

## How to be a successful Volunteer with *Know Your Neighbor*



Congratulations! You have now been matched with your new refugee friend through the Know Your Neighbor (KYN) program. In this document, we have set out to provide useful guidance to better ensure success for you and your match, and to give examples of volunteer opportunities with KYN.

To begin, there is a fundamental principle to which all who come to understand the refugee resettlement process try to adhere : *Integration for the refugee*. The [UNHRC](#) describes integration thusly:

“The integration of refugees is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population. The process of integration is complex and gradual, comprising distinct but interrelated legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions, all of which are important for refugees’ ability to integrate successfully as fully included members of the host society.”

We hope you can see how important your role is as a volunteer and how it fits with this goal of integration. Gerald Brown, our orientation guru and founder of Know Your Neighbor, likes to say that having an American friend is one of the most important parts of integration. As friends, ensure that you are not participating in any forms of cultural erasure by promoting the “right” way to do things in American society. Do not assume your beliefs and values are the right beliefs and values for everyone.

When working with refugee populations, something as important as the idea of integration is “cultural competency”. Simplified, cultural competency encourages one to *acknowledge and respect* the differences around culture and belief systems that you and refugees hold. And if you can integrate the following cultural competency tenets into your interactions, the stronger your understanding will be of your refugee match:

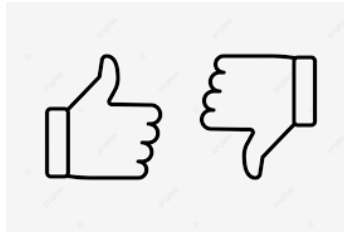
**Lifelong Learning and Self Reflection:** The most helpful thing you can do when interacting with refugee populations is to let go of unchallenged assumptions; be open to learning and understanding others, ask polite questions, be humble, and be open to being wrong and corrected. Although you're likely to make mistakes, if you are reflecting on your words, actions, body language, etc and trying to see yourself through the eyes of those you interacted with,, you're going to do great!

**Mitigating Power Imbalances:** There is a common issue in the field of refugee work of "saviorism". Saviorism is a worldview according to which some people are saviors and others need to be saved by them. It can be subtle, or it can be overt. To avoid this, watch how you speak to the refugees you work with about your experience. Are you centering yourself as the "hero" and the refugees as victims who need to be helped? To avoid a power imbalance, communicate openly and respectfully: Use techniques like active listening and have empathy to create a more positive and trusting relationship.

When in doubt, remind yourself of the motivation for signing up to volunteer; whether it was to expand your own community, to practice a language, or maybe even to improve your resume - you are also meant to benefit from this relationship! This isn't a service you are providing but rather building a mutually beneficial relationship. One idea for establishing that is to ask to structure English tutoring over cooking lessons if you want to learn different cuisines. Remember! You both have something to offer.



## Let's look at a few "Dos and Don'ts":



### DOs:

- Be very clear about meeting times and places. Consistency may be key!
- Send a reminder text or WhatsApp the day before.
- Be realistic in the time you can devote to volunteering. Remember to take care of yourself and your needs first. If it's becoming too much, let us know early on so we can help!
- Remember the specific goals you set together during your first meeting. "No" is a full sentence. You can point them in the right direction by using this Refugee Provider Resource Manual found [HERE](#).
- Speak slowly and simplify your phrasing as much as possible. For example: "Do you understand?" instead of "Got it?"
- Be patient and come with a sense of humor. Keep your interactions light!
- Reach out to KYN with any concerns about your interactions with your match.

### DON'Ts:

- Don't take anything personally! So much can be "lost in translation", literally and culturally. For example, Afghans do not smile by default when meeting someone new. A neutral face may mean that they are *very* happy to meet you!
- Don't speak louder! There is probably nothing wrong with your new friend's ears. They just need practice processing what you are saying.
- Don't talk about politics or religion. Pretend it's Thanksgiving at your in-law's house!
- Don't touch someone of the opposite gender, even to shake hands, or approach children without their parent's permission.
- Don't overextend yourself to the point of getting burned out! You do not need to meet all your refugee friend's needs. Slow and steady volunteering could lead to a life-long friendship.

If you feel comfortable and confident in your ability to try what has been laid out here, then you are well on your way to having positive interactions.



Lastly, here are examples of what our refugee volunteer opportunities might look like:

- Volunteering with an Individual
  - Mentoring
  - Community connection
  - ESL instruction/practice
  - Tutoring (Youth and GED)
  - Homework Help
  
- Volunteering with a Refugee Community Based Organization (RCBO), a refugee led non-profit that is funded by the Refugee Services Office
  - Grant writing
  - Grant facilitator/Admin support
  
- Volunteering with a Refugee Services Office (RSO) program
  - Adult Leadership
  - Youth Leadership
  - Housing application help
  - Class instruction (Sewing, Basic Computer, Python, Basic Office Admin)
  - Interpretation/Translation
  - After School Program
  
- Volunteering with one of our community partners
  - ESL instruction/practice
  - Event Support
  - Client requests (misc.)

Please reach out to Know Your Neighbor at [knowyourneighbor@slcgov.com](mailto:knowyourneighbor@slcgov.com) with any questions or if you want to further discuss these guidelines. Keep this document handy and revisit it from time to time as you get to know your refugee match. Some of these concepts will take time and regular practice.

*Something to look forward to:* Know Your Neighbor is working on setting up a WhatsApp group where all of the volunteers can be connected and have a place to share experiences. We hope that it will lead to a sense of volunteer community for you all.

**Thank you for your participation in the Know Your Neighbor program!**

