

# Volunteer Manual

**DRAFT**

Some relevant pieces for you

Please do not distribute



Financial literacy/banking and budget	X (provided in cultural orientation)		X (can help supplement information; ☺ See <i>Appendix K</i> , pp. XXX.)
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## 9. Relationships with JFCS East Bay Newcomer Clients

Different types of relationships evolve with clients. The most intense part of the welcome group assignment is in the first few months, and then some of the clients' immediate needs begin to taper off. Volunteers may continue the relationship for months and potentially years; others taper off their contact once clients become relatively more self-sufficient. (☺ See Section 4, pp. XXX, *Resettlement - A Long and Non-Linear Process!*)

At the time volunteers begin their work with clients, clients are highly dependent on them and on others. Some clients are eager to get past this very dependent period and may be sensitive to offers of help after the point that they see themselves as self-sufficient enough. They may also need occasional breaks from volunteer visits but may not be able to express their feelings directly. (☺ See information on culturally influenced communication styles in Section 16, *Cross-Cultural Considerations*, pp XXX and in *Appendix M*, pp. XX.)

Relationships with clients can be long- or short-term:

- Some volunteer relationships with clients may become close and end up being long-term; other relationships may mainly involve practical help (from the volunteer) with minimal potential for friendship; or, the relationship may fall somewhere in the middle. *Whichever way it goes, all help and support go a long way.*
- The relationship with newcomers is not an "equal" relationship in that they are in a very dependent state and are unsettled.
- Friendship may happen, and if it does (volunteers report) that it is mutually satisfying and enriching. Friendship, however, is not the immediate goal of Welcome Group volunteering.
- If there is anything uncomfortable that arises in your relationship with the individual or family, speak directly with a JFCS East Bay staff member involved with the family.

In summary, some volunteers connect more with our agency clients than other volunteers. Rather than relying on feelings of connection as a measure of "success," look for other signs of success that have resulted from your efforts. A few examples...

- ...when your family receives its benefits
- ...when their apartment is furnished
- ...when they work out a budget
- ...when they are able to fill out forms with minimal assistance from you

## 10. Newcomers, Trauma and Volunteers' Interactions

*"You don't leave home unless home is the mouth of a shark..." (Warsan Shire)*

*"The ache for home lives in all of us...the safe place where we can go and not be questioned..." (Maya Angelou)*

Our clients are in the U.S. because of persecution or a "well-founded fear of persecution" (i.e., from the official definition of "refugee"). Depending on which group of refugees/immigrants and their particular countries of origin, they have experienced one type of threat or another and, in some cases, violence. Many of our clients have undergone trauma and they may still be experiencing lingering effects from the original trauma (i.e., PTSD or post-traumatic stress syndrome).

Be aware that some of your visits may occur on days where family members or individuals may be feeling, in general, very sad, or depressed because of the tremendous loss they have experienced and all the change that is required of them. You may arrive, ready to help, and find out that the parents did not sleep well the night before because their children were awake a lot of the night, and scared and missing (for example) the grandparents who were not able to leave the native country.

Our clients may not be able to express their feelings exactly. They may not be able to say, "I really don't feel up to visitors today" or "I really appreciate all you are doing for me, but I just need to be home with my family today." Be sensitive to the moods of the newcomers, including to the point of sensing when they may not want a visitor, even if you have a pre-arranged meeting.

### *General Guidelines*

As volunteers, you are not in a clinical role, and, therefore, it's important that you maintain boundaries around helping. If you have questions or concerns related to the behavior, reactions or mental health of a newcomer, please share concerns and observations with the Case Manager and the Volunteer Services Manager.

If you are troubled by your own ability to handle any aspect of a newcomer's behavior or communication potentially related to trauma experienced (or if you are triggered in any way), discuss with the Volunteer Manager and other members of your Welcome Group.

- *Clients' Triggers* - We cannot fully understand newcomers' experiences and don't know what may "trigger" them (or what may result in their recalling and reliving feelings they had during their traumatic experience).
- Pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal cues. Some clients will say directly, "I don't want to talk about XYZ..." Or you may observe signs of verbal or nonverbal withdrawal, such as:
  - Resistance (physically pulling or turning away)
  - Vague answers, avoidance of answers
  - Withdrawing from the conversation with the use of a cell phone (getting on the phone can be a way of disengaging without feeling uncomfortable)
- Some clients may tell you a little bit about their traumatic experiences, but then minimize those experiences, saying that they are ready to move on (i.e., they don't want to dwell on the past).

The Case Manager and/or Volunteer Manager will be able to advise as to whether additional professional help (e.g., therapists, lawyers, health care professionals) is needed. If you have concerns about newcomers' safety or any medical situation, please follow this guideline:

- Call 911 – If there are life-threatening situations or serious medical situations, take immediate action by seeing to it that the newcomer receives as immediate medical attention as possible.
- *Coping Styles*
  - People's response to trauma varies greatly from individual to individual. Some people are emotionally expressive whereas others refrain from speaking about their trauma. In western psychology, the common belief has been that people should express their emotions and talk about the trauma. However, recent psychological research suggests that individuals who choose not to "process" their trauma verbally may be just as psychologically healthy as those who do (source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191>).
  - Culturally, the above point is significant. In many group oriented cultures people tend to cope with their traumas indirectly and in collective contexts (i.e., not in one-on-one "talk therapy"). They may not speak explicitly of feelings of depression and anxiety (i.e., examples of common responses to trauma), but may prefer to spend time with groups of people (extended family, religious

communities). “Coping” may involve group activities such as singing, dancing or even group poetry reading.

- Volunteers who have been socialized within a western framework of psychology can, therefore, keep in mind cultural variations of coping. Realize that clients may draw on their own resources for healing – even if it is not apparent.
  
- *Trust Issues*
  - Remember that people who have experienced trauma have often had their trust violated. People who were supposed to care for them may have hurt them.
  
  - Some clients may have trust issues with strangers stemming from their past trauma -- or a lack of trust may be a cultural tendency to not automatically trust strangers. They may not completely understand why you want to help them. (🌀 *See Section 16, pp XXX, Cross Cultural Considerations*).
  
  - Again, try not to ask intrusive questions. It is not necessarily appropriate to “encourage” the client to talk about past experiences.
  
  - Let the clients set the pace of the relationship and recognize that trust may take longer because of the trauma they have experienced in the past.
  
- *Homesickness and Loss*
  - Homesickness is common even in the face of and tragedy experienced in the native country.
  
  - Some newcomers may have had recent losses due to war, natural or natural causes and may be in a period of bereavement; they may or may not wish to discuss. If they do share, just being present and listening is comforting.

## **11. Volunteers and Confidentiality**

Volunteers are asked to sign a confidentiality statement before working with our agency’s newcomers. We protect our clients and help them build their lives by being careful with their stories. In the case of LGBTI refugees, in their own countries, they have experienced breaches of privacy by being publicly “outed” and shamed for their sexual or gender identity.

In general, whether for LGBTI clients or others, we are committed to protecting our newcomers by not sharing stories for which we do not have permission.

- Unless clients are a danger to themselves or others, refrain from sharing stories without permission.
- Even with permission, share stories judiciously and in general terms, for example:
  - No names or identifying details
  - "I can't share details."
  - "They had to endure a lot."
- Share your responses rather than their stories
  - "I feel good helping someone who has been persecuted because of their gender, ethnic, political views."
- Handling requests from clients not to share details of their stories that may be critical to share
  - Use your judgment – who needs to know this?
  - Emphasize that volunteer Welcome Groups work together, and it is helpful for teams to share information in order to better support the client.
  - Encourage client to share – "Your Case Manager really needs to know this, so he/she can help you. Maybe we can call your Case Manager together to discuss this."

## **12. Volunteers' Expectations of Themselves, and Boundaries**

Welcoming and assisting newcomers is both gratifying and challenging. Experienced volunteers and staff assisting families, observe, all the way around, that expectations can be quite high and are sometimes unrealistic. An individual or family's needs may at times seem overwhelming; one way to manage emotions and reactions that go along with this is to develop realistic expectations of everyone involved in the resettlement process, including you, the volunteer.

- Your Welcome Group or you as an individual volunteer cannot do everything; there will be situations in which you feel unprepared and that cannot be fixed at all.
- You may, at times, feel disappointed that you and your group cannot do more.
  - **Whatever assistance you can provide is much more than if there were no welcome group at all.**

- Take care of yourself so that you can sustain your commitment; know that you are doing what you can and when you can.
- Know your boundaries; don't do anything that makes you feel unsafe. Your personal health and safety are paramount.

### 13. Expectations of JFCS East Bay, Staff and Newcomers

In this day and age, there are resettlement agencies, but this has not always been the case. *Historically, newcomers in America have had to make it on their own.* Typically, in the history of U.S. immigration, newcomers have had to “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps,” relying on their own ingenuity as well as on the help of family members or sponsors immigrant family. The immigrant story, for many, but certainly not for all, is about starting with nothing and improving lives in the new country on one's own.

- There are many ways that we can and do help; it will always seem like more can be done.
- It's helpful when volunteer and clients understand the limitations of the resettlement agency, and also understand the “bandwidth” challenges of agency staff. In general, it is safe to say that most Case and Volunteer Managers in resettlement agencies (if not all) are stretched and unable to provide **all** services to completely “resettle” a new family.
- *Specific Expectations of JFCS East Bay* – all resettlement agencies are different; some receive part of their funding from the same sources (e.g., federal funding, county), but each also has various funders, and different mandates.
  - JFCS East Bay does **not** have funding and dedicated staff to support vocational development, including job search and placement.
  - JFCS East Bay has funding to provide mental health support (some agencies do not), and health education to newcomers. JFCS East Bay is known to provide a holistic and coordinated set of services that greatly help newcomers with aspects of their initial resettlement, but it does not have the staff capacity and funding to do everything.
  - As noted earlier in this Manual, it is *not* the mandate of JFCS East Bay to find housing for the majority of newcomer families; there is neither specific funding nor dedicated staff to oversee this most challenging aspect of resettlement.
  - Our agency staff does, however, provide support to potential housing hosts and “tie family” members for this task.



- *Expectations of JFCS East Bay Case Managers* - We currently have five refugee resettlement Case Managers, each of whom carries a very large case load. Case Managers are not social workers, and, therefore, cannot solve some the problems that newcomers are facing (but will know when and how to refer clients to others). Some of the Case Managers were refugees themselves many years ago. They have tremendous empathy for our clients and intensive experience helping with the resettlement process, but they are not trained to do the work of a social worker.
- *Expectations of JFCS East Bay Volunteer Services Manager/Department* – Our Volunteer Services Department consists of the Volunteer Services Manager, Kathryn Winogura, and the Volunteer Services assistant, Nora Morton. Nora is primarily in charge of handling all initial volunteer inquiries, volunteer applications and background checks, database management and tracking, in-kind donations, community service projects as well as community collection drives. (She also coordinates our weekly Shabbat meal delivery program and all volunteer placements for our older adult clients.)
- Kathryn is responsible for the following: communicates regularly with volunteers, orients and places individual volunteers and welcome groups with newcomers, communicates with Welcome Group leads, fields requests for and places volunteers for a few agency departments, runs the agency's hosted housing program (for LGBTI refugee clients), does public speaking on behalf of the agency, and oversees all food delivery programs.
- *Expectations of Newcomers/Newcomer Families* - All families and individuals move at their own pace and, especially when under stress, may be slow to respond to or even resist offers of support and volunteers' suggestions that they (volunteers) feel are beneficial for clients. Volunteers may not understand clients' cultural context or lack of readiness for certain steps, and therefore may be surprised at resistance to suggestions of offers of support. (📍 See Section 10, under the sub-section, Trust Issues.)

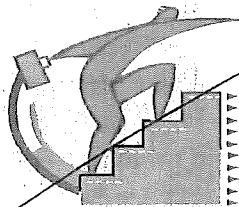
Examples of efforts by volunteers where expectations of families were not met:

- A volunteer provides some excellent suggestions for job connections in client's professional field. Client has temporary work that pays well and does not act on volunteer's suggestions. (Client does not communicate directly about his reluctance to network and does not respond to volunteers' e-mails including the contact information for job networking. Eventually, volunteer speaks with client, gently asking about his interest in professional networking, and learns the reasons for his reluctance. There are too many changes in his family's life, and he prefers status quo for a while.)

- Welcome Group volunteers observe that the school-aged children sit for hours and watch T.V. Volunteers are very concerned about this situation and work together to figure out how the children would be able to go to summer camp. After much work, volunteers are able to secure scholarships for day camps. Volunteers meet with parents and excitedly tell about what they perceived to be success. Parents do not appear to appreciate the efforts that went into securing the scholarships and indicate that the children will be staying home with the mother over the summer.
- A couple of volunteers in a Welcome Group encouraged one young newcomer (a mother) to study for her driver's license, and they offered to help her learn the material. The mother was completely resistant to the idea though the volunteers presented some strong arguments as to how a driver's license would benefit her. The mother did not offer a specific reason for resisting.
- Volunteers encouraged a mother to go to community college to start taking a few courses in her field, but there was no interest on the part of the mother.

In the examples above, volunteers made assumptions about steps they thought the newcomers should take in order to get ahead in the resettlement process. The readiness was just not there.

#### **14. Getting Started as a Welcome Group/Tips for Working Together as a Team**



A Welcome Group provides a structure allowing volunteers to sustain their energy and commitment to the work. Welcome groups work best when all team members in it share responsibilities as well as opportunities to connect with the newcomer(s).

It is also wonderful for a newcomer family (or individual) to be able to get to know several supportive people soon after their arrival!

##### *Initial Welcome Group Meeting and Potential Follow Up Meetings*

- It is highly recommended that the group meet together as a team prior to starting to work with an individual or family.

- In the case of any interpersonal issues' arising among team members, it is important to work them out and, of course, not involve the client(s) in any way. Always feel free to ask for help from Kathryn if there are group dynamics that may affect the effectiveness of the Welcome Group.

#### *Communication with the U.S. Tie(s)*

In some cases, you may never meet the U.S. tie(s) and in other cases, you will. U.S. ties may become very involved in the immediate period after a client's arrival, but then may reduce their help as they have their own family and work responsibilities. In other cases, U.S. ties choose to have ongoing involvement. In these cases, it may then be appropriate to share contact information and tasks.

#### *Communication with Housing Host*

Currently, only a small percentage of our clients are LGBTI refugees; in the past, and especially with LGBTI clients, we have worked with quite a few housing hosts. Currently, with the focus on SIVs, we rely on the U.S. tie to arrange housing. (📍 See Appendix L, Communication with Housing Hosts, pp. XXX for more detail in case that this is relevant to your situation.)

## **16. Cross-Cultural Considerations**

### *Hidden nature of culture*

***"Culture is like an iceberg. It hides more than what it reveals, and strangely enough – what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own members."***

*(Edward Hall, Anthropologist; Author of Beyond Culture and The Hidden Dimension)*

***"Culture is communication."*** (Edward Hall)

People from two cultures may not be aware of where differences lie, particularly when those differences are subtle or hidden. Until individuals have had extensive exposure to other cultural groups or have lived in another culture, they often unconsciously expect others to be like them. As a volunteer, you can contribute a great deal to clients' cross-cultural education. The more you work with them and get to know their culture, the more you may notice assumptions that they are making based on their own cultural frameworks. Gently explain differences while also showing respect for alternative cultural viewpoints.

With cultural beliefs and values, there is, in most cases, no right or wrong. However, clients need cultural knowledge (from the new culture) and skills that will help them survive and succeed in their new country.

### *Preserving One's Culture and Adapting to Another*

Newcomers do not and should not have to give up their cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, for their well-being, they will need to adapt to aspects of the new culture while still holding on (even unconsciously) to their cultural roots. One way to view adaptation is to think about the creation of a "third culture," i.e., one that is neither solely the culture of the native country nor the culture of the new country. Without clients' necessarily knowing it explicitly, this is what is happening in the process of adaptation.

### ***Afghan cross-cultural insights and information\****

This section provides brief information on a few important cultural tendencies, customs and guidelines that apply to the Afghan culture (although not all of the following is necessarily unique to the Afghan culture). As noted earlier in the Manual, the majority of our current clients are Afghan SIVs (Special Immigrant Visa holders); therefore, this section highlights aspects of Afghan culture only rather than details of other cultural groups.

- **"Afghan"/Central Asia** – We mentioned earlier in this Manual (pp. xxx) that the correct adjective for people from Afghanistan is "Afghan," and not "Afghani." "Afghani" is a currency in Afghanistan but is very common, *incorrect* usage. Another fact about identification associated with Afghan nationality/ethnicity -- Afghans are not Middle Easterners or Arabs and they do not speak Arabic. Afghanistan is not in the Middle East; it is in Central Asia (in some instances, Afghanistan is also considered to be in South Asia, but there is not a consensus on this).
- **Verbal greetings** - A common greeting for Afghans is "Asalaamu Aleikum" to which they may respond "Wa Aleikum Salaam," or just "Salaam." The Arab phrase literally means, "May peace be with you." If you feel comfortable trying out some words or phrases in a new language, this is a very warm greeting, and a culturally appropriate way to begin to establish rapport! Despite the fact that Arabic is not an official language in Afghanistan, it is used for Islamic ritual and greetings. (The two official languages in Afghanistan are Dari and Pashtu; they are written in the Arabic script.)
- **Nonverbal greetings (traditional)** - Afghan women greet each other with a hug and three kisses on alternating cheeks and may greet you (female volunteer) this way as well. Men more commonly greet each other touching alternating cheeks three times. Handshaking (same gender) is common as well. Another way people greet is by placing their hand over

their heart and nodding the head just a bit. You may observe Afghan men greeting women in this manner as it does not involve touching.

\* *Sincere appreciation to JFCS East Bay Afghan Case Managers and clients for offering their insights and cultural information on Afghan culture.*

- **Informal greetings and male/female contact** – Younger people may also hug or slap backs as an informal greeting, but not across gender. When family members become acculturated, they may eventually greet you with a hug (for example, California style!) because they have observed this in their new culture. However, when it comes to cross-gender touch, the general rule is to avoid it. Male volunteers should not extend their hand to a woman for a handshake, and should *only* shake hands with a woman if she offers it (this would be rare for her to do so at first except in the case of women who have had more Western exposure). In Afghanistan as in many parts of Asia and the Middle East, women walk hand in hand or arm in arm, and men may as well. You would not see men and women displaying this type of affection in public.
- Again, with respect to those with a more traditional orientation -- if an Afghan woman has an appointment and needs a ride, a male volunteer should generally not take her (she may gently refuse). Her husband may indicate that if he is with her, it is OK for a male volunteer to drive.

**Initiating Conversation**– In traditional households, male volunteers should refrain from initiating conversation with women early on in the relationship. If you are male, it is better to begin by talking to the man while a female volunteer initiates conversation with the woman. This dynamic is likely to change as the family becomes more acculturated and develops a more trusting relationship with members of the volunteer group. Keep in mind that in traditional Afghanistan, women may have only known male family members, and may not have had free interaction with any other male. Again, this guideline will not apply to all Afghan newcomers. Age, exposure to westerners, professional life, and degree of religiosity all play a part in any one individual's cultural orientation and individuals preferences.

- **Interaction, including Male/Female Dynamics** - Volunteers needs to be conscious of their initial interactions with clients. Some husbands from traditional backgrounds may, at first, be protective of their wives and children. Many of the women have not had much exposure to men outside their families or to Western cultural norms of interaction. Initially, some men be worried about the exposure of Western norms (or those that are perceived to be); this may affect the degree of openness in conversations. Keep in mind and respect the fact that clients have come from a more conservative and traditional society than that of the U.S. (and Bay Area culture). Clients don't yet know about American ways or at least what they perceive to be American lifestyles. There is always a tendency to stereotype other cultural groups (we all do it!). Work on trying to find

common ground. We often discover across cultures that there is more in common than we think with people whom we initially see as very different.

- **Privacy** – Eastern cultures, including Central Asian, have unspoken or tacit rules about personal sharing, and generally people have a preference for opening up slowly as relationships develop. In the Afghan culture, social etiquette calls for not revealing personal information early on in relationships. That said, some sharing about yourself can help break the ice and can contribute to establishing rapport (sometimes just sharing our common “humanness” is the way to go!). If your clients do not share much personal information, it does not mean that they are disengaged or uninterested. They may be unsure about how much to share with you and how much to ask you.
- **Topics of Conversation** - With respect to topics of conversation, until you establish trust with *some* clients in your volunteering role, it is a good idea not to ask questions about religion right away. Some clients may view this with suspicion although individuals differ in their comfort levels about such topics. (In the U.S., many people are private about their religion, and, for some, it may also be a taboo topic.) After a relationship is on solid grounds, many people tend to open up. You may have to work a bit at conversations with new arrivals. Talk about family, siblings, parents and grandparents, clients’ cities or region in Afghanistan, their culture, including music, art, and poetry. Share information about your own family and place of origin. Discuss U.S./Afghan cultural contrasts or similarities as you are both discovering them.

Keep in mind that some clients may not want to share personal details about family in Afghanistan as they may feel that it could endanger family members. In many cases, individuals have been separated from family members and may find this topic very difficult to discuss. In other cases, clients may open up to you. There is always individual variation with respect to the degree to which people open up.

- **Pride in Afghan Culture**– Afghans are very proud of their culture and have a strong sense of cultural identity. They are proud of literary, musical and artistic achievements and contributions to the world (e.g., the poetry of Rumi). Show an interest in such aspects of clients’ cultures. They will appreciate it as well as your support of their efforts to preserve their culture. Even though we know that adapting to a new culture is a balancing act (i.e., the need to incorporate a new identity, meshing the new and the old), we want clients to know that volunteers appreciate that cultural identity is strong and something positive.
- **As a Guest in an Afghan home** - When you enter an Afghan home, you should remove your shoes and be careful not to step on a prayer mat if you see one. Ask if you are not sure – the prayer mat always needs to remain clean.

Traditionally in Afghanistan, Afghans sit on cushions (“toshak”) on the floor to eat. This custom is changing with modern times, but still takes place. Upon arrival, immigrant

families may not have furniture and will eat on the floor. If you are eating or sitting with clients, wait to let them tell you where they want you to sit.

- **Cultural value of hospitality in the home** - Hospitality plays a very important role in Afghan culture as it does in other parts of the world such as South Asia and the Middle East. Afghan hospitality is very warm and generous; as a volunteer, you may have the experience of being offered multiple cups of tea or your host/hostess may simply continue to refill your cup or refill your plate. It is important to accept gestures of hospitality, but it is also acceptable for you to let clients know when you are really full. Thank clients for food and tea and let them know how much you have enjoyed it to reciprocate the warmth. (It is even sometimes a challenge for Afghans to turn down hospitality with other Afghans!) It is acceptable to push away your plate just a little bit. This nonverbal signal will let your clients (host/hostess) know that you have had enough. Sometimes Afghans will turn their tea cup over on the saucer to indicate that they have had enough. Just don't do these actions too soon!

As in some other cultures such as India, there is a preference for eating with one's hands. This, too, is changing, but you may observe it. On the other hand, many Afghans use knives and forks regularly and/or they may not feel comfortable eating with their hands in front of volunteers.

- **Compliments** – In cross-cultural literature, you can find references to the frequency with which Americans pay each other compliments, and this is particularly true of American women. In traditional Afghan culture, as in some other cultures, the receiver of a compliment has a tendency to offer the object being complimented to the individual who gives it. This can happen if you compliment a piece of jewelry, for example, or certain other items you see in the home. If you forget about this custom or decide to give a compliment – and if you are offered an item – you can say something like, “Oh no, thank you, it looks so beautiful on you,” or “It (the item) really goes well in your home!”
- **Religion/Halal/Ramadan** – Volunteers will not automatically know the degree to which clients adhere to religious customs and practices. “Halal” is one example and refers to the way that food is prepared (especially meat, and the way an animal is killed), and to certain restrictions on meat (specifically pork or anything made from pork). There is a lot of overlap between “halal” and “kosher,” but there are differences as well. If you ever bring food to clients, it is best *not* to bring meat since the clients may eat only “halal.” Alcohol is also prohibited by Islam. The large majority of women do not drink alcohol and try to eat Halal.

Expressing holiday greetings, and especially those for the holiday of Ramadan, is a positive gesture. Ramadan is the most sacred time of the year for Muslims and is observed for one full month. An appropriate greeting is, “Ramadan Mubarak.” This Arabic phrase roughly translates to Happy Ramadan and is the greeting that is used in Afghanistan. Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset and celebrate the end of the fast with “Eid al Fitr,” the feast on

the final day of the holiday. Ramadan does not fall on the same day every year because the Islamic holiday cycle is based on a lunar calendar. Celebration of Ramadan will no doubt be different for immigrants and refugees who have had to leave their communities, and in some cases, large extended families. That said, the holiday is as important for Muslims as Christmas is to Christians and Passover is to Jews, thus, it is good to acknowledge it.

- **Dress/Attire** - Female volunteers should always dress modestly to respect the norms of Afghan women. It is advisable not to wear shorts, short skirts, tight pants, and tight-fitting, revealing tops. Afghan women in Afghanistan wear loose head scarves and loose-fitting clothes. Only in very traditional or conservative families do women wear the full body covering, the "burka." Men generally wear modern clothes.
- **Family** - A great deal of respect and deference are shown towards elders. This is manifested in multiple ways. Older people expect to be respected and valued. Showing this respect means *not* refuting anything that elders say. Younger people make an effort not to hurt older people's feelings by refraining from contradicting them. Many volunteers are older than the clients. It can be expected that most younger people will not disagree with older volunteers and may hesitate to express themselves directly.  
(☛ For more information, see *Appendix M, More about "High and Low Context" Communication, pp XXX.*)

Many immigrant families from all backgrounds are very isolated when they come to the U.S., and with new stresses, the dynamics of the family often change. Whereas they may have been accustomed to living with their larger extended family, our clients are now perhaps only the mother, father and children. Additionally, there are structural and power changes when people immigrate whether by choice or whether or they are forced to. The adult who speaks English better may get ahead faster than the other spouse. With Afghans, it is generally the men who has the better grasp of English since most were translators for American military in Afghanistan. This may also mean that the man "speaks for" the woman who, consequently, requires more attention in order to develop her English.

- **Time and Appointments** – Concepts and perceptions of time differ greatly across cultures. In Afghanistan, time is seen as more fluid rather than fixed. Western concepts of time and, in particular, U.S. time management calls for tight scheduling of appointments and a sensitivity to the schedules of others. For example, a doctor's appointment takes place at a certain time, and patients know that they need to be efficient during their short times with doctors. In certain parts of Afghanistan, one does not make an appointment to see a doctor or go to a clinic. Some clients will need help with time planning when it comes to appointments (i.e., the need to arrive early, allow extra time for traffic and so on). They will need to learn that tardiness to an appointment will likely result on losing their time slot.



- **Politeness vs Efficiency/Task Orientation** – Many cultures can be placed on a continuum of “relationship” versus “task orientation.” (Many are a blend of both; context also determines this aspect of style.) In relationship-oriented cultures such as Afghanistan, it is considered polite to avoid getting right down to business, whether verbally -- in face-to-face conversation, or in writing.

A task-oriented e-mail would look like this. What’s important to the writer is in this e-mail is efficiency:

*I will pick you up at 3:30 PM tomorrow as we discussed.*

An e-mail reflecting more of a relationship-orientation would look like this:

*Hi Fauzia.*

*Good morning! I hope you and your family are doing well. I wanted to confirm our pick-up time tomorrow. We discussed 3 pm. Is that still good for you?*

*I look forward to seeing you!  
Deena*

Afghans tend to communicate with a great deal of politeness and the second e-mail reflects more politeness. Afghans will definitely appreciate a few minutes of polite conversation or small talk (even if they are not used to it in English) before you get down to business. This style or approach toward tasks is very customary in Afghanistan, and, more broadly in many cultures around the world.

Sometimes it is the individual who differs in styles with respect to communicating “efficiently,” and it may not be cultural. However, the potential for cultural misperception exists...when an overly task oriented person communicates with someone whose norms of politeness call for warm interaction before task, there can be cross-cultural misunderstanding.

- **Verbal communication style differences** - The following information on communication is not unique to Afghan culture. Afghan culture is one of many cultures favoring “higher context communication” in more formal settings and in communication with older people or those seen as of a higher status.

(📍 For more information, see *Appendix M, More about “High and Low Context” Communication, pp XXX.*)

*Higher Context Communication Tendencies:*

- “Yes” means “I’m listening;” there is a tendency to avoid saying no directly.
- There can be difficulty answering yes/no and either/or questions.
- Direct communication is challenging. A “No” may simply be silence, or an e-mail or phone call not returned.
- There is a desire to maintain harmony and avoid disagreement and conflict, particularly with people who are older than you.
- There is concern about maintaining face (one’s own and others’ face).
- There is a preference for getting to the point slowly and/or indirectly.
- There is an appearance of “beating around the bush” (i.e., this is a low-context communicator’s perception and filter of the higher-context style); in high-context communication, beating around the bush is seen as a polite style of communication and the “right” way to communicate

(In contrast, mainstream U.S. culture exhibits “lower-context communication” tendencies: For example: “Yes” equals “yes” and “no” equals “no.” There is ease with direct communication and responding directly to conflict. There is a belief that “the truth” is more important than issues of “face.” There is a preference for getting right to the point; “beating around the bush” is seen as negative.)

- **Cultural views of volunteering/helping in crisis situations** – In Afghanistan, people are supported by communities and often large extended families. It is *not* usual for strangers to provide intensive help and support to people who are not part of their families.

Volunteers are giving from their hearts, and clients know this. At the same time, it can be overwhelming for people new to the country to be assisted by strangers. When people arrive, they are fatigued. If there is a language barrier, it is an effort to communicate and particularly in the midst of crises. Sometimes, when crises arise, clients are sensitive about offers from volunteers. Culturally, Afghan culture is a culture of reciprocation. As a volunteer, you are giving all the time, and clients are not yet in a position to reciprocate. Your job as a volunteer is, indeed, to help. However, there needs also to be sensitivity to “over-helping,” which includes the ability to *sense* when to give and when to notice that clients may be overwhelmed and when they simply need privacy.

Clients may not feel that they can explicitly refuse an offer, but all they may want is to be left on their own and also communicate with their Case Manager in their native

language. Everyone has different ways of dealing with shock and trauma; sometimes clients need "breathing space" and the ability to work things out on their own. Always check with the Case Manager/Volunteer Manager when challenging situations or crises arise to get a sense of how, if at all, you should or can help. Check in with the Case Manager to make sure your offers of help are not overwhelming. (Also, be aware -- though clients may not have communicated this to you -- that staff members may already be working on the resolution to a challenging situation or crisis. You may not be aware of the steps that the Case Manager has already taken because clients are not updating you. This is an important aspect of partnering with Case Managers.

### **17. JFCS East Bay Clients and Intra-Group Diversity**

Understanding basic cultural generalizations such as those outlined in the above section is valuable as these will help you prepare, in general, for interacting with people from different backgrounds. However, the tremendous diversity that exists within national and ethnic groups will also equally help you "see" and understand the individual(s) with whom you are assisting.

- Recognition of the diversity within each national and ethnic group individual personalities is as valuable as understanding cultural generalizations about similarities.
- Keeping in mind this diversity will help to limit any preconceived notions you may have.

Let's look at the huge amount of diversity within the Afghan culture, as only one example (huge diversity exists in many cultures, and Afghan illustrates this concept well). Afghanistan is a highly divided society, which has been involved in civil war for almost 40 years. There are many class, language, educational, tribal, regional, vocational, professional and family divisions not unlike those in the U.S., and possibly even more pronounced. These divisions can lead to intra-group competition among Afghan resettlement clients who will not necessarily all get along or feel that they have things in common with each other.

(As an aside, this information about social divisions in Afghan society brings up back to a point made in the Section entitled, How Welcome Groups Help (☺ See Section 7, pp. XXX.)

Networking and developing friendships within the Afghan community is best left to the clients themselves.)

If you think about diversity within your own cultural, racial, national and/or ethnic group, you'll find unique characteristics among people you know associated with many different attributes, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Mental and physical abilities/characteristics
- Sexual orientation
- Personality types

- Communication styles
- Education backgrounds
- Family status (e.g., single, married, extended family structure)
- Military experience
- Professions; work experiences; income levels
- Religion; spiritual orientation`
- First language; second language ability
- Geographic location of origin

The layers of diversity that distinguish one individual from the next are applicable in all cultures even if these differences are not explicit or visible.



*“I am a human being;  
nothing human can be  
foreign to me.”*

*Maya Angelou*

### **18. English Language Considerations**

Every first-generation immigrant and refugee from non-English speaking countries struggles with English language acquisition. Our Afghan clients are exceptions. Many of the husbands or men, in particular, were translators in Afghanistan for the U.S. military. Thus, they have a great advantage over other newcomers who never used English in their professional or vocational lives. Nevertheless, other family members (e.g., wives) may be struggling with English; your patience and encouragement in this arena is a very important gift that you can give them as a volunteer.

#### *Silence and A Slow Pace*

When an individual is a limited speaker of English, he or she translates mentally from the native language to English. Theoretically, it can take twice as long for a non-native speaker to produce