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Dinner is served - for thousands

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Mission volunteers help deliver food to Arlington residents in need.

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A line of people wrapped around Mission Metroplex in Arlington yesterday as the agency prepared to serve its traditional Thanksgiving Day dinner.

However, these people were in line to give rather than receive.

About 500 families volunteered their time to help load and deliver turkey, pies and canned vegetables to about 4,000 people at four meal sites and homes throughout the city. Old and young, married and single, families, groups of friends, couples and individuals shared similar tales of what brought them out at 9 a.m. to help.

Their reasons ranged from wanting to help the less fortunate to teaching their children the importance of volunteerism to taking their minds off of their misfortunes.

Kenny May, 40, and his wife, Cheryl, 40, said they took comfort in helping others after the death of their 16-year-old daughter in June.

They brought their two sons to help.

"She went to sleep one night and never woke up," Kenny May said of his daughter, who suffered from seizures.

"We wanted to get our minds off our loss," Cheryl May said.

The Logan family has made delivering meals a Thanksgiving tradition. Accompanied by four sons and her husband, Farida Logan, 32, got back in line after delivering vegetables to two families that had turkeys but none of the fixings.

She wants her children, who are 6 to 18 years old, to learn the importance of sharing.

"It's just letting them know, 'Hey, we have so much, and there's so many people out here that don't,'" Logan said.

On the receiving end were people like Angel Durham, who ate dinner at one of the meeting rooms at the Hunts View apartment complex - one of the delivery points for the mission.

Durham, who is 25 and eight months pregnant, and her husband, Randy, are rebuilding their lives after a flood destroyed their home in Louisiana three years ago. A fire in their Arlington apartment delivered another setback.

Randy Durham works 12 to 16 hours a day. The couple make too much to qualify for Medicaid, Angel Durham said, but not enough to pay for her prenatal care. So Angel prays for the health of her fourth child.

With only an eighth-grade education, Angel Durham stays home to take care of her children and baby-sits on the side.

"Everything I would work for would go to day care anyway, so I'd rather stay at home and raise my kids," she said.

"We work so hard and I wish we could get a hand up. If it wasn't for Emily Wilcher, a mission volunteer and the mission, I don't know what we'd do."

Across town, volunteers from Mission Metroplex and parishioners at the Peach Street Community Church were serving a Thanksgiving Day meal. Ellis, 42, a transient from Georgia, dined alone. He declined to give his last name.

His common-law wife, he said, was in jail.

The couple came to Arlington to get work, but Ellis said his job leads fell apart after the man he was working for had a heart attack.

Now Ellis sleeps in cars and anywhere else he can lay his head.

Tillie Burgin, executive director of Mission Metroplex in Arlington, said she was grateful for the volunteers who put together food baskets and delivered them this week.

Before yesterday's meal, volunteers had delivered baskets to about 2,000 people.

"We appreciate a community that comes together like this so people could have something special on Thanksgiving," Burgin said.

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