

Volunteering with Mariposa

Assisting new immigrant families

Frequently Asked Questions

Thank you for wanting to help people who are vulnerable in these times. We hope this handout will encourage you to consider volunteering with Mariposa.

What is Mariposa?

Mariposa began in the spring of 2024, as part of [ArCS](#) that has been helping asylum-seekers since 2017. Mariposa is a small group of volunteers, who are assisting legal, newly-arrived immigrant families as they await more permanent housing through the state system. Mariposa focuses on short term housing needs.

What ways can I volunteer with Mariposa?

- If you have a spare bedroom, host a newly-arrived family for one week at a time.
- Serve on a support team: give rides, accompany trips to the grocery store, play with children, help the family sign up for local services, etc.
- Serve as a translator, especially if you speak Haitian Creole, Spanish, or French.
- Other skills are welcome: coordination, publicity, fundraising, counseling, etc.

Tell me more about the families you help

Most guests come through [IFS](#), the Immigrant Family Services Institute in Mattapan, MA. They are here legally. Most are mother and father with a child aged 2 - 5 years old. Families come for a wide range of reasons, but most have left situations of profound dysfunction and systemic violence, both physical and economic. They are in urgent need of housing while they await space in the state system.

What are the requirements for hosting a family?

For one week, you'll provide a private bedroom and a place they can store and cook food. The bathroom and kitchen facilities can be shared with you. When the family first arrives, you'll spend time helping them get oriented to your home and your expectations, likely with the help of a translator. Other than that, it's fine for you to come and go as you normally would in your daily life. Some hosts simply provide shelter and leave the rest to other Mariposa volunteers. Other hosts choose to connect with their families more: sharing meals, playing with children, helping with grocery shopping and medical appointments, etc. It's up to you how involved you wish to be.

Some additional important qualities if you are drawn to hosting:

- **Accepting unpredictability.** Some families have been easy and delightful. Others have been challenging for hosts. All are displaced and highly stressed. It's possible that just hours before you plan to host a family, a shelter space becomes available and their stay with you is cancelled. The whole journey is unpredictable.
- **Respecting boundaries - yours and theirs.** This is a cross-cultural experience. Your guests may or may not speak any English. They might wish for quiet and privacy or might want connection. You might not know your own needs until guests violate them. It's important that you can speak up for your own needs as a host and stay in touch with Mariposa for help making the stay a positive one for both you and the family.
- **Communicating promptly.** When the Mariposa coordinator or helpers contact you (by email, text, or phone, depending on your preferences) it's vital that you respond promptly. Successful hosting is a team effort.

It's OK to host just once. And we hope that hosting a family will be so rewarding that you'll want to host another family in the near future.

Hosting sounds challenging! Why do people do it?

Because many of our hosts have found hosting so rewarding, they do it again and again. You are being deeply useful! If the families were not staying with you, they would likely be on the street. Often guests are expressively appreciative, and the cross-cultural experience is stimulating and enriching.

I'm intrigued! What are my next steps?

If you are interested in volunteering in any of the roles above, your next step is to email one of the Mariposa facilitators to share a little about yourself and which role(s) you are drawn to. Contact anne.ellinger@gmail.com or sarah.trilling@gmail.com.

We'll first have a conversation—by phone or Zoom or in person. Then, if you want to volunteer, you'll watch or attend an orientation session. If you want to be a host, you'll fill out an online form about your home and availability, an online form for a CORI check and to be in the Welcome Center's database, and read a more detailed FAQ paper.

We hope to hear from you! Thank you for caring.