

LOCAL AUGUST 5, 2016 5:53 PM

# Thousands of people expected at Convoy of Hope



BY ROY WENZL  
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His name is Dakota, he said. He declined to give his last name.

Dakota came to work Friday with shorts, ankle tattoos, a cancer-swollen neck and a summer shirt that exposed muscular arms. He spent six and a half of his 23 years incarcerated, he said, mostly in the Sedgwick County Jail.

“I did a lot of bad in my life. Now I want to help people.”

He was working for free on Friday, at the Bethel Life Center at 3777 S. Meridian in south Wichita, placing tables, carrying chairs and setting up fencing on the grounds for Convoy of Hope-Wichita. Officials expect a gathering of people in need Saturday that could exceed 10,000 in number.

Nearly 8,500 showed up last year, so many that the 1,500 school backpacks full of school supplies were all taken in the first hour. They bought 3,000 backpacks this year, officials said.

Convoy officials do not want 10,000 people rushing to get 3,000 backpacks, so people at the gate will put armbands on those who qualify for backpacks. They’ll be able to relax and walk the grounds, their backpacks assured. Gates open about 8:30 a.m.

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### **I DID A LOT OF BAD IN MY LIFE**

Dakota, a Convoy of Hope charity volunteer

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The logistics of giving food and backpacks and family portraits and medical screenings to 10,000 people are formidable, said event director Stacie Cathcart. It required coordination with Wichita police, and also required acquiring tents to shelter thousands, many of them children, from the summer sun.

It required 1,200 volunteers and finding parking places on the many grassy acres surrounding Bethel Life Center.

Dakota will be one of the people in need; he said he will bring his 4-year-old son, and his 1-year-old daughter. He will bring his girlfriend. They need the food and supplies the Convoy people will give them.

But on Friday, Dakota was working as a volunteer, giving back, he said.

Dakota smiles, shakes hands and talks bluntly about himself. He bows his head with Bethel Life’s lead pastor, the Rev. Ken Squires, who puts a hand on his shoulder and asks God to lay a healing hand on Dakota’s tanned neck.

Dakota said he attends Bethel Life Center church services only occasionally. But he wanted to be here Friday to help them give.

Saturday, he will come for help.

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### **If you go**

**Location:** Bethel Life Center, 3777 S. Meridian

**Time:** Saturday, 10 a.m.

**Cost:** Free


**More information:** [convoyofhope.org/wichita](http://convoyofhope.org/wichita)



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