



# ONE ASK AWAY

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Tapping into the heart and service of volunteers





■ by Tucker Van Brunt

Painting fences, washing dishes, leading programs and mentoring your community, volunteers can provide tremendous value to your operations. Often, potential volunteers are left untapped, waiting for your organization to approach them with a simple ask. ►

Photo courtesy of SOWER



They come from all walks of life. They may be retirees looking for life beyond their vocation; exploring new skills or ways to stay involved in ministry while investing their life's wisdom in your staff and campers. Volunteers who were recently campers may return to camp with excitement to be a part of the story as they delve into key operational areas.

Volunteers come in waves and from different places, too. Some are ready to spend just a day or two, while others nestle down with the ministry for a few weeks or months. These willing helpers may be found within your organization, as campers, former staff or donors, while others may be strangers on the other side of the country, eager for a camp to open its doors for help.

### **An Exchange of Investment**

Paul Biles, executive director at Tejas (Giddings, Texas), has welcomed volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to serve at camp. "It's people, it's relationship building," Biles shared. He loves getting people "plugged in, finding their best fit and getting them engaged in some way."

Biles believes an exchange of investment happens when you incorporate volunteers into your ministry. By facilitating an environment where volunteers feel valued, have a shared desire for the mission and are well-equipped by your organization, volunteers can intentionally pour their time into it.

By investing in a volunteer program and in the individuals who serve at your camp, you create an opportunity to free up some of your essential staff for other things that often fall by the wayside, especially during busy seasons. "When volunteers come alongside us, it allows our staff to either dream or work on something else," Biles explained.

Volunteers can find plenty of opportunities to grow and learn while serving. Biles shared that he's seen people who are "more seasoned in life" learning new things. He's witnessed people who spent their professional lives in charge learn humility in a volunteer role. "It's always interesting to see individuals who first ... want to 'take charge,' and then a few years later, they're like, 'How can I help?'" Biles said. ►



Photo courtesy of Conference Point

# Potential volunteers are everywhere, whether they've grown up at your camp or never heard of your ministry.





Photo courtesy of SOWER



Photo courtesy of Tejas



Photo courtesy of Tejas



# Finding Volunteers

## *Sources to connect ministries and volunteers*

Looking for volunteers? Here are a few sources. If you have any that aren't listed here, feel free to share them on the CCCA Forums!

- Roving Volunteers in Christ's Service (RVICS)  
[www.rvics.org](http://www.rvics.org)
- Construction Workers Christian Fellowship (CWCf)  
[www.cwcf.org](http://www.cwcf.org)
- Hard Hats for Christ (part of CWCf)  
[www.cwcf.org/ministries/hard-hats](http://www.cwcf.org/ministries/hard-hats)
- Building in Youth (part of CWCf)  
[www.cwcf.org/ministries/building-in-youth](http://www.cwcf.org/ministries/building-in-youth)
- Ready Volunteers for Christ (part of CWCf)  
[www.cwcf.org/ministries/rvers-for-christ](http://www.cwcf.org/ministries/rvers-for-christ)
- SOWER  
[www.sowerministry.org](http://www.sowerministry.org)
- Volunteer Match  
[www.volunteermatch.org/recruit-volunteers](http://www.volunteermatch.org/recruit-volunteers)
- Sojourners  
[www.sojourning.org](http://www.sojourning.org)
- Texas Baptist Men  
[www.tbmtx.org](http://www.tbmtx.org)



Photo courtesy of SOWER



# “As a volunteer, you want to be needed. You want to ... have plenty to do.” —Jody Gustafson, camp volunteer

## Finding Volunteers

Potential volunteers are everywhere, whether they've grown up at your camp or never heard of your ministry. Aaron Ahlquist, executive director of Lost Timber Bible Camp (Chandler, Minnesota), relies on volunteers for most of his camp staff. Ahlquist sees the importance of growing volunteers from within your camp, intentionally investing in campers at a young age. While strengthening their overall camp experience, this provides a clear choice to volunteer with your camp when they're ready.

Ahlquist shared, “We try to focus on building those relationships with campers, even in grade school and middle school.” Even though it may be years before campers can apply for a staff position, Ahlquist said, “We'll intentionally try to get to know them so if they do apply for staff, we know about [their personality] and there's that relationship already.”

Ministries like SOWERs (Servants on Wheels Ever Ready) work to match retiree volunteers with recreational vehicles with organizations looking for help. Gary and Stephanie Conrad have served with SOWERs for 20 years, and Gary currently serves as president on the board of trustees. The ministry's motto is “RVing with a purpose,” Stephanie said. “We have about 170 current ministries that have asked for SOWER assistance, and in the 40 years of SOWERs, more than 500 ministries have been served.”

The ministry has about 550 couples, and it's all self-directed, Stephanie explained, “so we're not required to work a certain number of projects per year.” She believes many choose to join the ministry in retirement because “they want to serve; they want to be a help.”

SOWERs publishes a list of needs from ministry sites across the country. “We have an online list that is updated every week,” Stephanie said. Potential volunteers can search the list and request a specific ministry and time frame. Ministries can request the number of SOWER couples they'd like and the months they'd like them to serve. Interested camps can request service at [www.sowerministry.org](http://www.sowerministry.org).

## Volunteers' Perspectives

Husband-and-wife team, Bob and Jody Gustafson, have served and been served as volunteers at several camps across the country. “For us, we want to be aligned with a camp that has a clear mission statement, [has] thought through its operations and has a strategy of how they're going to carry out the mission,” Bob explained.

“One camp we've had the pleasure to serve at is Fort Wilderness (Rhinelander, Wisconsin),” Bob said. “They have a program called OWLS (Older, Wiser, Loving Saints), and there is an army of people later in life who have plenty of energy and specific skills.”

Beyond the physical work at a camp, the Gustafsons have found an opportunity to pour into the lives of younger generations in their role as volunteers. Bob explained that they're “finding a lot of satisfaction in being able to steward the years that we've had, and in some ways, to be frank, steward the pain and stories we've lived through.” They've been amazed to see “how we can coach and help raise up and mentor the next era of camp workers.”

Jody said, “As a volunteer, you want to be needed. You want to ... have plenty to do.” She explained that “it's always nice to have someone at the camp who is checking in with you ... just to avoid some problems of overworking or under-utilizing your volunteer.”

The Gustafsons wish that more camps would make it easy for volunteers to express interest and sign up to serve. Bob wants camp directors to know, “Most people are just one ask away.” ■



*For 15 years, Tucker Van Brunt lived on-site at Camp Sentinel (Center Tuftonboro, New Hampshire) with his family and discovered at a young age his passion for camping ministry. Obtaining a bachelor's degree in communication arts with a focus in marketing and public relations from Gordon College in 2021, Tucker has been applying his marketing skills to Sentinel for many years. Tucker currently resides in Newburyport, Massachusetts.*