



Circles of Support:


Developing Peer Supports for College Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Circles of Support

- 4-7 volunteer Ambassadors* per circle
- Provide support, as needed, across the range of college activities
 - Academic work
 - Daily planning
 - Extracurricular & social activities
 - NS class assistants
 - Spring Break trips
- 5 Educational Mentors per circle
- Provide the following supports
 - Tutor
 - Lunch Buddy
 - Daily Planning
 - Workout Buddy
 - Navigation Guides
 - Classroom Mentors
 - Project collaborators
 - Extracurricular Activities

*A play of words on the Vanderbilt mascot, the Commodores.

Next Steps at Vanderbilt & University of Tennessee FUTURE Program

- Recruiting peer supports on campus
 - Requirements & application process
 - Creating individualized circles of support
 - Training for peer supports
 - Supports across a variety of activities
 - Ongoing communication & assessment
 - Lessons learned
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Recruiting Ambassadors

- Freshman Organization Fair
- Sororities and Fraternities
- Resident Life
- Office of Active Citizenship
- Word-of-Mouth!
- Special Education classes
- Current Statistics
 - 42 ambassadors
 - 25 returning, 17 new
 - 76% retention rate

Recruiting Peer Supports

FUTURE Program

- Campus-wide Survey
- Meetings with Deans and Department Heads and flyer sent via student listserv
- Ad in Campus Newspaper
- Presentations to student groups and classrooms
- Independent Study
- Honors Freshmen Course
- Self Identify in classrooms
- Students recruiting other students
- 45 Educational Mentors

Ambassadors Requirements and Application Process


- Application
- Three-hour training
- Two references
- Background check

Requirements and Application Process

UT FUTURE Program

- Complete 4 hour training or educational mentoring class
- Background Check
- Matching Form
- Hang out, add to program development

Building Individualized Circles of Support

- Ambassadors role preferences
 - Student relationships
 - Common interests
 - Student needs – time and support
 - Scheduling and availability
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Training for Peer Mentors

- Separate New and Returning Ambassadors Trainings
- Topics covered include:
 - Program overview and requirements
 - Disability etiquette
 - Student and program goals
 - Explanation and expectations of each role
 - Effective strategies for working with students
 - Policies and Rules
 - Ambassador Panel

Role: Lunch Buddies

- **Focus areas:**
 - Social skills: manners, conversations, and interpersonal interactions, asking questions
 - Health: making good food choices
 - Food journal
 - Dietary goals
- **What to do:**
 - Vary conversation topics
 - Introduce students to others
 - Ask about food goals
 - Explain meal plan

Role: Workout Partners

- **Focus areas:**

- Stamina: increase endurance
- Health: establish healthy habits

- **What to do:**

- Go to the gym, play football, take a long walk, take a class at the rec center, etc.
- Initial student log*

**Students are required to workout at least 3 hours a week and record their exercise in weekly logs.*

Role: Daily Planners

- **Focus areas:**
 - Organization: managing materials and assignments
 - Independence: meeting personal goals
 - Responsibility: fulfilling program expectations
- **What to do:**
 - Update student planner
 - Check/reply to emails
 - Check food journal
 - Reflection journal entries
 - Help to revise sentences

Role: Tutors

- **Focus areas:**
 - Academic success: completing assignments
 - Study skills: establishing and practicing
- **What to do:**
 - Review independent learning contract
 - Utilize and check student planner
 - Check work and revise as necessary
 - Check for understanding of class material
 - Review disability services note taker's notes with student
 - Help with assignments for Vandy and NS classes

Role: Job Coaches

- **Focus areas:**
 - Workplace etiquette: interactions with co-workers, supervisors, and customers
 - Quality of work: completing tasks appropriately
 - Independence: following through with procedures and responsibilities without assistance
- **What to do:**
 - Work with job developer to learn tasks
 - Implement supports for the student
 - Model appropriate behavior and task completion
 - Gradually fade your support

Other Activities...

- Physics lab once a month
- Campus choir
- Art and Dance classes
- Circle Activities
- Best Buddies events
- Ambassadors Social Committee events

Best Buddies

Alternative Spring Break Trips

Vanderbilt Best Buddies Chapter has successfully led service learning trips for 3 years. Sites include:

Knoxville, TN– helped to prepare a spot for an inner city garden, March 2009

New Orleans, LA– project was Katrina clean-up, March 2010

Washington, DC –
educating Congress members on the
Eunice Kennedy Shriver Act

Miami, FL –
serving lunch at a food kitchen

Denver, CO –
volunteering at a large food bank
distribution center

Ongoing Communication

- Lead Ambassadors role
- Circle meetings 2-3 times per semester
 - Student progress
 - Problem-solving
- Check-ins twice a month
- Ongoing communication about necessary educational, behavioral, or social supports

Assessment of the Experience

- Fall 2010 survey of peer mentors at Vanderbilt
- 42 respondents
- 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)
- Items about their circles, the experience
- “My circle shares what has been going well, and any successful problem solving methods.”
 - strongly disagree (4, 9.5%), disagree (5, 11.9%), neutral (15, 35.7%), agree (13, 31%), strongly agree (5, 11.9%)

Assessment of the Experience

- Spending time with NS students has helped me grow as a person (97.6% agree or strongly agree)
- Including NS students on campus enhances my college experience (69% strongly agree)
- I have learned from my time with NS students (71.4% strongly agree)
- Including the NS students at Vanderbilt is a way to promote social justice (71.4% strongly agree)
- In the future, I would like to continue working with individuals with disabilities (95.3% agree or strongly agree)

Lessons Learned

- Circles of support should be individualized—one size does not fit all!
- Consider frequency of communication & assessment with undergrads.
- Individualized assistance as needed
- Our students are young adults—issues around relationships and sexuality will come up.
- Anticipate issues and set boundaries, if necessary (think through policies re: texting, Facebook, etc.)

Circles of Support

- Authentic friendships,
- Meaningful inclusion, &
- The college experience!

Our Special Guest Speakers:

- Jeanne Gavigan, a 4th semester NS students. Jeanne considers herself to be a “senior.”
- Thea Ervin, a Vanderbilt graduate now working at National Council on Independent Living. She was Jeanne’s Ambassadors her first 3 semesters.

Questions?

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