



## **Mentor Manual**

### **WELCOME**

Mentors play a tremendous role in our Ready For Life (RFL) Academy program. You are the backbone of the program and spend enormous amounts of time with our students, boosting their self-esteem and preparing them for future challenges. Our goal is that mentors be proud to be involved in such a worthwhile endeavor. This is what dreams are made of and where miracles happen.

It is important that each mentor realizes the responsibilities, as well as the rewards, involved in interacting with individuals with disabilities. Some days may be a great deal of work, while others may be easy. It is the hope of the RFL Board of Directors that each mentor goes away a better individual because of the contribution they have made in changing the lives of our students.

This manual will provide information to help you get started as a mentor for Ready for Life.

### **About Ready For Life Academy**

**Mission:** To provide young adults experiencing cognitive, learning and social disabilities opportunities to be challenged academically, build relationships and prepare for their transition into life.

**What We Do:** RFL is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing inclusive learning opportunities to individuals with intellectual disabilities. We offer post-secondary education transition services on college campuses to those who would not normally be accepted to a two or four-year college so they can work on their life goals of independent living and paid employment alongside their non-disabled peers.



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## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Principles of Mentoring**

1. Mentoring involves people undertaking defined activities:
  - of their own free will
  - without payment (other than out of pocket expenses) and
  - which will be of benefit to the community and the organization concerned
2. RFL acknowledges the contribution that mentors make to enhance the lives of people with Intellectual disabilities. Many of the services we provide could not operate as effectively or as extensively without the support and input of many mentors.
3. RFL seeks to effectively train and support mentors. Mentors will be provided with adequate induction and training so that they are aware of their specific role within RFL and have the skills and understanding necessary to undertaking their role.
4. The involvement of mentors will not displace paid staff.

### **Responsibilities of RFL**

1. While the attention of RFL will naturally focus primarily on the tasks to be performed and on ensuring a sustained quality of service, the interests of both paid and mentor staff will be considered.
2. The different roles, rights and responsibilities of mentors and paid staff need to be clearly defined and understood by all parties, and a climate of mutual respect and confidence engendered.
3. RFL must ensure that mentor tasks:
  - are clearly defined and consistent with Ready For Life's role and function in the same way they are for paid staff.
  - are useful, meaningful and do not exploit mentors.
4. RFL must ensure that mentors have a clear understanding of the objectives, role and function of the organization.
5. To ensure that an effective working relationship is established, mentors must be given:
  - a clear description of the tasks to be performed
  - orientation and appropriate training
  - appropriate supervision
6. Responsibility for mentor programs must be vested with a member of the paid staff who possesses the appropriate skills in working with mentors.

7. RFL's policy on staff development and training should cater to mentors while ensuring that the staff development and training needs of paid staff are not sacrificed to the needs of mentors.
8. RFL should ensure that a mentor's expectations, interests, time commitment and skills match the task to be performed. This involves a clear description of the task, interview and match of the mentor.
9. Communication channels should be clear to all concerned and mentor staff should be consulted on decisions which affect them. Consultation is especially necessary during times of change.
10. Mentor activities should be assessed regularly. In addition and where appropriate, individual mentors should be given the opportunity for a formal appraisal of their particular contribution to RFL.
11. Mentors, as is the case for RFL employees, will be covered by Equal Employment Opportunity policy and legislation, The Whistleblowers Protection Act, 1993, and the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act, 1986.
12. Mentors must be adequately protected from unsafe situations in accordance with the principles and practices as set out in the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act, 1986.
13. RFL must ensure that the budgetary and general resource costs of mentor programs can be met. These costs include out-of-pocket expenses, accommodation and facilities as well as the time of paid staff for recruitment, orientation, support, supervision and training.
14. There should be clear Organization guidelines concerning the payment of out-of-pocket expenses, assessed to be fair and reasonable, to cover matters such as mileage, fares and other costs associated with the job. The rates and circumstances attracting payment will, as a minimum, be based on those which apply to paid staff; however, some circumstances, such as the payment of mileage expenses, may require reimbursement to exceed this approach and it is important that the reasons for this are clearly understood by mentors and staff.
15. Disciplinary and grievance procedures applying to mentors should be based in principles consistent with those for paid staff.

### **Responsibilities of the Mentor**

1. The objectives, role and function of RFL should be clearly understood by mentors.
2. Mentors have the same obligation as paid staff for working within RFL guidelines.
3. Mentors should make realistic commitments in terms of both time and area of involvement, and acknowledge the right of RFL to expect these commitments to be fulfilled.

4. As with paid staff, mentors need to be aware of their responsibility to act according to instructions from appropriate individuals, and to adhere to the normal reporting mechanisms as practiced by RFL or as specifically established by their supervisor.
5. RFL deals with material of a confidential nature. RFL must ensure that mentors who may have access to such information are aware of the importance of preserving confidentiality, and that failure to do so may result in the mentor not participating in the Organization's activities in the future.
6. Mentors bring energy, skills and attributes to RFL. Nevertheless, many activities will require that they participate in training to enable them to perform particular tasks and to familiarize themselves with RFL. Mentors should be willing to attend training and orientation sessions when offered.
7. After being made aware of the principles, practices and regulations set out or in organization with the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act, 1986, mentors will be required to observe these provisions.
8. You have a responsibility to respect the members, staff, fellow mentors and the philosophy and policies of the RFL.
9. Infections spread readily. If you are sick, consider other staff, mentors and RFL Students as well as yourself.
10. You have the responsibility to ask questions about things you don't understand. Discuss concerns rather than keeping them to yourself. Relevant information should be passed onto the coordinator.
11. When working with others, you have a responsibility to accept direction and supervision from paid staff and to maintain a good working relationship with your colleagues.
12. Accept other people's opinions even if you don't agree with them. Don't force others to agree with your opinions.

## **Mentor Rights**

### *Orientation and Training*

- You have the right to know as much about the Ready For Life as appropriate, including policy and programming.
- You have the right to initial training and continuing education.

### *Support and Respect*

- You have the right to be treated as a co-worker by the people with whom you work.



#### *Explanation*

- You have the right to know if you are unsuitable for a task or your performance is unsatisfactory.

#### *Mentor Satisfaction*

- You have the right to be given suitable tasks with consideration for preference, temperament, life experiences, education and employment background.
- You have the right to have a task that is challenging, worthwhile and enjoyable.

#### *Say 'No'*

- You have the right to say “No,” to tasks outside your abilities.

### **Interacting with Individuals with Intellectual disabilities**

When interacting with people who have intellectual disabilities, there are a few things to keep in mind to make you and the other individual as comfortable as possible.

- ✓ Treat those with intellectual disabilities as you would like to be treated.
- ✓ Think before you speak and avoid using labels, as they are offensive to everybody.
- ✓ Try to avoid showing or conveying pity. Do not be patronizing. Do not talk down to them or treat the adults as children.
- ✓ Talk directly to them (not to their parents or caregivers). Make eye contact and smile. Speak in clear, simple sentences and give them time to respond.

Always try to remember that individuals with intellectual disabilities are people like you and me. Just like you, they want to be treated with dignity and respect. Their disability is one of their characteristics.

### **MENTOR POLICIES**

It is the policy of Ready For Life to encourage mentors/mentors to work with our client/students and staff. Each mentor working must certify in writing that he/she is free from communicable disease and the mentor's physical and mental health will not negatively affect either the health of the client/student or the quality of the client/student's education.

A mentor, under the direction of Ready For Life, shall sign a statement indicating whether he/she is on court-supervised probation or parole or has been convicted of a crime. We may also require a criminal history background check.

A mentor, under the direction of Ready For Life, will be required to review and familiarize him/herself with the policies and procedures of Ready For Life



### **Personal Conduct**

Each mentor of RFL is expected to conduct himself/herself in a manner that will reflect favorably on the image of RFL and the character and/or competence of the mentors. Any mentor who behaves unprofessionally, or who brings discredit in any way upon himself or herself, other mentors or employees of RFL or RFL itself will be terminated from the program.

### **Record Management**

The CLS coordinator maintains records on each mentor at Ready For Life (RFL) Academy. Records include dates of mentor service, positions held, duties performed, evaluation of mentor performance, training attended and awards/recognitions received. Mentor records, including application, reference checks and background checks, are confidential. Mentors are responsible for submitting and updating information contained in their files to CLS coordinator.

### **Dress Code**

Mentors are representative of RFL and are responsible for presenting a positive image to constituents and the community. Mentors will dress appropriately for the conditions and performance of their duties. Mentors who work as support in an office or classroom situation will dress according to the code of the particular office or classroom. Individual mentor/mentors will be informed of the dress standard for their duties at the time of assignment.

### **Attendance and time**

Mentor attendance is important to the operation of each program. Mentor/Mentors should notify their supervisor in advance if they are unable to be present on their scheduled day or presentation. Mentor/Mentors are responsible for completing and submitting their mentor/mentor time on the applicable logs.

### **Service Requirement**

Mentors agree to commit to a minimum number of hours of service for the semester. At the end of a semester, mentors may elect to renew their mentor/mentor service agreement with RFL. The number of service hours requested is approximately 15 hrs. each semester. However, this service requirement varies by opportunity.

### **Anti-Harassment**

It is the intent of RFL to provide our mentors with the best possible working environment. It is the policy of RFL that there is no harassment of our staff or mentors by co-workers, supervisors or non-employees with whom we come in contact during the course of our working activities. Harassment serves no legitimate business purpose. RFL will not tolerate any harassment, including, but not limited to, harassment or discrimination based upon race, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, mental condition or veteran status. Examples of activities NOT constituting harassment include constructive suggestions, comments or interventions, and actions to terminate participation of mentors in the RFL program. RFL takes issues of harassment seriously, and will take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate and correct violations of our policy. RFL mentors should report any instances of alleged harassment to the Executive



Director. It is the policy of RFL to resolve issues of harassment in a prompt and consistent fashion, and to maintain the highest levels of confidentiality in all aspects of such matters.

### **Alcohol and Drugs/Smoking**

We are a Drug and Alcohol Free and Zero Tolerance Workplace. One of RFL's highest priorities is providing a safe environment for participants, mentors and employees. The RFL policy on this matter is: RFL strictly prohibits the use, sale, transfer or possession of drugs and/or alcoholic beverages, by its mentors, on the RFL premises while in the service of RFL, including your lunch break. RFL strictly prohibits mentors from working in an impaired state. Failure to comply with this policy will result in immediate termination from the program.

Ready For Life supports a tobacco/drug/alcohol-free lifestyle and workplace. **Smoking is prohibited at all events.**

### **Disciplinary Procedures**

Whenever a mentor's behavior warrants disciplinary action, RFL staff will determine the appropriate action. Types of discipline may include verbal warning, written warning or termination from the program. The disciplinary action taken will depend upon the seriousness of the offense.

### **Confidentiality**

All records and files of RFL are the property of RFL and considered confidential. No mentor is authorized to copy or disclose any file or record. Confidential information includes all letters or any other information concerning transactions with members, member lists, payroll or personnel records of past or present mentors, financial records, all records pertaining to purchases from vendors or suppliers and documents concerning operating procedures. All telephone calls, letters or other requests for information about current or former mentors should be directed to the Mentor Coordinator, who can assist in providing the appropriate information.

### **Conduct**

Mentors are expected to follow rules of conduct that will protect the interest and safety of all mentors, staff and students. The following are only some examples of inappropriate conduct which could lead to dismissal:

- Theft or inappropriate removal or possession of RFL's property or that of any RFL mentor, staff student, agent or visitor, including failing to cooperate fully in any RFL investigation.
- Altering RFL reports or records.
- Mentoring under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs and/or illegal or unauthorized possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs in the RFL environment.
- Creating a disturbance on RFL premises, at sponsored activities or in areas which could jeopardize the safety of others.
- Improper use of RFL's property or property owned by any other individual or organization.
- Lack of cooperation, or other disrespectful conduct.
- Violation of RFL, federal, state or local safety and health rules.
- Inappropriate use of telephones, computer equipment or systems, e-mail system, facsimile machine or other RFL-owned equipment



- Unauthorized disclosure of RFL propriety or confidential information
- Unsatisfactory performance or conduct.

### **Safety and Liability**

RFL aims to provide a safe and healthy environment for all mentors. If a mentor is injured during the mentor's service, it is important that the mentor notify his or her supervisor immediately. Mentors should also complete an incident report and submit the report to the mentor's supervisor.

RFL's general liability coverage, with some limitations and exclusions, protects mentors for covered injury or damage that results from activities or service that mentors conduct or perform at RFL's direction and within the scope of their duties for RFL. RFL's general liability coverage does not provide coverage to mentors themselves for liabilities they may have incurred for their actions. RFL's mentor accident insurance coverage covers some injuries to mentors while mentors are performing mentor service on behalf of RFL.

In some instances, mentors must sign a release absolving RFL of liability when RFL mentors voluntarily and knowingly subject themselves to certain risks while performing mentor services on behalf of RFL. Contact the CLS coordinator with questions or for more information about insurance and liability.

### **Confidential Information and Nondisclosure**

Each RFL student has a right to confidentiality. By mentoring at this organization, you are placed in a position of trust about information regarding students. Mentors must constantly be aware of the confidential nature of all information regarding the students.

We are required by law to keep protected health information confidential and to provide a privacy notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to all protected health information. Ready For Life will abide by the terms of this Notice as it is currently in effect. We reserve the right to change the practices described in this Notice and to apply the new provisions to all the health information we maintain, regardless of when it was created or received. If a mentor is contacted about the protected health information of a consumer or employee, direct the person to the Executive Director and immediately notify the Executive Director of this contact.

## **VOLUNTEER DESCRIPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

There are several ways you can mentor with RFL:

Social Mentor: Attend on and off campus events with an RFL student or group of students. Attend lunch or chapel with an RFL student(s).

In-Class Mentor: Assist an RFL student in a college class that you are already taking. Sit by the RFL students, assist with notetaking, group work, and/or group discussions.



RFL Classroom Mentor: Join the RFL students in the RFL classroom for their life skills classes. Participate in course instruction or assist with notetaking, group work, or class discussions. Work one-on-one with an RFL student on course work for their College classes, modify the course work to meet their needs based on instructor approval.

Horizon Attendee: Attend monthly social events on Calvin College's campus with adults with developmental disabilities.

### **SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION FOR MENTORS**

Ready For Life sponsors recognition events for mentors to highlight the contributions of mentors to the organization. Continuing recognition of mentors is vital and will occur throughout the year.

### **THANK YOU**

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to mentor for Ready For Life Academy. Without caring people like you, willing to give of your precious time the Academy would not be the success that it is.

People just like you are willing to donate of their time for a variety of different reasons. Some mentor to help others less fortunate than themselves. Some do it to give themselves something to do and others mentor for the friendship and companionship of others. Whatever your reason may be, Ready For Life wants to thank you for your dedication and hard work. We sincerely hope that this experience has been an enjoyable one for you, and we hope to have you as a mentor at future events.

**THANK YOU!**



**Ready For Life**  
belong · believe · become

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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**RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE  
READY FOR LIFE MENTOR MANUAL**

I have read the Ready for Life Mentor Manual and understand the policies and procedures fully. RFL reserves the right to modify, revoke, suspend, terminate or change any or all policies or procedures, in whole or in part, with or without notice. The language used in this manual is not intended to create, nor is it to be construed, to constitute a contract between RFL and any one or all of its mentors. RFL is the sole interpreter of all policies and procedures stated in this manual.

I acknowledge that I am a mentor and not an employee of RFL or any of the sponsors of this program. I receive no compensation for any mentor services. I acknowledge that I am not covered by Workers Compensation Insurance for accidents occurring during mentor activities.

I have been accepted as a mentor of RFL and just as I may voluntarily leave at any time, my mentor service may be terminated at any time and for any reason.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE MENTOR MANUAL

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Mentor Signature

Date

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Mentor Name (please print)