

## The Refugee Guide Programme – practical integration

# Building bridges between immigrants and natives

The programme with Refugee guides, nationally coordinated by Eskilstuna municipality, is currently running in 160 municipalities all over Sweden. In many places, the programme is run in collaboration with local and voluntary organizations such as the Red Cross, local churches, Rotary, etc.

This programme, matching immigrants with natives, has been running successfully in Eskilstuna since 2006. We have a reliable model for starting new projects nationwide, as well as a specific step-by-step outline. We also provide different kinds of print material (posters, brochures, rollups, etc.) free of charge to use and edit to meet local demands.

### Background

In 2006, the initiative to start the Refugee guide programme was taken by our current integration coordinator, Mr Rabie Aldeeb. In late 2012, the municipality of Eskilstuna officially decided to make it a local government project. Since then, the number of participants have increased substantially.

### Concept

After the initial meeting between immigrant, native and coordinator, the participants decide on their own how often they will meet. They also come to a mutual understanding regarding what kind of activities (dinners, cultural events, working out together, etc.) they will be engaging in. Their contact is based on the three pillars voluntarism, mutual exchange and language practice. The idea is that people, with help and support from the municipality, get in contact with

individuals from other cultural backgrounds and then form relationships on their own that favour the integration process in a practical and personal way. The municipality can always be contacted by participants in case of emergency or if any need for assistance occur. We also provide activities for both immigrants and natives (cultural lectures, recreational events, educational visits, etc.) in order to show our support for and keep in touch with participants.

### Results

The main results of this programme is faster and more efficient language learning and cultural understanding on both sides. We also see a reduction in ignorance, segregation and prejudice. But what we are most proud of is that almost two-thirds of participants continue their relationship after the usual one year agreement and many people become friends for life!

### Contact

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The Refugee Guide Programme is a Swedish nation wide project run by the Municipality of Eskilstuna. Visit:

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