

Refugee Health Policy and Strategy Action Group

Summary Report, September 2019



Mental Health
Foundation
Scotland



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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The Refugee Health Policy and Strategy Action Group was established in July 2017 with three-year funding from the Scottish Government Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund.

The primary focus of the action group is to increase the engagement of refugees with the wider health and social care policy landscape in Scotland through building capacity of refugees and raising awareness of their mental health and wellbeing needs.

This is to improve the representation of refugees so that health and social care systems can appropriately and quickly address issues of trauma, distress and ill-health arising from the life experiences of refugees living in Scotland.

The key outcomes of these projects are:

- **Refugees living in Scotland are active advocates for mental health and wellbeing both locally and nationally**
- **Local and national health and civic society agencies are engaged in refugee-led prevention and support approaches to service planning and provision**
- **Statements and dialogues on mental health and wellbeing are being initiated and led by refugees in places and spaces across Scotland**

This report outlines the achievement of the programme from July 2017 until June 2019, where the initial focus has been working within the three local authority areas of Glasgow, North Ayrshire and North Lanarkshire.

Policy Context



The geographical distribution of the refugee population in Scotland has changed. Whilst refugees are now settled across all of the 32 Local Authority areas in Scotland, Glasgow remains the centre of the refugee population both for people going through the asylum process, and those who have confirmed refugee status.

The political landscape in Scotland looks favourably upon asylum seekers and refugees; and this commitment is outlined in the New Scots Strategy, a framework designed to support refugee integration in Scotland.

New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 to 2022 is the second strategy that sets out Scotland's approach to welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. It recognises the challenges that continue to exist and can limit the inclusion of refugees in Scottish society with a number of actions to mitigate these challenges. It also acknowledges that refugees bring strength, knowledge and skills that are an asset to our communities.

The Mental Health Foundation, alongside Scottish Refugee Council, co-chair the Health and Wellbeing Subgroup of the New Scots Strategy. The work of the Refugee Health Policy and Strategy Action Group is placed very much in the context of these structures and supports the implementation of the actions associated with the subgroup.

These include building on the core principles of New Scots which are:

- Integration from day one
- A rights-based approach
- Strong refugee involvement
- Inclusive societies where everyone is enabled to be active citizens
- Working together in strong partnerships

Background to the Project



The origins of the Refugee Health Policy and Strategy Action Group began with the Mental Health Foundation receiving one-year funding from the Scottish Government to work with Syrian refugees resettled in Scotland through the Vulnerable Person Scheme.

This project was called Musawa (Equality in Arabic) and was delivered in partnership with Freedom from Torture. It aimed to increase the visibility and voice of refugees in health forums at a policy and strategic level across Scotland.

The Musawa project also supported the development of relationships with a number of local authorities and voluntary organisations.

These relationships were strengthened with the new funding which enabled the work of Musawa to be widened out to include non-Syrian refugees and refugees who are going through the asylum system and do not experience the same access to statutory rights.

In addition our work has expanded to include more local authority areas.

Key achievements of Musawa included:

- Engagement of 100 Syrian refugees (incl. children) through a number of events.
- Delivery of "*Engaging with Survivors of Torture*" training to 41 staff and volunteers working with Syrian refugees. This included staff from health and social care, education (including ESOL), housing and social work.
- Syrian Refugees prepared and presented at two National Health Learning events in Glasgow and Perth attended by over 100 health and social care professionals; refugees contributing towards the New Scots Strategy engagement events and attending the launch of the New Scots Strategy 2018-2022.
- Preparation and dissemination of a briefing paper to all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland.

Refugee Health Policy and Strategy Action Group

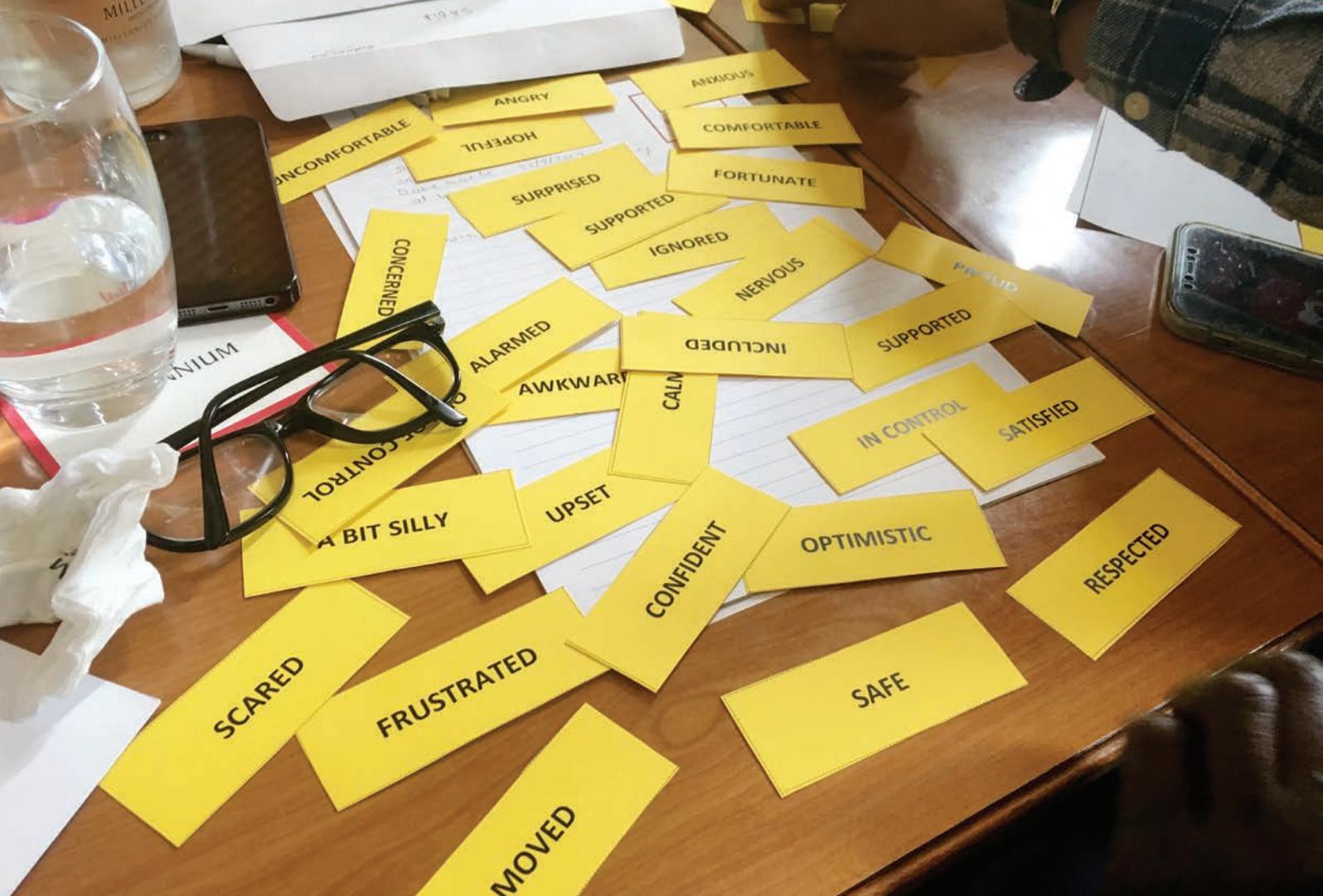


The Refugee Health Policy and Strategy Action Group has been building on the achievements of the Musawa project. Our approach has been to work intensively in three local authority areas to build capacity of refugee volunteers so that they can engage with the refugee community and represent lived experiences within local forums. We have successfully established a dynamic group of volunteers in Glasgow, North Ayrshire and North Lanarkshire who have brought their own skills as well as engaging in our health policy and rights training (see box).

We recruited 12 volunteer participants from refugee backgrounds all of whom continue to engage in the project. The volunteer group represent the new settlement patterns; they live in North Lanarkshire, North Ayrshire and Glasgow; and include a range of nationalities Syrian, Somali, Ethiopian, Iranian, Nigerian and Albanian and include men and women.

Our volunteers have led the process of creating different resources to raise awareness about refugee mental health and wellbeing. These innovative approaches are documented below. In addition we have a commitment from three new local authority areas to actively engage with asylum seekers and refugees on mental health and wellbeing issues.

Our strategic role within the New Scots Health and Wellbeing Sub-Group has helped us to connect and make the case for wider refugee representation and voices in service provision. This is significant as New Scots structures are linked to national policy and also local authorities, third sector and academic representatives. The Action Group is exploring ways asylum seekers and refugees can become more active participants in New Scots structures to ensure they continue to inform policy at a strategic level.



Health Policy and Rights Volunteer Training

Prior to the development and delivery of training, we brought together participants who had been involved in our wider refugee health work. This was a listening and advisory exercise that created a space to reflect on previous practice and how best to engage new people in this work and what the training could best focus on.

This led to the development of a four-module training programme for refugee volunteers focusing on mental health, human rights entitlements and the right to health, health policy and advocacy, and communication and leadership skills. This was to enable volunteers to become advocates for their communities in

their local areas, and to develop the communication and advocacy skills needed to engage effectively in mental health topics and with forums and working groups across Scotland.

The training evaluated very well with participants comments including:

"I learnt a lot of information, for example, I learned about the UK rules, about the GPs and education system in the UK..."

"[the training] makes me confident, and makes me happy, because I know I am going to, what I have learnt from here, I'm going to help other people"

Project Delivery



Our volunteers have connected with local groups and people, in areas they have prioritised, so they can actively advocate for the mental health and wellbeing needs of refugees. All the resources developed locally are designed to instigate dialogue on wellbeing and refugee mental health.

The civic forum project in Glasgow is directly linked with the New Scots Strategy and offers an opportunity for dialogue around representation of asylum seekers and refugees in public life and ways in which they can have a voice and tackle isolation in their new society.

The storytelling and the poster productions in North Lanarkshire, which will be displayed in public areas, aims to start conversations in local communities with small refugee population to allow them to share their experiences.

The gardening project in North Ayrshire is multi-dimensional in concept. It allows communities to come together in a therapeutic setting, and work together, in addition to providing space for volunteers to discuss mental health and integration in Scotland.





Glasgow – Voice and Visibility, The New Scots

Our volunteers have produced an awareness film about civic forums which will be launched at a national event on 25 September at the University of Strathclyde's Technology and Innovation Centre. The film allows asylum seekers and refugees to better understand the purpose of civic forums and the opportunities that exist for involvement within health, education and housing engagement forums across Glasgow.

The volunteers have connected with the Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership, Glasgow City Council (Education Services) and the Scottish Refugee Council.

Volunteers led each step of the filming process which included:

- The identification of key representatives from civic forums, refugees, human rights advocates
- Volunteers agreeing the framing questions, as a guide, to structure the video outputs, eg:
 - What is the purpose of a civic forum?
 - What are the opportunities for involvement?
 - What are the key barriers for people that want to be involved?
 - How can asylum seekers and refugees be involved in civic forums?

The process of film planning, development and deciding what the film would communicate, was crucial to ensure it was relevant to the target audience. But also to demonstrate the ability of the volunteer group to work together and use the learning from the earlier training they participated in.

- Four days of filming in external sites including Clyde College, St Paul's High School, Scottish Refugee Council, Govan Community Project and Mental Health Foundation offices.

As well as highlighting the topic of civic participation, it has also enabled the volunteers to connect with the spaces where the civic meetings are held.

This activity engaged with over 30 people from across the collaborating agencies with filming locations including health and civic forum meetings and interviewing civic and legal experts.

- During the editing phase the volunteer team learned about the editing process and reduced the running time to an appropriate 8 minutes from over 1 hour.

This experience was complemented by adding music and subtitles. It was decided to translate the subtitles to Arabic to ensure wider linguistic accessibility that exists within the refugee communities across Scotland.

Examples of Impact



This project (including the civic forum video) was presented at the Glasgow City Integration Joint Board Public Engagement Committee on 28 August. At this meeting, our volunteers highlighted some of the key barriers and offered advice on how asylum seeking communities could be better engaged in public life.

One of our Glasgow based volunteers took the initiative to connect the project with the Govan Community Project Men's Group. This is a group of local asylum seekers and refugees who have formed a social space to welcome new migrants in the city.



One of our volunteers organised an event in Govan to introduce our project to 12 of the group and discussed a wide range of themes around mental health, explored themes around civic forum participation for refugees as well as taking part in mindfulness exercise. This 'by us for us' approach has been vital for the sustainability of the project learning as it allowed us to connect with the target group, meaning that the local film resource developed is informed and tailored to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

Another volunteer attended a meeting at the Health and Social Care Partnership Forum at Clyde College to better understand how meetings are conducted, in addition to having the opportunity to express some of his ideas to the organisers on how refugees can engage in this type of forum.

We have partnered with the Glasgow School of Art (Design Innovation and Service Design) for Masters students to research and engage with asylum seekers, refugees and public services to design and recommend ways to be more inclusive and promote better collaborative civic forums in Glasgow. This has resulted in a report which will be available on the MHF website.



North Ayrshire – Gardening for Produce Project

Our volunteers have connected with the Ayrshire Community Trust to design and deliver a gardening project alongside other volunteers from non-refugee backgrounds. This shared activity has a longer term aim of becoming an enterprise activity where produce can be sold at some of the local markets in Ayrshire. Activities currently underway include:

- Photo-diary of the project for use at national exhibitions
- Four workshop sessions on cultivating fruit and vegetables
- “Working with Refugees” training for local non-refugee volunteers and staff at the Ayrshire Community Trust
- Delivery of enterprise training

Our North Ayrshire volunteers are now collaborating with the Ayrshire Community Trust volunteers in the gardening for produce project. One of our volunteers from a farming background in Syria has taken the lead explaining techniques around gardening to the other volunteers.



Following the planting of various vegetables, the group are now interested in how to connect this to broader enterprise to learn ways to sell their produce at local markets.

The Syrian refugee interaction, and involvement with the local volunteers, has demonstrated a shared connection within the local area and also an opportunity for the local population to work with people from different nationalities to get to know each other better.

The engagement of local volunteers in the “Working with Refugees” training we provided has been useful in building the confidence of people who had no previous interaction with refugees. This has led to the building of mutually supportive relationships.

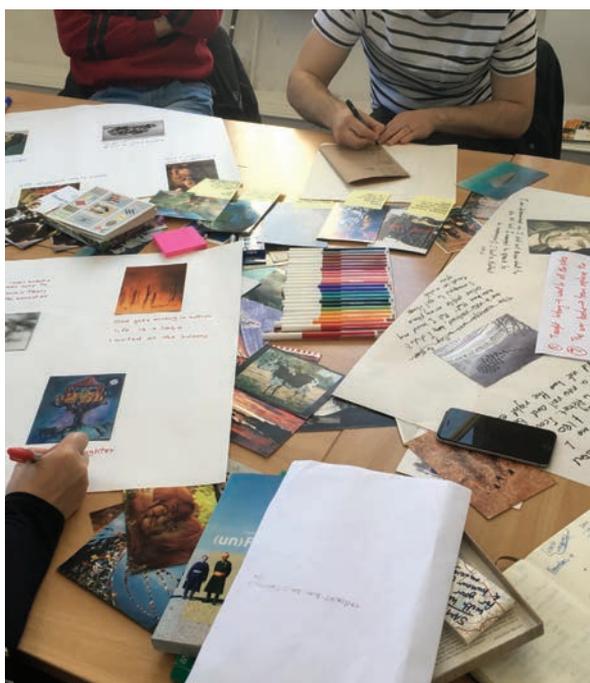
The North Ayrshire project has been documented through photography which will be exhibited locally and nationally to inspire communities to do things together.



North Lanarkshire – Stories from Syria

Our volunteers engaged with four workshops supported by the Village Storytelling Centre to explore story gathering techniques, editing, ethics and graphic design. They held a community-based story-gathering cafe in Motherwell to develop three compelling stories about their new life in Scotland.

The key purpose was to highlight that refugees are people with multiple identities and stories which go far beyond any experience of war in Syria. Although the project has given the opportunity for wider participation, it has been primarily led, designed and taken forward by three of our volunteers. It was this core group that sought the stories and the subsequent development of posters and postcards. The volunteers will now work with local libraries and public areas to showcase this work.



Insight: Asylum seekers at breaking point as trauma takes its toll on mental health



Despite the torture, his brother's job and his wife's testimony that the authorities were still looking for him, the Home Office remains unconvinced he would be at risk if he returned.



Majdi Zalaf, 23, says he felt so supported when he came to Glasgow, he wants to give something back. Picture: John Devlin

At one point, he was sent to a detention centre near Heathrow, ready for removal. "I knew if I was sent back to Sri Lanka, I would be arrested and killed so I decided to

The storytelling initiative has given confidence and opportunities to volunteers who are now keen to highlight some of the key issues affecting Syrians resettled in Scotland. One of our volunteers who was resettled in Coatbridge with his family has talked publicly about his own experience. He connected with the Syrian families across North Lanarkshire and utilising his acquired skills from the project engaged with mainstream media to share the mental health experiences of recently resettled Syrian families in Scotland.



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