



# Volunteer Handbook 2018

*Policies and Procedures for Volunteers at Ouachita Children's Center*

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*The Ouachita Children's Center is a nonprofit child advocacy organization providing emergency shelter and quality services for youth and families, empowering them to achieve lifelong success*



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## Volunteer Handbook Table of Contents

Welcome!.....	2
OCC Mission Statement .....	3
Our Values.....	3
Philosophy.....	3
History of Ouachita Children’s Center .....	4
Our Vision for the Future .....	4
Code of Conduct .....	5
Confidentiality.....	5
Volunteer-Client Interaction .....	6
OCC Staff-Volunteer Interaction .....	7
Volunteer Procedures and Guidelines .....	8
Volunteer Groups.....	9
Grievances and Concerns.....	10
Conclusion.....	10



## Welcome!

Welcome to Ouachita Children's Center (OCC)! We offer emergency shelter and support services for youth in crisis. Our emergency shelter is located in Hot Springs. Case management, outreach, and support services are offered through our offices in Hot Springs and in Arkadelphia. We also serve community youth, as well as their families, in order to assist them in times of difficulty or distress. Volunteers have always been an important part of how we fulfill our mission and we are so glad that you are interested in becoming part of that volunteer tradition. Working with our staff and program, you can make a difference in helping youth and families to achieve lifelong success.

This handbook is designed to help you have the best possible experience as a volunteer. It answers frequently asked questions and provides you with information about our program, our clients, and your role as a volunteer.

Please read this handbook, carefully. It was prepared to give you essential information about the policies and expectations of OCC, as well as what you can expect of OCC. If you have any questions regarding these volunteer guidelines, please feel free to contact our Volunteer Coordinator.

Thank you again for your desire to be an OCC volunteer!



## **OCC Mission Statement**

The Ouachita Children's Center is a non-profit child advocacy organization providing emergency shelter and quality services for youth and families, empowering them to achieve lifelong success.

## **Our Values**

As an organization we believe in and practice:

- Respect
- Trust
- Compassion
- Safety
- Integrity
- Stability
- Commitment
- Advocacy

## **Philosophy**

The philosophy of Ouachita Children's Center is best characterized as being a combination service and advocacy agency. Our philosophy and purpose is:

- To improve the care and treatment of juvenile delinquents, youth in need of supervision, and dependent neglected youth
- To improve methods and services in prevention, detection, diagnosis and treatment of neglected and abused youth.
- To serve as an advocate for additional services needed by youth



## **History of Ouachita Children's Center**

Ouachita Children's Center (OCC) was founded in November 1977 by a group of Hot Springs residents and officials in the juvenile justice system. Built in 1928 and listed on the National Historic Registry, the facility – located in an older residential neighborhood in the city of Hot Springs – was initially known as the Interstate Children's Orphanage and later, the Hot Spring Children's Home.

In 1977 it became the Ouachita Children's Center. In 2003, the building and land were deeded to Ouachita Children's Center by the Hot Springs Children's Home Board upon dissolving their corporation. The historic building was dedicated as the Joe Poe Building in 2004. An office was later opened in Clark County to provide support services and case management for youth and families in need.

The early years of OCC were characterized by a "law enforcement" approach in which the shelter served primarily as a detention facility. Beginning in 1981, the shelter began providing long-term residential services, but that was discontinued in 1985. A philosophical change led to a transition from a punitive facility to one of prevention and intervention.

Historically, non-residential services have always included outreach, casework, reintegration services for youth released from Arkansas correctional facilities, diagnosis and evaluation, and from 1984-1988, outpatient and residential drug treatment. OCC also provided supervision of youth who were court ordered to perform public service work, and employment opportunities for youth ordered to pay restitution. Additionally, there have been times when OCC provided an independent living program for older adolescents.

Today, OCC residential service components consist of emergency shelter, respite care, and shelter sanctions. Non-residential service components include casework management, educational support and intervention groups, intensive casework management for serious offenders, and outreach programs to targeted populations, such as homeless youth.

## **Our Vision for the Future**

One youth at a time, OCC sees itself as a community leader, breaking the cycles of asocial and negative behavior, as well as those of abuse and neglect for Arkansas youth. In the future, we envision the OCC facility and programs expanding and changing to accommodate the ever evolving needs of youth in crisis.



## Code of Conduct

OCC is dedicated to serving clients (OCC youth and families) and the public with the highest ethical standards possible. All volunteers are expected to follow the same Code of Conduct as OCC staff. These standards are as follows:

### **Confidentiality:**

- All information about OCC clients is confidential. Protecting confidentiality is also how we protect our clients. Unless you have pre-approval by our management staff, and then written consent from our clients and their legal representative or guardian, it is imperative that you keep all client information confidential. This means that you do not disclose or discuss information about our clients with others - including other clients, visitors, families, friends, or colleagues. If you are uncertain as to what is or is not “confidential,” please ask an OCC staff member.
- Protecting client confidentiality also includes using or discussing client information **ONLY** with those who are directly involved in your duties and responsibilities, not with those who have no direct involvement. This includes communications with other volunteers or visitors.
- In order to assure confidentiality, volunteers may not take photographs, videos, or other recordings of any OCC clients. No images, videos, or other recordings of OCC clients may be posted on social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and others), nor may they be uploaded onto the internet, websites, or shared in emails.
- Should you encounter an OCC client (past or present) when you are not on our campus, it is important that you let the client initiate contact, and not the other way around. Because you may be unaware of the client’s situation, you might put the client in jeopardy if you were to initiate contact or, at the very least, cause embarrassment.
- There are rules and regulations that OCC must adhere to regarding confidentiality and, as a volunteer, you are expected to comply with these same regulations. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in your termination as a volunteer and your service to OCC, possible civil penalties (including fines), and potential criminal investigation that might lead to penalties provided for by law.



### **Volunteer-Client Interaction:**

- ❑ Our emergency and temporary shelter is for children in crisis. Clients are usually here for one of two reasons: they have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect or they have been sent here by juvenile court or their parents. At the most, they stay with us for 90 days.
- ❑ You must be prepared for a high turnover of our client population. There is a high probability that the clients you spend time with for one visit will not be here for your next visit.
- ❑ Clients are at OCC because they have experienced crisis and trauma and – as a general rule – participation in activities is optional. Be prepared for the possibility that any activities volunteers might offer may or may not be well-attended or well-received by our clients. In fact, there will be times when clients lose interest in an activity and leave or stop participating altogether. This is not to be taken personally because it has more to do with the client's circumstances and progress than with you, your planned activity, or your intentions.
- ❑ Our staff members work with each client to develop a case plan that will help equip them for a successful life. Their progress is carefully monitored by staff to make sure they are on-track to reach their goals. All clients are expected to be respectful to everyone – staff, fellow residents, visitors, and volunteers; to refrain from physical or verbal altercations; to complete their chores; to attend school or a day program; and to participate in the shelter or outreach schedules. They earn points and privileges when they “work-the-program.” They lose points when they do not. Volunteers are not involved in these points or rewards programs, but should be mindful of how the clients and staff are working together.
- ❑ You – as a volunteer – are not a replacement for OCC's staff, but you must function within the boundaries set by OCC at all times. Except for certain categories of volunteer positions – such as mentors, interns, or therapists – you can expect OCC staff to always be present when you are interacting with clients and during planned volunteer activities. Because OCC staff members are present, volunteers are not responsible for handling behavior problems or other situations that might arise with clients. Should you have concerns about client behavior or participation, ask OCC staff who are present to address those concerns directly with the client.
- ❑ Although OCC clients are children, it is imperative that you respect their physical and personal space. This means that you must refrain from hugging, kissing, or making any inappropriate and non-consensual physical contact. This is important from both a legal and respectful perspective.



- Although it should go without saying, there is absolutely no sexual contact with OCC clients or staff. Anyone who engages in sexual contact with a minor will be reported to law enforcement.
- OCC is a state contracted agency – meaning it is a secular agency. Volunteers are to be extremely respectful and sensitive to the diverse personal beliefs and practices of OCC clients and staff. While we welcome people of faith who want to serve as volunteers, we encourage you to express your values and beliefs through your actions. Proselytizing, preaching, evangelizing, or engaging in persuasive conversations or debates about issues of religion or faith are not appropriate. At OCC, actions speak louder than words when it comes to how you express your beliefs.
- You are to refrain from sharing personal or intimate information with OCC clients about yourself, your family, your friends, or your circumstances. This keeps both volunteers and OCC clients focused on activities and it also protects both.
- You are not permitted in our clients' rooms or in our client's bathrooms.
- You may not bring drugs or alcohol onto OCC's campus and you may not volunteer at OCC while under the influence. Should you do so, you will be asked to leave immediately, law enforcement may be called, and you will be terminated as an OCC volunteer.
- There are procedures and resources that OCC staff can access in order to meet the needs of our clients. You must never insert yourself into these procedures and resources – especially in the presence of the client – and without authorization from a Case Manager or Management Staff. This means that you are not permitted to purchase items on behalf of the client, give clients gifts, run errands, or do favors for clients without prior approval. In addition, you may not communicate with family or friends of clients. If a client makes such requests from you, you are to report this to the OCC staff immediately.
- If there is any interaction or behavior of a client that causes you concern, please bring those concerns to the attention of OCC staff as soon as possible.

### **OCC Staff-Volunteer Interaction:**

- Please be aware that OCC staff are highly trained professionals. From Direct Care Staff to Management, our staff members go through extensive and on-going training in order to effectively provide the therapeutic care that our clients need and deserve.
- OCC staff have specific protocols that they must follow to manage the complex needs and demands of our clients. Everything from behavior management to mealtimes to medication distribution is carefully fulfilled by our trained staff.





- Should any problems or concerns arise with clients, it is the function of trained staff to address these with the client according to our protocols. Your function is to serve as a volunteer – facilitating the work of our staff and the enriching mission of OCC through your gifts of time, talent, and resources.
- In the event of a problematic situation or emergency, it is the responsibility of OCC staff to resolve the situation. Should an incident occur that requires staff intervention, it is imperative that volunteers step back from the situation and follow the directions that staff might give to you.
- If you are concerned about staff behavior, contact that staff's supervisor, case manager, or OCC's executive director.

### **Volunteer Procedures and Guidelines**

- You must be age 18 or older to serve as an OCC volunteer.
- You must submit the signed VOLUNTEER CONFIDENTIALITY AND BEHAVIOR AGREEMENT, along with a copy of your PHOTO ID. In some instances, volunteers may also be required to undergo a complete criminal and child maltreatment background check at the expense of OCC.
- Please leave your VOLUNTEER CONFIDENTIALITY AND BEHAVIOR AGREEMENT with the Volunteer Coordinator. If the Volunteer Coordinator is not present, please leave your agreement with the receptionist or on the reception desk and a note indicating it should go to the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Because OCC works with children and youth, you may not bring minor children on campus with when you volunteer. This is for the protection of our clients' dignity and confidentiality since many of our clients might go to school with non-OCC children.
- Only animals screened and certified by the City of Hot Springs Department of Animal Services may come on to OCC campus. Please do not bring animals onto our property or into our buildings and DO NOT leave animals in your vehicle while you are volunteering or Hot Springs Animal Control will be called to rescue the animal.
- All volunteer activities must be scheduled through the Volunteer Coordinator. If others will be joining in the volunteer activity, the names of those volunteers must be submitted to the Volunteer Coordinator and each one must complete and submit their own signed Volunteer Confidentiality and Behavior Agreement and a copy of their photo ID.
- On the day of the scheduled visit, please enter the building through the front door unless you need a handicapped accessible entry. In that case please use the ramp at the back door and enter there. Regardless of your point of entry, please come to the front reception area, sign in and note the time on the VOLUNTEER SIGN IN SHEET.



- ❑ At the conclusion of your volunteer activity, please sign out, noting the time, on the same VOLUNTEER SIGN IN SHEET and record the number of hours you worked for that particular shift.
- ❑ If you need to use the restroom while you are volunteering, one of our staff will direct you to the appropriate restroom. Usually this is the restroom just off the Direct Care area or the one in the Training Annex Building.
- ❑ Please do not bring your personal property – such as a purse, bag, or electronic equipment like a cell phone, camera, tablet, or other devices – into the OCC building. OCC has no way to secure your personal items while you volunteer and cannot be responsible for loss or theft of your property. You might consider locking your things in your car and then secure your keys in your pocket or on a lanyard to be kept on your person at all times. Please do not leave your keys or personal items unattended, even for a few minutes.

### **Volunteer Groups:**

- ❑ Throughout the year, volunteer groups enrich OCC with special events and projects. When groups want to bring an event or project to OCC, this generally needs to be scheduled several weeks in advance with the Volunteer Coordinator, the Residential Services Director, the Program Director, or the Executive Director.
- ❑ Volunteer groups need to provide their CONTACT PERSON information – including name, email, and mobile phone number – to the Volunteer Coordinator. This contact person must submit a detailed itinerary or project description to the Volunteer Coordinator at the time of scheduling.
- ❑ The contact person must also submit a list of group participants to the Volunteer Coordinator 24 hours prior to the event or project date. Each participant must submit a Volunteer Confidentiality and Behavior Agreement and a copy of their photo ID, which can be submitted upon arrival on the day of the scheduled activity.
- ❑ Should the volunteer group wish to distribute gifts during their scheduled event (such as during the holidays), this must be coordinated and approved by OCC Staff. Because this is a TEMPORARY shelter, groups and volunteers need to clearly understand that there is a very high turnover of OCC clients. This means that volunteers may bring gifts for “CHILD A,” only to find that “CHILD A” has left and “CHILD B” has just arrived a few hours earlier. This may mean that gifts will be redistributed at the discretion of Management or Shelter Staff in cooperation with the volunteer group.



## **Grievances and Concerns**

Given the population that OCC serves, the complexities of our scheduling, staff shift changes, and other fluid situations, it is easy for there to be miscommunication or lack of follow-up by both OCC staff and volunteers. Because misunderstandings and problems sometimes occur between volunteers and OCC staff, we strive to resolve these problems as soon as possible by taking the following steps:

- Volunteers and OCC staff will treat each other with respect and in a fair and just manner at all times – including times when there are problems or misunderstandings.
- All complaints must be fully described by the individuals with the grievance, and those grievances will be shared with the one against whom the complaint has been made.
- The Volunteer Coordinator and other Administrative Staff will work in a timely manner to address and investigate any confusion, questions, concerns, or problems that are raised by either volunteers toward staff, or staff toward volunteers.
- When misunderstandings occur, we will make every effort to mediate the situation so that there is a positive outcome by first having an informal discussion with the Volunteer Coordinator or Administrative Staff to identify problems and to seek possible resolutions. Should this informal approach not bring about resolution, further steps and the possibility of more formal communications may be considered in an effort to address concerns.
- The Volunteer Coordinator or Administrative Staff will keep copies of all statements, information relating to the statements, and documentation of decisions will be placed in a separate file maintained by the Volunteer Coordinator or Business Manager.

## **Conclusion**

It truly “takes a village to raise a child,” which is especially true at OCC. There is no higher calling than to give of your time, your talents, and your resources to those who need them the most. OCC clients are with us for just a brief amount of time, but the difference that you can make by being a caring and safe person who brings light and life into their lives cannot be overstated.

You may never see these children who are in crisis again, but rest assured, you have had a positive impact that they will never forget.

OCC staff and volunteers, working together, can offer these children an enriching experience as they pass through our doors and across our lives. We are so grateful that you have chosen to be one of those beacons of light to help shine the way as they continue on their paths to a successful life. Thanks for being part of our “Village!”