

# Community Sponsorship in the UK: from application to integration

---

**JULY 2019**

**Formative evaluation**

**INTERIM REPORT**

Jenny Phillimore  
Marisol Reyes

**Institute for Research into Superdiversity**  
University of Birmingham

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the already very busy Community Sponsorship volunteers and thought leaders who spared a great deal of time to be interviewed for the evaluation and also to the refugees who generously shared their stories and their time. Without them the evaluation would not have been possible.

The contributions of **Dr Sara Hassan, Hoayda Darkal, Manar Marzouk and Mariam Lefsay** in undertaking interviews and data analysis in Arabic were essential in bringing the refugee perspective to the evaluation. **Reset Communities and Refugees** and the **Home Office** have offered much support in terms of identifying respondents, discussing findings and feeding back on the development of research tools on the report. **The College of Social Sciences and the ESRC IAA fund** generously supported the costs of the evaluation.

We are grateful to all the above for their contributions.

# Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter 2: Community Sponsorship in the UK</b>	3
Basic stages in the Community Sponsorship Scheme	5
Approval Phase	6
Arrival Phase	7
<b>Chapter 3: Research Methods</b>	9
Longitudinal evaluation	9
Retrospective interviews	10
Thought leader interviews	10
Ethics	11
<b>Chapter 4: Before arrival</b>	12
Group formation and models of volunteer recruitment	12
Case Study 1: Mary establishes a group	13
Model 1. Value driven	14
Model 2. Civically driven	15
Model 3. Personally driven	16
Contributions	17
Skills	17
Case Study 2: Sandra becomes a CS expert	18
Case study 3: Peer support	21
Support	22
<b>Chapter 5: From reception to integration</b>	23
Case study 4: Jamal and Amira's arrival story	23
Reception	24
Gains for volunteers	24
Learning about new cultures	25
Case study 5: Learning about new cultures	26
Social Capital	26
Challenges for volunteers and refugees	28
Refugee integration challenges	31
Case study 6: Employment expectations	33
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusions</b>	37
Volunteers	37
Application process	37

Arrival and placement .....	38
Resettlement.....	38
Moving forward.....	39
<b>Chapter 7: Recommendations .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Reset and partners .....	40
Home Office .....	42
IOM/UNHCR .....	43
CS Groups .....	43
References .....	45
Appendices.....	46

# Executive Summary

---

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme was introduced in 2016 and developed by the **Home Office in partnership with civil society and local government**. This report presents the interim findings of a formative evaluation which aims to help shape the development of Community Sponsorship in the UK.

## Chapter 2: Community Sponsorship in the UK

The UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CS) was inspired by the Canadian Private Sponsorship model. A key dimension of the CS is that community groups take responsibility for **welcoming, supporting and settling vulnerable refugee families** and provide an effective way to support refugee integration. In early 2018, the Home Office made available grant funding to support the creation of a new arm's length organisation called **"Reset Communities and Refugees" (Reset)**, intended to become the main infrastructure organisation for CS. Reset work closely with partner organisations to promote the CS and support CS groups. In order to become a CS group, organisations must have some formal constitution, raise appropriate funds, identify housing, obtain local authority consent, develop a safeguarding policy, engage in training and complete an application form. Groups must demonstrate that they are **capable of meeting key responsibilities** once the refugee family they plan to support arrives.

## Chapter 3: Research methods

Between January 2017 and January 2019, a **team of researchers from IRiS** conducted 112 interviews with refugees, CS volunteers and thought leaders. The team followed eight CS groups from establishment to arrival of the family and 12 months after arrival. They also interviewed **15 refugees who had been in the UK in excess of 12 months and 36 volunteers who had supported those refugees**. Interviews took place in urban, rural and suburban areas and in England, Scotland and Wales. Some 12 thought leaders who had been involved in the development or promotion of the CS were also interviewed. Full ethical approval for the evaluation was received **from the University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee**. The interviews covered the period in which the CS was developed in the UK with findings feeding in to the development of the scheme and associated support services.

## Chapter 4: Before arrival

Volunteer recruitment is fundamental to the CS. Many individuals were motivated to establish groups or to volunteer by media coverage of the 2015 crisis or by calls from faith leaders to act. The role of **social or faith values, interests in civil society action and the desire to overcome personal challenges** were all important in encouraging volunteers to get involved. Volunteers brought wide ranging skills to the CS from former careers or their own personal experiences. They gained **new skills and knowledge** especially around team working, communications, charity development and the CS. Many groups spent a great deal of time working on the application focusing

collectively on different requirements. They faced challenges around raising funds, preparing the resettlement plan and identifying affordable housing. Fledgling CS groups gained support from some of the larger charities promoting the CS, from more established CS groups, local authorities and from communities with origins in the Middle East.

## Chapter 5: From reception to integration

Arrival of the refugee family was one of the high points for CS volunteers, with refugees reporting that arriving to a small welcome committee at the airport was extremely reassuring. Most groups and refugee families bonded quickly, with kin-like relationships developing in some instances. **Volunteers reported gaining a great deal from the CS: friendship, new knowledge, learning about different cultures and a sense of purpose.** Refugees clearly benefited from the social capital gained from having a ready-made network to help them settle in. Volunteers aided refugees with accessing healthcare services and welfare benefits. They were pivotal in engagement with schools and in supporting English language acquisition. They also offered emotional support and tried to connect refugee adults with other refugee families.

Both volunteers and refugees also faced challenges. Some refugees did not quite “fit” in the local environment if it differed enormously from their former life. Communication was tricky in the early months. **Refugees and volunteers struggled with unanticipated social and cultural differences.** Refugees were used to an open-door approach to socialising while volunteers liked to schedule activities. The nature of gender relations in some of the families concerned volunteers used to more egalitarian gender dynamics. Despite important social connections with volunteers, many refugees, especially those in rural areas or women, felt isolated and worried about the friends and family they had left behind.

Progress with English acquisition was slower than anticipated and refugees not literate in Arabic felt out of their depth in ESOL classes to the extent that their difficulties learning English impacted on self-confidence and self-esteem. Having expected to access work quite quickly after arriving in the UK, refugee adults were disappointed at not getting a job and concerned that accessing work depended on language acquisition. **Neither refugees nor volunteers were aware that gaining work is acknowledged to be a major challenge in refugee integration per se,** and so lack of progress towards self-sufficiency was a frustration to all. Lack of work and progress with English combined with the horrific experiences which led to forced migration combined to impact on refugees’ psychological wellbeing but as yet no group reported engaging with the counselling services, partly because of concerns about language barriers. Several groups reported racist opposition to the CS before their family arrived, and one refugee adult reported being racially harassed.

CS groups received support to address the above challenges from various sources including the charities and organisations which had previously encouraged their application. Many groups interviewed were set up before the establishment of Reset, who now provide extensive advice and support refugee resettlement.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

Our data reflects the fledgling nature of the CS and identifies some of the teething problems that are in the process of resolution. Despite our work focusing on what was a challenging period for the CS, overall we find that **the CS is working well in the UK** and that groups, volunteers and refugees are benefitting from the scheme, often in ways that were not anticipated. Further work is planned to try to identify the benefits of the CS that move beyond refugees and volunteers to include the wider community.

## Chapter 7: Recommendations

This chapter sets out a range of recommendations about the ways in which the CS in the UK can be enhanced, some of which are already in hand. These touch upon encouraging group formation, the application process, recruiting and retaining volunteers, managing expectations, training, support, education and English, integration and employment and identifying the key stakeholders who might respond including Reset, the Home Office, IOM and UNHCR and CS groups.

### GLOSSARY

<b>BRP</b>	Biometric Residence Permit
<b>CS</b>	Community Sponsorship Scheme
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>IoM</b>	International Organisation for Migration
<b>IRiS</b>	Institute for Research into Superdiversity
<b>LSCB</b>	Local Safeguarding Children Board
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>VCRS</b>	Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme
<b>VPRP</b>	Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme
<b>VPRS</b>	Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme

# Chapter 1:

# Introduction

---

In July 2016, the UK government introduced the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CS) to enable community groups, including charities and faith groups, to support refugees to resettle in the UK. Any community group constituted as a charity can apply to the Home Office to welcome and support a refugee family into their community. This scheme is part of the **Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPRS)** that is intended to settle 20,000 vulnerable refugees in the UK by 2020 and the **Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS)** which aims to resettle 3,000 vulnerable children and their families by March 2020<sup>1</sup>. Under the VPRS and VCRS schemes, local authorities are given five years of funding to support the resettlement of refugee families. By contrast, the support provided for refugees arriving under the CS is provided by local communities. The underpinning idea of the CS is that support offered by local people will accelerate resettlement and integration processes for vulnerable refugee families. This report outlines **the findings from a formative evaluation of the CS focusing on the functioning and outcomes of the scheme in its early stages** with a view to providing information that can help shape the future development of the CS in the UK and beyond for all stakeholders involved in its delivery.

**The Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS)** at the **University of Birmingham** was initially invited by Citizens UK and the Methodist Church to undertake a formative evaluation of the Community Sponsorship Scheme with a view to ensuring their efforts supporting a refugee family were as effective as possible. Following receipt of internal University and ESRC funding and later through connecting with Reset, the research team expanded their efforts from two to twenty-two groups. The objectives of the evaluation include:

- *Considering the motivations, aspirations, and experiences of CS organisers and volunteers*
- *Exploring group establishment and application processes*
- *Identifying the gains enjoyed and practical challenges faced by CS groups*
- *Examining the provision of support once sponsored families are in residence and the extent to which support needs are met*
- *Exploring the experiences of refugees and the ways in which the CS support shapes their resettlement*
- *Documenting good practice*

---

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the VPRS and VCRS schemes individuals can also be resettled through the Gateway Protection and Mandate Refugee Programmes or be granted refugee status following a claim made upon arrival or after entry to the UK. Home Office, National Statistics, [How many people do we grant asylum or protection to?](#)



- *Impacting upon the shape of the CS providing knowledge for practitioners, sponsors, policymakers and CS groups*

This report outlines some of the key findings from the research undertaken between January 2018 and 2019. It is important to note that the evaluation engaged with groups who were “pioneers” in the CS at a stage when the application and support processes were being developed. Subsequently the data presented herein reflects the nascent nature of the scheme and for example that Reset, the organisation set up to support the CS in the UK, was in the process of being established.

## Chapter 2:

# Community Sponsorship in the UK

---

**The development of the Community Sponsorship Scheme was influenced by the Canadian Private Sponsorship model, wherein civil society groups sign agreements with the Government agreeing to support refugees invited to settle in Canada.**

Canadian groups must be incorporated organisations with personnel and finances available to ensure they can meet the resettlement needs of refugees. Sponsoring groups provide refugees with care, lodging, settlement assistance and support for a period of around 12 months or until the refugee becomes self-sufficient. The programme has resettled more than 275,000 refugees since its inception in 1979<sup>2</sup>.

The UK Government was attracted to the idea that community groups could take responsibility for welcoming, supporting and settling vulnerable refugee families and provide an effective way to support refugee integration. The UK Home Office, with representatives of UK civil society, met with **the Canadian Government and organisers of the Private Sponsorship Refugee Programme** to learn from the Canadian experience and worked closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the development of the CS. The CS is arguably partly an outcome of the determination and passion of UK civil society **groups who sought a more active role in resettling refugees**. A unique aspect of developing the scheme was the inclusion of a variety of groups who worked closely with the Government on its design and implementation<sup>3</sup>. Those groups include Citizens UK; ABIDE Ottery St. Mary; Caritas (St Monica's RC Church); Croeso Abergwaun; Croeso Teifi; De Beauvoir Welcomes Refugees; and Salvation Army Raynes Park Community Church; CHARIS.

The CS was formally launched on 19 July 2016 by the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, and The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who said:

***"The full Community Sponsorship Scheme presents churches and other civil society groups with the opportunity to provide sanctuary to those fleeing war-torn places"***<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Data from 2016, see [Canadian Council of Refugees, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program Proud history, Uncertain future](#)

<sup>3</sup> UK Citizens, [The story of community sponsorship in the UK](#).

<sup>4</sup> Home Office, [Community Sponsorship Scheme launched for refugees in the UK](#)

The CS is seen as having great potential to promote positive resettlement outcomes, both for the resettled families and local communities, and was unparalleled in Europe at the time of writing. Its innovation is based **upon enabling community groups to become directly involved in supporting refugee resettlement**. Its ultimate ambition is to empower families to rebuild their lives and to become self-sufficient<sup>5</sup>.

In early 2018, the Home Office made available grant funding to support the creation of a new arm's length organisation called **"Reset Communities and Refugees"** intended to become the main infrastructure organisation for the CS<sup>6</sup>.

Their mission is:

***"to see as many people as possible getting involved with Sponsorship and welcoming refugee families into their communities"***

There are three main ways that they work to achieve their mission:

- 1. To raise awareness of Community Sponsorship across the country*
- 2. To support community groups to welcome refugees into their local areas*
- 3. To gather the experiences of sponsor groups and sponsored refugees and convey their views to the Home Office to shape the development of Community Sponsorship.*

Reset became established in the period that we undertook our evaluation, with their services rapidly developing and evolving to meet needs. Their main model of working **was to establish a network of partners who provide advice, guidance and support to sponsorship groups** from application through to supporting a resettled family. Currently, Reset partners with the following leading refugee, faith and community charities:

- *Caritas Salford*
- *CHARIS Refugees*
- *For Refugees*
- *Kings Arms Project*
- *Mercy Mission*
- *Refugee Council*
- *The Salvation Army*
- *Scottish Refugee Council*
- *Citizens UK-Sponsor Refugees*
- *Oasis Charitable Trust*

Initially, training for CS groups was provided by Refugee Action but Reset has now taken over this function, offering the training required by the Home Office to complete the application process. They also run training days covering a range of topics including cultural awareness, understanding boundaries, safeguarding and preparing for arrivals. The sessions are designed to be interactive, with case studies taken from CS groups' experiences responding to real-life situations. They have recently launched a training website aimed at meeting the needs of CS groups <https://training-resetuk.org/>.

---

<sup>5</sup> Home Office, [Community Sponsorship, Making it Happen](#).

<sup>6</sup> See Reset website at: <https://resetuk.org/>

Besides promoting learning and knowledge, Reset works closely with the Home Office.

*“Reset has been a kind of voice and policy role to the UK government and trying to understand what the barriers are for sponsorship growth and listening very carefully across the UK on sponsorship stakeholders”<sup>7</sup>*

Reset has been closely involved with this evaluation in supporting access to groups and families and in responding to feedback from the research team on a regular basis, using the feedback to help shape their services.

## Basic stages in the Community Sponsorship Scheme

The CS has three distinct phases:

- a. Application
- b. Approval
- c. Arrival

### Application Phase

Once CS groups have formed and gained the appropriate organisational status or partnered with a sponsor charity, they have to meet the Home Office’s application criteria. The application phase involves obtaining essential resources needed for the resettlement of refugees, as well as complying with legal and organisational **requirements. A summary of the key conditions that all the sponsor groups must meet are:**

### Organisation status

Prospective sponsor groups must be constituted as one of the following entities: a registered charity; an individual or body falling within section 10(2) (a) of the Charities Act 2011; or a registered Community Interest Company. The sponsor organisations must name a lead sponsor responsible for signing the sponsorship arrangement.

### Funding

CS groups must provide evidence that they have sufficient financial resources to help the family to integrate. The Home Office request a budget forecast of anticipated expenditure accounting for the social welfare income the family should receive and the expected cost of accommodation. At the outset of the scheme, sponsor groups must have a minimum of £9,000 per family.

### Housing

Formal responsibility for support of the resettled family is for a period of one year, but housing availability must continue for two years. The groups have the option to offer support beyond this period, according to the needs of the resettled family. They must liaise with the police to ensure there is no objection to housing the family at the proposed address.

---

<sup>7</sup> Telephone interview with Reset’s Founder and former Director, 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2019.

### Local Authority consent

Sponsor groups are required to provide the Home Office with written evidence of local authorities' consent to apply for each CS arrangement. Groups must liaise with local authorities to facilitate access to other aspects of resettlement such as education, and safeguarding.

### Safeguarding policy

The group must demonstrate their intention and ability to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable adults by preparing and submitting a safeguarding policy, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) must be given an opportunity to comment on that policy.

### Training

All CS groups receive training by Reset (previously from Refugee Action) on important aspects such as cultural awareness, boundary-setting, empowerment and arrival planning.

### Application Form

The Home Office requires CS groups to produce a detailed and credible resettlement plan to illustrate how they will deliver effective support to a resettled family, which must be detailed in the application form. The plan must outline a comprehensive list of requirements for integration as well as contingency plans.

## Approval Phase

The approval phase involves a detailed assessment of a CS group's application by the Home Office which examines the extent to which they have met the above criteria.

**Staff from the Home Office visit each group before approval to assess application progress and provide feedback and advice on questions or difficulties.** Local authority representatives are also invited to attend the meetings.

During the approval phase, the Home Office carries out security checks on CS group members. They can refuse or revoke approval if false or inaccurate information is provided; if groups manifest vocal or active opposition to fundamental UK values; and if there are criminal convictions, immigration offences, or other illegal activity. The lead sponsor of the group must ensure that all the individuals involved in supporting their resettled family are suitable.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has responsibility for all out-of-country casework activity relating to the UK's resettlement schemes. The UNHCR<sup>8</sup> identifies candidates for resettlement who meet the UK's criteria: including legal and/or physical protection needs; survivors of violence and/or torture; medical needs; women and girls at risk; family reunification; children and adolescents at risk; and lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions. **The UK will not resettle individuals who have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity or other serious crimes.** Refugees who meet the criteria are offered the opportunity to be resettled in the UK. Once they have accepted the offer, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) undertakes health assessments, organises the appropriate documentation and arranges travel to the UK.

---

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, Kate Brown, Reset Co-Director, May 2019

More recently, procedures have changed a little, in that an application may be given full approval by the Home Office, or be approved-in-principle. In the latter case, full approval is subject to one or more final steps the group must take, such as securing a property. Once full approval is granted, groups sign a formal agreement setting out their responsibilities. **The Home Office proposes a particular family for resettlement, sending to the CS group detailed information about the family and any special needs or challenges they face.** The family must meet the vulnerability criteria and can originate from different countries. Once the CS group and local authority agree to accommodate the family, the family is notified and the date of arrival agreed. Refugees are invited by IOM to attend a pre-departure cultural orientation session which informs them about life in the UK and provides information about their destination, although this may be provided only in writing.

## Arrival Phase

Currently the average time between Home Office application approval and family arrival is approximately 3 months. **The arrival phase crystallises all the efforts invested by sponsors and is one of high points of the scheme.** Resettled families have lost their homes and many have lost loved ones, friends and family, while witnessing the horrors of conflict. Some have specific medical needs or disabilities.

The Home Office ensures that CS groups fulfil a set of basic responsibilities in the twelve months after their family arrives. These include providing support, with access to school and language learning, benefits and job applications, and health and socialisation. Table 1 outlines the specific aspects included in each category:

**Table 1:** Key responsibilities

Migration Status	School/Language	Job Centre	Health	Social activities
Refugees must receive Biometric Residence Permits (BRP) within 1 day of arrival of the BRP	Assist with registering children in schools within 2 weeks of arrival	Support attendance at JobCentre appointments for benefit assessments, within 3 days of arrival	Assist registration with a local GP and dentist practices, within 1 week of arrival	Support attendance at local community activities
	Provide ESOL courses with a qualified teacher, for a minimum of 8 hours per week for the first 12 months and monitor progress for a year	Assist with access to employment, including development of CV, and education	Advise on accessing mental health services and help for victims of torture, as appropriate	Assist with accessing digital services for communication and access to benefits
	Provide the opportunity to obtain an English language qualification, to support access to employment and education			
	Provide practice of conversational English			
	Provide interpreting services, as required, for 12 months from arrival			

Source: Home Office, *Community Sponsorship guidance for prospective sponsors*, updated December 2018.

Finally, the sponsor groups must keep refugees' key documents securely, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations. Those documents include their UNHCR registration; entry clearance document; their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP); National Insurance number and NHS number. After arrival, the Home Office arrange monitoring meetings, either in-person or via digital communications.

## Chapter 3:

# Research Methods

---

**The aim of the formative evaluation was to develop an understanding of the effectiveness of the Community Sponsorship scheme with a view to feeding into the ongoing development of the scheme.** A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was adopted to ensure an in-depth understanding of the experiences and processes underpinning the scheme as it evolved. The interview guides that were used throughout the evaluation are included in the Appendices.

Between January 2017 and January 2019, the team of researchers from IRiS conducted **112 interviews**. There were three main elements to the evaluation: longitudinal research with CS groups and, where appropriate, the refugee adults they supported; retrospective interviews with refugee adults and associated groups who have reached the 12 month point; and interviews with thought leaders, most of whom were volunteers with two acting in a paid capacity (see Table 2). Longitudinal research involved **repeated visits to the groups at different stages** (see below) while retrospective research involved **one-off interviews** in which respondents looked back across the whole process.

**Table 2:** Interview respondents

	Longitudinal	Retrospective	Thought leaders
Refugee adults	2	15	
Volunteers <sup>9</sup>	36	36	10
Others			2

### Longitudinal evaluation

The formative evaluation commenced in January 2017 with two groups based in the West Midlands. The importance of the evaluation soon became clear and, through connections with newly formed Reset and injection of further funds by the University of Birmingham, the evaluation was extended to cover a total of eight groups. Groups were selected to include urban and rural areas and activity in England, Scotland and Wales. Interviews took place at three stages in order to collect data about each aspect of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Some Interviewed twice at different stages (see longitudinal evaluation below)



CS process. These were 1) with group organisers pre- approval to examine experiences of the application process; 2) with refugee adults, organisers and volunteers around six weeks after refugee arrival to examine arrival and early settlement experiences and 3) with the same respondents one year after arrival. At the stage of writing we had reached stage 2 with two groups and had interviewed 11 volunteers twice – all other volunteers had been interviewed once.

The interview schedules used can be found in the Appendices section. Interview questions covered a range of issues including the actions taken, challenges faced, solutions identified, plans for the future, expectations and more. Interviews with refugees were undertaken in Arabic by an Arabic speaking researcher. At the interim stage of the evaluation the majority of groups had not reached the 12-month milestone and some may never reach the point of receiving a family. Nonetheless interviews with unsuccessful groups are important if we are to understand the reasons why they did not proceed. We continue to follow the progress of all eight groups and report herein on progress as it stood at January 2019.

## Retrospective interviews

Partway through the longitudinal evaluation, Reset approached IRiS to explore whether it would be possible to undertake interviews with refugees who had reached the 12-month mark. **IRiS collaborated with Reset to design the interview schedule** (see Appendix 4) and interviewed 15 refugees from six CS groups. Subsequently we interviewed the volunteers and organisers who had been involved with the support of those refugees. These interviews enabled us to gain insight about the scheme from successful groups. While retrospective interviews rely heavily on the memories of respondents, which can be selective, they also enable respondents to offer an overview of the entire CS process and to identify good practice as well as areas for improvement.

## Thought leader interviews

Thought leaders are defined as individuals who worked or volunteered for organisations who had been involved with the CS since its early stages, had some involvement in its development and were working to inspire other groups to resettle refugees. They sometimes act as **coordinators for sponsor groups** and use their expertise to address problems brought to them by groups. In November 2018, our researchers interviewed eight respondents attending a workshop with thought leaders organised by Reset. We later undertook a further four interviews. The thought leader interviews enabled us to identify key learning from across the scheme.

**In summary, a total of 72 volunteers and group leaders from 14 community sponsorship groups have been interviewed.** Eight groups were closely linked with a faith group, while six groups characterised themselves as secular. Some 55 (76%) of the interviewees were women, and 17 (24%) were men, roughly representing the gender balance within CS groups. Most participants were white British and semi-retired or retired. Six groups were based in multicultural urban areas; three in less diverse suburban neighbourhoods; and five groups in small towns or villages with little experience of diversity<sup>10</sup>. **Fifteen interviews were undertaken with refugee adults in seven families.** Nine refugee interviewees were women and six were men. The average

---

<sup>10</sup> Due to the confidentiality of the information obtained in this study, specific names of the participants and their organisation have been omitted.

age of refugee women was 33 years, and of men 42 years. Five families arrived into the UK in July-August 2017, one in 2016, and the latest in February 2018. Of the 12 thought leaders, nine were men and three were women and they represented organisations operating across England and Wales.

## Ethics

Full ethical approval was received from the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee. Each potential respondent was initially approached either by telephone or e-mail and asked if they wished to participate. If they showed an interest, they were given a participant information form and an opportunity to discuss the nature of the research and ask questions. Once they agreed to participate, they and the researcher undertaking the interview signed a consent form formally agreeing to participate. **All documents and discussions were available and undertaken in Arabic for refugee participants who were accessed via their CS group leads.** Once the group leader had the initial approval of refugee adults to participate, they were contacted by a researcher who outlined the aims and objectives of the evaluation, the kinds of questions that would be asked and how the data collected would be used. Three CS groups declined to invite the family they supported to be interviewed on the grounds that they currently had too many medical commitments and would struggle to find the time. One refugee family declined to be interviewed when asked by their CS group lead. All refugee adults who agreed to the initial conversation with our Arabic speaking researcher subsequently agreed to participate.

## Chapter 4:

# Before arrival

---

The information collected in the interviews was processed and classified thematically in order to evaluate the motivations, aspirations, and experiences of the organisers and volunteers during their involvement with the CS. The data has been organised into two parts that correspond with the two phases we observed. The first begins before the arrival of the family and includes the recruitment of volunteers, formation of groups, completion of the application process, and approval of the application. The second phase began when refugee families arrived, and volunteers and sponsored families focused upon supporting their resettlement.

This chapter begins by discussing group formation and exploring the drivers behind the volunteers' involvement in the CS. It also describes the contributions and expertise that volunteers brought into the scheme and the new skills that they acquired through involvement. Finally, the chapter describes the challenges associated with the application that were experienced, and the support received to address them.

### Group formation and models of volunteer recruitment

Volunteer recruitment is fundamental to the CS. The engagement and the commitment of volunteers who work to raise funds and complete the application documents as well as support refugee families are at the heart of the scheme. Refugee resettlement is an emotive topic, with the events of 2015 providing an important impetus for individuals to act to "do something" to help. In particular, media coverage of the three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, whose body was washed up on a shore in Turkey in 2015<sup>11</sup> was mentioned by several respondents.

*"Summer 2015 with the refugee crisis in Syria and the news about the refugees trying to flee from the Middle East to Europe and dying in the process, and the image of the little boy on the beach...it was such a powerful thing"*

Urban group

Before the CS was formally launched, some partner organisations wanting to encourage refugee resettlement started to promote the scheme and recruited volunteers within their own networks. Other groups used social media and local newsletters to engage with their local communities. **Further groups ran awareness-raising events to tell people about the fate of refugees and how they could help.** Social networks were key to recruitment, with some individuals asking their friends and extended family to help or using their personal networks to recruit volunteers.

---

<sup>11</sup> It has been reported that the photograph of Alan Kurdi in the mass media increased substantially the amount of donations to charities helping migrants and refugees in the UK. Hemnley, Jon (3 September 2015) "[Britons rally to help people fleeing war and terror in the Middle East](#)". The Guardian.

---

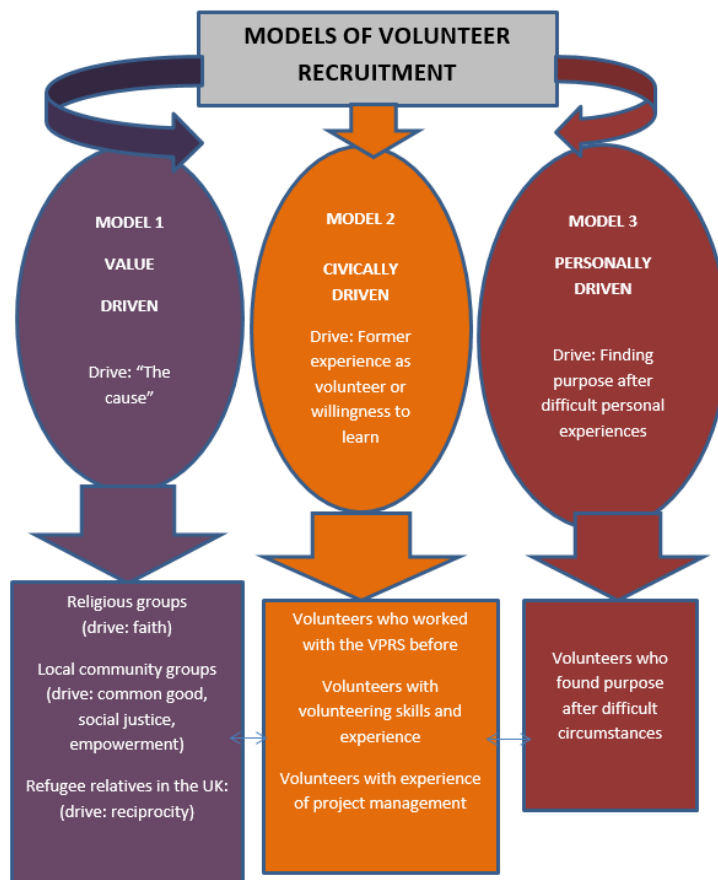
## Case Study 1: Mary establishes a group

**In 2013, after seeing images of the Syrian crisis on the news, Mary wrote to the Government demanding action.** Disappointed by their response she posted an advert on social media to identify others willing to help. Initially, four people met in a coffee shop in August 2015. After the image of Alan Kurdi went viral, many more people became interested and the group grew. Mary approached her local authority and was told her town was not suitable for refugee resettlement. Nonetheless, the group kept meeting, organising and pushing the authority to act. When the CS was announced in 2016, Mary's group was one of the first to apply. Their first family arrived one year later.

---

Average group membership consisted of six to eight core members who were involved in development and leadership and an additional ten to fifteen volunteers who offered support with specific tasks (i.e. driving to and from hospital). Three main drivers that motivated individuals to establish or join a group were identified. These are set out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Models of volunteer recruitment



## Model 1. Value driven

Participants who were members of neighbourhood associations, local community groups, or linked to Citizens UK outlined their desire to act as a community and saw helping refugees as an opportunity to stand up for values such as social justice and "the common good". They were often motivated by seeing images of refugees in distress and the desire to improve the lives of others.

*"Social Justice... I have always been involved in social justice; it is part of my life"*

Urban group

*"Strength and sense of community... it is a good way of building community and having positive experiences together"*

Semi-urban group

*"Without diminishing that this is about refugee protection first and foremost, it is a really valuable community thing"*

Urban group

*"My civic ethos is to serve others rather than myself"*

Rural group

Volunteers belonging to faith groups were frequently motivated by their religious values and beliefs. Some cited the appeals of religious leaders such as **Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury** in asking religious communities, monasteries, and shrines throughout Europe to host a refugee family as a call to action.

*“Community Sponsorship totally transformed my own life, my working life, and the life of my family in an amazing way. I never gave it any thought at all, but because I have a very strong faith, I just felt that God was telling me: Do something, do something... and as soon as I stood up for refugees the doors started to open, one after the other”*

Thought leader

*“Halfway through I felt like I have done something in my life that is by God and I thought if I can do something that counts, I will do this”*

Urban group

Finally, some participants mentioned that they felt an affinity with the CS because they are refugees themselves or have family who came to the UK as refugees.

*“We are a community of refugees, so I think it is our social responsibility to help other refugees”*

Semi-urban group

For example, one woman told us her mother-in-law came from Uganda as a refugee and had spoken about how the “warmth of the nation” enabled her to settle and build a comfortable life. The respondent wanted to reciprocate by supporting a refugee family. Others had personal experience of migrating to the UK and felt they understood something of the challenges faced by refugees, so wanted to help.

## Model 2. Civically driven

Being active in civil society was extremely important for some participants and the CS gave them a new opportunity to become civically active. Being part of a lively group and feeling that they were making a contribution to community and society was important.

*“I can’t think of anything else that I have done before that has had such a profound effect and I have been working in this for eighteen years. It’s been the best thing that I’ve done”*

Rural group

*“It’s really funny; you never know when you start something how it will affect you and how involved you will become... this aspect of the job... has become something that means too much to let go at the minute, which is why I said I’d stay on as a volunteer”*

Urban group

Some participants had previously volunteered in different ways in their local community and recognised they had skills that would be useful to their local CS group. Indeed, some were invited to participate on the grounds that they had a skill which the group needed. **Once involved they then became more passionate about refugee issues.**

*"I've worked with Syrian refugees who have come in through the local authority, who have been contracted out to a charity who is taking care of their resettlement, and I can see the problems there and the bumps in the road, and how they feel neglected... which is why I support and I am passionate about CS in the first place"*

Urban group

Some participants were delighted to play a part in giving refugees the opportunity to meet their potential. They felt encouraging refugees to move to their area would build a better community for everyone.

*"I'm not an absolutely standard English reticent person. I want more refugees coming here. And we are determined to have refugees living in town, and I'm determined it will be a good environment for them as well because as I say from my own point of view, there's so much potential that they've got and they can give"*

Semi-urban group

### Model 3. Personally driven

Some volunteers experienced difficult personal circumstances such as bereavement, retirement, or illness. They reported that involvement in CS gave them a sense of purpose, helping them to deal with their personal problems. Many expanded their group of friends building new connections both within the group and with the refugee family, thereby reducing their sense of isolation.

*"I cannot even begin to tell you what I have gained...so much...so much, joy, the feeling of having a purpose, the feeling of changing something ...the power of little people"*

Semi-urban group

*"...What a great thing this meant to me, I think it has been helping me tremendously on my journey after my husband passed away"*

Urban group

*"It has been very enriching but it has been much harder work than we anticipated, but much more rewarding and I've gained very good friends and neighbours, people I am very fond of. It has been very nice"*

Rural group

Many respondents engaged in the scheme because of several of the aspects outlined above.

## Contributions

As the groups formed their leaders, they tried to integrate into the core team individuals with skills that could address some of the specific needs associated with the application process in order to increase the chance that their application would be successful. **They used their social networks to identify people with the skills needed.** Most leaders and volunteers came from professions such as nursing, accountancy, academia, social work, planning, and interpreting. Most were retired or semi-retired, a factor considered important given the amount of time they devoted to their application.

Most groups worked collectively to prepare their proposal, although there were examples where one individual with experience of writing applications had done much of the work. Volunteers' contributions included skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- Project management
- The workings of housing associations
- Networking with local authorities
- Navigating the NHS
- Knowledge of primary and secondary school systems
- Teaching English or ESOL courses
- Knowledge of the benefits system
- Accountancy and finance
- Arabic language

## Skills

The first phase of the Community Sponsorship Scheme involves an intensive process of coordination and collaboration among the organisers and core volunteers in order to comply with the requirements set by the Home Office. Preparing the resettlement plan and safeguarding policies, as well as liaising with the local authorities and raising funds to support the sponsored families, meant some members of the groups had to take on new roles and engage in unfamiliar activities. **Partner organisations, the Home Office and Reset provided special training and advice for volunteers in specific areas.** Individuals developed new skills and abilities through the process of preparing their plans and from getting advice from other CS groups.

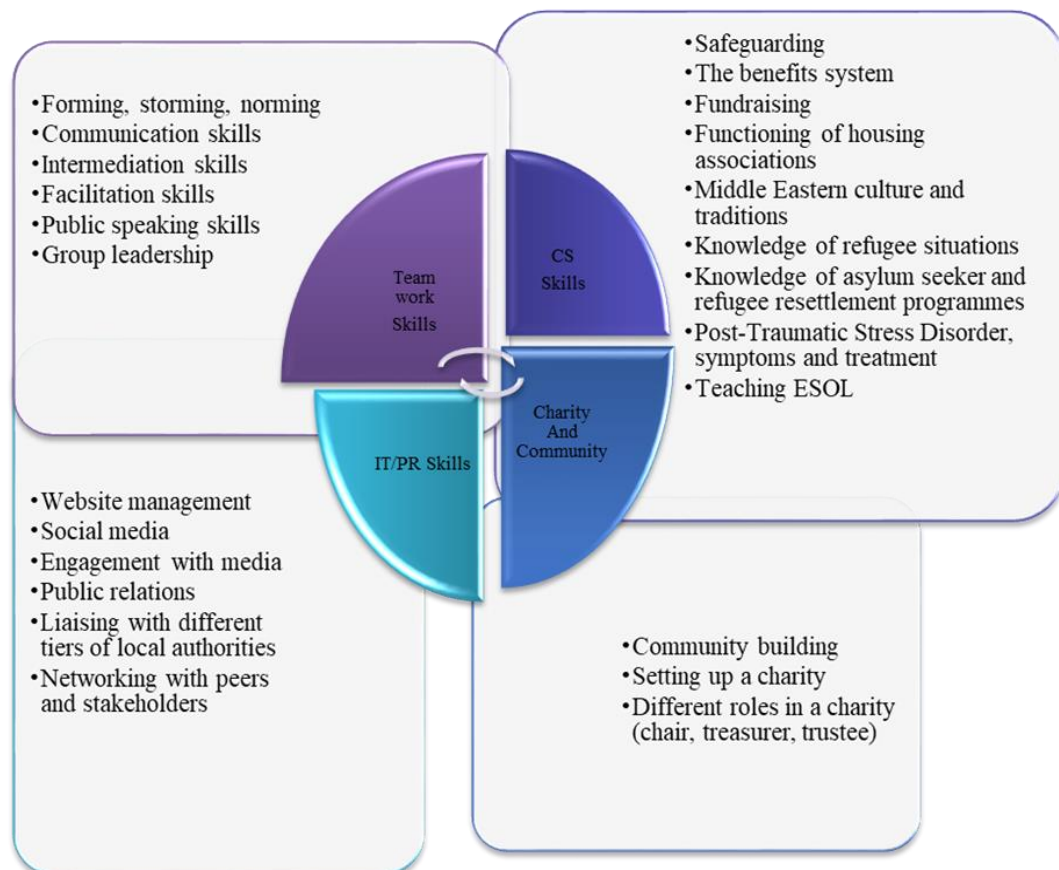


## Case Study 2: Sandra becomes a CS expert

Sandra worked in an administrative role but CS was not in her job description. As her employer became increasingly involved in CS she took responsibility for their CS application. Completing the documentation took her nearly six months. Eighteen months later, when her contract ran out, she continued project managing CS as a volunteer. Sandra gained an understanding of different cultures and backgrounds. She became the go-to expert on CS and began to support and mentor emerging groups. Sandra's CS work gave her a better understanding of her own faith and how to work for her community.

As shown by Case Study 2, engagement in the CS application process can be conceived as an opportunity for self-development. Participants reported acquiring new skills in four specific areas: teamwork, IT and public relations, CS-specific skills and knowledge of how to set up a charity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Skills gained by volunteers



### Time investment

The time invested by the volunteers during the first stage of the scheme depended upon the role that each individual played but it was reported to be extensive. Overall, volunteers found the level of commitment higher than anticipated. The main organisers leading the application said they worked almost full time for several weeks before the family's arrival. **Other volunteers dedicated around one or two days per week during this phase.** It is important to note that many of our respondents made their applications before the application process was finalised, and changes have subsequently been made with the aim of speeding up the application and approval processes.

## Challenges associated with the application

The timing of the evaluation was such that the groups interviewed were involved in the early stages of the development of CS in the UK at a time when Reset were establishing and the application process was not fully formed. Many had no precedents to follow so were "reinventing the wheel". Many groups outlined a range of practical challenges that were faced and which are discussed below.

### Fundraising and finance

The task of raising the funds was daunting for groups without the support of an established charity and/or which lacked voluntary sector experience. Their learning curve went beyond just developing knowledge of the CS to trying to understand some of the complexities of civil society regulation. CS groups supported by charities tapped into their expertise and infrastructure.

***"The charity took a big responsibility and helped us to raise the money at the outset"***

Sub-Urban group

The option of connecting with an established charity was not open to all. Where this was not the case, some committed individuals decided to establish their own charity and learnt from scratch how to raise funds and administer the charity.

***"Originally, we approached a charity to support our application but they set too many conditions to join them, like paying £500 a year and renew every year, so we decided to set up our own"***

Rural group

Some groups found local sponsors who helped them with loans, while others set up weekly collections among their sympathisers. Groups engaged in wide ranging events and activities to raise the funds they needed. These included bake sales, festivals, raffles and more.

***"We have two pots of money: Donated and loaned money. One person in the community helped us with a £9,000 loan"***

Rural group

*“We set up monthly standing orders among the network with our local parish and they keep donating even after two years”*

Sub-Urban group

#### **Preparation of the resettlement plan**

Some 12 groups reported finding the application process slow and frustrating. Some of the pioneer groups experienced several rounds of amendments and associated delays because after launching the scheme, the Home Office continued to amend and add to the application criteria. This situation is now believed to be resolved.

*“One of the frustrations I know that we all share is that it has taken so long for a refugee family to arrive. I’m sure there are very good reasons for that, but it has felt very frustrating along the way.”*

Sub-urban group

*“It was such a long-winded process with form filling and refilling. And it’s not that it is difficult, it just takes a long time. So that was the most frustrating thing”*

Urban group

Despite finding the preparation of the application time-consuming, three volunteers who worked on it reflected that the level of detail expected had forced them to be very well-prepared to support their family. **The application process forced groups to consider issues that they may not have thought about in advance of receiving a family.** Several groups reported addressing the application process methodically by delegating different parts of the plan to specialist volunteers.

*“I think that the preparation time was not good. We felt really well-prepared by the time to go through all that, but it wasn’t right, and I’ve come to the conclusion that there is a danger of rushing through the application, and sometimes just that long preparation is a good thing”*

Urban group

*“From a professional perspective, you don’t take on the whole thing. You look at the small pieces and break them down one by one, and that is the way that we handled it”*

Sub-urban group

Some groups were connected by the charities supporting their application to other CS groups whose application had been approved.

---

### Case study 3: Peer support

**Fran heard that a nearby CS group had gained approval to support a refugee family. The work of this group inspired her to try and establish a group in her area.** With the support of a close friend, she organised a community meeting and gave a speech about the CS. After the event, seven people volunteered to help apply to the scheme. With their group established, Fran contacted the successful group and asked for help. They provided detail with their application, especially around housing associations and fund raising. The two groups communicated closely, exchanging ideas and advice, and mentoring volunteers. After the new refugee family arrived, the family in the established group prepared a meal at the welcome party and provided advice on Middle Eastern culture.

---

These “experienced” groups exchanged problem-solving tactics and application templates. Connections between groups were said to be particularly useful. Those groups who did not have the support of a charity approached existing groups themselves and found the resultant help invaluable. Speaking to groups who had already been through the process and understood their frustrations helped new groups to feel less overwhelmed. They also sometimes provided feedback on the application which helped to identify potential problems before submission.

***“Before submitting our application to the Home Office we approached a peer group who has a lot of experience in order to have their comments”***

Sub-urban group

#### **Housing**

Finding properties with rents that are affordable for a family dependent on welfare benefits could be challenging, especially in urban areas. Some groups struggled to find private landlords who were prepared to let a property to refugees. Locating appropriate housing was particularly difficult given groups’ lack of knowledge about the makeup of the families or their arrival date.

Many community sponsorship groups had to cover rental costs while properties were empty in the period between taking on the tenancy and the family’s arrival. Without access to Housing Benefit, these costs - sometimes thousands of pounds - were covered from the donations they worked hard to fund-raise.

***“We have to find sympathetic landlords really... no landlord wants to say, “Oh yes, we’ve got a house, it’s empty at the moment, that’s fine we can wait.” So naturally, they have people in it! And the Home Office is saying to us, “is this house allocated to you,” and we’ve said, “yes we have an understanding that it will be used when we need it.” But the question is, when will the family come, what will their needs be and will they fit into this house?... questions we can’t answer”***

Semi-Urban Group

Many groups got help to access housing from a local housing association, the charity that supported them or from their personal networks.

*“First of all it was difficult to find a house suitable for five people, but finally one volunteer found one suitable and affordable (£120,000). A housing association bought the house and got the rent from the tenants. The family can stay there for two-five-ten years. Currently, they have two-year tenancy”*

Semi-Urban Group

In November 2018 the Home Office announced that they would cover up to eight weeks of 'void costs' for empty housing<sup>12</sup>. Most groups thought this move would resolve the problem of unnecessary housing costs for new groups.

### Other challenges

Respondents outlined other factors they found challenging in the application. While these challenges were not common to all groups they did affect several:

- *Finding a place in schools without information on the children's ages*
- *Finding volunteer interpreters in rural areas*
- *Finding ESOL courses available for refugee adults (more later)*
- *Persuading decision-makers and local communities that refugees are in the UK legally and that there are no safety risks associated with refugee hosting*
- *Racism and discrimination*
- *Getting the sign-offs required by the scheme*
- *Difficult relationships with local authorities*

### Support

Groups proved to be very creative in solving problems associated with the application process. Some pioneer groups received special support from the Home Office because they were working together to design and pilot the scheme. **Groups developed networks with local authorities, local mayors and MPs**, contacting them when they needed help to address specific concerns around, for example, inspecting potential housing, working through the school admissions processes, and supporting engagement with other partners, such as the police, Jobcentre, etc.

The main source of support with the preparation of the resettlement plan was the charity promoting Community Sponsorship who helped with their applications. Groups also connected other more experienced groups to exchange insights and knowledge. Finally, some groups located in multicultural settings approached Middle Eastern communities and Arabic speakers in order to get more information about the food, culture and practical needs of an “average Syrian family”. **Some people from these communities later joined the groups as volunteers**, often helping with interpretation. Some refugees who were already supported by CS groups helped out with other groups. For example, one refugee family cooked food for the welcome reception organised for a newly arrived refugee family.

---

<sup>12</sup> See: [http://www.sponsorrefugees.org/void\\_costs\\_for\\_housing](http://www.sponsorrefugees.org/void_costs_for_housing)

## Chapter 5:

# From reception to integration

---

**This chapter focuses upon the findings related to refugee and volunteer experience after the arrival of refugee families to the CS group area.** We begin by discussing reception experiences, moving on to outline what volunteers have gained from participation in the CS scheme and through supporting a refugee family, and we then consider the challenges that groups and families have faced in the resettlement period.

---

### Case study 4: Jamal and Amira's arrival story

**The arrival date came, and a small welcoming committee of volunteers waited for Jamal and Amira and their children at the airport.** When they saw the refugees' welcome sign with their names on it, they felt very happy and reassured. For them, the UK was a new world and they had made the decision to start a new life in a place where their children were safe and would have more opportunities. On the first day in their new home, Delia cooked delicious Syrian food for the family and all the volunteers in her group.

***"We felt a big relief when we came to the house and met the other members of the group. They felt like family to me, from then until now"***  
(Jamal)

---

## Reception

After months of hard work and preparation, the first family supported under the CS arrived in July 2016. Volunteers expressed satisfaction, happiness and relief after they finally met “their” family. The first meeting, generally at the airport, was perhaps the high point of their work.

*“It was magical, amazing and it was also a relief. We did not know if they were going to like us, we did not know how they were”*

Urban group

*“It has been a delight to have the family, you know, I really liked all of them at first sight.”*

Semi-urban group

Refugee families reported feeling very happy and optimistic after hearing that they had been accepted for resettlement in the UK but the experience of moving to a new country was very stressful and they worried about what to expect. However, being received at the airport by a small reception committee of volunteers reassured them.

*“I was very scared at the airport. When we first arrived, I saw the people are all foreigners speaking foreign languages. Were we the only Syrian family on the plane? I asked myself, where was I? What did I put myself into? What is this world I am in now? I don’t know anything. I had many questions. How will I live? How will I raise my children here? But, when I saw them with the signs with our family names, I was slightly relieved”*

Rural family

Some groups noted that in the first month after arrival, their interpreters played a crucial role in connecting the volunteers with refugee families. Most of them not only helped with the interpretation but also explained cultural differences to both parties. Interpreters were able to act as cultural mediators because they had lived in the UK for a long time and had experience and understanding of different aspects of both Arabic and British cultures. Interpreters who were members of the core group of volunteers tended to develop deep relationships with refugee families.

## Gains for volunteers

Following the arrival of refugee families, most groups reported positive first impressions and said they bonded with their family very quickly. After months of preparation, the arrival of the family boosted the energy and optimism of the volunteers. Volunteers reported quickly feeling convinced that they had made the right decision in pursuing the CS.

*“The family is amazing”* Urban group

*“They are a very lovely and grounded family”* Urban group

*“They are appreciative, lovely, happy and caring”* Semi-urban group

*“It has been great to be part of it. They have enriched our lives”* Rural group

Daily interactions between volunteers and refugees progressed to close relationships that were likened to kin-like ties for volunteers and refugees alike.



*"I gained friendship, I gained a family"* Urban group

*"They are like extended family for us"* Semi-urban group

*"They are like family to us"* Rural family

*"We have left our parents in Syria but we have found new parents here"* Rural family

The positive effect of the emergent relationships and the knowledge and learning about refugee lives was reported to have extended across their local communities.

*"The family has given the group a story to tell. A story that cuts across the narrative of how people talk about refugees as outsiders and that kind of things. This is a story that it is very different and that is really profound"*

Urban group

*"It started as a project but is growing into so much for us and the whole community"*

Rural group

Refugee families expressed enormous gratitude and appreciation for the welcoming attitude of volunteers and the practical and emotional support that they received. The kindness, support and love received was beyond anything they expected and was said to be incredibly useful in aiding their resettlement. The appreciation and gratitude received was rewarding for volunteers and showed that their efforts had been worthwhile.

*"They are amazing people, very dedicated and helpful"* Urban family

*"They never failed us and my children adore them"* Rural family

## Learning about new cultures

CS gives volunteers living in areas with little experience of diversity the opportunity to learn about different cultures. Before forming a CS group, many had no direct experience of interacting with people from Arab and/or Islamic cultures. Interactions between volunteers and refugees enabled them to learn from each other. Volunteers were able to ask families questions about their lives, cultures and faiths and gain deep insight into other worlds. Refugees welcomed the interest in their background and religion.



---

## Case study 5: Learning about new cultures

**Fatima follows her religious traditions in the UK and during Ramadan she and her family fast.** Some members of her rural sponsorship group were unfamiliar with Muslim traditions, but when Fatima told them that it is a very special occasion for her and her family, they started to help. They took her young daughter out for walks so Fatima had some rest during the day. They also talked with the headmaster at her son's school and now she can sign him off for the first day of Ramadan. He is also allowed to fast at school.

*“Last year, on the first day at school my son was fasting, so they sent me a letter asking why my son wasn't eating. I asked my son to stop fasting, especially since the fasting day in the UK is long. This year, the teacher said that if I want next year to remind the school that in this month my son will be fasting, no one will force him to eat.”*

---

## Social Capital

The intention of the CS is that community support provides a ready source of assistance for refugees that will aid their integration. There was clear evidence that the volunteers were able to support refugees in multiple ways helping them to address everyday concerns which would have been extremely challenging had they not have had assistance.

### Accessing health, education and welfare

Support covered multiple areas. For example, refugee parents relied heavily on help from volunteers for communication with schools and for all activities associated with their children's education. Volunteers attended meetings such as parents' evenings with refugee adults and interpreted official letters and messages from schools. They also helped with homework and revision. One child was the subject of bullying, and after repeated interventions by volunteers, the situation was slowly improving.

Refugee families are entitled to claim welfare benefits on the same basis as UK nationals. All groups reported that navigating the extremely complex benefit system was challenging, especially as few volunteers were familiar with its functioning. In order to support their family, groups either recruited specialist volunteers or enrolled volunteers in training. Respondents argued that without their assistance, refugees would not have been able to access benefits.

*“If he hadn't had our support, he'd have lost his benefits by now, because it is very difficult to navigate the system. The family would have been homeless. There is no doubt about it”*

Urban group

Several refugee families experienced difficulties opening the bank accounts needed to receive benefit payments, as most banks expected evidence of three years of residence in the UK. Groups supported refugees to understand and overcome complex banking regulations, with one group identifying an online bank which made fewer demands but provided similar services to mainstream banks.

All the families were helped to register with local GPs. This was important as some needed to access specialised medical attention to address complex medical problems. Groups helped to explain the functioning of the health system and requested interpreters so that the refugees they supported could communicate with clinicians. They also kept refugees company during medical procedures and cared for children while adults attended appointments. Volunteers helped overcome bureaucratic problems i.e. one group were able to support a pregnant refugee to access antenatal care after her right to free treatment was (incorrectly) challenged.

### Support with English acquisition

Groups put huge amounts of work into supporting their family to learn English, aware that without language skills they would struggle to integrate. Several groups employed their own qualified ESOL teachers while others attended training to learn how to teach English, and obtained ESOL materials online so they could offer ESOL courses. **Some volunteers adapted the contents of books and created new material to meet the specific needs of their sponsored families.** Volunteers found new and innovative ways to teach vocationally-specific language, for example labelling foodstuffs so that a refugee who aspired to be a chef could learn the appropriate terminology. Refugees and volunteers reported that one-to-one sessions with tutors and volunteers were the most effective route to learning English.

*“I am a professional ESOL teacher and I am very familiar with the books and material associated with it. To be honest, I like some bits, but the material has to be adapted for the needs of each culture, or specific families”*

Semi-urban group

*“I felt that the English tutoring at home was the most helpful and it is the priority for integration”*

Rural group

Adult refugees reported finding one-to-one tuition highly beneficial. For example, one refugee woman who had received no education in her country of origin was able to communicate well in less than six months, courtesy of one-to-one sessions. In order to ensure they could provide adequate levels of one-to-one support; one group established a team of ten ESOL volunteers who offered home tuition.

*“I prefer the one-to-one classes that I got from our tutor”* Rural family

*“I am learning more when the teacher comes to my house”* Urban family

### Social networks

One of the strengths of the CS is the capacity it offers to provide refugees with an instant social network offering emotional support. Some refugee respondents reported having developed deep connections with specific volunteers.

*“I consider the leader in the group as a Mother. I can complain to her, if I want to cry I would talk to her. And sometimes, I like her presence even if I don’t need any help. I just feel good emotionally when she is around”*

Rural family

Although volunteers did what they could to provide support and company for the family they supported, they were conscious that (as we show below) refugees missed their friends, family and culture. To expand the families’ network of friends, some groups tried to connect them with **other Arabic refugee families living** nearby or who arrived as part of the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPRP).

## Challenges for volunteers and refugees

While there was clear evidence that groups and refugees gained from participating in the CS, working towards integration is known to be difficult and all groups faced at least some challenges. This section focuses on some of the common challenges.

### Refugee placement

One of the innovations of the CS is that groups from anywhere in the UK can apply to support a refugee family. This means that some CS groups were resettling refugees into areas with little experience of diversity and that refugee families from urban areas can be relocated in rural areas, and vice versa. Some refugee and volunteer respondents argued that a mismatch between refugee families and location impacted upon refugees’ ability to settle. Four families were said to be somewhat mismatched, with two originating in urban areas placed in small rural towns and two from rural areas located in big cities. One refugee adult was surprised that his family was placed in a rural area where they constituted the only people with an Arab background. Unable to speak English, they struggled to build a social network. The volunteers supporting this family felt that they would have fared better in an urban area:

*“I expected that I could find friends, I could go out with my friends, start a new social life and have fun. I expected that I would not stand out as a different person. We know that the UK has a lot of Arabs and Syrians I expected to at least live near them, not with them but at least near them”.*

Refugee adult

*“Our family would have felt better in a bigger city because they are city people. Our area is very rural and extreme, so I think that they would have settled easier in an urban setting”*

Rural group

Another family originating in a rural area reported experiencing a dramatic lifestyle change when they were placed in a city. Again, the volunteers supporting them were aware that they faced the additional struggle of learning to live an urban life:

*“I miss my farm back home. We had everything. I used to finish the day’s work then take my family to the farm, we used to cook and enjoy fresh food and fresh air”*

Rural family

*"I think it is very traumatic for a family who lived in a small town to come to live in the city. I think that it's really a lot to expect of them, to come here, and just integrate, assimilate"*

Urban group

### Communication during the first months

Volunteers were aware that they would need to support the families to communicate after arrival and thus engaged interpreters for twelve months. However, such arrangements did not facilitate communication for all day-to-day activities. **The intensity of need was unanticipated, and groups simply lacked capacity to provide for every communication.** However, groups employed other approaches such as using Google translate, or preparing a list of basic phrases in English and Arabic which refugees could use in the case of emergencies or for basic daily needs. Some groups, especially those in rural areas, used videoconferencing with interpreters who lived some distance away. CS groups used these innovations alongside supporting refugees to learn and improve their English.

### Social and cultural differences

One of the attractions of CS for volunteers is that it offers exposure to new cultures, and CS groups appreciated the opportunity to learn about the lives of people originating outside of Europe. However, some groups and the refugees they supported were completely unprepared for the extent of difference. Perhaps the most profound differences related to ways of **socialising in Arabic and British cultures**. Refugees were used to an open-door lifestyle where friends and family could drop in and share food and drinks any time. In contrast, CS volunteers scheduled their social life and every interaction with the refugee family they supported. Refugees missed their extended social networks and the spontaneity of every day social life. Everything in the UK felt scheduled and compartmentalised. Volunteers struggled with unannounced visits from refugees and the expectation, when they visited the refugee families that they eat or drink something even if they were not hungry. Some volunteers appreciated the warmth of Syrian style hospitality and noted the family's need for more interaction. They attempted to engage in spontaneous visits to help refugees feel more at home. Others did not have enough time to be more sociable.

*"I was very much surprised, as you are Syrian; you know that our nature and traditions are different, in terms of getting out, and visiting the neighbours. While here you need to be committed to a specific time, for instance the guest will visit you in one hour, then after one hour you have an English class, etc. It feels as if life is planned, not as if I planned for it..... I feel I always have responsibilities"*

Rural family

*"Every time I visit them, they give me food"* Urban group

*"I learnt from them the need to be present to people. Not the need of doing something or going around and do an activity. They just want to be present with each other, that's what they want"*

Urban group

*"They are extremely welcoming. I never experienced that warmth before"*

Rural group

Volunteers were surprised that refugees were unaccustomed to UK norms around keeping animals inside of houses, with one rural group reporting that the family they supported were not comfortable entering houses when there were dogs inside.

CS comes with the expectation that volunteers provide intensive support with resettlement and volunteers were prepared to work intensively with the family. However, they did not anticipate what they saw as patriarchal gender relations. Some groups simply did not know how to engage in supporting families where a male refugee adult made all the decisions for the entire family and were concerned about the lack of voice of women refugees. Refugees on the other hand, and particularly women refugees, were troubled by the lack of understanding about the ways in which Muslim women were expected to live. While there was some learning here on the part of both volunteers and refugees, the nature of gender relations continued to be a frustration with volunteers unsure about how to proceed.

*“In the future the male in the family will need to accept that the women need to have a life of their own, and they have their own opinion”*

Rural group

*“We have been fighting so much for women’s rights that we have been very proactive working with the women in the family”*

Urban group

*“They [volunteers] didn’t know the way we greet people. For instance, in our culture women don’t shake hands with men. So, this point is essential for me. The group knows now that I require a special greeting, but the people that I meet for the first time are not aware of this”*

Rural family

### Isolation

Refugees are forced migrants who have been separated from friends and family. The refugee experience, regardless of how individuals are resettled, invariably means that individuals will **experience a sense of bereavement** for what has been lost and alongside this, feelings of loneliness. For those refugees placed in rural areas, where there were no other people of Arabic background, and given the absence of social opportunities as outlined above, **the sense of isolation appeared to be intensified**. Refugee women reported the highest levels of isolation. Without friends, family and social activities to distract them, some reported having too much time to reflect on their losses. The lack of an informal support network left them feeling unsupported as they did not wish to burden the volunteers every time they were unhappy or unwell.

*“Every day I feel pain and depression that I did not feel before. In Syria I felt fear, in the UK I feel depression hopelessness, loneliness so I self-medicate and I always overdose on all the vitamins actually any pills now so they can help me not feel depressed”*

Urban family

*“Last year in the New Year, I was sick, I was embarrassed to contact people from the group, for four days I was sick in bed and I did not call anyone, I used to cry in bed alone, no position was comfortable. I did not want to spoil their holiday and annoy them on New Year’s eve.... My worry is that I get sick and have no one to help me*

*after all that is what family is for, they are nearest. The group never failed me but they might not be around when it happens, you need to have family with you at home. When you are alone you feel lonely"*

Rural family

Many of the families expanded their networks by joining groups on social media. Such virtual networks offered a way of connecting refugee families across the world.

## Refugee integration challenges

The structure of refugee families appeared to impact on opportunities to integrate. Adults with school-age children had to learn English rapidly in order to support their children and engage with other parents. Interaction in and around school offered them multiple opportunities to build networks with the local community and to practice their language skills. In contrast, those without school-age children had fewer opportunities to learn English and socialise. As a result, they mainly communicated amongst themselves.

*"They don't have little children so they don't have to go to the school, whereas with little children it would have been easier to talk with other parents and integrate them and speak English"*

Rural group

Having a partner in the UK was said to build confidence for interacting with local people. A refugee who had been relocated without their partner reported facing practical and emotional challenges that affected their ability to socialise.

## ESOL

Learning English is acknowledged to be one of the main facilitators of integration. **In the UK, ESOL classes are the main route to English language** learning but there are acknowledged problems with both the ESOL system and with its effectiveness in delivering the nature of learning necessary for refugee integration (i.e. see Phillimore 2011; Morrice et al. 2019; Tip et al. 2019). Several groups, especially those in rural areas, struggled to access ESOL courses for adult refugees. However, even where courses were available, ensuring rapid access was not straightforward. Some refugees experienced a delay accessing classes if their arrival date did not coincide with ESOL enrolment dates.

All prospective ESOL students must undertake an initial English language assessment so that they can join classes at an appropriate level. **These assessments work on the basis that refugees are literate in their own language, could use IT and had some basic English language knowledge.** The assessment experience could be overwhelming for those who did not meet these criteria and undermined confidence before refugees even set foot in a classroom.

Most adult refugee men interviewed were not used to engaging in structured learning and found learning English difficult, slow and stressful. **One man expressed having lost hope that he would ever be able to learn English because he was not literate in Arabic and felt learning English was beyond his reach.** He felt the only solution for his family was to move somewhere where he could be helped by Arabic speakers to get used to everyday life in the UK. Low levels of attainment within ESOL classes undermined refugees' confidence and self-esteem. Further, the number of hours per week were too



low for individuals to progress rapidly and the focus was not on the everyday language refugees needed for self-sufficiency, which led refugees to question the usefulness of courses.

*“There is a big problem with the ESOL in this country particularly for newcomers like myself. The education system for foreigners here is all wrong. It is not useful. Last year, I registered, and they gave me only five hours of ESOL a week; this year also five hours, which is not enough by far for someone who doesn’t know any English. There are basic things that need to be taught so I am able to live and communicate. I do not really care about topics that are irrelevant or too deep. Children are more able to adapt but adults need more effort to learn the basics of day-to-day living. They say you need to revise at home, but at home I have no help, I cannot read and know nothing about the rules. I cannot even spell the letters correctly and do not know anything about the correct pronunciation. There is also a big gap between the classes, so I forget. In two hours they give us a worksheet to solve in English. I cannot even read it, let alone answer it. They want us to write in worksheets but do not explain in the beginning. I understand they are following a certain system but it is not working and is affecting me negatively”*

Rural family

Children’s language learning was facilitated by their rapid incorporation into formal education. On the whole schools were sympathetic and supportive. However, although some schools received funding to enable them to support refugee children and could offer special interventions, others were said to lack knowledge, experience and materials.

*“The books and material provided for the school are very specific in the English life and culture that newly arrived children cannot understand like the “Diary of a wimpy kid” or names like “Slimy Stuart” ...it is frustrating”*

Semi-urban group

### Financial independence

Achieving financial independence is the main priority for refugees and the groups supporting them but it is also acknowledged to be a major challenge in refugee integration per se (Cheung and Phillimore 2014). At the point of writing only two men and one woman refugee had accessed employment. One male refugee involved in the evaluation has now established a restaurant with the support of his CS group. Language barriers and employers’ requirement for UK qualifications were important obstacles to refugees finding work which have been widely reported elsewhere (i.e. Phillimore & Goodson 2006). It appeared that both groups and refugees were unaware of how difficult it would be for them to access employment. **Male refugees were mostly manual workers before arriving in the UK** and believed these practical skills would enable them to access work quickly. They were surprised and disappointed to find getting a job so difficult. Groups were not sure what to expect and how best to help refugees to find work.

---

## Case study 6: Employment expectations

Finding work for refugee adults is known to be a challenge but some of the groups were unaware of just how difficult it can be. An urban group were surprised to find that even entry-level jobs required basic English language proficiency. The family they support used to have a catering business and wanted to work in this field. Without English language competency they could not get a driving licence and or apply for permission to sell food. Volunteers in their CS group have struggled to explain to them how the UK employment system functions. The family are frustrated as they want to become economically independent as soon as possible and did not anticipate such difficulties.

---

Most of the refugee men were employed before forced migration and used to be the main providers for their families. Being able to provide was important to their well-being and self-esteem. Economic inactivity was thus highly problematic for some: inability to work had a clear impact on wellbeing.

*“I am always worried about my children, trying to provide for them and speak their language. I do not want to be depressed because I cannot communicate. I want to get a job and being independent. We have been through a lot already”*

Rural family

*“I thought that if I start a small cooking business I could start to make friends and trade with people and make connections. I expected to not become depressed, stressed and hate my life, but here I feel a new type of pain and distraught I do not feel like a man anymore, I mean I don’t feel like I can look after my own family. I feel like a human that has expired and is useless”*

Urban family

*“Dad causes tensions in the family. He feels vulnerable and because he is unemployed his role has been diminished”*

Urban group

Given the difficulties experienced accessing employment, some groups supported refugees to gain work experience through volunteering. Where possible they sought opportunities where **refugees could use their vocational skills**. Some refugees were beginning to give up on the idea that they might be able to find a job and were instead thinking about how they could create their own work through self-employment in food-related areas.

Being able to access appropriate volunteering and employment opportunities depends on refugees being mobile. **Those living in rural and semi-rural areas did not have access to good transport links**. Refugee men were keen to obtain a UK driving licence so they could access a wider range of opportunities. However, their English language



skills were not sufficient to pass the theory and practical driving tests, which cannot be taken in Arabic.

### Children

One of the main reasons for resettling in the UK was to access better education for their children, but some refugees worried about bringing up children up in a different culture. **They were concerned that children would lose their connection with their families if English replaced Arabic as their main language.** This was especially worrying for those adults whose own attempts at learning English were not particularly successful. Parents also feared that children would lose their association with Syrian and Arabic values and lifestyle as they became more westernised.

*“I am worried about my children. Life is not easy here and I am afraid that the children might leave me and my husband. I am also worried about my daughter, who will be raised here with a different culture and mentality. Her upbringing at home will play a role but she still will be influenced by everything around her. Children easily learn things. I am worried that they learn in school things that contradict our religious beliefs, like premarital sexual relationships for example. I am worried about my daughter that she will not speak Arabic. When we first came she spoke half English and half Arabic, but now all in English. I am worried she will forget the Arabic”*

Urban family

*“I know that my kids will be English speakers and I do not want to lose our strong family bond because I do not speak the language”*

Rural family

Refugees also found that there were different child-rearing norms in the UK and they worried about transgressing unwritten rules and perhaps losing their children.

*“I was told off for leaving my daughter alone at the house”*

Rural family

*“We were told that we shouldn’t hit our children; otherwise the government will take them. If they hear any loud voice at the house, they will take them. I was questioning myself if this could be possible. My husband was so worried, and he was always warning me not to speak loudly inside the house”*

Urban family

Lack of knowledge about UK child-rearing norms and expectations was a source of stress that could be mitigated through discussions between volunteers and refugee adults.

### Psychological wellbeing

The CS programme seeks to resettle vulnerable refugees, and inevitably that vulnerability results from challenging experiences. As noted above, refugees are forced migrants who have often been subject to horrific experiences which extend from witnessing conflict, being physically attacked, to losing friends, family, home and material belongings, undertaking treacherous journeys and then living in exile in extreme hardship in camps or in unfamiliar urban areas. **All CS groups made provision for psychological counselling** but at the time of writing no refugees had used those services. One group expressed concern that it might be difficult for refugees to

participate in counselling with an interpreter and wanted to know where they could source Arabic counselling services. Another wanted to access help for a child but was not sure where to go for specialist support.

The main source of distress for many refugee adults was not their own experiences, as they felt their closest family to be safe in the UK, but their concerns about their relatives and friends who remained in danger. They maintained contact via mobile phones, social media, and videoconferencing applications. **Communication was vital to ensure peace of mind** but meant they were constantly worried and felt guilty that they could offer little direct support now that they lived in different countries.

*“I just want to see my family. The group helped me with the application to take my family out of Jordan. They had an interview but it will take time. It is not guaranteed that they will be sent to the UK but I told my sister that any country is better than Jordan. My brother died and his wife is missing. His orphaned daughters are raised by my sister and my mother. It is very difficult and I want to help them too”*

Urban family

*“We came to a foreign society very different and strange for us. In addition, we are coming from a very difficult emotional situation. The children cannot remember and are not as affected by it. My wife and I are different. We saw the horrors and lived in fear, and the situation in Syria was bad. Yes, we left, but my family is still there, my siblings, my mother and friends. You always feel it that a Syrian person is not one hundred percent focussed, particularly during our classes in college. There are other things bothering our thinking”*

Rural family

Some families asked their CS groups to help bring their families into the UK. This is not currently possible in the UK despite being a central tenet of the Canadian scheme where many resettled refugees have some connection to previously resettled families.

### **Racism and discrimination**

Some of the groups, especially those in less diverse settings, reported racist resistance to their plans in the form of messages on Facebook and letters to the local newspaper. There were few reports of racism directed at refugees after they arrived. One group reported that a woman refugee had her hijab ripped off while travelling on public transport. Volunteers reported this incident to the police with the woman's permission. Elsewhere, a refugee child was bullied by another child at school. The volunteers were not sure whether the bullying was racially motivated and worked closely with the school and police to prevent further incidents. **It is not clear whether refugees are aware of what constitutes racism and discrimination** and thus possible that other incidents were not acknowledged or reported. Further research is needed to examine the extent to which the anti-refugee rhetoric expressed prior to arrival dissipates once refugees arrive, perhaps after local people realise that refugees do not pose any threat. We also need to understand more about the ways in which racism impacts on refugees' integration outcomes.

### **Support for sponsorship groups**

CS groups received support from various sources after their family arrived, including the charities and organisations which had previously encouraged their application. Many of the groups we interviewed pre-dated the establishment of Reset, who now provide

groups with training to help refugee resettlement. Local authorities were, on the whole, supportive of the CS and helped some groups overcome challenges such as finding places in local schools. Most groups felt they had developed a good network with local institutions and politicians and could use their support in the event of difficulties.

The Home Office undertakes **several visits after family arrival** in order to ensure the appropriate support is being provided. Some groups wanted specific feedback after the visits to enable them to improve their practice.

*“The Home Office monitors very closely when you set up, but once you accept the families they only have three meetings with the family and they did not really ask you serious questions about how you work. You know, we have written policies, but how are we working...are we listening to the families? Are we doing everything right...I would like to see them hold accountable the whole CS system in the whole country...to have some sort of formality. I can see potential for a lot of malpractices there”*

Rural group

## Chapter 6:

# Conclusions

---

The findings reported herein come from an ongoing evaluation which was undertaken in the period when CS was being developed. Our data thus reflects the fledgling nature of the CS and identifies some of the teething problems that have either been resolved or are in the process of resolution. Despite our work focusing on what was a challenging period for the CS, overall we find that the CS is working well in the UK and that groups, volunteers and refugees are benefitting from the scheme, often in ways that were not anticipated. Positive outcomes go beyond those experienced by refugee families to benefit volunteers and possibly wider communities, although more work is necessary to understand these wider benefits. In these conclusions we focus on the main findings around volunteers, the application process, arrival and placement, and resettlement.

### Volunteers

The success of the Community Sponsorship Scheme relies on its ability to attract, engage and retain volunteers with strong commitment, appropriate skills, knowledge, and interpersonal skills. In the medium term, the sustainability of the CS in the UK depends expanding the current scheme and building upon the “momentum” that motivated people to participate in the first instance while ensuring that groups have the desire to support additional families. In addition, word-of-mouth communication stressing the positive outcomes from participating in a CS group will be an important motivator for newer groups hoping to sponsor a family.

The skills, experience and knowledge of volunteers are fundamental to the composition and effectiveness of groups. **We found three main motivators which drew individuals towards the CS either as organisers establishing a group or as volunteers.**

Understanding these motivations is important to aid promotion of the scheme. They include focusing upon **personal values** such as the desire to promote the common good or social justice, motivations to contribute to **actions that bring communities together** and the opportunity to find **a new purpose in life**. It is important to note that while individuals did refer to challenges that taxed them at a personal level, most identified clear individual level gains including the development of new skills and knowledge, making new friends, recovering from illness or loss and finding a way to act on their beliefs. Stressing the potential for participation to offer such gains and finding ways to capitalise on those gains will enable the CS to promote the scheme effectively and help groups to retain volunteers.

### Application process

Groups faced three main practical challenges getting their groups off the ground: accessing funds, completing the application documents and finding appropriate housing. Many of the groups we interviewed were pioneers in that they came to the

scheme before the application and support processes were fully established. They relied heavily on their own creativity but also received additional support from charities and other groups who offered expertise, advice, infrastructure and access to networks. **As Reset becomes further established, more groups can benefit from the training and practical information that was lacking at the early stages.** Nonetheless, benefits can be achieved through connecting CS groups in a mentoring type arrangement so that they can learn from one another. These peer support relationships emerged as particularly important and will help to encourage groups to persevere towards a successful application or to collectively brainstorm any challenges faced.

## Arrival and placement

The arrival of a refugee family is perhaps the high point in the CS. Most groups quickly bonded with their families and over time formed deep and meaningful relationships. However, it appeared that some refugees received or understood little information about the nature of the area they were moving to and the reality of everyday life in the UK. **Mismatches in rural/urban backgrounds were problematic** and arguably as the scheme grows will become unnecessary given that both urban and rural relocation areas are available. It is important that refugees are made aware of the lack of diversity in some of the areas in which they are placed so they know that there will be no other Arabic speakers.

## Resettlement

Refugees were in general delighted with their relationships with the volunteers in their group and hugely relieved to be safe in the UK. They did however experience practical challenges most of which are common to refugee resettlement and can be difficult to overcome. Some advance knowledge of these challenges would have enabled both CS groups and refugees to be better prepared and to manage expectations to reduce disappointment and frustration.

Having the ready source of social capital that is inherent to CS meant that refugees benefitted from individualised help which appeared to go some way in addressing challenges around **language learning, navigating complex institutional cultures, building social networks, overcoming isolation and progressing towards self-sufficiency.** Other challenges were harder to address. Both volunteers and refugees were unprepared for some cultural and social differences, especially those related to approaches to socialising and gender relations, and might have benefitted from additional support in these areas.

There is a need to manage expectations to inform volunteers and refugees about the level of integration that can realistically be achieved within the initial 12-month period. Clearly this is likely to be very different for individuals who are educated and literate compared to those who have had very little schooling, and will depend on the levels of vulnerability within families. Families with school-age children appeared to fare best because interacting with schools offered opportunities to build social networks and to practise English. It is important to find other ways that refugees without small children can connect with local people and community life.

## Moving forward

The main challenge for refugees going forward is achieving financial independence; and slow progress was causing some frustration on the part of refugees and groups. Whilst becoming independent and adapting to life in the UK is a long-term process, it was clear from our interviews that the ability to count on emotional and practical support from a network of local people provided refugees with an excellent source of social capital that is critical to their integration (see Cheung and Phillimore 2014). CS has also provided an opportunity to empower volunteers to develop their communities. Their ability to create networks that connected volunteers with different sections of local communities was said to help manage local tensions and to change misconceptions about refugees, especially in areas less familiar with diversity. More research is needed about the ways in which CS can impact on social cohesion in areas where refugees are resettled, as this will aid understanding of how far the effects of the CS can reach beyond its evident impact on both refugees and volunteers. In the next phase of the evaluation we will examine the wider effect of the CS.

## Chapter 7:

# Recommendations

---

As noted above, our evaluation took place before some of the support structures now in place were established. In the following sections we outline all the recommendations drawn from our findings but note (and provide relevant links) where these have, at least in part, been addressed.

### Reset and partners

#### Encouraging group formation

- Expand upon the “Community Sponsorship Ambassadors” approach to share experiences of established CS groups and promote the CS to new groups (the current Community Sponsorship Ambassadors programme is coordinated by Citizens UK: [http://www.sponsorrefugees.org/our\\_ambassadors](http://www.sponsorrefugees.org/our_ambassadors))
- Build up a regional base of CS groups to support the development of new groups in the region
- Produce easy-access materials setting out the nature of the CS and how it works (see Reset training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/making-an-application/understanding-community-sponsorship>)
- Promote the benefits of the CS via social and other media (see Reset social media: @ResetUKorg (Twitter); Reset Communities and Refugees (Facebook); Instagram (resetukorg))
- Share good news stories to create a feel-good factor around the scheme and encourage new group formation (available on Reset’s website: <https://resetuk.org/community-sponsorship/send-us-your-testimony>)

#### Application process

- Provide examples of successful resettlement plans so that groups can see the content that is expected
- Provide a repository of information that groups can use, i.e.
  - Telephone numbers of Arabic interpreters (professionals and volunteers) who can support groups located in remote areas
  - Contact numbers of mental health professionals who can work in Arabic (the Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Directorate’s ‘Mental Health Mapping’ document is now available through Reset)
  - List of charities that support asylum seekers and refugees
  - Contact details of Arabic speaking dentists and GPs
  - Contact information of all CS groups willing to be contacted by other groups (Reset puts groups in contact with one another on request)



### Recruiting, supporting and retaining volunteers

- Promote the individual gains associated with being a CS volunteer (see Reset's website: <https://resetuk.org/get-involved/join-a-community-sponsorship-group>)
- Connect CS groups with volunteers from different groups so that mentoring or peer support can be offered
- Offer the opportunity to learn from the experiences from other CS groups, for example at regional networking events (Reset's series of peer-to-peer and best practice sharing events is scheduled for 2019/20, beginning in June 2019.)
- Make available clear pathways to support and advice i.e. via Reset or partners so that a source of advice is available when groups face tricky problems (<https://resetuk.org/community-sponsorship/support>)

### Networks and matching

- Connect the refugee families already in the UK to assist refugees in building networks with other families and help address feelings of isolation
- Create a CS Facebook page so refugee families can connect virtually when or even before they arrive
- Include a discussion section on the CS website and/or the Reset-UK website where groups can interact and post good ideas

### Training and support

- Offer training on team building and collaborative working as well as specialist training around aspects such as safeguarding and supporting independence (see Reset training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/understanding-your-safeguarding-commitments>)
- Provide training or advice about how to reassure members of the local community who might be hostile towards the scheme
- Develop a CS newsletter to share with all groups and their members updating them about developments (i.e. number of new groups), funding available and CS news
- Collate innovative approaches to supporting language learning (see Reset training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/making-english-lessons-available/esol-group-leaders-detailed> [note that this resource is only available to CS group members who have created accounts on the Reset training website])
- Provide links to digital materials that can aid language learning (see Reset training website: [https://training-resetuk.org/sites/default/files/toolkit-files/2019-03/2.3.2\\_esol\\_briefing\\_leader\\_0.pdf](https://training-resetuk.org/sites/default/files/toolkit-files/2019-03/2.3.2_esol_briefing_leader_0.pdf) [note that this resource is only available to CS group members who have created accounts on Reset's training website])

### Employment and integration

- Manage volunteer expectations about the time it can take to access work
- Provide advice and guidance about how to establish and successfully run a business in the UK
- Provide information about pathways to employment (see Reset's training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/answering-key-questions/avenues-employment>)



## Home Office

### Application process

- Explain the application process, the purpose of the various demands and likely timeframes (see Reset training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/making-an-application>)
- Ensure the application process is clear and transparent from the outset so there are no surprises (see new refined application form, available on the GOV.UK website; see also Reset's training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/making-an-application/understanding-community-sponsorship>)
- Outline potential milestones and levels of time needed to meet them

### Managing expectations

- Manage expectations of volunteers – approximate levels of time commitment, cultural differences and the extent of support refugees will need
- Educate groups about the challenges associated with supporting a refugee family (see Reset's training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/answering-key-questions/dealing-with-challenging-situations> [note that this resource is only available to CS group members who have created accounts on Reset's training website])
- Warn groups about the potential of negative press and local attitudes and help them to develop a coping strategy (under development by Reset)
- Manage expectations about what refugees are likely to be able to achieve at different stages
- Ensure CS groups are aware of the differences between life in the UK and refugee sending countries especially around socialising, scheduling, and gender relations (the compulsory training, delivered by Reset since March 2019, contains a session on Cultural Awareness)

### Networks and matching

- Help to connect refugee families already in the UK under CS and VPRS to aid network development and reduce isolation
- Form "regional hubs" of resettled families to aid wellbeing and reduce isolation – consider developing refugee women's groups
- Improve the matching of refugees to their environment

### Integration and employment

- Explore the possibility of named reunion, enabling refugees to be reunited with their families
- Ensure that all NHS providers know that refugees are exempt from NHS charging policies
- Provide summary information about CS and refugee entitlements that CS groups can share with their local DWP office (see Reset's training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/learning-about-benefits>)

## IOM/UNHCR

### Managing expectations

- *Families coming on CS should receive clearer information about the nature of the scheme before arrival*
- *Check that refugees have understood the information they have been given about the country and the location they are moving to*
- *Provide clear advice to refugees about likely access to facilities such as places of worship or foodstuffs, and necessity of learning English etc, avoiding where possible use of written materials (videos under development) – a podcast may be useful for refugees with a smartphone*
- *Manage refugee expectations about the time it takes to access work and the kinds of work that are likely to be available*

### Networks and matching

- *Improve the matching of refugees to their environment*

## CS Groups

### Recruiting and retaining volunteers

- *Develop a clear explanation of what a refugee is, the objectives of the CS and what it can bring to a community (see Reset's website: [www.resetuk.org](http://www.resetuk.org))*
- *Use social media, local newsletters, awareness-raising events, social networks, and word of mouth to attract volunteers*
- *Share responsibilities so that individuals do not experience burnout (see Reset's training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/making-an-application/organising-your-group/managing-volunteers>)*
- *Ensure there are policies for volunteer support, training and safeguarding (see Reset's training website: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/making-an-application/organising-your-group>)*

### Education and English

- *Ability to speak English is the foundation for integration – the more time that can be invested in offering English classes and opportunities to practise, the quicker refugees can access training and work*
- *English language learning must be targeted to the learning ability of the refugee*
- *Individual support with basic literacy and numeracy is needed for those refugees who have had little or no education*
- *Provision should be made for refugees to learn English outside of the ESOL term cycle so they can make immediate progress with language learning*

### Integration and employment

- *Consider the kinds of opportunities that might enable those without children to speak English informally, e.g. in language or knitting cafes (see Reset's training website for suggestions: <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/making-english-lessons-available/esol-group-leaders-detailed> [note that this resource is only available to CS group members who have created accounts on Reset's training website])*
- *Work with local media to share facts about the CS and to reassure local people about the scheme and the opportunities offered by refugees*
- *Share good news stories to create a feel-good factor around CS and to encourage all residents to be welcoming*

### Local authorities

- *Provide a named contact with responsibility for the CS and liaison with other resettlement schemes*
- *Connect schools and other local institutions working with CS and VPRS – perhaps arranging a quarterly learning meeting*
- *Connect schools with no experience of working with children from diverse backgrounds with those with experience*
- *Work with local libraries to ensure there are suitable resources to support the learning of refugee children and adults*

# References

Cheung, S.Y. and Phillimore, J., 2014. Refugees, social capital, and labour market integration in the UK. *Sociology*, 48(3), pp.518-536.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sin\\_Yi\\_Cheung/publication/259842733\\_Refugees\\_Social\\_Capital\\_and\\_Labour\\_Market\\_Integration\\_in\\_the\\_UK/links/55d1bf6308ae2496ee658087/Refugees-Social-Capital-and-Labour-Market-Integration-in-the-UK.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sin_Yi_Cheung/publication/259842733_Refugees_Social_Capital_and_Labour_Market_Integration_in_the_UK/links/55d1bf6308ae2496ee658087/Refugees-Social-Capital-and-Labour-Market-Integration-in-the-UK.pdf)

Morrice, L., Tip, L.K., Collyer, M. and Brown, R., 2019. 'You can't have a good integration when you don't have a good communication': English-language learning among resettled refugees in England. *Journal of Refugee Studies*.

Phillimore, J., 2011. Monitoring for equality? Asylum seekers and refugees' retention and achievement in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), pp.317-329.

Phillimore, J. and Goodson, L., (2006). Problem or opportunity? Asylum seekers, refugees, employment and social exclusion in deprived urban areas. *Urban Studies*, 43(10), pp.1715-1736.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jenny\\_Phillimore/publication/248974040\\_Problem\\_or\\_Opportunity\\_Asylum\\_Seekers\\_Refugees\\_Employment\\_and\\_Social\\_Exclusion\\_in\\_Deprived\\_Urban\\_Areas/links/0deec533b251695d13000000.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jenny_Phillimore/publication/248974040_Problem_or_Opportunity_Asylum_Seekers_Refugees_Employment_and_Social_Exclusion_in_Deprived_Urban_Areas/links/0deec533b251695d13000000.pdf)

Tip, L.K., Brown, R., Morrice, L., Collyer, M. and Easterbrook, M.J., 2019. Improving refugee well-being with better language skills and more intergroup contact. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10(2), pp.144-151.  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1948550617752062>

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Community Sponsorship Interview Pre Arrival of the Families

1. When did you get involved with the (group's name) Community Sponsorship scheme application? How did you end up getting involved?
2. What were your reasons for wanting to get involved?
3. What do you personally hope to gain from getting involved in the CS?
4. How did you hope to contribute to the application? (Probe the skills and experience they bring and where they got them from)
5. In what ways have you got involved so far?
6. Are there other contributions you would have liked to make but have not been able to so far?
7. Please tell me how you understand that the Community Sponsorship application works – describe the application process as you understand it.
8. What do you consider to be the main challenges the group has faced with the application so far?
9. Have those challenges been overcome? If so, in what way?
10. What do you think of the application process? How might it be improved?
11. What do you think your group has to offer a refugee family?
12. What types of support do you expect that a refugee family will need from your group if the application is successful?
13. How many hours per week and for how many weeks do you expect to contribute to the group a) in advance of the application b) after the family arrives?
14. What other ways are you hoping to contribute to sponsoring a refugee family if your group's application is successful?
15. When do you think you will know a) if your application has been approved b) the family your group is sponsoring will arrive?
16. How will you know if the CS has been successful for a) refugees b) the local community?

## Appendix 2: Community Sponsorship Interview Schedule – Follow-Up interview

1. When did the refugee family that your group is supporting arrive?
2. How did the arrival arrangements go? What went well? What would you do differently if you did it again?
3. What has your role been since the family arrived? Is that what you expected to be doing?
4. Has supporting the family been as you expected it to be? How different?
5. What do you wish that your group had a) known b) done before the group arrived?
6. What have you personally gained from getting involved in CS so far?
7. What do you think your main contribution has been? (Probe skills and qualifications)
8. Are there other contributions you would have liked to make but have not been able to so far?
9. What do you consider to be the main challenges the group has faced since the family arrived?
10. Have those challenges been overcome? If so, in what way?
11. Have the Home Office visited your group/family yet? If so, what did they do when they came?
12. What kinds of support have you had from the Home Office and Reset since the family arrived? In what ways was it useful? What other help did/do you need?
13. Has the group received help from anywhere else? Did you seek help elsewhere? What happened?
14. What do you think your group has been able to offer the refugee family?
15. How have the local community reacted to the arrival of a refugee family?
16. What types of support do you expect that a refugee family will need from your group in the next year?
17. How many hours a week do you volunteer for the group?
18. How many hours per week and for how many weeks do you expect to contribute to the group over the next year?
19. What relationships do you/ the group expect to have with the family at the end of the 12 months of sponsorship?
20. How have you a) attracted b) retained volunteers?
21. Have you had enough volunteers? What skills/experience etc has been missing?
22. What plans do you as a group have for the future?
23. How successful would you say your group has been so far?
24. How will you know if the CS has been successful for
  - a) refugees
  - b) local community
  - c) you?
25. What advice do you have to offer other CS groups?

### Appendix 3: Community Sponsorship Interview Schedule – 12 months after family arrival

1. When did you get involved with the (state as appropriate) Community Sponsorship scheme application? How did you end up getting involved?
2. What were your reasons for wanting to get involved?
3. What do you personally hope to gain from getting involved in CS?
4. How did you hope to contribute to the application? (Probe the skills and experience they bring and where they got them from)
5. In what ways have you got involved so far?
6. Are there other contributions you would have liked to make but have not been able to so far?
7. What were the main challenges the group faced with the application?
8. Have were challenges been overcome?
9. What do you think of the application process? How might it be improved?
10. What do you think your group has to offer a refugee family?
11. What types of support did you expect that a refugee family would need from your group? In what ways were these different?
12. How many hours per week and for how many weeks did you expect to contribute to the group? Did this change at any point in the process?
13. How will you know if the CS has been successful for a) refugees b) the local community?
14. When did the refugee family that your group is supporting arrive?
15. How did the arrival arrangements go? What went well? What would you do differently if you did it again?
16. What has your role been since the family arrived? Is that what you expected to be doing?
17. What do you wish that your group had a) known b) done before the group arrived?
18. What have you personally gained from getting involved in CS so far?
19. What do you think your main contribution has been? (Probe skills and qualifications)
20. Are there other contributions you would have liked to make but have not been able to so far?
21. What do you consider to be the main challenges the group has faced since the family arrived?
22. Have those challenges been overcome? If so in what way?
23. How many times has the Home Office visited your group/family so far? What did they do when they came?
24. What kinds of support have you had from the Home Office and Resettlement since the family arrived? In what ways was it useful? What other help did/do you need?
25. Has the group received help from anywhere else? Have you sought help elsewhere? What happened?
26. What do you think your group has been able to offer the refugee family?
27. How have the local community reacted to the arrival of a refugee family?
28. What types of support do you expect that a refugee family will need from your group in the next year?
29. What relationships do you/ the group expect to have with the family in the long term?

30. How have you a) attracted b) retained volunteers?
31. Have you had enough volunteers? What skills/experience etc have been missing?
32. What plans do you as a group have for the future?
33. How successful would you say your group has been so far?
34. What advice do you have to offer other CS groups?



#### Appendix 4: Topic guide for refugee families supported by Community Sponsorship Programme

Length of time in the UK

Length of time in refugee camp

Age

Gender

Highest level of education

Occupation

Religion

Family/ dependents

1. How long have you been in the UK now?
2. How did you get here?
3. Where are you living?
4. Which organisation has your family been sponsored by?
5. What were your first impressions of your new home and the area in which you live?
6. What did you expect your life to be like in the UK? So far how have your experiences matched your expectations?
7. What has surprised you about life in the UK?
8. What help have you needed since you arrived to help you settle in and find your way around?
9. Has the help you needed changed in the weeks since you have been here?
10. What help have you received since you have arrived?
11. Which help has been the most useful?
12. Which help has been the least useful?
13. What would you say are the biggest problems you have encountered since coming here?
14. Have those problems been overcome yet? If yes, how? If no, what other help do you need?
15. What other help did you need that you haven't received?
16. To what extent do you feel you can ask for extra help? Who would you ask? Who has been particularly helpful?
17. What do you hope to do with your life in the UK? Do you have any plans? Please tell me about your plans for the life here?
18. What help do you think you will need to make your plans happen?
19. What do you worry about most in terms of the future for you and your family?
20. What help do you need to enable you to overcome those worries?
21. Do you have any friends or family already in the UK? If yes, are you able to see/contact them? Have they helped you in any way?
22. Have you come across the term 'integration'? If yes, what does it mean to you?

23. If no, integration is the term that we use to talk about the process of settling in and feeling at home. What actions are your priorities in order to help with your integration?
24. What do you miss the most from your previous life? How can your sponsors help support you with that loss?
25. What advice would you give to an organisation like (name of sponsor organisation) if they asked you to set up a support scheme for other refugee families coming to live here?

## Appendix 5: Topic guide - Thought Leaders - Community Sponsorship Scheme

1. How did you get involved with the Community Sponsorship scheme application? How did you end up getting involved? When was that?
2. What were your reasons for wanting to get involved?
3. What do you personally hope to gain from getting involved in the CS?
4. What would you say you have gained so far? (Probe new friends, new knowledge, something to fill time, other)
5. How has being involved made you feel?
6. How did you hope to contribute? (Probe the skills and experience they bring and where they got them from)
7. In what ways have you got involved so far? Do you have a specific role? What skills/experience have you brought to your work?
8. How did you gain the trust of the team that has been working with you in the CS project?
9. Could you describe in which ways your work has inspired the team of volunteers? (Probe new ideas, engagement, solving problems)
10. Are there other contributions you would have liked to make but have not been able to so far?
11. What do you consider to be the main challenges facing the development of the Community Sponsorship Programme in the UK?
12. How might these challenges be overcome?
13. What do you think of the support that your group has provided to the family? How might it be improved?
14. Have you needed any support at all? What was that? Did you get the support you needed?
15. How many hours per week and for how many weeks do you expect to contribute over the next few months? Is your role paid or voluntary?
16. How will you know if the CS has been successful for a) refugees b) the UK c) you?
17. What would you say the main successes have been so far? How could the programme be helped to be more successful?
18. What advice would you give to others, perhaps in a different part of Europe, trying to set up a similar scheme? (Probe). Do you have a blueprint that can be replicated?