

Volunteer Guidelines

Our primary objective is to provide food, shelter and **Hospitality**...

One of the most important considerations for hosts is that guests are going through what may be the most severe crisis in their lives. Each person deals with this **trauma** in a different way. Some individuals are very optimistic and open about their situation, while others feel ashamed, humiliated and alienated.

However guests cope with their displaced situation, they find themselves dependent upon others to support their basic needs and the needs of their children for food and shelter. Many guests feel helpless, frustrated and incapable of meeting their own or their family's needs. They sometimes manifest these feelings by **withdrawing** or acting angry. Some may find it difficult to accept hosts' goodwill or to show appreciation.

It is important to remember that being homeless and in need of "shelter" can be a frightening experience. Guests are aware of the stigma attached to being labeled "homeless." They are very sensitive about their situation. They are also sensitive to being offered charity or being treated in a condescending or patronizing way. Volunteers should strive to be respectful of guests' **dignity and privacy** (both physical and situational) and to remember that volunteers are offering hospitality and sharing what they have with others who are in need.

While guests are without a home of their own, the hospitality rooms become their **temporary home**. Each day they encounter different hosts but guests consider their own small space as their temporary home. Despite the problems and obstacles guests face, volunteers are often amazed at the strength, perseverance, and even humor that some parents and children are able to maintain.

The sense of satisfaction experienced by volunteers in this program is occasionally tempered by disappointment in **unmet expectations**. Sometimes guests (like anyone at times) don't manage their lives in a productive way and don't display appropriate consideration and responsibility. However, a family's life is turned upside down and viciously altered by homelessness and the frustrations and difficulties imposed by that condition. These circumstances often lead to behavior which usually would not be manifest in normal situations. Volunteers understand this and provide the unconditional love that victims of this crisis need to maintain their dignity and gain their self-reliance.

Volunteer hosts can be a source of hope. They can provide a context for the **restoration** of the human spirit when hope has been lost. By experiencing the warmth and compassion of this program and a genuine desire by hosts to share and help, guests will benefit from this hospitality and be better prepared to move on to a stable and enduring independent life.

Be Yourself!

Do not refer to our guests as "homeless". Use terms such as; **guests**, clients, our folks, our people, etc. These are people who are between homes compared to people who are between jobs.

When bringing donations to the church, **label** them "**IHN**" not "Homeless".

The IHN Director screens our clients but cannot know every detail about them. We are providing a safe environment with unconditional love. We are **not** here to be **judgmental**.

Since we do not know every detail about our guests, as we don't know every detail about anyone, please keep **valuables** out of sight or with you at all times. Don't leave anything in temptations reach. Our guests are at a desperate time in their lives and a purse or money may be too big of temptation. Not all guests will feel like this but some may.

Any **donations** to individuals in the program should be made by one of the coordinators.

We provide bedrooms for our guests and these are their private spaces so **knock** before entering.

We are **not baby-sitters**. Children should never be left with us while parents go out.

We need to encourage **guest participation**. Don't do everything for them. If you think they need help with something ask them if they need assistance. Don't help automatically. Most guests want to do things for themselves.

Don't assume our guests want to discuss their problems. Don't pressure people to **talk**. If they feel comfortable with you and want to talk, they will.

Since our guests are under a lot of stress, you may find time when tension is building between them and their child or children. You can **gently intervene** by asking them if you can do something with their child. This is a good way of avoiding an awkward situation.

If you want to do something with children, ask for the **parents permission**.

Don't assume our guests need clothing. If you discover the need for **clothing** please contact one of the coordinators.

Please call your church's IHN coordinator if you have a **question**.

6/29/2011, 07:47, Dave Watts