



MISSION

So Kids SOAR provides life-changing activities that empower children with physical and developmental disabilities to unite with their peers and realize their potential.

VISION

All too often children with disabilities are isolated and don't have adequate opportunities to partake in physical activities that other children are able to experience daily. We differentiate ourselves from our competitors by the quality and abundance of volunteer support we offer. Each of our clinics ensures a 1:1 ratio of volunteer to participant.

PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

SKS Clinics

SKS clinics are adaptive clinics held once or twice a month for children with disabilities aged 4 – 24. Through our events, those with physical and developmental disabilities are able to come off the sidelines and unite with their peers. A lot of these children have been bullied in schools, and are left out of activities with able-bodied children. The empowerment and self-confidence gained through the clinic will carry over from the field to the home, classroom, and the community, allowing them to realize that their disability will not prevent them from fulfilling their dreams. Each child is partnered with a volunteer to learn the essence of teamwork, have a mentor, and also bond over a sense of camaraderie.

SKS Holiday Celebration

Throughout the year, SKS provides a wide variety of adaptive clinics for children with physical and developmental disabilities— from waterskiing and football to cooking and Prom. The SKS Holiday Celebration is more than a seasonal party; it is our culminating year-end event that gives our participants (the beneficiaries of our free SKS clinics) the opportunity to “pay-compassion-forward”. Participants engage in a variety of philanthropic activities at the Holiday Celebration including: wrapping presents for underprivileged children; decorating desserts for homeless shelters; making holiday cards for Veterans, and more. The SKS Holiday Celebration is a time for fun and philanthropy, and a reminder that their disabilities will not hold them back from reaching their potential.

Your Path To Success

SKS's mentorship and vocational building program that provides communication, leadership, and vocational skill building for young adults with developmental delays and/or physical disabilities in the DC area. The program concept derived from the need to provide SKS participants with resources to expand and grow after their time in SKS clinics. Over the course of 3 months, the program offers participants both skill-building workshops on topics such as resume development, interviewing, and formal e-mail communication as well as off-site group community service projects, site visits to places that employ those with disabilities, and opportunities to network. We seek for participants to walk away with meaningful relationships, new confidence, and real skills that allow them to pursue independence and gainful employment

Why SKS Activities Are Important

Children love to participate in activities with peers where they feel they can succeed! Physical and collaborative activities are beneficial to individual health and happiness and should be integrated into the lives of all children. Individuals with disabilities are often deprived of many opportunities typically developing kids have. A study that analyzed the quality of life of individuals with disabilities found that in a year only about half of the individuals surveyed had been to a physical activity facility (Sand & Kozleski, 1994). These individuals are not encouraged to participate in activities as much, even though "the participation of children with disabilities in sports and recreational activities promotes inclusion, minimizes deconditioning, optimizes physical functioning, and enhances overall well-being" (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). So Kids SOAR works to provide recreational events to kids with disabilities that benefit all aspects of their life. Participants are able to grow in physical health, relationship development, and flexibility when it comes to trying new things! SKS allows kids with disabilities the experiences that many individuals often take for granted.

Thinking About Being a SKS Volunteer?

What is a Volunteer and Why You Should Be One

A volunteer is someone who decides freely to assist or help with a given task. Volunteering provides incredible benefits to both the person volunteering and the recipient of the volunteer work. A study focused on volunteering and well-being found, "that volunteering is highly associated with greater health and happiness, while other forms of altruistic behavior, such as donations of money or donations of blood, are not" (Borgonovi, 2008). Volunteering is the best way to directly give back to a cause and is essential to the functioning of certain nonprofits such as So Kids SOAR

Role of a SKS volunteer

The role of a So Kids SOAR volunteer is to enable participants by helping and encouraging them throughout our programs. Each SKS volunteer is individually matched with a participant to ensure participants receive the full attention they deserve.

SKS volunteers are a support system and friend to participants throughout events. They support and adhere to the needs of individuals, and encourage activity and fun! All youth should feel empowered in their activities, and SKS volunteers help provide this feeling.

Volunteer Preparation for Events

All volunteers are prepped before events, through educational materials (a Disability Awareness Packet and Inclusion Training) and a briefing phone call. This volunteer packet also provides volunteers with the informational tools they will need to work with individuals with disabilities come the day of an event. It is important to read through carefully to fully understand different types of disabilities, appropriate language, best practices, and tips!

For some events/clinics, there are more specific instructions regarding the activity or venue, and that is why calls and emails are sometimes necessary. If the event you are volunteering at requires further information, rest assured, you will be notified and informed!

Guardians Presence at Events

Each participant is required to have a parent/guardian present at every SKS event. Parents can be volunteers although it is not required, but their role is to be accessible if a problem volunteers are ill-equipped to handle arises. This is for the benefit of the volunteers and participants. Volunteers are not tasked with being a temporary parent for their participant, rather their role is to provide the best experience possible to the child and help throughout the event. If there is ever an extreme circumstance where the participant refuses to cooperate or outside reinforcement is needed, know that a parent will be present.

What is Provided to me as a Volunteer

As a volunteer during clinics/events you are typically provided a meal as well as SKS gear specific to the event and the sponsors.

- Eg: At the Washington Redskins Football Clinic volunteers and participants received a T-shirt and water bottle

Interaction and Engagement Strategies

Introductions and First Impressions

Participants may at first be apprehensive to working with new individuals who they have never met before, which is why it is often most beneficial to familiarize participants with their volunteer before an event (Parsons & Bentley, 2016). SKS does not have constant volunteers who come to every event, and we open ourselves to new volunteers all the time, so this is not always possible. This is why the first impressions and interactions with a participant are so important. Let them take to time adjust to you as someone new, but also know that SKS board members and parents are there if you need help. Remember to give them time to warm up to you!

General Interaction Tips

- Be patient
- Listen to your participant
- Give them your full and undivided attention
- Don't undermine their ability
- Encourage them to interact positively with you and other participants
- EMPOWER THEM!

What are Interaction Notes

All volunteers will receive interaction notes about their participant when they are introduced. These interaction notes disclose information (provided freely by parents) about the participant that will be helpful to the volunteer. The notes include information about specific needs a child has, what they are interested in, and things they like.

Example Interaction Note: "He is very friendly, inquisitive, and loves to ask questions. He knows a lot of TV shows and songs, engage him with questions so that he is not just asking you questions!"

Typically Developing Participants

SKS allows the involvement of all types of kids! Although the main target is children with disabilities, SKS encourages the participation of typically developing siblings and close family friends.

As a volunteer it is important to remember that you could be paired with a child who has a disability and a typically sibling or friend who is there of course to have fun, but often to help!

Remember to give the typically developing child attention similar to the child with a disability. Often, siblings or close friends to children with disabilities feel they do not get enough attention and at SKS we want to make sure that all participants feel considered and important.

Safety/Emergency Situations

If you are ever unsure how to handle a situation or have a question, come find someone in an SKS branded shirt/jacket/vest.

- There are SKS board members at every program who are able to assist with any problem that arises or get the parent of a participant

Typically, at events, there is a security guard to ensure that everyone at a SKS event is actually supposed to be there. If you ever feel unsafe or are concerned about something, you can also go talk to the **security guard**.

Since every clinic differs, SKS has various measures of safety for each clinic

- Always feel free to refer to the **professional volunteers** (for a specific sport or organization) if they are present at an event (For example: If an issue arises during water skiing, ask the On the Edge Waterskiing staff for help because they know the most about waterskiing)
- If there is a serious life-threatening emergency--**IMMEDIATELY CALL 911**

Commonly Asked Questions

1. Where should I put my personal items?

SKS suggests that volunteers leave their personal belongings in a safe, secure area or in their car as SKS is not liable for any lost or stolen items.

2. What should SKS volunteers bring to events?

SKS always suggests that volunteers bring their own water bottle, although at most events water is provided. There is nothing specific or tangible that volunteers must bring, but all volunteers should come to events in a positive mood ready to empower participants!

3. What to do if I'm having an emergency with my participant?

If you are having an emergency with your participant, consider these 2 options depending on the severity...

1. Find a SKS board member in a navy shirt—they can help find the participant parent
2. Call 911

4. What are the best ways to support SKS?

The best ways to support SKS are through...

1. Volunteering consistently at clinics and event
2. Volunteering to be a mentor for the Your Path to Success Program
3. Donating to the organization
4. Spreading the word about SKS!

5. May we share contact information with sponsors and athlete ambassadors?

We do ask our participants and families to please not directly contact any of our sponsors and/or athlete ambassadors given the delicate nature of our relationships with these groups.