**Dignity. Hope. Opportunity.**

We are delighted that you are considering refugee co-sponsorship, also known as forming a Community Assistance Team (CAT). We hope that the material in this welcome packet will give you a general overview of what it entails and help you make an informed decision as to whether a CAT is for you and your organization or faith group.

As a CAT, you will walk alongside and welcome refugees who are fleeing violence and persecution in their home country. CAT groups are typically made up of more than 7 individuals already part of an established social group or organization, faith-based or otherwise.

CAT groups are assigned to a specific case or family and can choose to be responsible for any number of things from a provided list (see page 2), depending on the group’s capacity. The formal commitment for CATs is 3-6 months, however many groups stay in touch and maintain a relationship with their new neighbors years later.
What Can Community Assistance Teams Do?

- Set a fund-raising goal for your group/organization to help your refugee family with things like rental assistance, utilities, and other necessities.
- Set-up and furnish an apartment before an arrival. Bridge secures lodging for every case, but your team of co-sponsors can assist by collecting the items needed for furnishing.
- Welcome your assigned family at the airport and transport them to their new home. You can make signs and even learn how to say "Welcome!" in their language.
- Prepare a welcome meal that is culturally appropriate.
- Stock their home with 2-3 weeks worth of food. Bridge can supply you with a list of grocery items depending on where the family or individual is from.
- Transport your assigned family to necessary appointments and meetings.
- Teach your refugee family how to ride the bus and navigate the area on their own, as well as have access to the public library system.
- Help find jobs and prepare for employment alongside the family and Bridge's employment specialist.
- Offer in-home tutoring twice a week. We will connect you to the Center for English and Assimilation who will provide training and resources.
- Plan and attend community events with your assigned refugee family. Community involvement is a big part of refugee integration, and a great way for you all to get to know one another and participate in cultural exchange.
- Provide seasonal clothing and footwear for each member of the family for work, school, and everyday use.

**Bridge Refugee Services, Inc.** founded in Knoxville in 1982, is a non-profit refugee resettlement agency working with many community and faith organizations in the Knoxville and Chattanooga areas of East Tennessee. The Chattanooga sub-office was opened in 1996. The creation of Bridge brought expanded services to the cluster of East Tennessee churches which had been welcoming refugees since the 1970s. Bridge resettles refugees through the Tennessee Office for Refugees, and Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). Resettling refugees is a public and private partnership.

*Our mission is to provide opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives, after suffering persecution, so that they become productive, contributing members of the community.*
Role of Community Assistance Team

- Assemble a group of committed individuals and delegate tasks as needed
- Attend a training, complete background checks, and become familiar with Bridge policies and procedures, including Non-Proselytizing Agreement (see page 6)
- Ask questions and ask for guidance
- Commit to at least three responsibilities from provided list (see page 2)
- Serve as a community liaison for refugee client you are partnered with
- Provide support in terms of in-kind donations, volunteer hours and mileage, and financial contributions. Based on the cost of living for a single person, suggested starting donation is $3500. Funds go towards paying rent, unexpected emergency expenses, food, job preparation, bus passes, etc.
- Serve as community liaison for refugee clients and encourage them to be self-sufficient. Remember that we want refugees to be empowered
- Maintain open communication channels with Bridge staff Community Assistance liaison and follow staff guidelines
- Record and report all volunteer hours, miles and donations promptly

Role of Bridge Refugee Services

- Provide a staff member liaison with whom you can communicate
- Coordinate a training that covers the responsibilities of CAT group, expectations, policies, recommendations, and resources.
- Match Community Assistance Teams with refugees, share basic background information, notify CATs of flight information.
- Act as liaison with landlord to get CAT access to apartment prior to arrival.
- Welcome refugee at airport alongside interpreter and CAT.
- Provide background checks for members of Community Assistance Team working with family.
- Send periodic emails with resources and opportunities to network with other Community Assistance Teams, as well as upcoming events.
- Provide case management support for refugee clients, as well as employment services.
Other Ways to Help
Check out some alternate ways to welcome refugees below!

Volunteer at our office, as a transportation assistant/appointment advocate, or as an ESOL tutor or mentor.

Hire a refugee. Contact our employment specialist about hiring qualified candidates.

Fundraise for refugees -- oftentimes they arrive with nothing but the possessions they carry. Connect with the Bridge FUNdraising & Events team.

Organize a drive for needed in-kind items. Check-in with a staff member to see what is currently needed.

Advocate for policies that welcome refugees and ease their resettlement.

Follow us on social media and sign up for our monthly e-newsletter.

Refer landlords and rental properties willing to rent to refugees to Bridge Pre-Arrival Specialist

Next Steps

• Put together a team of 7-15 committed people from your organization.
• Delegate 2 people to serve as your group’s points of contact for Bridge.
• Contact Bridge staff member or AmeriCorps VISTA member to find out about upcoming training and orientation dates.
• Attend training and orientation as a team.
• Complete background checks.
• Go over Community Assistance Manual with your team and ask questions.
• Connect with other existing Bridge CAT groups.
• Prepare for your refugee family’s arrival.
• Meet with case manager at intake.
• Respect dignity, hope, and opportunity.

For more information, please contact:

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# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is the difference between an immigrant and a refugee?

An immigrant is a foreign-born individual who voluntarily leaves their country of origin. A refugee leaves their country due to fear of persecution or violence because of their race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion.

## Are refugees considered "aliens"?

Under U.S. law, any person who is not a U.S. citizen and resides in the U.S. is considered an "alien." Most aliens have some form of legal status in the U.S. and can be documented or undocumented.

## Will the refugee be healthy?

Prior to departure, refugees receive a preliminary health exam. If the refugee has a serious medical condition, they will be treated overseas. Women over 7 months pregnant will travel after delivery of the baby. Refugees may have health issues requiring follow-up in the United States.

## Can we select the refugees we want to sponsor?

We encourage groups to be open to accepting refugees from any part of the world. Bridge assigns Community Assistance teams based on the needs of clients and the organization.

## What is an asylee?

An asylee comes to the United States first and applies for protection after arriving, whereas refugees generally apply for protection at a refugee camp or other processing site outside of their home country. Bridge serves both refugees and asylees.

## How is the US refugee admission ceiling established?

The president establishes the ceilings each year in consultation with Congress and the State Department. Various organizations present testimony to support specific admissions levels and their rationale.

## When will the refugees arrive?

Resettlement agencies have no control over the scheduling of refugee travel to the U.S. It is our responsibility to arrange a CAT before the refugee can be processed for arrival, but this isn't always the case, and many Community Assistance Teams are connected after arrival.

## Will the refugee know any English?

Most refugees don't know any English unless indicated. It is usually safer to assume that the refugee family does not know English.
Non-Proselytizing Agreement

Bridge Refugee Services, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization

Our mission is to provide opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives after suffering persecution, so that they become productive, contributing members of the community.

Many refugees have spent years fleeing persecution and this may be their first chance to live without fear that someone has an agenda to change them in some way. Although it is natural to share what is important to you with others, as a volunteer in the Refugee Services Program you must not engage in proselytism. Proselytizing is defined as inducing someone, directly or indirectly, to convert to one’s own religion.

Engaging in conversations or passing literature out with the hopes to convert someone are examples of direct proselytizing and they are easily recognizable, however, it is more difficult to recognize indirect proselytism.

A joint working group formed by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, in their paper “The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness” includes the following indirect activities in their definition of proselytism:

- Making unjust or uncharitable references to other religions’ beliefs and practices
- Comparing religious communities by emphasizing the achievements and ideals of one, and the weaknesses and practical problems of another
- Employing any kind of moral compulsion or psychological pressure (direct or implied)
- Using political, social or economic power as a means of winning new members of your religion
- Extending explicit or implicit offers of education, health care or material inducements or using financial inducement with the intent of making converts
- Manipulative attitudes and practices that exploit people’s needs, weaknesses, or lack of education especially in situations of distress, and fail to respect their freedom and human dignity

In your role as a volunteer, it is important to understand that many refugees will perceive you as being in a position of authority. This power dynamic makes it easy for refugees to feel pressured into doing things to please you. In all that you do, make sure the refugees understand that your help is not contingent on their participation in your church or living a certain way.

________________________________________________________________________

Name (printed)                                           Date

________________________________________________________________________

Signature (signature of parent or guardian if participant is under 18)