Guidelines for Virtual Volunteers

Introduction

The Catholic Centre for Immigrants Ottawa, in response to COVID-19, is providing online/virtual volunteer opportunities that will serve to:

a) Engage current, and recruit new, volunteers from the community to support programs and services that assist in the settlement and integration processes.
b) Ensure that essential programs and services remain accessible and continue to serve CCI clients in the community remotely using virtual/online platforms.

It is important as we adapt to these challenging times that staff members across departments and volunteers are able to effectively collaborate and cooperate to ensure efficient delivery of services to clients.

This document serves as a guideline for CCI staff working with (or supervising) volunteers, as well as volunteers themselves.

Communicating Online

CCI encourages all volunteers to use the following recommendations as a guide when completing volunteer roles/duties online:

1. Follow any policies, resources and advice from your Supervisor and CCI.
   - Use digital platforms and technology that have been approved by CCI.
   - Ensure you are comfortable using the platform, including its capabilities surrounding confidentiality and privacy.
2. The same standards and behaviors that apply in the workplace also apply online.
   - Always keep language professional.
   - Remember you might be on camera, and if so, always assume you are visible and can be heard.
   - Participate in an appropriate space when online, such as a home office, kitchen, or other shared space when possible.
3. Maintain professional boundaries online.
   - All communications should be professional, and: occur during appropriate/pre-determined times; be directly related to client support; and not cross boundaries by becoming too personal.
4. Use your best judgment to ensure the safety and privacy of all participants.
   - Acknowledge and communicate to participants that certain sessions may be recorded (by you or other participants) when applicable.
   - Conversations within a group are not private, including any chat features. Your, or any participants, personal information should never be shared.

5. If you become aware of, or have any concerns regarding, the safety and wellbeing of any participants you are interacting with, please inform your Supervisor immediately.

Important CCI Policy for Virtual Volunteers

CCI Policy and Procedures apply to volunteers completing approved tasks on behalf of the organization. These policies apply to the workplace in both physical and virtual spaces. As a volunteer, you should be aware of all relevant CCI Policy, including those referring to: Client Interaction; Discrimination; Harassment; Health and Safety; Violence; and, Workplace Accommodation (http://cciottawa.ca/cci-ottawa-policies/).

All information is accessible through CCI's Volunteer Page, and volunteers are encouraged to connect directly with their Supervisor if they require clarification or have any questions or concerns relating to the information.

Tips for Virtual Volunteers

1. Be available.
   - Ensure that you set time aside to support the programs you have signed up for. Most programs come with a set schedule, so plan accordingly to limit distractions. Just like being physically present, being present and active virtually shows others you are interested and engaged.
2. Be prepared.
   - A private working space without distractions and an understanding of the software you are using can save time and will allow you to be more efficient during your volunteer shift.
3. Be open.
   - Sharing your life, work or educational experiences can be effective ways to communicate with others. Make sure you are comfortable with what you are sharing and always maintaining appropriate boundaries. If you are ever unclear on these boundaries, contact your Supervisor.
4. Be professional.
   - Being culturally sensitive, polite and respectful of others is necessary in creating a supportive online environment. Treat your new virtual environment the same as you would treat the workplace.
5. Be supportive.
   - This is the first time many of us are navigating the world of virtual volunteering, so be patient and forgiving with yourself and others. Don't get hung up on the small things, like spelling or grammar, and try your best to offer additional support to others if you can recognize it is needed.