

# Acadiana Outreach Center: Keeping hope alive

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Acadiana Outreach Center serves about 150 homeless and impoverished people in and around Lafayette.

The center helps those affected by homelessness, unemployment, lack of food, clothing, finances, mental and physical illness, domestic abuse, substance abuse, little access to transportation, childcare and basic hygiene and legal hardships. Their mission is to restore shattered lives. The Outreach Center gives people opportunities to start over and pick up where they have left off.

"There are many opportunities for students to volunteer their services to the center," said Jesse Guidry, a University of Louisiana at Lafayette alumni and Acadiana Outreach employee.

Guidry has been working in community relations at the center for about three-and-a-half months. Although a few "Holiday Happenings" have been planned, the largest fundraiser, Palates and Pate', is approaching and is set to occur on Nov. 14 at the Cajundome Convention Center. All of the proceeds collected will fund the Outreach Center's programs. There will be a VIP

cocktail reception at 6:30 p.m. and the gala will follow at 7 p.m.

"Volunteers will be needed on deck," Guidry said. "From Nov. 5-9, help can be used to distribute Palates and Pate' invitations and sponsorship gifts."

Following the center's successful annual gala is the Thanksgiving Dinner that will occur this month. This dinner serves about 400 homeless people with an abundant meal donated by Ruth's Chris Steakhouse; this has been done for nine consecutive years. The community and students here at UL Lafayette can donate desserts until Thanksgiving eve.

Sandi Degeyer should be contacted for volunteer and donation inquiries concerning that particular event.

Christmas for Kids will occur in December. It is hosted by Stirling Properties and Home Bank. This program serves about 300 children and will be distributed to

families from the U.S. Marine Corps' Toys for Tots. Pictures are taken with Santa along with snacks and games provisions.

The Christmas Wishes Toys-R-Us program benefits children

at the Lighthouse (a women's and children's shelter). Each child will receive

\$100 to purchase toys at Toys-R-Us. The children will go shopping for toys with sponsors or "buddies" that have contributed the money. In addition, their parents are not permitted to go, and the shopping will occur outside of the store's regular business hours.

The caroling and Christmas Dinner is another one of the Outreach Center's annual events. The Voices of Recovery Choir usually carols and spreads the holiday spirit throughout Lafayette. The Christmas Dinner will begin with a welcoming prayer and will

likely be held at the center's Celebration Center. The Voices of Recovery will be the featured entertainment while dinner is served to the less-fortunate neighbors in the community. Sammy Russo and Laura's Café have donated and prepared the meal for four consecutive years. Dessert donations will be accepted and should be delivered by Christmas morning.

Guidry said he wants students and the community to know that there is an urgent request for the revamping of the Outreach Center's New Leaf Garden. The project's purpose is to have fruit and herbs planted in hopes that the produce can be sold to help raise money. Although the center's clients maintain the beautification of the garden, suggestions are being accepted to improve it.

"People that know about plants and gardens are needed to take the project on and landscape the garden," Guidry said.

Guidry said he feels the experience has been personally rewarding.

"I can actually see the people that I help on a daily basis. It feels so good to just enrich other people's lives and see them better themselves. The Outreach Center is simply about restoring shattered lives," he said.

Students and anyone interested in volunteering can contact the Outreach Center at 337-237-7618.

Photo by Doil Robinson III



The Outreach Center offers many different counseling services for those in need.