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**Getting started as a refugee mentor volunteer**

**HOURS**: 2 hours a week for 6 months

**DESCRIPTION**: As a mentor you will be going to a refugee’s home, helping them learn about and adapt to life in the U.S. While there are many ways to help, please always keep in mind USCRI’s goal of helping refugees build **self-sufficiency** – so while you are providing assistance, also help the refugees learn how to do things themselves.

**NOTE**: It is very important as a volunteer to **set clear boundaries** with the refugees you’re working with.You are donating your time, and are not expected to address every challenge a refugee family may meet. It will help you *and* the refugees to make clear how much time you are available, when it is appropriate to call you on the phone, and to say “no” if you are asked to help with something you are not willing to do. You are welcome to tell the refugee to go to the USCRI office for assistance. Always call or email Jessica Fisk at USCRI if you aren’t sure how to handle a situation.

***What to expect at the Mentor Pairing Meeting:***

USCRI staff try our best to address any questions and fears by making the mentor pairing process as smooth as possible. The first meeting with your Mentee family will be hosted at the USCRI office and facilitated by the Volunteer Coordinator or Mentor Program Intern. Having this meeting at the USCRI office gives USCRI the opportunity to reassure you in your role as a mentor and it gives you the space to become comfortable with the family. It is important to also remember that the family is just as nervous or even more so to meet you, so the meeting at USCRI provides a comfortable setting for the family to get to know you a bit.

**The main goals of the Mentor Pairing Meeting are:**

1. To meet the family you will be helping.
2. To provide you with basic biographical information on the family.
3. To review and make clear your role as a mentor to the family.
4. To discuss the immediate and long term needs that the family needs assistance with.
5. To set the next time you will meet the family at their home.

After the first meeting is conducted, mentors then have the autonomy to come up with activities and to craft meetings with the family to their liking. After a couple meetings with the family, things will begin to run smoothly. The family will get into the habit of seeing you on a set date and they will begin to look forward to visits with you as their mentor. It’s important to note that each family is different and each mentoring experience will be different. With patience and steady dedication, the mentoring experience will be rewarding both to you and the family.

***What to expect at your First Home Visit:***

The first meeting that you have with the family at their apartment is an exciting moment in your new journey as a Refugee Mentor. It is also an experience that can be a bit overwhelming. There are probably a good amount of questions that begin to swirl in your head. You begin to wonder how you will communicate effectively with the family if you don’t speak the same language. You wonder how it might be uncomfortable to walk into the household of someone you just met. You begin to ask yourself what is it that you can really do to assist this family or where to even begin!

All these questions are normal before and at the first home visit between a Mentor and Mentee family. USCRI has seen that the urgency of these questions starts to calm down when Mentors learn that, while refugee families have numerous needs, what they need first and foremost is a smile and a friendly face! So our first recommendation is just to trust that you are already helping your refugee family by just being kind, being present, and offering your help.

*Before your first home visit:*

* Review materials in Mentor Manual which will be provided at your Pairing Meeting.
* Review the Mentor Resource Site.
* Read up on the culture and history of your mentee’s country of origin. You don’t need to know everything there is to know about the country but you should have an idea about where they are coming from. Here are some good resources:
  + <http://www.culturalorientation.net/>
  + <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/>
  + [http://www.unhcr.org/](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home)
* Consider bringing simple learning tools with you, like a picture book or calendar. Look for additional ESOL resources online or at the library.

*Ideas for first home visits collected from previous mentors:*

* Bring photos of your family to introduce to your mentees elements of your life.
* Label things around their home with sticky notes to help them learn English.
* Bring a simple board game to play together.
* Go over vocabulary sheets with them.
* Discuss their ESOL classes with them.

*After two or three visits, once trust has been established:*

* Take a walk around their neighborhood. Have them show you what they know about their neighborhood or where they like to go.

**12 Ideas for Family Mentors**

* Provide additional orientation support around the home. Assist your family in using appliances and with general household organization and hygiene.
* Build friendships over food. Help provide orientation around the supermarket and share in one another’s native cuisines.
* Take walks through your family’s neighborhood helping them become comfortable with the area.
* Practice using public transportation with your family. Travel to key places such as ESL classes, supermarkets and community centers.
* Share in an outing at a local park. Have a picnic and join in recreational activities.
* Assist your family in developing proficiencies necessary for home and public safety, like calling 911, obeying the laws and fire safety.
* Support your family’s English language acquisition through fun, practical lessons centered on topics relevant to their lives.
* Attend local events together that are free and open to the public, such as street festivals, museums, and outdoor concerts.
* Take a trip to the local post office and show your family how to buy stamps.
* Visit local farmers’ markets to allow your family to experience local products and goods.
* Teach your family how to use the coin operated machines at the local Laundromat.
* Spend time in the outdoors discovering local walking trails.
* Visit over a cup of tea. Photographs are a good way to learn about one another when communication is limited due to language barriers.
* Take a sincere interest in your family by simply being a friend.

\*\*Thanks to USCRI North Carolina for sharing these tips\*\*