

Episcopal High School Tips Off the Semester Volunteering

2017 marks the 12th year of Avondale House's ongoing partnership with Episcopal High School. Each January, the private Bellaire school sends its graduating seniors to tip off their spring semester by volunteering for a week and a half at various non-profits within the city of Houston.

This year, Avondale House hosted ten senior volunteers. The Episcopal seniors were put to work for eight full school days; some of them were challenged to create "social stories," and others interacted with our students to teach the importance of team sports. Each volunteer jumped into the experience with both feet and an open mind.

The Episcopal High School students who created social stories did not have any prior experience with social stories, but they showcased their video-making (and acting) skills and managed to produce an entire cache of videos that are now available for Avondale students. The concept of social stories is a relatively new one, developed by teacher Carol Gray specifically for people on the autism spectrum. Gray wanted children with autism to have visual aid to reference to practice social cues and learn different life skills.



With the help of Social Motion's Jennifer Soley, our BCBA Tarah, and our two BCBA interns Morgan and Desiree, Episcopal High School volunteers were able to replicate the format of social stories for Avondale teachers and parents to use with their students. Their how-to series of videos range from demonstrating tasks from using the microwave to putting on a seatbelt. "Being assigned to this project has given me a glimpse into the mind of a person with autism," said Brooke, one of the seniors.



While some Episcopal volunteers were busy writing scripts and editing film, the others were honing their coaching skills by teaching our students some basketball basics. They worked with each day school classroom during their recreational time every day for over a week. During that time, Avondale students performed shooting, dribbling, and passing drills, and eventually incorporated different colored jerseys to iterate the concept of a team. "I was a little bit intimidated to teach basketball at first," stated Episcopal student Chandler, "but now that the week is over, I'm really sad to leave. Watching these kids improve was an amazing experience!"

We are so grateful for the time we have had with these generous Episcopal High School students. They left Avondale House with a better sense of what autism entails, and our students were left with an understanding of teamwork and a series of tools to use as long as they wish.

