SUR LA BONNE VOIE — PRACTICAL GUIDE

Social integration in France — the method nobody teaches.

Not a theory. A chain of real connections, built from scratch.

OUR CHAIN — HOW EVERYTHING WAS BUILT

Facebook housing post → Apartment + first contacts → Neighbors → Dental emergency → Salon owner → Football team → Full network

Every link in this chain led to the next. None of it happened by chance. **Everything started with an action we chose to take.** That is the central lesson of this guide — the only one that truly matters.

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01 Start before you're ready

From day one

We arrived in Aubenas with one week to find housing. No French. Little money. But one clear conviction: **we were not going to wait for things to happen.** We were going to make them happen.

The first thing we did: post in the Aubenas Facebook group. In English and French — translated with AI. A warm photo. Genuine words about our arrival, our background, our desire to integrate into this town.

No begging. No appealing to pity. Presenting ourselves as people who deserve respect and consideration.

WHAT HAPPENED

Several people responded — potential landlords, but also local residents who simply wanted to meet us and welcome us. Within a week, we had an apartment and our first connections.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

French village Facebook groups are the number one local integration tool — and almost no immigrant uses them. **The people who can genuinely help you are often over 40 and use Facebook.** Not Instagram. Not TikTok. Facebook. Join your town's group on day one. Introduce yourself with warmth, respect, and clarity about who you are.

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02 Dignity as your calling card

The most powerful signal

In our post, in every meeting, in every conversation — one message was constant: **we are not asking for charity. We are offering something.** Our skills, our energy, our personality. We came to France to contribute, not to consume.

This signal is perceived immediately. People sense it before you even speak. In the way you carry yourself, make eye contact, smile without expecting anything back.

> **Dignity is not a luxury — it is your best introduction.**

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

French people who have the means to help — landlords, business owners, officials, professionals — share one thing: **they respect hard work and integrity above all else.** Show them you share those values and they will open doors that no administration can open.

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03 The daily greeting — the foundation of everything

Invisible but fundamental

We lived in a mixed neighborhood — Arabs, Africans, French, a few Latin Americans. At first, we didn't speak deeply with anyone. But we greeted everyone.

A smile. A wave. A "bonjour" even with a terrible accent.

These micro-interactions build something invisible but real — a presence, a mutual recognition. People start to see you as part of the neighborhood. And one day, someone takes the first step.

HOW THE CHAIN EXTENDED

A neighbor who knew us reached out when an employee at the local hair salon was suffering from severe tooth pain and couldn't find a dentist. My wife helped him — with Google Translate as interpreter. The story spread through the town center. A few weeks later, the salon owner himself came to speak with us.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

> **Offer before you ask. Always.**

If you have a skill that someone around you needs — use it. Without calculation. Without expecting immediate return. **In a French town, a good deed travels fast. So does a bad one.** Your reputation is built in those ordinary moments.

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04 Find your common ground

Sport, passion, skill

The salon owner, a former professional footballer, invited me to join his team. A team made up of Arabs, Africans, French — different backgrounds, few shared languages.

But on a football pitch, language is secondary. Skill speaks for itself.

When you can play, people respect you before you open your mouth. Questions come naturally. Exchanges begin. And without realizing it, you learn French from the field — and your teammates learn who you are.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Find your common ground with the people around you — sport, music, cooking, gardening, whatever. **Deep friendships don't come from conversations — they come from shared activities.** Join a club, an association, a team. Not to network. To live something together.

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05 Let the network build itself

The natural outcome

At a certain point, you no longer need to actively search. The people you've met introduce you to others. Your reputation precedes you. **People know who you are before you arrive somewhere.**

That's what happened to us. People we had never met knew our story. Doors opened without us knocking. But that only happens after planting — patiently, consistently, without expecting an immediate harvest.

THE MISTAKE THAT COSTS EVERYTHING

Surrounding yourself only with people in the same situation — no papers, no work, no resources. **That comfort is a trap.** We have seen immigrants in France for 8 years, still isolated, still stuck — because their social circle could not move them forward. Be open to everyone. But actively build connections with people who have values, work, and roots in the local community.

THE SECRET NOBODY SAYS

The people who can truly change your life in France — offer you housing, recommend you for a job, introduce you to a public official, testify on your behalf — **are established adults, with values, who have worked hard for what they have.** They will not help you because you need help. They will help you because they respect you. Earn that respect. It comes through integrity, through work, and through how you treat others — even when nobody is watching.

> *"Nothing happens if you don't initiate. Every encounter is a seed. You don't know which one will become a tree — so plant them all."*

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