

What is an ASP Group Leader?

As an adult, if you participate in ASP with a youth group, the answer is: an ASP Group Leader (GL) is **you**. We have no other adult roles. Adults are not primarily drivers, chaperones, or fellow workers – although we are all those things! We are leaders. We work with our youth through every step of the process – from application through fundraising and training, our work week, and followup. As the leaders, we are responsible for all aspects of the program and our youths’ participation in it. Our ability to lead, to inspire, to mentor, and to love will be the single largest determining factor of the experience that our youth will have next summer. It is a big responsibility, but done right (as our returning GLs can attest) one well worth taking on.

ASP’s “Expectations of a Group Leader” defines the “primary responsibilities of a group leader” as:

- [Being] responsible for your youth at all times
- Supervision of repairs at the assigned home

Nothing to it, right? As with many things in life, the concept is straightforward, but the details are a bit trickier. We hold the definition of “being responsible” for our youth not just to mean making sure that they are safe and in bed on time, but making sure that they fully participate in all aspects of the program, that they have opportunities to learn, to grow, and to do meaningful work, and that they are supported and encouraged to realize for themselves the power of being in service to others. We will spend a significant amount of time as a leadership group talking about these issues, and how best to work together to achieve those goals during our week of service.

The part of being a GL that is most frequently overlooked is that it begins now. With a group this size, we will be fundraising and training for most of a year. The GLs are responsible for leading that – planning fundraisers, leading training, and organizing all the details of the trip itself, well before the group climbs into the vans. Over the years, we’ve developed some specific expectations for our GLs during the preparation process:

- Go through a CORI background check
- Attend regular (every 1-2 months) GL meetings for planning, training and mutual support
- Assist with communicating information out to the youth
- Take an organizing role in one fundraiser, and serve as a supporting adult in a couple of others.
- Fully participate in and lead training events
- Take on at least one advanced planning task related to the week itself – from van rentals to route planning to cooler organizing to restocking the first aid kits
- Be willing to help out with whatever else comes up

Sound like a lot? It should, because it is. My goal in telling you all this is not to scare you off, but to make it clear that we’re asking for a serious commitment here. We believe that the success of our program has been in large part due to the strength of our leadership, and we’re not willing to compromise that going forward. We will not build a bigger group than we feel we can effectively lead, even if it means turning youth away.

Once we finish registration and pin down our group size, we will have a very specific number of GL spots available, based on the number of youth that sign up. It is likely that we will start with a GL waitlist. If that happens, we will order the waitlisted GLs in the same order as their kids appear on the youth waitlist. As with the youth, we expect attrition, and need to have prepared GLs who have been participating ready to step into gaps as they open up.

Ok, now the good news. ASP has a very high GL to youth ratio, 2:5. So, there are a lot of us, and we’re all in this together. We have large reservoirs of experience and talents of different types to draw on. We will work together, support each other, and in the process model servant leadership for our youth.

Feel free to ask questions (either in person or at asp@firstumchurch.com). Think it over. If you would like to sign up, please register using our webpage at www.westboroughASP.org.

I’d close by repeating the last two paragraphs on the “So you think you wanna go to ASP?” page, but I’m out of space, so I’ll let you read them yourself. On behalf of our youth and the people of Central Appalachia, thank you for your consideration.

-- Jonathan