

Volunteer Handbook

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FIRST LIGHT



A CENTER FOR HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

First Light Volunteer Handbook updated 8/2015

I. Organizational Background

A. Mission

First Light's Mission is to work with **homeless women and their children** to create hospitality in a safe and nurturing community, to encourage them to find hope, to seek opportunity, and to grow spiritually, thereby achieving their full potential.

B. History

First Light began in the basement of First Presbyterian Church in 1983 as an emergency night shelter operated solely by volunteers. The basement shelter accommodated 15 women and children, but would sometimes provide safety to over 40 women and children. It was soon evident that more space and services were required for the homeless women and children in Birmingham. First Light was incorporated in 1998 and a capital campaign began to renovate the old Granada Hotel, which was located just two blocks away from the church and had recently burned. The old hotel was renovated to accommodate more women and children, to provide space for social services and day programs, and to have living space for permanent residents who were unlikely to live independently again. First Light is a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

C. Programs

Emergency Shelter

The First Light emergency shelter is a dorm-like setting which offers a bed, locker and bathroom and laundry facilities for 36 women and one family on any given night. An overnight volunteer is available to distribute hygiene products and to simply be present to women who are in crisis. Every guest in the emergency shelter has a Social Worker, employed by First Light, who assesses her situation and helps her come up with a plan and access community resources. First Light is NOT a domestic violence shelter. We do not accept women who are seeking safety from a dangerous partner.

Overflow Emergency Shelter

On cold nights, on rainy nights, on weekends, where does a woman go when all shelters, including First Light's emergency shelter, are full? The overflow emergency shelter was born from necessity. We now provide mats, pillows and clean linens for up to 15 women and children nightly. Our overflow Social Worker's first goal is to get these women and children off of the floor- whether into a bed in our emergency shelter or at another shelter.

Supportive Housing Programs

Permanent Supportive Housing

First Light's fourth floor is home to nine women with severe mental illness who are unlikely to successfully live independently.

Bessemer HUD Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Ten chronically homeless women have been housed in apartments in Bessemer, Alabama through this program. They are provided with intensive support from the Permanent Supportive Housing Social Worker.

Shelter Plus Care Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Shelter Plus Care is a collaboration between First Light and the Jefferson County Housing Authority through which housing and supportive care is provided to women who are homeless due to a disabling condition, such as mental illness, past substance abuse or HIV/AIDS. They are provided with intensive support from our Shelter Plus Care Social Worker.

HUD East Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Eight chronically homeless women will be housed in apartments in Birmingham through this program. They are provided with intensive support from the Permanent Supportive Housing Social Worker.

First Light Transitional Housing for Women in Crisis

Through a collaboration with the YWCA, up to 12 women will be housed and receive supportive social services from First Light over the next 3 years. These women will have become homeless due to domestic violence, and one the goals for the program is independence.

Noah's Ark Permanent Supportive Housing

For up to 15 shelter guests who have disabling conditions (diabetes, addictions, mental illness, HIV, other physical illnesses) Intensive supportive care and payment of rent is provided.

Project Healthy Minds

This is a comprehensive program which addresses the overall health and well-being of all of our guests. It includes group and individual counseling sessions, assistance with securing diagnoses and medications, and transportation assistance when necessary.

Day Programs

This category entails the numerous activities offered to First Light guests by outside volunteers. They range from makeovers to Bible Studies to field trips.

D. Funding of the Agency

First Light operates all of these programs thanks to the generosity of the community in the form of donations from individuals, churches, businesses, civic groups and private foundations. We also are the recipients of grants from private foundations, corporate foundations and the local and federal government. Lastly, we conduct special events every year to raise a significant portion of our income:

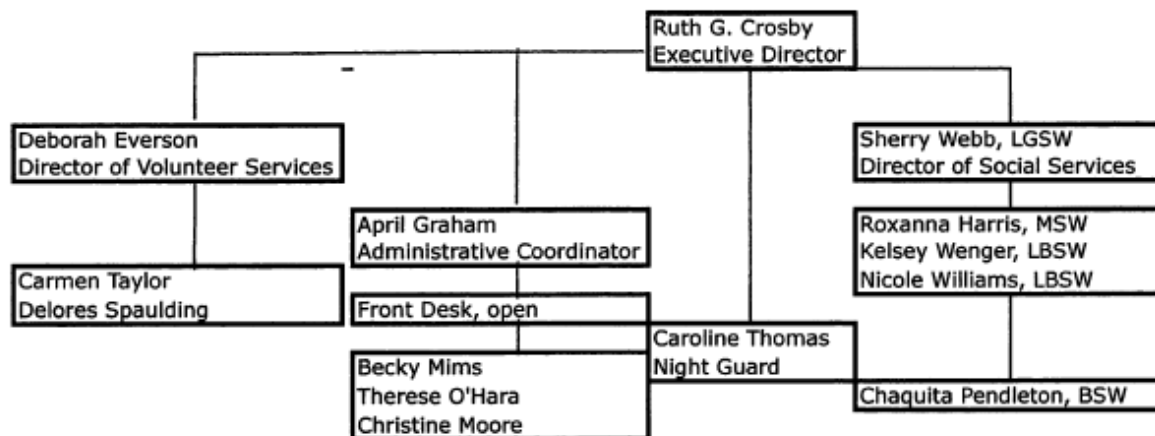
The gala is our major fundraiser, held in April or May of each year, and is designed to provide a meaningful evening of entertainment and updates about the good work done at First Light.

Holiday Lights is a fundraiser that begins each November. Through this program people or businesses make contributions to First Light in memory or in honor of loved ones or business associates. First Light then sends a hand-addressed holiday greeting card to the person being honored notifying them of the gift given. This provides our supporters with a meaningful way to give a gift during the special holiday season while supporting their favorite nonprofit!

Annual reports can be found on our website at

http://www.firstlightshelter.org/news_resources/annual_reports.html.

E. Organizational Chart



F. Board of Directors

Our board of directors governs the agency's policies and fiscal responsibility. The board includes the following members:

Jamie Sandford, President	Alabama Power Company
Marva J. May, Vice President	Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama
Erol Wallace, Treasurer	Sellers, Richardson, Holman & West, LLP
Emma Taylor, Secretary	Community Volunteer
Rev. Susan Clayton	Associate Pastor, Independent Presbyterian Church
Pat Clotfelter	Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz
Cindy Coyle	ArchitectureWorks
Rita H. Dixon	Rita H. Dixon, LLC
Tiffany Ford	Alagasco
Ben Greer	Protective Life Corporation
Denise Killebrew	Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz
Matthew Laird	Raymond James
Lisa Moose	SunGard iWorks Healthcare
James C. Phillips	Accenture
Staci M. Pierce	Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz
Thomas W. Schultz	Medical Properties Trust
Darri Scott	Community Volunteer
Hon. Sandra Storm	Circuit Judge, Retired, Community Volunteer
Rev. Catherine Goodrich, Ex Officio	Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church

II. Volunteer Program

A. What Volunteers Do

A volunteer is someone who gives time, effort or talent to a need or cause without profiting monetarily. They contribute to the mission of this agency with no expectation of reimbursement. Volunteers fill all kinds of roles at First Light. They:

- bring and serve breakfast and dinner
- stay overnight in the emergency shelter
- conduct fun group activities
- teach important topics like how to fill out a job application
- conduct Bible Study classes or chapel services
- serve on special event committees or volunteer at fundraisers
- provide services like haircuts, manicures, facials and chair massages
- do deep cleaning in the shelter or on the courtyard
- assist with or teach an art class
- serve on the board of directors
- assist ladies who are moving into their own apartments
- mentor ladies who are in our permanent housing programs
- create short, informal videos used to promote First Light
- offer graphic design or marketing skills and expertise
- teach healthy cooking classes to our permanent housing residents
- play music or put on a concert for the ladies
- run supply drives in the community to meet the basic needs of our guests (like toothpaste!)
- provide photography services at special events

No matter what role volunteers are playing at First Light, we can assure you that it matters greatly! During our latest fiscal year, our volunteers logged 10,000 hours!

B. Becoming a Volunteer

Volunteering at First Light is a deeply personal, rewarding experience. For the right people, it can also be incredibly fulfilling. For this reason combined with the generosity and philanthropic nature of our community, we are abundantly blessed with volunteers. As such, it is impossible to place every person or group that expresses a desire to volunteer. While every effort will be made to accommodate the schedule, desired activities and needs of those interested in volunteering, there are times when this will not be possible. There are also situations where there is not a good fit between the individual wishing to volunteer and the agency's current needs.

Recruitment: In general, no recruitment is done by our staff beyond having volunteer program information on the agency website. Occasionally staff will attend community service fairs for populations greatly unrepresented among our supporters or when seeking volunteers for specific programs.

Application and Screening: Individuals wishing to volunteer at First Light should fill out a volunteer application in person, via email or online at <http://www.firstlightshelter.org/volunteer/apply.html>. All applications will be reviewed and kept on file. Personal information will be treated with privacy and not shared with third parties or sold. Upon receipt, the Volunteer Manager will determine if an in-person meeting is appropriate. **The factors used to determine whether someone is a good fit to volunteer at First Light include their suitability and ability to complete the training and assigned task, and the need for that task to be completed during the available times and dates given by the volunteer.** We reserve the right to require a background and reference check for people wishing to volunteer with children or who will be largely unsupervised while volunteering.

Orientation and Training: Individuals who become volunteers will receive a thorough orientation to the agency and the training necessary to complete their assigned tasks.

C. Volunteer Guidelines

1. A volunteer's conduct should always portray the mission of First Light. Guests, residents, staff and other volunteers should be treated with kindness, respect and dignity at all times. Guests are expected to treat volunteers, staff and other guests with the same kindness, respect and dignity.
2. Volunteers should respect the privacy and confidentiality of all First Light guests at all times. Names and identifying information about guests should never be shared with anyone other than First Light staff. This is extremely important.
3. Any volunteer who does not show up for 2 or more scheduled volunteer opportunities within a 6-month period of time will be dismissed from volunteering at First Light. At the time of dismissal, the future volunteer schedule of the volunteer dismissed will be cancelled.
4. Personal relationships inside or outside of First Light between First Light guests and volunteers are not appropriate. First Light volunteers should maintain a professional relationship and appropriate boundaries with guests at all times.
5. Volunteers who anticipate arriving late or being unable to report for their scheduled volunteer service should notify the Director of Volunteers or another on-duty staff person as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made.
6. Volunteers must never enter into the role of counselor or social worker with First Light guests. First Light is fortunate to have a wonderful team of social workers who are very knowledgeable of and attentive to the guests' individual situations, needs and the community's available resources.
7. Volunteers may not give money or items such as clothing, shoes, toiletries, etc. to First Light guests. If a guest expresses a need for such items and you wish to assist her with those needs, you may contact her social worker and get approval to do so. Otherwise, donations should be made to First Light for staff to distribute as needed.
8. All volunteers are asked to schedule their volunteer service through the Director of Volunteer Services.
9. Volunteers may only show up at First Light when scheduled to perform a specific task or duty previously scheduled through the Director of Volunteers. Volunteers should not come to First Light to "hang out," chat with the guests or visit the guests without having a specific task to do.
10. Please do not take photographs of First Light guests without their prior written consent. Photo release forms can be gotten at the front desk and should be turned back into the front desk when completed.
11. Please do not attempt to sell or promote any products or services to First Light guests. Financial benefit of any kind should not be obtained by volunteering at First Light.
12. Volunteers should dress appropriately for their task. We also ask that volunteers not wear attire that may be considered vulgar, offensive, or overly revealing.
13. Due to the nature of the work done at First Light, volunteers will often not be supervised by staff members, although a staff member will always be available to support the volunteer, answer questions and help solve problems.
14. Staff members take precautions to provide a safe environment for our guests and volunteers. If an unsafe situation is noticed, please take the proper procedures to protect yourself and your belongings and notify staff immediately. While you are here, use good judgment in protecting yourself, your belongings and First Light property. If you bring your children to volunteer with you, please keep them with you at all times. A staff member should be notified immediately in the case of a medical emergency, a guest expressing the desire to hurt themselves or someone else, or in the case of suspected child abuse or neglect.

15. While First Light relies on volunteers to advocate for the homeless and for the agency, it is important that volunteers obtain prior approval from First Light to represent the agency to the media or through specific fundraising events. Please contact the Director of Volunteer Services if you wish to do a fundraiser for First Light.
16. Life skills classes, individual therapy sessions and group therapy sessions conducted at First Light are private and closed to visitors. No one may enter these confidential meetings without prior consent from the Director of Social Services.
17. Harassment of any kind is not tolerated at First Light. Guests, staff, volunteers and visitors are all held to this standard. Harassment of any kind should be reported to a full-time staff person as soon as possible. Volunteers who harass staff members or guests will be dismissed from their volunteer service.
18. Expenses incurred during volunteer service are largely unreimbursed by the agency. In some select cases, expenses incurred while volunteering may be reimbursed when there is a prior agreement with the Executive Director. Please consult the IRS code or your tax professional with questions about the deductibility of in-kind donations and expenses incurred while volunteering. In-kind donation forms are always available at the front desk or to be mailed to donors upon request.
19. If you wish to eat breakfast or dinner with the ladies when you are here to volunteer, please only do so AFTER all of the women and children have been served and when the meal volunteers do not mind. Please be respectful of the fact that the meal volunteers purchase the meal and may also wish to eat after serving all of the guests.
20. Volunteers who possess skills needed on our board of directors may be nominated to serve on the Board of Directors. Volunteers who possess skills necessary for conducting a fundraiser may be asked to serve on a special event committee. At this time, these are the only opportunities for advancement available, although volunteers are welcome to move in and out of different volunteer roles as they desire.
21. We appreciate every single one of our volunteers! However, it isn't possible to formally recognize them all. Factors considered when choosing the individuals or groups to be honored include: exceptional service, going above and beyond in service, overcoming personal obstacles to volunteer, length of service, total hours served, adherence to First Light's volunteer guidelines, and attitude toward and treatment of our guests. Anyone can nominate a volunteer for recognition by contacting the Director of Vol. Services.
22. Former First Light guests may volunteer at First Light after having been gone from First Light for at least one year AND with the permission of the Director of Social Services. Previous First Light guests who wish to volunteer must disclose their previous stay at First Light to the Volunteer Manager before scheduling volunteer service so that appropriate training can be given.
23. We are committed to providing the most meaningful, fulfilling, and pleasant volunteer experiences possible. In order to do this, we need your help! We need for you to tell us what went well, what didn't go well, what you were not prepared for, what happened that you didn't expect, what was incredible and what you think needs to change! Orientation and training are only the beginning of learning about First Light and about volunteering with these special women- volunteers should be responsible for reading emails from First Light regarding changes and improvements.
24. At any time during the screening, placement, orientation, training or volunteering process either the volunteer or the agency can end the relationship. Reasonable notice should be given upon the ending of the relationship.
25. Staff will keep track of your information and volunteer hours in a secure, online database called Cool Focus. We never share or sell your information and respect your privacy. Please record your volunteer hours on the provided volunteer sign-in sheets.

Releases and Agreement

I have read and/or have been verbally taught and understand the volunteer guidelines of First Light, Inc. I agree to abide by these guidelines as a First Light volunteer.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Photo release:

I consent to and authorize the use and reproduction by First Light, Inc. of any and all photographs and other audio-visual materials taken of me for promotional material, educational activities, and exhibitions or for any other use for the benefit of the program.

Date: _____ Signature: _____