**7-14-2019**

**What to Expect at the Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen**

If you live in Texas, you can volunteer at Catholic Charities’ Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen. They help anywhere from 400-700 people a day. They have a warehouse upstairs and organized areas for the refugees downstairs.

**Getting there**

* There is a volunteer coordinator. Her name is Hildi and her email is volunteercoordinator@cdob.org. You can let her know how many are in your party and when you plan to be there. You may or may not get a reply if you are traveling alone or with a small group, as she has her hands full coordinating large groups. **Go anyway.**
* **The correct address is 111 S. 15th in Google.** Don’t go to the Beaumont St. location. That’s where Google will send you.

**Arriving**

* If you have things to drop off, go down the alley behind the center (off of Austin St.) and look for the two doors marked with the address. The one on the right is to the warehouse. Stop, go inside and up the stairs to find someone to help you unload.
* If you don’t have stuff to drop off, just park and go to the front door. Knock on the far right-hand door; it is blacked out for privacy and so the building may appear to be closed, but it isn’t. A guard will let you in and show you where to sign in. Find out who is in charge of volunteers that day; ask for Hildi first and someone will direct you to whoever is in charge that day. If the person is otherwise indisposed, be a self-starter: walk up to the curved counter and ask if they need help (Spanish is critical for this job); or go through the big room to the right and find the clothing area and ask if you can help there (also Spanish is helpful). Or go upstairs to the warehouse (ask someone for directions or go through the back door in the alley).

**Parking**

* There is a big parking garage in the next block. Entrance is on the south side. Take a ticket, park. Get your ticket validated at the far end of the desk just inside the front door at the center (next to where they are making phone calls).

**Lodging**

(I’m still working on this one) I am in the process of gathering up info as to low-cost lodging. **If anyone knows of any places or networks for lodging volunteers in McAllen** and **how to contact them directly**, please let me know at helpatthetexasborder@gmail.com.

* The Basilica of San Juan del Valle has a hotel; their number is 956-787-0033. Rates per night: $66 for 2 twin beds; $67 for 3 twin beds; $61 for 1 full sized bed. Rates go down to $40 a night for 7 nights. Mention you are working for Catholic Charities.
* Also, it is possible to find low-cost AirBNBs; if you have four people who don’t mind sharing beds, you can find regular hotels online for around $70-75 a night to split up;
* or to stay at the Casa de Palmas Hotel which is right down the street from the Center and includes breakfast for $89 a night. Let them know at 956-631-1101 that you are volunteering with Catholic Charities.

**Warehouse**

* Currently the warehouse is not air conditioned. It is very, very hot. Take a bag of ice, a refillable water bottle, and an electrolyte drink (and one of those water neck cloths if you have one). Wear cool clothing and very comfortable shoes. Position yourself in front of a fan to do your work. Take breaks to go to a nearby restaurant to sit in the AC for a period of time.
* Take a fanny pack or drawstring bag to carry your personal belongings such as car keys and phone. For the time being there is no place to set/store personal items.
* Oversight/direction. I worked with Megan, who can get you started. If she’s otherwise engaged, be a self-starter. Find a task, set up a workstation, and just be repetitive until someone needs a specific thing that you can respond to. Making packets of baby wipes or baby formula, or hygiene kits; sorting bags of used clothing; going down to check at the clothing area or the front counter what you can bring to restock them. Bring stuff up from down at the bottom of the conveyer belt. Sort incoming shipments, or help to receive them when they are coming up the conveyer belt. Collapse empty boxes and take them and the trash downstairs. Take a load of stuff to Goodwill. Go around and find things that are blocking the paths and move them. Deal with miscellaneous stacks of trash or items that have been left somewhere. If you see a need, it’s probably real, just go ahead and do it.
* They moved recently. If you see a way to establish a system or clean/organize an area, offer to do it. Or lacking that, just do it.

**Downstairs (I didn’t work downstairs, so this section needs a lot of improvement)**

* Check with Sister Ann in the kitchen to see if they need to make sandwiches or snack bags. Or ask her if she needs someone to drive to HEB for food supplies such as bread and ham. If you brought cash donations, this is probably a great use of those funds.
* Check with the clothing area to see if they need help handing out clothing (Spanish will be necessary for this) or if you can fetch clothing sizes from the warehouse and restock them (Spanish not necessary for this).
* Check with the hygiene desk. If you know Spanish, you can help hand out things people come up and ask for. If not, make a list of things they need restocked and bring them down and restock them, or at least set them on the landing; clean up and organize under the counter and take away trash to the dumpster. It helps if you can exchange phone numbers with someone working upstairs, so you can text them what needs to be set on the landing or restocked.
* Keep small toys in your pockets to hand to crying/bored children. If it’s not too busy, bring down crayons and coloring books and hand out a few pages/crayons. Hand out playing cards to groups of bored adults and teens.

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* Take a fanny pack or light bag to carry your personal belongings such as car keys and phone. For the time being there is no place to set/store personal items.
* There may or may not be much oversight/direction in the warehouse. I worked with Megan, who can get you started. If she’s otherwise engaged, be a self-starter. Find a task, set up a workstation, and just be repetitive until someone needs a specific thing that you can respond to. Making packets of baby wipes, baby formula, hygiene kits; sorting bags of used clothing; going down to check at the clothing area or the front counter what you can bring to restock them. Bring stuff up from down at the bottom of the conveyer belt. Sort incoming shipments, or help to receive them when they are coming up the conveyer belt. Collapse empty boxes and take them and the trash downstairs. Take a load of stuff to Goodwill. Go around and find things that are blocking the paths and move them. Deal with miscellaneous stacks of trash or items that have been left somewhere. If you see a need, it’s probably real, just go ahead and do it.
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