

Volunteer Selection Process

PROTECTING THE WELL-BEING OF GLBTIQ YOUTHS AND THEIR ALLIES

PRYSM



POSITIVE REFLECTIONS OF YOUNG SEXUAL MINORITIES

Acknowledgements:

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VOLUNTEER SELECTION PROCESS

Protecting the Well-Being of Youths

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PRYSM VOLUNTEER SELECTION PROCESS

Protecting the Well-Being of Youths

INTRODUCTION

Most people who choose to work with youths are caring, responsible people who have the needs and best interests of the youths in mind at all times. They are members of caring communities who are significant in helping young people on their journey to competent and contributing adulthood.

Mission of PRYSM:

PRYSM (Positive Reflections of Young Sexual Minorities) is an organization for GLBTIQ and Allied Youth in Greater Lafayette. Our goal is to create a supportive network of peers in a positive, safe, and open environment. This will encourage said youth to become more self-aware, accepting of others, and comfortable with themselves and their orientation. By exploring relevant topics and taking action in our own lives, we strive to encourage the community to value equality and civil rights.*

PRYSM responds to the needs of GLBTIQ youths and their allies by providing experiences led by adult volunteers. PRYSM must make sure that the process of selecting individuals to serve as volunteers adequately identifies, selects, trains and supports those interested in volunteer leadership. It is clearly our responsibility as volunteers to do all we can to ensure that youths who come to our programs are treated with respect and dignity; and are provided with safe, caring environments in which to learn and have fun.

All of us who work closely with young people have the potential to have a profound impact on the well being of youths. In addition to providing safe and appropriate environments, we must also be positive role models for GLBTIQ youths and their allies, focusing on how we communicate with youths, our methods of problem solving and discipline, how sensitive we are to the individual needs of all youths, and to GLBTIQ and allied youths in particular.

The responsibility for the well being of youths lies with each and every one of us. **The purpose of this document is to help us develop a process for carefully selecting and matching appropriate individuals with PRYSM youth-related efforts that best meet the needs of everyone involved.** All PRYSM leaders and volunteers must follow the requirements outlined in this material.

* GLBTIQ = Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, intersex and questioning.

THE PRYSM VOLUNTEER SELECTION PROCESS

Initial contact is made with a potential volunteer who receives a copy of the PRYSM Volunteer Application Form and instructions for how to request the Indiana State Police Limited Criminal History Background Check.

(Letter 1, Form 2, Form 3 and return envelope)



The potential volunteer completes the PRYSM Volunteer Application Form and submits it to the PRYSM Steering Committee (SC).



The potential volunteer requests and pays for an Indiana State Police Limited Criminal History Background Check either online or by mail using the instructions sent with the PRYSM Volunteer Application packet. Upon receipt of the report, the potential volunteer contacts the SC to let them know the report is available for review.



The SC reviews the PRYSM Volunteer Application Form, conducts a reference check with the people the applicant listed as personal references, and conducts an interview with the potential volunteer. The ISP Background Check Report, if received, is brought to the interview by the potential volunteer. An affidavit attesting to its existence and results will be signed by all those attending the interview and kept on file with the SC.

Form 1, Form 4, Form 5 and Form 6



A second interview will be arranged with the potential volunteer to review the ISP Background Check Report if it is not available at the time of the initial interview. For purposes of confidentiality, only the SC carries out this step, an affidavit and not the actual report will be kept by the SC, and all results are kept in a locked file.



If the results of both these steps are acceptable, the SC sends a letter to the volunteer applicant stating that his or her application has been accepted along with the PRYSM Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct. The volunteer then signs the Agreement and Code of Conduct and returns it to the SC
Letter 2 and Form 7

If the results of these steps are unacceptable, the SC sends a letter to the volunteer applicant stating that his or her application has not been accepted.
Letter 3

SELECTION PROCESS FOR PRYSM VOLUNTEERS

This selection process is for volunteers who desire to work directly with youths.

Purpose of Selection Process

The process is designed to help ensure the appropriate selection and placement of volunteers for PRYSM youth activities, and to provide documentation of volunteer selection and placement.

Rationale

PRYSM strives to provide a safe, nurturing environment for youths participating in its programs. PRYSM has behavioral expectations for adults who work with the youth in its program. These expectations are written and available to parents and guardians, to those who wish to be volunteers, and to those sponsoring organizations charged with helping the PRYSM steering committee make decisions regarding volunteer selection and placement. With the concerns surrounding the safety of young people, most major youth-serving sponsors and agencies have instituted selection processes for volunteers because child abuse awareness and understanding has increased. A selection process is a method of strengthening recruitment and placement of volunteers by the steering committee for PRYSM, which is co-sponsored by and includes members of, PFLAG Lafayette/ Tippecanoe County, Pride Lafayette, Inc., and Citizens for Civil Rights.

When to Use This Process

New adult steering committee members and volunteers aged 25 and over who have ongoing, unsupervised access to children aged 18 and under during the course of their participation in the PRYSM program are subject to an Indiana State Police Limited Criminal History Check. "Ongoing" is defined as more than four meetings or gathering times and/or in-depth contact (such as overnight events, out-of-state trips, exchange trips). "Unsupervised assess" means that the person is alone with youth for significant periods of time (15 minutes or more). PRYSM steering committee members or volunteers who have completed the PRYSM Volunteer Selection Process can provide supervision of volunteers who have not completed the Volunteer Selection Process. If individuals will be in ongoing contact with youth, it is required that they be processed through this system.

Note that the appendixes found at the end of these materials contain copies of the forms, sample letters, etc. needed for this process.

PROCEDURE FOR BECOMING A NEW VOLUNTEER

Throughout this procedure, PRYSM steering committee members should use the "Prospective Volunteer Action Form" (see Appendix A, Form 1) to ensure that all steps are carried out. The chart on page 1 of this document provides a graphic overview of this procedure. Keep in mind that there is some flexibility in the order of the steps involved in the procedure. **(Note: the references in this procedure to the term "steering committee" do not include volunteers.)**

1. The PRYSM steering committee and/or trained volunteer selection committee or team gives to or sends the prospective volunteer the Sample Welcome Letter to PRYSM Volunteer Applicants (see Appendix B, Letter 1), the PRYSM Volunteer Application Form (see Appendix A, Form 2) and the Indiana State Police Limited Criminal History Check Instructions (see Appendix A, Form 3). The potential volunteer also receives a confidential envelope addressed to a PRYSM steering committee member to use for returning the completed forms. Accommodations for volunteers with special needs must be made. The prospective volunteer completes and submits the PRYSM Volunteer Application Form to the PRYSM steering committee and requests (online or by mail) a Limited Criminal History Check through the Indiana State Police.

Steering or volunteer selection committees may also want to share with prospective volunteers (and other interested people) the camera-ready flyer found in Appendix C.

2. The PRYSM steering committee (or team of trained volunteers) who processes the application reviews the PRYSM Volunteer Application Form and requests information from references using the PRYSM Volunteer Telephone Reference Form and/or the PRYSM Volunteer Mail Reference Form (see Appendix A, Forms 4 and 5). Keep in mind that at least **one** of the reference checks should be done over the telephone (or in person). **Don't rely totally on references obtained through the mail. Hints for conducting successful phone interviews can be found in Appendix C.**

The PRYSM steering committee requires that all volunteer applicants request a Limited Criminal History Check through the Indiana State Police.

3. Once the applicant receives results of the Criminal History Check, he or she contacts the PRYSM steering committee member(s) to arrange an interview. The results of the criminal history check and the Prospective PRYSM Volunteer Staff Action Form should **not** be shared with people other than PRYSM steering committee members.

4. The PRYSM steering committee and/or team of volunteer interviewers schedules and conducts an interview with the individual, and documents the results of this interview on the Interview Report of PRYSM Volunteer Applicant Form (see Appendix A, Form 6). In order that several applicants can be interviewed at one time and in one location, specific dates can be set and applicants can sign up ahead of time. It may

also be possible to do interviews in conjunction with other meetings. Hints for conducting successful interviews can be found in Appendix C.

Set up a file for each person who applies to be a PRYSM volunteer. The file should contain: Prospective PRYSM Volunteer Staff Action Form, PRYSM Volunteer Application Form, Indiana State Police Limited Criminal History Check sealed in an envelope marked "Personal/ Confidential."

There should be one set of files for individuals accepted as PRYSM volunteers and a separate set of files for individuals not accepted as PRYSM volunteers. These should be kept in a locked file. The files for an individual accepted as a PRYSM volunteer should be kept for the duration of his or her status as a volunteer and three years beyond. Files for those not accepted should be kept indefinitely.

Only designated PRYSM steering committee members may see the criminal history check for PRYSM volunteer applicants. Volunteer selection team or steering committee members (if a team or committee is used) can review the files of those who pass the criminal history check. However, they cannot examine the criminal history check of these files. **All persons involved in the volunteer selection process must be informed of the importance of confidentiality.**

All information on applicants and why they are accepted or rejected as volunteers with PRYSM are kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Only the PRYSM steering committee, if used, will be involved in discussion about applicants. **Discussions should not include the criminal history check.** The PRYSM steering committee and/or selection team or committee reviews each file. In cases where the suitability of the applicant is questioned, the PRYSM steering committee makes the final decision about whether to accept or reject the applicant.

5. The PRYSM steering committee promptly informs the applicant of the decision using the appropriate form letter (either the Sample Letter to Use When Accepting a Potential PRYSM Volunteer Applicant or the Sample Letter to Use When Not Accepting a Potential PRYSM Volunteer Applicant (Appendix B, Letters 2 and 3). A photocopy of this letter is added to the person's file.

6. If the volunteer is accepted, he or she will sign the PRYSM Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct Form (see Appendix A, Form 7).

PROCEDURE FOR PRYSM STEERING COMMITTEE

It is important to note that the PRYSM steering committee members who work with young people are also required to go through the same process as the one outlined for volunteers in this document. New PRYSM steering committee members will undergo a limited criminal history check and will be required to sign the PRYSM steering committee and Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct Form. This process will be completed by the PRYSM steering committee.

Still have questions? Throughout this process, questions related to many different situations can arise. For more information, refer to Appendix C, Questions Related to the Volunteer Selection Process.

ADDITIONAL SAFEGUARD PROCEDURES

The PRYSM steering committee should check the sexual predator Web site quarterly to see if names and addresses of volunteers PRYSM program are listed as individuals convicted of criminal sexual conduct.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT

Because of the nature of their jobs, some people are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect. A camp director and camp staff in a state-licensed camp, a physician, coroner, dentist, medical examiner, nurse, a person licensed to provide emergency medical care, audiologist, family therapist, certified social worker, social work technician, school administrator, school counselor or teacher, law enforcement officer or regulated child care provider who has reason to believe that a child under 18 has been abused or neglected is mandated by law to report the suspected abuse. Failure to do so is a crime.

PRYSM steering committee members are obligated to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect from an ethical/moral perspective, though not from a legal one. A person making a report in good faith is immune from both civil and criminal liability. The identity of a reporting person shall be confidential, subject to disclosure only with the consent of that person or by judicial process.

A report should be made when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or adolescent has been abused or neglected, or is in danger of being abused. A report is only a request for an investigation. The person making the report does not need to prove the abuse. Investigation and validation of child abuse reports are the responsibilities of child protection service workers. When reporting, the following information will be requested: name, age and sex of the child, and other family members; description of suspected abuse; current condition of the child; address, phone number and/or directions to the child's home

APPENDIX A

Forms

- Form 1: Prospective PRYSM Volunteer - Staff Action Check List
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APPENDIX B

Letters

Letter 1: Welcome to PRYSM Volunteer Applicants
Letter 2: Accepting a Potential PRYSM Volunteer Applicant
Letter 3: Not Accepting a Potential PRYSM Volunteer Applicant

APPENDIX C

Other Materials and Information

PRYSM Volunteer Selection Process

It is clearly our responsibility as PRYSM Steering Committee members, PRYSM sponsoring organization members, and PRYSM volunteers to do all we can to ensure that youth who come to our programs are treated with respect and dignity, and are provided with safe, caring environments in which to learn and have fun.

Document 1: Hints for Conducting Successful Interviews

Document 2: Questions Related to the PRYSM Volunteer Selection Process

Document 3: Questions About Handling Difficult Volunteer Situations

HINTS FOR CONDUCTING SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING

Interviewing is a conversation between two or more people on a subject of mutual interest in which each person has a chance to give and gain information. It is optimal to conduct the interview face to face whenever possible. Interviewing new volunteers helps you gain information about their interests and skills that will assist you in matching them with the work that needs to be accomplished. It should help place qualified applicants in specific jobs.

An interview need not be a formal, nerve-wracking session. Rather, it should be people learning about each other and the organization. It helps identify persons who are not good role models for youth. The interview will also help determine areas where applicants need additional training. It is a chance to make friends for the organization.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

- Decide: What information you need to get
 What information you need to give
 Time needed to interview
- Arrange: With the other person(s) the time
 and place to meet where you can
 be free from interruptions
- Prepare by: Organizing thoughts
 Selecting the questions you will ask
 Gathering needed materials

DURING THE INTERVIEW:

- Use the application to help determine interview questions to ask.
- Help the applicant feel comfortable and at ease.
- Begin informally and establish rapport.
- Listen and tell the applicant about the job(s) available (for example, duties, skills, qualifications and experiences needed, working relationships with others, authority and accountability, benefits, training and resources available, and time required).
- Be honest! Give the applicant time to answer your questions. Record responses on the Interview Report Form.
- Encourage questions.
- Suggest other positions which may be more suitable or of interest.
- Leave the door open for either the applicant or the organization to decide later.
- Close the interview by telling the applicant about the next steps.
- End on a positive note! Thank the applicant for his or her time and interest.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

- Record the information and your impressions as soon as possible:
- Ability to listen attentively and hear accurately
- Experience as a volunteer
- Knowledge of volunteer jobs available
- Ability to speak clearly and explain things well
- Capacity to recognize individual strengths and potential
- Experience in working with people of varied racial, religious, educational and economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and/or gender identities.

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWER:

- Ability to converse easily with strangers
- Acceptance of all people
- Skill in observing or sensing other people's reactions, attitudes, concerns and personality traits
- Backgrounds
- Familiarity with the program and the sponsoring organizations
- Ability to efficiently guide the conversation without sacrificing sensitivity or purpose

COMMON ERRORS INTERVIEWERS MAKE:

- Asking questions which have an obvious, preferred answer
- Making decisions too early in the interview
- Following a stereotypical pattern of interviewing without recognition of individual differences
- Lacking knowledge of precise job requirements
- Letting pressure of duties shorten the interview time
- Doing more talking than listening
- Failing to direct the interview and thereby wasting time
- Not knowing what to look for
- Tending to be overly influenced by individual factors such as personal traits rather than considering the person as a whole
- Lacking skill in asking questions and probing
- Failing to describe the job and organization in sufficient detail
- Tending to be too routine instead of adapting each interview to the individual
- Being interviewed by the candidate instead of leading the interview

USE OPEN PROBES; MESSAGES DESIGNED TO GATHER MORE INFORMATION, INCLUDING PHRASES LIKE:

- Oh?
- Can you be more specific, please?
- Why do you think (say) that?
- Really?
- That's interesting. What is your plan?

- Explain what you mean by ... What would happen if ...
- What do you think about that?
- Can you give me an example?
- Would you go into more detail about that?
- I'd really like to know more about that.

An open probe shows interest in what the person has said and encourages the person to talk more.

You can make an open probe simply by nodding your head in agreement and then raising your eyebrows in a questioning manner. Most people will talk more in response.

An open probe is one that cannot be answered with a yes or no or other one-word response. The probe asks for more information and signals to the speaker that you are listening and that you want to hear more.

USE CLOSED PROBES; MESSAGES DESIGNED TO GET THE RESPONSE YOU WANT (USUALLY ONE-WORD ANSWERS). THESE INCLUDE PHRASES LIKE:

- Did that make you happy?
- Where do you work?
- Have your children been in 4-H?
- Do you have a plan?
- When did that happen?
- Are you supportive of . . . ?
- That was good! I've heard what I wanted/needed to hear.
- This happened in what year?
- Did you accomplish your goal?
- Did you ever . . . ?
- Do you do too much?

Closed probes are statements or questions that bring the topic of conversation to a close. They usually are questions with one-word answers, often "yes" or "no."

Closed probes do not get a lot of information from people and do not stimulate them to talk more.

USE ACTIVE LISTENING.

Active listening is accomplished when one party really concentrates on what another is saying and asks open probes to get the speaker to open up and talk more. The listener does not offer empathy by relating what the speaker is saying to some other experience the listener has had, no matter how similar it is. The active listener also does not offer solutions or try to solve the problem or situation the speaker is talking about. The only goal of the listener is to get more information on the specific topic of conversation from the speaker.

Conduct an active listening exercise with a group you're working with. Split the group into pairs. Have one person from each pair be the speaker and the other the listener. The speaker will tell the listener about a problem he or she is concerned about. The problem may be with a friend, neighbor, coworker, relative, pet, etc.

Tell the listener to try to get the speaker to tell the listener everything there is to tell about the situation.

- The listener **may not** talk about himself or herself or about anyone the listener knows who has had a similar experience.
- The listener **may not** change the topic.
- The listener **may not** offer his or her own opinion about the subject.
- The listener may only ask questions to get the speaker to tell the listener about the subject.

After about five minutes, stop the exercise and ask the pairs the following questions:

FOR LISTENERS

How did it feel to be a listener?

Did the listeners experience any frustrations?

Did the listeners find it hard to think of open probes?

What was the thing you (the listener) most wanted to do while the other person was talking?

FOR SPEAKERS

How did it feel to be the speaker?

Did you feel like the listener understood you?

Did it help you to find a solution to the problem you were talking about?

How do you feel toward the listener?

Did the listener keep to the rules and not change the topic of conversation or offer opinions, solutions or similar stories?

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. How long does it take to do a Limited Criminal History check with the Indiana State Police?

The Web-based system allows for immediate response on criminal history checks.

Q. Are there criminal convictions for which volunteer applicants will be automatically rejected?

Yes, a conviction for criminal sexual conduct involving children means that an individual will not be accepted as an PRYSM volunteer working with children. Convictions for other offenses will be considered on an individual basis.

Q. If there's a concern about a potential volunteer and use of controlled substances or alcohol that might affect this person's ability to be a volunteer working with youth, how do we discuss this with the individual's references?

The person doing reference checks should indicate that the potential volunteer will be working directly with youth and needs to be a positive role model for young people. Next, the person doing reference checks should ask the references if they are aware of any problems the applicant may have with the use of controlled substances or alcohol that would affect his or her ability to be a positive role model for youth. Indicate to the references that this topic is routinely considered as we select volunteers to work with youth and that their responses are confidential to the extent permitted by law.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HANDLING DIFFICULT VOLUNTEER SITUATIONS

Concerns related to a volunteer's misbehavior or suspected misbehavior must be faced squarely, without delay. If you are unsure how to handle a given situation, seek help, right away. Such situations call for sound judgment and timely attention.

Q. If I decide to suspend or dismiss a volunteer, is he or she entitled to a hearing, or to an appeal?

No. Being a volunteer is a privilege, not a right. The privilege can be limited or removed without formal proceedings. As a matter of policy, PRYSM participants are protected from discriminatory treatment on the basis of sexual orientation, sex, race, age, national origin, religion, disability unrelated to the ability to participate and physical characteristics.

If you are considering suspending or dismissing a volunteer, good sense dictates that you confer with your steering committee and directors or officers of the sponsoring organizations. This will ensure wise decision making. Also, while there is no formal right to an appeal, a dismissed volunteer is certainly free to raise any concerns in a letter to the steering committee.

Q. If I learn that a volunteer has been charged with a crime, what should I do?

Tell the volunteer that he or she is suspended from active participation in PRYSM programs, pending a review. Do not discuss the matter further with the volunteer until you have conferred with the PRYSM steering committee and directors or officers of the sponsoring organizations.

Q. If I learn that a volunteer or volunteer candidate has a criminal record, should I think about taking some action, like suspension or dismissal?

Yes. A felony conviction must always be taken seriously. A misdemeanor conviction may also indicate a problem. If the misdemeanor was for shoplifting 14 years ago, that may call for questions, but not likely any action. If the misdemeanor charge was for indecent exposure, even years ago, dismissal would be appropriate.

Q. That last answer ends on a harsh note. Please explain.

Keeping people (especially kids) safe has to be PRYSM's chief concern in its volunteer programs. People who have run afoul of the law because of any form of sexual misconduct or indiscretion are poor volunteer candidates. People who prey on children look for opportunities to be with children. If you have reason to believe that a volunteer or applicant may have an emotional or psychological impediment to healthy relations with children, you must pursue your concern.

Q. How important is confidentiality in these situations?

Extremely important! You do not want a person's reputation to be damaged because personal information was disclosed to someone who did not have a specific need to know the information. A volunteer does not have a "right" to be a volunteer, but he or she **does** have a right to not be the subject of rumors and loose talk. If you know personal or embarrassing information about a person, you stand to face legal problems if you share that information with anyone who lacks a specific need to know.

Q. When I learn of possible questionable behavior by a volunteer, what I should I do? What is the first step?

First, pause to consider whether the circumstances require immediate action. For instance, suppose you hear from a source you trust that a volunteer who is scheduled to supervise a weekend trip for adolescents offered to provide alcohol for some of the teens who are participating. In that situation, indeed, in any situation that raises concerns related to sex, drugs (including alcohol) or violence, it is important to act without delay. You would want to take whatever measures are necessary to negate the underlying concern. Once you have dealt with the possible need for immediate action, you need to gather information.

Q. How do I gather information and once I have it, what do I do with it?

The best way to get information is to ask people the questions that journalists ask: who? what? where? when? how? You want detailed factual information. Write the information down so that you can later refer to your notes and be confident that they are fairly stated and complete. Normally, after you learn what you can from other people, you talk with the person whose behavior is in question.

Q. Once I have gathered information, what do I do then?

Having the information will allow you to assess the seriousness of the situation and to make a remedial plan. Some matters, for instance, a volunteer's habit of using foul language, calls for a conversation with the volunteer so he or she is clear regarding your expectations. It bears repeating that in situation that are serious, or possibly serious, you should be in close contact with your Steering committee.