

Becoming a Partner

Read on for answers to common questions about becoming a partner congregation. Interested? Get in touch with our Executive Director.

What is a Host Congregation?

While IHNGC staff provide case management services at the Day Center, the congregations are in charge of providing overnight lodging, three meals per day, and enough volunteers to help house up to four families every night for a week. Host congregations usually host guests for a week at a time about four to six weeks per year. Hosting families allows congregations to reach out by providing families who have lost their homes with safe, secure lodging and a sense of community. Hosting also gives volunteers the opportunity to provide hands-on outreach in their own congregational facility.

The following are the basic elements needed to be a Host Congregation:

1. Designated space to host up to 4 families (16 individuals) for a week at a time, 4-6 times a year. Since a host congregation is providing hospitality to families for the week, the guest areas should remain set-up and secure all week. Congregations host families from about 6:00 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. Monday through Friday and 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. Saturday and Sunday.
2. Sleeping Accommodations should be as homelike as possible. Ideally, each family will have a private sleeping area, often in a separate religious education classroom. Alternatively, if one large room must be used for a sleeping area, partitions will be needed to provide privacy for each family. Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) prefers congregations to purchase the 18 rollaway cots needed (2 are for the overnight volunteers), but can, sometimes, provide financial assistance.
3. Living Area/Hospitality Room separated into an adult lounge (with sofa, chairs, tables, and a TV) and a children's activity area.
4. Two bathrooms: one for women and one for men; at least one should include a baby changing station. If you have showers, all the better, but they're not necessary. The Day Center has showers.
5. Kitchen, dining area, refrigerator, and necessary clean-up items for meal preparation (dinners may be cooked at the congregation or brought in and heated).

6. Designated outdoor smoking area located at least 20 feet away from any building entrance.
7. Space for overnight volunteers to sleep, within close proximity of families. Any space can be used, for example, offices, hallway, etc.

The congregation provides all meals: nutritious cooked dinners, simple breakfasts (hot or cold) and supplies for sack lunches, bed and bath linens and various basic items. Please see host supply list below.

How many volunteers are needed?

A congregation should always have at least 2 volunteers present and generally not more than 6 at a time. Volunteers can come from the host or support congregations or organizations (such as a youth group from a community organization, for example). All volunteers should be trained, either by the congregation, or by Interfaith Hospitality Network staff.

The host congregation provides an Interfaith Hospitality Network coordinator(s) to serve as the point person and communicator between Interfaith Hospitality Network and the congregation's volunteers, as well as to recruit volunteers for the host week and attend scheduled Interfaith Hospitality Network meetings (4 times per year).

What supplies do host congregations need?

- Alarm clocks or clock radios (4)
- Towels & washcloths
- Lamps (4), night lights (4)/night stands (4)
- Beds for babies (Pack & Play or Port-O-Crib)/linens for babies beds
- Bed linens - pad & sheets (20 sets)/blankets (20)
- Laundry baskets or hampers
- Toiletries - soap, shampoo (baby also), feminine hygiene products
- Toothpaste & brushes, hair brushes
- Disposable diapers or pull-ups/tissues, baby wipes
- Disposable (non latex) gloves
- Box with lock & key
- Bandages, Tylenol (Children & Adult Strength), Cough Syrups (Children & Adult)
- First Aid cream, indigestion/diarrhea liquids, thermometer
- Toys appropriate for different age groups, drawing materials
- Books & games, carpet or rug for play area (If Necessary)

- Videos, toy box or shelves
- Lamps and/or rugs to make more personal, sofa or other comfortable seating
- Television with VCR, dining tables
- Rocking chair(s)
- Name tags
- Toilet paper
- Hand soap for bathrooms & kitchen, cleaning supplies (for cleaning tables, kitchen, & dishes)
- Flashlights & batteries, cover for windows or doors where necessary
- Light bulbs, extra pillows (8-10)
- Iron & ironing board, infant bath tub
- Highchairs
- Lunch foods (sandwich meats, sliced cheese, breakfast foods (cereal, Pop Tarts, oatmeal, sausage biscuits, chips, cookies, carrots, raisins bread, etc...))
- Drinks (fruit juice, milk, lemonade, tea,
- Snack foods (cakes, cookies, microwave popcorn, chips)
- Try to avoid soft drinks
- Dish towels/cloths
- Microwave
- Plates - bowls - cups (paper or glass)
- Toaster or method to toast
- Flatware (plastic or stainless)
- Coffeepot
- Picher (for mixing drinks or formula for babies)
- Tablecloths
- Different cookware and utensils (If Guests are allowed kitchen use)
- Small ice chest or ice bucket
- Paper products (foil, wrap, Ziplocs, napkins, paper towels,
- Trivets or trays for hot items, lunch bags, sandwich bags)
- Peanut Butter & Jelly
- Tuna - Vienna Sausages
- Soups (Chicken Noodle, Vegetable Beef, etc...)
- Crackers
- Salt - Pepper - Sugar - Sweetener - Coffee Creamer
- Mustard, Mayonnaise, Ketchup
- Margarine or Butter
- Coffee - Tea Bags
- Baby formula (Women, Infants & Children usually provides this)

- Additional supplies will likely be needed for the children's play area and common areas (such as toys, games, books etc.)

What is a hosting week like?

Several weeks before a hosting week, the Interfaith Hospitality Network Coordinator at the congregation will begin to round up volunteers for the upcoming week. There are all sorts of volunteer opportunities--in order to host Interfaith Hospitality Network for a week, volunteers are needed to prepare and serve meals, greet guests, stay overnight with the guests, do laundry after the host week, and plan and participate in activities with the guests. There are many opportunities for whole families in the congregation to volunteer; children in the program and children from the congregation often have a great time playing together and getting to know one another.

The host week runs from Sunday evening to the following Sunday morning. The Thursday before the host week, the coordinator will get a list of guests that will be staying with the congregation. The coordinator then can prepare the guest rooms, alert the meal preparation volunteers, and so on. From then on, the Interfaith Hospitality Network Coordinator makes sure that volunteers are at the congregation at all times, to greet the guests when they arrive around 5:30-6:30 p.m., to serve and eat dinner with the guests, to participate in any evening activities, and to be available during the night in case a rare emergency should happen. The overnight volunteer also puts the families on the bus in the morning at 6:30 a.m. on weekdays, and 7:30 a.m. on weekends.

After the host week, the coordinator makes sure that volunteers are available to put the congregation's Interfaith Hospitality Network space "back to normal" and clean any linens used during the week.

What is a Support Congregation?

Support congregations work in conjunction with host congregations who need extra volunteers, meals, and/or monetary support. They typically help the hosts for a few nights each week but have a less intensive commitment than host congregations. Becoming a support to an existing host might be right for your congregation if you have a smaller pool of interested volunteers or if you lack the physical space to host 16 people at a time.