

DHS Staff Volunteer for Pope's Visit

October 16, 2015

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) partnered with the American Red Cross to mobilize resources and individuals to support humanitarian needs during Pope Francis's recent visit to Philadelphia.

More than 170 DHS employees, helped make the Pope's historic visit a success. Some DHS employees provided reunification services for people separated from loved ones in the large crowds. In partnership with the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management, the Red Cross operated 12 family reunification stations from Friday, September 25 until Monday, September 28.

In addition, DHS established a multi-agency call center at the Norristown State Hospital and a toll-free number for people to call if they became separated from friends and family.



Impact: DHS Employees Make a Difference

Michelle Herr of Crawford County Assistance Office experienced firsthand the sense of comfort people received from the family reunification stations and hotline number while coming in contact with families traveling back from Philadelphia after catching a glimpse of Pope Francis.

At a turnpike gas station, four women and eight young children filed out of a minivan with signs reading "Pope Bound," so Herr asked about their experience. The children had big smiles as they showed pictures and videos of their up-close visit with the Pope. Herr explained her work at one of the reunification stations set up to assist displaced family members. The families reminded the children that people were around to help them if they were separated. This group expressed their gratitude for the volunteers and systems put in place during this historic event.

As part of normal preparations for a large-scale public event, the Red Cross also took steps to reinforce the community's ability to respond to disasters of all sizes, creating contingency plans so that normal emergency support services could continue. The Red Cross also mobilized and ready to provide shelter, comfort, and assistance in the event of an incident affecting the large number of visitors.