

# world relief<sup>®</sup>

## Building Relationships with Refugees

One of the most important roles that volunteers have at World Relief Triad is building relationships with clients. Often times just a familiar smiling face is all that is needed to help put newcomers at ease. We have some simple fun ways to help build those relationships. As well as some information about different cultures that may help you.

### Cultural Information

**Is there a way to find out more about the family before they arrive to know how to make them feel more welcome?**

**How much information are we allowed to know?**

Once you have been paired with a refugee family, World Relief Triad will provide you with their personal information. This includes name(s), age(s), religion, ethnicity, and country of origin, country of refuge, language spoken, and employment history (if applicable). World Relief Triad recommends looking up information on the specific people group from which your newcomer/family comes.

The [Cultural Orientation Resource Center](#) is an excellent source with extensive information on certain refugee populations. To gain an understanding of the spread of the gospel among any people group, go to <http://www.joshuaproject.net/> and search for your people group. Prior to their arrival or your meeting, we recommend you pray regularly for them. Meeting your refugee friends for the first time is an exciting time. Just focus on making your new friend(s) feel welcome. Whether or not they speak English, you will be able to easily communicate friendship, love and welcome.

### Cross-Cultural Bridge-Building

*[Parts adapted from World Relief Minnesota] WR Triad volunteers will have the opportunity to experience many different cultures. While the languages and mannerisms that volunteers have may be different from those of their refugee partners, volunteers will be the most successful if they develop certain attitudes:*

- **Willingness to Suspend Judgment:**
  - Refugees may do or say something that seems strange; don't immediately jump to conclusions or makes judgments. Keep an open mind and remember that every culture makes sense to the people living in it.

- **Willingness to Learn:**
  - Ask questions and listen to the answers. Take time to learn about refugees' cultures.
- **Sense of Humor:**
  - Volunteers should be willing to laugh off embarrassing, confusing, or annoying moments as everyone works to understand each other.
- **Focus on Relationship:**
  - Since volunteers wish to see their partners thriving socially and economically, relationships must be the foundation of their work. Building relationships with healthy boundaries will benefit both the volunteer and partner.
- **Willingness to Take Risks and Fail:**
  - Don't be afraid to reach out to a partner in a new way.
- **Willingness to Share Yourself:**
  - Volunteers should be willing to be open and honest in relationships. Each volunteer has special gifts and experiences to share with partners
- **Do Not Abuse A Felt Position of Power:**
  - Refugees are in a very vulnerable situation where they may not have any support in the US. Volunteers should not make a partner feel any pressure to engage in certain activities or conversations that they do not want to take part in.

\*For information on overcoming barriers and adjustment to the U.S., reference the [Overcoming Barriers Toolkit](#).

## Understanding Worldviews and Culture Shock

- One's worldview defines what is "right" or appropriate in all areas of life. It defines our big issues like overall values and societal systems, but also smaller issues like foods to eat and how to eat them.
- Many of the refugees resettled in the US come from cultures where the following subjects are viewed differently: the value of time, individual vs. community, a person's identity, a person's value, and youth vs. age.
- While these are only a few examples, it is important to understand that cultural values are extremely different. For example, a refugee may not realize that being late is considered rude, as many other cultures do not put the same value on time that Americans do.

- Volunteers should be understanding and patient if there are any instances where a refugee seems difficult or rude. It could just be a case of cultural differences.

## **Culture Shock**

Culture shock is the name given to many uncomfortable emotions and reactions that people experience when they move into a new culture that is very different from their own. Please be mindful and considerate of any discomfort from partners as they may be experiencing culture shock.

There are five main stages of culture shock:

1. **Honeymoon Phase:** The culture is new and exciting; their dreams and expectations about the future seem to be coming true.
2. **Rejection Phase:** The realities of life (housing, employment, and family) can become overwhelming. Many things do not go according to plan, and newcomers may feel misunderstood by those around them.
3. **Regression Phase:** In order to deal with the stressful changes, a newcomer may only try to surround himself with people of their own culture.
4. **Recovery Phase:** If a person can work through the regression phase, they may be able to accept and feel accepted by American culture.
5. **Reverse Culture Shock:** A person may become so accustomed to their new culture that they would exhibit culture shock if they returned to the home country.

Persons in the rejection and regression phases may exhibit moodiness, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, or depression. Refugees may have also experienced severe trauma and persecution in their home country and may struggle with these symptoms as well.

### **Encouraging refugees to stay in North Carolina during their first three to six months:**

Oftentimes, through word of mouth, refugees learn about other locations in the U.S. where there are higher concentrations of people of their ethnicity, or there are supposedly better job opportunities. If refugees (specifically) leave N.C. during their first three to six months they will no longer be eligible for government or WR Triad funding.

## Cultural Background Profiles

## World Religions

Refugees come with various faith backgrounds. The following resources offer foundational information for understanding world religions and are helpful for conversing with people of different belief systems. Especially when evangelizing, it is considerate, helpful, and only fair to understand a person's faith on a deeper level. Included are overviews on some of the largest world religions with which WR Triad volunteers might come into contact: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. Outreach material can be located on World Relief Fort Worth's [webpage](#) to assist volunteers when ministering to refugees.

Check out <http://www.4truth.net/world-religions/> for more information.

## Conversation Starters

Starting conversations with refugees can be difficult, especially when talking to someone whose first language is not English. Eventually, communication can flow more easily as volunteers develop a good system of communication. You can always use [Google Translate](#) or a phone app to help you along. **Here are a few possible conversation starters:**

- Basic info: names, ages, grades
- How did you come to be in America?
- How long have you been in High Point/North Carolina?
- What was it like when you first came to America?
  - Remember, some families have only been here for a few days.
- Do you like America, school, jobs, etc.?
- How is your home country different from America? What are some of the challenges of having to move here?
- What do you miss about your home country? Do you want to go back some day?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- Remember that many have just come from very difficult circumstances
- Can you teach me some words in your language?
- What is your job? What did you do in your home country?
- What kind of food do you like?
- How can people help refugees in America?

**When talking to kids:**

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
  - Remember that some may have never had a chance to hope and dream like we do here.
  - Now's the time to give them a chance to do just this. Dream with them.
- What is your favorite subject in school?
- What do you like to do for fun?

### **Tell them about yourself:**

- Your interests, what you do for a living, where you live, etc.
- Share your favorite activities and things you would like to show them.

**Any ideas for breaking the ice as we eat, keeping in mind the language barrier?** When refugees arrive, they have usually traveled for several days without resting, so do not take it personally if they do not want to socialize immediately. For later encounters, here are some helpful mealtime ice breakers:

- Bring a translation dictionary to learn some words in their language and begin teaching them some English. Teach/learn words for the food being served and begin teaching some daily phrases.
- Pictures are universal! Bring some paper and pens to communicate via drawings.
- If their alphabet has different characters, ask how to write their name(s) in their native language and show them how to write yours. Ask them to teach about their alphabet (if literate) and show them the English alphabet.

### **Overcoming language barriers**

- Volunteers are to understand that language barriers will occur between them and the refugees whom they are befriending. This is okay! Language barriers are awkward, and volunteers are to embrace this. Refugees who do not speak English understand that they cannot understand you and you cannot understand them. Be patient, use hand motions and have fun with Google Translate and dictionaries.
- Exposure to the English language and persistence on a refugee's part are key to learning.
- As volunteers expose themselves to the accent of the refugees whom they are befriending, they will be able to understand their English better.
- Do not be afraid to use broken English. Sometimes this can help refugees.
  - For example: say "You go, grocery store, bread" instead of, "You should go to the grocery store to buy more bread." Or say, "Tomorrow, three, I come" instead of "Tomorrow at 3 p.m. I will come to your house to visit you."

## Listening to refugees

- Oftentimes, many refugees have not had the opportunity to be listened to. Volunteers have the honor of providing this type of empowerment for them. Take time to listen and learn about their culture.
- Take time to ask intentional, specific questions that show you genuinely care about building a relationship and knowing the refugee.
- Understand that refugees may not understand things that you would consider common sense. Be patient and work with them.
- When refugees make mistakes (either in their English or in actions) be sure to find a balance between when it's healthy to correct them and when it is hurtful.
- Sometimes it is more beneficial to observe refugees rather than ask questions.

## Activities

### Community Orientation

- Take a ride together on **public transportation**. Help newcomers locate the nearest bus stop and travel to important locations via public transport (grocery store, hospital, public assistance office, library, etc.)
- Go **grocery shopping** at an American grocery store and/or an ethnic store. Look at pricing, pounds, sizes, products, and coupons. Teach newcomers how to shop on a budget.
- Take a tour of a local government office, i.e. post office, fire station, or police station (usually offered for free if arranged in advance).
- Visit an **ethnic restaurant** of which the food is familiar for the newcomer.
- Enjoy parks, holiday festivities, Church, and sporting events with your refugee partners.
- Give your refugee partners a map of the city, state, country, and/or world so they can have a perspective on where they are now in relation to their home country.
- Some refugees may enjoy hearing the history of the area and city they are living in now.

### Cultural Adaptation

- Discuss public safety and how to call 911 – when to call, when not to call, what to say.

- Review the home for maintenance problems. Practice with the newcomer explaining them to the landlord.
- Teach newcomers simple English phrases and words important to everyday life. Learn the same phrases in their language.
- Review a map of the community. Ride the bus or drive around town to learn street names.
- Visit the local post office and show them how to buy stamps and mail a letter.
- Visit the local library, show them how to use the Internet, apply for a library card, and check out books.
- Practice making and receiving telephone calls. Practice polite greetings and phone etiquette.
- Discuss money. Practice making change, tipping, etc.
- Practice telling time with a clock. Explain the importance of being on time in this culture.
- Take a trip to the laundromat. Discuss temperatures, color separation, amount of detergent, coin machines, etc.
- Go to a second-hand store or garage sale together and buy something for yourself. Some newcomers may think there is a stigma to buying used items. If you buy some for yourself that will help them see that it is okay.

### **Friendship Building Activities**

- Take them to the park
- Invite them to a cultural event (family birthday party, wedding, cultural celebration)
- Ask them to teach you how to prepare a dish from their culture or teach you some other skill they have.
- Find out what they like to do and do it with them! (Bike riding, hiking, sewing, dancing, etc.)
- Find out about international events in the area (International Festival in Raleigh, etc.)

## Befriending Refugees beyond Case Closing

### **What can we do when a family has become independent and doesn't need our help meeting immediate needs?**

If your refugee family has reached sustainability, this is a wonderful marker in their journey here! Hopefully you have grown in friendship with them over the past months.

Our goal from the start was for them to grow in friendship with you, while becoming progressively less dependent upon you. From this point on, we encourage you to continue in friendship with them, just as you would with any other friend. It is likely that they will still have periodic questions, and you are in the perfect position to continue offering them that advice or help. As you continue in your friendship, we would encourage you to consider beginning friendship with another refugee/family.