

# HOSTING GUIDEBOOK



In partnership with



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## What is the need?

An asylum seeker or refugee is a person who has fled their home country due to persecution or well-founded fear of persecution, for the reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Currently the most visible example is the millions of Syrians who have fled civil war over recent years, or Eritrean nationals fleeing the military dictatorship. Many asylum seekers endure months of dangerous sea and land crossings to get to countries who are signed up to the UN convention requiring them to give protection to genuine asylum seekers.

Vulnerable migrants may have arrived in the UK on a visitor or student visa, for example, and due to a change in circumstances need to submit an application to the Home Office to extend their leave or even claim asylum. As with asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants have no recourse to public funds so cannot get support from a lot of housing charities. This leaves homeless vulnerable migrants in the UK with little or no support, making hosting a lifeline while they apply for leave to remain.

The UK has a long history of giving sanctuary to people fleeing persecution and our system is meant to ensure that these people are treated with humanity and fairness. However, every year thousands of refugees and asylum seekers find themselves in situations of destitution in the UK. Destitution can affect people at all stages of the asylum process: when people first arrive; when people are waiting for an outcome on their asylum claim, are not allowed to work and experience difficulties or delays accessing asylum support; when people are granted legal permission to stay but have problems accessing mainstream support; when people have had their asylum claims refused and government support is withdrawn but are too fearful to return home.

People can often reach the end of the asylum process without having their protection needs recognised. This is because decision making by the authorities is not always as robust as it could be and asylum seekers often struggle to access good legal advice to present the claims to the Home Office. According to Home Office statistics for 2015 53% of asylum seekers were refused permission to remain in the UK on their initial asylum submission. But around 63% of refused claims go to appeal and some 38.2% of these appeals are upheld<sup>1</sup>.

Numbers surrounding vulnerable migrants are less easy to collate, but with the increase in Home Office fees and growing complexity of application forms, the number of vulnerable, undocumented migrant numbers look set to rise. Similarly, we do not know how many refused asylum seekers there are in the Thames Valley area but agencies working with Sanctuary Hosting estimate there are around 1000 asylum seekers, of whom a significant proportion are people who have had their claims refused.

Destitute, refused, asylum seekers often have to rely on the kindness of friends and the support of community, faith and charitable organisations. In many cases people end up street homeless, sofa-surfing or living in overcrowded conditions. Destitution can make people vulnerable to exploitation and lead to physical and mental health problems.

## Who is Sanctuary Hosting?

The idea of a hosting scheme is not new and other community groups, such as Namaste, have set-up the foundations for a hosting network in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons (2016) Briefing Paper, [Asylum Statistics](#)

There are also numerous examples of successful hosting schemes around the UK. **Sanctuary Hosting** is supported by a network of local charities and individuals. By serving as a link to other local services, Sanctuary Hosting is able to harness wide-ranging support in the community and focus it into this project, allowing us to help destitute asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants and refugees in an organized and well thought-out way for both asylum seeker and host.

Sanctuary Hosting aims to match those who are homeless and without recourse to public funds or who are waiting for benefit decisions to hosts who can offer spare rooms in their own homes. We are happy to help in any way we can during the hosting process, but please keep in mind Sanctuary Hosting is an almost entirely volunteer-based community group and has just become a registered charity in May 2017. Our main role is to act as an initial link to match those in need with those willing to open their homes to them.

Access to food banks that can help provide guests with some groceries. The British Red Cross can also provide practical and in some cases limited financial destitution support directly from the Red Cross office in Abingdon or Milton Keynes or in Oxford via its based partners Asylum Welcome and Refugee Resource. However, please note the provision of this support is discretionary and based on a case-by-case needs assessment. In Reading, Reading Refugee Support Group provides a wide-range of services helping asylum seekers with advice, education, language, life skills and housing support.

For contact details of the above agencies please see page 11. For further information, resources and reports on the causes and effects of destitution, as well as general information on asylum in the UK see **Annex 1**.

## What does a Volunteer Host do?

A Host is someone who generously accommodates a refugee, asylum seeker or vulnerable migrant in their own home. This is usually in a spare room.

It is up to the host to decide how long they are willing to accommodate someone. This could be for just a few days – or considerably longer. You can always decide to extend the period of time you are offering if things are going really well, but we recommend always making it clear when the arrangement is due to end.

We aim to be as flexible as possible. You can decide your own living arrangements with your guest, including whether or not they can have a key and if they can be home during the day alone or should be out of the house during certain hours. If you go on holiday or ever need a break we can try to arrange another host to cover for you (but please give as much notice as possible). If you need your room back suddenly, Sanctuary Hosting may be able find an alternative host/room for the guest.



We will try to support you throughout the process. If you have any questions or concerns, please do get in touch.

## How do I become a Host?

Firstly, talk the implications of hosting through with your family and make sure your children and any other adults living with you are “on board” and in complete agreement with hosting, before you go further with your enquiry with the hosting scheme. It is good to explain to them why your potential guest has nowhere else to go.

Then get in touch with Sanctuary Hosting ([info@sanctuaryhosting.org](mailto:info@sanctuaryhosting.org)). We will take your details, send you information and answer any questions.

We will arrange to meet with you to discuss the hosting process and what you feel able to offer. We will also take character references and complete DBS checks to ensure your suitability as a host.

When homeless, refugees, vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers are referred to us we will meet each person before placing them with a host. We will not place people with known alcohol or drug problems, with aggressive behaviour, serious criminal convictions or severe mental health problems.

We will then contact available hosts by phone or email to ask if you are able to host someone.

We will try our best to match hosts with suitable guests. For example, we will not ask a single lady to host a man, unless they specify that this is ok. This matching process is accomplished through a series of detailed questionnaire and application forms, and a preliminary meeting usually in a neutral location between the host, the potential guest and a member of the Sanctuary Hosting team.

Then, if the situation is still agreeable to you and the guest we will arrange a further meeting in your home. A simple contract will be signed to ensure your guest understands their living arrangements and how long they can stay. We will try to ensure that these and all expectations are made clear and explicit from the outset.

We will call the host and guest individually during the first few days and weeks of a new hosting situation. This allows both host and guest to privately discuss any concerns they have with the placement and to avoid any larger issues or concerns from developing.

## Hosting Guidelines

### **Cultural awareness**

Culture can encompass many different aspects of a person - language, beliefs, values, customs, communication styles and food, to name but a few. Our cultural identity can also involve negotiating a mix of values, norms and lifestyles associated with the different groups that we belong to or spend time with.



It's most likely that your guest will have a different cultural background from you, but rather than viewing this as a challenge to the relationship, it is important to recognise that the very activity of hosting offers the opportunity to counteract prejudices and gives both of you the opportunity to learn about different ways of life. Many hosts go on to report that they find it an enriching experience

In your relationship with your guest, try to be both culturally curious AND culturally sensitive. Try to be open to learning and appreciating both your differences and similarities so that you can learn from each other. Try to use these simple steps in your hosting role, regardless of how similar or different your culture is from that of your guest:

- Accept that your way may be right for you, but might not be right for your guest based on sets of internalised values, ethics and customs
- Be honest when examining your own prejudices and stereotypes
- Try to identify how common biases can come into being and the history that surrounds these
- Understand the common threads that can bind people together such as a shared vision of poverty reduction – use these threads to help overcome cultural barriers

We are often unaware of how culture shapes us as it's intrinsic to our being – when confronted with another culture we may feel a bit uneasy. It's okay to feel like this as long as you understand that this discomfort may simply be from our own belief and value system being challenged with a different system. Use the opportunity to reflect these differences, and try to understand their point of view even when it goes against your own experiences and ideas.

Also try to consider these cultural differences when meeting with your guest initially;

**Greetings:** Some cultures do not greet each other with a handshake or offer a soft handshake rather than a firm one. Pausing briefly to allow someone to lead the greeting is a good way to learn their norm for saying hello. Also, some avoid using first names upon meeting people for the first time and use Mr or Ms – let them know how you prefer to be addressed e.g. first name etc. Also remember it is fine to ask them how they would like to be addressed by you – you don't have to guess at this.

**Religious:** There are many differences that may need discussion e.g. how food is prepared, how people observe prayer times and religious festivals. Try to not assume things – it is fine to ask. Sanctuary Hosting may also be able to offer guidance.

**Body language:** For example, some cultures may avoid direct eye contact. It may be advisable to avoid too much direct eye contact with those that appear uncomfortable with it.

**Language:** Remember that your guest may not speak English as a first language. Sometimes they may use words or phrases inappropriately by mistake; this may seem offensive or give another meaning than intended. Always clarify things before jumping

to conclusions about something that was said. Remember, 70% of communication is non-verbal, it is remarkable what can be communicated without words!

One simple example: some languages don't distinguish between the verbs 'to listen' and 'to hear' as the English language does – your guest might say over the phone '*are you listening to me?*' which may sound a bit rude in English, when they may simply have meant to say '*can you hear me?*' if the phone connection isn't very clear.

Remember, best practice is always to be **open, honest** and inquisitive rather than make assumptions – it may even be that people have fled their country of origin because they were persecuted after they broke established cultural norms and behaviours.

Ask them if there are places or activities that they do not want to go to or do, ask them about times to complete different household activities for both of you, ask if you think you've misunderstood something they've said etc.



### **How well will my guest fit in?**

You may be 'culturally challenged' by hosting someone. It is unlikely that your guest will be used to doing things exactly the way you do, especially if they come from a different culture and climate, and even more if they have not been in the UK for long! However, since it is your home, you can set the parameters and we suggest that you do this explicitly – rather than expecting them just to know.

We recommend setting simple house rules e.g. about mealtimes; use of the bathroom, washing machine, TV; when you want quiet; definition of guest's space; where you want bags etc. to be kept. It is also good to set the parameters regarding visits from friends, so there is no misunderstanding.

If you would like your guest to contribute, along with the other members of your household, to the daily household tasks then please explain this to the guest before they move in. Some guests will like to think that they can contribute something in return for your hospitality, so don't be afraid to say 'yes' if they offer!

### **Do I have to cook for my guest?**

It is completely up to you. If you would like, you can cook for them or share the cooking or cook for them only occasionally. If you are eating together you will want to find out if there are foods your guests do not eat (e.g. most Muslims will not eat pork).

Alternatively, you can let your guest cook all their own food. If your guest needs help accessing food, Sanctuary Hosting can refer them to a local refugee agency to provide a basic food parcel or free meals.

If you are sharing your kitchen you will want to clarify when you need space to cook and how soon after cooking you like to tidy away. For many cultures the concept of sharing another person's kitchen takes a lot of getting used to – as does the concept of "helping yourself" – don't be surprised if your guest simply doesn't!

### **Do I have to give my guest a key?**

Again, you can decide this for yourself. It is reasonable to expect your guest to leave the house when you go out, at least for the first few days. If and when you give them a key is entirely up to you, but you do need to consider a couple of things: If you want them to leave early in the morning, do they have somewhere they can go? Also, if you are often out in the evenings, will it be easier to let them have a key?

Do not feel obliged to leave strangers in your home alone. During daytime there is often a library open or they may be able to attend a nearby day centre. Your guest may also get involved in other activities that local organisations run and we may be able to get help with travel for the guest to take part in community activities. However, unless you are open to trusting your guests, the placement may not work too well in the medium to long term.

### **Will hosting mean I have to pay additional costs?**

Having a guest should not be expensive – but it may add to your living costs if you are a long term host. If your property is rented, you may have to pay extra for an additional person. If you are single, your council tax is likely to go up if you have someone for more than three months.

Incidents of theft in hosting schemes are extremely rare, but you may want to check your insurance policy just in case. For this purpose the person you are hosting can be defined as 'guest'.

The hosting scheme may also be able to help by providing cheap or even free furniture, bedding and other essentials — just ask.

### **Should I give money to my guest?**

Please do not be tempted to do this! It sets precedent that you will help financially again and also means different individuals will have differing amounts of support available. If your guest has ongoing financial difficulties, please raise the matter with Sanctuary Hosting who may be able to advise on other options.

## **PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

As a volunteer, you have a responsibility to maintain a professional attitude and adhere to clear boundaries. This will ensure that your voluntary role is not jeopardised in any way and allows you to carry out your responsibilities appropriately. It also ensures that we are able to provide an equal level of service to all users, protects both hosts and guests in their roles, and protects the integrity of the project as a whole.

When performing your volunteer duties, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Be clear to the person you are working with that you are performing your duties as a volunteer to ensure that the working relationship is not misread or confused.
2. Do not engage in any inappropriate sexual innuendo or behaviour. Also be aware of how people can misinterpret behaviour.



3. Do not accept gifts from users if this could be interpreted as being given in return for preferential treatment. Where it is difficult to refuse a gift, please contact Sanctuary Hosting for guidance. See 'Gift Giving' section below.
4. Respond to any inappropriate behaviour immediately and seek guidance from Sanctuary Hosting.

### **Gift giving**

Gifts are given for many reasons, and forbidding it can actually be harmful to a relationship. Nonetheless there are some concrete rules that need to be followed when it comes to accepting gifts. Cash gifts should **never** be accepted.

The following elements may be used to assess the appropriateness of the gift:

Personal gain: relative value to the giver and recipient.

Intent: was the gift solicited or coerced? Is there an expectation of different care or support after receiving a gift?

Cultural/religious factors: Was the gift given for a particular occasion where gifts are given as the norm?

### **Talking about Asylum**

As refugees and asylum seekers, guests have fled their country of origin because they felt unsafe and feared persecution. Some have left family and friends behind, lost out on educational or employment opportunities and/or experienced conflict and trauma.

You may find that your guest is reluctant to talk about their home or how things used to be before they came to the UK – or you may find the opposite as they enjoy talking about their lives even if this touches upon difficult memories. **Don't make assumptions** – each person is different and experiences the asylum process in their own way. It is important to let your guest set the boundaries around their personal situation and history. The role of a host is to provide a safe place for guests to be sheltered, clothed and fed and is NOT necessarily to be a friend or mentor.

### **Will I need to help my guest with their asylum or immigration case?**

You should not get involved with your guest's case. There are strict rules around helping with immigration cases and it protects you if you do not get involved. If they would like advice they should arrange to see a specialist agency – we can help to refer them if necessary. These specialist agencies may be able to help them to gather fresh evidence to submit a new asylum claim. They may also be able to help pay bus fares to solicitors or for hospital appointments, so please encourage your guest to seek assistance from relevant agencies (or Sanctuary Hosting can help signpost where help might be available). Experience in hosting schemes is that, often, just the fact that someone at last is offered a safe environment enables them to go on to make a successful claim for refugee status. As soon as they are granted this they can enjoy the same rights as other citizens to work and to receive benefits and accommodation. In

this way hosts often enable guests to turn their lives around – just by providing a port in a storm.

### **Will my guest need a lot of emotional support?**

Some guests may be very independent and fit in straight away. However, many asylum seekers who have just become destitute are often in a great deal of shock. Depression is also common due to traumatic past experiences and their experience of the asylum system. Please try to understand - it may take your guest a while to learn to trust you and they may not want to talk much until they become more comfortable with you. Try to encourage your guest to keep active. They may want to join in English classes or could volunteer for a charity shop or project. If you are worried about your guest please get in touch with us or encourage them to see a GP.

If you do not have much time available to socialise and interact with your guest, please do not feel this is a barrier to being a good host, as there are other projects and forms of support we can refer your guest into. For instance, we can refer your guest to mentoring and befriending projects.

### **What if my guest needs to see a doctor?**

Asylum seekers are entitled to access all NHS healthcare services, free of charge, whilst their asylum applications are under consideration. People cannot be refused registration because they are an asylum seeker. If someone's asylum application has been fully refused but they are unable to return home they can still receive the following without charge: GP and emergency hospital treatment, NHS dental treatment, sight tests and prescriptions.

To register with a doctor people are usually asked to complete a form giving their basic details, some surgeries will also ask for photo ID and proof of address. Your guest will need a valid HC2 form in order to be exempt for paying for their prescriptions. If your guest does not have a HC2 form they will need to complete a HC1 application.

Call us if your guest needs assistance with this as we can refer to a local refugee agency who is experienced in helping asylum seekers access services. If your guest has serious medical problems take them to casualty or call an ambulance.

### **What if I have problems with my guest?**

We suggest that host and guest agree an initial trial period of up to two weeks for the placement. After this time you may well have formed a good relationship and be happy for your guests to stay, but this gives you and them the option for change. We will also call the host and guest individually during the first few days and weeks of a new hosting situation. This allows both host and guest to privately discuss any concerns they have with the placement and to avoid any larger issues or concerns from developing. If an issue does arise, we recommend that you talk this through with your guest and try to come to an agreement. If this is unsuccessful please get in touch and we will try to mediate to resolve the issue, or help bring the Hosting relationship to an end if necessary.

### **What if I want my guest to leave before the arranged time?**

You can terminate the hosting arrangement at any time, but it would be helpful to let us know in advance so that we can try to make alternative arrangements. We understand that circumstances change, and that it can be draining to be a host long term, so don't feel guilty if you need to do this.

## **Ending a hosting relationship**

Support will be provided from Sanctuary Hosting throughout the hosting relationship, but paying particular regard to the ending of a hosting relationship. Sanctuary Hosting will always look to support you where possible to move a guest to another host. Sometimes two or three hosts may work together on supporting one destitute individual so as to provide respite support to one another. We encourage and can facilitate hosts meeting one another, if they wish to, to share good practice and support one another. All guests will be moved on at the end of the agreed time period, unless both the host and guest wish to continue for a longer period of time.

## **I feel helpless**

When listening to the gravity of problems your guest is facing, it may be difficult to see how much your support can make much impact.

Remember that your guest is in a very difficult situation – if they are an asylum seeker they are essentially in 'legal limbo' and don't know when their situation will be resolved. You can understandably feel helpless in this situation, but it isn't your responsibility to resolve this issue. Sometimes there are no easy answers, and a listening ear and a chance to be heard and understood is what is needed. By providing a home you are already making an immense difference preventing homelessness from adding to their difficult situation.

Should you be dealing with difficult circumstances in your own life, and/or the circumstances that your guest has related to you weighs heavily on your mind, then please talk to us. We can offer a listening ear and help find solutions or coping strategies for you and if needed, refer you to a local refugee mentoring/befriending programme for extra guidance and support.

## **Confidentiality & Sanctuary Hosting Policies**

Hosts are considered volunteers and are responsible for adhering to all Sanctuary Hosting policies and procedures. Hosts will also be expected to sign a confidentiality agreement once approved. All personal or sensitive information about guests, other hosts or anyone else within Sanctuary Hosting is considered confidential, and cannot be shared with an outside third party without express consent of the individual. Care should also be taken to ensure that individuals within the scheme know what information is being shared about them within the organisation between hosts, guests and employees/ other volunteers, and that this is limited as much as possible while still allowing for the agreed upon services to be provided at the highest level of quality possible. Once approved, host(s) will receive further information and training on Sanctuary Hosting policies and best practise.

## **DISCLAIMER**

Please note that, whilst Sanctuary Hosting will make every effort to ensure that hosting is a positive experience for all concerned, it cannot accept any liability for private arrangements made between host and guest. Once again we would like to reiterate that we are a group of volunteers, so responses to concerns or questions will not always be immediate, though we will do our best to reply in a timely manner.

## Useful Local Contacts

**Sanctuary Hosting:** [info@sanctuaryhosting.org](mailto:info@sanctuaryhosting.org)

**Milton Keynes British Red Cross,** 3 Joplin Ct, Crownhill, Milton Keynes MK8 0JP, [01908 578344](tel:01908578344)

**Refugee Resource:** The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE, UK. [info@refugeeresource.org](mailto:info@refugeeresource.org) or 01856 403 280

**Asylum Welcome:** Unit 7, Newtec Place, Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RE, UK. [office@asylum-welcome.org](mailto:office@asylum-welcome.org) or 01865 722 082

**British Red Cross Thames Valley Refugee Support and International Family**

**Tracing services:** Red Cross House, Colwell Drive, Abingdon, OX14 1AU, UK. 01189 358 234

**Emmaus Oxford:** 171 Oxford Road, Oxford OX4 2ES, UK. [admin@emmausoxford.org](mailto:admin@emmausoxford.org) or 01865 402 073

**Reading Refugee Support Group,** London St, Reading RG1 4PS. [info@rrsg.org.uk](mailto:info@rrsg.org.uk) 0118 950 5356

## What to do in an emergency

Sanctuary Hosting is run by volunteers and is not an emergency service. If you have an emergency then please contact the emergency services in the usual way. We are happy to offer support and guidance to the best of our ability but please understand that although we will aim to arrange this as soon as we can this could take a few days.

## Guest Referrals

All referrals of potential guests are reviewed on a case by case basis. We cannot guarantee that a place will be available. We also reserve the right not to place a referral in accommodation.

**Further information and resources on refugees, asylum seekers and the effects of destitution:**

**British Red Cross** - <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Refugee-services>  
Destitution Report, 'Not gone, but forgotten' (June 2010)  
<http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/News/2010/June/New-report-calls-for-end-to-asylum-seekers-destitution>

**Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees** - <http://www.icar.org.uk/>  
Destitution Briefing  
<http://www.icar.org.uk/6575/briefings/destitution.html>

**Homeless UK** - <http://www.homeless.org.uk/migration-project>  
Homelessness among Migrant Groups: A Survey of Homelessness and Refugee Agencies across England (March 2010)  
[http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Migrants%20and%20Homelessness%20report\\_March\\_prm.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Migrants%20and%20Homelessness%20report_March_prm.pdf)

**Refugee Action** - <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/>  
Destitution in the asylum system in Leicester (June 2009)  
[http://www.refugeeaction.org.uk/information/documents/RALVSFReportfinal\\_lor\\_es\\_web.pdf](http://www.refugeeaction.org.uk/information/documents/RALVSFReportfinal_lor_es_web.pdf)

**The Destitution Trap: Research into destitution among refused asylum seekers in the UK** (November 2006) [http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/campaigns/documents/RA\\_DestReport\\_Final\\_LR.pdf](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/campaigns/documents/RA_DestReport_Final_LR.pdf)

**Refugee Council** - <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>  
Chance or Choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK (January 2010)  
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/rcchance.pdf>

**Further submissions and access to asylum support (July 2010)**

[http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/policy\\_responses/10%2008%2020%20Advocacy%20briefing%20on%20further%20subs%20and%20destitution.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/policy_responses/10%2008%2020%20Advocacy%20briefing%20on%20further%20subs%20and%20destitution.pdf)

**Oxfam** - <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/>  
Coping with Destitution: Survival and livelihood strategies of refused asylum seekers living in the UK (February 2011)  
[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/right\\_heard/coping-with-destitutionsurvival-strategies-uk.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/right_heard/coping-with-destitutionsurvival-strategies-uk.html)