



Dear Volunteers,

Thanks for volunteering with Chicago Voyagers. We love the youth we get to work with and we hope you will too. They are smart, funny, and some love trying new things. They can be risk adverse and they spend little or no time in the outdoors – this is all new to them and can be overwhelming. Some of them also have deep personal issues or struggles – whether through past trauma, a tough family situation or exposure to a violent neighborhood. We hope this document can help you better prepare for the interpersonal component of volunteering.

Tips when working with our youth:

1. Provide them with plenty of positive feedback. Don't yell.
2. Engage them. Take initiative in striking up conversation and ask questions. Allow them to share or teach you something.
3. Make sure youth are included in activities. If a youth is standing around, invite them to help.
4. Get curious not furious: youth act out and behave in certain ways for numerous reasons. If a youth is behaving in a way that is unfamiliar to you, begin to be curious about their behavior rather than angry or frustrated. Consult with Chicago Voyagers' staff as needed.
5. Small encouragements go a long way. Do not say something that is not true, but affirm even small victories such as getting to the program site, engaging, and trying new things. Some of our youth almost never get affirmation.
6. Find interests of the youth and support their interests
7. Embrace being with the youth, even if there is not conversation in the moment.

Here are some short profiles of types of youth you may experience in our program:

Jose, 15 year old male

Jose is enthusiastic about the overnight caving trip and immediately introduces himself to you at initial meeting place. He energetically paces around but you soon realize that he is reluctant to help pack gear and says disparaging comments to other youth. In talking with the agency leader, you and the CV leaders learn that Jose has been diagnosed with ADHD and lacks impulse control. Last year, he received multiple school suspensions for making inappropriate comments to teachers and other students. He especially faces challenges when encountering new people and environments. Additionally, the agency leader shares that Jose's biological father is not involved in his life and his step-father treats him drastically different than Jose's step siblings. His mom is caring but she works two jobs, and generally seems overwhelmed by Jose's issues. Jose's comments make it challenging for other students to interact with him and he often makes comments alluding to the fact that no one likes him and that he doesn't have any friends.

A few suggestions when working with Jose:

- Be proactive in engaging him and give him lots of positive feedback
- Don't allow negative comments - either about others or about himself. Step in to challenge him in a gentle way – perhaps using humor or redirection.
- Give him clearly defined tasks and leadership roles. Give him not too complicated tasks that help him feel accomplished.



Sophia, 14 year old female

Sophia is a shy and withdrawn individual. When you first met her, you had to ask her three times to repeat her name because she spoke so softly. Additionally, the other girls in the group are older and quite comfortable with each other and while they don't intentionally try to exclude Sophia, she often finds herself on the outside. During the introduction, she refused to say anything more than her name and grade she is in and you begin to realize that this overnight backpacking trip is going to provide a lot of challenges both physically and socially for Sophia. In a conversation with the agency leader, you learn that this is Sophia's first night ever away from her parents. She was extremely reluctant to go on the trip and the agency leader spent a considerable amount of time encouraging her parents to allow her to attend. The agency leader also explains that while Sophia is shy and withdrawn, during one-on-one conversations, she can become quite engaging.

A few suggestions when working with Sophia:

- Make it a point to talk to her one-on-one; initiate the conversation and ask lots of questions without sounding too probing
- Encourage the other group members to be inclusive. Help create structures that ensure Sophia is included. This might mean limiting "self-selection" of assignments.
- Pair her with her peers for jobs

Marcus: 18 years old

Marcus currently lives in a residential center to work on his anger and dealing with trauma in his past. He arrives for an overnight camping trip with 5 other young men and their 3 agency leaders. Marcus is visibly agitated at arrival and does not respond when you introduce yourself to him. His agency leaders inform you that Marcus has had a rough day so far and is not excited to be on the trip. The agency leaders inform you that they know Marcus well and can handle his behavior and there is no need to worry about his current mood.

A few suggestions when working with Marcus:

- Continue to be a positive presence with Marcus but do not push conversation too hard.
- Remain open minded that even though Marcus is currently upset, that does not necessarily mean that Marcus will always be upset on the trip.
- Allow the agency leaders to push Marcus, as a volunteer the goal will be to remain positive with Marcus and a friendly presence.
- Encourage and affirm Marcus by expressing your excitement and gladness that Marcus is on the trip.
- Seek out an opportunity to work with Marcus one-on-one (build a fire, unload a canoe, etc).