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Cathryn Morgan, Family First and Refugee Coordinator at Ceredigion County Council, has been championing Community Sponsorship since 2016, and last week, accompanied Cllr Ellen ap Gwyn, Leader of Ceredigion County Council, to accept the Local Authority Award at the Community Sponsorship Awards in London.

I love it when communities come together to achieve something great. And so, it's lucky that part of my role at Ceredigion Council is to support Community Sponsorship - helping groups of ordinary people welcome and support a refugee family in their first year in the UK.

Being involved in Community Sponsorship is an amazing way to have a positive impact on a global crisis. But besides empowering refugees to build a new life, and fostering more resilient communities, Community Sponsorship can also help councils meet their resettlement targets.

Community Sponsorship has been established in Canada for 40 years, but was only introduced in the UK in 2016. Since then, nearly 400 refugees have been resettled by sponsor groups. I hope that with local authorities as champions, that number will be much higher soon.

Community Sponsorship in a nutshell

Sponsor groups (usually groups of 10-20 friends, neighbours, or community groups) raise funds and find housing for a family, and submit an application to the Home Office for permission to support a refugee family for their first year in the UK. Local authorities must give consent to sponsor groups before they submit their applications.

Refugees resettled through the programme benefit from having a network of local people supporting them to do essential life skills, like registering with a GP, finding school places, or learning the local bus routes. They are better empowered to rebuild their lives and are better connected to their new community.

The opportunity for local authorities

Community Sponsorship is a huge opportunity for councils, and benefits existing communities too. All Community Sponsorship applications approved by councils before the end of March 2020 will contribute to UK government resettlement targets; for those yet to reach their targets, now is the best time to focus on progressing applications.

There are benefits for the local area, too. Community Sponsorship brings together friends, faith groups, colleagues, or neighbours. These sponsor groups deepen and broaden their social ties through the course of sponsorship, creating more resilient communities and boosting individual wellbeing.

Making it work in your area

However, Community Sponsorship is still a new scheme. You might be wondering how to mitigate risk, what safeguarding measures you need, or simply where to begin. Don't worry; we're all still learning. In Ceredigion, we were lucky that the leader of the council, Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn, was a champion from the start. However, we still had to learn to make it work in our area.

In Ceredigion, refugee families and sponsor groups were faced with an added language challenge: The parents of one refugee family were taking ESOL lessons to learn English, whilst the children were taught Welsh intensively because most of the primary schools in Ceredigion teach through the medium of Welsh. To help the family manage with moving to a bilingual area, the children received daily English language lessons in the school and they can now communicate through both English and Welsh – and of course Arabic. In fact, their excellent language skills have [recently been covered by the BBC!](#)

Tips for making Community Sponsorship a success:

1. Create a network of people you can seek advice from within the council. By finding people who you can run questions of data protection, health or housing past, you will be able to progress applications with more ease and speed.
2. Seek support from a senior level. In our case, our Refugee Resettlement Partnership Group has been instrumental in the programme's success - with representatives for health, social care, DWP, the police and even the fire services all involved. As a result of this, fire officers now carry out home safety checks in the houses secured for refugees, and the police have prioritised talks against discrimination at local schools.
3. Get in touch with Reset - the leading independent charity supporting Community Sponsorship in the UK. They have a wealth of training and advice tailored to local authorities as well as sponsor groups, and provide bespoke guidance (details below).

I first heard about Community Sponsorship three and a half years ago. Now, knowing that groups have used their initiative to welcome refugees to our area makes me even prouder of Ceredigion than I was before - and I'm pleased to have been a part of that. I urge all local authorities to find out how they can best support Community Sponsorship - and to make the most of the resources available to you in the process.

To find out how to make the most of Community Sponsorship, visit Reset's guide for local authorities: <https://resetuk.org/community-sponsorship/support/local-authority> or give them a call on 020 3582 9882