

Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in West Dunbartonshire



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Summary: Case study

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This is an executive summary of a report reviewing the Syrian Resettlement Programme put in place by West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP). It looks at the experiences of the refugees themselves and the processes and structures implemented by the CPP and its agencies.

It focuses on three key elements: The initial arrival and settlement of the refugees, social connections across communities and social links to public services. The report is based on interviews with refugees and employees from health, school and adult education, local authority and housing.

Findings

- In general, the resettlement programme was very successful. The refugees felt welcomed and appreciated the efforts of all those who contributed towards ensuring that their experience of arrival was positive. The early convening of a multi-agency group; the use of evidence to identify suitable locations; and early engagement with established communities, along with the creation of a Resettlement Team, all contributed to the success of this programme.
- Employees involved in the resettlement programme showed very high levels of commitment and professionalism and were justifiably proud of their work. Individual officers played a key role in the success of the resettlement experience. Whilst Syrians perceived this support to be positive and beneficial, the dependence on a small team placed significant pressure on individual workloads.
- The work of staff to engage residents in resettlement areas at an early stage of the resettlement process helped to promote positive community relations. However, a gap for Syrians was the lack of opportunities to build and extend social connections across communities.
- A key challenge for reforming public services to meet the needs of equalities groups is how to strike the right balance between providing support targeted directly at a population with specific needs whilst fostering independence and reforming mainstream services to promote inclusive and responsive practices.
- Across all services there was a need for greater attention to equality in access to public services.
- English language development has not progressed as well as many service providers had expected and the provision of interpretation was not consistent across all services.
- Syrian women were less likely to be comfortable interacting in public spaces than men and tended to carry more childcare responsibilities. Services need to be aware of these gender

differences and consider ways that activities can be designed to ensure that women can participate.

- Schools play an important part in the resettlement process and offer a potential hub through which new arrivals can build social connections and engage in the education of their children.
- In the provision of health services, specialist expertise in trauma and trauma-informed practice was an area of concern that requires greater attention.

Recommendations

- Provide greater opportunities for new arrivals to build social connections across communities. The potential for a befriending scheme should be fully explored with the aim of facilitating language acquisition.
- Promote active citizenship and community development through participation in local community projects and seek peer support from Glasgow's Integration Networks.
- Continue to encourage Syrian involvement in co-designing service provision. This could make services more person-centred and ensure that integration is central to service design.
- Improve collaboration between local services to enable services to respond more effectively to the needs of Syrians and to meet public sector equality duties.
- Services should pay attention to the issue of gender, making sure opportunities to build social connections with members of other communities are promoted for both men and women.
- Widen the provision of interpretation services across the community planning partnership, especially in relation to housing repairs and GP services. This would enable Syrians to engage with services on an equal basis and reduce dependence on bilingual members of staff.
- Review the provision of specialist expertise in trauma and the potential to access additional funding to meet complex health needs.
- Review the impact of refugee resettlement on ESOL provision, adult education and crèche availability.
- Agree a long-term plan to secure bilingual teachers for local schools.
- Explore the potential for schools to perform a role as community hubs and centres for social interaction. Consider ways of involving Syrian parents more directly in their children's education, including opportunities for parents to learn about the Scottish education system.

Effective partnership requires a clear purpose and rationale. The need to resettle the Syrian families quickly led to a sense of urgency to act and this galvanised cross-agency collaboration between services at a local level. The resettlement programme met its short-term goals but making the shift to mainstreaming support for Syrians has proved more challenging. This case highlights the importance of collaborative leadership across public services focussed on the long-term goal of designing public services for more diverse populations¹.

See the full report - *Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in West Dunbartonshire* - on the What Works Scotland website at whatworksscotland.ac.uk/resettlement-of-syrian-refugees-in-west-dunbartonshire

¹ For more on how public services can support transition towards more diverse communities see What Works Scotland blog http://whatworksscotland.blogspot.com/2015/11/scotland-welcomes-refugees-how-do_63.html