

Hakafa Refugee Volunteers Guide

Thank you so much for agreeing to work with our refugee families! We hope this is a wonderful experience. Below are some suggestions that we hope help. This is just basic information and certainly not a comprehensive guide. One of the best parts of working with our families is working with our other volunteers. Brainstorming and discussion will be much more helpful than this document, but hopefully this will help at the beginning. Please ask if you have questions.

Getting Started

Please send a selfie and your cell number to Allison Stein at ajzstein@gmail.com. Allison will share this with our family to help them get to know us.

You will see an email from Refugee One authorizing a background check. Please respond. They require this for all volunteers.

What Refugee One does

Refugee One does the “heavy lifting”

- Arranges/furnishes the apartment
- Registers kids for school
- Takes the family for medical appointments upon arrival
- Takes the family for a cell phone
- Enrolls them in public benefits (SNAP/WIC)
- English classes
- Employment assistance
- Mental health services if needed

How do we help

These are examples of some ways we may help. For our families who come from refugee camps, the adjustment is hardest. Some families don't need help with all of these things (i.e, they may already be familiar with cell phones), and some get help from people other than us (friend/neighbor/caseworker).

- Friendship/answering questions
- Getting to know Chicago/learning their neighborhood
- Practicing English
- Grocery shopping (how to use WIC checks - see below)
- Budgeting
- Opening a checking account - Look for a bank that is close, with few fees.
- Writing checks/paying bills
- Medical appointments after initial round (if help is needed).

- Birth control - we don't have to have this conversation but may want to ask if we are at a doctor's appointment if the doctor/nurse can do it. You can also discuss yourself.
- Parenting (discipline norms, safety issues (not leaving kids home alone, car seats))
- Working with schools
- Using a cell phone - texting, adding contacts
- Introducing to new foods - Many of our refugees like the familiar foods from home and there are groceries in the area that will stock them. It is good for them to also get familiar with unfamiliar foods which may be easier to get (closer grocery stores may stock) and cheaper. If you bring them foods, make sure that they know what they are and how to heat/ prepare. I got funny looks when I bought an African family soup and tried to explain that it was eaten warm with a spoon. I had another African family who poured milk over uncooked oatmeal.
- Staying warm - likely not an issue for a Russian family but these are general suggestions.

Refugee One rarely visits after the first week. However, upon arriving, the refugees usually go to Refugee One Mondays-Thursdays during the day for intake, English classes, employment assistance, etc. Refugee One isn't opened much in December so the family may be slow getting started. We are the "in home" help but can call on Refugee One for support.

Staying in touch

Our refugees all have phones after the first few days. If you don't speak their language, you can either use google translate to text with them, or call upon one of our Russian speakers to help you.

Refugee One puts together a google document for us to record meeting notes, most of our volunteers find it is easier to send each other emails, or texts than use the google document. For at least the initial period, please try to use the google document because it helps Refugee One know what is going on. Any communication between our volunteers is helpful - we're all in/out and good to know where there are open issues/updates.

Money matters

Our goal is to help our families become self sufficient. It is fine (and good) to take them somewhere they can't afford/bring them a small gift (fresh fruit, a toy, baked goods, American food to try). However, we want to help them learn to live within their means. You are not expected to spend large amounts of money on the family. We can call on the Congregation to donate additional items (e.g., coats); we also have money that has been donated which we can use for unexpected items (e.g, we bought an air conditioner for a family living in a very hot apartment).

The family will receive food stamps (Link card). The Link card contains both money that must be used for food and cash assistance that they can use for items not covered by food stamps. They will likely also qualify for WIC (Women Infants and Children Nutrition Assistance). WIC benefits are checks that the family receives which lists specific items that they can purchase. The list is very detailed and the check can only be used for that specific item (e.g., the specific size, brand, etc.). Items covered by WIC are usually marked in the store.

RefugeeOne pays full rent for clients for the first three months they are in Chicago. The fourth month, refugees pay a portion of their cash assistance towards their rent. The fifth month, they are on their own.

Refugee One gives clients a one month bus pass which is usually used the first month they are here. After that, they add money from their cash benefits from DHS for transportation.

We will receive and share additional information from Refugee One about their finances.