

What will I be doing as a volunteer?

You will be providing support to a young person with a disability in a community recreational activity. The individualized support plan that the TIES Coordinator gives to you will contain, in detail, the strategies that you will use to help your participant partner enjoy success in the activity and make friends with other members of the group. Here are some examples of strategies –

- Cue the participant to say, “Hi!” to other members of the group.
- Model turn-taking for the participant.
- Break instructions down into short sentences.
- Use conversation starters.
- Move the participant’s wheelchair close to other members of the group.

What does an activity look like?

It can be any organized recreational or extracurricular school activity in which students typically take part.

How long is each activity?

An activity may be a single event, such as attending a school dance or after school football game, or an ongoing class (dance, martial arts, music, gymnastics) or continuous participation in a traditional organization, such as Scouts. If an activity is ongoing, two or more peer volunteers may share the commitment.

Is one peer volunteer assigned to one participant?

Peer volunteers make a commitment for one activity at a time, and each activity is arranged as a separate project. For long-term activities, two or more peer volunteers may take part. Some partnerships endure from year to year, while others may change with each activity. Individual input and choice is a dynamic element of the program for both peer volunteers and participants.

What if I do not like the participant?

The TIES Coordinator aspires to match peer volunteers with participants based on common interest, age, and gender. Both parties complete similar applications on which they list their interests, hobbies, or activities they are currently involved in or have been involved in before. From this information, the TIES Coordinator proceeds to make arrangements. The program is designed to be individual and flexible. If at any time either the participant or peer volunteer feels that he or she was not correctly matched, the Coordinator will gladly find another partner.

Do I need to travel to and from the activity with the participant?

No. You and the participant are responsible for getting to and from the activity on your own.

Do I have to pay for the activity?

No. Your fee will be waived or covered by another source. You will need to register for the activity with the activity leader, however, so that you are covered by insurance.

Do I stay with the same participant from one activity that they choose to the next?

Once you and your participant have completed an activity, you may tell the TIES Coordinator whether you would like to continue in another activity, but it is not required.

What if I need to stop doing the activity because of another commitment?

When you have a change in your schedule, let your TIES Coordinator know so that she can find another peer volunteer. The program is flexible to accommodate the needs of student volunteers to participate in other activities along with TIES.

Can I do something with my participant partner outside of the TIES activity?

You are free to make arrangements to meet with your TIES participant outside of the TIES activity. The TIES Coordinator and the school district are not involved in or responsible for activities other than the TIES activity.

What is the training workshop?

The peer volunteer training workshop is designed to extend awareness of inclusion, diversity, and language of respect. It is integral to the program as a valuable tool for both volunteers and activity leaders, and can be adapted to a wide array of audiences.

The workshop is 45 minutes long to accommodate school period schedules and covers the following areas

- Definition of developmental disability.
- How diversity enriches our lives and community.
- The critical role of friendship in a person's social and emotional growth.
- Examples of support and modifications that the individual may need.
- Person first language.
- The skills and attributes of an effective peer volunteer.
- The role and responsibilities of the peer volunteer.

The emphasis is on creating a relationship of mutual respect in which the specific goal is successful participation of each individual in a group activity. Friendship, which cannot be mandated or created at will, may arise from this opportunity but is not a specific goal for the partner team.