



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Welcome Circles Guidebook

2022

HIAS Welcome Circles Guidebook



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Protect the refugee.**

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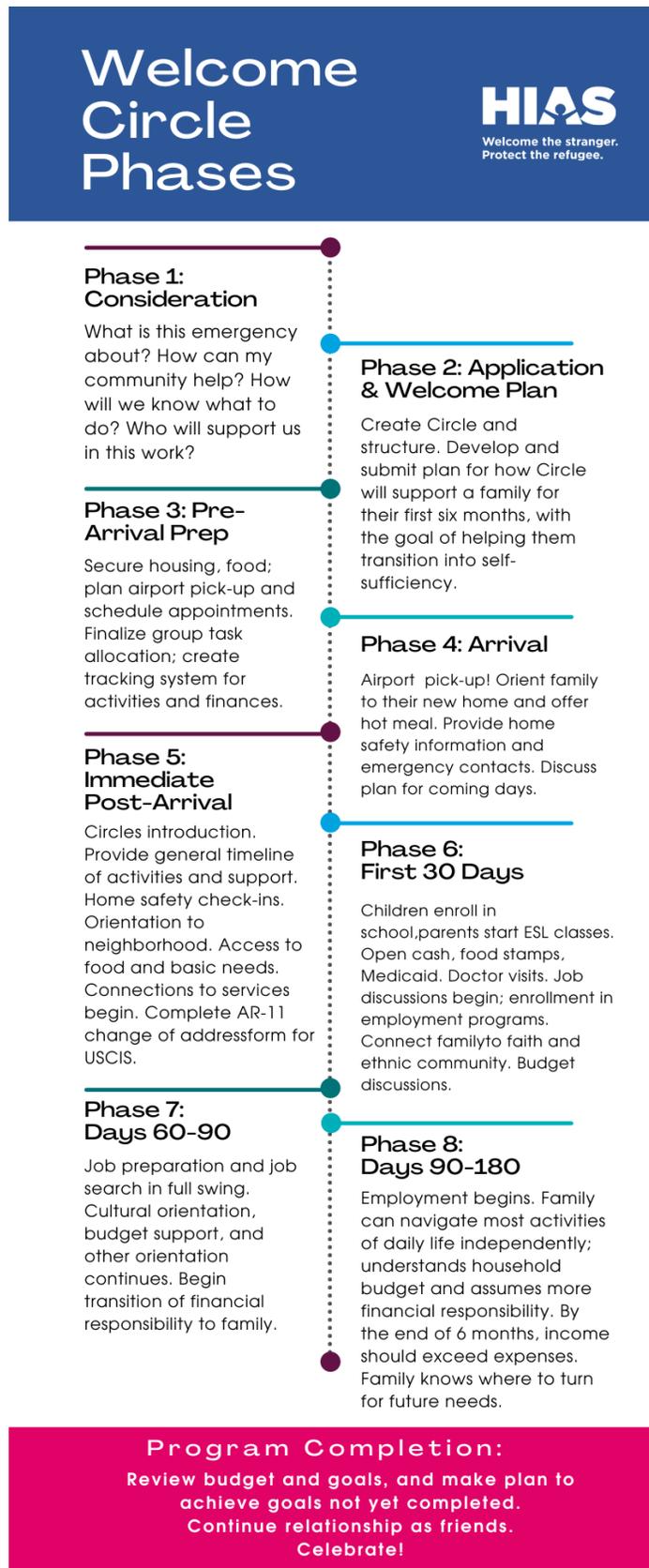
About This Guide

This guide will provide you with an overview of the Welcome Circle process, from conceptualization to project completion.

As you read through the guide, you will find more information about each of the phases outlined in the timeline overview to the right, including what your circle should be considering or doing during that phase, and what resources you can turn to for guidance.

Because each community is different, we encourage you to think of this as a resource to help inform your decisions as you manage this project, rather than as an instruction manual.

This document has been created using resources developed by the Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH), with some additional information and resources added by HIAS.



PHASE 1: Consideration

Grounding thought: The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” --Leviticus 19:33-34

What you should be thinking about:

What is the need? What can we do?

How do we know what to do?

Who will provide guidance?

How do we apply?

Take some time to familiarize yourself with the Afghan emergency & U.S. response:

- [Taliban history video](#)
- [U.S. State Department update on Afghan evacuation and resettlement](#)
- [Welcome.US website](#)

Learn more about the new U.S. response to the crisis – private Welcome Circles:

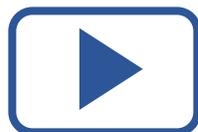
- [Sponsor Circles website](#) (funded by the State Department and private philanthropy)
- [Private sponsorship to resettle Afghans](#)
- [New York Times article on private sponsorship](#)
- [The case for private sponsorship](#)
- [LA Times article Dec. 20 on former Vietnamese giving back to help Afghans](#)

Familiarize yourself with HIAS and with HIAS’ Welcome Circle model:

- [What is HIAS?](#)
- HIAS Welcome Circle model: [HIAS Welcome Circles FAQ](#) | [HIAS webinar recording](#)

Get to know the application process:

- [Sponsor Circles Application Process](#)



WATCH:

[What’s it like to sponsor a family \(Canada\)](#)

PHASE 2: Application & Welcome Plan

Grounding thought: “How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment to start to improve the world.” —Anne Frank

What circles should be thinking about

What does the application entail?
Who will help with/assess the application?
What makes a good circle? How much money must we raise?
How do we find housing and resources in our community?
What types of tasks will we be undertaking?
What does self-sufficiency mean for the newcomers?

In this section, you’ll find:

1. [Group Communication: Defining Roles](#)
2. [Group Lines of Communication](#)
3. [Housing](#)
4. [Arranging for Interpretation and Translation](#)
5. [Navigating Benefits](#)
6. [Supporting Access to Employment](#)
7. [Enrolling Children in School](#)
8. [Accessing Legal Assistance](#)
9. [Additional Resources](#)

Group Communication: Defining Roles

In the Welcome Plan, Welcome Circles will be asked to complete an arrival and welcome checklist identifying which group members will be responsible for leading on which core resettlement tasks.

In determining this division of responsibilities, Welcome Circles may want to consider diving even deeper. Having a dedicated discussion early in the preparatory phase can be helpful to learn about each member’s interests, experiences, and skills. A sample group structure can be found [here](#).

While this resource was created to support co-sponsorship arrangements overseen by resettlement agencies, much of the group organization advice can also apply to Welcome Circles.

In defining roles, it will also be important to identify a member or members as leader/co-leaders of the group. Welcome Circle lead(s) can ensure that the group members are communicating among each other and with HIAS, organizing the group's performance of resettlement tasks, and ensuring that the group submits its day 30 and 90 reports.

Welcome Circles should be mindful of the fact that some responsibilities may be more intensive than others at various periods of the sponsorship. For instance, finding housing may take a significant effort early in the sponsorship, but once permanent housing is secured, the support burden lessens. Some tasks are necessary before the arrival of the newcomers to the community – e.g., fundraising. In assigning tasks, Welcome Circles should consider their daytime availability and spreading out tasks based on overall group capacity.

Group Lines of Communication

Regular meetings among Welcome Circle members are strongly recommended.

Prior to the newcomers' arrival, you'll need to have some important discussions about setting expectations, completing the Welcome Plan and application, fundraising, collecting donations, and other preparations.

Following arrival, Welcome Circles will likely encounter unexpected situations that will require circles to respond flexibly to the newcomers' circumstances and stated needs. Meetings on a weekly basis or even more frequently will be helpful for the Welcome Circles to discuss challenges that the members are encountering, celebrate successes, and plan for the coming days and weeks. Meetings can be in-person, over the phone, or via videoconference. Welcome Circles should also consider tools for more regular, real-time communication. A WhatsApp or Signal group can be helpful to share updates, plans, and ask questions.

Welcome Circles will be the primary point of contact for the newcomers. Newcomers should be provided with contact details to all Welcome Circle members with whom they will be interacting.

Newcomers will also have contact information for a neutral representative of the Community Sponsorship Hub to be able to report any concerns. If the Community Sponsorship Hub receives any concerns from a newcomer, it will notify HIAS to discuss the issue raised and the need for any potential follow-ups.

Housing

Welcome Circles are responsible for securing safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for the Afghan newcomer(s).

Temporary Housing:

- In many circumstances, securing adequate permanent housing may take time, and Welcome Circles may need to identify temporary arrangements.
- Because of the emergency situation, it will be acceptable for Welcome Circle members to offer spaces in their own homes as temporary housing. It is best practice for this type of housing to have a separate entrance and kitchen. However, shared kitchens may be acceptable on a short-term basis as long as families have their own private bathroom.
- Welcome Circles may be able to secure free or discounted temporary housing via [airbnb.org](https://www.airbnb.org). Contact your HIAS Liaison for more information.

Permanent Housing:

- Within the first 90 days of the Afghan newcomers' arrival in the community, it is expected that Welcome Circles will help them secure safe, sanitary, accessible, and affordable permanent housing. Housing is among the most challenging core resettlement responsibilities to meet, and circles may benefit from having several dedicated group members working together to find an appropriate housing solution.
- Welcome Circles should seek housing that the newcomers will have a good chance at being able to afford on their own at the end of a 90-day period.
- Welcome Circles should consider minimum wage as well as government benefit rates as an indicator of subsequent affordability.
- Welcome Circle members should leverage their personal networks and share housing asks publicly.
- If the Welcome Circle members live in an area that is more expensive, consider searching for housing in nearby cities or towns that are more affordable. Typically, areas that are more affordable for low-income individuals and families are also more likely to have other useful resources such as ESL classes, food pantries, and public transportation.
- Newcomers should be listed as tenants on their lease agreements, and they will be expected to sign the lease. Most landlords will require a guarantor or co-signer since the family will have no credit history. Welcome Circles will need to determine which

member will feel comfortable co-signing the lease. [Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services](#) provides helpful best practices and information on this process that can be adapted to support Welcome Circles' conversations with landlords.

- Landlords generally require a deposit equal to 1-2 months' rent. Welcome Circles will need to account for this in the Welcome Plan budget.

Arranging for Interpretation and Translation

Welcome Circles will need to explain in the Welcome Plan how they plan to communicate with the newcomer family they will support.

More formal interpretation and translation services may be especially needed in the first month post-arrival, so that Welcome Circles are able to clearly communicate with newcomers regarding setting mutual expectations, understanding family budgets, technical details of benefits and service access, home set up, etc.

Professional interpretation services are recommended for visits to healthcare and other service providers. Sometimes this will be provided, since any agency that receives federal funds (e.g., Social Security Administration or Department of Social Services) is responsible for ensuring language access.

Potential sources of low-cost or free interpreters are colleges/universities (e.g., Muslim student groups, Arab student groups, mosques, churches, and cultural groups). If professional interpretation comes at a cost, Welcome Circles should budget for this in advance and reflect that in the Welcome Plan.

After getting to know the newcomers a bit more, or for more informal interactions, Welcome Circles can also think about using more informal interpretation/translation aids, such as the Google Translate app. Patience is required, as not everything is always translated accurately, and some re-phrasing might be needed to convey messages.

Navigating Benefits

Examples of **federally funded benefits** for which humanitarian parolees may be eligible include:

- Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps
- Medicaid
- Refugee Cash Assistance
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Refugee Medical Assistance

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

Local benefits for which humanitarian parolees may be eligible include:

- Public library programs
- Low-income assistance programs
- Mutual aid programs
- Mental health services
- Pro bono legal services

In researching which public benefits are available and how to access them, Welcome Circles should consider:

- Reviewing the information sheet from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) [here](#).
- Identifying a [local state government benefits office or State Refugee Coordinator](#), contacting them to learn about available ORR benefits (Refugee Cash Assistance, ORR Matching Grant Program, Refugee Medical Assistance) and services and application processes in advance, and arranging an appointment soon after the newcomer's arrival.
- Identifying the local Department of Social Services office, contacting them to learn about the application process in advance, and arranging an appointment soon after the newcomers' arrival.
- Learning about [Medicaid eligibility](#), including for [Afghan evacuees](#), and how to apply via either the [state Medicaid agency](#) or via [healthcare.gov](#).
- Learning about [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#) eligibility and how to apply for newcomers of different ages.
- Learning about [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families \(TANF\)](#) programs in your State to find out if the newcomers are eligible, and if so, how to apply.
- Identifying and contacting the local government or social service provider to find out about additional local benefits that might be available.
- Researching what services might be available through public libraries, local places of worship, community centers, etc.

Supporting Access to Employment

Although the wider sponsor circle program asks for a 90-day financial commitment, HIAS Welcome Circles are asked to plan for 180-day period. It is therefore important that Welcome Circles support adult newcomers in finding initial employment as soon as possible after arrival.

Exploration of employment opportunities should begin even before the newcomer arrives in the community. In the Welcome Plan, your Welcome Circle will need to describe any affordable

employment counselling or other employment-related programming in your community. Welcome Circles should be aware of any upcoming job fairs, for example.

Welcome Circles will also need to describe a plan for informal employment support, e.g., helping to create resumes/CVs, search online job boards, practice for interviews, support transportation to interviews, etc. Your Welcome Circle should survey the employment landscape in your community for entry-level and reasonably accessible jobs that can accommodate language learners.

Although many newcomer families may have a wealth of work experience or even specializations, language barriers, foreign certifications, and a lack of familiarity with the U.S. systems mean finding work in higher-level roles will take time. Therefore, it will be important for Welcome Circles to manage newcomers' expectations and emphasize how important it is for them to accept the first job offer they receive, even if it is entry-level. Even if it is not the job that provides self-sufficiency, it will lead to better or full-time employment with the same, or a different, employer down the line. Getting a higher-level job is easier when a newcomer already is working. Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services provides some additional helpful [guidance](#) that Welcome Circles may consider as you support newcomers in accessing employment opportunities.

Welcome Circles will be expected to leverage personal networks to support the newcomers' employment search. Welcome Circles are not required to provide employment for the newcomers, but there may be Welcome Circle members who might be willing to offer employment. Such arrangements should be approached with full sensitivity around and commitment to mitigating the potential power dynamics at play. Newcomers may feel indebted or pressured to work for a Welcome Circle member – it is important to both understand yourselves and emphasize to the newcomers that they have autonomy in their employment decisions. The Community Sponsorship hub has a module in their [Knowledge Check](#) course on power considerations in sponsorship that may be useful to review.

Enrolling Children in School

Welcome Circles will be responsible for supporting any school-aged children in the newcomer family in the public education system within the first two weeks of the family's arrival.

Your Welcome Circle will need to research, and describe in the Welcome Plan, details regarding the enrollment process in your community, including needed immunizations and your district's point of contact responsible for enrollment.

The outreach that Welcome Circles do in the preparatory phase will also help the school district in preparing for welcoming the newcomer children into schools. Thus, if possible, it is recommended that a Welcome Circle reach out to the district contact point to discuss enrollment processes and how to best support children in their school integration prior to the family's arrival in the community.

Accessing Legal Assistance

Humanitarian parole is a temporary legal status used to rapidly bring individuals to safety in the U.S. in cases of emergency. Humanitarian parole status is normally granted for a one-year period. Once that period expires, parolees are expected to return to their country of origin unless they can renew their parole or adjust their legal status to a different status.

In the case of Afghan evacuees, there is an expectation that newcomers will adjust their status by applying for protection through the U.S. asylum system or to a Special Immigrant Visa status.

Welcome Circles are not expected to support newcomers in navigating the legalities of the complex U.S. asylum system. However, circles are expected to connect newcomers to legal aid as soon as possible following their arrival in the destination community. Time is of the essence, as U.S. asylum procedures can be lengthy. Your Liaison will also share information about trainings run by HIAS' Legal Services team for pro-bono lawyers supporting Afghan Parolees through asylum applications.

Possible sources of support can include Human Rights First, the International Refugee Assistance Project, a local legal aid office, or a local refugee lawyer willing to represent the newcomers pro bono or at a discount. Welcome Circles might visit USAHello or CLINIC online to identify a professional.

Additional Resources

For more information about the application, fundraising requirements, the circle's role, program training, and background check requirements, check out these resources:

- [Sponsor Circles website](#)
- [HIAS Welcome Circles FAQ](#)

Resources for volunteers working with resettlement agencies under Co-Sponsorship Model:

Note: Welcome Circles do not report to resettlement agencies; however, there is valuable info in these guides.

- [IRIS resources](#) and [IRIS manual for community sponsorship](#)
- [Church World Service manual](#)

Resources from national refugee technical assistance sites:

- [Afghan parolee resources](#)
- [Resource identification: Find Hello](#)
- [Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange](#)
- [Employment and case management](#)
- State Refugee Coordinators contact info: [State Refugee Coordinator](#)
- [Welcome.US](#)

Local service providers to research:

- County Assistance Office (cash assistance, food stamps, Medicaid) – check if your area has a refugee site
- Department of Health (vaccinations)
- Health clinics (primary care)
- School district (enrollment info for English language learners)
- English as a Second Language classes
- Job centers, possibly local refugee providers
- Legal immigration clinics
- United Way search

PHASE 3: Pre-Arrival Prep

Grounding Thought: *“We are here to change the world with small acts of thoughtfulness done daily rather than with one great breakthrough.”*

– Rabbi Harold Kushner

What circles should be thinking about:

Housing search, interpretation set up, apartment furnishings, culturally appropriate food provision, technology provision, finalizing contacts for key services, creating financial/task tracking documents, planning airport pick-up and first week activities.

Training/education on Afghan culture, working with interpreters, cultural humility, boundary-setting, self-care, child safety, trauma-informed approach.

In this section, you’ll find:

1. [Tips: Donations and Discounts](#)
2. [Basic Necessities: Clothing](#)
3. [Basic Necessities: Food Staples](#)
4. [Basic Necessities: Utilities](#)
5. [Basic Necessities: Phone and Internet](#)
6. [Additional Resources](#)

Tips: Donations and Discounts

Much of the furniture and home furnishings can be collected by Welcome Circles as in-kind donations. Welcome Circles should be encouraged to leverage their networks to solicit donations where possible. Any donated items should be clean and in good condition.

Second-hand stores or online platforms like Kijiji or Facebook marketplace should also be explored for discounted items.

Some items, such as bedding, towels, and personal hygiene items should be in excellent condition if used or purchased new. Welcome Circles should be encouraged to find low-cost options for purchasing such goods (e.g., dollar stores). Welcome Circles should think about the budget for these items from the outset, as it will need to be reflected in the Welcome Plan.

Basic Necessities: Clothing

Welcome Circles can collect donated clothing for the newcomers but should be mindful of the fact that circles may not know the needs and sizes of the newcomer family members ahead of their arrival in the community. If you have gathered donations of goods that end up being unsuitable for the family members, plan to donate them to others who may be in need.

Some clothing will need to be purchased new (e.g., socks and underwear). Welcome Circles could consider taking the newcomers on an initial shopping trip shortly after arrival to purchase clothing and other basic goods. This trip can also include stops to introduce newcomers to secondhand clothing stores in the community.

Welcome Circles should be mindful that providing too much new clothing or other goods may establish an expectation that the group will not be able to continue to fulfill.

Special consideration should be paid to securing seasonally appropriate clothing.

Many Welcome Circles may find themselves deluged with donated items and that their expenditures on clothing and other goods are negligible. Think about the budget for these items from the outset, as you will need to reflect this in the Welcome Plan and budget addendum.

Basic Necessities: Food Staples

Welcome Circles may consider arranging a culturally familiar meal for the newcomers on their arrival. This can serve as a warm introduction to both the group and community and help put the newcomers at ease.

Welcome Circles should purchase some basic food staples ahead of the family's arrival to ensure sufficient provisions to get by in the first few days after their arrival. Welcome Circles should research what food staples are common in Afghan cuisine. For example, [this blog](#) gives some helpful tips.

Welcome Circles should remember to provide baby food, as applicable.

Welcome Circles should plan (and budget for) a grocery trip with the newcomers soon after arrival so that the newcomers can stock up on food items of their liking. The group should orient itself to affordable grocery store options in the community.

Welcome Circles should also budget for ongoing grocery costs over the course of the newcomers' first 180 days in the community and reflect this in the Welcome Plan and budget addendum.

Basic Necessities: Utilities

Welcome Circles will be responsible for helping the newcomer family establish utility accounts associated with their permanent housing.

Afghan newcomers will need their social security numbers to register for utilities. If they were processed on military bases, the initial paperwork to obtain social security cards should have been completed there. These should be sent to the destination community after the newcomers arrive. To ensure the newcomers receive their social security cards, Welcome Circles will need to help them complete a change of address with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and with the U.S. Postal Service. If there is a delay in receiving the social security cards, Welcome Circles should be prepared to establish utility accounts themselves using a group member's social security card. Responsibility for the accounts can be transferred once the newcomers' social security cards arrive.

Some local communities may offer utilities subsidies for low-income families through [LIHEAP](#). Welcome Circles should research whether any other local benefits are available to lower the monthly costs of utilities. Welcome Circles should orient themselves to the process of registering for utilities in advance, as well as the estimated monthly costs of utilities in the first 180 days.

Basic Necessities: Phone and Internet

Telephone: Welcome Circles should plan for the provision of at least one cell phone in good and working condition to the family, as well as covering the initial costs of the phone plan (first 180 days). Donated cell phones are acceptable, and smartphones are strongly recommended. Welcome Circles should research service providers to identify affordable plans and describe this in the Welcome Plan.

Internet: Welcome Circles should plan to help the newcomers register for an internet plan for their permanent housing. Welcome Circles should research available service providers to identify affordable plans and describe this process in the Welcome Plan.

Additional Resources

Housing guidance

- [Finding housing](#)
- [Benefits of renting to refugees](#)
- [Safe Housing and Furnishings checklist](#) (second tab)
- Setting up housing: [JRC RRIJ Apartment Furnishing Process.pdf](#)
- [Template using “Sign-Up Genius” for furnishing donations](#)
- [Refugee housing FAQ](#)
- [Affordable housing locator resource from HUD](#)

Best practices:

- Working with Interpreters Training [video](#)
- [HIAS guide to using volunteer interpreters/translators](#) (pages 14-28)
- [Free interpretation resources](#)
- [Trauma & trauma-informed care guide](#)
- [Boundary setting guide](#)
- [Boundary setting one-pager](#)
- [Cultural Orientation](#)
- [Adult learning](#)
- [Teaching plans and resources](#)

PHASE 4: Arrival

Grounding thought: Let no sadness come through this gate. Let no trouble come to this dwelling. Let no fear come through this door. Let no conflict be in this place. Let this home be filled with the blessing of joy and peace. – Birkat HaBayit

What circles should be thinking about:

Airport pick-up
Home and safety orientation
Hot meal and food supplies
Early timeline

In this section, you'll find:

1. [Meeting Newcomers at Their Point of Arrival](#)
2. [Priorities in the First 24 Hours](#)
3. [Additional Notes and Resources](#)

Meeting Newcomers at Their Point of Arrival

Mixed emotions surrounding the actual arrival of newcomers highlight how important the first meeting is, and how lasting its impression. When Welcome Circles receive the newcomers at their point of arrival, be aware that they may be experiencing a bewildering number of things all at once:

- **They may be exhausted and/or scared** - they may not even be particularly happy about being in the U.S. or the destination community. They not have left their country by choice. They are likely to have experienced a traumatizing exit from Afghanistan, and a long time in processing at the U.S. Safe Haven (military base). Their feelings might be quite different from those of the Welcome Circle and very mixed.
- **Meeting new people can be exhausting.** Welcome Circles should carefully consider who among their core members should greet the newcomers at the point of arrival, and keep in mind that having too many greeters can be overwhelming. Although groups may feel like celebrating immediately after arrival, the newcomers' first need will likely be for rest.

It helps for Welcome Circles to always communicate to the newcomers what you are doing and why and to allow them as much privacy as possible.

It is strongly recommended to bring a qualified interpreter to the initial point of arrival to support the provision of a warm welcome by communicating in the newcomers' language. Welcome Circles should proceed with transporting newcomers directly to their initial accommodations. Newcomers should not be separated from each other or from their belongings during this journey.

Source: [RSTP Handbook, Chapter 7 on Settlement Preparation](#).

Priorities in the First 24 Hours

The first 24 hours and the first few days are a critical time in newcomers' lives. First impressions are formed, and vivid memories of these days are likely to remain with them for the rest of their lives. While your Welcome Circle will want to ensure that you are addressing the necessary practical issues during this time, it will also be important for members to focus on the newcomers' emotional needs.

This **suggested checklist** addresses a few of the immediate practical concerns in the first 24 hours:

- Ensure newcomers' accommodation is stocked with sufficient food supplies for a few days, and that newcomers are greeted with a warm, culturally appropriate meal.
- Orient newcomers to how to use things in their accommodation – e.g., faucets, telephones, basic household equipment, and objects that might be unknown to them or difficult to figure out, such as fire alarms.
- Ensure newcomers know how to contact someone from the Welcome Circle at any time, day or night. Provide several numbers and develop a system to communicate when in need of help if English is poor (such as Google Translate). **Make sure they know who to call in case of emergency.**
- Support the newcomers in making any desired phone calls to relatives or loved ones.
- Provide newcomers with some pocket money in case they need to leave the accommodation to purchase any goods.
- Arrange a time for a deeper orientation meeting the next day with a qualified interpreter.

Source: [RSTP Handbook, Chapter 7 on Settlement Preparation](#).

Additional Notes and Resources

Airport pick-up guidance

- Bring interpreter, if possible; if not, have phone interpreter available
- Try to get permission to meet family at gate
- Create welcome sign with family's name
- Do not take photos without permission
- Do not touch family without permission

Culturally appropriate hot meal upon arrival

- Consider asking Afghan neighbor, if available, to cook for family (provide money or gift card)
- Purchase hot meal at Halal market or restaurant

Home and safety orientation

Review [Safe Housing and Furnishings checklist](#)

PHASE 5: Immediate Post-Arrival

Grounding thought: “To be kind is more important than to be right. Many times what people need is not a brilliant mind that speaks but a special heart that listens.” —Rabbi Menachem Mendel

What circles should be thinking about:

Providing welcome
Explaining Circles
Orientation to neighborhood/community
Expectations
Completing the AR-11
Lease-signing
Documentation collection
Money distribution

In this section, you’ll find:

1. [Orientation Meeting](#)
2. [Priorities in Week 1](#)
3. [Additional Resources](#)

Orientation Meeting

A best practice for Welcome Circles to follow is to arrange an orientation meeting with the newcomers within the first 24 hours of arrival, but *after* the newcomers have had an opportunity to rest in their initial accommodation.

During this orientation meeting, it will be important for Welcome Circles to:

- **Introduce** the newcomers to all the members of the Welcome Circle and explain (simply!) how the group members have divided their responsibilities.
- **Set expectations** by explaining the resettlement supports the Welcome Circle will be providing, and for how long (180 days).
- **Provide an overview** of key appointments that the newcomers should expect in the first week and other plans (e.g., trip to the grocery store).
- **Introduce the budget** to the newcomer family and have a transparent discussion regarding plans for spending of funds on the newcomers’ behalf.

- Ensure newcomers are aware of their **rights and responsibilities** in the U.S. Welcome Circles should never make decisions for the newcomers, but rather make decisions together with them. Whenever possible, mentor newcomers by providing alternatives and resources.

It is strongly recommended that this first meeting take place with the presence of a qualified interpreter, so that newcomers feel as comfortable as possible asking questions regarding the Welcome Circle members, the Welcome Circle Program, their new community, and what to expect as they get adjusted.

Priorities in Week 1

During the first week after arrival, Welcome Circles should prioritize tasks that will be critical to orienting the newcomer to how they can access necessities, obtain key documentation needed to establish themselves in the community, and begin to access critical benefits and services. It is advisable for Welcome Circles to arrange any needed appointments ahead of the newcomer's arrival to avoid unnecessary delays in access to critical benefits and services, if at all possible.

Priorities should include:

- An **initial shopping trip** for groceries and other necessities, neighborhood walk-about, and initial orientation to public transportation options.
- Obtaining a **cell phone and plan**.
- Supporting newcomers in completing a **change of address** with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and with the U.S. Postal Service to their temporary accommodation so that their social security cards and Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) are sent to them as quickly as possible.
- **Attending appointments** at the local state government **benefits** office, local **SNAP** office, and other locations, and/or completing relevant **online applications** to secure any benefits the newcomers might be eligible for.
- Attending an initial appointment with the **local health department** and the local **department of social services** to access health insurance and connect the family to health practitioners.
- Attending an initial appointment with a **legal professional** to begin the asylum process.
- Enrolling newcomer adults in **English language classes** appropriate to their circumstances, taking into consideration any childcare needs.

***Important:** Welcome Circles should remain mindful of the newcomers' emotional needs during their initial week after arrival and watch for signs of stress or culture shock. The

[Knowledge Check](#) course from Community Sponsorship Hub has a module on power, cultural, religion, language, trauma, and privacy, and communication considerations that will be helpful for navigating these initial, busy days.

Additional Resources

Getting to Know You:

- [Welcoming activities/icebreakers](#)

Core Services Provision Starts:

- [Try using this sample checklist tool](#) (first tab) to track what needs to be done and when
Note: Welcome Circles are not required to follow this timeline, but most of these tasks apply.

Orientations

- Circles members, structure, roles, money disbursement, activities, and goals
- Neighborhood and Community

Lease-signing, as applicable

- Use interpretation to ensure understanding of legal document
- Ensure comprehension of lease length, protections, consequences of breaking lease, and apartment maintenance requirements
- [Housing guide](#) for family
- [Landlord repair guide](#)

AR-11 Homeland Security Document

- [Reason for AR-11](#)
- [AR-11 Form](#)

Handling Expectations:

- [Canadian program document](#)

PHASE 6: The First 30 Days

Grounding thought: “Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone’s task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it.” – Viktor E. Frankl

What circles should be thinking about:

Core service provision
Expectations
Tracking activities
Appointment follow-up
Cultural orientation

In this section, you’ll find:

1. [Priorities in Month 1](#)
2. [Days 30 and 90 Reports](#)
3. [Understanding the Adjustment Period](#)
4. [Supporting the Adjustment Period](#)
5. [Recognizing and Responding to Emergencies](#)
6. [When to Pursue Mental Health Care](#)
7. [Additional Resources](#)

Priorities in Month 1

The first month after arrival is critical for the newcomers to begin feeling settled and establishing a routine in their new community. Priorities for Welcome Circles during this period should include:

- **Completing any tasks from the “[Priorities in Week 1](#)” checklist** that the Welcome Circle may not have been able to complete immediately.
- **Enrolling school-aged children** in educational institutions (within first two weeks).
- **Opening a bank account** (within first two weeks – note that this requires the arrival of the newcomers’ social security cards).
- Helping adult newcomers **adjust to a routine** of attending language classes.
- **Attending an appointment with an employment counsellor**, if available, and otherwise beginning to provide employment coaching and job search support to adult newcomers.
- Offering and facilitating **cultural connections** as the family desires.

- **Supporting transportation needs**, while encouraging the family to gradually begin navigating their community independently.
- **Beginning the search for permanent housing** – the sooner the newcomers are settled in their permanent home, the more settled they will feel in the community.

Days 30 and 90 Reports

Proactive check-ins will take the following forms:

- A day 30 online report
- A day 90 online report

The Community Sponsorship Hub is designing these reports, and they will be provided to circles via their HIAS Welcome Circle Liaisons.

Understanding the Adjustment Period

The resettlement experience comes with several stages of adjustment. Welcome Circles should be aware of possible stages the newcomers may be experiencing, including:

- **Honeymoon**: excitement, anticipation, hopefulness, eagerness
- **Hostility**: frustration, anxiety, anger, depression, fear, mistrust
- **Humor**: learning new things, understanding culture, meeting new people, feeling more comfortable
- **Home**: feeling adjusted, comfortable, hopeful, positive, able to cope, teaching and supporting others

Welcome Circles can help newcomers through these stages in various ways, including providing friendship, support, and community connections; linking newcomers with people, events, goods, and services from their own culture; and organizing time for social and recreational interactions.

Supporting the Adjustment Period

Refugee newcomers often have an adjustment period when certain symptoms may appear that will later dissipate once certain factors are in place. Factors that can help improve mental health include employment, language acquisition, meeting new people, and being able to send money to family. Before assuming that there is a mental health problem, Welcome Circles should do their best to gather more information while continuing to respect the newcomers' right to privacy:

- **Listen to and empathize with the client**: Is this a global distress issue having to do with the stress of adjustment, of paying rent, of learning English, of missing loved ones, of

uncertainty of where loved ones are? These stressors are very common for newcomers. Or is it a more serious mental health problem?

- **Ask questions, be curious, engage in conversation:** Helpful prompts can include, “What is going on?” “What made you upset today?” “What happened?” “Tell me how you are feeling” “How long has it been going on?” “Have you been treated for this issue in the past? With medication?”



Recognizing and Responding to Emergencies

Welcome Circles should be prepared to watch for and recognize **signs of emergency**, which can include:

- When a newcomer has expressed suicidal thoughts in the present and/or has expressed a plan
- When a newcomer has expressed homicidal thoughts
- When a newcomer is incoherent, unable to respond, and has a flat affect
- When a newcomer is expressing hallucinations – visual, audible, tactile
- When a newcomer is acting erratically, exhibiting bizarre behaviors, violent behaviors
- When there is a real or perceived need for immediate professional assistance

If a Welcome Circle recognizes signs of emergency, the following actions should be considered, as appropriate:

- Have a plan ahead of time by being aware of local mental health services in your area
- Call 911 – explain that it is a mental health emergency that needs a mental health professional present when responding
- Bring the newcomer to the emergency room and explain that there is a mental health emergency. The emergency room attendant will assess and admit the newcomer to emergency psychiatric care if they deem necessary.

When to Pursue Mental Health Care

Welcome Circles may consider encouraging the newcomers to access mental health care in the following circumstances:

- When the newcomer expresses that they need extra support
- When the newcomer is exhibiting behaviors that are concerning and chronic, for example:
 - not sleeping
 - not eating
 - not being able to get out of bed or to leave the house
 - paranoid/hyper-vigilant behavior

- experiencing audible/visual/tactile hallucinations
- experiencing constant panic attacks
- expressing or threatening violence of self or others

Additional Resources

Core service provision:

- [Try using this sample checklist tool](#) (first tab) to track what needs to be done and when

Resource guide for volunteers working with resettlement agencies under Community Sponsorship

Model: *Note: Circles do not report to resettlement agencies however there is value info in these guides.*

- [IRIS resources](#) and [IRIS manual for community sponsorship](#)

Legal immigration:

- Connect family to legal immigration resource to begin process to adjust status
- [USCIS info](#)

Cultural orientation:

- [Activities](#)
- [Scroll to Afghan Placement & Assistance section \(Guides in translation\)](#)
- [CORE Settle In](#) Facebook page in Dari/Pashto

Assisting at appointments: medical, welfare, school, ESL, legal immigration, etc.:

- Schedule and attend follow-up medical and other appts
- Right to interpretation at providers [resource](#)
- [Duolingo English lessons](#)

Starting to seek employment:

- Seek enrollment into refugee employment/case management services (if available)
- For high skilled/English speakers, [contact Upwardly Global for career services](#)

Activities happening in this phase:

- Transportation training to key spots
- Children enrolled/starting school
- After-school programs for youth
- Parents in ESL
- Budgeting and employment discussions begin and are frequent
- Connections to faith and ethnic community
- Family fun activities
- Circles check-ins are ongoing
- Disbursal of money per Welcome Plan

Mental Health

- IRIS, "[Refugee Mental Health Info for Cosponsors](#)"
- RSTP, "[Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)"
- Maria Popova, "[The Science of How Our Minds and Bodies Converge in the Healing of Trauma](#)"



WATCH:

RSTP webinar: "[Preserving and Improving the Mental Health of Refugees, their Sponsors and Supporters](#)"

RSTP webinar: "[Supporting Refugee Mental Health](#)"

PHASE 7: Days 30-90

Grounding thought: “The greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to support a person by endowing them with a gift or loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding employment for him, in order to strengthen his hand so that he will not need to be dependent upon others...” – Maimonides’ Eight Levels of Charity, Mishnah Torah)

What circles should be thinking about:

Job search
Money management
Budgeting
Core services ongoing
Referrals to services

In this section, you’ll find:

1. [Priorities in Month 2](#)
2. [Priorities in Month 3](#)
3. [Additional Resources](#)

Priorities in Month 2

By the second month, newcomers should be reasonably settled into a routine of attending school or language classes, be actively searching for employment and permanent housing (if not yet secured), be receiving benefits and accessing other relevant services, and feel more comfortable navigating their surroundings to obtain groceries and other basic necessities.

During this period, Welcome Circles should focus on ensuring:

- That any **outstanding resettlement tasks** from the first month are fulfilled.
- If **permanent housing** has not yet been located, the search should intensify so that the newcomers can settle in as quickly as possible.
- If **employment** has not yet been secured, the search should intensify so that the newcomers can strengthen their financial security as quickly as possible.
- The newcomers are aware of **recreational opportunities** in the community and can find opportunities to have fun in their new surroundings.

While it is likely the newcomers will continue to be busy navigating appointments and attending to administrative matters during this time, hopefully the intensity of the first month will have somewhat abated, enabling the Welcome Circles to focus on providing mentorship on day-to-day challenges that may arise, and arranging fun opportunities for the newcomer(s) to get to know the community.

Priorities in Month 3

By the third month, newcomers should be settling into their daily routines. Ideally, they will have secured employment and moved into permanent housing. The third month should be focused on beginning the gradual transition to self-sustainability. Ensure outstanding resettlement supports have been provided (click [here](#) for a sample services checklist), and that the family feels equipped to enter the next stages in as self-sufficient a manner as possible. Moving forward, you should continue to be available as a resource and friend, but the family should be in the “driver’s seat” as much as possible.

During this period, Welcome Circles should focus on ensuring:

- That all **outstanding resettlement supports** have been provided.
- If **employment** has not yet been supported, Welcome Circles should dedicate significant energy and time to connecting newcomers to employment opportunities.
- If **permanent housing** has not yet been secured, Welcome Circles should dedicate significant energy and time to the housing search, providing accompanying needs for furniture and other household furnishings, and ensuring appropriate utilities hook-ups and account registrations.
- That the newcomers feel comfortable **navigating their community independently**.
- That the newcomers feel comfortable **budgeting** for their needs and understand how to navigate the American **banking** system.

Additional Resources

Planning for self-sufficiency:

- [Money management](#)

Refuge providers (Afghan parolees are eligible for these)

- [Refugee Support Services: focus on employment](#)
- [Intensive case management for refugees with high needs](#)

Mainstream Employment services

- [TANF employment and training services](#) (for families with children under 18 receiving cash assistance)
- [SNAP employment and training services](#) (for families not receiving cash assistance)

PHASE 8: Days 90-180

Grounding thought: “You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it” – Pirkei Avot: 2:21

What circles should be thinking about:

Employment start
Transition to financial self-sufficiency
Connections to ongoing resources
Changing circles role

In this section, you’ll find:

1. [Best Practice: Transition Planning](#)
2. [Additional Resources](#)

Best Practice: Transition Planning

About two weeks before the conclusion of the sponsorship period, you may want to convene a discussion with your HIAS Welcome Circle Liaison about the goals the circle and family have achieved and what tasks you might need to undertake before the sponsorship comes to an end to ensure as smooth a transition as possible for the newcomers.

A best practice for Welcome Circles is to also arrange a similar transition meeting with the newcomers, as noted in the [Sponsor Circle Guide](#). Welcome Circles should always carry out their responsibilities with a view to an eventual transition to self-sufficiency.

Some topics for discussion during this meeting could include:

- Have the newcomers become comfortable with **purchasing groceries and household items** on their own?
- Are the newcomers **oriented to the public transportation** system and able to navigate their community independently?
- How are the newcomers doing in terms of the **employment search and language acquisition**?

- Are there any concerns relating to the newcomers' **ability to continue to support themselves following the sponsorship?**
- Do the Welcome Circle members plan to continue offering any support after the conclusion of the formal sponsorship period, whether financial or non-financial? *

**Note – this is not required but some groups may find themselves wanting to continue to support newcomers on their paths to self-sufficiency. Some helpful considerations the Circle members might discuss include their personal capacities to offer ongoing support, the newcomers' needs to attain eventual self-sufficiency, any impact on the newcomers' ability to continue receiving public benefits, and the newcomer's right to self-determination.*

Additional Resources

- [Career laddering resources](#)

COMPLETION

What circles should be thinking about:

- Review budget and goals
- Make plan to achieve goals not yet completed
- Celebrate completion
- Continue relationship as friends
- Group celebrates among themselves!

Congratulations! Your Welcome Circle has taken a chance and embarked on a challenging and exciting journey to support your new neighbors during a time when they needed you most. Along the way, you will almost certainly have had more successes and more unexpected hurdles than you could have imagined, and you have made it through together, in partnership with the newcomer family. As a result, your community is stronger and more welcoming. You should take this moment to celebrate the immensity of your accomplishments and celebrate together with your new neighbors!