

Motivating and sustaining Community Sponsorship volunteers

The Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) was introduced in the UK in July 2016 enabling community groups to support the resettlement of refugees. In late 2017 the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham commenced a formative evaluation of the CSS. Between 2017 and March 2020 IRiS has undertaken a total of 250 interviews. These include 61 with refugees, 145 with CSS volunteers, 12 with thought leaders who were engaged in sponsorship from the outset of the scheme and 32 with wider community members in CSS areas. The evaluation involved 22 groups in rural and urban areas in all four countries of the UK. This briefing draws on the findings from the evaluation.

Ensuring the continuation and expansion of the CSS relies on:

- Motivating groups of individuals with the appropriate commitment and skills to act to establish a group
 - Sustaining those actions through the application and reception processes by ensuring that volunteers feel supported, valued and informed
 - Ensuring the experience of sponsorship is rewarding and successful with positive outcomes for both groups and resettled families in turn empowering established groups to encourage and support newly formed groups to move forward to sponsor a family and for existing groups to maintain their enthusiasm to support additional families.
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Forming groups and attracting volunteers

The events taking place following the conflict in Syria and refugee crisis of 2015-2016 acted as a catalyst for individuals to become involved in tangible actions to assist refugees. Media coverage and particularly the pictures of the drowned toddler Alan Kurdi on a Turkish beach in September 2015 generated shock and empathy coupled with a desire to act.

“ And of course, you see Syria on the news and you knew that it was a terrible situation that was unfolding and you felt that there was nothing you could do. And then this started to present itself as something that could be done, you know. Even the small things can all amount to something ”

Urban group

The introduction of the CSS in the UK gave people a conduit to “do something”. It offered individuals a pathway to respond to the unfolding crisis. We identified three (not mutually exclusive) drivers of volunteer motivation:

- Values driven – for example, religious groups driven by faith, local community groups driven by social justice and the common good, and refugees/migrants driven by a desire for reciprocity.
- Civically driven – for example, volunteers with relevant experience from other civil society activity or those with a desire to become civically active and who want to contribute to their wider community.
- Personally driven – for example, volunteers who wish to find purpose after having undergone difficult experiences themselves.

Organisations such as Citizens UK, the Salvation Army, Caritas and Reset have promoted sponsorship through workshops and information evenings as well as social media campaigns. Social networking and word of mouth have been key factors in the recruitment process of the volunteers joining the CSS, with many groups growing from the actions of founders through connecting with friends, family and congregations. Once engaged in the CSS, volunteers frequently reported that they developed new skills and expertise, expanded and deepened social networks, felt more embedded in their local community and experienced high levels of satisfaction.

More recently the UK has struggled to achieve its targets for CSS group establishment. Although the number of displaced people continues to increase year on year, media coverage has reduced markedly meaning that the visual catalyst for action that was so important at the beginning of the scheme is no longer available.¹ However the UK remains committed to growing its CSS programme and with the introduction of the new Global Resettlement Scheme planned for 2020 the focus of community sponsorship

has been extended from refugees affected by the conflict in Syria to those escaping conflicts globally.² Further, refugees resettled under the CSS will be additional to national targets. Both these changes may offer a new opportunity for group establishment and volunteer recruitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **In the absence of extensive media coverage new motivators are needed to catalyse individuals to take action. These could include:**
 - Awareness-raising events about the current experiences and needs of refugees may help with further recruitment of ‘values driven’ volunteers.
 - Promotion of the wide range of skills and opportunities gained by volunteers and the local community in order to attract civically and personal development driven volunteers.
 - Identification of other civil society groups who might be willing to sponsor a refugee family under the CSS, such as sport clubs, rotary clubs, community foundations and social enterprises.
- **Once the Global Resettlement Scheme is introduced, the fact that CSS will be ‘additional’ to national resettlement targets should be promoted.**
- **In order to promote the scheme at a local level, volunteers should be supported to:**
 - Explain the nature of the CSS and why it is important to local people.
 - Organise events to raise awareness of the needs of refugees and how CSS can help in schools and other settings.
 - Share good news stories about the CSS on social media, through local newsletters and with local media.

¹ UNHCR Populations statistics at <http://reporting.unhcr.org/population>

² Home Office, [New global resettlement scheme for the most vulnerable refugees announced](#)

Retaining and sustaining existing volunteers

It is necessary to continue recruiting volunteers throughout the whole CSS process. In order to retain existing volunteers and to sustain action, through often lengthy application processes and beyond, it is important to ensure volunteers are well supported and informed. Groups need to:

- Establish a core leadership team able to set clear goals and motivate and encourage volunteers.
- Manage expectations from the start regarding the length of time the process will take, the commitment required from volunteers and both the challenges and the rewards.
- Maintain communication highlighting small successes, such as receipt of donations or identification of housing, through monthly newsletters shared during the application process.
- Recruit individuals with knowledge about housing, benefits, finance, health and education and, where possible, those with experience of working with refugees.
- Ensure that sufficient volunteers are recruited and tasks fairly shared and delegated to reduce the risk of burnout.
- Engage with different opinions as different ideas aid development of services and ability to troubleshoot problems.
- Receive ongoing monitoring, feedback and practical support.

A significant factor in ensuring groups remained motivated was the development of networks of peer groups who could share ideas, advice, and resources. In some cases, more experienced

CSS groups mentored emerging groups which helped make the application process more straightforward and ensured the groups had a source of advice and guidance when encountering problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Increased regional networking opportunities for CSS groups could be established, and (data protection allowing) a list of CSS groups could be established for each region and shared via the Strategic Migration Partnerships.**
- **The CSS should have a virtual “discussion forum” for connecting CSS groups across the UK giving them a “self-help” platform on which to share experiences, tips and problems.**

Growing Community Sponsorship through naming of family members

Evidence from the Canadian approach to sponsorship shows that sponsoring named refugees is becoming increasingly important as a means of expanding sponsorship.³ Through ‘naming’ sponsors can identify themselves the refugees they wish to resettle, permitting existing groups and refugee families to sponsor eligible refugee family members and thereby enabling family reunion.⁴ This approach offers great potential to increase the number of groups sponsoring a second or third family.

Our research identified that all refugees interviewed wanted to be reunited with their family members awaiting resettlement. Many

³ Audrey Macklin, Kathryn Barber, Luin Goldring, Jennifer Hyndman, Anna Korteweg, Shauna Labman, and Jona Zyfi, BVOR briefing note, May 2019. See ‘Probing private refugee resettlement in Canada: long-term sponsors and their communities – a research project’ at <https://jhyndman.info.yorku.ca/files/2019/08/Probing-private-refugee-resettlement-in-Canada-long-term-sponsors-and-their-communities-a-research-project-updated-Aug22-2019.pdf?x94127>

⁴ Canadian Council for Refugees, Renewing Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, January 2016 at <https://ccrweb.ca/en/renewing-private-sponsorship-refugees-program>

had asked their group about reuniting with family. Groups were aware of the high levels of distress caused by prolonged separation from family members and that this undermined refugees' ability to integrate fully. They wished to assist refugees to reunite with their loved ones and found not being able to assist stressful. Allowing groups to sponsor a named second family would enable groups to meet reunion needs and increase the likelihood of repeat sponsorship. It would also facilitate the integration of existing refugee families who would help support the groups to resettle a second family. The UK's Mandate Refugee Scheme (MRS) enables resettlement of refugees from around the world who have a close family tie in the UK. There is no integration package under the MRS as the UK-residing relative is expected to provide initial accommodation and cultural orientation for their family members. This scheme could be connected with the CSS to provide a route for CSS groups to sponsor family members of refugees who have previously been sponsored under the scheme.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The Home Office should give serious consideration to allowing the sponsorship of named refugees eligible for resettlement. This would facilitate the integration of existing families who would help to support new arrivals, thus enabling the integration of named families.**
 - **The Home Office should look at the possibility of connecting the MRS and CSS to provide a route to family reunion co-supported by groups and refugees.**
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View the three Community Sponsorship Scheme evaluation reports:

Full CSS report www.birmingham.ac.uk/communitysponsorshipevaluation

Refugee perspectives report www.birmingham.ac.uk/refugeesoncommunitysponsorship

Wider impacts report www.birmingham.ac.uk/widerimpactscommunitysponsorship