

# Meal Volunteer Handbook



**first light**

**First Light, Inc.**  
**2230 Fourth Avenue North**  
**Birmingham, AL 35203**  
**205-323-4277**  
**[www.firstlightshelter.org](http://www.firstlightshelter.org)**

**Camilla Jones**  
**Director of Volunteer Services**  
**[camilla@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:camilla@firstlightshelter.org)**

## General Volunteer Guidelines

**Safety/Emergency-** Here at First Light, we strive to provide a safe environment for our guests and volunteers. A staff member should be notified immediately if an unsafe situation is noticed, a medical emergency arises, or if a guest expresses the desire to harm themselves or someone else. For the safety of everyone at First Light, it is essential to follow all emergency guidelines without hesitation. In the event of a fire alarm, please exit the building immediately using the nearest safe exit. In the case of severe weather, proceed down the stairwell to the basement for shelter. Always treat every alarm as if it is a true emergency. Your quick and calm response helps protect both you and our guests. Thank you for prioritizing safety.

**Privacy/ Confidentiality-** We kindly ask all volunteers to respect the privacy and confidentiality of First Light guests at all times. Guest names and any identifying details should only be shared with First Light staff. In line with our confidentiality policy, please do not photograph or record guests. You are welcome to take pictures of yourself, your group, and the facility while you are volunteering. **Don't forget to tag us @First Light on social media!**

**Volunteer Engagement-** We welcome you to engage with our guests while serving. However, we kindly ask that you refrain from giving advice, offering counseling, discussing other guests, or forming personal relationships. Please do not give money or personal items such as clothing, shoes, or toiletries directly to guests. All donations should be made to First Light, where staff will ensure they are distributed appropriately. Men and children are welcome to volunteer at First Light. Children should be accompanied by a responsible adult and closely supervised. The kitchen contains equipment that can be very dangerous to unsupervised children. Please do not allow them to play in the walk-in cooler or climb on counters. Former First Light guests are welcome to volunteer after they have been away from the shelter for at least one year and have received permission from the Director of Social Services. If you are a previous guest and wish to volunteer, you must disclose your prior stay to the Volunteer Coordinator before scheduling any volunteer service. This ensures that appropriate training and support can be provided.

**Cancellations-** Providing a meal at First Light is a vital act of service, and our program relies 100% on volunteers to ensure our guests are fed every single day. Because of this, we ask that you only sign up for a meal if you are confident in your ability to follow through. If something unexpected arises and you're unable to serve in person, we kindly ask that you still provide the meal. It can be delivered or dropped off, and our staff will gladly serve it on your behalf. Your commitment helps us maintain consistency and care for the women and children who depend on us.

**Expenses-** Expenses incurred during volunteer service are largely unreimbursed by the agency. Please consult the IRS code or your tax professional with questions about the deductibility of in-kind donations and expenses incurred while volunteering. In-kind donation forms are always available at the front desk.

**Volunteer Termination-** At any time during the screening, placement, orientation, or volunteering process either the volunteer or the agency can end the relationship. Reasonable notice should be given upon the ending of the relationship.

**Sign In/Out-** Please make sure that you sign in and out each time you are volunteering at First Light in the designated binders located in volunteer areas. Staff will keep track of your information and volunteer hours in a secure, online database called Cool Focus. We never share or sell your information and respect your privacy. Please record your volunteer hours in the provided volunteer sign-in binder (located in the kitchen next to the ice machine). Name, time in, time out, and signature are required. First Light receives matching funds based on volunteer hours, so please remember to sign in and out!

**Feedback is helpful!-** We're committed to creating meaningful and fulfilling volunteer experiences and we need your feedback to do that! Let us know what went well, what didn't, what surprised you, and what could be improved. Your voice helps shape a better experience for everyone.

## Meal Volunteer Guide

*Thank you for your interest in being a meal volunteer at First Light!*

*Below is some information that you might find useful. The Online Meal Calendar is for viewing available meals only. To book a meal, please call or email Camilla at 205-323-4277 or [camilla@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:camilla@firstlightshelter.org).*

- For **breakfast and dinner**, please prepare enough food to serve **50** guests. For **lunch**, plan for **25** guests. Always check with FL for an update on headcount closer to your serve day.
- You are welcome to cook in First Light's spacious kitchen, bring prepared food, or cater from a restaurant. Our kitchen is equipped with a conventional oven, gas stovetop, pizza oven, small griddle, large pots and skillets, cookie sheets, serving utensils, basic spices, and plastic wrap and foil for leftovers.

**Important:** Please do not bring additional appliances, as they can trip the breakers and disable the kitchen equipment.

- Two to six volunteers can easily prepare and serve **breakfast or dinner** at First Light, and **one to three** volunteers for **lunch**, depending on the menu. While there is no required number of volunteers, we kindly ask that groups be limited to a maximum of 15 people due to space limitations.
- **Breakfast** is served at **7:30AM**. **Lunch** is served at **11:30AM**. **Dinner** is served at **6:30PM**.

Please arrive at least 30 minutes prior to meal time. If you are running late, cannot come, or will not be staying to serve, please inform FL staff as soon as possible.

**\*note: The routine we keep at First Light is extremely important. We understand last-minute emergencies, but if it is at all possible, please arrive and serve promptly.**

- **What is provided and what should I bring with me?** Paper products (plates, cups, eating utensils, napkins, serving gloves) are provided by First Light. For lunch and dinner- you can serve sweet tea and lemonade that is available in the cooler and provided by Milo's Tea Company, or you can bring sodas or juice. For breakfast- coffee and fixings will already be prepared for the guests in the Day Room. We ask that you bring fruit juices of your preference (orange, apple, grape). We often have basic condiments, but not always. If you would rather use what we have, you may call a day in advance to find out if we have the condiment(s) you will need for the meal.
- Please notify the front desk staff when you are ready to serve. They will then call for guests to line up according to bed number (so that families with children and those with physical disabilities do not have to stand in line.) Before serving seconds to anyone, please verify with a staff member that all guests have been served.
- Leftovers that you wish to leave at First Light may be covered tightly, labeled with the date, and placed in the walk-in cooler.
- We appreciate your help with the following after dinner: date and place any leftovers you wish to leave in the cooler, wipe down counters, wash and put away used utensils, pots and pans, and sweep or clean up any spills on the floor. **Thank you!**

**If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator- Camilla at 323-4277 or by email at [camilla@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:camilla@firstlightshelter.org).**