

Acculturation/Hospitality

Introducing the refugee family to our complex American culture will involve many members of the community as well as the co-sponsorship Resettlement Team. During the first few weeks there should be daily contact to make sure that all is OK and answer acculturation questions as they arise. Friendly visits and outings are among the most important ways we show the refugee family that they are welcome. However, scheduling visits and outings with your refugee family can become a logistical nightmare if you don't have an organized "central clearing house" for keeping their appointments. This can be a large calendar in the refugee's home or kept by an appointed member of the Resettlement Team (often the transportation person). Emphasize to your group that ***no one is to schedule even a brief outing*** with your family without checking and making a note on the calendar!

We strongly recommend that the hospitality person make a poster with the photos, names, and roles of each core resettlement team member to put on a wall in the family's apartment. This will help the family learn your core team members' names and faces and know who is responsible for what area of resettlement. We also recommend that anyone who comes to the home of the refugee family where a name tag and something that indicates that they are part of your group—so the family knows that this is a safe person whom they can trust.

Some of the areas of American culture that refugees will need to understand include:

- ***New Surroundings*** Refugees should be encouraged to visit community attractions and resources on their own. "Getting out of the house" is vital to establishing connection with their new community. A public library card can be a meaningful first source of community contact. (Many refugees appreciate free computer access available at public libraries, though some charge for printing.) Recreation and cultural activities should be made part of orientation.
- ***Grocery*** Go with the family at least the first time to buy their food at a nearby grocery. Show them how to shop economically, how to weigh vegetables, how to check out using SNAP. *Be sure that in using the ConnectCard they ALWAYS use SNAP to buy food, as it is easy to get confused between the RCA/TFA and SNAP accounts on the same card.* They may need to be instructed to ask for certain items (e.g., cigarettes, some over-the-counter medications, certain health and beauty items) rather than go behind the counter to take them. Show how to return bottles for deposit refund. Take the family to an ethnic food store periodically to be sure that they have the specialty items they need, especially if they keep *halal*. For those who may need help finding mosques as well as halal stores and restaurants in their areas, you may search for these by zip code through <http://www.zabihah.com>. To be clear, *kosher and halal are not necessarily considered substitutes for each other.*
- ***Laundry*** Show the family where they can wash clothes at a nearby laundromat or in their building/house, if applicable. Give careful instruction on selective washing, temperature, timing, soap use, and drying. Show how to use a moneychanger/ change machine if using a laundromat. If using a washer/dryer in a building or house, be sure to explain the importance of cleaning the lint filter on the dryer to prevent fire.
- ***Post Office*** They will be interested in writing letters overseas as well as within the United States. Explain airmail letters and stamps, how to purchase them and how to use them. Show them where to find the nearest blue mailbox.

- **Cell Phone** The cosponsor will be responsible for acquiring one cell phone and one month of service for the refugee family to be ready at arrival. Once the family members have Social Security numbers, you can help them get one more cell phone via the Lifeline program (free cell phone, and free 250 minutes/month service – plus texting – for as long as they continue to be low-income). The best way we've found to apply for that program is online at www.safelink.com. The limit in the Lifeline program is one free phone per household. But if there is an adult son or daughter who lives in the same home but has a separate source of income (either a job or DSS cash assistance or SSI disability), then he/she is considered a separate household and can be eligible for a separate free phone.

If the refugee arrives with a smart phone, s/he would be responsible for activating service in the US with a recognized provider.

While it is a covered expense under R&P, we recommend purchasing a phone card that the family can use to place a call to their home country when they arrive. The cell phone you purchase with service should only allow for unlimited calls within the US, as is the standard we have in place at IRIS. Phone cards can be used from cell phones to call internationally at a much lower rate than dialing directly. To get an idea of what kind of calling cards are available for families to call numbers in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Iran, or Afghanistan, you can survey options available through <http://www.callingcards.com/> as a start. IRIS does not endorse a particular plan; you will discover many vendors online and some sold in convenience stores. Like with gift cards, it is best to investigate fees and taxes exclusive of the value on the front of the card (or as presented online).

Unless the quality and consistency of cell phone coverage is particularly problematic in your area, we **do not** recommend spending money to install a landline, which is expensive to activate and maintain. If the refugee wishes to have access to the internet and/or television through a cable company or Frontier, they would be responsible for all associated expenses, including activation and monthly service.

The refugee will need a cell phone to communicate with the Contact Person and a translator. You will need to teach the refugee how to use the phone, remember the phone number, and how and when to **dial 911** in an emergency, whether at home or while out and about. Since the level of cell phone service does not include international calling, calling cards are a good alternative to dialing direct long distance and can be used with cell phones. It is important to impress upon the refugee the initial expenses involved with cell phone service through smart phones and/or purchasing calling cards for international calls, such that using mail, email, and/or a friend or cosponsor's internet connection should be encouraged for long-distance communication, where practical, and at least until they are able to pay for such services themselves.

- **Identification** The Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) issues non-driver photo IDs for a \$22.50 (as of this edition). Refugees must present their I-94 printout, passport and/or Department of State Admission Letter, Social Security card, and two pieces of mail received at their address within 90 days of application to prove Connecticut residency.

Internet Service/WiFi, and Cable TV

It is increasingly common for refugees to arrive with smart phones, through which they are accustomed to calling their friends and family through WiFi rather than dialing directly. Nonetheless, **we do not recommend installing internet service prior to the family's arrival.** The normal monthly fees for internet access are prohibitively expensive at the outset and they may not be able to afford to maintain them long term. In addition to the calling card option presented above as way to allow the family to call home after they arrive, we recommend that you allow them to use one of your smart phones as a hot spot to enable them to call on their own phone using the free software to which they are accustomed. Longer term, the following is recommended for the family to access WiFi:

- Libraries, shopping malls, cafes, and other public places that have free WiFi signals
- Group member's smart phones while in transit or waiting for an appointment
- **Discounted internet access through your school district** is available for qualifying low-income families. Once the family's benefits through DSS are bona fide and you have received the benefit determination letters, you can assist the family in renting a router and getting internet service for about \$20 per month. It is definitely worth waiting until this option is available because it is so cost-effective (and the children will need the access to do homework). This program is available through Frontier and most cable companies statewide in cooperation with all local school districts.

Cable TV is expensive and not recommended for the family so soon after arrival. It may be tempting to provide access to channels in other languages, but acquiring some channels can cost as much as \$30 per month in some markets. The simplest solution to accessing foreign channels is **over the internet!** If a TV has a USB port, the computer can be hooked up and voila. If they want to order such service later when they have more money, that is their choice.