

Being A Good Neighbor

Suggestions:

We suggest reaching out to your assigned individual or family 3 times in the next month to offer support and see if there is a way you can help. At least one of these should be an in-person visit. If you have a team, try going in two different small groups at two different times. Not every volunteer will have an ongoing or warm connection with every refugee. People are different, and relationship cannot be forced! However, in this time of uncertainty we believe it is valuable to offer our support.

Reaching out could take several forms:

- 1) In-person visit (consider bringing a small gift, such as fruit or another food item)
- 2) Phone call
- 3) Text message

Language

It will be helpful to use Tarjimly or Google Translate to communicate if the refugee does not speak English. These are free online services/apps. Tarjimly is staffed by real volunteer translators. Google translate abilities vary by language. If you are sending a message, try to do it both in English and a translated version, but don't expect perfect comprehension because these services are imperfect.



Volunteer Resources

<https://worldrelief.org/western-ny/volunteer-resources/>



Client Hub

<https://worldrelief.org/western-ny/client-hub/>

GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS HELPING REFUGEES

(Last edited: 1/29/2025)

This is NOT an exhaustive list, just something to get you started, if the person you connect with expresses a desire for assistance.

The goal is to empower the family to care for their own needs, to “TEACH TO,” not do for, and offer friendship, companionship, and orientation to life in the US. Continually ask yourself, “Would I do this for a friend?”

All of our refugees should be eligible for SNAP food benefits, Medicaid, and also rent assistance depending on whether or not they have begun to work. Their case worker has applied for this for them.

SOME IMPORTANT MILESTONES AND GOALS FOR THE FAMILY:

Mail to watch out for:

You can help families read and interpret mail that comes to their home and respond, as necessary.

- At 4/5 months, the family will need to complete recertification paperwork for their SNAP benefits.
- Billing statements from RGE, Spectrum, etc.
- Additional DHS paperwork which may need to be responded to in a timely manner
- Travel loan paperwork

Employment:

- If they begin to work, they must report this to DHS within 10 days. Failing to do this may result in a bill for benefits they receive while working but that they are not entitled to get.
<https://www.monroecounty.gov/files/hs/Employer's%20Statement%20MCDSS-729.pdf>
- If your family members have jobs, but feel dissatisfied, it's important that you encourage them **not to quit** without talking first with an employment counselor at Catholic Family Center or OACES. Many job-related conflicts can be smoothed over through a conversation with the manager, and this way loss of income and confusion with benefits can be avoided.
- Our clients can go back to CFC or OACES as many times as they want for 5 years.

Paying Rent and Bills:

- Most of our families have a month to month lease at their current apartment. Even if the family does have rent assistance it may not cover the full amount of rent. If there is a gap, the family is responsible to cover it with a direct payment to their landlord.
- During this time the family will transition from assistance with their rent, to paying rent and other bills on their own as they begin working. Please help your family understand this process, including where and how to pay rent, whether it is online or through mail, bank check or money order. Doing this helps your family be independent and helps World Relief maintain good relationships with the landlords who rent to our clients.
- You can show your family how to pay their RGE, Spectrum, etc., bills online with their debit card. Most of our clients have bank accounts at ESL. They should have the information from their case worker.
- Your family may be eligible for HEAP benefits in the winter on their heating bills. You can help them apply for this. <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/>

- Our R&P team will have set up your family with a bank account. Reinforce how to use it and the associated debit card.

Travel Loan

- At around 6 months, the family will need to begin to repay their travel loan to the federal government. They will receive a letter in the mail. They have 5 years to pay, with zero interest. You can help them look out for this information that will arrive in the mail. It's important not to miss payments, as being regular with these will help them to build good credit history. Clients can pay online at worldrelief.org, under the Travel Loan section or call 800-901-1908; 800-903-1924 or 800-901-1951. <https://worldrelief.org/travel-loans/>

Budgeting

- As members of the family begin to work, they will lose some of their public benefits. You can help them understand ways to reduce their expenditures by teaching them which stores have lower prices, how to save money by turning down their thermostat when not home, or at night while sleeping, etc.
- WIC – If your family contains a pregnant woman, new mother, or young children under age 5, applying for WIC could help reduce their food expenses by covering certain healthy food items. Learn more about that here: <https://www.monroecounty.gov/health-maternal-WIC>

Your family may or may not need assistance with these suggested things. Use your judgement!

- Their local library. If they can get here, they can get help to access other benefits.
- Navigating health appointments and insurance
- Navigating special education resources for their children at school
- Common over the counter medications in the US and how to use them.
- Where to find donated clothing and food items near them, if needed.
- Where to buy used clothing such as Goodwill, Salvation Army, or Savers.
- Knowing where to get dental and eye care that take Medicaid
- Almost every refugee can benefit from conversational English practice!

Immigration

At the time of this document being printed, refugees are eligible to apply for a green card after 1 year in the US, and 5 years after that may apply for citizenship. www.uscis.gov. Other immigrants will have different pathways. Be careful not to offer legal advice, but rather point to reputable local sources for assistance.