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## Mary and Frances Youth Center

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# Mary and Frances Youth Center

## **Abstract**

The Mary and Frances Youth Center opened in 2007 on Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Monroe Park campus in Richmond. Its facilities include two private tennis courts and a number of classrooms designed for youth-centered programming and training. The youth center's flagship program since opening has been Lobs & Lessons, a nationally recognized tennis and learning program, but it also hosts and leads Discovery summer program, which provides middle-school students with in-depth experiences in science, technology, engineering, arts and health sciences. In addition to these programs, the youth center co-manages the implementation of the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a quality improvement process for out-of-school service providers across the region. VCU and the youth center are committed to maintaining a safe, supportive environment for minors participating in VCU programs. To that end, the Safety and Protection of Minors Policy was launched in March 2016 to ensure all youth programs and activities on campus meet specific requirements, including biennial background checks.

## **Keywords**

Minors, Policy, Youth on Campus, HEPNet, youth protection policy, volunteers

## **Disciplines**

Civic and Community Engagement | Higher Education

## Case Study

## Mary and Frances Youth Center



### Organization Background

The Mary and Frances Youth Center opened in 2007 on Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Monroe Park campus in Richmond. Its facilities include two private tennis courts and a number of classrooms designed for youth-centered programming and training. The youth center's flagship program since opening has been Lobs & Lessons, a nationally recognized tennis and learning program, but it also hosts and leads Discovery summer program, which provides middle-school students with in-depth experiences in science, technology, engineering, arts and health sciences. In addition to these programs, the youth center co-manages the implementation of the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a quality improvement process for out-of-school service providers across the region.

VCU and the youth center are committed to maintaining a safe, supportive environment for minors participating in VCU programs. To that end, the Safety and Protection of Minors Policy was launched in March 2016 to ensure all youth programs and activities on campus meet specific requirements, including biennial background checks.

### Background

Before moving to Verified Volunteers, the Mary and Frances Youth Center relied on the Virginia State Police to conduct background checks, which could take several weeks to complete depending on their workload and complexity of the screening. This was always meant to be a temporary solution for VCU, as the University was in the process of finalizing its Safety and Protection of Minors Policy. The policy was created to ensure a safe environment for minors on campus and aligns the University with national best practices.

The Center learned about Verified Volunteers through positive recommendations from VCU ASPIRE which is a living-learning program promoting community engagement through academic coursework and co-curricular experiences. VCU and the Mary and Frances Youth Center hired Alyssa King as a Program Specialist in 2016 to help implement the new policy and Verified Volunteers.

### Solution

Verified Volunteers was introduced in July 2016 at the Mary and Frances Youth Center, as well as across campus, and has helped to screen hundreds of individuals working with youth on campus via its easy-to-use platform.

In signing on with Verified Volunteers, Mrs. King found it was easier than expected to manage multiple program accounts via a single service provider and platform. "As a whole, it's made our lives easier. It's been helpful to work with one person at Verified Volunteers to manage all our subaccounts," she says.

### Results

VCU's new Safety and Protection of Minors Policy calls for certain individuals working with non-enrolled minors on campus to undergo biennial screenings. Verified Volunteers aided in the creation of a screening infrastructure and helped policy implementation run smoothly. According to Mrs. King: "When we introduced Verified Volunteers, it was actually a great relief for the programs, which could share or offset some of the costs with their volunteers."



"It was a long process to bring the policy forward and Verified Volunteers made it easier than I could have imagined to implement. Everything is moving smoothly and quickly and I feel confident about sharing a user-friendly platform across campus that will help programs implement the policy at their own levels."

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