



**JEWISH FAMILY &
COMMUNITY SERVICES**
EAST BAY

Volunteering with LGBTQ+ Clients

JFCS East Bay is heartened by your interest in supporting newly arrived LGBTQ+ clients. As a volunteer with these clients, you will help our resettlement staff by providing rides to medical appointments, delivering important documents, being a friend, and more.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

As anti-queer and anti-trans sentiments rise, we are seeing an increase in LGBTQ+ refugees from around the world. These refugees face many challenges when resettling in the US. They are fleeing from violence committed not only by state actors but sometimes also by family members, friends, neighbors, and community members as well. It is often single clients that resettle, as opposed to a family. They typically lack critical support networks because they are outcast from their ethnic group or religious group in the US. Additionally, not all countries conceptualize sexuality and gender in the same way. When clients settle in the US, they may not feel comfortable being “out” or identifying with certain terms. Therefore, local LGBTQ+ communities may feel foreign or overwhelming. As a whole, LGBTQ+ refugees usually have compounding trauma and face significant isolation when resettling. However, with JFCS East Bay’s comprehensive services and your volunteer help, we aim to make their transition to a new life here as smooth and supported as possible.

Gender and Sexuality Basics:

Sexual orientation refers to one’s emotional and sexual attraction to others or intimate relations with others (for example, gay, lesbian, bisexual). Gender identity refers to one’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of their gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth (for example, transgender, gender fluid, nonbinary, intersex).

Pronouns are words we use in everyday language to refer to ourselves or others. Some examples of pronouns are: she/her, he/him, they/them. Some clients may use ‘they/them’ as personal pronouns. ‘They’ is considered a gender-neutral pronoun, compared to pronouns like ‘he/him’ or ‘she/her’ which are generally perceived as gendered terms. Additionally, some clients may use multiple pronouns, like ‘she/her’ and ‘they/them’. If this is the case, you can use either set of pronouns to refer to the client.

Example usage of they/them pronoun: “Jac needs help filling out their medical paperwork. Could we please get a translator to help them with this task?”

VOLUNTEERING GUIDELINES

Respecting Identity and Privacy

We understand that you’re excited to work with LGBTQ+ clients and may want to share your personal stories with them. However, clients might be quite private and may not be ready for these kinds of conversations. In fact, you will likely encounter clients who will never disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to you. Please do not ask clients directly about their gender identity or

sexual orientation. Additionally, do not make assumptions based on how a client presents themselves or their relationship status. We encourage you to introduce yourself and your pronouns to the client when you first meet but let them offer their pronouns if they wish to. Refer to our email or phone communications with you regarding what pronouns a client uses, what they identify as, and any other pertinent details. Please trust that even if you're not talking directly about LGBTQ+ topics, working on an LGBTQ+ related issue, or you are doing a small task, it's incredibly meaningful for the client.

Do not assume that a client is "out" to housemates, friends, or other people in their life. If you find yourself interacting with any of these people (for example, delivering items to a client's home), refrain from mentioning sensitive details and use the least amount of information necessary to accomplish the task. Let the client direct how much information they want to disclose.

Clients are often processing trauma while trying to adjust to life in a new country. Please be patient and let them lead the conversation. Do not ask them why they came to the US unless they bring it up. Before asking personal questions, first ask yourself if the question is necessary for the task you are helping them with or if you are asking it out of your own curiosity.

Specific Scenarios

If you are assisting a client at an appointment, there may be a situation where a client's name doesn't match their legal documents or medical records. You can say, "Is it possible that your chart has a different name listed?" or "What is the name that's printed on your legal documentation?" Do not ask what their "real" name is – this suggests that you don't consider their preferred name as real. Additionally, if a client is uncomfortable sharing their legal name, they can give their documentation directly to the medical professional, who can look them up in the system without having to refer to the client by the inappropriate name.

If a client is worried about revealing their sexuality or gender identity to a medical professional, you can remind them that doctors are required by law to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, they have the right to request being called a different name at the appointment.

If a client needs to use a restroom, let them decide which restroom to use but note that they will likely feel most comfortable using single occupancy restrooms. They may need help finding a single occupancy restroom, as they are not always as accessible as gendered restrooms.

Maintaining Boundaries

JFCS East Bay's staff are trained to provide long-term support for our clients, while our volunteers are invaluable for help with specific, one-time tasks. Accordingly, please keep relationships with clients professional at all times – no romantic relationships or ongoing emotional support. It is not acceptable to push a client to come out or show pride about their identity. Conversely, please notify JFCS East Bay staff if a client is not maintaining boundaries, for example if a client continues to ask for assistance outside of the original volunteer task.

Have additional questions? Please contact us at volunteers@jfcs-eastbay.org.