conflict Resolution

The best way to handle conflict is to communicate honestly, soon after an incident has occurred. We have an open door policy for raising volunteer concerns and will always do our best to address them. No member of our team is too busy to field questions or discuss issues – open and ongoing communication is encouraged and reduces misinformation. If you have questions or concerns, please discuss with staff.

Code of Conduct and Corrective Action

The successful operation and reputation of BTG is built upon the principle of ethical conduct of our volunteers. We reserve the right to terminate a volunteer's connection with BTG at any time. A staff member may provide a consultation and/or warning prior to termination, but is not required to do so. Possible reasons for termination may include but are not limited to:

- Conduct in or outside of program which would be detrimental to BTG
- Attending program or other BTG event under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Theft of property or funds
- No call/no show for three program sessions
- Releasing/breach of confidential information

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

After reviewing the Volunteer Handbook, please read and return this acknowledgment form, dated and signed, to the Director of Intervention. Thank you!

This Handbook is provided to you for information and reference. As we are a dynamic and changing organization, policies in this Handbook are subject to change, revision, deletion, or addition by BTG from time to time with or without prior notice.

USE OF LIKENESS

I hereby give to Bridge the Gap the right and permission to use my name, statements, audio or video recordings, likeness or photograph that may be captured during BTG programs or events. This likeness may be used in future BTG productions, publications/newsletters, company presentations, on the website or social media channels or for other promotional purposes; such use will be granted without any form of compensation. This form shall be valid until revoked by the undersigned.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I acknowledge that I have received and read my copy of the BTG Volunteer Handbook and am familiar with and understand its contents, policies and volunteer expectations. I agree to comply with the terms outlined in this Handbook.

Volunteer Signature

Printed Name

Date
