

Frequently asked questions

about becoming a host with Sanctuary Hosting

How does hosting work?

Individuals and families – ‘hosts’ - offer a spare room in their home to a refugee, asylum seeker or vulnerable migrant who is homeless. These are our ‘guests’.

How do I know if I’d be eligible to host?

Hosts need to have a spare room they can make available, along with access to kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities. If you only have a sofa bed, please consider being an emergency host - sometimes we need to find a room for someone at short notice, for just a weekend or few days while we look for other options.

You need to be in a town/city or on a reliable public transport route. Guests may need access to their caseworker, English classes, groups run by voluntary organisations, a place of worship and so on – so very rural areas without good transport links can be difficult.

And of course, you need to understand the nature of hosting - for example, guests are not carers or cleaners – and be happy to work within Sanctuary Hosting’s guidelines.

After you apply, we will arrange an informal interview which will provide plenty of opportunity to find out more about hosting and ask any questions. After this, it’s absolutely fine if you decide that hosting is not for you.

How often would I be hosting? And for how long?

There is always a trial period of one to two weeks to check that both host and guest are happy with the placement.

After that, it is up to you how long the arrangement lasts. Some guests are hosted for just a couple of weeks, others for several months, so there is no ‘typical’ stay. We are always flexible and understand that circumstances change. So if, for example, you plan a holiday or have visitors coming or simply want a break, we will find another placement for the guest. Of course, it helps to have a reasonable amount of notice.

Just as you have control over how long a guest stays, you can also say if you want to host continuously, take breaks between guests, or specify particular periods of time (eg you may need the room back during university holidays). It is not uncommon for guests to stay with several different hosts during their time on the scheme, and Sanctuary Hosting takes full responsibility for managing placements and moving guests around as necessary.

Who would I be hosting?

Individuals are usually referred to Sanctuary Hosting by organisations such as the Red Cross and refugee support charities. To be taken onto the scheme, guests must be:

- either homeless or about to be homeless in the Thames Valley Area (we consider referrals from outside the Thames Valley only in exceptional circumstances)

- from another country and with a strong reason (other than economic) for not wanting to go back there
- 18 or over (we don't house children)
- willing to accept any reasonable accommodation that is offered to them, including Home Office accommodation

In addition, they must not have: an alcohol or drug problem; any history of violence; a serious mental health condition. We are not able to place those who have (as far as we are aware) a high level of additional support needs. We check guests as far as we are able, by taking up two references, where possible from people who have known them in a professional capacity. We meet all guests before a placement is made, and guests are expected to have someone who is progressing their asylum or immigration case such as a solicitor or Red Cross caseworker. The scheme is intended as a short-term solution, with the aim of providing people with the time, space and safety they need to find ways of moving forward.

We will always respect your wishes with regard to hosting. For example, female hosts may prefer to have women guests. Before making a placement, we will tell you a bit about the person, including language, dietary requirements and if possible something about their interests. We do not share guests' personal stories or details of the reasons they have come to the UK, unless they ask us to do so.

Would I need to provide meals?

It is entirely up to you whether you provide meals, ask the guest to be entirely self-catering, or share meals occasionally. Like other practical aspects of the hosting arrangement, this will be discussed when you and the guest are introduced to each other, and before you make a final decision about hosting an individual guest. A support worker will take you through a host/guest agreement that covers use of the kitchen and other facilities, issues around lifestyle eg the hours you keep, and anything you want to highlight about security, pets or any other areas.

Will I get involved in my guest's immigration case?

No. Other professionals or volunteers help with their immigration/asylum case, emotional well-being, financial situation and access to services and activities. There's more about this below, but in general hosts provide a safe space along with a bit of human interaction; other than that, we recommend they go about their own daily business as usual. The offer of a welcoming place to stay can be life-changing and is enough on its own to make a big difference to someone's life.

Will it cost me extra to host?

Having a guest may add a little to your living costs but in general it should not cost very much. 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. And if you receive housing benefit, guests staying for longer periods can affect your entitlement, so it is a good idea to check with your local authority.

Whether or not you share meals with your guest, most hosts choose to provide basics such as bread, milk and washing powder.

Incidents of theft in hosting schemes are extremely rare, but we would always advise you to check your insurance policy. When you have a new guest, it may be advisable not to leave high value items lying around.

We ask hosts *not* to give money to their guest. It creates a precedent, sets expectations and creates inequality within the hosting scheme. If a guest has no money and is not able to access asylum support, Sanctuary Hosting or the Red Cross may be able to provide a small weekly amount. We can also often help with transport costs.

What support will I get?

When a placement is made, both host and guest are allocated a volunteer support worker. Your host support worker will check in with you regularly to ensure the placement is going well, discuss any questions you have, and ensure any concerns are addressed quickly. Sanctuary Hosting staff are also available to provide support. We ask you to note that hosting is an entirely voluntary arrangement and Sanctuary Hosting cannot take responsibility for issues that may arise. However, problems are rare and the support worker structure means that most issues are picked up and resolved quickly.

After completing the induction training, all volunteers get a copy of Sanctuary Hosting's volunteer handbook.

What if a guest's asylum claim is turned down - is it legal to host them?

You would only be breaking the law if you helped someone who had committed a crime or escaped from a detention centre to hide from the authorities, or if you deliberately withheld information requested from you by an official.

Can I talk to someone before I apply?

We are delighted to have a chat and answer any further questions you may have. Please [email](#) us with your phone number and availability. It would be helpful if you could give an indication of what you would like to discuss.