

WELCOME



BITTERSWEET

Volunteer Handbook



Welcome

Welcome to Bittersweet, Inc.!

As Executive Director, it is my pleasure to welcome you as a volunteer at Bittersweet Farms.

Bittersweet Farms is a world-renowned program in the greater autism community. There are few places that specialize in providing residential services to adults with autism and even fewer that use a farmstead model to do so. Our transition school programs are also on the cutting edge in the field. We are truly pioneers seeking to assist those with autism to develop to their fullest potential.

By volunteering with us, you are becoming an important contributor to this unique organization. The skills, abilities, energy, and commitment you bring are vital in ensuring that the individuals we serve continue to grow and develop in a nurturing and stimulating environment.

This volunteer handbook provides an outline of Bittersweet's policies that relate directly to volunteering. It also includes some "Autism 101" information to help you better understand our participants and the environment at Bittersweet. Please use it as a reference during your time here and feel free to ask questions if you do not understand.

Thank you for joining the Bittersweet community!

Sincerely,



*The mission of Bittersweet, Inc.
is to positively impact the lives of
individuals with autism and
those whose lives they touch.*

Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator with any questions or concerns:

Shannon Solt

ssolt@bittersweetfarms.org

419 875 6986, ext. 1263

Who We Are

Bittersweet Farms was founded in 1983 after Bettye Ruth Kay, an activist teacher, realized the bleak future many adults with autism faced upon leaving the school system. Despite the fact that autism is a lifelong neurological disorder, there are a disproportionately smaller number of resources available for adults with autism. This makes Bittersweet's emphasis on serving adolescents and adults especially important.

Bittersweet engages in a model which employs meaning and motivation, active engagement and aerobic activity, partnership and purpose, and structure and support. This provides a community of interdependence and a healthy, holistic environment in which the potential of each participant is envisioned and developed. Every interaction is a lesson in reciprocal communication, relationship building, and mutual cooperation between staff and participant.

Bittersweet prides itself on recognizing the unique qualities and needs of each individual with autism and addressing those needs appropriately. Dignity, respect, and kindness are the hallmarks of the staff and participant relationship and all of our behavioral and habilitative programming incorporate these ideals.



Autism 101

Basic Facts

1. Autism affects one out of every 68 people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2014)). Within ten years, 500,000 children will transition into adulthood.
2. Autism knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries; no family income levels, lifestyle choices, or educational levels; it can affect any family and any child.
3. Autism is a neurological disorder, usually diagnosed around three years of age.
4. Autism is a lifelong condition, with no known cause nor "cure."
5. Autism is five times more common in boys than girls.
6. Early and accurate diagnosis and support is vital.
7. "Autism Spectrum Disorder" (ASD) references several disabilities under one umbrella.
8. Autism affects the functioning of the brain, especially development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills.
9. Autism often prevents or impacts individuals from properly processing and understanding what they see, hear, or otherwise sense.
10. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties with one or more of the following verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, leisure or play activities, and a markedly restricted repertoire of activity and interests.
11. People with autism may demonstrate stereotypical movements such as toe walking, hand flapping, finger flicking, rocking, or spinning.
12. People with autism may have a fascination with movement (e.g., spinning tops, running water) and strong attachments to inanimate objects (e.g., a piece of string, a toy, a favorite book), even well into adulthood.
13. Different groupings and degrees of characteristics exist within each individual, but the groups almost always include differences in communication involvement, sensory, social, and executive function, and repetition or restricted interests.



Bittersweet Core Values



RHEAL

Respect

Our core values are built upon a rock solid foundation of RESPECT for each and every member of the Bittersweet community, with full recognition that each person has something of value to offer the whole.

Help First

While adherence to operational policies & procedures and governing regulations is vitally important, every action should be carried out with an unwavering intention to HELP FIRST by acknowledging the need and urgency of any member of the Bittersweet community, or the global community of which we are all a part.

Empathy

We use EMPATHY to gain insight and understanding for the people we serve and for one another in order to work together collaboratively and successfully.

Achieve Together

Although we may differ as participants, family members, or employees, or vary by location, program, department, or responsibility, we are united through every challenge and ACHIEVE TOGETHER every success.

Learn and Grow

As an organization, we LEARN & GROW by inviting a diversity of perspectives, fostering discourse, and reflecting upon the observable outcomes of our actions.

Bittersweet Philosophy

When you are on a journey with a person with autism, use...M.A.P.S.

Meaning and Motivation

Be sure to teach the meaning for different activities: what is the reason for doing an action? Help each person understand the value of his/her work, at his/her level of comprehension. Find out what motivates the individual and integrate it into the schedule. Celebrate even small accomplishments.

Aerobic and Active Engagement

Encourage the person to move, doing healthy exercise/activities throughout the course of the day, design/set-up simple physical movement within an activity - walking, bending, stretching, reaching, etc. Think of it as a sensory banquet designed for each person's likes and needs; encourage as much participation as possible in every activity.

Partnership and Purpose

Work as a team with a mutual goal that is understood by each partner. Share all the work, teach by modeling, and teach in context. This is important in developing successful social "interdependence."

Structure and Support

Consistently structured routines, work areas, and social interactions (utilizing individualized supports) help persons with ASD to understand the order of activities, to make choices, and to communicate interests and needs. Prepare and use visual schedules (written or pictured, depending upon need) so each individual can understand what is happening, what is expected, what is coming next. Break long tasks into smaller steps. Rehearse. Prepare for changes. Gather supplies. Appreciate and consider sensory needs/concerns. Develop positive communication systems so the person can effectively, efficiently, and socially-acceptably refuse, request, respond, and react!



Volunteering at Bittersweet

Volunteers must be able to perform assigned duties independently or with external support provided by the volunteer. Volunteer hours are coordinated with each program leader at each different location. Volunteers are required to commit to a minimum of eight hours of volunteering. Any volunteers under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Please be sure to read the important rules and guidelines for volunteering at Bittersweet Farms on pages 7 and 8.

Recommendations for Interactions

1. Invite; don't demand.
2. Avoid over-verbalization and long explanations.
3. Give plenty of time for information processing.
4. Stay relaxed; sit with participants rather than standing over them.
5. Use a soft voice. Some individuals may respond better to a whisper.
6. Reinforce communication - photos, line drawings, models of objects, written word. Use visual examples whenever possible.

Person-First Language

The way a society refers to its members who have disabilities shapes its beliefs and ideas about them. Using person-first terms can foster positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Person-first language emphasizes the person, not the disability. It's easy to get trapped in old language habits. However, a few adjustments can ensure all of us, regardless of our abilities and disabilities, use language that is accurate and shows respect for individual differences. To describe differences accurately and in a way that conveys respect:

- Put the person first in word and thought
- Tell the truth without adding judgment
- Don't include a person's differences if they're not relevant to the information you're sharing
- For example, instead of saying "autistic man," say "man with autism."
- Pay close attention to the phrases employees use.



Volunteer Policies and Procedures

It is our hope that volunteers find their experience at Bittersweet enjoyable and meaningful. We encourage you to contact the Volunteer Coordinator with any compliments, questions, or concerns.

Attendance

We typically assign our volunteers to a particular area in advance, and often our day program participants and residents look forward to working alongside our volunteers. Participants may become distressed with absences that are not communicated. Please contact the program coordinator that you have been in contact with, or contact the Volunteer Coordinator at 419 875 6986 if you are ill or unable to volunteer.

Signing In

Volunteers must sign-in upon arrival at the location in which they are volunteering, regardless of whether or not a volunteer is receiving credit for the volunteer hours. If you are volunteering at our Whitehouse location during regular business hours (M-F, 8:30-4:30 pm), please sign-in and pick up your volunteer badge at the front desk in the administration building.

Dress Code

Clothing must be modest, casual, and comfortable. Clothing that is revealing or promotes drugs, alcohol, or profanity is not permitted. Shorts must be to the knee. Yoga pants, sandals, and open-toed shoes are not allowed. Any volunteers not in compliance will be sent home. Bittersweet discourages volunteers from wearing expensive or valuable clothing or jewelry. Be mindful of strong fragrances, as some of our participants have a very acute sense of smell. Requests may be made per individual area.

Cell Phones and Internet Usage

If a volunteer needs to use his/her cell phone, he/she is asked to notify a supervisor, who will find an appropriate area for the volunteer to use their cell. Taking photos of Bittersweet participants is not permitted. Posting and uploading names and photos of Bittersweet participants to social media and the internet is also not permitted. Any violations will result in immediate dismissal.

Confidentiality

All information about our participants is confidential. Volunteers are not permitted to disclose or discuss any participant, human resources, or management information with individuals who are not directly involved with the participant's care. This includes but is not limited to verbal discussions, written documents, and electronic media. Volunteers are not permitted to access information simply to satisfy a curiosity. It is unacceptable to look up data other than that which is required to perform volunteer duties. Volunteers must not discuss participant information where others can overhear. Volunteers are not permitted to take photos of participants unless the proper authorization is given.



Beverage Policy

It is the philosophy of Bittersweet to encourage healthy food and drinks. Bittersweet does not provide coffee, hot chocolate, tea, juices or lemonade for personal carafes, thermos or containers. No carafes, thermos, cups or containers of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or juice will be allowed in the presence of residents or participants in work areas. If volunteers would like to bring these items (coffee, tea, hot chocolate, juice), they must be kept and consumed in a locked car or office and kept from sight.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs

Bittersweet has a strict policy against smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use anywhere on Bittersweet property, including in personal vehicles. We maintain a tobacco-free work environment. This policy applies to all employees and volunteers on Bittersweet property. Smoking, the use of any tobacco or tobacco by-product, or the use of electronic cigarettes is not permitted anywhere on Bittersweet properties, buildings, structures, or parking lots.

Fire/Tornado

Volunteers are expected to follow posted safety plans. Follow the lead of the staff member(s) in your area.

Harassment Free/Discrimination Policy

Bittersweet does not tolerate any sort of harassment or discrimination on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, religion, gender, condition of pregnancy, disability, and/or any other condition protected by law.

Fundraising

Bittersweet greatly appreciates community members who are interested in raising funds. Please contact the Development Department before proceeding with fundraising.

Injury/Accidents

The Bittersweet nursing staff must assess any individual who is injured while volunteering.

Insurance

Our volunteers are covered by Bittersweet's insurance, secondary to their own. This coverage is limited to medical expenses that result from injury incurred while at Bittersweet.



BITTERSWEET

SERVING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM



www.bittersweetfarms.org

We appreciate your support!

We want to express a special thank you to all of our volunteers for donating their time and services toward creating a positive atmosphere here at Bittersweet Farms.



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