



Enhancing Volunteer Engagement: Identifying Gaps and
Strategies for Increasing Utilization and Impact at the South
Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice

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Overview of Agency

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ or agency) is a state cabinet agency committed to serving South Carolina's youthful offenders. DJJ is responsible for providing custodial care and rehabilitation for youth who are incarcerated, as well as on probation or parole, or in community placement (SCDJJ, 2025). The agency is led by Executive Director L. Eden Hendrick and has over 1,100 employees across the 46 counties in the state. It operates 10 branches which includes the Office of the Chief of Staff, Legal Services, Community Services, Behavioral Treatment and Support Services, Facility Rehabilitation and Health Services, Educational Services, Safety and Law Enforcement Services, Physical Plant Management, Security and Operations, and Administrative Services (Appendix A, SCDJJ Organizational Chart).

DJJ serves an estimated 3,000 youth yearly. Its mission is “to impact and transform young lives, strengthen families, and support safer communities through targeted prevention and rehabilitation” (SCDJJ, 2025). The agency operates its own accredited school district, helps youth pursue career and workforce development opportunities, shows youth how to make a positive impact on their local communities, and provides rehabilitative and recreational services tailored to the individual needs of each young person under agency supervision (SCDJJ, 2025). Whether it's through tutoring, mentoring, religious guidance, supplementary supervision, or other support, volunteers provide much-needed enrichment to the services we provide to at-risk youth that target their rehabilitation.

Problem Statement

From ages 6 – 23, DJJ serves approximately 3,000 youths a year. DJJ has long understood that the juvenile justice system alone is an inadequate system to rehabilitate the state's at-risk youths. Juvenile rehabilitation provides youths with resources, assistance, and guidance to address the reason they've committed their offenses. With only 1100 employees, DJJ utilizes the support of approved volunteers to enhance services and programs offered to youth and their families.

According to DJJ's volunteer management system, to date DJJ has 890 approved volunteers. The agency defines volunteer as "a person providing unpaid ongoing services and/or support to SCDJJ" (SCDJJ policy 914, Volunteer Services). Volunteers can offer positive social role modeling through mentoring, build teamwork through recreational activities, support chaplaincy initiatives and provide spiritual guidance and developmental support, build youth leadership programs, and/or assist probation and parole officers in the community. Volunteers can serve in a number of capacities such as mentors, interns, one-time volunteers, seasonal, service- learning, community partners, and/or donor.

Although DJJ has an established volunteer program and an array of possible volunteer opportunities, DJJ lacks effective strategies and measurable goals for increasing volunteer utilization. The agency needs to identify existing gaps and explore methods to enhance volunteer utilization and the impact over time.

Data Collection

Volunteers contribute significantly to the success of rehabilitative programs by offering services that address educational, emotional, and social needs. Research

indicates that effective volunteer programs in juvenile justice systems can reduce costs, improve program outcomes, and foster community involvement (Wilson, 2021).

However, leveraging these benefits requires addressing systemic gaps in the management and utilization of volunteers. The purpose of this research is to examine gaps in DJJ's volunteer program and propose strategies to enhance engagement and efficiency.

To determine the current systematic gaps, research was conducted in the following areas:

- DJJ volunteer utilization
- Recruitment strategies
- National best practices

The review period of data collection was September 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024.

DJJ utilizes a volunteer management software or database to track its volunteers. The database can create and export reports, track hours, activities, and allows direct communication with volunteers. A Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey was emailed to 1,015 volunteers and was used to gain a baseline of volunteer's overall satisfaction of DJJ's volunteer program.

Interviews were conducted with twenty DJJ staff members who work directly with DJJ's volunteers. Each interviewee was asked the same 5 questions:

1. Do you utilize the agency's volunteers? If so, in what capacity?
2. Do you recruit volunteers? If so, how?
3. What barriers do you have utilizing volunteers?
4. In the last 3 months how often have you utilized volunteers?

5. How can the agency improve the utilization of its volunteers?

Research was also conducted of key states which have robust volunteer programs within their juvenile justice facilities.

Data Analysis

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice Volunteer Services program utilizes a volunteer management software designed to help engage volunteers. All of the volunteers are entered into this management software for all tracking and communication purposes. This database will be referenced throughout the report, as it is the repository of the agency's volunteers.

The SCDJJ Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey, was sent to 1,015 volunteers listed in the database (see Appendix B, SCDJJ Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey email and Appendix C, SCDJJ Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey). Of those, 506 emails were returned undeliverable. That means DJJ was unable to communicate with approximately 55% of the people listed in the database. This was an alarming revelation. Communication is key to a successful volunteer program. Though limited, email is one of a few ways DJJ informs volunteers of the updates of the agency as well as prospective volunteer opportunities. Without a correct email address, DJJ is limited with its communication ability with its volunteers.

It cannot be assumed that the remaining 509 survey emails sent were delivered to its intended recipient. Some emails may have gone to junk folders, or spam inboxes. Nonetheless, 64 volunteers did respond to the Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey. Of those 64 responses, DJJ received an average rating of 3.89, or 4 out of 5

stars, indicating their overall satisfaction with the agency's volunteer program (see Figure 1).

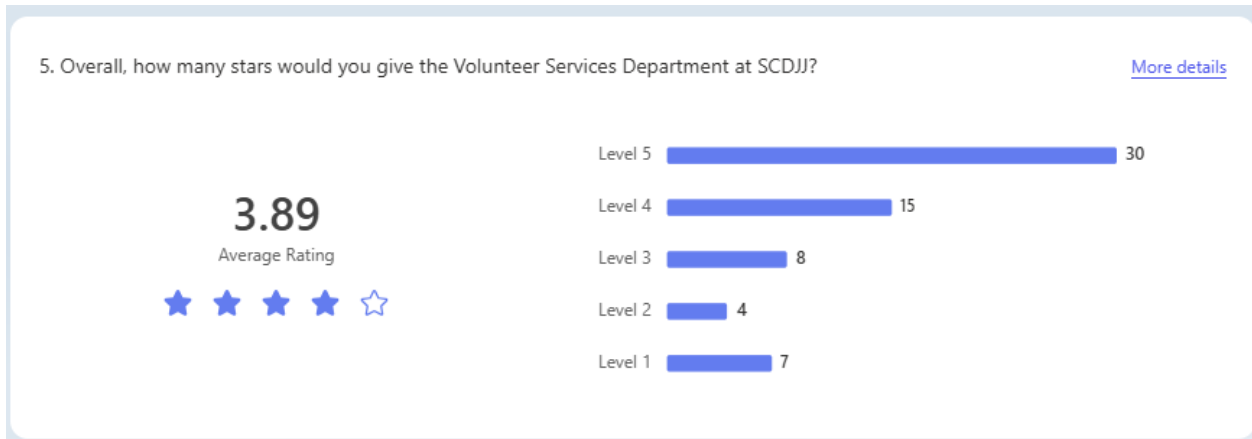


Figure 1

When parsed out in different categories, volunteers were overall satisfied with DJJ's volunteers services, such as the access to the volunteer application, processing time, volunteer orientation, volunteer opportunities, and communication. In Figure 2 below you can see DJJ's areas of opportunity to improve in the dark blue. The data revealed 12.5% of respondents are very dissatisfied with how long it takes to process applications and communication between the agency and volunteer.

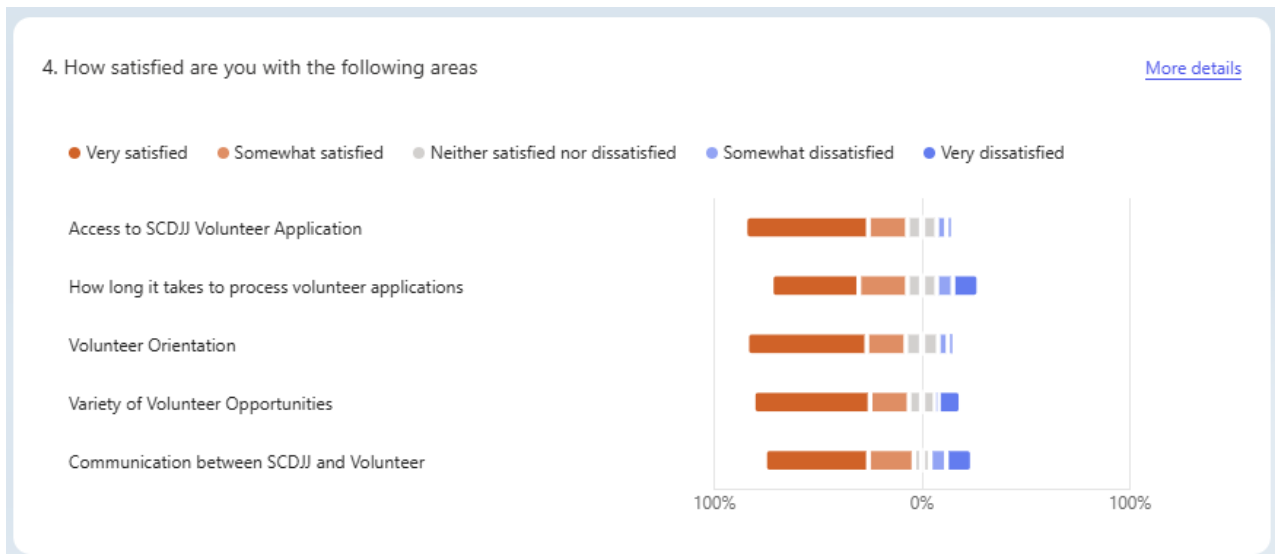


Figure 2

Informal interviews were conducted with twenty DJJ staff members. Each were asked the same 5 questions:

1. Do you utilize the agency's volunteers? If so, in what capacity?
2. Do you recruit volunteers? If so, how?
3. What barriers do you have utilizing volunteers?
4. In the last 3 months how often have you utilized volunteers?
5. How can the agency improve the utilization of its volunteers?

Responses were similar amongst those interviewed. Volunteers are utilized in several capacities such as, recreation, spiritual development, leisure activities, mentors, and interns. Most rely on the volunteer services staff to find volunteers to support their planned activities or programs. However, 10% of the respondents recruit their own volunteers. When asked how, many relayed using their personal connections as a source of volunteer recruitment. Overwhelmingly, all the respondents feel there is room for improvement in the utilization of the agency's volunteers. Better communication and better volunteer opportunities were the two most mentioned ways to improve volunteer utilization within the agency.

Research was conducted of other states correctional or juvenile systems for best practices in volunteer engagement and retention. Indiana's commitment to volunteer engagement within its correctional and youth development systems is exemplified by comprehensive training programs designed to prepare volunteers for meaningful and effective service. These programs emphasize safety, role clarity, and ongoing support, ensuring that volunteers are well-equipped to contribute positively (IDOC, 2025). A well trained volunteer base ensures that individuals feel confident and competent in their

roles. This leads to greater volunteer satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose. When volunteers receive proper training and ongoing support, they are more likely to remain engaged, reducing turnover and fostering long term commitment to the organization (Urban.org). Florida's Youth ChalleNGe Academy focuses on structured mentoring that demonstrates the importance of clear role definitions and ongoing support. While Georgia's juvenile justice program emphasizes flexible opportunities highlights the need for a variety of volunteer roles (FL Youth ChalleNGe, 2022; GA Youth ChalleNGe, 2025). Currently DJJ does not offer additional training for volunteers beyond the initial orientation, nor do they offer additional training specific to volunteer roles.

In totality, the data reveals the need for a multi-faceted approach to the enhancement of volunteer utilization. Systemic gaps are present in the following areas:

- Communication
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Recruitment
- Training

These gaps present significant challenges to DJJ's volunteer program. They hinder the program's ability to attract, engage, and retain a diverse and skilled volunteer base. Addressing these issues is not only essential for enhancing volunteer satisfaction but also for achieving DJJ's broader mission of rehabilitating and empowering at-risk youth.

Implementation Plan

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ and agency) has a strong foundation for involving volunteers in its rehabilitative and supportive services for youth. However, there are notable gaps in several key areas that limit the effectiveness of its volunteer program. By implementing targeted strategies in the following areas, DJJ can build a robust volunteer program that supports its mission and improves outcomes for youth.

Effective Communication

DJJ should establish a clear strategy for how and when the agency communicates with volunteers. The volunteer database is the cornerstone of their operations. It must be properly maintained, ensuring correct volunteer contact information. Doing this will facilitate timely and direct communication with volunteers so that any communication strategy DJJ uses is effective. Communication strategies should include regular updates, event reminders, and follow-ups. Consistent communication keeps volunteers informed and engaged. DJJ must diversify its method of communication. The agency can utilize various platforms such as email, social media, and the volunteer management software/database to ensure messages are accessible and cater to different preferences. Lastly the volunteer services program should create avenues for volunteers to share their thoughts and experiences. This not only makes them feel valued but also provides insights into programming improvement.

Diverse and Meaningful Volunteer Opportunities

DJJ should match volunteer tasks with individual skills and passions to increase engagement and satisfaction. Understanding volunteers' motivations can help in

assigning suitable roles. DJJ needs to clearly define roles and expectations to avoid confusion and ensure volunteers understand their responsibilities. DJJ should consider re-establishing programs for youths that involve volunteers, such as mentoring.

According to the National Institute of Justice, mentor programs are promising interventions that promote positive outcomes for at risk youth (IDOC, 2025). Providing a range of opportunities with varying time commitments to accommodate different schedules will make it easier for more people to get involved.

Expanding Recruitment Efforts

DJJ can expand its targeted marketing by nurturing established partnerships with universities, community organizations, and professional networks to attract diverse volunteers. DJJ needs to use its volunteer management software to its fullest extent. Adding an online application component that is user-friendly and efficient will simplify recruitment efforts. Hosting informational sessions and open houses to promote volunteer opportunities is another option to finding a well round divers volunteer force.

Training and Support

Ensuring that volunteers are adequately trained and supervised is essential to maintain the quality and effectiveness of services provided. Beyond the volunteer orientation offered to every volunteer, DJJ should develop a structured onboarding program that equips volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed for their roles. Ongoing training should also be offered in areas directly related to volunteering along with general agency updates. Also, pairing new volunteers with experienced volunteers would help build confidence and provide guidance. DJJ should create opportunities to celebrate volunteer milestones through awards, certificates, and appreciation events.

Potential Obstacles

It will be prudent for DJJ to identify potential obstacles to these strategies. Doing so is a great way to strengthen their implementation plan. Research shows that effective communication with volunteers is important to a successful volunteer service program. Without effective communication, none of the strategies listed in this report will be effective. One obstacle the agency uncovered is maintaining accurate volunteer contact information. Ensuring accurate information in the database could prove challenging if volunteers frequently change details. This could cause communication gaps and lead to misunderstandings or lack of buy-in. Additionally, diversifying communication methods might face resistance if volunteers are not tech savvy or have different communication preferences. Developing diverse and meaningful volunteer opportunities may face obstacles like matching volunteer skill or suitable roles within the agency's volunteer opportunities. Not having diverse volunteer opportunities hinder recruitment and retention efforts. Lastly, training and supporting volunteers consistently might be difficult if resources are stretched thin or if there's a need for specialized training programs.

Evaluation

To evaluate success DJJ should measure volunteer engagement through volunteer feedback surveys or questionnaires. These surveys or questionnaires should be designed to gather opinions on the program's effectiveness and their overall experience. Another evaluation could be tracking how many volunteers actively engage in activities or events. High participation rates and positive feedback indicate successful implementation. Additionally, DJJ could monitor their recruitment numbers and retention

rates. High retention usually means volunteers find value in their roles, while low retention could signal a need for improvement. Lastly, DJJ can assess the effectiveness of training and support by observing improvements in volunteer performance and confidence. The agency should consider creating a system for volunteers to report back on their experiences and any challenges they face. This will help continuously refine DJJ's approach in enhancing volunteer utilization across the state.

Conclusion

Enhancing volunteer engagement at DJJ requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses communication, recruitment, diverse volunteer opportunities, and training. By implementing targeted strategies and learning from successful programs in other states, DJJ can build a robust volunteer program that supports its mission and improves outcomes for youth. Investing in volunteer engagement not only benefits the agency but also strengthens community ties and promotes positive social change. By doing so, DJJ can elevate its volunteer program from a supportive function to a transformative force, driving meaningful change in the lives of youth and the communities they call home.

Volunteers are more than auxiliary support; they represent a vital link between the organization and the community it serves. Strengthening this relationship through targeted strategies will yield tangible benefits for DJJ, its volunteers, and the youth it seeks to rehabilitate.

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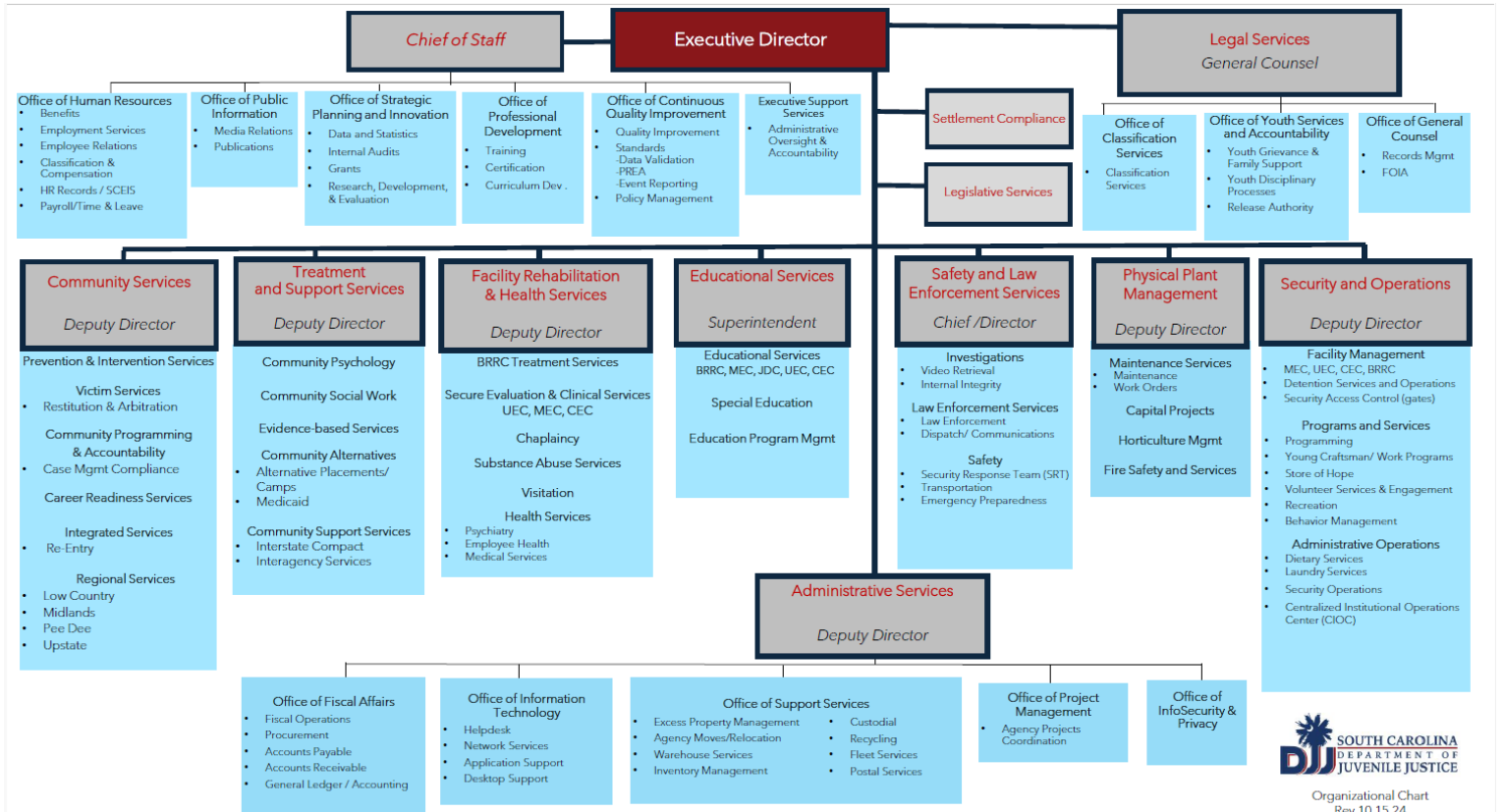
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Appendix A

SCDJJ Organizational Chart



Organizational Chart
Rev 10.15.24

Appendix B

From: [Andrea Foster](#)
To: [Andrea Foster](#)
CC: [paulmorse94@gmail.com](#); [endyamoten@yahoo.com](#); [pkmott44@yahoo.com](#); [dejam@usca.edu](#); [Lisamozinqomoring@gmail.com](#); [rdmuscatell@protonmail.com](#); [anna.mueller@cydc.org](#); [avoqueen76@gmail.com](#); [pecoljvungin55@gmail.com](#); [irene4u@nctv.com](#); [jim4u@nctv.com](#); [laronemurphy@outlook.com](#); [yvonne@murrayboyleslaw.com](#); [anthony1633@gmail.com](#); [eamyers@email.sc.edu](#); [billymyers25@gmail.com](#); [eneal117@yahoo.com](#); [aneapollioun91@gmail.com](#); [tneed19@yahoo.com](#); [pnicho12@scsu.edu](#); [sknicodemus@gmail.com](#); [nixdd@aol.com](#); [nixdd@aol.com](#); [mbnorman1@charter.net](#); [jnorris@emerge4unity.org](#); [tonrisdrums@gmail.com](#); [Lightbrightboxing@gmail.com](#); [stephen.nowell123@gmail.com](#); [jinnun23@icloud.com](#); [christembassyrockhillsc@gmail.com](#); [christembassyrockhillsc@gmail.com](#); [meghan.nyers@gmail.com](#); [qatesharley@gmail.com](#); [WLOconner04@att.net](#); [carolineolive53@yahoo.com](#); [oliver.keyatta@yahoo.com](#); [eortiz37@liberty.edu](#); [osoriosm@q.cofc.edu](#); [costmann@email.eds](#); [towens16@gmail.com](#); [mpadrick1963@gmail.com](#); [mpadrick1963@gmail.com](#); [adulging101org@gmail.com](#); [goodfriend1082@gmail.com](#); [jparker104@carolina.rr.com](#); [katherine_parris@yahoo.com](#); [aparrott@bgcpea.org](#); [ns12@email.sc.edu](#); [wcsimonjr@gmail.com](#); [assistant@predestinedoutreach.org](#); [simskamisha@yahoo.com](#); [raqalsims37@yahoo.com](#); [singleton.steg@gmail.com](#); [tsingleton@bethlehem.com](#); [jsistrunk813@gtmarion.edu](#); [arisebaee14@gmail.com](#); [newmaq3inc@gmail.com](#); [tsmall.romc@gmail.com](#); [absmalls@yahoo.com](#); [jsmalls0859@live.com](#); [hazelton.nasia@gmail.com](#); [tamikasmalls927@yahoo.com](#); [aqie864@gmail.com](#); [dcbqyc@gmail.com](#); [bradsmith@scfbins.com](#); [brodericksmit@yahoo.com](#); [carolyn.smith@healthsouth.com](#); [clsmith@comporium.net](#); [smithsmith7172@live.com](#); [geraldsmith1@gmail.com](#); [gsmith@ascresource.org](#); 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Subject: SCDJJ Volunteer: Quick 2 Minute Survey
Date: Monday, August 26, 2024 5:52:00 PM
Attachments: image002.png

Dear Valued SCDJJ Volunteers,

We greatly appreciate your dedication and contributions to the youth of the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice. To help us enhance our volunteer services across the agency, we kindly ask you to complete a brief 2-minute survey. Your feedback is invaluable and will assist us in better supporting and improving our volunteer programs.

Please click the link below to start the survey:

SCDJJ Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey

Thank you for your time and continued support.

Best regards,



Andrea Foster

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Appendix C



SCDJJ Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback Survey. Your responses are very important to us and will help enhance volunteer service opportunities throughout SCDJJ.

* Required

1. Are you a certified SCDJJ Volunteer *

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

2. How long have you been volunteering at SCDJJ? *

- Less than a year
- 1 - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- Longer than 10 years

3. How often do you volunteer with the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice *

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Seasonal
- Holidays
- Yearly
- I haven't started yet
- Never

4. How satisfied are you with the following areas *

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Access to SCDJJ Volunteer Application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How long it takes to process volunteer applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteer Orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Variety of Volunteer Opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication between SCDJJ and Volunteer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Overall, how many stars would you give the Volunteer Services Department at SCDJJ? *



6. Can I contact you about your answers? *

- Yes
- No

7. Enter your email address *

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