Providing Independent Living Services: Training for Senior Corps Volunteers

Curriculum Modules at a Glance

The curriculum, *Providing Independent Living Services: Training for Senior Corps Volunteers*, contains eight modules. Each module includes PowerPoint slides with facilitator notes, worksheets for activities and exercises, informational handouts for participants, an evaluation, and a list of additional resources. Below is a brief description of each of the eight modules, including the exercises and reflection activities.

**Module 1: Types of Independent Living Services Delivered by Volunteers**
- Describes some of the services most frequently provided by RSVP and Senior Companion volunteers that support seniors living independently in the community.
- Exercise: Participants read a brief description of a client having difficulties, consider what the issue might be, and discuss services available in their community that could help.
- Reflection Activity: Participants think about other seniors they know who: (a) might benefit from a service available in the community; or (b) would be interested in volunteering to help deliver those services.
- Recommended: Provide the participants with a list of local community services available to seniors and use it for the activities.

**Module 2: Becoming an Effective Care Partner: Helping Volunteers Recognize Benefits to Themselves**
- Describes some of the research findings on mental and physical health benefits of volunteering, and offers tips for maintaining the health and enthusiasm of volunteers.
- Exercise: Participants discuss their own experience with mental and physical health benefits of volunteering, including benefits of social support.
- Reflection Activity: Participants complete a “self-care” worksheet that asks them to think about how they do/will (a) get support when volunteering, and (b) maintain good mental and physical health.

**Module 3: Understanding the Physical, Emotional, and Social Challenges Experienced by Clients**
- Looks at some of the challenges clients face, including loss or limitations around mobility, self-care, activities of daily living, and companionship, and offers tips for volunteers to better assist them.
- Exercise: Problem-solving exercise where participants read a brief scenario and discuss how they can tactfully offer help to a client in a delicate situation.
- Reflection Activity: Participants think about someone in their life that may need help to perform daily living tasks, and what they might do to help.
Module 4: Effective and Respectful Communications

- Reviews tips and techniques volunteers can use to respectfully and effectively engage and interact with their clients. Many clients are frail and may be dealing with several chronic conditions in addition to taking a number of medications. Suggestions are offered to improve communication.
- Exercise: Role play exercise involving common communication challenges. One participant is a client and the other is the volunteer. Each reads a description of their situation and works through the challenge.
- Reflection Activity: Participants are asked to think about the last time they said “yes” to a request and regretted it. They then consider how they could say “no” (set limits) politely but firmly in the future. This activity is an opportunity to talk about your policy on volunteer-client boundaries.

Module 5: Understanding Dementia

- Looks at what is normal in the way of cognitive shortcomings and what are signs and symptoms that indicate a more serious problem. Participants learn basic information about the different types and causes of dementia, including Alzheimer’s disease, and how volunteers can help clients and their family members/caregivers learn to cope.
- Exercise: Hands-on puzzle activity designed to help participants understand what it feels like to struggle with something seemingly simple, so they can better appreciate how people with dementia may feel. You will need to prepare small bags of items found around the office.
- Reflection Activity: Participants are asked to think about their own strategies for coping with loss and how they would advise a friend. This activity is an opportunity to offer support to volunteers struggling with grief.
- Recommended: This is an important and frightening topic for many people, and the research is ongoing. Before training on this topic, review the latest news at the Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org), and consider inviting an expert to speak at the training.

Module 6: Paying Attention to Body Language

- Body language, or nonverbal communication, is the use of body movements or gestures that further communication through expression. Describes nonverbal communication and its function as well as cultural considerations of body language. Offers tips for volunteers to better respond to nonverbal communication when assisting clients.
- Exercise: Participants read a brief volunteer-client scenario and discuss: (a) the message the volunteer may have unintentionally sent through body language; and (b) how the volunteer could have sent a more positive message.
- Reflection Activity: Participants are asked to use increased awareness to reflect on their own nonverbal signals, both positive and negative.
- Recommended: Visual demonstrations are the best way to open a discussion on body language. If you have the technical capabilities, consider showing videos to illustrate important points.
Module 7: Home Safety

- Provides information about household hazards and basic steps volunteers can take to help their clients make their homes safer, as well as be better prepared to respond to natural disasters and emergency situations.
- Exercise: Participants read a brief scenario describing a client’s home and situation, and discuss potential risks and how they might be alleviated, including how to raise the issue in a sensitive manner.
- Reflection Activity: Participants begin completing a disaster preparedness plan (“In Touch”, provided by Elder Care Locator) for assisting a parent or other elderly person in their life in the event of a natural or other disaster.
- Recommended: Do a separate training on disaster preparedness that incorporates likely emergencies in your area (e.g. wild fires, hurricanes, tornados, but also extreme temperatures that can be especially dangerous for the elderly).

Module 8: Beyond Companionship Services: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life

- Offers tips, ideas, and suggestions that volunteers can use to help clients improve their quality of life by alleviating loneliness and social isolation, feelings of uselessness or helplessness, and effects of physical or cognitive limitations.
- Exercise: Participants make suggestions for helping clients maintain or improve quality of life in different areas: social, emotional/spiritual, cognitive functioning and health, and physical functioning and health.
- Reflection Activity: Asks participants to think about how to offer suggestions in a tactful and respectful way, and starts a conversation on appropriate volunteer-client boundaries. This activity provides an opportunity to discuss potential ethical dilemmas that volunteers may face.

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