

JRS UK *AT HOME*



HANDBOOK FOR PROSPECTIVE HOSTS

Meet the Team



"The compassionate human encounter which forms the basis of our hosting scheme is transformative. Our refugee friends are met with an open heart by their hosts. It is such a practical form of accompaniment - a humanising experience, uncommon within our hostile asylum system. Our hosts provide sanctuary amidst a cycle of uncertainty."

Amy-Leigh Hatton

Accommodation Project Coordinator

"Having a safe and welcoming place to sleep can have a huge impact on all aspects on someone's life. Not only does their mental and physical health improve but it also gives them to space to engage with the legal process and look forward. Hosting provides people with respite at a time when it is most needed."



Laurence Rossignol

Accommodation Officer

CONTENTS

ABOUT JRS UK	4
NEED FOR HOSTING & HOSPITALITY	6
THE <i>AT HOME</i> SCHEME	8
ABOUT OUR GUESTS	10
STEPS TO BECOMING A HOST	11
SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE PLACEMENT	15
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	17
CONTACT DETAILS	20

“ I had quite a big house for just myself, with spare rooms — for just me, you know? So, I couldn't say no. The Lord was looking down on me, saying 'what about those spare rooms?' I am pleased I did it anyway.

At Home Host

ABOUT JRS UK

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people.

Our work is founded on principles of Catholic Social Teaching and imbued with an Ignatian charism in line with the Jesuit contemporary mission : "the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement".

We give priority to situations of great need, where a more universal good may be achieved, and to needs others are not attending to.

JRS in the UK has a special ministry to serve those who find themselves destitute as a consequence of government policies and those detained for the administration of immigration procedures.

JRS UK currently provides the following support for our refugee friends:



The work of JRS UK is carried out in collaboration with other JRS offices around the world, as well as other Church and secular organisations, which are active in the same field.

Our mission to accompany refugees underpins all of our work and radically alters the beneficiary-service provider relationship. We place a high value on hospitality and relationship; on coming to know refugees as people with gifts and personalities not only defined by their situation in immigration law.

“ *Our mission to accompany refugees is first and foremost a mission to “be with”. We come to know refugees as whole people, even as companions, who are so much more than the label of refugee or asylum seeker.*

JRS Deputy Director

Terminology

Throughout this hosting guide, and through conversations with the JRS team, you will notice that we use the language of "Volunteers" and "Hosts" when referring to At Home hosts, while we name "Refugee Friends" and "Guests" those we accompany and serve through JRS UK.

THE NEED FOR HOSTING & HOSPITALITY

The journey to being recognised as a refugee in the UK, and thus, be able to secure a job and support oneself – is a long and challenging process.

The asylum system is notoriously difficult to understand and navigate, even for those whose first language is English. It is also slow and arbitrary, based on the culture of disbelief towards applicants, a lack of accountability, and the poor training of those making decisions.

The Illegal Migration Act passed in July 2023 has made claiming asylum even more difficult, inevitably leading to thousands of individuals who have a well-founded fear of persecution having their asylum claim refused.

Whilst families are generally entitled to statutory support regardless of their immigration status, the majority of those whose asylum claims are refused lose their right to claim any benefits or accommodation. They are banned from working and become utterly destitute, left powerless after having already spent months or years awaiting a decision.

These changes are already leading to an increase of vulnerable people becoming trapped in limbo; cycling between homelessness, precarious conditions, and even detention.



Fortunately, we already have a well-developed model that responds to this growing need for safe and stable accommodation.

At a time when we are seeing more hostility than ever, hosting is a life-line for refugee friends at risk of street homelessness.

Who can host?

Our hosts are members of the public, living in domestic housing, or religious communities, who have a strong desire to help destitute asylum seekers by offering short-term, strictly defined respite accommodation in their home or community. JRS UK accepts applications to host from anyone living in London who is willing to open up their home to a destitute refugee.

Could legal issues arise?

JRS UK is one of many organisations running hosting schemes for destitute asylum seekers. **Hosting is perfectly legal**, as long as no money changes hands. There is legislation that prevents those without immigration status from renting property (Right to Rent rules) – so the 'At Home' scheme depends on hosts receiving guests as guests, under condition of freely given hospitality. Hosting cannot be in exchange for labour or favours of any kind. There are projects like ours at JRS throughout the UK.

The situation is slightly more complicated if the host is a rental tenant, and we usually only place guests into the homes of those who are home owners or who are not in an assured short-hold tenancy agreement.

THE AT HOME SCHEME

At Home is the JRS UK hosting scheme. We match individuals, families and religious communities that can offer short-term respite accommodation in their households to refugee friends who have found themselves destitute as a consequence of the asylum process.

*14 Refugee
Friends hosted
through At
Home in 2022*

The only way out of this destitution in the long-term is when refugee friends can regulate their immigration status. This requires safety and stability to sustain the work required to find a solicitor, and put together a new application. Destitution and sporadic street homelessness can make this very difficult.

For refugees who have spent nights trying to catch some sleep on a night bus, having access to a place where they can take a shower, enjoy a hot meal and sleep in a comfortable bed brings peace of mind and the opportunity to recuperate from the affronts to their dignity they had experienced daily. **Receiving hospitality as opposed to hostility recalls and affirms their humanity.**

JRS UK recognises that opening your home to an unknown person with a very different background may feel daunting. We believe however that— with support, guidance, and clear parameters for both host and guest — the experience can be enriching.

The relationship between the host community and the refugee guest is at the heart of the hosting placement. We have seen how both the host and refugee guest change in the process.

“ People are very kind and helpful. I am a million times thankful from the bottom of my heart. I wish this programme will continue.

At Home Guest

Our hosts often say that, despite their initial apprehension about welcoming a stranger into their space, they find hosting to be a fruitful experience. It enables them to encounter a fellow human being and appreciate that behind the label 'refugee' is a person with a story, hopes, dreams, and fears, who is seeking to get on with their life, much like the rest of us.

Our hosts have shared how much they learn through the cultural exchange of hosting. By opening your hearts, you open to the experiences of the world that might otherwise feel distant from your own.

And, hosting is an opportunity to learn more about yourself, and your household, too.

“We were trying to practice what we preach; that’s the aim at least!”
At Home Host

We hope this handbook will answer all of your questions, will ease any initial concerns or apprehensions, and act as an on-going resource if you decide to host with JRS UK.

If you do decide to become an At Home host, you will be provided with the JRS UK Host's Handbook, which offers best practise guidance to facilitate safe, positive hosting experiences.



ABOUT OUR GUESTS

The principal aim of At Home is to provide accommodation and food to destitute refugees and asylum seekers – our guests. Those who are hosted have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), are not allowed to work, and are often denied access to state funded homeless services and hostels.

All 'At Home' referrals are carefully considered, and potential Guests are registered with JRS UK Destitution Services. This team come to know the individual over time and can help inform decisions regarding placement suitability.

“ *Hosting was like I was escaping. I didn't expect too much... I just want the certainty of a place where there will be peace and you will be considered as a human being.*

Refugee Friend

The process of assessing a guest's suitability for the scheme aims to be as exhaustive as possible. The Accommodation Team work with refugee friends to explore their support needs and undertake risk assessments for their time in hosting. For the safety of guests and hosts, JRS UK is unable to accept a referral from someone with complex support needs.

The Accommodation Team have the final say on whether a referral is suitable for a hosting placement. Those who are suitable will review and sign the Guest Agreement, which outlines expectations, rights, and responsibilities throughout their time with 'At Home'.

STEPS TO BECOMING A HOST

In most cases, the steps to becoming an At Home host follow the same pattern:

1. INITIAL ENQUIRY

The Host will make an initial application to the hosting scheme. The Accommodation Officer will provide further details about the hosting scheme and discuss expectations.

STEP ONE



2. MEET JRS STAFF

This stage will include a home visit to evaluate the environment and to meet with JRS staff in person. When references have been collected, training will be scheduled in order to prepare hosts for the role..

STEP TWO

3. MATCHING

The Accommodation Officer seeks to find a guest who suits the environment the host has on offer.

STEP THREE

4. MEET WITH GUEST

The Accommodation Officer and guest visit the host's home for an introduction and to review expectations and the hosting agreement.

STEP FOUR



5. TRIAL PERIOD

The guest moves in for a one-week trial period. The Accommodation Team will check in with both Host and Guest after the trial has ended to review the first week. The Accommodation Officer will also arrange to visit.

STEP FIVE

6. CONTINUATION OF PLACEMENT

If both Host and Guest are happy to proceed with the placement they will sign the hosting agreement.

Placement dates are agreed (usually 4 months) and the team will check in regularly, but you can contact them at any point during the placement..

STEP SIX



FURTHER DETAILS ON THE PLACEMENT PROCESS

1. Making an initial enquiry

When you have expressed your interest in hosting by completing a short application online, the Accommodation Team will get back to you via phone to chat through the basics of the scheme, and any initial questions you may have. This is an introductory conversation and there is no problem if you decide not to proceed any further.

2. Learning more

The next stage will be a home visit, where someone from the Accommodation Team visits your home. They can meet all members of the household if possible, and have a talk through the finer details of what hosting will entail. It will be necessary to see the room that will be available to the Guest, and to also view the other household facilities including kitchen and bathroom.

If you decide to proceed following this visit, the JRS team will collect your references and you will be invited to our training programme. The Accommodation Team will facilitate a hosting induction for you which will provide you with an in depth understanding of best practice in hosting, and more information on what to expect from the experience. You will sign a Host Agreement, which sets out your rights and responsibilities as a Host.

3. Matching host & guest

Due to the importance of matching the right guest with the right host, some delay may follow between the initial approval of hosts, and a guest being placed.

Matching of host and guest is based on a number of things, including: gender, locality, duration of stay, availability of hosts, and individual needs.

Once a prospective match is made, an initial meeting is arranged between the Accommodation Officer, the host and the prospective guest, preferably at the host's home.

This provides guest and host (and any other members of the household) the opportunity to find out more about each other. It's a chance for the guest to see the house and to gather important information about the rhythms of the home, bus routes, local amenities etc.

The guest and/or host may need some time to consider the hosting arrangement. Or, if both are clearly happy with the match, a future day and time may be agreed on the day for the guest to come to stay. Travel to the host home is arranged by JRS.

In some instances, offers of accommodation are turned down by guests. Hosts should not be offended. There could be a range of reasons for this, such as internalised feelings of rejection, challenges in adjusting to family life after loss of loved ones, or the locality perceived as too remote for the guest from their support system.



4. Agreeing boundaries together

Agreeing basic 'ground rules' with the Accommodation Officer and guest reduces the potential for misunderstanding later on.

The Accommodation Team will support hosts to prepare a 'Welcome Pack' for the guest's arrival, which is an opportunity to think about how you live, your rules, rituals, and own household boundaries, in addition to the At Home guidance set.

We advise hosts to be curious about how they live, and to reflect on each hosting experience, so we can learn together how to support you to have a rewarding journey.

“

Hosting has highlighted character traits in us that may otherwise have remained hidden. It reminds us of the richness of shared lives - learning much about 'difference'.

At Home Host

5. Trial period

The placement will begin with a trial period of one week, during which the Accommodation Team will review the experience with both host and guest.

Once the trial period has passed, barring any unresolvable concerns, the Accommodation Officer will visit the household to formalise the placement with the Placement Agreement. This agreement outlines the parameters of the placement and a copy will be kept on record by JRS.

The placement will continue for full term with regular contact between the Accommodation Team, Guest, and Host.

SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE PLACEMENT

The Accommodation Team will be a supportive presence throughout the placement, arranging visits from time to time, and meeting separately with hosts and guests. The Accommodation Team are available for pastoral support, guidance, and in some circumstances, mediation.

Most placements will last **4 months**. If any challenges arise that require support from JRS, the Accommodation Team will work with host and guest to resolve these. If the difficulties seem insurmountable, then the guest will be asked to leave.

The Accommodation Team will endeavour to find **alternative, suitable accommodation** for them. Guests are made fully aware from the outset that they have no legal right or entitlement to accommodation through the hosting scheme and that the first week therefore is offered on a trial-only basis.

Hosts have the right to terminate a stay at any time, but it is helpful if the Accommodation Team can be given **as much notice as possible**. This will assist with finding alternative accommodation for the guest.

JRS UK values greatly the hospitality offered by its hosts to our guests. The Accommodation Team takes every care to ensure that the host and guest feel supported throughout the placement and both the host and guest feel secure.

Support for the host

Support to the host is offered in a number of ways:

- All hosts will receive a Host's Handbook when they join the At Home scheme.
- An induction with the Accommodation Team, and training through the JRS staff and volunteer training programme.
- Regular contact with the Accommodation Team, including pastoral 1-2-1s.
- Regular opportunities to meet and reflect with other hosts. These offer both an opportunity to share the practical challenges and joys of hosting, alongside the opportunity to integrate the experience of hosting with personal values.



Support for the guest

Support to the guest is offered in a number of ways:

- The Accommodation Team keeps in regular contact with the guest over the phone and ensures that the guest has enough phone credit to contact them and the host.
- The Accommodation Team meet with the guest in person at the JRS centre.
- The guest continues to work closely with their assigned JRS caseworker, who offers specialist advice and casework.
- The guest has access to meaningful activities through JRS, as well as hardship grants and legal advice where appropriate.
- The Accommodation Officer is the point of contact between the guest and host if there is anything that the guest doesn't feel confident discussing directly with the host.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is it called a hosting scheme?

Hosting is based on the principle of hospitality; extending warmth and welcome to a guest. We are not asking for professional support to be offered, simply a place to stay, facilities to wash, food and somewhere to cook and/or eat. This and the respite from your warmth and flexibility as a host can be transformative.

If I can only host for a short time what will happen to my guest afterwards?

Sometimes short stays are sufficient. We try to match your availability and offer of hospitality with the guest's needs. We will do our best to find them an alternative accommodation, if needed, after the time in your home or community has ended. Sometimes, unfortunately, guests cannot access further accommodation after their stay with you. If this is to happen, JRS will continue to support the host and guest through this process.

Can I contact a guest after the placement has ended?

Sometimes, hosts and guests want to keep in contact after a placement has ended. If you plan to stay in touch once the placement has finished, you must consider the appropriateness of your contact, why you want to maintain contact, and be aware that you no longer have the policies and processes of the organisation in place to cushion your relationship. JRS will no longer be accountable for the relationship.

Can a period of hosting be extended?

The At Home project aims to observe the timeframes that are agreed in the outset. This is so all hosts can plan their rooms and availability, and so that hosts and guests are protected by clear boundaries.





If the need arises we might ask both host and guest whether they would be willing to extend for a short period of time. However, neither host nor guest would be under any obligation to do so. The onus is on the Accommodation Team—not the host—to find a suitable placement for the guest.

Can I ask the guest to leave the house when I am at work or out?

Yes, you can. You set the parameters of the hosting. It is reasonable to ask your guest to leave the house in the morning and to return in the evening when you are there, as long as you make sure your guest can have a proper breakfast and dinner. We just ask that it is discussed at the meeting between you, the guest and the Accommodation Officer. This ensures there is a common understanding of what the host is offering and the guest expecting. We try to ensure that guests know where Day Centres and other places of interest are located so that they have somewhere to go.

Can I host if I have a criminal record?

All applicants are asked to provide details of their criminal record at an early stage of the application process. Based on the information provided, we will have an open and measured discussion about your suitability for hosting.

Will I receive financial support?

We do not provide financial compensation to hosts for accommodating guests. Please keep in mind that there will be an extra person living and eating in your household for the time of the placement, but you should not incur any other 'out-of-pocket' expenses when hosting with At Home. Your guest should not ask you for money.



Do I have to cook for the guest? What if they do not like our food or have specific dietary requirements?

Some hosts are willing to share meals with their guests while others may have a lifestyle that does not allow it regularly. If you choose to host a refugee friend, you will determine what works best for you. Whether and when the guest will have access to the kitchen will also depend on your household's dynamics. Logistics, along with dietary restrictions and preferences, will be discussed during the first meeting with your guest, and reiterated at the beginning of the placement.

In addition, all guests receive a grant through At Home to assist with the cost of food that their host would not usually have at home (for example halal meat or ingredients from their country of origin).

Is it ok to ask a guest to clean their own room?

Absolutely! These are important things to discuss before a hosting placement begins, but a general rule of thumb is that it is ok to ask a guest to be responsible for cleaning their own spaces and common spaces as well (as long as this is a chore that is visibly shared equally between guest and other members of the household).

Will I need to pick up the guest to bring them to my house?

No, JRS provides transportation for the guest at the beginning and the end of a hosting placement.

Do we always need to spend time together?

No, chances are your guest will need alone time, just like you will. These different rhythms can be discussed throughout a placement.



CONTACT DETAILS

JRS contacts

Laurence Rossignol

Accommodation Officer

07718 134 105

laurence.rossignol@jrs.net

Amy-Leigh Hatton

Accommodation Project

Coordinator

07745 227 141

amy-leigh.hatton@jrs.net

Monday - Friday 10AM - 4PM

Other useful numbers

The JRS team doesn't operate an on-call/emergency phone for At Home. In case of emergency, please encourage your guest to contact the below:

The Samaritans: 116 123

NHS Urgent Mental Health Helpline

the number varies depending on location - you can find the right number to call for your location on this website:

www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

Out of hours medical care: 111

Emergency services: 999

REMEMBER: anyone is entitled to emergency health care regardless of their immigration status.

If you do find the need to contact any of these numbers, please do update the Accommodation Team as soon as possible, and they'll do all they can to help.



UNITED
KINGDOM

Hurtado Jesuit Centre
2 Chandler Street
London
E1W 2QT

020 7488 7310 | uk@jrs.net

Version Published September 2023 | images: © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk