

# Volunteer Preparation



## **Role and Responsibilities of the Volunteer**

***Remember the primary concern of the disaster response volunteer is the need of the survivor!***

The survivor's overwhelming need is to tell his or her story to someone willing to listen, and to be assisted in obtaining a wide range of disaster related services. Volunteers will find that the following qualities are important for a successful work experience:

### **Flexibility**

Volunteers should be prepared to offer whatever services are most needed at the time of assistance. Although you may have made plans for a certain project, you should be flexible enough to respond to needs that may be more immediate at the time. If you are asked to perform an unplanned task, please confirm the change with the leader of the project.

### **Adaptability**

In disaster response you may have to improvise. In these situations, a person needs to be able to do the best with what is available. Supplies may not be available. Change can happen at any time.

### **Willingness to Serve**

You are here to serve. Be guided by the survivors in what you do and how you do it. Try to establish a friendly relationship with the persons in whose home you are working.

### **Sensitivity**

Be sensitive to what survivors are going through. Be tolerant of the reactions of other relief workers and survivors - their irritability, hopelessness, or despair. Disasters are a time of stress for everyone. Treat all individuals as persons of worth with feelings, skills, and knowledge. Avoid making remarks that might be harmful or hurtful to the disaster survivors. Before speaking, try to think how you would feel if outsiders came into your home and said the same things. Ask permission before taking pictures of individuals or homes. Approach survivor's possessions with great care, for what may seem like rubbish to you may be a precious belonging to the owner. Do not judge people by how they lived before – this is a chance to start anew.

### **Cooperativeness**

The ability to work with others, to take directions from the people in charge, to overlook some of the irritations which come from living and working around other people is essential. A few general rules to follow:

- Refrain from unannounced excursions.
- Avoid derogatory comments about the food, lodging, project, volunteers, etc.
- Always be helpful, allowing team leaders to lead, while making the best of the situation!
- Maintain your sense of humor!

## **Personal Checklist for Volunteers doing Disaster Response Projects**

Since each individual trip is unique, there is no one checklist that will fit each experience. However, some items will always be needed on nearly every trip.

- Picture Identification.
- Waiver of Liability form. You may have several of these depending on who ARDF is partnering with on the mission trip.
- Medical Information form, including your medical history, allergies and medications, in quadruplicate (team leader, partner, yourself, someone at home) If a group is traveling in several cars, trucks or vans keep medical information in the vehicle in which you are traveling.
- Double supply of medication. Keep one with you, the other in your suitcase or where appropriate. Also, carry a copy of any prescription in case you lose medication.
- Change of clothing for after work.
- Old work clothing (long sleeve shirts and tee shirts, long pants)
- Work boots, sturdy shoes (no sneakers or sandals for working)
- Work gloves, heavy duty but good fit
- Safety goggles
- Disposable face masks (those with exhale vent are best)
- Rain jacket, possibly rubber boots for muddy areas (ponchos are hard to work in)
- Hat for working in sun, bandana, sweatband, neckband
- Sun block, sunglasses
- Insect repellent (high in % of DEET)
- Absorbent body powder – zinc oxide type
- Moleskin (for wounds)
- Gel Sanitizer, wet wipes
- Bed roll, sleeping bag, pillow, and/or air mattress or pad
- Bathing suit for public showers, flip-flops
- Towel(s) and washcloth(s)
- Personal toiletries (non-scented – mosquitoes are attracted to certain scents)
- Personal First Aid supplies (Band-Aids, disinfectant, Tylenol, Neosporin, etc.)
- Spare contacts or glasses
- Lawn bags for wet and dirty clothes
- Heavy cord, 10-20 feet, for clothesline, clothespins, laundry soap
- Flashlight
- Bible, notebook and pencil

- Water bottle, cooler, water jug
- Money or traveler's checks
- Snack food (power bars, granola bars, fruit, nuts, etc.)
- Backpack or fanny pack

## **HEALTH**

**Current Tetanus Immunization** is necessary, hepatitis shots at the discretion of your doctor. Volunteers should be in **good health**.

## **CAUTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS**

- Increase your fluid intake & decrease caffeine intake to improve hydration.
- Take showers daily (if possible) to prevent rashes.
- Rinse and powder feet to keep dry and fungus-free.
- Change underwear and socks daily.
- No sneakers (there are a lot of nails and other debris that could pierce sneakers).
- Treat "hot spots" immediately. Rashes and skin infections will become infected quickly in the post-disaster environment.
- Use moleskin for foot blisters and other wounds to prevent infection.
- No swimming in local bodies of water! Infections and bacteria increase after natural disasters.
- Get out of a thunderstorm into a safe place, preferably a building.

## **COPING WITH DISASTER**

Having recently experienced the shock and pain of the aftermath of a disaster, you may experience some normal emotional reactions because of your experience. Recognize your own feelings and reactions and accept your right to experience them. Strong feelings after a disaster are almost universal. It is not "abnormal" or "crazy" to have strong feelings and unanticipated reactions.

*Some common reactions are:*

- Exhaustion – get sufficient sleep.
- Emotions - Sadness, apathy, helplessness, agitation, anger
- Hyperactivity, inability to concentrate
- Loss of appetite
- Sleep disorders, nightmares
- Headaches
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms
- Skin disorders/rashes
- Memory loss
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Panic attacks with shortness of breath and increased heart rate

The items listed below are suggested interventions to help you cope while any of these reactions may persist:

- Take care of yourself. Get as much physical activity as possible. Take care of your own needs first, so that you can then be of assistance to others.
- Eat well-balanced meals - increase your fluid intake, eat more complex carbohydrates, and decrease your intake of caffeine and alcohol.
- Get enough rest, but allow for changes in sleep patterns.
- Decrease environment stresses such as noise and clutter.
- Accept help from others – family, friends, counselors, and associates.
- Make time for yourself - do task-centered activities, resume hobbies or projects you especially enjoy, even if it is less time than you normally spend.
- Make "to do lists" based on things that must be done - (A) self care and (B) other tasks that must be completed. Put other tasks on a "wait list" or delegate to others.
- Find a friend you can visit with periodically who can give you the outlet you need for the frustrations and aggravations that always come in high-intensity situations. Talking helps relieve stress and helps you realize that your feelings are shared by others. Do not allow yourself to become isolated from others. You are not alone.

### **WHEN YOU RETURN HOME**

You may find yourself needing a few days to make the transition home. Help your family understand you need some time to yourself before beginning a full schedule of normal activities.

Be tolerant of what others at home want to share. What has happened to them while you were away is just as important as your disaster response experiences were to you.

Anticipate mood swings and strong emotional reactions. Expect that your family's responses to you may not be what you expected or think you "deserve." Be aware that you may have unexpected reactions to sounds, sights, or people that remind you of experiences at the disaster site.

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