

Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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Introduction

Who are Refugees?

Refugees are people who must flee their homeland fearing death or persecution because of their race, religion, or political views. They must leave everything behind, including family members, material possessions, and cultural identity for the chance to rebuild a life with personal safety, individual freedom, and peace.

The Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services (RAIS) supports refugees from a variety of countries, including Hmong refugees originally from Laos, the Former Soviet Union countries such as the Ukraine and Russia, as well as other countries throughout the world. RAIS also supports people granted political asylum coming from many different countries.

How does RAIS support refugees?

The office of Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services is primarily concerned with aiding refugees and asylees in their resettlement into Alaska. RAIS serves as the refugee resettlement office for the State of Alaska. Through culturally competent services, RAIS assists by being an advocate, a guide and a resource to clients in areas related to housing, health, employment, and other basic needs as expressed by our clients. In all assistance, RAIS staff seeks not to simply do for the client, but to teach them how to do for themselves and, ultimately, gain self-sufficiency.

Contact Information

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About the Program

The office of Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services was established September 30, 2003 and is located at the Catholic Social Services Center on 3710 20th Street, Anchorage, AK.

Program Goals

- The primary goal of the Program is to promote employment and self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is defined as a lifestyle that has sustainable financial support, and in which the family's basic needs are fully met on a long-term basis. The Program provides a bridge for clients from their former life experiences to the new skills required for success in the United States.
- Our schedule of goals includes, but is not limited to:
 - **Within the first 90 days:** safe and sanitary housing and furnishings; food; clothing; referrals for additional services; social security cards; registering children in school; beginning ESL classes; health-orientations and referrals; community and other orientations; employment preparation and assistance; coordination and consultation with public agencies; and monitoring.
 - **Within the first 8 months:** clients complete English Language Training and extensive cultural and job orientation; case managers work with clients to achieve employment in the United States.
 - **Within the first 5 years:** Self sufficiency, including employment.

Primary Program Services

- Cash and medical assistance for the first eight months the client is in the United States, if he or she is ineligible for Temporary Assistance for Needs Families (TANF) benefits.
- Access to English as a second language classes.
- Vocational assistance to help clients develop the U.S. training credentials and obtain the job-related tools necessary for competitive job hunting.
- Employment assistance, including finding and applying for jobs, resume writing and job coaching.
- Document translation, assistance making appointments, interpretive service as appropriate.
- Assist with applications for access to public benefits and public agencies.
- Cultural orientation and civics lessons.

Refugee Assistance Volunteering

Volunteers are essential in welcoming the newcomer; putting a human face on the United States and helping the refugees connect with the community. Newcomers become self-sufficient more readily due to a unified volunteer, staff and client resettlement plan.

Committing to Volunteering

Volunteers often serve as a “lifeline” for refugees, orienting them to a new community, helping them with advocacy, tutoring them in English and providing friendship. The most important gift you can give is kindness and a warm welcome. Depending on the type of volunteering that you chose to do, we may ask for up to a six month commitment.

Volunteer Role

In keeping with the Program’s mission, and with both compassion and common sense, volunteers are committed to addressing the legitimate initial resettlement and adjustment needs of those refugees entrusted by the Program to their care.

Age Limitation

Our volunteers are generally 18 years of age or older. Volunteers under the age of 18 are welcome to work with RAIS with written permission from a parent or guardian. Volunteers under the age of 18 however, are not permitted to interact with clients unless accompanied by a non-client adult. The volunteer duties assigned to a minor will comply with all appropriate laws and regulations on child labor.

Orientation

This handbook, as well as the CSS Agency Volunteer Handbook, your interview, and the facilitated meeting with your RAIS client serves as your orientation. If you have any questions about the program, or CSS as an agency, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

Resignation

Should you decide to cease volunteering before your time commitment is up, we ask that you let us know as soon as possible and ask for at least two weeks notice in order to make arrangements to fill the absence. Of course, we realize there are sometimes circumstances that arise which will make a two-week notice impossible, and we are understanding about such.

Dismissal

Volunteers may be terminated for violating Catholic Social Services or RAIS policies and procedures as well the guidelines and procedures outlined in this manual.

RAIS Volunteer Philosophy

Do: 1) what you can; 2) when you can; 3) in a coordinated way; 4) within a well-built support system.

Volunteer Opportunities

For each of the volunteer categories listed below, more information is available from RAIS and/or the volunteer coordinator, which you may request at any time.

Support Team (we suggest at least 2-3 individuals per family)

As a member of a support team, you will serve as coordinator for the family, along with their RAIS case manager. The role of the support team may be unique for each family but can include some basic areas. You may meet a newly arriving family at the airport and help set up their apartment with furniture and household items. You will visit the family approximately once a week to help them with English, share U.S. cultural and social customs, and familiarize them with the community. You may also assist the case manager in transporting the family to appointments where a case manager is not needed, such as a doctor's appointment or to apply for Alaska State ID. You may also be the person to address trouble spots, such as a family who requires some assistance learning how to houseclean. We ask that you make a minimum six month commitment to working with the family.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Tutors

As an ESL tutor, you will visit the family (usually in the family's home) and help them with English lessons. Many of our clients are enrolled in ESL classes at the Anchorage Literacy Project and your tutoring will supplement the classes they are already enrolled in. Those interested may take advantage of the Anchorage Literacy Project's ESL Certification training to gain the basic skills and educational materials needed. RAIS and ALP ask for a 6 month commitment, meeting with the client for at least 1 ½ hours, twice per week.

Homework Tutor

As a homework tutor, you will tutor youth with homework and help them improve their English. You may also introduce them to activities that U.S. youth enjoy. RAIS asks for a 6 month commitment, meeting with the client for at least one hour per week.

Other

There is a variety of other volunteer activities available, including assisting with office duties, or working on special projects. These can be tailored to an individual's skills and schedule. Please feel free to contact RAIS to discuss possibilities.

Volunteer Guidelines and Procedures

The most important guideline is your own common sense! Keep in mind that you are serving as a role model and your example will have significant effect on how the refugee views his or her new country and its members. If you would like to see the Program's Procedures, please ask a staff member.

We ask you to observe the following guidelines while interacting with the clients:

1. Recognize that the refugee may have just joined his or her relatives in the United States and that this extended family must be respected and given high priority.
2. No drugs or alcohol permitted.
3. No sexual activity of any kind permitted - even between consenting adults.
4. If a client makes a request beyond the scope of your duties or responsibilities, the client can be referred back to the case manager and you may discuss with the volunteer coordinator.
5. If you have a need for supplies or training, you may direct these needs to the volunteer coordinator.
6. If you detect that someone has a need not being met (food, clothing, housing, money, job etc.) please contact the RAIS office. Please do not take any action on your own until you have notified our office.
7. Respect differences in culture. You may be exposed to religious medical and cultural practices that are unfamiliar to you. If you would like more information about these differences, please speak to the RAIS staff, preferably the refugee's case manager.
8. Volunteers must abide by reporting laws and codes of confidentiality. This means that suspected child, spouse or elder abuse must be reported to the program. If a client wishes to confide potentially harmful information, you need to remind the client that you can and do share information with the case manager as necessary. Confidentiality also means that **no information** about the RAIS office or staff, other volunteers, or any clients may be shared with anyone outside the agency at any time without authorization. RAIS gains consent from clients to release information to certain organizations; please ask for the list if you are unsure.
9. As a RAIS volunteer, you are representing the program as well as Catholic Social Services, please keep this in mind while volunteering. If you would like to use this representation for activities such as lobbying, talking to the press, or any other official acts, you must seek authorization from the program first.
10. Please do not proselytize to our clients. Proselytizing is against the CSS code of conduct. CSS serves anyone in need, regardless of religious affiliation.

Guide, educate, encourage, empower!

Donations

We always accept donations from the community. The following is a list of items that are always very useful for our clients.

Furniture

As our clients are often starting their homes “from scratch,” they can use almost any (used or new) furniture that you wish to donate. Some of our most needed items include:

- mattress and box spring sets (all sizes)
- couches (all sizes)
- tables and chairs
- dressers

Clothing

Our clients are always in need of warm clothes such as coats, boots, hats, mittens, etc. We especially need these items for children. RAIS no longer accepts donations of used clothing and will take new clothing only.

Other

Some of our other most needed items are:

- bedding (sheets, blankets and pillows)
- towels
- dishes and utensils
- cookware
- toiletries

* We ask for cash donations to **NOT** be made directly to our clients, however, you may make a cash donation to the RAIS office or to Catholic Social Services.

Encouraging Self-Sufficiency

Resettling refugees provides an extraordinary opportunity for us to take an active part in offering a caring and supportive environment for refugees as they begin new lives.

The guiding philosophy behind refugee resettlement services is enabling self-sufficiency. Your role as a volunteer is vital. But please realize that your role has limits.

You are asked to help refugees obtain necessary information. You are not asked to make decisions on their behalf regarding health care, housing, employment, social service benefits, family relations or schools schooling. When refugees have problems in these areas, you should refer them to the RAIS office. As a volunteer your help is part of a team effort that includes staff members, other volunteers and families. As such, we want to all work together and communicate often.

In the face of real need or an outstretched hand, we understand it is difficult to say no. So, here are a few guidelines to help you if faced with more demand on your services than you anticipated:

1. Encourage the family to find their own solutions to problems. For instance, if they find that they lack a piece of furniture, a back pack, etc. Help them to learn how to find it themselves (discount stores, etc.) or budget to be able to afford it.
2. Demonstrate how to do things: use the bus, get a driver's license, make a maintenance request to the landlord, and ask for help from the RAIS caseworker. Avoid doing it for them.
3. Assist in the employment process by talking about job possibilities with them, lending an eye with a resume, or helping them search for openings.
4. Put them in contact with others that share their cultural or religious background and other support systems for new arrivals.
5. Encourage him/her to make contact with Americans: employers, teachers, neighbors, bus drivers. The more contacts they make in the American community, the more confidence they will have in moving out into the community.

*No one is useless in the world
who lightens the burden of it to anyone else.*

- Charles Dickens

Culture Shock

The following stages represent the feelings that some refugees might go through upon arrival into their new culture. Of course, the stages are not universal nor based on a clear timeline; everyone has his or her own unique experience.

Stage I:

1. They don't know much about the people and the place.
2. They mainly see the similarities between the new culture and your own.
3. They feel very excited, even euphoric.
4. Everybody tries to help them because they are a newcomer.

Stage II:

1. They begin to see a lot of differences between the new cultures and their own.
2. They feel that the people of the host country are not very friendly towards them and they begin to feel negative towards them.
3. Everything seems more difficult than they thought it would be. They begin to wonder if they'll ever be able to fit in.
4. They lose their sense of humor and sometimes small irritations seem a lot more important than they really are.
5. They enjoy spending time with others from their country of origin and complaining about their host country.
6. They feel homesick
7. Their eating and sleeping patterns change and they may experience stomach upsets, rash, pain, etc.

Stage III:

1. They gradually increase their understanding of the language, the culture and the people.
2. They gradually accept other ways of living and thinking.
3. They get back their sense of humor and stop exaggerating minor problems.
4. They become more confident and feel they know more about themselves and the host country.

Stage IV:

1. They feel able to understand the local culture.
2. They are more able to deal with difficulties that arise.
3. They enjoy exposure to the new culture and experiences.

I have received and read the Volunteer Handbook for Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services and indicate my compliance with its guidelines with my signature below.

Name: Printed

Signature

Date

* Please return this sheet to the CSS Volunteer Coordinator.