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### Citation

Ornert, Anna (2020). Interventions to promote wellbeing of refugees in high- and middle-income countries. K4D Helpdesk Report 736; Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK.

### URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/96294/>

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# Interventions to promote wellbeing of refugees in high- and middle-income countries

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6 March 2020

## Question

*What evidence is there to support specific interventions promoting refugee wellbeing, including the role of social capital and networking? Please focus primarily on evidence from high- and middle-income countries.*

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## 1. Summary

Although there is a growing literature about refugee wellbeing, and the links with social capital and networking, the evidence around interventions is more nascent. Despite the interest in refugee wellbeing, there is no commonly agreed definition of wellbeing in the literature on this. Most definitions used include some combination of psychological, affective, social, cultural, and even practical, dimensions. Similarly, the term social capital is contested, although most definitions draw on the seminal work on social capital by Putnam (1995) or Bourdieu (1986), to include aspects of networks, reciprocity, trust, shared norms and social agency.

Where evidence on interventions has been identified, it is often limited in scope (for example, studies of smaller-scale, or one-off, interventions or with a limited sample size of participants). Existing evidence is overwhelmingly available from interventions in high-income countries. Interventions in middle-income countries were more elusive.

This review highlights evidence around supporting refugee wellbeing across five main areas: (1) community-based interventions; (2) peer-based support and cultural brokering; (3) sponsorship schemes; (4) digital and social media; and (5) non-traditional mental health and wellbeing interventions.

A number of factors have been associated with successful **community-based interventions**. They are often culturally specific and appropriate; focus on post-migration daily stressors; delivered in non-stigmatising settings or by trusted actors (eg, trusted community venues, refugee community organisations, schools, faith-based or civil society organisations); address social determinants of mental health issues; build upon refugees' cultural strengths; and engage (or highlight the value of doing so) refugee communities in the design of the intervention.

There is an emerging body of literature on **peer-based support and cultural brokering**. Peer-based approaches are based on empathetic understanding through shared experience and are often led by individuals who share common beliefs, ethnicity, religion or other community factors to change behaviours and improve specific outcomes. Despite evidence of the effectiveness of peer-based interventions, peer support groups for refugees are limited and where programmes exist, research on participant experience is scarce. Cultural brokering is used to address cultural barriers to service access and provision. A cultural broker is an individual who takes on the role of bridging individuals or groups of differing cultures for the purpose of improving communication and reducing conflict. Although there is evidence that cultural brokers have improved service delivery to immigrants, there is limited information on the actual activities that they engage in.

There is growing interest in the potential of **sponsorship** to support refugee wellbeing. There is evidence of multiple benefits emerging from the relationships between refugees and sponsors including: emotional support; facilitation of access to basic services; assistance overcoming barriers to integration (eg, language and cultural knowledge); strengthening of intergroup relationships; development of social connections; and higher levels of satisfaction with the resettlement process. There is also evidence that government schemes are more likely to prioritise structural integration dimensions, while community sponsorship prioritises cultural dimensions, community engagement and wider social networking. Direct participation by civil society in resettlement has been identified as a major element in the success of Canada's private sponsorship programme. A number of criticisms have been raised: (1) private sponsorship schemes risk contributing to the privatisation of refugee resettlement; (2) supporting privately sponsored refugees depends heavily on a small number of individuals and organisations; (3)

sponsors themselves need a range of support and (4) some sponsors may impose their own values and ideas on the refugees they sponsor.

There is also emerging interest in the potential for **digital and social media** to build refugees' social capital and networks. Although information and communication technology has helped improve community connection and facilitate the generation of social capital historically, evidence on the role of ICTs in the current refugee crisis is more limited. Nevertheless, there is evidence that digital technology can provide refugees and migrants with information, help tackle isolation and support engagement and connection to the cultural practices of both host and home communities. There is evidence that maintaining social relationships in the home country helps to overcome adjustment challenges.

There is also a body of evidence around non-traditional interventions to support refugees' mental health and wellbeing. These types of interventions include participatory music, community gardening and interventions to encourage nature-based leisure. The evidence for these relies mainly on smaller-scale studies or case studies.

Several gaps in the research have been identified:

- More research is needed on the most critical conditions and factors for successful refugee resettlement more generally (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2017). There is a need for further evidence to support understanding of how successful interventions for promoting migrant mental health and wellbeing can be developed by strengthening social capital (Lecerof, Stafstrom and Westerling, 2016).
- There is limited research which explores social capital from the perspective of refugee communities themselves (Pittaway, Bartolomei and Doney, 2016).
- There is a limited body of evidence related to school-based interventions related to wellbeing (Sullivan and Simonson 2016). There are few models for school-based interventions to support refugee-background students and a lack of evidence concerning their impact (Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs, 2014).
- Despite evidence that public libraries can provide knowledge, social and emotional support during the resettlement process, there are few studies on the role of public libraries in the lives of refugees (Vårheim, 2014).
- There is limited evidence about the benefits attributed to sports participation, including the specific processes through which inclusion may or may not be occurring, as well as the promotion of wellbeing through sports for 'culturally and linguistically diverse migrants' (Gibbs and Block, 2017).
- Existing research on refugee group-based programmes has not explored peer- or group-based support for resettlement challenges (Badali, Grande and Mardikian, 2017)
- Although there is evidence that cultural brokers have improved service delivery to young immigrants, there is limited information on the actual activities that brokers engaged in to support individuals with mental health challenges (Brar-Josan and Yohani, 2019).
- Private sponsorship is not well-researched (Hyndman, Payne, and Jimenez, 2016)
- There is a historic body of literature that supports the role of ICTs in improving community connection and facilitating the generation of social capital, but evidence on the role of ICTs in the current refugee crisis in Europe is more limited (Almohamed, Vyas and Zhang, 2017; AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018). More research is needed to

further understand whether social media technology facilitates or hinders integration processes in various societal spheres (Komito, 2011; cited in Alencar, 2017)

- Despite the evidence of benefits of community gardening for physical health and wellbeing, limited research exists to document the effects of community gardens on wellbeing amongst vulnerable populations in countries other than the United States.
- The effects of government policies on the way refugees perceive and experience integration, as well as host societies' perceptions and actions towards refugees, and how these affect their settlement in terms of actions (eg social support, discriminatory acts etc) is a neglected area of research (Alencar 2017: 1601).

## 2. Definitions: wellbeing, social capital and social networks

Despite a growing body of research on refugee wellbeing, there is no commonly agreed definition of **wellbeing**. It is conceptualised and operationalised in many different ways (Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett, 2010: 5). Whilst, wellbeing was traditionally linked to mental health - and examined in relation to past experienced trauma (Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett, 2010: 6), it increasingly includes a range of social and cultural dimensions. Examples of the range of definitions of wellbeing found in the literature include:

- 'psychological adaptation' (Berry and Hou, 2006: 254)
- 'individual perceptions of one's life [including] cognitive aspects [eg, life satisfaction] as well as affective aspects' (AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018: 1)
- 'a more holistic sense [including] the importance of agency and ability to live or to *be well*' (Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett, 2010: 6)
- 'the ability, independence, and freedom to act and the possession of the requisite goods and services to be psychologically content' (Ahearn, 2000; cited in Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett, 2010: 6)
- 'a state [...] in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community' (World Health Organisation, 2013; cited in Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017)

For the purposes of this report, a broad definition of wellbeing has been employed, based on these holistic understandings. Crucially, wellbeing is also related to the broader social environment in which refugees have been resettled (Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett, 2010: 6) including processes of acculturation (Berry and Hou, 2016), integration and social inclusion.

There is evidence that refugee wellbeing is adversely affected by: cultural and language barriers; differences in cultural expressions of illness and coping; familial processes that facilitate or complicate interpersonal interactions; levels of social acceptance; lack of social support networks; experiences of poverty; and discrimination and loss of valued roles and identities (Goodkind et al, 2014; Caxaj and Gill, 2017: 1121; Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017). Goodkind (2006: 79) highlights that refugee men and women often have different wellbeing needs and resources. The wellbeing of women is important not just for them but their families, yet they often face the greatest resettlement challenges (eg, human capital resources, employment discrimination, family caring commitments, health and psychological wellbeing).

To counteract these adverse effects on wellbeing, there is a growing interest in supporting the social capital of refugees. Despite this, **social capital** remains a contested term with no commonly agreed definition (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 101). Most understandings build on the seminal work on social capital by Putnam (1995) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986) on cultural capital. For example, Berry and Hou (2016: 255) use the term to refer to individuals' social networks (Berry and Hou, 2016: 255). Elliott and Yusuf's (2014) suggest that it is an individuals' relationship with those social networks as well as 'the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness' (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 101). Indeed, many definitions of social capital include these aspects of networks, reciprocity, trust, shared norms as well as a dimension of social agency (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 101). More simply, social capital is seen as the glue that holds society together (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014; Pittaway, Bartolomei and Donei, 2016).

Social capital is generally understood to be either **bonding** (ie, networks within an individuals' own group) or **bridging** (ie, networks between an individual and other groups) (Berry and Hou, 2016). Both of these can affect a refugees' sense of belonging (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014; Berry and Hou, 2016: 255) and, subsequently, wellbeing. Bonding social networks link refugees with other members of the same national or ethnocultural group and may strengthen a refugees' identification with the home country. It involves an aspect of common identity (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 102). In contrast, bridging social networks involve relationships in the host community which may promote sense of belonging to wider society (Berry and Hou, 2016: 255). These are often based on 'looser connections' with other groups in the community and involves diversity (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 102). There is evidence that both bonding and bridging capital are crucial to refugee wellbeing (Berry and Hou, 2016). A third type of social capital is **linking** social capital (ie, the connections refugees have to state structures and institutions) which relate to power and authority (Elliott and Yusuf 2014; Hanley et al, 2018).

A common theme in this literature is **social connectedness**, which is understood to facilitate wellbeing (Caxaj and Gill, 2017). For refugees, social connectedness is linked with access to both practical and emotional support (AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018: 2-3). It is also linked to sense of belonging (Berry and Hou, 2016). **Social networks** are often seen as crucial for successful refugee resettlement (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 101) by providing sense of belonging, and emotional and practical support. Social networks can be mobilised into social capital (Hanley et al, 2018). Hanley et al (2018: 125) define social networks as 'families, extending to friends, peers, acquaintances and professional contacts'. Nevertheless, belonging can also be a 'contradictory experience' with both positive and negative implications for wellbeing (Caxaj and Gill, 2017: 1120). Positive aspects of communal ties include affiliation to religious institutions, connection to place, shared values and contentment with geographic isolation. Negative aspects can be normative/ rigid expectations (ie, pressure to conform), role strain, reduced privacy and autonomy and difficulty accessing new information (Caxaj and Gill, 2017: 1120-1121).

The following sections in this report highlight evidence from a range of interventions that support refugee wellbeing. Many include aims of generating social capital through engagement with social networks.

### 3. Community-based interventions

Goodkind et al (2014) highlight multiple benefits of community-based interventions. They are often culturally appropriate, targeted at post-migration daily stressors, occur in non-stigmatising

settings, address social determinants of mental health issues, and build upon refugees' cultural strengths. They also frequently include a focus on improving language proficiency, social support and re-establishing important social roles (Goodkind et al, 2014). Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark (2017: 102) suggest that community-based interventions that 'bridge Western and non-Western practices' can enhance the wellbeing of refugee families and support their settlement in new communities.

The **Refugee Wellbeing Project** (RWP) is a community-based intervention, jointly developed in 2000 by Dr. Jessica Goodkind and a group of refugee community members. Today, it is an annual 9-month programme pairing undergraduate students from the University of New Mexico with refugee families in order to mobilise community resources and engage in mutual learning. It uses a social justice approach, involving partnership between refugees, community organisations and universities to address multiple sources of psychological distress amongst refugees in a holistic manner (eg, psychological, material, physical, social, educational and cultural). It also uses an ecological approach, focusing on multiple levels of context that impact on wellbeing: microsystem (eg, family, school, work settings), ecosystem (eg, formal and informal social structures) and macrosystem (eg, political, legal, economic and other social systems). It also uses a strengths-based perspective, acknowledging refugees' strengths, resources, multilingual abilities, coping strategies, community bonds and support (Goodkind et al, 2020).

The Project has 5 key aims:

- Increase refugees' ability to navigate their new communities;
- Improve refugees' access to community resources;
- Enhance meaningful social roles by valuing refugees' cultures, experiences and knowledge;
- Reduce refugees' social isolation; and
- Increase communities' responsiveness to refugees (Goodkind et al, 2020)

This is achieved through two key project activities (see Refugee Wellbeing Project website for additional details<sup>1</sup>):

(1) **Learning Circles** focus on cultural exchange between refugees and American undergraduate students. These are jointly developed and facilitated by undergraduates and refugees and are held weekly for two-hours at a local community centre, which also offer computer and fitness classes, and other free activities that can provide added sources of support for refugees. Childcare and transport are provided for the refugee families attending the Learning Circles. Through involving refugee elders, parents, and children, the cultural exchange format is intended to foster improved inter-generational respect and communication. Topics explored include cultural norms/expectations, discrimination, child discipline and traditional art/music/clothing. Others relate to cultural celebrations in the United States. Students and refugee partners are invited to share topics of mutual interest which emerge during their time together. In addition to these group activities, one-to-one learning takes place, with refugees and students working in pairs, on an ongoing basis, on an aspect of learning identified by the refugee (eg, English competency, completing job applications). Simultaneously, undergraduates engage in

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<sup>1</sup> More details about this project are available on <https://rwp.unm.edu>

learning about the culture, experiences and knowledge of refugees. Activities are also targeted at refugee children and adolescents, including age-appropriate cultural conversations, art and other learning activities, tutoring and help with homework.

(2) **Advocacy** is based on the relationships formed between undergraduates and refugees during the Learning Circles. Each student is paired with between 1 and 3 refugee partners. They then work together for 4-6 hours per week in order to mobilise community resources to address needs identified by the refugee family (eg, navigating government systems for healthcare, financial assistance, education, professional re-certification and housing; job-seeking; language learning; accessing public transport and/or learning how to drive). Work is undertaken to transfer advocacy skills to the refugee families in order to increase sustained access to resources following the end of the RWP. During this process, students may also learn about aspects of their own society they were not previously aware of and they may also be exposed to new foods, customs and ideas through spending time with the refugee families. According to the RWP website, 'because the time spent together is consistent and intensive, often strong relationships are formed [...] Social support is an important part of life in a new country for newcomers and it is likewise supportive for undergraduates.' Students may also support children or teenagers to help with homework, access tutoring, extra-curricular activities or other needed support. Student-advocates also have weekly group supervision sessions with their instructor/ supervisor and classmates.

Multiple positive impacts have been identified for participants in the RWP, including improved quality of life, decreased psychological stress, increased English language proficiency and greater satisfaction with resources (Goodkind, 2006; Goodkind et al, 2014). Goodkind et al suggest that 'interventions that promote social justice by addressing social inequities in a holistic, strengths-based way have the potential to reduce the burden of mental illness among refugees' (Goodkind et al, 2014). Identified benefits of the RWP are not just limited to refugees. Goodkind (2006: 83) highlights the 'genuine engagement' that emerged between refugees and undergraduate students, whilst Hess et al, (2014: 351) note that 'transformative learning' shaped undergraduate students' awareness of individual privilege and humanisation of the 'other'; understanding of the relationship between social and other inequities; and a stated desire to effect structural change to address these disparities. The process also enabled refugee participants to recognise their own knowledge and contributions; find their voice in the host society; empower them to 'see beyond racism' and recognise ways to address health and social disparities through education, greater social support and access to resources (Hess et al, 2014: 351).

Other studies examine **family-focused interventions**. Betancourt et al (2015, cited in Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017: 103), examine interventions designed for a family unit instead of the individual, highlighting the strength of the family as a resource and source of support. The study finds that interventions to strengthen family resources through social support networks and community supports enabled families to protect their children from post-settlement challenges (Betancourt et al 2015, cited in Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017: 103). By focusing on resettlement challenges family-focused interventions can strengthen the skills needed to navigate the community and its resources (Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017: 103).

A 2003 report by Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services reviews parent strengthening programmes in the United States (BRYCS, 2003, cited in Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017). This finds that most family-focused interventions are culturally specific to the targeted



refugee group. The interventions cover similar topics (eg. parenting skills, information about school systems and child abuse laws, and language classes). Effective programmes shared a number of characteristics:

- Parents were involved in programme development and implementation;
- Community leaders were engaged in early stages of development;
- Potential barriers to attendance were identified and addressed;
- Concrete, experiential methods were utilised to teach parenting skills;
- Parental authority was enforced; and
- The intervention was strengths-based and focused on decreasing the acculturation gap (BRYCS 2003, cited in Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017).

Settling refugees in regions where other family members or the same ethnic community live can contribute to support and a greater sense of belonging. On the other hand, in areas without strong pre-existing ethnic communities, there is a greater need for community programmes to enhance wellbeing (Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017: 103). The authors suggest that interventions that address refugee wellbeing should focus on helping families navigate post-resettlement systems and challenges. This can be done by creating partnerships between community leaders, stakeholders and refugee families. Providing community support may bridge the gap between refugees' resettlement challenges and their hesitancy to engage with services (Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark, 2017: 103). Specifically, working with or through refugee community organisations (often already trusted by refugee families) can reduce negative perceptions around engaging with mental health services and increase the likelihood of engagement. Nevertheless, culturally-aligned family-focused interventions may not work for families that require more direct therapeutic interventions for mental health symptoms.

Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark (2017) make recommendations for designing community-based interventions:

- Engage the family as the central unit for intervention.
- Use community leaders (eg, established community members, religious leaders) in outreach and programme development.
- Address barriers to participation (eg, language, stigma around seeking help, access to services) and embed services into 'safe spaces' (eg, schools or community centres where families already attend).
- Ensure that basic needs are met to prevent families' existing coping resources from becoming overwhelmed. Employing 'community navigators' can help families access resources and navigate systems (eg, schools, courts).
- Use a psychoeducational approach to provide families with the tools they need to navigate new cultural norms and increase adaptation.
- Celebrate families' strengths and resiliency.

Pejic, Alvarado, Hess and Groark (2017) suggest that working with or through **refugee community organisations**, which are already trusted by refugee families, can reduce negative perceptions around engaging with mental health services and increase the likelihood of participation in interventions. Community organisations can reinforce refugee identity, making members feel safe, and contribute to social bonding (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014). In their study of

Somali refugee's involvement with Auckland Community Association (New Zealand), Elliott and Yusuf (2014: 108) find that this organisation enhanced the community's social capital, helped refugees overcome isolation, reinforced a sense of Somali identity and enabled refugees' engagement in the wider community.

Schmidtke (2018) examines the role of civil society organisations in **Neighbourhood Houses** (NH), a community-based intervention in Greater Vancouver (Canada), in building local community capacity for integration of 'newcomers' and addressing social exclusion through their provision of services. NHs were founded in 1938 to serve underprivileged groups with a range of social services to support social cohesion and inclusiveness (eg, employment support, day care, after school care, senior day activities, parent groups, recreation programmes, sociocultural events and youth leadership). Over the past two decades, they have taken on a key role in supporting the settlement and inclusion of newcomers (Schmidtke, 2018: 149-150). Schmidtke (2018:150) suggests that NHs are 'valuable sites for the formation of networks and social capital [and that] the seemingly mundane practice of interacting at NHs and participating in community-based activities can allow for the learning and practice of important civil and political skills'. On an individual level this contributes to overcoming social isolation and encouraging engagement in the wider community through 'providing entry into communal engagement in a non-threatening, service-based environment' (Schmidtke, 2018). On a communal level, NHs provides a physical and social framework for social networks, dialogue and communal empowerment, facilitating residents to work together towards collective goals. Although Canada's 'state-driven multiculturalism' and integration policies have provided the necessary framework for including newcomers, civil society actors and networks are responsible for how these processes unfold on the ground (Schmidtke, 2018: 154).

## School-based interventions

Because schools are often the primary point of socialisation for refugee children and youth, their role can be critical in promoting successful resettlement outcomes, enabling social inclusion (Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs, 2014; Sullivan and Simonson, 2016) and improving mental health and socio-emotional functioning (Sullivan and Simonson, 2016). A range of resettlement challenges have been identified for refugee children including adjusting to new language and culture; disrupted or limited education; disrupted family networks; poverty and insecure housing; and negative stereotypes and discrimination (Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs, 2014). Effective participation in formal education in a supportive environment can promote self-esteem and resilience; contribute to social inclusion; build on existing strengths and skills to enable future success in employment and further education (Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs, 2014); and decrease depression (Sullivan and Simonson 2016). Benefits to delivering interventions in schools include their potential to serve as a link between refugees and the broader community, enabling affordable, practical and easily accessible interventions to groups of refugees. School-based programmes tend to be locally developed and small-scale, enabling culturally and contextually appropriate design (Sullivan and Simonson, 2016: 508).

Sullivan and Simonson (2016) synthesise existing research on **school-based interventions<sup>2</sup> for wellbeing of refugee children**, including creative expression, theatrical activities, music

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<sup>2</sup> The review also covers a number of trauma interventions in schools, but as these were focused on more serious mental health challenges related to pre-migration trauma, they are considered out of scope for this report.

therapy, cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) and play therapy. Most of the interventions were targeted specifically at children, although a few were targeted jointly at children and their parents. The synthesis found that:

- Creative expression and play therapy interventions were most frequently used, but with the least consistent results. One limitation of creative expression and theatrical interventions is their reliance on trained specialists for delivery, which can make them cost-prohibitive.
- Music therapy intervention showed negative outcomes (the reasons for this are unclear) and the authors suggest that more evidence is needed before considering implementing this type of intervention.
- CBT interventions showed more consistent outcomes. Focusing on developing coping skills, these interventions were effective in decreasing depression. Because schools often have school counsellors, social workers or other educational specialists on staff, this intervention may also be more feasible for many schools.
- Child-centred play therapy as well as interventions targeted jointly at parents and children were also seen as effective in supporting the wellbeing of refugee children.
- Generally, however, existing research on school-based interventions is limited.

Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs (2014) examine **The School Support Programme**, an intervention that promotes an inclusive, whole-school approach to supporting refugee background students and their families in Victoria, Australia. Its objectives include:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the refugee experience, including its impact on learning and wellbeing, within schools;
- Building capacity through sharing information, expertise and resources across schools and agencies;
- Establishing sustainable and mutually supportive networks;
- Facilitating dialogue between stakeholders; and
- Developing resources, promoting good practice and providing specialist support.

Delivering the programme through a network strategy to groups of schools in a region, rather than responding to individual requests for support, was a more proactive, cost effective and sustainable model for supporting schools. Although specific data on learning and wellbeing outcomes of this intervention were not collected, Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs (2014) suggest that programme participation had (or would lead to) positive outcomes related to wellbeing and education of refugee students. These positive outcomes included:

- Increased awareness of, and support for, the specific educational and welfare needs of refugee students;
- Adaptation of teaching and curriculum to accommodate the impacts of disrupted education;
- Increased use of interpreters and programmes that provide psychosocial support and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Challenges identified in the programme included: weak buy-in from some schools, time constraints and competing priorities, school staff turnover and barriers to parental participation (eg, language).

## Libraries

Although there are few studies on the role of public libraries in the lives of immigrants, there is evidence that public libraries can provide knowledge, social and emotional support, sources of solace during the resettlement process (Vårheim, 2014; Bowles, Glass and Ngan, 2016; Hurly, 2019).

Bowles, Glass and Ngan (2016) highlight the federally funded **Library Settlement Partnerships (LSP)** programme in Canada which supports settlement workers in library branches serving newcomers. Recognised internationally as best practice, LSP has been replicated in Canadian and American libraries. LSP workers offer a variety of customized programs that meet newcomers' immediate and long-term needs.

Bowles, Glass and Ngan's (2016) study examines the role of Toronto Public Library (TPL) (Canada) in providing settlement support to Syrian refugees under this scheme:

- TPL partners with eight local settlement agencies to deliver **settlement services** in fourteen library branches in the languages spoken by newcomer populations.
- TPL provided **pre-arrival support** using social media to engage and connect with refugees and sponsors. Information is provided to Syrian refugees via blog posts and communication pieces translated into Arabic and Western Armenian. TPL provided additional pre-arrival support for private sponsors, including orientation sessions.
- TPL also conducted **outreach** to refugees' temporary housing in order to build relationships and connections with refugee families. Bowles, Glass and Ngan (2016: 8) note that for families forced to flee with few possessions 'a library card is an important status symbol, viewed by sponsors and refugee families as a significant step in resettling in Canada'. Refugees became library members without a permanent address. TPL provided the local library as the first address, enabling barrier-free access and reinforcing the idea that refugees are welcome and belong in the Library, a community cornerstone.
- TPL also provided **regular meet-ups** for private sponsors and refugees, offering a safe, welcoming space for sponsors and refugees to connect with each other, community supports and networks, addressing the issue of social isolation.
- TPL also allocated funding for significantly **growing collections in Arabic and Armenian**, for both adults and children.
- TPL also offers a wide range of **English language classes** through partnerships with the public school board and community agencies.
- A number of **events** were delivered for newcomers and their sponsors.
- TPL also extended its popular museum pass lending program, the Sun Life Museum + Arts Pass (MAP) program, to help Syrian refugees discover and experience Toronto's many arts and culture venues and attractions.

Many newcomers identify the library as the first place they felt 'at home' in Toronto (Bowles, Glass and Ngan, 2016).

A study by Vårheim (2014) examines the role of the library in building trust for a group of refugees enrolled in a two-year compulsory introductory programme in Norwegian language and society. As a part of their study programme, the students were introduced to the public library

which organised a range of programmes for them (eg, women's reading group, homework service conducted by the local branch of the Red Cross). The study finds that:

- The refugees and asylum seekers (in particular, the students and men) used the library more than the average Norwegian population.
- Although usage reduced over time, the programme - through its formalised cooperation between the library and the study programme - enabled forging of strong links between the students and the library (Vårheim, 2014: 64).
- Although refugee students trusted the library and other library users, they generally held lower trust towards strangers.

The study concludes that public libraries could be suitable settings for trust building more generally through informal contact between individuals who do not know each other as they are 'places where patrons from different ethnic groups can at least observe or engage more intensively with each other over a prolonged period of time (Vårheim, 2014: 63).

## Faith-based organisations and groups

Religion has been identified as an important form of social capital for refugees (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014: 108). For example, in their study about a Somali refugee community in New Zealand, Elliott and Yusuf (2014) find that mosques and madrassas are crucial for the maintenance of culture and preservation of identity in the host country. Tingvold, Hauff, Allen and Middelthun (2012: 571 cited in Wilkinson, Santoro and Major, 2017) find that family church attendance by Vietnamese refugees in Norway reinforced cultural values and social connections both within, and across, communities. Cheung and Phillimore (2013) suggest that, for new refugees in the UK, regular interaction with religious groups created opportunities for contact with other groups and organisations, enhancing refugees' opportunities for accessing employment and education.

Wilkinson, Santoro and Major's (2017) study of Sudanese refugee youth in New South Wales, Australia, finds that religious engagement supported the development of both cultural and social capital. The study examines how **participation in religion and faith-based youth and community groups** generated resources that contributed to intercultural competence, successful acculturation and education success for young Sudanese refugees. Religious affiliation provided young people with access to social capital through moral directives, positive role models and access to adult churchgoers from different class backgrounds, which, in turn, supported their social inclusion. Religious participation also supported access to 'legitimised cultural capital in the form of opportunities for leadership' through participating in group discussions and decision-making and mobilising and public speaking activities (Wilkinson, Santoro and Major, 2017: 8).

Hurly (2019: 6) examines the experiences of a group of African former refugee women settled in Canada, highlighting how their Christian faith, church and **faith community provided 'solace, support and community bonding'**. Whilst practicing their faith 'nurtured' the women, the physical church building was also identified as a 'tangible hub' for socialising, developing meaningful relationships, building a sense of belonging and increasing their sense of wellbeing (Hurly, 2019: 7). The study suggests that their faith also provided the women with the confidence to connect with members of wider Canadian society. Barriers to church participation included geographic distance and transportation difficulties.

Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic's (2011) study of the Church World Service's role in refugee resettlement in the United States suggests that **relationships between refugees and members of faith-based communities** can enable individuals from different cultural, political and religious backgrounds to get to know each other and begin to care about each other as individuals (Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic, 2011: 600). This can decrease tensions that might occur at a local level as a result of new arrivals from different ethnic or religious groups. The study argues that these relationships may also inspire members of faith communities to advocate for change at national and international level.

## Sports and recreation programmes

Sports and recreation programmes for immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees have been shown to support resettlement by easing boredom and stress, promoting intergroup relationships and strengthening social networks (Rich, Misener and Dubeau, 2015; Hurly, 2019). Participation in sport can also support health, wellbeing and social inclusion (Hurly, 2019). Community sport is increasingly used to build capacity, improve physical and mental health and develop inclusive communities. It can also support language acquisition, self-esteem, confidence and a sense of belonging (Rich, Misener and Dubeau, 2015; Gibbs and Block, 2017).

Nevertheless, there is limited evidence about the benefits attributed to sports participation, including the specific processes through which inclusion may or may not be occurring. One challenge is that many sports interventions targeting young refugees are 'short-term, ad hoc and difficult to sustain' (Gibbs and Block, 2017: 92). Additionally, Whitley, Forneris and Barker (2014: 219) highlight challenges related to evaluating sports interventions for young people in underserved communities (eg, trust building, obtaining parental consent, demonstrating cultural competence and attrition). There is evidence that the capacity of sport to promote social inclusion is limited and shaped by broader social and structural exclusionary processes (ie, that social impacts of sport are shaped by context). Coalter (2015: 19) suggests that 'it might be that rather than sport contributing to "social inclusion", various aspects of social inclusion may precede such participation'. One key gap that has been identified in the evidence relates to the participation of 'culturally and linguistically diverse migrants' (Gibbs and Block, 2017: 92). Similarly, despite evidence about the importance of leisure for newcomer women's wellbeing, not all leisure and recreation activities benefit women (Spaaij, 2015; Hurly, 2019: 2). Cultural differences may influence women's leisure meanings and choices (Hurly 2019: 2). Gibbs and Block (2017) found gender norms to be a barrier for young refugee women

A study by Gibbs and Block (2017) studies **sports participation models for young people from refugee backgrounds** in Melbourne, Australia and examines the benefits, challenges and weaknesses from the perspective of those delivering the programmes. The models included (1) short-term programmes for refugee-background children, (2) continuing programmes for refugee-background children and (3) youth and integration into mainstream clubs. The study finds that:

- Benefits for health and wellbeing were observed across all three models. While physical health benefits were often seen, mental health and wellbeing benefits were more common (eg, self-esteem, positive self-image, goal setting, sense of success and achievement, increased knowledge of local culture and leadership skills) (Gibbs and Block, 2017: 95).

- All models fostered bonding and linking social connections, and many of the sports programmes were connected with mentoring programmes which provided educational and social support to the young people (Gibbs and Block, 2017: 97).
- All the programmes enabled young people to build connections between young refugees and community youth support organisations. Building bridging connections across ethnic divisions and with the wider community was done most effectively through supporting integration of refugee youth into mainstream clubs (Gibbs and Block, 2017: 96).
- Barriers to joining mainstream clubs included lack of knowledge of relevant systems, gender norms and competing priorities (eg, family pressures and education) and, to a lesser extent, access (eg, transport and cost) (Gibbs and Block, 2017: 96). Many of the continuing and short-term programmes specifically for refugee-background children were designed as a response to these barriers.

Rich, Misener and Dubeau (2015) examine to what extent **The Community Cup** soccer tournament, an annual participatory sporting event in Ottawa, Canada, facilitates social inclusion and supports the acculturation processes of immigrants and refugees. The study concludes that while 'sport, in and of itself, is not a sufficient condition to promote inclusion' (Rich, Misener and Dubeau, 2015: 137), different sports opportunities *may* have the potential to promote these outcomes.

## 4. Peer-based support and cultural brokering

### Peer support

**Peer support** is a system based on giving and receiving help based on 'the principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful' (Mead et al 2001: 135, cited in Badali, Grande and Mardikian, 2017: 3). It is based on understanding another's situation empathically through shared experience (Badali, Grande and Mardikian, 2017: 3). Peer-led interventions often use individuals who share common beliefs, ethnicity, religion or other community factors to change behaviours and improve outcomes amongst members of a particular community (Im and Rosenberg, 2016: 510). The peer-based model is increasingly employed in social work, health care and counselling sectors. Despite evidence that peer-based interventions are effective for high-risk, hard to reach and cultural minority groups (Im and Rosenberg, 2016: 510), peer support groups for refugees 'remain elusive' (Badali, Grande and Mardikian, 2017: 3-4). Where programmes exist<sup>3</sup>, research on participant experience is limited (ibid). Im and Rosenberg (2016: 510) suggest that peer-based interventions can increase participant involvement, create bonds between peer facilitators and participants, empower the collective and support social inclusion.

**The Promise of Partnership** is a peer-support programme for Arabic-speaking refugees in Ontario, Canada (Badali, Grande and Mardikian, 2017: 2). Part of an inter-organisational initiative

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<sup>3</sup> British Columbia Immigrant Settlement Services created Women's Peer Support Groups created to develop support networks, gather information and resources and overcome refugees' sense of isolation. In Toronto, the Metropolitan Community Church offers a monthly one-hour peer support programme for refugees to help build social networks while tackling issues related to social services and financial needs. The Self Help Resource Centre is a peer support programme for LGBTQ refugees, to support community networks and provide information on services, such as employment and healthcare (Badali, Grande and Mardikian 2017).

to provide supportive, therapeutic and preventative mental health intervention, the peer support programme focuses on the resettlement process and promoting wellbeing of refugees. Discussion-based sessions are held weekly for (mixed gender) participants over a 12-week period, to encourage active listening and sharing of lived experiences. Discussions are facilitated by a native Arabic speaker.

Badali, Grande and Mardikian's (2017) study of this programme highlights that:

- Peer support created opportunities for participants to build their support networks, share their stories, learn about available community services, discuss issues related to acculturation, and build emotional strength through sharing coping strategies.
- Peer support groups have limited capacity to impact on economic, cultural and political systems in which refugees are embedded.
- Despite a lack of transformative system-level changes (eg, societal shift in attitudes through changes in public policy), the programme created multi-level outcomes for refugee wellness, though these are primarily short-term benefits (eg, social and relational).
- The programme helped overcome isolation, generate a feeling of belonging and build connections. Additionally, participants gained knowledge of norms and social skills needed to integrate into the host society, as well as build hope and self-confidence.
- The programme enabled community capacity building (eg, development of trusting relationships between refugee service users and service providers; and participants' capacity to become community leaders).
- A potential 'ripple effect' of peer support was noted, which can promote wellbeing in the community through early intervention to prevent mental health problems (Badali, Grande and Mardikian, 2017: 24).

Im and Rosenberg (2016) examine the potential for a **peer-led community health workshop** to build social capital within a Bhutanese refugee community in the United States. This was part of a community-based participatory research project to promote refugee wellness and healthy adaptation during the resettlement process. The intervention involved building partnerships with mental health service providers, training refugee leaders and service providers and using a peer-to-peer model to deliver a community health intervention. Community leaders and members of the refugee community were trained in mental health and psychosocial support, and health education and facilitation skills, to prepare them for providing community-based health workshops to their fellow refugees. The trained refugee leaders were actively involved in the development process to ensure a culturally sensitive intervention. The curriculum was developed in English but delivered in the mother tongue of the refugees. Sessions related to nutrition, daily stressors of resettlement, coping strategies, common psychological distress and mental health issues facing the community. Im and Rosenberg (2016: 514) suggest that in addition to meeting its objectives to health-related outcomes, the peer-based model enabled building social capital, expanding social networks, encouraging participation in the community, building community capacity, and contributing to a growing sense of community and connectedness, and increasing access to relevant help.



## Cultural brokers

**Cultural brokering** has emerged in health and education as one approach to addressing cultural barriers to service access and provision. A cultural broker is an individual who takes on the role of bridging individuals or groups of differing cultures for the purpose of improving communication and reducing conflict (eg, paraprofessionals, settlement workers, bilingual co-workers, diversity liaisons and bi-cultural members within an ethnic community group) (Brar-Josan and Yohani, 2019: 512-513). Although there is evidence that cultural brokers improved service delivery to young immigrants, there is limited information on the actual activities that brokers engaged in when assisting individuals with mental health difficulties (Brar-Josan and Yohani, 2019: 513).

Brar-Josan and Yohani (2019) examine the informal and formal activities taken on by a group of **cultural brokers working with refugee youth to enhance their home and school environments** in a large urban city in Western Canada. The brokers worked within an immigrant-service agency's In-School Settlement Programme, providing refugee children and youth (aged 5-18) with support at both micro and macro levels. This included day-to-day support and educational activities to support adaptation (ie, micro-level) and activities related to the longer-term macro-level process of transforming the system (eg, cultural interpretation, awareness raising, advocacy). The cultural brokers facilitated cultural integration and sense of belonging (which they defined as developing an affiliation with various social groups) through delivering after-school activities (eg, culture clubs focused on both introducing Canadian culture and maintaining refugees' own heritage culture). Field trips (eg to the public library) were undertaken to encourage refugee youth to become familiar with their environment. Practical skills (eg, related to finding employment and engaging in post-secondary education) and supportive counselling (eg, guidance, information, encouragement and emotional support), and referrals to more formal mental health support were also provided. Despite the limitations of the study (ie, small sample, focus on perspectives of cultural brokers rather than refugees) Brar-Josan and Yohani (2019) argue that the holistic approach can enhance the wellbeing of refugee youth.

Greene (2019) also examines **the role of cultural brokers** in the **Refugee Wellbeing Project** (outlined in more detail earlier in section 3 of this report), in the context of the meaning and context of weak and strong ties and their relation to refugee wellbeing. Greene suggests that strong ties (which are more intimate and require more time and energy), often formed between similar people, can support emotional wellbeing and provide coping assistance. Weaker ties (eg, acquaintances), often bridging diverse groups, can also connect people to important resources, employment or advancement opportunities, as well as facilitate community organisation. Greene suggests that cultural brokers fulfil a third, 'hybrid' function, covering both weak and strong functions. For example, cultural brokers can provide strong emotional support while also enabling access to information and resources through networks and associated social capital. In the RWP, cultural brokers were often fellow refugees (eg, community leaders, advocates, interpreters or neighbours) who had arrived earlier and become involved in community and advocacy efforts.

## 5. Sponsorship

Refugee sponsors can include states, international organisations, humanitarian or development actors, regional organisations, local authorities, civil society or faith-based organisations, the private sector, host community members, or other refugees (UNHCR, 2019). There has been particular interest in recent years in **private sponsorship** of refugees, the approach originally

pioneered in Canada in 1978<sup>4</sup>. Under the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme, refugees can re-settle in Canada with support and funding from private or joint government-private sponsorship (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2016). The current private sponsorship programme requires that sponsors raise the funds to cover the equivalent of social assistance for one year, provide emotional support and assist with resettlement (eg, finding housing, medical and dental services, schooling and language classes) and introducing refugees to appropriate cultural communities and activities (Ritchie, 2018). Refugees can also be partially privately sponsored (ie Blended Visa Office-Referrred refugees) in which the private sponsor provides half of the first year's financial support while the federal government provides the other half (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2017: 57).

Relationships between refugees and sponsors can provide emotional support; facilitate access to education, health and housing; and help overcome barriers to integration including lack of language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability (Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic, 2011: 603). Additional benefits include strengthening of intergroup relationships (Hynie, 2018), development of social connections (Ahraie, Collins, and Rigon, 2018) and higher levels of satisfaction with the resettlement process (Lenard, 2016). It has been argued that social connections provided by private sponsorship translates into social capital for better employment and income housing, educational access, and friendship across cultural groups (Kumin, 2015; Lenard, 2016; Ahraie, Collins, and Rigon, 2018). Lenard (2016: 304) suggests that 'members of sponsorship groups are often the *essential* connection to Canadian society for newcomers, who rely on their sponsors to counter the loneliness and isolation that accompanies the refugee experience.' Lenard (2016: 304) suggests that sponsorships also generate multiple benefits to citizens, including the opportunity to take concrete positive action and develop life-long relationships with newcomers and countering negative public opinion of refugees.

Direct participation by civil society in resettlement has been identified as a major element in the success of Canada's private sponsorship programme (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2017: 58). There is evidence that private sponsorship is more likely to lead to successful integration than government assistance (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2017: 59). The flexibility and creative resourcefulness of community co-sponsors in providing services and social support to refugees can be an important counterpart to assistance provided through more formal (government) programmes which can often be inflexible in their requirements, eligibility and benefits (Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic, 2011: 603).

Nevertheless, private co-sponsorship has faced criticism for contributing to the privatisation of refugee resettlement and welfare (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2016: 7; Ritchie, 2018) and individualising wellbeing (Ritchie, 2018: 665). Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez (2017: 56) argue that 'it is important that private sponsorship is *additional* to government-assisted resettlement commitments, and not a substitute for them.' In Canada, another issue is that priority processing

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<sup>4</sup> Although the private sponsorship model has been adopted by other countries (see Lenard, 2016: 302) due to its many perceived benefits, Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez (2017: 59) note that 'there is no single private sponsorship recipe to follow.' They go on to highlight that positive public opinion towards refugee resettlement in Canada is unusual and that successful refugee resettlement also depends on strong government leadership and civil society engagement.

for Syrian refugees under the private sponsorship scheme has contributed to a backlog on processing co-sponsorship of non-Syrian refugees from protracted conflicts, who may have been waiting years for processing to take place. It has also been argued that the work of supporting privately sponsored refugees depends too heavily on a few individuals and organisations and that sponsors themselves need support (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2017: 59). There have also been cases of 'excessive intrusiveness of sponsorship groups in the lives of refugees' (Hyndman, Payne and Jimenez, 2017: 59).

Ahraie, Collins and Rigon's (2018) **comparison of community sponsorship and government resettlement** of refugees in the UK, finds that government schemes are more likely to prioritise structural integration dimensions than cultural ones. Community sponsorship takes a more holistic approach, prioritising the creation of cultural dimensions, community engagement and wider social networking to create more space for interaction between newcomers and host communities (Ahraie, Collins and Rigon, 2018: 5). The participation of host community members and institutions is related to positive impact on integration processes. While this participation takes place in both community and government schemes, the role of the host community in the process of integration is more institutionalised and structured in community sponsorship schemes. Ahraie, Collins and Rigon (2018: 5) suggest that this leads to more efficient resource management, effective accelerating of the process, well planned and flexible interventions, and a sense of responsibility of the host community. Community sponsorship is seen to benefit not only newcomers, but also local communities since it creates new experiences and learning, strengthens communities, changes perspectives and challenges stereotypes (Ahraie, Collins and Rigon, 2018: 5).

Drolet and Moorthi (2018) examine **social networks, social support and social capital available to Syrian refugees** resettling in Alberta, Canada **under government assisted, private sponsorship and blended visa office referral schemes**. This finds that social relationships are crucial to resettlement and that ethno-cultural communities, sponsors and community organisations can help newcomers make friends and build ties. However, in most cases, these remained 'nebulous' and were focused on settlement needs or linking to socio-cultural community. Government assisted refugees had stronger links to settlement agencies, while privately sponsored refugees had closer links to community networks. Refugees linked to smaller refugee centres tended to report higher levels of belonging and more engagement with settlement or community organisations, but they had lower rates of participation in recreation or religious activities.

Hanley et al (2018) examine initiatives to increase social networks, social support and social capital for Syrians who arrived via private sponsorship schemes in Canada, including:

- Efforts to increase cultural understanding between Syrians and their host community
- The role of religious institutions in creating social networks and social supports
- Initiatives to bring Syrians together with the broader Montreal community; and
- Informal support from community members

The study finds that the strongest capital available to recently settled Syrians was bonding capital (eg, family networks and Syrian friends). The organised events allowed refugees to establish trust with other community members and gain access to resources, although barriers included language, public transportation difficulties and cultural approaches to networks (Hanley et al, 2018: 143). Participants also began to generate bridging capital (eg, making friends with non-

Syrians through language classes). With the exception of connection to religious institutions, the study found little evidence of linking capital (eg, with government or community institutions) being helpful with regards to social support or settlement help.

## 6. Digital and social media

Digital and social media have been identified as important tools that can enable refugees to build social capital (AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018; Alencar, 2017; Bacishoga, Hooper and Johnson, 2016). There is a historic body of literature that supports the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in improving community connection and facilitating the generation of social capital more generally (see, for example, Ellison, Stenfield and Lampe, 2007 and Kim, 2008; cited in Alencar, 2017), although evidence on the role of ICTs in the current refugee crisis in Europe is more limited (Almohamed, Vyas and Zhang, 2017; AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018). Generally, however, contemporary migrant populations are considered to be tech-savvy, with high smartphone penetration rates (AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018), although a digital divide has also been identified (eg, Alam and Imran, 2015). Digital exclusion can be based on inequalities in material access to ICT, IT literacy and skills, and ability to pay for services.

Digital technology can provide refugees and migrants with information (eg, about rights, citizenship, support services) and help tackle isolation by supporting language learning, making information available in migrants own languages, and helping them connect to the cultural practices of both host and home communities (Alam and Imran, 2015; Alencar, 2017) and maintaining contact with family and friends in country of origin (Alencar, 2017: 1592). There is evidence that maintaining social relationships in the home country and engaging with transnational online communities helps to overcome adjustment challenges rather than promote social segregation (Alencar, 2017: 1592).

Alencar's (2017: 1588) study examines the **relationships between social media usage and refugee integration** processes, for refugees from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan at an Asylum Seekers Centre in Amsterdam. These refugees used digital technologies in several key areas of integration (eg, employment, education, linguistic competence, cultural belonging, social capital, rights and citizenship). The study finds that, regardless of age and gender, participants preferred social media platforms (eg, Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, Google and Line<sup>5</sup>) over other Internet applications. Participants in the study reported high levels of social media and Internet usage, which were attributed to having much spare time as well as the challenges and monotony related to existing in camps and asylum seeker centres, where leisure and other activities were scant. Findings from the study include:

- Social media was used as a tool to cope with anxiety as well as to access important information (eg, immigration procedures and laws) and navigate practical issues in the host society (Alencar, 2017: 1596-1597).
- Social media applications helped refugees build both bridging and bonding capital. It supported learning the host country language, finding integration and language courses, and coordinating intercultural exchange meetings with Dutch people (bridging capital). It also helped refugees maintain contact with friends and family in home countries (bonding

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<sup>5</sup> Line is a social media app, similar to Skype, used by Syrian participants in the study.

capital), which gave them emotional support for addressing the challenges of resettlement.

- Although civil society actors and local organisations were seen as more reliable sources of accurate information about the local labour markets and education system, social media helped refugees navigate these domains (Alencar, 2017: 1600).

A study by AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier (2018) examines **the role of online communication for Syrian refugees in Germany in promoting social connectedness** with family and friends **in their home country as well as with the local host community**. Positive impacts are found for both. ICT-enabled communication with family and friends made refugees feel emotionally supported, enabled mass communication and empowered refugees to communicate through the use of translation apps. Despite the small interview sample, the study provides evidence that ICT usage had a positive impact on refugees' social inclusion (eg, agency, social networking, employment, education and language, culture, health, citizenship and housing) (AbuJarour, Krasnova and Hoffmeier, 2018: 11).

A related study by Walker, Koh, Wollersheim and Liamputtong (2014) examines how **a mobile phone-assisted health promotion programme can support the social connectedness** among refugee women in Australia in order to enhance mental, physical and social health. This found that free-call phones and peer support training strengthened personal relationships; provided emotional, informational and practical assistance; and reduced acculturative stress at both individual and societal levels. In Australia, many government programmes support refugees exit, but are often designed from an Australian perspective. Because they may not meet refugee needs, refugee women often do not engage with them. The study argues that communication technologies can support social connection of refugee women, if their specific needs and capacities are taken into account.

Almohamed, Vyas and Zhang (2017) explore **the role that ICT played in enabling refugees** from Syria and Iraq in Australia **to use their existing social capital**. Challenges for new arrivals included language and cultural barriers and mobile technology, including conversation apps and Google Translate, enabled refugees to overcome these. Nevertheless, the study also highlights that many technologies that have been developed specifically to support refugees have been insufficient and seen limited uptake (Almohamed, Vyas and Zhang, 2017: 8). It concludes that designing technology to support refugees' building social capital requires understanding refugees' preferences, cultures, norms and technology usage.

Veronis, Tabler and Ahmed (2018) examine how a group of Syrian newcomer youth use social media to explore and communicate their identity as Syrian Canadians and develop relationships with other Canadians. The study finds that social media (eg, Facebook and Instagram) help this group of youth learn about their peers and community in Canada but also provide a platform for sharing information about Syria with their Canadian peers. This enables youth to actively challenge the unidimensional stereotypes that are often perpetuated in social and news media. Thus, the virtual world is 'a safe social space in which to start building relationships, sharing personal histories and trying out new ideas and behaviours as they navigate the boundaries between cultural spaces to build identities as Syrian Canadians'.

## 7. Non-traditional mental health and wellbeing interventions

### Participatory music

Lenette and Sunderland (2016) map existing literature across the fields of community music and health promotion to examine the potential for participatory music practices to support health and wellbeing outcomes for asylum seekers and refugees across different settings ('conflict' settings, refugee camps and resettlement settings). This concludes that, when coupled with broader evidence from the fields of health and well-being research, growing empirical research on music and wellbeing for asylum seekers provides a strong foundation for both further research and investment in music (and the arts more generally) as a key positive social and cultural determinant of health for this group.

A systematic review by Henderson, Cain, Istvandy, and Lakhani (2016) of evidence on the role of music participation and health and wellbeing outcomes for migrant populations finds there is a scarcity of generalisable quantitative research and credible qualitative research.

### Community gardening

The benefits of community gardening are well established for the general population, including their potential to support social connections and create social networks (Hartwig and Mason, 2016: 1153-1154). Although community gardens exist globally, there is limited research on the effects of community gardens on wellbeing of vulnerable populations, including refugees, outside the United States (Malmberg Dyg, Christensen and Petersen, 2019).

Malmberg Dyg, Christensen and Petersen (2019) review research on **the effects of community gardens on the wellbeing of vulnerable populations**, including refugees. This finds evidence that community garden participation may have a positive impact on both physical health and wellbeing. Community gardens can have a positive influence both at the individual level (i.e. self-esteem, independence, personal control) as well as the relational and social level (i.e. relationships, social connections, community and neighbourhood). Individual-level benefits were particularly notable for refugees.

Hartwig and Mason (2016) evaluate a **refugee gardening project** hosted by churches in Minnesota, United States, serving primarily Karen and Bhutanese refugees. This found that refugee gardeners from 8 participating gardens reported both physical and emotional benefits from participation in the project, including strengthened sense of identity (Hartwig and Mason, 2016: 1153). Benefits that emerged included provision of purposeful work in the absence of, or as a supplement to gainful employment; amelioration of depression and generation of joy amongst refugees. Social benefits were also identified, including fun gardening with family and friends, enjoying time outside and socialising. Mental and emotional benefits of gardening was particularly notable for female participants. Some participants described gardening as offering the opportunity to interact with people in the neighbourhood or other church members. Over time, however, interaction between gardeners and church volunteers declined – this may be attributed to the greater number of meetings at the onset of the project (eg, related to organising gardens, assigning plots, tilling the soil, distributing compost). As the season continued, gardeners came and visited the plots at their own convenience, and reduced the likelihood of seeing one another, particularly in the smaller gardens.

## Nature-based leisure

Hurly and Walker's (2019) study examines the impact of a two-day winter camping experience in northern Alberta, Canada and how it might foster the well-being of refugees from three African countries, and Iran. The study found that the refugees welcomed the opportunity to be away in a natural setting as a distraction from their daily lives (ie, connecting with others, learning new activities, involving their families) and that the welcoming efforts of the social services and parks agencies bolstered their confidence and well-being. This highlighted both the potential of nature-based leisure in mitigating stress, as well as the role of host society attitudes toward newcomers in fostering their wellbeing. Rishbeth and Finney (2006; cited in Hurly, 2019), also find that asylum seekers and refugees in England who engaged in nature-based leisure experienced reduced resettlement stress and anxiety about their residency status.

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## Acknowledgements

We thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

- Jessica Goodkind (University of New Mexico)
- Michaela Hynie (York University)
- Jenny Phillimore (University of Birmingham)

## Websites

Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (Resource Centre) <https://www.uel.ac.uk/research/refugee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-portal/resource-centre>

## Suggested citation

Orrnert, A. (2020). *Interventions to promote wellbeing or refugees in high- and middle-income countries*. K4D Helpdesk Report 736. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

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*K4D services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations working in international development, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with Education Development Trust, Itad, University of Leeds Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Birmingham International Development Department (IDD) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI).*

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