



# WELCOME HOUSE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUNICIPALITIES  
ON HOW TO ESTABLISH A WELCOME  
HOUSE FOR REFUGEES, VOLUNTEERS AND  
CIVIL SOCIETY

### **Contributors:**

The Tuborg Foundation

City of Copenhagen, Employment and Integration Administration, Refugees, volunteers and staff at the Welcome House in the City of Copenhagen

IS IT A BIRD

### **We would like to thank the following:**

Refugees, volunteers and staff at the Welcome House

Copenhagen January 2018



---

# CONTENT

---

<b>Preface and purpose</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Target group</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations for actors and division of responsibilities</b>	<b>7</b>
- Permanent staff at Welcome House	7
- Volunteers	8
- Other actors	8
<b>Recommendations for start-up and operation</b>	<b>10</b>
- Recruitment and retention of volunteers	10
- Recognition and motivation	12
- The Welcome House users	12
<b>Recommendations for communication</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Recommendations for activities</b>	<b>16</b>
- The interior	16
<b>Summary</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Check-list</b>	<b>18</b>

---

# PREFACE AND PURPOSE

---

## Denmark's first Welcome House opens in Copenhagen

In 2016, the City of Copenhagen ceased to be a so-called 0-quota municipality and began receiving refugees screened by the Danish Immigration Service. The municipality decided to accommodate all newly arrived refugees in temporary housing in Valby until they could be offered permanent accommodation

At the same time, the municipality decided to establish a Welcome House on the ground floor of the temporary accommodation building.

Getting properly settled and becoming part of a new society requires more than a safe and adequate physical environment. Social relationships are essential to successful integration.

That is exactly what a Welcome House can help ensure. An informal and cosy setting offers a safe and well organised platform from where refugees can meet other Danes, socialise and learn what living in Denmark entails.

The Welcome House fosters relationships between newly arrived refugees and the local community through communal dinners, sewing workshops, Danish tutoring, job cafés, yoga classes, children's theatre, group excursions and much, much more.

At the same time, the house builds bridges between refugees and the municipality through activities such as job search assistance, presentations about the possibilities of family reunification, and introductions to the use of NemID, Digital Post and the tax rate and deduction card (skattekort).

The Welcome House, as it is officially called, opened in May 2016. Today, it is a unique meeting place with approximately 150 active volunteers and civil society organisations that all contribute to arrange a constant stream of activities and events, while also helping the municipality's refugees start off on the right foot in their new lives in Copenhagen.

## Purpose

The purpose of this booklet is to show how a Welcome House can be established and operated.

In it, we provide a number of general guidelines and recommendations that can hopefully help and inspire other municipalities. However, we do not take into account issues of a logistical, financial, legal or political nature.

---

*"I hope and believe that Copenhagen will serve as a role model for how modern societies receive refugees in a way that is both empathic and gives refugees the best possible opportunities to become part of the city in terms of work, education and life in the city in general"*

---

## Mia Nyegaard

Employment and Integration Mayor

---

# TARGET GROUP

---

## A welcome house is intended for newly arrived refugees and their family members who come to Denmark through family reunification

Being a newly-arrived refugee can be challenging in many respects. The refugees have to build a new life in a foreign country and might feel isolated from the rest of society. They may also find it challenging to understand and navigate within a foreign system and worry about whether permanent accommodation can be obtained.

In addition are the requirements to attend Danish lessons and finding employment. There are also some who, at the same time, are applying for family reunification, and most of them only have limited proficiency in Danish. The primary purpose of a Welcome House is to give refugees a sorely needed break from everyday life

and to serve as a breathing space, where it is possible to come and go and participate to the extent possible. Meeting other refugees, the volunteers, and municipal staff can nonetheless also help the refugees understand and solve many practical issues, improve their Danish skills and gain a better understanding of Danish culture.

A Welcome House is primarily aimed at newly arrived refugees. That said, however, refugees who have lived in Denmark for a long time are also welcome. The visitors to the house accordingly have different levels of knowledge about Denmark and differing language proficiencies. Their experiences and educational backgrounds also vary, and many of the visitors are children.



---

# LOCATION

---

Separated from or an extension of temporary accommodation?

If a municipality has a single location where it accommodates refugees, a Welcome House could be placed either in extension of that location or in a separate location. This can result in two very different dynamics.

### **Placed together with temporary accommodation:**

- Provides better opportunities for the refugees to take ownership of their temporary accommodation
- Makes the refugees' time in the temporary accommodation easier to cope with

- Creates an opportunity for a synergy effect between the staff in the temporary accommodation and the Welcome House

### **Two different locations:**

- Increases the incentive for refugees to travel more extensively throughout the city/municipality
- Reduces the risk of transferring conflicts from the refugees' temporary housing to the Welcome House



*At the Welcome House in Copenhagen, visitors can participate in activities such as bicycling, sewing and painting workshops, board game events, IT training, Danish lessons, establishing vegetable gardens and baking cakes.*

---

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTORS AND DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

---

The house becomes a meeting point for a wide range of actors, which is why roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined

The actors in the Welcome House are crucial to its success. For the refugees it is essential to build networks in Denmark, which is a process that the volunteers and staff at the Welcome House should facilitate.

In addition, the staff should establish partnerships with the local area and associations with a view to organise events and activities that can benefit the refugees. It is important to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each actor in order to establish uniform procedures and minimise stress and confusion for both volunteers and refugees at the Welcome House.

## **PERMANENT STAFF AT THE WELCOME HOUSE**

### **Duties that should be handled by permanent staff:**

#### **Daily management**

The day-to-day management of the house and external communication are both important tasks. We therefore recommend hiring a permanent employee who is responsible for the overall management of the house and staff, and therefore able to maintain an overview of what goes on.

#### **Volunteer coordination**

Recruitment of volunteers and maintaining their engagement are also important tasks. This includes the day-

to-day internal communication as well as organising meetings for volunteers and continuously ensuring that the volunteers are happy with their roles. This is an essential aspect in building a strong volunteer collective that remains committed and takes responsibility over a long period.

This responsibility can be assigned to a volunteer coordinator who could also be responsible for establishing partnerships with civil society organisations and engaging the local community

#### **Hosts**

In order to ensure the best possible conditions for both refugees and volunteers, it is beneficial to have hosts manning the Welcome House during opening hours. These could be part-time staff or volunteers.

The hosts are responsible for opening and closing the house, supporting activities, supporting volunteers and refugees in making use of the house, and introducing new volunteers and other guests to the house. There are obvious advantages to the hosts and volunteer coordinator working closely together. Whereas the hosts are responsible for the daily interaction with volunteers and for supporting the activities, the volunteer coordinator has the overall responsibility for the volunteers. It is a benefit to recruit hosts with specific skills in areas such as languages, teaching or integration.

## Interpreters

In a Welcome House, the refugees speak many different languages, and their ability to speak Danish is often quite limited. It is therefore worth considering whether there is a need for interpreters in order to ensure clear communication between all the actors. You could either hire interpreters for specific events or make use of bilingual volunteers.

## VOLUNTEERS

### A Welcome House should be open to different types of volunteers with varying levels of responsibility

It is essential to have a strong core of volunteers with a long-term commitment and who show up regularly, as this contributes to build a sense of community and ensures stability and familiarity for the refugees. That is why it is a good idea to recruit a stable team of volunteers who are representative of the Danish population and whom the refugees can relate to - e.g. young, old, men and women.

### Coordinators

Ideally, every activity at the Welcome House is attached to a project coordinator who has the overall responsibility for it.

The coordinator determines the structure and content of the activity and plans a weekly schedule of activities with the other volunteers. The coordinator is also responsible for maintaining the volunteer group's record of contact details. In the day-to-day operation of the Welcome House, the coordinator should discuss the refugees' needs with the hosts.

### Team volunteers

Instead of being attached to a specific activity, some volunteers could be involved in the operation of the Welcome House. Teams of volunteers responsible for handling specific areas such as communication and PR could work together with the general manager and volunteer coordinator.

### Activity volunteers

Volunteers who would like a regular role in the house, but not too much responsibility can sign up to be activity volunteers. Activity volunteers facilitate and help out on a specific activity

## Friends of the house

Volunteers who are not interested in facilitating activities, but who visit on a more informal and irregular basis to form close relationships with the users of the house, can become so-called 'friends of the house'. Such volunteers come to spend time with the refugees and form friendships.

Additionally, it could be helpful for volunteers to participate in some of the activities rather than always being responsible for them.

## Mix it up

The personal preferences and capacity of the volunteers vary tremendously. When recruiting, it is a good idea to consider different types of volunteers in order for you to hire some who want to be coordinators with a high level of responsibility, others who have a more flexible role and less responsibility, some who visit regularly and are responsible for few activities, etc. However, we recommend that you strive to ensure that the majority of your volunteers are people who are able to commit to the role and show up regularly, as this contributes to create stability and engagement among the refugees.

Furthermore, it is important that volunteers are recruited on the basis of their skills and willingness to handle the tasks that are important to the refugees.

## OTHER ACTORS

### In order to create a well-functioning Welcome House, it is also crucial to consider the following:

#### Local associations

One of the greatest strengths of a Welcome House is that it serves as a platform for interactions between newly arrived refugees and the local community. We therefore recommend inviting local associations to get involved in the house so they can develop relationships with the refugees and invite them to become part of society.

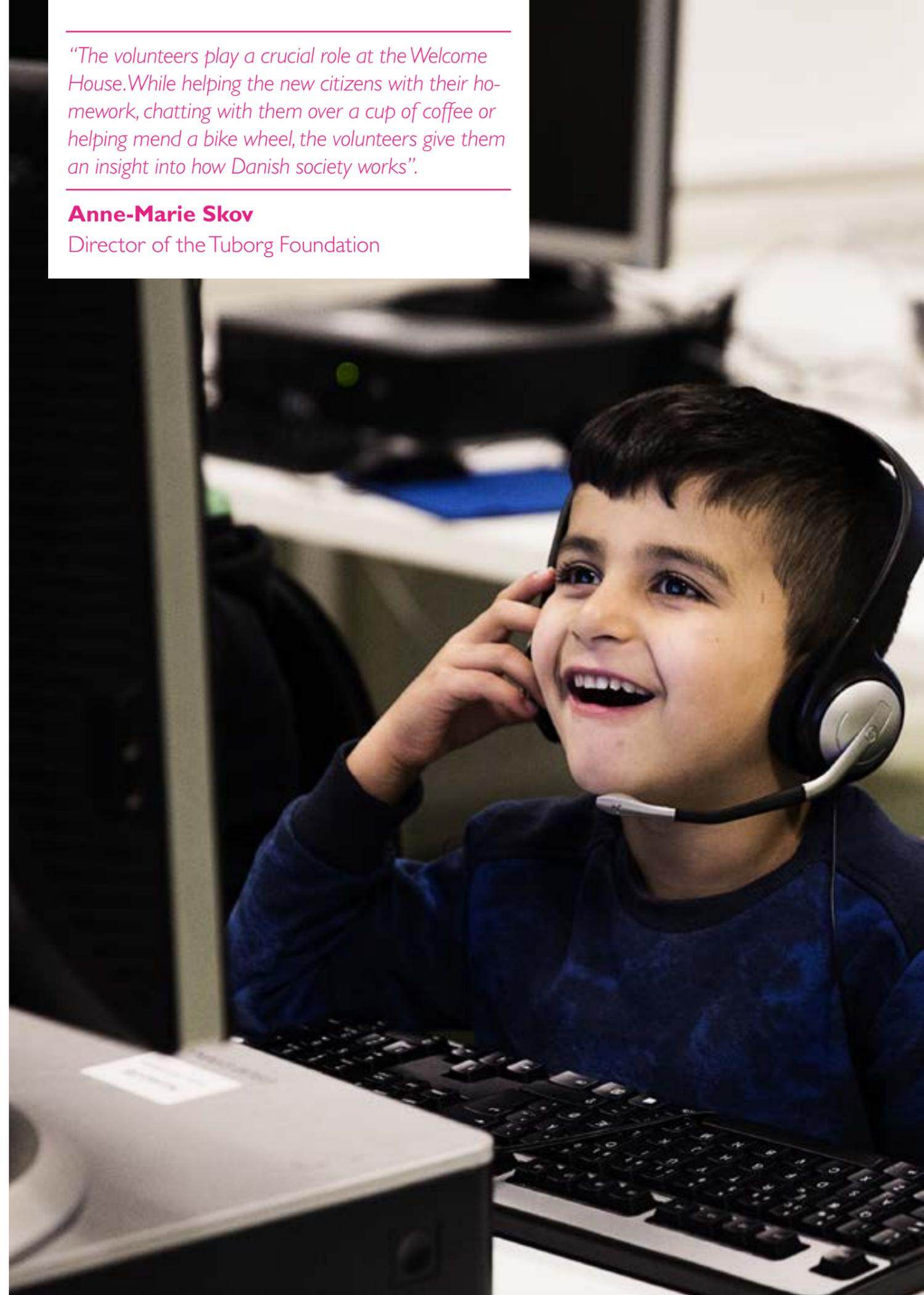
#### Organisations

In order to make a new Welcome House more effective, we recommend establishing close partnerships with organisations that work with integration. Such organisations can also be invited to get involved in the house so they can meet with the newly arrived refugees. A Welcome House can be a good physical setting for meetings between refugees and organisations.

*"The volunteers play a crucial role at the Welcome House. While helping the new citizens with their homework, chatting with them over a cup of coffee or helping mend a bike wheel, the volunteers give them an insight into how Danish society works".*

### Anne-Marie Skov

Director of the Tuborg Foundation



---

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR START-UP AND OPERATION

---

Prior to starting up a welcome house, you should ensure you have the following:

- a physical location prepared
- a team of permanent staff
- a team of volunteers
- rules and criteria for the house's activities
- completed preparations for the various activities
- spread awareness about the house
- start-up meetings with local associations and organisations in order to ensure that civil society organisations are involved from the beginning.

We recommend organising an opening event to stir enthusiasm, celebrate the opening and spread awareness of the new house. This will help attract more volunteers and increase the number of users. The Copenhagen Welcome House also hosts regular events to which neighbours and other locals are invited, such as Christmas luncheons, music events and presentations on various topics.

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS

**The volunteers and friends of the house play a crucial role in its success.**

**That is why the volunteers should receive lots of guidance in the beginning, be continuously involved and well prepared for their roles.**

### 1. Intro meeting

The volunteer coordinator should have an introductory conversation with new volunteers. The purpose of the conversation is to match expectations and intro-

duce new volunteers to the purpose and function of the house. It may be time-consuming, but at the same time it ensures that both parties are clear on what the volunteer's role entails. Volunteers should also provide a statement of no previous convictions in respect of children.

### 2. Intro evening

In order to ensure that the volunteers are sufficiently prepared for their work with refugees, new volunteers should participate in a mandatory intro evening. The purpose of this event is to introduce them to the volunteer role, the house and its visitors. They should also be informed about the various rules and procedures, including confidentiality and the duty to report. Intro evenings can be arranged when needed as new volunteers sign up - and can become a fun way to get to know some of the other volunteers.

### 3. Shadowing

In order to ensure that a new volunteer gets off to a great start at the Welcome House, he or she could shadow an experienced volunteer who can help them through their first few days.

In the start-up phase of the new Welcome House, you could divide the volunteers into two-person teams for the same purpose.

### 4. Follow-up meeting

Finally, it is important that a volunteer coordinator follows up with new volunteers 2-3 times over their first six months. These follow-up meetings are an opportunity to revisit the matching of expectations from the introductory conversation and to find out whether the volunteer is happy with the tasks he/she has been assigned.



---

*"I'm a volunteer because I believe you should help where you can, and I know how to work on bikes, so I figured I could do that here."*

---

Volunteer at the Copenhagen Welcome House

## 5. Regular meetings

It is important to ensure a good working environment for the volunteers. Even though most of them may enjoy volunteering and be driven by a motivation to help others, challenging situations may arise. Many refugees have a story that can be tough to listen to, and conflicts may come up between the refugees. You should therefore have some house rules and norms that apply in your house and ensure that both the volunteers and refugees are aware of them.

In addition, we recommend having regular meetings where the volunteers get the opportunity to talk about difficult experiences. These could easily be combined with a fun social event for the volunteers. Should any particularly challenging situations arise, you should offer group supervision with an authorised psychologist.

## RECOGNITION AND MOTIVATION

As a way of retaining volunteers, it may be helpful to offer them courses and training. This helps to keep the group's motivation up and enhance their competences.

In the initial phase, we recommend recruiting a broad range of volunteers. Later on, however, recruitment should be more focused in order to achieve diversity in the volunteer collective and a stable core of volunteers who are willing to take on responsibility.

A Welcome House is generally strengthened by strong social bonds among the volunteers. You can encourage this through organising events and workshops for the volunteers.

The volunteers need roles and a structure they can step directly into when they start at the Welcome House. A new volunteer should therefore be attached

to an existing activity or an established team to start with. Later on, you can give them more responsibilities or start up new activities should they desire so.

Knowing what resources they have at their disposal creates clarity and stability for the volunteers. That is why it helps having a transparent budget as well as a fixed procedure for refunding expenses and the like.

## THE WELCOME HOUSE USERS

### The refugees must feel welcome and at ease

Regardless of whether someone is a newcomer or has visited the Welcome House for a while, it is important to always receive a warm welcome. It creates a sense of security when the volunteers greet you, encourage you to join activities or simply ask how things are going.

The benefit of a Welcome House is that the newly arrived refugees have a place to go to meet Danes and get help getting settled in Denmark. A cosy and warm atmosphere creates a sense of the house being a safe place to visit.

There will be periods where some of the same refugees will visit often because they have built good relationships and feel welcome. After a while, you could encourage these users to take charge of certain activities or help out in some other way. This increases their sense of ownership of the house and can also lead to other refugees feeling motivated to help. Events where the users can contribute or give something back to the volunteers have tremendous value because they place both parties on equal ground. The more specific the tasks the refugees can help with, the better.

Some newly arrived refugees will visit the Welcome House less frequently, but may need someone to talk to or to seek comfort and guidance from. A Welcome House should accommodate both types of users.



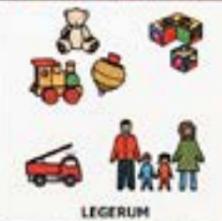
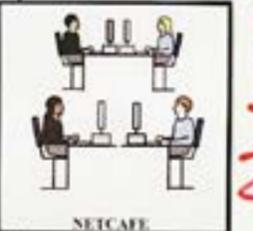
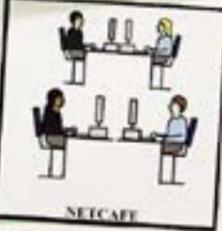
*“I’ve returned because I’ve been in their situation, so I want to give something back because I can”*

Volunteer and former user at the Copenhagen Welcome House

### Welcome material for refugees

**It could be helpful handing out welcome material to the refugees who visit the house. The material could contain information about the house’s activities, an overview of the staff and the volunteers’ roles, helpful tips and rules and the opportunity to volunteer themselves.**

**The material should be translated into a number of relevant languages.**

TIRSDAG TUESDAY الثلاثاء	ONSDAG WEDNESDAY الأربعاء	TORS DAG THURSDAY الخميس
 NETCAFE 16:30 - 20:00	 MUSIKCAFE 16:00 - 21:00	 BERGEMOSEEN 16:00 - 18:00
 SYVÆRKSTED 17:00 - 20:00	 SORTERING BIXEN Hele dagen	 LEGERUM 16:00 - 18:00
 ZUMBA FOR KVINDER 20:00 - 20:55	 CYKELVÆRKSTED 16:00 - 18:00	 DANSKUNDERVISNING 17:00 - 19:00
 NETCAFE 17:00 - 20:00	 KREATIVT VÆRKSTED 18:00 - 20:00	 SYVÆRKSTED 15:00 - 18:00
		 NETCAFE 17:00 - 20:00
		 15:00

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

A Welcome House brings together many people - staff, refugees, volunteers and civil society organisations. This places high demands on internal planning and communication as well as creating external awareness about the house in order to spark interest in the local community and get it involved.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

When communicating internally, it is important to be aware that the messages you write are read by the right persons. That is why it is crucial to have clear communication channels and to distinguish between information that is intended for volunteers and information that is intended for refugees and partners. When communicating with and to volunteers, it is important to consider different means of communication, as people's preferences differ. Some prefer communicating via Facebook, while other volunteers prefer e-mails or text messaging. Make a plan for how you want to handle internal communication.

### Communication with the refugees should be frequent and clear

The users of the Welcome House require a certain degree of hand-held communication, i.e. someone to remind them of appointments and meetings. The refugees come from different cultures, some of which do not value or prioritise punctuality as much. Some also lead busy lives and may not always remember when a certain activity is scheduled for. However, relying fully on one-to-one communication can also be problematic, as it is premised on the staff knowing what each and every refugee wishes to participate in, which can be difficult in relation to new refugees or due to language barriers. You should therefore make sure to post activity descriptions and plans somewhere in the welcome house, ideally with small icons that can help the refugees understand what each activity is about.

You should also make sure to have the contact details for the refugees. Send out group messages with appointment reminders as needed. Having people sign up for activities is not necessarily a solution, because it does not guarantee that they will attend. What is more important is to build up a good dialogue with the refugees and continually adapt activities and communication to their needs.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The Welcome House's external communication serves a wide range of important purposes that can help ensure its success. It also helps to ensure that people who may be interested in volunteering know about the house.

### Visibility creates interest and involvement

An active social media strategy could help raise awareness about the house among the local community. Besides advertising on the municipality's website, you can publish short stories on Facebook, pictures on Instagram or short articles in the local newspapers. Offering the world an insight into the house results in involvement and awareness. So, do not hesitate to show off the great things you are doing on different platforms. You can also communicate through any refugee and integration networks that have already been established. There are many forces that would be interested in helping and which have already been mobilised. You can also work with the partner organisations in terms of joint communication and reciprocal branding arrangements.

---

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

---

The activities in a Welcome House should include counselling, social activities and activities for children. They should also form the basis for a dedicated and rewarding involvement of civil society. Therefore, it is important that the activities are adapted to the needs of the refugees, but at the same time, varied and flexible enough for volunteers to feel motivated to get involved in them.

The Welcome House should be suited to refugees from a wide variety of backgrounds. This also includes the most disadvantaged. Many refugees neither have the capacity to do things on their own initiative nor a need to participate in a long list of activities. On the other hand, they have a particular need for counselling, children's activities, a place to relax and to socialise. One of the main functions of a Welcome House is that it gives refugees a sense of certainty that there is a place they can feel welcome.

Therefore, in the initial phase you should not spend too much effort on finding 'the right activities'. The crucial part is ensuring that the refugees' needs are met, as described below.

## Counselling

One of the biggest obstacles refugees face is that they have a difficult time figuring out the system they have become part of. They therefore have a great need for help and counselling in relation to things such as job-seeking or family reunification. These activities are highly valued and often requested by the refugees.

## Children's activities

Parents have a great need for a place that can give their children something meaningful to do while the parents

themselves get a break. Even though a Welcome House is not a day care centre, the house can help the parents by organising activities for the children.

## Socialising and relaxation

The refugees live busy lives and often they have many concerns. They therefore need a place where they can relax, enjoy themselves and have fun. That is why a café can serve well as a social gathering point where the refugees can meet Danes who are from elsewhere. Having someone willing to listen and talk to you results in a positive experience of feeling appreciated and welcome.

This applies not only to the refugees who visit the welcome house - to the volunteers it is also important to have some form of interaction on an equal footing, where the refugees can give something back instead of always being beneficiaries. Cooking together could be one such activity.

## THE INTERIOR

The furnishing of a Welcome House influences the atmosphere in the house. Cosy furniture, big common spaces and kitchen facilities create an inviting atmosphere for getting together and are crucial in creating an environment for interaction. Some refugees have spent a long time in an asylum centre, and a Welcome House should not feel like one. You should therefore strive to avoid the house resembling an institution.

In order for a Welcome House to serve as an environment for interaction between refugees, local associations and other organisations working with integration, it helps if the house has many large conference rooms.

These rooms should be furnished with chairs, tables, computers and whiteboards, allowing them to be used for presentations and counselling.

Many activities and meetings can also take place outside the house, such as at the local community centre or football club. This is beneficial in terms of establishing cooperation and relationships between the refugees and the local community.

If a Welcome House is established at the same place as temporary housing for newly arrived refugees, it is important to separate the housing section from the Welcome House. The residents' homes should be private, and activities should not take place in the housing section.

A Welcome House should be open to both children and adults, but in order to avoid the children dominating the house, you could introduce rules for the children's use of it. The Copenhagen Welcome House has good experiences with excluding children from the house after 19:00 as this results in a calmer space with more room for the adults and their needs.

---

*"The staff create a sense of stability that allows me to just come here and do what I want. It makes it wonderfully easy to be a volunteer. Here, I can be charitable and kind without having to be an administrative robot."*

---

Volunteer at the Copenhagen  
Welcome House



---

# SUMMARY

---

The various tools and recommendations in this booklet can serve as inspiration for your efforts to establish a new Welcome House. Local conditions can result in major differences in relation to what approaches make most sense in different municipalities.

The key is therefore that the recommendations are used as guidance material and as a tool to create a safe and pleasant house where the refugees feel cared for and welcomed, and where the volunteers and civil society organisations are motivated to participate and get involved in working with the newly arrived refugees.

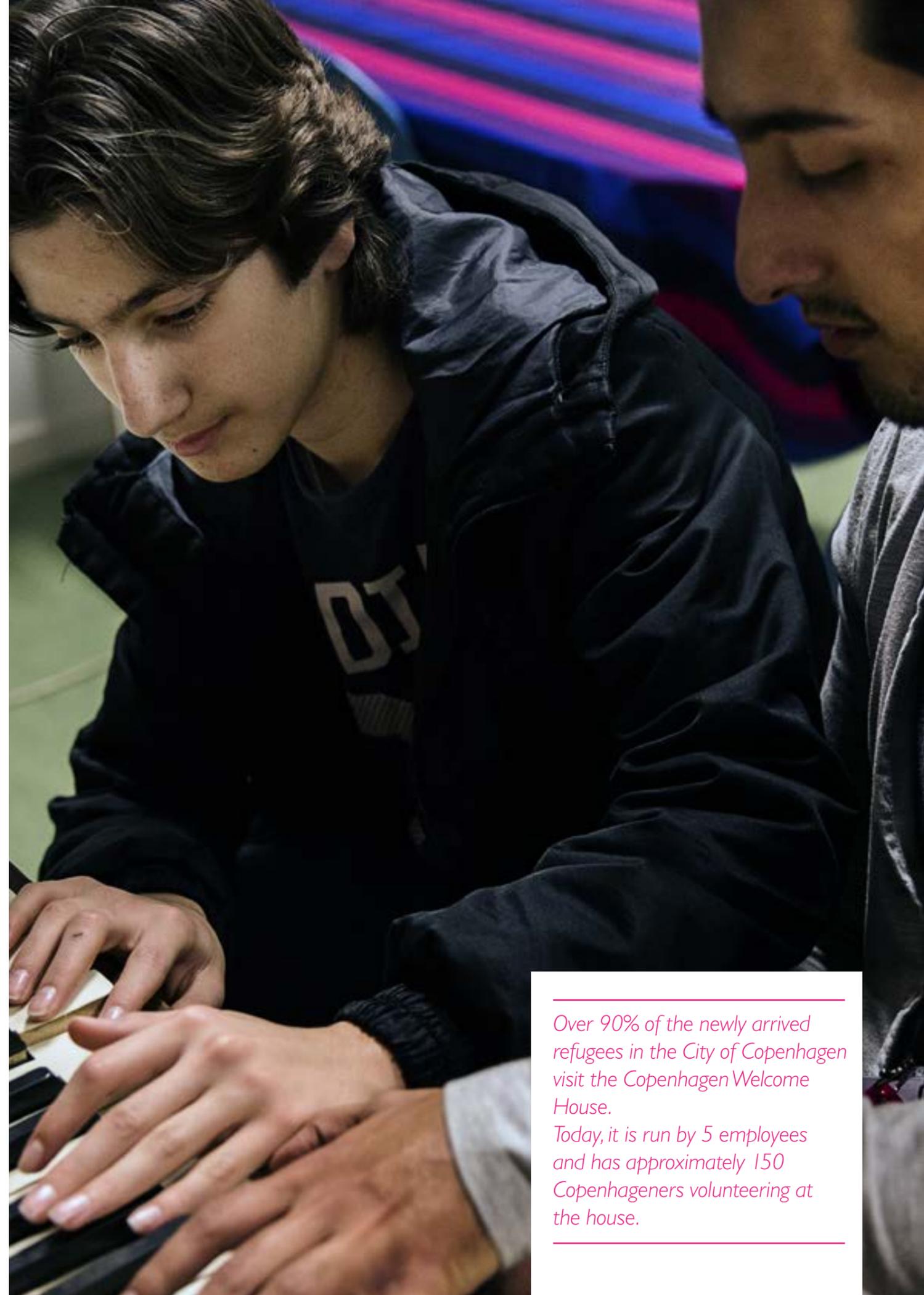
- A Welcome House should be a platform for interaction between civil society and newly arrived refugees. Working together with organisations and the local community is accordingly crucial.
- Visibility and branding plays an essential role in the recruitment of volunteers.

- A welcome house should be able to accommodate refugees from many different backgrounds with different capabilities and needs. The refugees need counselling, social activities and activities for their children.
- Much of the communication with the refugees should be translated to the different languages spoken in the house, even if this is challenging and changes often. Using icons to get the message across is recommended.
- Volunteers invest a lot of time and energy into a Welcome House because it is a positive, fun and rewarding experience. Keeping volunteers engaged, acknowledging their efforts and making them feel appreciated is crucial to the success of the house and the volunteers' motivation to stay
- Acknowledgement, sparring and social bonds are important elements of successful cooperation.

## CHECKLIST:

---

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have you hired permanent staff?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a communication strategy?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has the distribution of responsibilities been clarified?                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Both an internal one and an external one?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a volunteer collective?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the house furnished and ready?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have you figured out what activities to organise? Have you found coordinators for them? | <input type="checkbox"/> Have you prepared welcome material for the volunteers and prepared them for their roles?              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have you established partnerships with local associations?                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have you prepared welcome material for the refugees? Has it been translated?</li></ul> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a plan for volunteer recruitment and follow-up meetings with volunteers?    |  |



---

*Over 90% of the newly arrived refugees in the City of Copenhagen visit the Copenhagen Welcome House.*

*Today, it is run by 5 employees and has approximately 150 Copenhageners volunteering at the house.*

---

---

*“When the Danes get involved,  
we feel that they sympathise  
with us and understand our  
situation”*

---

Visitor at the Copenhagen  
Welcome House

