

# Overnight Volunteer Handbook

# First Light, Inc.

# 2230 Fourth Avenue North

**Birmingham, AL 35203**

**205-323-4277**

**[www.firstlightshelter.org](http://www.firstlightshelter.org)**

**volunteer@firstlightshelter.org**



# FIRST LIGHT

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## A CENTER FOR HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

## **First Light Volunteer Handbook**

### **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**

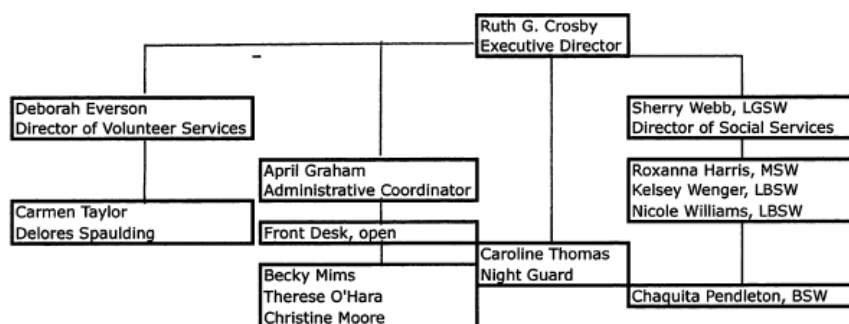
First Light operates all of these programs thanks to the generosity of the community in the form of donations from individuals, churches, businesses, civic groups and private foundations. We also are the recipients of grants from private foundations, corporate foundations and the local and federal government. Lastly, we conduct 3 special events per year to raise a significant portion of our income:

1. The gala is held in April or May of each year and includes a silent and live auction, seated dinner and a meaningful evening of entertainment and updates about the good work done at First Light.
2. The Pancake Breakfast is held each year on the Saturday before the Iron Bowl. This is an event designed to engage our volunteers and supporters in some good, clean fun and delicious breakfast- all while benefiting the good work being done here!
3. 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](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  
Marva May, Vice President  
Erol Wallace, Treasurer  
Emma Taylor, Secretary  
Rev. Susan Clayton  
Pat Clotfelter  
Cindy Coyle  
Rita Dixon  
Sharon Fenstermaker  
Tiffany Ford  
Ben Greer  
Denise Killebrew  
Matthew Laird  
Lisa Moose  
James C. Phillips  
Staci Pierce  
Thomas W. Schultz  
Darri Scott  
Hom. Sandra Storm  
Rev. Cat Goodrich, Ex Officio

## **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 2014-15 fiscal year, our volunteers logged just under 10,000 hours! According to Independent Sector, a volunteer hour in Alabama is valued at \$17.70, meaning that the financial impact of volunteers at First Light last year reached over \$175,000!

## **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 Volunteer Manager 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 Volunteer Manager.
9. Volunteers may only show up at First Light when scheduled to perform a specific task or duty previously scheduled through the Volunteer Manager. 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 Assistant Director 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. A Volunteer of the Month will be chosen each month, as well as a Volunteer of the Year. 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 Volunteer Manager.
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.

# Overnight Volunteer Guide

Thank you so much for volunteering at First Light! Volunteers are the heart of our organization and we could not serve Birmingham's homeless women and children without your help. We hope that any questions you have are answered below. If not, please feel free to ask.

## **How often will I be spending the night as an overnight volunteer?**

Everyone is different and has a different schedule and different needs. Most overnight volunteers come once a month or once every few months, with a handful of volunteers coming more often than that. No volunteer will be scheduled for more than 3 nights per month.

## **What time should I be here on my scheduled night?**

By 7pm.

## **What should I do if I will be late or cannot come on my scheduled night?**

Please contact the Volunteer Manager or another staff person as soon as possible if you will be late or cannot come on your scheduled night. **Call 205-323-4277.**

## **Can I bring someone with me?**

Yes. Up to 4 people may stay overnight at a time, at least one of whom must be a female 18 or older. The volunteer room is equipped with 2 bunk beds and a private restroom. Males may come if accompanied by an adult female. However, we ask that males over the age of 18 remain in the volunteer room so that the guests feel more comfortable in their night clothes. Children may also come if accompanied by a parent. Family members of current guests cannot stay overnight. Unless you bring someone with you, you will be the only overnight volunteer here on your scheduled night.

## **Where should I park?**

You will need to park on the street at a meter. However, you do not need to pay the meter after 5pm. If you park on 23<sup>rd</sup> street across from First Light, the guard can watch your car during the night.

## **What if I forget my toothbrush?**

Relax! Toiletries and hygiene products are located in the supply closet in the volunteer room. You may use any supplies that you need.

## **Can I smoke and eat on the second floor?**

You may smoke in the smoke room located next to the volunteer room. You may eat in the volunteer room. However, we ask that you do not eat in front of the guests (who are not allowed to bring food upstairs) and that you not leave food in the room.

## **What should I do when I get here?**

You may go up to the volunteer room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor when you arrive. A staff member will take you up and unlock the volunteer room for you

\*\*\* Volunteer sign-in sheets are located in a binder on the desk in the volunteer room. Please sign in so that we can record your volunteer hours. Be sure to include your arrival time, departure time and your signature.

\*\*\*If you will require documentation of your community service, please give ALL information on the sign-in sheet. You may request documentation of your community service hours by calling 323-4277, leaving a note at

the front desk, or emailing [volunteer@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:volunteer@firstlightshelter.org). PLEASE request documentation well in advance of when it is required.

### **How do I reach the person at the front desk?**

There is a small gray box on the wall in the volunteer room that will enable you to talk to the person at the desk. Press 1, 0 and the arrow key to talk. Press • to end.

Please allow the staff person or guard on duty to handle the following unlikely situations:

- Medical emergencies
- Fire or weather emergencies
- Loud or heated arguments between guests
- Reports of theft
- Fights

### **What happens after the women come upstairs?**

The women take showers and do their laundry after dinner. They will come to the volunteer room door and ask for toiletries, hygiene products, laundry detergent and other supplies. The ladies are not supposed to go back downstairs unless it is for medication.

Helpful hints:

- It is best if the guests do not enter the volunteer room.
- When asked for over-the-counter medicine, tell the guest that she may go to the front desk on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor to get over-the-counter medicine.
- The guests do their laundry by their bed number. Only guests scheduled to do laundry on that particular night may do laundry. Please refer to the laundry chart and sign located on the volunteer room wall.
- If everyone scheduled for that night has washed one load and someone wants to wash another, that is fine.
- If someone's clothing isn't finished drying by 10pm, she will need to finish her laundry the next morning. The laundry room can be unlocked when you wake the guests.

### **Can I talk to the women?**

Absolutely!

Helpful hints:

- Please avoid giving out personal information.
- While the instinct for the tender-hearted is to solve the guests' problems and make them feel more comfortable, please avoid doing personal favors for the guests (i.e. giving money for the pay phone, letting someone use your cell phone, making an exception to a rule, getting a woman something to eat or drink from our kitchen, etc.).
- If you can't do something for all of the women, please don't do it for one.

### **What do I do if a guest asks for underwear, socks or other clothing?**

Please only give out socks, underwear and other clothing in case of a **true emergency** (i.e. she has no clean underwear, nothing to wear to bed, etc.).

### **What should I do if someone wants another blanket?**

The ladies are only allowed to have 2 blankets, 2 pillows and one set of sheets. If the woman only has one blanket, you may give her another. If she already has 2, she will need to speak with a staff person the next day.

### **What should I do if someone soils their sheets and needs another set?**

Give her another set of sheets. They are located in the supply closet of the volunteer room.

**What do I do if there is a fire or weather emergency?**

In the unlikely event of an emergency, please stay calm. Do not use the elevator. You may contact the guard for assistance and specific instructions. Please make a mental note of the evacuation plan posted on the wall on the second floor. Also be familiar with the placement of the fire extinguishers and alarms.

**Can I do something special for the women?**

With prior approval from a staff person, you may have a special activity for the women, i.e. give manicures, facials, chair massages, etc. With prior approval, you may also bring gifts for the women. However, we ask that you bring enough gifts for all of the guests and that you consider bringing enough for the guests in the overflow emergency shelter as well. There are generally 5-15 women and children in the overflow.

**Should I leave the door closed or open, or should I go out of the room and talk with the ladies?**

You are more than welcome to come out of the volunteer room after you have met the guest's needs for supplies. You are also welcome to stay in the volunteer room if you'd like. However, we ask that you leave the door propped open until 10pm so that the women know you are available if they need something. Another reason for leaving the door propped open is that when volunteers segregate themselves from the guests or act afraid of them, it hurts the ladies' feelings.

**When do I turn the lights out?**

Turn off the lights at 10pm. The dim lights on the walls will remain on all night. At 10pm, turn off the guest's television and close the laundry room.

Helpful hints:

- If one of the guests is disturbing the others, you may ask her to go sleep on a mat on the first floor. Many of our women work and need to sleep without being disturbed.
- \*\*\*Please fill out the bed check form found in the sign-in binder in the volunteer room. It is best to do this after the women are in their beds.
- You may record any information that you think staff may need to know about on the bed check form.

**What time do I wake the guests up in the morning?**

Wake the women up at 6am Monday-Friday and at 7am on Saturday and Sunday.

Helpful hints:

- The best way to wake the women is to turn on the lights and cheerfully say "Good morning ladies!"
- It is not your responsibility to be sure that the women actually get up and downstairs on time. It is only your responsibility to inform them that it is time to wake up.

**What time can I leave?**

You may leave after waking the guests and unlocking the laundry room. Please turn in the bed check sheet at the front desk before leaving.

**Do I need to clean the volunteer room before leaving?**

No. However, please turn off the window heating and air unit, TV and all the lights in the volunteer room. Place your linens in the laundry basket in the volunteer room supply closet. Please close and lock the volunteer room door when you leave.

# Overnight Volunteer Check-List

Please feel free to use one of these check lists if you'd like. You DO NOT need to turn it in to the front desk upon leaving.

- ☐ Fill out the volunteer sign-in sheet located in the blue sign-in binder  
(Note: Name, time in, time out and signature are required, you may give us the other info if you wish!)
- ☐ Give necessary supplies to the guests
- ☐ 10PM Turn off the lights in the dorm room
- ☐ 10PM Close the laundry room
- ☐ 10PM Turn off the guest's television
- ☐ 10PM Fill out the bed check form located in the blue sign-in binder, putting a star on the beds that are empty
- ☐ Monday-Friday: Wake the ladies at 6AM
- ☐ Saturday, Sunday and major holidays: Wake the ladies at 7AM
- ☐ Open the laundry room so guests may finish their laundry
- ☐ If using First Light's sheets, please place dirty linens in the basket in the supply closet for staff to wash
- ☐ Turn off lights, heating/air unit & TV, lock volunteer room door by pushing button on handle
- ☐ Turn in the bed check form to front desk staff

## 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. I have also received training to be an overnight volunteer and understand the expectations of staff and the duties to be performed.

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: \_\_\_\_\_