

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Visits Fort Dix, Announces State Efforts to Aid Refugees

Gov. Christie Whitman today toured Fort Dix, where 400 refugees from Kosovo are expected to arrive tomorrow. The Governor also announced a statewide hotline for New Jerseyans interested in volunteering services to help families from Kosovo.

Staffed by the Governor's Office of Volunteerism at the Department of Human Services, the hotline (800-286-6528) will be a central phone number for citizens to call if they are looking to help the families. The phone bank will be staffed with volunteers and will be operational during business hours beginning tomorrow.

"New Jerseyans have always proven themselves to be generous with their time and resources. We have already fielded a number of calls from people who want to help somehow but don't know where to turn," Gov. Whitman said. "The Governor's Office of Volunteerism will serve as a clearinghouse for those who want to help."

The Governor said the Office of Volunteerism will coordinate its efforts with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to ensure that the donations match the needs.

The U.S. Army expects the first plane of 400 refugees to arrive on Wednesday. Another plane is expected later in the week. Up to 3,000-4,000 refugees may ultimately pass through Fort Dix. Up to 1,000 refugees at any one time will be housed at Fort Dix during processing before they continue on to stay with relatives and host families throughout the United States.

Although housing and feeding the refugees will be handled by the federal government, Gov. Whitman said she asked each of her cabinet officers to be ready to provide any backup assistance that is necessary.

The Department of Health and Senior Services is working with the U.S. Public Health Service, which is directing medical assessment and support. Among the efforts by DHSS are:

- securing vaccines for children
- arranging with the department's laboratory for the transport and analysis of refugee's blood and other specimens as part of the medical screening procedures.
- identifying backup transport in the community by emergency medical technicians
- arranging for follow-up sanitation support services

The Office of Volunteerism hotline will serve individuals, organization, and corporations who are willing to volunteer or who have goods to donate. Callers should be prepared to give the precise product or service that is being offered, or the type of skill that could be useful as a volunteer.

In addition, the Department of Human Services, through its contract with the Immigration Network, is working with the major refugee resettlement organizations to make sure they are prepared to work with refugees who may need to settle in the United States.

Gov. Whitman also applauded the generosity of Toys `R Us which has donated 1,000 stuffed animals to be distributed to young refugees when they arrive at Fort Dix. "Like so many New Jersey businesses, Toys `R Us has continually demonstrated they are good corporate neighbors to our citizens. While the refugees will have overwhelming needs even for the bare necessities, we cannot minimize the comfort that these toys will bring to these children," Gov. Whitman said.