Counseling and Releasing Volunteers

Once volunteers are engaged in serving families, you may run into the occasional issue with someone not

performing the required tasks. Volunteers often experience difficulties in their own lives or a change in life

circumstances that hinder their ability to serve. Keep this in mind when speaking with a volunteer who appears

to be neglecting or struggling with his/her duties. Always begin any important conversations with an inquiry of

the volunteer’s wellbeing and proceed with understanding of the situation. The first thing to consider when counseling and/or releasing volunteers: “What is my goal?” It is most often to restore relationship and/or to clarify roles. Below are a few common occurrences that may require your redirection, counsel and wisdom. Think about how you would respond in love to the following situations:

Scenario 1: A flagrant infringement of privacy or breaking of a known protocol.

You can, with a loving approach, tell this person that they will have to step down from their position. Clearly

state the infringement and why it is unacceptable – especially if there is no room for a second chance or this

was a second chance. Show grace and forgiveness, speak truthfully with love, but do not back down once

a volunteer has shown not to have listened or if this is a matter of a “second chance” given, resulting in

repeated infraction.

Scenario 2: A volunteer is not doing his/her job.

First inquire as to the wellbeing of your volunteer, what they may have going on in their personal life and/

or if anything has changed in their situation. This will often open a door that allows you to offer them an

opportunity to step down. It also helps you understand outside circumstances of which you may not have been

aware. Use wording such as, “If this is a difficult season for you, would it be better for you to take a break for

awhile?” Often giving an “out” allows people to admit that they can no longer manage a responsibility.

Scenario 3: Coaching and Releasing

If you’ve given the “out” and this person is determined to serve and “get it right,” do better, and continue on,

you must clearly restate what is expected - informing them that you will be checking in with them regularly.

For example, if a Team Leader is not sending out the weekly email and not contacting their foster family on a

regular basis to inquire of their needs, check with the foster family to ensure this necessary communication has

improved. If not, the Team Leader must be released from their role. “I’m so sorry, but it is really important for

the foster mom to have regular contact as it adds more stress to her life when she doesn’t know if you will be

contacting her. She really needs ...”

Scenario 4: The foster family and a particular volunteer are not a “match.”

This is a most challenging situation and difficult for all involved. Start by offering the volunteer an “out,” as described above. If he/she does not take it, you will have to be more candid and say, “Sometimes the needs of a foster family do not match very well with the volunteer(s) on their team. Unfortunately, this is the case with the Smith family.” Then, you can explain the “disconnect” in concrete terms, not emotional terms. For example, perhaps the volunteer is perpetually late bringing a promised meal. Explain the need for timeliness and respect for the foster family’s schedule. Possibly give one last opportunity for them to “get it right.”