

Giving back to the community

Volunteers are needed in the Lafayette area

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Hundreds of opportunities are available in the Lafayette area for people wanting to give back to the community this holiday season.

Keler Williams, volunteer center director at the United Way of Acadiana, said the organization has compiled a list of agencies needed volunteers.

Williams suggested that those new to volunteering look for opportunities that match their personalities.

"I think that it's always a good idea for volunteers to select something that's of interest to them," Williams said. "They're more likely to extend the opportunity and continue with that organization rather than doing something one or two times."

Williams said that lately, several organizations have shown an interest in welcoming younger volunteers.

"A lot of groups are interested in engaging children," Williams said. "There's room for children, families and organizations. This is a great time to introduce children to volunteerism and try to get them involved at a young age."

At the Acadiana Outreach Center, Executive Director Valerie Keller said volunteers can do anything from serving holiday meals to tutoring children to folding clothes.

"What we look for is anybody who has a heart to help and a positive attitude," Keller said. "We see our mission as helping those who have a need to give and a need to receive and allowing them to connect and bless each other."

Dannette Vidrine, volunteer coordinator at Hospice Care of Louisiana, said the organization look for people who are compassionate, non-judgmental and willing to spend time with families during a difficult time.

"They can run errands, they can sit and talk with the family, they can read to someone," Vidrine said. "There's a lot they can do."

Vidrine said those interested in volunteering can call for an application. If the application is accepted, they must attend an orientation class and have references checked before being assigned to a patient.

"Most times, once people get involved, it's something they continue because they enjoy doing it," Vidrine said. "You meet some of the neediest people. You meet some really great families that you get to care about."

Keller said many volunteers feel an immediate sense of satisfaction.

"They feel that they're part of something greater than themselves," Keller said. "We also hear people who walk away feeling like they have had their perspectives broadened."