



Volunteer Handbook

Last update October 2021

Welcome

Welcome to Volunteers In Service (VIS)! We are thankful God has prompted in you a desire to work with VIS through your congregation in serving people with needs in Kent County. The following is designed to acquaint you with our mission and provide guidelines for your time as a volunteer. Our hope is that the following information will prepare you to serve the Lord by serving others.

*Luke 10:2- He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.
Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

Mission Statement

"Volunteers In Service empowers Christians to join Christ's work in their community."

As people of faith, we know service is a powerful way for individuals to express and experience Christ's love. Volunteers In Service helps the Christian community answer the call to serve with an open mind and a ready heart. Just as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, Volunteers In Service helps people of faith and their congregations discover the joy of humbly serving others with heart, mind and hands.

Agency Overview

Volunteers In Service carries out its mission in three primary ways:

1. Training/Coaching: These supportive services are available to church leaders when requested.
2. Connecting: VIS connects church members to serving opportunities in their neighborhood. Serving opportunities include one-time service projects as well as long-term friendship support connections.
3. Group Service Projects: Small groups in churches looking for service opportunities can contact VIS to discover possibilities for consideration. This includes adults and youth.

The following handbook is a focus on Connect (#2 above). Volunteers In Service is fortunate to work with a large network of local congregations from a variety of denominations, from which volunteers are sought. VIS serves as a link between people with unmet needs in our communities and volunteers from our network of churches. This enables "connections" to be made, resulting in people being served in the name of Jesus Christ. We believe God meets such needs through the willingness and availability of Christ's followers to serve others.

Since 1986, VIS has received requests for various needs on behalf of individuals and families living in Kent County. To receive services for the first time, a referral from an organization or agency is required. A screening process is used to help ensure the appropriateness of referrals. Once individuals have first been served, they may refer themselves after that point.

Those we serve are called VIS Friends, rather than clients or consumers. The circumstances of many of them result in "falling through the cracks" of other systems of care. This may be due to one or more of the

following factors: poverty, housing issues, disabilities, illness, and isolation. The generosity of time and talent by volunteers is the difference-maker for our VIS Friends.

1 Peter 4:10 - Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

VIS Serving Opportunities

The list below describes the areas of service for volunteer opportunities regularly available through Volunteers In Service. Some may be one-time requests (repairing something in the home, or one-time cleaning). Others are ongoing (help with cleaning, serving as a Friendly Visitor, or providing rides to appointments.)

BENEVOLENCE

Food pantry delivery
Grocery shopping w/o VIS Friend
Errands w/o VIS Friend
Furniture needs
Furniture delivery
Laundry
Meals
Housecleaning
Packing/Moving

SOCIAL

Friendly Visitor
Phone Friend
Social Outings
Mentorship
 a. Financial
 b. Other
Mother's Helper
Respite

SERVICE PROJECTS

Interior home repairs
Exterior home repairs
 Painting
Ramp building
Yardwork
Snow removal
Organizing

TRANSPORTATION

Errands with VIS Friend
Grocery shopping with VIS Friend
Medical appointments

Basic Requirements of Volunteers:

- All VIS volunteers must be active members of a Christian church of any denomination.
- If you are interested in becoming a volunteer and your congregation is not a partnering church, please contact Debbie Jones (616-459-7500) ext. 16 or dbjones@visgr.org.
- Volunteers should be at least 18 years old, or accompanied by an adult if younger.
- Requests for services are often time-sensitive. Therefore we appreciate that phone calls or emails from VIS be responded to promptly. We typically receive two weeks' notice from referring agencies.
- Confidentiality of the VIS Friend's information must be maintained at all times. This is an important way to show respect for our VIS Friends, and it affirms the trust they place in us. All VIS Friends sign a Release of Information which permits VIS staff to tell a congregation and its volunteers the name, address and phone number of the VIS friend, as well as the nature of the request. Volunteers are not to share VIS Friend's identifying information with anyone outside of Volunteers In Service. VIS staff do not provide volunteer contact information to VIS Friends.
- VIS staff encourages volunteers to take their commitment as seriously as you would any commitment. If you are unable to fulfill a commitment, please contact the VIS office as soon as possible at (616) 459-7500, M-F (9:00 am-4:30 pm). We will then seek another volunteer, if needed.
- Please immediately report any concerns about the safety or well being of any VIS Friend to VIS staff. All staff are considered "Mandated Reporters" under Michigan law.
- Please follow up by phone or email with the VIS connecting staff member with necessary updates and when you have completed your project or task.

General Goals for VIS Volunteers

The efforts of VIS volunteers in working with VIS Friends can be grouped as follows: *to Engage; to Empower; and to Equip.*

ENGAGE:

Engage means "to occupy the attention or efforts of a person, as in a conversation or because of a commitment that has been made."

Many of our VIS Friends spend days socially isolated from friends, family, or neighbors. A VIS Volunteer who is connected to a VIS Friend helps to reduce that isolation.

The following may be helpful in engaging with a VIS Friend:

1. Be friendly and interactive with the VIS Friend. Volunteers have found asking questions to be an effective way to get to know someone. A list of conversation starters, talking points and questions are included in this booklet. For one time projects and requests, the amount of time spent with the VIS Friend would of course be limited, so a lengthy conversation may not happen.
2. As a faith based organization, we initially inquire with our VIS friends if they are comfortable working with church volunteers. Not all are equally comfortable. It is important to meet people where they are in their journey and be respectful.

3. Each connection is an opportunity to share the Good News. This can be done through prayer with the individual directly or praying for them in private. It can also be done through our actions, in conversation or by sending an encouraging scripture in a card.
4. We recognize everyone has their own comfort levels. If you feel led to pray directly with a VIS Friend, please ask if they are comfortable. If they are not, inquire if they have specific things you could pray for them at a different time. Knowing that someone is praying for them is encouraging. (*Tip: Praying for the VIS Friend removes the burden from you and places it in God's hands.*)

Ephesians 6:18 - ...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert...always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

EMPOWER

Empower is defined as "giving power or making someone stronger or more confident."

VIS empowers volunteers to provide needed assistance to VIS Friends. Their efforts then empower the VIS friends to live in a stronger, more confident manner. Volunteers In Service believes that empowering in the true sense of the word is done only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

At times, you may encounter individuals or circumstances that may pull at your heartstrings. This can lead to a desire to "fix" someone's circumstance. As we walk alongside our VIS Friends, we are not called to fix or rescue them. We allow them and encourage them to be part of the process of discovering a solution. By taking ownership and contributing to this process, they are empowered. We seek to do and walk *with* them, not *for* them. By doing too much, we risk taking away their dignity and self-respect. Please see page 9 for a helpful diagram "Helping, Fixing, and Serving."

The following may be helpful when thinking of empowerment in relation to VIS Friends:

1. Establish boundaries for yourself and with VIS friends. One example is to avoid sharing your phone number or other identifying information with the VIS Friend. We discourage volunteers saying, "Contact me anytime." We prefer they contact the VIS office, not you individually. (*Tip: To keep your phone number hidden when phoning a VIS Friend, please touch *67 before entering their number. Your number will not appear on their caller ID.*)
2. It is important to set boundaries regarding your available time. This means budgeting adequate time to complete the task. The VIS staff who connected you to the VIS friend will help you to do this. If something additional is requested by the VIS Friend, do not feel obligated to comply with the request if you have no more time. You should be prepared to tell the VIS Friend to call our office with any new request. (*Tip: You need not apologize for saying no to another request.*)
3. Be honest with VIS staff regarding your availability and comfort level. If you are either a one time or ongoing volunteer, let us know the following:

Your physical abilities or limitations

- Areas of interest (benevolence, transportation, social, service projects)
- Specific situations or living conditions with which you may not be comfortable
- Preference of geographic location
- How often you would like to be called upon

4. Many VIS Friends have had difficult relationships with friends or family. They may also be experiencing physical challenges including chronic pain and physical limitations. They may be fearful. Situations that our VIS friends experience can sometimes be expressed negatively to volunteers. (*Tip: Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in all situations and relationships so that you can demonstrate Christ's love to the VIS Friend.*)

Some relationships may challenge your patience and tolerance. In such situations, feel free to ask for assistance from the VIS staff or your church contact. Let us know if you believe you are being over-used or taken advantage of. (*Tip: If you feel you are in "over your head" call any VIS staff member at 616 459-7500.*)

5. We do not expect volunteers to provide their personal funds to purchase supplies for the VIS Friend such as helping with supplies for a minor home repair project. Such costs are the responsibility of the VIS Friend. If the VIS Friend has limited income, we try to determine what they can do to contribute to the cost of the project. This helps them to feel a part of the solution. If significant financial assistance is needed, the VIS staff will work out arrangements with your church or another partnering church. (*Tip: It is not your responsibility to take such a request to your congregation. That is the role of the VIS staff.*)

Colossians 3:17 - And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

EQUIP

Equip means "to furnish or provide whatever is needed for a purpose or undertaking."

VIS staff will equip you by providing accurate information about the task you are taking on and enough information about the recipient so that you know what to expect. In a similar way, you will be equipping the recipient or VIS Friend to live a more satisfying life. Opportunities may present themselves for you to equip those you serve with information about the Gospel.

As described earlier, our connections can be either a one time connection with a VIS friend (assisting with a home repair or yard work) or a continuing relationship (bringing a VIS Friend to the grocery store each week, or serving as a friendly visitor). Either way, it is our hope that you feel supported by the VIS staff and comfortable in communicating any questions or concerns related to your experience.

The following are ways VIS staff equip volunteers to be of service to VIS Friends and promote good communication:

1. We will give you the VIS Friend's phone number and address as well as pertinent information about their request. We do not give out the phone number or address of volunteers.

You are encouraged to keep in touch with your VIS connecting worker regarding the progress of a project and when it is completed. We like to hear how you are doing and appreciate your feedback. Volunteers can be a helpful source of information regarding the welfare of the VIS Friend. An open line of communication is helpful to all.

2. For longer term connections, our staff keeps in regular contact with our volunteers and VIS Friends to provide support to the relationship and to make sure things are going well. Again, volunteers can be a helpful source of information gleaned details we may not be privy to. Feel free to share anything you learn to assist us in our service to VIS Friends.

You are encouraged to also communicate with the VIS Contact at your church. It is beneficial to keep your congregation informed and involved regarding the work you are doing in partnership with VIS, remembering confidentiality. The prayers of your congregation are vital.

3. Our staff pray on a regular basis for volunteers and church leaders.

Please know how much our staff appreciate your willingness to serve because of your love for Jesus. VIS staff are blessed when a VIS friend expresses gratitude because a volunteer cared enough to make their life a little easier. It is also a blessing when we can share positive feedback from VIS Friends with our volunteers and church contacts. We are thankful for His servants being the hands and feet of Jesus. Without you, we could not fulfill our mission to serve others in the name of Christ!

*Ephesians 2:10- For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do. .*

Staff Contact Information

Bernita Tuinenga	Development Executive Director	btuinenga@visgr.org	Ext. 15
Suzanne Reinink*	Director of Operations & Training	sreinink@visgr.org	Ext. 18
Debbie Jones	Connections Coordinator	djones@visgr.org	Ext. 16
Steve Boerman	Referral Coordinator	sboerman@visgr.org	Ext. 16
David Lundberg	Casework Connections Associate	dlundberg@visgr.org	Ext. 14
Rosemary Tymes	Casework Connections Associate	rtymes@visgr.org	Ext. 19
Muriel Lamer	Connections Associate	mlamer@visgr.org	Ext. 17
Carole Roelofs	Accounting & Development Coordinator	croelofs@visgr.org	Ext. 10

*Full-time

Hours of Operation: Monday- Friday (9:00 am- 5:00 pm) **Phones may not be answered after 4:30.*

Observed Holidays (VIS office closed)

New Year's Day Labor Day Memorial Day Thanksgiving Day Independence Day Christmas Day

Phone Number - (616) 459-7500

Website - www.visgr.org

Mailing Address - P.O. Box 8215- Grand Rapids, MI 49518

Physical Location

Providence Christian Reformed Church; 7730 Eastern Ave. SE- Grand Rapids, MI 49508

*South Entrance, side door #D

Helping

- ◆ Helping is based on inequality.
- ◆ Helping is using your own strength to help those with lesser strength.
- ◆ Helping incurs debt - someone owes us one.
- ◆ Helping gives us a feeling of satisfaction.
- ◆ Helping can take away from people their ability to be part of the solution.
- ◆ Helping can foster low self-esteem and sense of worth.
- ◆ Helping can be draining and depleting and cause burn out.

Fixing

- ◆ When I fix, I perceive a person as broken.
- ◆ In fixing, there is inequality of expertise.
- ◆ Fixing results in dependence.
- ◆ Fixing is taking over responsibilities of another person.
- ◆ Fixing robs people the freedom of being themselves as you correct or alter them to be the way you want them to be.
- ◆ Fixing is an experience of mastery.
- ◆ Fixing can become a controlling mechanism.

Serving

- ◆ Service is a relationship between equals.
- ◆ Service takes the focus away from us and puts it on those we serve.
- ◆ Serving fosters a feeling of gratitude.
- ◆ Serving is the work of the soul.
- ◆ Serving helps the one serving as well as others.
- ◆ Service is renewing.
- ◆ Serving is being a servant.
- ◆ Serving is honoring the knowledge of those you serve.
- ◆ Serving is responding to a problem and collaborating with others to find a solution.
- ◆ Serving is asking questions, i.e. "what support is needed to be successful."
- ◆ Serving is listening.
- ◆ Serving is empowering people.
- ◆ Serving models Jesus.

When we *help*, we see life as weak.

When we *fix*, we see life as broken.

When we *serve*, we see ourselves as servants who are part of God's story.

Guidelines for Specific Serving Opportunities

These guidelines have been created to help volunteers navigate specific serving opportunities in hopes of achieving meaningful connections with VIS friends. Each case is unique so these guidelines can not be applied to every situation. They may be a helpful tool for volunteers.

A. PHONE FRIEND- Please review “Tips for Healthy Conversations” page 12

1. Use *67 to block caller ID each time to prevent VIS friends from calling you. Sharing your number is up to you, but generally the volunteer should be the one to initiate the calls.
2. Determine a day/ time that is convenient for both parties. Typically, volunteers call a VIS Friend one time a week, but this can vary. Ask a VIS friend if a card would be appreciated.
3. It is helpful to agree on the length of a phone call.
4. Pray for God’s leading before you call your friend.
5. Sometimes it is challenging for VIS friends to show appreciation or be pleasant with others. Many of our VIS friends struggle emotionally. Avoid judging and demonstrate acceptance, respect and patience.
6. Maintain confidentiality at all times, referring to the VIS Friend by first name only.
7. Avoid dominating the conversation. Find topics that you and the VIS Friend share in common. Avoid contentious areas like politics, etc.
8. Be aware of boundaries and use discretion in sharing personal information about yourself unless you feel that it would benefit the VIS friend.
9. If a VIS friend asks you to do other things for them in addition to being a phone friend, feel free to decline and recommend they call the VIS office.

B. TRANSPORTATION (with a VIS friend)

1. We ask every volunteer to follow the COVID-19 guidelines - Anyone (Volunteer or VIS friend) who meets any of the criteria below should refrain from meeting or providing services until they no longer exhibit the criteria.
 - a. *Returned from, or connected through, any of the following areas within the last 14 days. China, South Korea, Iran, Japan, Italy.*
 - b. *Been diagnosed or been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed or has been in contact with someone who may have been exposed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days.*
 - c. *Have experienced any cold or flu like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, respiratory illness, difficulty breathing within the last 14 days.*
2. VIS Staff will communicate with the VIS Friend and Volunteer regarding whether each individual is vaccinated. If one or both are not vaccinated, it will be the decision of the VIS Friend and Volunteer if the request can be fulfilled. In this case, VIS recommends masks be worn.
3. Please use good hygiene. i.e. washing hands and cart etc. Sanitize hands whenever possible.
4. If you are shopping with the VIS Friend, please make arrangements for pick up.
5. Please communicate with your VIS connections staff when the task is completed.

C) GROCERY SHOPPING (w/o a VIS friend)

1. If you are shopping without the VIS Friend, call to get the list of requested items ahead of time.
2. Make arrangements to pick up the method of payment prior to shopping. If it is a Bridge Card, the individual should have a signed/dated written note of permission for you to use it. They may also need to give you their debit number.
3. Bring an envelope with you for placing any change/card/receipt to return to the VIS Friend.
4. Pick up the items at the appropriate store. Avoid multiple locations.
5. Communicate with your VIS connections staff when the task is completed.

TIPS FOR HEALTHY CONVERSATIONS

1. Create a safe warm environment. **People** never **care** **how** much you know until they **know** how much you care. Caring and fixing are two totally different things.
2. What are we thinking? What we think controls how we act and what we say. Are we in a position of right thinking? If not, how can we take captive any thoughts that are not conforming to Christ?
3. Building trusting relationships is about listening, discerning and then responding.

A. Use language that **is** grace-filled **and** encouraging **even** in challenging conversations. Be aware of judgmental attitudes that like **to** creep in.

Examples of questions:

"Wow, it sounds like you are going through some very challenging times right now. I'm sorry to hear that." (Pause and wait for a response)

"I'm sorry you are struggling with _____."

*"I am sure that is heavy **on** your heart. I'm sorry to hear **that**."*

"I am sure that it is very challenging to face every day."

B. Affirm what you have heard..

Examples of questions:

"Let me just make sure that I heard you right. I think I heard you say _____? Did I hear that right?"

*"I've heard you say **many** things, **so let me** just share **what** I heard and you can tell me **if** I have the details correct."*

C. Ask open-ended questions. Part of effective communication is learning how to phrase questions that make the other person think..

Examples of questions:

"What do you think of or about...?"

"How does what you have shared with me impact.... (or influenced, affected, change etc.)"

"How do you feel about...?"

"What do you think it would take to change this situation?"

D. Ask clarifying questions.

Examples of questions:

*"Help me understand..." **This is a great question to use. Use it often.***

"I am not sure I really understand what you are saying. Help me understand this better."

"Help me understand what you are trying to tell me."

"I really care a lot about what you are telling me and I am sorry for what you are going through. But, I am not quite sure I understand how you came into this situation. Help me understand."