**Volunteers for Program in a Box**

Volunteers will be teaching youth, ages 13-18, life skills which range from household activities and chores to completing job applications and resumes’, learning to do banking, making appointments, and budgeting.

Volunteers should like to establish rapport and get to know the youth with whom they will be working. Volunteers are encouraged to find out what youth already know about a skill/activity, what related experiences they already have, and then build on those. Listening is often as good as talking when with the youth.

Volunteers should know at least one life skill that we want our youth to learn – simple cooking, baking, cleaning, laundry skills, ironing, completing a job application, writing a resume’, opening a bank account, developing a monthly budget, and making appointments. It will be very beneficial to volunteers to do practice run-throughs will skills they will be teaching - note the steps and think about what they will say. Remember, it is always a good idea to ask youth what their experiences are, and if they can show you any part of the skill which you can reinforce, it’s a good moment! Some of these youth handled some of the chores in their biological homes before coming into care. If we can support anything they already know, it’s good for them, and helps you with teaching them what they don’t know.

Discussing any other miscellaneous skills which assist with independence is also welcome. For instance, check with youth to find out how they wake up in the morning is a good conversation. If youth depend on caretakers for their wake-up calls, encouraging caretakers and youth to use an alarm clock for waking the youth as needed is a good thing to hold out as a kind of challenge. “What if you had to get up yourself? Could you set your own alarm? Would you get up in time for school? Could you dress, eat breakfast, and get to school on time?” And so forth. Be good-natured in this effort.

Volunteers should be able to set aside about 3.5-5 hours to do a training session with a youth. This will usually include travel and from to the youth’s home, a brief time to meet and explain the activity to the youth, time to do the activity, clean up if necessary, and wrap up.

It is very important to have male volunteers to do the training with most of the male youth. There are several male youth for whom male volunteers are essential. Volunteers might think about going in pairs if there is more than one youth to be included in the skills training during the visit.

Reality checks such as arranging for youth to visit work sites to determine what kind of work they want for themselves as adults can be very helpful. Do they aspire to work in fast foods or in other minimum wage employment areas for careers? If not, what might they want? Have they thought about what it will take for them to have the employment they want for themselves?

Volunteers can help youth do computer searches around future employment opportunities youth are interested in. Searching for vocational schools/ colleges/ universities where youth might gain skills and education to qualify for their preferred employment can be enlightening and exciting for them.

There are benefits for attending college for many youth who are currently in CPS custody. There is information at the CASA office about these benefits and which youth can qualify.

As they think about possible careers and life styles, budgeting exercises can help youth see concretely what their incomes will have to be to support the life styles they are interested in. Some youth can enjoy taking time to look at the income that certain careers can provide.

Another reality check exercise could be to help youth view living accommodations which are commensurate with various incomes – minimum wage and up. Youth can be helped to better understand that their futures depend significantly on their own efforts to achieve worthwhile goals for themselves, and consequently for their current and future families.

Always, as volunteers are working with youth and “Program in a Box”, it is important to remember that we are preparing youth for basic life skills as well as better life experiences for themselves than they have seen modeled for them before they came into CPS custody. For most youth, what they know about their current family is painful and demoralizing. What Fostering Futures offers is hope and a better future with support, training, and benefits available to them now. Volunteers can be instrumental in helping them during this period and process.

Program boxes will be supplied with items which have thus far been useful in conducting various skills trainings with youth. However, additional items can be supplied if volunteers make it known what they would like to have and what it is for.

If anyone is interested in volunteering to do “Program in a Box” training, please be in touch with Executive Director Debbie Dugger and/or your Advocate Coordinator. Regarding your particular skills interest, we can advise you of past experiences with youth and tools which have been used, and learn from you what your conceptions of the trainings might entail. Together we can devise a training plan which will be comfortable for you and beneficial for the youth whom you will be training.