



# Peer Connect Facilitator Guide

## Introduction to CherishAbility

CherishAbility originated in 1984, as a residential facility called Rainbow Valley Ranch in Hadley, NY. Operating as a working farm, the three founders, Doug and June Dickinson and their close friend and colleague, Joy Parker, dedicated their lives to providing a *learning community* in a healing atmosphere for Christian Scientists labeled in society as “developmentally disabled.”

The ranch sold in 2004, and the organization has evolved into a nationwide support community of volunteers, caregivers and ambassadors dedicated to delivering spiritually enriching activities and financial support to Christian Science families and their loved ones with developmental special needs.

CherishAbility’s mission is to build a compassionate sense of community and support for Christian Scientists with developmental special needs and their families through financial assistance, informational and inspirational resources, and experiential enrichment activities.

### Services Offered

- Networks
  - Family Network
  - Loved One Network
- Enrichment Programs
- Financial Assistance
- Hope Library

## Peer Connect

### Introduction

Over the years, CherishAbility has offered opportunities for participants in our circle to engage with other Christian Scientists through our enrichment programs at Christian Science (CS) camps (both in-person and online). These programs are engaging, fun, and uplifting; but they are designed for larger groups.

CherishAbility has seen a growing desire to connect and socialize with other CS peers, as well as for support and guidance in navigating life’s social situations in joyful and elevating ways. Many Christian Scientists enjoy meaningful social interactions through church, CS summer camps and even schools. These avenues are often not easily accessible to Christian Scientists with developmental special needs.

They miss out on these social opportunities with fellow Christian Scientists—while their peers miss out on the blessings of interacting with them.

## Purpose

To connect CherishAbility participants with peers from the wider CS community, one-on-one or in small groups, and to engage in fun, social hangouts, while providing opportunities for all parties to learn and grow.

## Description

CherishAbility loved ones will hang out once/week for four consecutive weeks, one-on-one or in small groups, with CherishAbility Peer Facilitators—seasonal staff or volunteers. Facilitators will incorporate social skills practice through fun and playful activities online.

Here are a few distinguishing characteristics of this program:

- **Small groups:** One-on-one or in small groups of 1 – 4 participants with 1 – 2 facilitators.
- **Social skills:** Hangouts are focused on developing social skills as identified by parents and caregivers.
- **Individualized:** Participants are grouped according to their interests, means of communication, and goals. Activities are tailored to each participant’s interests, and hangouts are scheduled based on their availability.

## Hangouts

**Eligibility:** Christian Scientists with developmental special needs who are interested in social connections within the CS community and fun online learning opportunities.

**Activities:** CherishAbility staff will work with Peer Facilitators to ensure activities are tailored to the specific interests and ability levels of each participant, emphasizing fun and connection while having a social-skill focus. For example, getting to know a new person, taking turns, following directions, listening, expressing a like or dislike in a graceful manner.

**Duration of each hangout:** 60 min. per week

**Dates:** Dates are flexible and dependent on what works best for the group. If you sign up for a session, you hang out with your group once a week for four consecutive weeks.

**Format:** Video conference

## CherishAbility Support

CherishAbility staff will support facilitators throughout the program by:

- Managing the registration process
- Sharing pertinent participant information

- Scheduling an orientation meeting with facilitators to:
  - Provide strategies and guidance for working with CherishAbility participants
  - Help draft a schedule for your group
  - Assist with a communication plan for you and your group
  - Review the debrief process that will occur after each hangout
  - Answer questions
- Being available to offer support and help plan the hangouts

## Expectations, Responsibilities, and Requirements

### Expectations

- Abide by the Peer Connect Facilitator Guide
- Establish relationships with CherishAbility participants
- Offer support and encouragement
- Nurture the growth, enthusiasm, and joy of participants
- Develop and improve your facilitation skills

### Responsibilities

- Plan and prepare 60-minute hangout sessions that include three essential elements:
  - 1. Metaphysical inspiration based on the teachings of the Bible and Christian Science
  - 2. Activities tailored to the interests and abilities of the participants
  - 3. Meaningful interactions with participants
- Communicate hangout dates to your group and send reminder emails before each hangout
- Inform the assistant program director if you are unable to make a scheduled hangout
- Maintain confidentiality
- Participate in the debrief process which includes reporting the following to the CherishAbility program director:
  - description of the hangout activities
  - overview of what worked and what didn't work/challenges
  - fruitage or special moments between you and the participants

### Requirements

- A "sincere seeker of Truth,"\* as taught by Christian Science—striving to live in accordance with its teachings, demonstrating its principles, and being metaphysically prepared (*\*Science and Health, p. x*)
- At least 18 years of age or older OR enrolled in DiscoveryBound's National Leadership Council (NLC) program
- Complete the online Peer Connect Facilitator application
- Complete an orientation session with a CherishAbility program director