

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MANUAL



Housing Ends Homelessness
Volunteering for a future where no one sleeps outside

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Section 1: Welcome to Abode

1.1. Welcome to Abode

Dear Volunteer,

Welcome, and thank you for choosing to be part of Abode's work to end homelessness. Since our founding in 1988, Abode has grown into a regional leader serving more than 18,000 individuals and families each year across Alameda, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Napa, Sonoma, and Solano counties.

As a volunteer, you are an important part of this mission. By sharing your time, skills, and compassion, you help expand opportunities, strengthen community, and support residents on their path to stability and well-being.

This handbook outlines what you can expect from Abode, what Abode expects from you, and the policies that guide our volunteer program. Our goal is to ensure your experience is safe, meaningful, respectful, and impactful.

We are truly grateful you're here and excited to partner with you in this work.

Warmly,

Vivian Wan
CEO, Abode

1.2. Our Mission and Core Values – and the Role of Volunteers

Abode's mission is to end homelessness by helping low-income and unhoused people, including those with special needs, secure stable housing and the support they need to thrive. We also work as advocates to address and remove the root causes of homelessness.

Our vision is a future where every person has a place to call home, with dignity, safety, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Volunteers play an important role in advancing this mission. Through direct support, skill-sharing, and community engagement, volunteers expand access to resources, strengthen resident well-being, and increase Abode's capacity to serve individuals and families on their path to housing stability.

Our work is grounded in dignity, compassion, equity, collaboration, and innovation – values that guide how we serve residents and how volunteers contribute to meaningful, mission-driven impact.

1.3. Quick Start: Volunteer Checklist

Welcome! Use this checklist to get started quickly and confidently as an Abode volunteer.

Before Your First Shift

- ☐ Complete the Volunteer Application
- ☐ Pass required background check(s) (if applicable)
- ☐ Submit any required consent or school forms (if applicable)
- ☐ Review this Volunteer Manual in full
- ☐ Confirm your volunteer role, schedule, and site location
- ☐ Log into Get Connected to track hours

On Your First Day

- ☐ Arrive on time and check in with your On-Site Supervisor
- ☐ Review site-specific safety procedures
- ☐ Clarify your tasks, boundaries, and who to contact with questions
- ☐ Ask where to store personal items and review dress expectations

During Your Service

- ☐ Maintain confidentiality at all times
- ☐ Follow staff direction and stay within your approved role
- ☐ Communicate absences or concerns promptly
- ☐ Log your volunteer hours accurately

If an Issue Arises

- ☐ Contact your On-Site Supervisor first
- ☐ Reach out to the Volunteer Programs Manager if needed
- ☐ Call 911 for emergencies and notify staff immediately

We're glad you're here! Thank you for supporting Abode's mission.

Section 2: Expectations

2.1. What You Can Expect from Abode

As a volunteer, you can expect that Abode will:

- Provide a **clear volunteer role description**;
- Match you with opportunities aligned to your **skills, interests, and availability**;
- Offer **orientation, training, and supervision**;
- Provide **ongoing feedback** and welcome your suggestions;
- Recognize and appreciate your contributions; and
- Treat you with respect and include you as part of the team.

2.2. What Abode Expects from Volunteers

As an Abode volunteer, you are expected to:

- Understand and fulfill the responsibilities of your role. Ask for clarity when needed;
- Treat residents, staff, and fellow volunteers with dignity and respect;
- Communicate promptly about absences or lateness (*see section 3.1. for notification timelines*);
- Maintain **professional boundaries** with clients, staff and fellow volunteers;
- Maintain **strict confidentiality** regarding residents and participants; and
- Share feedback to help strengthen our programs.

2.3. Volunteer Status and No Compensation

As an Abode volunteer, you agree that:

- You are to serve without wages, salaries, or benefits;
- Service is entirely voluntary and does not create an employment relationship with Abode; and
- Volunteers are not eligible for overtime, meal or rest period, paid time off, or other employee benefits.

Reimbursement of Pre-Approved Expenses:

- Volunteers must obtain written pre-approval before incurring any expenses on Abode's behalf;
- Approved, reasonable expenses will be reimbursed consistent with Abode's policy upon timely submission of requests;

- Volunteers will not be reimbursed for unapproved expenses; and

No Substitution for Employee Work:

- Services performed by volunteers shall remain strictly within the roles and duties designated by Abode for volunteers; and
- Volunteer service shall not displace or replace work performed by paid staff.

Section 3: Volunteer Program Policies & Procedures

3.1. Accountability & Reliability

Volunteer roles are essential to Abode's services. Volunteers are expected to arrive on time and complete scheduled shifts. If you are unable to attend, notify your on-site supervisor **within 24-48 hours prior to your scheduled shift**. If you expect to be late to your scheduled shift, notify your on-site supervisor **as early as possible**.

3.2. Background Checks & Age Requirements

- For certain designated roles, volunteers must complete and pass a background check and/or DMV screening before placement or assignment.
- Volunteers under **18 years old** require a signed **parent/guardian consent form**.

Refusal to complete required screening disqualifies participation.

3.3. Communication & Supervision

Open communication is key to successful volunteer experience.

- **On-Site Supervisor:** Primary contact for daily duties, scheduling, and site-specific questions.
- **Volunteer Programs Manager:** Oversees the volunteer program, addresses concerns, and shares updates.
- **Volunteer Communications:** Volunteers will receive program updates and notifications through official communication channels and may opt out at any time.
- **Check-ins:** Depending on the role, periodic meetings, emails, or calls may occur.

3.4. Confidentiality & Privacy

Volunteers must maintain participants/residents' confidentiality and always respect their privacy. Every resident at Abode has the right to confidentiality. If you are aware of a client issue that requires immediate attention, however, please inform your supervisor and/or the Volunteer Programs Manager immediately. As you work with staff, information of a confidential nature may be shared with you. You must not share this information with anyone outside of Abode. Any volunteers who gain access to information about residents while fulfilling the duties of their volunteer work must keep such information confidential.

Social Media and Media Guidelines

To protect residents' privacy and uphold Abode's confidentiality standards, volunteers must:

- Obtain pre-approval from on-site staff before taking personal or group photos;
- Do not take photos or videos of Abode's clients and staff;
- If photos or videos are something a staff member or participant would like to be a part of, please let your supervisor know so that a permission slip can be filled out by said staff or participant prior to the photo or video being taken;
- Avoid disclosing personal information about Abode's participants and staff through social media or any external media channels;
- Refrain from discussing the details of their volunteer work with any media representatives without prior consent from Abode's communications team;
- If you do post about your volunteer work at Abode on social media, we encourage you to tag Abode's account – if possible; and
- If you are contacted by media reporters, photographers, or TV news camera operators, please contact Chris De Benedetti, Abode's Director of Communications & Marketing, at cdebenedetti@abode.org.

3.5. Conduct & Professional Boundaries

- At all times, volunteers must treat all participants, residents, staff, and fellow volunteers with dignity, respect, and professionalism.
- Volunteers must not engage in any form of discrimination, harassment, or inappropriate behavior.
- Volunteers must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with participants and Abode staff. This includes not sharing excessive personal information, offering personal gifts, or providing advice beyond the scope of their volunteer role.

- Volunteers must not engage in personal, financial, or romantic relationships with participants or residents.
- Volunteers must not use or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs during shifts.
- Volunteers must not remove Abode property or copy records without proper authorization.
- Volunteers must always follow staff guidance and only perform tasks within their assigned role.

3.6. Safety & Substance-Free Environment

- Volunteers must report any hazards, unsafe conditions, or injuries immediately.
- Smoking is prohibited within Abode facilities and within 20 feet of buildings; use designated outdoor smoking areas.
- The use, possession, or distribution of alcohol and illegal drugs on Abode property is strictly prohibited.
- Volunteers must not arrive at the site under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Any reasonable suspicion of impairment may result in immediate removal from the site and review of volunteer status.
- Volunteers are expected to follow all safety procedures established at their volunteer site.

3.7. Discrimination, Harassment & Equal Opportunity,

Abode Services is committed to providing a respectful, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all volunteers. Consistent with applicable federal, state, and local laws, including the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), Abode prohibits discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and abusive conduct in all volunteer activities.

Abode provides equal opportunity in volunteer engagement and does not discriminate against volunteers or volunteer applicants based on any legally protected characteristic, including actual or perceived race (including traits historically associated with race such as hair texture and protective hairstyles), color, religion (including religious dress and grooming practices), national origin, ancestry, citizenship or immigration status where protected by law, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding or related medical conditions, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, marital status, registered domestic partner status, physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information, military or veteran status, reproductive health decision-making, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state, or local law.

Harassment based on any legally protected classification is strictly prohibited. This includes verbal, visual, written, electronic, or physical conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment or interferes with a person's ability to participate in volunteer activities. Sexual harassment – including unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, inappropriate comments, jokes, gestures, images, or physical conduct of a sexual nature – is prohibited regardless of whether it occurs between volunteers, employees, residents, vendors, contractors, or any other individuals interacting with Abode.

Abode also prohibits retaliation against any volunteer who, in good faith, reports discrimination, harassment, abusive conduct, or other violations of this policy, or who participates in an investigation. Retaliation of any kind will not be tolerated.

Any volunteer who experiences, witnesses, or becomes aware of discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or abusive conduct should promptly report the concern to their On-site Supervisor, the Volunteer Programs Manager, or Human Resources. Reports may be made verbally or in writing. Abode will promptly, thoroughly, and impartially review all concerns to the extent appropriate, maintain confidentiality to the extent possible, and take appropriate corrective action when warranted.

Violations of this policy may result in corrective action, including removal from volunteer service. Appropriate action will also be taken to deter any such conduct in the future.

The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Civil Rights Department (CRD) will accept and investigate charges of unlawful discrimination or harassment at no charge to the complaining party. Information may be located by visiting the Agency website at www.eeoc.gov or www.cacivilrights.ca.gov.

In keeping with our commitment to a harassment-free environment, Abode Services will comply with all applicable rules and regulations regarding the training of volunteers.

3.8. Dress Code

Volunteers should follow the guidance of on-site staff and dress appropriately for their duties. Please remember that you represent Abode, and you are a role model to our community in many ways. For safety reasons, we ask you not to walk barefoot or wear open-toed shoes while on-site. Closed toed shoes, and shoes with backings are required (no flip flops or sandals without backs).

3.9. Driving & Transportation

Volunteers may **not transport residents**. Some roles may require driving a personal vehicle for program-related tasks. Specific guidance and training on driving and transportation expectations will be provided by on-site staff as needed to ensure safety and compliance.

3.10. Technology & Electronic Communications

To perform your duties as a volunteer, you may use Abode's electronic equipment, including computers, copiers, Internet access, e-mail, and telephones. These tools must never be used to receive, view, or store discriminatory, harassing, defamatory, or illegal content or information, nor to disclose confidential or proprietary information belonging to Abode. Always safeguard confidential information, including client data. If you accidentally see client information you are not authorized to view during your service, you must report it immediately to on-site staff.

3.11. Emergencies & Mandated Reporting

- Follow staff instructions during emergencies.
- Call **911** for medical, fire, or life-threatening situations and then notify staff.
- Immediately notify staff if concerned about a resident's or your own safety.
- Volunteers should not intervene in crises unless directed by staff.
- Incident reports are completed by staff, with volunteers' input when necessary.

3.12. Gifts, Tips & Donations

Volunteers must not accept or request any tips or gifts from residents or their families. Abode does not want to create an atmosphere where residents feel obligated to reward volunteers for their efforts with cash or gifts.

3.13. Political & Religious Neutrality & Other Solicitations

Volunteers must not promote political or religious beliefs, nor solicit for personal business, political, religious, or other non-profit causes while volunteering with Abode.

3.14. Health & Wellness

Volunteers should stay home when sick, notify their on-site supervisor, and return only after symptoms have resolved to maintain the health of residents and staff.

3.15. Concerns & Feedback

Volunteers are encouraged to voice concerns without fear of retaliation:

1. Contact the on-site supervisor first, or the Volunteer Programs Manager;
2. If necessary, escalate to the Vice President of Fundraising and Communications;
3. Concerns will be addressed respectfully and as confidentially as possible, and if necessary, may be escalated to an internal investigation; and
4. Complete the feedback form at the end of volunteer service.

3.16. Volunteer Hour Tracking and Verification

- All volunteer hours must be logged in **Get Connected**.
- Accurate tracking supports funding, program evaluation, and the verification of volunteer service.
- Students, court-ordered volunteers, or volunteers needing hours for work, school, or personal reasons should bring any required forms or documentation for signature.
- Volunteers may request letters of recommendation or verification of hours for work, school, or personal purposes, which will be provided upon confirmation of logged hours.

3.17. Resignation, Absence & Reinstatement

We understand if volunteers decide to discontinue service at any time but encourage them to provide notice. Exit feedback is also strongly encouraged.

Inactive volunteers may be required to complete a new background check before returning.

3.18. Volunteer Service Termination

Sometimes, volunteering with Abode turns out not to be the right fit for the volunteer or the organization. Abode has the right to terminate a volunteer at any time but will always consider the cause leading to the termination. Reasons for termination can include excessive tardiness or failure to show up for a volunteer shift without notice, violation of any Abode policy or procedure, or illegal, violent, or unsafe conduct or acts.

3.19. Youth Program Behavior Guidelines

Volunteers working with youth must:

- Model positive behavior;
- Refrain from using slang, profanity, or other inappropriate language;
- Refrain from imposing personal views on parenting practices, including but not limited to comments regarding a child's home life, screen time, bedtime routines, or the content they consume;
- Avoid unnecessary physical contact, including, but not limited to, hugging, piggyback rides, carrying children, or engaging in rough play;
- Seek staff support for behavioral challenges; and
- Never use physical punishment, inappropriate contact, or food deprivation.

Note: Role-specific training and background checks will be required for volunteers participating in child and youth programs to ensure safety and compliance with Abode policies.

Thank You

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with Abode. Your time, compassion, and commitment strengthen our community and make a meaningful difference in the lives of the people we serve.

Please reach out to our team at any time you need support or have questions:

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