



# UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF RESETTLEMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Learning from refugee women

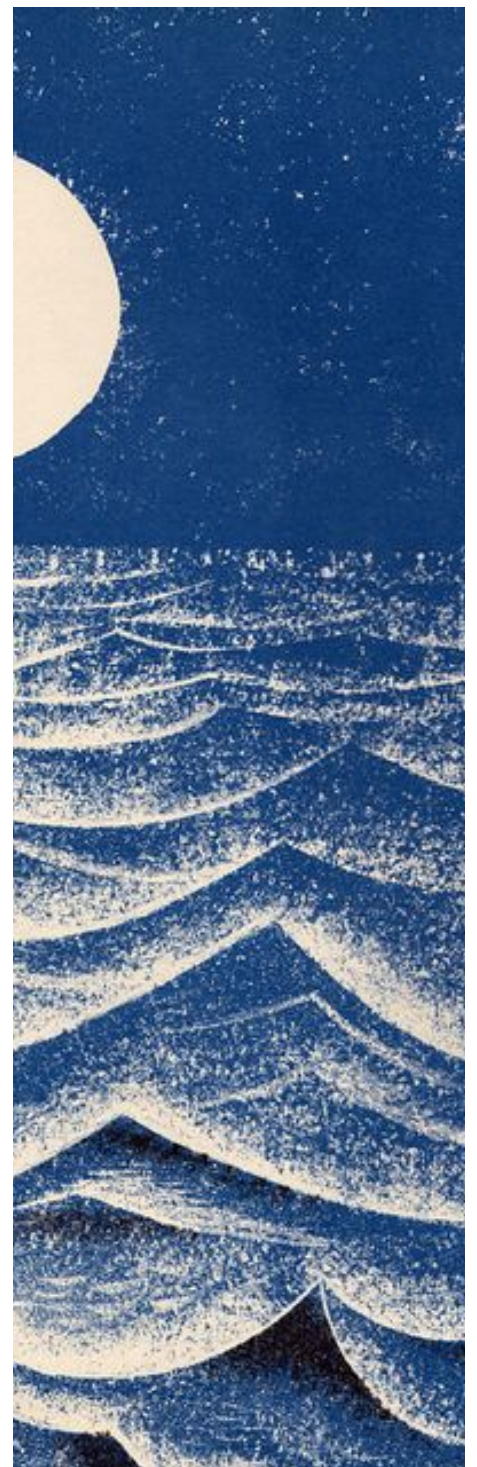
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# INTRODUCTION

To enhance our understanding of the experiences of those being resettled through Community Sponsorship, in December we brought together a group of women who had arrived in the UK through this scheme.

The purpose of the focus group was to learn from the women about the misconceptions surrounding resettlement to the UK. The aim was to utilise the learning from the focus group to guide and enhance Reset's work on training, advice, and support to Community Sponsorship groups. This included the adaptation and development of resources and training.







## Method

A focus group was conducted with five Experts by Experience: Syrian women who had arrived in the UK through Community Sponsorship with their families in the past two years. The approach adopted was collaborative and trauma informed, ensuring that facilitators were mindful of the potential for participants to be triggered and equipped to provide support and service sign-posting as needed.

The research was conducted remotely with the focus group taking place online via Zoom. Utilising a collaborative approach helped to ensure that participants' voices were heard. The focus group lead facilitator had lived experience of resettlement through Community Sponsorship and this helped to create a sense of ease within the group, with the facilitator able to relate to much of the discussion which encouraged open participation. Furthermore, the participants worked collectively to agree on some rules for working together, prior to commencing the focus group.



# Women's Experiences

Before the women and their families departed their host country to resettle to the UK, many of them had concerns surrounding the cultural differences in child-rearing practices between Europe and the Arab world. They also feared being treated differently because of their religious beliefs and the way they dressed.

However, when they arrived they were relieved to be welcomed with warmth and kindness, especially by their Community Sponsorship group and also their children's teachers. One woman said, "I am very grateful for my children's teachers, who exhibit a great deal of patience and understanding towards me. Despite my limited proficiency in English, they go above and beyond to clearly and effectively communicate important information to me. Their kindness and willingness to help is truly appreciated."

“When I first arrived here, I was deeply moved by the kindness and thoughtfulness of the Community Sponsorship volunteers. They went out of their way to take us to local mosques and Arab shops, creating a sense of safety and familiarity for us. It was truly a beautiful and heart-warming experience.”





Among the group participants there was a general consensus that they should be given a chance to learn English. However, many of the women stated they've experienced pressure by the job centre to obtain work promptly. They found this impacted their wellbeing and their ability to study effectively. They felt that learning English was the first essential step to getting a job and integrating into life in the UK.

One woman explained that after seven months she was told by the job centre to find a job. She explained: " The difficulty of the language also limits the ability to search for job opportunities. I cannot read the signs and I always get lost because of that. How can I work?"

"Everyone likes to work and have a future, but I need a good opportunity. I want to work in my field of study, which is agriculture. I studied agriculture at Aleppo University. All I need is a chance to study the language. That's all."





Experiences of mental health problems were described as common. The majority of the participants had experienced social isolation and loneliness. A lack of social connection due to language barriers was a key contributing factor to this. While the absence of family, friends or Arab speakers exacerbated the problem.

One participant added, "It is hard for all of us. We do not know anyone and we are always at home, even during holidays. We do not enjoy it as much as other people because we do not have friends and family. Especially during Eid the children get sad because they used to have fun, but not now."

For many of the women, their husbands were unemployed. They found the shift to unemployment very challenging. This had an overall impact on the level of stress in the household and consequently increased family problems.

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"Since the beginning of our arrival, the constant presence of my husband at home has caused problems between us due to the psychological pressure it has created. I wish he could find work so that he could spend more time outside."

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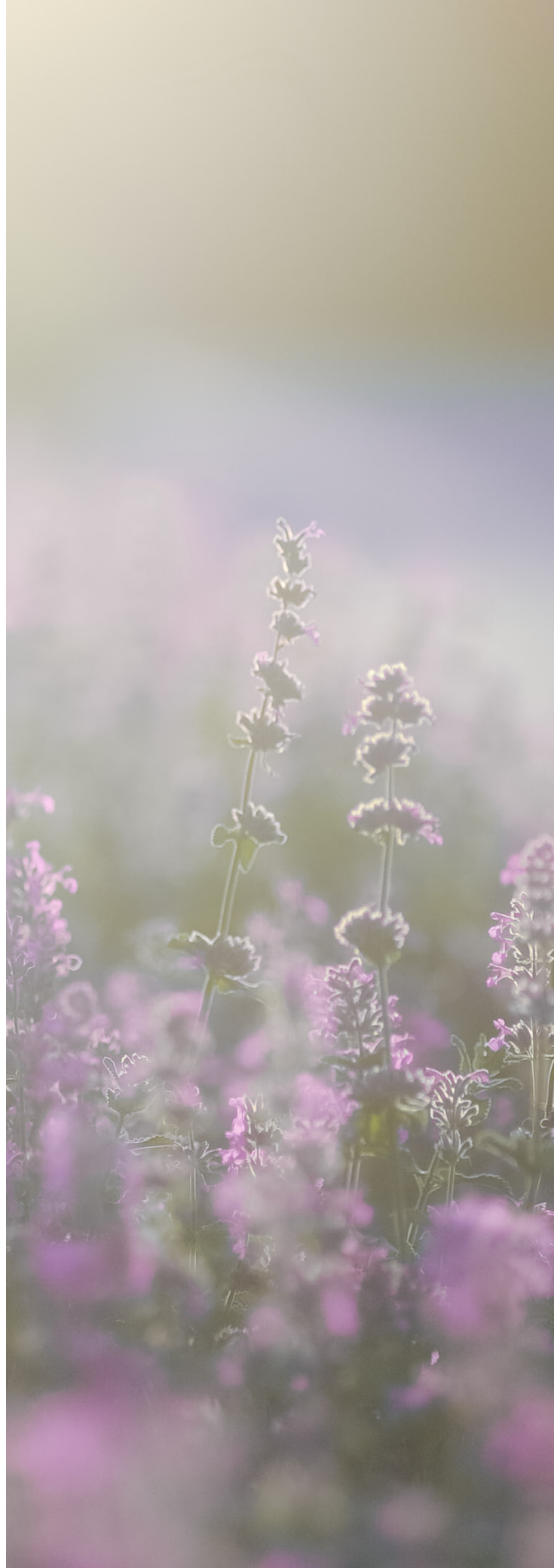


The women had expected the health system and local hospitals in the UK to be well managed. However, they found this not to be the case. They explained that it was hard to get appointments in times of need, even when their children were sick and these experiences impacted their emotional wellbeing.

"This is something we did not expect to happen in the UK".

“My daughter's knee was swollen and she had a very high fever, but we waited a whole day in the hospital just for the doctor to see her. I was so

scared.”





# What we Learnt

The focus group provided valuable insights into the expectations and realities of resettling to the UK through Community Sponsorship. The participants shared their experiences of struggling with language barriers and social isolation, as well as challenges in accessing healthcare and finding employment. Despite these challenges, they also spoke of the kindness and support they have received from Community Sponsorship groups.

A prominent theme that resonates is the impact of these experiences on emotional wellbeing, highlighting the importance of Community Sponsorship groups understanding of the emotional journey of resettlement and being equipped to understand mental distress and signpost accordingly. Transition can be challenging, not as expected and unique for each individual. Expectation management is a key part of Community Sponsorship and plays a significant component in Reset's training and support.

We understand that these findings are limited given the number of participants and sole nationality and gender of participants. However, the findings provide a basis for understanding some of the expectations and realities of resettling to the UK through Community Sponsorship. Further focus groups would add valuable knowledge to deepen this understanding.





We would like to say thank you to Nawal Mohamed for leading the women's focus group. In 2021, Nawal and her family resettled to the UK through Community Sponsorship.

“Hearing directly from refugee women is crucial as it provides a first-hand account of their experiences and challenges. It humanizes the issue of refugees and highlights individual and unique stories. This can help to break down stereotypes and increase empathy and understanding among those who may not have direct exposure to the refugee experience. Moreover, it also provides a platform for these women to have their voices heard and their perspectives acknowledged, which is essential in creating more inclusive and supportive communities.”

Nawal Mohamed.

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And remember that

# we are here to support you

If you want to talk to our team, learn more about Community Sponsorship or have some questions then our door is always open for you.

You can also go onto our website to find out more information on Community Sponsorship in the UK.



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