



# Community Asylum Seekers Project Volunteer Handbook

*Welcome to CASP!*

*Thank you for your commitment to those seeking asylum here.  
Please read this overview of CASP's mission,  
your role, and our expectations for our volunteers.*



The mission of CASP is to provide basic needs and a supportive community for those in the process of seeking asylum in the U.S.

In order to do this, CASP finds local host homes for those seeking asylum; supports the guests with food, shelter, and other daily needs as they resettle in our community; assists them in navigating the asylum claims process; and helps them achieve

eventual independence as they proceed through the asylum process.

Many of you will be working in your own communities, and you can direct questions to your local team leaders. For unanswered questions, please email or call CASP founder and Executive Director Steve Crofter at [info@caspt.org](mailto:info@caspt.org) or 802-275-4646.



## **The Asylum Process**

Asylum seekers in the United States are:

- displaced people fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries
- requesting sanctuary individually through the Department of Justice, unlike refugees who are invited and resettled by the U.S. State Department

What happens to asylum seekers after they arrive in the United States?

- They are often detained in locked facilities for an uncertain period. Men and women, mothers

and children are usually separated.

- They are given a formal interview to determine if they have a credible fear and therefore a reasonable claim to asylum.
- They may be released if they have relatives or friends somewhere in the U.S. to support them (or an organization such as CASP).
- On release, they will be scheduled for asylum hearings in immigration court.

The process usually takes a few years, resulting in either asylum or deportation.

## Seeker Issues

In our everyday contacts with families and individuals seeking asylum, we often enter situations that necessitate understanding our guests and following clear standards of behavior and protocol. Please read the following description of some of the issues you might need to deal with as a volunteer working with asylum seekers, including trauma, safety, and acculturation. Following that is a section regarding volunteer conduct and our policies on driving, background checks, and sexual harassment and abuse.

### **Trauma and Safety**

We believe that those who work with asylum seekers must keep in mind that the seekers are here, not for comfort or economic gain, but simply because they are not safe in their homeland. Most have encountered and overcome extraordinary danger on their way here, and most suffer scars, physical or mental, acquired on their journey. In addition, they may display a chronic, free-floating anxiety known as culture shock, a term that covers a number of reactions that individuals may have dealing with long-term exposure to a new environment.

*The emotional needs of our guests is a primary responsibility.*

CASP's case manager is trained in evaluating the various problems our asylum seekers may have, and the manager will refer those seekers for appropriate psychological treatment if needed. However, it is up to all of us to be alert to what may seem to be a seeker's unreasonable fears, depressions, tantrums, or other out-of-place behaviors and to report these to the case manager for evaluation.

Also, it may seem natural to us to ask seekers to share the experiences that brought them to this country, but often this kind of remembering will trigger traumatic responses. The best course is to wait until our guests feel ready to come forward with their stories and do so without prompting. Finally, although we believe there is little chance that the threats our seekers have come here to escape will follow them or that misguided resent-

ment in our own community will find them, it is wise to be cautious and to report any unusual incidents to a CASP representative for investigation or intervention. It is CASP policy that the CASP Executive Director or a designated agent must approve, prior to release, any publicity concerning the asylum seekers under our care.

### **Acculturation**

*Imagine. Your spaceship crash-lands on a newly discovered world. You can breathe the air, eat the food, but the inhabitants (who look very much like you) speak in weird grunts and whistles. They sometimes laugh when you see nothing funny, they sometimes cry for no reason you can explain. And you must come to terms with all this because you're stranded in this strange place, trying to survive and to thrive. This is your new life.*

This is how it may seem to asylum seekers trying to find their way in a new community that may be vastly different in language, culture, customs, and ethics. There is no single or simple way to deal with this. Learning English is, of course, important, and CASP tries to support this in every way possible. Children, here, must go to school, and we are thankful for a public school system that mandates ESL learning.

We believe that having many varied opportunities to connect with their new community is important for all seekers, and so we support volunteers who want to help by offering home visits, shopping support, event accompaniment, or local area orientation walks or drives.

*Can you find a way you can share a part of your life with an asylum seeker?*

CASP's long-term goal is to make it possible for our guests to live independently, to be self-supporting, and to enjoy the freedoms and safety this country can offer. To do this, we guide and, more importantly, listen. We offer respect, believing that it will be transformed by our seekers into self-respect. We try to act in the interest of our guests, just as we hope others would act toward us should we crash-land into their world.

## Volunteer Policies

Here are a few guidelines we hope you find helpful. Of course, no policy list can cover every contingency, but we hope this statement will deal with a number of the situations you might come across. If you have questions or need further help, feel free to contact a CASP board member or the case manager. We might not have all the answers, but learning what the questions are is always a step forward.

### *Volunteer Drivers*

If you want to drive for CASP, we ask you to observe the following.

#### *Rules of the Road*

- You must be 21 years of age or older.
- You and your vehicle must be properly licensed and insured.
- Your driving record must reflect no more than one moving violation in the past year with no record of DUI.
- While driving for CASP, you must abstain from using drugs, alcohol, or tobacco,
- Make sure that both you and your passengers wear seatbelts.
- Refrain from using headphones or texting while the car is moving.
- You must report any accident or incident to the CASP Executive Director or another board member as soon as possible.

If you have any problems or questions regarding our Rules of the Road, please notify the transportation coordinator at [security@caspt.org](mailto:security@caspt.org).

### *Background Checks*

**In order to work alone with our asylum seekers, either as a staff member or volunteer, we ask that you provide CASP with a national criminal background report.**

If you already have a such a report, please write to [volunteering@caspt.org](mailto:volunteering@caspt.org) to find out if it will suffice. If you don't have a report, you can arrange for one using [backgroundreport.com](http://backgroundreport.com), as follows:

1. Go to [www.backgroundreport.com/users](http://www.backgroundreport.com/users)
2. Create an account.
3. Select the \$19.95 Basic Search. If you wish, CASP will reimburse you for the cost.

You will receive your report by email and will be able to review it before forwarding it to [volunteering@caspt.org](mailto:volunteering@caspt.org). You can also write to that address if you'd like to discuss the contents of the report or if you need help navigating the [backgroundreport.com](http://backgroundreport.com) website.

*You do not need a background check if your work does not include time alone with one or more asylum seekers.*

### *Staff, Volunteer, and Guest Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Prevention*

The Community Asylum Seekers Project, Inc. (CASP) is committed to maintaining an environment that respects the rights of our guests and one another. Sexual abuse or other unwelcome conduct is strictly prohibited, and we reject any such behavior.

#### *Sexual Misconduct*

No one should be subjected to conduct such as (but not limited to) touching, blocking, staring, making sexual gestures, making or displaying sexual drawings or photographs, or verbal conduct such as sexual propositions, slurs, insults, jokes, and other sexual comments. Such behavior should cease immediately in response to any objection voiced by another.

We ask that anyone who observes such misconduct report that behavior to a CASP officer, host, or case manager, depending on the circumstances. No reprisal, retaliation, or other adverse action will be taken against any person who in good faith reports abuse or misconduct or assists in an investigation of such abuse or misconduct, and we will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of those involved.

#### *Sexual Abuse*

Sexual abuse is a crime and must be treated as such. It is defined as undesired sexual behavior of one person upon another using physical or psychological force. Reasonable allegations of sexual abuse will be reported to local law enforcement agencies for investigation and further action as appropriate. The accused will be suspended from any involvement in CASP until the investigation is complete.

CASP will take prompt disciplinary and remedial action in response to violations of this policy. If you need clarification of what constitutes

misconduct or unwelcome behavior, contact Executive Director Steve Crofter at 802-275-4646 or [info@caspvt.org](mailto:info@caspvt.org).

## **NOW, AGAIN, WE WELCOME YOU TO CASP!**

We're delighted that you have decided to contribute your energy and talents to join us in helping people who have risked so much to find safety and a renewed life in New England for themselves and their families.

Working with others to make the services and goals of CASP a reality offers all of us rich experiences and fulfillment, and we are happy to share this with you. In reality, while it is necessary

to share the rules and regulations set forth here in a clear and uniform manner, we're happily looking forward to working with you as, together, we help our clients through this important transition.

So, again, welcome! May your involvement bring you joy, just as you will bring hope and peace to a struggling group who sorely need what you offer.

**THANK YOU.**

### **Policy sign-off**

To begin as a volunteer with CASP, please sign off on the following page of the CASP Volunteer

Handbook, and write to [volunteering@caspvt.org](mailto:volunteering@caspvt.org) for mailing instructions.

## **CASP VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

I have received, read, and understood the CASP Volunteer Handbook, and I agree to follow the policies it outlines. I am willing to undertake volunteer assignments in compliance with the guidelines explained in the Handbook. This means that I will follow CASP's rules for drivers, will not work alone with asylum seekers before submitting a criminal background check, and I will follow the outlined policies on sexual misconduct and abuse prevention.

Full name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_