

# OUTREACH RUNS

The Outreach Run is about finding common ground between the housed and the homeless through dialogue with an Outreach Guide and with those you will meet. The Outreach Run is not the solution to ending homelessness, but the human exchange, rather than the exchange of goods, is the essence of the Outreach Run's mission.

Get a group together and distribute food, clothing or toiletries to those in need on the streets.

1. Find out who is interested and advertise the opportunity
2. Pick a date and time (day times or early evenings work best)
3. Contact local shelters and food programs to see what groups already provide outreach to the location you've chosen in order to avoid duplication.
4. Decide what you want to distribute--clothing, food, toiletries, or a combination. Collect or purchase supplies needed. Then make bags to organize the donations so they are easy to distribute.
5. Go out on foot or via vehicle into the streets in your community and engage in conversation with those whom you encounter. Ask them if they would like what you have to offer them.

The dialogue/conversation you have with each person you meet is the most important part.

A typical outreach run will last for up to two hours, but it depends on how many things you have and how many people you encounter.

Outreach Run Fact Sheet and Information Form: Whether you are doing the Outreach Run in your own community or with NCH in Washington, DC, visit this manual's appendix to view this fact sheet and information form. This includes information on: history, purpose, guidelines, recommendations for what to distribute, length of Outreach Run, and safety tips.

# OUTREACH RUN in DC

National Coalition for the Homeless  
2201 P Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20037-1033  
Phone: 202-462-4822 x234  
speakersbureau@nationalhomeless.org

Thank you for your interest in our Outreach Run program. This public education program is an essential part of our mission at the National Coalition for the Homeless, and we appreciate you giving us the opportunity to work with you on this.

The Outreach Run is about finding common ground between the housed and the homeless through hearing from one of our Outreach guides and meeting our homeless neighbors. The Outreach Run is not the solution to ending homelessness, but the human exchange, rather than the exchange of goods, is the essence of the Outreach Run's mission.

We look forward to working with you and learning more about your event. Please review the attached fact sheet on getting ready for and doing an Outreach Run. Please read carefully the Outreach Run Guidelines section. Please fill out the Outreach Run Event Request Form section that spells out many of the logistics, and return it in as timely a manner.

## OUTREACH RUN GUIDELINES

### Donations

- The group should collect the donations to be distributed before the time of the event.
- Recommended donation items:
- Bottled water, toiletries, and socks.
- Other suggestions are t-shirts, rain gear, jackets (winter time only), non perishable food items or gift certificates from fast food establishments.

### Introductions: 15 minutes

- One of NCH's Outreach Run guides will meet with your group at either the location your group is staying in or has booked, or we can meet at NCH's office.
- The Outreach Run guide will share some of his/her personal experiences with homelessness and discuss stereotypes and leading causes of homelessness with the group.
- The guide will then instruct the group on best practices before distributing donations in the neighborhood.

### Donation Distribution: 1 hour and 45 minutes

- The guide will lead the group to nearby areas where people are in need of the donations to be distributed.

**OVERALL TIME: 2 HOURS (THIS INCLUDES THE TIME WALKING TO THE DOWNTOWN PARKS.)**

## PURPOSE OF HAVING A HOMELESS/FORMERLY HOMELESS GUIDE

In addition to sharing his/her personal story at the beginning with Outreach Run participants, the guide will interact the participants throughout the Run, plus taking part in a reflection session at the end of the Run. The guide also knows the local community well and is a lot more “streetwise” than run participants. While by no means a body guard, the guide is usually able to handle most adverse situations.

### Number of Homeless/Formedly Homeless Guide(s)

We recommend one guide per 15 to 20 people

### Honoraria and Program Fee

Each guide will receive a \$50 honorarium. NCH charges a program fee of 20% of the total honoraria amount. If you only need one guide, the total amount would be \$60. The check should be mailed in advance of the event.

### Donation

We invite your organization to support the work of the National Coalition for the Homeless by becoming a member. Go to our website: [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)

## OUTREACH RUN HISTORY

In 1984, with horrible, dehumanizing poverty reaching new levels in New York City, a partnership was made between members of a church in the suburbs of NYC and a homeless woman from Manhattan. These unlikely teammates shared the same goal—to help those who were less able to get to resources they desperately needed on the streets: food and clothing. Members of the church began making trips to Manhattan to pass out food and clothing directly to their homeless neighbors. More and more groups began joining the group, which is now a collaboration of over 150 community organization, and now called Midnight Run.

In 1987, students from Marquette University attended a National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness conference, and were inspired by the group from New York City. A year later, they started their own midnight run program to meet the needs of Milwaukee’s homeless population.

A vital part of outreach programs like these is serving people fellowship, along with, and above food or clothing. Outreach runs like these put a real face on the suffering homeless people experience. These are real people who have dreams, aspirations, and hope, beyond their despair, just like any one of us. The companionship and conversations you have with people you encounter on your outreach run will be the most memorable part of the trip. You will carry some of the relationships you form on these runs for years to come.

So, get a group together, and walk with your brothers and sisters in need. Make a difference in someone's life, no matter how small, and allow someone to make a difference in your life. You will be surprised at how great a difference that may be!

## OUTREACH RUN RECOMMENDATIONS

You are going on an outreach run to distribute helpful supplies and lend a caring ear to members of the homeless community. The conversations you have and relationships you develop are the most important part of the outreach run!

Here are some helpful tips from different groups who organize outreach runs to help make your outreach run as effective and enjoyable as possible:

- Find out who is interested in joining you, and advertise the opportunity to everyone in your community.
- Be familiar with local resources for the homeless.
- Plan ahead: Pick a date and time, set up a route, and make transportation arrangements.
- Pick a time that is good for everyone. Evenings/early nighttime or weekends usually work best.
- Remember to schedule enough time for preparation before the actual Outreach Run, including clothing sorting (for easy distribution) and preparing bag meals.
- Have a pre-planned route for your run. Pick spots where larger numbers of homeless people congregate. Also, be sure to pick busy spots in your neighborhood or city. Try not to go off to secluded spots like wooded areas. It probably wouldn't be efficient to stop for every person you see, so try to stick to your route. If your run is going to be a regular program, with a definite next-date, spread the word of where/when you will be back so more people can be ready for you. This would make your run more equitable for the entire homeless community.
- You can go out on foot, but remember you are bringing supplies with you. It might be better for your group to travel in a van or another vehicle that can fit both your volunteers and supplies.
- Decide on what you want to distribute: clothing, food, toiletries, or all three!
- Host clothing, food, toiletries, and donation drives well ahead of your run. Whatever supplies aren't donated, purchase with the money you were donated, or money collected from volunteers.
- Call local hotels to ask for donations of hotel shampoo/conditioner/soap..

Here are some more specific tips for preparation and distribution of items on your run:

- **Food:** Try to prepare bag meals of substance. Include a hearty sandwich, a piece of fruit, a high-protein snack (perhaps a hard-boiled egg), energy bar, nutritional drink a juice box and a dessert or two.
- **Beverages:** Be sure to bring bottled water and coffee or hot cocoa
- **Meal Assistance:** Fast food coupons/grocery store gift cards
- **Can opener**
- **Smart Trip Cards** for DC's subway/bus systems.
- **Deck of cards** (used or new)
- **Blankets**—a clean/used or a new one.
- **Rain pancho/gear**
- **Sleeping Bag**—a clean/used or a new one
- **Hand warmer packets**
- **Long johns** during the winter season
- **Sports/Book Bag**
- **Umbrella**—a small, compact one that can fit in a sports/book bag

- **Clothing:** Try to collect all the essentials (coats, pants, shirts), but don't forget socks, underwear, knit hats (men and women), gloves and scarves. Socks are extremely popular! Wool socks in winter.  
-In preparation for your run, organize clothing into a system that will allow for easy distribution.  
-Organize clothes into Men's/Women's/Children's and then sizes. Roll-up socks into pairs to easily grab and distribute.
- **Toiletries:** The most effective and easiest way to distribute toiletries is to make up small kits of unused hotel toiletries or travel-sized toiletries. If you are coming from your hometown to the big city, call your local hotels seeking donations.

Try to include:

Hand Sanitizer  
Soap  
Toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, mouthwash, tooth numbing ointment  
Bar of soap  
Shampoo  
Towelettes  
Disposable razors, shaving cream  
Small package of Kleenex  
Nail File/clippers  
Lip balm  
Lotion—body and hand  
Deodorant  
Ear plugs  
Q-Tips  
Feminine hygiene products.  
Band Aids  
First Aid ointment  
Cough drops & throat lozenges

When distributing goods, here are some helpful tips to remember,

- Homeless men and women don't often get to decide their wardrobe. So, offer them the opportunity to choose. Work to accommodate special requests. Ask them what size they'd prefer, and if you have several of their sizes, allow them to choose their favorite style. Receiving something they wanted and requested will mean a lot.
- When approaching someone, try to visibly hold an item you are distributing. Introduce yourself and explain what you are doing. Offer the item you have in your hands and any other items your group has.
- Try not to wake anyone up who is sleeping. We want to respect their privacy, but we also don't want them to miss out on anything they may need.  
-Try standing at a decent distance (so as not to wake them if they are in a deep sleep) and identify yourself and begin naming some of the items you have to offer. If they still seem to be sleeping, leave a bag meal or two for when they wake up.
- TALK! Most people, even more than they want your socks or food, want someone to talk to. Again, these conversations are the most valuable part of these Outreach Runs, so take advantage of them.
- Never feel like you have to treat the run like an assembly line, having to personally talk to each individual person. A few homeless people may be too busy or may not want to talk. If you find someone who is interested in having a serious, longer conversation, open up and listen!  
-When talking to people you meet on your run, remember you are not professional counselors, student researchers, or evangelists. You are people who care. Make a connection, but try not to make anyone believe you have professional advice to give.
- Some questions not to ask. Are you homeless? Do you have family? What caused them to become homeless? If they volunteer that info, this is fine.
- As a rule, try not to give money to people on your run. Your supplies, conversation, and genuine interest/care are enough.

- Always be fair and equitable in your distribution. You should not have a problem with equitable distribution, but if you do, calmly request order. If the problem persists, simply pack up and move on to your next scheduled stop.
- Never be afraid if you run out of food! No one will hold that against you. Don't cancel any additional stops, especially if they are expecting you. Go anyway, and talk to the group and distribute whatever supplies you can offer.
- Clean up! Remember to bring garbage bags to help keep the streets/parks and these people's homes clean.

Some other general suggestions:

- » Try to refrain from bringing cameras or taking pictures. If you would like, take pictures of your volunteers preparing food or sorting clothes, or even on the street, but respect the privacy of homeless individuals by not revealing their identities or where they sleep.
- » There is no reason to be afraid of people you encounter on an Outreach Run. These projects are safe and occur all around the country, without incident. However, in the rare occasion that there is an emergency, including a medical emergency, call 911 immediately!