



## **ST. MARY'S HOME VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

*St. Mary's Home / Maison Sainte-Marie is a voluntary service licensed under the Child and Family Services Act. St. Mary's Home has a Residential Program and a Young Parent Outreach Centre. On an annual basis we provide counselling, programs and support services to hundreds of infants, children, pregnant and parenting teens and young adults up to the age of 25. St. Mary's Home program objectives include enabling parents to learn positive parenting skills while they obtain counselling to empower them to make healthy decisions for their children and their lives. The specific programs offered cover five strategic points: Health, Parenting, Lifestyle, Independent Living and Education.*

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at St. Mary's Home!

This handbook has been developed to provide volunteers, including volunteer mentors and students in field placements, with information about St. Mary's Home's volunteer program. We are grateful to you for your interest in giving your time and talent to St. Mary's Home, and we look forward to working with you to provide excellent programs and services to our young parents and their children.

We hope that this experience adds value to your life as a volunteer and community member. Please feel free to have an open dialogue with St. Mary's Home staff and management as we work together. We believe that engaging volunteers in our work will help us to continue to make an immeasurable difference in the life of St. Mary's Home clients!



## Details of Our Organization

### **Our Mission Statement:**

*'Building on the strengths of young pregnant women, young parents, and their children'*

### **Our Commitment:**

Grounded in a strengths-based philosophy which builds on the inherent resilience of each individual, St. Mary's Home/Maison Sainte-Marie is committed to providing comprehensive services, advocacy and programs for pregnant youth and young parent families. These are offered in a milieu of respect, care and safety and in partnership with the community.

### **Our Values and Beliefs:**

We believe that

- Pregnancy is a time of opportunity for personal growth
- Young parents are capable of building strong, nurturing and healthy families
- Children have rights as individuals

### **Values that are Integral to our Work**

**RESPECT:** Each individual has innate worth and dignity. This is reflected in our attitude and in the practice of equality, fairness and teamwork.

**TRUST:** Relationships built on integrity and compassion lay the foundation of trust. We are committed to providing an atmosphere where trust can develop and grow.

**ACCEPTANCE:** A nonjudgmental approach is essential to supporting youth with their life experiences and choices.

**STRENGTH BASED:** Our role is to build on the resilience, strength and abilities of youth, children and families.

**INCLUSION:** We promote an anti-discriminatory approach to service delivery. We are committed to continuously growing in knowledge, sensitivity, and skills so that we can best respond to a wide range of backgrounds and a diverse population.

**PARTNERSHIP:** Strong community partnerships are integral to our programs and services. We promote and invest in collaboration and partnership.

**EFFECTIVENESS:** Working with innovative and best practices, we actively strive towards measurable positive outcomes.

## Objectives of our Programs and Services

- Support optimal perinatal outcomes
- Motivate choices for healthy lifestyles
- Provide opportunities for education and learning
- Promote positive parenting skills
- Build self-esteem
- Champion healthy child development
- Promote secure attachment in children
- Provide social and health supports

## Impact of the Organization

We believe that it is important for volunteers to appreciate the genuine impact of the work they will participate in at our agency. For this reason, we would like to share some of the comments made to us by young parents who have attended programming at St. Mary's Home.

### Young Parent Feedback and Testimonials:

- "St. Mary's prevented my children and I from living on the street. It gave us options."
- "St. Mary's has made a big impact on my life and has changed the way I see things. I've made a wonderful group of friends that I consider my 'family'. My life has changed so much since my first day here."
- "It has taught me a lot about parenting, it has shown me what kind of mother I want to be to my kids and what values I want to teach them."
- "We love to sing songs at St. Mary's and we have learned proper routines and foundations for our child forever. She's the happiest child I've ever seen."
- "Being young and pregnant you face a lot of backlash from society but here it was always perceived as a good thing. I got congratulated instead of being looked at weird which made it that much more exciting!"
- "(St. Mary's ) was there through the good and not so good times in my life as a mom and young woman.... advocated for me in more ways than one.. supported and stood by me through court battles, CAS meetings... never spoke ill of me or my parenting.. gave me confidence boost when I needed... were honest with me when I was letting my impulsivity get the best of me."

## Volunteering at St. Mary's Home

We always appreciate when a volunteer can provide us with a heartfelt testimonial about volunteering at St Mary's Home. We use testimonials in our marketing materials to promote and share the good work that is being done by our dedicated volunteers.

### Volunteer Feedback and Testimonials:

- "Volunteering at St. Mary's Home is a special gift. I am greeted with a smile and respect and leave with a thank you and appreciation. I have been volunteering at St. Mary's for 12 years, in the classroom and as a member of the Board of Directors. Supporting young pregnant women, young moms and dads and their children is investing in their future and our future. Thank you for this gift."
- "It was our honour and our privilege to be witness to the magic of St. Mary's. Their care, assistance, love and kindness seems to weave a beautiful tapestry; one that is felt/palpable to all upon entry. Thank you for your warm welcome and the opportunity to give back ; for It is in giving that we receive."
- "I wait all week to come to St. Mary's to volunteer. To me it's a treat to see people I know, have a chat and share a cup of coffee after my volunteer work is done. It makes me feel alive! I do it for myself, really!"
- "I admire the young mothers' courage - it's not easy to take care of young children and study to obtain a high school diploma.. I have attended their graduations where we all celebrate their successes. These young women are the real heroes..."

## VOLUNTEER APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Before you become a volunteer at St. Mary's Home, you will be asked to participate in the selection process that is outlined below. We value and respect the important roles that volunteers fulfill in the work we do with young families. However, please be aware that not all volunteers who apply will be approved for placement in a volunteer role. It is our goal to ensure that successful candidates represent the best fit with our organization's mission and core values.

We are interested in matching potential volunteers with roles that will match their skills and interests. We carefully select our volunteers to ensure that we provide the most appropriate role for each volunteer, while ensuring that the safety and well-being of our vulnerable clients is given paramount importance.

### The Process:

#### Recruitment

1. Potential volunteers must first complete the St. Mary's Home Volunteer Application Form, which is available on our website at [www.stmaryshome.com](http://www.stmaryshome.com). The completed application form, as well as a current resume, can either be sent to the Volunteer Coordinator at [info@stmaryshome.com](mailto:info@stmaryshome.com) or they can be dropped off at our Young Parent Outreach Centre.

### Selection

2. A short telephone interview will be conducted by the Volunteer Coordinator.
3. Potential volunteer candidates will come to St. Mary's Home for a group or individual tour.
4. Potential volunteer candidates will provide the Volunteer Coordinator with 2 to 3 references (names and phone numbers). References must either be supervisors, employers, or other non-family members.
5. The Volunteer Coordinator will complete reference checks.
6. The Volunteer Coordinator will generate a letter which waives the fee to obtain the Police Vulnerable Sector Check (PVSC)\*. Potential volunteers are responsible to apply for the PVSC with the police department nearest to where the candidate lives. ( They may choose to pay an extra fee to receive the PVSC more quickly, however St. Mary's Home would not be able to reimburse this cost.)
7. Potential volunteers receive the results of their PVSC in the mail and make an appointment with the Volunteer Coordinator to present the form. Volunteer candidates must have a clear PVSC to be eligible for volunteer opportunities at St. Mary's Home.
8. A copy of the PVSC is made for the volunteer's file. Volunteer files are kept by the Volunteer Coordinator for 5 years after the volunteer has left St. Mary's Home. The volunteer can access her/his file by making a request to the Volunteer Coordinator.
9. \*Note: PVSC's must be renewed once every five years. Letters are provided in advance to current volunteers to waive the processing fee. An offence declaration must be signed annually in the years that do not require a new PVSC.
10. Once all steps are completed successfully, the volunteer is welcomed to join the St. Mary's Home volunteer team. He/she is given appropriate orientation and training for the role in which he/she is placed. Attention is given to the needs and desires of the potential volunteer to ensure, to the best of our ability, that each volunteer is matched with a role that is suitable and satisfying for the volunteer.

### **Training and Orientation:**

Once a volunteer has been officially welcomed to the St. Mary's Home volunteer team, she/he will be oriented and trained for her/his volunteer role. The first step for the volunteer is to read and sign the Volunteer Handbook. The new volunteer will also be asked to read and submit other necessary forms (copy of driver's license if applicable, confidentiality form, photo release, etc.). The volunteer will receive an orientation to St. Mary's Home, after which the Volunteer Orientation Checklist will be signed. The completed checklist will be kept by the Volunteer Coordinator in the volunteer's file. Each volunteer will receive the training that is applicable to her/his particular volunteer role. (See Volunteer Orientation Checklist).



## YOUR ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER

### Commitment and Expectations:

We are grateful to you for expressing an interest in St. Mary's Home. Your role as a volunteer will be to help us deliver the best programs and services possible to our young parents and their children. Ideally, St. Mary's Home requests a commitment of one year to our volunteer program. This time commitment will not only allow our clients to build trust with you, but it will allow you ample time to excel in your role and gain a sense of accomplishment as a volunteer.

Having said this, we do understand that life circumstances change and holidays and vacations are booked. We are flexible and can discuss openly your schedule as a volunteer to ensure that it serves both your needs and desires, and those of St. Mary's Home clients.



### **Commitment and Expectations - the Child Development Program:**

There are specific rules and responsibilities related to a volunteer's role in these programs, which are noted below. If you have questions about child development philosophies or procedures followed at St. Mary's Home, please speak with the Child Development Program Coordinator.

- Please be prepared to go outside for outdoor play. This includes having proper outerwear, footwear, sunscreen and/or a hat.
- Please wear comfortable shoes without high heels.
- If you are uncomfortable sitting or kneeling, please speak to the Volunteer Coordinator and we will find you a more suitable volunteer role in the centre.
- Staff often need help preparing an activity, tidying up, putting lunch tables together...be prepared to do many types of activities

Child Development Program Volunteers Must Not:

- Change diapers
- Spend time in the sleep room unsupervised
- Leave the room with a child
- Ask young parents personal questions (e.g. where they live, their age, who lives at home, etc.) or share their own personal information
- Address children using terms of endearment....please refer to children by name, "friend", or "little one"

Please model the language and strategies used by staff to guide children's behaviour in the Child Development Program. Our staff, who are all trained childcare professionals, are following specific attachment-based frameworks to help them properly guide each child individually in his/her development. If you are unsure of words or behaviours you should and should not use, please ask your direct supervisor.

### **Restrictions to Volunteering:**

As outlined in the Selection process, acceptance of potential volunteers is based on agency requirements and pre-determined screening measures. Your role as a volunteer may change over time based on the needs of the organization and/or your proficiency in your role.

A person will not be selected as a volunteer if:

- He/she does not have a clear PVSC.
- She/he is an alumna of St. Mary's Home who has been away from the centre for less than 5 years.
- He/she is not deemed to be an appropriate fit for the organization based on St. Mary's Home's needs, values, and mission statement.

In the child development program, volunteer placement may be based on the following factors:

- Conflict of interest (eg. personal relationship with a child who attends our programs)
- Energy level and physical ability (based on tasks required such as kneeling, sitting on the floor, active play with children, bending down, etc.)



## **VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT TERMS AND REQUIREMENTS**

### **Security:**

Every volunteer, regardless of their role and proximity to clients (including members of the Board of Directors) must have a clear PVSC. The only exception to this would be a one-time-only guest speaker who would be closely supervised by staff at all times.

### **St. Mary's Home Policies:**

Volunteers are required to review all pertinent St. Mary's Home Policies, and sign the Acknowledgement and Agreement Statement form indicating that they have reviewed and agree to adhere to St. Mary's Home policies. (See St. Mary's Home Policy Tracker-Acknowledgement and Agreement Statement Verification Form.) They must also sign a Confidentiality Agreement Form.

### **Volunteer Bill of Rights and Responsibilities:**

As a volunteer, you have:

- The right to feel safe
- The right to information about your volunteer role or project
- The right to feel valued
- The right to negotiate your volunteer role
- The right to cease your role as a volunteer
- The responsibility to communicate your needs
- The responsibility to follow through on your obligations
- The responsibility to not promise what you can't deliver
- The responsibility to honour the organization's investment in you
- The responsibility to take care of yourself

### **Code of Conduct:**

People from many different backgrounds share this environment. St. Mary's Home adheres to the Human Rights Code which declares that "every person has the right to equal treatment without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, handicap or the receipt of public assistance." Everyone at St. Mary's Home has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Anyone volunteering at St. Mary's Home has the responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect.

### **Communication:**

At St. Mary's Home, we value open, non-judgemental communication. Every person who is accepted as a volunteer at St. Mary's Home is asked to communicate the following with the Volunteer Coordinator:

- Absence due to illness or vacation
- Any medical conditions that might impact on their volunteer work
- Emergency contact information in case of illness or injury on-site
- Any changes to their criminal record
- Information about anything they see or hear at the SMH centre or residence that might present a risk to the health or safety of St. Mary's Home clients.

### **Volunteer Evaluations:**

- Your direct Supervisor is the St. Mary's Home staff member who will be most familiar with your work and will, therefore, observe and evaluate your performance as a volunteer.
- Your first evaluation, using a one-page evaluation form, will occur after your 3rd month as a volunteer. You will be evaluated yearly thereafter.
- A copy of this form is available from the Volunteer Coordinator.
- After your evaluation is completed, your Supervisor will meet with you briefly to give feedback and answer any questions you may have. This is an opportunity for you to provide valuable feedback to us as well.
- If there are areas of concern your Supervisor will meet with you to discuss these concerns and offer you support to address any challenges you are experiencing in your role.
- Disciplinary measures may be required when a volunteer is in breach of St Mary's Home policies, including the guidelines as outlined in this handbook. Measures taken are appropriate to the level of seriousness of the violation. When a policy is breached by a volunteer, the Volunteer Coordinator, Supervisor and, when applicable, the Executive Director will deal with the situation using the guiding principles of respect for the persons involved, objectivity, protection of confidential information, and due diligence.
- If a concern that is raised in your evaluation presents a risk to the health or well-being of St Mary's Home clients, you may be released immediately from your duties as a volunteer.
- St Mary's Home is here to support you as you learn and grow in your role as a volunteer. We are also open to hearing from you if you wish to change to a different role in the centre. Please keep an open line of communication with us so that we can support your valuable work and important contribution to our young families.
- Completed evaluation forms will be kept in your file, which is kept by the agency until 5 years after a volunteer leaves. You may get access to your file through the Volunteer Coordinator.

### **Volunteer Recognition:**

At St. Mary's Home, it is our pleasure to recognize our volunteers for the amazing work they do. We make every effort to ensure that our volunteers regularly receive the appreciation they deserve for their generous offer of time, skills, and effort. The work done by volunteers helps us support our young parents and their children to have happy, productive lives. Volunteer involvement also clearly demonstrates to our young families that they are cared about by their community members.

Some of the ways in which St. Mary's Home has shown appreciation in the past:

- Volunteer Appreciation Events
- Training opportunities
- Holiday cards
- Thank you notes from parents
- Artwork from children
- Invitations to student graduation events

Please share with us any ideas you have that would enhance your experience as a volunteer at St. Mary's Home.