



CENTRAL VERMONT REFUGEE ACTION NETWORK

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

CVRAN Volunteer Guide March 2022

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN). We appreciate your interest in CVRAN and your generosity in offering your time, skills, and compassion to the new Vermonters we serve.

The purpose of this Guide is to describe the work we do and provide a resource for volunteers. Working with our guests - asylum seekers and Afghan refugees - is a rich and rewarding experience. But it can also be challenging. The Volunteer Guide is here to help, and so are all of us in CVRAN.

CVRAN was established as a non-profit in Montpelier in 2015 with the mission of making our local communities welcoming, safe places for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers. Our work is to help these new Vermonters settle, work, and thrive in Central Vermont. Our experience is that they greatly enrich our own cultural and economic lives.

The New Vermonters that CVRAN assists come from many different countries and are here for a variety of reasons. The people CVRAN is presently serving, and the work our volunteers do with each group are explained below.

WHO DOES CVRAN SERVE?

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers flee countries around the world because of a fear of persecution, violence, and even torture. They arrive in the U.S. without the prior permission of the U.S. government and must apply for a grant of asylum. The legal process of preparing a case for asylum and receiving a ruling on it can take several years.

Volunteers from CVRAN sponsor asylum seekers and help secure their release from detention. Volunteers find host families to house asylum seekers on their arrival in Vermont, then help locate permanent housing and needed furnishings.

CVRAN volunteers regularly provide asylum seekers with transportation to grocery stores and medical appointments. They help adults with basic education and English language learning. They represent the interests of children in our local schools. Volunteers teach asylum seekers to drive, assist them in getting driver's licenses, and help to purchase affordable vehicles. CVRAN works to find legal assistance to aid asylum seekers in applying for asylum status.

Once their asylum cases are in process, asylum seekers are eligible to work in the US. Volunteers then help them secure social security numbers and employment authorization papers. Volunteers also help asylum seekers get job training and find jobs.

Throughout the entire process, as asylum seekers are learning about their new communities and becoming more self-sufficient, CVRAN volunteers are with them, providing help and support, social activities, and friendship.

Afghan refugees

In August 2021 when the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan, many Afghan people who had helped the U.S. government were evacuated to the United States. Others fled to neighboring countries and were then brought to the U.S. as refugees.

Unlike asylum seekers, Afghan refugees have already been granted the protections of the U.S. government when they arrive. The Vermont branch of the

The United States Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) based in Colchester is the federal government agency which provides financial support, housing, and work authorization. A year after their arrival, the Afghan refugees can be given permanent residency; later they can apply for U.S. citizenship.

CVRAN volunteers work with USCRI, performing much of the day-to-day activities of welcoming the Afghans and settling them into their new communities, making sure their needs are met. CVRAN in partnership with USCRI helps to find host families in Montpelier to house Afghan families and individuals when they arrive; they also help to locate and furnish more permanent rental properties for them to live in.

As with asylum seekers, CVRAN volunteers assume local ongoing responsibility for refugees, providing help with transportation to religious services, medical appointments, and food stores. They arrange for English language learning for adults and local school placement and

support for children. They also assist Afghan refugees with their job searches and job support. In addition, CVRAN volunteers offer friendship and social activities for the Afghans amongst their local Afghan community as well as the Montpelier community at large.

Migrant workers

Migrant workers are primarily from Mexico and Central America and come to the U.S. to earn money for themselves and their families in their home countries. They are undocumented and without the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Migrant workers keep Vermont's dairy farms economically viable. But their living and working conditions are often unsafe and they face harassment, detention, and deportation from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

CVRAN volunteers work with Migrant Justice, a non-profit organization based in Burlington VT, which organizes immigrant farm workers for economic justice and human rights.

Once a year representatives from the Mexican Consulate in Boston, at CVRAN's invitation, come to Montpelier to provide Mexican farm workers with identity documents, legal advice, and medical care.

HOW IS VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION IN CVRAN ORGANIZED?

CVRAN is set up in committees as follows:

Direct Service Committee

Volunteers work directly with asylum seekers and Afghan refugees in all the ways outlined above. Each asylum seeker or refugee family or individual is supported by a team of volunteers who share the responsibilities of assistance. A team leader coordinates the team members and handles new needs or problems.

Outreach Committee

Volunteers make presentations about CVRAN's work to faith communities and civic organizations, highlighting our need for volunteers, host families, available housing, and financial resources.

Publicity Committee

Volunteers work with the media to inform our local communities about CVRAN's activities. They also produce content for CVRAN's website and Facebook page.

Events Committee

Volunteers set up educational events to familiarize CVRAN members and our communities with the cultures, history, and experiences of new Vermonters. Events include films, panels, speakers, and videos. A recent public forum was "Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Immigrants in Vermont: Present Realities and Steps toward a Brighter Future."

Fundraising Committee

Volunteers organize, promote, and administer events to raise funds that directly support the people we serve. Fundraising activities have included grant writing, ethnic dinners, sales of Equal Exchange products, and the March Arts Marathon (MAM). MAM artists and writers invite sponsors to donate to CVRAN and in return the MAM participants pledge to email their sponsors an original work every day in March.

HOW TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER

Complete the volunteer form on CVRAN's website CVRAN.org. You'll be asked about your skills, especially in ESL and languages as well as what kind of work you'd like to do with CVRAN. Volunteer roles include working directly with our guests, community outreach, fundraising, and more. All volunteers are expected to complete and submit a background check. Two website options for instant background check services are included in the volunteer form. The fee is reimbursable on request.

Once your application has been submitted, CVRAN's volunteer coordinator will contact you and will begin the process of matching your skills and interests with our existing needs.

Both the Volunteer Application and Volunteer Guide are on the CVRAN website cvran.org. All volunteers are encouraged to read the Handbook and use it as a reference.

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS WORKING DIRECTLY WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND AFGHAN REFUGEES

Structure of Support

CVRAN's Volunteer Coordinator arranges for new volunteers who are interested in working directly with our guests to join a Support Team, assigned to each asylum seeker and Afghan refugee family or individual. These Support Teams help with the guest's particular needs such as transportation, translation, English as a second language, conversation partners, driver training, job searches, and access to legal services, medical care, and child education.

Each Support Team is led by a Team Leader who works with the Volunteer Coordinator to arrange for the help our guests require. The necessary information for a volunteer assignment will be given to volunteers by the Team Leader.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital to our work. An asylum seeker's background and reason for fleeing his or her country to seek asylum in the U.S. is confidential information and should not be shared. An Afghan refugee's background and reason for being granted protection by the U.S. government is confidential information and should not be shared.

The volunteer never asks about these reasons, and listens without comment if these circumstances are brought up by the guests. As a volunteer on a Support Team, you will be given only the details you need to fulfill your assignments by the Team Leader. Any information you may have about an asylum seeker or an Afghan refugee should not be shared with anyone unless there is a clear and specific reason relating to the guest's health and welfare. If you are in doubt about any issues, questions, or information about a guest you're working with, ask the Team Leader for clarification.

Under no circumstances should you share information about a guest out in the community or through any type of social or news media. Do not share the newcomer's country of origin unless the person is already publicly sharing that information. If pressed, you can speak broadly, giving the name of the continent the guest is from - South America, for example, or Africa.

Personal Safety

CVRAN is committed to maintaining a culture that is respectful of the rights of guests and volunteers to interact in healthy and respectful relationships. CVRAN will not tolerate exploitive, coercive, or abusive behaviors or sexual misconduct toward any guest or volunteer. If an abusive act is criminal, it will be treated as such.

CVRAN also requires that anyone who observes or has knowledge of physical, emotional, or sexual misconduct report it immediately to the Team Leader. Anyone who in good faith reports violations of this policy can be assured that CVRAN will protect their confidentiality, strictly limiting the sharing of such information to a legitimate "need to know " basis.

If you are asked by one of the people you are assisting to do something you are uncomfortable with, trust your instincts. Tell the person that you must first ask the Volunteer Coordinator.

Driving

In order to drive on behalf of CVRAN you'll need to have completed your background check, be at least 21 years old, hold a valid driver's license, and operate a vehicle that is properly insured and inspected. While driving for CVRAN, you cannot be under the influence of alcohol or any drug (including prescription drugs) that would affect your driving performance. You also cannot smoke or use headphones and you cannot carry additional passengers.

When required or requested you must always wear a mask while driving and while interacting indoors with guests or other CVRAN volunteers. Similarly, you have the right and the responsibility to ask passengers in your car as well as other occupants of an indoor space to wear masks when required or requested.

Record Keeping

It is vital to keep careful records of all financial transactions made while acting as a volunteer for CVRAN. A credit card is available for certain pre-authorized expenditures. Every transaction needs to be accounted for - listed, dated, and with an explanation of its purpose. All such information should be given to the Team Leader who will forward it to CVRAN's treasurer.

Financial Considerations

Volunteers should not give their own money to help asylum seekers or refugees. GoFundMe and similar private fundraising efforts require prior CVRAN leadership approval. Many asylum seekers and refugees have close family members in their home countries whom they are

concerned about. They may want to send funds to support them. It is our policy that volunteers should not give funds to our guests for this purpose. Self-sufficiency in every aspect, including financial self-sufficiency, is an important measure of their success in building a new life in Central Vermont.

Cultural Considerations and Trauma

Volunteers should never ask a guest for details about what they have gone through or why they are now in the U.S. It is likely that both asylum seekers and Afghan refugees have experienced substantial trauma. People process events in their own time and manner. They may choose not to remember or may want to avoid having to recount their experiences. This is their right. Our guests have come here against great odds to establish new lives, free of threats and violence. Our job as volunteers is to accept them as they present themselves, and simply to support and help them on this part of their journey.

What a guest may or may not know about life in the U.S. should not be assumed. Common areas of cultural difference between Americans and people from other cultures may include attitudes toward work and education, behavioral norms between men and women and between parents and children, concepts of racism and equal rights, and treatment of individuals who identify as LGBTQ+.

Notions of time are also different in different cultures. Punctuality as it is commonly understood in the U.S. may be quite foreign to a guest from another country. Particularly when punctuality is required. With a scheduled appointment, for example, it's best to build in extra time.

Good communication with our guests will help them understand what is expected of them and what they can count on from us. Making expectations clear in advance is helpful in avoiding misunderstanding on both sides. When you are in doubt about these expectations, consult your Team Leader.

A new English speaker may nod, seemingly understanding your every word, but miss key concepts that you think have been imparted. Check for understanding as you go. Putting key points in simple writing, keeping appointments on a simple calendar, texting reminders are all important. The majority of our guests at this time use WhatsApp for their calling and texting since it is free even to other continents, and volunteers might want to use the same when sending a message.

OTHER RESOURCES

Working with asylum seekers and Afghan refugees is a rich and rewarding experience. The resilience, persistence and faith with which they navigate the legal and personal challenges that they face is incredibly inspiring. Sometimes it can also leave us feeling unprepared, unhelpful, and drained. The trauma and dislocation our guests have experienced are largely unknown to us and overwhelming to think about.

At the end of the Volunteer Guide you'll find a resource list of books and videos that have been put together by the Community Asylum Seekers Project in Brattleboro. These resources are a good place to turn when we are feeling overwhelmed or have questions that are too big for a simple answer. We recommend becoming familiar with them prior to meeting the asylum seekers or refugees you'll be working with.

We are grateful for your conviction and readiness to help our guests as they achieve safety and independence in our Central Vermont communities. In doing so you will become part of a community of volunteers who have opened their lives to offer this special kind of support. All of us at CVRAN are thankful for your commitment and best efforts in making our community a diverse and welcoming one.

On Asylum Procedure

- CitizenPath, [How the Asylum Process Really Works](#): this article contains further information about how and where people seek asylum, and how the juridical process takes place.
- American Immigration Council, [Asylum in the United States](#): this guide contains an even broader overview of the asylum process, including how it begins, and what changes took place under the Trump Administration.
- If you are assisting in an asylum seeker's case, or want to be more informed for conversing with them about it, you may want to review this legal [guide](#) to filing for asylum pro se (without a lawyer).
- You may want to consult this [playlist of videos](#) that give information and guidance about the asylum process through USCIS.

On Refugees and Immigrants in Vermont.

USCRI.gov - <https://refugees.org/uscri-vermont/> focus on VT arrivals

AALV <https://www.aalv-vt.org> focus on long-term integration and resettlement support in Vermont

On Working with the Afghan Families

[Being Culturally and Trauma-Informed While Assisting Displaced Afghan Families | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(nctsn.org\)](#)

CORE's Afghan Backgrounder is now available in both a [web format](#) and a more [detailed PDF](#), attached. This resource provides an overview of history of Afghanistan, other details about Afghan culture, along with tips for working with Afghans around key Cultural Orientation topics, including cultural adjustment, role of resettlement agency, and rights and responsibilities. The web page also provides links to additional resources. This document was authored by Farid Saydee and Durana Saydee and reviewed by Afghan-Americans with experience in resettlement and in-depth knowledge of Afghan history and culture. Its available online here: <https://coresourceexchange.org/working-with-afghans/>

Resources on Secondary Trauma and Self-Care

- Haga, [Fighting injustice can trigger trauma — we need to learn how to process it and take healing action](#) (Waging Nonviolence)
- Check out this short [TEDx Talk](#) on vicarious trauma
- A [guide](#) to trauma for humanitarian workers
- You may also want to check out this or other resources on [“compassion fatigue”](#)

With thanks the Community Asylum Seekers Project and the Randolph Area Asylum Seekers Support for allowing us to adapt freely from their Volunteer Resource Guides.