

## 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 Kathy Koehler, Volunteer Coordinator [kkoehler@alphahouse-ihn.org](mailto:kkoehler@alphahouse-ihn.org) (734)822-0220. Thank you for your support!