



# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

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# Welcome and Thank You

Thank you for volunteering your time with Conversations to Remember. We recognize that there are many opportunities available to volunteers these days, and are grateful that you've chosen to dedicate your time to us. The time that you devote to our organization will help improve the lives of senior citizens. We hope that it will have a positive impact on you as well.

Conversations to Remember was founded in 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, many senior citizens who were living in senior living communities were not allowed to leave their communities, because the communities feared that they might bring COVID back with them and infect the other residents. They also did not allow in-person visits from family members of the seniors in their care for the same reason. This led to an increase in feelings of isolation in seniors, many of whom were already feeling lonely prior to the lock down. Our mission has been to match up seniors living in senior living communities with students in high school and college for video visits. All of our volunteers either actively participate in these visits or support them in some way.

## Purpose of this Volunteer Handbook

This document details our policies regarding volunteers and volunteering for our nonprofit organization, Conversations to Remember. These standard policies will provide you with what is expected of you as a volunteer of the organization and what you, in return, may expect from Conversations to Remember. These policies are guidelines which we endeavor to apply in a consistent and reasonable manner and reserve the right to amend or terminate at any time.

## Key Contacts for Volunteers

Our Executive Director, Eve Lefkowitz, is the key contact for all of our volunteers. Her contact information is:

Messaging service: @eve

Office phone: (862) 243-5331

Cellphone: (201) 247-1863

Email: [executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org](mailto:executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org)

Our messaging service is our preferred contact method. For issues that require immediate attention, Eve asks that you send her a text message on her cellphone. If she doesn't respond within five minutes, call her on her cellphone.

For matters such as your ability to make an upcoming visit or other commitment, please DM your direct supervisor in our messaging service, If you are providing less than 24 hours notice of a change in your ability to attend a virtual visit or meeting, please reach out to her to confirm

that she has received your update (unless you've texted between 10:00pm and 9:00am Eastern time, in which case, you should call her at 9:00am).

## Definition of a 'Volunteer'

A "volunteer" is anyone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation, performs tasks at the direction of and on behalf of the organization. A 'volunteer' must be officially accepted and enrolled by the organization prior to the performance of the task. Unless specifically stated, volunteers shall not be considered as "employees" of the organization and shall have no expectation of rights, compensation or benefits of an "employee."

## Waivers

Depending on the type of service, volunteers must complete applicable paperwork and waivers. Volunteers under the age of 18 must have a parent or guardian sign any needed paperwork/waiver prior to beginning their volunteer service.

## Attendance

Above all else, our volunteer work is a serious commitment, and volunteers must be responsible regarding attendance. The senior citizens, especially those experiencing cognitive decline, heavily rely on consistency. Arriving to calls as scheduled and on time is paramount. If a volunteer does not show up on time, it could result in cancellation of that day's call, even though another volunteer went to the trouble of attending. In addition to upsetting the senior, it could result in termination of the call. Volunteers who miss a call without providing sufficient notice are subject to removal from the call and the program.

We, of course, understand that life happens. If you have an event or appointment that conflicts with your call, please let us know as soon as possible. Should you know of your appointment or event weeks in advance, we request that you inform us as early as possible so that we may plan accordingly (*e.g. If you are scheduled to take your MCAT on November 2nd, please don't wait until November 1st to inform us*). *If you let us know of your conflict sufficiently in advance of it, we can plan to have someone substitute in for you.*

We also understand that emergencies sometimes occur that you can't plan for in advance. When that happens, please let us know as soon as possible that you will not be able to make your call. Please do not send us an email or message in our messaging service five minutes before the call and expect that we will have seen it prior to the call. If possible, please call us at one of our contact phone numbers.

No call/no show events may result in immediate dismissal of a volunteer.

## **Ending Your Volunteer Role**

You can cease volunteering with our organization at any point in your volunteer relationship. We would prefer that it be when you are not currently engaged in an assignment/project, however, you are free to end the relationship at your will. In the event you wish to cease volunteering, please notify us via a direct message to your supervisor on our messaging service as soon as you know that you wish to stop. For volunteers doing weekly calls, we request at least three week's notice (which is really just three visits from the perspective of the senior whom you're visiting). This will allow us time to place another volunteer on your call, and to smoothly transition. For those volunteers who have made a minimum time commitment of hours and/or weeks, you are expected to fulfill that minimum commitment, but still provide previously mentioned notice that you will not be continuing beyond your commitment.

## **Pausing Your Volunteer Role**

Volunteers who need to leave their role with Conversations to Remember for a few weeks or months due to changes in semester, school breaks, etc., are requested to provide as much notification as possible that they wish to stop volunteering. Please provide us with information about when you'd need to start your break, and when you'd be available to return. For volunteers doing weekly calls, we request at least three week's notice. Following a break or a pause, you may need to repeat the training prior to volunteering again.

## **Discretionary Service**

Volunteer service is at the discretion of Conversations to Remember. The relationship between Conversations to Remember and volunteers may be terminated at any time and for whatever reason.

## **Representing the Organization**

All activities for Conversations to Remember are guided and governed by our board of directors. Volunteers may not contact other organizations or individuals on behalf of the organization unless provided specific permission to do so by the executive director or another member of the management team. Volunteers are also not permitted to contact the senior whom they're assigned to or the community (if applicable) where the senior lives outside of their normal visitation time or outside of the Conversations to Remember virtual visit platform.

Prior to any action or statement which might affect or obligate the organization, volunteers should seek prior consultation and approval from the executive director or the management team. These actions may include, but are not limited to, public statements to the press or public, coalition or partnering efforts with other organizations, or any agreements involving contractual or other financial obligations.

## **Confidentiality**

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a single staff member, volunteer, community member, any other person, or involves the overall business of the organization. In addition, it is expected that volunteers will respect the privacy of the seniors/residents with whom they visit. This includes medical information that you may discuss with them. Should you feel that information disclosed to you reflects an imminent danger to the senior or that they are being mistreated in some way, please disclose it to us in a manner consistent with the level of the danger. Volunteers are not permitted to take or share photographs of the senior or other volunteers, nor are they allowed to take or share video of their conversations with the senior. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with the organization.

## **Copyright/Ownership**

Volunteers hereby grant non-exclusive permission to Conversations to Remember for use of any materials produced for assignments, projects, or programs including, but not limited to, graphic materials, marketing materials, blog submissions, newsletter content, web page designs, web page content, narratives, research compilations, instructional texts, and digital collateral, etc. These materials become the property of the organization upon submission, and not limited to, may be copied, reproduced and published at the discretion of the organization.

## **Standards of Conduct**

Conversations to Remember expects that all of its volunteers will treat each other and the seniors/residents with respect and dignity. Even though it may not be obvious, many of the seniors are experiencing difficult times. Cognitive decline may have an impact on their behavior, and they may not be fully aware of their surroundings or their circumstances. It is your job as a volunteer to be compassionate, and treat them with kindness. Be careful not to laugh or act uncomfortable around them, as this could make them feel self-conscious. To clarify, it is okay to laugh with them, but not at them. Volunteers should be cognizant if they have a tendency towards nervous laughter, as that can be misinterpreted.

It is important to pay attention to the senior when they are speaking. While it is expected that some of them might have memory issues and not remember what you've said, it is important that you remember what they said, because we don't want to create a situation where they feel that you are not paying attention.

Our goal is not to just occupy the seniors with whom we visit. We are there to make them feel comfortable, and hopefully build a relationship with them. It is important to not place the burden of carrying the conversation on them. This means that the volunteers must tell their own stories

and be prepared to keep the conversation moving forwards between themselves, even if the senior is not participating in the conversation.

Do not argue with the senior, even if they're incorrect about something. If they believe something that you know is inaccurate, as long as it is not going to harm them, you should just move forward with their reality. An alternative to that is to pivot to another subject.

## Contacting other Volunteers

Occasionally, volunteers may contact other volunteers regarding their activities with the organization. We expect all such communication among volunteers to follow general etiquette guidelines and behave and communicate in such a way that is appropriate. We suggest following this rule; if you would not like for everyone to hear it or know it, then do not say it or ask it.

## Social Media

Conversations to Remember encourages all volunteers to use social media responsibly. Social media should support, not jeopardize, Conversations to Remember operations and the dignity and privacy of the seniors, communities, caregivers, and other partners with whom we work.

You are personally responsible for the content you publish - err on the side of caution. Conversations to Remember may remove or request the removal of any posts or publications that conflict with Conversations to Remember guidelines.

While volunteers may post photos of themselves while engaging in their calls, they must do so while respecting the privacy of the seniors they're visiting with. For this reason, there should be no live streaming or video taping of visits, and senior images may not be posted.

**Do not use the Conversations to Remember logo:** The Conversations to Remember logo cannot be used for any part of a personal blog or social media post without the express permission of our executive director or the management team.

**Keep safety, security and the privacy of others in mind:** Never discuss the personal details regarding fellow volunteers, the organization, seniors, caregivers, or community partners online. That information may be sensitive.

**Get permissions:** Respect everyone's right to privacy and never take photos or videos without written permission. Never share photos or videos without permission. Note that posting of minors is only permitted when written permission is granted via a parent/guardian.

# Non-discrimination Policy

Conversations to Remember is committed to providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of age, race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic protected by applicable laws.

We do not discriminate in the delivery of our services, recruitment of volunteers, or engagement with partners and stakeholders. Our organization values diversity and strives to ensure that all participants, volunteers, staff, and partners are treated with respect and dignity.

Conversations to Remember is dedicated to fostering an atmosphere that promotes understanding, fairness, and equal access to our programs and services. Discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.

If you have any concerns related to discrimination or wish to report an incident, please contact the executive director either by phone at (862) 243-5331 or email at [executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org](mailto:executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org). Should a volunteer feel that they need to escalate something beyond the executive director, they can reach out to [board@conversationstoremember.org](mailto:board@conversationstoremember.org).

## Anti-Harassment

All forms of harassment are expressly prohibited at Conversations to Remember, and the organization is committed to addressing complaints of harassment at all levels within the organization.

The term harassment includes harassment based on any category protected by federal, state or local law, which may include, but is not limited to: unwelcome slurs, jokes, or verbal, graphic or physical conduct relating to an individual's race, color, religious creed, sex, national origin, ancestry, citizenship status, pregnancy, childbirth status, pregnancy, childbirth physical disability, mental disability, age military status or status as a Vietnam-era or special disabled veteran, marital status, registered domestic partner or civil union status, gender (including sex stereo-typing and gender identity or expression), medical condition (including, but not limited to COVID-related, cancer-related or HIV/AIDS-related), genetic information or sexual orientation.

Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature where:

- Submission to such conduct is an explicit or implicit term or condition of employment or volunteering
- Employment or volunteering decisions are based on a team member's submission to or rejections of such conduct; or,



- Such conduct unreasonably interferes with an individual's work/volunteer performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working/volunteering environment.

Instances of harassment should be reported immediately by anyone experiencing or witnessing them. They can be reported on the virtual visit feedback form or by contacting the executive director either through the messaging service, by phone at (862) 243-5331 or email at [executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org](mailto:executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org). Should a volunteer feel that they need to escalate something beyond the executive director, they can reach out to [board@conversationstoremember.org](mailto:board@conversationstoremember.org).

## **Incident/Complaint Reporting**

Conversations to Remember takes complaint reporting very seriously. This includes, but is not limited to, violations of laws, fraud, discrimination, harassment, unsafe working conditions, or any conduct risking the organization. We request that you report incidents within 24-hours. If you would like to report a concern, please immediately contact the executive director. As reasonable, reports will be kept confidential. Absolute confidentiality cannot be assured.

## **Whistleblower Policy**

Conversations to Remember prohibits any form of retaliation against employees or volunteers who, in good faith, report incidents under this policy. Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy and will result in appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination of volunteering privileges or employment.

## Gifts and Favors

Volunteers shall not solicit or accept for personal use, or for use of others, any gift, favor, loan, gratuity, reward, promise of future employment, or anything of monetary value that might influence, or appear to influence, the judgment or conduct of the team member in the performance of their job. We understand that some seniors may be grateful for the attention and companionship that our volunteers provide, and may insist on providing some kind of gift. We advise volunteers to politely decline any offers, and attempt to pivot to a different subject during your visit if this comes up. If the senior persists, then please let us know, and we'll address the issue with the senior or their caregiver.

Volunteers are not to give, offer, or promise directly or indirectly anything of value to any senior, caregiver, partner, community employee, vendor, potential vendor, financial institution or potential financial institution with whom Conversations to Remember has or may have a business relationship.

## Post Visit Feedback

After each visit, volunteers are required to fill out the feedback form. This provides volunteers with an opportunity to give feedback about their visits, so we can take any steps required to improve them. It also gives volunteers an opportunity to voice any concerns that they might have. The feedback form also contains a section for the volunteer to confirm that they will be present on the following week's call. We request more than one week's notice of a planned absence, but, at the least, it should be reported on this form as well as being reported via the messaging service to the executive director. To ensure accuracy of the feedback, all feedback forms must be submitted within 24 hours of the completion of your virtual visit.

When volunteers request community service credit for their participation in our program, we use the feedback forms to calculate their involvement. We will not entertain requests for credit for work when a student did not fill out the feedback form.

## Timesheets

All volunteers (other than the volunteers on the weekly video calls) are required to submit timesheets. Timesheets must accurately reflect the hours that they have volunteered along with an accurate description of what was done during those hours. Time sheets must be submitted the same day that the work is done and cannot be backdated.

## Questions

Any questions about this handbook should be directed to [executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org](mailto:executivedirector@conversationstoremember.org).