

## **Portfolios**

Portfolios seem to be the most fun, individually meaningful, useful, creative and respected way to document learning. Every Learner in the VISION Home and Community Program (HCP) is encouraged to maintain a portfolio. A portfolio is a representative collection of a Learner's best and most challenging work that reflects progress over time and allows for on-going self-reflection of the learning process. It is sometimes called an "authentic assessment" because unlike tests, portfolios reflect what the Learner, rather than the teacher, believes is important and valuable, thereby giving Learners practice in the area of self-awareness and self-evaluation.

### **Purpose:**

There are many reasons for Learners to create portfolios as a way of documenting learning. Some of those reasons include:

- Learners have the opportunity to reflect on work they feel good about.
- Learners freely decide what parts of their work are important and meaningful.
- Learners enjoy creating and sharing a composite of their best and most challenging work.
- Learners discover new aspects of themselves as they reflect upon their learning.
- Learners and parents have an opportunity to discuss overall process and end product on a periodic basis.
- Learners develop organizational skills.
- Learners can use their portfolios to determine what they want to explore next.
- Learners can create identity and make a statement or representation of self.
- The portfolio can be useful in getting jobs, for college entrance, and is a requirement for graduation from VISION HCP.

### **What to include:**

Anything that the Learner considers meaningful, significant, or special can be included in the portfolio. Many pieces are appropriate, but Learner choice is primary. Learners might consider:

- Reading lists
- Photos of themselves doing something they enjoy
- Writings they are particularly proud of
- Art work or photos of their art work
- Challenging math assignments
- An entry from a field journal
- Science experiment results
- Brochures from camps or programs they've attended
- Personal reflections
- Recommendations given by Educators or mentors
- Newspaper clippings in which they are highlighted
- Anything else that reflects who they are

Along with the item in the portfolio, sometimes a brief write-up is needed explaining why the Learner chose that piece or what that piece means to the Learner. Ideally, the Educator and Learner will do this selecting and notating together. The Learner and RC or parent can also do this. It is also a good idea to date the pieces in the portfolio to help show growth over time, or to be able to capture a particular moment in the person's life.

### **Process:**

- How to go about it: There are many ways to create a portfolio. Some believe that on-going reflection of work coupled with frequent additions to the portfolio works best. Some believe that periodic reviews of a Learner's own work is more beneficial. Most agree that portfolios are collections of special works rather than homework folders. Ultimately the Learner determines what to include. (If a Learner's completed math workbook is special to him because of the sense of accomplishment and pride that he feels, this is indeed meaningful.)
- Physical display: Three-ring notebooks or photo albums seem to work best. Boxes, file folders, and large envelopes could work too. Some advocate having both a "working portfolio" and a "permanent portfolio." The Learner can add many pieces to the working portfolio as she goes. Periodically, the Learner selects the most meaningful pieces and adds them to the "permanent portfolio." It may seem insignificant, but displaying the portfolio in an honorable, respectful way is important. Keeping the portfolio in a box in a corner somewhere devalues the whole process. The "look" of the portfolio is not the most important part; it is the process Learner goes through to select pieces for her portfolio and the discussions surrounding the process that is of value.

### **Role of Learner, Parent, Educator and RC (with regards to the portfolio process):**

- Learner: To pursue work that is fulfilling, to reflect upon new learning and growth, and to collect work in a portfolio.
- Parent: To support the Learner in this process using care to allow the Learner to reflect and explore on her own. Guidance on what to choose to put in the portfolio is one important way for a parent to get involved if a Learner is struggling with this.
- Educator: To help the Learner be excited about learning, facilitate discussion on work the Learner did that was meaningful, and support the Learner in collecting materials for her portfolio. Writing up a description of the work the Educator did with the Learner to be included in the portfolio would be useful as well.
- RC: To be knowledgeable about portfolios. All RCs will have received some training and will have created their own portfolios. In turn, the knowledge is used to support Learners and parents in this process. RCs might also provide support to Learners who are having difficulty deciding what to include. RCs will also check in with Learners four times a year to look through the portfolio and facilitate a discussion about what kinds of learning have occurred so far.