
Housed Great Falls
PO Box 3592
Great Falls, MT 59403

Welcome to **Cold Weather** **Drop In Center**

We're so glad to have you join the team! This orientation is meant to provide team specific information to help you get off to a great and productive start.

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WHO WE ARE

Our Mission

The Cold Weather Drop In Center is a safe, evening space for people who are experiencing homelessness or are stranded during the cold winter months. When temperatures are forecast to be a 'feels like' 25 degrees or lower the Church will be open between the time of 5:00 - 9:30 PM

until overnight services at the Rescue Mission opens at 10:00 PM. Transportation from the warming center to the Rescue Mission will be provided. Water, warm drinks, and snacks will be provided to those utilizing services.

The Team

The Cold Weather Drop In Center is being hosted by the First United Methodist Church (FUMC), organized by volunteers from Housed Great Falls (HGF) and includes volunteers from the greater community. We are deeply thankful for everyone who has or will volunteered their time to make this possible.

Our Values

The Cold Weather Drop in Center is committed to providing a physically and emotionally safe place for all people regardless of race, national origin, gender, age, creed, or sexual orientation. We are a secular organization; proselytizing is not part of our mission. We aim to treat all people with respect and dignity, understanding that the people we serve are struggling with issues that many of us can only imagine. We serve all people with compassion and grace.

The Housed Great Falls Facebook page will announce when the drop in center is open; as well as other events and happenings!

THE HUMAN CONDITION

Those We Serve

The people we serve are those who are experiencing homelessness in the city of Great Falls, and while not a guarantee, there is often an overlap with substance abuse, trauma, and mental health concerns. For many of us these can be topics that are uncomfortable, confusing, and even scary; they are outside of our lived experience. But for the people we serve, these issues are often experienced daily. While these differences can seem daunting, they are not insurmountable.

Don't take it personal

Many of the people we serve will not respond to common situations in the way that you might expect; being angry, defensive, overly friendly, laughing, or crying for no apparent reason. The majority of the time these reactions are not about you, but about some precipitating event or factor that has nothing to do with you.

Empathy vs Sympathy vs Compassion

Sympathy is a feeling of sadness or pity for another person, empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Compassion is the action we take when we have empathy for another. We would like to encourage volunteers to develop empathy with those that we are serving; and that empathy to become the action of compassion. However, don't try to force a comparison if you can't be genuine; it is better to admit that you don't understand someone's life situation than comparing their lack of basic necessities with your wifi being out for an hour and missing your favorite TV show.

Questions

When speaking with those we serve, we suggest not asking any questions that you yourself wouldn't be comfortable answering if a complete stranger asked you; remember that people do not 'owe' us their life stories to receive services. Some may volunteer more information than you wanted to know, others may be vague and protective; both extremes are common.

Easy starting questions can be "What's your name?" or "How long have you lived in Great Falls?" If someone does not want to engage, respect their right to privacy.

Boundaries

Boundaries can be both emotional, physical, material, or time oriented and are important to healthy relationships; including while volunteering. Setting a boundary does not mean a lack of concern or care, but insures that love and care are sustainable in a relationship.

- **Physical Boundaries:** Ask permission before giving someone a hug or other forms of physical contact (pat on the back, etc..) Due to some people's history (trauma, PTSD, etc...) they may not feel comfortable with this.
- **Emotional Boundaries:** Each of us is entitled to have our own feelings regarding the events in our lives, including the people we serve. We also have the right to set a boundary around inappropriate or uncomfortable topics for us. Example: "This isn't a topic I'm comfortable discussing."
- **Material Boundaries:** Material boundaries revolve around people's personal possessions. We ask that volunteers NOT give money to individuals. You are allowed to have boundaries, such as not letting people borrow your phone. We also ask that volunteers do NOT give rides in your personal vehicle.
- **Time Boundaries:** In healthy time boundaries a person can set aside time for all facets of their lives; know your limitations and do not over extend yourself. While we need your volunteer time, we want you to stay healthy and not get burnt out.

Remember, setting boundaries does not necessarily indicate a lack of compassion, but is a building block for safe and sustainable relationships. Many of the people we serve lack effective boundary setting and this might be frustrating; please be firm yet compassionate. Remember, it is seldom personal.

TASK & PHYSICAL SPACE

Task

- Ensure that guests sign in and out when entering and leaving the cold weather drop in; marking the time.
- Make coffee and serve available food to guests.
- Greet guests with warmth and hospitality
- Engage in listening and conversation with guests.
- Encourage use of games, puzzles, books, etc.
- Clean up space at the end of evening.
- Clear building to insure that no one is left inside.
- Ensure that lights are off and doors locked before the end of evening.

Physical Space

The Cold Weather Drop In Center is hosted by the First United Methodist Church (FUMC), located at 610 2nd Ave North. All volunteers and guests are to use the rainbow door on the south side of the building. All other doors to the building are to remain locked during operation of the Cold Weather Drop In.

Upstairs from the rainbow door is the fellowship hall and kitchen. Only volunteers allowed in the kitchen area. Guests are to stay in the fellowship hall during the cold weather service; with the exception of the bathrooms (located on the first floor just inside the rainbow door).

RESOURCES

How To Volunteer

We would ask volunteers to contact a member of HGF or FUMC before volunteering to get your contact information and a brief screening to ensure volunteers are a safe fit for our services. After that, please use the link below to sign up for dates you can volunteer during cold weather.

- <https://signup.com/client/invitation2/secure/1044718534016278015/false#/invitation>

We will announce via Facebook and email a week in advance about what dates are needed based on the weather forecast. If there are not enough volunteers for a particular date (a minimum of three for safety) then we will cancel.

Emergency Contacts

- For medical emergencies contact 911.
- For disruptive individuals who do pose an immediate threat, contact 911.
- For disruptive individuals who do NOT pose an immediate threat, contact the police non-emergency number (406) 727-7688 and select the option for dispatch.
- For individuals who are suicidal or suffering a mental health crisis; 988 will reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- For a physical facilities problem contact Rev. Dawn Skerritt (406) 781-4524] Do NOT contact this person for problems mentioned above.

Housed Great Falls

Housed Great Falls is a grassroots 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Housed Great Falls aims to provide missing scaffolding in Great Falls to unhoused and unsheltered community members including access to services and infrastructure. Housed Great Falls is composed of community members who are passionate about the wellbeing of our unhoused community members. Board members include those with health and human service histories.

We can be contacted via email at housedgreatfallsmt@gmail.com or via mail at PO Box 3592 Great Falls, MT 59403. Monetary and in-kind donations are tax deductible. Monetary gifts may be sent to our PO Box. Accepted donations include bedding (blankets, sleeping bags), winter supplies (hand warmers), snacks and meals, and clothing.