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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 or leaving 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 almost zero at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, we are hosting an average of 10-20 guests each night in each of the two hospitality houses we have open.

The refugees arriving in our houses today come from a wide range of circumstances, but generally are referred to us from ICE, the Social Security Administration, hospitals or other local agencies. These guests have permission to travel within the US and typically stay with us for a few days to a few weeks while they figure out their next steps. A significant number are from Venezuela, but by no means all. Our work is to provide these individuals with shelter, meals, changes of clothes, and accompaniment as they figure out the next phase of the journey. We also have a smaller number of longer-term guests; some 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. 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. We need volunteers to be prepared both for busy days and for possible slower days.** Whether we have one guest in the house or fifty, we still need a volunteer to be on duty at all times and to see to things like serving meals, answering the door and phone, and keeping bathrooms stocked with supplies.

Our guests' COVID-19 status is unknown and **it should be assumed that some guests may have COVID.** Volunteers must accept the risk that they may be exposed to COVID, and 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:

ANNUNCIATION HOUSE

CASA VIDES

CASA DEL REFUGIADO

ALBERGUE PAPA
FRANCISCO

CASA TERESA

CASA OSCAR ROMERO

CASA ANUNCIACION
JUAREZ

CASA EMAÚS

1. **Fluid Reality** – The number of refugee arrivals is unpredictable. It has been on the lower side since January 2025, and some days no new guests may arrive. Other days, we may be quite busy welcoming several new families. Volunteers must be prepared for a wide range of “busy-ness” and understand that their presence is extremely helpful even if there are only a few guests in the house.
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. Volunteers who do not speak Spanish are also very helpful. But non-Spanish-speaking volunteers need to understand that most guests speak little to no English, and be prepared to use Google Translate, pantomime, etc to communicate.
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”. This includes an overnight shift. The volunteers on the overnight shift usually get a full night of sleep, but they are “on call” in case of any emergencies that arise in the night.
6. **Hospitality Center Assignments** – **We ask volunteers to come with an openness to help wherever they are needed and to do whatever is needed.** We currently have two houses of hospitality open, and volunteers may be assigned to either house.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

- “Guest servant” shift – Each day is divided into two eight-hour shifts, from 6am-2pm and 2pm-10pm. A weekly schedule is drawn up and an individual volunteer is appointed to be “on duty” for each of these shifts. The volunteer schedule is posted so that volunteers know when they are expected to be on duty.
- The volunteer on duty bears 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 carry out a variety of tasks. This may include doing refugee intakes (if language ability allows), staffing the office, greeting visitors, taking donations, etc. It also often involves meal preparation, since the low number of guests in our houses currently means there may not be enough guests present for them to fulfill all cooking duties.

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- Prepare, or 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. Overnight Shifts have been mostly uneventful and the Overnight Volunteer is usually able to sleep the entire time.

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.) AUGUST 30, 2025
 - b.) SEPTEMBER 13, 2025
 - c.) SEPTEMBER 27, 2025
 - d.) OCTOBER 11, 2025

- e.) OCTOBER 25, 2025
- f.) ...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 (for local El Paso/Las Cruces community individuals) or 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