

Procedures for handling new VIS referrals:

1. Getting Ready for the Initial Visit

- a. **Know why you are making this visit.**
 - By taking the time and initiative to visit and find out how the church can best help, you demonstrate that you care, and that the church cares.
 - Making this visit helps you assess the situation—to discern the real needs, or perhaps see that the referral is inappropriate. (Remember sometimes meeting immediate needs will not address the root problem.)
 - Actually meeting the person in need enables you to become an effective advocate for that person and will help you in matching an appropriate gifted church member with the same hobby or interests (history, knitting, trains, sports, recycling...).
- b. Take time to **think about your own attitudes about receiving help.** (You too would probably rather give help than ask for help.)
 - Remember that as Christians we ourselves have to know how to accept God's love and kindness as a gift--not as something we earned.
 - Remember you are sharing God's unconditional love. You are there because of what God has done for you--not because of your own ability to solve problems. Only God is the Cure-giver; we are care-givers in His name.
 - Always show respect for the recipient of help, and affirm the person's ability to participate and be able to give back to others in some way, however small.
 - Benevolence is never intended to create dependency but to be a tool in the process of restoring the person.
- c. If possible, **find a partner to make the visit with you.** Working as a team will broaden the input you get from this visit. (Seeing a situation from the viewpoints of both a man and a woman can be very helpful!), and helps prevent the misunderstandings that can occur if a man makes a visit to a woman's home by himself.
- d. Before making the first phone call, **spend some time in prayer**, asking for the Lord's blessing and His Spirit's presence in giving you the appropriate words to say. Taking time to ask God for help will remind you that the outcome depends on Him alone!
- e. During the first phone call, **follow these guidelines:**
 - Introduce yourself, including what church you are from.
 - Tell them VIS has made you aware of their need. (VIS staff will have already told the person to expect your call so this will help them make the connection.)
 - Give the purpose of your visit--tell them you and a partner are coming to meet them, to hear about their situation from them, and to help figure out how your church can best help at this time.
 - Set up a time to make a brief visit (15-30 minutes) at a time convenient for them. Schedule the first visit in their home, or wherever is least threatening for them.

2. Making the First Visit

- a. **Begin with greeting and introductions.** Make sure you know the names of the family (including the kids!) ahead of time. Try to put them at ease by saying something positive, but don't spend too much time in small talk.
- b. **Make the transition to the purpose of the visit** by a specific statement: their need has come to your church's attention; you care and are interested in helping.
- c. **Ask open-ended questions** (that cannot be answered by a yes or no) **to help determine the root cause of the need.** Listen for lack of resources, lack of information, lack of family and/or church support, a sudden unexpected event, changes in environmental factors, personality or behavioral problems.
- d. **Ask for their solution to the problem** (their dreams and goals). Remember it is their problem; they must take ownership both of the problem and of the solution. However you might have to help them be realistic about attainable solutions.

- e. **Use good listening and observation skills** to build trust:
(*The Lord gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason--to listen twice as much as we talk.*)
- People communicate for 3 reasons: to put their feelings into words; to be understood; and to solve problems (request physical help or information).
 - Listening involves more than just words--words are only a small part. Be aware of the non-verbal cues (yours and theirs) that also send messages, sometimes unintentionally: tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, especially eye contact.
 - Listen to hear the hurt, not to heal the hurt. Resist the temptation of being the fixer or problem solver. You cannot solve the problem--that ultimately has to be done by the person in need; you only offer your help.
 - Listen for the root problem, not just surface needs.
- f. **Make an assessment of what the person needs.**
- Listen for the real need: lack of resources (money), lack of skills (such as budgeting or parenting), support (loneliness), or information (not knowing what help is available through various agencies).
 - Realize that the need may be camouflaged--the person may ask for help vacuuming when the real need is to have someone to talk to and visit with, a human contact.
 - VIS can help you with this--we know what aid is available through social agencies, have experience in a variety of needy situations, and are able to find out if the person is receiving help from other agencies or churches.
- g. **Make sure you communicate well.** Part of good communication is not passing judgment (imposing your values) or providing your answers. You are there to help people find their own solution to their problems.
- Unconditional love accepts the other person as he or she is, genuinely and sincerely. By showing such love, you communicate (demonstrate) Christ's love, which is unconditional.
 - One good way to initiate good communication is to reflect back a summary of what the person says or restate the description of events and feelings that the person just shared with you. This helps people feel understood and accepted; sometimes hearing what they just said, restated, helps them better understand themselves.
 - The most common danger to good communication is thinking we have to do something. Worrying about doing the right thing--instead of listening and being there--blocks communication. The person you are meeting may not be ready to do anything--doing something may be your need, not theirs.
- h. To close the visit, **ask if there are any other immediate needs**, and **state what support is immediately available to the person.** Summarize the meeting to make sure you all agree on the needs and proposed plan of action. Again state you are there on behalf of your church to share God's love with the people in this neighborhood.
- i. **Plan for a future meeting or follow-up phone call** so the person knows what to expect.
- j. After you have left the meeting, **debrief with your partner** what went well and why, as well as what did not go well and why. Make sure you know who is responsible for the next steps. Write down your impressions and factual information while it is still fresh in your minds. Maintain a file for reference.

3. Following the Initial Visit

- Using the information you gained from your initial visit, **recruit a volunteer** from your congregation. Begin with a bulletin insert stating the need and asking for a volunteer, but also use your knowledge of people. Ask God to help you identify someone who would be a good match, and pray that He will prepare the heart of the right person to volunteer.
- When you have a volunteer, **set up another visit to introduce the volunteer** to the person needing support.
- If it takes more than one or two weeks to initiate action, be sure to send a letter or card--or make a phone call--to **let the person know the need has not been forgotten.**
- Remember confidentiality!** If your church does not have a clear policy on matters of confidentiality, help develop one.