

Registration Information FAQ Westborough ASP 2021

What are ASP and Westborough ASP?

Appalachia Service Project (ASP) is a Home Repair Ministry headquartered in Johnson City, TN. It brings thousands of volunteers annually from around the country to rural Central Appalachia to repair homes for low-income families. It makes homes warmer, safer, and drier for families and provides transformational service experiences for volunteers.

ASP was founded in 1969 by the Rev. Glenn “Tex” Evans, connecting the energy of youth with the deep needs of the poor. Since then 393,643 volunteers have repaired 17,866 homes, and in the process Appalachian families, volunteers, and staff have been immeasurably blessed. Over 16,000 volunteers participate in ASP each year.

By transforming faith into ASP service, volunteers respond to a specific need: housing. By putting aside their own needs and desires, ASP volunteers free themselves to share talent, love, and concern with the people of Appalachia and with one another. More important than construction know-how is a willingness to enter the communities and homes of Central Appalachia with sensitivity, concern, and love — accepting people right where they are and just the way they are.

Westborough ASP is sponsored by First United Methodist and St Luke the Evangelist churches, both of Westborough, MA, and organizes teams of local volunteers to participate in ASP. The group began in 1990, and currently runs two trips a year – a summer youth trip and a fall adult trip.

This packet is about the youth trip. More information can be found about both organizations at their respective websites: www.asphome.org (ASP) and www.westboroughasp.org (Westborough ASP).

Who can participate?

The Westborough ASP Youth program is open to high school youth in 9th grade and above during the 2020-2021 school year. We also have spots for Leaders-In-Training (LITs: graduated high school in 2020 through age 21) and adult Group Leaders (GLs: age 22 and over). Construction experience is extremely helpful, but not a requirement as long as you are willing to pitch in and learn on the job.

Our program depends on caring, committed GLs to organize, transport, train, and lead our youth. See the “What is a GL?” sheet for more information. If you know someone who would be a good GL, please let Jonathan know: asp@firstumchurch.com. We will be holding another Zoom call for prospective GLs on Tuesday, Oct 6 at 7:30 pm. See www.westboroughASP.org for the links.

What kind of projects do we do?

Volunteers work in crews of 6-7 people on a variety of different projects, including tasks such as strengthening foundations, patching floors, fixing roofs, building walls, repairing stairs, digging drainage channels, installing sheetrock, insulating, painting, and installing siding. No matter how much or how little building experience you have, we will match your skill level to an appropriate project.

When and where do we go?

So far, we know the dates of our trip: **July 10-18, 2021**. Our group may be assigned to the Appalachian portions of any of 5 states: Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, or North Carolina, to which we will travel by van caravan. We won't know specifically where until next spring. During our time there, we will stay in an ASP Summer Center, generally set up in a school or community center building, sleeping on floors and eating in the cafeteria. Because our group is so large, we expect to be split across two locations.

What does our week look like?

Departure Day (Saturday)

5:30 am Arrive at FUMC lot; Announcements, prayer, pictures, last-minute loading
6 am-6 pm Drive. Arrive at a church on the route to stay overnight
6 pm Dinner, evening program, organizing
11 pm Lights Out

Arrival Day (Sunday)

6:30 am Wakeup
6:30-8 am Cleanup, pack, morning worship
8 am-2:30 pm Drive
2:30-5 pm Arrive at your center; move in; meet other groups.
5-5:30 pm Staff introductions; review center rules, expectations, daily schedule, community information, center chores, etc.
6 pm Dinner
7 pm Prepare vans for work week, representatives visit project sites
11 pm Lights Out; rest for a big day tomorrow

Work Days (Mon-Fri)

7 am Rise and shine
7:30-8:30 am Devotions, breakfast, make lunch, load supplies
8:30-4:30 pm Work day with noon lunch break at the work site.
5-6 pm Crew check-in for project updates, supply requests, etc.
6-7 pm Dinner
7-10 pm Center clean-up; evening activities (fellowship, reflection, sharing, singing, playing, sometimes a guest speaker such as a local musician or artist); free time
10:30-11 pm Wind Down and Quiet Time; reflect on the day and settle in for a well-deserved sleep
11 pm Lights Out

Departure Day (Saturday)

7 am Pack, center clean-up, and good-byes.
8 am-5 pm Drive. Arrive at church on route to stay overnight
6 pm Dinner, evening program with reflections and debrief of the week's experiences
11 pm Lights Out

Arrival Day (Sunday)

7:00 am Wakeup
7-8 am Cleanup, pack, morning worship
8 am – 4 pm Drive
4-5 pm Unpack and clean out vans. Put things away. Go home!

What expectations does ASP have of volunteers?

We expect that our volunteers will focus on meeting the needs of those they have come to serve, and support their fellow workers who are trying to do the same.

The one need that we know that the families we work for will have is home repair. However, other needs that all people have include respect and sensitivity. The people we serve are important to God, and we strive to treat them as such. For some, knowing that someone else cares about them is just as important as the repairs.

Our ASP group takes youth volunteers away from home for a week, and puts them in an Appalachian community, working in people's homes. Supervision is provided by the ASP Group Leaders (GLs), who are adult volunteers traveling as part of our group, and by the ASP Staff, who work fulltime for ASP, and run the center locations where we will stay and organize the work projects. In order to work effectively and safely, we expect youth volunteers to follow rules and guidelines set by that leadership.

The general ASP rules are in the document "Required Reading-Rules & 3s". They are not negotiable, so please make sure you read them and understand what you are signing up for. People have been removed from the trip for failing to live up to them. Group leaders and staff may create additional rules as necessary to address the specific situations we find ourselves in. All ASP rules (including the dress code!) apply throughout all the fundraising and training sessions and travel days, not just the work week itself.

Remember that we go into people's homes as representatives of ASP, First UMC, and St Luke's Parish. We are accountable to them both for our behavior and for our use of the materials and resources they have entrusted to us. We acknowledge that we are sent forth by them and have an obligation to keep them informed and report back to them after our return.

Volunteers are asked to signify their acceptance of these expectations through filling out and signing our Volunteer Covenant as part of the registration process.

What do we have to do to get ready?

There is lots of preparation and planning required to get us ready to hit the ground running and maximize the impact of our short time in Appalachia. That includes group building, tool training, expectation setting, and of course fundraising! This process goes on from now to the trip in July.

Youth are expected to attend 3 program meetings, and a weekend retreat. A calendar outline is below. All of the events are designed to pass on essential information about the trip, set expectations, teach skills, get people thinking and praying about their week of service, and get the group (including the leadership) used to working together. Returning volunteers will help communicate information to those who are new. Participation in all events or suitable makeups is mandatory for youth volunteers. Some exceptions may be made for returning LITs who attend college remotely.

PROGRAM MEETING OUTLINE

Kickoff Meeting (including parents!)

Second Program Meeting

Prep Retreat Weekend

Final Meeting

TBD (November)

TBD (March)

May 7-9, 2021

TBD (June)

How much does it cost, and how do we pay for it?

One of the primary activities of the ASP group between signup and the actual trip is fundraising. Part of having a prepared, ready-to-go group is being able to cover all the expenses necessary for our work. While there are certainly more expensive ways to spend a week's vacation, an ASP trip is still not cheap. The 2019 youth team spent around \$710 per person on materials, room and board, travel meals, van rental, gas, and training, totaling \$117,101 for 165 volunteers.

This year's expense budget is estimated at \$735 per person. Given that there are 2 adults per 5 youth in a crew, this works out to **\$1029 per youth**. Once we fundraise enough to cover our budget, extra funds can be used for more construction materials, special items such as windows, water heaters, etc.

Our policy has always been that we raise money as a team, through a variety of fundraisers. This has many benefits: it gives us practice working together as a team; it provides opportunities to those who cannot just write a check for the trip cost; it gets us out as a group in front of our churches and community; and it requires people to be serious about their commitment of time and energy long before the actual trip. We remain committed to group fundraising for all of these reasons.

We have set minimum requirements for all youth, for both individual dollar amounts raised and hours spent in group fundraising and service activities. The minimum fundraising targets for this year are \$560 and 12 hours per youth. LITs only need 6 hours, but will have additional responsibilities during the trip. ***Note that the minimum per youth requirement remains well below (just over half of) what we actually need to fund the trip!*** We depend on everyone to fully participate and raise what they can.

When youth participate in fundraisers where individuals donate money or items, or get personal sponsorships from family or friends, we credit funds directly to the youth who brought them in. For events that we work on as a group, we divide the net money raised by the number of participants, according to the time spent. Hours are not credited for the individual time looking for sponsors, asking family and friends for direct contributions, etc. Specific handling will be published for each event. We also need parents' help, and parent participation can fulfill up to 4 hours of a youth's 12.

We have 2 checkpoints during the year, to make sure people stay on track with fundraising. These mirror the deposits that ASP requires from us and we have found intermediate checkpoints to be very useful in helping people to think through their level of commitment and make hard decisions about their ability to participate, possibly opening up space sooner for others who are able to commit fully. ***Anyone on the confirmed list who misses these deadlines will be moved to the end of the waitlist, and the person at the top of the waitlist offered their spot.***

FUNDRAISING CHECKPOINTS

All youth and LIT volunteers must reach \$50 by Jan 10, 2021.

All youth volunteers must reach \$280 (including the initial \$50) by March 28, 2021.

The balance of the minimum \$560 and 12 hours are required by June 20, 2021.

It is not our intent to create a bunch of paperwork or a lot of pressure. Fundraising can be fun and a great chance to get to know people. But with the large group we need a way to maintain a level of accountability and workload balance among our many members, and to move folks through the process of discovering if they are committed to the level of participation required to enjoy this unique mission experience.

Why do we have a Waitlist? How is it formed?

Our goal is to make the trip possible for everyone who would like to participate and to maximize the work we are able to do for ASP families. Ultimately, however, the size of the group we can actually take is based on the number of committed adult Group Leaders we have, the size of the organization we can capably manage, and the amount of money we are able to raise. We will not commit to a bigger group than we feel we can lead and equip safely and effectively.

We also know that for various reasons, volunteers will sign up but not be able to participate by the time of the trip. Both we and ASP need to plan for the number of volunteers we're likely to actually wind up with, not the number that initially sign up. So, to account for this natural attrition, we always start the year with a waitlist. We do our best to plan the waitlist size (subject to the limitations above) so that it will drain completely. In only one year (2011!) have we still had people on the waitlist at the time of the trip. So, please understand that starting on the waitlist doesn't mean you've done anything wrong, and we will work to get you off it as soon as we can.

We start with the ***initial pool*** of youth who are signed up by the registration deadline. This includes ***everyone who has completed their registration online*** by that date. We do not register people on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The initial pool is then sorted in this order:

1. Youth having a family member who is a committed Group Leader. (If we have excess GLs, GLs will placed on a waitlist according to the same process as youth.)
2. Returning youth (see below for explanation on this)
3. Youth from the 2020 trip – this includes anyone who had passed the first checkpoint and was in good standing at the time the trip was cancelled.
4. New youth

Within each of the above categories, the youth are ordered by grade. For people who tie on all criteria, the order is chosen randomly. We then apply our expected shrinkage and GL signups to come up with a group size. The initial ***confirmed list*** is the top of the sorted initial pool up to that size.

Youth from the initial pool beyond the committed group size are placed on the ordered ***waitlist***. The waitlist will be published a couple of weeks after the signup deadline. Anyone who signs up after the registration deadline (and is therefore not part of the initial pool) is placed at the end of the waitlist at the time of signup.

How do I move off the waitlist?

Youth will move to the confirmed list as spots open up due to other youth dropping out of the program or failing to meet their program and fundraising commitments. If someone on the confirmed list is not in good standing when a checkpoint is reached, they will be dropped to the bottom of the waitlist and another youth will be moved up to take the spot.

If you are on the waitlist, it is up to you how much you participate. All fundraising deadlines will be suspended unless and until you are officially confirmed as an attendee on this year's trip. However, if/when you are moved to the confirmed list, you will still be responsible for retroactively completing all the requirements you've missed, so you don't want to get too far behind.

Why do we give priority to returning instead of new youth?

ASP impacts everyone who participates – families served, youth volunteers, group leaders, staff members – in unique and special ways, and every trip is different for every participant. A younger youth may discover working with their hands or their ability to help someone for the first time, while young adults (LITs) may learn how to lead and how to facilitate someone else's experience. ASP has many things to teach that take more than a week to learn (or at least to internalize). Speaking for me (Jonathan) personally, ASP has not become less important to me over the 35 years that I have participated, and I would be a much different person had I stopped being part of it after 12th grade.

Our group actually depends on having a large number of repeat participants. While we put a lot of effort into training and preparation of the group, the fact remains that there is a limit to how much information we can transmit prior to the trip, and we intentionally use the accumulated experience of our group to bring new people up to speed and set expectations through example. Older students are often much more relevant role models for high school youth than adults. We have intentionally cultivated an ASP community that extends beyond the boundaries of a single year's group, and maintains continuity over time.

While each year the confirmed list tends to be dominated by returners at its initial publication, the final effect in practice has not been so dramatic. Things clear out over time. We consistently end up with 40-50% first timers in the final group, which seems to be a good range for our program.

What impact does the pandemic have on our planning?

ASP is about bringing people together into a community – volunteers, staff, and families being served. Volunteers travel and work together for an extended period, live in close quarters, and enter families' homes. Our fundraising and training events bring large groups of people together as well. All of these things may be contraindicated during a pandemic.

The Westborough ASP group will not take volunteers into a situation that we feel is unsafe. ASP will not host volunteers unless it feels it can do so safely. In the summer of 2020, that resulted in the cancellation not only of our trip, but all ASP trips, impacting both thousands of volunteers and hundreds of families that were counting on their help.

Nobody knows what the pandemic situation will be by next summer, nor by what path we will arrive there. It is certainly a possibility that we or ASP will have to cancel the trip again. But we do know that if we don't start preparing now, we definitely won't be in a position to pull off a successful mission trip in 2021, so we're getting started. Our plans will evolve along with the circumstances.

At the time the 2020 trip was cancelled, we had raised about half of our budget (over \$50,000), which was roughly equal to what we had budgeted for materials. We decided to send that money to ASP so that it could be used for what it was originally intended for – funding home repairs for those in need – even if it wouldn't be us doing the work. Westborough ASP remains committed to the goal of addressing substandard housing in Appalachia to the best of our ability, so if that decision has to be made again, we plan to do something similar. We have also made a commitment to local service work.

At present, we believe we can safely hold meetings and group events via Zoom. We are comfortable holding small outdoor events (can drives, food drives) with masks and social distancing. But large in-person events are on hold for now. Again, our plans will evolve along with the circumstances.

What happens to money I raise if I don't go on the trip?

The money we raise is the money required to fund the trip for the group. Many of our expenses are not strictly per person (dropping 1 volunteer doesn't allow us to not rent a van) and/or are incurred well before the trip (we pay per-person ASP deposits in November and March). Furthermore, contributions to the program are charitable donations to the Westborough ASP program, not to individuals. We cannot refund money if someone drops out.

We would encourage people who participate in fundraisers but are unable to go on a trip for any reason to consider that they have still made a difference in the ongoing effort to eradicate substandard housing in Appalachia.

Why do you need 6 digits of my Social Security Number?

ASP, First UMC, and St Luke's are all committed to the safety of both our ASP volunteers and the families we work for. Our group's policy is that everyone who works with children must pass a Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) background check. Since we will all be living and working together for a week, and will not know until we arrive in Appalachia what families we may be working for, it is necessary for our entire group to undergo this check, both adults and youth, regardless of age. The last 6 digits of your Social Security Number, your birthdate and full legal name are required to perform this background check.

Why do you need the right to use my picture?

Our Westborough ASP group is commissioned and sent forth every year by FUMC and St Luke's, and we travel as their representatives. We have many family and individual supporters outside those churches as well. To keep them in touch with what we do every year, we create slideshows, bulletin boards, and social media albums showing our group in action, both during our week of service and during fundraising and training events. ASP also uses pictures of volunteers to publicize its work.

We are also asking for a picture of each volunteer as part of the registration process. This is simply to aid the process of leadership getting to know the youth in our large group.

Pictures will not be used for any other purpose.

What is the role of non-GL parents in our ASP program?

We need parent participation in many ways. First, your children need your support and encouragement as they take on a major project, and they will benefit from your guidance as they work through what an ASP trip entails. As this document outlines, we are asking participants to make a big commitment, and they may need your help planning to attend meetings, meeting fundraising deadlines, packing, etc. ASP encourages youth to take responsibility, so we're not asking you to do these things for them, just help them make sure they get done. You know what your child needs better than we do.

Many of our fundraisers also benefit from parental participation. Those will be marked when we send out signups. Parent participation can fulfill up to 4 hours towards their child's 12-hour participation requirement.

Can I participate if I have food allergies, physical impediments or other special restrictions?

If you have food allergies or special dietary considerations, **please review the food policy** posted with the registration materials before registering. If you have physical, medical or other restrictions, please email us directly. We can accommodate some, but not all, restrictions due to the physical nature of the program.

So, you think you wanna go to ASP??

I hope all that didn't scare you off. I know it sounds like a lot. It is. But, as with everything else related to ASP, if we decide to work hard, remind ourselves why we're doing all this and decide to have fun with it, we'll have a good time. And, we'll reach Appalachia with the most prepared, cohesive, well-funded, ready-to-hit-the-ground-running group possible.

So, you still want to go? Think about it. Pray about it. Talk to someone who's been before. Look at pictures on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/WestboroughASP). Look at our website (www.westboroughASP.org) and ASP's website (www.asphome.org). Ask questions (asp@firststumchurch.com). Make sure you understand what you're getting yourself into.

Finally, if you're ready, register via the Westborough ASP website by October 18th to be placed in the initial pool at <http://www.westboroughasp.org/register.html>.

- The Westborough ASP Steering Committee

