

GUIDANCE FOR REFERRERS

Refugees at Home matches people who have a spare room with refugees and asylum seekers in need of temporary accommodation.

This guide lays out who we help, how, and what we need for a successful hosting. Please read it before making a referral, so the experience is as positive as possible- most importantly for the guest.

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WHO WE HELP

Guests need to either have refugee status or to be actively engaged with the asylum process.

The people we help are:

- **Refugees:**
- **Asylum seekers** who have submitted their first claim
- **Refused Asylum Seekers:** whether appealing, preparing a fresh claim, or planning for voluntary return.
- We also support a small number of people who have 'other' statuses e.g. those who have right to remain through a family member and whose relationship has broken down, or those who have been identified as victims of human trafficking. Please contact us to discuss before making a referral.

We do not host:

- Unaccompanied minors
- People with complex mental health issues
- Anyone with drink or drug abuse problems
- Those with serious convictions (including convictions for violence)
- Anyone not engaged with the asylum process e.g. trying to stay or work in the UK illegally.

We do not provide other casework, e.g. legal or housing advice.

WHAT WE OFFER

Hosting is a temporary solution for those in need of accommodation. Individuals offer spare rooms- or sometimes, in emergencies, sofa beds- to people who would otherwise be destitute or in unsuitable accommodation.

We expect the referrer (or guest if this is a self-referral) to have a plan for the next step and to use the period of hosting to work on transition to more stable, long term housing.

- Who a host welcomes into their home and for how long is entirely at their discretion.
- There is no payment for hosting- in cash or in kind. Guests can help round the house (and should clear up after themselves) just as you would in any other guest/host arrangement.
- Hosting can be for 1-2 nights or for longer periods. Stays of over a year are unusual and generally we do not encourage these. In most cases, a year is plenty of time to make other arrangements: but we will look at every guest request on a case by case basis
- How long a guest stays with an individual host is up to the host.
 - Many guests will have to move between hosts during the period they are being hosted because of the hosts' personal commitments. While we do what we can to keep this disruption to a minimum, please explain to your client that this does sometimes happen, and it is not their fault when it does
 - We ask you for an idea of how long a guest needs to be hosted – we know this is not an exact science, but we do need you to keep us updated.
 - Hosts often commit to a short period of hosting and are more willing to extend when they get to know the guest.
 - When considering whether to accept a short initial placement, it is worth remembering that once someone has been hosted once, it's much easier to find a follow-on host as we ask for a reference from hosts at the end of a placement.
- We try to place people in the area they request but are limited by host availability.
 - The more flexible a guest can be on location, the more likely it is we can offer a stable, longer term hosting arrangement. This is especially true for asylum-seekers as experienced hosts know these can be very long-term requests.
 - We can offer some help with commuting costs (not more than £20 per week) for essential journeys where guests are placed outside their preferred area

Hosts

The host offers a clean, safe place to sleep. What more they offer is up to the host and may vary.

Our hosts are all assessed by a home visitor, a volunteer with a professional background which allows them to assess people in their own homes – social workers, health visitors or GPs for example. They make sure that everyone in the household is happy about the prospect of hosting and that there is an understanding of what hosting involves, including practical issues such as home insurance.

Our hosts vary enormously –

- Some hosts are busy working and can spend little time with their guest, others can include the guest in family meals and family life.
- Some are single people, others have families, some are retired people or those whose children have left home recently and a number are quite elderly.
- Some hosts have masses of space and a separate bathroom for the guest's use, others offer a sofa bed or a blow-up mattress for use in an emergency for a few days only.

What they have in common is their generosity and a willingness to open their door to a stranger and invite them to stay.

WHAT A GUEST CAN EXPECT FROM A HOST

Our hosts provide a clean safe place to sleep.

Some hosts will also provide meals, company, English practice and offer friendship. Others get on with their busy lives and expect their guest to do the same. Some hosts will give the guest a key immediately, others may do so only when they feel they know them a little, a few not at all. But they will always do the best they can to make their guest feel welcome.

Note- Hosts are not trained and do not necessarily understand the immigration, benefits or housing system, and guests should rely on their caseworkers for professional advice and support.

TRANSPARENCY

We are completely open with hosts -and with the specific home visitor who supports them- about any guest we ask a host to invite into their home.

- All the information you give us about a prospective guest will be shared with the hosts and their home visitors when we approach them to ask if they will help.
- Anything we discover while hosting a guest will be shared with future hosts, including reasons for the end of a hosting arrangement.
- We will not conceal information from hosts.

Hosts and home visitors know that they need to treat this personal information with care and respect.

MAKING A REFERRAL

We can accept self-referrals from refugees (i.e. people with status) who are able to communicate with us in English. Everyone else needs to be referred.

To apply to be a guest (self-refer) or to make a referral, complete the online form on our website.

CONSENT FOR A REFERRAL

Referrals are made through our referral form on the website.

We ask that whoever completes the form confirms that the data they have provided is accurate and that the person the information belongs to has both understood our data policy and given their permission for that data to be stored and used for the purposes of arranging hosting.

Some of the information we ask for is sensitive, the country of origin of the guest for example.

- Guests need to actively consent to Refugees at Home holding this sensitive information. If you submit a referral and tick the consent box on the referral form, you are confirming this.

Our privacy policy is available on the website and we are arranging for it to be translated into the languages commonly spoken by our guests. Please let us know if you would like a copy in a particular language .

SELF-REFERRALS

People who have refugee status and a good standard of English can refer themselves for accommodation. They will need to provide details of two people who can vouch for them. These need to be people who we have known the prospective guest while they have been in the UK and who know the guest well enough to be able to answer questions about who they are and what their plans are. Hosts may ask to speak to them. Please make sure that the people given as referees are happy to be contacted in this way

REFERRALS

All other referrals need to be made by a referrer.

The role of the referrer will vary depending on the level of support the guest needs and the complexity of the immigration or housing issues the guest is working through: whatever the situation, all referrers must commit to staying engaged and working actively with the guest for the duration of the hosting.

- If casework is withdrawn, we may have to ask the guest to leave, so it is vital that the referring organisation stays engaged and works with us.

Where the guest has a complex asylum case, poor English, is very young or vulnerable or we have concerns about the move on plan, we will ask you to sign a referral agreement with us, confirming that active case work is in place and the timelines for next steps.

Successful hosting arrangements depend on trust, and a clear understanding of everyone's role.

We do not meet and assess guests – we trust you to do that. Try to imagine that you or a member of your family were about to ask someone they didn't know to come and stay – what would you want to know about that person? If you would hesitate to invite this person to live with you, then they are probably not suitable for hosting.

- Please complete all fields in as much detail as possible- if there is information missing, we will come back to you to fill in the gaps.

- The information you give us on this form is the information we will provide hosts if we ask them to welcome that guest into their home- we are always completely open with them.
- The more details you can give us, the easier it will be to find a match for your client. Knowing they support a particular football team or love gardens might be the detail they a host needs to decide to offer that guest a room.
- Please don't conceal anything. A guest with specific needs or issues can often be hosted, but a host who discovers them later can feel manipulated and the relationship may quickly break down. They may even refuse to host someone else in the future. Please be as open with us as you can.

We can only offer temporary accommodation, so we need you and the guest to have a really clear understanding of how you will solve the problems preventing them from being independent, with time scales and details of who will take this forward. Keep us updated if plans or dates change, too.

Don't forget to include your contact details on the form! We do need mobile numbers as well as office ones.

WHAT WE NEED REFERRERS TO DO

We and our hosts are not trained or resourced to take on the challenges of asylum cases or benefits claims. We need you to help them with whatever that guest needs to move on.

As well as actively working towards a move on plan:

- We expect that you will explain to the guest you support that they must move on when they are offered accommodation – those who are in the asylum system are expected to move to NASS, if this is possible, while those who are offered a room or hostel place need to be willing to accept it, even if it is not their ideal place to live.
- If the guest has refugee status we assume that they will be working towards being able to manage on their own – learning English, developing their skills and looking for work.
- Guests who are working should be encouraged to save up for a deposit for a rental or building some financial reserves.

We need to be able to reach you or someone who can contact the client between 9 and 5 on weekdays, as a minimum. As we said above, if you move jobs or are absent, please arrange cover.

You will be the link between the host and the guest and will need to help them understand what is being offered, how to get there and to sort out any problems which arise.

When we find a host, especially if it is in an emergency, we will need you to contact the guest and explain this to them– guests do not know us or the hosts and direct arrangements are, in our experience, rarely successful. They trust and know you and will rely on you to give them the confidence to turn up at the front door of a stranger.

HOW HOSTING WORKS

You need to explain to guests that they are joining a household.

- We ask hosts to explain how their home works, but all guests should be careful not to disturb their host at night, to clear up after themselves and keep the home secure- closing doors and windows when they go out etc.
- Almost all hosts have a 'no smoking' rule and those who smoke need to check if it is OK to smoke in the garden.

- We advise hosts not to quiz their guests about their journey to the UK or the experiences which led them to leave their home country; and not to give advice on immigration or legal issues (even if they are qualified to!) as multiple opinions and directions can be confusing for guests.
- We have a guide for guests which explains more about this. We expect that referrers will go through this with their client and explain what they can expect from hosting but also what is expected of them. We are working to get this guide translated into the languages most commonly spoken by our guests and these will be on our website as they are completed.

Some guests come from cultures where a woman living alone and inviting a man into the house would be viewed with suspicion or as immoral. That is not the case in the UK, of course, and it may help to explain that if a male guest is placed with a female host, he should always treat her respectfully- almost as if she were his elderly aunt. The same respect must be shown to every person in the house of a host family including any employees such as a cleaner or an au pair.

If a host is worried about inappropriate behaviour by a guest, s/he will ask them to leave immediately and we will support that. We will not arrange further hosting for anyone about whom a complaint of sexual impropriety has been made.

GUEST PREFERENCES AND RESTRICTIONS

We have some hosts who have asked us to explain certain aspects of their identity to any prospective guests. We do not ask anyone about their religious beliefs or sexual orientation but will ask you to discuss issues like this if the hosts have requested us to do so.

We assume that our hosts and guests will be tolerant of difference but if you feel that your client might have a serious issue in a household because of their background or experiences, please let us know. That might be a guest who would be unhappy about being hosted in a house with pets, for example, or a guest who has experienced gender-based violence and feels unsafe in some environments.

Please bear in mind that while we will do our best, it may not be possible to host a guest if they have restrictions and we have no hosts who meet their preferences.

FUNDS

We have some funds available to support hosting when the guest has no financial resource and the hosts are unable to provide food or help with their guests travel costs.

- We can arrange for up to £20 a week, to be paid to the guest via the host, to use in whatever way they think is suitable.

We do not make these payments as a routine as we have limited funds, so please use other funds if they are available. We ask the hosts to contact us about this but if you feel your client may need this sort of support, let us know.

WHAT IF THINGS GO WRONG?

Sometimes hosting arrangements don't work out.

It's rare but it happens- a host may become ill or have a family crisis, a guest may not get on with the family or find the journey to their college or work too onerous.

When we become aware of a problem we will act quickly to resolve things but this may mean asking the guest to move to a new host.

- In very unusual circumstances we may take the view that the guest is not suitable to be hosted again. We do not take this decision lightly and will always explain this to the referrer, and to the guest if that is appropriate.
- We have never had any incidents of theft or assault. We have had misunderstandings and, on a handful of occasions, unwanted romantic approaches. In many such situations, there are two sides to any story and we need you to help us understand the guest's perspective when things have gone wrong.
- The only reason for asking a guest to leave and then not being able to host them again would be if we felt this was not safe for our hosts.

Most problems can be resolved- our hosts are supported by their home visitors, and we need you to support the guests so we can reach a positive outcome.

FIND OUT MORE

Our safeguarding policy and our complaints policy are available on the website.

We have also provided advice to our hosts and home visitors about what to do if they have any concerns that their guest might be vulnerable to radicalisation.

Please let us know if you would like us to send you a copy of any of these documents.