



## The Friendship Squad (TFS)

**To Get Involved:** Email founder Dan Frey at [cityvoices1995@gmail.com](mailto:cityvoices1995@gmail.com) or call (917) 702-8537

**PROBLEM:** Human beings with mental health and/or substance use challenges are being released from institutional settings without the emotional support needed to make a successful transition to community life. They sometimes find themselves in crisis, utilizing services such as the emergency room or hospitalization. Feelings of despair and anxiety are all too common experiences for people trying to make it back into community life.

**PURPOSE:** To pair compassionate volunteers who have the lived experience of having been through mental health, substance use and/or criminal justice systems, with their peers who may be struggling, lonely and isolated. We especially want to reach people who are reentering the community from institutional settings. The emphasis of the project is to foster peer-to-peer friendships that generate hope, trust, mutual learning, stability, community involvement and growth. The volunteer's main purpose is to support their friends through attentive listening, mutual respect, openness, and trust. Volunteers are not responsible for traditional service provision such as advocacy or connections to services. Fostering a nurturing friendship is their only responsibility. For example, if a friend expresses a need for housing or medical services, the volunteer will bring this up to the project director to find a solution, if possible.

**DESIGN:** The Friendship Squad (TFS) works as a complement to traditional therapies for people in recovery from mental illnesses, substance use disorder and emotional challenges. Screened, trained, monitored and caring volunteers provide social support through friendship by being positive, hopeful, attentive, and engaging. TFS makes matches based on gender, age, identity, shared experiences and interests. Friends meet for at least one hour per week via telephone, text, chat, zoom etc. It is beyond the scope of The Friendship Squad to meet in person.

Volunteers will have monthly zoom meetings to engage with the other volunteers and the project director to help work through any difficulties in relationship-building and to find solutions if friends need to be connected to other services.

**Volunteer Pool:** There are many potential volunteers who have the will, the compassion, and the time to participate in TFS. Many potential volunteers have been waiting for an opportunity to share their strengths and compassion in support of their peers who may be struggling. Many may be current or former peer specialists. Many may have the goal of becoming peer specialists one day and the experience gained through TFS can help motivate volunteers to move toward this employment goal or simply remain a worthwhile way to volunteer their time.

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