



# Volunteer Handbook

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## **WELCOME**

Welcome to The Sparrow Project. Thank you for choosing our organization to devote your time and commitment in this special way. We are excited about your interest in helping our participants.

The Sparrow Project is a non-profit organization serving adults with intellectual disabilities. Volunteering with The Sparrow Project will allow you to become part of a dynamic team that provides a safe and welcoming environment in which our participants can learn and have social interaction.

This handbook will give you important information about volunteering with The Sparrow Project and our policies and procedures. It is important you read and understand this handbook. This handbook cannot cover every situation or answer every question about policies and procedures and The Sparrow Project reserves the right to add new policies, change policies, or cancel policies at any time.

We want this experience to be fulfilling and rewarding to you as a volunteer. Thank you in advance for sharing your time and talents with us and our participants. We look forward to working with you!

## **OUR MISSION**

The Sparrow Project is a non-profit, faith-based organization designed to create a safe environment for post high school adults with intellectual disabilities. We promote happy and fulfilled lives through developing community connection, life skills, creative interests, social activities, and job skills.

## **OUR HISTORY**

Each year school districts graduate students with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22. These students and their families have had up to 20 years in the public school system to gain knowledge, life skills, and social skills. After graduation, there are limited options in our area for these individuals and their families. Some go to adult day cares, others to sheltered workshops (where there are waiting lists), a hand full are able to hold down regular jobs, and many are forced to stay home alone, if independent enough, or with a caregiver. Some families give up an entire income so that one parent can stay home with their child.

This project began with a few families of young adults with disabilities discussing the limited options for our children. The families on the ground floor of this project are as diverse as the disabilities of their children, but the common denominator is, everyone deserves the opportunity to have a fulfilled life.

## **WHY SPARROW?**

Matthew 10:29 reminds us God's eye is on things we deem insignificant. The sparrow symbolizes vigilance, joy, and creativity. These small birds are constantly busy building nests and foraging for food. Sparrows serve as a reminder that every person has worth and that busy hands and minds promote happy, fulfilling lives.

## **OUR PROGRAMS**

### **Sparrow University -**

Sparrow University provides weekly classes for participants in the areas of cooking, creative interests, exercise, life skills, music, work skills, and volunteerism. Class sessions are generally two hours in length.

Sparrow University classes are taught by volunteer instructors and class assistants are volunteers as well. Our instructors are experts in their respective fields. They have a desire to volunteer their time to teach adults with intellectual disabilities. We maintain a 1:6 volunteer/student ratio for unaccompanied students.

All classroom assistants have completed volunteer training and have background and character reference checks. (Volunteer instructors are considered "guest speakers" and are not subject to background checks.) High School student volunteers are not subject to background checks. However, the students must have two teacher / school administrator recommendations.

It is important to the board of directors that inability to pay does not prohibit individuals from participating. To keep tuition costs low, families may be asked to participate in fundraising activities. Donations are always appreciated and are tax deductible.

Sparrow University is not intended to be an adult day care. However, unless previously identified under "Conditions of Participation," students who can

participate with minimal assistance are welcome to attend without a companion (see page 5).

Because our space is limited and we want to ensure quality standards in our classes, only participants and companion(s) allowed; no children please.

We recognize that everyone has bad days and Sparrow participants are no different. In the interest of providing a safe and enjoyable atmosphere, disruptive behavior will be addressed in a direct, kind, and

Sparrow University enrollment is limited due to space and volunteer availability. Those who enroll in classes and are a no call/no show- will be subject to fees and other consequences

#### Nest -

Weekend/evening social fraternity designed to provide a safe place for socialization. Nest activities vary and depending on the complexity of the event and/or location companions may be required to attend.

Volunteer ratios are the same for Nest as they are for Sparrow University.

Those who participate in Nest events are required to cover the cost of the event (i.e. movie ticket, dinner, etc.) - this applies to caregivers as well.

If a participant needs a companion for Sparrow University, he/she will require a companion for Nest activities as well.

Children are not allowed at Nest activities unless otherwise noted.

#### Annual Social Events -

Held once a year, The Sparrow Project hosts a dinner/dance. These events are designed for families and all participants must be accompanied.

*Note: Due to liability insurance restrictions, all programs will be “alcohol free.” Alcohol will not be served or allowed during program activities.*

## **OUR FUNDING**

The Sparrow Project is funded through donations and fundraisers.

## **OUR TEAM**

The Sparrow Project is governed by a five-member board of directors and advised by a 12-person advisory committee comprised of community leaders and professionals. At least one board member will be present at Sparrow sponsored events. The Sparrow Project employs a Program Coordinator to assist the board of directors. Please direct all questions and/or concerns to the Volunteer Liaison or Program Coordinator.

## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Classroom/Program Assistants:**

We are currently seeking volunteers who have a desire to work with our program participants. Volunteer Assistants commit to a minimum of two hours per month, self-schedule for the classes/events that fit into their busy lives, and are surrounded by an experienced team of special education professionals, teachers, and parents.

### **Volunteer Instructors:**

We are always looking for volunteers who are experts in their respective fields and have a desire to share their talents by leading a class. Some of our instructors teach one class per semester, while others teach monthly. We work with your schedule! Examples include:

- Art Instructor
- Cooking Instructor
- Music Instructor
- Fitness Instructor
- Reading Instructor
- Drama Instructor
- Computer Instructor
- Gardening Instructor

If you have an idea for a class, please let us know!

## **WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE SPARROW PROJECT**

Always remain flexible. Some days can get very busy and The Sparrow Project staff may need you to help out in several places. Being able to adapt will allow The Sparrow Project to operate smoothly.

Sparrow volunteers assist in a variety of ways. For classes such as music and fitness, our volunteers are there to interact with the group. During art and cooking classes, volunteers are paired with students who may need assistance with fine motor skills and following step by step instructions.

Volunteers are NEVER alone with a student and do not provide medical treatments, administer medication or provide toileting assistance.

For more information about our program, follow us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/thesparrowprojectmoore/>  
[www.sparrowproject.net](http://www.sparrowproject.net)

## **VOLUNTEER RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

### **Volunteer Rights:**

- To do meaningful and satisfying work
- To be assigned to projects which meet your goals, objectives and capabilities
- To be oriented to The Sparrow Project's mission, goals, policies, staff and projects
- To receive appropriate training for assigned tasks/agency involvement
- To be given direction, guidance, and support by staff
- To be heard and acknowledged when offering suggestions and/or feedback
- To show initiative when completing tasks
- To have your service with The Sparrow Project documented for further use

### **Volunteer Responsibilities:**

- Learn and abide by The Sparrow Project's missions and policies
- Participate in The Sparrow Project orientation process and complete needed paperwork (confidentiality form, background check, time sheets, etc.)

- Maintain confidentiality of agency information, clients and personnel at all times, including upon the termination of your service
- Represent The Sparrow Project with the utmost respect and enthusiasm
- Be reliable by showing up on time and completing assignments/ tasks on time
- Show commitment by following through with training expectations and abilities
- Do what you are qualified to competently handle
- Be a team player
- Deal with conflicts and difficulties in an appropriate, professional manner
- Be organized and clean up following any project

### **Volunteer Expectations:**

**Background Checks** - To serve as a volunteer with The Sparrow Project the volunteer must be able to pass a criminal background check (including a search of the sexual offender registry). Volunteer candidates must be free of Felony convictions (and certain misdemeanor convictions involving sexual and or violent offences). If a volunteer candidate is unable to pass the required background check, the volunteer candidate may ask for an appeal of the background check results. The appeal will be heard by a committee of three board members. Certain circumstances may be considered (length of time since the date of the conviction, rehabilitation since conviction, etc.). Exceptions must be approved, by majority, of the review committee.

Background check fees are to be paid by the volunteer candidate in advance of the background check being processed. These fees may vary depending on the background service company being used at the time of your background check. Please contact the Volunteer Liaison for the current cost information.

On an ongoing basis, The Sparrow Project will require volunteers to complete (annually) a disclosure form regarding the volunteer's ability to meet the background check criteria.

**Confidentiality** - As a volunteer, you are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which you are exposed while serving The Sparrow Project. This may involve information about The Sparrow Project staff, operations, participants, or partners. Failure to maintain confidentiality will result in loss of volunteer privileges.



**Professional Conduct** - All volunteers are expected to perform assignments to the best of their abilities. If a volunteer must miss or be tardy, he/she should inform the Program Coordinator as soon as possible. Volunteers will dress and conduct themselves appropriately for the conditions and performance of their duties, requesting clarification, if necessary.

**Social Media for Volunteers** - Volunteers are prohibited from distributing or posting on social media, photographs or videos of classes and events sponsored by The Sparrow Project. However, we encourage the sharing of photographs and videos that are made available through The Sparrow Project social media page(s).

**Harassment Policy** - The Sparrow Project is committed to providing an environment that is free from all forms of discrimination and conduct that can be considered harassing, coercive, or disruptive, including sexual harassment. Actions, words, jokes, or comments based on an individual's sex, race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability, or any other legally protected characteristic will not be tolerated. Volunteers who experience, or witness, sexual or other unlawful harassment at The Sparrow Project are to report it, immediately, to the Program Coordinator.

**Dress Code** - The Sparrow Project has a business casual dress code. In a casual work setting, volunteers should wear clothing that is comfortable and practical for work, but not distracting or offensive to others. Any clothing that has words, terms, or pictures that may be offensive to others is unacceptable. Remember that some are allergic to the chemicals in perfumes and makeup, so wear these substances with restraint. Appropriate dress and hygiene are important in promoting a positive company image to our clients, both internally and externally.

**Attendance** - If you are unable to meet the scheduled commitment, notify the Program Coordinator as soon as possible. As a volunteer, we ask that you use our online scheduling tool to sign up and track hours for classes/events.

**Emergency Closures** - At times, emergencies such as severe weather or power outages may disrupt the daily operation of The Sparrow Project. In extreme cases, these circumstances may require the cancellation of a scheduled activity. The decision to close will be made by the Program Coordinator and notification will be made via phone and Facebook.

**Supervision** - All volunteers will report to our Program Coordinator. Please contact the Program Coordinator for questions or assistance with your role.

## **PROGRAM POLICIES**

### **ACCOMPANIED VERSUS UNACCOMPANIED PARTICIPANTS - (COMPANION REQUIREMENTS)**

The Sparrow Project will accept applicants according to program specific eligibility criteria. Companion requirements will be evaluated prior to the participant being accepted into any of The Sparrow Project programs.

Companions are “required” if the participant falls into one of the following categories:

- Requires toileting assistance
- Is a “runner”
- Requires medical assistance for breathing
- Tends to be disruptive in group settings
- Has a medical condition that requires skilled services

Companions are “not required” if the participant falls into one of the following categories and does not fall into any of the categories requiring a companion:

- Requires minimal assistance with activities involving fine motor skills (cutting, gluing, etc.)
- Requires minimal assistance with activities involving gross motor skills (basic dance steps, exercises, bowling, etc.)
- Requires minimal assistance with basic office tasks (shredding, stapling, etc.)
- Requires minimal assistance in following basic directions

### **EARLY DROP-OFF / LATE PICK-UP POLICY**

Out of respect for our volunteers, we ask that you refrain from arriving at or dropping a participant off for an event more than 10 minutes before the event start time. Likewise, we ask that you pick the participant up from the event at the time the event ends, and no longer than 10 minutes after the event ends.

In the occurrence that a participant is dropped off more than 10 minutes early or is not picked up within 10 minutes of the end of an event, there will be an early drop-off / late pick-up fee assessed in the amount of \$20.00 per occurrence.

## **NO-CALL / NO-SHOW POLICY**

Many of our activities and classes have waiting lists for those wishing to participate. With this in mind, we ask that the participant attend those activities and classes for which he/she is enrolled.

We recognize that life can, at times, require a change of plans. When these times occur, we ask that you give us as much notice as possible should you need to cancel an activity or class. This will allow us to give another individual the opportunity to attend.

When cancelling a class, you must give a minimum notice of 24 hours when possible. If a participant is a no-call/no-show for the class (no advance notice given), then there will be a \$20.00 “No-Show Fee” assessed for the next activity or class for which the participant enrolls.

## **RELEASE TO UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS**

It is the policy of The Sparrow Project to not allow program participants to leave the premises in the company of individuals who are not listed on the program participant’s registration form as being authorized to pick them up from Sparrow functions. A program participant shall not leave the premises in the company of individuals if previous arrangements have not been made through The Sparrow Program staff.

In the event that a program participant either requests or is requested to leave the facility with an unauthorized individual, a program staff member shall be notified immediately.

In the event that the program participant is not his/her own guardian, he/she shall not be released under any circumstances to an unauthorized individual without the expressed consent of the guardian.

## **TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

The Sparrow Project does not allow board members or volunteers to transport participants on behalf of or as a representative of The Sparrow Project. Should a board member or volunteer agree to assist a family in transportation for a participant, a signed Transportation Waiver of Liability Form must be in the participant's file before such transportation takes place. Please see the Program Coordinator should you need a Transportation Waiver of Liability Form.

## **ELOPEMENT**

Program volunteers will ensure and monitor the safety of unaccompanied individuals upon arrival and departure from The Sparrow Project functions. In the specific instance of elopement, volunteers will follow these steps required when an elopement situation occurs. Elopement is defined as an attempt to slip away or run from something or someone. It is an attempt by a participant to leave the Sparrow function without giving someone notice, and thus putting himself/herself in danger.

Whenever an elopement situation arises the following action will be taken:

1. A volunteer will attempt to persuade service recipient to return to the designated area.
2. The Program Coordinator will be alerted.
3. The Program Coordinator will contact the participant's guardian.
4. An incident report will be filled out in detail regarding the incident and placed in the participant's file.
5. If participant is in imminent danger, 911 will be called.
6. The Sparrow Project reserves the right to discontinue services to any participant when elopement becomes an on-going issue.

## **MEDICATION**

Under no circumstances shall a Sparrow Project volunteer handle, store, or dispense medication to program participants.

## **BEHAVIORAL CORRECTION POLICY**

Any participant behavior that puts the participant or others at risk of injury will not be tolerated. Additionally, behavior that disrupts the environment or impacts the ability of others to be successful in the environment will be addressed using a progressive discipline process as follows:

1. First Incident - the participant will be verbally warned to correct the offending behavior.
2. Second Incident - the participant will be required to be accompanied by a companion for future events.
3. Third Incident - the participant may be asked to refrain from event participation for 30 days.

## **RELEASE OF INFORMATION FOR PUBLICITY**

The Sparrow Project fully respects each individual's privacy. All participants and legal guardians must have signed the acknowledgement form in the back of this book.

## **ABUSE PREVENTION AND REPORTING**

The Sparrow Project does not tolerate abuse of individuals. As per Oklahoma Statutes (43A Okla. Stat. Ann. §§ 10-103, 10-104; 63 Okla. Stat. Ann. §§ 1-1902, 1-1939), program volunteers are considered "mandatory reporters" for known or suspected abuse of vulnerable adults. "**Vulnerable adult**" means an individual who is an incapacitated person or who, because of physical or mental disability, including persons with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, incapacity, or other disability, is substantially impaired in the ability to provide adequately for the care or custody of himself or herself, or is unable to manage his or her property and financial affairs effectively, or to meet essential requirements for mental or physical health or safety, or to protect himself or herself from abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, or exploitation without assistance from others.

Volunteers must report suspected or known abuse to the Child/Adult Abuse Hotline (1-800-522-3511) immediately and should notify the Program Coordinator of any suspected or known abuse immediately.

## **EMERGENCY MEASURES - INCIDENT REPORT POLICY**

In the event of an emergency (significant injury, seizure, etc.) the volunteer or Program Coordinator will call 911. The volunteer and/or Program Coordinator will contact the participant's guardian and complete an incident report which will be placed in the Participant's file.

In the event of non-emergency situation (sudden illness, behavioral changes, minor injuries, etc.) the Volunteer Liaison, or Program Coordinator will contact the participant's guardian and complete an incident report which will be placed in the Participant's file.

## **EMERGENCY MEASURES - BAD WEATHER CLOSURE**

We take the safety of our participants seriously. Sparrow events may be rescheduled or cancelled due to weather.

We generally base our cancellations on Moore Public Schools weather closures. However, we reserve the right to make closure or cancellation decisions that exceed those issued by the schools.

If a weather event occurs during an event, we will follow the policy/procedures of the facility.

Facebook is the best resource to obtain cancellation or rescheduling information. Refunds will be given for cancelled programs.