



**ACT**  
Government



School Volunteer  
Program ACT

# Volunteer Mentor Handbook

## **Our Purpose**

To connect volunteers who want to make a difference, with young people who would benefit from having an adult mentor.

To harness the wisdom and skills of mature adults to enrich the learning experiences of students.

## **Our Vision**

Our community helping young people to succeed.

## **Our Mission**

To prepare and connect volunteers with students who have been identified by their school, as likely to benefit from engagement with a mature role model.

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# Welcome SVPACT Volunteers

**Volunteer mentors provide enrichment opportunities that enhance the education experience for students, while supporting teachers and staff. We aim to assist students who are struggling because of a variety of factors, often beyond their control.**

Our mentors work with children and young people to increase their engagement in learning and build self-confidence.

**The School Volunteer Program ACT (SVPACT) has been operating in the ACT for more than fifteen years.** Our volunteers give students one-to-one experience with a mature role model. They not only give their dedication, inspiration and hard work, but they also give that most valuable resource, time.

Volunteers use a variety of activities to build a rapport with their students.

As a mentor, with guidance from the teachers, you will support what the students are learning in the classroom.

This handbook is intended to help you make a smooth transition into volunteering in ACT schools, providing you with an overview of SVPACT and the variety of opportunities that you may wish to pursue. I congratulate you on your role in this worthwhile and rewarding program.

The President,  
SVPACT Inc

## About SVPACT Inc

SVPACT is based on a successful Western Australian program and was first introduced to the ACT by the Rotary Club of Weston Creek in 1997.

A similar program was being trialled at Charnwood Primary School and by merging the two programs a new program called STYLE was created.

From this program the School Volunteer Program of the ACT evolved and it was formally launched in 2005 by the former Governor-General, Major General Michael Jeffery at North Ainslie Primary School. At this time there were 12 mentors operating across 8 schools.

General Jeffery is currently the Patron of SVPACT.

There are now 160 mentors operating across 40 schools.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been created to formalise the partnership between SVPACT Inc and the ACT Education Directorate.

All members of SVPACT Inc contribute their time on a voluntary basis and financial support is provided by Teachers Mutual Bank and several Rotary Clubs.

## Training Opportunities

SVPACT runs two Mentor Orientation seminars each year – one at the start of each semester. The purpose of these seminars is to explain in detail how our volunteers support school students and the parameters of our program. Topics such as Active Listening, the Boundaries of the Program and Mandatory Reporting provide essential information for mentors. It is essential that every volunteer participates in at least one of these seminars.

Other training opportunities are provided during the year. They can include:

- Helping students to improve their reading and literacy skills
- Playing games with students to assist with their number skills
- Using art as a means of connecting with children
- Dealing with challenging behaviour.

As well as providing advice and strategies to use during your mentoring sessions, these workshops are also a valuable opportunity to network with other mentors. Finding a colleague or two, who is sharing the same experience, can be extremely valuable for mentors. By sharing stories, you will gain more confidence in your role and a better understanding of the program.

During the year mentors may be invited to informal events where they can meet up with other mentors, to enable further networking.

## Good communication with children: the basics

Good communication with children is about:

- actively listening to ensure that you understand what the child is telling you
- asking open-ended questions and giving them plenty of time to answer
- being able to really listen and respond in a sensitive way to all kinds of things – not just nice things or good news, but also anger, embarrassment, sadness and fear
- focusing on body language and tone as well as the actual words, so you can really understand what children are saying
- taking into account what children of different ages can understand and how long they can pay attention in a conversation.

Communicating well with children **improves your bond** with them and encourages them to listen to you.

Sometimes children are at first reluctant to talk to their mentor.

Don't press them. Tell them a little about yourself. It can be useful to bring some items with you to provoke the child's curiosity and interest.

Mentors in the meccano program find that the meccano kit and booklet of model building ideas is a great ice breaker.

# Mentoring – Making a Difference

Be yourself! Accept that students in the program may have different backgrounds, cultures, vocabulary and manners from yours.

By being yourself, by caring, by showing up and giving your time, you will be making a difference.

Effective mentoring relationships involve:

- ✓ Realistic goals and expectations
- ✓ Positivity and optimism
- ✓ Having fun together
- ✓ Active listening
- ✓ Giving your student choice and voice in deciding how you will spend your time together, and
- ✓ Respecting the trust your student places in you.

## Getting Started

1. Anyone wanting to volunteer in schools must hold a Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) Card. These can be obtained by applying through Access Canberra at [www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au](http://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au). Registration is free for volunteers.
2. You will need to complete and submit an SVPACT application form which can be downloaded from our website: [svpact.org.au](http://svpact.org.au).
3. On the application form you are required to provide names of two people who know you well and, who can act as referees. These people will be contacted by one of our committee members.
4. Once your referees have been contacted, a committee member will contact you to arrange a meeting. At the meeting you will discuss the role and responsibilities of volunteers, the joys and challenges of mentoring and what you might bring to the role. We will answer any questions you have and you will be able to indicate the age range of the child whom you would like to work with and your availability.

5. You will be invited to attend the next Mentor Orientation Seminar.
6. The SVPACT Committee member will contact a suitable local school and advise them of your availability and suitability. An appointment will be made for you to attend the school with the Committee member, to meet the Principal and School Coordinator. At this meeting you will be provided with your SVPACT name badge
7. The School Principal and School Coordinator will liaise with teachers at the school to identify a student who would benefit from mentoring.
8. You will be invited to meet the child and the classroom teacher and to find out more about the student's needs. You will also be shown around the school and have the school procedures for signing into and out of the school explained.
9. It is a good idea to request a copy of the School Newsletter via email when it is distributed. This will provide useful advice about activities taking place at the school. Schools are busy places with many activities such as assemblies, school camps, excursions etc which may prevent your student from meeting with you. Ideally, you can organise for a member of staff to notify you about these in advance.
10. Mentors usually spend up to one hour per week with the student.
11. Usually mentors work one on one with students, but in some cases small group mentoring may be preferred.

As well as abiding by the SVPACT Code of Conduct, mentors must also adhere to the ACT Education Directorate's Code of Conduct for Volunteers and their *Working with Children and Young People – Volunteers and Visitors Guide*.



# Volunteering in Schools

Mentors work with their students under the general supervision of the classroom teacher.

The school provides all books, writing materials and other learning resources as required.

Classrooms are usually too noisy and distracting a location for mentoring, so an alternative location is often chosen by the classroom teacher. This needs to be a public location; mentor and student should be within line of sight of a staff member at all times. The school library, a corridor or breakout area adjacent to the classroom are common options

Students to be supported through our program are selected by the school. Some students may be struggling readers or lacking confidence in using numbers, others may be very able but require extra challenges to maintain their interest.

Students usually benefit from having a mature role model having an interest in them. Our experience shows that their self-confidence improves and they can develop useful skills that can be applied in the classroom, to improve their learning.

Schools have the responsibility of seeking the approval of parents or carers for their child to be supported by an SVPACT volunteer.

Mentors **do not** meet with the student, or their family, outside of the school premises or outside of school hours.

## Resources

On the Mentor Resources page on the SVPACT website are ideas for strategies to use as ice breakers - to get students talking in the early stages of your relationship building.

You will also find handouts from previous training sessions and ideas for engaging activities that could be of interest to the student you are working with.

# Mentoring using Meccano

Mentoring through building with Meccano is a significant part of SVPACT.

Meccano mentors work in teams of four or more and meet at the school to work with students. While focusing on one student, each mentor has plenty of scope for interaction with other mentors and students in a group environment.

Involvement of an individual student is generally for a ten week period, which usually matches the time taken to complete one model.

Building Meccano models has proved very successful in enhancing self-esteem and confidence of participating students. Although the focus is on model making, there is plenty of conversation taking place.

## Mentor qualifications and skills

No formal qualifications are required to be a SVPACT mentor.

However, three key skills are required to be a successful mentor:

1. **Patience** – it is important to be prepared to progress slowly and steadily, and be able to cope with possible lapses of student progress. We all learn at different rates but often students who are involved in our program may be slower at grasping new ideas and concepts
2. **Empathy** – having an unbiased, friendly outlook towards young people is vital. Mentors need to accept that children are sometimes embarrassed, tentative or can be overly assertive – just like adults.
3. **Life Experience** – mentors who can share their life experiences, challenges and skills with students, impart their wisdom and be a mature role model, are best suited to the School Volunteer Program.

## Issues or student concerns

Mandatory reporting is a term used to describe the legislative requirement for selected groups of people to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to government authorities. All teachers and staff in schools have a mandatory reporting responsibility to report to relevant authorities, any concerns that they have in relation to student welfare and wellbeing.

As a school volunteer, working with your student for a short time each week, you are not required to report your concerns to the authorities. However, as a trusted mentor, should you find that your student shares information with you, or demonstrates behaviour that causes you concern, discuss your concerns with the classroom teacher or the School Coordinator.

Sharing this information will enable the school staff to gather information which would be required if an incident/situation was to be reported to the authorities.

Your response to the student should they disclose information is critical. **It is important to remember that your role is to be a supportive listener.**

It is not your role to counsel the child or investigate his or her claims.

Student disclosure is about seeking support and your response can have a great impact on the young person's ability to seek further help and recover from the trauma.

## Confidentiality

As a volunteer working in a local school you will learn a lot about how schools and teachers operate. In your role as a supportive listener you will hear many stories. You are placed in a position of privilege and trust as a volunteer with SVPACT.

For this reason, we provide very specific instructions in our Code of Conduct. You must observe confidentiality in respect to all information gained through your participation as a volunteer.

If you are discussing your role as a volunteer with anyone you should never mention the name of the school, any staff members or student(s) you're working with.

When you first visit the school where you will mentor a student you will be asked to complete a *Working with Children and Young People - Volunteers* Nomination form.

On this form you will be required to register the details of your Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) card and sign a confidentiality agreement.

You must also sign the SVPACT Code of Conduct agreeing to abide by all of its requirements.

If you have questions or concerns, please discuss them with the School Coordinator or a member of the SVPACT Management Committee.

## **Administration**

### **Insurance**

SVPACT provides public liability and personal accident insurance cover for all volunteer mentors.

### **Record keeping**

Every time you enter or leave the school premises you must register using the school registration system. This enables staff to determine how many people are on site in the case of an emergency.

### **Working with Vulnerable People Card**

All mentors are required to have their current WWVP card with them at school during their mentoring sessions. School staff may, at any time, request to see it. The cards have a limited lifetime and it is your responsibility to ensure that it is kept up to date.

## **Thanks**

### **Always remember that your efforts are appreciated.**

Sometimes we get caught up in the day to day operations of SVPACT and may forget to thank you. Your efforts are certainly appreciated, and we value the time that you give.

## Who to Contact

The SVPACT management Committee aims to support its mentors according to best management practice. They are available to answer queries and to support you in your mentoring role.

If you desire further information about any aspect of SVPACT please contact the Secretary, Melissa Sykes:

Phone: 0432842550

Email: svpact2018@gmail.com

Website: [www.svpact.org.au](http://www.svpact.org.au)

## SVPACT Code of Conduct

By becoming a member of SVPACT Inc, you are joining a caring community of mutual respect and trust. We ask that you become familiar with the mission and ethos set out in this pledge and live these values throughout your volunteering experience.

As a volunteer with SVPACT Inc I will:

1. Know and understand all my responsibilities in my role working with students
2. Always represent SVPACT with professionalism, dignity, pride and courtesy
3. Treat all people respectfully, with honesty and integrity and not influence students on matters of a religious, political or personal nature
4. Be alert and focussed when undertaking my volunteer role and not be under the influence of alcohol, illicit drugs or prescribed medication that affect my perception or mobility
5. Advise SVPACT if I experience significant changes in my physical or mental wellbeing that may adversely affect my volunteering role
6. Respect the privacy of students and staff and hold in confidence any private and personal information I may come across during my role as an SVPACT volunteer
7. Always be circumspect and professional and refrain from making and sharing judgements about the school in which I am volunteering

8. During each school visit at my allocated school, sign in and out, wear my SVPACT name badge and carry my Working with Vulnerable People Card
9. Undertake my volunteer role with my allocated student(s) in a public area of the school such as a corridor, staff room, library or within eyesight of at least one member of staff
10. Never email or engage with my allocated student(s) via telephone, text messaging, and social networking and other technologies such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter
11. Never transport students as part of my SVPACT role
12. Never photograph students without written permission of the school and the student's parent/guardian
13. Accept that all SVPACT volunteering activities are school based, during regular school hours and occur within the confines of the school premises
14. Agree that I will not continue, in any way, the in-school relationship I have developed with my student(s) outside the school premises, out of school hours or attend the student's home
15. Consult with the School Coordinator if I have any concerns about my volunteering role or the tasks allocated. If unable to resolve the matter at the school level, I will contact the SVPACT Mentor Coordinator for advice and assistance.



