**CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY**

**HUMANITARIAN RESPITE CENTER**

**MCALLEN, TX**

**VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION**

Thank you so much for coming to McAllen to volunteer at the CCRGV HRC. Volunteers play a crucial role in our organization and in our mission, our mission being creating hope and restoring dignity to the most vulnerable among us.

Upon your arrival at the center, which right now is located at 209 W. Hackberry in McAllen, go to the front desk and introduce yourself to the staff member (or ask for Hermi) and sign in on the volunteer work sheet for that day.  Be sure to sign out each day before you leave.  Many volunteers leave after the last bus arrives, but if you are able to stay longer we would appreciate the extra help.

Typically, mornings are spent sorting or restocking clothes, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, making sandwiches, preparing snack bags, cleaning showers and bathrooms, shopping, making soup and getting ready for the afternoon rush.  Afternoons are spent welcoming new arrivals and tending to them and their needs, Evenings are spent giving out clean clothes and getting them ready for their trip.

U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) brings our guests by bus from the holding center and they enter by the side door. We very rarely know how many to expect for each day.  Lately it has been anywhere between 500 to 900 people a day. They line up in two lines depending on which bus company they will be taking.  It is helpful to station one volunteer at the water fountain so that the new arrivals stop here for their orientation and do not move forward and meld into the busload ahead of them.  When two or more buses arrive at the same time, things get backed up, noisy and crowded by the water fountain and the front desk.

We give each family a bag (usually a red HEB shopping bag) containing toiletries, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrush and a comb. We give additional toothbrushes depending on the number of family members.  Razors are given out to men only and shoe laces as needed (all shoelaces were confiscated by ICE).

We try to distribute the bags to the people before one of the staff members gives them their orientation.  Part of their orientation is explaining the process they will be going through.  During their orientation, the staff member will ask all the children old enough to go off on their own to go to the dining area to eat while the parents go through the registration process.  A volunteer will always help lead the children to the dining area.  They will line them up along the right hand side across from the kitchen and let the kitchen staff know that they have a new group.

In the meantime, the adult process continues as follows: parents continue in line with infants and toddlers to secure their bus tickets. Please be alert for those who may need additional physical or emotional support, particularly young mothers with a baby in her arm and a toddler at her side. The staff, both at the front desk and in the front room, use their cell phones and laptop computers to contact sponsors to purchase bus tickets.  Each family is given a manila envelope for the documents they are given by ICE. In their envelopes we also put a colored sheet with explains their rights and responsibilities as asylum seekers.  Also, a paper is stapled to the outside of the manila envelope which reads: PLEASE HELP ME. I DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH. WHICH BUS DO I NEED TO TAKE? THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

After the parents have registered, they can join their children in the dining area to eat.  Also, the parents can find an available room and mat to settle in.  The staff and volunteers prepare and serve two meals each day. A local community organization, MATEO 25:35 run by Mayra Garza, prepares and serves the evening meal outside, weather permitting.  She has subgroups to cover about 4 days /week but needs donations to buy pizzas on other days.  Go to her Facebook page to learn more about donating pizzas.

Each individual receives a fresh set of clothes (pants, shirt, underwear and socks – and a belt, if available) from one of the four clothing rooms (women’s, men’s, children’s or infants). LYCRA PANTS are ONLY for pregnant women.  The infants’ room, 0-24 months, also includes jackets/hoodies, bottles, formula (two different types depending on the age of infant), pampers and wipes.  We also have a shoe room but the selection is limited.  Tie a pair of shoes together with rubber bands.

Only one family at a time in each of the rooms.  Under no circumstances are families allowed to find their own clothes.  The volunteer will always pick out the clothes for them.  The best thing to do is to not give them choices.  Pick something out that you think will fit them and move to the next person.  The door must remain at least partially open while there is a family in there. Keep the door completely closed when you are restocking or tidying up in there.  The clothing and coat rooms are closed when buses are arriving; otherwise it gets too crowded in that hallway.  Just ask families to please return later.  The one exception is if there is an infant with a soiled diaper that needs attention.  There are a couple of diaper changing stations scattered throughout the building.

The families will usually have the option to shower, but when we receive the numbers we have been receiving lately, we cannot allow them to shower.  There are shampoo and soap in the showers and there are towels also. Do not give out any shampoo or soap to the families.  There are bins outside the showers so they can put their soiled clothes in. We only collect pants and shirts from these bins and take them to the laundry room.  We wash these clothes and reuse them for other families coming through the center.

Throughout the day, children may ask you for a toothbrush or deodorant.  Let them know that that their parent has one for them in the family bag. Also, guests may often ask for a second large bag.  We can only provide one bag per family, even when there is a husband and wife.  We have had to take bags away from families because they were given two.   We have to be careful with this as we are always running low on toiletries.  Sometimes people donate used bags and we can offer those to the families.  Also, if available, we may offer backpacks to mothers traveling with infants.

Other very requested items include chap sticks, elastic pony tail bands and hand lotion. We may or may not have these items in toiletries/TP closet across from the front desk, We can offer Vaseline on a Q-tip for dried lips.  If anyone asks for water, do not give them a plastic water bottle, there is water for them by the kitchen.  OTC meds are on the shelf in the room behind the front desk. It is best to direct people to the medical clinic if there is someone on duty there.

Coats, sweaters and jackets are not given out until the day and time of departure unless they are leaving very early the next morning.  Periodically, go out into the hall and inform those waiting in line that they will only receive a coat if leaving already or going to a cold place.  If the family is going some place cold, we have some warmer coats in the closet, but keep that closet door closed except when you take something out.  They will also ask you for gloves and hats.  These will be passed out when leave also.

The last step is for our guests to be driven to the bus station.  As they go out the front door, we give each family one black plastic bag containing snacks, sandwiches and water. Also, except for those going to Texas and Florida, they receive a blanket, hat and gloves.  We sometimes give a blanket to families with small children unless we are running low – since the bus can be cold.

**Tasks you may be asked to do**:

* Assemble toiletries packs;
* Measure out formula;
* Hand out bags, toothbrushes, razors or shoe laces;
* Carry in new donations;
* Sort clothes;
* Staff one of the clothing rooms, shoe room, or coat/sweater room;
* Make sandwiches;
* Give out snack bags as the families are leaving;
* Work in the laundry room;
* Clean showers;
* Clean bathrooms.

**Other tasks you can do on your own:**

* Entertain children with games, crafts, English lessons;
* Direct folks to the bathrooms – especially the blue port-a-potties out back;
* Empty trash cans (first consolidate as much as possible, never take out a half empty bag);
* Replace garbage bags;
* Replace toilet paper in bathrooms and port-a -potties;
* Staple HELP ME sheets to manila envelopes and stuff with colored sheets;
* Break down cardboard boxes and take to recycling dumpster at back of site;
* Ask the families to help with any of these tasks;
* Also ask the families to help sweep and mop the floors;
* Ask the families to clean their rooms.

**Process for receiving, storing and distributing donations:**

All donations are received in the room near the side door that says DONATIONS.

We do not accept shorts, sleeveless tops, dresses, swim suits, extra large clothes, flip flops or toys.  These items are given to Goodwill, Salvation Army or St. Vincent de Paul Society at any Catholic Church.

Items are sorted in the donation room.

Then all sorted clothes are taken to the room marked re-stock and placed in the proper bin on the appropriate shelf according to the size of clothing.  Volunteers doing sorting should not restock the individual clothing rooms.  Allow the volunteers who are working the four clothing rooms to go to the restock room to resupply their own individual rooms.  Exception, shoes and coats may be taken directly to the shoe room and to the coat room from the donation room due to their bulky size and limited space in the restock room.  Also, hats, scarves and gloves may be taken directly t the small room just inside the front door.  ***DO NOT REMOVE ANY CLOTHING BINS LOCATED ON ANY SHELVES! ONLY USE EMPTY BINS ON FLOOR TO TRANSPORT DONATED ITEMS!***

Check with staff about where to store non-clothing donations (toiletries, shoelaces, bags, backpacks, paper products, etc.)

Volunteers are **NOT ALLOWED** to take pictures of families unless approved by staff. There will be no picture taking of children.  It would be best if volunteers could leave their phones in their vehicle.  Also, if a group is volunteering, please try to carpool as there is not enough parking at the center.  Volunteers are asked to please never make calls for the immigrants.  You will be asked over and over again to use your phone, please do not allow them to use it.  Volunteers are not allowed to exchange money for the families, or to receive money for them from western union or any other way. Any questions regarding travel that the families may have, please direct them to the staff or the temps doing registrations.

Thank you for volunteering at the Respite Center. We hope to make your experience as positive as possible and to keep you busy serving the most vulnerable among us.  God bless you!!