**Congratulations!**

You are officially an appointment assistant! This packet is to help you navigate the various applications and registrations for services that clients have to enroll in when they arrive. Every appointment may not go perfectly, and that’s okay. Your presence and cultural understanding being alongside our clients through the beginning stages of their resettlement helps in more ways than you know. Even if an appointment goes unsuccessfully, it was better that you were there with them to understand why and reiterate to your volunteer coordinator who will then inform the clients’ caseworker.

Here are some common questions you might find yourself asking:

**Why are these appointments so crucial and why am I needed?**

Within the first 30 days of arriving in the United States, refugees need to apply for social security cards, a state-issued id, SNAP benefits, and visit the doctor’s office a few times for necessary health screenings. It is a major challenge for our clients to learn the bus system and administrative tasks so early in their resettlement. Without a car, money for an uber, and most often no family; Bridge is all our clients have at first. You showing up with a smile and some open seats in your vehicle is worth more than just a couple miles of transportation services.

**Am I expected to do everything for the client?**

On the contrary: Bridge’s mission is to EMPOWER clients to be self-sufficient. That being said, sometimes our clients need a little guidance. This does not mean we do everything for them for the sake of ease or time. Rather, let the client take the initiative to install that car seat or hand those papers to the front desk. If they don’t at first, then encourage them to do so. If they still struggle (which commonly happens), then educate. Just remember that people learn quicker from doing, not just observing.

**What if we can’t communicate at all?**

More often than not this will be the case. Most refugees come to the U.S. with a very limited grasp on English. The detailed information that your volunteer coordinator provided you with should list the language spoken by the client. If it doesn’t, reach out to your volunteer coordinator so functions like Google Translate or various dictionaries can be used in the field. Just remember that 80% of communication is non-verbal (yes, that’s actually true). So, a smile, relaxed posture, a hug or a handshake can all go a long way. Also, learning a greeting or two of Swahili or Arabic can really help to break the ice.

**What if the appointment is a total bust?**

Guess what, the vast majority of our clients have spent most of their lives, if not their entire lives in a refugee camp in the middle of nowhere. That being said, they are used to things getting done slowly or never getting done at all. Most come from cultures that are slower paced and with less of a social services infrastructure (hard to believe I know). If they don’t get their social security card that day, or have to reschedule an appointment; chances are they are used to it and will be okay. Their caseworker might be sweating bullets, but the client will most likely not have much of a reaction.

**Okay, none of these answer any of my questions/anxieties, what do I do?**

Call your volunteer coordinator, they gave you their personal cell phone number. They want this to go smoothly just as much as you do.

**I hope you learn something, and have fun!**