



Ballina Region
for Refugees

Homestay Program

A Handbook for
Homestay Hosts



Welcome Respect Support

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PART 1

GUIDELINES FOR HOMESTAY HOSTS

INTRODUCTION

A very warm welcome to the growing family of homestay hosts of the Ballina Region for Refugees Homestay Program!

These guidelines may assist first-time homestay hosts to make the hosting experience positive for the host and guest.

The guests that you host have very likely been through long periods of extreme hardship, fearing for their safety and not knowing when or where they will be able to settle and rebuild their lives. Many have lost everything: loved ones, their home, their job, their place in society. However, they have shown immense resilience by surviving the journey from their homeland and coping with Australian refugee processes. Every guest is a person, just like us, needing acceptance, friendship and a sense of belonging.

Through your generosity in hosting asylum seekers and refugees, you are showing them that Australians care.

These guidelines will help you to enjoy the hosting experience during which you will share your everyday lives with your guests.

YOUR GUEST(S)

- Each guest of our Homestay Program has been referred to us by a refugee advocate known to us or a referral party from a recognised refugee agency.
- Upon referral, the Homestay Committee contacts the guest or referring party and completes a guest register form, rather similar to the one completed by hosts. Based on the information, the Homestay Committee matches the guest with a suitable host.
- Guests generally have a post-beginner to intermediate level of spoken English.
- Guests may differ in terms of their legal status. Some could be on a temporary protection visa or a bridging visa. Some guests have work rights and others do not.
- Guests have, to date, come from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Guests are given an “Information Sheet for Guests” (found in Appendix 2) which briefly describes the Ballina region, purpose of the homestay, their host and home, and some dos and don’ts.

MAKING YOUR HOMESTAY HOST EXPERIENCE A SUCCESS

The following may enhance your homestay experience:

You may like to connect with your guests before their arrival by phone, text or email.

When they first come to your home, introduce your guest to your household members and show them around your house and garden.

While people may have different religions, diets or customs, they will generally be happy to fit in with your lifestyle but you can let them know if you have any 'ground rules'.

If your guest has religious observances, try to accommodate them.

Different food preferences by guests can be seen as an opportunity to learn rather than a challenge. Some guests may not eat certain foods (eg. are vegetarians) and this can be discussed beforehand. Guests may wish to try some of your favourite foods. (See further Appendix 1)

Sometimes guests may be reticent to ask for something – give people options. For example, instead of asking "Would you like tea?" ask "Would you like a drink – we have tea, coffee or a cold drink". Likewise, instead of asking "Would you like to go for a swim?" ask "Would you like to go for a swim, a walk or just relax at home?"

While you may be interested in their background, recognise by their response if you are intruding too much. They are not obligated to tell you their traumatic story.

Find a balance between being with them, showing them around, having outings and leaving them alone to relax if they wish – in other words, treat them as you would any other guest and don't feel you need to be a tourist guide.

Invite your guest to participate in your normal daily activities – shopping, cooking, gardening, meeting friends etc. If appropriate, invite your guest to cook a meal – it's a great way of sharing and communicating, from shopping for ingredients to watching the food preparation and cooking!

The Guest Activity Sheet provided by your Homestay Officer offers suggestions for activities you could enjoy with your guests.

Treat your guest as you would any person you have just met. People seeking asylum are just like us but living in difficult situations.

Ballina Region for Refugees (BR4R) has no resources to assist guests in obtaining employment in this region. If you are asked by your guest, suggest that the caseworker is their first point of contact and explain that there are limited employment opportunities in Ballina.

Last but not least, remember that your guests are having a break—give them a good time and enjoy it together!

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The first priority of the Homestay Program is to protect our guests who may be vulnerable. Therefore, we request the following:

1. Lock away any medications.
2. Consider any possible Occupational Health and Safety issues around your house.
3. Make your home environment as welcoming as possible. Especially in the guests' bedroom, consider removing confronting or distressing pictures or images.
4. If you have a swimming pool, abide by local government pool regulations.
5. Respect your guest's privacy by not identifying him or her as an asylum seeker publicly. You may introduce your guest to friends and family but remember never to disclose further details. Asking your guest how they would like to be introduced is important.
6. Obtain a 'Working with Children' check. This applies even if you are not hosting children. It is free for volunteers. Details are at: <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/working-with-children/working-with-children-check>
7. Check that your home insurance is current and includes public liability insurance.
8. Do not allow your guests to go in the sea, river or lake unaccompanied until you have observed for yourself that they swim well even if they say they can swim.

SUPPORT FOR HOSTS

Before a visit:

The hosts may have attended a workshop by our Wellbeing Support Officer. Further workshops may be conducted in future as new hosts are brought into the program. The focus of the workshops may change in response to the needs of the hosts but, fundamentally, they will address the issues discussed below in the section 'Rising to the Challenge'

Any concerns hosts may have regarding how they can best support their guests can be discussed during an informal chat with the Wellbeing Support Officer sometime during the fortnight before a visit.

Occasionally, things don't go as planned with guests having to cancel or postpone their visit at short notice. We ask hosts to be understanding and flexible at such times.

The Homestay Officer meets and greets the guest(s) on arrival and does an official hand-over to the host.

During the visit:

The host is contacted by a Homestay Officer during the homestay to see how things are going. The Homestay Officer is also on call for practical support during the visit.

The Wellbeing Support Officer is on call should a difficult situation arise relating to the wellbeing of either the guests or the hosts.

The Homestay Officer will discuss with you any volunteer assistance you might need during the visit, for example, to take guests on outings, offer transport etc. BR4R keeps a list of Homestay Volunteers for this purpose.

Various resources such as toys, craft materials, videos, a pram/stroller, foldable/inflatable bed and a child car seat are available on request through the Homestay Committee. If a child becomes attached to a toy, he/she is welcome to take it at the end of the homestay.

BR4R provides a small financial contribution to the host for each guest hosted.

For those guests who do not have Medicare cover, the Homestay Committee has links to GPs who may treat non-urgent conditions pro bono. In the unlikely event of a medical emergency, local hospitals are able to treat your guests.

On departure, the hosts farewell the guests, often at the airport or a public transport stop. There may be times when it is difficult for the host after the guest has left. If a guest has shared tragic stories of loss and suffering and the host knows that their guest is returning to circumstances that are very difficult, it is possible to feel burdened and helpless. Hosts need to prepare themselves for this possibility, be careful not to offer more than they can afford beyond the visit and be mindful of the fact that through their openhearted hospitality they have already given something invaluable that their guest will always have with them.

After the visit:

After the visit, a debrief is conducted by the Wellbeing Support Officer to discuss the host's experience and identify any issues that require the attention of the Homestay Committee. Notes from this debrief will be recorded at the end of the Homestay Host Form and made available to the Homestay Committee members only. Depending on the guest's visa restrictions, and the suitability of the host's experience, a story which ensures guest anonymity may be submitted to local media for publication.

Photographs of guests should never be given to the media by hosts. This is for the guests' protection. However, guests may be asked by BR4R if they permit the use of their photos in media or promotion. This is strictly controlled and depends on individual circumstances.

TRANSITIONING FROM HOMESTAY PROGRAM

While the Homestay Program offers a short-term stay with a host, there are situations where guests may be invited by their host to stay longer.

Occasionally, guests and hosts may become friends and continue contact, including repeat visits. Both situations are officially outside of the Homestay Program and BR4R does not assume responsibility for any aspect of the accommodation and support of the guests and hosts.

Occasionally, a guest may directly ask their host for a repeat visit. The host has the following options: (1) invite the guest without going through the Homestay Committee (in which case, the immediately preceding paragraph applies); or (2) refer the guest's request to the Homestay Committee to decide whether or not to support the request, and if yes, whether with the same host or some other host. Option (2) may be usefully relied upon by a host who might feel uncomfortable rejecting the request of the guest.

A second visit may be supported if the guests' circumstances mean that they are still eligible under the Homestay Program guidelines. Any visits beyond this would only be supported under exceptional circumstances. Hosts are encouraged to check with the Homestay Officer.

CONTACT

Please contact your Homestay Officer at any time if you have any questions or concerns relating to physical arrangements.

For any questions or issues relating to mental, emotional or cultural issues, please contact your Homestay Officer who will connect you with our Homestay Wellbeing Support Officer.

PART 2

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Contributing positively to the healing process

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INTRODUCTION

Your willingness to invite asylum seekers and refugees into your home indicates that you are aware of the circumstances out of which these people have come. We have all heard terrible stories of systematic discrimination, oppression, maltreatment, dislocation and profound loss. We are bound to wonder how to even think about human beings who have endured so much and yet are people just like ourselves.

The aim of this section is to offer material for your consideration as you prepare for your guests and to reassure you that you have the ability to be a supportive host. You can make a positive contribution to the healing process of anyone who is suffering from trauma.

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCE

We are all hard wired to react to difference and from a very early age we learn from those closest to us our attitudes to people who we perceive are not the same as us. For these reasons we have to challenge our ways of thinking and the assumptions we make about other people. We have to learn not to be afraid of difference.

Regardless of our role in relating to others, be it as a neighbour, host, official or mental health professional, we are required to examine our attitudes to those whose experience, colour, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation is different from our own.

Addressing people who work with refugees, Dr Laura Brown* states, we have to find our way to respond with Humility, Curiosity, Self-Awareness, Willingness and Open-heartedness. This is the challenge for hosts.



THE NATURE OF TRAUMA

While your guests' journeys to Australia will undoubtedly have cost them in every possible way, each individual will have responded differently to the circumstances they have been exposed to. We need to recognise that any apparently traumatic event will affect each individual differently. Some people are remarkably resilient - particularly those whose countries have been at war for many years. Their capacity to survive is often utterly inspiring. Others have been deeply traumatised by what they have gone through and need special consideration.

According to Dr. Robert Scaer† what makes a negative life event traumatising is not the literal life-threatening nature of the event, but rather the degree of helplessness it engenders in conjunction with one's history of prior trauma.

* Brown, L.S. 'Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy: Beyond the flashpoint' (2008)

† Scaer, Robert MD. 'The Precious Present' Published in Psychotherapy Network (Nov/Dec 2006)

Currently recognised symptoms of trauma:

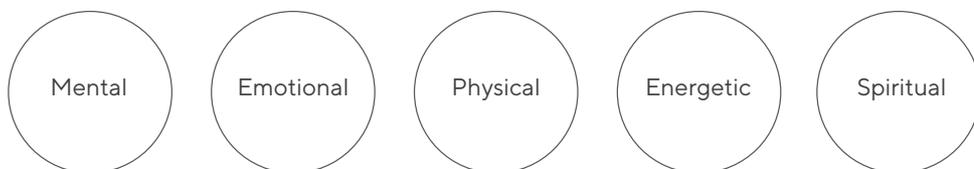
- Flashbacks - Re-living the traumatic event. The person relives the event through unwanted and recurring memories, often in the form of vivid images and nightmares.
- Intense emotional or physical reactions to some triggers: e.g. sweating, heart palpitations or panic when reminded of the event.
- Hyper-vigilance - Being overly alert or wound up. The person experiences sleeping difficulties, irritability and lack of concentration, becoming easily startled and constantly on the lookout for signs of danger.
- Avoidance - Avoiding reminders of the event. The person deliberately avoids activities, places, people, thoughts or feelings associated with the event because they bring back painful memories.
- Feeling emotionally numb - The person loses interest in day-to-day activities, feels cut off and detached from friends and family, or feels emotionally flat and numb.

People who demonstrate these symptoms for more than two or three weeks are, in our western medical system, diagnosed as suffering from PTSD - post-traumatic stress disorder. However, dealing with refugees and asylum seekers, we are operating in a cross-cultural setting so it is worth noting that there are cultural perspectives on trauma, which call into question the biomedical paradigm. This paradigm of ours in the West tends to pathologise or medicalise all emotional states turning pain, loss and grief, dislocation and dis-empowerment into a disease requiring specialised medical intervention. Many sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists challenge western psychiatric illness classifications such as PTSD, seeing them as culture bound. Dr Derik Summerfield* has studied human responses to war and atrocity. He argues that PTSD has been given the status of a scientific truth that has come to represent a universal response to trauma. This tends to mystify trauma for people who are not trained in the area of mental health. We can become afraid or uncertain around people we expect to be suffering from trauma or PTSD.

People experience trauma on 5 levels of consciousness:

Mental. Emotional. Physical. Energetic. Spiritual.

Healing from trauma involves all these levels of consciousness.



* Summerfield, D. 'Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture' (1993)

HOW TO BE WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE TRAUMATISED

We don't have to engage with the discourse on PTSD, but we can recognise that in the fields of medicine, mental health and wellbeing, there are uncertainties about both diagnosis and treatment for people suffering the consequences of traumatic events in their lives. What we do know is that people's reactions to trauma are not a mysterious disease. They are human reactions - human emotions - the body's efforts to keep the organism safe. Most of us have not experienced war or torture or the inhumane treatment so often meted out to displaced people seeking safety. But most of us know about fear, pain, grief, loss and insecurity. We can understand a person's need to feel safe.

The most basic element in therapy, when we are dealing with trauma is the relationship between the client and the therapist. More than anything else the client needs to trust the therapist. There is no mystery in that. And so it is with our dealings with refugees and asylum-seekers who have suffered a 'negative life event in a state of relative helplessness'. Above all, they need to feel safe. With that in mind we can look at the 5 levels of consciousness in terms of how we can contribute to the healing process if we are dealing with someone who is suffering the after-effects of significant trauma.

Mental

We don't have to be a therapist to help. We can be open to developing a relationship with our guests. We can't ask for accounts of their experience, but we can be there for them if they want to talk. We can listen. We can be empathetic. We can offer a balance of activities that involves enough sleep and enough down time, good food and drink, good company and plenty of exercise.

Emotional

Warmth, kindness and acceptance is often more helpful than we can imagine. We can offer this simply without our being too effusive or overbearing. Sometimes, we need to imagine a reversal of roles with ourselves as the guest. How much attention would we want? What would we need to feel welcome and safe?

Bed-wetting is often a problem with disturbed children. You can save guests embarrassment (and your mattress) if you have good non-rustling waterproof mattress protectors on your beds.

Physical

Moving is important. Offer suggestions of physical exercise. Anything that is fun, rewarding, encourages people to breathe deeply, or to laugh is helpful. In addition to outings, guests may enjoy helping out around the house, participating in the kitchen or cooking a meal, mowing a lawn, taking the dog for a walk or going shopping.

Energetic

People who are traumatised frequently suffer from a lack of energy. I believe that they find their energy when they find what motivates them. However, being in detention for a long period breaks peoples' capacity to imagine what they would like to do or could do. It takes time to get excited about future possibilities. We can be mindful of this and present possibilities to our guests through sharing our lives with them and by introducing them to the aspirations of our children and to people in our community who are involved in various occupations.

Spiritual

Some people's needs are met by their faith and their religious affiliations. As hosts and friends, we can of course support them in this by giving space for religious practice and showing an interest in their beliefs and practices. However, I am referring here to 'spiritual' in the broader sense, which involves one's connection to self, to others and to the environment. A large factor in the process of healing on the spiritual level is belonging - feeling okay in one's own skin, being connected to and accepted by others and belonging in terms of place. In this respect, hosts have a special opportunity to respond to the spiritual needs of their guests. We can offer the possibility of feeling connected. Fundamentally, we are all simply human beings and share a common humanity. But we can make a point of seeking out any interests we have in common in order to help our guests feel that they are a part of the human race. Explore possible interests such as music, food, children, art, sport, nature, football, - anything - and build around it.

Finally, let's go back to the most fundamental consideration in the treatment of trauma - the need to feel safe. Neuroscience has demonstrated recently something that we have known all along - that people impact on each other regardless of what they say in conversation. Anxiety, tension and stress, in one organism, is sensed by another. So the greatest gift that you can offer your visitors is a relaxed you. That is the first step in making your guests feel safe in your house. If you have difficulties with anxiety or your stress level is uncomfortably high, there are many resources available that can help you. Feel free to contact the Wellbeing Support Officer if you would like some suggestions.

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

What we understand about difference, as stated above in 'Dealing with Difference', is essentially what we need to apply when we are dealing with cross-cultural issues. You may, however, be interested to know more about the cultures from which some of your guests come.

The information provided here is offered as a resource to be referred to if and when the need arises - and it may not. Most of the information in Appendix 1 refers to issues that relate to practising Muslims who have had very little experience of Australian culture. Some of our guests, however, are not practising Muslims. They may be Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian or non-religious. Many have been in Australia for several years and have adapted to Australian customs. So the information in Appendix 1 may be interesting but not relevant.

It is suggested here that people should not try too hard to do the 'right thing' in cross-cultural situations but rather be open about wanting to learn. Let your guests know that you would welcome their telling you if you do something that seems strange to them. Hosting asylum seekers and refugees and so having the opportunity to learn about cultures from other countries will almost certainly be a rich and positive experience.

PART 3

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 CROSS-CULTURAL TIPS

APPENDIX 2 INFORMATION SHEET FOR GUESTS

APPENDIX 3 GENERAL INFORMATION ON ASYLUM SEEKERS IN AUSTRALIA

APPENDIX 1 CROSS-CULTURAL TIPS

Addressing Guests

Although not usual in our culture and a little difficult when a guest is first introduced it is better to use 'Mr' rather than just the first name. This will show respect. The guest will let you know when they are comfortable with your calling them just by their first name.

Shaking Hands

As a general rule, men shake hands with other men, however the length of the shake depends on how well they know the person and it is not uncommon for a man to also touch the other man's elbow as they shake hands as a sign of closeness. A more traditional greeting between men involves grasping each other's right hand, placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder and exchanging a salutation on each cheek. Some men will shake hands with a woman, however it is advisable for the woman to wait for a man to offer his hand. If he does not offer it the woman shouldn't offer hers, it would seem very forward and will make a male guest feel uncomfortable.

Male – Female Relationships

In the countries where many of the guests come from it is believed that if you treat someone of the opposite sex as an equal your friendliness may be interpreted as sexual interest and availability. This applies to both men and women and may affect the way a guest will interact with members of the opposite sex within their host family. In our society men and women can have close friendships with each other without their relationship being sexual. This is not a concept that is familiar to many guests and friendships between members of the opposite sex who are not related or married are highly discouraged in their home countries. By remaining cool and aloof a guest may be trying not to put you in an uncomfortable position. In time a guest may adopt a more relaxed nature when it comes to being friendly to strangers, however a new guest to our country may be guarded to start with. Be aware that prolonged or close eye contact between men and women is considered rude in many cultures. Eye contact in this case can be seen as a type of invitation.

Coffee/Tea

Offering a cup of coffee or tea to a guest is a sign of welcome and respect. Middle Eastern coffee is spiced with cardamom and tastes quite different to our coffee. Middle Eastern tea is often flavoured with sage or mint. You are not expected to supply traditional coffee or tea, however it is recommended that you have both coffee and tea in the house when your guest first arrives as it is another way of making them feel welcome.

Your First Meal Together

Hospitality is very important and one way to welcome your guest is to organise a family welcome dinner where all members of the household are present and introduce themselves. A BBQ will not only provide an introduction into the Australian way of life but also provide the guest with a wider selection of foods to try. Ask your guest if they only eat Halal food, if so a variety of BBQ Halal meats will ensure the guest will not go hungry. You may wish to offer more even if you think they may have had enough, as it is the sign of a good host.

Be prepared for your guest to refuse food as a sign of not imposing (even if they are actually hungry). Ensure you repeatedly insist that they join you in a meal – this is a sign of your hospitality and welcome.

Religious Worship

Some guests may wish to worship with fellow believers during their visit. For example, a Christian may like to attend a church service, a Hindu may like to pray at a temple or a Muslim at a mosque.

Touching

Under no circumstances should you attempt to touch any guest of the opposite sex. Many males touch others while conversing to enhance their communication but this is not a sign that they are linked romantically and it is not appropriate for this to be copied.

In many religions around the world such as Islam, the top of the head is a sacred part of the body. Never pat or touch the top of any guest's head or any part of their body to ensure that you do not offend, except for a handshake where applicable.

Smiling

As Australians we tend to like people who smile. In many cultures around the world a smile doesn't necessarily mean that the person is happy but denotes embarrassment, shyness, or may even mask the signs of anger. Be aware that for many a smile can be more than just a person being nice and friendly, it can mean to them that a person is being very, very friendly and can be taken as a sexual invitation.

Female Clothing

Guests may feel uncomfortable around people that they consider to be under dressed. With this in mind, female members of host families should be sensitive to this and carefully consider whether it is appropriate in the circumstances before wearing bikinis or revealing singlet tops around the house.

Communication

There are many differences in verbal communication between Australians and guests to our country. The main cause of these differences is that of the structure of the languages used.

As with many international guests, it is often considered more polite to bend the truth in order to avoid bad feelings or a guest may use a word or phrase in place of a term that might be considered too direct, harsh, unpleasant, or offensive. For example they may say they are feeling tired when they are actually feeling sick.

Aggressive Tones

A major area of potential miscommunication is the way non-English speakers actually speak English, often sounding aggressive and omitting "please" or "thank you" and so sounding quite rude. When translating not only is there a requirement to think in two different languages at the same time, there is also an expectation that a guest will immediately understand the way Australians speak to each other and the correct tone to use. If you hear a group of guests talking it may sound very guttural and aggressive to us because as Australians we have a language that uses limited high and low tones. Some languages have a greater range of tones and therefore can sound very aggressive. In some cultures, it is normal to speak in an almost aggressive manner to make a point. Loudness of voice, rising pitch and tone, even shouting, are actually perceived as signs of sincerity not aggression.

Many guests have learnt their version of English from someone who may not have been a native English speaker. In many languages the use of "Please" or "Thank you" is not in the sentence structure as it is in English but is included in the inflection (use of high or low tone) in the sentence. Similarly the use of "I want" or "give me" is often only a reflection of how the guest understands English. It is important to listen to what is being said and not so much to how it is being said. A good host will understand this and help the guest to understand how to say things in due course.

Yes and No

In many cultures around the world people go to great lengths to avoid saying the word “no” as it is considered very rude and abrupt. Instead use of the words “maybe” or “not yet” or even “yes” are common.

When communicating with a guest it is better to gently advise if something is not available and resist from using the word “no”. It is also recommended that you try to offer some reason why you cannot do what they ask rather than just dismissing the question or request. Similarly “Yes” may not mean “Yes” in answer to your question. It can also mean “Yes I understand the question” and the guest may be taking their time to decide an answer or “yes it is a possibility but I haven’t really decided yet”. Although you should feel encouraged by the use of the word, “yes” it would be wrong to assume that the negotiating is over. “Yes” often means “possibly”.

Silence Is Golden

In our western culture a silent pause in a conversation is often a sign that the person is uncomfortable or does not understand. It is generally an Australian’s inclination to fill the silence by talking. In many other countries silence in a conversation is a sign that the person is thinking about what they are about to say and background silence is a normal part of a conversation. This may make you feel uncomfortable whereas a guest will be quite comfortable with this.

Topics best Avoided

Many normal topics of conversation in Australia may not be suitable to talk about with a guest. Topics that are best avoided are:

- Reason for fleeing their country of origin
- Religion, politics, drugs, alcohol, sex

Once comfortable, a guest may wish to talk about these issues but that will usually take time.

Topics to be Encouraged

- Food preferences
- Accommodation
- Music
- Australia and Australian culture
- Sport
- Art / poetry
- Employment

Dealing with Criticism – Face

Negative situations with guests need to be handled with extreme sensitivity. Any discussions must ensure that there is no loss of “face”. The western equivalent of “face” is embarrassment. Face is very important to guests from many countries. If a guest is criticized in front of others they will suffer from “loss of face”. In order to avoid loss of face, it is recommended that if you deliver any criticism in a conversation, you include praise and gratitude for the positive things that the guest is doing. Quite often, if a guest is seen to be anxious or angry it may mean that they have lost face. To try to regain face they must be seen to be in control of the situation and to do this they may speak down in an aggressive way to those who have caused the loss of face.

If necessary the best way for a person to regain control of the situation is to show respect to the guest in front of their peers. If for example you try to use verbal force to regain the power in a conflict situation it will only escalate.

Conflict Resolution

It is generally not in a guest’s nature to force conflict. If unhappy with a situation, the guest may prefer to have an intermediary discuss the situation with you rather than confront you themselves. Similarly if there are issues that need to be discussed it is better to do this in an indirect way. If it is a serious matter it may be better to find an intermediary to do this as direct criticism will only escalate a situation. Patience is imperative.

The most appropriate action is to act in a calm, controlled and unemotional manner. Talk to the guest in a private environment, without others around and you will find they will be far more accepting of the issues involved. It is important not to use the guest’s religion or cultural background in a conflict situation. For example it is not recommended that you say “It might be OK in Islam to” This is a direct attack on one of the most important things in a Muslim guest’s life. It is much better to say something indirect such as “Maybe we have a different perspective on this situation – please tell me yours”. Then explain your perspective without bringing religion into it. Try also not to make direct criticism, for example instead of saying “When you..... ..I get very angry”. It is better to say “When I hear someone say It makes me feel angry because” If there is a situation that you cannot provide something that has been requested you should always try to offer some reason why you can’t do what is being asked. Just saying that it can’t be done will not bring satisfaction.

Daily Schedule

The daily schedule for a guest in their own country may include praying several times every day and/or it may also include an afternoon siesta. It is common to have a sleep after lunch (generally the hottest part of the day) and then resume work in the late afternoon and continue until about 8.30pm at night. Most adapt very well to Australian routines, however, one of the consequences of this daily schedule is that many guests prefer to eat dinner later in evening. Their daily routines may also have been disrupted by being in a detention centre and it may take a little time for them to re-establish a daily rhythm.

Social Life

It is normal in many countries to socialise with friends into the night. You may find that although a guest is out until very late at night they are generally out with friends - or given their background, they may find sleeping at night difficult and just feel the need to get out and not be alone.

A Guest in our Country

Many cultures stress the importance of honoring guests to their country and treating them very well. In Australia our standard of service is considered to be quite good but one problem we do face is that guests do not understand why our retail and food outlets are not better serviced and they may get a little impatient as they wait to be served because there are only one or two assistants to serve, whereas in their country it would not be uncommon to have eight or ten staff in one small retail outlet, restaurant or market.

Left Hand

You may find that some guests are reluctant to receive items from your left hand. There is a simple reason for this. The left hand is traditionally reserved for personal toilet hygiene. All passing of items in some cultures is done with the right hand for this reason. If possible you should particularly resist using your left hand when dealing with food as the left hand is considered by some to be unclean.

Personal Belongings

Be careful with the guest's personal belongings such as their Koran and prayer mat if they should have these. It is best not to touch a guest's Koran, it is a very personal item and they will expect that it is shown great respect. It is best to avoid admiring any item owned by a guest to excess as they may feel obligated to give it to you and when offered a gift, it is impolite for you to refuse.

Electrical Appliances

Electrical appliances may be different from the ones that guests used in their home country. Providing clear instructions on their usage may be helpful.

Pets

BR4R's Homestay Program asks guests if they are comfortable with pets such as cats and dogs. Many people do not relate well to domestic pets (especially dogs) in the same way that Australians do. The dislike of dogs for a Muslim guest goes beyond personal preference; it derives from the laws of Islam. Therefore, we do not match guests with hosts who have dogs if this is an issue.

Sightseeing

Your guest will enjoy experiencing your local attractions but be careful when attractions involve interaction with dogs or pigs. Find out if this is a concern for your guests.

Mobile Phones

Communication with friends and family is an important facet of a guest's life and they will be very attached to their mobile phone. You may wish to give your guests your wifi password while they are staying with you.

Perception of Time - Insha'alla (God Willing)

Some practising Muslim guests have a theologically based philosophy about time. A common saying is 'Insha'alla' which means "God willing", and is said after any plans for the future are made. Insha'alla basically means that "Allah" is the only one that controls the future and that although I will try to be on time, ultimately if something else happens to stop me then that is Allah's wishes and out of my control; however, it likely that most guests will endeavor to be punctual for appointments and may even become agitated when others are not.

Australian English

It is important to remember that as Australians we speak a unique form of English. Not only do we have words that do not translate well, we also have an accent that is very hard to understand to people who have learnt English as a second language. We also have the tendency to speak quickly and run words together which makes it even harder for international guests to understand. Speak reasonably slowly and clearly, without jargon, to assist your guest. You could ask your guests if they would like you to help them with their English by correcting them from time to time. Some people really appreciate this but some don't.

Signaling

The typical hand signal "come here" that we often use to direct guests can be extremely confusing to guests. The typical Australian "come here" signal is, in many cultures, indicative of a sexual act. The most effective way to signal a guest to come towards you is to signal in a downward sweeping motion. To you it may look silly however it is better to look a little bit silly than to be sexually suggestive.

Pointing

When pointing to an item it is suggested that you never use just one finger because in many cultures this is how you point to animals. It is more appropriate to use your whole hand to point towards something. In particular never use your finger to point at another person, it is considered extremely rude.

Another gesture that many find offensive is pointing using your feet. Feet are considered a dirty part of the body and therefore should be kept on the ground and only used for walking.

FOOD AND PREPARATION TIPS

The Homestay Committee endeavours to determine any special dietary requirements of guests prior to each visit.

Hosts sometimes find that it can be challenging to provide meals for several days for people from a different cultural background. And occasionally we find that incomplete or inaccurate information has been provided by guests or their referring agency prior to the visit and hosts are surprised by unexpected dietary requests.

A sensible approach is to discuss food, and take your guest/s to the supermarket, as soon as possible after arrival. You are likely to find that your guests will appreciate the opportunity to cook for you or with you. This also gives your guests permission to be upfront about their needs, and their likes and dislikes.

If there is no time to shop together before the first meal, a good approach is to keep the first meal simple with fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, cheese, seafood and meats. Your choices can be informed by the cuisine of your guests' country of origin (eg including rice with the meal if this is a staple for them back home).

Some guests will have specific needs as their religion restricts them from eating certain foods. Practising Hindus and Muslims may adhere to particular dietary requirements. However, assumptions should not be made that all Hindus and Muslims have these requirements. The level of adherence may vary from person to person. Also, people from a Muslim country may not necessarily be Muslim just as some Tamil people from Sri Lanka may not be Hindus. Usually Hindus do not eat beef or pork and are vegetarians. A number of our guests are Christians.

If your guests are Muslim, make sure this first meal is Halal. This may sound challenging if you haven't done it before but is easy to achieve. Halal simply means 'permissible'. Halal food is prescribed by the Koran. Practising Muslims are not allowed to eat foods explicitly prohibited in Islam. More information about Halal food appears below,

Note that Muslim guests vary tremendously in their level of observance so it really is worth having the food discussion early on. If you learn anything new that would help BR4R to better inform future hosts, please pass this information on to your Homestay Officer.

HALAL FOOD

Halal food is basically food that can be eaten by a practising Muslim. Many Australians have heard of Halal meat as Australia is one of the largest producers in the world. Halal however is much more than just a special type of meat. The opposite to Halal is Haram. How strict a Muslim guest is with their diet will vary depending on their individual values. However, most will not eat pork or any pork product such as bacon, ham or salami.

The meaning of the word Halal is “Permitted, allowed, authorised, approved, sanctioned, lawful, legal or legitimate.”

Animals such as cows, sheep, goats, deer, moose, chickens, ducks, game birds etc. are all Halal, but they must be Zabihah (slaughtered according to Islamic Rites) in order to be suitable for consumption.

In addition, Halal food must be kept separate from food which is not Halal and cooked in a pan that has not been used for cooking ordinary meat and cut with a knife that has not been used to cut ordinary meat. This is similar to Kosher in the Jewish religion.

To qualify as Halal, food must be slaughtered to the specifications of Islam:

- Blessed facing Mecca
- Free of filth not derived from dead animals.
- Must be totally free of products derived from pigs
- Must be totally free of products derived from dogs
- Must not be prepared with anything that is “Haram”

According to Islamic thinking, the following are considered Haram:

- Pork including all by-products
- Alcohol or any product containing alcohol
- Animals with fangs such as tigers, lions, cats etc.
- Insects considered ugly or filthy such as cockroaches, worms, lice, flies
- Birds that have talons with which they catch their prey such as owls, eagles, etc.
- Scorpions, centipedes, rats etc.

- Dogs
- Animals which Islam forbids to kill such as bees etc.
- Animals which have toxins, poisons or produce ill effects when eaten eg. amphibian animals such as crocodiles, turtles, frogs etc.
- Meat (limbs, tails, fins etc.) which have been cut from a live animal
- Gelatin as it is often a product of a Haram animal such as a pig

Hundreds of food products found in Australian supermarkets have halal certification and are marked accordingly. Examples include items such as Nestle Crunch bars, Maggi Two Minute Noodles and Kellogg’s Coco Pops. We have also been told by our guests that Lilydale chicken products and Steggles products are halal, and some other meat products at Coles supermarkets are also halal. Check with staff or your guests.

Most halal certified products in Australia, such as honey, are the same as a non-halal certified version. These labeled products appeal to strictly observant Muslims because they can be absolutely certain that these foods have in no way contacted non-halal products.

If you are unsure about a product, search online to clarify its halal status. Many companies include information about their halal products on their websites.

It is a very positive gesture to supply your guest with their own new cutlery and crockery. This way they can be assured that it has not had any contact with contaminated foods such as pork products.

The importance of a practising Muslim guests’ food being free from “Haram” products cannot be underestimated. For example if you are to have a BBQ you will not be able to cook certain meats such as sausages or pork chops on the same grill as Halal meat as it will instantly contaminate it. The condiments that are used must also be Halal. Some of the things you may use could be Haram so it is best to check beforehand. As mentioned previously many foods in Australia contain additives that are not Halal.

APPENDIX 2

INFORMATION SHEET FOR GUESTS

The information aims to make the stay a comfortable, enjoyable and stress-free experience for both the guests and their host.

Ballina region

Ballina is a small coastal town of around 18,000 people, situated in north-eastern New South Wales about 750 kilometres from Sydney and 180 kilometres from Brisbane. It is a popular tourist destination with a relaxed country-town and seaside/ riverside atmosphere. There is much to see and do in Ballina and its surrounds, such as gentle walks along the coast and in nature reserves, swimming in lakes and the ocean, visiting villages, markets, art galleries, listening to live music and tasting the delicious local food. The climate is sub-tropical so it never gets too hot or too cold.

Visitors will find the local people relaxed and friendly, and the region quite different compared to the much busier spots such as the Gold Coast and cities like Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney.

The Purpose of the Homestay

The primary purpose of the homestay is to provide the guests with a short time away from their everyday life in the city and from their cares and worries as people seeking asylum.

The homestay will enable the guests to socialise with everyday Australians who are caring and concerned people, and who are keen to meet people from countries with different cultural and religious traditions.

BR4R has no resources to assist guests in obtaining employment in this region.

Your Host

Your host could be a single person or a couple, and there may or may not be children living in the household. In many cases, your host will be over 50 years of age. Your hosts are Australians who have a deep concern for the welfare of their fellow human beings, and who believe that the Australian government could do much more to assist asylum seekers who have arrived in Australia.

Another quality of your host is that he or she will have a fair degree of cultural awareness and sensitivity to other cultures and ways of behaving. As such they will tend to be more accepting and understanding towards their guests, and will also be interested in their guests as people from a different country and culture.

Guests will be provided with some personal information about their host prior to their visit, such as the host's name, gender, age, occupation and hobbies.

The Home

Your host's home may be situated in the middle of town or in the countryside. Guests will have their own bedroom although they may be required to share the bathroom and toilet.

Hosts may invite their guests to cook a meal if they would like to, as a way of sharing their culture and food. Together with their guests, the host may go shopping for ingredients.

Some hosts have pets such as well trained dogs or a cat. Guests will have the opportunity to decide whether they prefer to stay in homes without pets.

Expenses

The transport costs of guests to Ballina will be covered by BR4R. This includes airfares, ground transport to and from Ballina airport, bus or train fares (if coming from Brisbane) and petrol if the guest is traveling in their own car. All food and associated costs during the visit will be covered by the host or by BR4R. However, the guests need to find their own transport from their home to the domestic airport (such as Sydney), if flying.

Dos and Don'ts

Do inform your host of anything that could make your stay more enjoyable such as any food preferences, social activities that you may like or dislike, and other personal needs such as rest periods, a place and time for prayer etc.

Do ask your host about anything that you may be unfamiliar with in the house such as the use of kitchenware, TV or music equipment, location of light switches etc.

Do inform your host about any health and safety matters you think they should know, such as your swimming ability, level of physical fitness, and effects of medication.

Don't feel shy asking your host about themselves – such as their families, jobs, hobbies, cultural or religious background, or their views about issues that are important to you.

Don't feel as if you should share with your host information about your personal circumstances and problems unless you want to.

And last but not least ...

Do enjoy yourself as best as you can, taking the opportunity to get to know friendly and caring Australians and seeing one of the most beautiful regions of Australia. Try to put aside your cares and worries for the duration of your homestay, so that you can return to your city refreshed.

APPENDIX 3

GENERAL INFORMATION ON ASYLUM SEEKERS IN AUSTRALIA

According to the Immigration Detention and Community Statistics Summary as at 31st January 2018, there were 1,287 people held in immigration detention facilities on the Australian mainland and on Christmas Island. 447 people are living in community detention.

The 447 people in community detention are from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Somalia. There were also people from other countries and some stateless people.

Of the 1,287 people in immigration detention facilities on the Australian mainland and on Christmas Island, 33% had been held for over 365 days with 20% held for over 730 days. The statistics do not indicate the length of time people have been held in offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru.

According to the statistics, 336 people are held in the regional processing centre on Nauru and zero in the regional processing centre on Manus Island. As the regional processing centre on Manus Island closed in October 2017, the asylum-seekers and refugees on Manus Island are no longer included in these statistics.

For the latest statistics visit:

www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/immigration-detention-statistics-31-january-2018.pdf

Please note that the amount of statistics reported by the Department of Home Affairs has been reduced.

As at 4th January 2018, there were 16,069 people on bridging visas according to statistics compiled by the Refugee Council of Australia. They are waiting for determinations to be made of their temporary protection visas. The wait can take many years.

BR4R's Homestay Program would like to especially offer hosting for people on bridging visas.

RESOURCES

For comprehensive statistics:

www.refugeecouncil.org.au/statistics

For information about the Government's policy on asylum seekers and refugees:

www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/60refugee

www.theguardian.com/australia-news/australian-immigration-and-asylum

General Information:

Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law (stories, facts and videos)

www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au

Australian Human Rights Commission provides an asylum seeker and refugee guide and updates on legal and policy developments

www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees

Australian Department of Social Services (Refugee stories)

www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/refugee-stories

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

www.bmrsg.org.au/research-material/overseas-countries

Red Cross

www.redcross.org.au/get-involved/take-action/5-things-you-can-do

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

www.unhcr.org.au/unhcr

These books may also be of interest to you:

Beyond Veiled Clichés: The Real Lives of Arab Women by Amal Awad (2017)

Journalist Amal Awad provides Muslim women's perspectives on their life in the Arab world in Australia - work, relationships, home and family life, friendships, the communities they live in, and more. Arab-Australian women are at the intersection - between Western ideals and Arab tradition.)

The Arabs: A History by Eugene Rogan (2013)

Background perspective on the current Middle East situation

The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East 1914-1920 by Eugene Rogan (2016)

Background perspective on the current Middle East situation

The Islamic Republic of Australia by Sami Shah (2017)

Based on a series from ABC Radio by comedian and writer Sami Shah. This book provides funny and thoughtful insights into Australian Muslims, who there are, how they live and what they think.

They Cannot Take the Sky: Stories From Detention (2017)

First person accounts of people speaking from inside immigration detention on Manus Island and Nauru, or from within the Australian community after their release.

Through My Eyes Series by various authors. A fiction series told through the stories of children in world disaster areas. Highly recommended reading for young adults and children.

For current and often inspiring Australian TV and radio programs on refugees, you can go to ABC iView, ABC Radio or SBS OnDemand websites and search for 'refugee'.

The TED Talks series also provide some interesting perspectives

<https://www.ted.com/talks>



Ballina Region
for Refugees

To Find Out More

Contact the Homestay Coordinator:

homestay@ballinaregionforrefugees.org.au

www.ballinaregionforrefugees.org.au



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Image courtesy of Larm Rmah