

Screening & Checks Policy

An important aspect of safeguarding is minimising any potential risks involved in introducing residents to refugees for the purposes of befriending. At HostNation, we take this very seriously and have established a robust system of screening, checks and training to mitigate this risk.

Befrienders

Registration to 'apply' to befriend is done online. Before being allowed to register, applicants have to confirm that they are over 18, they are a British resident, not currently suffering from alcohol or drug dependency and without criminal convictions. They fill in a detailed screening and profiling questionnaire which includes uploading their passport ID, a photo and their DBS/PVG certificate if they have one. They also provide two independent referees (who are not family or partner) and have known them for many years.

HostNation checks their passport ID to ensure they are who they say they are and arranges a 40 minute video screening call. Before the call, applicants are sent and asked to read our 18-page befriending guide which covers asylum seeking in the UK, the problems encountered, how the system works, best practice befriending, boundaries, safeguarding, signposting to specialist support services etc. On the call this is discussed further along with their commitment, availability and reasons for wanting to befriend. Each applicant is given a score out of 5 to register their suitability for the role. Their references are requested and they are invited to a 2hr online training session that covers trauma-informed practice, challenges, boundaries and safeguarding. ONLY once both references are in, the training has been completed and they have received scores of 4/5 or 5/5 do we consider them ready to be matched. Any reservations are noted and those applicants will generally not be matched.

DBS eligibility

Standard DBS checks are for people working in specific professions, while Enhanced DBS checks are only available for volunteering roles that involve regulated activities (related to the health, social or personal care of a vulnerable person). Befriending someone or providing companionship, is not eligible for these checks (Gov.uk). It is an offence to apply for a DBS check if the role is not eligible. The potential risks our befriendees are exposed to through out of home, adult befriending are considered very low. For this reason we do not request our volunteers to have a DBS check specifically to join HostNation. Many of our befrienders are recruited from refugee support networks or come from caring professions or have a background of community volunteering and some of them have an existing enhanced DBS. If you feel it is necessary for the person you are referring to be matched with someone from our database who has a previous DBS, please state this in the Any Other Information section at the end of the referral form.

Befriendees

We do not take children (under 18) or people with substance abuse issues and advise against referring the highly vulnerable or those with complex/serious mental health problems. We have a referral process as it is important that someone (ideally in a professional capacity), vouches for the person being referred and declares any information that they know which could carry a safeguarding risk to the befriender or result in too large a burden of responsibility. We also screen the referral (usually a friendly chat to ensure they understand what we offer) and if they have self-referred (generally discouraged), we will request a reference from an organisation or a professional. We do not make matches until we are reassured that neither party will pose an unnecessary risk to the other.