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Lost in Information? Syrian new Scots Information Literacy Way-Finding Practices

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Who is a refugee?

A refugee is 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)

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

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.

Current Activity in Scotland

7 September 2015 the Prime Minister announced an expansion of the existing *Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme*, resettling **20,000 Syrians** (over five years drawn from established refugee camps)

Worked with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to identify some of the most vulnerable displaced Syrians and bring them to the UK.

- **Nicola Sturgeon** - special taskforce: Scottish Government Ministers, the Scottish Refugee Council, the UK Government, local authorities and representatives from public bodies across Scotland.

- The first **1,000 Syrian r**efugees arrived in the UK in November 2015 with around **400** of them have arrived in Scotland. Since then more Syrian refugees have arrived in stages (on-going resettlement)

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

— Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland

REFUGEES WELCOME

Refugee Integration (RIS)

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

- ◦ Refugee's integration to the country, fulfil initial critical needs: 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 Servic*e, 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

COSLA | scottish refugee council | The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Action Plans

Needs of Dispersed Asylum Seekers
Employ ability and Welfare Rights
Housing
Education
Health
Communities and Social Connections

'Scotland's response to the refugee crisis has represented both a challenge and an opportunity for the New Scots strategy. **All of the partners involved in its implementation have been working under extreme pressure to ensure the smooth arrival and initial integration of large numbers of refugees in a short period of time.** '
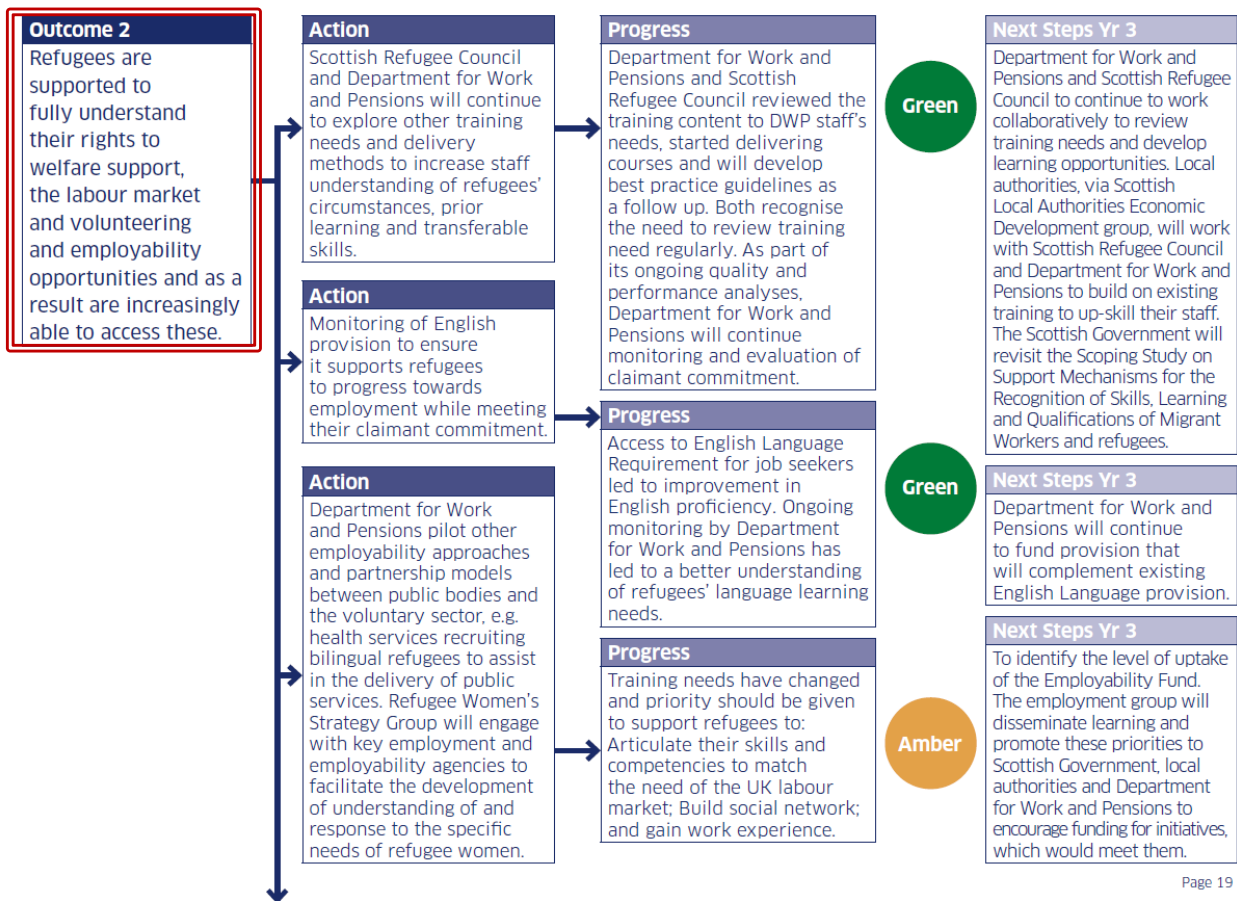
Syrian Resettlement Programme

◦ Refugees have different entitlements to those who have come through the asylum process...

◦ Work is underway to combine and streamline the new refugee crisis structures into those already existing for the New Scots strategy, and this will continue in 2016.'
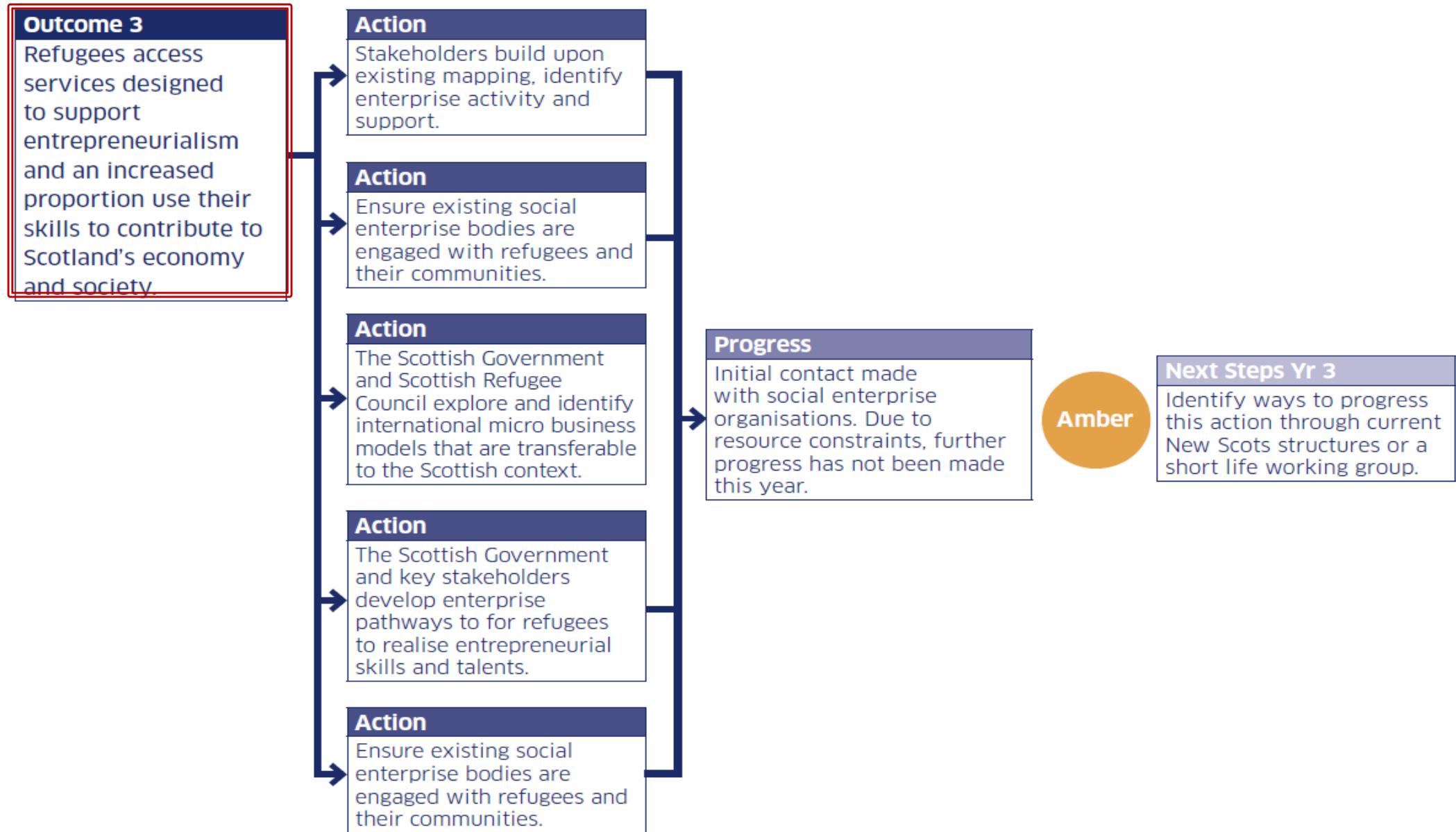
(Scottish Government, 2016)

Progress Report & Year 2 Implementation

New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities

YEAR 2: IMPLEMENTATION

PROGRESS REPORT

Outcome 2
Refugees are supported to fully understand their rights to welfare support, the labour market and volunteering and employability opportunities and as a result are increasingly able to access these.

Action
Scottish Refugee Council and Department for Work and Pensions will continue to explore other training needs and delivery methods to increase staff understanding of refugees' circumstances, prior learning and transferable skills.

Action
Monitoring of English provision to ensure it supports refugees to progress towards employment while meeting their claimant commitment.

Action
Department for Work and Pensions pilot other employability approaches and partnership models between public bodies and the voluntary sector, e.g. health services recruiting bilingual refugees to assist in the delivery of public services. Refugee Women's Strategy Group will engage with key employment and employability agencies to facilitate the development of understanding of and response to the specific needs of refugee women.

Progress
Department for Work and Pensions and Scottish Refugee Council reviewed the training content to DWP staff's needs, started delivering courses and will develop best practice guidelines as a follow up. Both recognise the need to review training need regularly. As part of its ongoing quality and performance analyses, Department for Work and Pensions will continue monitoring and evaluation of claimant commitment.

Progress
Access to English Language Requirement for job seekers led to improvement in English proficiency. Ongoing monitoring by Department for Work and Pensions has led to a better understanding of refugees' language learning needs.

Progress
Training needs have changed and priority should be given to support refugees to: Articulate their skills and competencies to match the need of the UK labour market; Build social network; and gain work experience.

Green

Green

Amber

Next Steps Yr 3
Department for Work and Pensions and Scottish Refugee Council to continue to work collaboratively to review training needs and develop learning opportunities. Local authorities, via Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development group, will work with Scottish Refugee Council and Department for Work and Pensions to build on existing training to up-skill their staff. The Scottish Government will revisit the Scoping Study on Support Mechanisms for the Recognition of Skills, Learning and Qualifications of Migrant Workers and refugees.

Next Steps Yr 3
Department for Work and Pensions will continue to fund provision that will complement existing English Language provision.

Next Steps Yr 3
To identify the level of uptake of the Employability Fund. The employment group will disseminate learning and promote these priorities to Scottish Government, local authorities and Department for Work and Pensions to encourage funding for initiatives, which would meet them.

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Outcome 3
Refugees access services designed to support entrepreneurialism and an increased proportion use their skills to contribute to Scotland's economy and society.

Action
Stakeholders build upon existing mapping, identify enterprise activity and support.

Action
Ensure existing social enterprise bodies are engaged with refugees and their communities.

Action
The Scottish Government and Scottish Refugee Council explore and identify international micro business models that are transferable to the Scottish context.

Action
The Scottish Government and key stakeholders develop enterprise pathways to for refugees to realise entrepreneurial skills and talents.

Action
Ensure existing social enterprise bodies are engaged with refugees and their communities.

Progress
Initial contact made with social enterprise organisations. Due to resource constraints, further progress has not been made this year.

Amber

Next Steps Yr 3
Identify ways to progress this action through current New Scots structures or a short life working group.

http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00497690.pdf

Rationale

"i-**Refugee, the iAsylum seeker, the iMigrant**: modern ICTs (smartphones, tablets, social media, global positioning services) essential resource for action and decision-making in migration. **Basic needs have evolved**: shelter, water and food, mobiles, SIM cards and charging stations (Kosciejew 2015)

Refugees may have already developed **complex information strategies for purposes of migration** (e.g. to connect with their families, to navigate difficult migration routes on their journey to the host country, to deal with isolation from home)

Information Desire Paths: created where constructed ways take a circuitous route, have gaps, or are non-existent. They present the shortest, most easily navigated informational routes to address information needs:

- ◦ ensuring a smooth transition between cultures upon settlement to the migrating country
- ◦ creating a sense of belonging and social inclusion

What do we know?

Communicating: "nearly every young male refugee…has a smartphone devise. The devices provide a lifeline for people to their families and friends - apps like **WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype** allow to avoid the prohibitively high costs of making traditional phone calls across borders. Graham (2015) "the majority of refugees are travelling with mobile phones, or at least one amongst families or groups".

Navigating: Google Maps: able to make their own way like never before, without having to rely on the high prices and often horrendous conditions offered by people-traffickers.

◦ On crossing one national border their "iPhones tell them that that is Croatia" (Gill, 2015 p. 26) one step nearer to their intended destination.

Understanding: Foreign-currency-conversion calculators popular choice, helping people to avoid getting ripped off as they cross borders and currency areas (Price 2015).

No direct references were made to women using smartphones and there may be other disparities of use that should be investigated, e.g., urban/rural or age divides (e.g. women and girls often comprise the majority of civilians in conflict situations and are often the most vulnerable).

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 Refugee Council Coordinators and Focus Group with Syrian new Scots**

- ○ Phase 1: Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire (almost completed)
  - ○ Two SRC Coordinators, 9 Syrian women & 9 Syrian men. 1 volunteer

- ○ Phase 2: Glasgow

○ *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

Preliminary Results

English

- **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)

Cultural differences, cultural integration, wellbeing

- "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?" (SRC Coordinator)

- 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** (SRC Coordinator 2). However, "there were so many areas to cover" so the question was **"How do you do that and how do you prioritise"** ?

Shared Rhetoric / a common communication space

Technology v interpersonal sources

"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" (SCR Representative 1).

A shared communication practice on WhatsApp

Technologies
Mobile phones   √ (pay as you go sim cards)
WhatsApp   √ (central communication point)
Google Translate   √ (used by young people)

Computers - (not much use)
Websites? - (not much use)

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.

I Like

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

Everyday life encounters

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
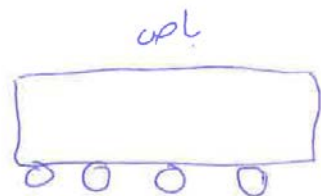
Jane's drawing of bus/hospital incident

"the transportation for us is even more important than food. It's very very important".

Emma's drawing of bus/hospital incident

"I fear learning English will take too long".

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

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

Family reunion & Financial stability

"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)
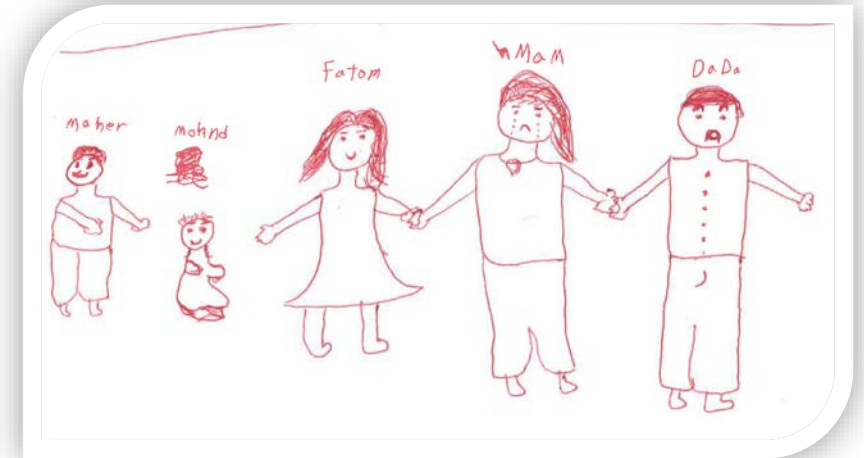
"we are always thinking, we are very stressed, very worried. We are not enjoying life because of our worries, being stressed, always being stressed about this…this makes it hard to integrate. It's all an on-going worry…"
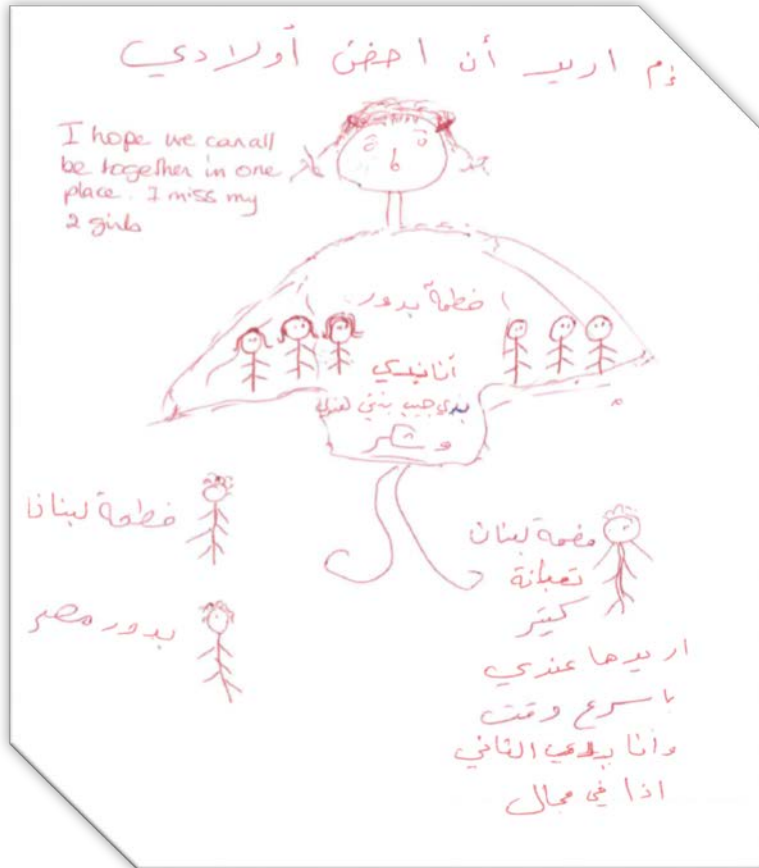
Maria's drawing showing her holding her daughters and sons
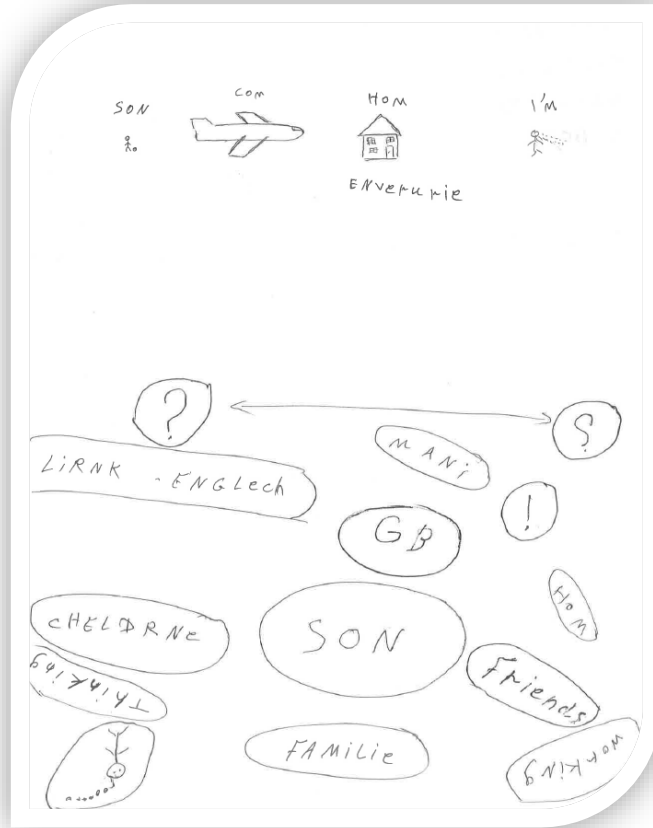
Bill's concerns around family reunion, English language, financial security and integration
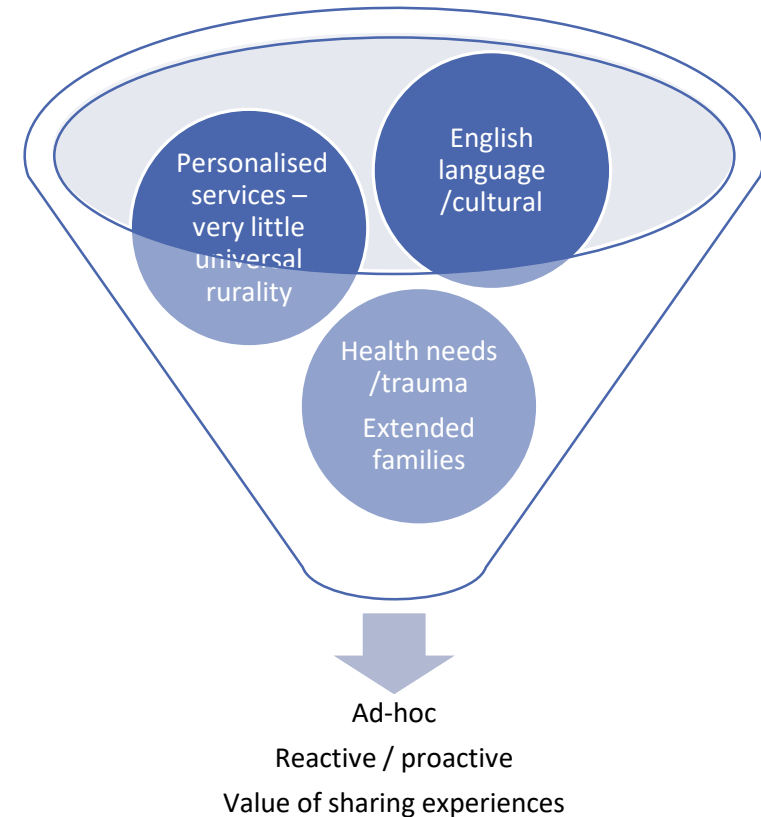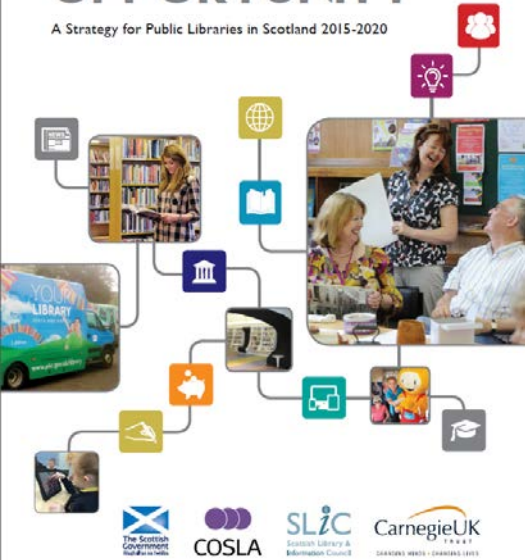

Nicola's drawing depicting her family in Syria

"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).

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" (SRC Coordinator 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 (SRC Coordinator 1).

Personalised services – very little universal rurality

English language /cultural

Health needs /trauma

Extended families

Ad-hoc
Reactive / proactive
Value of sharing experiences

Can libraries help?

One of the strategic aims of SLIC is centred on libraries promoting 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

SRC Coordinators

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"

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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

Would you like to help?

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

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