

Blacksburg Refugee Partnership

Volunteer Handbook

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Doing the work of resettlement with love.

This document provides an overview of some of the roles of BRP volunteers and in particular the principles and policies which are applied to all BRP decisions and volunteers. No names or contact information are included here so that this document can be freely disseminated. All volunteers can be provided with a list of names and contact information for each role described.

First, Thank You

We are delighted that you are interested in working with Blacksburg Refugee Partnership (BRP). Our goal is to provide new refugees with the skills and support needed on their journey to becoming self-sufficient. This could not be possible without volunteers like you. In fact, BRP is an all-volunteer organization.

Each volunteer provides a critical role in fulfilling our mission. By giving your time, you will help a family to make a smooth transition into their new home and also make them feel welcome! Whether you can commit to five hours per year or five hours per week, you will make a real difference in the lives of families. There are many ways to show your support depending on your interests, skills, and availability.

The handbook is a companion guide to Volunteer Orientation. We hope you find this handbook useful for understanding who we are, roles within the organization, BRP policies, and how you might contribute. Of course, if you have any questions, you can ask our Orientation Coordinator at orientation@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org. Once again welcome and thank you!

Blacksburg Refugee Partnership Overview

BRP was formed in the summer of 2016 to support refugee families from war-torn countries. BRP assists with the resettlement of refugee families in the Blacksburg region until they can meet their own needs and participate in the community independently if they so choose. BRP support includes: housing; food and basic needs; health care planning and organization; adult and child education assistance including English Language Learning, tutoring, and school interfacing; childcare; translation; transportation; employment searches; and, U.S. banking and finance literacy. The work of BRP is guided by our Mission, Vision, and Values as an organization.

BRP Mission

Empower independent and sustainable lives.

BRP Vision

Self-supporting resettled refugees in an inclusive community.

BRP Values

1. Informed decision-making and personal autonomy resulting in independence from BRP in day-to-day function
2. Financial independence from BRP for resettled refugee families through employment and financial literacy
3. Cross-cultural understanding
4. An inclusive, welcoming, and hospitable community
5. Mutually respectful adult/child and adult/adult interactions
6. Constructive relationships
7. Privacy, confidentiality, and personal boundaries
8. Physical safety and health
9. Emotional, spiritual, and mental health
10. A clear, well-communicated BRP organizational structure and processes

Core Principles and Policies

Underpinning all of BRP's specific policies are the following core principles. These are formed to help achieve the goal of the families participating in the community independently and also to protect them.

- All decisions that impact the families we partner with are made by the families themselves. We will inform and educate them to the best of our abilities, but we cannot make their decisions.
- Our activities in partnership with the refugee families always consider the goal of the families living independent of our support. As their abilities increase, our support will scale back in an appropriate and reasonable way.
- While we make every effort to help our families participate in our community, we make no attempt to influence their cultures and traditions.
- By accepting our support, the families agree to secure and maintain employment if appropriate or engage in educational activities at a level commensurate with Social Services requirements. They also agree to learn English.
- Respecting that each member of each family comes to BRP with different knowledge, skills, abilities, and life experiences, BRP will work to "meet each family member where they are". Specifically, BRP will determine individual needs and develop a phased approach learning plan with suitable goals and realistic benchmarks that are developed in concert with the families themselves. A simple example is determining the level of English-language skills to offer training in an efficient and effective format.

Project-wide policies support these core principles and protect the families:

- All BRP volunteers must complete and pass a background check. You can do this by emailing background@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org.
- All BRP volunteers must sign a confidentiality agreement, which may be found at <https://bit.ly/brp-confidentiality>.
- All BRP volunteers must attend a Volunteer Orientation session. You can view the Volunteer Orientation video at <https://blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org/orientation>. After watching the video and reviewing this handbook, please direct any questions to orientation@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org.
- To protect the families and the volunteers, all BRP volunteers must be fully vaccinated against COVID19 if they are to meet either a family member or another volunteer. You can send a picture of your vaccination card to volunteering@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org. BRP roles that are performed remotely do not require COVID19 vaccination. Wear a mask when meeting with another volunteer or family member indoors.
- Information that could be used to identify or locate any family member, in particular any pictures, can never be made public or posted in any social media. Taking pictures with the children is permitted so long as there is permission from the parents and those pictures are kept private among the volunteer, BRP, and the families.
- Any information related to any family member's health, education, or legal status is confidential and may be shared only by Family Mentors (see BRP roles in a later section) trained to handle confidential information and only with people who are appropriately authorized to be privy to that information, e.g. health information can be shared with the family member's personal physician.

Additional Policies Related to Etiquette, Personal Boundaries, and Safety

- Some family members are inclined to be agreeable to volunteers, even if they are not completely comfortable, because they are receiving help and want to be polite. This fact puts the burden on volunteers to always be especially considerate and mindful.
- Always ask permission to enter a home.
- Adult male volunteers should avoid being alone with adult female family members. Adult female volunteers should avoid being alone with adult male family members. An exception may be made if the family member is asked about their preferences and gives express permission to be alone with the opposite-sexed volunteer. For discretion, the family member should be asked their preference privately and prior to the volunteer being allowed to work with the family member (e.g. for the purpose of tutoring).
- Once the families speak sufficient English to understand dates and times, call beforehand to ask when you can stop by before going to their home.
- Realize that families may keep very different hours than what may be typical in the U.S. For example, some families may like to rise early and go to bed early (8:00 pm). Some may not want to be disturbed after a particular time of day or during special times (meals, prayers). Be mindful of a family's comfort with having company during certain hours.
- Ensuring the safety of the children in our care is of paramount importance. The parents are the ultimate authority when it comes to who interacts with their children. Until parents are comfortable with volunteers, we should seek to avoid situations where children are alone with a new volunteer. It is highly recommended that there are always two volunteers whenever possible. For an exception to be made, the parent must know and give express permission for a particular purpose. If given permission, the volunteer should not deviate from the plan that was agreed upon. Likewise, volunteers should not take children anywhere, especially to their own or another's home, without the express permission of the child's parents. These policies protect both the families we serve and our volunteers.
- Volunteers are not permitted to be intoxicated (under the influence of drugs or alcohol) when working with any family member.
- Volunteers are not permitted to hit, spank, yank or use any other physical force with any family member to achieve a purpose.
- The potential threats to children who are online without parental supervision are numerous and our newly arrived parents may not be equipped to protect and monitor their children's online activities. Therefore, volunteers are not permitted to give any gift to a child that allows them online access, including phones, tablets, computers, and gaming systems. (School-aged children will receive a computer from school that has appropriate protections installed.)

Cultivating Cultural Sensitivity

What is Culture?

Culture is a complex term that is composed of many aspects. Some aspects are visible or tangible and some are not. Some people describe culture as an iceberg. What is observable is only the tip and what is invisible underneath the surface is vast and runs deep. We can distinguish between these layers as follows:

Surface Culture: Food, music, dress, holidays, language, art, etc.

Shallow Culture: This layer is “made up of unspoken rules around social interactions and norms, such as courtesy, attitudes towards elders, nature of friendship, concepts of time, personal space between people, nonverbal communication, eye contact or appropriate touching...**Social violation at this level can cause mistrust, distress, or social friction.**”

Deep Culture: This layer is made up of one’s worldview that “guides ethics, spirituality, health, and theories of group harmony... This layer runs deep. **Challenges to cultural values produce culture shock or trigger the brain’s fight or flight response.**”



source: Zaretta Hammond, Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students.

How Do You Cultivate Cultural Sensitivity?

Based on research by scholars of refugee studies, and by listening to current and former refugees from many parts of the world, we ask volunteers to be aware of how our assumptions shape our interactions with our new neighbors.

Whether or not we’ve worked with resettled refugees before, we already have assumptions about what “a refugee” is that come from popular culture, the media, and other non-governmental organizations. Even if we have worked with resettled refugees before, our ideas have been shaped by those particular individuals. Yet the identities of newly resettled refugees are unique to them, and not only because they are (for example) Muslim or Afghan: like us, their identities are *shaped by*, but are not determined by, the place where they were born. Volunteers should regularly reflect on our actions and ask, “Am I acting based on my assumptions about this family as refugees?” and, “Am I acting based on my assumptions about their culture?”

Our relationship to our new neighbors is based on their status as resettled refugees, yet that is not the entirety of their identities. As long as we treat individuals as only resettled refugees, refer to them only as refugees, ask them to do things only as refugees, we emphasize that *one aspect* of their identities. We ask them to continue to be “refugees,” rather than inviting them to become community members like the rest of us.

Scholars and former refugees alike have identified certain attitudes common among volunteers, government officials, teachers, and others who work with resettled refugees:

- Expectation of gratitude from our new neighbors
- Assumption of lack of knowledge about all aspects of American life
- Assumption of inability to make “proper” decisions
- Infantilizing—making decisions for the families
- Frustration
- Pity

We may not be able to avoid these feelings because this is how our culture has taught to see refugees. For this reason, we believe that there is a need for volunteers to continually engage in constant self-

reflection: Are we treating these people as intelligent, competent, complex individuals, ones who have survived hardships that might have defeated us? Or are we treating them as “refugees” who, like children, are unable to make decisions about their own lives and futures?

Finally, beware of “microaggressions” – statements, actions, or incidents that may be taken by a refugee as discrimination, regardless of whether you intended it to be. As an example, a list of microaggressions to avoid with newly arrived Afghans is provided in Appendix A.

You may find it helpful and interesting to do some reading about refugee experiences. Some books to consider are the following:

- Jennings, Mary. *The Broken Circle: A Memoir of Escaping Afghanistan*. (2018): 80-80.
- Rahmani, Niloofar and Sikes, Adam. *Open Skies: My Life as Afghanistan’s First Female Pilot*. Chicago Review Press (2021)
- Nayeri, Dina. *The ungrateful refugee: What immigrants never tell you*. Catapult, 2019.
- Bui, Thi. *The best we could do: An illustrated memoir*. Abrams, 2017.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh, ed. *The displaced: Refugee writers on refugee lives*. Abrams, 2018.
- Fishman, E. *Refugee High: Coming of Age in America*. The New Press (2021).
- Tran, G. B. (2013). *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Ballantine Group.
- Qasmiyeh, Yousif M. “Writing the Camp: Death, Dying and Dialects.” *Refugee Imaginaries: Research across the Humanities* (2019): 311-329.
- Hughes, Kiku. *Displacement*. First Second, 2020.
- Bush, Elizabeth. "Illegal by Eoin Colfer." *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* 71, no. 11 (2018): 467-468.
- Folman, Ari, and David Polonsky. *Waltz with Bashir*. Vol. 90. Jaffa: Bridgit Folman Film Gang, 2008.
- Bashi, Parsua. *Nylon Road: A Graphic Memoir of Coming of Age in Iran*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2009.
- Brown, Don. *The unwanted: Stories of the Syrian refugees*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018.
- Jamieson, Victoria, and Omar Mohamed. *When stars are scattered*. Faber & Faber, 2020.

Considerations for People Experiencing Trauma

Be mindful that refugees are people who were forced to leave their homes and countries to find safety. They might have experienced war/conflict and/or natural disasters. Reactions to that experience can leave people very distressed. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is triggered by a terrifying event either experienced or witnessed that leads to difficulty functioning in relationships, work or school, or in performing daily tasks. Symptoms of PTSD may include the following:

- Intrusive memories such as memories of the traumatic event, feeling like it is happening again, nightmares, emotional or physical reactions to something that reminds one of the event.
- Avoidance of thinking or talking about the traumatic event or avoiding places, activities or people that remind one of the traumatic event.
- Negative changes in thinking and mood such as negative thoughts about oneself, other people or the world, hopelessness about the future, not remembering aspects of the traumatic event, difficulty in relationships, feeling detached from others, lack of interest in activities, feeling emotionally numb.
- Changes in physical and emotional reactions such as being easily startled or frightened, always being on guard, self-destructive behaviors such as engaging in reckless sex, driving too fast or

drinking too much, trouble sleeping, trouble concentrating, irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior, or overwhelming guilt or shame. Children under six may re-enact the traumatic event through play and/or have frightening dreams that may or may not include aspects of the traumatic event.

- Triggers to symptoms can be obvious such as hearing a car backfire or seeing a news report about a sexual assault or more subtle such as hearing a song or smelling a particular aroma.

Common symptoms of stress to know are:

- Physical: Fatigue, nausea, chest pain, difficulty breathing, elevated blood pressure, headaches, upset stomach, visual problems, grinding teeth, dizziness, perspiring, chills, shock symptoms.
- Cognitive: Confusion, difficulty concentrating, poor decisions, impaired memory, hypervigilance, more or less awareness of surroundings, disorientation, nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive images.
- Emotional: Anxiety, guilt, grief, denial, fear, depression, inappropriate emotions, apprehension, feeling overwhelmed, intense anger, irritability, agitation, panic.
- Behavioral: Changes in activity, withdrawal, emotional outbursts, panic attacks, suspiciousness, restlessness, changes in speech pattern, increased use of substances, increased or decreased appetite, intensified startle response, pacing, increased or decreased sexual drive.
- Spiritual: Anger at God, feeling distant from God, feeling that God is not in control or does not care, belief that one has failed God, withdrawal from place of worship, increase in spiritual involvement, faith practices seem empty, loss of meaning and purpose, questions of one's faith, anger at the clergy.

It is important to understand that volunteers can experience trauma upon hearing traumatic stories from the refugees. If you are experiencing distress related to your volunteer work, email orientation@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org. The orientation volunteer will talk to you about what you are experiencing and be someone you can talk to. If you decide that more help is needed, the orientation volunteer will put you in contact with someone who can help. If you think a refugee family member is experiencing PTSD, please contact ellenp@vt.edu to discuss your concerns.

Confidentiality

Because of the politicized nature of refugee resettlement, keeping information about the families confidential is critical. You may learn intimate details about the lives of the families we serve – health issues, financial matters, past experiences – that are important for your job as a volunteer; however, these must remain confidential

While you should feel free to tell people that you volunteer with BRP; however, do not tell people details about the circumstance of the families you work with. For example, you can say, “I volunteer with BRP as a health coordinator” but not “I serve as health coordinator for the X family who are refugees from Y and have Z children with these health concerns: ...” If you happen to be out with a family member and come across another acquaintance, you can say, “This is Ms. X”, but not “This is Ms. X who is a refugee I work with through BRP.” Also, be aware of your surroundings when meeting with other volunteers or speaking on the phone. For example, a busy cafe might not be the best spot to have a meeting about health concerns. Just as most of us do not care to have intimate details of our lives discussed by people we barely know, the families would also appreciate discretion and respect.

Likewise, within a family team, consider which volunteers *need* to know which details? The family liaison should be kept informed since that role is the main coordinator for the family team; however, does the

education coordinator need to know about the mother’s issues at work or does the finance coordinator need to know how the children are doing in school? Most likely not. Does the education coordinator need to know about children’s health issues that might affect their performance in school or does the finance coordinator need to know if a parent has their hours cut back at work? It is likely that the answer in these circumstances is yes. If you are unsure about the sharing of information in a particular situation, please discuss this with your team lead or the family liaison.

Enabling versus Empowering

When trying to help someone learn a new skill, it is common to want to do tasks *for* that person instead of *with* that person and teaching as you go. The reason is that it often is faster and more efficient (in the short term) to simply do the task yourself; however, this approach is counter to BRP’s mission of empowering independent and sustainable lives. To be mindful of avoiding enabling behaviors and working from a place of refugee empowerment, the following chart concerning enabling versus empowering behaviors from therapist Nedra Tawwab (<http://www.nedratawwab.com>) is useful.

Enabling	Empowering
Doing things for others without being asked	Honoring a reasonable request to assist someone when asked
Creating goals and expectations for others	Asking people what they want for themselves
Shielding people from consequences	Allowing people to experience natural consequences as a process of growth
Blaming people other than the person responsible because you want to protect the person	Holding people accountable for their role in the situation
Solving and fixing problems for others	Teaching people how to do things for themselves
Doing the work for others	Supporting the person to do the work

Family Decision Making

It is completely natural to see and hear the stories of the families that come to us for assistance and compassionately want to ease their suffering. Without a doubt, across the board, these families have lived through circumstances we can barely fathom. However, making another’s decisions for them will not ease their suffering in the long run. Likewise, all high-functioning people must learn to live by the consequences of their actions.

When families come to us, they are, understandably so, overwhelmed in the initial weeks and months. When presented with options – and depending on family circumstances, background, and education – it is normal for them to defer and ask a BRP member what to do. It is important in this circumstance to lay out the potential reasons for and against any particular action. You may even tell them what other refugees or people in this country typically do. Afterwards, give them time to discuss the decision among themselves, and then assist them in enacting the action of their choice.

To maintain the dignity and autonomy of those we are trying to help, consider that the best route may be to ask permission to help before helping. For example, you may be considering healthcare and teeth

cleanings for a family. Instead of simply calling the dentist, making appointments, and telling a family what you have done, consider this alternative approach: “It is customary in the United States for everyone to have their teeth cleaned every six months. May we set up some appointments for your family?” The family may say yes but they may say no, and that is their choice to make.

Inevitably, moments will arise when a refugee family makes a choice for themselves with which you will not agree. When that happens, remember that these are people who are incredibly resourceful and resilient. Otherwise, they would not have made it to us. In assisting refugees to have independent and sustainable lives, remember the concept of *equanimity*. In the context of empowering others, it is important to be balanced with regard to all the good you want for them and your desire to control decisions and actions that are not rightfully yours to control.

Also, please remember that a difficult situation is not yours alone to address. BRP is organized to be a web of support for the families and the volunteers. Go to your Team Lead, Team Mentor, or BRP Board of Directors when you need help or have a concern. The following BRP Organizational Chart and Volunteer Support Sections provides you with resources.

BRP Organizational Chart and Volunteer Opportunities

To accomplish refugee resettlement while honoring BRP Mission, Vision, and Values, BRP is organized as a system of concentric circles with the refugee family being at the heart of our organization.



Stemming from our Mission, Vision, and Values is the organizing concept that the refugee families we serve are at the center of what we do. As such, one might think of BRP as concentric layers of support and resources.

- The innermost ring is the **Family Team**. This is a group of four **Family Team** members who assist the family through day-to-day activities until the family learns what is necessary to be self-supporting. Having a designated Family Team minimizes the stress of multiple people coming and going in the family's home and facilitates communication within the Family Team. The Family Team will meet regularly – likely two to three times per week initially – then less frequently as the family becomes independent. The Family Team members are:
 - Family Team Lead(s): The liaison acts as the lead coordinator for the Family Team and has the role of communicating and updating family needs and concerns to the Family Team Mentor or Board of Directors.
 - Family Children Education Mentor: Works with the parents on communication that comes from the school, including checking backpacks for forms and teacher notes. This mentor also communicates to the Child Education Support Team on any educational issue and the need for tutors.
 - Family Healthcare Mentor: Shepherd the family members through the healthcare system, including making appointments, prescription management, and learning the U.S. healthcare system.
 - Family Finance Mentor: Work with the family on all financial matters with the goal of moving them toward financial literacy and independence. Will include help with budgeting, financial document management, managing bills, and developing a financial plan for the future. (Items over \$1,000 must go to the Board of Directors for approval).
- To support the Family Team is the **Family Support Teams**, or the corresponding team for each of the Family Team members, including a **Family Team Mentor**. The Family Team Mentor is someone with ample experience working with refugee families and the “go-to” person for questions. The remaining family support teams – **Child Education and School Outreach Support, Finance Literacy Support, and Healthcare Support** – work to support the relevant mentor in the Family Team to track progress, evaluate strategies, and troubleshoot challenges relevant to the domain of their team. The Family Team Mentors have the responsibility of coordinating communication within their teams, to their respective Family Team mentor, and out to other teams through regularly scheduled meetings.
- The outside ring represents the **Facilitating Teams and Directors**. These are the additional teams and roles that work to support the Family Team, Family Support Teams, and the families. These groups communicate as needed – likely frequently when a new family arrives, then less so as the family becomes more independent.
 - Translation/Cultural Orientation Team: Performs the role of translator and aids in the cultural understanding between the BRP volunteers and families.
 - Family Orientation Content Team: Determines the information needed by the newly arrived families in order to understand who BRP is and what services we aim to provide.
 - Volunteer and Data Coordinating Team: Volunteer intake; ensures compliance to requirements, such as obtaining a background check, signing the confidentiality agreement, and attending orientation; tracks which teams the volunteers participate in; volunteer follow-up; and, keep an updated list of team volunteer needs.
 - Transportation Team: Reviews the transportation needs and coordinates necessary transport for family member appointments, such as doctor's visits, school meetings, and so forth. Some transportation needs are regular while others are occasional.
 - Public Transit Team: Teaches the Blacksburg Transit, Two-Town Trolley, and other public transportation options.
 - Employment Team: Overseeing job search for full- and part-time jobs for the families.

- Adult Education Team: Assists adult family members in attending adult learning classes, including English and enrollment in appropriate classes at local institutions.
 - Volunteer Orientation Team: Maintains the Volunteer Handbook, the orientation training materials, and coordinating and scheduling orientation sessions.
 - Housing Coordinator: Works with area landlords to secure housing for families and works with the families to understand basic tenant responsibilities.
 - Childcare Team: Review the childcare needs for families and arranges childcare through the volunteer database.
 - Family Wellness/Recreation Team: Communicates with the family teams, coordinates social activities for adults and children, and organizes the children's summer programs.
 - Partner Organization Coordinator: Works with area organizations, such as churches and philanthropic organizations to support the BRP mission.
 - Long-term Planning Team: Connecting the families with local resources that will help support them on their road to independence.
 - Fundraising Team: Supports fundraising through donor relations, grants, and outreach to the community to secure financial resources for the families.
 - BRP Website Manager: Maintains and updates the BRP website.
 - The Secular Society (TSS) Scholars Coordinator: Utilizing a donor supplied scholarship fund, this person will Interface between the refugee scholars and Virginia Tech.
 - Legal Counsel: Provides assistance on legal issues that may arise.
 - Communications Director: Helps craft, reviews, and approves any public messaging.
- There is one additional ring out from what is depicted in the figure, the **Board of Directors**, which has several roles, including: acting as an organizing body to support all committees through volunteer coordination and planning; tracking family progress and wellness; approving the policies and procedures of BRP, approving major financial decisions, evaluating overall strategies and future planning of BRP, and determining the financial ability to support new families. The Board of Directors meets weekly. The current board has ten members including a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. Board membership is modified by a board vote. The Board's decision to partner with a family is made in consideration of resources including having needed financial assistance, volunteer availability, family housing, and other practical constraints.

Volunteer Support

BRP has as its mission to support refugee families during their transition, but BRP is also supportive of its volunteers. As a volunteer with BRP, you will be a part of a team with a team lead. You can consider your team lead your first support resource to provide training and answer your questions.

If a volunteer experiences any concern or discomfort regarding their work with BRP or the families, they are encouraged to seek help. BRP has members with the appropriate background as well as community partnerships to help. Please do not hesitate to bring any concerns to a BRP team lead, team mentor, or BRP Board of Directors. The Board of Directors may be reached by emailing coordinating@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org or board@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org.

It is important for a volunteer to understand that, while volunteering with refugees is very rewarding, it may sometimes be tiring and stressful for several reasons, including, the difficulties that refugees have adjusting to a new culture; sadness that refugees have about family and friends who remain in other countries; disturbing historical information that a refugee may share with volunteers; decisions that a refugee may make that volunteers may not agree with; and, the challenges of helping those who may

have little English. If you are experiencing distress related to your volunteer work, email orientation@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org. The orientation volunteer will talk to you about what you are experiencing and be someone you can talk to. If you decide that more help is needed, the orientation volunteer will put you in contact with someone who can help.

BRP offers volunteer orientation meetings twice monthly. These are the second Wednesday at 7pm and fourth Monday at noon. The meetings provide an overview of BRP's history, current state of the organization and families, lessons learned applicable to new volunteers, and question and answer time. These meetings are required for any new volunteers.

Once per month the Board of Directors holds an "All Hands" meeting open to all volunteers. During this meeting, volunteers will be provided with an update on issues of general interest to BRP. The update will be followed by a question-and-answer session to address any concerns, challenges, or ask general questions.

Emergency Procedures

As a general approach, working with BRP families should be like any other volunteer-client relationship. In any situation in which one would normally call 911 or notify law or school officials, this should be done with no hesitation. A Family Team Lead and/or a BRP Board Member should then be notified.

Important Email Addresses

Several email addresses have been provided throughout this handbook. To make them more convenient to find, they are relisted here:

- Confidentiality Agreement: <https://bit.ly/brp-confidentiality>
- Background Check: background@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org
- Volunteer Coordinator: volunteering@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org
 - Send background check, picture of vaccination card, questions about volunteering
- Orientation Coordinator: orientation@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org
 - Send orientation questions, BRP process concerns or suggestions, or to find a time to talk about particular challenges or stress
- BRP Board: coordinating@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org or board@blacksburgrefugeepartnership.org

APPENDIX A:

MICROAGGRESSIONS TO AVOID WITH NEWLY ARRIVED AFGHANS

This material is edited from that provided by Dr. Iman Ahmad Sadique. Dr. Sadique is an Afghan American and an academic who has studied the Afghan refugee community. She reminds us that arriving in a new country as a refugee is a delicate period of transition. Certain behaviors should be avoided with newly arrived Afghans as these microaggressions, even though they may be unintentional, can be hurtful for our new neighbors.

1. The appropriate word for someone from Afghanistan is Afghan. Do not call them Afghanis, which is the word for the currency in Afghanistan and is utilized as a slur by other communities against Afghans.
2. Asking a newly arrived Afghan about their tribal background is perceived as displaying your interest in labeling them into a box instead of learning about them as a person. Do not ask an Afghan what their tribal background is; rather, seek to learn about them as an individual.
3. Many new Afghans are professionals whose degrees and accomplishments aren't accepted in the American system, so they take up working class jobs to care for their families. Don't assume because they are refugees that they are uneducated.
4. Just because an Afghan may speak with an accent, doesn't mean they think with one. On the contrary, Afghans are often bilingual and can balance multiple languages. They simply communicate in a way you're not used to. Do not assume an accent means they are intellectually inferior.
5. Just as you would not ask a neighbor who they're voting for, do not ask an Afghan what their political views are on America. They've been through a more complex experience than you may be aware of and are focused on feeling a semblance of safety, not on political questions.
6. The media portrayal that sectarian friction applies to all Afghans is false. Their personal experiences are much richer than that. Don't ask if they're Shia or Sunni and give them space to practice their religion however they feel comfortable. They just want to feel welcome.
7. Newly arrived Afghans are mourning the loss of their homes and social networks. Don't bring nationalism and racism into a discussion with them. They're not responsible for the refugee crisis and your political opinions are not helpful for them.
8. Just as you would not like it if a foreigner met one American and assumed he or she represents the entire country, don't assume one Afghan is representative of every Afghan and every Afghan's experience. It is an unfair burden for anyone to carry.
9. The emotional toll newly arrived Afghans are experiencing is intense. Building relationships for them will take time. Do not expect them to immediately feel comfortable with you or trust you.
10. Be mindful not to project a biased viewpoint onto a woman in a hijab, being especially mindful not to assume that she is oppressed. Her life experiences and personal choice and hers alone. Commenting on her attire will make her feel uncomfortable, as it is perceived that you are judging her physicality. She already feels like an outsider in a new place. Leave her be to wear whatever she wants however she wants.
11. Whether it be Afghan clothes, a different style of hijab, wearing hijab sometimes but not always, or not at all — respect that you don't know everything about an Afghan's cultural background. Just like you, what they wear is what makes them feel comfortable at that time. Don't stare and make them feel like an outsider in a place they're just getting to know. Do not laugh at or make fun of any attire they choose to don.

12. Many Afghans' homes were destroyed, their lives put at risk, and their families torn apart. Providing humanitarian aid should be done freely. Do not expect a personal thank you from them.
13. Discussing personal religious viewpoints is often awkward and uncomfortable, even if you are from the same religion. The same social taboo to discuss religion with guests applies here. Afghans are preoccupied with feelings of loss, PTSD, and worries of resettlement. Give them the grace of space to not get into heavy topics or feel imposed upon. Regardless of your faith, do not preach your religious perspectives to them.
14. Newly arrived Afghans are learning a new culture, and they're learning about it daily. Allow them space to decide how and when they'd like to learn more and what they want to partake in. Do not assume they will immediately celebrate all American holidays. Secondly — remember that holidays also have a large financial investment and having lost all stability, they may not be in a position to make those financial investments.
15. Let newly arrived Afghans ask you questions about American culture. If there's something you notice that would be helpful for them to know, ask someone who they are comfortable with to discuss it with them one-on-one in private. Do not humiliate an adult by correcting their behaviors publicly. Don't feel a need to give them a personal crash course on American culture.