

Engelsk



# Socialising, Language Practice and Practical Support

- connect with a volunteer buddy/friendship family



RØDE KORS

**DRK** DANSK  
FLYGTNINGE  
HJÆLP

Udgivet af:

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Borgergade 10

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Design og layout:

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Oplag: 2000

Tryk: KLS



SILVER

PurePrint® by KLS  
Producent: PurePrint®  
af KLS, Kluver A/S

December 2020

[www.vennerviservej.dk](http://www.vennerviservej.dk)

Venner Viser Vej er finansieret  
af Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet

# What is a volunteer buddy/friendship family?

A volunteer buddy/friendship family is for anyone with a refugee background, whether you have just arrived in Denmark or have been here for some time.

Volunteer buddies and friendship families spend time together because they want to. Volunteers do not work for the municipality or other authorities and they do not receive money for their time. Volunteer buddies and friendship families are ordinary people who want to support you and your family. They may also find it interesting to meet new people and learn more about your cultural background.

The volunteers are part of the organisations the Danish Red Cross or The DRC Danish Refugee Council. These organisations have many years of experience in supporting people with a refugee background.

Together you can decide when, where and how often you want to meeting up. You can also decide together what you want to do. Maybe you will meet for a simple cup of coffee, or maybe you will share meals together. Your volunteer buddy can also help you reach any goals you may have, like getting better at Danish, preparing for an education or training programme or finding a job.

Volunteers are bound by confidentiality agreements. So you can talk about private and confidential things.

If you receive money from the municipality, you will continue to receive the same amount, even if you have a volunteer buddy or friendship family.

“ We are learning about each other’s cultures. For example, we celebrated Danish Christmas together. It was really nice and cosy. ”

Esraa Rahal from Syria on having a Danish friendship family

# What can volunteers help with?

A refugee background can present several different challenges. If you are new to Denmark, you may want help with some practical, everyday tasks. For example, volunteer buddies can explain letters from the municipality, show you how to use NemID or help you communicate with your child's kindergarten or school.

If you have been in Denmark for a few years, you may just want support in finding a job or an internship. Volunteer buddies can help you write a resume or prepare for a job interview. Maybe you are even lucky enough that your volunteer buddy can keep an eye out for job openings in your local area.

You can also talk to your buddy about training and education programmes. Your

volunteer buddy will often have knowledge, experience and networks that can be useful to you.

## **Communities and traditions**

Your volunteer buddy or friendship family can help you get to know the local community where you live, for example the football club, the music association or other local clubs.

They can also introduce you to Danish society and tell you about norms, traditions and unwritten rules. Maybe you will be invited to a traditional Danish party like Christmas or a birthday celebration. Maybe you can also share your own traditions with your volunteer buddy?

“ It’s hard to understand the letters from the municipality. Whenever we called Signe, she always had time to help us. ”

Ahmed Rahal from Syria talks about having a Danish friendship family



## **First Danish, then a job, house and marriage**

Mir Houssian Karimi has just received his driving license. The 23-year-old Afghan refugee also just bought his very own car with money earned from his job at Netto, where he shows up at 6:30 in the morning. When Mir is not working in Netto, he attends school.

Since he did not go to school in Afghanistan, there is a lot to learn.

Hans Jørn and Bente Fogh Olsen have helped him with his schoolwork. They are Mir's volunteer buddies. He has also practiced Danish with them and they have met every week for several years.

"It would have been hard for me to learn Danish if I had not come here."

Mir now speaks Danish so well that he has begun to dream of getting an education, perhaps as a mechanic:

"I want an education, a job, my own house. Then I want to get married. In that order," says Mir.



# Getting started

The first time you meet your buddy, you do not know each other at all. It might feel a little strange. It is a good idea to start by talking about why you want a volunteer buddy and what you hope to get out of the partnership. The volunteers can also explain why he or she wants to be a buddy.

Then you can talk about how often you would like to meet. Make firm commitments

from the beginning. Many choose to meet 2-4 times a month. But it will vary depending on how much time you each have. Everything will be easier if you make a plan and try to stick to it.

Your interactions with your volunteer buddy should be as equal as possible. Think of yourself as friends who decide together what they would like to do. Be open to each other's suggestions and ideas.

“ I have learned a great deal about what it means to come from an Arab country, to live as a Muslim and the whole cultural background. That has given me a new perspective of my own culture. ”

Signe Irminger on being a volunteer buddy  
for the Rahal family from Syria

# Making good commitments

- **Explain why you would like a volunteer buddy or friendship family.**

Talk about what you each hope to get out of meeting up.

- **Where will you meet up?**

You can meet at your own home, or at your buddy's home. You can also meet at the library, the playground or the volunteer centre. Or you can take a walk together. You should both be involved in deciding what to do together. That will make meeting up nicer for both of you.

- **How will you keep in touch?**

Decide together how to best contact each other. Is it ok to call each other regularly? Is it okay to call in the evenings, on week-

ends or during working hours? Is it better to communicate via text messages or is it hard to write in Danish? It is important that you both take the initiative to arrange meetups. If only one person initiates contact, it can feel like an unequal partnership.

- **Are you unable to keep your commitment?**

Remember to let your buddy know if you cannot meet up as planned.

- **When there's something you don't quite understand**

If there is something that surprises you or that you do not understand, be curious and ask your volunteer buddy.

# What can you do together?

It can be a good idea to eat together, especially if there are children in your families.

It can also be a good idea to play games.

Choose something that everyone can participate in, no matter how old they are or how well they speak Danish. Maybe you know a good game.

It is also a good idea to watch Danish television or read a newspaper together. You can talk about what is happening in Denmark and the rest of the world. Maybe you or your family can also tell your buddy about your home country. Volunteers love to hear about your traditions.

## **Good ideas for activities**

### **Leisure activities**

- Take a walk around the neighbourhood, at a museum or in the woods.
- Buy groceries, prepare food and enjoy a meal together.
- Play a game or watch a movie.

### **Practical support**

- Work on schoolwork together.
- Practice Danish (see page 10 for helpful tips).
- Read official letters, pay bills, draw up a budget or apply for a job.

### **Activities in the local community**

- Join a local club or association together.
- Attend local events together, like concerts or lectures.





## Dropping pounds and practicing Danish

After her first pregnancy, Senet Tekleab wanted to get back into shape. Her volunteer buddy Susanne Orthmann took her to her gym. They went together three times a week for four months. Senet still does the exercises she learned at the fitness centre. But today she is more focused on managing her family and her future, so right now, the two cook together when they meeting up.

“My son must bring three packed meals to the nursery every day. I’m not used to making Danish packed meals, but Susanne is teaching me how,” says Senet, who is originally from Eritrea.

The two bake together and talk about what will happen when Senet’s maternity leave is over.

“I want to find a job, and Susanne has promised to help me write a resume.”

# The Danish language

If you do not speak the same language, it can be difficult to meeting up. Your volunteer buddy knows how important it is to be able to speak Danish and is happy to help you practice.

If you attend a language course, your buddy may be able to help you with your homework. If you have been in Denmark for several years, you probably already speak Danish, but maybe you want to improve even more.

In order to learn a language, you need to practice as much as possible. Together, you can find a way to practice that suits both of you. Every conversation counts. If you like taking walks, you can practice Danish together while walking. It is often easier to find something to talk about when you are not sitting face to face. You can talk about what you see. For example, you can go to a park and talk about nature. Or if you both have an interest in food, you can talk about various

vegetables, or talk about what you are doing while cooking together.

You might also go to the library together to find books in simple Danish. Your volunteer buddy can help you get a library card if you do not already have one.

## Tips for practicing Danish

- Listen to the radio and watch Danish films with Danish subtitles
- Download the free language apps Duolingo and Google Translate to your mobile phone
- Play together
- Read the newspaper, books and letters from the municipality together
- Listen to Danish music and sing along

“ At first we could not talk with each other at all. Now Mir speaks Danish very well. And when Mir visits us now, he often helps us out. For example, he’s been the one to trim our hedge the last couple of times. ”

Hans Jørn Fogh Olsen on being a volunteer buddy  
for Mir Houssian Karimi from Afghanistan

# How long will you stay in touch?

There are no rules for how long you and your buddy should stay in contact. For some, the partnership ends naturally when they get a job, finish an education or have become better at Danish. For others, it becomes a friendship that never ends.

If you do not get along well, you might only see each other a few times. It is always ok to stop meeting up. You decide.

If you want to stop meeting up with your volunteer buddy or friendship family, notify the person who helped you get a volunteer buddy. That way, you will be able to get a different volunteer buddy or friendship family if you want one.

“ In the beginning, we were the ones helping Legese. Now things have turned around. He helps us just as much. For example, he has helped us move, and he installed lighting for us. ”

Annie Ipsen talks about being a volunteer buddy for Legese Ghide from Eritrea



PHOTO: JOHNNY WICHMANN



**The Danish Red Cross and DRC Danish Refugee Council** are Denmark's two largest organisations supporting voluntary integration work. We are behind the nationwide project Venner Viser Vej (Friends Show the Way), in which volunteers support people with refugee backgrounds in order to help them thrive and become a more active part of Danish society, as well as find their footing in the labour market. [venneriservej.dk](http://venneriservej.dk)