



Becoming a “Big Friend” to Preschoolers

Washtenaw Promise is a non-profit organization with the mission to support early childhood education in Ypsilanti, Michigan, particularly to underserved children. In partnership with the Ypsilanti Community School District (YCS) and the early childhood education team of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD), we bring dedicated volunteers into the preschool to work directly with kids and teachers. We call this effort our “Big Friends” program, intending that each volunteer will act as a big friend to young children in their first or second year of school. We want to provide children connections with caring adults outside of school; volunteers who will show interest in the child’s life with a positive, thoughtful, encouraging presence each week. It is well understood that these connections can make a profound difference in the lives of children. To do so is our intention and we hope it will be yours.

To become a Big Friend mentor, we ask that you become familiar with the following steps, and complete them before we place you in a school, working directly with kids.

1. First we ask that you fill out two required forms and submit them back to us. This may be done at our orientation meeting, if we are in-person, or electronically within the first week of your volunteering time. You can find the two “**Forms to Fill Out Before Mentoring**” on the volunteer page. The first one is a YCS confidentiality agreement and requires only your signature. The second is a clearance form, required by law, that we submit to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). That one also needs a copy of your driver’s license—both sides—and your signature, *which must match the signature on your driver’s license!!* We’ll remind you of this at our orientation meeting in January.
2. Next, it is very important that you view the “**Mentor Training Videos**” found on our volunteer page, within your first week of volunteering. These training recordings are about 45 minutes each and have been created by Katie Watson, Behavioral Specialist at Beatty Early Learning Center, our WISD consultants, and the Surgeon General of California, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris. While watching, please jot down any questions or thoughts you may have. We will be debriefing with you to discuss your reactions. We also strongly encourage you to review “**Key Points from Training**” on the volunteer page.
3. Finally, please add your name, contact info, hours of availability, and any other optional info to the document, “**A Little About You**” found on the volunteer page. This information will be public to all our volunteers. It will help us make your placement, get to know you better, and be able to contact you individually. We will do so during the term to answer your questions and to keep you informed of important info to come!

We’re very excited to be working with you this term, very grateful for your commitment, and eager to help make the experience as rewarding as possible for everyone. We hope to see you at our orientation meeting in January!