

# **PEN PAL PROJECT**

## **Volunteer Packet 2018-2019 School Year**

Volunteer Connections  
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**The Pen Pal Project provides an opportunity  
for a child to develop a friendship  
with a caring adult  
while developing their writing,  
communication,  
and computer skills.**

**The Pen Pal has been coordinated by  
the Human Services Council's  
Volunteer Connections Program  
for over 25 years.**

# How does the Pen Pal Project work?

- Volunteer Connections utilizes the assistance of Volunteers to help facilitate school and volunteer letter transactions. Pen Pal Leaders communicate primarily via email – watch your in-box!
- In the summer, adult pen pals write their letters of introduction to the students. You will not be assigned a specific student until September, so this is a GENERIC letter. The best way to address this letter is “Dear Pen Pal”. In the first letter you will introduce yourself and tell your pen pal a little bit about your interest, hobbies, favorite things, what you did over the summer, etc. It is also recommended to ask questions to encourage the student to talk about themselves in the reply letter.
- Adults and students send letters to each other for one full school year, once per month. (Note: At times we have experienced slight delays due to school testing, outdoor school, illnesses, or holidays. Please be patient with the process.)
- Adult Pen Pals receive their letters by email *or mail depending on the classroom participating. Details will be provided once assignments are finalized.*
- Adult Pen Pals are welcome to email their pen pal letters to the email account that will be provided to them, mail via postal service their letters, or hand deliver their letters to the Human Services Council’s Volunteer Connections office.
- At the end of the school year, Pen Pals have one opportunity to meet each other: a fun dessert party! During early June, Volunteer Connections and the school host a pen pal dessert party at the school. This is an opportunity to meet and visit with your pen pals, and say your farewells. It is important that you make every effort to attend this party so that the student does not feel left out of the activity. The adult pen pal volunteers bring a dessert to share with their student(s). If you cannot provide one – don’t worry – we can help! RSVP will provide plates, utensils, cups and punch. Please arrive on time for the party; the children are very anxious to meet you.



## Pen Pal Project Guidelines:

- The Pen Pal Program is intended to benefit students and their literacy skills, and volunteers must participate with that purpose in mind. Some teachers may use it primarily for mentoring and building of friendships with adults. Other teachers may have a more structured project with a focus on letter writing, sentence structure, etc. Although this is a writing project, we ask volunteers to not correct or comment on the grammar and spelling of the student’s work.
- Volunteer Connections operates the Pen Pal Program; mail your letters and direct any questions to the Pen Pal Program Aide at Volunteer Connections, not to the schools or teachers.
- At the top of your pen pal letter and/or envelope, please include the student’s name, teacher’s name and school.

- The Pen Pal Program runs with the intention of keeping students, their parents, adult volunteers, and teachers safe and comfortable with participating in our program. To help facilitate this, the Volunteer Connections Program screens each adult Pen Pal through the National Sex Offender Registry and Washington State Patrol.
- Letters must be received on or before the due date. A late letter means your student will not get their letter on the day that the rest of the class does. Instead, the Program Aide will send a substitute letter in its place. As you can imagine, this is very disappointing to the student so please be sure to get your letters in on time.
- Adult pen pals who fail to send their letter on time for two months will be removed from the program. If you know you will be absent when your next letter is due, write one in advance.
- Adults must not send anything but their letter, although they may decorate their letter with stickers or pictures. Postcards, photographs and greeting cards are allowable. Gifts, food, money, etc. sent with any letter will be removed as they are not allowed. These items are also not allowed at the end of the year party.
- Your student may move out of the classroom during the school year. If that happens, we will make every effort to reassign you to a different student that joins in one of the classrooms during the following months.
- Adults and children meet only once at the end of the year party and do not share addresses or phone numbers, nor continue a relationship. Pen Pals do not write to each other after the school year.
- Volunteer Connections automatically records 30 minutes for every letter you write during the month. You do not need to send in your volunteer time for this project unless you feel it exceeds that amount.
- Letters are subject to screening for inappropriate content. Please **DO NOT** include: personal contact information, sexual content, reports of abusive behavior, religious persuasion (proselytizing), etc.
- You may receive a survey at the end of the school year asking for feedback on your experience with the Pen Pal program and engagement of your student. Those surveys are essential to our grants and funding so please take the few minutes necessary to complete the survey.
- **If a volunteer is not following guidelines the Program Aide or a Staff member will make every effort to help them address the situation. If no changes are made the volunteer WILL BE removed from the program.**



# (EXAMPLE LETTER)

Letter is on time

April 7, 2016

Ms. Christina

Crestline Elementary

Teacher and school  
are clearly noted

Dear Conrad,

Continuing a  
conversation

Thank you for your nice letter, it was so colorful! Flag football sounds like a fun way to hang out with your friends. When I was younger I played a lot of sports. I'm not a fan of Star Wars or movies at all but my friend likes it so we saw the movie together. I'd rather be outside, personally.



Letter is decorated but does not contain a gift

I sure am enjoying the sunshine and am looking forward to planting my garden. In addition to some flowers, I'm going to plant potatoes, peppers, onions and pumpkins. Do you have a garden at your house?

Content is grade-level appropriate, asks questions,  
and is written in paragraph format

Did you do anything fun on spring break? I spent some time with my grandkids while they were out of school and watched my nephew play baseball.

I'm really excited because I have three nieces who are going to have babies, two this month that are both boys and one in August which is a girl. Unfortunately, they all live in Arizona so I guess I might have to take a trip down there sometime this fall.

I'm looking forward to meeting you at the Pen Pal Party just before the end of school. Do you have a favorite dessert you want me to bring? Please let me know. I want to bring something you like.

Have a great month!

Corey

No identifying or  
contact information

Planning to attend  
Pen Pal Party

## Can't think of what to write about? Here are some ideas...

- Ask questions about what your pen pal likes to do, their families, pets
- Your gardening experience — funny looking vegetables, lack of success or what you did with the excess produce.
- Your family: spouse, children, grandchildren, or pets
- What you did this summer
- Yourself—age, how you would like to be addressed—Auntie, Grandma or your first name or ???
- Your pet, even pictures if you desire
- Where you went on vacation
- Send cards, even postcards from places you have visited
- You can send stickers, word puzzles—**Not a book** (that could be considered a gift), pictures, jokes (clean, of course)
- You can discuss a book you have read and suggest they read it too - if age appropriate
- Exchange simple recipes
- Ask what your Pen Pal would like as a treat for the Pen Pal Party early, because the last few months are very hectic for students due to testing
- How they are doing in school
- Share what your favorite part of school was, favorite subjects, did you get awards, etc.
- Hobbies

## WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Give your **home address**
- Give your **phone number**
- Ask for your Pen Pal's **Phone Number** or **Address** (this includes their home email address)
- Send **gifts**
- Meet face to face before the Pen Pal party.
- Contact the school directly-please contact Volunteer Connections 360-735-3690

## Links to pages for fun mazes & educational activities you can print off and share:

Maze Generator: <http://www.billsgames.com/mazegenerator/>

Word Search Creator: <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/WordSearchSetupForm.asp>

Math Puzzles: <https://www.mathsisfun.com/puzzles/>

Brain Teasers/Riddles: <http://www.squiglyplayhouse.com/BrainTeasers/>