



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK 2026

Kinship of Morrison County

**Historic Courthouse – Suite 202
107 Second Street SE
Little Falls, MN 56345-3080
Phone / Text: (320) 632-8806**

**E-mail: info@kinshipofmc.org
Web: www.kinshipofmc.org**

Mission Statement

Kinship of Morrison County is dedicated to the premise that children need, and can benefit from the guidance and companionship of a mature adult friend. Our purpose is to provide this friendship in the most wholesome way possible with the intention that the child would show noticeable improvement in personal development.

History

- 1955 - A group of Lutheran seminary students formed “Kinsmen” to establish supportive one-on-one relationships with troubled young men living in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The program began through the Plymouth Youth Center.
- 1962 - Kinsmen became formalized by hiring a full time program director. It expanded to include girls and women, adding a new focus on helping children ages 5-15.
- 1967 - Kinship became a national program with the support of the American Lutheran Church. Individual units were established throughout Minnesota and several other states.
- 1974 - Big Brothers Big Sisters opened its door in Little Falls, expanding to include all of Morrison County in a few years.
- 1994 - The Board of Directors left the BBBS program and Kinship of Morrison County was established as a separate non-profit organization servicing all communities in Morrison County.
- 2002 - Aaron Olson became the new director of Kinship of Morrison County.
- 2012 – Kinship expands to Greater Long Prairie to fill the void left when Kinship of Todd / Wadena closed.
- 2016 – Kinship begins using short-term matches

The Youth in Kinship

Who are the kids in Kinship?

- The youth in Kinship (a.k.a. Kinkids) live in a home without both natural parents (i.e. single-parent, foster, step-families, etc.).
- The youth are age 6-18, and reside in Morrison County.
- The Kinkid (and the parent) has a desire to have a mentor in their life. That means they want a positive adult volunteer to spend time with them, doing everyday kinds of things (i.e. hiking, baking, visiting, sports, etc.). This time together with build a lasting, trusting friendship. These matches set goals (i.e. social, meetings, educational, skill learning, etc.)

Mentor Description

Who can be a mentor:

- An individual, married couple or family who desire to make a positive difference in the life of a child. This is done through healthy role modeling & companionship with a child.
- Candidates must be at least 18 years old
- Mentor candidates must successfully complete Kinship's screening process
- All adults in the household must pass a nationwide background check

Ways to mentor through Kinship:

- **Traditional Mentoring:** The mentor(s) is/are matched with a child based on common interests, hobbies, passions, etc. and spend at least four hours per month doing every day kinds of things. Matches are encouraged to stay together for at least a year, and often "renew" the match year-after-year.
- **Group Mentoring Activities:** The mentor(s) is/are matched up with a child at a Kinship sponsored group activity. The "match" only lasts for that activity, but the volunteer role & impact on the child is the same; friendship & relationship building, open communication, fun & fellowship are key!
- **Short Term Mentor:** The mentor(s) are is/are matched up with a child for a three-month period with the expectation that the "match" gets together for 6-8 hours each month. They can get together on their own or attend Kinship's activities. The short-term match ends after three months. The match will then successfully graduate, or hopefully will convert to a tradition match.

Skills Required:

- Dependability and enthusiasm.
- Wide variety of interests.
- Transportation and time to spend once a month with a child.
- Nonjudgmental attitude.
- Love for children.

Duties:

- If matched, be responsible for initiating contacts with a child & scheduling get-togethers (either on your own or at Kinship's group mentoring activities).
- Mentors are to meet the monthly minimum (4 hours traditional / 6-8 hours short-term) time together, but should strive to stay in contact on a weekly basis (i.e. phone, text, in-person, etc.)
- If not formally matched, attend Kinship's group mentoring activities or short-term programs that are of interest to you where you will be "matched" with a youth for the duration of that activity.
- Maintain ongoing monthly contact/consultation with the Kinship staff; sharing concerns, highlights, and ideas.

Time & Resources Required:

- 4 hours a month at a time determined by the mentor, child & parent. Time will vary according to the contact/activity. Matches can fulfill their 4 hour commitment in one or multiple visits per month.
- Mentors are encouraged to do low or no cost, everyday kinds of things together.
- Matches are welcome & encouraged to participate in Kinship sponsored group mentoring activities.
- Unmatched volunteers are encouraged to attend any and all group mentoring activities where they will be "matched" with a youth for the duration of that activity.

Training Provided:

- Ongoing support and consultation with staff.
- Please contact your coordinator for information for any particular training needs.

Supervisor:

- Directly responsible to Kinship staff, including the Match Manager & Executive Director.

Mentors Make A Difference

At its most basic level, mentoring brings a compassion & consistent adult into the life of a young person. Parenting is difficult, and being a single-parent adds even more challenges. Enter a mentor. The mentor isn't a substitute parent, nor do they make a daily commitment, but they are a consistent adult in the life of the child. A child is not alone in dealing with challenges. Those challenges may be as straight forward as having someone there to talk to, someone who listens and someone to share experiences with.

Think back. Did you know how to study for a test or make plans for college? Do you remember wanting your first car or looking for a part-time job? Simple things that seem easy or straightforward to you now may appear to be a complete mystery to a young person. Mentors provide their Kinkid with an experienced friend who is there to help in any number of situations.

Support for education

- Mentors help keep students in school.
- Students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37% less likely to skip a class (Public/Private Ventures study of Big Brothers Big Sisters).
- Mentors help with homework and can improve their mentees' academic skills.

Support with day-to-day living

- Mentors help improve a young person's self-esteem.
- Youth who meet regularly with their mentors are 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and 27% less likely to start drinking (Public/Private Ventures study of Big Brothers Big Sisters).
- About 40% of a teenager's waking hours are spent without companionship or supervision. Mentors provide teens with a valuable place to spend free time.
- Mentors teach young people how to relate well to all kinds of people and help them strengthen communication skills.

Support in the workplace

- Mentors help young people set career goals and start taking steps to realize them.
- Mentors can use their personal contacts to help young people meet industry professionals, find internships and locate job possibilities.
- Mentors introduce young people to professional resources and organizations they may not know.
- Mentors can help their mentees learn how to seek and keep jobs.

The number of ways mentoring can help a youth are as varied as the people involved in Kinship. Research confirms what we know anecdotally or intuitively — that mentoring works. The 2013 study “The Role of Risk: Mentoring Experiences and Outcomes for Youth with Varying Risk Profiles,” examined mentoring program relationships, experiences and benefits for higher-risk youth, and among the findings determined:

- The strongest program benefit, and most consistent across risk groups, was a reduction in depressive symptoms — a particularly noteworthy finding given that almost one in four youth reported worrisome levels of these symptoms at baseline.
- Findings also suggested gains in social acceptance, academic attitudes and grades.
- In addition to benefits in specific domains, mentored youth also experienced gains in a greater number of outcomes than youth in the comparison group.

Overall, the study’s results suggest that mentoring programs can be beneficial for youth with a broad range of backgrounds and characteristics.

Understanding Your Kinship Kid

Children are referred to Kinship from a variety of sources, including parents, school and county social workers and word of mouth. Most children in the program are living in a single-parent, female-headed household. Some children live with grandparents. Some of the children may have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. All Kinship Kids desire to have a special friend through the program.

One of the keys to a successful relationship is understanding and respecting your Kinship Kid's individuality, his or her unique personality and developmental stage. Observing the child's interests, skills, and social interactions can help you determine the developmental needs of your Kinship friend. Understanding your friends needs will enable you to select suitable activities to encourage growth and development.

The Match

Only after volunteers complete the screening process (orientation, application, 3-4 references, nation-wide background check and interview) will they be considered for matching. Matches are determined primarily according to interests, skills, and location.

After determining a suitable match, the Kinship Match Manager arranges for the initial meeting of the child, parent, and volunteer.

Most get-togethers between kids and their Kinship Mentor center on everyday activities: grocery shopping, yard work, and hobbies. You might include picnics, ball games, parades, and the circus, entertainment normally a part of the child's own family activities. If the parent is unable to do so, some Kinship mentors attend school events.

Successful Mentoring Criteria

- **Be a model for youth:** It is not enough to tell someone that you want to help, you must show them by your actions. Youth have a genuine appreciation for those who know how to lead without ordering or scolding. Be kind but firm, be reasonable but realistic in your expectations.
- **Be Persistent:** Often the child expects to be disappointed, so convey to him/her that you will not give up. Do not concern yourself with achieving immediate results. This will give assurance to the child that he/she can trust you and place his/her confidence in you.
- **Be Patient:** Allow time to get to know the child gradually. The positive impact of your relationship may not have decisive effects until after you've been working together for a long time. The youth may need time to think over your suggestions, so don't be too impatient or demanding. Sympathy and understanding are the best incentives to help encourage youth to participate.
- **Be Consistent:** Say what you mean. Do not make impossible promises. Keep your appointments, be on time, and plan with the child so he/she can anticipate future meetings with a real trust in your reliability.
- **Empathy:** Freely accept the child without forcing your expectations upon him/her. We all need acceptance in order to grow. Discuss your own growing pains and point out the similarities to those of the child. Have faith that your honest and sincere example will have a positive impact.
- **Friendliness:** Give attention and affection. The child you're matched with may never have known sustained attention and affection. The boy or girl should know that you are aware of his/her background. This will help the child feel that you are a friend who is interested and concerned, regardless of his/her past experiences or growing problems.
- **Honesty:** Be frank, honest, and loving in your relationship. Honesty without LOVE is brutal; LOVE without truth is sympathy. Display a genuine interest in the youth. Give advice sparingly; share your own growing experiences. Let the Kinkid develop his/her own individuality. Avoid preaching.
- **Trust:** Trust can be a vehicle for developing self-respect and responsibility for the Kinkid. It is natural for youth who are struggling with their own identities and in-securities to deceive others. The Mentor should quietly explain that trust has a reasonable purpose. As the youth gains confidence in his/her Mentor, the tendency to be dishonest or take short cuts will diminish.
- **Respect:** Youth should be given respect just the same as adults. Assume the best from your match and most often he/she will live up to your optimistic respect. Let your match know you recognize his or her good qualities and positive achievements.
- **Confidentiality:** The mentor has the responsibility of keeping all discussions between mentee and mentor confidential, unless it breaks the mandatory reporting regulations, or the mentor feels that the mentee is at risk of depression and is in danger of hurting himself/ herself or someone else. The mentor should then follow the reporting procedures.

Practical Tips For Mentoring

- Practice the discipline of presence. Be attentive, compassionate, and a good listener.
- Be open about your own life when appropriate. Self-disclosure invites conversation characterized by mutuality.
- Assure confidentiality. Trust is built upon maintaining boundaries.
- Set limits for yourself. Let the other person know when you are or are not available. Consider some form of “contract” on time, energy, and commitment to be there for someone else.
- Clarify your own role in the relationship and the attitude you bring to it.
- Pay attention to your own needs. We cannot give what we do not have. Take care of yourself - this is not self-indulgence, but a sign of maturity and wisdom.

Common Challenges To Mentoring

- Grandiose Goals
- Over Involvement
- Demanding Reciprocity
- Amateur Therapist
- Substitute Parent

What do we do together?

Kinship volunteers are expected to take the leadership role in planning get-togethers with their Kinkid. Your match was made based on “common interests” like sports, board games, cooking, the outdoors, etc., so your initial visits could easily focus on your shared interest. You are encouraged as a match to do low or no cost activities that you both enjoy. A list of possible activities are included at the end of this booklet.

Low cost or no cost activities are encouraged. Greater lessons may be learned making dinner together, going fishing or raking leaves together than going to an amusement park or on a shopping trip. Occasional activities costing money are okay, but its best to make the relationship as life like as possible. Work ethics and lifestyle skills can be learned by incorporating the child in “real life” experiences rather than “consumer” oriented activities. We recommend volunteers plan enjoyable time together providing opportunity for discussion, use of imaginations, and the development of healthy values.

As you get to know the child better, you may try to alternate activity planning, with the mentor planning one week and the child planning the next (it this is age appropriate). Your match may make a suggestion jar together. If costs are incurred for activities, the volunteer is expected to cover them. Occasionally, the child's family may be able to help cover costs for a special outing. This needs to be discussed with the child's parents/guardian beforehand and in private.

Overnights

Kinship's insurance provider does not allow any overnight visits with Kinship matches.

Kinship, Insurance & the Activities you do together

As a mentoring program, Kinship has a variety of insurance coverages that protect the program, staff, the board of directors, you as volunteers and also the Kinkids. The insurance binder is very thick and complex, so here is a brief overview of how a volunteer is covered by Kinship's insurance and also what activities are NOT covered.

- General Liability
 - o This protects the Kinship program and individuals who perform their role as a volunteer mentor in accordance with Kinship guidelines. **Your personal liability policy provides coverage for you as well.**
- Accident Coverage
 - o You and your Kinkid have coverage when together (either as a match or at a Kinship sponsored group mentoring activity) in case of an accident with injury. This is secondary to personal insurance either of you have.
- Automobile Liability Coverage
 - o There is additional liability coverage when you are transporting your Kinkid & have an accident. This policy covers Kinship's liability. Your auto policy, along with your Kinkid family's auto policy are primary. It is recommend that you carry of minimum of 100/300/100 automobile coverage.

NOT COVERED: Some activities are NOT COVERED by Kinship's insurance. They are listed below. If you want to do one of these activities (with parental approval & support), there is a form you can complete which acknowledges that you are doing that activity outside of Kinship and will not hold Kinship liable. The activities NOT COVERED include: overnight visits, bungee jumping, parachuting, skydiving, parasailing, hang gliding, flying in a private plane, racing, travel outside of the USA and riding a scooter. Any illegal activity is obviously not covered. Many of these activities would be awesome experiences, but we are unable to get affordable insurance coverage on them.

If you have any further insurance questions, please contact the Kinship office and your private insurance company.

Kinship Sponsored Group Mentoring Activities

Kinship sponsored group mentoring activities are planned throughout the year such as snow tubing, fishing, baseball games, canoeing, etc. The gatherings provide an opportunity for Kinship people to get together and have fun. They are offered at no cost to the youth or volunteers. If you have any suggestions for activities, please share them with Kinship staff.

You will be notified of these events by phone, mail or email. A bi-monthly newsletter provides all

Kinship participants with organizational information, uplifting articles and suggestions for activities.

Mentors are needed at these activities (both with the traditional match or just as an unmatched volunteer) and will be paired up with youth in a small group setting. The volunteer's role is to foster communication, to share in the experience with the youth and to build a friendship, even if it is just for a night.

Respect of Child & Family

Kinship mentors may find the home environment and child's "family rules" considerably different than their own. There may likely be cultural differences, associated with environment, race, and economics. It is important that differences be recognized as they are, not implying the people themselves are any better or worse.

Kinship Mentors should always tell the parent/guardian where they are going and approximate time when they will bring the child home. It's always a good idea to call just before leaving to pick up the child in Kinship to confirm the appointment. Always have a game plan with the parent in the event that they are not home when you take the child back. You can discuss this with the Kinship staff to decide what plan of action would best suit the family you are working with.

Matters Of Faith

If the parent or guardian is supportive, the child may be included in prayer, discussion about faith and church services or activities. Many times, the Kinship mentor's lifestyle and actions speak much louder than any words spoken to the child. Inclusion or exclusion of your Kinkid in your faith (i.e. worship, prayer, activities, etc.) is ultimately up to their parent. Never coerce the child into attending church, discussing faith or prayer.

Touch

Kinship works to help Kinkids & their mentor establish and maintain a healthy and satisfying relationship. One area which can destroy such a friendship is inappropriate touch. All people have personal, physical boundaries around their entire body. The child's body language shows when close is too close. More caution should be used with children who do not display any personal boundaries. Some children have difficulty defining a personal boundary, therefore, it is important for adults to be sensitive to this.

Some adult-child interaction is quite clearly inappropriate. Examples of this are sexual intercourse, fondling, etc. Touching of the pelvic or breast area is inappropriate, as is exposing these areas. Inappropriate sexual words, references, sexting, taking explicit photographs and viewing of sexually explicit materials are never appropriate, and Kinship has a zero tolerance of those actions.

Other types of interaction may be less clearly defined as appropriate and inappropriate. Since we don't always have the complete history or knowledge to know how the child may react to any touch, normally appropriate touch may be perceived inappropriately. Examples are back or shoulder rubs, massages,

contact sports, and playful pats.

Kinship's primary concern and commitment is for the children. If inappropriate behavior is reported or communicated to Kinship staff, they will act in accordance with Minnesota law and report it to the police department and/or county child protection workers.

A hug or handshake can bring warmth and good feelings. Touch is crucial for healthy development, but it can bring fear and anxiety when inappropriate. Your sensitivity to such concerns can lead to the child feeling safety and love. When in doubt, caution is advised. **Please contact Kinship staff with specific questions if they arise in the course of your Kinship experience.**

Mentor Night Out - Training Opportunities

Kinship provides training / networking opportunities for its volunteer mentor 1-2 times per year through Mentor Night Outs. These events bring mentors together for a time of fellowship, support and celebration of mentoring. Often dinner and an activity is included.

Tax Deductions

Much of the traveling and other out of pocket expenses incurred during the course of volunteering may be tax deductible. Volunteers should consult with their tax advisors with questions.

Mandatory Reporting

As a volunteer you are required by the State of Minnesota under the statute 626.556 to be a mandatory reporter of child abuse. The Mandated Reporting 2000 statute states that anyone who works with children such as: Teachers, Mentors, Day Care workers, etc., needs to report any suspected case of child abuse. You will not be held liable if you report the suspected case of child abuse in good faith, but if you fail to report any case of child abuse, it may result in a misdemeanor. Child abuse is defined as any harm that comes to a child at the hand of someone who is a parent or acting in the place of a parent at the time of the act.

There are two steps to follow when reporting child abuse. The first step is an oral report to be made immediately by telephone to either the local law enforcement agency or to the county social service agency. ("Immediately" is defined "as soon as possible but no longer than 24 hours"). The second step for a Mandated reporter is to follow the oral report with a written report within 72 hours.

If you have any questions about mandatory reporting or have a situation that needs to be reported call the Kinship Office immediately.

Morrison County Social Services: (320) 632-2951

Morrison County Sheriff's Office: (320) 632-9233

Activity Suggestions for Matches

Attend an Air Show
Baking
Basketball
Beach
Billboards
Boating
Board Game
Bow and Arrow Shooting
Bowling
Build and Fly a Kite
Build a Race Car
Camping
Canoeing
Card Games
Care Rides
Chess
Chop Wood
Christmas Party
Church Activities and Festivals
Color Books
Color Easter Eggs
Concerts
Conversation
Cribbage
Crochet
Curling
Cutting a Christmas Tree
Dinner together
Drawing
Electronic Projects
Fairs
Farm
Farming Projects
Fairs
Feed Ducks
Field Trip
Fishing
Fly Model Planes
Football
Games
Homecoming Parade
Home Movies
Horseback Riding
Hunting
Ice Fishing
Ice Skating
Inner Tubing
Jacks
Jogging
Kinship Activities
Kite Flying
Lawn Work
Leather Craft
Library
Make a Snowman
Motorcycling
Movies
Painting
Paper Dolls
Picnics
Pinball
Ping Pong
Pizza
Plays
Pool
Puppet Show
Reading and Studying
Repair Bicycle
Roller Skating/Blading
School Christmas Program
Shopping
Skating
Skiing
Sliding
Snowmobiling
Snow Shoveling
Social Functions
Sports on Television
Build a Fire (preferably in a fireplace)
Stock Car Races
Swimming
Golf
Haircut
Halloween Party
Hiking
Hockey
Taped Records
Tobogganing
Tour Campus
Trip to Service Garage
Trip to Fire Department
University: Theater
University: Variety Show
Visit Friends
Wash Car
Woodworking
Symphony
Table Games
Taking Dog Out
Talking and Listening
Talk on Phone
Television
Touch Football
Trip to Humane Society
Walking
Window Shop
Work Projects
Visit Nursing Home
Visit Santa Claus
Water Balloon Fight
Water Grass/Garden

Winter Things to Do

- Go sliding, skating or skiing.
- Go snow shoeing, ice fishing, snowmobiling or snow boarding.
- Build a snowman or a snow fort.
- Plan a building project.
- Borrow records from the library and listen together at home.
- Learn a musical instrument together.
- Play cards (learn a new card game each month).
- Make Christmas decorations together.
- Pop some corn and watch a TV movie at home.
- Take a life saving course.
- Learn telephone use: long distance calls, hotel/transportation reservations.
- Study the stars, chart and follow a course; atmosphere, nature's elements.
- Take a joint motivation (personal) course.
- Woodwork - how about bookcases, wooden plant pots, use carpentry tools.
- Repair a broken toy or bike together.
- Bake a yummy batch of cookies together.
- Enjoy a cup of hot chocolate, coffee or cappuccino
- Try making candles and other crafts.
- Attend a school band concert or play.
- Spend a cold afternoon at the library.
- Tour local factory, police/fire station, museum, or stores.

Spring Things To Do

- Plant a garden of vegetables or flowers.
- Color Easter Eggs.
- Start learning a new sport like tennis, jogging, or swimming.
- Go bird watching, see who can find and name the most species of birds.
- Go for a hike at a state forest.
- Have an outdoor barbecue.
- Fly a kite. Learn to build one out of materials you have at home.
- Go to the lake to watch the baby ducks.
- Watch a baseball or soccer game.

Summer Things To Do

- Go fishing then cook your own catch for dinner.
- Take a tour of historical sites near you.
- Learn or improve your canoeing skills.
- Celebrate the 4th of July by watching the fireworks together.
- Go to the state fair or other local festivals. Call your state tourism office to find out when and where they are.
- Go to a drive-in movie.
- Have a picnic and each of you contribute half the food.
- Spend a day at the beach.
- Plan, plant, weed & harvest a garden.
- Go for walk or hike.
- “Catch” a baseball game.

Fall Things To Do

- Play touch football.
- Get ready to go back to school.
- Harvest your garden.
- Press leaves.
- Get your car ready for the winter.
- Make your own Halloween costume.
- See a spooky movie together right before Halloween.
- Go for a drive in the country to admire the changing leaves.
- Have the “last” picnic of the year.
- Bake Halloween and Thanksgiving cookies together.
- Carve a jack-o-lantern. See who can make the most scary or funny face.
- Rake leaves.
- Go on a hayride or go horseback riding.

52 ideas, one for each week of the year

January

- Celebrate National Mentoring Month.
- Make your New Year's resolutions and set your mentoring goals.
- Develop a website.
- Write thank you notes for holiday presents.

February

- Rent each others' favorite movies.
- Read the same book and discuss it.
- Go sledding.
- Talk about your first job.

March

- Go to a high school basketball game.
- Make plans for spring break.
- Talk about planning a career.
- Set goals for physical fitness and work out together.

April

- Go to a baseball game.
- Plant seeds for a garden.
- Talk about taxes.
- Tour a college campus and learn about how to prepare for enrollment.

May

- Go to a high school play.
- Work on a resume.
- Plant a tree.
- Go fishing.

June

- Look for a summer job or internship.
- Go to an free outdoor concert.
- Develop a portfolio to showcase skills.
- Shoot some hoops.
- Go outside and take pictures together.
- Build a birdhouse or craft project.

July

- Talk about news and current events.
- Go to a community parade.
- Search for fireworks displays.
- Go see a movie with a mentoring theme and discuss it.
- Talk about how to look for a job.

August

- Go to the beach.
- Make dinner together.
- Share a talent or teach a skill.
- Talk about planning a budget.

September

- Prepare for the school year.
- Tour your city/town.
- Share each other's worries.
- Volunteer for a fundraiser or service project together.

October

- Go to a football game.
- Tackle some homework.
- Share life experiences.
- Talk about what it takes to succeed.
- Go on a haunted hayride.

November

- Take a walk together.
- Talk about elections and politics.
- Eat a Thanksgiving dinner together.
- Write a book or poem together.

December

- Help make creative presents for each others' friends and families.
- Bake holiday cookies together.
- Make a scrapbook of all the different things you have done.
- Talk about the future.