

Like pebbles in a pool: the effect of community sponsorship on knowledge about, and attitudes to, refugees in less-diverse communities

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INTERIM REPORT

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GLOSSARY

CSS Community Sponsorship Scheme

ESOL English language classes

ESRC Economic and Social Research Council

IRiS Institute for Research into Superdiversity

VPRS Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme

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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.

This report sets out the findings of exploratory research looking at the impacts of the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) on knowledge about, and attitudes to, refugees in two small towns characterised by low levels of ethnic diversity.

Chapter 2: Research methods and sample

The research used semi-structured interviews with local residents to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of local residents and those working in institutions in the selected communities. Some respondents had encountered CSS but were not directly involved in the scheme, while other participants had no knowledge or involvement with CSS.

Some 16 individuals participated in the study. Of these 63% were men and 37% were women. The predominant group were middle age participants (56%), all of them currently employed. A second group included people over 60 years old, who were mainly semi-retired and retired (31%).

Chapter 3: Findings

Knowledge about refugees and Community Sponsorship

All respondents had a reasonable understanding of what a refugee is, but most of them were unaware of the CSS. Individuals who we interviewed who had no connection with refugees did not know that there were families residing in their town. CSS group leaders and volunteers reached out to individuals working in schools and JobCentre Plus to explain CSS.

Community responses to arrival of refugees

Some resistance to the idea of refugees moving to localities was experienced before refugees arrived. Negative letters in local newspapers and social media comments appeared to die away after refugees arrived. On the whole local people were accepting of refugees, however some children experienced bullying at school. CSS volunteers and especially group leaders had worked hard on different initiatives to educate, inform, and connect their communities with the refugee families. These approaches were reported to have enabled refugee acceptance into the communities.

Learning from refugees

Respondents who had some kind of contact with refugees and CSS either through community or paid work reported learning about generosity, gratitude, welcome and hospitality, and enjoyed interacting with people with different cultures. This learning was helpful for reframe negative views about refugees and was shared by those in direct contact with friends and family who were reported to hold negative attitudes about Muslims and refugees.

Institutional learning

Respondents from local institutions including schools, Jobcentre Plus and community groups reported receiving high level of support from CSS groups in advance of refugee arrival. This support enabled them to understand and address the needs of the refugee families. Schools had adapted their approaches to teaching and produced new materials; while the Jobcentres reported feeling a sense of professional pride at the work they had done and in seeing the progress their clients were making. The learning from their experiences was shared with other colleagues and institutions.

The Benefits of Community Sponsorship

In both cases respondents reported that CSS had brought the community together in new ways. CSS had connected respondents in the wider community with refugees enabling them to develop a more global perspective. Several interviewees spoke of experiencing joy, love and acceptance because of their interaction with CSS. Refugees were said to be an inspiration within schools and local communities had become more outward looking as a result of their engagement with refugees.

Challenges

The study found that the main challenge was associated with refugees' own experiences and included difficulties in communication; lack of support available locally for refugee wellbeing; poor transport; and problems accessing employment. The absence of Arabic interpreters locally was also problematic. Two factors were raised in terms of refugees being able to fit in locally. These were differences in attitudes around sexuality and gender relations, and negative attitudes towards refugees held by a minority of local people.

Enhancing the impact of Community Sponsorship within the wider community

Respondents suggested three actions for maximising the benefits of hosting refugees in their communities: 1) Provide information about refugees and CSS for local people so that they were aware of the CSS mission and their reasons for acting 2) Find ways to accelerate refugees' English learning 3) Bring refugees and local people together in multiple ways.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

The advent of community sponsorship in less diverse areas offers potential for transformation of understanding of refugee issues, to reduce fears about “others”, to change working practices to make them more inclusive for wider diverse populations and to bring new perspectives into relatively homogeneous communities. There are clear signs that contact with refugees and those who work with them has the biggest effect. Such changes are possible through direct contact with refugees or CSS volunteers but also potentially through word of mouth sharing of information by those who encounter refugees and CSS volunteers. Over time and/or with the arrival of further refugees it is possible that the effect on knowledge and attitudes about refugees will increase. Further research is needed on more communities and with more respondents over an extended period of time to identify the nature of change.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

The Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) was launched in the UK in July 2016. Since this time nearly 350 refugees have been resettled into rural, urban and suburban areas across the UK. Inspired by the Canadian Private Sponsorship model, the CSS is believed to have great potential to promote positive resettlement outcomes, both for resettled refugee families and local communities. It was unparalleled in Europe at the point of introduction and has subsequently inspired actions elsewhere in Europe. Its innovation is based upon enabling community groups to become directly involved in supporting refugee resettlement. The underpinning aim of CSS is to enable communities to empower refugee families to rebuild their lives and to successfully integrate into life in the UK.

The Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) has been undertaking a formative evaluation of Community Sponsorship since 2017. We have monitored the progress of eight groups and the refugees they support from group formation stage to 12 months after the arrival of the refugee family they support. We have also engaged in interviews with refugees from other groups who have been in the UK more than 12 months and interviewed the volunteers who run those groups. Finally, we have undertaken interviews with “thought leaders”: individuals who have had a role in the development of CSS in the UK. Following an analysis of the interim findings of this evaluation published in July 2019 <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/Misc/CSS-UK-IRiS-June-2019.pdf> a wide range of positive benefits of engaging in Community Sponsorship (CSS) were identified for both refugees and CSS volunteers. Volunteers and thought leaders alluded to these positive effects moving beyond the immediate sponsorship group to the wider community in which they are situated.

Following publication of the July 2019 report the IRiS CSS evaluation team were asked by the charity Reset to undertake some exploratory research to document these wider impacts of CSS. Reset is an independent charity empowering groups of people to support a refugee family as they integrate into their community. Given that initially our findings suggested that these effects of CSS were more prevalent in less-diverse areas we decided to focus upon two CSS groups with low levels of diversity.

The aim of our study was to identify the impacts of CSS on the wider community and institutions in these two areas, with a particular focus on changes in the knowledge and attitudes of community members in relation to refugees and CSS. Increasing knowledge about wider impacts of CSS is of key importance both at the current time

when levels of hostility towards some ethnic minorities is increasing in the UK¹ and there are proposals to roll-out CSS more widely under the UK's Global Resettlement Scheme. Identifying the extent to which CSS has transformative potential especially in less diverse areas enables us to make recommendations about how this potential can be tapped and developed.

¹ The proportion of people from an ethnic minority who said they had been targeted by a stranger rose from 64% in January to 2016 to 76% in February 2019. See Opinium "Racism raising since Brexit vote" [opinion of racism since brexit](#)

Chapter 2:

Research methods and sample

As noted above the aim of this project was to identify the impact of CSS on wider communities and institutions in areas with little ethnic diversity, with a particular focus on changes in the knowledge and attitudes of community members. Given low-levels of resources we elected to focus our small-scale study on two small towns surrounded by rural communities in England. This study implemented interviews with local people in those areas to explore their knowledge of CSS and refugees and the impact of CSS on their local area.

No baseline study examining knowledge and attitudes about refugees and the CSS scheme was undertaken beforehand thus we are unable to compare beliefs, attitudes and experiences to those reported prior to the advent of CSS. Despite their relatively small size the communities in which we undertook the research are home to thousands of people and many institutions. Resource restraints meant it was not possible to interview a representative sample of individuals from across the community. Instead we focused upon engaging with a selection of individuals and institutions who had encountered CSS but were not directly involved as CSS volunteers and a small number of people who had no knowledge or involvement with CSS. **At this stage we would argue the findings are indicative of some of the effects of CSS beyond the immediate group.** The findings from this study have potential to be developed into a questionnaire that could be used to collect data from the wider community in community sponsorship areas.

The areas

We selected two areas with well-established CSS groups but very low levels of ethnic diversity. In both areas the proportion of the population classified as ethnic minorities formed less than 2% of the overall population in the 2011 census.

The community in Case Study 1 (CS1) now has several refugee families living in the area, the first arriving as part of CSS, and then others subsequently arriving as part of the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). During the formation of the group, some volunteers experienced hostile calls and the local newspapers received letters criticizing their work supporting refugees. These tensions are now said to have reduced.

The community in Case Study 2 (CS2) supports refugees who arrived under CSS. Originally, the local authority rejected the group's application considering that the area to be unsuitable for refugee' resettlement. However, with perseverance the group were able to persuade the local authority to endorse their application enabling them to meet Home Office requirements and received a refugee family. At the outset of its operation,

the group experienced contentious comments when mass media reported their participation in CSS. Subsequently following the arrival of refugees, the negative reporting has abated.

The sample

A snowball sampling technique relying on introductions by the CSS groups to institutions and then asking interviewees to identify further participants was used to recruit respondents to participate in the study. CSS group leaders also contributed providing the names of the locations of places where the refugee families receive services like GPs, dentists, Job Centres and schools. We then contacted these places directly and invited individuals working there to participate in the study. During our visits to the two areas we also conversed widely with local people exploring in an informal way the extent of their knowledge about CSS and refugees.

In total 16 individuals were interviewed, 63% were men and 37% were women. The predominant group was represented by middle age participants (56%), all of them currently employed. A second group included people over 60 years old, who were mainly semi-retired and retired (31%). Details of those interviewed are set out in Table 1. Note in order to secure confidentiality of place and respondents we are unable to provide detailed information about the sample or to profile the case study sites.

Table 1. Sample

Coding	Gender	Age	Occupation	Role
C1.1	Male	Over 70	Semi-retired	Landlord
C1.2	Female	Over 60	Semi-retired	ESOL teacher
C1.3	Male	Over 70s	Retired	Befriender
C1.4	Female	Middle age	Working	Befriender
C1.5	Male	Middle age	Working	Jobcentre Plus Manager
C1.6	Male	Middle age	Working	Jobcentre Plus employee
C1.7	Female	Over 70	Working	Community Leader
C1.8	Female	Middle age	Semi-retired	Neighbour
C1.9	Male	30's	Working	Taxi driver (originating in South Asia)
C2.1	Female	Middle Age	Working	Teacher Assistant Junior School
C2.2	Male	Middle Age	Working	Headteacher
C2.3	Male	Middle Age	Working	Jobcentre Plus employee
C2.4	Male	Middle Age	Working	Headteacher
C2.5	Female	Middle Age	Working	Teacher
C2.6	Male	30's	Working	Interpreter (originating in Africa)
C2.7	Male	Over 70	Retired	Long term resident

Chapter 3:

Findings

Knowledge about refugees and Community Sponsorship

All respondents regardless of whether had encountered CSS had a reasonably accurate understanding of what a refugee is emphasising that refugees are displaced people, having to leave everything behind them, escaping war or persecution and seeking safety.

“My view of refugees is basically a displaced person. But of course, I think the Syrian Middle East situation is far worse than that” (Landlord, C1.1).

“They are people moving away from conflict for their own safety to save their family and their children. They have to take refuge in another place to remain safe” (Befriender, C1.3).

Most respondents were unaware of the Community Sponsorship Scheme until it had been introduced to them by their local CSS group or they had heard about it through publicity from the group.

“The families that initially came into XXX were under the Government's scheme of the resettlement scheme and so I heard about the Sponsorship scheme mainly through XXX charity who had tried I think to get them here through the Government's scheme and that was proving incredibly difficult... So then the government introduced a Sponsorship scheme and so that's how we heard about it” (Community leader, C1.7).

Indeed, some respondents were not aware of CSS but had heard of the wider Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Individuals who we interviewed who had no connection with local CSS groups had no knowledge of CSS and were unaware that there were refugees residing in their town. Given that each town resettled a very small number of refugees it is highly likely that the majority of residents who are not connected to active community groups or local institutions are aware of the scheme. Institutions were made aware of the scheme and educated about refugees more generally by CSS group members who wanted them to understand why they would be encountering refugees. Group leaders reached out to schools and JobCentre Plus in both case study areas to explain CSS.

“I did not know too much about it until I met the CSS group leader here. So, it's a group of volunteers...people with various kinds of interests, skills, and things that they can offer...they offer to the language skills but also people who were near the system in terms of its legal side and can help with paperwork applications. And so, I thought it was so amazing to see something so concrete being in place for them...Because it's the personal side you see. So I was very impressed by it” (Interpreter, C2.6).

In Case Study 1 some interviewees involved with local charities were aware of the differences between VPRS and CSS and commented on the marked difference in support structures between the two with CSS seen as the ideal model because it offered wrap around support.

Community responses to arrival of refugees

Respondents who were aware of the development of a CSS group in their vicinity reported that some negative attitudes were expressed both via social media and in the letters section in the local newspaper before refugees arrived. This discourse had led to some respondents feeling concerned that refugees would not be made to feel welcome. In practice no respondent was aware of any incidents targeting refugee adults.

“At first I was wondering what people might think about someone coming out in a burka and two children XXXX....but her burka is not the typical one. Yeah it's not all black. Yeah, it's very pretty. Very beautiful colourful. Yeah. Yes. But you wonder how people are going to react.... Yes, I've seen her coming out and say we've had no feedback on anything. When we've asked them, they've said, no problem.... They said no problem, going around is fine” (Befriender, C1.3).

However, in both case study areas refugee children had experienced bullying at school and had moved school. It was notable that white British respondents appeared to be less aware of racism in their locality. They believed that on the whole local people were accepting, if rather defensive about the arrival of any outsiders (whether refugee or not). However, a BME respondent highlighted that racism was common in the locality. When negative attitudes were expressed the respondent put these down to fear or ignorance.

“But you know, I think that it is because people are afraid, they're afraid to what is different... So it's not hatred... They're not acting out of hatred but ignorance, ignorance, and fear, real fear” (Interpreter, C2.6).

Notably CSS volunteers and especially group leaders were identified by respondents as making concerted and greatly appreciated efforts to explain CSS and to reassure local organisations and institutions that the arrival of refugees would not be problematic for the town. Often this included talking about the opportunities that refugees would bring to the locality.

“I knew from the group leader of the Community Sponsorship about the families coming to our community. We got a meeting with her and the headmaster and she explained to us the programme and the family's circumstances” (TA Junior school, C2.1).

CSS groups had also run community events to introduce refugee families to the local community, encouraged refugees to attend wide community events and instigated awareness raising activities. These were reported to have had a broad impact in the community of familiarising them with the newcomers so that they were used to mixing with refugees and had overcome initial fears.

As individuals interacted with refugees and their families through their paid or voluntary work several became more involved with supporting refugees. Some respondents talked

of their engagement with refugees as becoming a family affair as their children now played with refugee children and their friends and family engaged with refugee families.

“So, with some of our friends, we ask them to meet them... to get to know them. Yes, we also do with some of our family members, with my wife’s son; he’s 33 or 34, and we sometimes going round to do something with the families. So our own family is involved, and it is so beautiful to see the two children playing with our other son and grandson. It touches when you see them because you say they are lovely people just like us” (Befriender, C1.3).

In each of the case studies most respondents felt that refugees had settled well and that their presence had largely a positive impact on local community by bringing much needed diversity and a more outward looking perspective. Some individuals noted that within the wider community most people were either unaware or indifferent to the arrival of refugees. Thus, it would seem that the “community” effect of CSS was largely felt within the “contact zone” around refugees: schools, doctors’ surgeries, Jobcentre Pluses, housing and ESOL providers and community organisations. Over time it is likely that the contact zone will expand and possible that the positive effects reported with extend across the community more widely.

Learning from refugees

Some 14 individuals had directly encountered refugees as a result of the work of CSS groups in their locality. They spoke of learning from refugees about generosity, gratitude, welcome and hospitality

“A family invited us for a meal.... My husband and myself went for a meal that I was so touched because they have so little. They wanted to share. So they made us feel more than welcome. They are very generous and welcoming culture” (ESOL Teacher, C1.2).

They also learned how to interact with people from different countries, about different cultures and religions including how to cook Middle Eastern food, and about conflict and loss.

“I have learnt a lot to not take for granted many things...yeah. I think that we have learnt to be more understanding and open” (Headteacher, C2.2).

Importantly the majority of respondents who had some kind of contact with refugees and CSS, either through community or paid work, had shared their learning with friends and family sometimes using their experience to reframe negative views about refugees.

“We had some Christian friends and we were talking about what I was doing and what lovely people they are because I’ve been teaching the Syrian families. I told them that they are Muslims. And they said: Aren’t you worried about coming into contact with Muslims. I said no... why... don’t you think they will try and radicalize you... Don’t you think they will try and impose their views on you that they have an ulterior motive in influencing you...but, what I told them is that if they have met these people... They are gentle and loving (ESOL teacher, C1.2).

The landlord respondent now actively promoted refugees as tenants to other landlords arguing that they were less problematic than their “usual” tenants.

Institutional learning

The formative evaluation referred to earlier identified that one of the key roles of volunteers was to support refugees to engage with local institutions such as schools, hospitals and Jobcentres. Respondents from such institutions noted receiving a high level of support from CSS groups in advance of their interactions. In Case Study 1 support had helped them to work with VPRS refugees as well as those who were supported by CSS. Respondents reported finding ways to engage with refugee families – communicating using Google translate and generally “*trying to make them feel as welcome as we possibly could*” (Manager Jobcentre, C1.5). The learning from trying to communicate with refugees had been translated to other clients for whom English was not a first language.

Respondents working in schools spoke about how they had adapted their approaches to teaching as a result of working with refugee children. They learned to focus on generic skills such as maths which were not dependent on English language competency. Respondents also told other teachers within their school what they were doing so that they could learn from experiences which could, for example, aid language acquisition for other children struggling with language learning.

“So we have to make adjustments, but not just for them but first class and because we’re slightly different you know in primary school so we rotate around that...”(Teaching Assistant Junior school, C2.1).

Teachers also spoke of how they connected with other schools to access materials for children who had been out of education for some time and shared materials with other schools.

“Well, you know, we’ve been sharing with other colleagues ...with our sister schools which have a college...” (Head teacher Junior School, C2.2).

Respondents working with refugees in a professional capacity outlined high levels of job satisfaction at seeing refugees progress and feeling that they had made some contribution to progress. Teachers and community workers reflected on the joy they felt as seeing refugee children progress quickly

“To be honest, probably the most rewarding thing for us was to see XXXX...He just started singing and talking and whistling... It’s incredible; to see them transform their lives through the school and see the XXXX happiest children you could ever see and to think you know this is going on for them only 18 months ago... Yeah is great” (Teacher, C2.5).

Within the Jobcentres supporting refugees there had been a steep learning curve but respondents reported feeling a sense of professional pride at the work they had done and in seeing the progress their clients were making. They too shared with other Jobcentres

“I would shout from the rooftops about the work we're doing, the work my work coach is doing with them....because it's very inspiring and makes us feel very proud” (Jobcentre Manager, C1.5).

The benefits of Community Sponsorship

Respondents were asked to sum up the benefits of CSS for their communities. In both case studies respondents referred to CSS bringing people together – mixing and relationship building between community members and between the community and refugee families and other ethnic minority communities. Events were particularly important in both case study areas. CSS groups had put on special events to enable refugees and local people to meet but also increasingly refugees were attending and sometimes volunteering at local events.

“Mum in the family has been attending some of the events that we prepared for the parents to see their children’s development. She just comes in and it's difficult for her with the language barrier, but she is socialising more and some months ago the school gave a birthday party to XXXX... And luckily, both Mum and Dad poured lots of Syrian food and all the children were trying.... and the parents were trying it... And that was really good because they felt for the first time really close to them” (Teacher, C2.5).

“The XXXX Church is organising activities for them once a month and the families have a great time, it doesn’t really matter what type of things, they love to go and socialise with other families” (Befriender, C1.3.).

Through these interactions friendships were developed and people were gradually becoming used to having refugee families in their locale. Respondents reported enjoying the company of refugees and in particular learning about other lives and other places

“And I think it has helped me understand what's going on in the world how devastating it is... And I think anyone that comes into contact with these families and they are vulnerable with you. It's very humbling. And it makes you just me anyway it makes me just want to provide a safe haven for more people” (Community leader, C1.7).

Within communities generally, but especially within schools, the diversity and associated intercultural learning brought by refugees was considered to bring more of a global outlook to places that were argued to be somewhat inward looking

“They are good people and a place like XXXX needs diversity and learn about other cultures and communities. It is lovely to have people from different countries” (Befriender, C1.4).

“The refugee families, as well as people from different countries, are good for encouraging diversity in the community. Sometimes it is difficult for the people of (the county) to accept newcomers, even if they are from other regions of the UK” (Jobcentre Employee, C2.3).

A key part of the diversity seen as a major benefit of resettling refugees that was mentioned repeatedly was *“the fact that they cook wonderful food” (ESOL teacher, C1.2).*

Several respondents spoke of experiencing joy, love and acceptance because of their interaction with the CSS

“The benefit for me personally has been meeting lovely people who are so willing to learn, wanting to learn, and so grateful... that's helped me personally. To be embraced by them, to be accepted by them. So yeah. I gain a tremendous amount of love from them” (ESOL teacher, C1.2).

“They do love and accept me for who I am. I totally love that. You know I do bring them up a little bit about things. And they are... they say, they want friendship, they don't care whether they're Christian Muslim Atheist whatever they are. They just want to be friends with good people and they are open to. And I think they're great for that” (Neighbour, C1.8).

The sheer level of support offered by CSS to volunteers had impressed and inspired some respondents renewing their faith in human nature:

“What I see with the Community Sponsorship is that they give people a sense that I'm here for you always. You are the centre of attention...Because what happens is that over time when they're consistently meeting people who love them unconditionally, they begin to heal” (Interpreter, C2.6).

Finally, refugee children and the joy and inspiration that they brought to their schools and local communities were highlighted as a major benefit from CSS. Respondents were astounded at children's resilience and adaptability and how quickly refugee children learned to speak English and made friends. Progress with their learning was impressive and teachers said they provided a good role model to other students because they worked so hard.

“The children....Well they are probably bilingual by now. Amazingly children don't really have too many problems because actually, they learn the language very quickly and that helps a lot the grownups” (Community Leader, C1.7)

Challenges

As we identified in the interim evaluation report the advent of CSS brought some challenges but beyond reporting that they needed to adapt their services most respondents talked about the challenges that adult refugees were themselves facing in trying to integrate into a new country. They highlighted problems with communication, refugees' complex needs and the lack of support available locally for wellbeing, poor transport opportunities and the difficulties refugees faced accessing employment. Given the lack of diversity in both areas the absence of Arabic interpreters locally was problematic.

The only two factors raised in terms of integrating refugees into the wider community were differences in attitudes around sexuality and gender relations. One respondent in Case Study 1 felt that opening up the discussion with her refugee neighbours about homosexuality and acceptable women's behaviour offered potential for changes in attitude in the longer term.

"I told them that my half-brother is gay and they said, well, you know they said, we Muslims, we don't accept that, and they changed the subject after that. But it's kind of like opening them up to reality, is like I said, you know, this is the U.K. Even down to the drinking culture. Oh, you, you can't, you can't do that. And I'm like, no, no, this is what we do. You know, you can come along but I'm going to be having a few beers and this is what I do" (Neighbour, C1.8).

Two other respondents noted that women refugees were less confident about going out without a volunteer to escort them or in speaking out about their needs. However, there was optimism that over time they would learn what was possible and that CSS volunteers would support them to become more independent.

"Like what you saw with the Mum today...Indeed, she had the desire to express herself...but she said, I just don't know how to do it...what she's really saying is I'm not sure... because they're not used to that freedom...women are not allowed to express their feelings" (Interpreter, C2.6).

Finally, several respondents alluded to negative attitudes either anti-refugee propagated by the media, or held by individuals, and how these could potentially be a barrier to refugee integration. In our travels around the case study areas talking to many individuals most were unaware of the refugee arrivals and when told about them were indifferent to their presence in the community. As reported above we were told that these rather homogenous communities could be inward looking but only one person, an elderly man attending a coffee morning in a church who was a long-term resident of the area, offered a negative opinion. He expressed concerns that *"Muslims should stay in countries that practice Islam and the same sort of traditions"* (C2.7) directly equating Islam with violence. This man knew nothing of CSS or refugee resettlement and said he had never met a Muslim or a refugee. Given that some of our respondents spoke of the transformative effect they had witnessed having shared stories with individuals who expressed negative opinions about refugees and Muslims about the joy of working with, or meeting refugees, it is possible that individuals may experience some change in their opinions once they met the objects of their fear in a familiar environment.

Enhancing the impact of Community Sponsorship within the wider community

We asked respondents what actions might help CSS groups and refugees to flourish and to maximise benefits for host communities. Three key actions were identified.

The first concerned providing information about refugees and CSS for local people so that they were aware of the CSS group's mission and their reasons for acting. It was also believed that sharing information about who refugees are and why they need to be resettled would reassure those such as the elderly man we refer to above, that embracing refugee resettlement offered no risks and a range of benefits.

The second concerned communication which is a key theme in all studies around refugee integration and indeed a key issue to emerge from the wider evaluation. Respondents were keen to see more intensified efforts to help refugees to learn English and argued that refugees found their own lack of progress frustrating.

Thirdly respondents called for more events to bring refugees and local people together. Activities, especially involving food, were viewed as good for breaking down misconceptions and developing friendships as well as helping refugees to adjust to a new life.

“I have heard that different charities and churches have been trying to organise social events for the families. That is very good because they feel that people care about them.... And if you're a refugee you just come in and make the effort to mingle...support groups for only women are very good because they are used to socialise and they feel free to express their feelings with their peers... They love to share their cooking and they love to share a meal and chat...” (Interpreter, C2.6).

Chapter 4:

Conclusions

Analysis of the interview data collected for this exploratory study suggests that the advent of community sponsorship in less diverse areas offers potential for transformation of understanding of refugee issues, to reduce fears about “others”, to change working practices to make them more inclusive for wider diverse populations and to bring new perspectives into relatively homogeneous communities. Such changes are possible through direct contact with refugees or CSS volunteers but also potentially through word of mouth sharing of information by those who encounter refugees and CSS volunteers.

Not everyone in the case study areas had encountered refugees or even knew that they had moved into the areas and on the whole those who knew nothing of CSS or refugees were indifferent to their arrival. This is unsurprising given the small number of refugees now residing in both places. Some respondents suggested that there was anti-refugee sentiment on the part of local people who did not like change or were fearful of “others” often believing some of the negative media conflating refugees with criminality. Fears had been widely expressed about introducing CSS to the two towns, but post-arrival respondents argued that these fears reduced.

Our findings suggest that contact with refugees and CSS have potential to overcome the concerns expressed by some residents. Certainly, CSS groups were actively attempting to give local people opportunities for contact and respondents overall believed that the more opportunities made available for mixing, the better the outcomes would be for everyone.

Most respondents expressed positive opinions about the impact of CSS and refugee families in their locality. Those with direct contact found they gained much from their encounters with refugees both at emotional and intellectual levels. Individuals working with refugees in a professional capacity found their work rewarding and enjoyed working in new ways and sharing their learning and new skills with others. CSS volunteers frequently built the foundations for positive outcomes paving the way for CSS to act as a quiet force for change opening opportunities for movement towards more openness to diversity and building new kinds of social relations whilst pushing back against concerns generated by negative media.

This study was small in scale but enables us to offer some tentative findings which reinforce those offered by volunteers interviewed for the formative evaluation that the **impact of CSS goes beyond the effects on refugee families and the CSS group volunteers who support them**. In this respect the impact of CS in areas of low diversity might be likened to that of a pebble that is dropped into a pool of water. Immediately around the pebble ripples are created but these reduce in intensity with distance from the entry point of the pebble. Over time the ripples radiate to the outer edge of the pool making

small but difficult to observe changes. Increasing the size of the pebble or number of pebbles will create more and greater ripples that have a potentially greater effect on the pool, while observing the pool over a longer period of time will help increase understanding about the extent of small-scale change over time. To understand impacts further work is required to:

- Examine how communities change over time by studying attitudes and beliefs before and after the arrival of refugees
- To follow outcomes over a number of years to explore how embedded changes are in the years after refugee resettlement and how far those changes reach within the community
- To explore the opinions of a broader range of individuals living and working in CSS group areas perhaps by developing and implementing a survey tool to be completed by local people and those working in institutions
- To examine the extent to which the number of refugees located in an area shape the scale of impact
- To investigate differential outcomes in areas with more or less refugees and more or less levels of diversity.