

How to Engage Newcomers and the Wider Community in Refugee Sponsorship

Iftakhar Latif; Waltham Forest Community Sponsorship Partnership (WFCSP)

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Engaging with migrants and refugees in the community:

- When we started our Community Sponsorship group, it knew it was so important to involve migrants. We engaged with people who had been in our community for several years, who know what it is like to move and settle here from other countries.
- It was also important to involve refugees, who have been through the same experiences as the family we were about to welcome. Their experience is something we didn't have.
- We put out a call to all the mosques in Waltham Forest. Six Arabic speakers coming forward.
- A lot of women came forward. Was also important to get male Arabic speakers too. It is important that men are able to speak to other men in their native language.
- During a Citizens UK event, we met with Br. Abdulrahman, who resettled to the UK through the Local Authority. He really impressed us, and we asked him to join the group. And we invited other people who have resettled as refugees to the local area – even though they didn't speak English yet, they could still add value and direct support for the family.
- There were benefits to us of having migrants and refugees in the group to help the family. But they also benefited from it. It gave them confidence and self-belief – that they were now in a position to help other people to settle. And it also helped them to be more included and accepted in our local community.

Engaging with Mosques:

- A lot of groups in UK are church groups. In church, there is a hierarchy. People are employed with jobs, there is structure. In mosques- each one is an independent organisation. They are funded by the local congregation. Most people who run them are volunteers. So, getting their time is difficult – they have so much else happening in their lives.
- But if you do engage with them – if you need money, clothes, house, volunteers --- just put out a call and people will come forward. They want to help, and just need to know how.
- Go after Friday prayers, ask to speak to the Imam or committee members. Present what you want to do, and ask how they can be involved
- Don't make things a burden – say you'll do the paperwork, but you'd like them to call out for Arabic speakers/ donations of furniture / landlord / social support when the family arrives -whatever it may be. If you give very specific tasks, they will get involved.
- We involved all ten mosques in the area. We put a call out for fundraising – on Friday prayers, they asked people to donate, and raised £14,000 in one day.
- It also led to more volunteers in community – people came forward to furnish the property, donate, help with social welfare applications. It developed a wider network.

Engaging with schools and other local institutions

- It was also important to go beyond Muslim community. So we engaged with a local Sixth Form College (16-18 year olds). The students raised £4,000.
- The relationship with college was fruitful when the family arrived. The principal accepted the older children at the college– and has allowed them to stay at the college longer than normal, until they are ready for university.

- Building these relationships with GPs, mosques, colleges, and so forth is important – it makes it so much easier when you need help. The personal networks facilitate things so much easier. And we always received so much more than we asked for.
- We are also working with the local primary schools. They raised £14,000 for our project! They also incorporated refugee awareness into their curriculum. It's not just about bringing the family – its about the future – these young people are going to the be the generation of change. If we engage them now, it will make it easier to bring change and welcome more refugees in the future.
- Through our wider engagement, we are breaking down barriers in community – For example, it was one of our volunteer's first ever experience of visiting and engaging with a mosque. We have ordinary people from different backgrounds in the community coming together. It is inspiring for everybody.