

Why is hosting needed?

There has been significant reporting in the media about the humanitarian crises of people fleeing wars and civil unrest in the mid-east. This has led to a desire from people in Britain to help those in distress. Ad hoc hosting schemes have been set up across the country as a result of this desire of people to help. Most hosting schemes help destitute refused asylum seekers who are currently living in Britain, rather than newly arrived asylum seekers, as there are systems in place to support asylum seekers.

Most asylum seekers whose claim has been refused will have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and will be destitute and homeless. They are not allowed to work or claim benefits and it is not possible to return some people to their country of origin as either it is not safe to do so, there are no safe routes to it, or they are too scared to return. They are reliant on charity handouts and support from friends or family. Some may be able to submit fresh claims for asylum and then they can access support as an asylum seeker.

Who will be the guests on the project?

- Action Hosting is a short term solution to help destitute and homeless refused asylum seekers. We hope having somewhere to stay on a temporary basis will give people the time and respite to look at the future options for their asylum case, and if possible to submit a fresh asylum claim.
- We will help single males or females who are over 18 years old. We will not place a female guest in all male households, nor a male guest in all female households.
- We will not accept people on the scheme who have serious mental health issues, current substance misuse issues or who display aggressive behaviour.

What does hosting involve?

- Hosting will involve providing somewhere to stay for a destitute asylum seeker in a spare bedroom in your home.
- Each host will need to provide for the guest
 - A clean, safe, dry, warm room with a bed and bedding
 - A meal on the day of the guest's arrival
 - Access to food storage, refrigeration, preparation, and cooking facilities
 - Access to laundry and bathroom facilities
 - Signposting to relevant local agencies, which we will help with
 - General assistance and support
 - To be located near accessible and reasonable public transport which allows access into Newcastle and Sunderland
- We ask hosts to agree to undertake the following:
 - Provide full up-to-date information with the application form and appropriate character references, as well as a DBS check that we will pay for

- Allow Action Hosting staff to visit your home and talk to other household members as part of the application process
- Notify Action Hosting if there are changes to your household
- Attend induction training and any relevant follow up sessions
- Contact Action Hosting if there are questions or if problems arise
- You will **NOT** undertake
 - Counselling or advice work
 - Take any responsibility for the guest's financial or legal affairs
 - Provide physical assistance or perform the work of a health care professional
 - Transport your guest anywhere as part of your volunteer placement
- **Expenses** We are unable to provide any expenses for living costs. Guests will be staying rent free in your accommodation, and no payments are made for this. Some hosts may want to provide meals, others not, and we can discuss this at interview.

What is the process for the hosting scheme?

- All hosts need to fill an application form which asks about their household, any criteria relating to guests, and information about references.
- The hosting coordinator will arrange a home visit to meet all members of the household, ask more detailed questions and do a basic property safety check.
- If everyone is happy at this point, then a DBS check is sent for by Action Hosting on all members of the household over 18 years old.
- When all checks have been confirmed hosts will be notified that they have been accepted on the scheme and dates for induction training will be provided. All hosts will need to attend this training before taking a guest into their property.
- Guests are referred to the hosting scheme through a number of projects. They will complete a referral form for each potential guest and send this to the hosting coordinator, who will arrange a face to face assessment with the client.
- We risk assess all guests through the referral form and a face to face assessment with them. We then carry out a police check for every guest. We do not accept those with violent or serious criminal history, drug or alcohol addiction. We will only accept people with mental health difficulties if they are well managed/supported and which aren't likely to result in behaviour that would be upsetting or dangerous in the household where they are placed.
- We look to match the guest to hosts. It is important that we find the best match so that everyone is then happy in the placement. An introductory meeting will be arranged with the hosting coordinator between the host and the guest which will take place away from the host home. Either party can decide after this meeting if they want to proceed with the placement or not. Any host can say no to any request to hosting someone, and it is important to us that hosts feel in control of their situation.

- There will always be an initial trial period of a week for each placement, and then the length of stay will be agreed with the host.
- There will be regular review meetings with the hosting coordinator and the host family to ensure that any problems are dealt with quickly and to ensure the smooth running of the placement.
- Action Hosting does all it can in line with current best safeguarding practice to assess and mitigate risk, both for hosts and guests, but the project cannot be held liable if something goes wrong.

How long will I host for?

- An initial trial period of a week will take place. This will be extended based on the host's availability. We ask for a minimum of a month from the host and with the potential of extending this if it is suitable.
- We do not ask people to host on a continuous basis or indefinitely as it's important for hosts to have time out of doing this.
- We help manage the end of the host agreement when the agreed time period is nearing completion. The guest will know that this arrangement is only for a fixed amount of time and when the date for the agreement to end is due. We will arrange the transfer of the guest between host properties.
- Guests should not be moved between host homes without the knowledge and agreement of the hosting coordinator.
- If you need to end the arrangement at any time you are free to do this and you are free to withdraw from the hosting scheme at any time. It would be useful to let us know as much in advance as possible so that we can try to make alternative arrangements. We understand that circumstances change so don't worry if you need to do this.

Are hosts breaking the law by hosting a 'refused' asylum seeker?

- No, it is the Home Office's responsibility to remove those who they believe should not remain in the UK. Even if someone has had their claim for asylum refused, they have papers giving them "temporary admission." This means that they are not breaking the law by being here, although they may be liable to detention or removal by Home Office officials at any time.
- It is an offence to help someone hide from the authorities if they have committed a crime, or escaped from a Detention Centre. It is also an offence to withhold information deliberately from an official of the state if this is requested from you.
- Hosts should notify Action Hosting of any enquiries they receive from any official source about their guests.
- Your guest will need to sign on at the immigration office in Middlesbrough, and Action Foundation provides travel costs for the guest to do this.

What about house insurance, benefits, council tax, car insurance?

- **Household insurance.** Hosting a guest should not have any implications for your insurance. It is legally the same as if a family member or friend has come to visit. However, you do need to check the details of your existing household policy.
 - **You must check that putting up a guest in your home, free of charge, is in line with your initial proposal details** (statement of facts). It should say if non- family members or lodgers are able to stay. **We will need you to confirm that your housing insurance covers this for our public liabilities insurance cover**, and also to ensure that your insurance cover is not made void by having a guest stay.
 - If you are discussing your hosting with your insurance company you should make it clear that no payments are being made, that you are not engaging in any form of business, and they are staying for short defined time.
 - Most policies allow for guests to stay without any additional premium. However, some hosts have found that when they mention that some of their guests are ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘strangers’ their insurers have increased their premiums. Some insurers are more risk averse than others, and those who charge additional premiums evidently consider asylum seekers to be riskier than other non-asylum seeking guests who may stay in your home.
 - Normally insurers will exclude theft unless by forcible entry to the main property.
- **Housing benefits.** You receive no income for offering this room. We have agreed with the local authorities that there will not be a change to housing benefit if you are hosting a guest for up to 4 weeks. Any host placement that is longer than 4 weeks could though impact on your housing benefit. You will need to let the hosting coordinator know if you receive housing benefit and they will then let the benefit office know you are hosting a guest on a temporary basis.
- **Private rented tenancies.** Hosting is not covered by the ‘right to rent’ as there is no rent paid, though there may be implications if you rent your home from a private landlord or a housing association. We will provide documentation to all hosts and guests, to make it clear that no rent is paid. Having a guest does not mean that you become a house of multiple occupancy. Please speak to the hosting coordinator if you are in a private rented or housing association tenancy.
- **Council tax.** We have agreed with the local authorities that there will not be a change to any single persons discount if you are hosting a guest for up to 4 weeks. Any host placement that is longer than 4 weeks could though impact on your discount. You will need to let the hosting coordinator know if you receive single persons discount and they will then let the benefit office know you are hosting a guest on a temporary basis.
- **Car insurance.** We are not asking you to transport your guest as part of this volunteer role, and therefore it will not affect your car insurance. If you decide voluntarily that you

want to take the guest somewhere, then this is a personal arrangement and has not been sanctioned as part of this service.

House rules agreement

- The agreement between you and your guest is an informal arrangement and there is no occupancy agreement signed. Instead you agree with your guest what your house rules are and they sign to this. This is not a rental agreement, as no money changes hands, and the guest has no legal right to your home.
- The guest signs a separate agreement with the hosting project about using the hosting services.
- The host signs a separate volunteer agreement with the hosting project about being part of the hosting scheme.

Confidentiality agreements

- We will need you to sign confidentiality agreements, once your application has been approved. All personal and sensitive information about guests, other hosts or anyone else involved in Action Hosting is confidential, and cannot be shared with an outside third party without express consent of the individual.

Information about the guests

- All guests will:
 - Provide Action Hosting with full, up-to-date information and character references
 - Give permission for Action Hosting to contact other agencies who are working with or are in contact with the guest.
 - Abide by the house rules as agreed with the host.
 - Remain in contact with Immigration authorities.
 - Remain in contact with the agency that referred them to the host scheme.
 - Contact Action Hosting should any questions/problems occur.
- Guests will have a named support officer in Action Foundation who will be in regular contact with them about their asylum situation.
- Action Foundation has been working with The West End Refugee Service for many years, and they already refer destitute asylum seekers into our Action Housing scheme. They will refer clients whom they are already supporting into our hosting scheme.
- **Welfare payments.** Welfare payments are made through West End Refugee Service to destitute asylum seekers of £15 cash per week. Most have to travel there weekly to get this, though those live further away are sometimes able to do this every two weeks to save on travel costs. This money is for any living and travel costs, and any food needed.
- Some destitute asylum seekers can get food from food banks, and referrals will be made to these by other projects.

Medical needs/ access to health services

- Asylum seekers are entitled to access all NHS healthcare services, free of charge, whilst their asylum applications are being considered. People cannot be refused registration at doctors because they are an asylum seeker.
- If someone's asylum application has been fully refused but they are unable to return home they can still receive the following without charge: GP and emergency hospital treatment, NHS dental treatment, sight tests and prescriptions. Any course of NHS hospital treatment already underway at the time when the asylum seeker's claim, including any appeals, is finally rejected will remain free of charge until completion. It will be a matter for clinical judgement as to when a particular course of treatment has been completed.
- Treatments for treatment for infectious diseases such as TB or HIV are exempt from charges.
- Immediately necessary treatment to save life or prevent a condition from becoming life-threatening should always be given to failed asylum seekers without delay, irrespective of their eligibility for free treatment or ability to pay. This includes all maternity treatment.

Professional boundaries

- It is important that you feel safe and that boundaries are understood between you and your guest.
- Your guests will likely have a wide range of needs apart from housing- legal advice, financial support and healthcare. It is important to remember that you have offered to provide accommodation only, and that you are under no obligation to try and solve the rest of the difficulties.
- **Talking about Asylum.** You should not get involved with your guest's case. There are strict rules around helping immigration cases and it protects you if you do not get involved. If they need advice they need to see a specialist agency, which may be able to help them gather fresh evidence to submit a new asylum claim. Experience in other hosting schemes is that often the fact that someone has found a safe environment enables them to go on and make a successful claim for refugee status. However, be aware that for some people it is not possible for them to put a fresh claim in and they will not get refugee status.
- Intimate relationships between a volunteer and client are not permitted. If a host feels that a situation is developing that may be problematic, they should discuss as soon as possible with the coordinator, who will offer guidance.

Emotional support

- There are many emotional benefits from being a host. People find it is a life changing and positive experience for all involved. It is also important to understand the importance of boundaries whilst hosting.
- It is generally best that hosts (and other household members) do not ask the guest about their personal history, in particular the circumstances that led them to leave their home country – unless the guest offers this information. These issues may be deeply traumatic and remain unresolved.
- It may take a little while for them to trust you, and they may not want to talk much initially. They also may need to get a lot of rest at first, as it may be the case that they have not had somewhere safe to stay the night for some time.
- Most destitute asylum seekers will have experienced trauma both before arriving in Britain, as well as during the asylum process. It is not surprising therefore that many develop mental health issues, and most often this will present as a depressive illness. The hosting project has referral criteria regarding mental health issues. It is possible however that you might notice problems develop during a placement. Depression may present in many ways. You may find guests have difficulty getting up, very irregular sleep patterns. Concentration may be poor; they may be listless or have a lack of motivation. If you are concerned about their mental health then you should encourage them to see their GP and also let the hosting coordinator know.

Safety issues

- It is important that everyone remains safe whilst on the hosting scheme, and we take people's personal safety very seriously.
- Whilst hosting it is important to remember the following:
 - Never do anything that feels unsafe. Never stay in a situation where you might be at risk.
 - If you are unsure about the person you are being asked to host, it is fine to say 'no' to have them stay in your home.
 - It is best to keep any cash, bank cards, personal financial information and valuables somewhere safe in your house.

Children in the property

We advise that you do not leave children with the guest unsupervised for any length of time until a strong relationship of mutual trust has been established. We gather as much information about guests as we can, but we are not able to do the same level of background checks as we can for UK citizens.

Hosting guidelines and good practice

We will work with you to decide what your house rules are before anyone comes to stay with you. This will help you work out what is important to you for the host placement to be successful for you. Often it is these small issues that can cause the greatest difficulties in a placement. By thinking about these house rules before someone moves in you can help prevent problems arising. These rules could be relaxed over time, but it is best to start with a strict framework in the beginning.

The house rules will also form the basis of the agreement that both you and the guest will sign. We will go through these with each guest and you, to make sure that everyone understands and is happy with them, at the introductory meeting.

- **Meals and cooking** –A meal needs to be provided on the day of arrival for the guest. Just make this something very simple, as you will not know what they do or do not like. We recommend a vegetarian meal. Some storage space and instructions on kitchen equipment will need to be given for when they cook for themselves and also some storage space for any food. You may want to share meal times and food with your guest, or prefer that they sort their own food out. This is up to you to decide.
- **House keys and access to house-** It is reasonable to expect your guest to leave the house when you go out for the first week, in the initial trial period. If, and when, you give them a key is entirely up to you, though other schemes have found longer term hosting works better if guests have some freedom to come and go. If they do not have a key, times will need to be agreed when the guest should leave in the morning and return home.
- **Heating-** Some guests may feel the cold more than others, and may have been used to unlimited heating in Home Office accommodation. Having additional bedding and blankets is a good idea.
- **Bathroom availability-** There may be times when you need to have free access to your bathroom, and you can state when these are. It is worth making sure the bathroom has a lock on the door.
- **Household amenities-** It is important to establish clear boundaries about the use of your television, computer and phone. Most guests will have their own mobile phone, but you may be happy for them to use your landline for local calls if you are on a contract that enables these for free at certain times.
- **Washing machine-** guests will need access to your washing machine if you have one, and you will need to show them how to use this.
- **Household chores** –Do not be afraid to ask people to help around the house. Being able to help can enable people to feel more equal. Be aware though that any help in the house must not be seen as payment-in-kind for them staying. They are a guest in your home and not there to work for you.
- **Smoking-** A lot of people prefer no smoking in the house, and it is important this is made clear from the start.

- **Storage space-** guests will normally have personal possessions, and it would be good for them to have some storage space for these. They do not normally have large amounts of personal possessions.
- **Privacy-** It is helpful if you discuss at an early stage when you will need time and space to relax on your own, or when you have friends visiting and would like some privacy.
- **Bedtimes-** you probably have a time that you normally go to bed when you will need the house quiet, so that people are not then disturbed.
- **Pets** -some cultures are not used to pets, and some are not keen on being around dogs, so it is important we know if you have any pets.
- **Alcohol-** Be aware that if you drink alcohol, your guest might not. Be considerate about how you use and store it.
- **Money-** It is not part of your role to give the guest money. It is also best not to lend them anything as this can then get complicated if things are misunderstood. You have given them somewhere to stay and you are not expected to support them financially as well. It is also best not to accept gifts from your guest.
- **Valuables-**it is not wise to leave money, jewellery, credit cards or your car keys lying around.
- **Use of guests' own electrical equipment-** If in any doubt, it is advisable to provide guests with a RCD circuit-breaking plug board for use with their personal electronic devices.

Cultural issues

It is most likely that your guest will have a different cultural background from you, and this gives you both an opportunity to learn about different ways of life. It is important to try to be sensitive to any differences. Here are some general issues to consider, though these are generalisations and may bear no relevance to the person hosted by you! It is also worth noting that there are often great variations within cultures, so it is unwise to expect two guests from the same country to hold identical beliefs and practices. If in doubt, then ask them.

- **Greetings-** some cultures do not greet each other with a handshake.
- **Religion-** there could be many differences between people's religions. There may be issues around how food is prepared, how people observe prayer and religious festivals. It is not appropriate to handle the Quran without the permission of the person who owns it.
- **Body language-** for example, some cultures may avoid direct eye contact.
- **Language** – your guest may not speak English as a first language. They may accidentally use words or phrases inappropriately. Always clarify things if you are unsure, and try to speak clearly, using simple sentences.
- **Gender-** In some cultures there is more role-division than we may be used to. For some it will not be appropriate for a man to be alone in a room with an unrelated woman. Handshaking (and any other close physical contact) with someone of the opposite sex may cause offence, or allow for possible misinterpretation.

- **Food-** There are some different food laws within each religion. Most Muslims (and Jews) will not eat pork products; most Hindus are vegetarian; practising Muslims eat Halal meat. Likewise some practising Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs will not be happy to eat food cooked in pots used for beef or pork.
- **Personal hygiene.** Washing, rather than using toilet paper, is the norm for many Muslims after using the toilet. It may help to provide a jug for this purpose.
- **Religious festivals ie Ramadan-** Muslims celebrate Ramadan and one of the principles of the Ramadan fast is to not eat or drink (even water) between dawn and evening, according to local sunrise and sunset times. Ramadan normally lasts about four weeks and it ends with the celebration Eid.

What support will Action Hosting provide?

- We will:
 - Visit the host family and property to talk through their application, answer any queries, and assess their suitability for the hosting scheme.
 - Arrange induction training for all hosts before they host an asylum seeker.
 - Facilitate an introduction meeting between the host and client, so they can both decide if they wish to go ahead with the placement.
 - Provide regular opportunities for review/feedback about the hosting arrangements.
 - Provide a support worker for the guest.
 - Help manage the end of the hosting placement and help the guest to move on.
 - Provide an information pack of daytime activities and details of other support and advice agencies. You will only be expected to signpost guests to services.
 - Help support a host network enabling hosts to keep in touch with each other come together to share experiences if they wish.
- Action Hosting cannot provide support to hosts who provide accommodation to asylum seekers or others who have not been referred through the Project.

Coordinator details

- The project coordinator is Vicki Harris and she can be contacted on 0191 231 3113, or hosting@actionfoundation.org.uk