

Community Sponsorship in the UK: Formative evaluation 2017-2020



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Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2: Research Methods | 8 |
| The interviews..... | 9 |
| Sample information | 10 |
| Ethics..... | 10 |
| Chapter 3: Before arrival | 11 |
| Recruitment and groups' formation | 11 |
| Maintenance and consolidation of the group | 12 |
| Challenges associated with the application..... | 13 |
| Support during the application process..... | 14 |
| Chapter 4: From Reception to arrival – the transition period..... | 16 |
| Pre-arrival briefings..... | 16 |
| Reception at the airport..... | 17 |
| Challenges and good practice in the first months | 17 |
| <i>Arrival fatigue</i> | 17 |
| <i>Trust and communication</i> | 17 |
| <i>Expectations</i> | 18 |
| Benefits and finance | 19 |
| Volunteering in the early months..... | 20 |
| Chapter 5: Settling in over the longer term..... | 21 |
| Education | 21 |
| Health..... | 21 |
| Social networks..... | 22 |
| Chapter 6: Integration challenges | 23 |
| ESOL | 23 |
| Jobs and financial independence..... | 24 |
| Wellbeing | 24 |
| Family reunion | 26 |
| Social and cultural differences..... | 26 |
| Gains for volunteers and families | 28 |
| <i>From befriending to friendship.</i> | 28 |

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Learning from each other</i> | 28 |
| Chapter 7: The future | 30 |
| Volunteer/refugee relationships | 30 |
| A second family? | 30 |
| Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations | 32 |
| Conclusions | 32 |
| Recommendations | 33 |
| <i>Reset and other organisations supporting CSS Groups</i> | 33 |
| <i>Home Office</i> | 34 |
| <i>Local Authorities</i> | 35 |
| <i>Volunteers</i> | 36 |
| <i>Jobs and benefits</i> | 37 |
| <i>Help to reduce isolation</i> | 37 |
| <i>Family Reunification</i> | 38 |

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Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Home Office introduced the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) in 2016. The Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) commenced a formative evaluation of the CSS in 2019 and presented interim findings in July 2019. This report builds on the findings of the first phase of the evaluation offering new insights into the aspirations and experiences of CSS volunteers, support for refugee families, and assessing the impact of the CSS on the wider communities in which groups are located.

Chapter 2: Research methods

Research was undertaken in two phases implemented semi-structured interviews conducted with adult refugees and CSS volunteers. Between 2017 and March 2020 IRiS has undertaken a total of 250 interviews. These include 61 with refugees, 145 with CSS volunteers 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. Refugee interviews were conducted in Arabic. Full ethical approval was received from the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee.

Chapter 3: Before arrival

This chapter covers the findings that relate to the establishment of groups from the application stage to their consolidation. Bearing in mind that the first phase of the evaluation found that volunteer recruitment is a fundamental component of the CSS, this chapter focuses further on volunteers' motivations for participating in the CSS. It also identifies the expertise needed to establish and run a group, experiences of the application process, and the support groups received at this early but critical stage.

Chapter 4: From Reception to arrival – the transition period

The first phase of the evaluation found that reception and arrival of the refugee family is one of the high points for CSS volunteers. This chapter examines the challenges and good practice of volunteering during the first months after the family arrival as well as exploring refugees' experience and the relationships built between refugees and volunteers as they evolve from support to friendship.

Chapter 5: Settling in over the long term

Social connections are at the heart of the CSS. The first stage of the evaluation indicated that one of the key contributions of the scheme is the role of volunteers supporting refugees in multiple ways such as helping them with accessing essential services and to broaden their social connections in the UK. The second phase found similar patterns across three areas in which CSS volunteers sought to facilitate positive resettlement experiences over the longer-term: education, health, and social network development.

Chapter 6: Integration challenges

The first phase of the evaluation identified a range of challenges faced by refugees and the volunteers around language, accessing work, raising children in a new country, wellbeing, and racism. These were evident too in the second phase. Also, raised were concerns about psychological wellbeing of refugees and of coping with cultural differences.

Chapter 7: The future of the CSS groups

Although the CSS commitment to families was for a year of support and two years of housing, most groups were keen to see the family remain and to provide continued support, albeit with intensity of support tapering off over time and relations becoming more balanced. This chapter briefly discusses the challenges ahead in the relationship between volunteers and refugees and the potential for groups to sponsor a second family.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter summarises key points about the future of CSS in the UK. It argues that the growth of the programme depends on CSS groups having a positive experience and feeling that their contribution was worthwhile and successful. While many volunteers found great joy in their work on CSS, they also questioned the success of their endeavours and were concerned about the wellbeing of refugee adults and their long-term independence. A number of recommendations are set out for different stakeholders participating in the scheme.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

The Community Sponsorship scheme (CSS) was introduced in the UK in July 2016. The CSS enabled, for the first time in the UK, local community groups to become directly responsible for supporting the resettlement of refugees¹. The initiative was inspired by the Canadian Private Sponsorship scheme and was only the second of its kind in the world. Since its establishment others are beginning to be established in Europe including variations on the model in Ireland, Italy, France, Portugal, and Germany.

Since the introduction of CSS nearly 400 refugees have resettled to locations across the UK supported by around 70 CSS groups. In 2019 the UK Government committed to supporting the CSS for a further five years hoping to increase the numbers of refugees arriving under the scheme. Focus has been extended beyond refugees affected by the Syrian conflict to enable refuge to be offered to vulnerable refugees escaping conflicts globally². Further, with the introduction of the UK's new Global Resettlement Scheme planned for 2020, refugees resettled under CSS will be additional to national targets. At the time of writing resettlement is on hold in the UK because of the COVID-19 emergency. However, around 120 groups are at some point of establishment and plans continue to be made by communities across the UK to resettle refugees.

In late 2017 the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham was supported by the College of Social Sciences and the Economic and Social Research Council's IAA fund, to undertake a formative evaluation of the CSS with a view to ensuring that efforts supporting refugee families were as effective as possible. In 2018, the charity Reset Communities and Refugees (Reset) was established to promote and support community sponsorship and IRiS and Reset connected and began to work together to increase the size and scope of the evaluation. The interim findings of the evaluation were presented in July 2019³. The evaluation began with longitudinal research with eight sponsorship groups who were pioneers in the CSS at a stage when the application and support processes were being developed. Later retrospective views were sought from a further six groups who had already received a refugee family and 36 adult refugees resettled into those groups.

Data collected in the first stage of the evaluation reflected the fledgling nature of the scheme and identified some of the challenges that groups, and refugees faced. Overall findings illustrated that despite some teething problems the scheme was working well, and that groups, volunteers and refugees were all benefitting (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social->

¹ Home Office, [Community Sponsorship, Guidance for prospective sponsors](#)

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

³ Phillimore and Reyes (2019) [Community Sponsorship from application to integration. Formative Evaluation](#)

[sciences/social-policy/Misc/CS-UK-IRiS-June-2019.pdf](#)). The findings also contributed to the ongoing development of the CSS and Reset's services and were communicated directly to groups and other stakeholders via a report and policy and practice briefs.

This report builds on the findings of the first phase with data from a second phase collected with groups and refugees between March 2019 and 2020. The new data enables further exploration of patterns identified in the first phase and explores new developments that have emerged as the CSS moves towards maturity. The aim of the second phase was to expand our evidence base exploring processes of developing sponsorship opportunities and co-ordination of support for sponsored families, understanding the motivations, aspirations and experiences of volunteers and assessing the impact of the CSS on the wider communities in which groups are located. Findings about the wider impacts of CSS are reported in www.birmingham.ac.uk/widerimpactscommunitysponsorship.

Chapter 2:

Research Methods

This study uses the same approach used in the first stage, semi-structured interviews with volunteers and refugees. Questions were asked about application processes, refugee reception and support in the first few months and how this evolved over time, challenges faced, and successes enjoyed and progress around integration.

In total across both phases of research 250 semi-structured interviews were conducted. This report offers an overview of findings from both phases. These include 76 interviews with volunteers and 21 with refugee adults undertaken between January 2017 and March 2019 and a further 69 volunteer and 40 refugee interviews undertaken between March 2019 and March 2020. This figure also includes 12 thought leaders who were engaged in sponsorship from the outset of the scheme, and 16 participants in case studies conducted with members of the wider community in 2018, and 16 in 2020 (see Table 1). In total 22 groups participated in the evaluation, 14 in the first phase and 8 in the second.

TABLE 1. INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED FROM 2017 TO 2020

| Date | Interviews with volunteers | Interviews with refugee adults | Sub-Total |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| January 2017 to March 2019 | 76 | 21 | 97 |
| March 2019 to March 2020 | 69 | 40 | 109 |
| Thought leader 2018 | | | 12 |
| Case studies 2018 | | | 16 |
| Case studies 2020 | | | 16 |
| Total | | | 250 |

The interviews

The first phase of the evaluation consisted of both longitudinal and retrospective approaches. The longitudinal approach involved repeat visits to volunteers and refugees within eight groups at different stages of group development from the application phase to the period after refugees arrived (where relevant) and, for six groups, 12 months after receiving a refugee family. This approach enabled us to explore the evolution of the CSS and to feed our findings into stakeholders who were shaping the scheme. Some 25 interviews were undertaken with volunteers and refugees with six groups interviewed twice. Alongside the longitudinal research we also undertook interviews with eight additional groups who had received refugees. These one-off interviews with 19 refugees and 53 volunteers might be described as retrospective as they asked respondents to recall their experiences across the CSS process from application phases to the current time. The retrospective method relies heavily on the memories of respondents, which can be selective, but enables respondents to offer an overview of the entire CSS process and to identify good practice as well as areas for improvement.

The second phase of the study commenced in March 2019. The research method involved primarily retrospective interviews with volunteers and adult refugees who had lived in the UK for at least three months. Some 55 participants in the second stage of the evaluation were group leaders or volunteers interviewed for the first time. Just one group from the second phase was interviewed for a second time. Some 38 refugees were interviewed for the first time with two participating for the third time (see Table 2). For detailed findings from interviews refugee adults see link here: www.birmingham.ac.uk/refugeesoncommunitysponsorship

TABLE 2. TYPE OF INTERVIEWS

| | Longitudinal interviews | Longitudinal interviews | Retrospective interviews | Retrospective interviews |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | January 2017 - March 2019 | March 2019 – March 2020 | January 2017 - March 2019 | March 2019 – March 2020 |
| CSS volunteers | 23 | 14 | 53 | 55 |
| Refugee adults | 2 | 2 | 19 | 38 |

To locate respondents for the second stage of the evaluation, IRiS worked with Reset to identify CSS groups who were supporting a refugee family and who were not involved in the first phase of research. Reset provided a list of groups and ten were selected on the basis of country and regional spread with a balance of groups from diverse and less diverse areas and with secular and faith-based roots selected. Reset contacted group leaders to introduce them to the project and research team. Between January to February 2020, eight groups agreed to participate, and one group from the first phase was interviewed for a second time.

Sample information

Across the evaluation 11 groups were connected with a faith group and 11 characterised themselves as secular (see Table 3). The socio-demographic characteristics of volunteers across both stages of the evaluation were similar with 75% of interviewees women and 25% men. Most volunteers interviewed were retired or semi-retired (58 phase 1, 51 phase 2). All but four participants were white British. Fourteen groups were based in urban areas; and eight in more rural small towns or villages with little experience of diversity. One group was located in Scotland, two in Wales, one in Northern Ireland and the remainder in England.

TABLE 3. SAMPLE INFORMATION

| | Phase | Secular | Non-secular |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|--------------|
| Groups | 1 | 8 | 6 |
| | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Setting | | Urban | Rural |
| | 1 | 9 | 5 |
| | 2 | 5 | 3 |
| Refugees | | Female | Male |
| | 1 | 13 | 8 |
| | 2 | 20 | 20 |
| Volunteers | | Female | Male |
| | 1 | 55 | 17 |
| | 2 | 57 | 16 |

Ethics

Full ethical approval was received from the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee. After being contacted by Reset and agreeing to consider being part of the study each potential respondent was initially approached either by telephone or e-mail and asked by the research team if they wished to join the study. If they showed an interest, they were given a participant information form and an opportunity to discuss the nature of the research and ask questions. Once they agreed to participate, they and the researcher signed a consent form formally agreeing their involvement. All documents and discussions were available and undertaken in Arabic for refugee respondents who were accessed via their CSS group leads. Once the group leader had the initial approval of refugee adults to participate, they were contacted by a researcher who outlined the aims and objectives of the evaluation, the kinds of questions that would be asked and how the data would be used. All refugee adults who agreed to the initial conversation with our Arabic speaking researcher subsequently agreed to be interviewed.

Chapter 3:

Before arrival

This chapter explores the experiences of groups in the establishment and application phases. It examines volunteer motivations, the expertise needed to establish and run a group, and experiences of the application process and the support groups received at this early but critical stage.

Recruitment and groups' formation

Many CSS group volunteer respondents were motivated by images of refugee families fleeing conflict in Syria. They wanted to act to make a difference to the lives of refugees.

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).

Organisations from religious and civic backgrounds were instrumental in encouraging participation. These included Citizens UK-Sponsor-Refugees, The Salvation Army, Caritas Salford, CHARIS Refugees, Kings Arm Project, For Refugees, Mercy Mission, Refugee Council, Scottish Refugee Council, and Oasis who together with Reset promoted sponsorship through workshops and information evenings as well as social media campaigns. Several groups were established after hearing about CSS via such promotions. Reset worked hard to support fledgling groups to formalise.

Once inspired to act individuals gradually formed groups and then recruited individuals who contributed to the group in different capacities. Social networks were a key mechanism for recruiting volunteers with groups leaning heavily on friends and family. The tendency to use social networks may explain why so many groups are predominantly made up of white British women over 50 years of age. CSS groups tended to include three levels of actions and involvement in terms of time:

- A. Core/steering group: a small group comprising the group leader and two or three volunteers. They control decision making. They possess experience of leadership, group management, planning and coordination. Level of involvement is very high.
- B. Sub-groups: CSS has four key aspects that need to be addressed before the arrival of refugees: housing, education, health and finances. Each area is allocated a sub-group with a leader. Volunteers have experience, skills and networks in those thematic areas. Level of involvement varies from medium to high.
- C. General volunteers: Most groups need approximately ten volunteers to support the group with short-term tasks or activities that require a low level of involvement at different stages of the scheme.

Maintenance and consolidation of the group

Once the group has formed and they begin the application process volunteers reported wanting to feel respected, needed, and able to participate if they were to sustain their involvement. Volunteers thought that trust and openness were key elements for maintaining group cohesion and commitment. Those groups who have consolidated their membership effectively mentioned the following components of good practice:

- A. Clear direction and good leadership. Volunteers liked having a group leader able to set clear goals. Leaders able to motivate and encourage the group to keep going were appreciated.

We've had very good people in the core group and our lead has driven that, yeah. She has driven that. She was instrumental in getting sponsorship going. You see, it takes somebody, one person, to say: Right. I would like to do this and then getting other people involved. But she drives it (Rural group).

- B. Appropriate delegation of activities. The core group understand the skill sets possessed by different volunteers and allocates appropriate roles and tasks in a fair, flexible and planned manner.

Because some of the lead co-ordinators have full-time jobs, we've got some other volunteers that play very important roles. Everyone has a specific task and they know what to do very well (Urban group).

- C. Open and effective communication. Such communication enabled building trust and camaraderie between members. Frequent communication and active listening enabled teams to be effective and remain motivated.

We did quite a lot of just email communications, you know, fairly regular sort of news sheets just going out to the volunteers of where we're up to.... I think the worst thing will be if they did all this preparation then heard nothing for three months, people would lose energy and they would lose the sort of sense of connectedness (Rural group).

- D. Responsibility. Accountability enabled teams to achieve their aims. Group leaders need to be clear and consistent and each volunteer needed to accept their responsibility.

The person who set the group up - very dynamic, very inspirational, really lovely personality- however that person just couldn't stick to the boundaries that we set up. Managing that dynamic continues to be tricky. And I think it's caused real unhappiness and it's led to misery (Urban group).

- E. Engaging with different opinions. A diverse team with different ideas can advantage the group but it is important to mediate where there is tension.

There were, I think, eight of us in the very first meeting, very diverse team but all with brilliant skills that helped tremendously (Urban group).

- F. Experience of volunteering before CSS. Many volunteers and especially leaders had volunteered within their communities previously and brought experience of community work. Five CSS groups had members who had volunteered with refugees and asylum seekers. Such knowledge was valuable to groups

When I knew that a group was supporting refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity presented itself for me to get involved in the grassroots locally, then I learnt more about their needs and their problems (Urban group).

- G. Friendship. CSS offers opportunity to develop and deepen friendship which helps to ensure coherence and perseverance.

I think we've become closer as a group through friendship, because we realise, I suppose that it's very unusual to do sponsorship. We've become our own support group and it's led to friendship (Urban group).

- H. Sense of humour. Humour was a powerful tool in building cohesion and helping groups to cope with difficult times.

Having sense of humour and being able to actually joke about is very important for keeping the group going (Urban group).

Challenges associated with the application

The first phase of the evaluation identified that pioneer groups found the application process challenging. By the time the interviews were undertaken for the second phase the Home Office had streamlined the application process to make it less time consuming and more accessible which was on the whole reflected in the experience of the groups interviewed. In particular those groups who had assistance and support from other more established groups found the process relatively straightforward

At the beginning when we were learning about it and completing the form, we received brilliant support and advice from a peer group who has applied before, so we were very close in that stage (Rural group).

Even though development of the resettlement plan was time-consuming groups found it aided planning in detail everything needed before the arrival of the family. All respondents found the Home Office support team helpful and accessible

The process of completing the form is the process of figuring out what you're going to have to do to deliver the project, so I found it...I thought the Home Office were incredibly supportive, it always felt very collaborative (Urban group).

Several groups raised concerns about housing and associated local authority responses. The first phase of the evaluation showed that accommodation with rent that was within the budget of a refugee family dependent on welfare benefits was hard to find, especially in urban areas. This problem was also experienced by the new groups. Groups were keen to ensure that where possible the family would be able to remain in their housing after the 24-month period.

But again, after lots of looking around we went down the social housing route because it's much more sustainable for the family and that they wouldn't have to move as our support over the two years came to an end, and that we wouldn't have to additionally fund the house and then pass it over to them and create a burden in terms of the funding for the house (Urban group).

Local authorities could be facilitators, or obstacles, in the approval process in respect of housing. Four groups struggled to gain local authority approval for the housing they identified. Finding the person with the appropriate responsibility prepared to approve housing was most problematic in multi-tiered systems where there was insufficient coordination between councils. In some cases, CSS was confused with the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). Other authorities did not want to get involved with CSS

I guess to try and work with the local authority as best as you can, which was a difficult one for us because they basically refused to work with us at all in the early stages, and then accused us of not involving them (Rural group).

Applications could be delayed substantially while local authority approval was negotiated.

Support during the application process

In the first phase of the evaluation the main source of support for CSS groups during the application process were the charities promoting CSS who provided advice with the resettlement plan and tips for speeding up the process. Groups involved in the second phase were able access support from a wider range of organisations. These included the Home Office, local authorities and Reset.

Support received from the Home Office helped four groups with particular problems including providing an official letter for opening bank accounts for the refugees; liaising with local authorities to encourage them to sign-off of housing approval, and identifying help within the Department of Work and Pensions around the benefits system.

We did get at the time we were having all the difficulties with the bank. The Home Office did do a letter saying: look there's a refugee family. Even though they were not supposed to, they'd been told not to do this they did do that, and that speeded up getting the bank (Urban group).

One rural and one urban group benefited from resources, services and networks provided by their local authorities. Both groups were located in areas involved in the VPRS. These local authorities extended the services they offered to VPRS refugees to CSS families. Help received included printed information with practical advice for supporting refugees, information about services in Arabic,

minibuses for collecting refugees from the airport, free library cards and bus passes. Groups also accessed free Arabic interpretation for appointments with the Jobcentre and health services. Some nurseries and primary schools received grants to hire part-time Arabic speaking teaching assistants and they identified books and reading material in Arabic and English. Finally, councils connected CSS groups with networks of local charities specialising in supporting refugees and promoting social cohesion.

The Red Cross does a kind of handbook for everybody coming under the VPRS scheme, so they gave us a copy of that and a copy of that in Arabic, which was just again tremendously useful, it's a great resource to be able to give the family. So, you know, this you can look up if you've any questions (Rural group).

In contrast two rural groups struggled to gain local authority support for a CSS group. Respondents thought that authorities had insufficient knowledge and understanding of the CSS so were nervous about making a commitment. These groups would like to see the Home Office provide more information about different resettlement schemes to local authorities especially regarding roles and responsibilities. One of the groups eventually obtained support by asking their Member of Parliament to support their application.

We were very lucky that our local MP was very supportive, he was very helpful, he brought our issue up in the House of Commons a few times, and he got in touch with the local council to try and help, so we were lucky that the MP was very helpful, but I think the council could've done with better education about refugees, and about the whole Community Sponsorship scheme (Rural group).

Several groups received training from Reset. Those volunteers with less experience supporting refugees and of safeguarding found this training extremely helpful. Rural groups were impressed that Reset reached out to groups in remote places and others commented on the willingness of Reset to offer sessions at flexible times.

I was quite impressed with them coming up and doing it in the evenings, the relevance of what they told us, the examples – people always listen more when you've got an example of how things can go wrong. They came and did the training in our community (Urban group).

During the application stage many groups received support and advice, either from their sponsoring charity, or other experienced groups. Peer group support was said to be encouraging and motivating. Groups valued practical tips in areas such as the skills needed for running the group, communication and organisation with sub-groups, fundraising strategies, speeding up applications, management of volunteers' expectations and good practices on teamwork, and training on supporting refugees and the history, culture and traditions of the Middle East

Training from groups with vast experience on refugees has been ace (Urban group).

Chapter 4:

From Reception to arrival – the transition period

The first phase of the evaluation found that the arrival of the family was one of the most exciting and emotive moments of the scheme. This phase is also intense and demanding in terms of volunteering as groups must put in place everything needed for refugees' daily life. Newly arrived refugees experience a rollercoaster of emotions as they feel relieved and excited about the new life beginning but overwhelmed by cultural differences and the information they have to assimilate. This chapter explores further refugee and volunteer experiences after arrival and through their early months in the UK while they are transitioning to a new life.

Pre-arrival briefings

Some weeks before the arrival of refugees, groups are provided with a general profile of the family. Volunteers argued that this information was insufficient to enable understanding of the family's needs. Information sought included the pre-conflict life of refugees, details about their religion, culture, extended family, level of education and life in exile.

Similarly, refugee respondents expressed a desire to have more information about the characteristics of the community where they were to be placed. No refugee interviewed knew anything about the area that they were moving to and many were surprised to find themselves in places without any Arabic speakers living locally. In fact, in some instances we found that refugees did not understand the difference between the UK and Europe as a whole thinking that Britain was a city within Europe. More information about the local area and about the CSS would help refugees to have a better idea about what to expect and to manage their expectations.

No, we didn't know anything. We didn't even know where we were heading to or what to expect. But we accepted because of the situation we were in (Rural refugee, male).

Groups also expected refugees to have been told much more about the area they were coming to and about British culture. They were shocked about how little refugees knew and felt that there was insufficient preparation which intensified culture shock on arrival.

We were very much led to believe by the Home Office that there was this fairly structured preparation program that would be delivered by the IOM or the UNHCR three days – we were given a three-day curriculum that they were supposed to have had delivered and when they first arrived we kind of assumed that that had taken

place. I mean it didn't take us very long to start realising that a lot of this preparation hadn't happened (Rural group).

Reception at the airport

Typically, a representative of the Home Office is part of the committee that welcomes the family at the airport. Their role is to ensure that arrivals have all the necessary documentation to enter the UK and access services. Volunteers involved in welcome committees found the presence of the Home Office reassuring. However, groups said it would be helpful for them to have a list with all the basic documentation requirements in advance and that the families also needed to be informed why the documentation was necessary. On two occasions the Home Office representative did not come to the airport which caused volunteers some anxiety given that they were unsure whether all the necessary documentation had been provided.

Challenges and good practice in the first months

Arrival fatigue

Culture shock is commonly experienced by individuals moving to a new country. The majority of refugee families experienced exhaustion and culture shock during their first weeks/months in the UK and needed time to simply absorb all the changes.

I felt so happy but at the same time I felt pressure on my heart wondering how I will live here, in a new culture, a society different than mine, a language different than mine (Urban refugee, female).

I was very worried and afraid at first as I do not speak the language and also I do not know the rules, laws and regulations. I was crying on the plane. I felt much better after 5 months (Urban refugee, female).

Some groups acknowledged that they had over-planned the first weeks and ended up overwhelming refugees. They reflected on the importance of being flexible and having regular meetings with refugee adults to reflect on their needs.

Sorting tenancy agreements, opening bank accounts, and claiming benefits constituted a huge task for volunteers many of whom had not previously come across such bureaucracy. Refugees were frequently overwhelmed with documents in the first few weeks and clearly found this time very confusing. Some groups found it useful to hold a briefing session with interpreters and work with them to develop a strategy to explain in an accurate and accessible way the purpose of documentation requiring signatures.

Trust and communication

In the first few weeks after arrival a process of relationship building commences based on mutual trust and respect, but problems with communication can slow down or even undermine the development of trusting relations. Volunteers from five groups found the role played by interpreter/s to be crucial during that initial phase because they formed their main point of contact with refugees. Confusion resulted from interpreters who did not understand CSS, who gave incorrect advice or who did not understand the traditions of refugees. Where interpreters were part of the core group of volunteers

rather than simply contracted to offer services, they were better able to explain the aims of CSS to refugees and to inform them about what to expect. Interpreters who were familiar with both British and Middle Eastern lives were able to act as cultural mediators for both volunteers and refugees explaining the confusing and unfamiliar to both parties.

He joined our group as well, and he is an interpreter and he works with refugees around the area.... I think we would have struggled a lot more because it wasn't just the language, it was his understanding of the culture, of the religion and of other refugee families. He knows all the things that they're thinking about and all the concerns that they have and he would address a lot of those things (Urban group).

However, there were examples where interpretation did not work well, and interpreters did not understand either certain aspects of British life or that of the refugees they communicated with. In one example refugees were told that their children could be taken away if they shouted at them and in another the interpreter informed volunteers that a woman refugee was pregnant without her consent. This caused embarrassment as such matters were not openly discussed in her culture. Another time an interpreter did not seek clarification about the school travel entitlements of the family and instead communicated his own understanding of the school bus system which caused a financial and physical burden.

The school is about 45 minutes away. We wanted to ask if there was a school bus. The translator then said there was none and that my children should use a public bus that stops 15 minutes away from school. The children being new here do not know the roads. So, for months we spent time and money trying to get to school when we already had difficulties upon arrival. I'm not saying that the translator didn't translate 100%, he might have just thought that we required undeserved special treatment. (Rural refugee, female).

Expectations

As noted above refugees' expectations of life in the UK could be unrealistic because they had received so little information about British lives and traditions or about the place they would be living or indeed the way that the CSS programme worked. One source of misinformation as well as assistance could be other Syrian refugees residing in the UK. Contact was frequently made before arrival and could lead to misunderstandings. Groups gave examples of where families had been shown photos of the UK before arrival with pictures of nice houses fully equipped with new furniture. On arrival refugees may find themselves in a rather different situation in a small apartment with second-hand items which left them wondering why they received poorer support than their peers. Volunteers did not realise that some refugees had a comfortable lifestyle before having to flee and were unaccustomed to receiving charity in the form of secondhand clothes or furniture. Open and honest conversations were needed at early stages in the resettlement process to explain the constraints of the CSS as well as the many benefits it brings so that refugees understand that they are not being treated unequally.

A second issue was expectations about the type of place refugees would be located. Two families from urban backgrounds were resettled in rural communities. Refugees had not anticipated being placed somewhere without access to halal shops or mosques. They struggled to feel at home.

My biggest problem here is being in an isolated place, no halal food that is close, no friends no Arabs and Syrians, feeling trapped and depressed (Rural refugee, female).

In addition, the location of refugees' housing impacted on their daily transport needs. Families in rural areas had restricted transport options with buses irregular, unreliable and expensive. Given the expense, like most people in the area, refugees decided they would need a car to get around. However, getting a driving license is also expensive with costly lessons needed for both theory and practical tests. Tests were only available in English or Welsh which added to the challenge.

Benefits and finance

Five families experienced delays in the payment of their benefits for some months after arrival with this situation affecting groups in different ways. Lack of familiarity with the benefit system by refugee families and lack of expertise on the part of volunteers created misunderstandings and confusion that impacted their relations and trust in the CSS group as some refugees felt that money was being withheld. Some groups spent time helping refugee families to learn how to manage their money in the UK. Other groups were able to provide loans or funded the families temporarily. Inconsistencies between the amount of funding groups provided and benefits had potential to generate considerable confusion.

It is actually a requirement of the scheme that we provide an initial £200 per family member for settling-in costs, which for us came to £1200 for the family of six. We opted to give them this money in increments of £50 per person per week, so £300 per week, at the advice of our contact on the council, and it was that amount that we opted to continue paying per week until their benefits started coming in, an extension of one or two weeks. The issue was that the benefits they were entitled to were about half the amount we had been required to give them, which meant there was no way around the financial shock of moving from the settling-in amount to the benefits amount. (Urban group).

Because of the confusion around benefits some volunteers identified special training while other groups recruited volunteers with appropriate skills that allowed them to navigate the benefits system more effectively. One group sought help from the Citizens Advice service which was instrumental in sorting out benefit problems.

Further groups reported that newly arrived refugee families had no idea of the value or cost of goods in the UK which could impact on their ability to manage money. Refugees found too that volunteers had no experience living on a limited income so gave poor advice sending refugees to the most expensive supermarkets.

I got in touch with a friend who has been living here for about seven years, so she asked me where I shop. I told her from Waitrose, and she said what?! How do you shop at

Waitrose?! I told her it is too expensive, and I can't even find what I needed (Rural refugee, female).

In some cases, groups struggled to set up bank accounts for refugees. Some groups identified banks with less stringent requirements such as Monzo. Volunteers in three groups used their personal relationships with bank managers to help set up bank accounts.

Volunteering in the early months

Volunteers frequently reported working as part of a CSS group was the most rewarding thing they had done but also the hardest. Very few groups or volunteers were prepared for the amount of time needed to help refugees settle in the early months. The intensity of the work and long hours could generate burnout. Groups reflected on the need to expand their volunteer base to ensure that the workload could be spread out. However, they also thought it was important that refugees had familiar faces to deal with.

We just need to make sure we've got enough people and I think as it stands we don't have enough individuals, enough people, so I think the group needs to grow a bit and I think that we just need to covet more volunteers that we can call on (Urban group).

Chapter 5:

Settling in over the longer term

Social connections are at the heart of the CSS. The first stage of the evaluation provided clear evidence that volunteers supported refugees in multiple ways such as helping them with accessing education, health and welfare. Volunteers when identifying a need for the refugee family that they were unable to meet, frequently used their personal networks to facilitate a solution. The second phase of research found similar patterns with three key areas in which volunteers sought to facilitate positive resettlement experiences over the longer-term: education, health, and social network development.

Education

The first stage of the evaluation found that volunteers took on key roles helping refugee children to access schools, attending parents' evening meetings, and providing one to one tuition to help support children's learning. The groups involved in the second stage of the research also offered this support. Refugee respondents stressed just how valuable this support was to them. In addition, four groups sought to identify schools able to attract funds to hire temporary teaching assistants or staff specialised in provision of English as a Second Language.

So, I asked the school that this family was going to arrive, and could I please put their name down for the school, and they said, oh gosh, we're so full, you know, we are full. The headmistress knows me so, Yeah, and so, the next thing, they were allocated, both children to start, both in the reception (Urban group).

Volunteers also spent time explaining the UK education system to refugee parents. There were some examples where Muslim children were enrolled in Christian schools and were involved in assemblies punctuated by prayer. Volunteers explained to parents that schools did not have a remit to convert their children. This issue was not raised as a concern by refugee parents in the refugee interviews.

Health

Groups also assisted refugee families to register with a local GP. They explained the functioning of the health system and requested interpreters when booking appointments for refugees. Given that refugees arriving to the UK on resettlement programmes often have health problems it is unsurprising that much time was spent supporting refugees with medical appointments. Volunteers were unprepared for the extent of support needed which could involve multiple weekly appointments with associated childcare, transport and support during appointments with each visit potentially requiring

three volunteers. Groups observed that they sometimes had insufficient volunteers to meet all needs which led to them feeling stressed and guilty. We also found that in some instances volunteers did not offer to attend appointments with refugees because they felt they might be intruding. One woman refugee attending a booking appointment for her pregnancy was quite stressed at having to attend by herself and wished that she could have been supported by a volunteer. The balance between ensuring privacy and respecting boundaries and leaving individuals feeling abandoned was difficult. Volunteers were frequently reluctant to ask refugees what they needed fearing causing offence whilst refugees were conscious that volunteers were already busy and reluctant to ask for further assistance. Many of them worried about becoming a burden upon their sponsors but hugely valued the support they received with medical matters.

Social networks

Many of the groups were mindful that refugees missed their friends and families and were used to different, more collective, ways of socialising. While they offered important emotional support, it was rarely possible for volunteers to meet all the emotional and social needs of refugees. Refugees whilst considering some volunteers to be their friends or even kin continued to miss extended family parties or just the opportunity to socialise in Arabic. Volunteers tried to expand families' network of friends with some groups organising events to introduce refugees to local people. Others sought to connect them with other Arabic refugee families living nearby.

She enjoys going out with different people from our church for a picnic or getting together for playdates with the boys, or whatever. That's where she is at her happiest, I think. She just loves the whole, being together, we are also helping the family to find different friends through the mosque (Urban group).

Such matchmaking could have mixed results. Although some individuals did develop relations with nearby families, others found the connections made worsened feelings of isolation because they were incompatible with the families. On some occasions matches were made without refugees being consulted leaving them to attend meetings that were awkward or embarrassing. Clearly it is important to ask refugees what kinds of support they need to meet new people. Many refugees were quite self-sufficient and able to identify friends via social media and to develop relations without introductions.

Chapter 6:

Integration challenges

The first phase of the evaluation identified a range of challenges faced by refugees and the volunteers supporting them around language, accessing work, raising children in a new country, wellbeing, and racism. These were evident too in the second phase. Also, raised were concerns about the psychological wellbeing of refugees and of coping with cultural differences. In this section we expand on the findings from the first phase.

ESOL

Echoing our earlier findings, and from scholarship about integration more generally, language and communication were top priorities for both refugees and volunteers but also the biggest struggle they faced. Groups found they had to spend more on interpretation than anticipated and often could not locate an interpreter every time they were needed. However, they learned from other groups about how to use Google translator and muddled through. In the first phase we found that volunteers had expected that ESOL classes would enable refugees to learn English quickly. In the second phase groups appeared a little less hopeful about the efficacy of ESOL and monitored adult refugee progress from an early stage finding that the quality of ESOL provision was variable.

There's no standard approach to teaching ESOL. Every individual teacher comes up with their own syllabus. And actually, I think its college provision has been pretty mixed, I would say it's been poor to mixed (Urban group).

Similar problems emerged in terms of number of hours, access to lessons, proximity of colleges in rural areas and inflexible start times. Once again, the biggest concerns emerged around refugees who were not literate and older refugees although most of the refugee adults interviewed during our evaluation were still at a relatively early stage of English language learning despite being in the UK for some time and working very hard to progress their learning. Four groups found that ESOL classes assumed literacy in mother tongue languages and teachers were not able to support those who lacked literacy. Refugees soon learned on arrival to the UK just how hard life was without speaking English. Often, they had not realised they would need to learn English so fast. The need and desire to speak English could be overwhelming. Lack of progress was frustrating and, in some cases, undermined refugees' wellbeing as they began to lose hope that they would ever progress.

ESOL courses continued to be the main resource of English classes for refugees but we found that increasingly groups employed their own qualified ESOL teachers while others sent volunteers for training about how to teach English. They obtained ESOL materials online so they could offer courses. Without a doubt both refugees and volunteers agreed that one-to-one sessions with tutors and volunteers were the most effective route to learning English. Where refugees were not literate groups had to find ways of teaching basic functional English to underpin the learning from ESOL classes.

Refugee adults were grateful for the CSS volunteers' help and personal tuition on language, particularly with day-to-day communication and daily expressions which added to the formal ESOL curriculum.

Jobs and financial independence

As in the first phase, supporting adult refugees to find work was a key challenge for groups while accessing work was top priority for most refugee men. Groups were not sure how to help refugees to find work while refugees were disappointed to find getting a job so difficult and had expected to be working as soon as they arrived.

Language competency continued to be the key hurdle to finding working but in two instances, where refugees spoke English well, they struggled to access appropriate work because they could not convert their qualifications into UK equivalents. Jobcentre Plus was the main point of contact for volunteers and refugees. Volunteers were frustrated by the lack of understanding about the challenges that refugees faced getting work and concerned that sometimes refugees were actively discouraged by the Job Centre from seeking work experience. Groups felt the best way for refugees to begin to build their employability was to engage in volunteering. Refugees from four groups were volunteering in roles at local charities identified by CSS volunteers.

All adult refugees interviewed expressed their ambition to achieve economic independence by finding suitable and decent jobs. Their priority was to re-enter their former profession or trade and they wanted to retrain or requalify in these areas. Others wished to start their own businesses. Refugee respondents outlined the importance of both employment but also financial independence to male refugees' identity and self-esteem. Unable to support their families and gain work generated a sense of failure which over time could turn into hopelessness which undermined refugee's ability to integrate in other areas. Lack of work led to stress and worry for all members of the family.

I have the will to work every day, 10 hours a day, that is what I am used to. The issue is that we are used to a particular way of life we are used to earn money through hard work and our sweat, so we can save a little bit of money aside for whatever issue we could face in the future (Rural refugee, male).

Wellbeing

The first phase of research identified that some refugees, particularly women, felt isolated in the absence of extended friend and family groups and that these feelings intensified for refugees living in rural areas. The second phase found that loneliness remains acute for the families living in less diverse communities. On the whole refugees sought large friendship groups comprised of both volunteers but also "people like me". While some living in less diverse areas did build close connections with volunteers or a neighbour often they struggled to form deep connections with most relationships quite cursory. In some respects, we found that women were in a stronger position than men because most volunteers were women and refugees had the opportunity to meet local women through schools and mother and baby groups. We found instances where men were extremely isolated and outlined feelings of hopelessness and despair. The lack of male volunteers to befriend refugee men and reluctance of some refugee men to make friends with women volunteers because of cultural norms meant it was difficult for volunteers to find ways forward in these situations.

I do sometimes think, this is a lovely place to live, but they are 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, I can't change that (Rural group).

Volunteers were aware as they established their groups and developed resettlement plans that refugees arriving in the UK would have experienced trauma and hardship. Although all groups interviewed made provision for counselling, some found it difficult to find appropriate support by Arabic speaker counsellors.

The view in the group is that actually we can't do anything about the trauma, until we can communicate more effectively than we can at the moment. It's not really something conventional - you can't really do counselling and listening and things with an interpreter-. We need an Arabic speaker doing this role (Urban group).

Refugees also found it difficult to express their feelings and emotions to volunteers through interpreters. Some private matters were expressed to our interviewer who shared a similar background and culture. One refugee explained her situation:

I am now a different person, I am depressed, if I didn't have my new-born, I would hate life. We have new issues here which are hard to explain they are like a pain my chest and I am only opening my heart to you because you look like us and you understand us. I am telling you this I would never tell anyone else. I trust you because you are like us so basically, I know you might understand me. I would not tell anybody this detail about my life (Rural refugee, female).

We heard from two groups that teenager refugees struggled to adapt to life in the UK. Whilst younger children were said to adjust very quickly, teenagers, many of whom had been outside of education before being resettled, experienced difficulties catching up and settling in. It was difficult for them to achieve the academic standards required while learning English. Volunteers felt that teenagers were more likely than younger children to have memories of conflict and loss and had to grow up quite quickly in difficult situations. Resettlement meant returning to being a child at school which represented a shock alongside the trauma experienced. Volunteers tried to find sources of support for teenager wellbeing but again lack of counselling in Arabic was a problem.

The teenager in the family has some on-going trauma, I would have thought. He's quite withdrawn. He is not thriving as well as his brother is at school. We've talked about counselling help if that's the sort of thing you mean, but you have to be really careful that it's going to be the right counselling in the right way (Rural group).

We were also told that elderly refugees struggled to fit in. Some had been separated from their adult children for many years and had experienced much loss. While many had hoped that resettlement would enable reunion with their children, when it was clear this was not the case, they expressed feelings of hopelessness. Volunteers said they were frustrated that older refugees who were in fact younger than them were reluctant to be active, acting as if they were elderly. Interviews with older refugees revealed that they felt exhausted and lonely and found learning language and engaging in

activities too demanding. In addition, in their culture people of their age were generally much less active. Finally, they felt a sense of despair at ongoing separation from extended family which undermined any motivation to be active. Some older refugees felt they were constantly pushed to learn language and participate in groups when they were emotionally and mentally consumed by loss and separation from their families.

Family reunion

We allude above to the impact of being separated from family members on refugee wellbeing. Interviews with both volunteers and refugees highlighted the negative effect of being unable to reunite with family on refugee integration. Reunion or visiting family members was their top priority and the desire to see those from whom they have been parted for years was all-consuming. Refugees repeatedly asked volunteers to help them either reunite with families through sponsoring them to come to the UK or to help them travel to visit relatives.

The importance of family reunion cannot be over-stated. Refugees find the idea of not being able to visit their families for years deeply disturbing. They fear the loss of loved ones in conflict zones and particularly elderly parents. They worried that they will never see their family again and not be able to say goodbye.

Volunteers observed refugee's distress and noted that their concerns about family and longing to see long-lost family undermined their ability to focus on moving forward. Refugees too highlighted how integration was impossible while they were separated from loved ones. Volunteers empathised with the distress they observed which in turn led to them feeling both upset and impotent.

Well, I think Grandma carries a lot of sadness. Simple things like you'd put your hand on her arm in those early months and she'd just melt into me and start sobbing. All I could do was put my arm around her and comfort her, really. The fact that they can't visit and that that family can't visit them is just appalling. That just makes me really, really angry. Because I do think, if they'd been able to visit the whole resettlement would be so much easier for them (Rural group).

Volunteers struggled to understand regulations around reunion and travel and to explain to families what was possible. Some groups would have liked to help the family they supported to reunite with extended families through perhaps sponsoring a named family through CSS, but this is not currently possible.

Social and cultural differences

We observed in the first phase of the research differences in culture that were unanticipated by both refugees and volunteers. These were also evident in the second phase particularly around parenting and gender relations. Despite receiving some training about Middle East culture volunteers on the whole lacked knowledge about what to expect or had a rather essentialised view of there being one unifying culture that meant all people from an Arab background were similar. They wanted and needed more detailed information. A number of mistakes were made by volunteers which caused offence to refugees. For example, a family was allocated a house within a housing compound with shared laundry. This was problematic for the refugee woman as she was unable to take the laundry

out when there were male neighbours using the facility. Sometimes male volunteers came to visit without women's husbands being at the home which is culturally unacceptable and made women feel extremely uncomfortable.

Mistakes may have been made because volunteers appeared to lack the confidence to ask refugees about their culture and about ways of interacting. This was unfortunate given that refugees said they would be happy to answer questions and to explain traditions such as wearing a hijab or fasting during Ramadan month.

Volunteers in four groups expressed concerns about refugee parenting styles. These included using negative rather than positive parenting approaches or not putting into place enough boundaries. Groups were unsure as to whether they should provide parenting advice. For some volunteers the cultural norms and parenting traditions of refugees can seem old fashioned. In addition, refugee adults lacked understanding of cultural norms, rules and regulations which could be a challenge when trying to explain these to their children. For example, this woman explains how her children would not fasten their seat belts when in a volunteers' car:

My husband asked XXX to stop dropping the children off to/from school because my children started to burden him, they would tell him to stop the car and they would open the doors and run out. When XXX told us about this, I got worried, and god forbid, a child opens the door and gets hit by a car, XXX will be implicated. We need to raise the children's awareness. We try to tell them but they don't listen (Rural refugee, female).

Refugee males said they did not appreciate interventions when volunteers tried to address some of their family's personal issues and disputes.

I would tell the groups not to get involved in personal matters. If they do, they ought to do it with good intentions. There is a difference in what they understand to be good intentions. For instance, a man is disputing with his wife, they mustn't come and tell them to separate. That's not how we do things. They should try to settle matters verbally, perhaps they must remain together for the sake of the children. But, if God forbid, if separation happens, the children mustn't be taken away from either parent (Urban refugee, male).

Middle Eastern men were considered in many families to be the providers for the household, whereas women are traditionally restricted to care duties and managing the household, even if they are highly educated. Many men would not normally seek help or advice from women (in their family or volunteers). At the same time refugee women, might not want men to help them or address their needs. Volunteers expressed concerns about gender relations within families. They wanted to know more about culture and traditions in order to understand better the relationship dynamics of refugee couples. Gender dynamics within families made some volunteers uncomfortable but they did not know how to address their concerns.

I think in terms of trying to recognise culture, then I think the culture within Syrian families is that the men seem to be on a higher plane than the women are. What I've tried to talk to them about is, in England, it's much more level. You know, men and women are seen in the same respect and whatever (Urban group).

Gains for volunteers and families

The first phase of the evaluation found that most volunteers and refugees quickly established positive relationships. Despite the hard work volunteers were convinced that getting involved in CSS had been a good move. These gains were evident in the second phase too.

From befriending to friendship.

Volunteers reported that over time their relationship with refugees became intensified from superficial friendships to close relationships likened to kin-like ties. Refugees valued some volunteers as friends and as family seeing these relations as a positive element of their new life which brought richness, value and meaning after losses experienced in previous years.

Here they are all my friends. I don't treat them like friends. They are my second family and I am happy and honoured to have them because what they did for us (Urban refugee, male).

The intensification of friendships between some volunteers and refugees also brought a dilemma around boundary setting. Groups struggled to agree on the best way to approach their relationship with refugees and to know what support they should legitimately provide as a group or as a friend. These issues were compounded by concerns about the level of support appropriate to ensure self-sufficiency.

I think for every single group that I've come across there is a difficulty with you know, are they your friends? Or are they a family that the HO has asked you to resettle? Because you have two roles, don't you? You actually fulfil resettlement, as a group, but then you become friends as well so sometimes there's that real difficulty working out where your boundaries are (Urban group).

Learning from each other

The first phase of the evaluation illustrated that through interactions volunteers and refugees learned from one another, and that volunteers living in less diverse areas gained an opportunity to learn about different cultures and traditions which was greatly appreciated. In the second phase volunteers celebrated their introduction to new food, language and cultural knowledge.

My husband and I have been invited to one or two formal occasions to their house. One was their daughter's birthday party and then we were – I think one of our visits was a Sunday and I said that I would cook some English food and they would cook for us. So, we had a family meal (Rural group).

Refugees also particularly enjoyed the company of volunteers and were grateful for the celebrations they were invited to such as birthdays and Christmas. Volunteers were their primary source of cultural awareness and company.

At first the group were shy and we felt left out for 3 days in the house no one contacted or visited us. They were worried that they might annoy us. We had no internet or TV, so we needed more human contact at this point to make us feel more settled. It is a

cultural difference between Arabs and the west. They like to give privacy but we appreciate them being more involved. (Rural refugee, female)

Volunteers reported that refugees were sometimes perplexed by different aspects of British life or everyday practicalities. They frequently offered assistance to understand everyday life in the local area.

There were various things that they weren't happy – I guess were confused about and weren't feeling confident about which brought a few problems, like how to use equipment in the house. That was quite a difficult thing. Our ridiculously complicated rubbish collection, things like that. That would bring a little bit of a stress I guess, because it's such an innate thing for us to understand. It's quite frustrating, but we have been working together and they are fine now (Rural group).

Chapter 7:

The future

Although the CSS commitment to families was for a year of support and two years of housing most groups were keen to see the family remain and to provide continued support, albeit with intensity of support tapering off over time and relations becoming more balanced. This chapter briefly discusses the challenges ahead in the relationship between volunteers and refugees and presents some reflections from those groups thinking about sponsoring a second family.

Volunteer/refugee relationships

Volunteers were aware that refugees needed to be independent and that men in particular wanted to be economically self-sufficient. Groups had originally believed that the timeframe to independence would correlate with the 12-month period and soon realised this was unreasonable. They lacked knowledge about how to enable independence and constantly questioned the decisions they made in relation to support.

Volunteers wanted to see refugee children receiving a good education and thriving and the adults feeling safe and integrated. However, in the medium term, some groups had concerns that families living in expensive areas would not be able to afford their rent when tenancies were renewed, and feared families would be disrupted, and children have to leave their schools.

They'll probably have to move out of the area, there's a big question for us about whether we can persuade the landlord to let them stay one more year because the little boy is in year 4, we got him put down a year because it felt like he was going to need the three years in primary school. But if he had to move at the beginning of year six and then the beginning of year seven, to different schools I think that would be so disruptive, so we will move heaven and earth for them to stay proximate to the primary school (Urban group).

Refugees too feared having to move with the majority wishing to remain in the local area and within their housing. This stability was particularly important to them after years of disruption and left them worried about the future.

A second family?

Following the first phase of research six groups have either supported a second family or are preparing to with a further two groups looking at the possibility of a third family. In the second phase two groups wished to apply to support a second family with a further four thinking about it and three deciding against it. The main challenge shaping their decision making was the availability of appropriate and

affordable housing. Some were concerned about having sufficient volunteer capacity to support a further family while the current family continued to need much support.

But you've put so much into this family you think, God I don't know if we could do it again and if we can find a good house... And with some people they might move away. So, I think that's why— I don't we're saying never say never. We'd have to really think a strategy that we— some people might not be as available as they are at the moment (Urban group).

Chapter 8:

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

This report has provided an overview of findings from the first phase of the study and offered a detailed account of findings from the second phase.

The first phase focused on the experiences of volunteers and refugees involved in the early stages of the scheme offering insights on the application process, arrival, placement, and resettlement. This was a challenging period of the CSS as teething problems emerged many of which have now been resolved.

The second phase enabled us to further explore patterns identified in the first phase and identify new findings. Over time the scheme is improving with a more accessible application process, provision of suitable training and availability of support from the Home Office, Reset and other CSS groups.

However complex and important challenges remain around the effective provision of pre-arrival information for refugees and volunteers, associated expectations, refugee wellbeing and long-term integration of refugees. Many of these are common to refugee resettlement although CSS groups were unaware of this and tended to view such challenges as resulting from their own failure.

The future of CSS in the UK and the growth of the programme depends on CSS groups having a positive experience and feeling that their contribution was worthwhile and successful. While many volunteers found great joy in CSS voluntary work they also questioned the success of their endeavours and were concerned about the wellbeing of the refugee adults and their long-term independence.

There is further scope for working with groups to help them develop a realistic sense of the challenges around refugee support and integration and also more work that could be undertaken to ensure refugees have a more positive experience with better integration outcomes. In the final part of this report we set out recommendations for actions that could be taken to improve policy, practice and outcomes. Note these recommendations are based on interviews with groups who in some instances established many months ago. The services and support available to them have evolved since this time. Where possible we have identified where there are now mechanisms in place to address the recommendations made.

Recommendations

Reset and other organisations supporting CSS Groups

Connecting CSS groups

1. 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.
2. 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.

Motivating volunteers

3. 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 right can 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.

Compulsory training from Reset to CSS groups should be expanded to cover:

4. A clear account of the challenges associated with refugee integration for example how long it can take to speak English well enough to be able to communicate and seek work.
5. Signposting to sources of advice to help assist refugees to apply for travel documents.
6. Information about some of the challenges refugee families may face on arrival including around isolation, and the impact of conflict and trauma and where to find resources to address them.
7. Follow up notes from training sessions should include links to resources enabling further learning about Middle Eastern history, cultures and practices, including gender relations and religious practices.
8. Reset offers guidance on ‘preparing for uncomfortable conversations⁴’. Training offered by groups to new volunteers who did not attend these sessions should support the development of skills to have frank conversations with refugee adults in a respectful way.
9. Training should include support to understand the specific needs of different cohorts of refugees (i.e. those who have been outside of education) and how to manage expectations of what refugees might achieve within the 12-month period.

⁴ <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/dealing-with-challenges/preparing-uncomfortable-conversations>

Other recommendations for training:

10. Training for volunteers should include a realistic overview of the approximate levels of volunteer time commitment likely to be needed and the extent of support refugees will require.
11. Offer more extensive training focused on how to help refugees gain employment after volunteers have received a family.
12. Training should include a realistic overview of the approximate levels of volunteer time commitment likely to be needed and the extent of support refugees will require.
13. Training sessions could be complemented with links to free online resources such as those from [Future Learn](#), [Cambridge English](#), and [Amnesty International](#).
14. Ideally trainers should have direct experience of supporting refugees.
15. Help is needed to traverse boundaries between friendship and formal support in ways that do not discourage the development of friendships which are so important to refugees and volunteers (boundary issues now covered in Reset training).
16. Volunteers need to be encouraged to engage refugees in decision making and empowered to ask refugees questions about their culture and needs (empowerment issues now covered in Reset training).

Home Office

Before the arrival of the family

17. Prior to resettlement refugees should receive:
 - Clear information about the CSS, what it means to be resettled under the scheme, and how it differs from other schemes.
 - Detailed information about onward location including information about the location of the UK relative to mainland Europe, about the nature of the relocation area and facilities available and profile of the local population.
 - Information about the necessity of learning English before accessing work and typical timescales for doing so.
 - Information about the challenges of applying for family reunion and visiting family elsewhere in Europe.
18. Refugee families should be told that they can turn down a placement if they feel it is not suitable and be assured that other placements will be offered.
19. All information provided to refugees prior to arrival should be available in a range of formats, including written, audio and video, in refugees' primary language.
20. Those providing the above information should take steps to ensure that pre-departure information has been understood.
21. More information should be gathered about refugees' preferences (i.e. rural/urban) to inform placement decisions.
22. The Home Office set out what support it can and cannot provide to CSS groups.

23. More information should be provided to CSS groups prior to arrival about the family members' level of education and English ability so that they can plan targeted English language provision, and one to one support with basic literacy and numeracy where needed.
24. Throughout the application process groups should be made aware of their responsibility to assess how well a family will suit the location and be encouraged to turn down potentially poor matches while being reassured that the family will be resettled elsewhere.
25. Volunteer expectations could be better managed through setting out average timeframes for application processes including length of time to develop the application, receive a decision and receive a family.
26. Local authorities should be provided with information about the different schemes for supporting refugees and including the ways in which CSS might complement other resettlement schemes.
27. The Home Office should explore working with existing apprenticeship and employment schemes to further to encourage employers to offer opportunities to refugees.
28. The majority of groups interviewed had contracted with a private landlord accessed via personal networks. Reset and the Home Office might consider making contact with the National Landlords Association to promote the scheme and the good experiences that landlords are having with refugee tenants.
29. After arrival. The Home Office no longer go to the airport to meet the new family. Groups can consult Reset's glossary to check which documents will be needed <https://training-resetuk.org/glossary>.
30. 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.
31. The Home Office should improve the flow of information to Local Authorities about the different resettlement schemes ensuring it reaches the right people.
32. The Strategic Migration Partnerships could offer a liaison role helping to identify a named contact with responsibility for CSS in local authorities.
33. The Home Office should give serious consideration to allowing the sponsorship of named refugees. This would facilitate integration for existing families and, because existing families will help support new arrivals, increase the likelihood of success for named families.

Local

Authorities

34. Regional coordination through Strategic Migration Partnerships could be used to strengthen local authority capacity by identifying and developing solutions for common challenges and achieving economies of scale in commissioning services and support.
35. Each local authority should be encouraged to provide a named contact with responsibility for the CSS and liaison with other resettlement activities. This is particularly important in multi-tier authorities.
36. Local authorities supporting resettled refugees should be encouraged to share resources and support actions with CSS groups.

37. Local Authorities should be encouraged to think, with groups, about their responsibility to assess how well a family will suit their location and be encouraged to turn down potentially poor matches while being reassured that the family will be resettled elsewhere.
38. Local Authorities supporting resettled refugees should share ESOL resources and support provision with CSS groups.
39. Local authorities should consider setting up an ESOL hub where all stakeholders can share information about ESOL needs, good practice and materials.

Volunteers

Communication during the first months after the arrival of the family and working with the interpreters

40. Volunteer expectations could be better managed through setting out average timeframes for application processes including length of time to develop the application, receive a decision and receive a family.
41. CSS groups should try to ensure they recruit volunteers of mixed genders and ages.
42. CSS groups should continue to offer one to one support and tailored help with language and education catch up ideally sharing good practice with Reset.
43. Groups should budget to ensure that ample interpretation is provided in the first few months, ideally from both male and female interpreters.
44. Volunteers should familiarise themselves with Reset's extensive guidance on finding and working with interpreters, including those who can provide interpreting face to face or by telephone.⁵
45. Where possible, groups should try to incorporate an interpreter into their core group of volunteers as this can help facilitate stronger relationships with refugee families, although they should be mindful of the pressures that could be placed on that volunteer.⁶
46. Volunteers should work with interpreters prior to the family's arrival to ensure they understand the purpose and framework of the CSS.
47. Reset offer a range of resources for day to day communication, including a list of basic phrases in English and Arabic <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/planning-arrival/common-arabic-words-and-phrases> which groups will find useful alongside the use of online platforms.
48. Volunteers should ensure that refugees have adequate access to digital equipment and the skills to use it paying particular attention to those with low levels of education.
49. Groups should consider approaching housing associations directly to discuss housing issues and options.

⁵ See <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/empowering-refugees/interpreting-options>

⁶ See https://training-resetuk.org/sites/default/files/toolkit-files/2019-03/2.6.7_volunteer_interpreters.pdf

Jobs and benefits

50. CSS groups need help to understand the length of time it might take to receive benefits and consider raising funds to provide a loan to tide the family over (see new Reset resource <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/empowering-refugees/making-loans-family-you-support>).
51. CSS groups should consider involving an employer or a representative from an employability organisation in the core group to help use their networks to identify employment and volunteering opportunities.
52. Volunteers should seek additional training on the benefits system available in their local area and make use of Reset’s guidance on accessing benefits.⁷ In addition, they should seek further insight on the realities of surviving on benefits.
53. Groups should be prepared to use the DWP Refugee Group Leads Network if the family they support have difficulties accessing benefits⁸.
54. Reset has produced extensive guidance on accessing employment⁹ – volunteers should be made aware of this and also offered more extensive training on how to help refugees gain work after the group have received a family.

Help to reduce isolation

55. CSS groups should recognise the importance of including male volunteers of a variety of ages within their groups who can work with refugee men.
56. In rural areas where public transport is poor, volunteers should plan to support refugees to take their driving test and acquire a car.
57. Many refugees appreciate the events arranged around them and introduction to local groups however once the introductions are made groups should not be disappointed if refugees do not pursue all connections.
58. Social life is very important to refugee integration. Dropping in to visit refugees, arranging community events and leisure activities are important ways to help refugees to connect with local people.
59. When refugee adults are isolated volunteers should work with them to explore ways to help build networks and discuss the kinds of connections they would like to make. Introductions to other people ‘like them’ should not be made without first consulting families.
60. Some groups have organised “holiday exchanges” with other groups to enable families to visit refugees in other locations. Others have used their CSS networks to connect families and support the development of friendship networks.

⁷ Available <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/learning-about-benefits>

⁸ <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/learning-about-benefits/working-with-jobcentres>

⁹ <https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/answering-key-questions/accessing-employment>

Family Reunification

61. Families may also ask about travelling outside the UK to visit family members who have been resettled elsewhere – training for CSS groups should cover applying for Convention Travel Documents and what support refugees will need to apply.
62. Groups should be informed before families arrive about the impact that separation from wider family has on refugees and that they are likely to be asked to help secure reunion (now covered in Reset training).
63. Volunteers should familiarise themselves with Reset’s guidance on family reunification¹⁰ and be prepared to discuss with refugees’ options and limitations.
64. 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.

¹⁰ <https://training-resetuk.org/sites/default/files/toolkit-files/2019-10/2.7.1c-answering-questions-about-fa>
<https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/answering-key-questions/immigration>