

UK Host Family Guidance



The generosity of the British public has been celebrated in the media and the government has expressed their delight that so many have come forward to support refugees under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

As of 20th April, 39,300 Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme visas had been issued and nearly 7,000 Sponsorship Scheme visa-holders had arrived in UK, with many more expected in the coming weeks.

This is wonderful news, but it is just the beginning of the journey. As an agency with some experience of training those who support refugees in a range of contexts, we thought it might be helpful if we offered some insights to host families – and those supporting them.

So we address this to all of you who are hosting – and supporters of hosts:

It may be that when you saw families fleeing Ukraine on your screens, your heart went out to them as you imagined what they were going through. Perhaps you thought that once they were safely in Britain, they would recover from their terrible experiences and you would help them to get on with their lives.



The reality may prove somewhat different.

The war is still going on and some refugees' trauma might be deepened at any time by a news bulletin or a message from home. The impact of this ongoing trauma for those living in a culture not their own, communicating in an unfamiliar language, may threaten to overwhelm even the strongest characters. We see that some Ukrainian families deal with this terrifying situation by holding on to whatever normality they can, proving to themselves and others that they are coping. So they may insist on keeping to their routines, doggedly determined to do things their way - whether it's eating a meal late in the evening or scouring the shops for familiar foods. In some ways the ideal living arrangement for many refugee families is likely to be more house-share than host and guest – but that parallel living may not be practical in your home.



Those of you who pick up on your guests' trauma may struggle emotionally yourselves; how do you deal with the stress of witnessing human suffering? **Are you able to stay resilient**, knowing that this is not your suffering but theirs and you are doing all you can to help? You may need to take 'time out' sometimes and do whatever it is that relaxes you (walking the dog, visiting a friend, some retail therapy – or join a Facebook group and talk with other hosts who might have similar experiences to yours).

If you are the sort of empathic person who is good at listening, then, by all means, make it clear to your Ukrainian guests that **you are available and happy to listen – but put no pressure on them to share**. It may be that they feel that the only way that they can hold their family safe and hang on to sanity is by keeping everything to themselves at this stage.



If you are still in the honeymoon period, where everyone is trying incredibly hard to be accommodating and meet each other's expectations, the little issues and niggles which might compromise harmony in the home may well not have emerged. To avoid them happening, it might be helpful to **draw up a guide to life in your home**; such a guide might include, for example, the wi-fi password, what to do in an emergency, the time at night when your house is silent so that people can sleep, any necessary routines around using the bathroom etc.

Again, if you **know of areas of potential tension early on**, a hospitality breakdown is less likely to occur. What follows is in no particular order:

- You are likely to have less quality time with your partner – if you have one – and your children may not want to share their toys or their space with another child. Be prepared for this and - with your children - negotiate in ways that are age-appropriate to reassure them of your love and attention.
- You may well have underestimated the amount of responsibility you will need to take on – for example, arranging schools, registering with a doctor etc.
- Ukrainian culture doesn't value 'please' and 'thank-you' to the same degree that British culture does. So, requests may come across as quite brusque – 'I want this,' rather than, 'Please may I have this'. It is not intentional – just a cultural difference.
- It will be vital for refugees to maintain contact with family and friends they have left behind. So a key requirement for them is going to be reliable wi-fi.
- Ukrainian women who have left partners behind are likely to want to be in a location where there is the prospect of work so they can earn money and support their family back in Ukraine. This may be difficult if you live in a rural area and may sometimes cause tension in local communities if work is in short supply.
- It is not unusual in Ukraine for children to be left on their own at home while parents go out to work, for example during school holidays. Most British parents would be very uncomfortable with this idea for younger children.
- While 83.7% of the adult population in Britain have been fully covid-vaccinated, the figure for Ukraine in January this year was 44.9%. If this concerns you, address the matter early on.
- Ukrainian refugees may not be able to return home for years. The current provision allows for them to stay here for three years and, during that time, to have free access to healthcare, education, benefits and employment support. Some members of the community may become unhappy at longer-than-expected demands on local resources, particularly if Britain continues in economic crisis. This may not be your mindset at all, but if you have thought about it, you will be better prepared should you encounter prejudice and racism in the future.

Should you want further information on any of the above, or would like to commission training for host families, please contact Sarah Stark on 01923 850 408 / sarah.stark@ac-education.co.uk

