

IRIS Cultural Companions Resource Handbook



"Sometimes pushing English too hard is a little much. It's just having an American in their lives. There is benefit here, trust me. Nothing incredible has to happen other than the bonding and respect. In the end, I made two friends; there are two people out there who like me and remember me. That's more than I had before, right? So maybe the refugees had a better perspective than the Americans, because all they wanted was friendship, and we went in saying, Oh, I'm a Cultural Companion. "

-Ken, Cultural Companion to elderly Sudanese refugee

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Introduction to IRIS

According to international law, refugees are those who have a "well-founded fear of persecution" and are unable to return to their countries without risking violence to themselves and their families, including torture and death. They are granted special immigration status according to international law. Each year the U.S. government invites a small number of them- 66,000 in 2012- to start new lives, or "resettle," in this country. The front-line work of resettlement is done by local agencies like IRIS. IRIS works intensively with refugees, particularly during the first year of their resettlement, to help them build lives of their own choosing in the U.S. IRIS resettles approximately 200 refugees each year. IRIS also provides some services to asylees and other immigrants. Currently, IRIS's refugee clients come from Afghanistan, Congo, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Sudan and other countries.

What is the Cultural Companions Program?

Cultural Companions (CC) is a 6-month long volunteering program that pairs you with one of IRIS's refugee clients for a one-on-one volunteering experience. What you do together is up to you! This handbook will provide you with a set of guidelines, advice and suggestions to make your CC experience as mutually enjoyable and rewarding as it can be.

What is a Cultural Companion?

First and foremost, IRIS wants all of its clients to reach self-sufficiency. What that means is that clients should be able to support themselves financially, handle day-to-day tasks in America with confidence, and make decisions on behalf of themselves and their family based on their needs and abilities. In the first 3-6 months after resettlement, IRIS provides clients with several core services and support for clients in varying capacities can continue for up to 5 years after resettlement if necessary. You, as a Cultural Companion, will be contributing to this effort to help clients reach self-sufficiency!

What Cultural Companions must keep at the forefront, however, is that while you might be signing on for a volunteer program to "save or help these people," **refugees are simply expecting to meet and make an American friend**, and we believe that becoming friends is the most valuable way you can serve and allow a refugee to serve you in return. **Please see the very end of this document for testimonials** that will draw this out more fully!

Before you Begin . . .

- What should you keep in mind as you begin a new relationship with your Cultural Companion?
 - *Time*: You should expect to spend about 3 hours/week with your companion at the beginning of your pairing. For the first 2-3 months, we ask that you try as hard as possible to be consistent in meeting every week. The longer you volunteer, the more variable your meeting schedule could become, as you and your companion get better at communication and start to branch out into different types of activities.
 - *Location*: If you are a student, you may think you have limited transportation options. Since our clients live all around New Haven, you may not be able to count on being paired with someone who lives within walking distance from your dorm or house! However, there are resources in the city you can take advantage of-- CT bus (\$1.50 a ride), Zipcar and Dwight Hall cars for YRP volunteers, other university shuttle systems, etc.

We know-- you are busy! You may sign on to the Cultural Companions program but quickly realize you don't have the time to commit to volunteering. If that is the case, DO NOT simply

disappear. Tell Laurel about your decision not to continue, and tell your companion as well. Make sure that they understand that it is not something they did or didn't do.

Your Role

A Cultural Companion Is. . .	A Cultural Companion Is NOT. . .
a teacher	an ATM
a cultural broker	a guardian or personal assistant
a challenger	dating material
a friend	a psychologist
	a case manager
	an IRIS go-between

The following is a brainstorming worksheet designed to help you think of ways you can fulfill the positive roles listed above. Check tasks and activities that you are excited to work on. If at some point in your six months you find yourself getting "stuck," you can return to this worksheet as a reference.

Teacher

Cultural Learning Opportunities- I am capable of helping my refugee companion learn to do the following:

___ Getting a library card

___ Searching and finding appropriate library books

___ Using online banking

___ Using Google maps

___ Learning to recharge a prepaid phone

___ Basics of money-- coins, bills, counting change, etc.

___ Going over finances together. Helping my companion create a budget and teaching about bills, banking, and credit (If you are interested in assisting in this way, tell coordinator to receive some tools from Case Management)

- ___ Sorting mail into trash/keep/"take to my Case Manager" piles
- ___ Buying a money order at the post office
- ___ Paying a utility bill at a payment center
- ___ Approaching a store/restaurant/business to ask about open job opportunities
- ___ Applying for jobs in person or online that we identify as good options
- ___ Investigating health care options should a longterm health concern arise with my companion
- ___ Helping understand confusing health-related questions or documents
- ___ Setting up the voicemail feature on his/her phone and regularly checking voicemails
- ___ Helping explain a child's report card or other school papers for parents
- ___ Explaining American dating customs
- ___ Scouting together the best, cheapest stores to purchase groceries, cleaning supplies, clothes, etc in my companion's neighborhood
- ___ Hosting my companion for dinner with my friends or family members
- ___ Cooking together, having my companion teach me how to prepare traditional cuisine from his/her culture and showing how to cook some of my favorite recipes
- ___ Performing minor household repairs for my companion, explaining what I am doing and teaching how to perform the repairs him/herself

Here are some other ways I could provide learning opportunities for my refugee companion:

Cultural Broker

I am especially capable of helping a refugee navigate these systems or connect to these opportunities in America:

I'd like to share these events, features or places in New Haven or my hometown with my refugee companion:

Challenger/Encourager

Depending on my companion's needs and skill sets, I would consider helping my companion search out and attend options such as:

- Free and open English classes
- IRIS English classes
- Free community trainings or classes (such as a funky cooking class at the Free Skool)
- GED (high school diploma) class at New Haven Adult Education
- Local volunteer opportunities if my companion is waiting for employment
- Pickup sports games or free, open gym slots at a local high school

___ Meetup groups (social groups around New Haven that meet regularly to play music, read books together, go on hikes, pretty much anything you can imagine)

Other ideas might include:

Friend

I expect my refugee companion may be more knowledgeable or capable in these areas than I am:

I hope to learn these things from my refugee companion during our time together:

Here are some areas I would like to learn about from my time with my companion:

___ Home country history

___ Home country music, art, or dance

___ Home country games

___ Home culture values and beliefs

___ Skills or trades my companion is proficient in

___ Basic greetings and important phrases in native language

___ Comfort food!

___ Asking my companion to teach/share vocational skills with me that he/she already has

Other: _____

A Cultural Companion is NOT . . .

- An ATM
 - Clients may tell you about their financial problems and their lack of money to cover basic needs.
 - Make it clear from the beginning of your mentoring relationship that you cannot give your companion money. Do not feel guilty for declining to help in this way; you will not always be there to back up your companion. Creating financial dependency can ultimately cause harm to your companion.
 - If your companion has problems with EBT card or other benefits, consider helping him call DSS or his case manager and trouble-shooting together.
- A Personal Assistant
 - Take the time to teach rather than do for your companion, even if it is much simpler for you to make decisions for him.
- Dating material
 - Be cautious about signals you are sending to refugees; because most come from conservative cultures, use extra caution when in contact with a refugee of the opposite gender. They are in vulnerable situations and may be more likely to grasp on to romantic possibilities.
 - If you choose to embark on a romantic venture with an IRIS client, we ask you to end your volunteer commitment for the duration of the dating relationship.
- A psychologist
 - Do not initiate conversations about your companion's reasons for fleeing their country.
 - If they bring up issues or memories from their past, you can listen, respond carefully (but do NOT ask overly probing questions), and focus on helping them identify ways to enjoy their new surroundings and de- stress.
 - If you suspect that your client is suffering from depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, DO NOT try to counsel them. Contact your volunteer coordinator so that your companion can be connected with mental health screening and services.
- A case manager or IRIS go-between
 - clients know who their case managers are and how to contact them. If they ask you to repeatedly contact IRIS on their behalf, emphasize that it is important for them to know how to do this themselves.

- If a client asks you for help on a matter that you do not feel you have the expertise for, it may be a job for their case manager. DO NOT attempt to help out on a task you feel requires qualifications you do not possess.

Dealing with Difference

As an American or someone accustomed to American culture, you occupy a specific comfort zone when it comes to certain cultural attitudes and behaviors. Culture goes beyond food, language and dress; it encompasses social rules, ways of communicating, notions of propriety and hospitality, and much more. You will often find yourself being pushed out of your comfort zone as a Cultural Companion, and this can be good! You may:

- try new foods
- meet new people
- go to places in New Haven you've never been to
- deal with language barriers and communication issues
- have to get accustomed to different understandings of privacy and personal space
- encounter different modes of hospitality

Addressing the Awkward

- Be prepared to encounter some cultural attitudes or practices you may find prejudiced or discriminatory.
- Be willing to suspend judgment; every culture makes sense to those living within it if not to outsiders.
- Respect differences even if you cannot reconcile them with your own beliefs.
- Work towards empowerment and integration into American life, not assimilation.
- Be willing to learn and ask sensitive questions about your companion's home culture. Do not assume beliefs based on your prior knowledge. Similarly, be willing to talk about yourself and share your culture with your companion.
- Have a sense of humor! Sometimes awkward situations will arise due to language barriers or misunderstandings. Learn to laugh it off and move on.

Knowing your Boundaries

At times you may find yourself attempting to take on a more involved or difficult task with your companion than you feel capable of handling. Other times you may feel guilty that you are not able to meet all of their needs and expectations. If this happens, you may be experiencing boundary issues. As a Cultural Companion, you have the opportunity to craft a unique relationship with a refugee in our community, but, as mentioned above, there are roles that you are not expected to play.

An important way to maintain boundaries is to define your role from the beginning of your relationship, both for yourself and your companion. Think about what you are and are not comfortable doing; if a situation arises where you feel pushed beyond those limits, calmly explain to your companion that this is a task that you are not able or willing to undertake.

Some situations where boundaries can be trespassed:

- Your companion's family does not want to go to IRIS because they do not want to run into the other families from their home country at the office. As a result, after a few visits they start treating you like a "case manager," wanting you to take care of tasks like talking to their landlord, going to DSS with them, etc.-- things that their case manager at IRIS should really be doing.
- Your companion has a child with significant medical issues, and she is increasingly reliant on you to make medical appointments and communicate with doctors and clinics.
- Your companion lives with several roommates who are all very nice. You start off doing ESL tutoring with your companion only, but then a few of his roommates start casually sitting in on your sessions and you end up tutoring them as well.
- Your companion's family is very hospitable! They want you to stay for dinner every time you visit, and start asking you to come over 3+ times a week. You know they will feel bad if you say no.

Think about how you would feel in these situations, and what you would do. There may not be one correct strategy to address these issues, but you should never feel bad about setting limits in your interactions with your companion.

And remember, make time for your own emotional and physical health! Being a cultural companion should be a challenging experience, not a draining one.

Expect the Unexpected!

Your companionship may start out as an arrangement centered around ESL but then take off in directions you were not anticipating. Don't worry! This often happens. Many of the clients we pair volunteer companions with are complex cases; there is often a reason they do not come to IRIS often, are feeling isolated, and therefore need a companion who can come to their home or meet them somewhere in the community. As a result, learning English is only one of the many things on their plates.

Past and current cultural companions have talked about the following things impacting their expectations for their companionship:

- medical issues affecting their companion's ability to learn and remember English-- poor vision, memory retention problems, speech impediments, etc.
- working with special needs companions
- mobility issues-- not knowing how or being unwilling to use the bus system
- just plain lack of interest in learning English any more than what they already know

At some point you may find yourself completely redefining what a successful companionship will look like-- and that's okay! Every client is different, their expectations are different, and every companion's ability to work within those expectations are different. In fact, if you end up not having any expectations in particular, that's fine, too. "Success" is not always easily quantified, and you may not be able to see the benefits of your presence and friendship in a tangible way. But that does not mean those benefits don't exist.

Mutual Diversity Training

The philosophy of resettlement focuses a lot on refugees "adjusting" to life in the US-- that's a very broad term! It can be easy to think of adjustment in the narrow terms of learning English, getting a job, finding stable housing, and learning the basics of American culture. However, it runs deeper than that, and can get messy. Similarly, as a cultural companion you might get yourself into sticky situations because of a lack of knowledge of your companion's home culture. We like to think of cultural education as a mutual experience, one that can be joyful, but also difficult.

Needless to say, your companion may harbor attitudes different from your own on sensitive topics like race, disability, gender roles, and LGBTQ people. Moreover, they may find some aspects of American culture, such as public displays of affection or the fact that practically everyone on the street has pet dogs, unfamiliar and distasteful. On the other side of the cultural coin, you may know absolutely nothing about the difference between Shia and Sunni Islam, or about the relationship between different ethnicities in the Sudan, or the ongoing conflict in the Congo.

So what can happen when all this lack of knowledge is gathered in one place? Confusion! But like we said before, you have to address the awkward-- don't be afraid.

"Firm no's" vs. open discussion

There's a very fine line between being integrationist and being insensitive. Sometimes, you just have to say, "this is how it is in America, and you have to try and learn to live with this part of our culture." You might be thinking, what is a situation in which I'll have to say *that*? Other cultural companions have brought up the topic of race as a common flashpoint. Clients from countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan may harbor attitudes about Africans and African Americans that are, frankly, racist in the American context. It's important to work through these attitudes and make it clear why, say, not wanting to send your children to a school with black teachers is not acceptable, or why saying certain things in public is not appropriate. Think about it this way-- there's not really any way to say, "negative attitudes about black people have a place in American culture."

In many other situations, though, different worldviews can open up the opportunity for rewarding discussion. For example, one of our cultural companion shares this story:

One day I decided to take my companion and her mother to the Yale University Art Gallery. We looked at the East Asian art, much of which was Buddhist art and iconography. My companion was not very familiar with Buddhism, so I explained some of the meanings of the art to her-- "this is a statue of a bodhisattva, which is a little like a god," and the like. She looked around, bewildered, shaking her head, and she said, "I don't understand, how people can believe this? You know, God is one!" (My companion is Muslim.) So right there, standing around in the Yale Art Gallery, I had a discussion with her about how people all around the world believe in different religions, and just because you don't believe in a religion does not mean that all the people who do believe it are wrong or crazy. Did she agree? I don't know. But I think it was important that we talked about it.

Learning from and for your companion

As a cultural companion, you have a job of your own to do. Take some time to learn about the traditions and current events of your companion's home country. Research topics you think may come up over the course of your relationship that you want to be able to talk

about sensitively. Clients really appreciate it when someone expresses interest in or knowledge of their home cultures because it shows them that where they came from is just as valuable as where they are now. Also, if you say something offensive by accident (hopefully never on purpose!), own up to it and admit your ignorance. In all, this companionship will be a learning experience for both of you.

Your First Visit

On your first visit with your companion, you may be at a loss about what to talk about beyond simple greetings. Here are a few suggestions for a rewarding first discussion!

- Introductions
 - Birthplaces
 - Friends and family in America
 - Client teaches volunteers 3 important words in native language
 - Volunteer teaches client 3 words in English
- Volunteer: Why did you become a companion? By the end of 6 months meeting together, what would you like to learn from the refugee?
- Client: Why did you want a volunteer? In the next 6 months, what would you like to do or learn from your volunteer?
 - What have you been enjoying in New Haven? What is very difficult?
 - What is something new you would like to learn about New Haven this month?
 - English: Where are you most using English and who are you typically trying to communicate with? What situations are difficult for you right now because of your English level?
 - Why are you learning English?
 - What do you want to do with your English?
 - One BIG goal or dream for your life in America?
 - Are you interested in finding a job?
 - What have you done so far to find employment? What do you need help with?

Refugee Books and other media

Consider reading a work of fiction or nonfiction about your Refugee Companion's home country. We recommend these sites to find good suggestions:

<http://www.imyourneighborbooks.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/RefugeeResourceCenter>

News Resources

If you are unsure of where to start, here is a list, by no means exhaustive, of some English language news sources from/about our clients' home regions. Note that we don't necessarily ascribe to the views presented on all of these websites!

[Refugee Resource Center: aggregates information on media about refugees](#)

[Al Arabiya News](#)

[Al Jazeera](#)

[World Press Review](#)

[Al-Ahram from Egypt](#)

[KurdSAT TV from Southern Kurdistan](#)

[Sudan Tribune](#)

[The Daily Outlook Afghanistan](#)

[TOLOnews channel from Afghanistan](#)

[The Guardian Newspaper: Tehran Bureau](#)

[Pars Times: Iranian news aggregator based in Los Angeles](#)

[PressTV from Iran](#)

[Dawn News from Pakistan](#)

[Eritrean News: Stanford database of Eritrean news sources](#)

[DRC news: Stanford database of Congolese news sources](#)

What should a refugee be able to do or explain after 90 days in New Haven?

Below, you'll find a list of

ESL Resources on the Web

Website	Comments
Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven resource website	favorite ESL websites with lesson plans and other resources for tutors
Literacy Volunteer sample lessons	ESL and basic literacy lesson plans for many topics, including game and activity ideas
BRYCS Clearinghouse	contains informational resources and best practices for teachers
ESL Flow	resources for all proficiency levels
English Grammar	Downloadable grammar sheets and online exercises
Using English	A large collection of ESOL resources for students and teachers on different subjects
Absolute Beginner English	Basic lesson plan structure for teaching absolute beginners
Quality Time ESL	A series for teachers of "Essential English" to beginner students
Podcasts in English	"Real" conversational English podcasts with worksheets, vocab, and quizzes for intermediate to advanced students
EL Civics	civics lessons for ESL students, good for studying for citizenship exam
The Times in Plain English	news articles in plain English

Articles in Easy English	Current event articles in easy English
News in Levels	news for ESL in 3 proficiency levels
Newsela	nonfiction literacy and current events in basic English, registration required
VOA Learning English	Voice of America ESL site, with audio and video
Proliteracy Ed	geared towards adults
British Council Learning English	resources for adults, teens and kids
Learn English Feel Good	audio, video, some worksheets cost money
ESL Lab	designed to build listening comprehension
Using English	resources for teachers and students
A to Z Teacher's Stuff	resources for teachers, geared towards kids
Child Drama	drama activities for kids, can be used to make ESL games
ESL Teacher's Board	Lesson plans for teachers, child-focused
ESL Tower	geography ESL worksheets
ESL Kid's World	ESL games for kids
Boggle's World ESL	teaching materials for young people
Reading A-Z	leveled reading comprehension for kids
UNI.edu TESOL	lots of resources in a 90s style webpage interface
ESL Party Land	interactive ESL quizzes

podcasts:

<http://www.podcastsinenglish.com/pages/level1.shtml>

more advanced level:

<http://www.english-online.at/index.htm>

Driver's Test Resources

Many refugees desire to pass their driver's tests, and indeed, they should only drive if they have a CT learner's permit or driver's license and not an international license. How can you help?

- 1) Learner's permit: First, they need their DMV learner's permit. IRIS Case Managers do not always have the time to help clients go to the DMV and wait in line to secure one. Ask your refugee companion if they have received one yet and consider taking them one early morning to wait in line together (bring a board game!).
- 2) Driving class: We sign groups of clients up regularly to attend a low-cost one-day training that is mandatory for all Connecticut residents who want to get their licenses. Talk to the IRIS Operations Manager (staff member at the front desk) to ask about the next class and help your companion sign up for it.
- 3) Practice the written test: This is what is most difficult for refugees, as the test will be administered in English.
 - a) CT DMV Test Manual: [HERE](#). We've been told by refugees that the test changes all the time and the manual is not always up-to-date. Consider using one of the online resources below instead for up-to-date test practice.
 - b) <http://driversprep.com/>
 - c) <http://driving-tests.org/connecticut/>

Internet

We do not help clients set up internet services in their apartments. Comcast offers \$9.95/month "Internet Essentials" internet service for families with children who receive free or reduced school lunches (all of our refugee students do, for the most part). Check out [this](#) website and consider helping your refugee companion apply for Internet Essentials. For clients without children, help them search for [free wifi hotspots around New Haven](#).

Stuff to Do in New Haven (Free or Low-Cost)

You may show up to a visit with your companion one day and decide what they need more than ESL tutoring that day is a trip out of the house! Some refugees, especially older women, don't get out much. Simply going to the park, shopping or a museum together can make a big difference in their emotional health. Here is a list of places in New Haven that are either free or low-cost to visit; some activities may be seasonal.

Best website for New Haven events:

Outdoor/Sporting Activities

The best resource to find New Haven area parks is the [City's Park and Rec website](#). This has informational material on all the parks in the city, as well as pools and sporting facilities. And don't forget Lighthouse Point, the beach in West Haven, and Wooster Square Park!

If your companion comes from an agricultural background, they might like to get involved in a community garden. Plots are available by application ([here for more info](#))

Yale Urban Resources Initiative has a program called Green Space that has partnered with the community to create several parks and other small recreational areas all over the city ([see here](#))

Arts and Cultural Events

Check out the Dept. of Arts, Culture and Tourism's [twitter feed](#) for info on cultural events in the city. In addition, the City website also has a list of upcoming events [here](#).

Other free arts resources in the city include:

[The Yale Center for British Art](#)

[The Yale University Art Gallery](#)

[New Haven Artspace](#)

[City Gallery](#)

[Creative Arts Workshop Gallery](#)

[Silk Road Art Gallery](#)

[The Elm Shakespeare Company](#) (for advanced ESL learners :D)

[Jazz Haven](#)

[The Annual International Festival of Arts and Ideas](#) (happens in mid-June)

Affordable Shopping

Clothes and Furniture

We recommend calling these places (or have your companion call) first to find out hours, general pricing, items offered, etc. HERE is a complete list of clothing resources in New Haven.

Salvation Army Thrift Stores

- 1359 Dixwell Ave, Hamden CT 06514 (203) 230-2323

Goodwill Thrift Stores

- 472 Foxon Blvd/Route 80, New Haven CT 06513 (203) 468-2355

- 61 Amity Road, New Haven CT 06515 (203) 397-2735

- 2369 Dixwell Ave, Hamden CT 06514 (203) 230-2910

- 2901 State St, Hamden CT 06517 (203) 248-1600

St. Raphael's Auxillary Thrift Shop

1386 Chapel St, New Haven CT 06511 (203) 789-3312

St. Luke's Auxillary Thrift Shop

111 Whalley Ave, New Haven CT 06511 (203) 865-0141

The Furniture Co-op

30 Morris Ave, West Haven CT (203) 389-1112

Glorified Deliverance Church (free clothing for New Haven residents only)

604 Dixwell Ave, New Haven CT (203) 624-4175

Varick AME Zion Church Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen

242 Dixwell Ave, New Haven CT (203) 624-6245

Must bring photo ID or address confirmation to receive free clothing

Grocery Shopping

Finding an affordable supermarket nearby can be difficult for some clients based on where they live. In addition, some of our Muslim clients will want to shop at a halal market for meat products. In general, there are a few tips you can give your companion to make sure they are getting their money's worth:

- Many of the more expensive items are placed at eye level on the shelves. Help your companion look around for more reasonably priced items. The bread aisle in a supermarket is a great example to use! There are lots of brands to select from of all different prices, and it can be a little overwhelming at first for someone not used to that much variety.
- Point out the differences between brands and how generic brands are often cheaper.
- Similarly, when shopping for produce point out the price differences between organic and non-organic items. It's very easy to pick up the organics without noticing, and they are often \$1 or \$2 more expensive.
- Show your companion how to compare size vs. price (e.g. "this can of beans is 14oz and costs \$2, this one is 18oz and costs \$3.99, what is a better use of money to buy")
- Take advantage of sales and promotions! But be careful to explain that some sales may only apply to people who have store cards or coupons. On that note, make use of coupons! Sometimes booklets are lying around in the supermarket, or you can find them in the newspapers, etc.
- Encourage your companion to buy healthy foods. Of course, this can be hard for them since healthy items are often more costly.

Supermarkets we recommend to clients when they arrive because of their lower prices:

Price Rite (sells halal meat for cheaper than halal specialty stores)

- Parkway Plaza I: 1869 Dixwell Avenue, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 281 0035

C-Town Supermarket

- 482 Greenwich Ave, New Haven CT 06519 (203) 773-8998

- 325 Ferry St, New Haven CT 06513 (203) 777-3998

And here are some other big groceries in the area:

Stop and Shop

- 150 Whalley Ave, New Haven CT 06515 (203) 505-0105

- 112 Amity Rd, New Haven CT 06525 (203) 389-8600

- 2335 Dixwell Ave, Hamden CT (203) 248-9615

- 460 Elm St, West Haven CT (203) 931-8843

Costco (must have membership, however)

1718 Boston Post Rd, Milford CT (203) 882-8881

Here are the locations of a few *Halal markets* in West Haven. Your companion may want to buy meat there, as well as some ingredients from their own cultural cuisines that are not available in supermarkets. However, it may be more cost-efficient to buy things like produce and other widely available items at a large chain store.

Price Rite (sells halal meat for cheaper than halal specialty stores)

- See above for addresses

Nazar Market (\$)

39 Elm St, West Haven CT (203) 891-7757

Aldean's New Heaven Halal Market (\$)

702 Boston Post Rd #A, West Haven CT (203) 934-7091

A&M Halal Market (\$\$)

211 Saw Mill Rd, West Haven CT (203) 937-8774

Halal Convenience (\$\$)
417 Old Orange Ave, West Haven CT (203) 931-7110

Other Cultural Food Stores (general pricing information not available, so this may be a useful trip to take with your companion to see what products are offered)

Golden Tree African and Caribbean Market
541 Campbell Ave, West Haven CT (203) 931-0799

Kristodia African Market, LLC
818 1st Ave #2, West Haven CT (203) 937-6348

Tlaxcala Mexican Grocery
964 State St. Suite 1, New Haven CT (203) 497-8361

Brito's Grocery Store
559 Campbell Ave, West Haven CT (203) 931-1003

Soup Kitchens/Food Pantries in New Haven County

[Christian Community Action Food Pantry](#)
168 Davenport Ave, New Haven CT 06519 (203) 777-7848

[Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen](#)
311 Temple Street, New Haven CT

[Community Dining Room](#)
30 Harrison Ave, Branford CT

[FISH of Greater New Haven](#)

[Master's Manna in Wallingford](#)

For a fun outing, you and your companion can take a trip to one of the many farmers' markets in the city. The locations can be found [here](#). Some of the farmer's markets may have ways that shoppers can use their EBT card to make purchases; the one in Wooster Square does, for example.

Communication Resources

As a cultural companion one of your goals could be to help your companion learn English, but nonetheless you may find it useful to know a couple of simple phrases and words in their native language. Be careful, though-- don't confuse your companion into thinking you can speak their language (unless you actually can)!

Some Useful Phrases

English	Transliterated Iraqi Arabic
Hello	Marhaba
Yes	Na-am or Bah-ley
No	La
No problem/don't mention it	Mu mushkila
Goodbye	Ma'-salaama
When?	Shwaket or ma-ta
What?	Ma?
Thank You	shokran
My name is . . .	ismi. . .
please	men fadlak (m), men fadlik (f)

English	Swahili
Hello	Jambo
Nice to meet you	Nafurahi kukuona
Please	Tafadhali
Thank you	Asante
Yes	Ndiyo
No	Hapana

What is this?	Hi nii nini?
What is your name	Jino lako nani? Wewe nani?
Goodbye	Kwa heri

English	Transliterated Dari/Farsi (learn more here)
Hello	Salaam
My name is	Ma naame _____ as/ Esme man _____ hast
How are you	Chutoor hastee?
What is your name?	Naamet chees?
Thank you	Tashakur
Goodbye	Khuda hafez
Yes	Bali
No	Na

Testimonials (updated 6/24/2016)

Client's names were replaced by an initial to preserve their privacy.

Friendship

My experience as a cultural companion has been nothing less than remarkably powerful. I have formed strong and genuine friendships with both S and S...the time flies as we emerge energized and looking forward to the next week. The ladies and I are really enjoying the time we spend together! -Lynn

Yes, I am really excited to spend more time with (my CC), because she is so keen and spends a lot of time with me and always waits until my baby is asleep to continue our learning classes. She also loves my kids and they love seeing her around. -S (speaking about her CC Cassandra)

It's been so good to get to know S and her son M over the past month or so. While I think I naturally get nervous over a growing friendship--awkward silences aplenty--I'm usually excited for our visits and even feel a little restored afterwards...[I] always leave thinking, "No reason to have felt anxious!" Conversation and language-building are huge goals, but it's a relief to reach the point where I think we're both totally fine with some quiet moments. So in that sense, it has gotten easier."-Kayla

One thing that has been important to me is introducing J to my friends, not as my mentee but as a friend. My roommate usually goes to visit with me. I just say, "We're having friends over for dinner! Or, want to go visit with me?" That has really helped my friends and helped J and his roommates than keeping everyone separate.-Timmy

Lauren is wonderful, funny, and kind. And kind of crazy, like me!! -F

Everything is great; K and I have become close friends. We have similar interests and enjoy just talking, walking around, going to cafes, etc....In a couple of weeks we'll probably go to Boston, visit my son, and eat in our favorite Afghani restaurant. -Andy

F has been a big inspiration and definitely makes all my challenges seem miniature. I am a bit surprised by how difficult it sometimes is to relate to his experiences (very different than mine),

and often find myself carefully re-evaluating what I say. We exchanged our life stories (and became Facebook friends !), and I have been eager to spend more time with him. - Goram

English tutoring and putting aside “productivity:”

“To me, we’re English tutoring within the context of hanging out. That is productive. It’s mentally and emotionally good to be and have a friend, it’s good to hear and speak English outside of a strict classroom setting. Now, it’s more of, ‘Let me tell you this story and I’ll explain it. Now, tell me a story about your day!’ It’s fun and more relaxing.”-Timmy

“It was really difficult to schedule a time together because he had so little English at first. It’s hard to speak on the phone, and he still doesn’t always understand texts. He would cancel on me. One of our first lessons together was working on understanding the ways people express time. “I am free,” “I have work until or ‘till...” “O’clock, fifteen after, I have to work until 4 o’clock, and then I am free after...” It’s really important to make sure you are on the same page, because people will want to say they understand you.”-Timmy

“Try to get yourself in a place to speak simply. Be very careful, and simple in what you are saying. Don’t use slang or idioms, or explain them if you do. Even avoid contractions. I Can’t/I can not come.”-Timmy

“It’s a delicate balance. I sometimes felt like I was going over there to entertain them, but then, we were visiting. There is nothing wrong with visiting. Sometimes pushing English too hard is a little much. It’s just having an American in their lives. There is benefit here, trust me. Nothing incredible has to happen other than the bonding and respect. In the end, I made two friends; there are two people out there who like me and remember me. That’s more than I had before, right? So maybe the refugees had a better perspective than the Americans, because all they wanted was friendship, and we went in saying, Oh, I’m a Cultural Companion. “-Ken

Serving as a Cultural Broker:

“I advocated for A when he went to the rehabilitation home after his surgery and helped him get better care. My wife worked there before. We heard other people who worked there say that it was a ‘storehouse for human beings.’ I was concerned for A. It wasn’t bad, but it’s no way to live. He had no social contact or exercise when he was there. I felt a real need to help him at that point... I used to make him do aerobics, take him out for coffee, take walks, anything to get him out of there. It was a lot easier with A then, because there wasn’t this focus to try to help him with English.”-Ken

“When she’s asked certain questions, especially about marriage and family here, I was totally stumped; how do I explain all the different ways that Americans might practice those two things? But I’ve kept it simple and told her my own experience or that of close friends and family because that’s all that I can explain well. And she’s seemed very open-minded about the whole thing and asks me how my dad and step-mom and mom and step-dad are doing.”-Kayla

"We have also worked with maps of the US and I taught her about the Civil War and how the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments impact her today. She did not know that if her baby were born in the US, he/she would automatically be a US citizen. She was thrilled."-Lynn

Getting out of the apartment:

"One of the things we used to do was go to Stop and Shop and walk through the different aisles and work on food vocabulary. But we could only spend one hour or so together. He liked walking in a hardware store like Home Depot...One time, we met at his house and it was sweltering hot. I took him to the beach, and he loved that. Another time, we went up to East Rock. There was a sense of fresh air and openness. Those apartments can be so dark and cramped." -Ken

*"I will help [S] get a library card next week, and I promised to teach her how to drive a car"
-Lynn*

Roommates and family members:

"His previous housemates would join in a lot of the time. I would visit and answer basic life questions for him and his three roommates, who were also from Afghanistan but were older than him. They would ask me questions about life. One time, we spent half an hour going over the difference between 'soccer' and 'sucker'--as in 'grab those suckers and tear them out!' which one of his roommates heard all the time in his job as a gardener, in reference to weeds. There were lots of things they weren't understanding day to day. Now, I always meet with J and his two roommates, because they are best friends."-Timmy

"A's apartment is great; there are always Sudanese friends together, helping each other. During the World Cup, I visited and it must have been 100 degrees in that apartment, but there were 10 people sitting, watching games together...With A's roommate, I would have him read from news. We would stop and explain what the topics and differences were in America. He is so curious, and asked so many questions. We had a lot of interaction. We would work on pronunciation." -Ken

Reciprocal hospitality:

"It's important to let meals happen if they are going to happen, it's a big part of letting J and his roommates know they have something to give, that this is an equal friendship. I used to be big on, 'Do you need socks, hats, clothing?' Now, I know not to initiate explicit conversations about it....You can't make them feel like a charity case. Inviting people over to dinner is a way of giving without making them feel awkward. You're showing them, 'I want your company, I would love to have you to dinner.' Or, 'I'm going to get groceries anyway, I can pick you up and we can go together.' It doesn't feel like, 'Oh, you're so poor, let me do these things for you."-Timmy

"Part of the problem here is that you go into the home, and you want to help them. You get into this relationship of thinking your job is to help them. I think there needs to be some guidelines there. A's apartment was cold, and I got him a heater. I's bike got stolen, and I helped him get a new bike. I didn't feel like it changed the nature of our relationship. He would tell me about getting around town on his bike and it made me feel good. But I should have given it more thought. -Ken

Responding to situations/stories of hardship:

"There was a night when J shoveled snow for hours and hours in the middle of the night. I asked him how it went. I didn't want to say, "That sucks, your job is terrible." I don't want to make them feel like they are doing shitty work. If he is venting to me, I have to gauge what he wants. Sometimes I just listen and don't lie that things are going to be great right away. Sometimes he wants be distracted and have fun. Sometimes he wants someone to help him come up with ideas on how to fix a problem."-Timmy

"What I was always so impressed by with refugees is that they have had no easy luck but they are so kind. The fundamentals of human values are there, they just need education and opportunity... They just need hope... They are so motivated to work and be a part of this community. All they want is a normal life. They don't want to be on welfare."-Timmy

Sharing about each other:

"I try to feel out when they want to talk about themselves and when I should talk about myself. My parents were refugees. It's about not being afraid to have those conversations. At the beginning, I would just ask where their family members were, etc. I haven't heard anything crazy, and I don't push them for information. There is sharing on both sides, and I try to be careful not to always fill silence by talking about myself. I show them pictures of my family on Facebook. We cook for each other. They really liked when my roommate played music and I sang. It's important to figure out if there is stuff you can share and enjoy, mutual experiences you can have."-Timmy

"Did you know that A was the best tailor in his city? His friends told me people used to line up at his shop for him to make their clothing. He could get a great job here if he didn't have sight impairment. He has a great skill, they say. I have no idea how he managed to make it here to America alone. It tells you how far personality and good attitude goes, because he had nothing. One of the things I never wanted to do was pry into their background. With A's roommate, he was more open. He explained to me that he had went to Libya, then a Tunisian camp. He would describe all of that. With A, it more difficult because we couldn't converse. I think it would be interesting if we had a better understanding culturally of where they are coming from. I got into one conversation trying to explain Western attitudes. I really pushed it. We had a conversation about gay marriage, and they couldn't believe it existed in America. It was important to talk about."-Ken

Giving and Receiving:

"I think maybe just being there as a friend for S, in a new and probably completely overwhelming place, is the clearest way I've helped. More so, it feels like she's helped me. I've had international friends before, but nearly all had either spent some time in the U.S. and were familiar with the culture, so I was never challenged to articulate the ins and outs of my own to someone." -Kayla

"Our first few meetings were pure English practice. I would look through his worksheets from IRIS English class and work him through the worksheets again to make sure he understood them. Often he would do them, but not really understand them. We worked on vocab and sentence meaning. Once we sat and read entire page of his story, explained all the details. A few months ago, things started to feel too high-stress and weird during our meetings. J would get super worked up about tenses. We practiced them over and over, and he was so mad he couldn't get the hang of them. We shouldn't have worked so hard on tenses. I realized we should have just focused on the critical English he needs everyday. He couldn't tell time well! He can do without tenses for now. He was also unhappy in his living situation. Then he moved in with his new roommate, who is his age and gets along really well with him. We mostly visit together now. I think J enjoys it a lot more. He would get really frustrated trying to learn English and was really hard on himself when we tried to practice together. He and his roommate can't afford to pay to go to things or pay for TV and movies, so it's nice to be able to invite them out to activities or visit at their apartment or have them over to our apartment." -Timmy

"J had left his old mattress in his old apartment and was sleeping on the floor, and I had an extra mattress at my apartment. I tried to explain that someone had given it to me for free and I wanted them to have it for free, but when I asked, 'Do you need my mattress?' they didn't get it. So I asked them to walk with me to my house, pick up the mattress, and walk back over to his apartment." -Timmy

"English wasn't happening. I didn't have the skills to break through to him. It was one thing to go over with him to say, 'This is a tree, this is a chair, this is a flower.' I used to try to teach him to say 'I don't remember.' That was all he could say. He needed a lot more than one or two days per week... The only thing I could do the night before his surgery was take him to Archee Moore's and have chicken wings and beer together.... When he was in the rehabilitation center, it wasn't about learning English. It was about giving this human being a break from the monotony of that place. Many times I would teach "I" (A's roommate) English and take a walk with A. It took the pressure off, it didn't feel like we were failing at anything..." -Ken