

August 2016

Dear Shelter Volunteer,

The purpose of this guide is to document some of the policies and practices of the operation of the shelter at Dorothy Day Hospitality House. Since most of the time you are the person in charge when you are at the shelter, we thought it might be useful to have a reference.

Without the steady stream of volunteers, Dorothy Day couldn't exist. You are what makes Dorothy Day House the special place it is, and you should feel good about that.

We're always in need of more volunteers. If you know someone who may be interested in volunteering, please have them contact Mike Murphy (email nottheglasses@gmail.com or phone 203-240-9276) or one of the coordinators. We're also trying to streamline the scheduling by having as many as possible sign up for one day per month (3rd Thursday, for example). If this can fit into your schedule, please let Mike know and he'll set you up.

Dorothy Day also coordinates operation of the overflow shelter at the First Congregational Church in Danbury, which operates from November 15 through April 15. Volunteers are also needed there. Contact Kathy Bardes at 203-470-8825 for more info.

We've been trying to do more communication and scheduling by e-mail, and this seems to be working well. If you have an email address and want to get on our email distribution list, or if your email address changes, please inform Mike Murphy.

In addition to this guide, you can find more information about Dorothy Day Hospitality House at our website at www.dorothydaydanbury.org

Thanks again for all your help!!

The Shelter Coordinators

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Dorothy Day Hospitality House
Guidelines for Shelter Volunteers
Edition 8 – August 2016

Introduction

Dorothy Day Hospitality House provides meals and a sleeping area (or shelter) with a capacity of 16 beds. Both men and women are welcome at the shelter. Children under 18 are not permitted in the shelter. The shelter is open all year round except for period in July when we take a break.

The sleeping area is supervised by coordinators and volunteers. The coordinators rotate their assignments on a weekly basis (weeks run from Monday night through Sunday night), and have overall responsibility for the shelter during their weeks.

The Shelter Committee is responsible for the overall administration of the Shelter. Currently the shelter committee is comprised of all regular and backup coordinators. The Shelter Committee meets the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 pm.. Volunteers are welcome to attend meetings if they wish. If you want to come to a meeting, call one of the coordinators beforehand, since meetings are not held if we can't get a quorum or don't have urgent business to discuss.

Daily Routine

The hours for admitting guests are from 9:00pm to 9:30pm each evening. The coordinator arrives shortly before 9:00 to inspect and unlock the shelter. Volunteers should arrive around 9:00pm – if you will be arriving later, that's fine – just try and call the coordinator beforehand (coordinators will generally call you sometime during the week to confirm you are volunteering). Dorothy Day now has a security guard on duty in front of the kitchen in the evenings until 10pm.

The shelter will accept guests until 9:30pm. Lights are turned out when everyone is settled and in bed (generally around 9:45 or shortly thereafter). At that time the coordinators will leave the shelter, and the volunteers will stay the remainder of the night.

Guests are awakened at 5:30am, and should be out of the shelter shortly after 6am. Breakfast is now served in the kitchen seven days a week starting at 6:30am.

Scheduling of Volunteers

Mike Murphy (email nottheglasses@gmail.com or phone 203-240-9276) has the challenging and often thankless task of scheduling volunteers for each evening. The goal is for volunteers to stay one night a month at the shelter, but this is sometimes difficult to arrange due to changing schedules. However, if you have a fairly set schedule and you can cover the same night each month (for example, first Monday), this would be most appreciated, and would also make Mike's work much easier. If you can do this, please let Mike know, and he would be only too happy to set you up. Please note that if you are signed up for the same night each month, that doesn't mean that you **have** to cover that night every month – if you have a conflict, give Mike a call.

If other plans come up and you are unable to make it to the shelter on your night, please call Mike as soon as possible. The more advance warning you give here regarding schedule conflicts, the better chance she has to find a replacement. Also, a few years ago, we had a few volunteers who were very flexible and could fill in on short notice – if this is the case, please let Mike know and he (and the coordinators) will be eternally grateful.

Volunteers for the sleeping area should be at least 18 years old. Couples and women volunteers are encouraged too. (If no volunteers can be found for a given night, the coordinator will spend the night).

Evening Activities

Because of his greater familiarity with the shelter and guests, the coordinator generally takes the lead while he is present. Below are activities that take place at the shelter until lights out:

- 1) Screening – Guests who have been banned from Dorothy Day House (the coordinators know who they are) and those under the influence of alcohol/drugs will not be permitted entry.
- 2) Sign-In – Guests are asked to sign their name in the register book for record keeping, as well as the bed number they occupied if they were staying at the shelter the previous night.
- 3) Explanation of rules for new guests
- 4) Assignment of beds – The coordinator generally will handle this, but volunteers can help by distributing a pillowcase, flat sheet and fitted sheet to guests if were not at the shelter the previous evening. New blankets are not always available for new guests, so existing ones can be re-used
- 5) Showers – All guests who wish to shower must do so at night. There are no showers available in the morning.

The coordinator will turn out the lights when things are settled down, generally around 9:45 to 10pm. Afterwards guests can shower, but should be finished around 10.

Before he leaves for the night, the coordinator should check to make sure there is detergent and bleach for the washing machine. The coordinator also should make sure there are adequate supplies (soap, razors, toothpaste and toothbrushes), and most importantly, make sure the volunteer has the key.

Please note: after lights are out and the door is closed, guests cannot go outside (ex “for a smoke”) and come back into the shelter. We’ve had too many bad experiences with this.

Keys

Before he leaves for the night, the coordinator should give you a keychain with a key on it. This key opens all the doors at Dorothy Day House – both kitchen and shelter. As you leave in the morning, please remember to leave the keys in the hole in the door on the left hand side of the passage into the kitchen.

Laundry

Please use rubber gloves at all time when handling unwashed guest clothes and bedding.

The groundrule on laundry is one change of clothes per person and no clothes washed for guests not staying at the shelter. Please feel free to turn down any laundry that will exceed this.

The washer is different than the washer you have at home – it is a commercial washer and designed to run full. So feel free to jam as many clothes as you want to into the machine – everything will get clean. On most nights you should be able to get all the guests clothes in one load. A good strategy to maximize your sleeping time is to start a load with all the clothes, and save linens for the second load (you can put this in the dryer in the morning). Instructions for the washer are on the front of the machine. Just press the **bottom** button and the machine will start. Detergent and bleach are fed automatically.

Things that cannot be washed

- Pillows – under no circumstances put a pillow into the washer. The washer spins very fast, and the feathers in the pillow will get loose and get into the washer motor.
- Sneakers should also not be washed, since they are so filthy that stuff from the sneakers will get on the other clothes in the wash. The Board of Health has also asked us to be careful about washing heavy coats because it is difficult to dry these thoroughly. They have asked us not to wash heavy coats, but I’m confident that we should be able to dry them satisfactorily with the new dryer.

The dryer is a gas dryer and gets clothes quite hot. Please use a cycle of approx 50 minutes drying followed by at least 5 minutes of cool down.

Night activities

- Wash clothes – don't start laundry until showers are done since hot water will not be available for showers.
- Set out clothes – leave these in the shower room in chairs and laundry baskets – or if you just have one load, you can leave them in the dryer and set out in the morning
- Fold and separate out kitchen laundry – dishtowels, aprons etc
- Set alarm clock – 5:15 should be fine if you are getting guests up at 5:30

Record keeping

There are three notebooks that are maintained:

- The sign in book – This contains one page per day for the guests to sign their names when they arrive. Entries from this book are posted into the tracking notebook so we can keep track of how many days each guest has stayed. The coordinator will generally bring this book and the tracking notebook back to the kitchen and lock it up in the supply cabinet each night.
- The tracking notebook – used to track how many days guests have accumulated in the current year
- The log book – This is generally kept on or under the counter in the shelter. The purpose of this book is for the volunteers to note anything unusual that happened during the night or morning. This is a valuable communication tool to let the coordinator know if something needs to be done. For example, there may be problems with plumbing, hot water or lack of certain supplies. Similarly, some guests may be rude or uncooperative with volunteers. The only way the coordinator can hear about these situations and correct them is by the log book. Please keep in mind that the coordinators check the log book when they arrive the following night, so if there is something that needs immediate attention (ie toilet that cannot be unplugged), please email or call coordinator in the morning.

Morning activities

- 1) Turn lights on at 5:30 – you can let guests sleep later if you want to but if you have to leave early, get them up at 5:30 – that is the official wakeup time.
- 2) Try to get guests up and out in a reasonable time (6:00 is excellent – 6:15 is average)
- 3) Make an entry in the log book about what happened the previous night (optional)

- 4) After guests leave, put on gloves and wash down showers and bathrooms with Lysol spray and paper towels (should be in cabinet)
- 5) Make sure rear door is closed tight (this door is alarmed). Also make sure no one is left in the shelter (check under beds and in shower room).
- 6) As you leave shelter, bring pitchers and kitchen laundry back to kitchen
- 7) Leave key in hole in door in back room of kitchen (the one you go in)
- 8) Leave by front door of kitchen

FAQ's – Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if someone knocks on the door after the coordinator has left and the lights are out?

Ultimately, it's your decision -- 99.9% of the time the answer is simple; you tell them that the shelter does not admit guests after 9:30pm and that if they absolutely need shelter they should try the City Shelter on New Street of the lobby of the police station. (Even though they may not admit to knowing it, most guests know when they are supposed to be at the shelter if they want to stay for the night).

What should I do if the police or hospital calls in the middle of the night and want to bring someone over?

If they call before 11pm, please try and accommodate these requests if possible. It's really your call, but check and make sure the potential guest is sober and understands that everyone gets up at 5:30 and is out shortly thereafter. If they call after 11, it's strongly recommended that you tell them that the shelter does not accept guests after 9:30pm, that we get up at 5:30 so the guest is not going to get much rest, and that admitting someone in the middle of the night will cause disruption for the other guests trying to rest. You can always call the coordinator for advice.

What should I do if there is a disruption after the coordinator has left for the night?

The good news is that most disturbances occur shortly after check-in when the coordinator is still around. However, occasionally problems occur later in the evening or in the morning, and then you have to use your best judgment. If a guest is abusive to other guests/volunteers or is particularly disruptive, he/she should be told that unless he/she stops this disruptive behavior, they will be asked to leave. If the disruption continues, ask the guest to leave. If the guest does not leave, threaten to call the police (this almost always works). If there's still a problem, call 911 and tell them that you are a volunteer at Dorothy Day House and you have a disruptive guest that you need escorted off the premises. You can always call the coordinators for advice (phone numbers are in the log book).

After things calm down, please briefly write down what happened in the log book.

What is the 30 day rule?

We track the number of days each guest stays with us every calendar year (it's posted in the black binder). During the colder months (January 1 through April 30 and October 1 through December 31), guests with less than 30 days have priority for available beds in the shelter. If any beds are left, then guests with over 30 days are admitted. During the warmer months (May through September) guests with over 30 days are not admitted, even if there is available space. This is to incent them to seek permanent housing.

What should I do if a guest asks me to hold valuables for safe-keeping during the night?

This is your choice. Some volunteers and coordinators will hold valuables for a short time while guests are showering, but it's not recommended to hold things for an extended period of time. If guests hold their own money, jewelry, etc, you can't forget to return them, and any discussions in the morning regarding exactly what was left in your care will be avoided.

Where should I park when I'm volunteering?

Dorothy Day now has a gravel 3 space parking lot at 8 Spring Street (on the other side of the street from the shelter about 100 feet towards New Street. There is no sign on the lot. Park perpendicular to the street. Overnight parking on Spring Street itself is not permitted (there are signs that say this).

Do I have to stay up all night?

No, you are encouraged to get as much sleep as you can. We reserve bed 17 for volunteers and do not assign it to guests.

What should I do if a guest asks for clothes?

We are not in the clothes business. Some leftover clothes are available on the shelf below the bed linen, and guests are free to take them. If a guest wants underwear, socks or other clothes not on the shelf, ask him/her to speak with the coordinator the following night. (We sometimes have a limited supply of clothes stored in the kitchen building, but would like to distribute these very carefully).

What is the policy on food in the shelter?

The official DDHH policy has been that there is no eating food in the shelter – if you want to eat, do it outside. The reason is to keep the shelter as clean as possible and minimize the amount of bugs. We’ve recently modified that to permit eating at the counter (because that keeps things under control), but there’s still no eating food in the sleeping area!!

What should I do if someone shows up in the morning and wants to use the bathroom?

It’s really your decision, but it probably should be OK to do this.

What should I do if the guests ask to sleep in late in the morning?

Some volunteers regularly let guests sleep in later, but if you want/need to get them up at 5:30am, tell them. They should not give you a hard time (if they do, let the coordinator know). If you decide to let guests sleep late, it’s a good idea to tell them before lights out in case anyone needs to get up early. Fortunately, most guests now have cellphones so they can set alarms to get themselves up.

What should I do if a non-guest knocks on the door after the coordinator has left and asks for a blanket?

Say that you are sorry but we don’t give out blankets. We do not have an unlimited supply of blankets, and many have been found discarded around town. If we started giving out blankets on a regular basis, the situation would quickly get out of control. You can always tell them to come by the following evening and talk to one of the coordinators.