

Hi! Thanks for your interest in La Puente Home.

This is a general letter to give you some quick information concerning La Puente and volunteer opportunities with us. Its important to recognize that most of the issues presented here have some flexibility. If you are still interested after you go over this information, please give me a call or e-mail me. We prefer to have phone contact with interested prospects before we send out applications.

We need a variety of skills to get everything done. We are always on the lookout for folks who have skills with people, business, computers, art, writing, photography, special events, social work, public speaking or public relations, and food service. Mostly we are looking for folks who come with an open mind and flexibility to do what needs to be done. We frequently craft special job descriptions for those who have unique gifts to contribute to our mission.

La Puente has between 10 and 15 full-time stipended volunteers at any one time. Most volunteers serve for one or two years. La Puente has also been a placement site for volunteers under the auspices of the Mennonite Church (Mennonite Voluntary Service), The United Church of Christ, and The Church of the Brethren. Volunteer houses are near the shelter and within biking distance to parks and the downtown. (There's no public transportation in the San Luis Valley.)

The application process consist of the applicant providing both a work and school history, respond to some basic essay questions which help us with the placement process, and provide us two three references with at least one being a work reference. After an application is fully completed with references, it takes about 10 days to accept the applicant. As stated above, if you have a sincere interest in coming to La Puente, we would like to have an exchange on the phone and also give you a chance to talk to an existing volunteer. If you want to apply at that point, we'll send you an application. This year applications will be accepted until June 1st.

Please recognize that the San Luis Valley is very rural and that the closest city is Santa Fe, New Mexico. The population of the Valley is 42,000 people spread out over 10,000 square miles. (The Valley is larger than the state of Maryland) Volunteers need to be wired up for a more rural lifestyle or this place is not for you!! Though there is a 4-year college in town, there's not a lot of "night life." There is a vast amount of wilderness to explore in contrast with the urban jungle scene. The San Luis Valley is not a traditional Colorado tourist destination. It is a collection of communities with deep cultural roots and a lot of poverty.

Look into how La Puente is wired up philosophically. (The main values for our volunteer program are community, simplicity, social justice and spirituality.) This will give you a sense as to whether you will be comfortable here. Look at our web site www.lapuente.net, our newsletters, and talk with existing volunteers. Volunteering with La Puente will be a year of hard work. Volunteers work 40 hours a week and shoulder significant responsibility. They are vital to our existence and services. Most volunteers

speak of their year of service as a time where they learned more than a comparable year of college.

Whereas most of the folks who work at La Puente have a spiritual motivation as to why they are here, matters of faith are held privately and expressed through a staff or volunteer's choice of church involvement. There is no established creed for anyone involved with La Puente and just as we receive people from many religious traditions to work here, we ask that all staff respect the diversity within the volunteer and staff community, as well as the community of those who receive services.

All volunteers receive the following:

Housing: There are three volunteer houses that accommodate between 4 and 5 volunteers at any given time. Volunteers have their own bedroom and share a bathroom, kitchen and common living space with other housemates. Married couples are welcome. All utilities are paid by La Puente.

Stipend: Volunteers receive a monthly stipend of \$225 to cover food expenses and other basic needs. (The amount may vary with volunteers placed through other organizations.)

Health Insurance: La Puente Volunteers are provided with health insurance through San Luis Valley HMO. This does not include vision or dental care.

Access to a vehicle: Volunteers will have access to a car for transportation needs. Each vehicle is shared among the volunteers. Volunteers pay for gas and the program pays for repairs and insurance. Some volunteers choose to bring their own vehicles, which is fine. All expenses for your vehicle must be covered by your own resources. Most volunteers use their bikes to get around during the warmer months.

Loan deferment: If you have a school loan, we can get it deferred during your term of voluntary service.

Americorps Stipend: Americorps provides a financial award at the end of a year of service. The award may be applied towards past or future education. The amount of the award has changed the past couple of years. Last year the amount was about **\$7400**.

Help with travel: Yearlong volunteers are assisted with a \$250 travel allowance to return home at the end of a fully completed year of service.

Time off: First year volunteers receive 7 working days off and 7 holidays off. Volunteers can accrue comp time during busy periods and redeem this time for additional time off.

Spanish is helpful and well utilized in most placements, but not required for any placement.

Volunteers are asked to contribute to our quarterly newsletter, either through writing an article, assisting with the artwork, photography, or poetry.

If you play music, have artistic gifts, can fix or build things, or have other interests or skills, please know that we will find a way to make good use of everything in your toolbox!!!!

Volunteers get together to go hiking, down hill skiing, cross country skiing, road biking, mountain biking, mountain climbing, river rafting, visiting hot springs, playing soccer, softball, basketball, racquetball, swimming, ultimate Frisbee, music playing, concerts, movies, plays, etc

Remember, we can craft some job descriptions individually, based upon someone's unique skills and interests. I believe we can offer you a challenging, exciting, and rewarding volunteer experience!

La Puente's Current Programs:

1) Emergency Shelter Program: La Puente annually provides over 9,500 nights of emergency shelter to over 1000 people, including over 75 families. The case manager establishes plans with guests and uses La Puente and community resources to facilitate guests reaching their goals. La Puente is the only agency within 120 miles that meets this critical need for families, migrant farm workers, singles, and others we serve.

2) Meal Program: La Puente anticipates serving more than 35,000 meals in 2005. Meals are served to sheltered families, single guests, low-income members of the community and victims of domestic violence sheltered elsewhere through Tu Casa, the local domestic violence support program.

3) Adelante: Adelante is La Puente's long-term transitional housing program serving homeless families. Using ten donated homes and 6 rent vouchers, the program provides a supportive network that endeavors to build family self-reliance and stability. Families have five requirements: 1) education and skill development, 2) developing family budget and finance skills, 3) completion of parenting curriculum, 4) completion of life-skills curriculum, and 5) full family participation in counseling. This transitional housing program targets Valley families who are homeless and motivated to increase their self-sufficiency.

4) SLV Food Pantries: La Puente provides the management and support for twelve food pantries throughout the San Luis Valley. "Action Against Hunger and Malnutrition" distributes a three-day supply of nutritionally sound food to needy families and individuals. In 2005, we anticipate providing over 15,000 emergency food packages. Distribution sites are located in Alamosa, Monte Vista, Fort Garland, San Luis, La Jara, Antonito, Center, Saguache, Moffat, Crestone, Del Norte and Creede.

5) Community Outreach Program: La Puente outreach workers journey to communities throughout the San Luis Valley, working with high-risk families and individuals. The goal of Outreach is to stabilize people in crisis to prevent homelessness. La Puente anticipates serving over 2500 community members in 2005. Services include: Situation assessment, utility assistance, rent assistance, landlord and employer mediation, enrolling people into the appropriate service network, assistance with applications, aid with translations and material provisions including clothing and furniture. Migrant farm workers are a special target group. The Community Outreach Program also sponsors special Christmas outreach activities.

6) The Gleaning Project: The Gleaning Project uses volunteers from schools, churches, and the community to recover produce left behind in the fields after harvest. Food is distributed to low-income families. In 2005, we anticipate recovering and distributing over 30,000 pounds of fresh produce.

7) Rainbow's End: Rainbow's End is La Puente's Community Thrift Store and center for the distribution of material goods. The Alamosa and Monte Vista stores work to raise funds for La Puente and serve local agencies that refer clients in need of clothing, bedding, and other material goods. Rainbow's End anticipates giving over \$15,000 worth of donated goods through its annual voucher program.

8) Over the Rainbow Apartments: These 17 low-income housing apartments are located above Rainbow's End and provide simple, affordable housing to the low-income community and people transitioning out of shelter.

9) Milagros Coffee Shop is a full menu cafe, coffee specialty shop and used bookstore. Milagros works to raise funds for La Puente while providing a valuable Job Readiness Training Program for people with little or no job experience, including Adelante parents.

10) Community Volunteer Program: La Puente's Community Volunteer Program provides opportunities for individuals and groups to participate and assist our services to the people of the San Luis Valley. Opportunities are available to prepare meals, perform shift work, assist at food pantries, provide repair and maintenance work at facilities, thrift store work, special entertainment and much, much more.

Thanks for your interest in volunteering. I believe we can offer you a challenging, exciting, and rewarding volunteer experience!

The next step would be to get on the phone with each other and detail some of the logistics and job descriptions. If your interest remains, then I'll send you the application and get the ball rolling!

Remember you can get more information about La Puente on the web at www.lapuente.net

If you have any more questions please feel free to e-mail me at volunteers@lapuente.net or call me at 719 589-5909 (La Puente).

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Volunteer Coordinator

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