

## Community Sponsorship & RightsNow!

### **Solidarity and community-building with immigrants and asylum-seekers**

#### **What's happening and why we need action #RightsNow!**

As the world continues to grapple with COVID-19, asylum-seekers and immigrants locked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have been left to face these turbulent times alone, in detention facilities well-documented to have substandard medical care, inadequate basic hygiene, and overcrowding.

Since the onset of the pandemic, [ICE has failed](#) to provide individuals and families in detention with sufficient soap and sanitizer or to facilitate “physical distancing.” Nor has ICE halted the unnecessary transfers of individuals between detention centers or from state and local jails, further endangering the health and safety of these immigrants and asylum-seekers and the community.

Many people in detention face dangerous and life-threatening complications if they contract COVID-19, especially those who are older or have serious medical needs. Rapid spread is already occurring, with thousands testing positive in detention. People have tragically died of COVID-19 while detained, and the fate of the tens of thousands who still remain needlessly locked up rests in the hands of ICE.

**All people should have the same access to care and safety, and immigrants and asylum-seekers must not be treated as an afterthought. They must be safe and freed now.**

The U.S. government is responsible for the health and well-being of people in its custody and must take all steps to protect them. Given the lack of adequate protective measures in detention facilities, ICE must release immigrants and asylum-seekers from detention to ensure their safety. Many people in detention have long-standing family and community ties in the U.S. Some are rebuilding their lives and have little to no resources as they transition and settle into their new homes during these difficult times.

**This is where the help of activists like you comes in.** Community sponsorship is a powerful action you can take in direct solidarity with immigrants and asylum-seekers. It will also strengthen your voice as an advocate for their rights and the release of individuals and families in detention.

#### ***“As people stay apart, the world is coming together.”***

As we come together and support each other in this critical moment in history, there is no time more urgent than now to advocate for the release of people in detention. They need to be freed, and they need to be freed now. Our voices have power, and we are an even stronger force to reckon with when local voices come together to be in solidarity with immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers through community sponsorship.

Amnesty International is helping build a global movement of welcome for people seeking safety. We all want to live in a world where we look after each other, and everyone is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

[Community sponsorship](#) (CS) is a simple but radical idea: activists like you can play a key role in assisting people reach safety and settle into their new homes. Not only are you creating positive change at a local level, you are also joining a global community that is changing the conversation about people seeking safety, even in the most hostile of environments. All of us are stronger advocates when we take powerful and personal actions connected to the issues we care about.

## Community sponsorship 101

Community sponsors are guides, advocates, and friends to refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants in the U.S. Technically speaking, community sponsors with Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) are groups who commit to provide financial support and/or in-kind contributions, and certain volunteer services to immigrants, asylum-seekers, asylees, refugees and other forcibly displaced people.

A sponsorship commitment tends to last anywhere between one to twelve months and varies by location. Activities may include help securing initial housing for the individual or family, housing setup, transportation, support with initial appointments, English language learning and job applications, and showing them around their new community. Bear in mind, some of these activities may need to be modified due to COVID-19 for everyone's safety, but virtual activities also present opportunities to be in direct solidarity and demonstrate welcome. Amnesty created a [community sponsorship guide](#) for activists on the various ways to engage in community sponsorship.

A sponsorship commitment is not a legal commitment. It relies on the good faith commitment of sponsors to implement an agreed-upon set of activities with a local service provider. Ultimately, and critically, the provision of services is the responsibility of local organizations partnered with AIUSA: community sponsorship helps supplement the direct services these local organizations provide to individuals and families released from detention.

## Our partners

AIUSA is partnered with all nine U.S. resettlement agencies and nearly 75 local resettlement affiliates for community sponsorship opportunities with newly resettled refugees. AIUSA is coordinating closely with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service ([LIRS](#)) who runs the [Post Release and Empowerment Program](#), as well as a growing list of local, community-based social service nonprofits to identify opportunities to match sponsoring groups with immigrants and asylum-seekers released from detention. AIUSA is also a member of the [Refugee Council USA \(RCUSA\)](#) coalition.

Local partners provide services like translation and interpretation, emergency remote legal aid, visitation services with people in detention, and match immigrants and asylum-seekers with community sponsors. Community sponsorship can increase the power of these mighty, mostly volunteer-led community organizations to support people immediately after they are released from detention. Your group has the potential to make a huge impact in the lives of people on the path to their new lives in freedom. When a group decides to pursue community sponsorship, AIUSA will connect them with one of these local organizations in the group's area.

## Solidarity through community sponsorship

As AIUSA campaigns to help free people from detention, released individuals and families may need initial shelter and housing support. They may also need logistical, financial, and community support to get to their new homes and find their way in their new communities. Many face difficulties in securing basic necessities to support this transition.

As community sponsors, groups will:

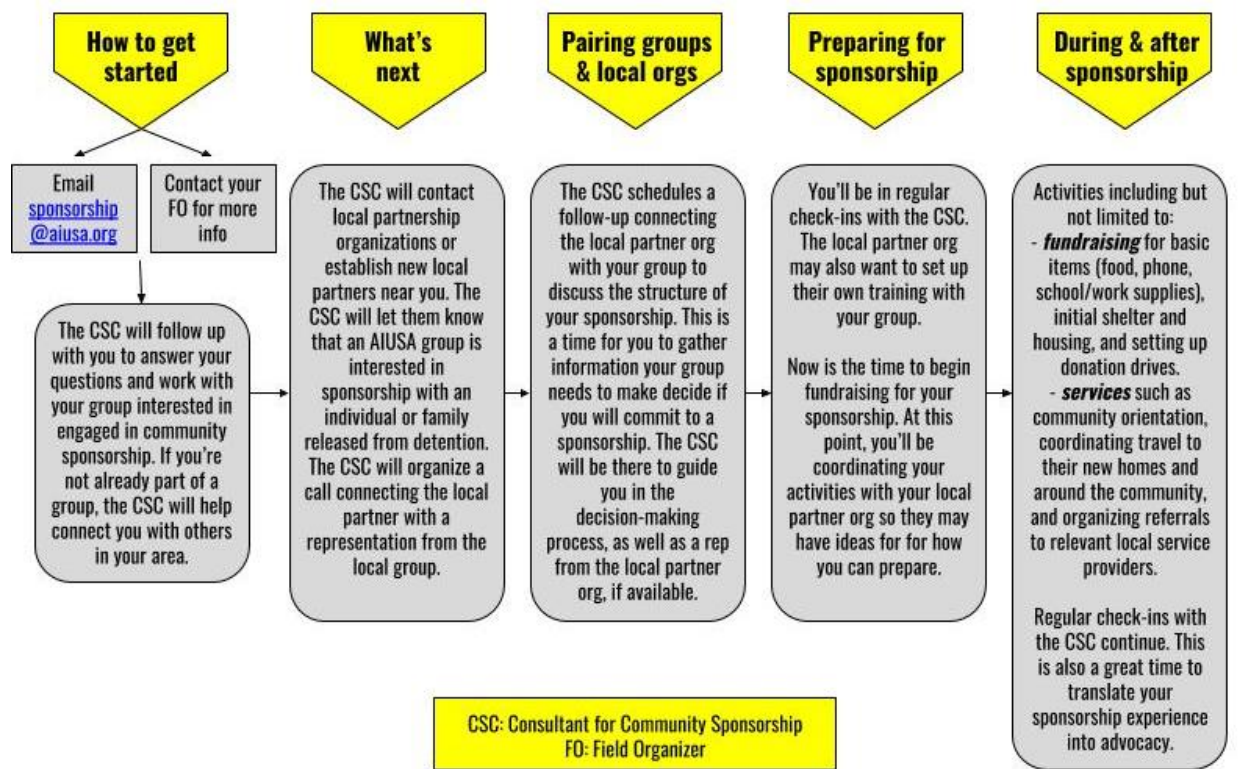
### ***Raise funds to support:***

- Basic items such as food, phone, school and/or work supplies
- Travel to their new homes and around their communities
- Initial shelter and housing

### Provide local community support:

- Cultural orientation, including through phone or video calls
- Provision of Know Your Rights materials
- Coordination of travel and transportation
- Referrals to relevant local service providers
- Set up online drives or wish lists for donations

These are just some of the ways to engage in community sponsorship, but the local partner you'll be paired with will provide you with information specific to their location and program before you commit to the sponsorship. You can find more detailed information about the community sponsorship process in our [CS guide](#).



### The process

1. **Find your group.** To serve as a community sponsor, you may need to be part of an established community group. If you are not part of an established group either through AIUSA or other community ties and are interested in community sponsorship, email us at [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org) and we will help to connect you with a group you can work with!
2. **Indicate your interest and learn more about your local community sponsorship program.** Email the Consultant for Community Sponsorship (CSC) at [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org) to let us know you're interested. We will answer any questions you have, and provide you with information about your local sponsorship program, and connect you with your nearest participating organization that assists immigrants and asylum-seekers.

- 3. Organize your group.** You will want one to designate a lead to serve as a coordinator and point of contact for the partnering local organization. You can get other organizing advice and tools by emailing us at [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org).
- 4. Raise the money needed.** In consultation with your partnering local organization, you can start raising financial and in-kind resources. Learn more about how to [fundraise](#) for sponsorship in our [CS guide](#).

The CSC will be able to connect to a support system of other local groups who have engaged in or are interested in community sponsorship. Reach out at [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org).

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

***How much does community sponsorship cost?*** The cost of community sponsorship varies by site and can range from \$0 - \$10,000, depending on the individual or family you are matched with, the cost of housing in their area, and the in-kind contributions you are able to pull together. Don't let the financial commitment put you off – we have a [fundraising resource](#) and a network of supportive staff and existing community sponsors who are available to help you navigate fundraising, and a fund to which you can apply for matching support!

***Do I have to be part of a group to serve as a community sponsor?*** This depends on the requirements of your local partner organization. If they require that you be part of a group and you don't have a local AIUSA group in your community, you can start an AIUSA group; participate through another established group such as a faith-based center (if you belong to one), which are a common community sponsors; or ask your local partner organization if they know of another group to which they can connect you. You can also reach out to [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org) to get support from our staff and to be connected to other advocates interested in community sponsorship in your area.

***I'm part of a student group. How can we be involved?*** You can absolutely engage in community sponsorship as a student group. Depending on the requirements of your local partner, you may need the support of adults outside of your group to address specific needs of the individual or family such as questions about finances. We can help you to figure out what's possible. Just email us at [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org) or speak with your local field organizer.

***How do I get started?*** Check out our [CS guide](#) to learn the various ways you can engage in community sponsorship, including virtual engagement as we practice physical distancing due to COVID-19. Let us know you're interested by emailing [sponsorship@aiusa.org](mailto:sponsorship@aiusa.org)! The CSC will immediately follow up with you to answer your questions and to find out more about what your group wants to do to support people still in and/or released from detention. Many of the activities, such as organizing your sponsorship group, fundraising, and connecting with a local service provider are done pre-sponsorship, so we encourage you to use this time apart to prepare yourself and your group.

***What happens after we are matched with an individual or family?*** The CSC will be here to check in with your group to see how your sponsorship is going and offer any support you may need, and will also maintain communication with the local partnering organization throughout the duration of your sponsorship commitment. Amplify your experience as a sponsor to advocate for the release of people from detention through the [RightsNow!](#) campaign. Advocacy based on direct and personal experience creates even more powerful voices for change.

***What has happened with the community sponsorship program since it first launched?*** In 2018, AIUSA launched The Longer Table Initiative. Members like you personally supported the resettlement of refugees in their communities; raised awareness on the issues refugees and asylum-seekers face in their search for safety; and advocated for higher refugee arrivals. AIUSA's [community sponsorship](#) work continues today through the RightsNow! campaign and its focus to help free immigrants and asylum-seekers in detention.

***Can we still sponsor refugees?*** While the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly slowed the regular arrival of refugees, it's still possible to create virtual community sponsorship opportunities for refugees who arrived to the U.S. before travel restrictions were put in place. AIUSA's partnership with local refugee resettlement agencies match local groups with refugee individuals and families who could use this additional support, particularly during this extraordinary time. Further information is available through [RCUSA](#), where you can search opportunities by zip code and download overviews of resettlement sites near you.

***What is the difference between asylum-seekers, asylees, and Special Immigrant Visa holders (SIV)? How are these populations different from refugees?*** Asylum-seekers are like refugees in that they are asking for humanitarian protection due to a fear of persecution based on race, religion, national origin, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Unlike refugees, asylum-seekers apply for and receive their status in the U.S. Those who have received status are considered asylees. Asylees are eligible for certain federally funded services, while asylum-seekers are not. Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters are for persons who provided support to either the U.S. military forces as interpreters or translators or for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad or Kabul. They are eligible for the same resettlement services as refugees. All of these individuals are in need of support and your assistance will send a powerful message of welcome.

***Can community sponsorship be done safely during the COVID-19 pandemic?*** Like so many of us in our work and personal lives, we are adapting community sponsorship to a world of physical distancing, virtual spaces, and protective measures. Welcoming and support doesn't stop – it's just communicated through different channels! Your support for immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees through community sponsorship is now even more necessary, and there are ways you can participate in sponsorship from your homes. Most activities described above, like financial and community support, can be done virtually. For example, you can set up phone or video calls between yourself and the individual or family after they have been released or are in their new homes to help foster a greater sense of community and combat social isolation, while also being an opportunity to assist with English language practice and to share local community resources. It can also serve as a way to communicate the latest information about your community's response to COVID-19. There are many other ways to engage in community sponsorship virtually and from your home which are highlighted in this [CS guide](#).