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**Refugee Mentoring Guide**

This guide is intended to help mentors navigate the challenges that many refugees face while establishing themselves in their new homes. While this guide does not cover every topic extensively, it provides some basic guidelines and resources that refugee mentors can use to help in the resettlement process.

**Mentoring Objectives:** The primary goal of the mentoring program is to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency. There is a lot of flexibility in the Refugee Mentor role and the ways in which mentors work to achieve this goal, but there are a few primary barriers to self-sufficiency that we ask you to focus on helping your mentee overcome.

1. English:

English is one of the greatest barriers to self-sufficiency. Improving communication has a widespread impact. It may be a slow process, but gradually increasing vocabulary and literacy is greatly empowering. It is also important to help your mentee(s) practice speaking clearly and focus on learning practical English.

1. Transportation and Navigating the Area:

While driving clients for every appointment and shopping trip can be tempting, this is a perfect example of where a sacrifice of time now will lead to great gains in self-sufficiency in the long term. Practice riding the bus with clients to key places like the doctor’s office, USCRI, the library, the store, and English class locations. The CDTA has schedules and resources for those who are new to the bus system available on their website. Feeling comfortable walking around their neighborhood is another step towards self-sufficiency. You can explore your mentee’s neighborhood together. Finding parks and going out to community events are a great way to help your mentee feel comfortable in their new home.

1. Economic:

USCRI Albany’s official definition of self-sufficiency is economic self-sufficiency, meaning income exceeding expenses. It is acknowledged that self-sufficiency encompasses many other factors, but it is this definition that we can assess quantitatively to measure concrete results. To help with economic self-sufficiency you can help mentees work on essential job skills like time management and interviewing, navigating the newspaper for job listings, filling out applications, and, of course, by practicing English.

1. Health:

It is of the utmost importance that you respect your mentees’ right to privacy, especially regarding health concerns. However, you can help your mentees in non-intrusive ways by going over basic health care skills. Review how to differentiate between emergencies, illnesses that require a doctor’s visit, and maladies that can be treated at home (this can save quite a bit of transportation time as well). Talk about homecare, including the importance of bed rest and hydration when ill. Preventative care in the form of proper nutrition and dressing appropriately for cold weather are also subjects you can review in order to non-intrusively help your mentee(s) maintain their health.

As you’re getting started with helping with all these things, please keep a couple of issues in mind:

* *Clients’ right to privacy.* While many things on the list are things you might become aware of through any visit, other items involve private family details. Please remember that each refugee family can decide how much information they’d like to share with their Volunteer Mentor, and any information shared with you should be treated with the utmost confidence, especially anything regarding health status and identifying numbers (SSN, Medicaid ID, birthdates, etc.)
* *Appropriate items to refer to the office*. As a mentor, you are not expected to solve all the problems your mentees may encounter. In fact, there are certain issues we ask that you refer to the USCRI office. This includes any concerns or changes related to their finances, benefits, and legal paperwork, such as green card applications. A USCRI staff member or trained intern will be able to assist mentees in the most efficient manner possible, or in some cases collaborate with a mentor to ensure appropriate procedures.

One reason is that with all of these issues, small errors on forms can lead to long delays and even improper denial of services or benefits. Any changes in financial resources must be reported to DSS and tracked by USCRI, and USCRI has procedures in place with DSS and other [orgs] to expedite processing. For these and other reasons, we strongly encourage mentors not to get involved with benefits and legal issues other than to help individuals make an appointment at USCRI.

The remainder of this packet provides tips and resources in the following areas:

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**ENGLISH AND EDUCATION**

**Mentors Can:**

* Encourage mentee(s) to attend as many English classes per week as they can. You can help reinforce the importance of learning English, and ask not only *if* they are attending class, but *where* and *how often* they attend.
  + If your mentees are not attending English classes, ask them what the barriers are to them attending and try and help them work through these barriers, or refer them to the USCRI office for more support.
* Help your mentees learn English by practicing practical English in their home.
  + Converse with your mentees in English.
  + Use sticky notes to label things around their home.
* Ensure that any school-aged children are attending school. You can help facilitate this conversation by asking where they are attending school, what grade they are in, and who their teacher is.
  + Help the parents understand how to navigate the school system: make sure they understand school forms and how to contact their children’s teacher.
* Ask if the adults are interested in pursuing college, employment training, or a GED. You can help them look at the opportunities available and register for classes.

**Resources:**

* For ESOL class locations and times see the schedule found at http[://sites.google.com/site/albanyesol](https://sites.google.com/site/albanyesol/home)
* Refugee Parent Guide- available in print at USCRI and on the Resource Site
* Guidelines for GED- available on the Resource Site

**TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE**

**Mentors Can:**

* Help them acquire knowledge of bus routes and how to use the bus.
  + You can also remind your mentees that they are entitled to a free bus pass from the USCRI office for the first six months: 1 is provided per family.
* Help them acquire knowledge of important locations and how to get to those locations by bus. Focus on grocery stores, laundromats, food pantries, hospitals, clinics, libraries, DSS, English class locations, and USCRI.
  + Riding the bus with your mentees is often a good way to help them learn how to use the bus and how to communicate with the bus driver.
  + Go with them to the grocery store and help them pick out healthy food.
  + Go with them to the laundromat and help them learn how to do laundry.
* Help your mentees learn the importance of timeliness in US Culture, including the importance of keeping appointments. You can do this by helping your mentees fill out their calendar and use a watch.
* See if your mentees are getting out into their neighborhood. Help them become familiar with the area by walking around the neighborhood and going to parks or free community events.
* Help them figure out where the nearest library is to their house, and show them how they can use the public computers and check out resources.

**Resources:**

* [www.CDTA.org](http://www.CDTA.org) has bus schedules and complete route information. .

**FINANCES, EMPLOYMENT AND PUBLIC BENEFITS**

**Mentors Can:**

* Support your mentees in the job search process by:
  + Helping your mentees practice English.
  + Helping them create a resume.
  + Helping them find job openings and fill out job applications.
  + Look through the newspaper with them and point out job openings that are suitable for them to apply for.
  + Point out job openings you see while you are out and encourage them to ask for applications if it is a suitable.
  + Make sure they know how to write their name, address and phone number for job applications.
  + Talking with the family to help them identify their major obstacles to employment, and how they can overcome these barriers.
* Help employed refugees continue to build job skills by practicing general English and workplace vocabulary. You should feel free to ask if anyone in your family is working. To facilitate that conversation you can ask where they are working and for how much.
* Encourage your mentees to attend weekly Job Club, a weekly job preparedness class, if enrolled in Matching Grant Employment Program.
  + The class is held on Wednesdays from 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
* Encourage your mentees to go to English classes.
* Contact USCRI and help your mentees schedule an appointment if your mentees mention any issues with their public assistance programs or you notice any issues with their benefits.
  + Problems with DSS (Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance) are, unfortunately, common. If a refugee you are working with has problems with these services, it is best to contact the USCRI office first before trying to negotiate a challenge on behalf of a refugee. USCRI has certain protocol that has been established in collaboration with DSS that need to be followed to effectively secure services for refugees.
* Help your mentees report any changes in employment to USCRI as well as to the Department of Social Services.
* Help your mentees learn about the American financial system by:
  + Teaching your mentees about US Currency.
  + Helping them understand the importance of paying bills on time.
  + Helping your mentees open a checking or savings account at a local bank.

**Resources:**

* Clients can receive job assistance from USCRI through two programs:
  + The Matching Grant Employment Program, which covers the first 6 months refugees are in the United States. See “Guide to USCRI Albany” for more program information, including Job Club.
  + If your mentees have been here longer than that, they can receive assistance from the Self-Sufficiency Program. Please note that the Self-Sufficiency Program Managers have a large case load, and are most able to help those clients who take the initiative and maintain contact with them.
* There are many cases where Mentors can be a great help in advocating for services, but please first email Jessica Fisk or the client’s case manager before contacting DSS on behalf of a refugee.
  + The Department of Social Services is organized on a County level, so please refer to the office in the county where the refugee lives.

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| **Albany County**  Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30-4:30  Phone Number: (518) 447-7300  Address: 162 Washington Ave, Albany | **Rensselaer County**  Hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00-4:30  Phone Number: (518) 833-6000  Address: 1801 Sixth Avenue, Troy |

**HEALTH CARE**

**Mentors Can:**

* Help your mentees learn to stay healthy by teaching them about home cleaning and hygiene (if needed, as some of our refugee neighbors will be well-versed in these things!).
* Help your mentees understand when to call their Primary Care Physician and when to dial 911 by helping them understand the difference between a normal illness and an emergency.
* Help mentees learn to take any prescribed medication by showing them on a clock or a calendar when the pills need to be taken.
* Do they have a primary care doctor? If they want help with this, you can go to the website of their managed care plan (CDPHP or Fidelis) for instructions on finding a PCP.
* If there are children 5 and under or the mother is pregnant, they are eligible for the WIC (women, infant and children) program. You can help mentees access the program and learn how to use the supplemental food coupons by assisting them at the grocery store.
* Is there food in the house?
* Any signs of domestic violence in the home?

*\*Please immediately call USCRI if Food Stamps aren’t working or you have any concerns about domestic violence, child abuse, or elder abuse. We will help any victims/possible victims learn their rights and options.*

**Mentor Resources:**

* A list of local health providers who offer interpretation services can be found on our resource page (URL may change) (<https://sites.google.com/site/uscrialbanymentorresources/resources/healthcareandspecialistsnon-maternity>).

**FOOD & HEALTHY LIVING**

**Mentors Can:**

* Encourage refugee families to continue to eat food from their culture and also help them seek healthy options that are available in American supermarkets.
* Show their family how to get to the supermarket and how to shop for healthy foods.
* Emphasize drinking lots of water, especially in hot weather.
* Talk about homecare, including the importance of bed rest and hydration when ill.
* Make sure that refugees know what foods they can use their food stamps for.
* Contact the USCRI office if the client does not have food at home, or doesn’t have money to buy food. There are a few options, depending on the situation. If Food Stamps are not working, USCRI staff can assist with finding out why and solving the problem.
* Help refugees contact Food Pantries for the Capital District. This is a coalition of 50 food pantries that works together to eliminate hunger in the Capital District. They will provide enough groceries to last 3-5 days. They will tell you which pantry the family can go to, when the family goes they must bring proof of address.
  + Phone: 518-458-1167
  + Email: [benji@foodpantries.net](mailto:benji@foodpantries.net)
  + Website: www.thefoodpantries.org
  + Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30
* USCRI is sometimes able to provide a grocery store gift card in food emergencies.

**Mentor Resources:**

* USCRI provides a nutrition outreach toolkit aimed at helping refugee families eat and live healthy in the US. The toolkit can be found on [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org) under the nutrition section of the resources for refugees tab.

**HOUSING**

**Mentors Can:**

* Reinforce with the family:
  + How to operate the stove.
  + How to operate the thermostat and other ways to regulate the temperature (opening/closing windows, wearing sweaters, hanging blankets over doorways, etc.). They should keep the thermostat at a reasonable level (in winter, 68 is recommended during the day, lower at night).
  + To keep doors locked even when home (Note: some clients have been robbed while at home).
  + To use shower curtains in the bathroom (Note: we have had landlord complaints of floor flooding because curtain was on outside of tub while taking showers).
  + To not put grease or oil down the sink drain; should be stored and thrown away.
  + How/where to dispose of garbage.
  + How to approach their landlord with home safety issues.
* Help mentees to practice calling the landlord about any problems. Is housing safe, sanitary, and in good repair? The landlord should be contacted with any concerns. The landlord is responsible for and should be contacted if there is:
  + Visible bare wiring; peeling or flaking interior paint or plaster; visible mold; or broken windows.
  + Gas odor from stove or other appliances.
  + Any evidence of household pests-i.e.-cockroaches, mice, bedbugs.
* Help ensure that:
  + All Smoke detectors work and have batteries.
  + All appliances in good working order in kitchen and bathroom.
  + Locks work.
  + Heating system works.

**Mentor Resources:**

* USCRI furnishes the apartment for each new arrival based on a list of goods required by the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program. Furnishings are not elaborate, but should be adequate for basic needs.
  + If you are concerned that there are not adequate basic furnishings (beds, chairs, table, sofa, dishes), please contact USCRI.
  + Winter: do they have adequate bedding? New clients can request additional blankets from USCRI, which can be provided if available. Mentors can also reach out to their networks to try to find donated blankets for the family.

**COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES**

**Mentors Can:**

* Recognize Your Own Culture: Try to identify values that you as an American hold dear, such as freedom of speech or individualism. Keep in mind that many cultures do not share these beliefs, nor do we share theirs. Recognizing differences is an important first step in reaching out.
* Be Complete and Explicit: You may need to explain your point in more than one way, as well as why you are making it.
* Simplify your words but don't leave out articles or resort to baby talk.
* Pay Attention: Concentrate on your listeners’ reaction to your mutual communication. If one of you is confused, you can try again or ask them to rephrase. Learning to read visual cues (especially from someone who uses different ones from those you are used to) reduces miscommunication.
* Demonstrate your Patience through body language and facial expressions, and by giving them your full attention.
* Diagrams and Pictures can help explain vocabulary.
* Paraphrase: After someone has spoken, and before you respond, restate what you think the other person said, or what you thought they meant. For example, say, “I think you are saying [x]. Is that correct?” Once the other person has assured you that you have the correct meaning, then you can respond.
* Verify: Make sure that your listener understands what you said, usually by asking the person to reiterate your words. Do not say, “Do you understand?” as most people will merely state, “Yes.” Instead, say, “I want to make sure I made myself clear. Will you tell me what you understood me to say?”
* Be Alert for Different Meanings: We paraphrase and verify our words because often a person will think they understand what the other person is saying, but suddenly will realize they do not. This is especially true when people assign different meanings to words, phrases, or actions. When this happens, stop and clarify the point of misunderstanding.
* Practice Empathy: When communicating across cultures, it is best to treat others the way that they, not you, want to be treated. Empathize with the other’s cultural values. Remember that adults think like adults, even if they speak like children.

**Mentor Resources:**

* The Center for Applied Linguistics provides useful tools for communicating across languages. [www.cal.org](file://Albany2010/public/Support%20Programs/Volunteer%20Program/Refugee%20Mentor%20Program/Mentor%20Training%20&%20Support%20(Packet,%20Website,%20Meet-Ups)/Mentor%20manual/2013%20revisions/Final%20Edits/www.cal.org)
* The Cultural Orientation Resource Center provides assistance for the cultural and community orientation that refugees receive. <http://www.culturalorientation.net/>
* Community Resources for Refugees in the Capital Region. [www.capitalregionrefugees.weebly.com](http://www.capitalregionrefugees.weebly.com)

**The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Albany Field Office**

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