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## ***VOLUNTEER NEEDS FOR REFUGEES ARRIVING IN EL PASO***

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### **BACKGROUND**

Annunciation House is a Catholic volunteer organization that has been providing hospitality—primarily food, clothing, and shelter—for migrants and refugees in El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico since 1978. Annunciation House needs volunteers who are willing and able to help in our hospitality centers, providing welcome to migrants and refugees entering the United States. This document is intended to provide prospective volunteers with a good idea of how Annunciation House works with refugee families.

The number of refugees we receive each day has varied widely in the last few years—from over a thousand people a day in some months of 2018 and 2019 to just a few dozen a week during some months of the pandemic. This September the numbers are relatively low; lately we have typically seen around 200 people being released from various immigration agencies in El Paso each day. We are receiving some of these people in our houses of hospitality, while some are being received by other community organizations such as Border Servant Corps, and some have the resources to travel on without assistance.

Many of the refugees we are seeing today are from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Cuba; a 2023 immigration policy permits several thousand people specifically from these countries to be paroled into the country each month. Others are from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil, and elsewhere. The vast majority of the people arriving in our houses today have previously been in Border Patrol, ICE, or other government custody. They have been released with either temporary or long-term permission to travel within the United States. Many of them have a friend or family member elsewhere in the US who is willing to provide them with a place to stay. Our role for these families is to serve as a “landing pad” upon release from detention. We provide them with shelter, meals, changes of clothes and supplies for the journey, and we help them make arrangements to travel on to their family elsewhere within the US, usually within a day or two of their arrival in our houses. We also have a smaller number of longer-term guests; many of those have medical needs that require ongoing care.

To receive all of these families and provide them with hospitality while travel arrangements are made for them to reunify with families and friends in the U.S., Annunciation House oversees several hospitality centers and also works with a network of churches who operate their own hospitality sites. One important aspect of our work is **that we are never sure how many people we’re going to be receiving in any given week, and we need volunteers to be prepared both for very busy days and for possible slower days.**

Our guests’ COVID-19 status is unknown and **it should be assumed that some guests may have COVID.** We do have a separate quarantine facility for any refugees who test positive for COVID-19. But volunteers must accept the risk that they may be exposed to COVID, and

**ANNUNCIATION HOUSE**

**CASA VIDES**

**CASA DEL REFUGIADO**

**ALBERGUE PAPA  
FRANCISCO**

**CASA TERESA**

**CASA OSCAR ROMERO**

**CASA ANUNCIACION  
JUAREZ**

**CASA EMAÚS**

anyone who is at high risk for complications from COVID should refrain from volunteering with us. **We require all volunteers to be vaccinated for COVID.**

## THE NEED

It is extremely important that prospective volunteers understand the following:

1. **Fluid Reality** – The number of refugee arrivals is unpredictable with some days seeing few families and others very large numbers. The speed with which refugee families move on is 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 the 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 meal preparation and clean-up, arranging toiletries & towels for showers, laundering and folding bedding, assisting with travel arrangements, rides to bus stations, assembling food packages for travel, addressing medical needs, facilitating communication with family in the U.S., etc.
3. **Mundane Work** – **A great deal of the work is very mundane and 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 stories, etc.
4. **Language** – Many of our guests are monolingual Spanish-speaking, and so Spanish-speaking volunteers are extremely helpful. We also periodically receive Brazilian guests (who speak Portuguese) and Haitian guests (who speak Kreyol), so volunteers who speak either of these languages can also be helpful. We sometimes receive guests who speak indigenous languages and have limited or no Spanish. In that case, we rely on hand signs and Google Translate. Volunteers who do not speak Spanish or other relevant languages are also very helpful. But non-Spanish-speaking volunteers need to understand that their interaction with our guests may be much more limited.
5. **The 24/7 Nature of the Need** – As long as there is even one refugee at a hospitality center, there must be a volunteer present. This includes overnight presence, with volunteers spending the night at the sites. A schedule of who is on “shift” is made so that volunteers know when they are “on duty”. Out of town volunteers need to understand that the hours are long and the need non-stop.
6. **Hospitality Center Assignments** – **We ask volunteers to come with an openness to help wherever they are needed and to do whatever is needed.** Volunteers will be assigned to help at one of our Hospitality Centers.

## VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Shift Coordinator – A Shift Coordinator must be on duty from 7 AM to 10 PM every day that a hospitality center is operational. This means that an individual Shift Coordinator volunteer will be on “duty” from 7 AM to 2:30 PM or from 2 PM to 10 PM each day. Shift Coordinators are the persons with overall responsibility for the operation and supervision of the hospitality center during their shift. They may work alone or with supporting volunteers to provide presence and supervision, and carry out a variety of tasks. This may include doing refugee intakes (if language ability allows), staffing the office, greeting

visitors, taking donations, etc. A volunteer schedule is posted so that volunteers know when they are expected to be on duty

**RANGE OF TASKS: all volunteers can expect to help with most or all of these tasks during their time in the house, as their abilities allow (e.g. language ability, whether they have a vehicle, etc.)**

- 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, volunteers also arrange transportation to the bus station or airport.
- Meal service- Assist our guests in preparing three meals a day for the household. Ensure that everyone gets fed, assign clean-up chores afterwards, ensure the kitchen and dining room are put in order, put away leftover food, take stock of needed supplies.
- Care Package Preparation – Volunteers often provide Care Packages to families traveling long distances by ground transportation. This can involve making sandwiches and filling Ziploc bags with food needed for travel by air or bus.
- Laundry, Cleaning, & Supplies – ensure all linens and towels are washed, oversee laundry supplies, assist in organizing and supervising the daily cleaning of the site by the guests
- Health Care & Needs–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. We have on-call health care providers that can be contacted for nonemergency situations. Health emergencies are responded to by calling 911.
- Clothing Bank – Sort and organize clothing donations and assist each new refugee in picking out a clean change of clothes.
- Fire and Safety Patrol – Walk an established route around and through our hospitality centers to look out for fire hazards, maintenance issues, and anything that might pose a threat to safety and security in our houses.
- Overnight Volunteer Shift –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 sleep the entire time. Short-term, out-of-town volunteers need to understand that they may be scheduled to do Overnight Volunteer Shifts.

**SPECIAL NOTICE FOR VOLUNTEERS COMING IN NOVEMBER 2024**

Last December, Annunciation House began to rent a building near downtown El Paso to use for refugee hospitality (in addition to the three houses we own and the parishes we cooperate with). Our lease expires on December 1, and we will be using the month of November to prepare to vacate the building—dismantling cots, boxing up supplies, cleaning and emptying, etc. We will be asking some Nshort-term volunteers who come at this time to assist with clearing out this building.

**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 bring their own car, while others rent a car to use during the time they are in El Paso so as to help with transportation. This is incredibly helpful. But many out-of-town volunteers are unable to do this and that's perfectly 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 50 to 200 refugees. Faith communities of all denominations and organizations have been *ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL* in providing some meals at the various hospitality centers.

There is a constant need for faith communities and community 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.

### **COVID REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS**

- A. **Volunteers must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19, with the last dose received at least two weeks prior to the start of their volunteer service.** If it has been a year or more since you were vaccinated, we recommend you get a booster, per CDC guidelines. There is a good chance you may be exposed to COVID in our houses.
- B. **If volunteers experience any COVID-like symptoms** in the 7 days prior to their arrival in El Paso, **please test yourself for COVID before coming and do not come if you test positive for COVID.** (Symptoms include fever, chills, cough, muscle pains, headache, gastrointestinal distress, loss of taste or smell.) Fully vaccinated individuals with no symptoms do not need to obtain a COVID test.
- C. Individuals with chronic or immunosuppressive health conditions that leave them particularly susceptible to COVID-19 are asked not to apply at this time.
- D. **IMPORTANT** – All individuals who offer to volunteer in any of Annunciation House's hospitality centers must do so with the complete awareness that they could be exposed to COVID. Annunciation House will take precautions to protect our volunteers and the refugees, but we cannot guarantee that volunteers will not be exposed and could possibly contract COVID.

### **OUT-OF-TOWN VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS**

- **2 WEEK MINIMUM 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. This applies to both new and returning volunteers.
- **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. We can also use Portuguese and Kreyol speakers to interact with refugees from Brazil and Haiti, respectively.
- **Background Check** – more info below
- **Willingness to do whatever is needed (within your capabilities).**

- Overall good health; no chronic health conditions that inhibit your ability to do the required tasks.
- Ability to walk up to a mile in the course of a day. Even if you are not doing any tasks that require physical labor, you do need to have good mobility.
- Must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19.
- For purposes of ORIENTATION, out-of-town volunteers **must arrive on one of the SCHEDULED Saturday arrival dates** so that they can start their volunteer service the following Sunday.
- Upcoming scheduled Saturday arrival dates are as follows:
  - a.) OCT 5, 2024
  - b.) OCT 19, 2024
  - c.) NOV 2, 2024
  - d.) NOV 16, 2024
  - e.) NOV 30, 2024
  - f.) DEC 14, 2024
  - g.) DEC 28, 2024
  - h.) ...and so on every other Saturday
- We typically only accept volunteers about two months in advance, due to the unpredictability of our needs.
- The dates listed above are designated as travel and arrival days; orientation and work assignments always begin the following morning, on Sunday.
- If you are able to stay until the Monday after your two weeks are completed (i.e. fly out on the Monday), this is extremely helpful since it allows for training of the new volunteers before you leave. We understand not everyone will have the flexibility and time off to do this.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS FOR OUT-OF-TOWN VOLUNTEERS**

If you are interested in coming from out of town to volunteer, please follow this link to fill out our Google Form:

<http://bit.ly/3rPztH0>

Filling out the form does not confirm your volunteering with us. Once we receive your submitted form, our volunteer coordinator will contact you over email to ask any further questions we have and answer any questions you may have. We will then let you know by email whether we can use your help, and confirm dates and other details with you.

### **HOUSING AND MEALS FOR OUT-OF-TOWN VOLUNTEERS**

We are happy to provide housing for those who request it. Volunteers are usually housed in the same hospitality center in which they are volunteering. Volunteers may be asked to share a room with another volunteer of the same gender due to space considerations. Accommodations are pretty basic, making use of cots, air mattresses, etc. Volunteers are welcome to eat the meals that are prepared and served three times a day for our guests. They will also have access to laundry facilities, bedding, and basic toiletries.

Because we are dealing with constantly changing numbers of volunteers and guests, we usually do not know until about a week in advance to which hospitality center a volunteer will be assigned.

Some out-of-town volunteers prefer to make their own housing arrangements, either by staying with contacts in El Paso or by booking a hotel or AirBnB.

### **IN-TOWN COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS**

We gladly welcome volunteers from the El Paso/ Las Cruces/ Juarez community who can commit to a weekly volunteer shift on an ongoing basis.

- **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, for local volunteers, **we request a minimum time commitment of eight hours a week for at least three months.** (For people who wish to volunteer “full time” for a shorter period, we request a commitment of two full-time weeks, equal to what out-of-town volunteers commit.)
- Volunteers must be at least 20 years old.
- We prefer volunteers who have at least some knowledge of Spanish, but this is not required. We can also use Portuguese speakers to interact with refugees from Brazil, and Haitian Kreyol speakers to speak with our Haitian guests.
- Background Check (more info below)
- Willingness to do whatever is needed (within your capabilities).
- Must be in good overall health.
- Must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- No underlying health conditions that elevate your COVID risk.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS FOR IN-TOWN COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS**

Locals from El Paso/Juarez/ Las Cruces: please follow this link to fill out our Google form:  
<http://bit.ly/3qJISAL>

Filling out the form does not confirm your volunteering with us. Once we receive your submitted form, a volunteer will contact you over email to ask any further questions we have, and answer any questions you may have. We will then let you know whether we can use your help, and give you directions on getting started.

### **BACKGROUND CHECKS**

Because this work involves children and vulnerable people, background checks are required for all volunteers before they 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 and brothers can send in a letter of good standing from their community.
- Otherwise, we will request a background check for you from nationwide databases through a service called Sterling Volunteers. If you go this route, you will get an email from Sterling with instructions to follow to complete the background check. There is a \$15 fee, which you pay directly to Sterling Volunteers.
- If you volunteered with us in the last three years and completed a background check at that time, you do not need to repeat the check.

## 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. Donations can be made online on our website, <https://annunciationhouse.org/financial-donations/>, or checks can be mailed to: Annunciation House, P.O. Box 11189, El Paso, TX 79995-1189. (Please make checks out to Annunciation House).

**MATERIAL DONATIONS:** Other than what is specifically listed below, we are NOT accepting used clothing donations. For people who prefer to donate material goods, our specific needs include:

- Travel Care Packages – Refugees 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 – MUST BE NEW. Also pampers, especially the larger sizes – 3,4,5 & 6.
- Coats, jackets and warm sweaters for adults and children.
- Breakfast and dinner supplies – Closeable meal boxes, cups, napkins, plastic utensils, smaller bottles of ice tea, lemonade, 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 P.O. Box 11189, El Paso, TX 79995-1189 or made via our website at <https://annunciationhouse.org/financial-donations/>

## CONTACTS

If you have any other questions about volunteer service with Annunciation House that are not answered in this document, please email [refugees@annunciationhouse.org](mailto:refugees@annunciationhouse.org) (for local El Paso/Las Cruces community individuals) or [volunteercoordinator@annunciationhouse.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@annunciationhouse.org) (for out of town individuals willing to travel to El Paso.)

If you have any other non-volunteering questions about Annunciation House, please email [annunciationhouse@annunciationhouse.org](mailto:annunciationhouse@annunciationhouse.org)