



THE COMPANION

LEARNING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
VOLUNTEER / MENTOR GUIDE

volunteers

one to one
relationships

confidence

self esteem

volunteers

confidence

self esteem

confidence





A BRIDGE

**simple
yet solid in construction
a log over a creek
a six-lane highway
linking areas or communities
approached or travelled in different directions
or simply there
to enable people
to cross safely
from one spot to another**
Glenys Brown

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The LAP Companion was developed from material prepared by Penny Penhall, Glenys Brown and Mary Carmody, with support from the Catholic Education Office and the Education Department of South Australia.



INTRODUCTION

Jeremy is in Year 2. He didn't want to read, so his new friend encouraged him to make up his own stories. Together they made a colourful mobile of characters from one of Jeremy's own books. Jeremy learned that books can be fun, and now enjoys reading by himself. He also loves to listen to others read to him and guessing what will happen next!

Kirsty could see little point in going to school. At fifteen years old, she was keen to leave, but had little idea of what she would do if she left. Her new friend introduced her to the art of gourmet cooking. Kirsty discovered that she enjoyed cooking, had a talent for it, and that she had a goal to work towards. With help and encouragement from her friend and teachers, Kirsty stayed at school until she was able to win an apprenticeship as a chef.

Jeremy's friend and Kirsty's friend have something important in common. They are both volunteers in the Learning Assistance Program.

THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LAP)

The Learning Assistance Program (LAP) originated at Banksia Park High School, South Australia, in 1976. It is now a state and nation-wide support program for students in all kinds of schools across all age ranges.

It is a scheme that brings together students, volunteers and teaching staff as partners in students' learning. LAP volunteers work with students on a one-to-one basis for one or two sessions a week, devising with the teacher, coordinator and student, a plan of activities tailored to that student's particular needs.

The success of the program is based on five simple principles. These are that LAP:

- is always one-to-one;
- is about relationships;
- builds confidence and self-esteem;
- takes a creative approach to learning;
- promotes parent and community participation in schools.

BUILDING BRIDGES WITH LAP

LAP is a program that builds bridges, between the school and the community, between the volunteer and student, in a way that links and supports all parties. Both school and community and student and volunteer are mutually supported and strengthened by the links that LAP provides.



WHICH STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM LAP?

Question: Which students can be involved in LAP?

Answer: Any student who would benefit from individual time with a volunteer.

There are often students in junior primary, primary and secondary schools who would benefit from individual time with an adult. Students may need support with class or subject work. They may be shy, disruptive, or just need someone to listen to them and show that they care. Others may have a particular interest or talent that needs encouragement or need support as they prepare to leave school for the work force.

Younger students benefit from LAP because they enjoy:

- spending time with a special friend;
- having someone to talk to and learn from;
- working on special projects;
- sharing books, stories, activities and games;
- celebrating special occasions;
- having fun.

Older students benefit from LAP because they enjoy;

- being treated as an individual;
- having extra time with, and support of a volunteer;
- sharing interests, tasks and activities;
- having someone to talk with and listen to;
- celebrating special occasions;
- having fun.

STUDENTS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

In LAP students take responsibility for their learning, for their active participation with LAP volunteers, and for their regular and timely attendance at LAP sessions.

Students are also responsible for negotiating with the LAP coordinator and with their class teachers about their attendance time at LAP.



No dream is ever too big
No dreamer is ever too small
Lisa J McInnes

LAP EQUALS A PLUS FACTOR FOR STUDENTS

STUDENT	OUTCOME
Lisa, Year 2, shy and withdrawn.	+LAP - planted a garden; - related positively with other children; - achieved some academic success.
Andrew, Year 9, 'turned off' school; truanted frequently; limited achievement.	+LAP - completed homework; - attended school when volunteer came; - started reading books out of own interest.
Kylie, Year 7, talented in Maths and English; frustrated with class activities.	+LAP - wrote a computer program with senior student at local high school; - attended some secondary classes with volunteer.
Metty, Year 3, recently arrived from South-East Asia; struggling in all areas of learning.	+LAP - volunteer providing support in own language; - happier at school; - achieving success.
Andrew, Year 4, limited reading ability; poor writing skills.	+LAP - produced own story and made 'big book'; - increased interest and confidence.
Luke, Year 5, quiet, shy child; few friends, no extended family; talented in Art.	+LAP - senior citizen became adopted grandparent; - went to lawn bowls; - entered local art show and won a prize.
Linda, Year 9, keen to leave school at 15; little knowledge of survival; rarely completed homework.	+LAP - explored career options; - enjoyed practical activities e.g. using a street directory; - decided to remain at school.
Justin, Year 10, aggressive, violent behaviour not achieving in class.	+LAP - attempted homework; - taught volunteer to play chess; - developed social skills; - obtained employment on leaving school.



HOW DOES LAP WORK?

The LAP program in your school is run by a coordinator who is either a volunteer from the school community, or a staff member whose time has been allocated to LAP. It may also be run by a management team made up of volunteers and teaching staff.

The LAP coordinator or management team takes responsibility for the administrative jobs of the program, and recruits volunteers to work with students, 'matching' the interests and abilities of both, and helping volunteers plan programs for students' learning.

You may hear about the program in your school through the school newsletter, or through the involvement of volunteers or students you know.

WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

Question: *What sort of people are volunteers?*

Answer: *People who have the time and interest in helping students.*

Volunteers for LAP bring special talents and interests to the school and come from all walks of life. You might be the parent of a student in the school. You may already participate in the school in a variety of ways. Volunteering for LAP offers opportunity for worthwhile involvement if you have not been involved in the past.

Your child may be involved in LAP. Seeing the benefit for your own child, you might offer to be a volunteer for another student. If you have junior primary age children, you might welcome the opportunity to work with older students in primary or secondary schools and vice versa.

Your first language might not be English. You might not have had the opportunity to participate in other activities and might offer to support students from your own cultural background. Students benefit from the chance to talk to a volunteer in their own language, thus enabling them to feel more secure and confident at school.

You might be a senior citizen. You have a lifetime of experiences and expertise to share with young people in schools. Many children do not have contact with grandparents, or the opportunity to develop a close relationship with an older person within the school setting.

You might be a senior student at secondary or tertiary level. Most younger students are delighted by the opportunity of a senior student working with me. Friendships often extend from LAP into the school yard and wider community.

You might be part of a mobile population. If you and your family need to move around from place to place, you might find involvement in LAP a good way to get to know a new community.



You might volunteer for LAP because:

- you have a genuine concern for others;
- you have spare time;
- you would enjoy working directly with students;
- you would like to participate in the educational program of the school;
- you have a particular interest or talent that you would like to share;
- you enjoy meeting people.

YOU'VE VOLUNTEERED FOR LAP - WHAT NOW?

The LAP coordinator or management team member will talk to you about the program, and perhaps ask you to fill in a questionnaire about yourself and your interests. He or she will also talk about your responsibilities as a person entrusted with the care of children. You will be asked to attend an orientation session about LAP, where the aims of the program are explained.

Your work as a LAP volunteer starts when you are matched to a student. Before you are introduced to your student, you will be invited to meet with the coordinator and the student's class teacher. At that meeting, you will be given some information about the needs and interests of your student, and an opportunity to confirm organisational details about your work in the school.

The essence of LAP is the creative process of developing an individual program for each student. This initial meeting will give you an opportunity to share in the planning of realistic outcomes for your student and to discuss a variety of strategies, tasks and activities. Your ideas and suggestions will be most welcome and highly valued.

As an example, on the following pages is one volunteer's response to the needs of a particular student.

Volunteers want to do things that are
important, meaningful and relevant.
They want to be involved and perform duties
that match their abilities.

VITAL

RECORD OF LAP SESSIONS

DATE	PLAN	COMMENTS
10 March	Get to know each other. Talk about her favourite stories and books, television, things she enjoys doing and maybe where she used to live. Tell her about my family and interests. Go outside for a walk if the weather is fine. Have a game ready to play.	I enjoyed the session. We walked around the school and she showed me where the library is. We decided to go to the library together next session to choose a book. We both love cats! She was very quiet but gave me a little smile when she left the area.
13 March	Go to library and choose a book about cats. Bring a photo of my cats to show her.	She loved my cats! We chose two books to read and we chatted quietly about her pets and where she used to live.
19 March	Coordinator rang - Joanne away.	
22 March	Read her one of the storybooks we had chosen. Talk about the story. Sit outside under the pergola.	Joanne enjoyed the story and joined in reading a page! Her teacher saw us outside and said hello. Joanne beamed. Went for a walk and she told me she liked coming to see me. I felt wonderful!
29 March	Draw pictures of cats and choose a game to play.	Joanne was still feeling unwell. However, she enjoyed the drawing and colouring and she thought my picture was funny. We put both pictures up on the display board in LAP. She was thrilled. Did not have time for the game.
5 April	Choose games to play this session and try to talk about her friends and what she is doing in class.	Spent the whole session talking. Joanne arrived very upset and in tears. We sat outside, had a drink, and she told me that no-one in the class liked her because she couldn't do anything. We talked about making her own book for her to share with the rest of the class. She left with a smile.
10 April		Spent the session talking to the coordinator as Joanne was on a class excursion. Discussed reading strategies in detail and now I feel more confident about encouraging her to read. The handouts will be useful. Joanne's teacher left a message that she was delighted that Joanne was in LAP and that she was happier in class. We briefly planned how to make the big book and I will spend time on this at home. We agreed that at each session we will do a little on the book and try to have it finished by the end of the term. I am learning a lot and loving every minute!



EXAMPLE OF A VOLUNTEER'S PLAN

Joanne is in Year 2 and has few friends at school, as her family has recently moved into the area. She has a younger sister who has not yet started school.

Joanne is very shy and withdrawn and stammers when faced with a difficult situation. She often cries at school, is very unhappy, and constantly seeks her teacher's attention. She has a low self-esteem and is reluctant to join in classroom activities. She struggles with reading but enjoys books and stories.

Joanne has been recommended for LAP by her classroom teacher and her parents are very pleased about her participation in the program.

Joanna's volunteer is Wendy, a mother of two children who both attend the same school. Wendy has a daughter the same age as Joanne. She has been living in the area for five years.

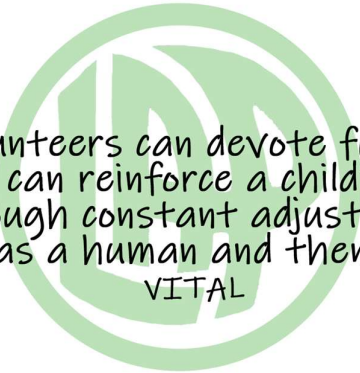
INITIAL PLAN

Aim of sessions

- To build self-esteem, through a caring relationship.
- To help Joanne to feel more confident in her new environment.
- To build on her interest in books and stories by sharing a range of relevant books and other materials.
- To develop her ability and confidence in reading.
- To achieve success in reading.
- To be a friend.

Possible activities (as discussed at an initial planning session)

- Talk about where Joanne used to live, her family, friends, pets, hobbies (when she is ready and comfortable to do so).
- Discuss favourite books, stories, television programs etc.
- Write a letter to a friend where she used to live.
- Take everything slowly - do not rush!
- Choose a book from the library together.
- Read to her.
- Make a big book together (consider the process to do this).
- Always greet her with a smile.
- Provide a balance between 'talking' and 'task'.
- Remember confidentiality.



Because volunteers can devote full time to one child they can reinforce a child's feeling of success through constant adjustment to meet needs first as a human and then as a learner.

VITAL



THE SIX C's OF LAP

The roles and responsibilities of LAP volunteers can be summarised as follows. You need to consider these carefully and, apply them to your work in LAP. Come back to them for inspiration!

CARE

- Will the things that I do and say show that I 'care for kids'?
- Do I have a genuine interest in students?
- Would I enjoy spending time on a one-to-one basis?
- Am I able to respect differences in abilities, cultures and backgrounds?
- Am I willing to accept students as they are?

COMMUNICATION

- Am I prepared to listen attentively?
- Am I willing to spend time to get to know a student?
- Am I happy to let a student get to know me?
- Am I prepared to jointly explore issues and problems with a student and not be a 'rescuer'?
- Will I accept the opportunity to discuss successes and concerns with the coordinator, teaching staff and other volunteers where appropriate?

CONTENT

- Do I recognise that my own strengths and interests will enrich a child's learning experiences?
- Am I prepared to spend time planning activities with the coordinator and teaching staff?
- Am I willing to be flexible to meet the student's needs and interests?
- Am I willing to keep accurate records of my work with the student?

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Am I aware that a student's feelings and thoughts need to be respected to build trust in the relationship?
- Will I be constantly vigilant in appreciating the confidential nature of my work with a student?
- Do I recognise the unique privilege I have in working with someone else's Child?
- Do I understand that I have a legal responsibility as a mandated notifier to report any concern about possible child abuse directly to the coordinator and principal of the school?
- Do I recognise that there is a difference between sharing experiences in a meeting of volunteers and 'gossiping' about the student at home or with friends?

COMMITMENT

- Do I have the time to make a genuine and realistic commitment to the program?
- Will I be available to work once or twice each week with a student?
- Will I be able to attend LAP sessions regularly?
- Am I prepared to advise the coordinator/school/student if I am unable to attend a session?
- Am I prepared to attend regular meetings and training programs where possible?

COOPERATION

- Am I prepared to work with teachers as partners to provide support and assistance for students?
- Will I share in the planning and decisions that affect the LAP program in the school?



WHERE WILL I WORK WITH STUDENTS?

LAP volunteers work with students in resource centres, away from the classroom, or in the school's own special LAP area. If you and your student share the same language other than English, you may also work in the classroom alongside your student, improving your own fluency in English and contributing to the experience of other students.

HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S WORKING?

An important part of the LAP program is reviewing our initial outcomes for the student and comparing them with the records of LAP sessions, changing our approach where necessary. As a part of this process, you will be invited to discuss your program with the LAP coordinator on a regular basis. On an individual level, you can reflect on each LAP session in the following terms:

- What happened today?
- What did I do?
- How did my student respond?
- What did my student do?
- What can I do to build on the things that went well?
- What can I do to change the things that didn't work as well as I'd planned?

As a volunteer in the school's LAP program you will also be involved with reviewing the overall direction and success of LAP in meeting the needs of the students of the school. This might take the form of regular meetings with the LAP coordinator or management team and other volunteers to plan group activities or share ideas.

Sometimes, after all your best efforts, the volunteer-student 'match' just doesn't work. If this happens to you, discuss it with the LAP coordinator or a management team member - if the basis of a good learning relationship isn't there, a change may be necessary. Try not to be discouraged!

'LAP DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

Coordinators report that students who are successfully involved with LAP often feel more involved with their other studies, and the people around them.

The aggressive student brings flowers for the volunteer;
the shy, quiet student tells everyone what has happened today;
the disinclined student arranges a time for their
volunteer and parents to meet;
the disorganised student remembers things that
have to be done - even over the holidays.

Morag, coordinator



KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

Volunteers have unique talents and life experiences. The value of your volunteer work will be recognised and acknowledged by the school community.

Celebrations are a part of any LAP program and give everyone involved a chance to meet and talk about their activities. You may celebrate students' and volunteers' achievements, or even be presented with a LAP badge for your contribution to the program!



*One only had to be at our last gathering
when the kids came in to give their
LAP helpers their new badges to know that something
lasting and important is happening in LAP.
Jan, coordinator*

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Through your involvement in the program, you will be given the opportunity to participate in formal training seminars organized through the school or through the 'Friends of LAP network'. LAP recognises that learning is a lifelong process, and you may welcome the chance to develop your skills and share ideas with other volunteers, and professional people.

CONCLUSION

Your participation in your school's LAP program can be an exciting and challenging experience. You may learn as much from your student as you give. You will face a variety of experiences - ideas to explore, frustrations to overcome and risks to take. Each day in LAP can also bring new opportunities to transform hesitant beginnings into good relationships.

Valuing the individual is the spirit that is LAP. This opportunity to share in a child's learning and to work in partnership is one not to be missed!



KNOWLEDGE IN YOUR LAP

**There's excitement in contact and learning
for learning's no troublesome trap
and here is a truth, when communing with youth
there's a nice way to do it with LAP.**

**It's a friendship, a process of helping,
and a well of goodwill it can tap.
A wise course it steers, with its brisk volunteers
the parents and partners in LAP.**

**It's challenging being with students
for here is an ongoing theme,
there's much to be done, if you work one-to-one,
you'll be one in a wonderful team.**

**Companions of learning, together
new knowledge you'll surely unwrap.
There are treasures to find for a lively young mind
and that's the nice thing about LAP.**

Max Fatchen

Cataloguing-in-publication:

371.3 Penhall, Penny

PEN The LAP companion. Volunteers' guide | Penny
Penhall, Glenys Brown, Mary Carmody. (Adelaide)
Education Dept. of S. Aust, 1992

DDC20: 13p. : ill. (Learning Assistance Program)

371.394 1. Education – Parent participation 2. School and community

I Brown, Glenys II Carmody, Mary III Title IV Series

ISBN: 0 7308 2030 0

SCIS order no. 709 062

© Education Department of South Australia

ISBN: 0 7308 2030 0

W17227/1