

## Volunteer at Lydia Home

### Serving Kids with Compassion and Consistency

We're building a team of volunteers to serve at Lydia Home, a licensed foster group home in Old Irving Park that cares for over 80 children. This is a meaningful opportunity to show up for youth who have been through a lot and to remind them they're loved, seen, and valued.

### Ways You Can Serve

Lydia Home has many needs, and volunteers can help in different ways depending on your strengths and availability:

- Hosting Activities (games, crafts, etc.)
- Helping with Lydia-led Events
- 1:1 Mentorship Opportunities (Check FAQs section for more information)
- Behind-the-Scenes Help (organization, sorting, prepping)

We're aiming to build a team that rotates and serves regularly, especially to host weekend activities in **2-hour blocks**. That said, if weekends don't work for you, don't worry! Arrangements can be made based on your availability.

### The Kids

There are four main groups of children, divided by age (6-17 y.o.) and gender:

- Younger Boys
- Younger Girls
- Older Boys
- Older Girls

Be thinking about which group(s) you'd feel most comfortable working with!

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### Requirements

Because Lydia Home works closely with **DCFS**, all volunteers are required to go through a clearance process:

1. **Submit a Volunteer Inquiry**
2. **Background Check** (SSN required)
3. **Complete Required Paperwork**
4. **TB Test** (schedule with your primary doctor)
5. **Fingerprinting** (free + provided by the state)

**Note:** You will also be asked about why you want to volunteer with foster children.

**Once submitted**, Lydia sends your paperwork to DCFS. It usually takes **4–6 weeks** to get cleared by the state. When approved, you'll receive a phone call and be connected to the volunteer coordinator at Lydia home to get started!

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### Safety & Support

You'll never be left alone with a child. A Lydia Home staff member is always present during activities.

If you have a friend you want to volunteer with, that's great! They just need to complete the full clearance process too.

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### Understanding the Kids We Serve

Many of the children at Lydia Home have experienced deep trauma. Some have faced situations that even adults struggle to process. While you won't know the full background of the child you're interacting with, you can safely assume they carry weight that affects how they move through the world.

Sometimes a child might respond in a way that seems extreme to something small—these are often trauma responses. That's why we must show up with compassion, patience, and love.

**Please note:** All of the children we'll be serving live at Lydia Home. Only those who have been cleared to participate and have shown respectful behavior throughout the week will be allowed to join the activities.

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### Questions You Might Have

➤ **Do I need experience working with kids to volunteer?**

**It definitely helps!** If you don't have experience working with children I would recommend volunteering with Awaken Kids first. It helps to have a foundation when going into Lydia Home.

➤ **Can I volunteer with a friend or in a group?**

**Yes!** In fact, we're hoping to create a group of volunteers who go in pairs or teams. If you have someone specific in mind to serve with, they'll need to complete the full clearance process too (background check, fingerprinting, TB test, etc.).

➤ **What's the time commitment like?**

It's super flexible. Once cleared, you'll coordinate with Lydia Homes Volunteer coordinator and work something out based on your availability. Even if you can't commit weekly, having a rotating team helps make sure the kids still have something consistent.

➤ **What kind of activities would I host?**

Arts & crafts, board games, movie nights, seasonal parties, creative projects, sports, etc.—you can lead your own or assist with events Lydia Home is already planning.

➤ **What's Mentorship? (and how it's different)**

If you're interested in building a deeper connection with a child, mentorship might be something to consider! This looks a little different from general volunteering:

- ☐ You must be **over the age of 25**
- ☐ **One-year** commitment
- ☐ You are paired with one child to build a **consistent relationship**
- ☐ Meet with your mentee **in person twice a month**
- ☐ **Phone call** on the other weeks you don't meet in person

What's great is that you can plan this around your own schedule, but it does require steady consistency. Because of that, Lydia Home prefers mentors to focus just on mentoring, rather than bouncing between roles.

**Recommendation:** We suggest starting out as a general volunteer first—this gives you a feel for the home, the rhythm, and a chance to meet the kids.

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A Note:

The staff are phenomenal and do everything they can to give these kids pieces of a childhood they didn't ask to lose—after being removed from homes due to abuse, neglect, or other painful situations. Some of the kids don't see their parents at all. And while Lydia Home is giving them stability and care, there just aren't enough people to help carry the load.

A lot of people don't show up for these kids. We can.

To come in and host an activity, offer some fun, or just be a warm presence? That's a gift and I truly believe it's a gift God wants more of us to step into. Let's do this together!