

Community Sponsorship Group Outcomes Report: What do you learn and gain from sponsoring refugees?

We are now well into our second year of surveying sponsor groups who complete their Sponsor Agreement and building our insights on what it is actually like to be a sponsor. This is a rolling survey, and is sent to Groups to complete once they reach the 12 month anniversary of welcoming a family.

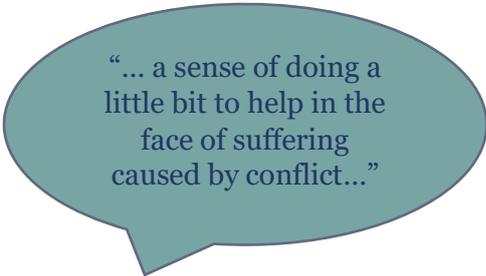
Through this survey, and because of those who shared their experience with us, we are able to share that:

- Of those we surveyed, 84% of Community Sponsorship Group members said they gained a strong sense of satisfaction from participation in the scheme.
- Of those we surveyed, 76% of CS Group members said they gained a strong sense of fulfilment
- Of those we surveyed, 37% of CS Group members said they gained a strong sense of community

The survey asks about your age group, working status and gender and how many hours are volunteered a week on average. It goes on to test what is gained from volunteering across different knowledge and skill sets as well as personal gains. Here, Group members rate each element out of 5 – 0 being none and 5 being lots of learning or gain . Group members also have an opportunity to add additional comments. Here is what we have learned so far.

1. There's something for everyone in volunteering with Community Sponsorship!

Most people get involved in Community Sponsorship in response to the well-publicised plight of people displaced from their homes as a result of the Syrian conflict. Here are some quotes from our end of Sponsor Agreement survey:



“... a sense of doing a little bit to help in the face of suffering caused by conflict...”



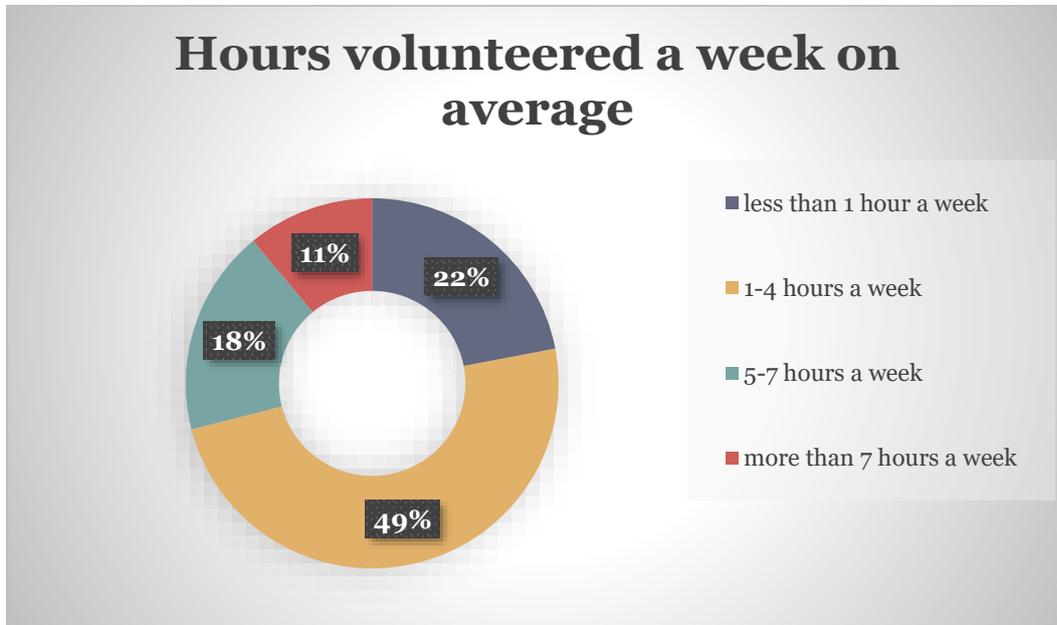
“... seeing the impact our project has had on [the family's] lived experience is truly humbling ...”

2. Sponsors gain skills from the programme

At the end of the one year Sponsor Agreement we ask people to rate their own skills development and look at what they gain personally from their involvement. The vast majority of people see a significant amount of personal growth. Star gains were those rated at least 4 out of a maximum 5 by the highest number of respondents.



Often people aren't sure they can commit to a full year or know in advance how much time they will be able to give. Our survey shows there is room for everyone.



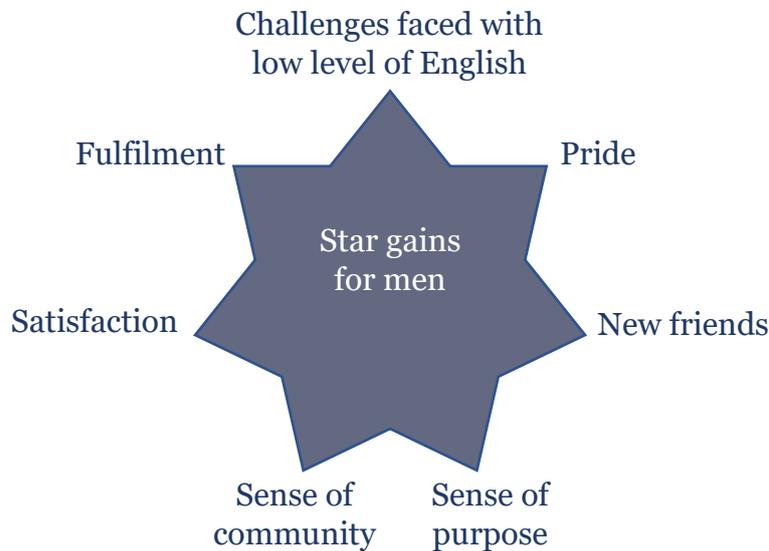
It doesn't matter how much or how little time someone can spare – it all counts.

Community Sponsorship needs to have as broad a volunteer base as possible to be successful; we are seeing a much wider spread of ages joining their local groups. There were as many people in the 35 to 54 age group as the over 65s and volunteers were split 50:50 working and non working.

We could still do with a few more men. All the research with the families that groups support consistently reports how important it is to the men in the families that they have men to relate to in their local community. Our survey shows that only 1 in 5 volunteers are men.

We took a closer look at what type of men volunteer and what they get out of the experience:

- On average, the men were much younger than the women and much more likely to be volunteering whilst working.
- In terms of gains they got a lot more out of it than the women, particularly from a personal perspective, with a lot more star gains.



The survey continues to confirm how worthwhile all our volunteers find the experience. It's not without its ups and downs and the odd frustration, but, on balance, they were glad to have been part of it.

Myth buster

I don't think I can offer enough time to make a difference

We found that more than 70% of volunteers give on average up to 4 hours a week – with more than a fifth overall doing less than an hour a week. Not enough to make a difference? That's not what our survey told us. We think as groups grow, it's easier to spread the workload: only 29% of people surveyed are giving up more than 5 hours a week compared with 44% in 2020. Sponsor networks are also making it easier to share knowledge so new groups aren't starting out blind.

Yes, if you are heavily involved as a Group or Core Group Leader it can be a lot of work. But, with that wider volunteer network to draw on, the chances of being overwhelmed reduce and the family benefits from a broader support group.

The top 3 knowledge and skills gained consistently across all volunteers, whether working or not working and whether frequent or less frequent volunteers were the same. Understanding the challenges faced by people with a low level of English, knowledge about a different culture and understanding the challenges of life on a low income: all part of building a more diverse and tolerant society.

It's going to be all retired people with time on their hands

Definitely not! We saw the same number of people in the 35-54 age group as the over 65s and just over half of those surveyed were in paid work. This broadening out of volunteer ages is great news. It's true that people who are retired or not working tend to give up more time than others. But when it comes to personal gain and new knowledge and skills, there is barely any difference between these two groups.

Getting into work is a priority for resettled families and also one of the main challenges. This was identified by the VOICES project¹ where resettled individuals talk about their experience of Community Sponsorship. Being supported by people actively in the workplace who could open up work opportunities will greatly improve their future prospects.

Aren't local sponsor groups all a bit cliquy and hard to break into?

We asked those surveyed to score what they gained personally from being in a Sponsor Group. As you would expect – a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment consistently drive high ratings. This year “making a new group of friends” broke into the leader board to join “a sense of community” as top outcomes for volunteers.

Finding volunteers with a variety of backgrounds is a challenge. The 2020 report on Community Sponsorship from the refugees' experience² notes that most volunteers are relatively well off. Advice on how to get by on a low income is, sadly, necessary for the resettled families. Unemployed (as opposed to retired or students) were very underrepresented in our survey, despite the very evident knowledge and skills gains reported by nearly all volunteers.

Community Sponsorship volunteering definitely contributes new skills that are transferrable into the job market. Planning, administration and management skills were near the top gains for the non-working volunteers. And a key missing skill in our survey was practical knowledge of the UK benefits system.

Do men join Community Sponsor Groups?

Yes – but we need more! Less than a quarter of surveys completed were from men. The two pieces of research done from the refugees' perspective are crystal clear: the men in the resettled families are desperate to connect with other men.

We are still not sure why sponsorship seems to attract fewer men. When we looked at the new knowledge / skills and the personal gains for men who volunteered, they were consistently higher than for women. The men that gained the most personally were actually the ones who volunteered for the shortest amount of time per week: 6 of the 8 categories of personal gains surveyed scored above 4 out of a maximum of 5 for this group.

So come on chaps – it's a win-win in return for an hour or so a week.

¹

https://resetuk.org/sites/default/files/attachments/blogs/2021/03/community_sponsorship_final_report.pdf

² <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2020/5-refugee-experience.pdf>