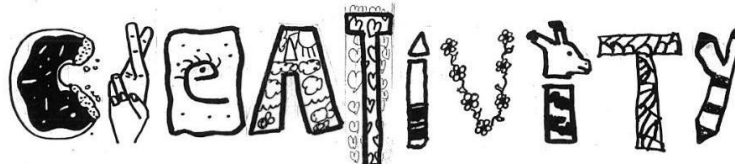
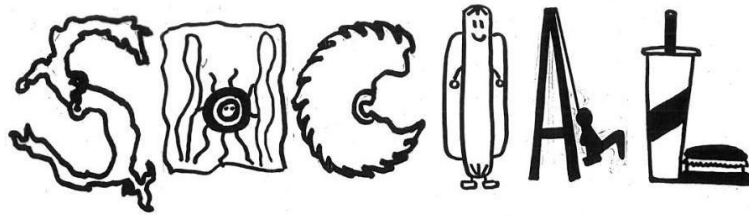




greenleaf
neurodiversity
community center

a project of easterseals central texas



Community Handbook

Updated August 31st, 2022

www.greenleafncc.org



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Contact Information

ADDRESS (program location and mailing address):

Greenleaf NCC
911 West Anderson Ln., Ste. 203
Austin, TX 78757

<p>Mitchell Bowman Program Director, Recreational & Vocational Programs Office: 512-366-5529 Cell: 512-537-7937 (Google voice) mbowman@eastersealstx.org</p>	<p>Amanda Varcelotti Associate Program Director, Recreational & Vocational Programs Office: 512-366-5529 greenleafncc@gmail.com</p>	<p>Andy Manns Lead Teacher, Greenleaf NCC Transition School Office: 512-366-5529 amanns@eastersealstx.org</p>
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Greenleaf NCC staff are all experienced autism/neurodiversity specialists with over 40 cumulative years of experience serving individuals with autism and other special needs. Across our team, we possess certifications in special education, advanced degrees in education and the arts, autism specialist credentials, and vocational training credentials.

Greenleaf NCC

Greenleaf Neurodiversity Community Center (GNCC) is an initiative of Easterseals Central TX which focuses on expanding opportunities for young adults with autism and related neurodivergent conditions to gain access to educational, recreational, and employment experiences that play to their strengths and interests. These experiences are designed to help individuals reach their potential and thrive in the community, in the workplace, and in life.

[Social Creativity Clubs](#) provide weekly clubs and social outings for GNCC community members, using a multi-disciplinary approach that incorporates creative learning experiences in visual art, drama, digital media, creative writing, and music. Activities are designed to promote friendships, creative self-expression, social skills, workplace readiness, and a sense of community belonging. Social Creativity Clubs and programs are for adults, ages 18 and up.

Greenleaf NCC also proudly provides Pre-Employment Transition Services and Vocational Adjustment Training Services as part of Easterseals Central Texas, a community service provider working with Texas Workforce Solutions. Eligible school-age participants and adults can participate in training in self-advocacy, workforce readiness, post-secondary and career options, financial literacy, disability disclosure, and more. Vocational training programs serve school-age youth, ages 14-22, as well as adults who are out of school, ages 18 and up.

Since Fall 2021, Greenleaf NCC also provides a new transition school option in partnership with Austin Independent School District to serve participants ages 18-22. This school serves special education participants with autism and related neurodivergent conditions who qualify for special education services, want to continue their academic pursuits, and have unique skills and interests in creative arts and technology, that, with the right transition support, make them good candidates for post-secondary education and/or employment opportunities not currently promoted through Austin ISD's existing transition planning process.

Why is Greenleaf NCC needed?

- Too few personal growth opportunities and structured social activities for young adults on the autism spectrum or facing other neurodiversity challenges.
- Too few transition program options after high school.
- Too little focus on neurodivergent people's capabilities and strengths related to employment and purposeful life as an adult, especially in the areas of technology and creative arts which so often play to the special skills and talents of neuro-diverse people.

Our Mission

Valuing neurodiversity and making it work — for our young people, for our families, and for our community.

Our Vision

To become our community's hub for leveraging the abilities of people on the autism spectrum and/or facing other neurodiversity challenges, so that they reach their full potential in the community, in the workplace, and in in life.

Our Values

We believe that all individuals, regardless of the level of support needed, should be able to live a life filled with **purpose, dignity, agency, and joy**.

Social Creativity Programs

The mission of Social Creativity is to further wellness, self-determination, creativity, meaning, and social inclusion for young adults and adults with autism and related neurodivergent conditions through recreational and educational programs. Through the integration of principles from creative youth development, contemplative and therapeutic practices, social and emotional learning, community education, and in partnership with employment and educational providers, Social Creativity community programs help participants thrive in their transition to adulthood and independent living.

Curricula

In keeping with the promotion of self-determination and self-advocacy skills, participant “voice and choice” is an important aspect of our methodology. Because projects and themes are generated in collaboration with the participants themselves, every Social Creativity club and curriculum is unique to the cohort participating in it and no two club experiences will be the exact same. Nevertheless, we go beyond simply planning fun activities and intentionally incorporate activities and experiences in our clubs and programs which promote the following life skills:

Personal Agency: Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy

- Self-Awareness (disability disclosure, identifying strengths and interests)
- Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy (making choices, speaking up for self, asking for needs, negotiating for self, knowing rights and responsibilities, using resources available)
- Executive function skills (time management, goal-setting and tracking, project-based learning)

Health & Wellness:

- Mindfulness, awareness, and self-compassion
- Stress management and coping with anxiety/depression
- Nutrition & fitness
- Healing (expressive arts work; therapy services via referrals)

Community Inclusion:

- Vocational skills (career planning, “soft skills” such as teamwork and networking, interviewing skills)
- Social skills (Social awareness, social reciprocity, relationship skills, conflict resolution skills)

Creativity & Meaning Making:

- Creative expression
- Personal contemplation & reflection
- Inclusion, accessibility, and appreciation for diversity and different abilities
- Community advocacy and service
- Mentoring and being mentored

Requirements for Participation

Our cohorts are successful partly because of careful attention to who is in each group and whether an individual's needs and behaviors will likely affect the enjoyment and success for both that individual and others in the cohort. *Compatibility* is an important part of successful group cohesion and relationship building. To that end, there are prerequisites for every program and community orientations are required for admission to programs. Not every program is appropriate for all individuals, but it is our vision to grow programs which may effectively accommodate a wide range of participant support needs and behaviors.

The following prerequisites are required for all participants, across all Social Creativity clubs:

- Willingness to attend sessions regularly and through to program completion
- Openness to learning new things and exploring creative processes
- Interest in making new friends
- Tolerance and respect for others' differences
- Independence in attending to personal self-care needs such as eating and toileting
- Amenability to participating in group activities

Recommended prerequisites for our creative ensemble clubs (Acting, Art, Film, Storytellers, RPG Clubs):

- Shows willingness to work collaboratively in varied groupings
- Shows willingness to use corresponding expressive tools (voice, body, camera, art materials, etc.) appropriately
- Engages in short reciprocal conversations when prompted
- Participates in activities independently and/or with occasional support

Recommended prerequisites for our other recreational clubs and programs:

- Shows willingness to work cooperatively with others
- Communicates verbally when prompted or utilizes assistive technology effectively to communicate with others in the group
- Participates in activities with occasional staff support (or is accompanied by a personal attendant)

Program Menu

SOCIAL CREATIVITY CLUBS

We offer different Social Creativity Clubs and events every semester/season in response to community member interest and availability. Priority enrollment typically happens in August for Fall Clubs, late December/early January for Winter/Spring Clubs and late May/early June for Summer Clubs. Most clubs are offered in-person, but we do try to provide at least a couple virtual clubs each semester/season to accommodate community members with transportation challenges or who prefer virtual engagement.

The following list describes some of the clubs that we offered during 2021-2022:

ACTING CLUB (in-person)

Like Storytellers Club, this weekly club is perfect for people who enjoy storytelling, improv, and the performing arts. Participants will hone their acting, comedic, and communication skills through creative writing, improv, and theater activities.

ART CLUB (in-person)

This weekly club is for people who enjoy drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, fiber arts, graphic design, and/or comics. Participants will work both individually and collaboratively to create graphic art works and have their work featured in a gallery show at the end of the semester.

BOOK CLUB (virtual)

This weekly club meets online to share and discuss a fictional book voted on by participants. Appropriate for those reading at a middle school level or higher (we typically read YA or adult fiction) and who can commit to reasonable weekly reading assignments.

COOKING CLUB (in person)

This bi-weekly club will give participants the opportunity to learn more about personal nutrition and meal preparation. We partner with Emilia Edmonson from Beyond PB&J to provide hands-on learning experiences with food. Learn new recipes that you can try at home!

GAMING GROUP (in person)

In this new bi-weekly club, participants will learn and play popular board and card games together, practice good sportsmanship, and develop skills in different types of games (strategy, cooperative, etc.).

GIRL GROUP (virtual)

This weekly support group for young women and youth who identify with female development, ages 18+, will meet online to discuss and explore topics relevant to women and female empowerment. Led by women, participants in this group will have the opportunity to work toward personal goals, explore relevant wellness topics, and build stronger relationships with other young women.

MUSIC CLUB (in person)

This virtual/in-person hybrid club is for people who enjoy listening to and making music. Typical activities include: music appreciation, learning music theory, lyric-writing, singing, composing music, piano keyboard basics, drumming, and learning from guest musicians.

STORYTELLERS CLUB (in-person)

This in-person club is for people who enjoy storytelling, character creation, and the performing arts. Participants will express themselves and work as an ensemble to tell stories through creative writing, theater, digital media, and film-making.

SUMMER SOCIAL SERIES (in-person)

This popular summer club provides relaxed recreational daytime and evening outings with friends around the greater Austin area. Participants RSVP for just the events they wish to attend. Typical outings include movie night, pizza and board games, bowling, mini-golf, Austin sight-seeing, going out for dinner, arcades, and more! Some events may require participants to pay for their own admission or food to participate.

RPG (Role-Playing Game) CLUB (in-person or virtual)

This club is for people who enjoy imaginative worlds and tabletop role-playing games. Participants are assigned to a club based on their interests and experience, with most club members participating in Dungeons & Dragons, the world's most popular role-playing game. In RPG Club, beginners are welcome and participants work with other players to co-create imaginative worlds, solve mysteries, and have fun! We also sometimes offer a second RPG Club which provides the opportunity to learn and play City of Mist, a popular story-based RPG involving superheroes solving mysteries in an urban setting.

WELLNESS CLUB (in person or virtual)

This in-person club is for people interested in healthy living, better relationships, and learning strategies for coping with stress, anxiety, and depression. Typical activities include meditation, yoga, fitness, cooking, community service projects, games, and creative activities.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

NEXT STEPS TRAINING PROGRAM (in-person or virtual)

This program takes the fun, creative, and individualized approach of Social Creativity clubs and applies it to workplace readiness topics. This class satisfies requirements as a “Pre-ETS” (pre-employment transition services) program for participants in high school or postsecondary, ages 14-22 and provides an excellent introduction to these topics:

- **Self-Advocacy:** Students learn how to advocate for their interests/goals, about their rights and responsibilities in relation to employment and education, and practice decision-making skills as they engage in person-centered planning for their future.
- **Career Exploration:** Students develop personal career plans as they explore career pathways of interest, discover their career aptitude areas, and consider important factors in making career/job decisions.
- **Post-Secondary Options:** Students develop plans for post-secondary training that complement their career plans, learn about the requirements and application processes for relevant programs, and the supports available within their programs of interest.
- **Work Readiness Training:** Students prepare for employment as they learn about appropriate workplace behaviors, identify opportunities for gaining work experience, develop their resume, and practice interviewing skills.
- **Work Experience:** Students get hands-on experience in the workplace by touring a job site, shadowing an employee, and developing skills for employability through a short-term internship.

ADULTING 101 (in-person or virtual)

This daytime program offers a series of courses based on the needs of the individual. This program provides adults and transition-age youth (ages 18+) with a deeper dive into these critical topics for independent living and workforce readiness:

- **Exploring the You in Work:** Participants develop personal career plans as they explore career pathways of interest, discover their career aptitude areas, and consider important factors in making career/job decisions.
- **Soft Skills to Pay the Bills:** Participants increase their employability skills through a variety of fun, hands-on activities.
- **Entering the World of Work:** Participants learn all the essentials to successfully navigate the workplace, including rights, responsibilities, pay and benefits.
- **Exploring Post-Secondary Training:** Participants develop plans for post-secondary training that complement their career plans, learn about the requirements and application processes for relevant programs, and the supports available within their programs of interest.
- **Disability Disclosure:** Participants strengthen self-understanding and self-acceptance while learning how to make informed choices about disclosing their disability across different environments and how to requesting accommodations.
- **"Money Smart" Financial Literacy:** Participants learn all the essentials to successfully manage their money and financial future. Topics include banking, income, expenses, saving, credit, borrowing money, debt, renting apartments, owning assets, and more.

Registration

All participants must complete (either independently or with assistance from an attendant/caregiver) a COMMUNITY MEMBER REGISTRATION FORM as a first step of course enrollment.

The following items will also need to be completed to complete your enrollment in a Social Creativity program:

1. Signed acknowledgement of this Community Handbook (end page)
2. Signed media release (also at end of this Community Handbook)
3. Informal orientation/interview with program staff to assess interests, needs, and goals
4. Proof of identification for City of Austin/Travis County (see below)

As part of our grant-reporting requirements, we ask all Social Creativity program participants to provide **IDENTIFICATION (State ID, Student ID, or Passport) and PROOF of RESIDENCE (ID or piece of mail with name and current address)**. These may be shared as photocopies via email or in-person, or if you bring these documents with you on your next visit to Greenleaf NCC we can scan them for our records.

We have to document this information for community members we serve in Austin/Travis County as a requirement for local funding we receive. This information, along with sensitive registration info, will be kept strictly confidential and only shared when requested by grant auditors to verify identities.

Social Creativity clubs are sorted and offered based on community interest and availability.

This means that rather than tell everyone up front which programs we will offer and when we will offer them, we first survey our community members in order to include as many as possible in our programs. Each semester (Fall/Spring/Summer) we ask community members to complete a short sign-up survey, selecting their club and availability preferences. Clubs with low interest or availability may be postponed until a later semester.

In order to include as many community members as possible, we may limit the number of clubs that a community member can enroll in initially and place them on a waitlist for additional club choices. This provides a greater chance for all community members to get to participate in at least one club.

We do limit club sizes to provide for a staff-participant ratio of 1:4 or better and to also limit the number of bodies and voices in a space at one time. If a club fills up quickly, we may also put a community member on a wait list until all club members are confirmed or until a spot opens up at a later date.

You must be a confirmed member of a club in order to attend. For numerous reasons, including program quality and safety, we do not accept “drop-in” participants. If you have a friend or guest you would like to share Greenleaf NCC programs with, please contact staff in advance to discuss the possibility of a guest visit or tour.

Donations/Pay What You Can Model

Greenleaf NCC programs provide high quality, recreational programming for young adults with autism and other neurodiversities. The cost of these programs is highly dependent upon the financial support of community members participating, and so we ask for a **suggested donation** for each of our club programs to help us offset the costs of staff, our facility, and materials expenses.

It is important to our mission that community members be able to participate in our programs *whatever* their financial situation. We have determined a fair value (**suggested donation**) for all recreational programs, but participants are welcome to donate whatever is personally meaningful for them to participate. We ask every family/participant to donate an amount that is personally significant for them.

In order to ensure our sustainability, many programs may also have a **minimum donation** requirement in order to participate. This is to help ensure our sustainability and to encourage all participants to contribute something. **If you are unable to afford the minimum donation, we don't want that to be a barrier for you! Please contact us to request a waiver to the minimum donation and we will be happy to consider your situation.**

Donations can be easily made through one of two ways:

- Through our website: <https://greenleafncc.org/donate/>
- Through check by personal delivery or mail:
 - Please make checks payable to “Easterseals Central Texas” and include Greenleaf NCC in the memo.
 - Please address envelopes to: Greenleaf NCC, ATTN: Mitchell Bowman, 911 W. Anderson Ln., Ste.203, Austin TX 78757

We encourage giving throughout the year, and there are numerous ways to contribute meaningfully to our program, including (but not limited to):

- Monetary donations
- Fundraising on our behalf (through social media, with your work group, etc.)
- Sponsoring an event, social outing, or other quality opportunity
- Helping to provide transportation to one of the above
- Spreading the word to help recruit new participants and peer mentors
- Donating needed supplies (art materials, costumes, cameras, instruments, etc.)
- Making or sharing food at classes and events

Guardianship & Independence

Unless parents have obtained legal guardianship, by default all community members become their own guardians upon turning age 18. In our registration form, we ask for the guardianship status of participants. We do our best to honor the personal agency and independence of community members by directing communications to them, unless we are aware of parental guardianship or of a need for parental/caregiver involvement to support communications and participation.

More information about seeking guardianship is available from GNCC staff upon request. In good faith, parents of community members who are their own guardians will still be included in communication from GNCC about events and opportunities, but we will first attempt to address behavioral concerns or other issues with the adult community member as a first course of action. To help us honor the agency and independence of community members, it is helpful to indicate to us whether parental/caregiver contact is welcome or unwelcome.

In cases where parental/caregiver contact is appropriate, we recommend honoring the growing independence of the community member whenever possible. For this reason, we recommend non-parental aides or attendants for in-program support when needed, as parental presence can affect the sense of community and independence of not only the person being supported, but other program participants as well.

Learning is not always comfortable, but some degree of struggle is often necessary in order to develop mastery and independence with any skill. It can be tempting for guardians and care providers to eliminate the struggle in order to help participants in the short-term, but this can actually hinder their development and leave them less equipped for life in the long run. As adults, community members should no longer be simply “along for the ride” but should now be helping to steer their own ship, with scaffolded support, fading that support over time as they approach their full potential for independence.

Consider the following ways that a parent/caregiver might support a young adult in building a sense of confidence and personal responsibility:

- Provide opportunities at home to increase independence in doing chores, meal prep, etc.
- Include your young adult in discussions and planning that impact their lives (eg doctor’s appointments, therapies, events, travel, recreational plans)
- Consider completing tasks or solving problems **with** them rather than **for** them
- Talk about the future often, and discuss ambitious but also realistic goals
- Talk to your young adult openly about their diagnosis or how it impacts them. Discuss their strengths as much as the challenges related to their condition
- Help them plan their own recreational outing or social gathering
- Use tools such as alarms, phone reminders, checklists, calendars and timers to replace direct verbal prompts from you or others

Communication

Community members may communicate with program staff by phone, text, or email. Participants are encouraged to consider sharing their personal cell numbers and emails with staff in order to facilitate effective communication. Participants are encouraged to communicate important information directly to designated staff as much as possible rather

than relying on parents to do so. Communication by phone/text should be limited to weekdays between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm. Please use email for communication outside of those hours. Communication from community members to staff by phone, text or email should never be overly personal, sexual or otherwise offensive in nature.

Community Behavioral Standards

The main focus of Social Creativity programs is to support the social and personal development of individuals with neurodivergent conditions like autism. We recognize that challenging behaviors may manifest at times, either as part of a disability or by way of participation in stimulating and sometimes challenging learning environments. By implementing positive behavior supports, providing participants with the skills to make choices and communicate their needs, effective teaching strategies, high support staff-to-participant ratios, and high rates of participant engagement, inappropriate behaviors are minimized.

If a situation arises that involves inappropriate behavior, as defined below, we will make efforts to work with the family and individual to prevent and minimize these behaviors whenever possible. Serious violations will be reviewed and may result in removal from the program.

Participants in programs (community members, volunteers, and parents/personal attendants, when participating in programs) must abide by the following community agreements regarding safety and appropriate behavior.

Disregard for the standards herein (whether intentional or unintentional) may result in removal from the program:

Prohibitions

NO ALCOHOL OR ILLEGAL DRUGS. Participants shall not possess, use, conceal, sell, and offer to sell, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at classes or social events. Sale or distribution of any of the foregoing may result in expulsion. *Occasionally, participants over 21 years of age may lawfully purchase and consume alcoholic beverages, within moderation, at outside social events. Underage alcohol consumption is strictly prohibited.

NO WEAPONS. Participants shall not possess, handle, transmit, conceal, or use an implement designed to be used as a dangerous weapon at classes or social events. *Art objects that wish to be shared with others that also can be considered weapons (swords, knives, ninja stars, etc.) may be brought with Director prior approval and supervision.

NO ARSON OR EXPLOSIVES. Participants shall not burn property or cause property to be burned at classes or social events. Participants shall not possess, handle, transmit, conceal or use any form of fireworks, explosive devices or substances which can be used as explosives.

NO VIOLENCE. Participants shall not cause physical harm or injury to other participants or staff, either by intentional act or unintentional dysregulation. Staff are certified in SAMA and will attempt to

de-escalate and mediate any violent or aggressive behaviors immediately. If a participant's behavior is severe enough that they are an immediate threat to themselves or others, staff may use physical containment only as a last resort in order to ensure safety. We will involve parents and law enforcement in these incidents, whenever appropriate. Inappropriate touching and physical advances of a sexual nature shall also be regarded as aggressive behavior.

NO THEFT OR INTENTIONAL DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY. Participants shall not take home the property of other participants or of Greenleaf NCC without explicit permission to do so. Participants shall demonstrate appropriate respect for technology and materials furnished by GNCC staff and not engage in intentional destruction of property.

Disruptions (Inappropriate Behavior)

Because a mutual sense of respect and safety is crucial to the continuation of each cohort, inappropriate behaviors may be subject to removal, with consideration to their frequency and severity. Even an isolated event of inappropriate behavior, if severe enough, can significantly affect the willing participation of an entire cohort for future programs and must be viewed as significant.

DISRUPTION OF PROGRAM: Participants shall not by use of violence, force, coercion, threat, harassment or intimidation cause the disruption or obstruction of the educational process, including all class and social event activities. This includes statements and non-contact action that a staff member, volunteer, or other participant feels to be a threat, as well as profanity directed *towards* other persons. This also includes any acts, intentional or unintentional, that seriously interfere with our ability to educate participants and ensure their safety. When appropriate, a behavior analysis with potential parental involvement will be included to determine the action to be taken.

VULGARITY: Participants shall abstain from use of vulgar language at clubs or social events, within reasonable limits and with respect to the severity and frequency of these utterances. This includes but is not limited to: profanity, obscene gestures, signs, letters, writing and images on clothing, pictures, etc. Vulgarity here also includes excessive toilet humor, sexual innuendo and suggestion, and extremely violent/macabre humor, suggestion, or threat.

DISCRIMINATION: Participants shall not engage in language or behaviors which intentionally disrespect or ridicule other individuals' identity markers, including protected classes like race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, or national origin. We are a safe space for community members who identify as LGBTQ+ and as part of affirming neurodiversity, we ask that community members respect and do their best to use the preferred pronouns of other participants. As a general rule, we also discourage conversations about religion and politics within programs because of their potentially divisive nature.

ENDANGERMENT: Participants shall not engage in any activity or action that may result in the endangerment of another person's health and/or safety. Such actions include, but are not limited to: throwing objects, tripping another participant or staff member, placing sharp object on chairs, spitting at another person, etc.

TOBACCO USE: Participants shall not use substances containing tobacco in our facility or at social events. Smokers may take needed breaks when all of the following conditions are met: a) Director has

given prior approval, b) tobacco products are used away from other participants and class facilities and off any school grounds (or other property where it is prohibited), c) tobacco products are disposed of properly (extinguished cigarette butts thrown in external trash, etc.). Due to sensory sensitivities, participants may be asked to completely refrain from smoking before/during program times if the smell becomes overly disruptive to other participants.

Harassment and Bullying

Participants shall not engage in any intentional written, verbal, graphic or physical act exhibited toward another particular participant which:

- Causes mental or physical harm to the other participant;
- Is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment for another participant.

This also includes any electronically transmitted acts of harassment or bullying, i.e., Internet, cell phone, wireless handheld device, etc., that a participant has exhibited toward another particular participant. In evaluating whether conduct constitutes harassment or bullying, special attention should be paid to the words chosen or the actions taken, whether such conduct occurred in front of others or was communicated to others, how the perpetrator interacted with the victim, and the motivation, either admitted or appropriately inferred.

Harassment and bullying can include many different behaviors including overt intent to ridicule, humiliate or intimidate another participant, as well as threats, taunts and intimidation through words and/or gestures. This also includes extortion, damage or stealing of money and/or possessions, exclusion from the peer group or spreading negative rumors; and, repetitive and hostile behavior with the intent to harm others through the use of information and communication technologies and other online sites (also known as “cyber-bullying”).

Disclosure

Participants 18 years of age and older are considered by law to be adults. As such, they are entitled to function in place of their parents in matters being dealt within the community behavioral standards. However, if a matter potentially affecting the success of an “adult participant” in the program is pending, we will assume the parents or guardians will want to know. Additionally, since adult participants may still rely on parents or personal attendants to assist them with transportation, communication, keeping track of appointments, problem-solving, and/or decision-making, we may involve parents when appropriate to the situation and to the maintenance of dignity for the community member. As part of building trust with the adults we serve and honoring their autonomy, however, we may not be at liberty to divulge information shared by community members with our staff to parents or other stakeholders unless there is a safety issue making it necessary for us to do so (e.g. suicidal ideations, etc.). **We are**

required to report suspected instances of abuse or neglect of community members to the appropriate authorities.

Participant Cell Phone/Internet Policy

Participants are permitted to bring personal cellular phones and devices to programs if they can control their use. Participants should put away their cell phones during class time and respectfully refrain from usage during social events. Headphones (with or without music) and other assistive technology may be used whenever it improves participant engagement and comfort.

Technology can greatly enhance our programming. Computers and other internet-ready technology use during classes and social events should be used in a responsible, efficient, ethical and legal manner. Participants should not use their personal devices or program devices to (a) obtain or transmit inappropriate material via Internet, electronic mail, or other forms of direct electronic communications; (b) engage in other unlawful activity online; (c) copy commercial software in violation of copyright law, or download software programs without the prior approval of the Director, (d) gain unauthorized access, including “hacking”, or (e) disclose or disseminate personal identification information of other participants, especially minors.

Note on Language/Terms Used

Despite the good intentions of person-first language, many individuals in the autism community have voiced their preference to us for the descriptor “autistic” over wording like “individual with autism” or “person on the autism spectrum”, etc., and so we defer to our community members’ preferences in this regard and frequently use the descriptor “autistic” in spoken and written word to validate the language preferred by the community members themselves.

We also use terms like “neurodivergent” and “neurodiversity” frequently to more broadly include community members who may not identify as autistic (or who may not primarily identify as autistic, in the event of co-occurrence with other neurodivergent conditions). For us, neurodiversity is not a term that exclusively reflects the voices and experience of those with low support needs. We strive toward the most inclusive meaning of the term in fostering a community that sees and values the wide variety of individuals who may have characteristics on the autism spectrum or within the neurodiversity paradigm. We respect and support members of our community who experience hardships and who describe their autism or other neurodivergent condition as a disability. We also respect and support those who experience and describe their autism/neurodiversity as simply a difference and who take pride in this unique aspect of their identity.

Participant Attendance

The success of each club cohort is predicated on the regular attendance and participation of all. **Missing sessions and arriving late both significantly affect the program, the program schedules, participant projects, and the experience of other participants.** Club participants are allowed to miss no more than 3 weeks, preferably with prior notice. Violation of the attendance policy (frequent lateness or absenteeism) will result in review by the Director and may cause the participant to be removed from the program to make space for another participant who could benefit.

While some recreational programs are of a “drop-in” nature, we strongly encourage committed attendance at Social Creativity for several evidence-based reasons:

- **LEARNING:** Participants build skills progressively as the class goes on and only get the full benefit of our program from consistent attendance and participation.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Participants who commit to regular participation in our clubs are practicing important life skills that are transferable to work and school, such as: dependability, time management, personal organization, communication, and relationship skills.
- **COMFORT:** We’ve seen again and again that participants experience less anxiety, confusion, and/or disinterest when they put in the time building relationships with other club members and becoming familiar with club activities and routines.
- **RELATIONSHIPS:** Other participants’ experiences of the club are connected to yours. When participants are late or absent, it affects the experiences of fun and friendship for everyone.
- **COMMUNITY IMPACT:** We intentionally limit our club group sizes for quality and do not typically let new participants into a group after it has begun. In other words, we reserve a spot for each participant at the exclusion of other community members getting to benefit from the club.

Of course, we understand that sometimes things come up and that the challenges of life can get in the way of perfect attendance. Whenever possible, communication about a participant being late or unexpectedly absent is appreciated and can be directed to the facilitator of the specific program. This also helps us to start on time, rather than waiting for participants who aren’t coming.

Accommodations Policy

We will make accommodations to ensure that participants with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all our programs, services, and activities. We comply with Title III of the ADA, which guarantees the right of individuals with disabilities to participate in and benefit from public programs, except where participation affects the health and safety of others or fundamentally changes the nature of our services. If you are unsure of your participant’s needs or ability to participate in our program(s), please consult with the Program Director.

Reasonable Accommodations & Modifications

Reasonable Accommodations & Modifications

Reasonable accommodations and modifications for participants with disabilities typically offered in Greenleaf NCC programs are not limited to, but may include, the following:

- Individual behavior plans (personalized expectations and reinforcers for participant)
- Alternate ways of participating in activities, including modifying activities to be more inclusive of physical limitations
- Fidgets and other distraction/self-soothing aides
- Peace or “chill-out” corners for taking a break and self-regulating
- Assistance transitioning between activities (time warning, extra time given, etc.)
- Use of pictures, hand gestures, or assistive technology to communicate
- Incorporation of transitional objects, auxiliary aides or assistive technology
- Participant leadership roles or helper jobs
- Regular communication and coordination with parents other professionals
- Dispensation of medication

Fundamental Alterations (not available in our Social Creativity programs)

Accommodations and modifications that would constitute a fundamental alteration to our program model are not limited to, but may include, the following list. **We are currently unable to provide the following accommodations in our programs:**

- Continual teacher proximity or one-on-one assistance (facilitators acting as a personal attendant or aide)
- Allowing participants to have autonomy over the schedule, transitions, or movement throughout the facility
- Furnishing participants with auxiliary aides, including but not limited to wheelchairs, hearing aids, assistive technology, etc. or providing physical therapy, social skills therapy, or counseling services as part of their participation. We are happy to provide participants and families with referrals for these services within Easterseals Central Texas or our larger network of disability service providers.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA is an important federal civil rights law that went into effect in 1992. The Act states that people with disabilities are entitled to equal rights in employment, state and local public services, and public accommodations. There are a few notable exceptions to this law:

Direct threat

Direct threat is defined as a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of the individual or others that cannot be eliminated or reduced by reasonable accommodation:

ADA, Title III: 3.8000 Direct Threat:

“A public accommodation may exclude an individual with a disability from participation in an activity, if that individual's participation would result in a direct threat to the health or safety of others...The determination that a person poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others...must be based on an individual assessment that considers the particular activity and the actual abilities and disabilities of the individual. The individual assessment must be based on reasonable judgment that relies on current medical evidence, or on the best available objective evidence, to determine --

- 1) The nature, duration, and severity of the risk;*
- 2) The probability that the potential injury will actually occur; and*
- 3) Whether reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures will mitigate or eliminate the risk.”*

We determine what constitutes a direct threat based on an evaluation of the individual's present ability and consideration of factors like the nature, duration, and severity of the risk for participant(s) and staff. We define risks to individual, staff, or group safety as inclusive of behaviors like *physical aggression* (biting, kicking, hitting, scratching, etc.), *unwelcome touch* (inappropriate physical contact), *verbal aggression* (name-calling, bullying, etc.), *emotional abuse* (false accusations, bullying, manipulation, theft or destruction of personal property, etc.), and *unsafe eloping from the program* (running or walking away from the program, exiting the premises, etc.). We are not required to provide proof of direct threat by law. We will determine this by reasonable evaluation of factual information at our disposal.

Fundamental alteration

Fundamental alteration is defined as a change that is so significant that it alters the essential nature of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations offered. The ADA does not require Greenleaf NCC to fundamentally alter the nature of its programs or services, or impose an undue financial or administrative burden:

ADA, Title III: 4.2000 Reasonable modifications:

“A public accommodation must reasonably modify its policies, practices, or procedures to avoid discrimination. If the public accommodation can demonstrate, however, that a modification would fundamentally alter the nature of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations it provides, it is not required to make the modification.”

Field Trips and Social Outings

Throughout the year, and as part of membership in some programs, Social Creativity participants may be invited to attend varied field trips and social outings in the community.

Field trips and social outings are significantly less structured than classes and sometimes in unpredictable environments. Staff will take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety and appropriate conduct of all participants in these environments, but it is helpful for parents/caregivers to be within easy reach by phone and transportation in the event a situation or emergency occurs. Participants over the age of 18 are considered adults and generally expected to take responsibility for themselves within the supervision of program staff during social outings and events. Chaperones are encouraged whenever social outings are at large or populous environments, or when participants require individual support in order to keep them safe. Transportation by staff or other qualified participants may be allowed with appropriate permission forms.

COVID-19 Safety Information

GNCC and Easterseals Central Texas are committed to providing a safe environment for all community members to learn. We respect the personal decisions of each individual, but participation in a community affects all involved. **We ask that all participants, staff, guests, and community members follow the following protocols in order to protect the *entire* GNCC community.**

COVID-19 “Community Levels”

CDC’s [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) help communities and individuals make decisions on what COVID-19 prevention strategies to use based on whether their community is classified as low, medium, or high. These levels factor in a combination of COVID-19 hospitalization rates, healthcare burden, and COVID-19 cases. **GNCC will follow guidance based on the current COVID-19 Community Level of Travis County.** When the COVID-19 Community Level indicates an increase to medium or high, GNCC may add layered prevention strategies, described below, to maintain safe, in-person learning. GNCC may choose to add layered prevention strategies at any COVID-19 Community Level. With decreasing or low COVID-19 Community Levels, GNCC may consider removing prevention strategies, followed by close monitoring of the COVID-19 Community Level in the weeks that follow.

The following Transition School at GNCC operational guidelines are based on current recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC):

At ANY level, including *Low*:

- **Participants are encouraged to stay up to date on vaccinations.**
COVID-19 vaccines available are effective at protecting people—especially those who are boosted— from getting seriously ill, being hospitalized, and even dying. As with other diseases, you are protected best from COVID-19 when you stay up to date with the recommended vaccines.

- **Stay home if sick**
 - **If participants have symptoms of COVID-19, or any infectious illness, they must stay home.** Testing for COVID-19 is strongly encouraged. Ask GNCC staff if you need assistance locating testing.
 - If you test negative, return after being fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
 - If no test, return when symptoms improve
 - **If you test positive, even without symptoms, stay home for at least 5 days.** If symptoms last longer than 5 days, stay home until fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
 - **If you are exposed to COVID-19 but are NOT up to date on vaccinations,** stay home for 5 days after contact occurred and get tested.
 - You do not need to stay home if you are exposed and are up to date on vaccinations, or if you have had COVID-19 within the last 90 days.
 - Students who show COVID-19 symptoms at GNCC will be distanced from others and parents called to consider pick-up. If a rapid test is available, participants may remain at school if they test negative, have no fever, and mask.
- Students are permitted to wear masks at any time they would prefer to do so.
- Hand sanitizer stations are available throughout GNCC
- Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette skills are taught and reinforced
- GNCC facilities will be cleaned and disinfected regularly

At Medium to High Levels:

- At Medium and High Levels, participants and staff may be asked to complete a screening questionnaire and/or have their temperature taken before entering
- Distancing will be implemented where possible and physical contact minimized
- Masks are encouraged in close quarters

At High Community Levels

- **Masks will be required indoors and in vehicles for all participants and staff**
- Some activities, such as internships or community outings may be postponed
- Virtual learning may be available for direct-teach classes

For more info about COVID-19 and to search local Community Levels visit www.CDC.gov

For local info about Community Levels, testing, and vaccinations Austin Public Health at <https://www.austintexas.gov/covid19>

Privacy/Data Collection

In order to qualify for and meet our obligations to local and federal grant providers, we collect demographic information as part of registration for each program participant. This data includes the participant's age, address, race, ethnicity, sex, and income (Federal Poverty Income Level).

Rest assured that we are committed to your privacy and the protection of your sensitive data. This information will be kept strictly confidential. In the quarterly reports we submit, demographic data is associated with a number and not a name, so individual identities are protected. We will not share this data with outside organizations nor with staff who are not involved directly in completing grant reports.

We will never share your contact information or personally identifiable information with marketers, advertisers, or researchers.

We also collect information about the participant's disability/diagnosis/health information. We do not share this with anyone who does not "need to know" (GNCC staff directly working with the participant). Our registration form is secure/encrypted through Microsoft and any PII (personally identifiable information) is encrypted when shared by staff via email or information systems.

Social Creativity Community Agreements

Across all Social Creativity Clubs, we have shared community agreements which we ask all participants and/or guests to abide by. Each is simple enough to explain in one sentence but has complexity in its many applications.

1. Be **KIND** and **PATIENT** with yourself and others.

- o No Judgment Zone! Accept others for who they are and focus on their good qualities.
- o Always be kind to others in your words and actions.
- o Give others space.
- o Remember that some people need different things than you. Some people need more “think time” before they respond, some people need to be reminded about things, and some people may struggle with something you find easy.
- o Take good care of materials and spaces. Help clean up after yourself.

2. Be **POSITIVE** and **SUPPORTIVE** of others’ enjoyment. (Also known as “Don’t Harsh the Vibe”).

- o Constructive conversations - no religion, politics, or vulgar/disturbing talk please. Too often these topics make others uncomfortable and they can be a barrier to finding common ground and building friendships, so they are best left outside our program.

3. **BE PRESENT**

- o Avoid distractions and stay on topic. Utilize fidgets and breaks as needed to stay focused with your mind and body.
- o Please put away your phone and other devices when programs are in session. These take your mind away from what is happening in the group and can be perceived as rude. Calls and texts can be returned during break or at the end of the program.

4. **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL**

- o Be flexible/keep an open mind. There are many things we can’t control in life, including the thoughts and actions of others. We always have a choice in where we put our energy and how we conduct ourselves.
- o Ask for help when you need it.
- o Take Care of Yourself. Take deep breaths and short breaks when you need them.

5. **BE CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN!**

- o Stretch yourself! It’s important to take healthy risks and try new things in order to learn new things about yourself.



Participant Acknowledgment Form

I have received the Social Creativity Community Handbook and I am aware of the program's policies. I understand that frequent and/or severe violations of the Community Behavioral Standards may be grounds for removal from the program.

I agree to abide by these policies and community agreements as a participant.

Name of Participant (legal adult)

Date

I agree to help my dependent participant abide by these policies and community agreements and to also abide by these policies, when participating in programs or events.

Signature of Parent/Guardian (for dependent participants only)

Date

Consent to Participate in Media & Publicity Activities

Easterseals Central TX/Greenleaf NCC Media & Publicity Consent Form

Name of Participant: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Consent to Participate in Media & Publicity Activities

I, _____ give consent to Easter Seals Central Texas to use the image(s) of the participant named above and captured by photographic or electronic means in the public relations work of Easter Seal Central Texas and Greenleaf NCC.

In addition, I give my consent to Easter Seals Central TX and Greenleaf NCC to use the participant's first and last name in their publicity materials for the purposes of marketing and outreach.

I hereby release Easter Seals Central Texas, and its directors, officers, employees and volunteers from any claims or obligations resulting from the use of any likeness of the student named above.

Name of Participant (legal adult)

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian (for dependent participants)

Date

This consent can be canceled at any time, in writing to ESCTX but the cancellation will not affect any disclosures already made prior to receipt of cancellation notice. This consent will expire five (5) years after signature.