Tips to Lower Your Stress and Increase Your Fun!

Thank you for volunteering at the Montessori booth at the State Fair this year! Many of you have joined us before, and some are brand new! Regardless of your experience, your time will be well spent reviewing the content in the Volunteer Information Repository we have prepared for volunteers. There is a short video overview, maps, feedback on interacting with visitors, and more!. Quick prep:

Prepare to be extra-diligent about being 15 minutes early to your shift (ESPECIALLY the Opening Shift at 9)

- We have had 80% of volunteers late to their shifts. They often arrive stressed and if it's busy, their fellow volunteers are stressed also. Planning to arrive 15 minutes early allows you a small buffer to not be late, but is intended for shift-hand-off and short networking window for you to meet those volunteering before you! This preparation will ensure you arrive relaxed and on time to relieve those volunteering before you.
- **It takes at least 30 minutes longer** to get to *and through* the fair than you think - more when it's busier. Make a transport/parking plan and start out *at least 30 minutes* earlier than you think you need to leave yourself plenty of time. If you happen to get the Education Building very early, get a snack nearby or check out the crafts in the adjacent building for a few minutes!
    - Buses at park and rides can be full and you need to wait in a (sometimes very long) line to get a shuttle. Don't be afraid to ask those in line if you can go to the front in order to be on time to volunteer and invite them to come with their children to "play at a space just for them" in the Education building.
    - You don't set the movement pace once you hit the gate - ticket, entrance, and bag checks lines can be extraordinarily long. Once you enter, the flow of people decides the speed of your walk. Hint: Folks meander about trying to keep track of their group and wander slowly trying not to drop their treats - its not fast!
- Volunteer transport tip: Parking East of the fair so that you enter through the front gates on Snelling will allow you to get ***through*** the fair most quickly. The Education Building is directly around the corner to the North (right) inside the front gate. Once through the front gate, you will be to the booth in 5 minutes, even on the busiest days. If you take the bus, account for at least a 30-minute walk with the crowd from one end of the fair where the Transport Center is located to the other end where the Education Building is located.
- **SPECIAL NOTE FOR OPENING SHIFT:** If you are volunteering from 9-12, you must arrive early or visitors will be in the booth before you! The buildings open promptly at 9 a.m. and people flood in.

Prepare to be busy (less on the 6-9 p.m. shift)

- Our visitors tend to be at the fair in largest numbers from 10-5 p.m. (depending on weather). As such, these hours are likely to be the busiest and fastest paced. These hours span three of the offered shifts at the Montessori Booth. 6-9 p.m. is generally a quieter time with less than five families per hour. Be mindful to support each other well during the busy times working together! The earlier and later hours of the day are great for deeper connections with families, and with fellow volunteers, so they are special volunteer times!

Prepare to engage recruiting passersby INTO the booth to INTERACT with booth

- You may find that you need to very intentionally invite families into the booth from the aisle. Fairgoers are not accustomed to being able to interact with spaces in the building the way they can at the Montessori booth. If you are not busy working with those already in the booth, pleas place yourself near the front and look for families with children or those looking curiously toward the booth and Invite them in to experience and learn more.

Prepare to use inviting language for the fair-going audience (HINT: May not be how we talk in a classroom!)

- Volunteers often find themselves using the words "play" or "break" to invite people in because this is what fairgoers experience when they visit our booth - as in "Would you like to join us to play for a few minutes?" or "Would you like to take a break from walking for a few minutes?" We have chairs for parents that are appreciated! Of course, with parents that choose to spend some time and allow their children to join us, we reframe the expectation that this is education and just like at Montessori schools, the children the booth are working very hard....it just looks and feels like play because of the genius of the method!

Prepare for diversity of visitors

- The work in the booth has been likened to a Montessori Open House that reaches state-wide and hundreds of people a day from just one location! You will interact with people who have never heard of Montessori, as well as current families who thrill to find "their school" in the Education building. You will also get to meet alumni that wander through nostalgically and parents of alumni who proudly state "My child went to Montessori!".
- This is also a great opportunity to help connect new people to a new career in Montessori education! There is nothing to fear in children not having Montessori experience. Most are interested and quickly immersed in the materials. Don't worry if a 10 year old is interacting with toddler materials, etc. You can invite them to explore further and direct to options more engaging and its just great if they are attracted to materials at a lower plain of development that are more accessible in the short-time they have (parents sometimes rush children along despite children's interest).

Prepare to share allow your experience in the booth to be different than a classroom

- Kathy Coskran, long-time leader of Lake Country, shares her wisdom: the *Montessori booth at the Fair* is ***NOT*** *a Montessori classroom at school.* In fact, its magic could be spoiled trying to make it such. It's an amazingly unique public Montessori experience-space unto itself!
- Preparing this environment and its volunteers for the diversity and pace of guests is very different. Consider:
    - **The material choices offered and layout are intentionally different** - accessible to those without deep Montessori experience, simplified to attract quick-interest, unusually integrated (i.e. math and language together or multiple levels together) due to space constraints or to illustrate a progression.

    - **"Classroom Management" is tailored to invite and allow curiosity exploration with less boundaries**. As long as everyone and the materials are safe, exploration is quite unlimited (i.e. teens may curiously explore with the toddler ball tracker for 20 minutes dropping much more than the balls into it, or a preschooler may take the trinomial cube apart attempt to make towers from the pieces). In five years, we have had only one broken glass (we learned to place the rug more completely under the weaning table!) and have not lost pieces of materials (though the tiniest pink tower cube can end up in the booth next store!). It is also rare that parents insist their children leave before "the mess is cleaned up", so even if they have made a mosaic on a working using three different materials parts, they all get put back before they leave!

    - **The presentation style is adapted to support very quick yet meaningful connections** - meeting the visitor wherever they are and leaving an inspired impression on the child and the parent (i.e. in the example above, a volunteer may engage with the teens and ask questions that bring understanding about the physics of a disc-shaped object vs. a ball.) Presentations and work often happen on the floor without a table or mat and are modified for quick attention-grabbing and to the time the parents seem to be allowing (sometimes as little as 10 minutes...then the often stay when they see the work unfold!).
- When you surrender the stress some of this would give you in the classroom and allow this fast-moving "Montessori Open House" to inspire you uniquely, the magic of Montessori is palpable with nearly every encounter. Amid unbelievable chaos of the fair around them, the children find the peace of deep concentration almost immediately in the Montessori booth!.

Prepare to share Montessori in Minnesota basics

Key facts that are fun to share:

1) Montessori is a method and not a school. We have nearly 200 Montessori schools using the method in MN with approximately 15,000 families served! (you can provide them the "Montessori Essentials" handout with the school list)

2) Montessori starts at birth and extends through high school. Minnesota has one of the highest numbers of Montessori high schools in the nation. (you can point to the smaller screen that shows the adolescent work and graduates).

3) Montessori options are funded both privately and publicly and those that are funded only privately often offer scholarships to ensure access to all. (Then share the directory that shows contact information and the funding source of each school in the state).

4) Our largest Montessori schools in the state are publicly funded and accessible without cost. (You can reference the maps on the table and tell visitors that there is an interactive map on the mnmn.org website that they can use to navigate options by location)

5) Working in Montessori is very special and exciting. We have a shortage of teachers and are lucky to have multiple training options for those interested in career options (You can had out the hand out with our training offerings in the state).

6) Connecting to Montessori and improving access to the method is easy with the Minnesota Montessori Network. Instruct visitors to follow the "Text to Join" signs and join the network to explore their interest, deepen their connection, and learn more! Everyone with an interest in Montessori is encouraged to join!