

You Can Make a Difference at Alpha House!

The Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) at Alpha House is a shelter serving families experiencing homelessness in Washtenaw County. While comprehensive case management, housing relocation, and advocacy services are provided by our staff, over 2,500 volunteers come each year to Alpha House to provide and serve evening meals, supervise activities for children, keep the shelter stocked with supplies, maintain the building and grounds, and so much more! Most importantly, volunteers help make Alpha House a warm and nurturing place for families experiencing the crisis of homelessness.

7 Things Volunteers at IHN-Alpha House Should Know

- 1) Confidentiality:** Out of respect for the privacy & dignity of all IHN families, we ask that staff, volunteers & visitors follow our Confidentiality Standards. Please do not reveal the identity of anyone staying at Alpha House, do not take photos of our residents or children, and do not exchange personal contact information, such as phone numbers or Facebook/Twitter/email. We also ask that you do not ask our residents for personal information about themselves. An important part of respecting confidentiality lies in maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- 2) Supervising Children:** At least 2 adults are needed to supervise children in each area of the shelter, including the outside play area. No volunteer should be left alone with Alpha House children at any time. This is for the protection of both the volunteers and our Alpha House children.
- 3) Parenting:** Alpha House staff work hard to empower parents to maintain their role as family decision-maker and leader in the face of losing control over so many other aspects of their lives. Parents are looked to for all decisions regarding their children. Please avoid contradicting a parent's instructions to his/her children and always ask permission before giving things to children. Talk with a staff member about any questions that might arise while you are volunteering.
- 4) Discipline:** Corporal punishment and abusive language are not allowed at Alpha House. With these ground rules in place, and in conjunction with IHN's parenting policy, parents are responsible for the discipline of their own children. Staff and volunteers do not determine discipline strategies for the children. If a child acts in a way that is unsafe and the parent is not present, then the volunteer should re-direct the child and give a verbal warning. If the unsafe behavior continues, the volunteer should send the child back to the parent so that the parent can deal appropriately with the behavior. Please remember that it is not a punishment to send a child back to a parent, nor does it represent a failure on the part of the volunteer. There are many reasons why a child might be struggling at evening playtime, and sometimes an early bath and bedtime is the best solution!
- 5) Empathy/Flexibility:** As a volunteer you are playing an important role in making Alpha House a warm and nurturing place for families in crisis. It is important to keep in mind that many of our families are going through some of the hardest times in their lives. Please don't assume that families are ungrateful if they are not able to be open and friendly while you are here. They may have faced a particularly challenging and difficult day. Please

know that our families consistently mention when they leave how much the warmth and generosity of our volunteers has meant to them. Also, please know that our families' situations sometimes change without warning. Please be prepared to deal with the changing needs of the program.

- 6) **Gifts:** With the generous support of the community, IHN is able to provide families with many of the material needs that they may have during their stay (toiletries, clothing, diapers, etc.). Families discuss their needs with staff, who strive to distribute these goods in an equitable and fair way. Keeping this in mind, volunteers should not make direct donations to families, but should first check in with the Volunteer Coordinator about any additional ways that they might be able to help meet all our families' material needs.
- 7) **Religious Activity:** At Alpha House, many diverse congregations come together to express their faith by helping vulnerable families. Interfaith Hospitality Network seeks to preserve every family's right to practice the religion of their choice or to refrain from practicing religion. To that end, Alpha House employees, volunteers, and other agents will try to be of reasonable assistance to any resident seeking to practice his or her religion (e.g. helping a resident get to religious institutions and back), but will not initiate a religious practice (i.e. prayer) or seek to influence any resident's decision to engage or not engage in a religious practice.

If you have any questions about our policies, please contact:

**IHN at Alpha House; 4290 Jackson Rd; Ann Arbor, MI 48103
734 822 0220**

Thank you for your support!

Alpha House Evening Schedule / Low-Barrier Housing Model

We at Alpha House cannot express enough thanks to our congregational and community coordinators / volunteers for their willingness to support our journey toward becoming a low-barrier shelter, a place where families can concentrate on the difficult challenge of obtaining housing without added stress from numerous rules and regulations. The rules and expectations still in place at Alpha House are primarily focused on health and safety rather than on maintaining a predictable schedule at the shelter. This change has been wonderful for our families, and we believe that this makes it worth the flexibility we now need to ask of our volunteers.

Long-time volunteers will be the ones who most notice a difference in our evening schedule. Families are no longer required to be back at Alpha House at a certain time in the evening. This change in expectation allows our families, many of whom depend on the bus or rides from friends for transportation, to schedule appointments, do errands, set up job interviews or extra shifts, or even visit with relatives and friends, without the added stress caused by a need to return to Alpha House by a set time. We continue to ask dinner hosts to provide food for 25 people. Leftovers are then stored in the front refrigerator so that families can reheat and serve themselves dinner when they return to Alpha House, whether that is at 8:30 pm after an event at their child's school, or at 1:00 am after their late shift is over. Please know that our families return to shelter hungry, and very grateful to find those tubs of leftovers. The dining room is now open 24 hours a day, and we do our best to keep food waste low!

We still offer our families the possibility of Activity Time for their kids, from 6:00-8:00 pm each evening, and are grateful for volunteers who will sign up to hold that slot open in their own schedule, but who will call ahead on their day of service, between 5:00-5:30 pm, so that evening staff can make their best prediction as to whether we will have children home for playtime. If volunteers arrive and families have unexpectedly left on errands, we will give our volunteers the option of heading home or helping with small tasks around the shelter.

Please know how much we appreciate this added layer of support for those in shelter at Alpha House.. We are well aware that our volunteers spend time and money preparing wonderful meals for our families, and that it may be disappointing to have fewer chances to sit and talk and eat with residents. But we are also well aware that our volunteers have our families' best interests at heart, and that joining in this effort to decrease stress in their lives at this difficult time will bring as much satisfaction to our volunteers as it does to our staff and board.

Dinner Servers & Clean Up Volunteers

Overview

Dinner Hour at Alpha House runs between **6:00-7:00pm** daily but **families are NOT required to eat at this time**, and we rely on volunteers to prepare a meal for 25 people (that includes our in-house families, two staff, and the volunteer servers); and, to help serve any families who come to the dining room during Dinner Hour. Most volunteers arrive by **5:30pm** in order to have dinner **ready to serve at 6:00pm**. Volunteers are free to simply drop dinner off or stay and eat with the families.

Dinner Volunteer Responsibilities

- Please **sign in at the check in station** by the front desk and make yourself a name-tag.
- We appreciate the fact that all of **our volunteers understand the need for background checks on everyone 18 yrs. and older** for the protection of our families, staff, and fellow volunteers. Names submitted prior to your visit will have had background checks completed.
- **Check in with the Evening Host or staff member.** Let them know if you need any help carrying items from your car to the kitchen. Also let them know if this is your first time volunteering. There is always a staff member who will gladly help orient you to the kitchen.
- Prepare the kitchenette and dining room for dinner by cleaning off tables and **placing dinnerware, drinks, and food on the kitchenette counter or side table.**
- **Place food with serving utensils on kitchenette counter buffet style. Please use silicone hotpads or potholders to protect the counters.**
- **Let staff know** when dinner is ready to be served.
- **Please be available to assist with serving food.** When doing so, **please wear the plastic gloves and aprons** provided in the kitchen.
- Monitor the food, giving appropriate-sized servings, and make sure enough food is available. **If it looks like there will not be enough food, tell a staff member and assist in preparing food from the pantry, fridge, or freezer.**

- **Make a plate for yourself and eat with the families.** Relax and be yourself! Take your cue from our families: **some residents enjoy the chance to talk with volunteers, while others may feel more private or need time to process a difficult day.** Please do not ask any personal questions!
- **If dessert is being served, please put it out after the children have had a chance to eat a healthy dinner.**
- When most people are done eating, **begin cleaning up kitchen and kitchenette area.**
- **Rinse dishes and load them in the dishwasher.** Please do not overload; running the dishwasher a second time later is much more effective! Large items may need to be washed by hand. **Do not start the dishwasher, please. A staff member will take care of that step.**
- **Please label, date, and securely store any and all leftovers in the residents' fridge.** Families who come in after the dinner hour is over will warm up these leftovers for their dinner.
- Check in with staff or the Evening Host when you leave, so we can say **THANK YOU!**

IMPORTANT KITCHEN USE GUIDELINES:

- Please place potholders or silicone pads under any hot dish or pan, both on the serving counter and in the kitchen.
- Please do not use abrasives on the counters—they should be cleaned with soap and water ONLY!
- Please let the staff run the dishwasher after you have loaded it.
- Please do not blow out or turn off the pilot lights on the kitchen stove/oven. The pilot lights are safe, and they need to stay lit in order for this stove to work. Because the pilot lights are on at all times, please do not put plastic items on top of the stove.

Thank you for sharing your time, energy, and resources with Alpha House families!

If you have any questions about our dinner serving guidelines, please contact:

Volunteer Coordinator
at Alpha House; 4290 Jackson Rd; Ann Arbor, MI 48103
ydesta@alphahouse-ihn.org

Thank you for your support!

Alpha House Children's Activity Time Volunteers

Overview: Children's Activity Time, which runs each evening from roughly 6:00 - 8:00pm, could not happen without volunteer involvement! We ask volunteers to call ahead of time, to determine if there are children here for Activity Time.

We try to promote a structured, creative, and fun environment. The best thing you can do as a volunteer is to actively engage with our children: ask them to play a game, draw or color with you, or participate in an activity. And don't forget to have fun yourself!

Activity Time Volunteer Responsibilities:

- Call the front desk (734-822-0220) between 4:30 - 6:00 pm to see if children are expected to be here.
- Upon arrival, sign in at the front desk and make a name tag.
- We appreciate the fact that all of our volunteers understand the need for background checks on everyone 18 yrs. and older for the protection of our families, staff, and fellow volunteers. Names submitted prior to your visit will have had background checks completed. If you have not pre-submitted your name, a background check will be done upon your arrival.
- Check in with the Evening Host or a staff member. Let them know if this is your 1st time volunteering and if you have any questions.
- Participate in playing with the children and model healthy interactive behavior. Redirect kids when needed.
- Alert staff immediately if problems arise, if you have questions, or if you are unsure how to appropriately help a child appropriately.
- At 7:55 pm or whenever play time ends, remind, encourage, and model for our children picking up all toys and cleaning up the play area.
- Meet briefly with staff after Activity Time if desired to share any highlights or concerns, or ask any questions.

A Few Important Things to Remember:

Touching: You should not initiate physical contact with children at Alpha House. However, if a child asks for a hug, or needs comfort after falling, you may want to give a quick side hug. Infants will need to be carried and cradled; however, please do not pick up toddlers or older children, or engage in overly physical play. Children's physical space needs to be respected and we ask our volunteers to mentor and model appropriate boundaries.

Discipline: At Alpha House, staff and volunteers do not discipline the children. We feel very strongly that this is the role of a child's parent. If a child's behavior shows that they are struggling during Activity Time, please give that child a warning and some redirection. If the behavior continues, alert a staff member, who can then involve the parent.. Our goal is to maintain parental authority and provide a safe and supportive environment for all of our children, parents, volunteers, and staff.

Confidentiality: Please remember it is the responsibility of staff and volunteers to maintain the privacy of the residents at Alpha House. With this in mind, do not exchange personal contact information with our children or guests, and **Do Not** take photographs of our children **even if given permission by family.**

Ask for Help: If you ever feel uncomfortable or unsure with a responsibility (too many kids for you to watch, discipline problems, etc.) please tell the staff immediately.

**Thank you for sharing your time, talent, energy, and resources
with our Alpha House families!**

Brunch Hosts and Servers

Brunch Overview:

Monday through Friday, our families have varying schedules, so they have a simple self-serve breakfast of cereal, toast, or oatmeal. When Hot Brunch time comes along on Saturday and Sunday, it is a real treat! Volunteers can plan to arrive whenever they want in order to have brunch ready at 9:30am and are welcome to stay for the full 2 hours.

Brunch Volunteer Responsibilities:

- Please **sign in at the computer station** by the front desk and make yourself a name-tag.
- We appreciate the fact that **all of our volunteers understand the need for background checks on everyone 18 yrs. and older** for the protection of our families, staff, and fellow volunteers. Names submitted prior to your visit will have had background checks completed. If you have not pre-submitted your name, a background check will be done upon your arrival.
- **Check in with our front desk staff.** Let them know if you need any help carrying items from your car to the kitchen. Also let them know if this is your first time volunteering. There is always a staff member who will gladly help orient you to the kitchen.
- Prepare the kitchenette and dining room for dinner by cleaning off tables and **placing plates, drinks, and food on the kitchenette counter or side table.**
- **Place food with serving utensils on kitchenette counter buffet style.** Please use silicone hotpads or potholders to protect the new counters.
- **Let staff know** when brunch is ready to be served.
- Monitor the food, giving appropriate-sized servings, and make sure enough food is available. **If it looks like there will not be enough food, tell a staff member and assist in preparing food from the pantry, fridge, or freezer.**
- When most people are done eating, **begin cleaning up the kitchen and kitchenette area.**
- **Rinse dishes and load them in the dishwasher.** Please do not overload; running the dishwasher a second time later is much more effective! Large items may need to be washed by hand. **Do not start the dishwasher, please. A staff member will take care of that step.**
- **Please label, date, and securely store any and all leftovers in the residents' fridge.** Families who come in after brunch is over may warm up these leftovers for lunches or snacks.
- Check in with staff when you leave, so we can say **THANK YOU!**

IMPORTANT KITCHEN USE GUIDELINES:

- **Please place potholders or silicone pads under any hot dish or pan, both on the serving counter and in the kitchen.**
- **Please do not use abrasives on the counters—they should be cleaned with soap and water ONLY!**
- **Please let the staff run the dishwasher after you have loaded it.**
- **Please do not blow out or turn off the pilot lights on the kitchen stove/oven. The pilot lights are safe, and they need to stay lit in order for this stove to work. Because the pilot lights are on at all times, please do not put plastic items on top of the stove.**