

Providing Accommodation

As you are looking at this page, you are probably considering becoming a sponsor, or a supporter to a Ukrainian person/family group or have decided to do so already.

Thank you for reaching out to others with such kindness and compassion. It will make such a big difference to them. At the same time this will mean a significant commitment for you and your family but organised well it could be a life-enriching decision for all of you.

Leading from your heart is wonderful but there will also be many things to think about – some practical, some more emotional. Consider what you might need in their circumstances, and this will be a good guide on how to approach the role of sponsor or supporter.

We hope that these suggestions/ideas are useful to you in your decision-making /planning both a sponsor but also as a supporter of the host. As a supporter, the sponsor would probably value your help from even this early stage of preparation.



Preparation

(Depending on your situation you may be able to offer either a self-contained property or a room in your home. Most of the following is for people who will be sharing their homes, as this will have potentially more impact on everyone).

- Before you start the process of inviting a guest from Ukraine to share your house for six months or more, please check with your landlord/mortgage provider/house insurance company that you are not jeopardising your own family's security. If you live alone, please check whether having long stay guests will affect your Council Tax.
- If you have children, a family discussion ensuring that all of your family members understand what you are undertaking would be very useful - particularly if you are asking your children to change their current sleeping arrangements to free up a bedroom for your guests. Six months is a long time! In your preparations draw on your own personal experience of sharing house space to prepare yourself/your family.
- You are being asked to provide a reasonably sized private room for your guests to stay for at least 6 months. Ideally the guests would have their own bathroom; if you will all be sharing one bathroom it may be worth planning how this will work e.g., who must leave early in the morning to go to school/work? Will you need a "timetable"? That may sound a bit formal but could help to avoid potential conflict.
- Depending on the personalities involved, sharing a kitchen could be tricky. You may need to give some thought to how this would work. Sponsors may have to provide some food for your guests until their benefits arrive. Are you in a position to do this?
- Mobile phones/laptops will act as a lifeline for your guests whose family members may be dispersed all over Europe - will your Wi-Fi connection be able to cope with more "traffic"? (This is North Devon!)
- Keys – are you willing to give a set of your house keys to your guests so that they can come and go as they wish?
- Would you be prepared to put a bolt on the inside of their bedroom door, or if you would prefer, give them a door wedge, so that they can be assured of privacy when they need it?

Meeting the individual/family

Transport arrangements will vary with each situation – you, or a member of your support team may need to meet your guests at the airport. Like many travellers, they will be tired on arrival. Make sure that you have appropriate car seats, snacks, and water for the journey (and sick bags for poor travellers!)

If they don't speak English, how will they be able to communicate their immediate needs? Taking a map to show them where they are going to be living (and the journey time) may reduce their possible anxiety and help them to feel more in control of their situation. There will be so many emotions – anxiety, relief, joy, sadness all swimming around with exhaustion.

Welcoming your guests

Everyone who has been living in Ukraine in the last few weeks will have experienced some form of trauma – it is difficult to begin to imagine how they will have coped with bomb attacks, seeing others being injured or die, their homes destroyed, having to say goodbye to normal life, fleeing in a hurry and leaving friends and family.

What can you, or your support group do to help your guests feel welcome? Here are a few ideas.

- Arriving at your house may be the first time that they have felt safe and secure for many weeks, but they may also feel anxious, tearful, and afraid. You can help by being sensitive to their needs, understanding their exhaustion. Giving them some space and time to settle in.
- Depending on your guests' ages and needs, you might consider preparing a welcome box. If you, or members of your support group have children, they may like to get involved in this, making a home-made welcome card, a folder of photos of key family members (and pets), a map of the area and pictures of North Devon. The box could include pens, notebooks, a soft toy, a plug adapter, snacks, water. Chocolate is usually very welcome in any stressful circumstances!
- Your guests are likely to arrive with few belongings and clothes. Consider providing some clothes, new underwear, toiletries, feminine hygiene items etc. Your neighbours and friends may like to contribute in this way.
- As a sponsor you might consider preparing an information sheet about your home and how you feel you can share it effectively. This could be translated on one of the translation Apps available. When you are tired it is difficult to take in information so having some notes to refer to later may be useful.

On Arrival

- Your guests will probably need some space to process what has been going on in their disrupted lives. Give them time to unwind and start to relax. If you have young children, they will probably be excited about meeting their new houseguests but prepare them be sensitive about giving your guests some space.
- The children arriving to stay in your home may need some time to feel secure again, initially unwilling to leave their parent's side until they adapt to their new surroundings. It is worth preparing your young children to have patience. Children are generally resilient, and it probably won't be long before they all are sharing games and communicating through play as children tend to do so easily.
- In the first few days/weeks you, and or your support group will need to have time to help them to register with a doctor, attend any appointments e.g., Job Centre. What are the transport links like in your neighbourhood? Will you have to provide lifts if buses are scarce as they are in rural areas.
- Do remember that until their lives changed so dramatically, you guests were independent people like yourself running their own lives. Initially you may need to organise a lot for them e.g., appointments. Many will want to find work and be more independent – you can support them by giving them choices and stepping back when the time is right so that they can begin to reclaim control of their lives.

Thank you for caring enough to consider sharing your home and your time as a support group with strangers – you will be making such a difference to their shattered lives. You will have your own lives enriched from this gesture of goodwill and hopefully make long-lasting friendships.