



Volunteer Handbook

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Introduction

Thank you for signing up to volunteer with Homeward Alliance! Our organization is home to more than 1,400 volunteers who provided over 10,000 hours of service in 2022 alone. Homeward Alliance could not operate without our dedicated volunteers and the support they provide. Each volunteer helps us move towards our goal making homelessness rare, short-lived, and non-recurring.

The information included in this handbook should act as a tool to assist you in your volunteer work with Homeward Alliance. As our programs change and grow to meet the needs of our community, the information provided here will also evolve. Please help us keep this handbook up to date by providing us with information, knowledge, and feedback regarding your volunteer experience with Homeward Alliance.

About Homeward Alliance

Homeward Alliance (previously named Homeless Gear) is a Larimer-County based 501(c)(3) non-profit with a mission to empower individuals and families who face homelessness to survive, move forward, and thrive. We operate a continuum of programs including but not limited to our Housing First Initiative, Re-Entry, Resource Navigation, Family Services, Bike Repair, Distribution, Mobile Laundry, EARN (Employment Services), FUSE, Peer Navigation, our Health Initiative, and the Murphy Center. Collectively, our efforts help people meet their immediate and long-term needs while furthering our goal of making homelessness rare, short-lived, and non-recurring. More information about all our programs can be found online at <https://www.homewardalliance.org/hwa/programs/>.

We aim to:

- Meet both short-term and long-term needs.
- Support people in the process of self-determination to decide when and how to engage in services.
- Respond effectively to the complexities of each person's situation.
- Encourage and provide the tools necessary to people as they work toward economic stability in whatever form that takes for them (i.e. supportive housing, their own apartment, return to a family member's home, etc.).

Housing First Philosophy

Homeward Alliance operates from a Housing First Philosophy. This means we believe that housing is a fundamental human need, and that it is difficult, if not impossible, to address other issues (e.g., unemployment, mental illness, substance use disorder, physical disability, etc.) without the foundation of housing.

Volunteers are in the DNA of Homeward Alliance

When our founder, Ken John, sold his sporting goods business and retired in 2007, he set out to help people experiencing homelessness. An avid outdoorsman, Ken realized that he had a garage full of

outdoor gear that was doing nothing more than collecting dust. Ken also realized that, despite Colorado's harsh winters, there were no Colorado-based organizations whose core mission was to collect and distribute gear to people who were experiencing homelessness. He founded Homeward Alliance (then called Homeless Gear) in 2008 with a simple mission: collect and distribute life-sustaining supplies to those who need them most.

Ken was the organization's first volunteer, and from that point forward, volunteers have been an integral part of our agency's culture, growth, and success. Of our programs, **nine** were founded or conceived by volunteers. Each year, over 1,400 volunteers provide tens of thousands of hours of service to our organization. As members of the community, they provide not only valuable hands-on assistance, but also financial support and essential contacts to local businesses, faith communities, and other groups who provide additional financial and in-kind support. Volunteers serve in both supportive and leadership roles, and contribute a wealth of experience, diversity, expertise, and energy that makes our organization stronger, more effective, and more efficient.

Policies and Procedures

As an organization committed to excellence, we hold all our staff and volunteers to a high standard of service, professionalism, and behavior. All volunteers are required to sign our Code of Ethics and Release of Liability forms prior to signing up for volunteer shifts. Both of these documents are available on our volunteer portal, [Galaxy](#).

Dress Code

Homeward Alliance has a casual dress code. Volunteers are on their feet most of the time, so please wear comfortable shoes. All volunteers must begin their workday wearing clean and neat clothing.

- Torn, dirty, stained, or frayed clothing is unacceptable.
- Stomachs must be covered; no midriffs, crop tops, etc. (Your shirt must meet the top of your pants.)
- No strapless shirts or spaghetti-strap shirts unless a sweater or shirt is worn over it.
- Shorts and skirts must go past your fingertips when your arms are at your sides.
- Shoes are required; you cannot be barefoot.
- At no time will employees or volunteers wear clothing that is imprinted with illustrations, political statements, or messages that are or may be insulting, demeaning, harassing or offensive to others.

Wearing clothing or other items that that are deemed inappropriate may result in the volunteer being asked to change their clothing, remove or cover the item, or leave the facility.

Volunteer Programs

Homeward Alliance operates a diverse group of volunteer programs. All our volunteer programs are designed to help people meet their immediate and long-term needs, while furthering our goal of making homelessness rare, short-lived, and non-recurring.

These programs include:

- Food Pantry: The Food Pantry helps address food insecurity among the people we serve. It provides guests with a snack bag, coffee or hot chocolate, a cup of soup, etc. The Food Pantry is open Monday through Friday, with the volunteer shift running from 7 AM to 10 AM each day.
- Gear Room: The Gear Room helps distribute necessary gear to the people we serve. Guests can request various items (backpacks, tents, clothing, etc.) depending on availability. The Gear Room is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with the volunteer shift running from 12 PM to 2 PM.
- Donation Sorting: Donation Sorting involves organizing various donations into sizes and categories, to be distributed out of our Gear Room or during Community Events. Donation Sorting takes place on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with the volunteer shift running from 2 PM to 4 PM.
- Front Desk: The Front Desk position handles a variety of tasks including sorting and checking mail, opening lockers, doing laundry, preparing toiletries, answering phones, assisting guests, checking guests in, etc. This shift requires a weekly commitment, an interview, and a background check. Front Desk shifts occur every day, with the volunteer shifts running from 9 AM to 12 PM, and 1 PM to 4 PM.
- Mobile Laundry: Mobile Laundry offers free laundry services to families and individuals in Larimer County. Shift duties include greeting guests and collecting formation, weighing laundry, washing, drying, folding, etc. Mobile Laundry takes place Tuesday through Friday (depending on need), with volunteer shifts running from 8:30 AM to 12 PM, and 12 PM to 3:30 PM.
- Bike Repair: Bike Repair distributes, repairs, and maintains the bicycles of people in need. Volunteers can repair bikes, rebuild trailers, or donate bikes to the program. Volunteer shifts vary throughout the year.
- Murphy Center Garden: The Murphy Center Community Garden operates between March and September. Duties can include cleaning up/preparing the garden for the new season, planting, maintenance, etc. Volunteer shifts vary throughout the season.
- Community Events: Community Events occur throughout the year. Some are yearly events (Project Homeless Connect, Family Resource Fairs, Mission to Hope Walk, Stuff the Truck, etc.), and others pop up as needs in our community are brought to our attention. These events require a number of volunteers and are posted a month or two beforehand. Volunteer shifts vary depending on the event.
- Unique Opportunities: Unique Opportunities are smaller volunteer events that are made to address specific needs in our community. Examples of this include the Point In Time (PIT) Count, Cleaning the Murphy Center, Helping Murphy Center Guests Apply for Housing Vouchers, etc. These shifts are posted as they pop up and occur throughout the year.

Signing Up for Shifts

All Homeward Alliance shifts can be found on our volunteer portal, [Galaxy](#). To sign up for shifts you will first need to sign into your account.

Once you are signed in:

- Navigate to the menu located on the left-hand side of the webpage.
- Click on the Opportunities tab (you can also look for opportunities by sorting by Program, or by using the search bar).
- Browse through the open volunteer opportunities and click on the opportunity you want to sign up for.
- Scroll to the bottom of the page and click the Sign Up button in the bottom right-hand corner.
- Add any relevant notes, then click the Submit Need Response button in the bottom left-hand corner.

AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP

Volunteers who are age 55+ are eligible for some additional benefits through AmeriCorps Seniors – RSVP, which is hosted by Volunteers of America. RSVP mobilizes dedicated older adult volunteers who want to contribute to the health and well-being of their community through meaningful volunteer service.

Homeward Alliance and RSVP make a great team and your membership in their program benefits both you and us! While your work makes a difference the lives of guests served by Homeward Alliance, your impact is documented by RSVP. They count your volunteer hours and share stories with Larimer County, community members, businesses and even on a national level about the ways that older adults are transforming our community. This program is one of the largest volunteer networks in America with over 300,000 volunteers serving nationally and over 600 volunteers serving here in Fort Collins/Loveland/Berthoud.

There is no cost to join, and RSVP provides supplemental insurance while working in your volunteer role, relevant workshops, and social events and gatherings for their members. For more information and to sign up follow this link: <https://www.voacolorado.org/volunteer-opportunities/retired-senior-volunteer-program-2>.

Best Practices for Working with People Experiencing Homelessness

While not all our volunteer positions have direct contact with guests, many do. This section of the Volunteer Handbook goes over some best practices for working with individuals experiencing homelessness including interpersonal interactions, setting appropriate boundaries, trauma-informed care, and staying SAFE. While we believe this is essential information for our volunteers to have access to, this Handbook does not provide any qualifications or certifications in the subjects discussed.

Interpersonal Interactions

When discussing the people we serve, it is important to use “people first language”. People first language puts a person before a diagnosis or situation, describing what condition a person “has” rather

than asserting what a person “is”. For example, rather than referring to someone as a “homeless person”, we say “a person experiencing homelessness”. This simple practice is used in many different fields, and is a proven way to reinforce compassionate and empathetic interactions with the people we serve.

At Homeward Alliance, we believe in showing compassion without conditions. We meet people where they are – not where we think they should be. It is important that our volunteers embody this mindset when interacting with guests.

Setting Appropriate Boundaries

All Homeward Alliance volunteers are expected to maintain appropriate boundaries with the guests that we serve. These include:

- Not giving money or gifts to guests.
- Not meeting with guests outside of your volunteer role.
- Refraining from using your position to further a personal agenda.
- Never engaging in any sort of sexual contact with guests.
- Not giving out personal information such as a phone number, address, etc.

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-informed care is a framework for working with and relating to people who have experienced negative consequences after exposure to dangerous experiences. The effects of trauma can lead to poor physical health, an increased risk of mental health issues, substance use disorders, and effects on decision making. When working with people who have been affected by trauma in some capacity, there are some practices that we can adopt to build trust and establish productive, positive relationships.

1. **Providing Safe and Secure Spaces:** This can happen within the physical spaces where we work, or the abstract spaces we create with our relationships with guests.
2. **Trustworthiness:** This is built by embodying Homeward Alliance’s values of passion, collaboration, and evidence-based best practices.
3. **Choice:** This is the practice of acknowledging a person’s agency and right to make their own choices, even if theirs do not align with ours.
4. **Collaboration:** Instead of talking at guests, converse with guests.
5. **Empowerment:** Individuals served by Homeward Alliance are empowered to explore and use their existing strengths when interacting with our programs. We are a support network, not the reason our guests succeed.

Staying SAFE

When interacting with guests, it is important to stay SAFE.

S – Know your Surroundings

- Be aware of the environment.

- What is happening around us that could aggravate the situation?
- Be aware of your audience.
 - Who else is here? How could the people around us help or hurt the situation?
- Be aware of your stance and demeanor.
 - Be calm, non-threatening, and reassuring.
 - Do your best to control your own emotional responses.

A – Be Actively Engaged

- Listen to what they have to say.
 - Active listening—show you are hearing and understanding them.
- When you respond, be clear and respectful.

F – Acknowledge Feelings

- Their feelings are valid.
 - Remember your trauma informed lens.
- Manage your own emotional response—stay calm, do not escalate.

E – Engage Resources

- Refer them to somebody who can help them with their issue if applicable.
- Ask staff or security to help.
 - They can provide an avenue for addressing grievances to help de-escalate.
 - They can handle the situation if the individual escalates further.
- If the situation continues to escalate, let staff take over and remove yourself from the situation.
 - Further engagement is not your role.

If a situation escalates to a point where you feel unsafe or unable to de-escalate, engage the help of staff, security, or other trained authorities.

Other Ways to Help

Donate Product

- Donate outdoor gear, outerwear, new underwear, new socks, hygiene items, and non-perishable food
- Visit our donation page at <https://www.homewardalliance.org/how-to-help/>
- Contact Brennan Snyder with any questions!
 - brennan@homewardalliance.org – (970) 829-1151

Donate Money

- Give online at <https://www.homewardalliance.org/how-to-help/>
- Mail checks to “Homeward Alliance” P.O. Box 873, Fort Collins, CO 80522-0873
- Ask if your employer has a “Matching Gifts” program for employee charitable giving!
- Contact Pam Brewer with any questions!
 - pam@homewardalliance.org -- (970) 829-1162

King Soopers Community Rewards Program

If you shop at King Soopers, consider participating in this free program.

1. Sign-up for the King Soopers Community Rewards Program: [Click Here to Sign Up!](#)
2. Search for Homeward Alliance either by name or code **WU625** and then click “Enroll.”
3. Don’t have an account? Sign up with a valid email address and a rewards card. Bonus: now you can get digital coupons too!

Every time you swipe your rewards card or type in your phone number, Homeward Alliance earns a rebate! Set this up once and you never have to fuss with it again.

ReFund Colorado – Donate All or Part of Your Colorado Income Tax Refund

Coloradans can give all or part of their state income tax refund directly to one of more than 7,750 eligible nonprofits registered with the state. Through the Donate to a Colorado Nonprofit program, taxpayers can choose to directly support an eligible Colorado-registered charity with a simple designation on their state income tax return.

For more information, please see the ReFund Colorado website at tax.colorado.gov.

If you would like to designate all or part of your Colorado income tax return to Homeward Alliance, please include our registration number of **#20123037053**.

Contacts

Volunteer and Events Coordinator – Kinszia Erickson

kinszia@homewardalliance.org

970-430-6105

Kinszia oversees all volunteer recruitment and scheduling. She also helps plan organization events. Feel free to reach out with questions about volunteering or to learn more about upcoming events and ways you can help support them.

Facilities Manager – Brennan Snyder

brennan@homewardalliance.org

970-829-1151

Brennan oversees all product acquisition and donations. He can answer questions about product donations and supplies (including for Gear Room and Food Pantry), as well as Homeward Alliance vehicles.

Development Director – Pam Brewer

pam@homewardalliance.org

970-829-1162

Pam oversees all fundraising efforts for Homeward Alliance. She can answer questions about current fundraising efforts, sponsorship opportunities, one-time donations, and planned giving.