



REFUGEE GUARDIAN GROUP

Policy and Procedures

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First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Table of Contents

- Charge of the Guardian Group..... 1
- Policies of the Guardian Group..... 2
 - Purpose 2
 - Limitations..... 2
 - Acceptance of Clients..... 2
 - Financial Support 2
 - Types of Support 2
 - Amount of Support 3
 - Length of Time Support is Offered..... 3
- Confidentiality..... 3
 - Exceptions 4
 - Release from Confidentiality..... 4
- Assignments and Roles 4
- Professional Conduct 5
- Transparency within the Group 5
- Joining the Group and Volunteers 5
 - Confidentiality and Volunteer Agreements 5
 - Volunteer Orientation..... 6
 - Mentors..... 6
- Review of Policy and Procedures 6
- Expense Reimbursements..... 6
- Suicide Threats and Psychiatric Emergencies 7
 - Intervention 7
- Confidentiality Agreement..... A
- Volunteer Agreement B

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Charge of the Guardian Group

(adopted by the Board of Trustees of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco, October 13, 2013)

1. The Guardian Group will provide resettlement support to legal sexual minority refugees, asylum seekers, and asylees (“clients”). This support will include:
 - a. Navigating governmental agencies such as Social Security, welfare, Selective Service, and the Department of Motor Vehicles.
 - b. Emotional and practical support for adjusting to living in the Bay Area, including an introduction to public transportation, establishing a checking account, and becoming oriented to the client’s city.
 - c. Assistance with finding housing, jobs, and appropriate educational opportunities.
 - d. Help with expenses not covered by government grants, including support while out-of-country waiting for clearance to enter the United States.
2. In its efforts the Guardian Group will work with lawyers representing refugees and asylum seekers and the Voluntary Agency (VOLAG) assigned the case by the United States Department of Homeland Security.
3. The Guardian Group will not disclose identifying information about the people they are helping nor specific actions taken that could help outsiders identify a client, unless the client agrees and only when such disclosure will not endanger the client.
4. The Guardian Group will report its activities to the Congregation.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Policies of the Guardian Group

Purpose

The Guardian Group provides honest and open non-judgmental help with transition anxieties, isolation, social engagement and life in the San Francisco Bay Area to sexual minority refugees, asylum seekers, and asylees. We offer help in finding housing, employment, and social engagement. We are committed to being permanent local anchors, as long as needed.

The Guardian Group also encourages other faith organizations – Unitarian Universalist and those of other denominations – to develop their own Guardian Group program. Our outreach work includes publicity and the development of program start up procedures and guidelines.

Limitations

The Guardian Group does not guarantee housing or employment for its clients. We must be clear that we do not have housing resources ourselves and we do not have money to provide market-rate accommodations for our clients.

We will assist clients to find housing and employment, but we cannot guarantee that we will find either necessity.

Acceptance of Clients

New clients of the Guardian Group will be accepted when there is both financial and volunteer energy available to provide support for the newcomer. Guardian Group members should feel comfortable that they are able to identify support for at least 8 months after a new client is added to the roster.

New clients will be accepted by vote of the Guardian Group Steering Committee. At least 3/4 of the members of the Guardian Group Steering Committee must agree that another client should be accepted before the group takes that action.

Financial Support

Types of Support

The Guardian Group will offer very limited financial support to asylum seekers and to other clients who are unemployed or under-employed. When a client is eligible to work, they will receive money only if they are earnestly looking for employment or if they are unable to work for physical/emotional reasons or if they are attending school.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

The Guardian Group will attempt to provide part or all of a client's extraordinary expenses when there is a pressing need and a client has insufficient financial resources. Typical extraordinary expenses the Guardian Group may pay for include move-in security deposits, dental/medical care not covered by the government, and registration fees for required classes.

When there are resources available, the Guardian Group will pay for transportation, cell phones, clothing, and incidentals when a client does not have sufficient resources.

In general, refugees receiving government benefits are not expected to need financial support for all routine costs of living.

Amount of Support

The Guardian Group will adjust its support for each client based on their ability to pay for the necessities of life.

In general, the Guardian Group will try to provide an asylum seeker with \$300 cash a month and provide another \$250 worth of essential items (Clipper cards, cell plans, replacement clothes, etc.).

When asylees and refugees are legally able to work the Guardian Group generally only helps with extraordinary expenses. The group may decide by a poll of its members to extend financial support to refugees and asylees who are unemployed or underemployed. Such additional support will be explicitly temporary and clients should not expect ongoing, regular financial support.

Length of Time Support is Offered

The social and emotional connections made with clients may last indefinitely. However, financial support from the Guardian Group generally ends after 12 to 18 months.

The group will be sensitive to long-term clients who have temporary financial reversals or extraordinary, unavoidable expenses after the normal period of support. However, after 18 months only one-time assistance will be given, and then only if 3/4 of the committee agrees that the support is appropriate.

Confidentiality

The identity of all Guardian Group clients is confidential. All Steering Committee members and volunteers will sign a Confidentiality Agreement (see attached).

Clients will not be mentioned by name or described with personally identifying data in any public document or forum, nor will their identity be revealed to any other individual without a compelling reason.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Guardian Group Steering Committee members and volunteers may share confidential information about clients with their immediate family so long as the immediate family members agree to adhere to the rules on confidentiality.

No photographs of Guardian Group clients will be posted in any public space where the client is identified as being associated with the Guardian Group.

In general, clients may be introduced to incidental third parties as friends or an associate known from church or a social place. Clients should not be introduced to people outside of the Guardian Group as refugees or as clients of the Guardian Group. The only time mentioning the client's relationship to the Guardian Group is appropriate is when a member of the Guardian Group is representing the client in front of a government or business official who needs to understand why the client is getting coaching/help from the Guardian Group member.

Information that Guardian Group members learn about the personal life of clients is not to be shared. This restriction includes, but is not limited to, health status information and client family information.

Exceptions

When a client asks for financial or housing assistance from the Guardian Group, Steering Committee members have an obligation to share with other Guardian Group members relevant facts pertaining to the client's request. Typical appropriate sharing would include data on the client's financial situation and specific psychological issues which affect the appropriate housing for a client.

Release from Confidentiality

Clients may release the Guardian Group from any or all confidentiality requirements. It is recommended that releases from confidentiality be recorded in written form to insure that the release is intended and its limits understood. A simple exchange of email is sufficient.

Assignments and Roles

The Guardian Group will assign one or more people to the following positions:

- Chair.
 - Represents the group to UUSF and in the wider community.
 - Creates meeting agendas and conducts the meetings.
 - Tracks assignment of tasks and mentors others to ensure that duties are fulfilled
- Secretary. Takes and distributes minutes of meetings.
- Treasurer. Tracks the group's fund balances and ensures that expenses charged are appropriate.
- Grant Writer. Takes the lead in applying for foundation grants.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

- Outreach Director. Takes the lead in visiting other congregations and organizations to establish refugee/asylum seeker support systems.
- Volunteer coordinator. Tracks people who have offered to participate in the group. Organizes training for volunteers. Mentors and supports other members of the Guardian Group.

Professional Conduct

Guardian Group members will conduct themselves according to the standards normally expected of professional counselors or therapists. Members will be mindful that they have exceptional influence in the lives of the clients and they will avoid conflicts of interest, personal financial gain, sexual and romantic relationships with clients assigned to work with them.

Transparency within the Group

Except as outlined in the confidentially section above, Guardian Group members will share information about clients assigned to them.

Members will also share with the Guardian Group communications from others suggesting additional clients, resources, projects, or other similar topics.

Joining the Group and Volunteers

Because of the confidential nature of the work of the Guardian Group, its meetings are closed to members only and to guests invited by the chair(s). According to the Society's Bylaws, Guardian Group members are appointed by the Moderator of the Board of Trustees and must be approved by a majority vote of the Board.

People who wish to become members of the Guardian Group may be invited to attend one or more meetings. If they continue to express interest in joining, the members of the group should, when the potential member is not present, discuss the appropriateness of recommending the appointment. If a 3/4 majority of the group believes the new person should be appointed as a member of the group, the chair shall contact the Moderator of the Board of Trustees and request the appointment.

Client mentors and volunteers who help clients with specific tasks but who are not appointed members of the Guardian Group may be added at any time by consensus of the Guardian Group members and such approval should be noted in the Group's meeting minutes.

Confidentiality and Volunteer Agreements

Guardian Group Steering Committee members, mentors, and volunteers will sign both a Confidentiality Agreement and Volunteer Agreement before working with any clients or client information.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Volunteer Orientation

New volunteers and committee members will be given training on the Guardian Group's policies and procedures, an orientation to the issues facing clients including typical backgrounds, a review of the resources available to clients, and an exploration of the roles and commitments they are making.

The Guardian Group will seek the help of ORAM, JFCS/EB, or other professional groups to organize and conduct trainings when possible.

Mentors

The key to helping refugees and asylum seekers settle in the Bay Area is the newcomers' relationship with the volunteer Guardian Group mentors assigned to them. Every client is assigned two mentors who lead the response to the client's needs.

Ideally mentors meet refugees at the airport when they arrive and stay close to them their first days in the country, taking them to Social Security, introducing them to MUNI, helping them shop for basics, explaining recycling rules and other weird local customs, and accompanying them to their many introductory appointments with the health care system, social services, and other outlets of the helping bureaucracy.

Mentors for asylum seekers provide similar support, emphasizing services available to those who aren't eligible for US government benefits, walking their clients through the steps to claim Healthy San Francisco care, obtain a checking account, and explore available free English-language classes.

Mentors are a stable, non-judgmental, non-anxious presence in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. They are a safe person for the refugee or asylum seeker to express frustration at. Clients can get angry at their mentors when they are really feeling powerless and disorientated. Mentors don't react to misdirected anger and remain committed to their client's wellbeing.

Review of Policy and Procedures

The Committee will review this document at least annually for necessary changes.

Expense Reimbursements

The Guardian Group follows the reimbursement procedures of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco. Members should claim all authorized expenses on the Society's Payment Request Form and submit the completed form to the chair of the Guardian Group who will countersign the request and forward it the church office for processing. The Treasurer will countersign the chair's reimbursement requests when the committee is functioning without a co-chair.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco

Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Suicide Threats and Psychiatric Emergencies

PTSD and other psychiatric conditions are common among people with the experiences of the Guardian Group's clients.

The Guardian Group will increase its ability to help current and future clients by:

1. Securing the services of a mental health professional acting as a consultant. If possible, the consultant will agree to volunteer their services.
2. Meet as a group with the consultant to establish working relationships and guidelines for intervention when needed.

Intervention

Should a client expresses any desire to injure themselves or end their life, the Guardian Group member aware of the situation will:

1. Discuss the situation with a consultant.
2. If recommended by the consultant, advise the client to seek psychiatric treatment, assist in making appointment, and accompany the client to the treatment.
3. If a specific suicidal threat is made, especially if the threat includes a time and method, the situation is an emergency. The Guardian Group will safeguard the client, taking action recommended by the consultant or by common sense. Emergency actions may include calling 911, notifying psychiatric emergency services, removing dangerous objects from the control of the client, and/or insuring that the client is not alone for 24 hours.

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Confidentiality Agreement

Confidential information includes:

- the fact that a person is or has been a client of the Guardian Group
- any information given to the volunteer in confidence by the client
- any information about the client, his/her issues and treatment or contact with the agency

Confidentiality does *not* include:

- suspected child abuse, elder abuse or intent to physically harm another person or oneself.
(The Volunteer Coordinator should be called immediately if these issues arise.)

Basic principles of confidentiality:

- All information divulged by a client to a Guardian Group representative is held in the strictest of confidence.
- The volunteer shares information about a client only with the client's caseworker, or the Volunteer Coordinator. Information may be shared with a volunteer's spouse if the spouse has also signed a Confidentiality Agreement.
- A volunteer should not communicate confidential information to anyone outside of the Guardian Group of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco or the volunteer's spouse who has signed a confidentiality agreement.
- Breach of confidentiality is sufficient grounds for termination of volunteer staff.

I agree to comply with the above principles:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures

Volunteer Agreement

In offering my services as a volunteer for the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group, I understand the responsibilities that I am undertaking.

In joining First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group as a volunteer, I agree to:

1. Be responsible for **full client confidentiality** as described in the Confidentiality Agreement.
2. **Contact the Volunteer Coordinator or Committee Chair after each of the first 6 visits I have with the client (if I am placed as a mentor for a client with a client).** I will do this in order to assure that the match is successful. In addition, after 4 visits with the client, I will meet with the Volunteer Coordinator or Committee Chair in person to check in.
3. Have ongoing contact with the Volunteer Coordinator or Committee Chair regarding my volunteer work with First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group. Contact with First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group regarding ongoing work with the client will be about once a month – or more if necessary.
4. Attend at least 2 of the volunteer meetings in the calendar year.
5. If I am driving a client, I have a valid California driver’s license, and my vehicle is in safe mechanical condition. I carry car insurance meeting the California minimum requirements for personal injuries and for property damage.
6. Carry full responsibility for any passenger in my car that is associated with First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group. This means that if I agree to drive a First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group client, I understand that all liability is carried by my own car insurance.
7. Work under the supervision of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group Steering Committee. I will bring any issues regarding work that I do, and any concerns I have, to the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group Volunteer Coordinator or Committee Chair.
8. Not spend my own personal funds, or accept a client’s funds, during my placement with a First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Guardian Group client. My volunteer placement is strictly for assisting the client with non-financial issues.
9. Not to engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with a client.

Name _____ Signature _____
Date _____

First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco Refugee Guardian Group Policies and Procedures