



East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary

SANCTUARY BREAKS

Guidance for Potential Guests

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What Is the Need?

An asylum seeker or refugee is a person who has fled their home country due to persecution or well-founded fear of persecution, for the reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Currently, the most visible example is the millions of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers who have fled civil war over recent years. Many asylum seekers endure months of dangerous sea and land crossings to get to countries who are signed up to the UN convention, requiring them to give protection to genuine asylum seekers.

The UK has a long history of giving sanctuary to people fleeing persecution and our system is meant to ensure that these people are treated with humanity and fairness.

Once an application has been made, awaiting an interview and a decision can take months or years. During this time, the Home Office provides shared accommodation with other asylum seekers. Rent, council tax, electric, gas, and water are all paid for by the Home Office. Asylum seekers are given about £5 per day for food, toiletries, clothes, over-the-counter medications, and transport. They are not allowed to work.

Asylum seekers are “dispersed” in areas with the infrastructure to support them (not too far from Home Office offices). These tend to be cities. Neither East Lindsey nor Lincolnshire county as a whole are dispersal areas.

Some asylum seekers may never have lived in a city before. Some may not be able to communicate with the people from other countries with whom they live. Some may only have friends who are asylum seekers.

For this reason, offering Sanctuary Breaks to asylum seekers is a gift to those who wish to use them. It means they can go to a rural area, live with English-speaking people (a great opportunity to practice English, if they wish), learn about British culture, and get warm attention from someone / people who are not in a similar situation to theirs.

Many who have hosted asylum seekers consider this to have been one of the most rewarding times of their lives. Clearly, however, every person (host as well as guest!) is different, as are the experiences they have lived through and the circumstances they are currently facing.

These notes aim to highlight some of the most important issues when considering hosting. Some will have hosted already or have lived amongst people from other cultures and may find much that is written here very familiar.

This is a working document and East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary (ELAoS) will be very grateful for any comments / suggested amendments or additions.

Who can be referred to ELAoS?

ELAoS's principal aim around hosting sanctuary breaks is to provide a short break for asylum seekers who are awaiting a decision. We do welcome, however, requests for short breaks for other people (for example, refugees and destitute failed asylum seekers).

About East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary

East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary (ELAoS) is a community initiative to welcome and support asylum seekers and refugees. We lobby the county council, raise money, and offer English classes and befriending (and other support) for refugees and asylum seekers. We also run a Sanctuary Breaks scheme, which is what this guide supports.

The Referral Process

We accept referrals from Leicester City of Sanctuary (or other City of Sanctuary groups in the network). We ask that a volunteer complete a referral form that provides us with key information about the person, including relevant medical/mental health details. Due to the importance of matching the right guest and host, there may be some delay between the initial approval of hosts and the first stay being arranged.

Hosts are also required to apply and provide references, if not already known to the ELAoS Sanctuary Breaks Coordinator. The host tells us important issues, such as use of facilities in the home, household security, meals, etc.

We then match referrals to hosts.

It may seem surprising that offers of breaks are sometimes turned down by guests. Hosts could easily be offended. This may happen if the potential guest decides they are unable cope with the sudden pressure of being amongst a family – especially if the guest has lost their own. It could also be that the locality is perceived to be too remote from friends and others from their own culture, even for just a short break.

The Stay

Short breaks are always for a weekend or up to 6-7 days. This is because asylum seekers must use their cash card locally (local to them) each week to stay within the requirements of the Home Office. Additionally, every two weeks, asylum seekers must report to the Home Office local to them. Therefore, breaks must be short. In addition, asylum seekers may have volunteer work and/or English classes that prevent them from staying a full week, so they may prefer just a weekend break or can only visit on holidays.

Support for Hosts

Agreeing to host an asylum seeker can be exciting and daunting – at the same time! We aim to give you as much support as possible. This includes:

- This handbook
- In-person Q&A with at least one host who can share their experiences
- Seven-day a week availability from the Sanctuary Breaks Coordinator to answer questions/raise concerns
- The chance to attend a community event (normally in Louth, but expanding to Lincoln soon) for hosts and guests to enjoy music, food, and sharing time together. (May include a trip to the beach, depending on the weather!)
- The chance to attend social events just for hosts, to share experiences and concerns and gain ideas on how to be better hosts

Some Issues to Consider

Culture

Whilst many hosts will have had considerable experience of relating to people from other cultures, this does not necessarily fully prepare you for having someone actually staying with you.

Please note that these are huge generalisations and may bear no relevance to the person hosted by you! It is also worth noting that there are often great variations within cultures, so it is unwise to expect two guests from the same country to hold identical beliefs and practices. Often, it is personality or temperament, rather than culture, that determines behaviour. If in doubt, ask.

Gender. In some cultures there is more role-division than we may be used to. This could become evident, for example, if male guests do not expect to assist with household tasks. For some, it will not be appropriate for a man to be alone in a room with an unrelated woman. Handshaking (and any other close physical contact) with someone of the opposite sex may cause offence, or allow for possible misinterpretation. Conversely, it is quite common in some cultures for men to hold hands in public. Concepts of appropriate personal space differ widely from culture to culture.

Dress. Hosts need to be sensitive to other cultures' dress.

Please and Thank You. Some languages have no equivalent word for 'please'. 'Please' and 'Thank you' may be more commonly expressed through actions and attitudes than words.

Yes and No. Non-western languages are often much more indirect. Be aware that to refuse someone's offer of, for example, a meal or a cup of tea, may be considered rude. A person may answer 'Yes' out of respect and the wish not to offend, without any intention of actually taking up the offer.

Volunteering. Some countries have no culture of volunteering and so there may be a misunderstanding (which we will endeavour to dispel from the outset) that hosts are paid – perhaps funded by the Home Office. It may be difficult for some to understand hosts' motives for offering accommodation and so suspect a hidden agenda.

Pets (see further on this below). Some cultures would consider household pets, in particular dogs, as unclean. We will always discuss this with potential guests before a placement is arranged.

Times (and space) for prayer. These are more rigidly adhered to in Islam, for example.

Religious Festivals. As the breaks are short, hosts may not need to familiarise themselves with the main festivals associated with the faith of the guest placed with them, as the guest probably wouldn't schedule a break if they wanted to be closer to their religious community.

Food. Most will be aware of the different food laws within each religion. Muslims (and Jews) will not eat pork products, most Hindus are vegetarian, and practising Muslims eat Halal meat. Likewise, most practising Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs will not be happy to eat food cooked in pots used for beef or pork. This clearly has significant implications for eating together and storage of fresh meat, which hosts will need to agree with their guests from the start. The use of cutlery is an eccentric western custom to some; hosts should be prepared for guests to eat with their hands – and sitting on the floor. Hosts need to be aware of the fasting rules during Ramadan also, when no food or drink is taken between dawn and dusk.

Personal hygiene. Washing, rather than using toilet paper, is the norm for many Muslims after using the toilet. It may help to provide a jug for this purpose.

Timekeeping. Some other cultures attach much less importance to punctuality than we do in the West. Being late for an appointment may not infer disrespect, simply that something perceived as of greater importance (perhaps helping a friend) has intervened.

Talking about personal faith. Whilst we ask that hosts do not seek to use their role as a means to try to convert others to their own particular faith, we recognise that, in many other cultures, it is much more acceptable to discuss openly spiritual issues and religious practice. We do not seek to discourage this.

It will often be helpful also to discuss British culture and traditions with guests who are hoping to be able to settle in the UK

Role Separation

The principal aim of ELAoS Sanctuary Breaks is to provide a short break for asylum seekers. There is no expectation that hosts become involved in their guests' cases; indeed, we recommend that, unless a host has knowledge and experience of the system and a considerable amount of time available, it is better to keep the two roles quite separate. This will often not be easy, particularly when guests appear to have no other support and are in crisis. City of Sanctuary (nationally and locally to where the guests live) has details of the other projects and services that are able to provide legal advice and other support. Hosts that are experiencing difficulties here should discuss this with us.

Talking about the Past

Unless guests volunteer the information, it is generally best that hosts (and other household members) do not ask them to talk about their personal history, in particular the circumstances that led them to leave their home country. Great sensitivity is needed over issues that may be very painful for the guest and which may remain unresolved.

Personal Names

Whilst many find names from other cultures confusing, it is a token of respect and friendship to quickly learn to properly pronounce someone's name, and to use their name of choice.

'House Rules'

It is very helpful to plan from the outset how you will address the following issues, and to discuss them at an early stage with guests, especially with those who visit regularly.

These will not all necessarily need to be discussed on the very first day, and certainly not all at once, especially if interpreting support is required but, by being agreed early on, there is less potential for offence being caused by misunderstandings later on. It is worth considering, at the outset, how you will respond if the guest is consistently unwilling / unable to comply.

Meals and cooking. Will the guest eat with you, or cook for themselves? If the former, then you will need to establish any dietary needs (cultural or medical). If the latter, then you may wish to make available some storage space and will need to give clear instruction on use of kitchen equipment and any particular food hygiene issues. If you are vegetarian, would you be happy to host someone who is not?

House key(s) and access to house. If guests are not to be issued with their own keys (and clearly this will make it very difficult for the guest), then times need to be agreed when the guest should leave in the morning / return home. This will likely not be an issue for such short breaks. However, what if the guest wished to go for a walk while you are out?

Burglar alarm. If guests are likely to be in the home alone, it is advisable to make sure that they are familiar with arming and disarming any alarm.

Use of bathroom. If you do not have locks on toilet and bathroom doors, it may be wise to fit them – or to provide a 'Busy' / 'Free' notice to be blue-tacked to the outside.

Use of washing machine (and instruction in its use). In our experience, the guest will need to wash their clothes at some point during a week-long stay, as they do not

have many clothes. As there are not many clothes to wash, you will likely wish to launder their clothes with your own things.

Cleaning of guest's room – and your access to it.

Use of telephone. Most guests will have their own mobile, however.

Use of household computer / IT equipment. It is wise to set clear boundaries here and, if in any doubt at all, to prohibit use. If you have wifi, the guest will be able to use their smart phone to access it.

Use of portable heaters. Safety issues need to be explained, such as not placing anything on top of them. It is worth noting that, in NASS accommodation, all utilities are paid for, and so guests may be used to leaving heaters and lights on much of the time.

Light at night. It is worth checking whether guests would prefer a light left on outside their room at night. Some guests may have more cause than most to be afraid of the dark.

Smoking arrangements

Usual bedtimes when you and your household (especially young children) go to bed / get up – and between which hours you do not wish to be disturbed.

It will usually be helpful to discuss at an early stage your need for time and space to relax on your own in private.

Pets.

Use and storage of alcohol. Sensitivity may be required with some guests.

Valuables. Whilst other hosting projects report that they have never yet had any reported incidences of theft, it is considerate, given the guest's situation, not to put temptation in their way by leaving lying around money, credit cards (or receipts) or items of great value, such as jewellery. It is also advisable not to keep car keys on view until you have full confidence in your guest.

Giving / lending money. We recommend that hosts do not lend or give guests money. It may be very difficult for guests to repay, and wrong expectations may be established. If you are willing to do so, it may be more practical to provide, for example, a weekly bus pass, or top up their mobile phone. If you would like to give your guest money, we recommend that you talk to us about it, as it's usually best to keep these arrangements in the open.

Storage of medication. We recommend that hosts store very securely their own and other household members' prescribed medication and stock of painkillers.

IMPORTANT NOTE: It is worth noting here that it is the experience of many who have hosted that, what they have found almost most difficult – at least at the outset – has been coming to terms with their guests' generosity and desire to help around the house. It may help to recognise that it is very difficult to always be in receipt of hospitality. The opportunity to reciprocate in any way, even when the guest has nothing, can make this easier for the guest to cope with. This is not, of course, always the case. There are many reasons why a guest may appear reluctant to help

(even themselves): depression, trauma, and reacting to multiple losses are some. But if the guest shows willingness to help out, by all means, support this, to a reasonable degree, and do activities like this together, when possible.

Mental Health

Most asylum seekers will have experienced extreme trauma both before arriving in Britain, as well as during the application and appeal processes. It is not surprising, therefore, that many develop mental ill-health. Most often, this will present as a depressive illness, but some may also develop psychoses or other disorders. Our referral criteria for guests clearly state that we are unable to accept referrals for those with serious mental ill-health issues.

Depression may present in many ways. Hosts may find that guests have great difficulty getting up in the morning or have very irregular sleep patterns. Concentration may be poor, leading to the loss of college places (for those lucky enough to have achieved one). Poor memory, listlessness, and lack of motivation are also common. If hosts have any concerns about their guest's mental health, they should let us know.

Needing a GP

Asylum seekers are entitled to access primary health care, including seeing a doctor, and A&E. They have a card that they may use for this purpose.

Disclaimer

Please note that, whilst East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary, in partnership with Leicester City of Sanctuary and others in the network, makes every effort to vet guests prior to making placements, and to support hosts and guests during placements, the placement is a private arrangement between the host and guest and neither ELAoS nor City of Sanctuary can accept any liability.