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## **RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN SCOTLAND: A COMMUNITY EDUCATION APPROACH**

This article seeks to describe the complexities of a partnership approach to supporting the successful resettlement of Syrian refugees in Scotland.

Syrian refugees have been moved to Scotland through the Person's Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme, an initiative of the UK Government. They have been offered a safe environment, after experiencing dehumanising conditions through war and traumatic events in their lives. Community Learning and Development (CLD) services have been tasked to support the learning needs of these refugees. The interventions have been designed to ensure that refugees can access ESOL (English as a second/additional language) and enable them to develop ties with the community in which they have been placed and engage in community activities as active citizens.

The ongoing work and planned developments are described. Reflections on the opportunities and challenges in this work are considered. The importance of the wider implications for the new arrivals in Scotland and the communities in which they are settled are offered. The challenges CLD practitioners and other agencies face in building positive relationships are also explored.

CLD through its value base and pedagogic approach is well positioned to play an important role in linking up the learners to appropriate opportunities. These opportunities include English classes with an empowering agenda which supports the development of person and context specific life skills.

Community Learning and Development provision is encapsulated by Sarah Banks et al. (2003, p. 44) who state:

A commitment to working in more empowering ways, as reflective practitioners, rooted in the values of equal opportunities and social justice, involves developing strategies in partnership with others. Through sharing the process of analysing the structural barriers and the policy

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constraints, together they may be enabled to develop a more effective jointly owned approach to maximising the opportunities for challenge and change (Banks et al., 2003, p. 44).

Banks reflects the value of partnership work and the opportunities it can bring. In CLD the approach is developed around partnership and collaboration designed to address the identified needs of the learners.

In 2016, North Lanarkshire Council resettled approximately 200 people under the Person's Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme. The role of Community Learning and Development was initially to provide the staffing requirement to deliver the ESOL provision, organise learning venues, select and buy appropriate resources dependent on the level of English of the learners and to engage with the various partners involved in the project. The *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities 2014-2017* (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 10) policy states the vision is, "For a Scotland where refugees are able to build a new life from the day they arrive and to realise their full potential with the support of mainstream services; and where they become active members of our communities with strong social relationships". The *Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community, Learning and Development* gives a clear statement of the purpose of CLD which is to "empower people, individually and collectively, to make positive change in their lives and in their communities through learning" (Scottish Government, 2012, p. 3). As part of our ESOL provision we embedded notions of empowerment and learning in a variety of ways focussing on individualising learning, contextualising learning, and learning that will enable the refugees to be independent and take control of their own lives.

As CLD workers we need to know and understand the community that we work in, and in this context it required understanding the background of the Syrian learners and the communities they have left. Working with people coming from a war torn country, every learner will have some level of trauma but it is important to understand that each person is an individual with different experiences and feelings. *New Scots: Integrating Refugees* states, "traumatic events associated with a refugee's flight and social isolation reported by many individuals in Glasgow lead to a higher risk of mental health problems. In turn, poor mental health can lead to poor physical health such as diabetes and cardio-vascular problems" (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 9).

The Syrian refugees have come from a country which has been torn apart by war, they have suffered from bereavement, loss of jobs, families and established community networks. The refugees have come through the Person's Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme which has a specific criteria: "It prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence amongst others" (Home Office, 2015, p. 5). The learners in the group have a variety of stories that they share, all of which are traumatic but all of which seem normalised to them. One family lost a son to

a bomb and are still grieving, another family described leaving a town with no clothes, no belongings where the husband had even lost his shoes and had to walk barefoot for miles. All the families are homesick and are desperate to speak to or see family members back in Syria or dispersed across a variety of countries. As a consequence of the learners' experience and the imperatives of CLD, we must work to support learners and their families to rebuild their lives.

As workers we must be aware of opinions and thoughts which are racist and in particular islamophobic and which may present barriers to the integration of refugees into the host community and consequently, be prepared to address these. Many of the areas where Syrian families are being placed are shown on the Scottish Index Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2016a) as being in the 20% most deprived areas. These Scottish communities are often stigmatised. Tracey Jensen highlights the effects of "stigmatizing ideologies and bad choices, bad culture and irresponsibility" (Jensen, 2014, p. 2). He goes on to discuss inequalities and how these can breed fear and distrust. During our work in the community approaches have been made to community members, and groups to help them to understand the plight families have faced. In general, the community has been understanding and generous however as CLD workers we need to be aware that racism does exist in communities and conscious of its effect.

Being aware of these wider issues and their origins relating to refugees and migrants is important to know for example, the media has a focus on migrants and refugees and the representation is not always positive. An area that creates confusion is terminology which the media exacerbate by using different terms when referring to refugees such as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As Imogen Tyler states "the torrent of anti-refugee publicity over this decade produced the new figure of the 'bogus asylum seeker' 'refugees' 'illegal immigrants' and terrorists were all rolled together" (Tyler, 2016, p. 91). The anti-migrant sentiment in communities and the media must be taken into account when planning learning activities to promote learning in relation to equality, community engagement and community development.

Danny Dorling discusses racism and how it effects communities and society as a whole. He states, "Racism permeates societies in ways that make it hard for most of us most of the time to recognise how omnipotent it is. Racism is also in the ether in a much wider sense than is usually recognised" (Dorling, 2012, p. 115).

All of the refugee families are motivated to learn English, get their children into school and find work so that they can earn their own money. Our role is to support families in achieving this but also to develop ties with the community and to become active citizens who feel that they are contributing to their new society. As Community Learning and Development workers, we understand learning theory and the impact of poverty, but working with refugees introduces new challenges.

We know learning must be delivered taking into account the individual, allowing learners to progress at their own rate and with a degree of flexibility on the content of what is delivered. This is what is described as learner-centred practice. Jeffrey Edwards states “Placing learners at the heart of the learning process, assessing and meeting their needs, is taken to be a progressive step in which learner-centred approaches mean that persons are able to learn what is relevant to them in ways that are appropriate” (Edwards, 1991, p. 85). An example of this occurred during the early weeks of our ESOL provision. A learner highlighted through the interpreter a health issue and his inability to know how to contact health services in an emergency. The learning was consequently adapted so that we covered not just learner’s saying their name and address, but also gave out information on 999 services so that learners would know how to get in touch with emergency services. This social practice approach is embedded in the Scottish Adult Literacies Curriculum framework (Education Scotland, 2016b).

Planning ways in which to combat racism is integral to our work and includes offering staff and volunteers training with specific sections on Syrian refugees. Addressing mis-information that is being put out by the media or developing a culture group based on different learners coming together to share their cultures is core to what we do. A culture group enables all of the learners taking part, whether Syrian, Scottish or from any other country to share knowledge and skills such as cooking, making jewellery, making cards, game playing (chess, cards or board games) or fitness activities. Its purpose is to develop a local community group for people to come together to develop inter cultural competence.

I mentioned earlier that each learner should be looked at as an individual and that learning should have an empowering, confidence building effect. Pam Coare and Rennie Johnston state:

as practitioners we see it >change in people’s lives< individuals who grow in confidence are empowered by the skills they acquire, recognise and embrace their potential to change. We also work with groups who learn to argue their case, take control of local projects, demand a voice or a place at the tables where decisions about their lives and communities are made (Coare, Johnston, 2003, p. 50).

It is vital to the work with the Syrian refugees that they realise that they are entitled to voice an opinion on services, goods and decisions relating to their lives. As Margaret Ledwith states “for voices to be heard is the first act of empowerment, and it equalises power relations between people as mutual, reciprocal acts of human caring” (Ledwith, 2016, p. 24).

Paulo Freire (1970) compares the different models of education, he argues that the banking model of education allows the oppressors to control society by dominating education and leading people not to question the knowledge they acquire. A liberatory approach to education stresses the importance of questioning and having an equal

relationship between teacher and learner leads to the emergence of consciousness and critical thinking. P. Freire contrasts these in terms of “education as the practice of freedom- as opposed to education as the practice of domination” (Freire, 1970, p. 62). In the design of our English classes we are following liberation pedagogy and encouraging learners to discuss learning with us and their preferred learning approach. There must be an equality between the worker and the learners encouraged through dialogue, questioning and learning how to be critical. Refugees will need support and potentially extra time and patience to encourage this approach to learning. The refugees must be supported to gain their confidence, trust in learning to find their voice again and be able to question freely, engage in learning or in wider community activities. Ira Shor and P. Freire (1987) discuss learning a language as much more than just learning the syntax. They highlight the role that the educator has in acting as a liberator by encouraging equality and critical thinking rather than just being the dominant teacher who passes out knowledge.

The learning we engage with our learners needs to have social transformation at its core. P. Freire discusses theories on oppression and liberation and he states (1970, p. 31), “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the situation which they can transform”. Pamela Coare and Rennie Johnston (2003) discuss learning that is provided to learners and citizens to provide them with more knowledge to allow them to fit into society. However, they also stress the importance of critical thinking and this links back to the ideas of learning that is done through learning from each other, collectively as equals. By engaging in learning which is transformative the learners will work towards greater empowerment and control of their lives so I try to reflect this in our practice. This supports the critical pedagogical approach of helping students to question and to challenge given assumptions.

For anyone to integrate into their community they rely on having a network of people. This could be family members, friends, colleagues, associations with community clubs or engagement in active social community events. Social theorists argue that different types of social connection should be seen as ‘social capital’ because they contribute to individual and community well-being by providing access to resources (Putnam, 2000; Ager, Strang, 2008). The Syrian refugees arrive here with nothing and these ties must be cultivated and developed over time. Social ties are created through developing activities which reflect individual’s interests. This is done through local schools and through local religious activities and through the work of befrienders who visit families and take them for days out. As Alistair Ager and Alison Strang (2008) point out integrated communities are dependent upon social relationships.

“How Good is the Learning and Development in our Community” (Scottish Government, 2016b) records the emphasis placed on partnership as a key indicator for how well we are managing the CLD work in the area. A key indicator focuses on

the efficacy of partnership working and it looks for partners to be actively engaged, understand their role, to be seeking opportunities for improvement and for the impact to be improvements for learners. Although the importance of collaboration is stressed in policy, in practice working with partners can be challenging and over time it has become apparent in working with Syrian Refugees that lack of professional dialogue results in inadequate information sharing. As a Senior Practitioner I have instigated partnership meetings to bring together CLD staff, Social Work, Housing, NHS and volunteers who are working with the families to ensure all partners understand their role and understand the service being delivered.

It is clear that ongoing work and planned developments involve a set of challenges emanating from the national and local policy framework and social and environmental context. The examples included here have enabled reflections on the opportunities and challenges in the ongoing work. We have considered the wider implications for the new arrivals in Scotland and the communities in which they are settled. The challenges CLD practitioners in working in partnership with other agencies have been discussed and consideration given to building positive relationships at community and professional levels.

Our reflections suggest that critical pedagogy is about striving to develop a fairer and more democratic world for everyone and that it is key to the work with the Syrian refugees in enabling successful resettlement in their new communities.

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### **Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in Scotland: A Community Education Approach**

**Summary:** Syrian refugees have been moved to Scotland through the Person's Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme, an initiative of the UK Government. Community Learning and Development (CLD) services have been tasked to support the learning needs of these refugees. CLD through its value base and pedagogic approach is well positioned to play an important role in linking up the learners to appropriate opportunities. These opportunities include English classes and family learning with an empowering agenda which supports the development of person and context specific life skills. The interventions have been designed to ensure that refugees can access English language provision and enable them to develop ties with the community in which they have been placed and engage in community activities as active citizens. This article describes the work with Syrian refugees and offers reflections on the challenges entailed in regard to inter-professional work, building positive relations in and between communities and the implications for both refugees and the settled community in Scotland.

**Keywords:** refugees, community, partnership, collaboration, adult education.

## **Rozmieszczenie uchodźców syryjskich w Szkocji: podejście wspólnotowe do edukacji**

**Streszczenie:** Syryjscy uchodźcy zostali umieszczeni w Szkocji w ramach inicjatywy brytyjskiego rządu określanej mianem Modelu Rozmieszczenia Osób Potrzebujących Wsparcia (the Person's Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme). Instytucje i organizacje w obrębie Edukacji i Rozwoju Społeczności Lokalnych (Community Learning Development – CLD) zostały wyznaczone jako te, które miały wspierać potrzeby edukacyjne uchodźców. Instytucje CLD ze względu na wartości, które stoją u ich podstaw, a także umiejętności pedagogiczne kadry odgrywają ważną rolę w procesie łączenia potrzeb osób uczących się z istniejącymi w tym zakresie możliwościami. Możliwości te obejmują zajęcia z języka angielskiego i naukę rodzinną z programem wsparcia, który wzmacnia rozwój osób w kontekście specyficznych życiowych umiejętności. Interwencje zostały opracowane w celu zapewnienia uchodźcom dostępu do zajęć z języka angielskiego i umożliwienia im rozwijania więzi ze społecznością, w której zostali umieszczeni, i angażowania ich w działalność społeczną jako aktywnych obywateli. W tym artykule opisano pracę z syryjskimi uchodźcami i przedstawiono refleksje na temat wyzwań związanych z interdyscyplinarną pracą, budowaniem pozytywnych relacji w społecznościach i między społecznościami. Wskazano także na implikacje tego typu działań dla uchodźców i osiadłej społeczności w Szkocji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uchodźcy, społeczność, partnerstwo, współpraca, edukacja dorosłych.