

# Volunteer Handbook

## Understanding the Volunteer Role



## The Rocky Mountain Regional VA Fisher House

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System  
1700 N. Wheeling St.  
Aurora, CO 80045  
720-723-7683

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### What We Do 4

The Fisher House Foundation, a National non-profit organization, builds Fisher Houses for both the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Veterans Administration (VA), wherever a need is determined to exist. Once built, the Foundation then gifts the house to either DoD or VA as indicated and once gifted over, the house becomes the property of DoD or VA and they take full responsibility for the ongoing management of the property. 4

The original Denver Fisher House was built in 1992 and opened in 1993 at the Fitzsimons Army Medical Center as a DoD Fisher House. When the base closed in 1996, management of the Fisher House passed to the Denver VA Medical Center, thus transitioning it to a VA Fisher House. In 2019, a new Fisher House was built on the VA campus, North of the VA Medical Center. It opened in 2020. 4

The RMR VA Fisher House provides no-cost accommodations to the families and caregivers of Veterans hospitalized at the RMR VA Medical Center (or at community hospitals under VA care coordination). The RMR VA Fisher House offers a comfortable home environment with 16-bedroom suites, all equipped with a private bath. Families share the following areas of the house: living room, dining room, family room, laundry room and kitchen. Guests/ Veterans/Active Duty Soldiers are welcomed to stay at the Fisher House until the day the Veteran is discharged, regardless of their length of treatment. 4

## **MANAGERS WELCOME**

We want welcome you and thank you for choosing the Rocky Mountain Regional (RMR) VA Fisher House to volunteer your time and energy. We appreciate your service as we assist the family members of our nation's heroes.

The RMR VA Fisher House supports the Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Aurora and the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS). The VA ECHCS is comprised of 44,000 square miles, mostly made up of the Colorado eastern plains. The RMR VA Fisher House not only supports Colorado families but those in neighboring VAs and states such as Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska, and North Dakota. Our sole purpose is to be here for the family members while their Veteran is undergoing treatment.

Your most important involvement here as a volunteer will be supporting the guests of the RMR VA Fisher House; providing a personal touch to the guest's overall experience. As guests of the RMR VA Fisher House, they are our priority in this "home away from home".

This booklet is designed to assist volunteers in carrying out their assigned duties more efficiently and effectively. Please carefully review the contents and discuss any questions and/or concerns with the RMR VA Fisher House Assistant Manager, who is our designated volunteer coordinator, prior to you beginning your work as a volunteer. It is your responsibility to be acquainted with all house rules and regulations as they apply.

Again, thank you for participating with our volunteer program and we hope you get much out of your volunteer experience.

Khristie Barker, MBA  
Fisher House Manager

Wanda Carter, MBA  
Fisher House Assistant Manager

## What We Do

Our mission is simple:

*The RMR VA Fisher House provides a "home away from home" for military families to be close to a loved one during hospitalization for an illness, disease or injury.*

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## Volunteering at the RMR VA Fisher House

There are three basic aspects of volunteering that needs to be clearly understood if citizen volunteer participation is to be successful:

1. Volunteering is directed by the Manager of the RMR VA Fisher House and managed by the Assistant Manager. In addition, we have a full-time volunteer that is the designated Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator will be the point of contact for specific volunteer duties assigned to the Volunteer Program.

The Fisher House Manager coordinates and integrates community volunteer participation in its mission and programs. All volunteers must complete the Volunteer Application through Voluntary Services prior, an officially authorized VA Medical Program, to rendering services at the Fisher House.

2. Volunteers Provide Supplemental Assistance.

Volunteer workers supplement and extend the service of paid staff. They do not take the place of paid staff and are not used to fill vacant positions.

3. Volunteers Provides a Two-Fold Service.

Volunteers provide two basic types of services to the RMR VA Fisher House - Direct Service and Indirect Service.

Volunteers provide Direct Service by participation in approved programs and activities, with and for guests, under RMR VA Fisher House supervision.

Volunteers provide an equally valuable Indirect Service as “Public Relations Ambassadors” to the community, informing their friends and neighbors about the RMR VA Fisher House’s “home away from home” program and the role of the community in assisting in these programs.

## TYPES of VOLUNTEERS:

The RMR VA Fisher House Manager establishes the “rules of engagement” for volunteers and the various volunteer activities that are needed to support the mission. There are two “types” of volunteers at the RMR VA Fisher House, providing ample opportunities for those who want to support the house.

1. Regularly Scheduled (Full Time) Volunteers *adhere to a defined & scheduled time commitment*
  
2. Occasional (Part Time) Volunteers: *as needed, as available*
  - a. Special Events & Functions; Volunteers (scheduled & assigned in advance)
  - b. Specific Skills Volunteer: evaluated & utilized on an “as needed”, case-by-case basis
  - c. “On call”: any volunteer willing to be available for ad hoc or unexpected needs

**Regularly Scheduled Volunteers (Full Time)** come into the Fisher House EACH WEEK or EVERY OTHER WEEK on a SPECIFIC DAY during a SPECIFIC TIME that is coordinated through the Assistant Manager.

You pick the day and the time period that you have available and that you can commit to. Half an hour to a half-day, the choice is yours. These volunteers do chores every day. Some examples of such jobs are:

- ✓ Routine administrative tasks to support the Manager’s office
- ✓ Taking inventory of the kitchen pantry
- ✓ Re-organizing the refrigerator, pantries and storage areas
- ✓ Shopping for and re-stocking basic supplies
- ✓ Other administrative duties as assigned

All Regularly Scheduled (RS) volunteers are expected to be present at their regular assignments during their scheduled times. Plans for anticipated absence should always be made known to the Assistant Manager as soon as possible, in advance of the absence.

Unanticipated absences should be called in or texted to the Assistant Manager as soon as possible.

Volunteers are requested to notify the Manager or designee when they no longer plan to serve. The reason for resignation would also be appreciated.

If volunteers stop volunteering for a long period, they should contact the Assistant Manager before returning to duty.

A new address and/or telephone number should be reported to the Assistant Manager.

**Occasional Volunteers (Part Time)** often sign up and commit in advance to SCHEDULED EVENTS & HOLIDAYS planned at the house.

Examples include:

- ✓ Hosting and providing a house meal for guests
- ✓ Holiday decorating
- ✓ Hosting/coordinating a theme day or special event day
- ✓ Grounds keeping and clean-up days
- ✓ Assisting with special functions like Veteran's Day Celebrations or Fisher House fundraising events

Both Regular and Occasional Volunteers can review a calendar of such events published in advance and sign up for those events and functions that interest them and are convenient to them. You can also schedule certain approved activities with the Manager/Assistant Manager when it is convenient to you, for example, a house meal preparation, or making home baked goods at the house.

Also, you can confirm your availability for events scheduled in advance at the house such as holiday decorating, grounds keeping days, or scheduled fundraising activities.

**On Call (Part Time):** Any and all Volunteers willing to be on a "on call" list when a sudden need arises at the Fisher House, or scheduled volunteer staff is inadequate for a particular function. There is no obligation to commit to any specific request.

In the event that we are fortunate enough to have more volunteers than we can use for an event, we will try our best to "rotate" volunteers and offer everyone an

opportunity to participate in supporting the RMR VA Fisher House over the course of the year.

**Special Skills Volunteers** (Full Time) have unique skills and talents that may be utilized by the Fisher House.

Such volunteer competencies must be reviewed and approved on an “as needed” basis by the house Manager, and may include things such as small building projects, massage, etc.

*Note: Most volunteer activities take place Monday through Friday, between 6AM and 4PM, hours in staffed by the RMR VA Fisher House. Preparing breakfast, lunch and/or dinner meals for guests usually takes place between 9AM and 5PM. From time-to-time there may be exceptions for volunteer opportunities outside of these hours.*

Each prospective “Regularly Scheduled” volunteer with access to the Fisher House must:

- Submit their application and in process through the Volunteer Service. Each volunteer must pass a background check & be fingerprinted at the VA Hospital
- Complete a two-part Tuberculosis skin test accomplished before they can begin their assignment. TB tests are provided free of charge to all Regularly Scheduled (RS) volunteers prior to acceptance as a volunteer
- Complete the Manager’s orientation at the RMR VA Fisher House
- Volunteer restrictions - volunteers cannot:
  - Be in a substance abuse program unless clean and sober for at least one year
  - Have been an inpatient in mental health program within the past six months
  - Use Fisher House volunteering for court ordered community service

ALL “regularly scheduled” volunteers or those who require routine access to the RMR VA Fisher House must undergo the VA Medical Center background check and TB testing. Once approved, you will be issued a VA photo ID which must be worn at all times on the premises.

This requirement does not apply to “Occasional” volunteers, although we recommend this same process for all volunteers.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

There are a variety of volunteer opportunities at the RMR VA Fisher House. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- ✓ Meal Preparation (Scheduled, prepared on or off site)
- ✓ Routine Gardening & Landscape Maintenance on the property

- ✓ Special Projects - Holidays & Events Decorating ~ 8-10x per year
- ✓ Special Projects - Grounds keeping / Landscaping 4x per year
- ✓ Local Fundraising events
- ✓ Stocking / Organizing Kitchen Pantry and Storage Spaces
- ✓ Shopping and Errands at Local Stores
- ✓ Administrative Tasks & Support / Assistance to the Manager
- ✓ General Housekeeping chores

During the holidays we often have volunteers who will help with children toy drives and small gifts for those staying at the home through the holidays.

Volunteers can tend to the yard surrounding the house. Although the home and landscape are maintained by the Facilities Management Service, they are limited in offering enhancements to the landscape. Our volunteers often step in and plant the seasonal flowers and shrubbery to make the homes an even more inviting environment.

The RMR VA Fisher House also maintains a 'wish list' of items that the Manager would like to add and/or replace in the house. Please speak with the RMR VA Fisher House Manager to review the Manager's current wish list.

### **How the Volunteer Scheduling Works**

Regular (Scheduled) Volunteers establish days and time commitments in advance for duties as determined and assigned by the Assistant Manager. Generally, such committed schedules are established for weekdays only, and the time may be set by agreement between the volunteer and the Assistant Manager. This schedule is maintained at least a month in advance and distributed to all volunteers via an e-mail distribution list maintained by the Assistant Manager and Volunteer Coordinator.

Other events and opportunities are established and posted to the schedule based upon the future plans and needs of the Fisher House. All upcoming events and activities will be published on the schedule and distributed to all volunteers via e-mail, who can then volunteer for those events. The Assistant Manager will fill opportunity slots and post the schedules on a first come, first served basis.

When other needs or opportunities arise including special skills opportunities, or a volunteer has to cancel a previously committed date, the Assistant Manager will solicit needs via the e-mail volunteer distribution list and coordinate the schedules.

In summary:

- A. A master schedule is maintained and published via e-mail to all volunteers at least one month in advance

- B. Regular Volunteers will be scheduled based upon their communicated commitments to serve the RMR VA Fisher House on a particular day(s) and time. In the event that there are no house requirements on a particular day, the house Manager may elect to cancel the volunteer's scheduled time. Communicating such changes can be accomplished via e-mail or texting.
- C. Forthcoming events, activities, and other volunteer opportunities will be published in advance. Volunteers can sign-up for any such events by contacting the Assistant Manager via e-mail or phone.
- D. If a sudden need arises, or a volunteer must cancel their commitment, the Assistant Manager will reach out to other volunteers to fill that scheduled opportunity.

## **DO's & DON'Ts**

### **VOLUNTEERS CAN...**

1. Advise guests to refer ALL medical care questions to their primary medical team at the VA Hospital. Discourage the guest from discussing their concerns with you.
2. Report any unusual requests or conversations to the RMR VA Fisher House Manager.
3. Be interested in guest's affairs but do not be inquisitive about them.
4. As a volunteer, you are to serve only activities or areas where you are assigned.
5. Observe the rules. Consult the RMR VA Fisher House Assistant Manager in the event you wish to learn the reason for some specific rule or regulation.

6. If a situation arises which you cannot handle, go to the RMR VA Fisher House Manager.
7. Never argue with a guest.
8. Exercise good judgment in completing your assignments and show initiative where required.
9. Refrain from providing advice or guidance with regard to medical, health, or VA Administration matters.
10. Be friendly and cooperative with members of other organizations with whom you come in contact.
11. Remember, you have volunteered to serve. Do your work cheerfully and willingly.
12. Be yourself - Courteous, Pleasant, Helpful, and Tactful.

#### **VOLUNTEERS DO NOT...**

Do not discuss religion, politics, or illness with guests.

Do not give home address or telephone numbers to guests.

Do not make suggestions to guests about medical treatment or suggest remedies.

Do not discuss your personal affairs or problems with guests. Be a good listener but do not give advice.

Do not provide personal gifts or money to a guest.

Do not accept personal gifts from guests or offers of reimbursement.

The RMR VA Fisher House is a smoke-free facility. Smoking is only allowed in outside designated smoking areas.

Do not work in an assignment that causes you any mental or physical strain or anguish. Report such problems to the RMR VA Fisher House Manager.

Do not drop in for extra days of service without checking with the RMR VA Fisher House Manager or Assistant Manager.

Do not expect volunteer work to be a training period leading to employment. Human Resources Management Service are the authorized department to handle employment.

The RMR VA Fisher House is an alcohol and drug-free facility. Alcohol and Federally prohibited substances are never permitted on the property.

## **VOLUNTEER ATTIRE GUIDELINES**

One of the goals of the RMR VA Fisher House is to improve the appearance and appeal of the house by promoting a professional look in the attire of its volunteers.

Items deemed inappropriate for wear include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Cutoffs or shorts. (Shorts and sleeveless tops may be worn in the summer if working in the yard/garden).
- Spandex wear
- Tank tops/muscle shirts
- Torn clothing or clothing with holes
- Jeans may be worn if they are neat, clean, and not patched or frayed
- T-shirts with any advertisements
- Baseball caps
- Underwear worn as outerwear
- Sweat suits or jogging suits
- Flip Flops
- Midriff blouses or halter tops.
- Excessively tight fitting and/or see-through clothing when it is inappropriately revealing or sexually provocative.
- Shoes and stockings should be appropriate to the overall manner of dress and to the duties performed.

\*We recommend that volunteers avoid the use of headphones or earphones when working with guests or during volunteer activities.

## **TIME AND ATTENDANCE RECORD**

All volunteers must sign in on a Volunteer Roster when reporting and departing for duty. The Assistant Manager maintains an electronic time log for all volunteers.

Thank you for volunteering.

# **Welcome to the RMR VA Fisher House!**

