



Volunteer Manual

2025





Care for Real's mission is to foster a healthy and equitable community by helping neighbors and families overcome food insecurity with dignity. Our work is guided by the core values of client-centered, community, dignity, reliable, and resourceful.

Through locations in Edgewater and Rogers Park, Care for Real (CfR) provides food, clothing, personal care items, pet food, referral, and additional services to thousands of neighbors and families each year.

Thank you for volunteering with Care for Real. We truly could not do it without you!



Care for Real Volunteer Program Contact Information
[Careforreal.org/volunteer](https://careforreal.org/volunteer)
Volunteer@careforreal.org
773-769-6182

Care for Real Volunteer Program

About Care for Real

Care for Real has a location in Edgewater at 5840 N Broadway and Rogers Park at 1545 W Morse. Care for Real welcomes neighbors and families facing food insecurity residing in the 60626, 60640, 60645, 60659, and 60660 zip codes to visit either pantry location up to once a week. Our neighbors who are unhoused are welcome to visit any day that we are open. Between our two locations and our Home Delivery program, we distribute food six days a week. Our food pantry clients can also request pet food, baby products, clothing closet appointments, and personal care items once every 30 days.

About Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to the foods needed to live an active, healthy life. Food insecurity is different than hunger. Hunger refers to the physical symptoms of not having enough food while food insecurity refers to the financial and other circumstances that lead an individual or members of a family to not have access to enough food.

Food insecurity can be chronic or episodic. According to the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD), one in 7 Cook County residents will experience food insecurity over the course of the next year. You can read more about Hunger and Food Insecurity in Chicago on the Greater Chicago Food Depository's [website](#).

Our Approach

Our goal is to help clients overcome food insecurity. We aim to serve all clients with compassion and dignity while they visit our pantries. It is our goal to also serve our clients efficiently. As Program Associate Caroline Covarrubias said, "We want to be a part of our clients' day, not their entire day." This is an aspect of dignified service. We believe everyone should have access to the food they both want and need to live a healthy life. An important component of volunteering at Care for Real is to treat all clients with deep respect, a friendly attitude, patience, and an understanding that it's not easy to ask for help. We do not place judgment on any client's food choices or requests. We invite clients to come each week so that they have regular access to fresh and nutritious foods.

It is our belief that communities are healthier and stronger when neighbors come together to help those in need.

You can see more about our impact in [this video](#).

Care for Real's work is grounded in trauma-informed care. The entire staff is trained in Trauma-Informed Care and De-Escalation to strive for a safe, inclusive environment for every member of our community. To learn more about Trauma-Informed Care and De-Escalation please view [this training](#).

Confidentiality is very important to us. We ask that anything you see or hear at Care for Real stays at Care for Real. Any identifying information about clients must remain confidential. The same goes for you. Use first names only and do not exchange phone

numbers, emails, or addresses. We want to make sure there are healthy boundaries between you and clients. If you see a client in the community and are by yourself and they are by themselves, feel free to say hello. If you are with someone or they are with someone, we ask that you kindly do not engage. Since there is a stigma in receiving social services, we never want any client to feel bad about coming here and getting services.

Getting Started

To begin volunteering at Care for Real, please visit careforreal.org/volunteer to fill out an application. We will then send you an email with the necessary steps to start volunteering.

Opportunities

We have volunteer opportunities seven days a week between CfR's two locations.

Roles include:

- Food packing: packing bags of groceries such as dry goods, bread, produce, meat, refrigerated goods
- Food distribution: load carts of groceries and bring to clients outdoors
- Marie's Clothing Closet: sort donations and organize clothing closet, support client closet visits
- Warehouse support: stock shelves and unload deliveries, including GCFD delivery day
- Home Delivery: pack or deliver groceries to home delivery clients
- Administrative, Event Support, and More

We welcome volunteers who are aiming to make a regular commitment, such as weekly, every other week, or monthly, and volunteers who sign up as their schedule permits. We will work with your schedule, and we are thankful for each hour you give to our community!

Age requirements:

Due to the nature of most volunteer roles, we cannot accept volunteers under the age of 8 for most roles. Volunteers under 14 must be accompanied by a parent or chaperone. View our youth volunteer age requirements [here](#).

Scheduling Your Shifts

All volunteer shifts must be scheduled in advance on the [VolunteerHub](#) website. We do not allow drop-in volunteers. After completing the orientation process, you will have access to the website to schedule shifts.

Please arrive on time for your shift so we can start our programs on time. If you have signed up for a shift, we are expecting you to arrive at the scheduled start time and stay for the entire shift. If you know in advance that you will need to adjust the scheduled start or end time, please make arrangements in advance via email.

We always appreciate communication about upcoming absences so we can plan to find a substitute. Volunteers can cancel or reschedule on the volunteer website before the

shift. We appreciate volunteers staying home when they are not feeling well. If you need help canceling a shift on the VolunteerHub website, please let us know so we can show you how to do so.

If you have challenges with scheduling shifts online, please take a look at our [VolunteerHub FAQs](#) or reach out via email.

Our Locations

You can choose to volunteer in Edgewater and/or Rogers Park. Please double check which location you have signed up for so that you go to the correct location.

Edgewater

5840 N Broadway

Walk through the gate on the south side of the building and enter through the automatic sliding door. This door may not be staffed before morning shifts begin at 8:30am.

Rogers Park

1545 W Morse

Come in through the Morse entrance at the United Church of Rogers Park.

There is no parking lot available at our sites. Do not park in the lot at the Edgewater location as it is used for distribution. Street parking is available at both locations, and both are easily accessible via public transportation. There are bike racks in front of our Edgewater location.

Your First Shift

Please arrive on time. When serving a morning shift, we ask that volunteers not arrive earlier than 8:30am as staff use this earlier time to prepare for the day. When you arrive, be sure to let someone know you are there for the first time. They will show you where to sign in and how to get a nametag. Save your VolunteerHub username and password on your mobile device to use the QR code sign in.

All volunteers must sign in and out of shifts. Care for Real relies on volunteers to record their hours. Volunteer hours are reported for our annual audit process to maintain our nonprofit status. Volunteer hours are also included in fundraising requests to keep Care for Real open and serving the community.

What to Wear

Please wear comfortable clothing that you can bend and lift in and closed-toed shoes. When choosing what to wear, please use your best judgment, recognizing that we are working in an active setting and serving our community both outdoors and indoors.

Examples of our volunteers and staff team in action can be found on our website and social media if you'd like to see what folks typically wear at our sites. Clothing like t-shirts, long sleeve tees, sweatshirts, shorts, or jeans are common choices. If you would like a CfR t-shirt, please ask a staff member.

Please note that our sites are warehouse settings, and there are frequent opening and closing of outside doors. You will find that when it is cold outside, it is cool inside, and when it is hot outside it tends to be warm inside. Please plan to dress for the weather so that you are comfortable.

What to Bring

We ask volunteers to limit what they bring with them (especially valuables), as locker space is limited. If you need a locker, please ask a staff member for assistance.

Feel free to bring your own water or coffee along with you. If you are volunteering for a full day, you are welcome to bring your own lunch and put it in the fridge. Ask a staff member where you can store your lunch for the shift.

Training

Training will take place during your first shift. We pair experienced volunteers with new volunteers to help answer questions and to help you feel comfortable. If anything is unclear following training with a seasoned volunteer, please ask a staff member for assistance.

If you are interested in opportunities requiring additional training, such as Home Delivery driving, Reception Desk, Administrative Support, or Client Registration, please check the appropriate box under Affiliations on VolunteerHub or send us an email.

Phone & Headphone Use

Volunteering is all about being present and building community together. To help keep everyone safe and connected, we ask that you limit phone use during your shift. If you need to use your phone, please step aside to do so safely. Most volunteer roles aren't suited for headphones, as they can make it harder to communicate and stay aware of your surroundings. Please ask us if you have special circumstances so we can address it together. You can always ask if wearing headphones is appropriate for a given role, and we will help you out.

Friends and Guests

If you have a friend or family member that would like to volunteer with us when they are visiting, please have them fill out a volunteer application. Send us an email letting us know about their visit so we can help get them scheduled for this one-time shift. All volunteers, even one-time guests, need to sign up for an account. Thank you for bringing your special people to volunteer with us!

About Our Food

We receive approximately half of our food from the Greater Chicago Food Depository each week. The other half comes from food rescue partners like Whole Foods and Trader Joe's, as well as from community donations. The food that has been donated to Care for Real is intended for the clients of our food pantry program. Volunteers are not permitted to take food home from volunteer shifts. If you need food assistance, we are here to support you. Please ask a staff member to connect you with a member of the Programs team so they can help you access our food pantry program. More information is available at careforreal.org/get-help.

Volunteers Who Are Clients

Please know that we do not expect any type of volunteer service from our clients. Our services are a gift to you. However, if you do want to volunteer with us, we welcome you! Please plan your visit to receive services at a different time than your volunteer shift. If you need help planning out your food pantry and volunteer schedule, please reach out to our programs team at volunteer@careforreal.org.

Group Volunteers

To schedule a group to volunteer with us, please create an account at careforreal.volunteerhub.com and under the Affiliations checkboxes, be sure to click, "I want to organize a group of volunteers." Reply to the automatic email with the necessary information and a staff member will get back to you. If you are a member of a group and would like to attend your group's activity, please use the Group Link we provided to your group contact.

Youth Volunteers

We love working with youth volunteers. When filling out the application, please be sure to check the Affiliation checkbox for Youth Volunteers. Volunteers aged 15+ can volunteer without a parent or guardian after completing a Volunteer Orientation and a waiver. Learn more about youth volunteer opportunities [here](#). Email us at volunteer@careforreal.org for more information and availability. When a youth volunteer fills out an application, their parent/guardian will be sent an e-mail asking them to sign the waiver. If you do not receive this e-mail, log back into your child's account and ask to have the waiver sent again.

Special Needs

Please let staff know if you have any special needs or injuries that require a modification or if you need help with an assigned task. We will do our best to find the right fit for you.

Challenging Situations

If at any time you feel a situation is escalating or help is needed, please get a staff member right away. We are here to help with these situations, and you should never try to handle them on your own. Please tell a staff member, "**I need you now.**" and this is our cue to immediately respond.

Weather

We do our best to operate our outdoor food pantry programs in all weather conditions. If the conditions are dangerous to people outdoors, we will make a decision to pause or cancel the distribution. Visit careforreal.org to find any emergency closures listed on our website.

Emergencies

In an emergency, please move away from the situation and wait for staff instruction. In some cases, volunteers may be directed to either go inside or move to another area. The pantry program may be paused or stopped due to the situation. Please always use your best judgment regarding your own safety. After an emergency, staff are available

to debrief what happened and discuss your concerns. Please tell us if you want to discuss a situation that occurred.

If you have not yet left your home to go to a scheduled shift and you are concerned whether a shift may be canceled due to nearby events or weather conditions, visit careforreal.org for updates or send us an email.

Community Service and Court Ordered Service

We welcome those in need of Mandated Service hours. Please check the proper box under Affiliations so we can send you relevant information about your community service.

For Court-Ordered Community Service, please note, we cannot accept those serving hours for theft, harassment, or violent crimes.

All volunteers completing required service hours must sign in and out for their shifts so that we can provide accurate documentation. To receive a letter confirming the hours have been completed, please send us an email request three business days in advance.

Waiver

You can read our Photo Release, Confidentiality Agreement, Volunteer Waiver, and Anti-Harassment policy [here](#).

Stay Involved

There are many ways to become more involved with Care for Real.

- Sign up for future volunteer shifts or organize a volunteer group with your work, neighbors, or friends
- Follow us on [X \(Twitter\)](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)
- Make an [in-kind](#) or [financial contribution](#)

We look forward to welcoming you to volunteer with us. Please let us know if you have any questions.

With gratitude,
The Care for Real Programs Team