

Developing literacy with refugees

As part of your application, you will have thought through the educational support that you will be offering to a resettled family. For children and young people, this will be via the school registration process in your area and for adults, this will be via the provision of ESOL classes and informal opportunities to learn English. Some Groups have told us that it has come as a surprise when they have found some adults in the family are illiterate in their own language. This resource outlines steps that you can take to support those who arrive and have a lack of basic literacy skills.

Remember that illiteracy may be something that is difficult to address or for individuals to speak about and should be dealt with sensitively. Adults who have basic or no literacy may not see the benefits of learning to read and write English initially, as they have already been coping without these skills for so long.

How will we find out the level of literacy in the family we will support?

Once you have had your application approved and when a refugee family is allocated to your Group, you will receive their [Resettlement Referral Form \(RRF\)](#) via the [Moveit](#) portal. The RRF will give you many important details about the family including each family member's level of education, the languages they speak, and their level of literacy in each of these languages.

Below is an example of some of the information you will receive about each of the family members. Remember that you can always ask the Home Office to find out further information on the details on the RRF, which they will seek to do.

Education:	3 years (or Grade 3)
Occupation/Skill:	Car, taxi and van drivers
Languages:	Arabic, Standard (Speak-Easily; Understand-Easily; Write-Not easily; Read-Not easily)

You may find that some of the family members allocated to your Group are not literate or have low literacy in their own language, which can affect your plans for communication and the ESOL tuition you've sourced. Although this poses a new challenge, there are many creative ways to ensure that the refugees you support are empowered to access the resources they need to learn and integrate into their new environment.

Active learning opportunities

Regardless of literacy level, many people are active learners and learn best from doing rather than reading. Consider the format of your [Welcome Pack](#), and how the refugees you support will get the most out of the information you've included. Although it's

important to have this information written down, consider different ways of helping them absorb this information. You can use different visual aids like in the [Fire Safety resource](#) to demonstrate important information such as putting a big red X over the bleach bottles under the sink. You could even make a video detailing the local area and how to use different amenities around the house.

Preparing your Welcome Pack

Your Group will have spent a lot of time preparing the [Welcome Pack](#) you will provide to the family on arrival, and the likelihood is that there will be a large variety of written resources in here. If you find that you are welcoming a family who cannot read or write in their own language, you will need to rethink how you provide this. Think about providing photo guides to who your Group are and a clear calendar when things are happening (benefits appointments etc), think about pre-programming phone numbers into any handsets you are providing. Remember that you can use videos or voice memos for the family to watch or listen to.

Exploring the local area

Your Welcome Pack will contain different information about where to buy food, which bus routes to take and how to pay for bus fare, but nothing will prepare the refugees you support for becoming acquainted with their local environment as much as getting out in the neighbourhood and navigating local streets and public transportation systems.

For example, the first time you go to the Jobcentre on a bus with the resettled family, show them which route to take, the number or letter of the bus, help them pay the fare or use a pre-pay card or pass and point out important landmarks that will show them where the route goes in relation to their home. The next time you take the bus with them, let them choose the bus, pay the fare and ask them about where they are in relation to different landmarks, they are familiar with. Knowing you are there will enable them to feel supported but carry out the journey themselves; you'll feel good knowing they know how to do things too!

Learning about currency

When the refugees you support arrive, they may be unfamiliar with the European numeric system, they will need to rely on recognising notes and coins based on physical attributes. Some Groups have found it helpful when providing each family member with the initial cash payment of £200 on arrival, to give them this money in all different denominations of notes and coins. When you explore different food shopping options in the area, help the family to pay using these different denominations. Other Groups have found it helpful to create a chart with pictures of British money from smallest to greatest value that the family members can keep in their wallets. Think through how currency is referred to in the UK too; how often do you say 'fiver' instead of £5? You could consider building some of colloquial terms into your informal learning opportunities.

Rethinking communication

When making plans with the family they support, many Groups ask interpreters to send messages to communicate where to meet, when to be ready or what they need to bring to an appointment. If the family members cannot read or write in their own language, you can easily call the family, but they will not be able to reference back to what was said. Instead, consider using Whatsapp or your mobile to send voice messages to the family members. This way, they can listen to the information multiple times if necessary. The same message in Arabic followed by the information in English can also be a great way to incorporate informal English practice into everyday activities.

Preparing for ESOL tuition

The ESOL lessons you are providing may be delivered by someone who has never worked with pupils with no or basic literacy before. Once you are aware that the refugees you will welcome cannot read or write, get in touch with your planned ESOL provider to ensure that they are ready for this challenge. Below are some insights from Groups who have supported refugees with low to no literacy:

- Picture-based resources are an essential part of learning. Pictures work as a starting point for oral work then moving to reading or writing.
- The Groups who have supported resettled adults who are illiterate have shared with us that the learner having the motivation to learn and a purpose for this in place is key to success. Think about how your support to help refugees achieve their ambitions can feed into this.
- Learning to write needs a lot of practice and is something which will take some learners a long time to master.
- Be prepared for frustration from the adult learners about how long it is taking them to make progress - especially when their children may pick up language skills more quickly. Repetition and practice is key for adult learners.
- Learners with low literacy may not have had much schooling and so learning in a classroom setting might feel strange or intimidating, discuss with the adult learners about how this is working for them.

Useful Resources

- Tarjimly – an app designed for refugees, linking them with a network of multilingual volunteers – can speak directly to someone who is available or send voice messages. You will need to have the app downloaded on a smart phone.
- British Council Blog on teaching ESOL to those with basic literacy
- English My Way – has developed free resources for those teaching ESOL to those with a range of literacy skills

- Some Groups have also found that the Google Translate app is useful when communicating with the resettled family, as there is an audio translate option. However, it works much better from English into Arabic than translating from Arabic to English, which can be frustrating for the refugees so this shouldn't be relied upon for crucial information.

Don't forget that Reset are able to provide [advice and support](#) to you throughout your Community Sponsorship journey.