

Learning by Serving: Preparing to Serve at the Buddy Dance

Overview/Logistics: Thanks to all who signed up to help at the Buddy Dance. The dance is from 6:00-9:00 at the Citadel Alumni Center. Your orders begin at 5:30 because we want everyone to be able to eat dinner, but if you are able to eat and get down earlier we could really use help starting at 5:45. Uniform is ACUs. Please arrive ready to pile in and greet guests, who will be arriving in vans and cars about the same time you arrive on foot. **Before your arrival, please read, print, and sign this brief orientation.** Then, pile in and help some wonderful folks enjoy their night!

What is the Buddy Dance? The buddy dance is a dance for people who have disabilities, their families & group home staff, and those from the college and community who want to help them celebrate a fun night of eating, visiting, & dancing. We at The Citadel have partnered with the Advocacy Coalition for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) for almost 20 years to do this event, and hundreds of cadets have learned things about themselves and about people with special needs by serving. While some come to their first dance in order to meet a course requirement or get “extra credit”, many return for the sheer joy of participating. Both are legitimate means of learning while serving others.

How do I help? What do I do? From the moment you are in sight of the Alumni center, please leave behind your other concerns and identities and shift to the mindset and behavior of one who is there to **serve as a HOST(ESS)**. You are welcoming visitors to your “home” and you want them to have a great time. Immediately upon arrival sign in, turn in this form, sign in on the volunteer lists, and get to work. Give your full attention to the guests who are arriving and the cadets/faculty/grad students who will be directing volunteers to stations to help.

Priorities: Our main priorities for the night are **safety, guest comfort & affirmation, full inclusion, and fun**. These are specific jobs you may be doing to insure these priorities are addressed:

1. **Safety:** At the beginning and end of dances most volunteers need to be helping at doorways to see that every guest is greeted and assisted into or out of the building. All guests in wheelchairs and most guests arriving in vans need a 1:1 escort who helps them get safely into the main hall via ramps or steps and seated at a table. A few will stay near the door to see that no one wanders out during the dance. No guest should be out in the parking lot without an escort- staff or volunteer. Step in and/or get help if you see any guests or volunteers dealing with unwanted intimate contact. To prevent spread of colds and flu, wash and/or sanitize your hands before and after dance.

2. **Comfort and affirmation:** Please help your guests feel welcome, have a place to sit near others, have food and drink, find restrooms as needed, and be relaxed. Some are overwhelmed or over-excited by the noise and crowd so stay with them if they need a calm, soothing side-kick until they acclimate. Learn their names and chat with them by name whether they can respond verbally to you or not. Adjust your position to be at eye level and gently touch their hand or arm while talking to them (if you both are comfortable with that) to help initiate and maintain contact.

3. **Full inclusion:** An explicit goal of this event is to make an opportunity for people of different ages/stages/abilities to have fun together. It is VITAL that you **do not cluster with other volunteers at this event. Cadets: if the people standing with you are all wearing grey, you are in the wrong place.** Individually or in small groups of 2-3 please find guests who are alone or clustered with other guests, then go make eye-contact and conversation with them. If they want to, help them get near to or into the dance scene. Especially as small groups and circles begin to spontaneously form on the dance-floor, look over your shoulder often; be sure no one is behind you being blocked out or left out. Bring them in. Scan the sidelines for guests dancing alone. Bring them in if they want to join the group or go out and dance near/with them on the outskirts.

4. **FUN:** Lay aside whatever apprehensions or prior dance experience you may have had and surrender to the spirit of FUN and friendship. You will quickly notice that everyone is having their own fun in their own way and no one is watching, judging, or concerned about YOU. Make sure that all guests are having fun and it's all about them.

Who are our guests and what kinds of special needs might they have?

Most of our guests will be adults or older teenagers who have diagnosed disabilities. Some will be people whose disabilities are due to a genetic condition (e.g. Down syndrome), some will be secondary to accidents or injury (eg car wrecks, combat-related injuries, head injuries), some will have mental retardation or motor/coordination problems of unknown origin, and some will be progressive or degenerative conditions in people who lived earlier parts of their life with no disabilities. Some will be very sharp mentally but have difficulties controlling their body movement. Some will physically be typical for their age but have understanding that is more typical of a younger person, even in some cases childlike. Just as you are all Citadel students but no two of you have the same history, personality, strengths, weaknesses, or interests, so the people who share a diagnosis or group home are all distinct individuals. Please think and speak first about this PERSON (use "Person-first" language and concepts) and make a priority of getting to know the unique person. If you want to learn more about how to accommodate or understand their special needs, please do not hesitate to ask the faculty, staff, and more experienced volunteers on site. We are all here to learn.

Who makes this dance possible? While the Citadel –ACPD partnership that has always made these dances flourish is alive and well, there is no longer any funding for the space, vans, DJ, pizza, drinks, ice, paper products, and cookies that are needed. The Citadel Alumni Association generously supports this event by contributing the space- please thank them in word and deed. The dances now depend totally on donations for expenses- BE SURE TO THANK THE CADETS OF SECOND BATTALION WHO HAVE GENEROUSLY SPONSORED THIS DANCE!

Sign-out and evaluation: Before you leave the dance be sure to sign out and complete the brief evaluation from next to the sign-out sheets. THANKS!

I have read the orientation above and agree to support the priorities of safety, guest comfort & affirmation, full inclusion, and fun described above.

Volunteer signature: _____ **Date:** _____