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VOLUNTEER NEEDS FOR REFUGEES ARRIVING IN EL PASO

We're in the midst of another refugee surge arriving at the El Paso border!

At the present moment, the flow of arriving refugees has increased to about 400 to 700+ per *day*. All of the refugees coming to Annunciation House are families and individuals that Immigration did not place in one of their detention facilities. The vast majority of refugees released are parents with one or two children.

BACKGROUND

Refugees - primarily from the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras as well as from Mexico and Brazil – continue to arrive at the El Paso border. To receive these families and provide them hospitality – mostly for very short periods of time (1-3 days) - Annunciation House oversees multiple hospitality houses and centers for refugees in need of both short and long term hospitality.

The need for volunteers who are willing and able to help in one of the hospitality houses or centers is great. This document is provided so as to offer prospective volunteers a helpful explanation of the reality on the El Paso border and the needs that refugee families have upon arrival. We want prospective volunteers to have a good idea of how Annunciation House is working with refugee families so that volunteer expectations can be as realistic as possible.

Violence and poverty are the single greatest factors behind the waves of refugees from Central America and Mexico. Many of the arriving families have been directly impacted by violence. Extortion and the threat of violence are pervasive, law enforcement is very compromised in many communities, towns and villages, and credible protection is non-existent. As a result, many families – feeling the threat especially to their children – are fleeing their country. A second major factor is that of severe poverty, especially in many areas of Guatemala, that leave families struggling to feed their children.

A majority of families arriving at the border have relatives and friends already in the U.S. and in many instances, these families and or friends are the ones who come up with the funds to pay *coyotes* (smugglers) to bring their family members across Mexico.

Upon arriving in Juarez, the Mexican border city across from El Paso, refugee families cross the border in one of two ways. Some climb the border metal fences that separate the two countries and end up being detained by Border Patrol (BP). Others walk into Ports of Entry, turn themselves in to a Custom and Border Protection (CBP) officer, and ask for asylum. However these families cross, they end up in the custody of Immigration.

Once in Immigration custody, refugees are processed - they are fingerprinted, photographed, interviewed, screened through security databases, and officially charged with having entered the U.S. illegally. After being processed, families are turned over to Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE), the department that makes the determination of releasing the family, or a part of the family, on parole, Orders of Supervision, or recognizance. Not all families are

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released. Some are placed on buses or planes and sent to family detention centers like those in Dilley and Karnes, Texas. In addition, some families are separated with part of the family being detained and the other part released. Separation and detention is most frequently seen with the dads of families as well as the young adult children of families being separated and detained.

Almost 100% of refugee families released by ICE leave El Paso to be reunited with family or friends already living in other parts of the U.S. The majority of short-term refugee families only stay with us from one to four days. To accommodate released refugee families, Annunciation House oversees a network of Temporary Hospitality Centers.

PRESENT STATUS

Beginning in summer 2018, there was an increase in the flow of refugees arriving at the El Paso border. As ICE detention facilities filled, the number of refugees being released by ICE increased. Weekly averages of 500 started increasing to 700 and 800. By November 2018, the flow had increased to over 2,000 refugees per week. As of the end of February 2019, 400 to more than 700 refugees per day are being sent to Annunciation House.

Annunciation House is categorically opposed to the detention of refugees that pose no security risk to the U.S. Annunciation House is also opposed to the incredibly cruel practice of separating families and detaining part of a family. Finally, Annunciation House is opposed to the practice of releasing families to the street instead of to hospitality houses or centers, thereby ensuring that they have a place to sleep, eat, shower, change clothing, etc. On Tuesday, October 23, Immigration announced a border-wide policy of releasing refugee families to the street if NGOs were unable to receive them in shelters. The implementation of this policy was seen on Friday, October 26 when some 125 refugees were released to the street in the evening in downtown El Paso. That evening Annunciation House was able to secure, on an emergency basis, a church building to receive those refugees.

So as to prevent the release of refugees to the street, Annunciation House has been expanding the network of Temporary Hospitality Centers. Unless these centers are operational, ICE will release these refugees to the street. The mantra of Annunciation House has become "*Not one refugee to the street!*"

But in order to remain faithful to this mantra, we need your help and the help of many other volunteers.

THE NEED

Presently Annunciation House is overseeing multiple Temporary Hospitality Centers in El Paso, Las Cruces, NM, and even Albuquerque, NM. Many of the centers are buildings affiliated with religious congregations or organizations; some are motels in El Paso. Annunciation House is directly operating many of the hospitality centers. All the centers are staffed entirely by volunteers.

It is extremely important that prospective volunteers understand the following:

1. Fluid Reality – The number of refugee arrivals is unpredictable with some days seeing fewer than 400 refugees and other days close to 800. The speed with which refugee families move on usually between 24 and 96 hours. The goal with arriving refugee families is to assist them in making contact with relatives or friends in the U.S. so that those relatives or friends can purchase bus or plane tickets for them. Once a refugee family has travel arrangements, volunteer drivers are recruited to get refugee families to the bus station or airport.
2. All Inclusive Work – Regardless of the number of refugees at any of the hospitality centers – be it one or a hundred - basic needs must be met. This includes meals and clean up, toiletries & towels for showers, clean bedding, travel arrangement

assistance, rides to bus stations, travel food care packages, medical needs, communication with family in the U.S., etc. As long as there is even one refugee at the center, volunteer staff must be present.

3. Mundane Work – A great deal of the work is very down to earth. It includes preparing meals, clean-up after meals, cleaning bathrooms, showers, hallways, dining room, etc., doing laundry, sorting clothing, doing intakes when refugees arrive, organizing activities for children, teens, and moms, listening to tons of stories, etc.
4. Language – The population is almost 100% monolingual Spanish-speaking, and Spanish-speaking volunteers are extremely helpful. Non-Spanish speaking volunteers are also very helpful. But non-Spanish speaking volunteers need to understand that if they do not speak Spanish, interaction with the guests will be much more limited. There are also non-Spanish speaking refugee families that arrive - Indigenous families and families from Brazil – in which case, lots of hand signs and Google translating goes on.
5. The 24 / 7 Nature of the Need – As long as there is even one refugee at the site, there must be a volunteer present. This includes overnight presence with volunteers spending the night at the sites. So it's a 24 hour volunteer presence and a schedule of who is on "shift" is made so that volunteers know when they are "on" and needed. Out of town volunteers need to understand that the hours are long and the need non-stop.
6. Hospitality Center Assignments – Volunteers need to come with a real openness to helping wherever they are needed. Volunteers will be assigned to help at one of the various Temporary Hospitality Centers.

SPECIFIC VOLUNTEER DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- Site Shift Coordinator – A Site Shift Coordinator is needed from 7 AM to 10 PM every day that a hospitality center is operational. This means that a Site Shift Coordinator volunteer will be on "duty" from 7 AM to 2:30 PM or from 2 PM to 10 PM. Site Shift Coordinators are the persons with overall responsibility for the operation and supervision of the hospitality center during their shift. This volunteer must be very responsible, bilingual, trustworthy, dependable, mature, with organizational skills and initiative.
- Support Volunteers – Support Volunteers works alongside the Shift Coordinator to provide presence, supervision, and carry out a variety of tasks. This includes doing refugee intakes, staffing center office, greeting visitors, taking donations, etc. Support Volunteers also assist in the supervision of the clothing room. A volunteer schedule is posted so that volunteers know when they are expected to be at their assigned hospitality center.
- Travel & Transportation – A very important function is assisting refugees in connecting with family/friends in the U.S. so that they can move on and be reunited. For this, Spanish is a must. In addition to making the travel plans, the volunteer also arranges transportation to the bus station or airport. Volunteers also see to it that Care Packages are provided to families traveling long distances by ground transportation.
- Kitchen & Cook Volunteer – Ensures meals are provided for guests, maintains kitchen cleanliness, puts away leftover food, takes stock of needed supplies. Although church groups have been consistently bringing homemade dinners to the center, volunteers are needed to prepare breakfast and serve leftovers for lunch.
- Care Package Preparation – fills Ziploc bags with food needed for travel by air or bus. Usually takes only a couple of hours to stock these bags in our storage room for availability as needed.
- Laundry, Cleaning, & Supplies Volunteer – ensures all linens and towels are washed, oversees laundry supplies, assists in organizing and supervising the daily cleaning of the site by the guests
- Health Care & Needs Volunteer – Center Volunteers also respond to health needs that may arise. At times, guests may be pregnant, have a fever, infection, lice, flu, etc. Sorting of over-the-counter medications is needed, as are on-call health care providers for nonemergency situations. Health emergencies are responded to by calling 911.

- Overnight Volunteer Shift – willing to simply provide a presence at the center during the night. Overnight volunteers are needed every night the hospitality centers are operational. This requires volunteers willing to sleep at the center. Overnight Shifts have been mostly uneventful and the Overnight Volunteer is usually able to get sleep. Short-term, out-of-town volunteers need to understand that they may be scheduled to do Overnight Volunteer Shifts.

TRANSPORTATION & DRIVERS WITH AUTOS

A tremendous need is for volunteer drivers able to transport families to bus stations and the airport. These volunteer drivers pick up families at hospitality centers, drive them to the bus station or airport, get down with the family, ensure that they get their tickets, and walk them to their departing gate.

Some out-of-town volunteers drive down with a car and others have been able to rent a car so as to help with transportation. This is incredibly helpful. But many out-of-town volunteers are unable to do this and that's OK. This is explained as a way of highlighting the need of transportation in working with refugee families.

DINNER MEALS FOR HOSPITALITY CENTERS

On any given day a hospitality center may receive 30 to 100 refugees. Faith communities of all denominations and organizations have been *ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL* in providing the meals at the various hospitality centers.

There is a constant need for faith communities and organizations willing commit to bringing meals to the various hospitality centers. Faith communities or organization are asked to commit for specific time periods. This can be once a week for one, two, or three months, or every day for 1, 2, or 3 weeks, etc. Faith communities or organizations willing and able to help with the dinner meal need to understand that they bring the complete dinner meal and the volunteers to serve it and clean up afterwards.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

- ✓ TIME COMMITMENT – Obviously, the longer time a short-term volunteer can offer, the more helpful it is. It takes time and effort to train a new volunteer and it takes a few days before that person can really be helpful. Therefore in general, **we request a minimum two-week time commitment**. We sometimes make exceptions to this time requirement on a case-by-case basis for people who have excellent Spanish and/or relevant experience (e.g., people who have worked in shelter settings or with immigrant and refugee populations). Even with these skills, **we cannot accommodate any volunteers who have less than a week to spend with us.**
- ✓ Age: volunteers must be at least 20 years old.
- ✓ Language: we prefer volunteers who have at least some knowledge of Spanish, but this is not required. However, for people with no Spanish, we firmly require at least a two-week commitment. (We can also use Portuguese speakers to interact with refugees from Brazil.)
- ✓ Willingness to do whatever is needed (within your capabilities).
- ✓ Overall good health.

APPLICATION PROCESS

There are two ways to apply, depending on your skills and availability:

1. **If you speak some Spanish and can come for at least two weeks:** please use the following website, which was kindly set up for us by supporters of ours who work with the Unitarian Universalist Church. Note that we are the listing on the left, and you can click through to an FAQ sheet and also an application:

<https://uucsj.org/volunteer/us-asylum/>

2. **If you do not meet the above requirements** (e.g., if you are a Spanish speaker who can come for at least one week but not two; or a non-Spanish speaker, who can come for two weeks or more), then we will make a decision about you on a case-by-case basis. In this case, please email Mary Fontana at volunteercoordinator@annunciationhouse.org with the following info:

- ✓ AVAILABILITY – specific dates you are able to come
- ✓ IDENTIFICATION – tell us a little about who you are, how you heard about this work, and whether you have any related experience
- ✓ CONTACT INFORMATION – Provide full name, address, email & cell #.
- ✓ LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY – What is your primary language, do you speak other languages and if so, rate your proficiency on a scale of 1 to 10.
- ✓ HEALTH & PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS – Identify any health or physical limitations.
- ✓ HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION – let us know if you will need housing while you are in El Paso, and if you will have a vehicle (personal or rental car). See “Housing” section below for more info.
- ✓ BACKGROUND CHECK - Because this work involves children and vulnerable adults, we require a background check for all volunteers. (You do not need to send this with your initial query, but it will be required before you can begin volunteering.)
 - If you already work or volunteer in a setting that requires background clearance, we will accept an email from your employer or volunteer organization stating that you meet their requirements (religious sisters, brothers, clergy can send in a letter of good standing from their community).
 - Otherwise, let Mary know that you would like us to request a background check for you. Mary will request one from the nationwide database, Verified Volunteers, and you’ll get an email with instructions to follow to complete the background check. There is a \$15 fee which you pay directly to Verified Volunteers.

HOUSING FOR OUT OF TOWN VOLUNTEERS

We are happy to provide housing for those who request it. Volunteers who want to stay with us are generally housed in one of the temporary hospitality centers (often the same one where they are working). This can be anything from an actual motel room to a makeshift dorm with cots in a community center or school. **In most cases, volunteers who stay with us will be sharing space with other volunteers**, so you must be comfortable with this if you are to stay with us. Because we are dealing with constantly changing numbers of volunteers and guests, we usually do not know until about a week in advance where we will have any particular volunteer stay.

Some out-of-town volunteers prefer to make their own arrangements for housing, either by staying with contacts in El Paso or by booking a hotel or AirBnB. If you do this, let us know roughly where you are staying and we will try to assign you to a hospitality center nearby (we have several scattered across the city). Staying near downtown or in the Sunset Heights neighborhood are good options if you are booking your own accommodations, as they are central locations with good access to several of our houses as well as public transit.

SOME INFORMATION ON DONATIONS

The work with arriving refugees has only been possible because of the spontaneous donations and generosity of individuals, groups, churches, congregations, etc. The churches and religious congregations that have made their facilities available for use as hospitality centers have been nothing short of miracle workers. The work of responding to arriving refugees continues to be done by literally hundreds of volunteers. The need for donations is also critical.

FINANCIAL DONATIONS: At this time, **we ask most urgently for financial donations rather than specific material items.** This allows us to buy exactly what we need and respond in real time to the changing needs of our guests. It also lightens the work and cost of sorting, transporting, and storing donated goods. Donation can be made online at our website, annunciationhouse.org , or checks can be mailed to our office at 815 Myrtle Ave, El Paso TX 79901 (make out to Annunciation House).

MATERIAL DONATIONS: For people who prefer to donate material goods, our needs include:

- Travel Care Packages – Refugees arrive destitute & have to travel long distances. Care packages include water bottles, juice boxes, Granola, cereal bars, nutritious snacks, fruit - anything that doesn't spoil easily.
- Tote bags – used for refugees' clothing, care packages, etc.
- Toiletries – Hotel-size bottles of shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, bar soap, combs, toothbrushes, menstrual pads, disposable shaving blades. Plastic bags, quart and gallon size.
- Underwear – Children, teen, & adult, both male & female underwear – ABSOLUETLY MUST BE NEW. Also pampers, all sizes.
- Breakfast and dinner supplies – paper plates, cups, napkins, plastic utensils, powdered ice tea and lemonade mix for drinks, milk, juice, fresh fruit
- Janitorial & Cleaning Supplies – Toilet paper, bleach, pine cleaner, laundry detergent, dish soap, ajax.
- Financial – There are many financial costs that can only be addressed with financial donations. Financial donations can be made out to Annunciation House and mailed to 815 Myrtle Avenue, El Paso, TX 79901 or made via our website at <https://annunciationhouse.org/financial-donations/>

NOT ONE REFUGEE TO THE STREET