

How to Start a Peer-to-Peer Companionship Project (like Companion Connections)

What is it?

Companion Connections is a social-support initiative that pairs people who are open to building meaningful companionships and supports them as those relationships grow. This guide can help you create your own peer-to-peer Companionship Project.

1. Develop a Website

I'm not a web designer, so I hired someone—and he may be able to help you too. A website makes everything easier because you can:

- Share your project summary
 - Host your applications
 - Send out clickable links to everyone
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2. Write a Summary of Your Project's Purpose

Our purpose statement reads:

“Companion Connections endeavors to unite individuals with life challenges—particularly those who have encountered mental health, substance use, and/or criminal justice systems—by promoting peer-to-peer companionships that generate hope, trust, mutuality, stability, community involvement, and personal growth.”

You can see more here:

<https://cityvoicesonline.org/companionship-description/>

3. Form a Team

I reached out to people in my network through emails, texts, and voicemails, letting them know I was creating a companionship project. I shared the project summary and invited them to support the effort.

Most of the work will fall on one or two people, but you'll need help spreading the word. I formed an advisory group and sent biweekly update emails. They offered guidance when I faced challenges like high turnover, low participation, or difficulty finding participants.

Seek advice from people connected to the communities you want to engage. You'll need help promoting your project to attract volunteers and people seeking companionship.

I began with my personal email list. Soon, the first volunteer applications arrived. Later, I expanded to Facebook.

4. Make Short & Simple Applications

I created one application for both Volunteers and Companions:

<https://forms.gle/FNWSbjSiDJLByWWc8>

Our website allows applicants to download a PDF of their completed form, and it sends a copy to my email. It also prevents submission until all required fields are completed.

5. Interview the Volunteers

I interviewed each volunteer for about an hour using questions that helped me understand whether their heart was in the right place. I wanted to ensure they understood the project's purpose, their role, and whether they could set gentle boundaries and navigate challenging situations.

See Appendix A for sample questions—you can modify or add your own.

6. Attracting Volunteers & Companions

In addition to contacting my network, I used Facebook to find both volunteers and people seeking companionship. I spread the word among colleagues, peer specialists, Zoom groups, and people I met at conferences.

I gathered volunteers first. After interviewing and accepting about ten, I asked them to be patient while I searched for participants seeking Companions.

Limitations included the need to understand English and have access to a phone, internet, or computer. Volunteers and participants can be from any English-speaking country as long as they can communicate.

I created a flyer for Companion-seekers and posted it on Facebook. It took time—finding volunteers was easier than finding participants at first.

7. Pairing Volunteers with Companions

This part is genuinely enjoyable. I reviewed applications from both volunteers and participants, drawing on what I learned during interviews and conversations.

I sent the volunteer's application (without contact info) to the participant, and the participant's application (without contact info) to the volunteer. I asked whether they felt comfortable with the match.

If both agreed, I introduced them by email, encouraged them to exchange contact information, and let them take it from there.

8. Agreements for Volunteers & Companions

Our agreements ask volunteers and participants to:

- Communicate for at least one hour every two weeks
- Commit to the project for at least six months

Ideally, companionships will continue beyond the project. Agreements aren't always followed perfectly, so be prepared to compromise.

See Appendix B for a sample agreement.

9. Biweekly Check-Ins with Volunteers and Companions

I check in with volunteers and participants every two weeks by text, email, phone, or Facebook. If someone is having difficulty with their Companion, I help them work through it while keeping both perspectives in mind.

Disagreements happen. Sometimes personalities clash. It's important to check in because people rarely reach out on their own when challenges arise.

If a companionship still isn't working after attempts at mediation, they can request a new match or step away from the project. This happens occasionally—but many companionships flourish.

You don't need to be a professional mediator. This project teaches you how to hold space and listen non-judgmentally.

10. Stay Organized

I created a folder for Companion Connections on my computer and added subfolders for volunteers, participants, flyers, spreadsheets, documents, and more.

I used Excel to track:

- Pairings
 - Relationship status
 - Challenges
 - Last contact
 - Notes
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11. Evaluations

After nine months, I sent a survey to ten volunteers to gather feedback. An advisor helped me create the survey using his software, but SurveyMonkey works just as well.

Save your results—they'll show you what's working and what needs improvement.

12. Free Assistance with Your Project!

Feel free to contact me (Dan Frey) with questions, concerns, or even for emotional support as you build your own project. This work has the power to transform lives through companionship.

You can call or text me at (929) 884-3564 or email cityvoices1995@gmail.com. I sincerely look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix A

Companion Connections Interview Questions

I encourage you to be open and honest when responding to my questions. You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You will have an opportunity to ask me any questions that come to mind.

General

- What is your understanding of our program?
- Can you commit to one hour every two weeks with your Companion via phone or text and a minimum of 6-months to the overall program?

Compassion

- Tell me about a time when you were sensitive or compassionate to a person who was in bad shape

General

- Let's role play how you would "shoot the breeze" or engage in small talk with a Companion

Trust

- Tell us what steps you take to build trust with your Companion?

Boundaries

- Under what circumstances would you create boundaries with your Companion and how would you go about it?

Hypothetical

- How would you respond to a person experiencing psychosis, paranoia or an altered state from drugs? (role play)
- How would you handle if someone wanted to talk about their suicidal thoughts that have lately been disturbing their peace of mind?

Responsibility (Ownership for consequences)

- I'd like you to think about a time where you made a mistake in a relationship and how you dealt with the consequences.

Finally

- What do you think your greatest challenge will be in being someone's Companion?
 - What do you hope to learn about yourself and about other people from this program?
 - Do you have any questions for me?
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Appendix B

Companion Connections Volunteer Agreement

<https://cityvoicesonline.org/agreement/>

Print Name: _____

Signed,

Date: _____

FAQ & RESOURCES

Q: What's the point of doing this? What do I get out of it?

A: You don't need divine approval from Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, or Buddha to make this work meaningful—though if they're keeping score, you'll probably earn a few cosmic gold stars. But the real reward happens right here on Earth: the warm, steady feeling that comes from knowing you've made life a little easier for another human being.

There will be frustrations and challenges, of course. Growth always asks something of us. But along the way, you'll gain valuable skills—enhanced social skills, project coordination, supervision, organization, research, and social media know-how, to name a few.

You'll get to know volunteers and participants, and many of these connections can evolve into genuine companionships of your own. What we're building is community—something people deeply need in order to feel connected, grounded, and supported. “No person is an island.”

And you're not doing this alone. I'm committed to supporting you every step of the way as you take on this meaningful work.

Q: How do I promote the project on social media?

A: I primarily used Facebook. Many of my Facebook contacts know people living with mental health or substance use challenges, as well as peer support workers. I simply asked:

- 1. whether they knew anyone who might want to volunteer, and**
- 2. whether they knew anyone facing life challenges who could benefit from a supportive Companion.**

I created a Facebook group for Companion Connections where I posted flyers, inspirational quotes, and related updates.

Success doesn't happen overnight. You have to commit, show up, roll with the punches, and stay with it. And you're not doing it alone—I'm here as a free

consultant whenever you need guidance. Leave a message, email, or text, and I'll get back to you so we can work through things together.

<https://www.score.org/> - SCORE is group of retired business professionals that offer free business consultations for a period of time

<https://relationshipsproject.org/about/> - This project was also founded to help people to build and maintain meaningful relationships.

https://www.madinamerica.com/2020/03/survivor-led-mutual-aid-projects/?mc_cid=20dc6d90c0&mc_eid=3748861603 – “Psychiatric survivor-led mutual aid projects thrive during the times of crisis” from Mad in America.