

## Hosting Refugees

Establishing Safe and Welcoming Hosting Programs for  
New Refugee Arrivals

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## Why start a hosting program?

As refugees face rising barriers to housing access amidst a nationwide scarcity of affordable rental units, affiliates increasingly rely on hotels and short-term rentals to temporarily house arriving cases. The high cost of hotel stays depletes refugees' per capita direct assistance and funds raised privately by the affiliate, exacerbating long-term housing insecurity. Therefore, many resettlement agencies are turning to creative solutions to reduce the costs of temporary housing and maximize the direct benefits refugees receive.

Volunteer hosting in a securely vetted private home offers cost-effective temporary housing, reducing the financial strain on affiliates, freeing up funds to support refugees' long-term housing expenses, and facilitating connections between supportive host communities and new arrivals. This guide offers advice and best practices for affiliate resettlement agencies on how to launch and run effective hosting programs, in which voluntary hosts offer a room in their home to newcomer refugees as a free or low-cost temporary housing solution upon arrival.

## Benefits to the refugee

Hosting offers a range of economic and psychosocial advantages. By providing free or low-cost housing, hosting protects recently arrived refugees from homelessness and housing insecurity during a time of high economic precarity. Refugees benefit from high quality, healthy, and stable housing, which is offered at a low cost or free of charge, enabling newcomers to save and/or allocate their limited dollars toward other essential expenses, instead of high-cost hotel stays. Through hosting programs, recently arrived refugees also access safe and supportive environments where they learn about life in their new city, practice English, and establish (often, long-lasting) connections to new communities. Warm and welcoming hosts and safe, stable housing assist refugees in beginning their journey toward resettlement, integration, decompression, and recovery from trauma.

## Benefits to the host

*Quote from a host: "The first couple I hosted, we're still good friends, and I know we're going to have a relationship for years to come. And that's of course not what I was in it for, but it's a pretty incredible outcome. We really mutually care about each other. That was quite a gift."*

Hosts also benefit from the experience of sharing their home with recently arrived refugees. Host families gain an impactful opportunity to learn about the world, other cultures, and the experience of migration. Hosts may have the chance to try new foods, hear different languages, and partake in cultural or religious customs and celebrations that are different from their own. Hosting facilitates new friendships and, sometimes, increases the hosts' sense of connection to their hometown, through organizing, problem-solving, welcoming, and resource-gathering with their neighbors and broader community. Many hosts also express that opening their homes to refugees countered their sense of despair

about global conflict. Through sharing their home and offering safe refuge, hosts have the opportunity to make a materially meaningful impact, which instills optimism, hope, and a sense of purpose.

*Quote from a host: “We are all struggling right now with feeling helpless in the face of so much injustice and degradation to the planet and to its people. It’s a very empowering feeling to do anything. Being a host is one drop in the bucket, but it is a wonderful feeling to just do anything. Especially something that feels like you’re providing a material and potentially transformative opportunity for another person.”*

## Program Structure

Refugee hosting programs exist around the world and across the country. In general, the affiliate recruits, screens, and trains hosts; identifies refugees in need of temporary housing; determines a good match, and helps hosts and guests prepare expectations, agree on house rules, and set boundaries for a successful hosting experience. Throughout the guest’s stay, the affiliate supports both guests and hosts and responds to any issues that arise. The affiliate helps guests secure and move into long-term, independent housing.

## Getting started

Before launching a new refugee hosting program, affiliates should:

1. **Develop internal policies**, covering
  - a. Screening requirements, including required background and reference checks
  - b. Expectations of host and guests (including the maximum number of days a guest can stay in a host’s home; which additional forms of assistance—if any—will be offered by the host, such as food or transportation; quiet hours, privacy; and/or smoking)
  - c. Required trainings hosts must complete
  - d. Contingency plans for hosting arrangements that do not work out
  - e. Compatibility criteria for assessing whether cases and hosts will be a good match
2. **Create template contracts**, including
  - a. Template house rules for hosts and guests to adapt, review, and sign
  - b. Contract outlining the support the affiliate will provide to the host (i.e., interpretation, check-ins, conflict mediation, assistance to move the case out when permanent housing has been secured, hours between which case managers can be contacted, etc.), and the role of the host
  - c. Confidentiality agreements
  - d. Liability waivers

3. **Develop training materials for hosts** on the refugee experience, common challenges during the initial resettlement period, expectations of a host, and how the affiliate agency will support the hosting experience.
4. **Identify staff and/or volunteers** needed to manage the program.
5. **Develop a host recruitment and retention strategy** (i.e., how/where to advertise the program and how to keep hosts engaged and continuously participating)

## Personnel

Depending on the scale of the affiliate's hosting program, a Hosting Program Manager (HPM) could be a part-time role, shared by one or multiple full-time staff members, including a volunteer or co-sponsor coordinator, the housing coordinator, case aides, and/or administrative staff members.

Here is a list of standard job responsibilities for an HPM:

1. Recruiting candidates to host refugees; publicly presenting about the hosting program
2. Processing applications, interviewing, and screening hosts
3. Training and setting expectations with hosts
4. Conducting home visits to ensure that living spaces are decent, safe, and sanitary and to ensure guests would have adequate private space and access to essential shared spaces
5. Setting expectations with guests about the hosting experience (what resources will be supplied by the hosts? What services will the affiliate contribute? What responsibilities are guests expected to take on themselves?)
6. Identifying compatible host/guest matches, facilitating initial meetings between hosts and guests, fielding questions from and providing ongoing support for hosts and guests, conducting home visits with guests
7. Helping guests move into and out of hosts' homes
8. Periodically checking in with guests and hosts
9. Providing mediation if any issues in the hosting arrangement arise, facilitating interpretation services if needed
10. Conducting exit interviews with hosts to solicit feedback on how to improve the program and confirm if they would be willing to host again; ensuring hosts feel acknowledged and appreciated for their contribution
11. Conducting exit interviews with guests to solicit feedback on their experience and how to improve the program

HPMs will also be involved in developing the policies, contracts, waivers, training materials, and compatibility criteria, in conjunction with the affiliate's leadership and legal counsel.

# Recruiting, Onboarding, and Supporting Hosts

## Recruiting Hosts

Here is a selection of recruitment strategies to reach out to and involve new hosts:

- Ask donors, volunteers, and board members to send a call for hosts out to their networks.
- Connect with houses of worship. Ask to send out a call for hosts in their listserv or weekly newsletter. Ask to make an appeal at the beginning/end of a weekly service.
- Connect with corporations that have supported the affiliate in the past. Ask to send out a call for hosts to their staff.
- Reach out to retiree clubs, civic groups, community leaders, volunteer organizations, Rotary clubs, and the United Way.
- Ask local public officials—including city council members, municipal officials, and mayors—to share this opportunity.
- Launch a recruitment campaign using social media, WhatsApp groups, the affiliate website, and email listservs. Ask partner organizations and supporters to share your message.
- Distribute fliers in coffee shops, community event spaces, grocery stores, etc.
- Share a press release. Pay for advertisements in local newspapers, online media, and radio. Ask for donated or nonprofit rates for advertising space and airtime.
- Ask existing hosts (some may have hosted asylum seekers) to offer testimonials about how the experience of hosting has impacted their life and the lives of their family members or neighbors. Include testimonials on promotional materials to recruit new hosts.
- Ask existing hosts if they would be willing to accompany hosting program staff at speaking engagements (i.e. to speak to a house of worship). Experienced hosts can help assuage anxieties that new hosts might have, highlight the unexpected ways their lives have been positively changed, and emphasize how meaningful it can be to offer shelter to someone who has been displaced.

Graceful stewardship of host relationships is fundamental to retention of hosts for future guests. Create a user-friendly and streamlined process for interested candidates to find more information, ask questions, and submit an application. Be sure to follow up on questions and applications as soon as possible.

## Host Onboarding Process

Affiliates should follow a standard process to screen, onboard, and train new hosts, prepare and match refugees with host families, set expectations, and support both parties throughout the hosting experience.

A sample onboarding and placement process is described below:

- 1. Application:** Potential hosts fill out and submit an application for the hosting program.
- 2. Interview:** If the Host Program Manager (HPM) thinks the host candidate could be a good fit for the program, HPM contacts applicant for an initial interview, through which the HPM can learn more about the potential host and share more about the program.
- 3. Home Visit:** If the applicant and HPM decide to move forward, they schedule a home visit. The home should meet the R&P standards for safe, sanitary, and decent housing, as outlined in the Cooperative Agreement.
- 4. Background Check and References:** If HPM decides that the home is safe, sanitary, and decent, with a private space for guests and accessible shared spaces, then the HPM can proceed with a background check and send reference requests.
- 5. Training:** Potential host undergoes training, in-person with HPM and self-paced with virtual training materials that outline the specific role and obligations of the host.

## Host Qualifications

Affiliates will determine the host criteria that best fits the needs of their clients. The following is a basic set of host qualifications to ensure the safety, well-being, and comfort of guests.

A host should:

1. Have safe, decent, sanitary, and stable housing that can adequately accommodate a minimum of one additional person
2. Have a spare bedroom, in good and clean condition, that offers a guest privacy
3. Have a bathroom that the guest can access (either private or shared)
4. Have a kitchen that the guest can access (either private or shared)
5. Be located near public transit lines
6. Be able to accommodate a guest for a minimum number of weeks/months, depending on program guidelines
7. Be welcoming and supportive of cultural and religious differences and expression within the home
8. Be patient, particularly with language barriers, trauma recovery, and the process of integration
9. Be willing to set boundaries, communicate expectations clearly, and take space when needed
10. Be willing to participate in trainings, excited to learn, and proactive in communication with the Hosting Program Manager (HPM)
11. Respect the guest's privacy and refrain from sharing private information about the guest with anyone outside of the household without the guest's permission
12. Be willing to submit to a background check and share three references that the HPM will contact

## Host Application

The host application should include questions that gauge the suitability of the candidate's living space, assess the candidate's motives for hosting and experiences that might make them a good host, and confirm the candidate's willingness to submit to vetting procedures and program requirements. A selection of example questions for a host application is shared below. Ideally, applications should be made available in print and online, and staff should review and respond to interested applicants within 72 hours.

### Home Suitability

1. Do you have a private bedroom for the guest?
2. Is the room furnished?
3. Can you make space in your kitchen for the guest to store food?
4. Can you make space in your bathroom for the guest to store toiletries?
5. Do you live in an area with public transportation access?
6. How many guests could you accommodate?

### Interests and Experience

1. Do you have any experience in sharing your home with others?
2. Do you have any experience in supporting immigrants and/or refugees?
3. What interests you in hosting a refugee?
4. What languages do you speak?
5. Are there any other qualities, experiences, and/or skills that will enhance your experience as a host that you would like to share?

### Commitment

1. Are you willing to undergo host program training?
2. Can you offer three references?
3. Are you willing to consent to a background check?
4. Will you be willing to have a brief check-in with the Host Program Manager \_\_\_ times per month throughout the duration of the hosting arrangement?
5. How long would you be willing to host a guest?
6. Do you anticipate any changes in your home life that might disrupt your ability to host for the agreed upon time (i.e. an upcoming move, career shift, birth, marriage, long-term visitor, etc)?

*Quote from a host: "The opportunity to host came about at a time when my wife and I were at loose ends; our kids had moved out, we were getting close to retirement. We had space in our lives and felt like we had some gifts or skills to offer and so why wouldn't we host? It's been quite a journey, and the fundamental thing is that I feel like it's good work that I know how to do. It feels rewarding. It also connected me with my town. And connected me with new people—neighbors I have lived alongside for a long time—in a way I did not expect."*



## Host Interview

After receiving the host application, the Hosting Program Manager (HPM) will schedule an interview with the host to get to know them better and to share more details about hosting. Below is a list of sample questions for the HPM to discuss with applicants to determine whether they would be a good fit to host a refugee.

1. How comfortable are you with sharing space and communicating with individuals with limited English language skills?
2. What are the rules in your home? (Consider noise, privacy, drinking/smoking, visitors, sharing food, taking and sharing photos, etc.).
3. Are you willing to host a guest of any gender? How about family size?
4. What would you want a guest to know about you before they move in?
5. What would you want to know about your guest before they move in?
6. How can a guest be respectful to you in the home? (Think about participating in cleaning, being considerate of quiet hours or need for alone time, etc.).
7. Are you comfortable sharing space with someone who may be going through a challenging time as they acclimatize to a new country?
8. How would you resolve conflict if any issues arose with a guest in your home?
9. Are you comfortable sharing your home with someone who may have a different religion, language, socioeconomic experience, and/or sexual orientation than you?
10. Are you comfortable reflecting on how social identities and power differences, (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status) might impact the host/guest experience?
11. Could you describe any deal breakers (i.e. “I am not comfortable hosting single men”; “I don’t have space for children”; “my home is 100% non-smoking”)?
12. What challenges do you anticipate for the hosting experience?
13. What do you hope to gain personally from this experience?
14. Do you have any concerns about hosting?

In the host interview, it may also be helpful to present a few hypothetical scenarios to the potential host to get a sense of how they might handle challenges that could arise.

1. The guest has agreed to clean her private bathroom, but she hasn’t cleaned it yet, and a month has passed since she moved in. How would you address this situation?
2. The guest receives a legal notice from immigration that he doesn’t understand, and he asks for your help interpreting what he needs to do. What would you do in this situation?
3. Because of the time difference to her home country, the guest catches up with family back home loudly on the phone during the night. This keeps you awake. How would you handle this?
4. The guest spends most of the day in their room and doesn’t initiate conversation with you when you come home. What might you do to reach out to them?
5. The guest asks if you can give them money. What do you do?

# Setting Hosts and Guests Up for Success

## Compatibility Criteria

Here are some compatibility criteria to consider when placing guests with hosts.

- 1. Household size** – Affiliate staff should make sure there is a sufficient number of bedrooms for guests (i.e., generally, for a standard-size bedroom, no more than two adults and one small child per room). Staff should additionally confirm the maximum number of guests the host is willing to accommodate at one time.
- 2. Gender and sexual orientation** – Affiliate staff should ask if the host feels comfortable taking in clients of all genders. Special considerations should be made for clients who might experience heightened vulnerability due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or experiences of gender-based violence, homophobia, and transphobia.
- 3. Family composition** – Affiliate staff should confirm if the host is willing to accommodate children and if the home is safe for children.
- 4. Language and culture** – Affiliate staff should consider if there are any hosts who speak the same language or who share religion or country of origin or ethnic background as the arriving case.
- 5. Physical accommodations** – Affiliate staff should check IRIS medical data for indications of ADA accessibility needs and confirm that the host's home can adequately accommodate the guest's needs, if any apply.
- 6. Arrival date** – Affiliate staff should confirm that the host's spare rooms will be ready and available for the guest, based on the arrival date on IRIS.

## Establishing Clear Roles

Ambiguity of expectations is a common challenge that hosts and guests experience in existing refugee-hosting programs. Studies show that role ambiguity leads to anxiety across jobs and sectors (Olivares-Faúndez et al., 2014). Clarity of expectations helps reduce stress, which in turn, can reduce the likelihood of burnout and help with host retention.

**Hosts are more likely to have a positive experience, host another guest, and recommend the hosting experience to others if they have a clear understanding of what they are expected to offer, appropriate boundaries and how to set them, and the types of support your organization will offer if they are struggling to maintain the agreed upon boundaries.**

Setting clear boundaries and consistent expectations of what the host can offer will also enable the guest to feel more comfortable. If the guest clearly understands what the host has agreed to offer, guests will be less likely to worry that they might overstep, ask for too much, or inadvertently upset the host without understanding why.

Therefore, successful hosting programs need to define the role of the host. A few questions that should be explored when defining the role of the host include:

1. Does the host offer a free room and nothing more? Is a bed included? Bedding? Towels?
2. Does the host supply groceries? Toiletries?
3. Does the host assist with transportation? Interpretation? Support at appointments?
4. Is the host expected to have regular meetings or meals with their guest?
5. Is the host expected to undertake some cultural orientation or social interaction with the guest? If so, how often?
6. If the host is not expected to answer social services questions for the guest, then who will assist the guest with questions?
7. How does the role of the host differ from a case manager or a landlord?

In many existing hosting programs, hosts are expected to provide a private bedroom, bed and bedding, towel, access to laundry facilities (if applicable), cleaning supplies, and access to the kitchen. Most programs additionally ask hosts to help with a light degree of social interaction and cultural orientation if they are up for it, but it is not generally a requirement. Regardless of the bundle of expectations chosen, the affiliate should delineate and communicate clear roles, responsibilities, and limitations for both the host and the guest.

Affiliates should also clearly define the role of all staff and volunteers who will support the host and guest. Affiliates should communicate what type of support each staff member will offer to the host and guest, when and how to contact that person, and what type of support is outside of the scope of services. Lack of clarity about who to contact, how the organization can assist the host/guest relationship, and who else would support the guest to meet their needs is a common challenge for hosts, causing confusion, frustration, exhaustion, and in some cases, a lack of desire to continue hosting.

*Quote from a host: “The murky boundary of who the host is complicates things. Is the host a friend? Is the host a mentor? Is the host an extension of social services? Someone who’s going to give [the guest] money? How much food is the host going to give them? That is very confusing to the resident and to the host. And not knowing the boundaries can cause distress for both.”*

## Helping Hosts and Guests Set Boundaries

It’s important for the guest to understand that though they are a guest in someone else’s home, they are not obligated to undertake inordinate tasks or engage in activities that make them uncomfortable. They should feel empowered to set and assert boundaries that help them feel safe, comfortable, and at ease. “Feelings of uncertainty and confusion can trigger intense trauma responses related to past experiences. Maintaining a consistent and predictable environment can help to instill a sense of calm, which in turn allows the [guest] to focus on recovery...Ways to establish consistency and predictability include clearly defining roles and boundaries” (Clervil et al., 2013). Helping the guest set expectations, house agreements, and boundaries with the host is an important aspect of creating a safe and trauma-informed environment for refugee arrivals.

Similarly, hosts—often motivated by a desire to support someone in need—may have trouble asserting healthy boundaries (i.e., saying “no” to a request from a guest) and taking space to themselves when they need to. Affiliates should remind hosts that if they let their personal energy get drained and they do not take measures to recuperate and care for themselves, they will have no energy to support others.

It’s vital to support hosts in setting clear boundaries and taking care of themselves to avoid host burnout. Some tips affiliates can share with hosts to set boundaries include:

1. **Know and honor your limits.** Tune into your feelings; if you feel stressed, overwhelmed, or uncomfortable, that may be an indication that you need to step away, take some space, and/or set a boundary about what you can and cannot offer.
2. **Communicate directly and compassionately.** State your requests frankly in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity, which could lead to an inadvertent boundary violation.
3. **Make time for rest and activities that recuperate and replenish.** Vicarious trauma and emotional exhaustion are common experiences for people who support refugees. Restoration is vital to being able to continuously show up for others.
4. **Consult with the Hosting Program Manager** for advice on how to set boundaries with your guest.
5. **Be thoughtful about connecting with guests on social media.** Is that a space you want to share?
6. **Practice boundary-setting** and stepping back when you need space! Start with low stakes boundary-setting. Remember that if we do not set boundaries, we may sit with resentment, which can put a wedge into a relationship and hamper our ability to support others. Give yourself permission to set, maintain, and adjust boundaries (if adjusting, be sure to communicate changes).
7. **Remember that we cannot (and are not expected to) solve everyone’s problems.** We can only contribute what we can.

*Quote from a host: “It’s important to gauge your ability to both be aware of your guest’s trauma and not let it take over you and also to be grounded enough to not be wrenching the relationship with your own neediness as a host.”*

## Host Education Resources

### Proactive Mediation Exercises

Here are three scenarios—drawn from real host/ guest arrangements—to illustrate how the Hosting Program Manager (HPM) can support the hosts and guests with regular check-ins, defining the role of the host and the affiliate up-front, and providing proactive mediation. The HPM can use these examples to help hosts think through potential challenges and how they might respond in a way that upholds healthy boundaries and respects all parties’ needs.

### Example #1

*A Tigrinya-speaking guest experienced a lot of anxiety about her inability to read letters or understand phone calls coming from social services and immigration agencies in English. Since her host spoke English, she insisted that her host help interpret for her, though her host did not speak Tigrinya. At the beginning, the host would try, but since they did not have language in common, it was challenging to explain the meaning of a phone call or the content of a letter. The guest became frustrated, but didn't know who else to turn to, so she continued to insist that her host help her. Her host felt desperate and overwhelmed; if she were trying to take space for herself in her room, the guest would continuously knock, asking for help that the host didn't know how to give.*

Ideally, the guest would be able to reach out to a caseworker and interpreter at the sponsor organization. If the guest did not reach out, the host should be able to reach out and ask for mediation assistance. The Hosting Program Manager (HPM) could also support the guest and host by learning about this issue during check-ins and finding someone (inside the organization, at a partner agency, or a volunteer) to take some of the weight off of the host. The HPM could also remind the guest that it is not the host's role to assist with social services questions, needs, or goals; the host may not be qualified or available. If the issue persisted, the HPM could check with the host and guest to see if relocation may be necessary.

### Example #2

*A husband and wife stayed with a host for 3 months. During that time, the husband worked long days, and the wife was home alone. She didn't have connections in the community, didn't speak English, and rarely left the house. When the host got home from her job teaching high school, the wife would want to spend the rest of the evening with her. The host was compassionate to the wife's situation, because the wife was socially isolated, but the host was exhausted after her social, emotionally involved job, and craved alone time to recuperate. The wife was determined to hang out with the host most evenings, and the host didn't know how to turn down her offers to spend time together immediately after work. Without finding a way to get alone time in their shared apartment, the host eventually got burnt out and did not wish to host again after the couple moved out.*

Ideally, the HPM could help the wife understand that the host needs alone time and is not expected to socialize with the guests every day. The HPM could connect the client to an employment specialist to find work, help the client brainstorm other areas to find social connections (houses of worship, recreation centers, women's groups, English class, etc.), and/or involve volunteers to take the wife on field trips to get to know the city and meet others in the community. Field trips and social outings would also offer the host some alone time in her home. The HPM could also arrange for an interpreter to join a mediation conversation so that the host could clearly and compassionately explain to the wife that she's exhausted in the evenings and needs time to herself but would be (for example) happy to share a meal once or twice a week.

### Example #3

*A guest stayed with a family in a suburban area where public transportation access was limited. The hosts felt responsible for the guest's transportation and would drive 40 minutes across town multiple nights a week, just for English class. They felt obligated to undertake a lot of the guest's acculturation and social services needs, as well, since they were far from other agencies that could have helped.*

Ideally, the affiliate would offer transit cultural orientation to help the guest become accustomed to taking public transportation—even if travel times are long, learning to navigate transit is important for self-sufficiency. If the guest was interested in bike riding, the affiliate could also look into acquiring a bike for the guest as an alternate form of transportation. Volunteers from the organization might have been able to help defray the burden of driving the guest to English class and other appointments. The HPM might have been able to work with the client's case manager to help coordinate virtual meetings for ESL and/or social service applications so that the hosts would not have had to drive so much. It would have been prudent to discuss how much transportation assistance the hosts would be willing to provide and how much the agency would need to supplement beforehand. Ultimately, however, it may not always be possible to accommodate transportation to and from a location far from an affiliate's office; thus, finding hosts with adequate access to public transit should be a priority.

## Trauma-Informed Hosting: A Guide for Hosts

Trauma and enduring psychological hardship are common experiences among refugee populations. The experience of trauma and feeling overwhelmed may start in one's home country and continue into the migration journey and the process of settling in a new country. During resettlement, new stressors that refugees may experience include "discrimination, loss of cultural connection and identity, loss of community, social isolation, language barriers, poverty, substandard living conditions, and homelessness," which may compound lasting anxiety from the experiences of war, torture, violence, natural disasters, incarceration, and family separation that they may have undergone (Clervil et al., 2013).

Traumatic events can cause long-lasting consequences to the mind and body. "Nightmares or flashbacks; agitation, irritability, and anxiety; hypervigilance; trouble concentrating; and feeling numb or disconnected" are common symptoms following an acute traumatic event (Clervil et al., 2013). Symptoms of PTSD can also include hyperarousal, hypervigilance, insomnia, depression, disassociation, numbness, social isolation, low self-worth, impulsiveness, and drug and alcohol abuse. A wide range of chronic physical and mental health conditions are associated with experiences of acute trauma.

An individual's ability to recover from a traumatic event is influenced by a variety of factors, including the intensity of the event, coping habits, and depth of supportive community. "Strong social support networks are protective and enhance individual and family resilience...However, for displaced individuals and families, these natural support systems that act to protect us following

traumatic events are themselves disrupted” (Clervil et al., 2013). These supportive social networks can be rebuilt in resettlement countries, but the process of building deep, reciprocal, trusting relationships takes time. New immigrants who do not speak English are particularly susceptible to social isolation.

*Quote from a host, “The most important initial thing is to recognize that you are providing safety, stability, and security for somebody who has likely experienced none of those for a long time.”*

The convivial nature of hosting programs for refugees can buffer against social isolation by enabling integration into new communities and facilitating the start of new supportive relationships. As trauma expert Dr. Bessel van der Kolk writes, “Numerous studies of disaster response around the globe have shown that social support is the most powerful protection against becoming overwhelmed by stress and trauma” (van der Kolk, 2015). In safe and welcoming hosting arrangements, guests might find the support needed to begin healing.

Given the prevalence of trauma among refugees, basic training on trauma and trauma-informed care can help hosts provide safe environments that support the wellbeing of both guests and hosts.

### **What is Trauma-Informed Care?**

“Traumatic experiences violate our fundamental belief that the world is a safe place and people can be trusted” (Clervil et al., 2013). Thus, the number one priority in trauma-informed care is safeguarding physical and emotional safety. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), trauma-informed care calls on organizations and individuals to understand the long-term impact of trauma; recognize the common signs and symptoms of trauma; integrate knowledge about trauma into everyday practices, behaviors, and spaces; adopt compassionate and nonjudgmental mindsets; avoid triggering or re-traumatization; encourage healing; offer safe, friendly, respectful, and welcoming environments; and enable restorative, trusting relationships (SAMSHA, 2014). To fully adopt a trauma-informed framework, affiliates should help hosts understand that their guests’ “behaviors, responses, attitudes, and emotions” may be “a collection of survival skills developed in response to traumatic experiences” (Clervil et al., 2013).

*Quote from a host: “There needs to be preparation for sensitivity to trauma. Hosts need to know that when you’re living with someone who’s a refugee, they’re fleeing their country for a reason. The level of trauma is unknown to the host family. You might be dealing with someone who has active PTSD or active trauma symptoms, or latent ones. They [the host family] need to be prepared.”*

### **Principles of Trauma-Informed Care in Refugee Hosting**

Various agencies and research centers define the principles of trauma-informed care slightly differently. Here is a summary of the main messages, as well as some examples of how to apply the principles in practice in a hosting environment (Office of Readiness and Response, 2020; The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care, 2015; Trauma Informed Oregon, 2023). The models of applying the principles of trauma-informed care in a refugee hosting arrangement are

examples that may or may not be relevant to each host, depending on the agreed upon boundaries and expectations of host/guest interaction.

Principle	Definition	In Action
<b>Safety</b>	Prioritizing physical and emotional safety; “For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow, we need a visceral feeling of safety” (van der Kolk, 2015).	Guests live in a safe and sanitary environment, where common areas are welcoming, privacy is respected, cohabitants are kind and courteous, and basic needs are met.
<b>Choice</b>	Ensuring individuals have choice and control over decisions that affect them	Guests choose if and when to accept an invitation to eat dinner with the host family or whether to accompany the host family on a weekend trip.
<b>Collaboration</b>	Making decisions jointly and sharing power	Guests have a significant role in shared decisions. When setting and agreeing on expectations before move-in, guests should have the opportunity to actively contribute to expectations and boundary-setting about privacy, household responsibilities, and noise.
<b>Peer Support + Reciprocity</b>	Building trust, community, and a sense of belonging through positive, authentic, and safe relationships.	Guests have opportunities to give and take; for example, they cook a meal from their home country for the host family or they teach the host family how to play a sport they love. The host family encourages and participates in opportunities to learn about their guest’s



		<p>culture and interests. Guests also have contacts outside of the host home (their case manager and/or volunteers) who they feel safe reaching out to.</p>
<b>Trust + Transparency</b>	<p>Establishing clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries</p>	<p>Guests and hosts talk openly about expectations before move-in (i.e., host cannot help guests with legal questions, or guest needs alone time at night after work) and maintain agreed upon boundaries throughout the hosting experience.</p>
<b>Empowerment + Agency</b>	<p>Enabling skill-building and opportunities for growth, leadership, and self-sufficiency; instilling hope</p>	<p>If guest is tentative about navigating public transit from host's home, host affirms that riding transit in a new country is challenging, offers guidance, and encourages guest, emphasizing guest's unique strengths and competencies. Guest builds confidence riding alone, and host celebrates and affirms guest's accomplishment.</p>
<b>Humility + Responsiveness</b>	<p>Recognizing and undoing personal bias, developing cultural competence; honoring the healing power in cultural traditions and connections, understanding the impact of social identities on experiences of and recovery from trauma</p>	<p>Host helps guest locate a house of worship that offers services in guest's home language; host educates themselves about racial/gender oppression; host takes an active interest in, makes space for the expression of, and is</p>

		respectful of guest's home culture and religion
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## Further Learning

Hosts can learn more about trauma-related topics, including the effects of traumatic experiences, common stressors for refugee populations, cultural differences in discussions of mental health, and self-care/ the impact of vicarious trauma.

*Quote from a host: "They show up at your house and it takes a while before they can decompress and feel at home, because they don't know if they can trust you. We might look nice enough, but we're strangers. And there's usually some trauma underlying that. So let them take their time to feel like they've found a safe space and can relax."*

Suggested materials for further learning about trauma:

1. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, Body in the Healing of Trauma*, by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk
2. *Wounded I Am More Awake: Finding Meaning after Terror*, by Esad Boskailo and Julia Lieblich
3. *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*, by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk
4. [Training](#) on Trauma-Informed Care for Displaced Individuals
5. [Training](#) on Developing Cultural Competency
6. [Toolkit](#): Trauma-Informed Care for Displaced Populations, a Guide for Community-Based Service Providers
7. [Chapter](#): Core Competencies in Working with Survivors
8. [Webinar](#): A Trauma-Informed Understanding of Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Video

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