

FACT SHEET

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE INTEGRATION JOURNEY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VOLUNTEERS/ SPONSORS AND HOSTS

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- **Integration looks different for each individual that experiences it.** Sponsors should recognize that what they expect integration to look like may not be how it evolves. Expectations of progress need to be checked and adapted.
- **Empowerment is pivotal to supporting integration journeys.** Hosts, sponsors and volunteers should avoid infantilization and not take ownership of the integration of those they welcome. Instead sponsors can support the cultivation of tools that those they welcome need to overcome barriers to progress or that allow them to make increasingly independent decisions about their own futures.
- Volunteers should recognize that they are **working with and not for the refugees they welcome**. The process is a collaborative one that requires the agency of everyone involved.
- **Preparing to step back as independence grows is a key consideration from day one.** If those that are welcomed need less support with time it is usually a sign that the integration process is going well.
- **A shared language, and access to second language training is key to long term integration.** A capacity to use the language of the country of welcome at the time of welcome is often one of the best indicators of the timeline to reach independence, followed closely by progress in language learning after arrival.
- Recognising that **trauma can affect behaviour and actions in diverse ways** can help sponsors and volunteers to manage how to react to and support those affected by it. Trauma can manifest well after resettlement and is not always tied to the feelings of safety or integration that someone experiences in their country of welcome.
- **Community sponsorship can strengthen existing bonds within a community**, build new ones and lead to better integration outcomes for future welcomed refugees. A welcoming community which strives for inclusivity can deeply support a family's integration journey. However, it is important to recognise that not all of the community will respond to a family arriving in a positive manner.

EVERY INTEGRATION JOURNEY IS DEEPLY PERSONAL AND UNIQUE

Integration may look different from one person to another. Integration is a journey with no clear timeline. For those supporting individuals or families whose welcome is community-led, managing expectations about what integration will look like is key to avoiding disappointment, impatience or unfair assessments of progress and commitment to the integration journey.

Recognising the complexity of the process of integration is pivotal to understanding individuals' feelings. Many things can impact the likelihood and length of time it may take for someone to feel integrated. There may be fears around loss of cultural identity, the barrier of a lack of shared language, the impact of trauma, or access to and inclusivity of the community the individual or family are in.

THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment¹ is a key factor in the integration of refugees resettling through safe routes. Although volunteers can support individuals in the process, it is important for them to also recognise that they cannot control every part of this integration process, nor can they control the feelings of the person(s) they are supporting. Rather, host and community sponsorship volunteers can help individuals to understand barriers they are facing, and how they can overcome them, but also to reflect and celebrate the progress they make.

The support of volunteers should be focused on empowerment to prepare the newly resettled family for independent living. It is essential that individuals are encouraged to set their own goals² and decide what is important for them to work towards as this can support both their motivation and outcomes. When the family first arrives, a group's provision of support is likely to be intensive and frequent, with a focus on practical help. As things start to stabilise for the family, the focus of support should become more about helping them to identify and pursue their aspirations and goals. As the family start to progress towards their goals, the focus of support needs to be more about coaching them to manage life in their country of welcome independently.

Work with the refugees you welcome, not for them: One of the difficulties that volunteers come across is accepting that sometimes the decisions that those they are supporting will make are not the decisions they would make themselves. This can include decisions around parenting, finances, education and job searches. Volunteers should remember that they are working “with them, not for them” and encourage the individuals to lead their own lives, building their independence which, in turn, supports their integration into society.

For the individual or family to manage life independently, there needs to be a change in the type of support offered, from ‘doing things for the family’ early on, to ‘teaching the family how to do things for themselves’. Examples of coaching the family towards this could be; supporting them to book a doctor’s appointment over the phone for themselves rather than doing it for them, or assisting them to report maintenance issues directly to their landlord rather than passing the message through a volunteer.

Some people may be happy to be more independent, others may require some encouragement and volunteers will learn how to negotiate this with the individuals they are supporting. Support from training organisations like Reset (in the UK) and charities acting in a mentoring role can often help to navigate these negotiations. Ultimately, the goal of community sponsorship is for the individuals welcomed to be as independent and integrated as possible, and although volunteers can support them, the end success will depend on them.

TIME

While the timeline of integration often involves significant support from sponsors in the first few days and weeks followed by progressively less interventions or requests for support over months and even years, it is not usually a completely consistent, predictable or linear trajectory. Nonetheless, if the sponsored family request less and less support over time, this is usually a sign of a successful integration process and of the support that has already been offered. Sponsors do not need to feel that they should offer support if the evidence of independence is there or it is not requested. Sponsor groups should consider exit planning³ from very early stages; it is important for both the group and family to think about how the support will change throughout the first year and beyond.

1 <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/introduction-integration/>

2 <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/working-towards-integration/>

3 <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/exit-planning/>

SHARED LANGUAGE AND ACCESS TO SECOND⁴ LANGUAGE TRAINING

An important factor to the success of integration is having a shared language between the sponsored refugee(s) and the sponsors and volunteers. A lack of shared language is a barrier to communication and can have both social and emotional impacts. Shared language alone does not guarantee that an individual will feel integrated, however, groups who have welcomed families or individuals who already have a good level of English have found it has a positive impact on their ability to communicate, access services and connect with others which in turn, impacts upon feelings of integration.

Learning a new language is no easy feat; it's hard, time-consuming, and easy to feel discouraged, especially when progress may be slow. For this reason, encouraging family members to have realistic expectations and a plan for what they want to achieve is a good way to keep motivated.

There are various ways to support individuals with their language. Both formal and informal⁵ second language opportunities gives individuals choice and autonomy in how they want to learn. Second language acquisition, and level of the native language of the resettlement country on arrival are among the strongest indicators of how long it will take for someone to live independently after arrival.

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Trauma will impact individuals in different ways⁶, and is central to the experiences of many refugees. The way in which one person responds may be entirely different to the response of another person. We should also be careful to not assume trauma and the impacts of the experiences faced by those we are supporting.

It is also easy to assume that a refugee's trauma has ended once they have been resettled in a new country. However, this is not always the case. Often symptoms of trauma are experienced once an individual is out of danger and beginning to feel safe. Stages of trauma frequently include the following and need specific approaches and tailored support for each stage:

Before migration: Persecution, possible torture and/or imprisonment, war, violence, economic hardship, loss.

During migration: Risk of life, escape, hardship, uncertainty.

After migration: Cultural difficulties, isolation, unemployment, poverty.

Recognising that trauma may present through different behaviours such as withdrawing from support, friends or family or not attending appointments or language classes is important. These behaviours may cause worry for those supporting individuals welcomed as they may appear to be signs that an individual is not willing or able to work toward integrating into their new environment. However, as symptoms of trauma, it is important to know that there is likely more beneath the surface and it is not simply about someone not wanting to engage or not being willing to work toward integrating. Being supportive of unexpected changes in plans shows that you are respectful of the family and their specific needs. It is normal to feel frustrated when plans need to change at short notice but keeping channels of communication open is key and respecting space when it is needed is also extremely important.

4 <https://training-resetuk.org/language/esol-group-leaders-detailed/>

5 <https://training-resetuk.org/education/creating-informal-english-learning/>

6 <https://training-resetuk.org/mental-health/considering-impact-trauma/>

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND ATTITUDES

An advantage of a sponsorship scheme is that volunteers can welcome families into the wider community because the group comes from the community itself. Sponsorship itself is a great opportunity for communities to strengthen their connections, lead to new friendships and collaborations and give people a sense of purpose and belonging within their villages, towns and cities. This in turn, can have a huge impact on the integration of the family or individuals welcomed into that environment as well as those that follow.

A welcoming community which strives for inclusivity can deeply support a family's journey of integration. However, it is important to recognise that not all of the community will respond to a family arriving in a positive manner. Sponsors should always prepare for the possibility of negative comments, bullying⁷ or hate crimes⁸ and access resources from support networks to ensure these events are adequately addressed and do not derail the integration process. You can read more about this in Reset's Media Toolkit⁹.

RESOURCES/FURTHER READING:

- <https://training-resetuk.org/group-management/media-toolkit-community-sponsorship-groups/>
- <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/hate-crime-briefing/>
- <https://training-resetuk.org/education/bullying/>
- <https://training-resetuk.org/mental-health/considering-impact-trauma/>
- <https://training-resetuk.org/education/creating-informal-english-learning/>
- <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/working-towards-integration/>
- <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/introduction-integration/>

Reset UK is a charity formed in 2018 to grow the Community Sponsorship movement in the UK which trains and supports volunteers across the UK to prepare to welcome refugees and to help them settle and integrate once they arrive. Reset UK also works with local authorities and other organisations to support volunteers in making community-led welcome happen.

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For more information on managing the expectations of sponsorship communities contact Reset UK at enquiries@resetuk.org.

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⁷ <https://training-resetuk.org/education/bullying/>

⁸ <https://training-resetuk.org/integration/hate-crime-briefing/>

⁹ <https://training-resetuk.org/group-management/media-toolkit-community-sponsorship-groups/>