

Practical Ways to Empower New Americans

DONATIONS: Do not give money or large gifts. If the agency confirms that it is a valid need, donate through the agency or another organization, but don't give directly.

CHOOSE THE SIDE OF THE AGENCY: It does not help to choose sides and work against others who are there to assist newly arriving refugees. Defend the agency and explain how busy the case managers are and assure them that the agency is doing their best at helping them.

ALLOW TO GIVE BACK: Find something that your international friends can do well and ask them to help or teach you this skill.

BE THEIR OWN ADVOCATE: Encourage your international friends to address their case manager when there is an issue and call them directly. If they don't get any response from the agency within two business days, only then should you call and address the issue on behalf of your friends.

NEEDS VS. WANTS: Other cultures have different "needs" than we do, and what you consider important may not be a priority for them. Assist them in locating important resources that will meet emergency needs, and communicate that not all their needs will be met at once.

BETTER TOGETHER: Encourage them to reach out and befriend neighbors, their apartment complex manager, classmates, teachers, the agency staff, etc. They don't have to 'go it alone.' Other new refugee arrivals need friends and practical help and advice.

VOLUNTEER: Volunteering gives new Americans good practice at gaining work skills, great immersion for learning English, and some experience to put on their resume. It also helps them get out of the house and establish good habits from the time they arrive.

TAKE THE BUS: Do not drive them to places unless it is really necessary or if the agency asked you to assist. Take the bus with your international friends as often as you can so that you are facilitating their independence.

ENGLISH IS THE KEY: Tell them it is important to attend ESL class each day. Their attendance record is valuable for future employment.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: Help them understand that resettlement is not going to be easy. It will take a great deal of determination but you can have that American dream if you start at the bottom and work hard enough.

DON'T GIVE THE ANSWER: Refugees are amazingly brilliant at figuring out solutions--even just after having arrived! Instead of rushing to meet needs, allow them to explore practical avenues and practice problem-solving skills to find their own solution.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES: Sometimes it is best and right to say "No, I won't be able to do that".

VALUABLE GIFT: Give time instead of money and things.

BE A FRIEND: Just be a faithful friend... do not try to solve their problems, meet their needs, or be their provider or their hero.

NATURAL LESSONS: Sometimes natural consequences teach the best lessons.

GOOD GUIDELINE: Don't do anything for them that they can do for themselves.