



# Handbook for Volunteers

*Dear Potential Volunteer,*

*It has been our goal from the beginning to help break the stigma of homelessness in our rural communities. This program is an opportunity for all of us to move forward in this endeavor. In order to fulfill our mission, we need YOU to help us grow in the very context of helping other people.*

*As a non-profit, Benjamin's House seeks to find ways for the community to get involved. We believe that having volunteers is important. We also recognize the need to offer training, supervision, and support to our volunteers. Thank you for your willingness to volunteer! We have prepared this handbook to give you some essential information about our policies and expectations. We look forward to helping you find opportunities to work alongside us at Benjamin's House.*

*Sincerely,*

*Benjamin's House Staff*

*April, 2024*

## **The History of Benjamin's House**

In January 2009, a group of interested individuals from twenty Barron County public and private organizations began meeting monthly to address the issue of rural homelessness and its negative impact on the health and well-being of people without shelter. They welcomed an opportunity to work together to create a comprehensive service delivery system to provide for basic needs. The idea to develop an emergency shelter was born!

At the same time, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis offered to rent their vacant convent building space to this group. It was located on a quiet, private piece of property called Heart Island Parkway in Rice Lake, WI. The Board of Directors named the shelter, Benjamin's House, to honor Mother Mary Benjamin, the Mother Superior of this order of Sisters, because she welcomed to their convent another group of Sisters who were poor, homeless, and faced with disbanding. Benjamin's House opened its doors to the homeless in February of 2011. Here is the Mission Statement:

***Working together with others to provide shelter, food, support services and an avenue to self-sufficiency for the homeless and people in need.***

On July 8, 2022, Benjamin's House was able to purchase and take ownership of the entire east half of Heart Island, which included the existing shelter, the former chapel, the former rectory, the Guest House, a garage, a playground, and several parking lots. Benjamin's House continues as a non-profit organization with 501(c)(3) status.

### **Statements on Equity**

Benjamin's House values diversity, equity, and inclusion in every aspect of our work, including our internal operations and external activities to support our mission. We are committed to growing a culture of respect for the dignity and value of each individual and family. We welcome all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, national origin, disability, household composition, housing status and/or belief system. These values are essential to our mission to assist and advocate for those who are homeless, to champion equity in all public and private responses to homelessness, and to help individuals and families from all backgrounds secure safe shelter.

## **What does our volunteer program look like?**

### **Room Sponsorships**

Benjamin's House has 19 bedrooms with sponsors who furnish the rooms with bed, dresser, rug, chair, lamp, curtains, small bedside table, bedding, hangers, fan, alarm clock, laundry basket, and shower caddy. Currently, churches, social groups, and individuals make up these sponsorships. Sponsors will keep the bedrooms supplied with furnishings listed above.

**Direct Service Volunteers-** have direct contact with the residents and staff.

- Meal volunteers
- Drivers for resident appointments-Background check, valid driver's license, and proof of insurance is required.
- Kindness Crews-groups of people willing to help residents with moving
- Drivers to pick up Kwik Trip donations on a weekly basis

### **Building and Grounds volunteers, outdoors**

- Mowing, trimming on the property
- Seasonal lawn clean-up
- Gardening and care of outdoor flowers
- Shoveling and de-icing sidewalks

### **Handyman work inside the buildings**

- Painting
- Carpentry
- Plumbing
- Electrical
- Heavy duty cleaning
- Storage room organization

### **Clerical**

- Assist with the mailings for the annual appeal.

### **Fundraising events and Donation Drives**

- Work at a Benjamin House fundraising event (Family Fun Fest, Street Eats, Winterfest, etc.)
- Initiate a fundraising event within your organization that will benefit Benjamin's House.
- Initiate a donation drive for canned goods, cleaning products, paper goods, personal items, and bedding for use at the shelter.

### **Community Service**

- Supervise and work with programs that require community service, including schools, service organizations, and employer-based service.
- Court-ordered community service is done on a case-by-case basis. Individuals must apply and a background check will be reviewed.

## **How do you get started as a volunteer at Benjamin's House?**

1. Complete the [Volunteer application](#) either online or in person. The minimum age is 18 years for an individual volunteer. However, young people may volunteer if they are accompanied by an adult.
2. Sign the required forms:
  - Emergency contact information
  - Statement of confidentiality
  - Acknowledgement of this on-line volunteer handbook.
3. A tour of the shelter can be arranged for you prior to agreeing to volunteer.
4. Before you begin, you will be assigned a contact person to whom you will direct any questions, concerns, or comments.

## **Policies**

- All volunteers should avoid any circumstances that might in any way be interpreted as a conflict of interest between the volunteer and Benjamin’s House.
- Potential volunteers with disabilities should discuss reasonable accommodations with the Shelter Manager.
- Volunteers who have preexisting personal relationships with residents will immediately disclose this relationship to the Shelter Manager.
- Volunteers are not permitted to have social or work relationships with residents.
- There is to be no fraternization with residents, including relationships conducted via social media.
- Refer residents to staff members for questions and assistance.
- Harassment and discrimination are prohibited at the shelter.
- Benjamin’s House does not assume responsibility for the loss, damage, or theft of personal belongings.
- Benjamin's House maintains a strict Zero-Tolerance policy with regard to the possession, sales, purchase, solicitation or transfer of drugs or alcohol.
- The possession or use of dangerous weapons is prohibited on Benjamin’s House property.
- Smoking, vaping, or any other use of tobacco is permitted outdoors in the designated smoking area.

## **Best Practices**

- Benjamin’s House makes a concerted effort to provide a safe environment that is conducive to health and safety for everyone. Volunteers are responsible for genuine cooperation with all aspects of their health and safety.
- Dress appropriately for the volunteer work you will be doing.
- Sign in and out with the staff on duty. Volunteer hours will be recorded for various purposes.

## **Emergency Procedures**

### **Personal Injury:**

- Inform staff on duty who will seek first-aid or medical attention for you, if necessary.

### **Critical Situation Plan:**

If you observe any of the following situations, please alert the staff on duty immediately. Staff will contact 911 if deemed necessary:

- Resident under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
- If a resident seems to be a threat to themselves or to someone else
- Medical emergency for a resident
- Parental neglect and/or abuse of a child

### **Fire:**

When a fire alarm sounds, you should:

- Remain calm.
- Stop what you are doing.
- Exit out the first available door and gather at the playground.
- Call 911 from a cell phone.
- Do not re-enter the building.

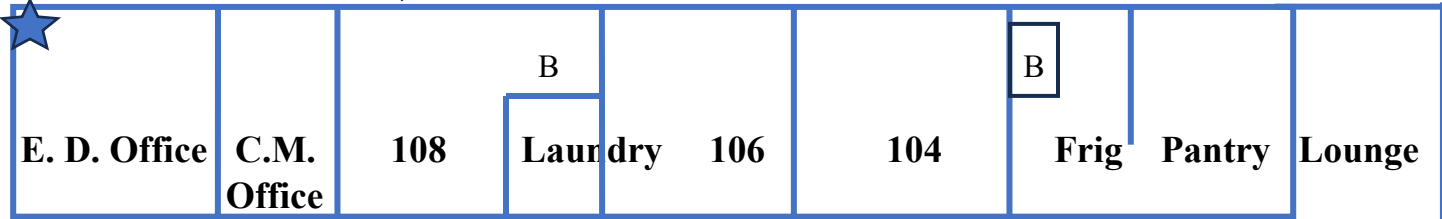
### **Tornado or Severe Storm:**

In the event of a tornado or severe thunderstorm warning:

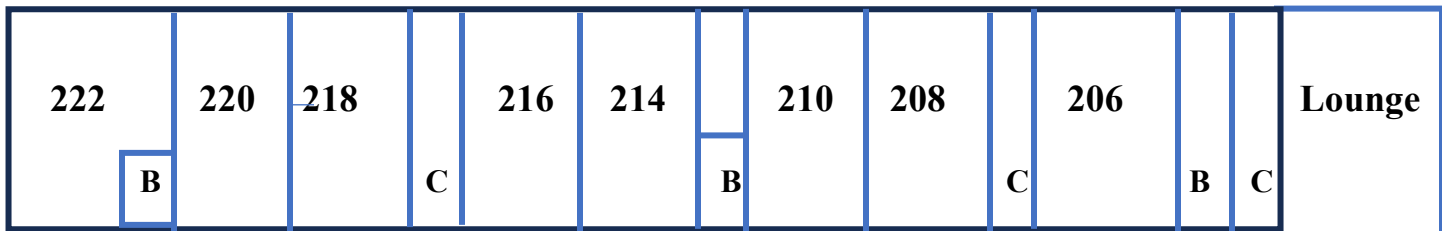
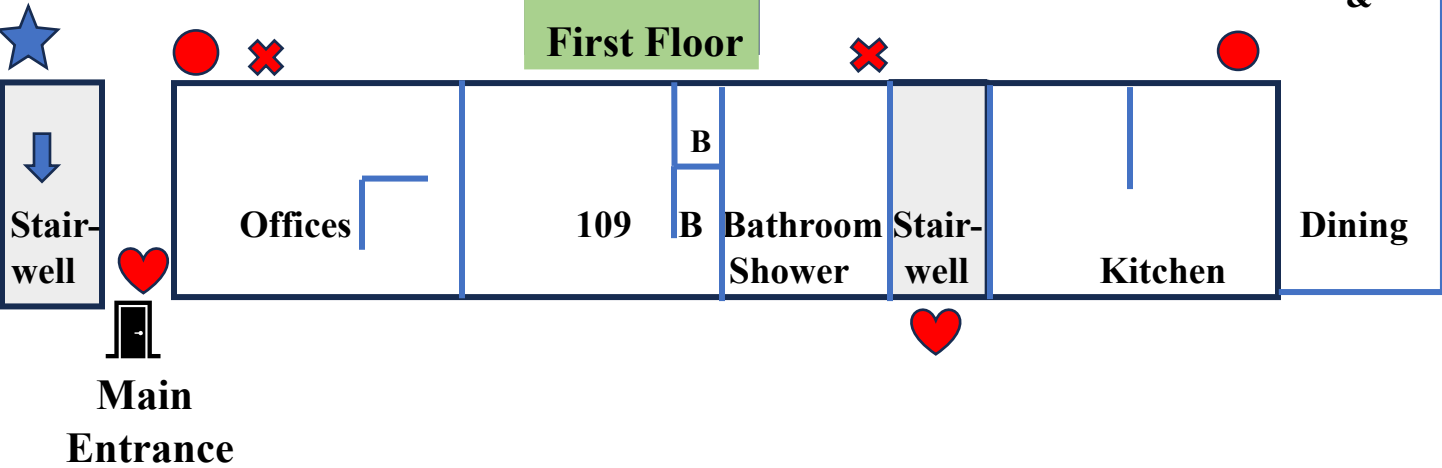
- Remain calm.
- Take all residents to the basement hallway.
- Do not go back upstairs until the ALL CLEAR has been sounded by staff.

# Benjamin's House Floor Plans

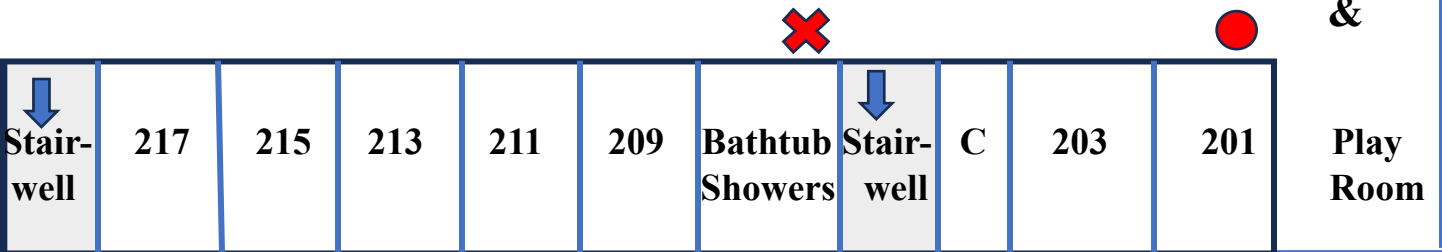
- Key**
-  Fire Extinguishers
  -  Fire Exit
  -  Fire Alarms
  -  Emergency Exit Doors through  
Heart Island Family Enrichment Center
  -  To Basement Storm Shelter



## First Floor



## Second Floor





## **Guidelines for Meal Volunteers**

April, 2024

[www.benjamins-house.org](http://www.benjamins-house.org)

715-736-2437

**Call, email, or use the “Sign-Up Genius” on the Benjamin’s House website to sign up for a meal volunteer date and time. Most volunteers bring a week-night evening meal, but if you wish to cook a Saturday or Sunday meal, a brunch, a cook-out, or a holiday meal, just have this conversation with a staff member. All meals are appreciated by our residents!**

**If this is your first experience being a meal volunteer, a tour of our facility can be arranged for you ahead of time. Contact staff.**

**Meal volunteers may prepare the meal at the shelter or do the cooking at home. You may buy the food that is served, or you are welcome to use food from the shelter pantry to prepare the meal. Talk with staff about what they have on hand in the freezers. Then plan your meal. Please try to bring a gallon of milk to have with the meal. Thanks.**

**We ask that you arrive by 5:30 p.m. and serve dinner by 6:00, unless another time has been pre-arranged. Plan to serve 24 people.**

- When you arrive at the shelter you may park by the entryway sidewalk to unload. Please move your car when you have finished unloading.
- Please make sure you stop in the office and sign in when you first arrive and when you leave.
- Before you begin cooking or serving, please clear the kitchen countertops and disinfect them.
- If you are in need of a sharp knife for food prep., you may request one from the office staff.
- Please set out the food you are serving and dish up the plates using gloves that are provided.
- Volunteers and staff are encouraged to eat with the residents.
- Several residents will have kitchen clean-up duties as one of their chores.
- You may wish to leave leftovers for those residents who are working and will miss the meal. Bring some containers for this.
- Your suggestions are always welcomed. Thank you for feeding our residents!