

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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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 findings of a research project looking at the impacts of the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) on knowledge about, and attitudes to, refugees in five small towns characterised by low levels of ethnic diversity.

Chapter 2: Research methods and sample

The research used semi-structured interviews with individuals living and working in areas that had an active CSS group who had sponsored a refugee family. The aim was to develop an understanding of the ways in which encounters with CSS groups or refugees had impacted on their knowledge and understanding about refugees, and to examine some of the challenges and opportunities associated with CSS for local communities. Some 33 individuals participated in the study. Of these 62% were women and 38% were men.

Chapter 3: Findings

Knowledge about refugees and Community Sponsorship

All respondents had a basic 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 had 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 over time. On the whole local people were accepting of refugees, however some children were bullied at school. CSS volunteers and especially group leaders worked hard on different initiatives to educate, inform, and connect their communities with the refugee families. These approaches were reported to have largely been successful.

Learning from refugees

Respondents who had contact with refugees and CSS either through community or their work reported learning about generosity, gratitude, welcome and hospitality, and enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures. This learning was shared with friends and family and could be helpful to reframe negative views about refugees.

Institutional learning

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

The benefits of Community Sponsorship

Respondents reported that CSS brought the community together in new ways. CSS 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 CSS.

Challenges

The main challenges 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 to increase knowledge about the purpose of CSS 2) Find ways to accelerate refugees' English learning to aid communication 3) Bring refugees and local people together in multiple ways.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

The advent of CSS 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 were clear signs that direct contact with refugees and those who work with them has the biggest influence of understandings and attitudes. However, word of mouth sharing of information by those who encounter refugees and CSS volunteers also appeared to be important. It is likely that the majority of the local population have not encountered CSS or the refugee family resident in their area. Over time and/or with the arrival of further refugees the effect of CSS may expand to impact on the wider population. Further research is needed over an extended period of time to identify the long-term nature of change.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

The Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) was launched in the UK in July 2016. Since this time nearly 400 refugees have been resettled 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 Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) has been undertaking a formative evaluation of Community Sponsorship since 2017¹. The evaluation has involved multiple interviews with group leaders, volunteers and refugees. Findings are reported in www.birmingham.ac.uk/communitysponsorshipevaluation and www.birmingham.ac.uk/refugeesoncommunitysponsorship). A wide range of positive benefits of engaging in the scheme were identified for both refugees and CSS volunteers. Volunteers and group leaders alluded to these positive effects moving beyond the immediate sponsorship group to the wider community in which they are situated.

In July 2019 the IRiS CSS evaluation team were asked by Reset to undertake some exploratory research to document these wider impacts of CSS. Reset is the UK's Community Sponsorship training, support and advice provider. Given that initial our findings suggested that these wider effects of CSS were more prevalent in less-diverse areas we decided to focus upon CSS groups operating in communities with low levels of diversity. Research was undertaken in five such areas between July 2019 and March 2020. The overall aim of the study was to identify the impacts of CSS on the wider community and institutions, with a focus on changes in the knowledge and attitudes of community members in relation to refugees and CSS. 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 developed. This report is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 sets out the research methods used to collect the data. Chapter 3 focuses on findings and Chapter 4 offers conclusions and recommendations.

¹ The first evaluation of the CSS can be retrieved in the following link:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/Misc/CSS-UK-IRiS-June-2019.pdf>.

Chapter 2:

Research methods

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 focus on changes on the knowledge and attitudes of community members. The study focused on five small towns in the UK. Interviews were undertaken with local people in those areas to explore their knowledge of CSS and refugees and their opinions about the impact of CSS on their local area.

The areas

We selected five areas with well-established CSS groups but low levels of ethnic diversity. In all areas the proportion of the population classified as ethnic minorities formed less than 2% of the overall population in the UK's 2011 census. In all five areas the refugees supported under CSS were the first refugees to reside in the area.

Case Study 1 (CS1) now has several refugee families living locally, the first arriving as part of CSS, and then others subsequently arriving as part of the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) wherein refugees are supported by the local authority rather than a sponsorship group. During the formation of the group, some volunteers experienced hostile calls and the local newspapers received letters arguing that CSS refugees would not be welcomed in the community. These tensions are now said to have reduced.

Case Study 2 (CS2) supports refugees who arrived under CSS. Originally, the local authority rejected the group's application considering the area to be unsuitable for refugee resettlement. With persistence the group managed to persuade the authority to support them. The group initially received negative media coverage, but this abated after the arrival of refugees.

Case Study 3 (CS3) is located in a region where a number of families have been resettled under the VPRS. The CSS area is remote and local people had not encountered refugees previously. When the scheme was advertised locally, the CSS group received negative feedback from some local people. Subsequently CSS volunteers teamed up with officers and charities supporting refugees to educate local people about refugee issues.

Case Study 4 (CS4) is another largely rural area receiving refugees for the first time, but it is located in a region that has resettled refugees under the VPRS. The reception of the refugee family by the wider community was facilitated by networks established between the CSS volunteers and the local authority which shared resources to aid integration in order to support the CSS group.

Case Study 5 (CS5) is a small market town located in a remote area. Long-established inhabitants take pride in their traditions and local culture having lived in the area for generations. The CSS group used

their knowledge of the internal dynamic of the community and their personal networks to organise the practical aspects of resettlement. Connecting the family with the wider community has been challenging as newcomers, in general, struggle to be included in this traditional community.

The interviewees

CSS groups were asked to identify potential respondents who had encountered refugees but were not part of the membership of the group. Group leaders provided contact information of services such as General Practitioners (GPs), dentists, JobCentre Pluses and schools who had contact with refugees. We then approached individuals working in these institutions, requested interviews and asked them to identify further participants who had encountered the refugee family. We also spoke informally with local people encountered during our visits about the extent of their knowledge about CSS and refugees. It is important to note that interviews took place after the arrival of refugee families to the area and rely on interviewees' recollections of changes and learning rather than offering a comparison against a baseline. As such our findings must be considered indicative of the potential effects of CSS on wider communities and further research is needed to explore the extent of these changes, perhaps using a baseline questionnaire before families arrive.

In total 33 individuals were interviewed, 14 men and 19 women. Most were employed middle age participants with around a quarter over 60 and semi-retired or retired (see Table 1). Individuals encountered refugees in a wide range of roles from teachers, to JobCentre Plus officers, wider communities, community volunteers and as neighbours and local residents. In each area we also interviewed the refugee adults and the volunteers supporting them. Most of these findings are reported elsewhere although we do draw on them herein where relevant. To ensure anonymity we are unable to provide detailed information about respondents or case study sites and identify only the role of the respondent but not their gender or location.

TABLE 1: PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

Case study	Male	Female	Economically active	Working in institution	Working in voluntary sector	Wider community
1	5	4	5	2	1	6
2	5	2	6	3	1	3
3	2	3	4	2	2	1
4	1	5	6	4	1	1
5	1	5	3	1	1	4
Total	14	19	24	12	6	15

Chapter 3:

Findings

Knowledge about refugees and Community Sponsorship

All respondents regardless of whether they had encountered CSS, had a reasonably accurate understanding of the term refugee, stating 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 (wider community).

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 (voluntary sector).

Interviewees with experience supporting refugees as part of their work, provided an informed and thorough characterisation of a refugee, including knowledge of resettlement processes.

So, a refugee is a person who has either come through the resettlement programme and automatically gets refugee status because they qualify for refugee status in the first place, or they come through the asylum process and the British government deems them to be suitable or qualified for refugee status. When someone has refugee status, they can have a limited time when you are a refugee for five years, and then you are evaluated again, or it used to be leave to remain automatically (working in institution).

Most respondents were unaware of the CSS until it was introduced to them by their local CSS group or they heard about it through group publicity.

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 (wider community).

Other respondents had not heard of CSS but knew about the local authority supported VPRS refugees.

Given that each town resettled a very small number of refugees, those residents who were not connected to active community groups or working in local institutions tended to be unaware of the scheme. Institutions and businesses were educated about refugees by CSS group members who wanted them to understand, before the arrival of the refugee family, why they would be encountering refugees in their work. Group leaders reached out to the local community to explain CSS.

There's a community news booklet and it came out— I read the one that was put through the door. It was before I opened the shop and I read about bits and bobs that were happening and I thought it was really interesting and a kind project for the community to be doing (wider community).

Some interviewees had considerable knowledge about VPRS and CSS. They were aware of the differences between them seeing CSS as potentially offering higher levels of sustainability than VPRS.

I think that it's a fantastic idea, I would love to see it more widespread, and I suppose if and when the Home Office VPRS scheme comes to an end, or if it changes from its current guise, then I think something like the Community Sponsorship Scheme should be more widely promoted (working in institution).

In Cases 3 and 4, participants involved in the VPRS programme on a professional basis saw CSS as complementary to that scheme. They thought the application process for CSS was rigorous meaning viability was guaranteed because volunteers had received specialised training to support refugees. They thought that the interpersonal connections inherent to CSS enabled refugees to access wrap around support.

So that appears to have worked quite well for them so far. They're a particularly capable group. They've got people who are Arabic speakers who live in the community, who have been able to support the Syrian family. And also, a number of the people involved in it have actually been involved in the Syrian VPRS scheme. So, one of the main people in the group, she was a doctor who helped us at a development centre, for example (working in institution).

Community responses to arrival of refugees²

CSS volunteers encountered negative attitudes from some parts of the wider community before the arrival of the refugees. Some individuals expressed hostile views toward refugees and were not happy at the idea they would be resettled within their community. They used social media, blogs, and letters in the local newspaper to share their views. In one community the CSS group leader asked the local police to stop what they felt was harassment, and at the request of the police the individual halted.

This gentleman wrote some really horrible things about us, and he even followed the family around the first week they arrived, took photos of them and published them in his blog. But at the time, we had already had contact with the local PCSO and also the local policewoman who was in charge of hate crimes. They were very supportive and just said "Look the best thing you can do is just ignore it" (CSS rural group).

Respondents in our wider study told us that some local residents simply accepted stereotypes about refugees without question and then resisted the idea of refugee resettlement because they feared

² The views and quotes from the CSS volunteers included in this report are part of an extensive research conducted by IRiS with 22 groups across the UK from 2017 to 2020. See: www.birmingham.ac.uk/communitysponsorshipevaluation

local cultures would be undermined. Group leaders sought to address these attitudes by explaining CSS and dispelling myths about refugees.

But after we had sort of set up the group, we decided to have a public meeting to raise awareness. And we anticipated about 50 people turning up, in fact 120 turned up. And probably 20-30 of them were very concerned about having refugees, and specifically having Muslims in the area. A lot of the disquiet about that had been fuelled by somebody who had got 'Britain First' information, that he printed it out in a leaflet and circulated it to every house in the town. And I did actually meet the guy for coffee and tried to talk to him about what he was saying and how actually he was wrong on a lot of issues (CSS rural group).

Interviewees from three communities reported incidents of racism in the regions where wider communities of refugee families were located as part of VPRS. However, those incidents were said to be uncommon, and were not perpetrated by close neighbours or people who have been interacting on a daily basis with the refugees. White British respondents showed little awareness of the presence of racism in their locality although a respondent from an ethnic minority background stated that it was commonplace. 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 of what is different... So it's not hatred... They're not acting out of hatred but ignorance, ignorance, and fear, real fear (voluntary sector).

In some areas CSS groups deliberately avoided placing refugees in social housing so that refugees would not be seen as usurping local people. They took such action as they had heard of instances where VPRS supported families had been treated with hostility because they were accommodated in social housing.

In two case study areas refugee children were bullied at school which resulted in them having to move to new schools. CSS groups were said to have made concerted efforts to explain CSS and reassure local organisations and institutions that the arrival of refugees would not be problematic. Often this included talking about the opportunities that refugees would bring.

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. We think that it will be brilliant for our students to interact and make friends with children from different cultures and backgrounds (working in institution).

CSS groups ran community events to introduce refugee families to the local community, encouraged refugees to attend wider community events and ran awareness raising activities. These were reported to have had a broad impact in the community, helping them to become familiar with newcomers, so that they were used to mixing with refugees and had a chance to overcome initial fears. Sometimes these interactions generated interest in volunteering to help the CSS group.

In the groups that I have been talking about, they are already grassroot organisations. A lot of our volunteers are also from XXX. So, word of mouth has come about that you know, you can

always come and join, you can always come and volunteer and we have had an increase in volunteers and people wanting to get to know what our refugees and asylum seekers are doing (working in institution).

As individuals interacted with refugees and their families through paid or voluntary work several began to get 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 go 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 (wider community).

In each of the case studies most respondents felt that the presence of refugees had largely a positive impact on the 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: wider community, schools, doctors' surgeries, Jobcentre Pluses, housing and ESOL providers and community organisations. Over time it is likely that the contact zone will expand and it is possible that the positive effects reported will extend across the community more widely.

Learning from refugees

Some individuals directly encountered refugees as a result of the work of CSS groups. 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 and 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 (volunteer sector).

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 and about different ways of living.

I feel that we have learned a lot from them, I would never have believed the vegetables that could be grown on a tiny patch of land, these people are amazing, doing things in a slightly different way. So I for one, and I am sure others would say, that we have learned an awful lot from the family just because of their perspective and doing things a different way (wider community).

Importantly the majority of respondents who had some kind of contact with refugees and CSS, either through community or paid work, 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 (volunteer sector).

A wider community respondent said he now actively promoted refugees as tenants arguing that they were less problematic than usual tenants.

Institutional learning

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 three case studies support from CSS groups helped them to also work with VPRS refugees. 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*” (working in institutions). 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. Some schools hired teachers for children who have English as a second language. They learned to focus on using techniques not dependent on English language competency.

We have some outside agencies that come in to support us with the English as an additional language. So, we have agencies from the local authority. We also make a lot of things of visual representations, so the ten refugee children that we have in our school can use them (working in institution).

Respondents also told other teachers within their school what they were doing so that they could learn from experiences which could, for example, aid learning for other children struggling with language.

So we have to make adjustments, but not just for them but first the class, and because we're slightly different you know in primary school so we rotate around that... (working in institution).

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

Well, you know, we've been sharing with other colleagues ...with our sister schools which have a college... (working in institution).

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 that progress. Teachers and community workers reflected on the joy they felt at seeing refugee children progress quickly.

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

Service providers who did not have previous experience working with refugees mentioned that they learnt from cross-cultural interactions. They realised that refugees were not familiar with services available in the UK and as providers of those services they needed to acknowledge differences in culture and respect diversity.

Within 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 of their clients. Some shared their experience 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 (working in institution).

Interviewees working directly supporting refugees found that some statutory services had preconceived ideas about culture and behaviour and tended to offer services based around these stereotypes. They saw their role as intervening to try to educate wider service providers about how not to essentialise culture in an attempt to ensure more sensitive service delivery.

We have been supporting a lady from XXX. She's not religious in any way, shape or form. She was born a Muslim, but she is not a practicing Muslim. She's had a few issues with her daughter, and it was really down to just being a normal teenager. British parents have issues with their teenage kids all the time, but unfortunately, Social Services had already made an assumption that mum wasn't being lenient because of religion, because of culture. So, it took – my goodness, it took months and months of me advocating on her behalf to explain to them that this is nothing to do with religion, nothing to do with oppression, because they were in the mind that she wanted to oppress this child (working in institution).

The benefits of Community Sponsorship

Respondents were asked to sum up the benefits of CSS for their communities. Respondents referred to CSS bringing people together resulting in mixing and relationship building between community members and between the community and refugee families and other ethnic minority communities. Events were particularly important. 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

XXX... And luckily, both mum and dad brought lots of Syrian food and all the children were trying it... and the parents were trying it... And that was really good because they felt for the first time really close to them (wider community).

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

But then we had the younger son would come into our Parent & Toddlers when we were looking after him, they said, 'oh, is he their son?', 'yes, he is, and we are looking after him while mum and dad are learning English'. And people have been very welcoming and stuff. Mum now comes into Parent & Toddlers to help and people were talking to her about her experience in XXX and sharing some....(wider community).

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

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 (working in institution).

For some participants the presence of the refugee families in their communities brought an opportunity for developing positive values such as tolerance, respect and inclusion.

I would hope it would mean more tolerance and, if we could have something in the town that was maybe more multicultural, then that, I would think, would benefit the community (wider community).

One of the major benefits of resettling refugees that was mentioned repeatedly was “the fact that they cook wonderful food” (wider community).

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

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 too. And I think they're great for that (wider community).

The sheer level of support offered by CSS groups to refugees 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 (volunteer sector).

Finally, refugee children and the joy and inspiration that they brought to their schools and local communities were highlighted as a major benefit. 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 they learn the language very quickly and that helps a lot the grownups (volunteer sector).

Challenges for the communities

Respondents noted that moving to a small town is a challenge for anyone, including newcomers moving from other regions of the UK.

I think we still come across resistance. So even though we speak the right language but with the wrong.... We use the same words but with the wrong accent and with the wrong perceived class. I'm convinced that we don't get along with some people because we are wrong (wider community).

Some respondents said their own arrival in the area and the new ideas they brought with them had been viewed as unwelcome by long-term residents whose families had lived in the area of generations.

As an incomer in this town I can see that those who have been living here longer don't want to change because they think the old ways still work. And maybe the old ways do still work, but then there are new ways of working as well which might work better, or not. From where I'm volunteering, my way of doing things, which are probably perceived as strange and new ways of doing things, is just because I've seen it elsewhere. So, I'm bringing that knowledge here (wider community).

Such communities had little exposure to multiculturalism and were said to be somewhat insular, viewing all different cultures, traditions and social behaviours as a threat. This was always going to be a challenge for CSS groups. However, some respondents expressed their interest in developing knowledge and understanding about refugees' history, culture, religion, traditions and customs. They thought such information might help dispel myths and avoid misconceptions.

Obviously, it's difficult for them because the way that people live in Syria and other countries all over the world compared to how we live in England, there are obviously differences in culture and there are certain things that stand out that I possibly would've thought, oh, maybe they will stop doing that. But that's not going to be the case because that's how they live (wider community).

Challenges for refugees

The advent of CSS brought some challenges, but beyond reporting that they needed to adapt their services, most respondents talked about the challenges that refugees themselves faced in trying to integrate. They highlighted problems with communication, the lack of support available locally for

wellbeing, poor transport opportunities and how hard it was for refugees to find jobs locally. Several participants were aware that the combination of those aspects, and the poor connection with the wider community, resulted in social isolation that would be difficult to overcome in the short term. This was compounded by refugees' separation from their close families and the awareness that refugees were unable to reunite with their loved ones.

I do sometimes think, this is a lovely place to live, but they have been dumped in a place where they are completely isolated from anything that they might be able to connect with. I think it's been done with the best of reasons, but it worries me because I do see that they're very isolated and with the best of intentions as a neighbour, I can't change that. So, from the organisation of placing refugees, I'm sure they're glad of every placement that is offered. I do worry for all of them, and that's a long-term thing (wider community).

Differences in attitudes around sexuality and gender relations were raised as concerns. One respondent felt that opening up the discussion with her refugee neighbours about homosexuality and gender equality 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 UK. 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 (wider community).

Two other respondents noted that women refugees were less confident about going out without a volunteer to escort them or in talking about their needs. However, there was optimism that over time they would become more confident 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 (volunteer sector).

Finally, several respondents alluded to negative attitudes about refugees in the local media or held by individuals and how these had potential to be a barrier to integration.

In our travels around the case study areas talking to local people, most were unaware of the refugee arrivals, and when told about them were indifferent to their presence. As reported above we were told that these rather homogenous communities could be inward looking but only one person, an elderly man, offered a negative opinion, although he knew nothing of CSS or refugee resettlement and had never met a refugee. Given that some of our respondents spoke of the transformative effect they witnessed, having shared stories with individuals who expressed negative opinions about refugees, it is possible that individuals may experience some change in their opinions, if 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. Five 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. They believed that sharing information about who refugees are and why they need to be resettled would reassure those, such as the respondent referred to above, that embracing refugee resettlement posed no risks and offered a range of benefits.

So my opinion about the CSS and refugees has changed as we've gone on and I just think it's brilliant. I think it's absolutely brilliant, the fact that ordinary people are stepping up and just wanting to help (voluntary sector).

The second concerned communication which is a key theme in all studies around refugee integration and indeed a major issue identified in our wider work on CSS. 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.

I am worry about mum. She's always glad if I volunteer at the play group because I will speak to her, but I think the other mums just – I don't think they're being prejudiced, it's just easier to speak with someone in the same language and I think mum probably finds it difficult there. It's just easier to speak to the people they know rather than welcome somebody new (wider community).

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 their 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... (volunteer sector).

Fourthly, CSS groups found that nurseries and schools have been a very good space for casual socialisation and interaction for the whole family. One school, located in a small community, encouraged the connection of British and refugee parents through the implementation of creative 'mentorship pairing' programmes.

They've set up, they call it, I can't remember the exact name, but it's like a mum's mentoring group. So, they pair a Syrian mum with a mum from the local community (working in institution).

The fifth key action concerned a number of charities and organisations specialising in community cohesion. They incorporated information about the opinions and experiences of refugees into meetings that they organised around community activities.

We have periodical meetings with all the parties involved to have a conversation about how to go forward with creating a more cohesive community (volunteer sector).

Educating the community

Volunteers involved in CSS groups from the five communities sought to inform and educate the wider population about their work. Challenging negative perceptions could take time but CSS volunteers made concerted efforts to provide information to reassure local people that it was safe to resettle refugees in their community.

But I think spreading news, we did a number of community events early on where we were explaining what exactly CSS was, making sure people knew these are not just people that are choosing, these are people that are screened, the background is known, we are not bringing terrorists into the community or that kind of thing, indeed, we have been educating our community (rural group CSS group).

In two cases, local governments funded charities and organisations with specialist knowledge about inclusion and diversity, were able to provide structured information programmes and activities to raise awareness about refugees in schools, libraries, and community spaces.

My work is about clarifying misconceptions about refugees. For example, you're in the class and I say, what is a refugee? Tell me what you think is a refugee? People that come here and take all the money and are terrorists. I say, where did you hear that? That's what my daddy said. Maybe your daddy doesn't know. I'm going to tell you some things. Refugees are this. So, that's – and you're getting the message across, but you're getting them to openly say what people say (voluntary sector).

Chapter 4:

Conclusions

Analysis of the interview data collected for this study suggests that the advent of Community Sponsorship in less diverse areas offers potential for transformation, in terms of understanding of refugee issues, to reduce fears about others more generally, to change working practices to make them more inclusive for 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 currently residing in those 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 security risks. Fears were widely expressed about introducing CSS to two towns, but post-arrival respondents argued that these fears reduced.

Our findings suggest that contact with refugees and CSS has the potential to overcome the concerns expressed by some residents. Certainly, CSS groups actively sought 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, creating 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 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 CSS 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 stronger 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. This could be achieved by studying attitudes and beliefs before and after the arrival of refugees, exploring the opinions of a broader range of individuals living and working in CSS group areas by developing and implementing a survey tool, examining the extent to which the number of refugees located in an area shape the scale of impact and investigating differential outcomes in areas with more or less refugees and more or less levels of diversity.

Finally, we offer a small number of recommendations to aid CSS groups and other stakeholders to maximise the benefits of CSS throughout the wider community.

Recommendations

In order to promote the scheme at 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 CSS on social media, through local newsletters and with local media.
- CSS groups to be provided with basic materials to explain the scheme and refugees to the wider community.
- CSS groups to work with communities and institutions in advance of refugee family arrival to explain the scheme and why refugees need resettlement.
- CSS groups to run regular community events bringing refugees and the community together around, for example, cultural exchanges or food sharing.
- In the longer-term CSS volunteers to support refugees to attend wider community meetings and to volunteer in wider community.
- CSS groups to be encouraged to obtain feedback from the wider community, local organisations, and institutions about what they have gained from their interactions with refugees and share with Reset to develop a positive news resource.
- CSS volunteers to be supported to have difficult conversations with individuals who are resistant to refugee resettlement.
- CSS groups to be supported to recognise racism and to be able to work with institutions to undertake appropriate action.