



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Kay Kafe Companions

Small actions can have a big impact. St. Jude Volunteer Services offers many short volunteer shifts to help meet the needs of St. Jude patients, families, and staff. While these smaller jobs typically require fewer volunteers, and may sometimes go unnoticed, those who fill the shifts play important roles in helping patient families. The Kay Kafe Companion Program is one of these small, yet important programs.

Navigating the Kay Kafe during peak hours can be stressful for an unencumbered adult. Now imagine trying to do so while pushing a wheelchair, holding a tray and keeping track of a small child or two. For St. Jude families, such a scenario is all too common. With suggestions from staff, families, and Patient & Family Advisory Council (FAC) members, Volunteer Services developed the Kay Kafe Companion Program to make these stressful situations a thing of the past.

Staff from Food Services partnered with Volunteer Services and FAC members to create the new positions. Family council members helped with everything from designing and purchasing the volunteers' bright yellow smocks to developing the training with the Food Services staff. It was a great example of collaboration across the institution with the goal of helping St. Jude families.

The program began with one lunchtime volunteer in the Kay Kafe on Wednesdays. Now, two Kay Kafe Companion volunteers are in the café at lunchtime, Monday through Friday, helping with whatever families need. Trained to look for caregivers who are struggling, the volunteers carry trays, help families get through the checkout line, reserve tables, return trays and alert Food Service staff when a spill happens or condiments need to be restocked. They are also communicating nutrition requests and special orders to the café staff, and they often explain the Kay Kafe's layout and food options to new families.

The Kay Kafe Companion volunteers tackle simple problems, yet make a huge difference. One parent said, "It was the busiest day I've ever seen, there were a ton of spills, and it was chaotic. The volunteer in the yellow vest came over to help me and my two daughters."

She added, "I was so happy, I almost cried. Where have these volunteers been all my life? And how can I let someone know just how happy I am they are here?"

Recently, a volunteer held a child so the mother could get her tray and personal belongings together. The mom said, "I just don't know what to do with myself. I'm so thankful you all are here!"

The volunteers in this role express a high level of satisfaction, and the turnover is very low, which is always an indication of happy, well-trained and engaged volunteers. They love helping the families, and it truly shows.

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Ready Runners



Volunteer Services staff members were inspired to develop the Ready Runner program after hearing about a similar program at an adult care hospital in Ohio. That institution was struggling with engaging their recent retirees in volunteer service, so they developed a “Volunteer Voyager Walking Program,” where the volunteers helped patients find their way around, and promoted it as a way to stay active and healthy after retirement.

Volunteer Services staff loved this idea and envisioned what a similar program might look like, with a slightly different focus. After meeting with leadership from Nursing and Environmental Services, the teams identified a prominent issue with maintaining an adequate supply of clean wagons and wheelchairs for patient use. Based on those discussions, the teams created a volunteer position that would help address this important and ongoing issue. The Ready Runner Volunteer Program took elements of the Ohio program and modified it to meet the needs of St. Jude.

The Ready Runner Pilot program began in May of 2013 a few days a week and quickly expanded to five days per week, offering volunteers a completely flexible schedule with multiple shift times throughout the day. The model has been a big hit with all ages – flexibility and autonomy of Ready Runner volunteer shifts is attractive to a wide range of community members. Volunteers from college students to those with ever-changing work schedules like pilots and firefighters, to working parents and recent retirees are all drawn to the position. Many people need the flexibility this role offers. As one volunteer put it, “It’s a way to come in when you can, work hard for a few hours, and know you’ve made a difference because you literally count everything you do.”

Tracking what the volunteers accomplish is a vital piece of this program. Ready Runner volunteers track practically everything they do during their three-hour shifts. The services these volunteers provide makes a huge impact on the care we are able to provide for our patients and families, thus enhancing the patient and family experience at St. Jude.

Since the program began in 2013, Ready Runners have:

- Given 3,500 volunteer hours
- Taken a total 1,957,500 steps, averaging 7,118 steps per shift
- Replenished almost 1,600 bottles of water in the parent exercise room
- Escorted 1,095 guests and families
- Collected 10,978 dirty wagons and 7,062 dirty wheelchairs
- Delivered 6,828 clean wagons and 3,350 clean wheelchairs

Volunteers find their role rewarding. One Ready Runner said, “In collecting the wagons and wheelchairs from all over campus, I know I’m providing an important service. The campus is big, and sometimes patients don’t feel like walking. Riding in a wagon is a fun way to get around.”

Staff recognize the value of these volunteers and the work they do. “These volunteers provide an extra layer of infection control protection to the patients by gathering dirty wagons and wheelchairs for cleaning,” said Kathy Cox, a staff member who regularly calls upon Ready Runners to find clean wagons.



Ready Runners are trained to use Vocera badges, a mobile communication device, which frees them to go wherever they are needed. This also allows staff to stay in their work areas and call upon these volunteers to run errands, escort families and guests, make deliveries and walk around campus looking for wagons and wheelchairs.

Many Ready Runners commented about how far they were walking during each shift and about how much weight they had lost since starting the program, so in late summer 2016, Volunteer Services decided to track each step by providing pedometers to check out at the beginning of each shift. Additionally, to inspire and motivate volunteers, a “Walk in the Park” feature was added to the Ready Runner Program. Volunteer Services purchased a map and flag pins to display in the volunteer sign-in room and promised these volunteers a party when they have completed their “walk” to Yellowstone National Park. Each month, the steps are counted, and the pins move closer to their destination. Many volunteers are competitive and stay to “beat” each other’s steps.

“It’s a fun competition, and the added bonus is, the more steps we take, the sooner we get the party. Plus, we are all getting healthier in the process,” stated a Ready Runner recently while

looking at the progress on the map. This sentiment is shared among the 23 current Ready Runners.

This program is a win-win for all involved and as another volunteer put it,

- “I didn’t expect to enjoy my service at St. Jude so much. I look forward to coming and always have a wonderful sense of satisfaction when I leave.”

