



*Extracts authorised for republication by Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative
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# Welcoming the Stranger

## *Signposts for Building Bridges and Making Peace*

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# Thread 1: Foundational Values

## Signposts

Identify the values that are important to you. How do they play out in real life? Consider different scenarios and identify behaviours that reflect your values. Identify those behaviours that are not based on your values. Tease out your motivations. Think about your reactions to an uncomfortable situation before it happens.

Examine your motives in friendship. Friendship for its own sake, or for the sake of the other is powerful and life-changing.

Be consistently, not constantly available, at whatever level of interaction you can sustain. Building friendship takes time. Give yourself and others' time. Value your contribution, however small it seems.

Listen.

Don't underestimate the power of connection, or the importance of being a friend.

Find a connection point, something you have in common that you are naturally drawn to, whether that be a shared love of cooking, or recreation, or being a parent.

Be kind to yourselves and others. Mistakes will be made. An attitude of humility gives and receives forgiveness – to yourself and to others. People are generally forgiving, especially if you approach them with humility and a willingness to learn.

Think hard about how to empower others. Resist the urge to provide a response for the immediate situation without thinking of the bigger picture. Instead, work in ways that build confidence and capability.

Empowering others means to place them at the centre of whatever must be done. Wherever possible explain what needs to be done to the newcomer and get their perspectives on how they would like to be supported.

For example, invite the newcomer to choose their bank, internet provider or doctor. Show them how to do things rather than doing things for them. Throw light on the hidden cultural norms in our society and the way things work here. For example, that we must be proactive in dealing with government departments and that police are not corrupt and can be approached in the street for help. Show them how to find useful information and support them in making their decisions.

Ask yourself: is this something I will happily do repeatedly? If not, think about how to teach them to do it themselves. A common example is transport. Teach newcomers to use the bus rather than take them everywhere in your car. Using your car seems such an obvious and helpful thing to do, but what happens when you are not available? How will they get around?

## **Thread 2: Extend the Hand of Friendship Together**

### **Signposts**

Develop collective values and expected behaviours for your team. Here are the values that were developed for our support for former refugees.

- We have identified these values that underpin our place-based Care + Connect approach:
- Our goal is to support refugees to become fully functioning members of society, in a way that is respectful of their beliefs and culture. We will not force our beliefs or religious views upon them.
- We are partnering with the former refugees and the government to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency. Partners act in good faith toward each other and on an equal footing.
- We will endeavour to provide the former refugees with choice and support them to make their own decisions about life, even when we disagree with their decisions.
- We accept that there will be times and situations where the former refugees do not react in ways that we might expect.
- Part of supporting them to make new lives for themselves is in the language we use. We will refer to them in language that does not betray their history. We will maintain their privacy better than we would our own, only discuss their needs in respect of completing this project, and not otherwise talk about them to third parties unless they are comfortable that we are doing so.
- We will care for each other and set healthy rhythms for ourselves and each other.
- We will endeavour to be open with each other about how things are going, and we will avail ourselves of the networks of care that surround us.

We ask that as a group supporting former refugees to settle you:

- Work with the church and the former refugees to support them to become self-sufficient by mid-2020.
- Accept other faiths and cultures, including being supportive of the right of others to maintain their faith and culture.
- Commit to being a cohesive group with an existing structure in place.
- Offer relevant experience of working with vulnerable people of different cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Are sufficiently diverse as a group to identify with and support strangers to our place.

Creating teams of people of different ages, life stages and skills is helpful. Diversity creates different opportunities for friendship. Having men, women and children willing to be friends, respects cultural sensitivities and creates opportunities for natural friendships to form.

Invite people of similar cultural backgrounds to participate and provide advice.

Having fun times together creates opportunities for friendships to form, with each other and with the newcomers.

Assign roles for people and discuss expectations. Team members need to have a clear understanding of their role and what needs to be communicated with each other. Establishing guidelines and expectations is important for building a sense of shared purpose. Have one or two people in a coordination role to provide structure and purpose, raise issues for group discussion and be a contact person for other agencies. Remember: the wider the support network, the wider the skill base, but also the more time-consuming to coordinate.

Regular face to face communication in the team supports having a common purpose and avoids over-reliance on electronic communications that can go astray. Meetings were supported by WhatsApp which is ideally suited for practical daily communication. Be respectful with shared information and maintain privacy of the newcomers.

Consider nominating a coordinator. Rely on the coordinator for difficult conversations, for example about the financial support that the group can give. Doing this avoids threatening relationships, particularly in the early days, and allows those closest to the newcomers to concentrate on forming friendships.

Think about the collective network of connections that your team has. Identify the opportunities that may exist and who could be invited to assist with supporting a stranger develop a sense of belonging. Recognise that as an established person in New Zealand you have much to offer a newcomer.

## **Thread 3: Think Differently About Place**

### **Signposts**

Think about your daily life as a place where you can meet and welcome the stranger. With your team map your neighbourhood.

- Where do you all live?
- What are the pathways you take as you move through your regular routines?
- Where do those paths intersect?
- What are the common interaction points? Where are the places that people congregate?
- Can you adjust your daily schedule to linger in those places to build on a connection?

Look for those people of difference in your lives, and act to engage with them. Start with eye contact or a smile of acknowledgement.

Create time in your daily routine for interactions with people.

Consider changing the way you move about. Replace car trips with cycling, walking or catching the bus because cars create barriers to human interaction.

## **Thread 4: Knowledge**

### **Signposts**

Learn about the person's culture. Any effort will go a long way in showing that you care enough to find out about the reality of another person's life. Talk and ask questions, go to a cultural event, read books, search the internet, but know that this is simply a start and that we have much to learn as well as teach.

Engage with others' and take advice. Be ready to invite the stranger to connect with people of similar background and cultural perspective.

Make opportunities to learn, but do not let a lack of knowledge stop you from extending a hand of friendship.

Get advice from former refugees and migrants who can help you understand what it is like to come to New Zealand.

Remember that anything we learn about the culture of the newcomer will not automatically apply to that individual, in the same way that not all kiwis are into rugby, racing and beer.

Invest time into knowing yourself and your team. Make safe spaces for your team to identify and share their unconscious biases, prejudices and fears. Examine your own cultural biases. Be willing to acknowledge that your way is not the only way to do things. Be open minded, humble and willing to learn. Be forgiving of your and others' mistakes.

Find opportunities to do things together. Actions speak louder than words. Doing things together creates opportunities for natural friendship to flourish.

# When Threads Unravel

## Signposts

Reach out for advice from people and organisations who have experience in welcoming newcomers.

Be open to and non-judgemental about other perspectives, including criticism of our country. Do not assume that 'our way' is better.

Avoid generalisations but instead speak from a personal viewpoint "I believe..."

Be respectful of other beliefs and perspectives. Ask questions and be prepared to answer questions about your beliefs.

Address any issues that arise due to miscommunication or unmet expectations to prevent the situation escalating or creating barriers to relationships.

Never assume. When in doubt, ask.

Be ready to help the newcomer engage with government and service providers.

Discovering our own biases can be uncomfortable and might need expert help to work through. Self-care is vital. Your team can help with this but there may be occasions when specialist intervention is helpful. Visit a counsellor or spiritual director. Take care of yourselves and each other.