



Notes from the Rocking Chair

Nola Grannies

Number 1

May, 2021

Edited by Melody Lee and Ann Sayas

Because the Grannies (and Granddads) really rock!

WE'RE B—A—A—A—ACK



From left to right: Grannies Rosemary Ryan, Kate Reynolds, Maggie Tidwell, Yolanda Lorio

Grannies Gather at El Pavo Real

On April 24, over fifty Grannies gathered at El Pavo Real for delicious appetizers and refreshing drinks. We greeted old friends and met new ones. Stories of how we survived the quarantine were shared enthusiastically. All were eager to return to the bus station to help the asylum seekers. Members of the leadership team explained the modified procedures for the bus station. There was a request for help in finding a storage location. As luck would have it, a suggestion was made that materialized into a location for for us to use in the near future.

Stats from the Station



April 19 was our first day at the station.

336 kits given out as of Sunday.

800 care kits have been packed.

Kits cost approximately \$2.30.

Kits contain a granola bar, trail mix, fruit loops, fruit juice, Belvita, Purell Wipes, face mask, toothpaste, and toothbrush. The kits are packed in paper bags. No water is provided until we get in our storage space.

Donations Needed

The NOLA Grannies is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and any money given to help the travelers is legally tax-deductible. You may donate monies to our [PayPal account](#) either as a one time or, hopefully, a recurring monthly donation. You can also donate to the NOLA Grannies by check - NOLA Grannies, P.O. Box 792222, New Orleans, LA 70179.



Volunteers are **urgently** needed to serve as greeters for the asylum seekers. The shifts to hand out care kits are at 6:00 AM and 8 PM. Spanish speakers are needed at all shifts. Weekend times are a special need. A few are doing the lion's share of the shifts now. Other cities are meeting only a few buses. Surely, NOLA Grannies can volunteer to meet all of the buses.

Welcome Back to Signup

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050d44ada82ca3fe3-come1>

Beth Bochnak, volunteer coordinator, welcomes you back to Signup. If you haven't done so already, please download the app. It will make your life much easier. Please sign up for as many shifts at the bus station as you can. The buses arrive at 6:40 and 8:00 PM. The 6:40 bus stays at the station until 9:20, so if necessary, you can volunteer and show up at 8:30 AM. Just make sure you share that information with your shift partner. In the comments section, share whether you speak Spanish and what you will be bringing. The men, women and children arriving at the station have very little, but at the moment we are operating on basic level — snacks, Purell Wipes, toothbrush/toothpaste. If you can bring some water, diapers, or baby food to your shift, that would be greatly appreciated by the travelers.

Bags of the kits will be available in the following locations:

Beth Bochnak's front porch — 124 S. Scott Street (Mid City). 973-216-6703

Jan Janz's carport — 58 Oriole Street (call to arrange) 504-782-7172

Mary Ann Boelke's apartment — 1303 Burgundy Street, Apt 2, 504-238-1307

We may run out of kits, so please check first.

RED TAPE. All Greeters must sign a "hold harmless" agreement that basically says we won't sue the bus station if we get hurt. This is pretty routine. When we contacted the City, we were told this is their rule, so we are stuck with it. Please email Beth Bochnak bethbochnak@gmail.com, and she will send it to you. It must be signed and sent back to the City before you go.

In the bag of kits is a short form. We need you to fill it out and send it to the people listed on the form. It is essential that we have an accurate count of how many kits have been given out. This information aids the shoppers and packers in preparing kits. Also, please return the large bags the kits are in when you pick up more kits.

The Signup program will remind you two days in advance. It also allows you to cancel (please don't) or swap your time with someone.

Thanks for all you do.

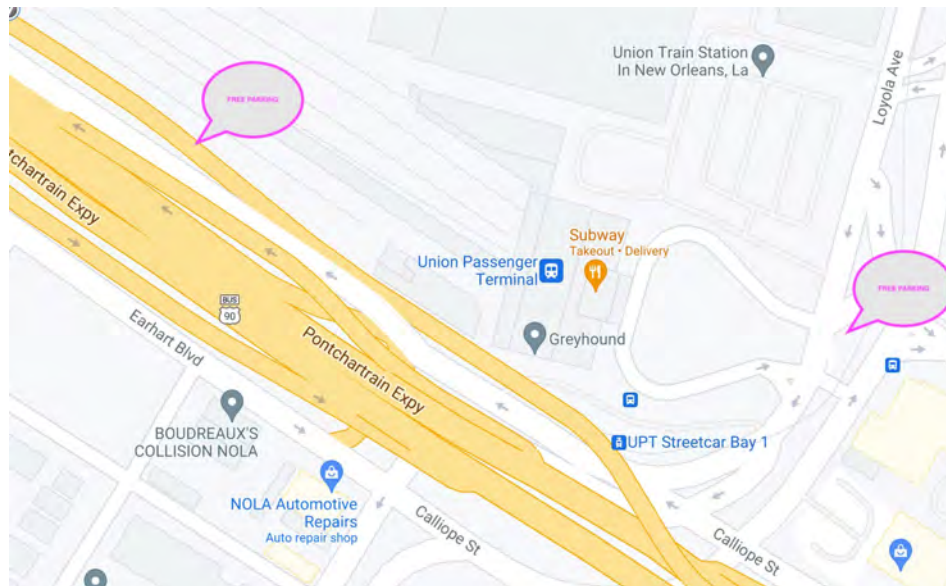
Greeters now have a **FACEBOOK** page. **NOLA Grannie Greeters (NGG) FaceBook page.** Search for that name, and it should pop up or go to www.facebook.com/groups/311313227009383/ Here you will find information and answers to pressing questions. It's an opportunity to share your stories from the stations.

***Greeters remember:** When you leave the station send a photo of the count page (or text the information) to:

MaryAnn Bohlke (504-236-1307) **and** Kate Reynolds (985-290-4005)



Greeters need to be aware that parking in the horseshoe requires that you pay the meter. It is \$5.00 for an hour. The map below shows two possible free parking places on the street.



Granny Jan Janz Shares a Story From the Station

This morning I decided to take advantage of free parking on Loyola Street. It allowed me to relax as I greeted travelers at the bus station, knowing I wouldn't have to worry about an expired meter. There were only 4 travelers this morning on bus #1246: a mother and her little boy as well as a young father with a 4-month-old baby. As usual, a kind custodian was there to help me greet and assure the travelers that I was there to help. Because there were only a few travelers, I was able to spend time with the father. When he entered the bus station, he had his baby in one arm and a raft of papers in the other. With the help of the free "Translate" app on my phone, I was able to help him navigate his route to his destination, Greenville, N.C. He had already been traveling for 10 days with two more to go. After a while, he let me hold his baby, who fell asleep in my arms. What a gift for this Granny!

As we joyously ramp up our work at the bus station, we are happy to reunite with old friends and welcome in new ones. We thought this would be an ideal time to discuss our history, introduce our Leadership Team, and tell you a little bit about the process we've developed for serving asylum seekers traveling through the Greyhound bus station in New Orleans.

Our History

In August of 2018, a handful of women joined a caravan of "Grannies to the Border," which started in New York and ended in McAllen, Texas. Their sole purpose was to see what was going on at the border and to think of ways that we could assist in humanitarian efforts. When we returned to New Orleans, we started providing basic necessities to asylum seekers (AS) who traveled by bus from the border and detention facilities to their sponsors. We called ourselves the NOLA Grannies and joined an ever-growing group of volunteer Grannies in cities across the country

Within a year, we had grown quite a bit. We received nonprofit status by the IRS [501 (c3)] and established the requisite Board of Directors. We packed supplies for and served up to 750 AS travelers a week who passed through Union Station on 3 different bus routes daily. Our efforts were supported by a vibrant fundraising presence.

The number of AS travelers sharply decreased after the January, 2019, Trump administration's "Stay in Mexico (MPP) policy". At that point, we expanded the NOLA Grannies services to provide "mini-grants" to local grassroots organizations serving immigrants in our community and at the border. Then, as stories of horrendous conditions in camps that had sprung up on the Mexican side of the border filled the news cycle, 10 NOLA Grannies traveled to the Brownsville/Matamoros border crossing to help with the humanitarian effort. We brought a van load of supplies to our partner, TEAM Brownsville. They fed and assisted the 3000 refugees waiting in Matamoros, Mexico, to be allowed into the US to pursue their asylum requests.

That was the first week of March, 2020. While there, news of the spreading COVID-19 epidemic prompted an informal meeting of the NOLA Grannies leadership, who decided to halt services at the New Orleans bus station. Although we thought this would only be a short temporary hold on our work, we are only now, over a year later, with a new presidential administration and an effective vaccine, starting up again.

**"Some stranger somewhere
still remembers you because
you were kind to them when
no one else was."**

Our Volunteer Groups

In addition to the NOLA Grannies Leadership Group, we have a groups of:

1. NOLA Grannies volunteer **Shoppers** who purchase the myriad of supplies we need to build our care kits and deliver them to our storage area,
2. 2. NOLA Grannies volunteer **Packers** who create the hundreds of bags of goodies we give out at the station, and
3. NOLA Grannies volunteer **Greeters** who pick up the supplies, head over to the bus station, and meet the asylum seekers during the bus stopovers. The greeters hand out the bags of goodies, which we call care kits, bottles of water, fruit, diapers and other items to help the asylum seekers during their trips to their sponsors. In addition, The NOLA Grannies greeters explain bus routes, bus transfers, and, most importantly, provide warm greetings and friendly faces to weary travelers.

Introducing our Leadership Team

Beth Bochnak. Primary duties: Managing the greeter sign-up system, new greeter orientations, NOLA Grannies Board Member.

Mary Ann Bohlke. Primary duties: Ordering supplies and packing teams, collecting the number of daily water and care kits distributed, packing, and liaison to partners

Claire Brooks. Primary duties: Correspondence, liaison to partners

Annette Broussard. Primary duty: Email management

Chrissie James. Primary duties: packing, social media, home delivery coordinator

Jan Janz. Primary duties: Packing, liaison to partners, NOLA Grannies Board Member.

Ed LaTour. Primary duty: Finance Manager

Cam Mangham. Primary duties: Fundraising coordinator, coordinating storage, packing

Kate Reynolds. Primary duties: National outreach, webmaster, NOLA Grannies Board Member

Ann Sayas. Primary duty: Newsletter editor

Maggie Tidwell. Primary duties: Grant writer (Maggie is an 'Emeritis' member of the Leadership Team.)
NOLA Grannies Board president.

Members of the leadership team can be reached through nolagrannies@gmail.com.

A New Storage Facility

Greeter Training

Fundraising



TWO Opportunities for Grannies to Help Folks with Transportation



Voces Unidas is seeking volunteers to provide transportation

TRANSPORTATION LOCALLY

WHAT?

Volunteers will drive folks to Immigration Hearings, DMV, possible doctors' appointments, COVID vaccinations.

TRANSPORTATION FROM DETENTION CENTERS

Typically, when people are released from detention centers, they go to a "safe shelter" in Jena where they are given food, clothing, hygiene products, and cell phones. After that, the "overground railroad" takes over. Folks may then be transported to Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans.

WHAT?

Volunteers are needed to pick up folks from the Baton Rouge driver and take them to New Orleans either for transitional housing or to the airport.

HOW?

Sign up with Martha Alguera (Vocesunidaslirc@gmail.com) as a volunteer driver. Receive a brief orientation and handbook. Download What's App on your phone. On What's App, post a day when you are available to drive (blocks of time on M-F). Martha will contact you 24 hours in advance about a possible transportation need.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Drivers are encouraged to a) wear masks, b) have and use hand sanitizer, c) leave windows open in vehicle (weather permitting).

Report from TEAM Brownsville
Author: Sergio Cordova

Team Brownsville is at the bus station daily welcoming asylum seekers with love and respect. I am going to tell you the highlight of my day. A man came through the line. ICE had taken his shoe laces. I gave him some. He was cold. I gave him a jacket. He was hungry. We fed everyone Chick-fil-a sandwiches. He had a 3 day trip to Florida with no money or food for his trip. I gave him a backpack full of munchies and drinks. He teared up because he knew that those items would sustain him. I was moved by his soul and gratitude. I handed him some cash, and he refused to take it. He said, "How can I take your money if I will never see you again to pay you back." I said, "It's not a loan, Brother. It's a gift. Pay it forward when you can." He broke down sobbing while hugging me. I assured him that everything would be ok. He was distraught, but felt better that he now had something to help him survive. Team Brownsville provides everything. If you would, just donate for us to continue this humanitarian effort. You can donate here. Please share this post.

<https://www.gofundme.com/.../teambrownsville-help-asylum...>

