

Some Things To Consider

You can search for reading programs on your own or find one with the help of your local United Way. Regardless of what kind of reading program you might choose to get involved in, here are some steps to take and things to consider:

Steps to take:

- Establish how much time you have available and if you would rather read to children, be a tutor or be a mentor – each activity will have a different time requirement.
- Think about the places where you can volunteer. It may be as simple as to talk to people in church who know one or more children that could benefit from your generosity.
- Check the requirements. Depending on your role (reader, tutor or mentor), you may have to be trained. In addition, because you are working with children, it is likely you will need a background check done.

Things to Consider:

- **Know your community educational issues and players.** Whatever you decide to do, you should understand your community challenges and barriers to educational success. You should also understand its assets to build on them. Read the local newspapers, do a web search and/or participate in the local school board meetings. You will learn about the problems and the programs addressing them. You will also meet other people who know, care about and have the power to change education in your community.
- **Set clear goals and expectations.** Even in an informal situation, it pays to set up clear goals and expectations and to have the buy-in of all those involved. Periodically providing feedback and asking for feedback will help you fine tune your volunteering experience and be successful in the long run.
- **Test the waters before you jump in.** If you are new to volunteering with small children, you may start as a volunteer reader. Being a reader is fairly simple; readers just have to know how to read, commit to reading to children on a regular basis and share the joy of reading a story aloud to children.
- **Explore the possibilities.** If you are ready for a bigger challenge, you can become a tutor. Volunteer tutors also go to classrooms and other educational environments to help children learn reading skills. Typically one tutor is paired with one student, and there may be a specific curriculum that the volunteer is asked to follow. Because of the one-on-one relationship, a fairly frequent time commitment may be necessary. Mentors have an even deeper relationship, usually to a single child.
- **Share the joy.** As you read, tutor or mentor, you may let others know about it. You may blog or use Twitter to share your experiences with friends and people with similar interests.
- **Recruit others.** After hearing about your experience, others may want to join you. Be sure they share your understanding of the issues and your commitment to the children. Creating your volunteering group and volunteering together multiplies your impact and can be a lot of fun.