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The Information Experiences of Syrian new Scots: more than meets the eye

Syrian new Scots Information Literacy Way-findings practices

Lost in Information?

Syrian new Scots' Information Literacy Way-finding Practices

https://syrian-information-literacy.blogspot.co.uk

Dr. Konstantina Martzoukou
Prof. Simon Burnett

School of Creative & Cultural Business
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK
k.martzoukou@rgu.ac.uk

information:
interactions
and impact

I3 conference 27-30 June 2017 Aberdeen

Who is a refugee?

...a person who: *'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'*

- (Article 1, 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees)

An **asylum seeker** is someone who has applied for asylum and is waiting for a decision as to whether or not they are a refugee.

The status of a **refugee** is formally recognised only after having been given a formal refugee status by the Government.

"SCOTLAND IS READY AND WILLING TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO HELP REFUGEES."

'refugee integration' (RIS)
advice and advocacy over a period of a 12 month programme

Fulfil initial <u>critical needs:</u> housing, welfare rights, education and access to benefits, employability options as well as their rights and entitlements should they are granted Leave to Remain

- Family Key Work Service
specialised advice and support to families with children from 0-8 yrs

- Scottish Guardianship Service
partnership between Aberlour Child Care Trust and Scottish Refugee Council: unaccompanied young people going through the asylum system.

New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities

2014 – 2017

Final Report

http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00515713.pdf

Lost in information? New Syrian Scots' information way-finding practices

Aims –

A scoping study that aims to examine the information related experiences and information literacy practices of Syrian new Scots (the Syrian refugees in Scotland) during their resettlement and integration.

Objectives –

- To explore Syrian new Scots' 'ways of knowing' for addressing critical social inclusion needs (e.g. housing, welfare, education, benefits, employability, rights and entitlements). This may involve interaction with people, tools and processes within their new socio-cultural setting.

- To examine the barriers (e.g. English language, socio-cultural differences) and enablers (local community support, new technologies and media) they encounter in the process of addressing their key information needs.

- To investigate how Syrian new Scots could be further supported to adapt to their local communities, feel a sense of belongingness and successfully establish their identity into the Scottish society.

Methodology

- **Interviews with 3 Refugee Resettlement Officers**
- **Focus Groups with Syrian new Scots**
  - One urban and two rural areas
  - A total thirty eight Syrian refugees in six focus groups (September 2016 - March 2017)

- **Drawing exercise based on Information World Mapping** (IWM) approach (Greyson, 2013)
  - **Critical Incident Technique** was used which outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance for the participants (Flanagan, 1954 p.327).

    - Information Needs
    - Information sources & Enablers
    - Barriers
    - Communication and sharing of information
    - Information and cultural integration
    - Technology and digital skills

Demographics (phase 1)

Table 1. Focus group demographics – rural area (female participants)

Name	Age	Married/single	children
Helen	46	married	5
Jane	51	married	5
Anna	19	single	0
Georgia	46	married	3
Nicola	21	married	2
Sandra	55	married	8 (4 in Lebanon; 4 in other countries)
Maria	51	married	6 (1 in Lebanon, 1 in Egypt)
Emma	39	married	4
Kathryn	21	married	1

Table 2. Focus group demographics - rural area (male participants)

Name	Age	Married/single	children
Mark	64	married	6 (1 in Lebanon, 1 in Egypt)
Stuart	61	married	8 (3 in Lebanon)
Tom	47	married	4
Aaron	28	single	0
Henry	29	married	1
Dylan	21	single	0
Bill	54	married	3
William	32	married	1
George	18	single	0
A volunteer	-	-	-

Demographics (phase 2)

Table 3. Focus group demographics – urban area (male participants)

Name	Age	Married/single	children
Aaron	47	married	4
Oscar	31	married	1
Elliot	31	single	0
Ivan	23	married	2
Andrew	29	married	2
James	N/A	married	3
Neil	27	married	N/A

Table 3. Focus group demographics – urban area (female participants)

Name	Age	Married/single	children
Claire	20	divorced	1
Fay	26	married	2
Daisy	26	married	N/A
Paola	N/A	volunteer	N/A

Demographics (phase 3)

Table 5. Focus group demographics – 1st group in 2nd rural area (mixed participants)

Name	Age	Married/single	children
	30s	married	2
Cassandra	late 20s	married	2
Helen	50	single	5
Mark	30s	unknown	-
Sarah	undisclosed	unknown	-
Christian	31	married	-

Table 6. Focus group demographics – 2nd group in 2nd rural area (mixed participants)

Name	Age	Married/single	children
Tom	28	married	2
Gerry	26	married	2
Marie	28	married	2
Alex	35	married	2

Foci of study

- English language and community integration
- Information Provision, Cultural Differences and Previous Experiences
- Financial security
- Use of technology
- Interpersonal sources
- Family reunion and sense of identity
- Prioritising information needs and the role of the library
- The role of Syrian refugees in the integration of others

ESOL Classes

- A **welcome pack** with basic information, "where is the nearest corner shop? Who can you call if there's an emergency?" (e.g. emergency services, benefits, GPs, finance, the police and fire service)
- A **24 hour Arabic helpline** was set up with the Mosque, for any emergency cases so that the families were not reliant on 9 to 5 office hours, or if something happened over the weekend
- **In-house translation**/interpretation service which made possible to use interpreters for every appointment

Everyday life encounters

- GP appointments **credit card size flash cards** with Arabic in one side and English in the other with all of the most common questions asked at the doctors.
- **WhatsApp group** (volunteer interpreters)

English

- "You know, you go to a checkpoint and for no reason at all back in your country, you're **detained, you're tortured**...there's a **very different role to the police** here for example, and many of the families who have come through this scheme to this country have been, by the very definition of being accepted to the scheme, victims of torture for example...**Should police officers wear uniforms?** Shouldn't they wear uniforms? Are we best to try and integrate them immediately by showing a positive role model of a police officer or not?" (Resettlement Officer 1))

- some people were **illiterate in Arabic**: presented verbally or in small chunks in another form: **using stickers, a diary, colour coding doctors and hospital appointments, pictures of the buildings, special maps procured for families to show them their areas** (Resettlement Officer 2). However, "there were so many areas to cover" so the question was **"How do you do that and how do you prioritise"** ?

Cultural differences, cultural integration, wellbeing

"I fear learning English will take too long".

I fear the future, I fear for my children's future.
I have sisters in Lebanon and Egypt.
I have a problem in learning English, I find it very difficult. I did not learn it in my country
I need to learn to speak English, it is a difficult but very important.
Thank you
Someone speaks English
No English

William's drawing of English language barrier presented as a wall (translated with the assistance of the interpreter)

I want to learn English quickly.

I fear if something happens to me I do not know to speak English with the one I want to learn quickly.

Kathryn's drawing

"I think it all revolves around the language…communication. If we solved this problem things would be resolved"

- not just about learning a new language
- interlinked with increased self-confidence
- increased health and well-being
- reducing feelings of isolation
- creating more opportunities to engage in the community.
- increased possibilities of getting a job and ensuring financial security

English Language & community Integration

"the family I worked with the very first night they arrived, - I was leaving them and obviously they were very anxious - I had said '**do you have any real anxiety?**', 'Is there anything you like to ask before I go home?' One of the families said, '**yes, when are we started our English classes?**'
(Loc-Auth 3)

how to communicate with others, express their needs and share information

e.g. going for shopping and if someone spoke to them in the street, when someone comes to read the electricity meter, when navigating in the city, when using the bus.

English Language & Community Integration Strategies

Community relevant learning

- how could go into the shop to ask for something;
- how they could approach a member of the public and ask for directions;
- how they would go to the train station and buy tickets;
- how to say when they needed to get off the bus;
- how they would go into their chemist and ask for a prescription, or to the doctor or the bank

Learning in proactive ways

- working with the NHS and with the Department for Work and Pensions and going down and doing mock discussions with the doctor.
- organising trips and activities.

Everyday life information needs

- **Ivan's story**: concerned about a "big barrier" he had to deal with every day, which included the accumulation of household waste from the other apartments in his building, a "building of four floors with only one, two bins" within a shared bin in front of his house. Ivan was concerned that the council had not remove the bins and as a result the pavement outside his door was never clear of rubbish.

- **Recycling**: When the council had come to collect the waste they had explained that there was a process of recycling. Although they had "a black and a blue bin for recycling different material" they were "not sure how to recycle".

Fay's story: Fay described an incident of her son almost getting burned by the cooking oil because the kitchen and the sitting room were connected in an open plan design.

building maintenance

House safety/ accessibility

Everyday life information needs /health and wellbeing

heat

Recycling

housing information barriers were highlighted as a significant issue for everyday life wellbeing.

In some cases housing conditions and everyday life 'routine' building maintenance tasks were even considered to be linked with health difficulties that the families experienced.

Health information needs

- **Clear communication barriers** in the provision of health services and around the expectations the families had, based on their **previous experiences** in their h**ome country** (e.g. going to the hospital instead necessarily making an appointment with the GP).

- **Interpreters** were a **source of normality and stability** as opposed to a world of 'otherness' and 'confusion' that surrounds them in their effort to make sense of their different realities. However, interpreters were not always available in hospitals or during GP appointments

- A list of standard translated sentences into Arabic had been created but it was not always sufficient to address the **contextual needs of the patients** who arrived with complex medical histories.

- The Syrian families required more support to **develop health information literacy** within the different socio-cultural contexts of their new country

"At the end of the day there is no one there to help them. Sometimes they call. Sometimes people call me, but I'm just a volunteer. They call me to translate (Interpreter).

Some Syrians were illiterate: "they do not know how to write or read in Arabic and in those cases the need of an interpreter is a necessity"

"I took her [his daughter] to the hospital. Cause he didn't know what to do, what to call, he didn't know how to call the ambulance, the NHS 24, so I was the easiest one" (Interpreter referring to Ivan a young father of two daughters).
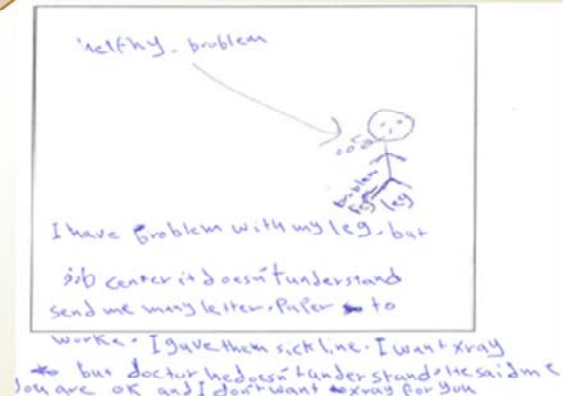
One of the female participants had a similar experience. Fay had been to the hospital emergency unit and she had her blood sample taken because she was suddenly gaining too much weight and she was not sure what was happening with her health. Fay had to wait for three and a half hours and she had asked a nurse for information, using the help of a volunteer interpreter. However, she was told to wait for another three hours or she had to leave. Since then whatever happened to her, she would not go to the hospital again. In addition, "they never told her what the problem with her is" (Fay with the help of the Interpreter)
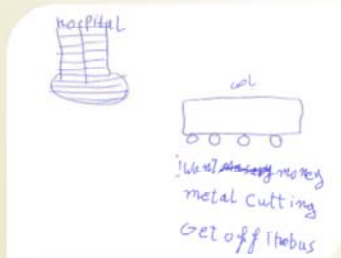
Financial Security

basic needs of the families (e.g. hospital appointments and ethnic food shopping/halal food) were expensive activities because the families had to travel regularly

"the transportation for us is even more important than food. It's very very important" (trips to the job centre and school)

"we are always thinking, we are very stressed, very worried. We are not enjoying life because of our worries, being stressed, always being stressed about this…this makes it hard to integrate. It's all an on-going worry…" (Case Study 1).

Jane's drawing of bus/hospital incident

Elliot's drawing on distance from school

Emma's drawing of bus/hospital incident

The rural area was the difficulty they had experienced with transportation. Being able to travel freely and afford travelling to the city to attend appointments (e.g. GP or job centre appointments) was extremely important for the families. In addition, this would facilitate integration because if they were not constantly worried about the costs, they would be more inclined to explore the local area. Some of the basic needs of the families (e.g. hospital appointments and ethnic food shopping/halal food) were expensive activities because the families had to travel regularly from the small town in which they lived to the city in order to be able to fulfil them, or they would elect a single member of one family to do this for all of them in order to save costs. They also noted that if they could source ethnic food locally this would help. They had already discussed their needs during Ramadan with a large supermarket chain and had provided a list of suitable foods but nothing had happened since then.

Use of Technology

Shared Rhetoric / a common communication space

Technologies
variable level of ICT literacy across the families

"**We talk about doctors as being 'the GP'.** The language has been really important ...maybe somebody is going to the surgery and people are thinking they will have their body off... that they are not going to the doctors". So shared rhetoric and language has been really really crucial....as peoples' language is progressing they are able to take more responsibility for information and you can see that growing"

"...in every family we've got there is somebody with a critical illness ...or a terminal illness or a disability so hospital appointments are constant... so you get a **hospital letter through**, rather than waiting until I'm going to the house two days later. **They take a photograph and send it to me on WhatsApp**" (Loc-Auth 1).

A shared communication practice on WhatsApp

Mobile phones √ (pay as you go sim cards)

Wi-Fi connection:

"That was everybody's priority. Because without Wi-Fi they couldn't speak to their sons and daughters within the first couple of days...we got sorted out with a pay as you go sim card" (Loc-Auth 1).

"using a top up service because that was more affordable than maintaining an Internet connection at home" (Case Study 2 – Urban area)

WhatsApp √ (central communication point)
Google Translate √ (used by young people)
YouTube √ (family entertainment, education)

Computers - (not much use)
Websites? - (not much use)
Email: - (not much use) the families initially did not have email addresses (mostly considered as a tool for business communication)

Family reunion & sense of identity

Maria's drawing showing her holding her daughters and sons

Nicola's drawing depicting her family in Syria

Cassandra's drawing showing gratitude and hope for

reuniting with her family

"I hope we can all be together in one place. I miss my two girls", explaining that particularly one of her daughters is "suffering a lot in Lebanon…I need her to come here and be with me as soon as possible" (Maria).

"what worries me is the future; what is going to happen. Okay we are adapting but what's next? …Because we all have families elsewhere. Will we be able to have citizenship here? Will we be able to travel to visit our families elsewhere? Our families, will they be able to visit us here?" (Mark)

Interpersonal Sources

- The community centre, where they regularly met to celebrate social occasions, learn English and socialise with the other Syrian families had made them **feel safe and secure.**

- The **Mosque** played a key role as a communal place where families, support services and volunteers could meet. For example, during the third week after the families' arrived, an event had been organised by the Mosque to bring together all the families from both the city and the rural areas.

- The families got information from *Facebook* groups and from **talking to other people** in Scotland and in other European countries were they had been settled

  - "So every one of my families will have someone potentially in Germany or Sweden and will learn from them what they're doing, and what the local authorities and equivalents there have been offering, supporting, what they're entitled to. So there really is a vast network of information that they access" (Loc-Auth 2).

  - key **Local Council Leads**: the most important sources of information and significant players in the adaptation process

    - had made them feel more **confident and at ease** with their new environment

Jane's drawing of four support staff as key information sources

Prioritising information needs and the role of the library

Complex information needs: "you have a family with maybe someone with a disability or a terminal illness, they have children in another country, they come from a war zone, they possibly have been abused or neglected in the last three years in the country they have been in; they' got depression, post-traumatic stress, they've been victims of torture or violence. How do you unpick which one is more traumatic than the other especially as we don't have services in Arabic?" (Loc-Auth 1).
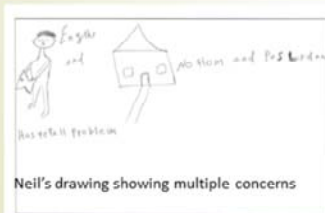
Not a homogeneous group: different levels of vulnerability and health issues, diversity on the basis of education, life experience and different levels of independence. homogenous group. The approach followed often needed to be tailored to individual family needs, at least in the initial months of adaptation (LOC-Auth 3)

Neil's drawing showing multiple concerns

Bill's concerns around family reunion, English language, financial security and integration

John's drawing showing gratitude and hope for peace and health

They have health issues, they are quite poor people, they don't have a lot of money and they also lack education. They are not very worldly wise, you know. Two of the families have travelled a bit but the other three families haven't travelled at all. So in terms of life experience, if somebody was assessing them, they have very little life experience, they have multiple health issues and obviously the families that are were coming last year were deemed to be the most neediest, you know, the most vulnerable. So you know poor education attainment would fit to the vulnerable category" (Loc-Auth 3).

Prioritising information needs and the role of the library

More work was required to position the library as a key place for communication, learning and support for the families.
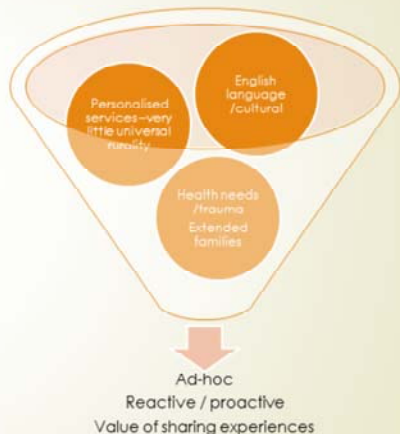
- Claire from the city borrowed some books mainly in Arabic language
  - **Books** for learning English from the library were **"very difficult and complicated"**
  - she would still **not use the library for Internet access** although she could not afford Wi-Fi access at home.

- **Third case study:** library situated within the community building / much easier for the families to gain access and be introduced to services
  - The library worked **in partnership** with the Local Council Leads, the ESOL service and the English language classes were held in the rear of the library
  - The Local Council Leads had worked in partnership with the library as part of the strategic and operational plan before the families had arrived
    - invested money in **dual language story books** for children and had ordered them before the families arrived
    - organised **mother and toddler groups**
    - keen to **encourage new potential volunteers** to see the work that was been done with the existing volunteers and the Syrian families.
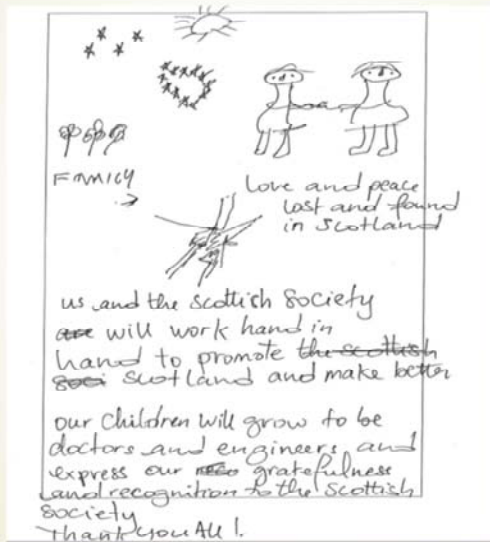
Challenges

"When the families arrived we never took any images because I didn't feel comfortable with it but it was a black and white picture. It wasn't even a black and white picture, it was grey. **It was like a grey in sepia picture. They were subdued, they were exhausted, they were black-eyed**. I mean there are still a huge amount of issues but there is some vibrancy, there is some colour, there is some character, people are beginning to return to themselves" (Resettlement Officer 1).

"a whole lot of other difficulties and challenges… around rurality"… "this isn't just about an urban city response… realistically it has to be about **centralisation of resources and services**. They have to be designed based around how people are going to be able to access them (Resettlement Officer 1)
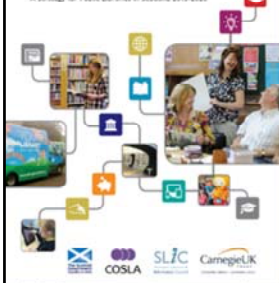
Personalised services – very little universal rurality

English language /cultural

Health needs /trauma Extended families

Ad-hoc
Reactive / proactive
Value of sharing experiences

A message of hope…

Sarah's drawing

Can libraries help?

- One of the strategic aims of public libraries in Scotland is to promote social wellbeing.

- *Ambition & Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-20* highlights public library support for social wellbeing in a number of ways:

  - **Responding to the social needs of individuals and groups** in their communities and developing activities and programmes to respond to particular needs.

  - **Making library space and support available for community** interest groups and members of the community looking to support one another.

  - Contributing to the ability of individuals to **become involved in their local communities** and take part in local and national life.

  - **Strengthening the identity and sense of community.**

  - **Creating a public service hub** for the delivery of a range of public services (SLIC, 2015, p.25).

Public Libraries

Local Refugee Resettlement Officers

Arabic resources available (for example more resources were in Polish)

"if there was a resource there and every library had **guaranteed a hub** and they had this information they would go"

------

no Arabic speakers

Increasing community awareness, presenting the whole picture of the situation that these families have encountered

- establishing a single library card for Syrian new Scots and automatically signing families as members
- setting up a community hub with volunteering opportunities for Syrian new Scots
- providing health information in accessible pictorial formats
- helping the families to develop their health & digital literacy (provision of additional classes)
- offering source material in Arabic (including newspapers and material for children) / Arabic speaker volunteers based in local public libraries
- setting up family sessions and getting the families to engage with the early years programme
- creating a friendly, welcoming and trusted 'third place' for families to learn, socialise and feel part of the community: e.g. introducing an induction session and a short film on what public libraries could offer

iL GROUP

Local public library Syrian new Scots Support

□ **A pop-up classroom area** has been created on the library Mezzanine floor to accommodate 10 Syrian learners and a tutor for ESOL classes. The classes run twice weekly, a men only class and a women only class which solves issues surrounding childcare. Due to the success of the class the booking has been extended. Feedback from the tutor has expressed thanks for creating an **"effective learning space in the library, for my Syrian classes"**. Library staff will be engaging with the learners to ensure ongoing support upon completion of the classes

□The Syrian new Scots were taken on a **guided tour of the Children's Library** and shown resources and services available for children and young people through the library service. Those with families were encouraged to join their children as members of the library service
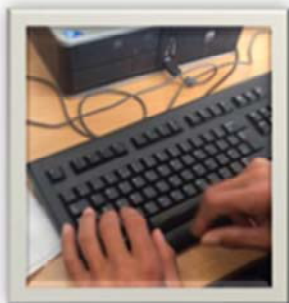
Computer Classes

Computer class organised by the Al-Amal Project

The Role of Syrian Refugees in the Integration of Others

- Peer Education Programme, English language (Nov – May 2017)

  - Pilot model developed in response to the resettlement Programme
  - Aims to complement the current local authority ESOL provision
  - Increasing social connections and language and cultural exchange between native and non-native speakers of English

- **Groups are formed in local communities** to bring together newly arrived refugees and local people with two peer educators who have been trained

The Role of Syrian Refugees in the Integration of Others

The Al-Amal (hope) Group

- **Objectives**

  - ☐ To improve resettlement experiences by enabling Syrian families to contribute to the planning, operational and evaluative process
  - ☐ To reduce isolation, low mental health, boredom and frustration by encouraging active community participation (locally)
  - ☐ To develop community projects that build on the skills, knowledge and expertise of Syrian new Scots
  - ☐ Coordinate and work with other groups with similar objectives
  - ☐ To develop employability skills and learning
  - ☐ To raise funds for cultural trips and experiences
  - ☐ To enable Syrian new Scots to support community events and projects (locally)
  - ☐ To develop the use of Social Media to aid communication
  - ☐ To advocate for the unmet needs of Syrian new Scots in Aberdeenshire

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/26/syria-heritage-in-ruins-before-and-after-pictures

Syrian new Scots cookbook

Photographs by: Paul Coleman and Chris Meek

The following slides were presented by Dured Alhalabe (a young Syrian Scot, founder of the Al-Amal group) at a COSLA event.

Dured won the Young Scot Community Award. The awards "shine a light on the positive contribution young people make every day and provide a fantastic opportunity to see their efforts and dedication celebrated" (Scottish Refugee Council, 2017)
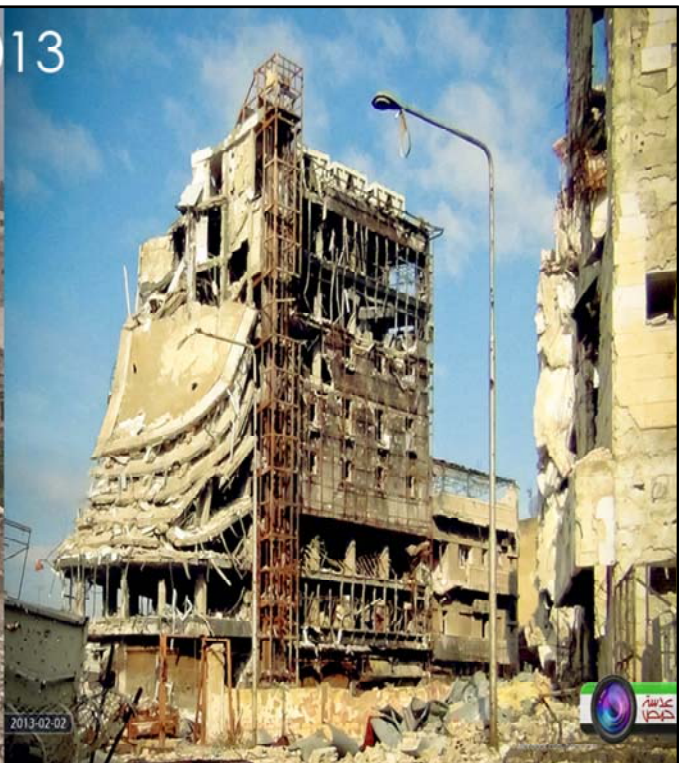
6 years ago

Homs 2011

2013

2013-02-02

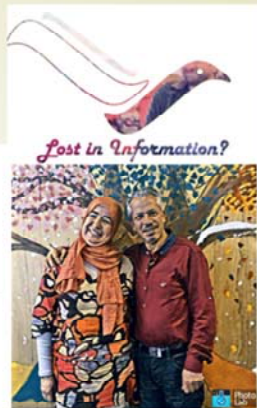Alquatly's Square

2011

2013

Welcoming new families

Airport

At home

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

Edinburgh

Would you like to help?

Blog: https://syrian-information-literacy.blogspot.co.uk/2016_09_01_archive.html

The Network http://www.seapn.org.uk supports libraries, museums, archives, galleries and other cultural and heritage organisations (as well as individuals) who are working to tackle social exclusion and towards social justice.

Brief library case-studies by EBLIDA (the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations)

Warsan Shire

"Home"

Five young London poets who have written about displacement and identity reflect on the refugee experience

Poet Warsan Shire. Photograph: Amaal Said

"No one leaves home
unless home is the mouth of a shark.
You only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well..

No one puts their children in a boat / unless
the water is safer than the land"

Warsan Shire
"Home"

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