



Community Co-Sponsorship Program Manual for Refugee Resettlement

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Welcome to Community Co-Sponsorship!

Thank you for your interest in community co-sponsorship. By opening your hearts to refugees, you are responding to the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time. You are participating in America's most noble tradition, rooted in the ancient ethic of many cultures: welcoming the stranger. And you are letting strangers welcome you as friends and as partners in the work of building stronger communities. We hope that you will discover the rich blessing many other community groups have experienced in the challenging and joyful work of co-sponsoring a refugee family.

This manual will be a reference throughout your co-sponsorship experience. Our aim is to help you prepare for the co-sponsorship experience in partnership with IRIS. In addition to general information about refugee resettlement in Connecticut, we present IRIS' regulations and expectations for partnership. Detailed information on a variety of subjects is available in materials linked to this manual. This will not be a complete guide. In co-sponsorship as in refugee resettlement you must be prepared to deal with the unexpected, but we hope to provide you with enough material for you to determine if co-sponsorship is something you want to pursue.

Co-sponsorship is a wonderful way to welcome a family into a community. Co-sponsors do the hard work of resettlement, ensuring that newcomers access all the help and information they need in accordance with the strict regulations of the federal government. They also provide a social network, friendship and opportunities for personal exchange that go well beyond the requirements. It is a mission that is fraught with challenges but very rewarding!

An Introduction to Refugee Resettlement

Who are refugees?

Refugees are a special type of immigrant. As defined by international treaty, they are people who have fled their home country because they were persecuted or because they had legitimate fears that they would be persecuted. They were singled out within their own country for abuse because of their nationality, religious beliefs, political views, or racial or ethnic background.

Currently there are more than 35 million refugees around the world. Refugees live in a variety of circumstances from refugee camps to urban apartment buildings depending on their resources and the support made available to them in their host country. Refugees generally wish to return home. In some cases, they do. In others they are able to integrate into their host community. A small percentage (less than 1%) is resettled in a third country.

How are refugees selected to come to the United States?

For a long time, the United States prided itself on resettling more refugees than all other countries put together. But since 2017 there was a dramatic shift in policy and in the numbers of people arriving. Each year the president determines a ceiling for refugee admissions. For 2017, President Obama raised the ceiling from 85,000 to 110,000. For 2018, President Trump set it at 45,000. For 2019, 2020, and 2021, the ceiling was set steadily downward at 30,000, 18,000, and 15,000, respectively. Fortunately, President Joseph Biden increased the 2021 refugee admissions ceiling to 62,500 in May while efforts to redeploy USCIS and other key personnel to refugee processing centers around the world were underway. The refugee resettlement community in the US is once again working in partnership with our government to rebuild capacity to welcome as many refugees as possible, with a refugee admission ceiling of 125,000 for FY22 and confirmed by President Biden's official presidential declaration on October 8, 2021. President Biden again confirmed a ceiling of 125,000 for FY23 and FY24 as well.

Traditionally the United States welcomes the most vulnerable people among the entire refugee population, such as those with serious medical conditions. There are also specific programs for people fleeing specific countries.

One specific category of refugees often aided by IRIS is Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders. The special immigrant program grants permanent residence to people who have aided the U.S. government while abroad. SIV status is available to individuals who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan or Iraq. Once approved, SIV holders and their families are assigned to a resettlement agency in the U.S. through the same federal resettlement program as other categories of refugees.

Refugees approved for resettlement in the United States have undergone a rigorous vetting process overseas. They have been interviewed several times before being granted refugee status by agency personnel of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). After applying for admission to the United States, they are interviewed again by Department of Homeland Security personnel, fingerprinted, and subjected to several background checks regarding former political or criminal activity. The process often takes at least two years to complete. Once a refugee has been approved, a medical exam is conducted both to make sure they carry no communicable diseases, and to determine what level of healthcare needs they will have in the US. Once approved for travel, refugees receive travel loans through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to cover their airfare to come to the US.

Refugees are assigned to one of ten national resettlement agencies which in turn, will place them with 350 local affiliated nonprofit organizations spread across the country. The three local affiliates in Connecticut are the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI) in Bridgeport, IRIS in New Haven and Hartford, and Jewish Family Services (JFS) in Greenwich.

What is IRIS?

Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) is a nonprofit social services agency whose mission is to help refugees and other displaced people establish new lives, strengthen hope, and contribute to the vitality of Connecticut's communities. IRIS provides case management, employment counseling, education and youth services, healthcare coordination, and cultural orientation to newly arriving refugees. IRIS resettled approximately 240 refugees in 2015. Thanks to community co-sponsors like you, IRIS resettled 75% more refugees in 2016. Of the 530 refugees coming through IRIS in 2016, our staff in New Haven resettled 318 (60%), while co-sponsors all over the state resettled 212 refugees who would not otherwise be able to come to Connecticut.

Since the Syrian refugee crisis in 2016, co-sponsors have continued to organize and step up, especially in times of crises. During the Afghan crisis that began in August of 2021, approximately 40 groups quickly prepared to work with Afghan evacuee families. Others continued to welcome families from around the world. By the end of FY 2023, co-sponsor groups had welcomed a total of 619 refugees to Connecticut.

IRIS was established in 1982 as a program of Episcopal Social Service of the Diocese of Connecticut. Today it is an independent nonprofit with its own board of directors. IRIS is affiliated with Church World Service (CWS), a national resettlement agency with whom refugees are placed through a contract with the US Department of State.

How does IRIS work with community co-sponsors?

IRIS is responsible for the resettlement of refugees. IRIS sees community co-sponsorship as a way to enrich the experiences of those refugees and enable more Connecticut residents to participate in and become advocates for refugee resettlement. IRIS works closely with community groups to recruit and prepare co-sponsors for this mission and continues to provide support as well as close supervision throughout the entire resettlement process.

After an initial orientation, the co-sponsor group will be asked to complete a community group self-assessment in the form of an application and to begin raising funds. During this process, your group members will be required to complete a virtual training program at IRIS. This program requires 2-6 hours of participation depending on each volunteer's role within their group. IRIS also requires that each co-sponsor group schedule meetings with local community leaders: at least one elected official, a representative from the police department, and a public school administrator. When your co-sponsor group is thoroughly prepared to welcome a refugee family on 2 weeks' notice, you will give IRIS a [Green Light](#) by submitting this form.

IRIS assigns families to co-sponsors based on family needs, co-sponsor resources and availability at the time IRIS receives an arrival notice. Community co-sponsorship groups cannot select families based on nationality or any other criteria.¹

¹ With respect to Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) families from Afghanistan or Iraq, an offer of placement is determined by the location as well as the consent given by the family's US tie.

When IRIS receives an arrival notice for a family that seems to be a good fit for your group, we will share the case information we receive (ages, gender, languages, education, nationality, religion, health issues, and employment background) with your group and ask that you take just two days to give us a confirmation that you will co-sponsor this family.

Once your group has accepted the case and the family arrives, an IRIS Community Sponsor Coach (CSC) will work closely with you throughout the co-sponsorship period. Communication differs depending on each case, but your CSC will advise your group leader on solutions when local options and group problem solving attempts have been exhausted. The CSC will also visit (virtually or in person) the family on several occasions during the first 6 months. You will provide IRIS with all the information and documentation needed to ensure compliance with federal requirements.

About Co-Sponsorship

What are the responsibilities of co-sponsorship?

Once a family is placed with the co-sponsorship group, there are many tasks the group will be required to perform. These will be described in detail in the materials linked to this manual from the document and resource page on the IRIS website. They include:

- 1) Securing housing, furnishing it and providing rental assistance as needed.
- 2) Welcoming the family upon their arrival and providing for their basic needs (food, clothing, transportation, etc.)
- 3) Assisting the family in applying for social security cards² and all the public benefits they are eligible for (medical insurance, SNAP, cash assistance, etc.)
- 4) Ensuring that the family has access to primary medical care including a required exam as well as any specialized care, as needed
- 5) Ensuring that adults are enrolled in English language classes and children are enrolled in school.
- 6) Assisting in sourcing employment for at least one family member in order to achieve financial self-sufficiency.
- 7) Coaching the family as needed so that they understand their financial needs and obligations.
- 8) Conducting community orientation – show the family where and how to shop, how to pay bills, how to use public transportation, use emergency telephone numbers, understand local laws and customs, etc.
- 9) Providing transportation to IRIS's Cultural Orientation and Refugee Education (CORE) program on 3 consecutive days. The CSC will inform the group of when classes are scheduled.

² SIV families have the option to apply for Social Security cards either as part of their visa applications or upon arrival at the port of entry. Visiting the SSA office is strongly recommended so that officials can verify that their applications are in process.

- 10) Maintaining regular contact with the IRIS CSC, submitting all required paperwork, case notes and financial documentation in a timely manner, and complying with all IRIS policies related to co-sponsorship responsibilities and limits.

Requirements for Veteran Co-Sponsor Groups Resettling Another Family

We encourage veteran co-sponsor groups to resettle another family. For groups who have an approved application on file and have resettled a family within three years of their last one-year co-sponsorship, IRIS requires that an addendum to the application be submitted. Community Sponsorship Developers can supply the Addendum. For those groups whose last co-sponsorship was more than three years ago, we ask that the group submit an updated application. All groups submit a Green Light form after their application or addendum has been approved. All co-sponsor volunteers need to update their co-sponsorship training if they have not participated in training sessions (either live or recorded) in three years. Developers will advise groups on the most updated, required training sessions available.

Planning and Organizing

At this point we hope we haven't scared you off and that you are excited to learn more about how to become a co-sponsor! In the next section we will outline the basic requirements that a co-sponsorship group must meet and the next steps.

Basic Co-Sponsorship Requirements:

A Community Co-sponsorship group must meet the following basic requirements:

1. Conduct a community self-assessment/ application and submit it to IRIS for approval.
2. Attend orientation and training sessions
3. Raise \$15,000-\$20,000 (depending on the location of the group and the cost of living in that location.)
4. Have 501(c)3 status (or designated fiduciary that has 501c3 status) and liability insurance to cover group members and other volunteers. Refer to [Liability & Group Organization](#) for more information.
5. Conduct background checks for all volunteers and submit them to IRIS. Refer to the [Volunteer Screening Guidelines](#) for more information.
6. Sign a *Memorandum of Understanding* (provided by the IRIS CSC) detailing the roles and responsibilities of the group and IRIS in the resettlement of a particular family.

501(c)3: You will need to designate a fiduciary (with 501c3 status) to hold your co-sponsorship funds. Often, a church, synagogue, or mosque will serve as a fiduciary for a co-sponsorship group. Please advise financial contributors to your co-sponsorship group not to make checks payable to IRIS, since you will be using these funds directly for the expenses of the refugee family. (e.g., your group will provide rental assistance by making a check out directly to the landlord of the refugee family.)

What are the steps to becoming a Community Co-sponsor group?

A. GROUP FORMATION:

1. Read the materials located on the [IRIS Community Co-Sponsorship](#) website and attend a Community Co-sponsorship Orientation session to become familiar with the overall program. You may register for an orientation session [here](#).
2. Organize a group:
 - a. Recruit and organize a **Core Resettlement Team** *that will be responsible* for providing the core services of co-sponsorship for a refugee family. The Core Resettlement Team should consist of at least 10 members responsible for each of the following areas of focus: finance (including Social Security/DSS), employment, housing, clothing/furnishings, ESOL for adults, children's education, health, acculturation, hospitality, transportation and administration. Please structure your Core Resettlement Team in such a way that it is clear who is responsible for each of the aforementioned core services. Refer to this [Sample Team Structure](#) for an example of group organization.
 - b. Recruit additional Volunteers as needed, a minimum of 30 volunteers is recommended.
 - c. **Identify a group leader or co-leaders** who will serve as project manager(s) and the principal contact(s) in communication with IRIS.
 - i. **Group leader/Contact person:** *All communication between IRIS and your group should go through your Group Leader/contact person.*
 - ii. S/he will coordinate the overlapping activities of the other Resettlement Team members.
 - iii. The **Group leader/contact person** will sign the Memorandum of Understanding. S/he will check in with the refugee family regularly until the family is securely established in their surroundings. The Group Leader/Contact person might have primary decision-making responsibility. Resettlement Team members will make regular reports to the Group Leader/contact person who will be responsible for maintaining contact with your IRIS CHC.
 - iv. **Administrative contact:** Responsible for completing and submitting forms and documentation to your CSC in a timely manner. Refer to [R&P Form Completion Instructions & Case File Documentation Timeline](#) for more information.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACT ROLE IS VERY IMPORTANT! IRIS is subject to federal, state, and resettlement agency monitoring during which these items are reviewed and scrutinized. Given the importance of this aspect of co-sponsorship, one person and an active alternate must be designated to handle all administration in order to effectively manage paperwork and documentation requirements independent of the group's numerous resettlement activities.

B. FUNDRAISING, TRAINING, APPLICATION:

1. **Identify a Fiduciary** with 501c3 status to hold your co-sponsorship funds.
2. **Secure general liability insurance for volunteers:**
 - a. Coverage possibilities:
 - i. A co-sponsor group's governing organization, such as a church/synagogue/mosque, service organization or professional organization may provide this coverage to the group.
 - ii. Co-sponsor groups that are independent corporations may purchase this coverage on their own.
 - iii. Co-sponsor groups that cannot establish this coverage through partnering with a qualifying organization may purchase this coverage on their own.
3. **Complete and submit the Co-sponsorship Application.** When completing the [Co-sponsorship Application](#), your group will provide details about your volunteer structure and your community to assess the potential for refugee resettlement.
4. **Fundraise:** \$15,000-\$20,000 is the minimum that should be raised to cover resettlement costs. Additional funds will be needed in higher rent areas. NOTE: *Groups that organize and publicize their efforts well, seldom have difficulty raising the funds necessary for refugee resettlement. Fundraising events such as concerts, movies, dinners, speakers on refugee/international issues, or solicitations from the congregations or community through letters and appeals have proven to be successful.*
5. **Attend IRIS Community Co-sponsorship Training:** All volunteers must attend a 2 to 6 hour co-sponsorship virtual training. Live virtual training sessions are offered periodically. Additionally, pre-recorded videos are available for those that cannot attend live training. At the training, the contents of this manual will be reviewed. More detailed information on what to expect and how to prepare will be provided. IRIS's Community Sponsor Developers will alert groups to when live training sessions are scheduled and can provide links to the pre-recorded sessions.
6. **Complete Background checks** for all volunteers through Sterling Volunteers. After your application is approved, your Community Sponsorship Developer will forward the approved application to Sterling Volunteers who will then set up a sub-account for your group. Sterling Volunteers will then communicate directly with a contact person within your group.

C. **GREENLIGHT & FAMILY PLACEMENT:**

1. **Complete & Submit the Greenlight Form.** Submission of this form to IRIS will signify that your Co-sponsor group has met all of the requirements and are fully prepared to accept a refugee family for resettlement.
2. **Wait:** Once notified of your group's Green Light, IRIS will contact your **group leader/contact person** when a refugee family has been identified. It could take 3 - 6 months for your group to receive a family placement.

Finances of Co-Sponsorship

The finance committee is responsible for overseeing the expenditure of the resettlement funds and introducing refugee adults to family budgeting, credit, the banking system and taxes. First this committee must ensure that the family gets the financial and other benefits they are eligible for.

Employment Authorization Documents (EAD), Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Social Services (DSS)

Refugees apply for Employment Authorization Documents and Social Security Numbers while they are still abroad. The EAD and SS cards arrive via US mail after their arrival in the United States. An EAD Receipt Notice should arrive via mail within (3) weeks after the date of domestic arrival. If the SSC is not delivered by 14 working days after the Date on the EAD Receipt Notice, co-sponsor groups should assist the family in contacting the local Social Security Field Office closest to the town where the family resides within (3) working days either to schedule an appointment or to directly follow up and consult whether a new application is necessary. You should bring each person's I-94 (for refugees) or visas (for SIVs). (*Refugees' passports, if they have them, should **not** be presented.*) Be sure that if a new application is necessary that it is for an **unrestricted Social Security card**. A refugee's card should not contain the notation "Valid for Work Only With DHS Authorization."

The I-94 is an official record of entry into the U.S. It is an essential document when applying for other documentation such as a social security card, state ID or driver's license. Refugee family members can access their I-94 by visiting the [USCIS website](#) and entering the necessary information. When asked for a document number, they must enter their A# or USCIS#. This is found on the PRM travel letter they arrive with or their EAD card. *Please note, sometimes an A must be added before the number and sometimes not.*

If a delayed arrival of the EAD Receipt Notice precludes the co-sponsor from meeting the above deadline, follow-up with the Social Security Field Office shall take place not later than four weeks from domestic arrival even if the Notice is not yet received. Any delays should be clearly documented in the group's case notes. Directions for completing case notes and a case specific case note spreadsheet is provided to the group by the CSC. An EXAMPLE can be reviewed on the [IRIS website](#).

If it is determined a new application is necessary, at the conclusion of your appointment with Social Security, each family member will receive a receipt proving that they have applied for a Social Security card. **Ensure the family saves this receipt. It may be needed when applying**

for state benefits.

The co-sponsor group is also responsible for ensuring that the refugee family applies for public assistance through the Department of Social Services (DSS): HUSKY medical insurance, Food Stamps (SNAP), and either Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) or Temporary Family Assistance (TFA)³. **Your Community Sponsor Coach (CSC) will provide you with detailed instructions for completing the online application.** Online instructions provided for DSS applications are to be followed very carefully, including sending the application numbers to your CSC once complete. **If the family's I-94s are not available three (3) days following arrival, please consult your CSC.**

Our approach to financial assistance

***Please note:** Financial assistance can become a point of contention between co-sponsors and IRIS. The limits IRIS places on assistance and the expectations for family self-sufficiency may appear harsh to someone of means who is unfamiliar with refugee resettlement and the realities of living on public assistance. We encourage you to discuss reservations you may have with the IRIS CSC, but insist on respect for the parameters set by IRIS.*

It is generally expected that co-sponsors will follow the same financial policies that IRIS applies to refugees resettled without a co-sponsor. This usually means an expectation of the family's financial self-sufficiency within 6 months. The co-sponsorship group must work with IRIS to establish and manage a budget for the resettlement that takes into account all requirements and all funds.

In addition to the financial assistance you will provide as a co-sponsor, the following funds will be available to help pay the refugee family's expenses:

- Federal Funds (a **one-time** grant from the US Department of State)
- State Funds (a monthly allowance from the Connecticut Department of Social Services [DSS])
- SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps (a monthly allowance administered through CT DSS exclusively for food)⁴

³ In Connecticut, Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) is provided to refugee singles and childless couples and lasts for 8 months. Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) is granted to families and lasts 21 months. When adult children are part of the arriving family, RCA is usually granted while still being included in the family's SNAP benefit. Families receive HUSKY A (for parents and children), while singles and childless couples usually receive HUSKY D or Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA).

⁴ At the pre-arrival meeting, your CSC will tell you what maximum benefit amount your family may receive for TFA and SNAP. Normally, maximum TFA is granted unless the family brings assets with them that were declared at their point of entry. The maximum SNAP amount, however, may be reduced by the DSS worker when they see the family is receiving rental assistance. Once the family is paying their rent either in full or up to the New IRIS Standard, DSS will usually adjust the SNAP amount upward once they have proof.

In most cases, IRIS expects co-sponsor spending of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per family resettled, though spending can vary widely depending on specific needs and circumstances. It is likely to be significantly more in high rent areas such as rents within Fairfield County.

The co-sponsor group outlines expectations for the duration of assistance and the rapidly increasing financial responsibility of the refugee family. Rent subsidies are provided for 3-6 months depending on specific criteria. In line with this, the co-sponsor will help the family to develop a budget that factors in decreasing financial assistance from the co-sponsor. Should the family not meet its goal of self-sufficiency within 3-6 months, assistance can be extended in accordance with the policy, but their contributions will continue to increase. The IRIS CSC will provide guidance on rental assistance each month.

Co-sponsorship groups must submit reimbursement requests using the Google Form specific to their group, the link to which is provided by their Community Sponsor Coach at onboarding, along with the required documentation in a timely manner. If requirements have not been met, reimbursements can be placed on administrative hold, meaning that the co-sponsor will not receive payment until the requirements are met.

Federal Funds Explained

For each refugee who arrives in the US, the US State Department provides the sponsoring resettlement agency (i.e., IRIS) a **Reception & Placement (R&P) Grant of \$2,425**. The components of this per capita grant break down as follows:

- **\$1,125.** This part of the R&P grant covers direct expenses of each refugee (e.g., a family of four would receive \$4,500 or 4[\$1,125]). The grant deposited into an IRIS account is specifically earmarked for the refugee. In a co-sponsorship arrangement, IRIS usually uses these funds to reimburse the co-sponsorship group for eligible expenses.

Typical expenses eligible for reimbursement include rent, groceries, a cell phone, bus passes, utilities, mattresses, furniture and other household items, car seats and baby items, and clothing. A complete listing of eligible expenses and maximum reimbursement amounts is outlined in the document entitled **What does Federal R&P Cover?** which can be found on the [Co-Sponsors' Resources](#) page in the Resource Documents/Finance section.

- **\$200 in Flex Funds.** While also deposited into an IRIS account, these **flex funds** may be used at the discretion of IRIS to help *the neediest refugees*. They are generally reserved for families who do not have co-sponsors.
- **\$1,100 in Admin Funds.** These funds are for IRIS' services and operating costs.

State Funds Explained

Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) and Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) are administered by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) and are funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Each refugee family will apply for RCA or TFA through DSS as soon as possible after applying for Social Security Cards, and will usually have access to their RCA/TFA accounts within 2 to 3 weeks from arrival. The amount the family will receive is calculated based on several factors (e.g., family size) and will vary by DSS geographical region. **Beginning in the second month after arrival, the families will be expected to contribute at least half of the cash assistance they receive towards rent.**

Family Budgeting

American money and finance are often very intimidating for refugees, who often come from cash economies with little understanding of credit, electronic banking, and payment of utilities. To help co-sponsors and their refugee families with tracking and organizing budgets and financial information, a budget calculator tool was created by a team from the Social Impact Club at Yale School of Management that can be customized by date of arrival and contains built-in formulas for calculating benefits under various circumstances. It must be opened in Microsoft Excel 2007 or later. The IRIS website provides directions on how best to use it.

Housing

The housing committee is responsible for finding appropriate temporary and permanent housing. Permanent housing should include at least a 6-month lease. Since it is impossible to predict the arrival date of a refugee family, **do not take** on financial responsibility (i.e. do **not** sign a lease) for housing until we have received an official Arrival Notice, typically two weeks before they arrive. Risks associated with signing a lease prematurely include making unneeded rent payments, potentially for many, many months as well as limiting the flexibility your group has for welcoming families of different sizes.

When researching temporary housing options, utilize your group's personal networks to identify possible locations. Other temporary housing options can include a residential hotel or AirBnB.

While many community members may wish to offer to house the family in their homes, federal policy requires that refugees have their own living accommodations. This respects their privacy, helps to prevent over-dependency on hosts, and communicates *your confidence in their ability to function independently*.

It is important that you locate housing that is safe, sanitary, **accessible**, and **affordable** to a family whose income may be limited during the first few years in this country. IRIS provides two documents for you to present to prospective landlords. One document is the **IRIS Financial Assistance Policy** which is located on the [Co-Sponsors' Resources](#) page in the Resource Documents/Finance section. The other document is a **Letter from IRIS' Executive Director** explaining the refugee resettlement program and vetting process. It is located on the same Resources page in the Resource Documents/Housing section.

Apartment Selection, Rental Assistance, and The “IRIS Standard”

IRIS strongly prefers that co-sponsors find apartments that refugees will have a good chance of being able to afford on their own at the end of their rental assistance period. If you live in an expensive and/or rural area with inadequate public transportation and/or affordable housing, we strongly recommend you search for housing options in nearby larger towns or cities to maximize affordability and self-sufficiency. Typically, areas that are more affordable are also more likely to have other useful resources such as ESOL, food pantries and public transportation.

Family Size

In most cases, IRIS will be offering co-sponsor groups refugee families that range in size from 3 to 8 members. Thus we ask you to price apartments that range in size from 1 to 4 bedrooms.

The “IRIS Standard”

When settling refugee families outside the co-sponsorship framework, IRIS endeavors to pay no more than the following for monthly rents:

Apartment Size	IRIS Max
1BR	\$1,300
2BR	\$1,850
3BR	\$2,050
4BR	\$2,300-\$2,500

These are the maximum amounts that we feel are realistic to expect the family to be able to pay within a few months of their arrival. We realize, however, that such rental rates may not be available in some communities. **For co-sponsors who cannot find housing at the rental rates we recommend, the co-sponsor must subsidize rent in excess of the IRIS Standard for the duration of the lease up to one year.**

The IRIS Standard was put in place to allow for co-sponsorship in high rent areas while maintaining equity for clients. Community groups in expensive areas will have to raise more funds in order to subsidize rent in excess of the IRIS Standard for one year. Consideration must also be given to impact on the family after one year.

Co-Signing Leases

Families should be listed as tenants on their lease agreements, and they will be expected to sign the lease shortly after arrival. Most landlords will require a guarantor or co-signer since the family will have no credit history. In such cases, IRIS asks that the co-sponsorship group co-sign the lease. We can provide best practices and information to ease any concerns about this.

Security Deposits

Landlords will generally require a deposit equal to 1-2 months' rent. IRIS recommends that you try to negotiate to avoid payment for more than 1 ½ months. While the security deposit is an eligible expense for reimbursement, IRIS prefers that co-sponsorship groups use the funds they have raised to provide security deposits. At the end of the lease the deposit will be returned to the group. If the family needs to move at the end of the lease, then the co-sponsorship group will be able to provide a deposit for the new housing.

Lead Inspections

IRIS requires that prospective housing built before 1978 is inspected for lead by a licensed professional before any pregnant woman and/or child under 6 years old can be resettled there.

Please review [IRIS Lead Policy](#) related to lead inspections for additional details.

Clothing/Household Furnishings

The clothing/household furnishings committee is responsible for procuring the material goods that will be provided to the family in their new home: clothing, donated furniture, *new* mattresses and box springs, and household items. Refer to the [R&P Permanent Housing Home Supply List](#) for more details. The expectation is that these will be basic items in good condition. It is not expected that the co-sponsorship group will provide items in excess of this basic list.

Donations of furniture and household goods can be pledged in advance of the refugee(s)' arrival. Unless you are personally able to repair them, it is a good idea to only accept items

in good condition! You should hold off on clothing donations until after you can determine the needs and sizes of your family. The exception to this guideline is appropriate outerwear for families who arrive during the winter. Co-sponsor groups can use the family information sheet provided by IRIS pre arrival to ensure they have winter coats available for each family member as soon as they arrive in Connecticut. Procuring donated outerwear is recommended since some adjustments for appropriate sizes may need to be made. Some clothing you will need to purchase (socks and underwear), but providing too much new clothing or other goods may establish an expectation that your group cannot and should not continue to fulfill. Most groups find that they are deluged with donated items and that their expenditures on clothing, household goods and furnishings are negligible.

Employment

The employment committee is responsible for locating appropriate jobs for all refugees in the family who are able to work. Since early self-sufficiency is the goal of the U.S. refugee resettlement program, early employment should be a top priority. *The search for employment opportunities should begin even before the refugee arrives.* Before your family arrives, you are encouraged to conduct an inventory of job possibilities from among your group's and wider communities. The skills of refugees vary widely from farming to electrical engineering, and they are confirmed during the course of employment assessments, which are discussed below. Beforehand, however, we encourage you to survey the employment landscape in your communities for entry-level, and reasonably accessible jobs that can accommodate English-language learners.

By about the 10th day, your CSC will come to visit the refugee family's home to conduct the beginning of the family's **service plan**. The first component assesses strengths and needs of the family as a whole.

- Each able-bodied adult in the household will then be assessed for employability by answering questions about skills, education, and work, language and literacy skills, health status, professional goals/job availability, and personal needs/goals. This will be followed by an **employment assessment** to obtain details about employment history and timelines to facilitate resume creation. IRIS can provide a [template for the resume](#). The employment committee should meet with the job seekers very regularly to discuss progress, leads and search strategies.
- Those family members who are non-employable will undergo assessments that concentrate on education, language, and literacy skills, health status, additional strengths/barriers, personal needs/goals, and reasons for lack of employability as appropriate (i.e., under 18, over 65, late-stage pregnancy, caregiver for a child under 18 or a fully dependent person, physical/mental health reasons).

Refugees arrive fully authorized to work and demonstrate this upon being hired by completing an [I-9](#) (i.e., legal proof of work eligibility). Many employers will initially say they cannot hire a refugee unless she or he has a Social Security card or an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), but this is illegal. If a job is offered before the Social Security card is

received, IRIS will advise on best steps to navigate this circumstance.

Please click [here](#) for additional information and tips for assisting family members in obtaining employment.

Giving the Green Light

Once you have been through training and made all of your preparations, you will let IRIS know you are ready to welcome a family by submitting the Green Light Form . This will mean that you are capable of resettling a family on two weeks' notice. Depending on the frequency and nature of refugee arrivals, you may unfortunately have to wait much longer for a family to be placed with your group

Placement and Arrival

Waiting for a Family, Taking the Case

Once you have given IRIS your **green light**, IRIS will consider your group for family placements. There are several factors we have to take into consideration when making family placements. Once your group greenlights, you could receive a placement offer at any time. Please be prepared to wait for 3 - 6 months (or less!), as IRIS has no control over the flow of arrivals.

IRIS generally receives notification of an arrival two to three weeks in advance. When IRIS thinks a case is appropriate for your group, the IRIS Co-Sponsorship Program Manager will promptly forward the information to your group's Contact Person(s). We ask that you take no more than 48 hours to decide if you can take the case.

Once you have agreed to take the case, you will respond to the offer of co-sponsorship via email and sign a "Memorandum of Understanding" or MOU with IRIS. This is not a legally binding contract, but it aims to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both IRIS and the community co-sponsorship group during the resettlement period. Upon its receipt, a community sponsorship coach (CSC) will be assigned to your group and will schedule a pre-arrival meeting with your group's Contact Person(s) and welcoming committee to go over last minute details and expectations for the first few weeks.

No shows: On rare occasions, a refugee scheduled for arrival will not show up. These "No-Shows" can be a stressful experience for co-sponsors. Sometimes the family is rescheduled for travel within a few days. Sometimes they are removed from travel without any explanation. In such cases, IRIS would aim to place another family with your group as soon as possible.

Key Action Items Pre-Arrival

The time between when you accept the co-sponsorship and the first few weeks after will be a flurry of activity. Detailed guidance and checklists of tasks to be completed during this time are provided in the materials linked to this manual and the [Resource Page](#).

During this time you will:

Confirm Interpreter(s)

You will need regular, reliable access to an interpreter to help you facilitate important meetings and appointments with the refugee family. **As your group is organizing**, those researching potential volunteer interpreters in your area should investigate those that speak the languages most commonly spoken by IRIS's arrivals (most likely **Arabic, Pashto, Farsi/Dari and Swahili**. IRIS also has arrivals that speak Somali, Kurdish, Dinka, Spanish and French, but these are less common.) It is required that your group source at least **3 interpreters** in at least **two of the language groups** most commonly spoken by families arriving through IRIS. Groups should also research online interpreter services and apps, like Tarjimly, to supplement their in-person volunteer interpreters.

***Interpretation:** Potential sources of low-cost or free interpreters are colleges/universities (e.g., Muslim student groups, Arab student groups) mosques, churches, and cultural groups.*

SSA and DSS can provide interpreters via telephone on site, so you will not need an interpreter for those appointments unless that is your preference. Many healthcare providers have language lines as well, but confirm this before arriving for an appointment with family members who will require interpretation.

*IRIS volunteer interpreters are generally not available to co-sponsors. **Remember: Each interpreter you source must undergo a [background check](#) and sign and submit a confidentiality agreement.***

Formalize Housing Arrangements

When looking for housing you will use a [Home Evaluation & Safety Checklist](#). You will send copies of this checklist as well as the signed lease. If permanent housing has not been obtained, temporary housing arrangements will be finalized as the search for a permanent apartment continues.

Establishment of Utilities Accounts

You must establish utility accounts prior to the family's arrival. Responsibility for the utility accounts will be transferred to the family once they have Social Security numbers, usually within 30 days of arrival. In the meantime, the accounts must be established by the group using its Tax ID Number or an individual in the group (e.g., Contact Person, Housing committee member) using her/his Social Security number.

Designation of Arrival Contact at Point of Arrival

You can choose to meet the family at the airport (Bradley, JFK or Newark) or meet them at the IRIS office in New Haven. If you want to go to the airport, you will need to send IRIS a copy of the driver's licenses and cell phone numbers of those driving vehicles.

The Day of Arrival

A *small* reception group, including an interpreter, must meet the family at their designated arrival and bring them to their new or temporary home. Remember that the refugees will be both tired and apprehensive; this is not the time for a gala welcoming party. Instead, offer the family a culturally appropriate hot meal and a chance to bathe and rest.

We offer these practical tips for meeting refugees:

- 1) Track the family's flight online or call the airline to confirm the arrival time.
- 2) Plan to wait. Entry procedures can take 1-3 hours
- 3) If going to the airport, come equipped with a sign bearing the refugee's name in large letters.
- 4) Bring weather/season appropriate clothing (in one-size-fits-all styles) and bottled water.

The reception group should also provide the family with an arrival packet containing the following:

- Names and telephone numbers of an interpreter, the Core Resettlement Team and IRIS;
- The Welcome Letter from the IRIS Executive Director in both English and the family's native language. This letter will provide a simple explanation of the co-sponsorship program for which they have been selected. They will not have been made aware of the arrangement beforehand.
- Pocket money and food allocation. Amounts are specified in **IRIS's Financial Assistance** policy located on the [Resources](#) page in the Resource Documents/Finance section.
- A map of the town, highlighting the home, safe routes for walking, and any nearby destinations (e.g. laundromat, library, supermarket). Keep in mind, however, that it will likely be necessary to show the family how to get to these places. Many can come from cultures where reading maps is not emphasized, and many have not yet learned to read or write in their native language.
- A poster with your core team members' photos, names, and roles.

POST-ARRIVAL

Resettlement Timeline Summary

The day after the arrival you must conduct a home visit and complete the [R&P First Home Visit Form](#). **Within 5 days of arrival, the co-sponsor must provide basic community orientation including an introduction to public transportation and conduct a [R&P Co-Sponsor Case Management Intake](#) to provide an overview orientation of policies, American culture and laws, and referrals.** For a complete list of required forms and the required timeline for each, review the [R&P Form Completion Instructions and Case File Document Timeline](#) and the [R&P Forms and Timeline Cheat Sheet](#).

Within 2 weeks of arrival, the IRIS CSC will organize a visit with the group members, the family and an interpreter. During this meeting more information about the IRIS Co-Sponsor relationship and self-sufficiency policies will be provided by your coach and s/he will also have the opportunity to discover what expectations the refugees may have for their new life in the United States. It is important for both refugees and co-sponsors to confront and clarify any misconceptions or miscommunications early in the resettlement process.

Also during this visit, your CSC will conduct a **service plan and supplemental employment assessments** for all employable and non-employable adults in the household, if the CSC had not already directed the group to begin these assessments before this scheduled visit. An Employment Committee representative must participate in this meeting and an interpreter must be present. Each service plan and employment assessment will cover questions about language proficiency, health, education, work history, availability, and any other information concerning and/or affecting employability. Once these assessments are complete, your CSC will send the assessment(s) to the Contact Person(s) in a PDF document plus a PDF-fillable template for the family and individual action plan components of the service plan to be completed, signed by all relevant parties, and submitted to the CSC by the 30th day. The Employment committee will use the information in the supplemental employment assessments to create a resume for each assessed employable adult before formally beginning job searches. During the 45-day visit, the CSC will review the complete service plan with the co-sponsors and the family with interpretation.

Most of the tasks required from the co-sponsor are completed within 30 days and the reception and placement (R&P) period officially ends at 90 days. These 90 days will be a very busy time and they will pass very quickly. The community co-sponsorship group and the IRIS CSC will be in frequent contact to ensure that everything goes as smoothly as possible. The IRIS CSC will visit the group and the family again about 45 days and about 90 days after arrival.

At 90 days the role of the co-sponsor will already begin to shift. The family should be able to do the majority of their life tasks without your assistance. The co-sponsor group needs to be proactive in encouraging such independence by taking them to the resources they can use on their own (e.g., DSS/local social services office, schools, transportation to shopping and medical appointments). Occasionally the co-sponsor may need to provide a refugee family member with transportation to an appointment that is essential, but not easily reachable by public

transportation. In such situations, it is important to not tack on several other errands at once lest the family think you will do this after every appointment. At this juncture, the family needs to realize that you, as the co-sponsor, are not available 24/7 and that you are available to help them via mutual agreement, not necessity. What may seem like putting off the family is often the most respectful way to approach it, as it levels the playing fields and reinforces the partnership nature of their relationship.

By 6 months post-arrival there should be a significant shift as the family will have made significant progress towards self-sufficiency. Careful budgeting at the outset, using the parameters provided by DSS and eventually income, will prepare the family for the end of assistance. Regular conversations about budgeting and finance, no matter how unpleasant or annoying, are needed in order to underscore the importance of managing finances and resources toward self-sufficiency. The IRIS CSC will visit again at the 6 month mark to help encourage this shift and help revise the resettlement plans if needed for any reason.

In most cases co-sponsors stay very involved with the family throughout their first year even when they are no longer providing any financial assistance. Usually as the 1 year mark approaches the group will be involved in helping the family determine if they will stay in their current housing or move to another location.

Changes to Plan for and Issues to Anticipate

Even after the initial resettlement period, it is normal for the family to need some assistance navigating their new lives, especially when it comes to maintaining their public benefits. It is important for community co-sponsors to keep the following in mind.

Income Reporting

Once a refugee family member starts working, s/he must report her/his income to DSS. Only in instances where a refugee or SIV may earn in excess of allowable income limits set by DSS would s/he lose her/his TFA cash assistance. When a refugee receiving RCA reports income, s/he loses RCA assistance entirely.

Recently employed refugees must report their income after they have been paid at least twice either weekly or biweekly. DSS will enter the wage information and recalculate benefits to determine eligibility. Refugees receiving both RCA and TFA will experience a slight decrease in their SNAP benefits and this will be confirmed in a determination letter mailed to the refugee's home. For RCA recipients, HUSKY will remain unchanged until the end of their 8th month in the US.

End of Rental Assistance

Once the family begins paying rent in full or at the IRIS Standard, it is important that proof of this be shown to DSS as their SNAP will stand to increase.

Periodic Report Form: SNAP

After at least three months, DSS may send a Periodic Report Form to verify the refugee family's continuing eligibility for SNAP. It is important to act upon this form as soon as possible and to document when the requested information was supplied to DSS. Families may receive SNAP as long as they remain below its income limits, although the monthly benefit amount may go down when their income increases from employment.

Jobs First Employment Services (JFES)

Adherence to JFES policies is generally required for anyone receiving cash assistance through the State of Connecticut. JFES, a unit of the CT Department of Labor, interfaces with DSS to make sure those who are receiving cash assistance are either providing job search activity logs or pay stubs to maintain their cash assistance. Failure to comply can result in a reduction or suspension of benefits. Thus it is important to read through every DSS letter related to TFA for information on JFES enrollment, which can be required as soon as the family starts receiving cash assistance. JFES compliance is not required for recipients of RCA.

Most families will get TFA for up to 21 months as long as they stay under its income limits, fulfill periodic documentation requests on TFA and/or SNAP as asked by DSS, and comply with the JFES program's requirements to provide ongoing verification of benefit-eligible activities (e.g. ESOL up to 15 hours per week, employment-focused English tutoring, and/or job search). Usually the family is contacted by JFES to make an appointment to meet with all working-age adults in the household.

Pregnant women are exempt from JFES requirements until two (2) months after the baby is born. At that time, she must provide ongoing verification of benefit-eligible activities as described above. She will automatically become eligible for **Care4Kids**, a statewide subsidized child care program that provides discounted childcare to JFES clients.

Over-assisting and Over-giving

These are among the most formidable and consequential ongoing challenges co-sponsor groups will face. Indeed, we encourage groups during the initial resettlement period to ensure they are not assisting and/or giving the family too much. Why is this so important?

In partnering with your community co-sponsorship group, our overarching goal is to make sure the family is as independent and as self-sufficient as soon as possible. IRIS recognizes that every family and each person within it is unique and that circumstances can inform how well the family gains a foothold toward independence. Assisting family members through tutoring, transportation, and tasks is often necessary at the beginning. Approaching the end of R&P and onward, the family is generally expected to undertake the majority of their shopping, transportation, and rent/bill payments. IRIS expects that issues surrounding mobility, employment, and transportation be worked out in anticipation of the 6-Month Meeting, when the family should be generally independent while the group takes less active roles in routine activities. The more empowerment is employed in encouraging self-sufficiency, the less likely the group should find itself over-assisting the family.

Similarly, over-giving can be either overt or inadvertent. Procuring provisions far beyond what are basic necessities may be what your group thinks the family needs, but they could create both unrealistic expectations and wants by the family and enmity and jealousy among co-sponsored and non co-sponsored families. IRIS urges groups to follow our guidelines and to refrain from purchasing expensive furniture or other household items. In addition, it is expected that groups be mindful of the privilege gap between group members and the family when planning activities. Special occasions should be special, of course, but it is good to strive for balanced and practical approaches. For example, taking the entire family to an expensive outing (e.g., Lake Compounce, MLB/NFL/NBA games, a day in Manhattan) can be fun but also could embarrass the parents, who could never afford to do so. Similarly, donating a car unconditionally to the father before he has his driver's license and/or a job takes away from the very real experience most Americans must have before getting a car: getting a job and affording insurance. Essentially, over-giving can and often does create complacency and unrealistic expectations. When coupled with over-assistance, over-giving will make the end of eventual assistance that much harder.

Additionally, assisting the family in excess of the IRIS Financial Assistance Policy will undermine the trust placed in your group by IRIS, creating difficulties in continued cooperation. It would certainly be taken into account before considering the placement of a second family with the same group.

Friendship or “Friendship”

In our experience, community co-sponsorship nearly always cultivates long-lasting friendships and relationships. While we would certainly agree that it is important to approach the family with a friendly disposition in your meetings and interactions, we would nonetheless recommend that you manage the friendships you are building with care. Some of our clients come from cultures that may find outgoing, enthusiastic, and friendly dispositions common in American culture off-putting and/or strange. If your family is reacting this way, it is not necessarily a sign of hostility. Rather, it is likely a sign of being somewhat guarded given all the changes they are experiencing.

It is important to note that the first several weeks are very important for how your group and your family will form a relationship. Indeed, the relationship will be somewhat lopsided in your direction given the many tasks that will require your guidance and expertise. Eventually, when the dust settles, the dynamics of your relationship will become more even-handed. As time goes on and the family's self-sufficiency steadily increases, the family will still need your help from time to time but not like when they arrived.

Thus your friendship will carry with it the need to understand the meaning of the word “friend” in this context. In building a relationship based on partnership, don't be overbearing or assume that you are or even will be friends. By respecting each other's privacy, being straightforward in your advice and remembering not to over-promise, your partnership with the family is more likely to develop with mutual understanding and respect that will endure.

General Advice for Co-sponsors

Respect is Essential

Refugees have been through a lot. They have fled countries where there was little respect for their human rights. On the move and living in refugee camps for years, many experienced insults, humiliation, and a sense of helplessness. Arriving in the US, not speaking English, they are dependent on our services and assistance. But they are not to be pitied. They must be treated with the utmost respect for their journey, their culture and their individuality.

As co-sponsors, remember that one of your most important jobs in refugee resettlement is to help refugees regain a sense of control over their lives. Part of this is helping them become self-sufficient as soon as possible. While it might be counter intuitive, confidence in their ability to handle difficulty and struggle well and insistence that they be as independent as they are capable of being, are signs of respect while giving them things that they don't really need are signs of condescension.

Sometimes co-sponsors liken their relationship to the family they are helping to a parental one. IRIS strongly discourages this. The refugees you will help are not your children. You will not be adopting them and it is disrespectful to envision your role in this way. We encourage you to approach your co-sponsorship as a *partnership* with a refugee family.

Exercise Religious Tolerance and Sensitivity

IRIS has a strict policy against proselytizing. It is important to realize that religion is a fundamental part of one's identity, and anything that could make refugees feel obligated to participate in the religious life of their co-sponsors can be disastrous both psychologically and emotionally for refugees. Instead, put them in touch with others of their nationality and faith and assure them that your friendship and support are not dependent on their involvement in your congregation. Please make every effort to avoid making any gesture that could be construed as proselytizing; it is strictly prohibited. Also, please note that some refugees will not adhere to or practice any religion. Do not assume that they will or suggest to them that they should adhere to any religion.

Privacy, Please

In the midst of all the activity your group will experience in welcoming and resettling a refugee family, it is important to remember that the family, while likely hospitable, needs and deserves privacy. Your group may be the guarantor/co-signer of the lease, but it does not mean that multiple group members should have keys or that you should not ring the doorbell before entering. The family's privacy in their new home is more important than the convenience keys among group members would provide. ***The co-signer of the lease, the landlord, and the family are the only people who should have keys to the apartment once the family has arrived.***

By the same token, some families come from cultures with open doors and may find it strange or be insulted if you feel you come over only if invited or an appointment is involved.

Nonetheless, such hospitality should not be taken to mean that group members can show up unannounced at will. Indeed, the family needs down time without visitors to help mitigate the stress of the myriad resettlement activities and functions they are dealing with. Early on, it should be established in friendly conversation that you will either text or call before coming over. It establishes an even playing field and mutual respect for each other's time and space.

Be “Trauma-Informed”

Many communities who welcome refugees want them to tell their stories publically. Unless they actively express interest in doing so, refugees should not be asked to speak about their refugee experience. Be aware that telling a persecution story can re-traumatize refugees. They have had to tell their stories multiple times to UNHCR and US State Department officials, in order to get refugee status and approval to resettle to the US. Once they are here, they can *choose* whether or not and under what circumstances to talk about the persecution they have experienced. Please respect this choice. By the same token, persecution experiences are by no means taboo. If refugees want to speak with you about what they have fled in their home countries, you will have a tremendous opportunity to be compassionate listeners.

We at IRIS do not ask our clients why they are refugees, and we require that our volunteers and co-sponsorship partners follow this policy as well. This is part of being *trauma-informed*, whereby it is assumed that refugees have experienced trauma to some degree, regardless of how they may appear to us. In addition to applying great sensitivity by not asking for tales of their experiences, it is helpful to adopt a trauma-informed orientation with your family, as the effects of trauma can be deceiving (e.g., being late for or missing appointments, forgetfulness, inconsistent behavior or moods).

If you notice any behavioral symptoms that are worrisome or problematic and are unsure of how to proceed, please reach out to your case manager or a mental health professional in your community who can help you find appropriate resources.

Mandatory Reporting

As a matter of federal and state law, any individual entrusted with caring for or working with children is required to report suspected or actual child abuse and/or neglect to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF). While all IRIS clients receive information on stringent US laws covering domestic violence and child abuse/neglect during CORE, occasionally parents may still revert to disciplinary practices that are not acceptable in this country. If you witness or learn of child abuse or neglect endured by the children in your refugee family, it must be reported to DCF. Discuss what you have witnessed with your group leader who will determine how a report should be handled.

Certain professionals, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, case workers (including those at IRIS), guidance counselors, lawyers, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are **required** to report child abuse and neglect, whether it is suspected or confirmed. If anyone in your group is one of these professionals and is told about abuse or neglect, s/he is also **required** to report it to DCF. The mandatory reporter has the right to report to DCF

anonymously so that the investigation into abuse or neglect can proceed without her/his direct involvement or the knowledge of the offending family member.

You should contact your family's CSC if you are unsure about whether there is a need to report to DCF. If your CSC deems that the incident must be reported, s/he will suggest that you contact DCF accordingly, since you are closest to the incident and can provide authentic, critical details. If you are uncomfortable doing so, your CSC will be obligated to report based on the information you shared.

While the need to engage in mandatory reporting is decidedly rare, it is important for your group to know who among you are mandatory reporters and to discuss how such incidents would be handled. Failure to report suspected or actual child abuse/neglect that is allowed to escalate without intervention can result in a fine. A summary of legal requirements concerning child abuse/neglect in the State of Connecticut can be found on page two of this DCF document, [Report of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect](#).

Addressing Social and Cultural Differences

For many refugees, they are arriving in a land replete with a colorful diversity of races, gender roles, faiths/religions, nationalities, and orientations that they may never have seen before. We have found that most refugees are warm, hospitable, and kind and interact well with our staff and volunteers in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Nonetheless, it is important to discuss key social and cultural factors that your family and your group may encounter while you build your relationships.

Racism

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, meaningful acknowledgment of racism in the United States came to the surface in stark relief after decades of being sidelined. In turn, demonstrations and calls for activism across Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and White communities alike have given rise to the study and practice of anti-racism all over the country. In recognizing how racism informs and affects our clients, especially those in BIPOC communities, IRIS has committed itself to doing anti-racism work with professional consultants and to incorporating anti-racism into its policies, practices, and relationships with community groups, as well as national and international organizations. As we prepare to welcome refugees from all over the world in earnest, it is incumbent upon IRIS and its partners to have educational, honest, and respectful conversations with our refugee families about racism and its pervasiveness in American life and history.

We plan to formally introduce elements of anti-racism into co-sponsor training once IRIS has progressed in its own organizational anti-racism training. Until then, we would invite all of your group members to review an [anti-racism blog series](#) developed by our colleagues at the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), one of the nine national refugee resettlement agencies contracted with the US State Department. While the intended audience is that of refugee resettlement service providers (e.g., IRIS), the comprehensive information the blog posts provide is very useful for community groups to review.

Sexism

In many cultures represented among our refugees, the family structure is very traditional, wherein the father is the head of the household and the mother is expected to stay home to tend to the home and care for the children. In some cases, young girls are not permitted to engage in the same kinds of activities that are common among young boys and girls in American culture. For example, sometimes a young girl is expected to come home right after school while her brother is allowed to play soccer with his friends. Similarly, a mother may wish to work and establish her own sense of identity, only to be told not to by her husband. Sometimes this simply reflects adherence to their own cultures without incident, and sometimes cultural adjustment pressures can escalate into situations involving domestic violence.

IRIS addresses domestic violence specifically as part of our federally required Cultural Orientation and Resettlement Education (CORE) program, which all adult refugees are required to attend within roughly one month of their arrival. With respect to less overtly violent sexism, it is important to be aware while allowing the family to proceed with cultural adjustment at their own pace. By simply being yourselves, you can help this process along, for example, by showing how men and women in your group work together without regard to gender and/or “expected” gender roles (e.g., women in positions of leadership, men not afraid to look after children or cook dinner). Of course, this is a delicate balancing act depending on where your family is from. Women from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan may be averse to being alone in a room with a non-related man. And likewise, some men may be hostile toward women whom they perceive to encroach on their authority. In any case, it would be wise for your group to do some additional research, especially once you know who your family is and where they are from.

In general, do not try to impose your views on the family but encourage discussion and exchange among the family and members of your group.

Homophobia

In the countries our refugees are from, LGBTQ rights and freedoms are nonexistent. Indeed, LGBTQ people who suffer persecution are eligible for refugee status. It is not as common, however, as very few refugee-eligible LGBT people are willing to describe their persecution in the kind of detail required for the rigorous vetting process by the US government. Hence, some may simply apply for refugee status based on other legitimate incidents of persecution (e.g., religion, political affiliation) rather than reveal their sexual orientation as the reason for requesting protection. Those who do come to the US due to persecution based on sexual orientation tend to travel alone and would thus be resettled by IRIS in New Haven.

Homophobia could be a concern for co-sponsor groups if you have openly LGBTQ committee members, fellow congregants or friends. This is not to suggest that openly LGBTQ individuals should not be part of the core resettlement team that will be interacting frequently with refugees. Quite the contrary. As in the example above with respect to sexism, being yourselves is the best way to help acculturate and educate a refugee family with respect to homophobia. It is unlikely, in our experience, that a refugee would ask, “Are you gay?” or express disdain

about an LGBTQ person in front of us. Nonetheless, as the refugee family gets to know people in your group better, and as they start to meet more Americans, you may see signs of inquiry start to emerge when certain cultural biases kick in. For example, a middle-aged gentleman may never bring up whether he is married or not, but that is often one of the first questions an Iraqi man or woman might ask when getting to know him. How he, or any LGBTQ person, answers is ultimately up to her/him, and of course, it depends on the refugee. It all comes back to being your authentic selves while respectfully allowing your refugee family the space to be more culturally sensitive and aware.

The Refugees Might Decide to Leave

Occasionally, refugees choose to move away from their initial resettlement community. This may happen within the first few months, or after a year or more. They may move to join relatives or friends, to pursue an avenue of economic support, or to live in a particular kind of climate. Our role is to provide objective information about the pros and cons of moving. In the end, however, refugees are free to make this choice. While it may disrupt our plans (and your plans) or even appear to be a bad choice for the family, we try to view it as a sign of their own independence and, of course, they are allowed to leave. It should not be viewed as a failure. One of the best antidotes to our feelings of disappointment is to co-sponsor another family soon!

Working Toward Independence

Do not encourage refugees to depend on you because it makes you feel good to help them. From the day they arrive, make sure the refugees and the community co-sponsorship group members focus on independence.

You can help by:

- 1) Discussing the importance of economic self-sufficiency as early and as much as possible..
- 2) Ensuring volunteers remind themselves of this importance. Every volunteer should stop and question if the task they are assisting the family with is being completed in a fashion that moves the family closer to independence. Completing tasks **with** the family as opposed to **for** the family should start very soon after arrival.
- 3) Working to develop **healthy two-way friendships** rather than dependent ones. Take the time to **listen and learn** from them. Their culture, food, language and experiences are fascinating. You will benefit and show them respect while they will gain a sense of dignity and pride in talking about what has been important to them.

A Final Word: Refugee Resettlement is Rewarding ... and Messy!

We are all human beings, and anything could happen to one of us, or one of the refugees, at any time. Your refugee family – like any family - is dealing with life's unpredictable twists and turns.

Keep calm. Co-sponsoring refugees is a big responsibility. IRIS is here to support you, provide advice, answer questions, and work with you through difficult situations you may encounter. The IRIS Co-Sponsorship Manager has access to the wealth of experience and expertise represented among IRIS staff and long-time volunteers. **You are never alone!**

Many community groups in Connecticut have participated in this wonderful program. If you would like to speak with a group that has had experience resettling refugees, please contact IRIS for their contact information.

Glossary of Acronyms

CORE	Cultural Orientation and Resettlement Education
CSC	Community Sponsor Coach
DSS	Department of Social Services
ELL	English Language Learner
ESOL	English Speakers of Other Languages
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PA	Principal Applicant
RA	Resettlement Agency
RCA	Refugee Cash Assistance
RHA	Refugee Health Assessment
R&P	Reception and Placement
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SSA	Social Security Administration
TFA	Temporary Family Assistance
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
APA	Afghan Placement and Assistance
CWS	Church World Services

