



Noelle, Joanne and Diana White, from left, at Monterey Public Library's end-of-summer reading party at the Monterey Beach House on July 20. Joanne is the Bookmobile coordinator for the library, and her daughters helped with the party of 300 people.

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# **Volunteers**

## **The Pros and Cons**

### **and Tips for Making the Volunteer Experience a Good One for the Volunteer and the Library**



# Pros

- Volunteers do your work for you.
- Some volunteers have artistic, musical, or other talents that can be put to use.
- Volunteers see firsthand all that the Library does for the community.
- Volunteers may become new Library users.
- The ones who stay, work hard, and are reliable are a real asset to the Library.

# Cons

- Processing and training is very time-consuming.
- Bad attitudes. (Parents or school made them be there.)
- They make mistakes when shelving.
- Unreliable.
- Finding work for them is extra work for staff.
- Low energy.



# More Cons...

- Telling them “it is not a good fit” can be awkward.
- When English is not their first language alphabetizing can be a challenge.
- Volunteer coordinator gets blamed for volunteer mistakes.



# Tips for making the volunteer experience a good one for both the Library and the volunteer

- Do the initial screening over the phone.
- Ask them how long they intend to volunteer.
- Simplify paperwork/training materials. (Training DVD)
- Don't judge a book by its cover or a volunteer by her/his application or first impression.
- Learn some key responses for people who probably won't work out.
- Show interest in your volunteers as a person, not just a volunteer, but not too much interest/time.

# Tips

- Have them take a page test to see if they understand the alphabet/Dewey Decimal System.
- Let them know up front that the Library has expectations similar to a job and that their showing up or not affects the workflow that day.
- Ask them to let you know ahead of time if they can't make it.
- Let them know what NOT to do as well as what to do.

# More tips...

- Call or email them if they don't show up. They'll know you're paying attention.
- Promote your best volunteer to Volunteer Trainer. It can be a huge time saver.
- Provide an out for those who may not like the position but don't want to be seen as flaky. Suggest other volunteer opportunities.
- Don't schedule two volunteers in the same area unless they request it. They take pride in completing tasks.

# And more...

- Communicate changes such as shelving locations.
- Use volunteer software such as [volgistics.com](http://volgistics.com), [trackitforward.com](http://trackitforward.com) or [yourvolunteers.com](http://yourvolunteers.com) to track hours. Put link to public computer so volunteers can sign in online as opposed to paper timesheets.
- An inexpensive gift could be a bookplate with volunteer's name on it.



# And more...

- Ask them what they like to do. Are they history buffs? Artistic?
- Talk to the teen instead of the parent.
- Give an accurate job description. If it is tedious work, let them know ahead of time. They won't last if they don't like it.
- **SHOW APPRECIATION!** Include them in staff parties at the Library. Write thank you notes at Thanksgiving, holiday gifts. Appreciation reception.

