

Volunteer Organization Profile: Hillside Family of Agencies, Rochester, NY

Volunteering in America 2011

All youth need a network of support to grow, learn, and achieve. However some youth, including those with developmental or learning disabilities, those who are living in foster care and seeking forever families, and those with mental health challenges need additional support.

Hillside Family of Agencies based in Rochester, NY, recognizes this challenge in Rochester and across Western and Central New York and has responded by developing a system of care as varied as the needs of the families they serve. From providing residential living and around-the-clock care to offering special education to overcome learning disabilities, to counseling and more customized services for families of youth with developmental disabilities, Hillside Family of Agencies is able to give youth that extra support they need. Offering over 120 services in more than 45 communities, Hillside Family of Agencies serves more than 11,000 families annually.



Volunteers are a key element to Hillside Family of Agencies' success, whether supporting campus improvement projects or fundraising events or participating in Hillside Family of Agencies' one-to-one mentoring program for youth. Hillside has an impressive rate of return as well, with nearly 80 percent of their volunteers coming back from one year to the next.

Chris Casey, a volunteer in Rochester, has organized two service days with his co-workers, helping support Hillside Special Santas—Hillside Family of

Agencies' holiday gift giving program—and working on initial cleaning, preparations, and set-up for a kids' summer camp. "You know who you're helping, which really makes it hit home," says Casey. "You're doing it for the kids."

Chris and his colleagues have been invited out to the summer camp later in August to spend a day with the children they have been helping. "I'm known for this now at my office," Casey says. "People are always coming up to me asking when we're going back and when the next event is. Hillside does a great job of keeping volunteers—they are so enthusiastic and upbeat."

One-day volunteer opportunities arranged through Hillside Family of Agencies have brought in groups from all parts of the community including local businesses and organizations, churches and religious groups, college sororities and fraternities, high schools, and other interest groups.

Another crucial role for volunteers at Hillside Family of Agencies is their one-on-one mentoring program. “Being a mentor means you’re a role model, someone for the child to talk to, someone who will listen,” says Heather VanDyne, volunteer coordinator for Hillside Family of Agencies. “Kids recognize that the volunteers aren’t paid and that they’re choosing to spend time with them. It’s important to them.”

Volunteers visit their buddies on a regular basis to spend time with them—whether playing games, taking excursions, or making crafts. These mentor matches aren’t taken lightly: Hillside partners with the local organization Compeer to match mentors with youth and to train volunteers and asks for a minimum of a one-year commitment from their volunteers.

“It’s about creating a lasting relationship and a network of resources for youth,” says VanDyne. Volunteer mentors are college and graduate students, young professionals, retirees, and even working mothers who still make time to be a consistent part of these children’s lives.

Cheryl Munson is one of Hillside Family of Agencies’ volunteer mentors. “It’s great to have the opportunity to positively influence an at-risk teenager,” says Munson. She works one-on-one with a 14-year-old girl who has emotional and behavioral challenges. “I knew I was in the right place when a fellow Hillside client asked if I was her mom and her response was, ‘No, but she’s like a mom to me.’”

You can learn more about Hillside Family of Agencies by visiting their website at www.hillside.com or by contacting Heather VanDyne at hvandyne@hillside.com or at (585) 224-1021.

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