



## What sort of help might a recently arrived refugee need?

### Welcome!

Firstly and foremost, refugees need to feel welcome. Having experienced the worst forms of hostility, many refugees will be nervous about how their new communities will behave towards them. A friendly smile and 'Hello' can go a long way to relieving this fear and making people feel wanted. Whereas many will be able to understand what you say, some won't yet have much English and being greeted in their own language can be a great icebreaker. Most Syrians speak Arabic and the Arabic for welcome sounds like "*Ahlan Wa Sahlan*". You can also write a message of Welcome on our [Welcome Wall](#).

### Getting Around

Like all of us when we arrive in a new town or city, it can be really difficult to learn how to get around. A newly arrived refugee might not yet know the key places they need to go to and it can be really hard to learn to use a public transport system. Do you buy the ticket on the bus or in a shop? Do you get a day ticket or a return? And that's before you get to timetables or planning more complex journeys. Learning how to get around can be really difficult. So if you meet a newcomer who's struggling, they'll be really grateful for an offer of help with directions or learning where to go.

### Conversational English

Some refugees have perfect English. We know many who have studied university courses in English. Others may have enough to get by but need help with the odd word or two. Some can't say more than Hello, Please or Thank you. And some might not even be literate in their own language. We've never met a refugee in the UK who hasn't wanted to speak English but learning a language can take time. Whereas formal courses can help people improve, these can have long waiting lists and whereas they can lead to qualifications and the correct use of grammar, they might not immediately teach people the specific language that people in their specific circumstances might need. Roleplaying how to ask for a particular food in a shop or a specific location when getting on a bus can really help. And so can learning the local lingo for wherever you are.

### Patience

Rights and entitlements, school timetables, tenancy agreements, bin collections; people can be overwhelmed with new information and tasks that need carrying out



when they first arrive. If you're providing information to a newly arrived refugee, keep it to a minimum, make sure it's information they actually need, use simple language and an interpreter if you need one and agree when it's time to take a break or leave it for the day. We all reach a point where we are saturated with new information and refugees can find themselves overloaded if we try to tell them too much all at once.

As anyone who's visited a country with another currency knows, learning which coin or note is which can take quite a while and it can be embarrassing at a shop checkout when there's a queue behind you – and even more so if you're struggling to communicate with the cashier. Although conditions in the refugee camps vary, the kind of accommodation Syrians are typically familiar with isn't hugely different to accommodation in the UK. But refugees from elsewhere might struggle with working out what goes in which bin and what goes down the drain – or even telling which house is which as they sometimes all look the same! Settling in can take a while and your new neighbours will really benefit from patience, understanding and maybe a friendly conversation to point them in the right direction when it's needed.

## **Professional Support**

Depending on their needs, a refugee family may have contact with any number of professionals. An asylum seeker might have a legal adviser. A refugee child might receive additional help at school. There might be a housing officer. If their experiences have caused health problems or disabilities, there could be many others. Support is best provided when it is tailored to the individual's needs and when organisations work together in partnership. Sometimes people need help to access the support they need – sometimes just knowing about it or where to go but other times a service might need some friendly nudging to provide what's required. Clear boundaries between different people working with a refugee family are essential in order for the family to have a good understanding of who they should go to for different things. Support for refugees is at its most effective when it seeks to promote independence rather than doing things for people if they are capable of doing whatever it is themselves.

## **Friendship**

Overall, the best way to help a newly arrived refugee is to befriend them. Being forced to leave your home can be a traumatic experience and for many - as well as losing their home country, many will have lost friends and family before arriving here. Rather than being 'helped' socialising can really help a refugee move on from what they've lost and rebuild their lives in their new country.