



**ADVICE
TO
NEW
HOSTS**





THINKING BACK I WOULD LIKE TO
THANK REFUGEES AT HOME FOR
HELPING ME TO GET SAFE
ACCOMMODATION WITH A LOVELY
FAMILY IN 2016, IMAGINE IF I SAID I
AM HOMELESS AND COLD WHEN
MY MUM CALLED BACK THEN.
INSTEAD I WAS SAFE AND WARM
AND SURROUNDED WITH LOVE AND
LAUGHTER WITH MY HOSTS.

AREEJ, GUEST

The urge to help those in need is one of the most basic human instincts, but having a stranger to stay for several months – someone from a different culture, who may be severely traumatised – can be complicated.

In this leaflet we've set out some of the things that are worth bearing in mind when you first host a refugee. The advice is based on feedback from the many experienced hosts who have volunteered with Refugees at Home since 2015. Some of it is as simple as making sure you welcome your guests with lots of smiles and a cup of tea.

Refugees at Home has made over 2600 hosting placements, with guests from more than 65 countries. With very few exceptions, both guest and host have found the hosting experience incredibly rewarding, and many have made lasting friendships.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE YOU SIGN UP TO HOST

Before you commit to hosting there are some important questions to ask yourself and other members of your household if you do not live alone:

- Is your partner and everyone else in your household in agreement that you would like to host?
- Have you checked with your landlord and/or home insurance provider to ensure you can offer a space?
- Would you be willing to share your home with people who do not share your religious beliefs or cultural attitudes?
- Are you comfortable sharing your kitchen and bathroom with a guest? And, in the kitchen, are you happy for your guest to store and prepare food independently?
- Are you happy to allow your guests to stay in your home when you go out to work – or if you go away for some time such as on holiday?
- Do you have the time to help your guests navigate our social security systems and register with the GP, dentist, schools and other services?
- How long can you host for? If your guests have trouble finding more permanent accommodation, are you prepared for them to stay six months or more, as the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme requires?

- If you're considering hosting more than one guest or a family with children, how many people can you realistically accommodate? Are the children's ages compatible with your children's ages?

- If you have pets, you might consider how this might affect your guests. Note that it's uncommon but not unknown for refugees to have their pets with them – can you accommodate them?



IT IS USUALLY EASIER FOR EVERYONE IF YOUR GUEST HAS A KEY – WOULD YOU BE COMFORTABLE WITH THAT?

- Remember that refugees may be traumatised and it might take them a long time to want to leave the house. You may find yourself sharing your living space for much of the day.

- Please bear in mind that your guests' experiences may make them quite fragile. Have you thought about how you might deal with this? They might want to speak about their experiences – or they might prefer to say nothing at all. You should be prepared for both eventualities. You certainly shouldn't ask questions about their journey – you might be asking them to remember a very traumatic experience – or who or what they have left behind. When they want to tell you, they will.

- It is important to be mindful of access to 24 hour news and that your guest may receive bad news from home while staying with you.



HE HAS EVERY REASON TO FEEL THE WORLD HAS TREATED HIM BADLY, BUT IS STILL SO POSITIVE, OPEN, GENTLE AND OPTIMISTIC... HIS GENTLENESS IS A HARD-EARNED GENTLENESS."

SIMON AND SHOSHANA, HOSTS



INITIALLY, WHEN WE TALKED ABOUT THIS, WE THOUGHT ABOUT ALL THESE POSSIBLE HOUSE RULES. THEN WE MET AREEJ AND WE WERE LIKE 'OH WHATEVER,' GIJS SAID. "WE GET ALONG REALLY WELL AND THE MOST LOVELY, SURPRISING THING THAT HAPPENED IS THAT WE BECAME FRIENDS."

EMILY AND GIJS, HOSTS

PREPARING FOR YOUR GUESTS' ARRIVAL

The Welcome Pack

At Refugees at Home, we encourage hosts to prepare a welcome pack document for guests. Ideally this will be in clear, simple language, including only necessary information.

The pack should include information about GP surgeries, dentists and opticians; local bus routes and stations and how to buy tickets; directions to local amenities such as the Post Office, faith centres, voluntary sector organisations, help centres, libraries, even specialist food shops such as halal butchers.

Please include clear information about the wifi code, how the television works and other essential household information such as how the shower or cooker works.

You might also add a few sentences on your family/household routine – who works at home, what time you generally get up, when the bathroom is going to be busiest, any regular visitors, if you would prefer guests not to smoke in the house.

You can do quite a lot in pictures and symbols. And remember that Refugees at Home can send you some examples of other hosts' packs if that is helpful.



I HAVE A WELCOME PACK DOCUMENT WHICH HAS WIFI CODES/MAP/PHONE NUMBERS/NEIGHBOURS NAMES BUT ALSO HOUSE RULES: NO PORK/SEAFOOD NO SMOKING INSIDE... TELL ME IF YOU EAT THE LAST BANANA/ ARE STAYING OUT ALL NIGHT."

SARA, HOST

GETTING YOUR HOME READY

The best thing that you can do to help your guests before they arrive is to try to think through the implications of sharing your home with someone new, and to make sure that you are prepared.

Your guests will need a private room with a bed and a door they can close. They also need access to the kitchen and a bathroom. You should have the room ready, clean and tidy with the bed made, spare blanket and towel. Put out spare toiletries and maybe some snacks – chocolate, fruit etc.

These are your guests, welcome them as you would any guest in your home.

“I provide new towels in a different colour from mine, basic toiletries and something like a nice bar of good soap. Both my guests have wanted a long hot shower before anything else.” (Mary, host)

“If they are in season, I put some garden flowers in the room, so they feel like cherished guests when they arrive.” (Sara, host)

“After the first guest, I started putting a little box of toiletries in the room- shower gel, shampoo and hair oil (suitable for Afro hair), razor, shaving gel, deodorant). Often

people say they are fine when you ask if they need anything but if you leave stuff out they use it as they clearly are not fine and want it but aren't willing to ask.” (Rachel, host)

You should provide meals and snacks for at least the first few days. Guests who have access to benefits or who are working should be able to provide their own food or contribute to the household expenditure. All households are different – some guests and hosts may prefer to eat separately; for others, sharing food is a way of bonding and learning about each others' customs.



EATING DINNER TOGETHER QUITE EARLY ON HELPED ME TO FEEL AT HOME.”

AMBER'S GUEST

“It means a lot to him that we share his food - whether it's dinner he's made or fruit he bought. I can feel bad, but for him it helps him to feel human/normal/ dignity etc.”

(Belinda, host)

“Scones go down a treat - almost as well as roast potatoes. Never had a guest not adore those...”

(Mark, host)



THE PRESENCE IN THE HOUSE OF SOMEONE WHO MADE A 2,000-MILE JOURNEY TO SAFETY WAS HUMBLING, AND A CONSTANT REMINDER OF HOW LUCKY WE ARE.”

ROSALIND, HOST



FOR THE LAST 18 MONTHS WITH REFUGEES AT HOME, WE'VE HOSTED TWO MEN, ASYLUM SEEKERS WHO NEEDED A HOME WHILST THEY DO THE HUNDRED THINGS THEY HAVE TO DO EACH WEEK TO STAY AFLOAT AND MOVING THINGS FORWARD THROUGH THE ASYLUM PROCESS. TODAY RAHMAN WAS SENT HIS RESIDENCE PERMIT :) - HE NOW HAS LEAVE TO REMAIN AND CAN LEGALLY WORK IN THE UK!"

LIZZY, HOST

WELCOMING A GUEST

Showing a guest that they are welcome can be very simple – lots of smiles, showing them around and making it clear where they can store any belongings. The offer of tea and something to eat is usually welcome, although occasionally, your guests might not want to eat. This is not anything personal, but just that they are already overwhelmed and the prospect of eating in a strange place can be just too alarming.

Some guests may have lots of questions. Others may be keen to just get to their room and relax in privacy, or to sleep.



TRUST, A WARM SMILE, A SET OF HOUSE KEYS, TOILETRIES AND TOWEL, PRIVACY AND PEACE UNTIL THEY'RE READY."

SARA, HOST



IN THE KITCHEN LEAVE OUT CHILIS, SALT, SUGAR AND TEA! NO JUDGEMENT ON THE AMOUNT OF SALT ADDED TO MEALS AND SUGAR ADDED TO TEA. (CAN JOKE ABOUT IT LATER THOUGH!) INTRODUCTION TO THE PETS OF THE HOUSE. YOUR PHONE NUMBER, THE WIFI CODE, THE TIME YOU EXPECT QUIET IN THE HOUSE FROM AT NIGHT:"

AMBER, HOST

Your guests may speak little or no English. If you learn a few phrases of their language it would do wonders to break the ice at the beginning of their stay. And Google translate is your friend!



MY FIRST QUESTION WAS 'DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU IF I GO OUT?' AND MY HOST SAID, 'OF COURSE NOT – HERE'S YOUR KEY'."

AREEJ, GUEST

DOS AND DON'TS OF HOSTING

All guests, hosts and households are different and there is no magic ingredient to a successful placement. In our experience, empathy, courtesy, common sense and good communication go a long way to making sure that guests and hosts get the most benefit from a placement. But here are some dos and don'ts which are commonly mentioned by our hosts:

Don't expect displays of gratitude. Your guest will be putting all their emotional energies into coping with the upheaval of their life – making them feel they are indebted to you will only add to their sense of alienation.

Don't put obvious locks or padlocks on any internal doors – there is nothing worse for a guest than feeling their host doesn't trust them.

Do explain basic rules, such as no smoking in the house (the welcome pack, put into their room, will help with this). Remember that your guest may come from a country where smoking is far more usual, so show them where they can smoke.



I WAS CAREFUL NOT TO ASK ABOUT HIS PAST AT ALL. THIS REALLY SURPRISED HIM AND HE WAS VERY APPRECIATIVE. HE'S SINCE TALKED OPENLY AND OFTEN."

AMBER, HOST

Do offer support without waiting to be asked. Your guests will have pride and dignity and may feel uncomfortable asking for extra help.

"Toiletries are important and perhaps enough money to pay for transport. We discovered our house guest didn't have enough money to pay the train fare to get to her charity's Christmas party, but didn't want to tell us that. We gave her some money and she broke down and sobbed. We were still discovering her unspoken needs two years later! It's a very humbling experience, but so worthwhile." (Angela, host)

Do make it clear that you're offering not just a room but some of your time and resources as well. Hosts have differing amounts of time but helping in the first few days is really welcoming. Some hosts help with GP and Job Centre applications. But if you don't have time, maybe someone in your community can.

Don't ask them about their journey or recent experiences – you may be asking them to relive some of the most traumatic moments of their life.



IF YOU ARE THINKING OF HOSTING, YOU SHOULD GO FOR IT BECAUSE IF YOU CAN EVEN HELP FOR A MONTH OR EVEN LESS, YOU ARE STILL DOING SOMEONE AN ENORMOUS FAVOUR."

JULIAN, HOST

FURTHER SUPPORT FOR HOSTS AND GUESTS

For many guests, a room is just the starting point. The additional help and support they need will vary from guest to guest, and on where they have come from.

Refugees at Home

The following advice is for those hosting guests from any country, via Refugees at Home.

If you are hosting through us you will have been met by an experienced home visitor who has assessed the placement, met the family and answered some of your questions prior to a placement. You can always contact your Home Visitor for support at any time during your placement, or email Refugees at Home.

Many of the guests placed through us will have come via a referrer, who will provide ongoing support around housing, employment, language classes and mental health services. Refugees at Home will check in with self-referred guests regularly and provide support on questions and concerns as they arise.

We may be able to provide a small weekly bursary in some instances. And there's nothing to stop hosts from offering food and whatever else they would like to offer:

"Big bowl of fruit on the kitchen table and instructions to help him/herself. Easy and accessible food for them to snack on when they like until they get back to the rhythm of being in a household. Peanut butter and bread. Crisps. But remember. Whatever you do or don't do. They'll think you're great. And they'll be right. Good luck!" (Guy, host)

Households hosting through Refugees at Home can always contact us at info@refugeesathome.org. We aren't open 24 hours a day but anything urgent would be picked up between early morning and late evening and over the weekends.

Homes for Ukraine

Ukrainian guests who have arrived via the government's Homes for Ukraine and Ukrainian Family Visa schemes should have access to support from the local authority. Information about support available under the scheme is available from www.reset.org

www.refugeesathome.org



ONCE WE TOOK THE STEP TO OPEN OUR HOME, IT BECAME THE MOST NATURAL THING IN THE WORLD."

RACHEL, HOST

SOURCES FOR PHOTOS:

UNHCR (pages 5, 6)

iNews.co.uk (page 9)

Tooting Daily Press (pages 10, 13, 15)



**BUT REMEMBER. WHATEVER YOU
DO OR DON'T DO. THEY'LL THINK
YOU'RE GREAT. AND THEY'LL BE
RIGHT. GOOD LUCK!"**

GUY, HOST



www.refugeesathome.org