

Safe Parking Program



Volunteer Dinner Group – Balboa Host FAQs

Thank you for your group's interest in hosting a dinner for the unsheltered families and individuals participating in the Safe Parking Program at Jewish Family Service!

Every night at two secured lots, Jewish Family Service operates a Safe Parking Program for unsheltered San Diegans living in their vehicles, many of whom are experiencing homelessness for the first time. A car is often a critical, final asset, allowing for transportation to work and school, the ability to seek employment, and access to resources. As these individuals and families work to lift themselves up out of a difficult situation, many are making nightly choices between purchasing food, gas, and other essentials. Creating further barriers to stability are the isolation and lack of social support that so often accompany homelessness.

By providing meals, our volunteer dinner groups provide both nutritious food and a sense of community. With a focus on stopping the downward spiral of homelessness, Safe Parking offers not just a reliable place to stay, but also a welcoming environment, meaningful resources, and dignified support to create a pathway to housing while meeting people where they are now.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who does the Balboa Avenue Lot serve?

The Balboa Lot hosts families with children and older adults who are currently living in their cars. Clients have access to a gated lot, indoor communal space, and a shower.

How many volunteers are needed to serve dinner?

Groups should have **between 5-15 volunteers** so that everyone feels they have a meaningful role. Volunteers should be at least 7 years old and volunteers under the age of 18 must be joined by an appropriate number of parents, guardians, or chaperones for supervision.

What time is the volunteer shift? What time is dinner served?

Volunteer groups **must arrive at 5:30pm and be prepared to stay through 8:00pm** to allow time for set-up, dinner service, and clean-up. Clients begin to arrive on the lot as early as 6:00pm and dinner is generally served until 7:30pm.

What should we bring?

Our volunteer dinner groups supply everything needed for the dinner:

- Food (Must be fully cooked, at temperature, and ready to serve; there is no kitchen access on-site.)
- Beverages and cups, or individually bottled drinks
- Hot plates or crock pots, if needed, with extension cords
- Serving dishes
- Serving utensils
- Plates or bowls
- Napkins
- Cutlery
- Disposable to-go containers or other packaging so clients may take any leftovers
- Tablecloths, if desired, for serving tables

What does JFS provide for the dinner service?

- Indoor space with tables and chairs for clients to enjoy their dinner in a communal setting
- Four 6' tables on which to set up your provided food and drinks
- Serving gloves for all volunteers to ensure safe food handling
- Sink for washing hands (Please note: the sink does not have a food disposal system.)
- Trash cans and trash bags

How many people should we prepare to serve?

We recommend preparing dinner for about **60 people**. While we host up to 60 cars (about 110 individuals) nightly at this lot, not everyone chooses to participate in the community dinners and/or some arrive later in the evening.

How do clients know dinner will be available on the night we volunteer?

We require 72 hours' notice from volunteer groups to sign up and we post all upcoming dinners on the Safe Parking community bulletin board.



What should volunteers expect to do?

- **Cook or cater a full dinner:** Volunteer groups should expect to feed about 60 people at this lot.
- **Set up:** Carry in food and supplies to set up on serving tables provided before guests arrive.
- **Serve dinner:** Volunteers dish out the food, pour drinks, replenish supplies, and bus tables.
- **Socialize:** Beyond providing a meal, your group provides company. We welcome you to sit and get to know the families. Some volunteers participate in kids' activities while others chat with the adults.
- **Clean up:** Please leave the room as it was found (wipe down the tables, package leftovers, etc.)

Are there any restrictions on the food we bring?

No, although **we do encourage healthy choices and recommend having a vegetarian or vegan option available.** Groups have provided everything from lasagna and stews to pizza and salad or tacos. Some groups love to bring desserts, but we also welcome fruit. Some groups stick with bottled waters while others prefer to include juice. Occasionally, we have clients with dietary restrictions (e.g. gluten-free, kosher, food allergies) but we don't always know in advance. Ultimately, everyone appreciates your effort to provide dinner—whether store-bought or homemade, a hot or cold meal!

Are there any restrictions to volunteers' participation?

To respect our programmatic requirements and maintain a positive experience for all, **volunteers may not**

- Solicit business from clients or staff,
- Promote or facilitate religious activities, including prayer with clients or staff regardless of faith, or
- Distribute literature that has not been preapproved by Jewish Family Service.

Can we take pictures?

We ask you to respect our clients' privacy and the confidentiality of our program.

Pictures can only be taken of your volunteer group before clients arrive.

Additionally, while you may get to know some of the clients over the course of the evening, please refrain from using any identifying information (names, places of employment, schools, etc.) when sharing your experience with others or on social media.

Can we bring any other donations?

Yes, but please know this is not at all expected—your dinner and your company are already so helpful! If your group has interest in providing additional essentials, please reference our wish list of most needed items since our clients have limited space in their cars.

Where is the Balboa Lot located?

The Safe Parking Program is located at Jewish Family Service of San Diego's JOAN & IRWIN JACOBS CAMPUS at 8804 Balboa Avenue, San Diego, CA 92123.

Where should volunteers park?

We ask volunteers to park in the lot in front of either JFS building. Visitor parking spaces are preferred, but you may also park in employee spaces after 5:30 pm. You may drive back to the check-in point if you need to unload food or supplies, but you will need to move your car before the start of the dinner, as the spaces between and behind our two buildings are reserved for the Safe Parking clients.

Where do volunteers check in?

When you head all the way back between the two JFS buildings, you will see a patio on the left where a JFS representative will welcome your group at 5:30 pm.

How do I sign up my group to volunteer?

Please visit our volunteer website to host dinner at the Balboa Lot.

Who can I contact with additional questions?

Carole Yellen at caroley@jfssd.org or (858) 637-3395