

SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT
SCHEME
EVALUATION FOR THE NOTINGHAM AND
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE REFUGEE FORUM

FEBRUARY 2018



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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In December 2015 18 Syrian families were brought to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (VPRS). By September 2017 a further 23 families had arrived in 6 separate cohorts. The majority of families have been settled in Nottingham City, with a smaller number in each of Gedling, Broxtowe, Ruddington and Newark.

The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (subsequently NNRF, or the Forum) were commissioned to provide casework support services for all of the families, and each family has their own caseworker. These services were prescribed by the scheme (see appendix, p36), and further areas have subsequently been added, including the employability project. A separate team has been set up within the NNRF to run the VPRS.

An initial evaluation was carried out by the NNRF in late 2016, a year after the first families arrived, based on one-to-one interviews with all of the families that arrived in December 2015.

THIS EVALUATION

This evaluation focuses on individual conversations with the team and people that are working with the families – five from the NNRF, and three from Newark and Sherwood District Council, Voluntary Action Broxtowe and Nottingham City Council. Interviews were carried out between late October 2017 and early January 2018.

It uses the Learning History approach, where themes are identified from the conversations and these themes are then written up using the participants' own words (the narrative – italicised) alongside an explanatory and interpretive text (the commentary – grey background). In this Learning History the narrative has been coloured to identify voices from within the Forum (black text) and outside the forum (red text).

The purpose of learning histories is to reflect on and learn from experience in order to shape what we do in the future. It will reflect a variety of opinions, and rather than judge these, the reader is invited to engage with them and use them as an opportunity to better understand the scheme and to think about its future direction and practice.

The evaluation is in five sections:

- 1: What people understand as the purpose of the VPRS
- 2: The successes and challenges of the scheme, in the context of future aspirations of the families

3: What might be learned from the experience so far about how best to work with families now and in the future

4: The impact of the VPRS within NNRF

5: Where next - some changes to the scheme suggested by participants both in how it is delivered locally, and how it is set up and supported nationally.

1. PURPOSE OF THE VPRS

People commented that beyond meeting the immediate practical needs of the Syrian families, the stated aims of the VPRS scheme are vague and have little grounding in the lived experiences of refugees.

The immediate practical support is well understood and is largely prescribed by the VPRS.

New requirements, including employability, have been added nationally in response to a developing understanding of the needs of the families.

For some who work with the families, the most important aspect of the work is providing the support that will lead towards independence and self-sufficiency.

...there's a statement of outcomes that are supposed to be achieved... but they're quite... wishy washy, and not particularly... effective...

...it was set up naively, it was set up as an emotional response to something... and it... has no basis on... everybody else's experience of being an asylum seeker and a refugee...

...what we have to provide is suitable housing... suitable furniture... education... make sure that all the benefits are in place... help into work for the future... it's normal everyday life...

...on a day to day basis... it's really quite clear... house, furniture, doctor... it's quite... prescriptive... and then interpreters... then at year two, they sent out a new statement of requirements... oh – employment...

...more recently... finding volunteering opportunities for them... looking at getting them back into work... so now, (the) focus is more on working... to find opportunities for them that are appropriate...

...we see our responsibility under the programme as providing safe, secure housing... smooth integration... allowing these people to... set up a new life here in the UK... where we can assist them into work... through providing English lessons... and guidance... so that they can become self-sufficient and start a new life here... that's how I see our responsibility... ...for us the priority is very much... creating independence...

...our focus... is on work... and independence...

...the main process is that they learn the language... and then they become self-sustainable, and they get into employment...

There is also a strong focus on integration, enabling the families to integrate into the broader community, and become active citizens in support of their communities.

Overarching all of these is a shared understanding that the scheme is about giving people hope, and helping them to re-establish their lives.

...we are focussing on integration as the main thing... we are focussing on the orientation... and the language... once you break the language... as you break the ice... you've solved... half of the problems...

...to help people develop their language skills... and to help them find their independence... a job... be part of the community... and socialise... be integrated into... the life of the community...

...this is the purpose of the programme... we are looking for people who are going to support this country as we have been supporting them through the programme...

...resettlement... giving people life... giving people some hope... is the main purpose of the programme... but there is a long-term purpose... you are giving life to generations... you are looking for something in the future... we have the children... who are going to build up... this community... sharing, and building up this country...

...helping people to re-establish their lives here... pick up the pieces... be able to become part of the wider community... and live a normal life...

2. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

SETTING THE SCENE: FUTURE INTENTIONS OF FAMILIES

To better understand, and to give a context to a discussion of the successes and challenges of the VPRS in Nottingham, it is helpful to first look at the future intentions of the families.

People working with the families suggest that most seem to see their future in the UK. Some have embraced this future enthusiastically, others more pragmatically.

Some of the families do see themselves returning at some point, and these families are concerned that their children shouldn't become too integrated into British culture and lose their Syrian culture and Language.

For the majority that do see their future here, many suggest that it is their children that will benefit most from their new lives here.

...these... who arrive now... they left their life in Syria... they're still feeling that... going back to the country... but they have... the same time... a feeling to live a better life... in the UK...

...some are... taking it one day at a time... seem quite laid back and relaxed... going with the flow... others are... forging ahead... hungry to learn and develop and grow...

...some families talk about wanting to return after the five years has ended... but not many... most just want to change... bigger houses... they're quite settled here...

...we have an Arabic family class on the Saturday... one of the big concerns of the Syrian families... their view is that they will return, at some point in the future... and they don't want their children... because all of the children speak English very, very well now... they don't want them to be in the position they're in, and not be able to speak Arabic... so we put on a family class... and all of the families come to it... it's a very big thing...

...in their heads... the adults... are still seeing Syria as home... they're mentally not adjusting... and the problem... the upset for them, is that the children do adjust, and are speaking fluent English... are settled in schools... and do have friends... their integration happens prior to the adults... and yet they come from a... culture where the... father is... the head of the family and says what goes...

...it's like... they've forgotten the past... I know they haven't, but it's as if they have, because they seem happier... and looking forward to the future... especially when it comes to their children...

...other families... where the parents are... well, they think they're elderly, but by British standards they're not really... they feel they can't work... but their futures lie in their children...

...sometimes... what the older Syrians are saying to us... this is a great place for my kids... and they see that there's opportunity here for their kids... but if it was just about them, they would want to be back in Syria...

...they see this very much as a new life... if not for them, for their children... that's why they're here, it's because of their children... they want their children to have a new life in the UK... building a new life here... and they're not looking back...

SUCCESSSES

GENERAL

Overall, people feel that it is a really good project, giving good support to the families and achieving positive outcomes.

...the programme itself... it's an amazing programme...

...we are in a good place... we are achieving a lot... we've been settling... 40 families around the City and the County... I can say, all in all, it's good...

...it's a brilliant project...

...we have good trust with the families...

...we're really pleased with the success of the project locally... our families are very happy... we get a lot of really good feedback... not only the families, but... the partners that we work with... it's going really well...

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

People are particularly positive about the quality and availability of practical support for the families.

...collecting the families from the airport... wouldn't change... all the families agree... we've asked them... and taking them to the properties... and checking over the properties... wouldn't change that...

This includes the work with different agencies to provide suitable housing and furniture, helping the families access healthcare and benefits, providing English (ESOL) courses, and making sure that the children are in education.

...this project's working well because there's a lot of support around it... all the agencies have everything in place for when the families come...

It also includes the day to day support given by the caseworkers.

...I think we're getting all the benefits... and the set up things right...

...they get so much support... in terms of the support I really don't see what else we could do... they've got their money sat waiting for them when they arrive... housing is ready, set up...

Contact with others outside the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire scheme suggests that it is doing better in this respect than many others.

...I think we are quite ahead of... a lot of the... other cities... with workshops... training that we're offering... the employment worker... community development... things that we're actually progressing on in terms of supporting the families...

CHILDREN

Children are generally settling well in school. Many have rapidly learned English and are making new friends.

...they can see that their children are settling in school... and they've got a better life... prospect...

...children... on the whole... they seem to be settling...

...and the children... have done really well at school...

...their English is fantastic... children adapt really well don't they... they're getting on really well... and the schools have been fantastic...

LANGUAGE

There has been extensive ESOL provision for all the families and many other opportunities created for them to develop their English speaking skills.

...ESOL... English... I think in the first year most of them have done brilliant... the children are great... amazing...

...I think our families are... progressing quite well with their English – we've certainly ramped up their English lessons, they have conversation groups, they have volunteers that go to their houses...

EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTEERING

There has been good support to help people towards employment.

...two out of the four men... in our four families... work... they have jobs... and one is ill... so there's just one person... who's looking for work...

Some people are starting to find work, and some others are gaining skills and confidence through volunteering.

...a barber... now he start working in a proper shop... part-time... to get more confidence and get the language... we have a chef... we have... one of them working in TK Max... we have one of them... working for a pizza factory... we have... 10%... 15%... maybe more or less... getting work... and they are very excited to get a job... really excited... to start work again...

...there's a lot of volunteering... especially the younger ones... volunteering... the men in the families are volunteering as well...

...three of the men describe themselves as chefs... we put on a course to get qualifications in... food safety... and they all came to it, and all got a level 2 qualification...

INTEGRATION AND INDEPENDENCE

Most people seem to be settled in their new houses and neighbourhoods, and are coming to terms with the practicalities of life in the UK.

Some are becoming more independent and able to cope without needing as much support from their caseworkers.

Some are starting to socialise and integrate more widely.

...most families... they've really integrated well... paying their own bills... taking their own meter readings... it's... finding the confidence for them to do it first time... they need to make mistakes as well... nothing's perfect, but most of them are doing really well...

...a lot of them, once they've got their homes they've got income coming in... they've got English classes so they're learning to communicate... and they seem... settled...

...for me... the success is people who are... doing things for themselves... who have the confidence... more than anything else... and are not looking for permission... the people that are... settled... happy with their houses... can start looking for work... can get jobs... there's a few that have moved in that direction...

...there are people who... are marrying British citizens... are settling... getting jobs...

...I think that we're quite unique here... with regard to independence...

...taking part in developing... or building the community itself... we've got... (people) who are volunteering... do a hard job... who are trying to say thanks to the UK for resettling them and giving them a life...

...a lot of the women are going to events in Derby, Nottingham... they've started going to a lot of events... and... they're making friends... in different areas... so...the connection is working... they're making friends from the Syrian community, but also from outside of it...

... the main successes... the challenges... we've done a really good job with the challenges... we've done a really good job with the cultural integration... the orientation... we've been really successful with getting some people... to... jobs... to start their work... getting the children to the schools... getting some of them to learn the language...

CHALLENGES

GENERAL

Everyone recognises that it is a new and very challenging programme.

...it is very challenging... it's enjoyable but it is challenging... but then any job where you have to deal with human beings is challenging...

...it's been really challenging... setting something up from scratch is always challenging...

...working with Syrians... is quite a bit different from working with other refugees... you have to find the funny side... they never cease to amaze me...

CULTURE

There are massive cultural differences between the life that the families have been used to and life in the UK.

This is affecting the families' expectations, their relationships with others, their approaches to learning and work, and their interest in and ability to integrate.

...there is a big difference between their culture and the culture in the UK...

...understanding the neighbourhood... is one of the main things... these people... they used to have a social life... neighbours... cousins... uncles... where they can gather in one house... and drink coffee in the morning with their neighbours... life here is different...

...we're now engaging with Homestart... to help the... ladies more with their integration... culturally, they seem to sit in the background a little bit anyway... they obviously miss family and friends from home... and the culture's very different here... they're used to a lifestyle... they would be in a community... where everybody's in and out of houses... so now... we're trying to... ensure that they've got some occupation – paid or otherwise...

...it's about culture really... and expectations...

...time... there is a big cultural difference in timekeeping... we're more focussed on timekeeping... and also... walking... and travelling... Syrian families won't walk anywhere, they don't want to walk... they won't go to something if it's too far... we've found that to be a huge difference...

...there are a lot of challenges... it's cultural, I think... and it's a learning curve for me as well, and I'm still learning... there's a long way to go... with regard to

integrating them... we've got to make sure that they're aware of how things work culturally here... so that they're integrating... and not alienating anybody...

EXPECTATIONS

There is a strong feeling that many of the families are arriving with unrealistic expectations of what to expect from life in the UK.

They see the UK as an extremely rich nation, assume that all live a life of relative luxury, and expect similar for themselves.

Additionally, many appear to have been given unrealistic expectations, before arriving here, of what they will be offered through the resettlement scheme.

Housing has been a particular disappointment to many. Social and affordable housing in the UK is generally small, and the number and size of rooms are not well suited to the size of the Syrian families and their sociable lifestyles. The houses they are being given are often significantly smaller than those they had known in Syria.

...everyone came to the UK with some expectation... not a simple expectation... came with a great expectation... this can be back to the historical issues with the UK... it's a big country... it's Great Britain... and when I'm travelling to Great Britain, I'm travelling to the greatest country in the world... so expecting everything to be perfect... and... completely... brilliant...

...these people have some preconceptions before they arrive... asking my families when they arrive... what sessions they had... what information they got... most of the information is confusing to them – we've been told this is going to happen in the UK, we've been told we're going to get that money and that thing... but no, you're coming to a new life... you need to live life as it is... not as you've been told...

...this makes our job a little bit harder... to amend... to adjust the ideas they've been told, and the life they came to live in the UK...

...for them it's... culture and expectations are two different things... they need more awareness of the expectations in the UK before they come here... there's a lot... are disappointed when they get here...

...what the community thinks is real, and what is real – there seems to be a great divide between the two...

...quite a few of them... their expectations are quite high... of what they should be getting, what their entitlement is...

...the houses... these people used to live in a big house... big kitchen... big cooker... these people have 5 sons, 3 daughters... 8 people, or 10 people... they need a big house... once they arrive here they're expecting that the house will be amazing... will be like a palace...

There are also unrealistic expectations about how fast things can be done – and some become extremely frustrated at how slow many bureaucratic processes are in the UK.

These problems of unrealistic expectations would appear to be recurring across the scheme nationally – it does not seem to be a problem that is unique to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

COMPARING

The challenge of unrealistic expectations is made more difficult because families know what is being given to other families, and are comparing this with what they have been given.

This makes it difficult for people working with the families to respond to the specific needs of one family, as they know that this will result in other families complaining because they feel that they have an entitlement to the same thing.

...they've got high expectations... I think a lot just think they're going to come... a lot had big, brilliant properties and expect they're going to have that when they come here... it's the size of the rooms... mainly... eating areas... an average house is quite small... compared to what they've been used to... as soon as they see it, they want to move... but we've got no bigger properties...

...and wanting things done quickly... in Britain things don't get done quickly, everything's a slow process... so, patience is something that is a challenge...

...the sense of entitlement, the emotional... throw all of our resources at the Syrians... all that sort of stuff is similar across the country... and this... being given an inch and taking a mile... that seems to be happening across the country...

...they just compare all the time...

...they're talking amongst themselves in the community... if one family has had something... that family's got that, why haven't I got it... I want it... I need it... amongst themselves... they talk...

...it's another thing... recognising that their situations are different, their circumstances are different... they won't get exactly what the other families have got... they find it hard to believe that... they just think if one person has got it they should have it...

...unfortunately, there's a lot... who all talk to each other... and go... we got so and so... and they want so and so... they got a cooker so we want a cooker... there's a feeling of... entitlement... for Syrians... not individuals... individual circumstances...

...the families sometimes telling me exactly what's happening... in Wales... they used to show me... this is the house in Wales... it's different...

PERSISTENCE

In addition to what caseworkers and others are experiencing as unrealistic expectations, inappropriate comparisons and a sense of entitlement, they are also being challenged by an unexpected persistence. They are finding that many families won't accept the word 'no'.

Some suggest, rightly or wrongly, that this is just a normal part of Syrian culture.

...that's the biggest thing... they hate the word No...

...they think they can have a negotiation with you when there are a set of rules, and this is the way it's going to work...

...some of the families... are not easy to work with... some of them... just want, want, want...

...in their culture, they don't ask one person... to help... if it's no, then they'll go and ask someone else... they'll keep asking different people until they get what they want... and that's how they are... it's their culture...

...I get the impression it's where they've come from... this wanting things... asking for more... and a... Syrian who came here in the seventies said – well that's what you do, you just go round asking until you find the person that gives you the answer you want... so that seems quite cultural... so I think there's something about... Syria...

LANGUAGE

Language is recognised as probably the biggest single challenge – and the major barrier to further integration.

Some are making good progress with English. For others, progress has been very slow – slower than would normally be expected of refugees and asylum seekers who have less support but are desperate to learn.

While there are problems in organising sufficient and early access to ESOL provision, this slow progress suggests some

...the language... some people find it a challenge to learn... some of them want to learn the language in one month... in one week...

...I knew that the language would be a barrier... but there's an awful lot of barriers, not just language... language continues to be probably the biggest barrier...

...language... the scope of that has... shocked me a bit... the fact that some of the refugees that have come through this programme, that have been here now for two years, still are on pre-entry English even though... ESOL is a priority provision for this particular cohort...

...in comparison to what I'd experienced previously with the general refugee population and how desperate they are to do ESOL and how desperate they are to learn English... it did surprise me that some of this cohort that had ESOL for the last two years had not really progressed that far... there's always exceptions to the

other challenges that will be discussed further below (p24).

rule... but as a general thing, I think the cohort haven't progressed massively in the time that they've had...

...some of them aren't actually literate in Arabic... so from being not literate in Arabic... in their own language... they're suddenly asked to then learn another language...

...also... organising additional ESOL provision... there is some provision... through the local... college, but it isn't sufficient to bring them up to speed...

EMPLOYMENT

Employment and employability are proving a real challenge. There appear to be numerous barriers.

...the VPRS cohort is very unique within the refugee population... it has its own... unique challenges... so trying to move them towards employment has been challenging...

Language is the first major barrier – without adequate English it will always be hard to find suitable jobs.

...they will tell you how hard they worked, what type of work they had... what jobs they did...

This is exacerbated by the work skills and experience that they bring and the age profile of the families in the scheme.

...all the barriers we face trying to get people into employment... you break down one brick wall, and then there's another and another and another... but all of it links back to their English... it's one of the biggest things really...

Many have trade skills appropriate to Syria, but not the understanding of legislation and regulations or the qualifications that are recognised and needed here.

...at the moment... it's trying not to run before we can walk... the adults are very keen to work... the male adults... but some of them have not very good English... so it's trying to hold them off until... we can get them into work that's going to be meaningful, appropriate and sustainable...

Being older makes it harder to find work, it also makes it more difficult to accept the need to effectively start again with an apprenticeship or retraining.

...because this cohort have been identified in the camps... they possibly wouldn't ever have got here if it wasn't for that... so, they're coming from more working class backgrounds, more trades skills... which are much harder to translate... and refugees find it hard enough to translate their skills anyway... but, to try and translate a trade... health and safety... the standards are so very different... they're basically going to have to go back to do an apprenticeship... to do an NVQ... trying to tell

them that... when they've probably had their own business in Syria... it's very different to... becoming an apprentice again... it's a huge barrier...

...other barriers include things like the fact that this population, this cohort... the general age of the adult population is much higher... we know... it's an ageist country... people... in their fifties struggle (to find work)... add in to that that they're refugees, that their English isn't very good... age is definitely a barrier...

...because they're older, their identity is so much more linked with what they used to do... it's much more easy for a young person... to arrive in the UK... to make more of a transition, to be more adaptable, to be... more fluid... whereas for somebody who's maybe in their fifties or sixties, that's been a joiner their whole life, for example, their whole identity is linked to that... so you're trying to break down something that is part of them...

BENEFITS

Some families are really struggling with benefits and finding it hard to manage financially, especially with the impact of the benefits cap.

The way that the benefits system is set up makes it very hard for larger families to survive unless both parents are in work.

Some families also seem to think that they are entitled to sufficient benefits to live a comfortable life, and are reluctant to recognise that they will need to find paid employment.

...a big issue is a lot aren't managing on benefits... I think they spend more money on food... they spend a lot on meat... the average family seem to be spending... well over two hundred... two hundred and fifty pounds a week on food...

...we're finding that now, because of the benefit cap, they're not managing... a lot of the larger families are having to pay most of their own rent... so they're not managing... at all... a lot are in arrears...

...they don't understand that we can have a family going to work for the same amount of money that they've got coming in on benefits... they just don't understand it... just won't listen...

...ultimately, the welfare system is set up for you... not to have more than two children... and to have both parents working... or you're penalised... and all of our families fall into the group that get penalised... so... if they don't go to work, if they don't get both of them in work... it's very hard for them to survive...

...that is challenging... trying to explain to them that... the benefits system is... to help them while they're not working... it's not there... for them to... live off... for life... and it's not there... to live a luxury life... because a few of them, I think, feel that everything should be paid for...

...they've got this thing about working part-time... they've got this thing about wanting to do 24 hours so they can claim working tax credit... and then they know that they wouldn't have to pay all of the rent... but... if they got a job on minimum wage that was full-time they could possibly be worse off...

INDEPENDENCE

Many families seem to be becoming highly dependent and reliant on the NNRF and their caseworkers.

Some are making real strides towards independence, but there is a real concern that many will not be able to support themselves independently at the end of the support that they are given by the scheme.

...over reliance... their expectations are just ridiculous sometimes...

...we seem to have some that think that they have to ask for our permission to do things... we have others that think we're just going to do it for them for the rest of their lives...

...I think it's achieving its aims where we're getting them here and they're getting set up... but, realistically, they're not going to be self-sustainable within five years...

...I think some of the older families are more reliant on us than the younger ones... and that's going to be a little bit difficult, because after the first two years, they're supposed to come in to here, unless it's something serious... we can't do home visits no more...

...some families... the children... they're the ones that have had to... deal with... any issues... and they're more or less carrying the family...

...although they're dependent in some ways... they will ask persistently for things... if something breaks – can I have a new one... but at the same time the question I get asked... every time... is... when are you going to help me get my driving licence... when are you helping me get a job... that's the focus of the families locally...

INTEGRATION

There is little shared understanding of what is meant by integration; whether it is simply about families becoming independent and self-sufficient, or whether it is also about culturally and socially integrating and mixing with others in the broader community.

There also seems to be an assumption in the way that the scheme is set up, that if people are given the material support and skills they need, that integration will just happen.

While some families, and particularly the children and younger people, are starting to integrate in the broader sense – many others aren't, particularly in Nottingham where the larger cohort of families often tend to stick together.

Where children are integrating more, this can cause cultural tensions within the family.

...there's no common understanding (of what's meant by integration)... there's a belief that people are going to turn up like this... that these are the things that they're going to need... because it's about vulnerable... children... vulnerable persons... a lot of emphasis on health services, and... trauma...

...they seem to be – get people here, make sure they have the things that they need... and then, suddenly, they'll be integrated... without a realisation that there's a journey... and there has to be a willingness from all parties... for that to happen... and that you can't make it happen no matter how much you force it into people's faces...

...one of the issues... is the first cohort that came was a really big cohort... they... got go to lots of introductory... and welcome things together... and I think they've kind of glued together...

...it's very difficult... if the fathers feel that their language is being eroded, their way of life is being eroded... they're not going to necessarily let their children out to get even more eroded... we can offer the opportunities, but if the parents aren't going to let them go...

...understanding the system, having friends at school, talking the language... the children are... pretty fluent... but... there's a reluctance to let them go out and do other stuff...

...I don't know if they (children) are actually allowed to integrate outside of school... that was one of the issues ...

MOTIVATION

Disengagement and a lack of motivation is a concern expressed by some that work with the families.

...a lot of them have just given up... they won't say that to your face... it comes through in... not attending workshops... not attending 1:1s... not turning up for appointments... having an attitude that they are doing you a favour by turning up to something...

This is being seen most obviously with some of the older men. There is a sense that any motivation or optimism they had when they first arrived has dissipated over the two years of making little progress in learning English and finding employment.

...I think the men... are more disengaged than the women... I think that's to do with... identity... I think the women's identity around work is not cemented, because actually they haven't been to work... their identities have not been pulled apart...

...it's harder to engage with the ones in the city... they've got an expectation, some of them... they've come on a package but they want even more... and I think some of them are not even trying...

...barriers around confidence... we see that in the cohort... the ones that have just arrived, that, kind of, come fresh-eyed... bushy-tailed... want to get going, want to get into the workplace... to get their lives started again... and then some of these that are two years down the track, that have faced all these barriers... and they just, kind of, give up... have reached a point where... this is never going to happen... it's all too hard – I'll just sit here and let the next generation take the benefits... of what the UK can offer...

...if you're a sixty year old man and you're basically told that none of your skills are worthwhile... eventually... I can't imagine how that must feel...

EQUALITIES

Equalities is an issue raised by many, particularly in relation to women, their position in the family, and expectations of what they can and can't do outside the family and home.

This is a challenging issue that will be at the heart of any work around cultural and social integration.

Some are particularly worried about how these attitudes are affecting girls and young women and their opportunities to develop.

...these people came with their families... their children... their wives... so we need to raise awareness about equality and diversity as well...

...there's one or two... from the country... they don't want their wives to work where there's any other males...

...I don't understand the thinking in not wanting their wives to work when the children are at school...

...in Syrian culture... the women... stay at home... and look after the kids... and the husband's the one that manages everything... the money... and goes out... that kind of thinking... they're not interested in changing it...

...one family... we generally put the child benefit in the... mother's name, and the father objected to it because he didn't want anything in her name... and another one of

Rather unexpectedly, however, in some areas women are taking leadership, and are showing more interest in and commitment to learning what they will need to support their children's progress in the UK.

There are also some issues arising around sexism, and the attitudes of some Syrian men towards the female staff in the NNRF.

the families... he was absolutely appalled at the fact that his wife...may have to go out to work...

...to them it's not backward, because it's their culture... but how do you get them to realise, well actually that has to stop... you have to... let go... and make changes... you've got to be willing to make the change... so that's a hard one... I don't think we're going to win that battle...

...the girls... are very much kept at home... they're not allowed to mix as much... some of the girls... we don't see them... they're just at home cooking... school and home and cook...

...I actually fear more for the young girls... because they're not allowed to come to the workshops, they're not allowed to think of a future... to engage in employment because they're going to get married...

...it tends to be the women who are the leaders...

...employability workshops... I was expecting the women, that there'd be hardly any turn up... actually, the women's were the best attended of all of them... I think even if they don't want to work, they want to understand... because it affects their families... their English... as a cohort generally... there's always exceptions, but I think their English is further forward than the men's...

...they can be a bit dismissive... sometimes they don't listen, and you'll tell them something they don't want to hear from you... and they want to speak to the manager... but unfortunately for them the manager's a woman anyway... they do have that attitude... and we have to be quite firm with them – which they don't like... because they don't want to be told by a woman...

3. LEARNING

This evaluation has set out the CHALLENGES that are being faced by the NNRF and others working with families through the VPRS.

This section will start to question whether some of these challenges are specific to the way the scheme has been set up and the specific cultural expectations and behaviours of the Syrian families, or whether the way that the NNRF and other agencies have worked with the families might also be contributing to these challenges.

The themes discussed within this section might also have a broader relevance to the work of the Forum with other refugees and asylum seekers.

...individuals who live in the County, I think they've developed a lot quicker than the ones that actually live in the city...

It has been suggested that families outside the City have, broadly speaking, developed faster and integrated better than the families in Nottingham. While there is currently no comparative data to confirm this, if it is true there are a number of potential reasons, these include:

- How we work with families: do the NNRF work with families in the same way as organisations in the County – and what might we learn from different ways of working?
- Location: does where families are located, and the numbers of other families located nearby affect progress and integration?

HOW WE WORK WITH FAMILIES

SUPPORT AND RELIANCE

Everyone recognises that the NNRF has provided excellent support for the families, and that the caseworkers have done a really good job.

In the process significant trust has been developed between the families and the NNRF.

The quality of support was also highlighted by the families themselves in the internal evaluation published in January 2017¹.

This intensive support is given for the best humanitarian reasons, but some are now questioning whether the level of support is creating an unintended dependence on the NNRF and on the caseworkers in particular.

...because our support is very intensive... these families consider us as their culture, their language... their solicitor... their mother tongue... we are everything for them...

...we are giving day to day support... maybe 24 hours sometimes...

...we have a lot of people saying... we trust you guys... we cannot trust anyone else... these people came out from trauma, they suffered from trauma...

...I think it's perfectly natural... the attachment to those families... in the scenario that they're given... but I think it has created problems... I think that's why those cohort one families are still massively reliant on the caseworkers... two years down the track...

...maybe sometimes... by giving extra... intensive support... makes some people maybe relying a little bit...

...some need more help than others... I think how we treat... the Syrians makes them a little more... reliant on us than any other refugee...

...it's made quite a few of them divas... they feel like they're special... the way they behave...

...we can't always solve their problems... and the fact that they think that we can... is really disempowering...

...in the end you really need to be saying No – it's not going to happen... they have to understand it's not going to happen...

¹ Report on Year One of the Syrian Resettlement Vulnerable Persons Scheme. Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum, 23/1/2017

...I'm used to working with homeless families... and it's always a holistic approach... and not creating dependency... knowing how important it is for these families... to become independent of the handouts they're being given... because that's the only way they're going to create a new life...

LANGUAGE

Language has been recognised as one of the major barriers, and progress for many has been unexpectedly slow.

Much has been done to provide interpreters and English language classes (although some feel more could be done, see p31 below)

Some are questioning whether the level and type of language support given might have unintentionally contributed to a greater dependence and slower progress.

Use of interpreters can give people an excuse not to practice English, and outside the NNRF some have consciously tried to avoid using interpreters where possible for this reason.

Where people have seen a need for additional language support, it has mostly been couched in terms of formal ESOL classes. Others are suggesting that there are

...the language barrier is... the biggest thing... we're fortunate we've got an Arabic speaker... case worker... and we've got a team of interpreters...

...we employed an Arabic speaking tutor... it was easier for us to work with people if we had that language connection...

...you've got the double-edged sword... of having an Arabic speaker... in your team... because, obviously that gives people... that welcome and everything to start with... but then... trying to take them... dependence to independence... from that language thing... is a double edged sword...

...there's been times when I've not consciously engaged an additional interpreter... (when) I felt it would be a backward step to have an interpreter... I do think the resistance to use them has helped them progress... because... it has been sink or swim...

...sometimes I think if you send an interpreter it sends the wrong message because it looks as though they're dependent... it is a deliberate ploy...

...English is a big gap... but it wasn't just about ESOL... it was about how we could give them other skills through different forms of practicing English...

many other practical and less formal approaches to learning and practicing English.

Language is also another area where the amount of general support given to the families might remove the incentive of the necessity to learn English.

...the language is an issue... but it's also an excuse... and it's allowed to be an excuse because they are not forced to do things for themselves...

...the other thing... is because of them arriving in cohorts... if you arrive as a refugee here, a young man, on his own... you have no support, you have no caseworker... you don't get given a house... you've got no community around you... the incentive, to learn English is paramount... because otherwise you're not going to survive... the difference between that, and somebody arriving with their family... with a whole Syrian... community... given a caseworker who's going to support them if there's any problems... so their incentive to learn English is much less...

ACCESSING SERVICES

For families in Nottingham, the focus of work is the Forum. Courses are run at the Forum, and families come to the Forum to sort their problems. It has been recognised that this might lead to dependence on the NNRF, and is now starting to be addressed.

In the County, outside Nottingham, there is no dedicated resource for refugees and asylum seekers, so the families have had to access general services alongside the general public, attend ESOL classes with other non-English speakers, and possibly therefore become less dependent.

...and one of the issues... everything happens at the Forum, and if we're talking about integration, and... getting people using other services... it's getting them out of the Forum and looking at other venues and activities that are going off across the city...

...it (having all activities at the Forum) doesn't familiarise them with other parts of the city... and once their five years has ended, where will they go to get support... they need to be starting to do that now...

...and also, it means it's not about us, it's about them... the community have set up conversation classes... the Job Centre is taking on this... the College is taking on that, the Council is taking on that... in the city it's us... it's the Forum... the Forum needs to sort this, the Forum needs to sort that... which is creating dependence...

...in our general ESOL classes, everyone comes together...

INTEGRATION

Outside Nottingham City, the agencies working with the families have intentionally tried to encourage people to mix more widely and integrate with local activities.

...I think it is a huge assumption that because they're from Syria, they should be together... I think it's probably dangerous to think... these are Syrian people so you have to do this with these people... that doesn't work at all... so we just mix everybody up...

...it was, kind of, a deliberate policy... when they first came... we wanted to... try and prevent what we thought would be an automatic migration towards the city to access all of the cultural things that we don't have here... we were encouraging more local integration activities...

...what we did was... we worked with the Syrian families... we got them together... and said... what would be the things that would be most helpful to you... and they wanted to do things like... go to places... visits... but they wanted to go with other people... they didn't want to go as a group of Syrian people...

LEARNING TOGETHER

The NNRF has wide and deep knowledge and experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers.

This can be a huge benefit, but it can also potentially be a problem, especially when a new project might present a whole new set of challenges.

For people working with the Syrian families outside of Nottingham City, this was a whole new area of work.

There was little option but to see the project as a huge learning exercise. If the approach is to learn alongside the Syrian families, the

...we're... in the early stages of it... we're quite new to it... so, we've probably got lots of learning to do...

...we've learned a lot from each other... and we're still learning... all the time... the staff really like that, about... working... with this project... is that, it's challenging... and we all learn...

...we were apprehensive before we took the first families because we don't have any experience of working with refugees... and their culture is so different... we were very nervous... so we're learning along the way...

...more cultural awareness may be useful... although... maybe not... I think you just have to learn that as you go along... every individual's different... and... I feel that we had the skills that we needed practically... and the rest of it I think you just have to... work on an individual basis... to the needs of that person...

dynamic changes from expert and client to co-producers.

It was easier to take this approach, because it fitted, at least in the case of Voluntary Action Broxtowe, with their intention to work on all their projects using co-production – putting people in charge of making things happen.

...I think that's really important (asking when you don't know)... because then it feels like a two way learning experience...

...we felt that there was an assumption that just because they were Syrian... they were all going to get on, and they'd all want to do the same things... so we... tried to... break that up a bit... and just said... tell us what you want to do...

...it's an interesting approach... it's really fascinating... it's been quite interesting to watch how it has evolved, when it's led by Syrian people...

...being aware of being sensitive to people's needs... and getting it right, really... we're all quite concerned to do that... and I think the answer to that has been, well... we will follow you...

...it just seems to be something that you just have to make up as you go along... because of the nature of the work... and the diversity of the people that you are working with... they're all very different...

...we just ask them... and just go with it... we do that with other people as well... I think that's what's good about the organisation – it works well to do that, because it's never what you expect it to be – but it's always better...

...we work in... we co-produce our services... we try... and... put people in charge of making things happen...

LOCATION

GROUPING, FACILITIES AND INTEGRATION

The experience of where families have been housed has raised some interesting questions.

The City has a wide range of appropriate cultural facilities and the dedicated expertise of the NNRF.

Outside the City there are fewer appropriate cultural facilities and no dedicated services for refugees.

While this has had its own challenges, some feel that the fewer facilities outside the City have actually made it easier for the families to integrate, as there has been no option. In the City, on the other hand, the Syrian families have tended to stick together in their own community.

A smaller number of families in an area might also have an impact – both in terms of needing to look outside the immediate community for social interaction and support, and in terms of potentially more personalised support if only working with a few families.

...the scenario that we've created in Nottingham... doesn't encourage integration... it encourages them to become their own little community... it's only the ones that want to integrate, that would have wanted to integrate anyway... that have...

...it's like the question – do we house them all together or do we separate them? – and it's such a difficult question... if you separate them... it... creates more of a scenario where they have to integrate... but then at the same time if you look at the families... that are totally isolated... that's not right either... where they're isolated and... a target for abuse...

...maybe it's easier in the County, because it's harder... it's... harder to do things, there were less things around...

... people like... they like Beeston because it's multi-cultural, the university's close by, and there's lots of diversity... and it's quite small... so people can get around easily... I think that makes it easier... that there are less... options... but then the essential things are there... I think that, sort of, works...

... we were quite concerned, initially, taking families here because we don't have... a big history... of accepting refugees... locally... especially from a totally different culture... concerned that we didn't have the right resources locally... that the families were going to require... we've got no mosque... no halal food... so we were... concerned as to how we were going to help them to integrate locally... to restart their lives...

...they say that they love Newark... that they've been to Nottingham and they've seen Nottingham, and... they're not interested, they don't want to live there, they like it here... the quiet, peaceful life... which is what they feel that they have here...

...in Beeston we worked closely with the voluntary and community service... and that project has gone really well... there's a smaller number in Broxtowe Borough as

well... because they had some of those things going off it was easy to integrate the Syrian families into what actually existed...

...in the County... if you compare the number of families... they're working on a much smaller scale... perhaps they can get more into the detail of those families...

LOCAL RESPONSE

In Nottingham the Syrian families weren't special. Nottingham already has many refugees and asylum seekers and large and vibrant communities from many parts of the world.

Outside the City, the families were more special – and a strong humanitarian response to the ongoing Syrian crisis has given rise to some positive community responses, including a new charitable project to support the families in Newark.

On the other hand, there have also been some more negative responses to some of the families housed outside the City, and some have received either low level or in one or two cases more overt hostility.

...the biggest challenge... is where we've had a lot of people who all came at the same time, and all living within the city of Nottingham... and that's problematic, because, the city of Nottingham has a lot of refugees in it... so it can't do something special for these ones... so it's brilliant... it's multicultural... you've got your mosques... whereas in Broxtowe... in Newark... smaller, never had refugees... the population's gone – wahey... and they're rallying round... also, they're isolated, so they're not... going... the other... people... are getting this, are getting that... it's worked well to put people into those environments... because... the community response has been mostly positive...

...every area is different... we didn't know what the reception was going to be here... it was something we couldn't plan for... we didn't know what to expect...

...there hasn't been any... overt... racism... just a bit of a reaction to... what they perceive as these people being given handouts before local people... on the whole there's been positive feedback... there hasn't been anything... too troubling... so far...

...we've had one family who have had some issues with a neighbour... I wouldn't say they've been openly embraced... but we haven't had any major issues... just some low level stuff in the neighbourhood... that was dealt with...

...there's been quite a lot of hate crime... against families... in the Borough... and one family... had to be moved...

4. DOING THE WORK

NNRF: TEAM

There is a good team supporting the Syrian families at NNRF, and a good team spirit.

...there's not an awful lot I'd change about how we work... I think we've got quite a good system... I've got a great team... they all know what they're doing...

...we support each other really well... we do try to help each other out when we can... it's a nice team...

NNRF: IMPACT

There are some concerns within NNRF about the impact of the VPRS scheme on the rest of the organisation.

...the resettlement programme is different from any other programme... here in the Forum... or around the city of Nottingham... or maybe around the UK... because you're... tackling different issues...

Some sense some resentment about the level of resources and support available for the Syrian families compared with the other refugees and asylum seekers using the Forum.

...with asylum seekers and refugees they are limited to some services...

It has also been suggested that there is a bit of a disconnect between the VPRS team and others working at the Forum which could exacerbate this resentment.

...a lot of... other clients have remarked... how they see... they're getting everything... and... they're not getting anything...

...so there's a big disconnect between what that team's trying to achieve... and the resources that that has, compared to all... other teams...

...I don't think it necessarily causes problems... there is an element of... because... the people involved don't really talk to each other... you've got a team that works with the Syrians, and answers to... the Council... and then there's the rest of the organisation...

...there is a resentment... there's an organisational resentment that one lot have everything thrown at them, and one lot don't...

5. WHERE NEXT

The team is already aware of many of the issues and challenges, and is already working in a number of areas to improve outcomes. This section of the evaluation summarises ideas from the team and others about these possible changes and improvements.

LOCALLY

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

The team recognise that more needs to be done to manage expectations – both of what families will receive, and what they will be expected to do for themselves - when the families arrive.

The team are addressing these issues, and changes are being made that will hopefully improve outcomes for new arrivals.

...we definitely know we need to manage expectations... so we're drafting a proposal to outline exactly what to expect once they're here... what we expect of them, what they can expect of us...

...constantly adapting... we've written... expectation documents, we do a lot around expectations when people arrive... expectations... in year one... in Arabic and in English... more boundaried in the way that we're working with people...

...more orientation... almost a checklist of what you're going to do with people... more, setting a plan... reviewing... that's something we've introduced... it is very much about... how the UK works, how the system works... what generally are the expectations...

LEARNING ENGLISH

There is a recognition that there needs to be more done to help families to learn English as soon as possible after they arrive.

...it's their learning ESOL... English... more than anything... I think if they got more intense ESOL it would be so much better...

...the only thing I would change, really... is trying to get into college quicker with ESOL...

...definitely more English classes... but colleges are stretched at the moment... they could do with more ESOL... from the beginning...

...I think we need to do more stuff around... ESOL's more compulsory, and they have to get into it straight away...

LEARNING UK LIFE SKILLS

Some feel that there also needs to be more emphasis on employability and life skills to help people to become more independent, and that this should start as soon as people arrive.

...they could do with workshops on budgeting... things like that... how to look after their home...

...I think they should have had the employability programme from day one...

...instead of saying, these people are going to take... a good two years before they can get into a proper, permanent, solid job... in that time, we are going to have a whole process of stuff that they have to engage in... volunteering... training... all this stuff... so by the end of those two years... they will be employable...

...they need to be on work programmes, but it needs to start from day one... if from day one that was the expectation, they would have done it... would have been fine getting on with it... they would have all been healthier... would have felt like they had some self-worth... and they'd have been in a better position now to actually get proper jobs...

...the employability is new... and a bit of youth work, but that's possibly come a bit late...

EQUALITIES

Equalities are a concern, and more thought is needed on how to work with families around this.

...run more classes on... equality... things that girls can do... you know it's going to meet resistance... but... you've come here to have a better life and to have hope for your children... so... give them the opportunity...

...I think also, the boys are following after their fathers with their thinking... now hopefully, that will change because they're going to school, and integrating, and seeing how things work... it would be nice... if we could do something... with the young boys so that they can see... well, your sister's actually equal to you, and... in this country... she can do... is allowed to do things...

HOW WE WORK

There is a recognition that the way that NNRF works with the families needs to focus more on supporting the families towards independence and integration.

The high levels of caring and personal support are given for the best reasons, but there is a growing recognition that this might be encouraging dependence.

People are looking for ways to give families more choice and agency, and work intentionally towards the families no longer needing or wanting support.

There is also the recognition that this is a challenging process.

It is a shift in culture which is already happening in the organisation. There is an understanding that it needs to happen – but knowing how to make it happen is more difficult.

...going forward... what we're trying to do is create a pro-active model... this is what's going to happen in this process, and these are the outcomes... this is what you can choose to do at each of those points... we're trying to give people that... opportunity... to have a... choice about what is happening...

...maybe being... a bit more proactive for refugees' futures, rather than reactive to their immediate needs...

...we've talked about how they... lever off the... caseworkers so they become more independent... rather than having a caseworker... (people) are directed to a drop-in, where you can just come... when they need support, rather than you go and visit them every week or every couple of weeks... and then you start using other partners within the city... so they've got other options to go to...

...the ultimate in any support service like this is that they don't come back...

...I think there's been a focus at NNRF... around empowerment... I think there is an awareness of that, and a shift in culture... management... wise, I think that is there... I think there is a tendency, though, within the team, to be too kind... to be too accommodating...

...I think the idea of empowerment... I think it is something where you need some training on it... I don't think it's a natural thing, necessarily, to think like that... as a human being, when you're presented with vulnerable people, and... you've been attracted to this kind of job because you are a caring person who wants to support vulnerable people... your natural response... is to take care of them, is to do things for them...

...but I do think that... saying that you want to empower people is great... and I think that at NNRF we are saying that now... that language is here... I don't think, actually, people understand what that is... how to actually empower people...

NATIONALLY

NATIONAL STANDARDS

There are differences in the way the scheme is operated in different parts of the UK. Clearer standards and expectations would give a more consistent experience to families in different parts of the UK.

...we need unity... around the UK... unity of the programme... we have a big challenge... when people trying to compare between Scotland... Wales... England... Birmingham... London... where... case worker giving different support... we need unity... around the UK...

...the integration and the orientation plans... sometimes we are doing something different from... the other... around the UK... more intensive English classes... orientation and integration... we're giving... different advice...

PREPARATION AND EXPECTATIONS

People feel that the work would be much easier if families were better prepared before they arrived, with a clearer understanding of:

- what life in the UK is like
- the differences in culture and cultural expectations
- what they can expect to receive through the scheme – materially and in practical support
- what they are expected to do for themselves

...we can do a lot... for these people to resettle... awareness sessions... before they are arriving... sometimes you need to tackle the issue before it's happened... we're tackling these issues after they're arriving...

...I think, learning about our culture before they came here would be beneficial...

...explain what benefits they would get when they come here... what the cost of living is in the UK... the price of food...

...more knowledge of what benefits are like before they come here... I think it's something they should know before they come... and it could change their mind before they accept...

...there's a lot around what people are being told before they leave their country... it needs to be realistic... people need to have an informed... picture of what the UK is like...

...the shame is... the bulk... all came in one go... so it's quite hard to persuade the bulk that this is the way things happen...

EMPLOYMENT

There are barriers to early employment (see p16), but long periods out of work are demotivating and deskilling people.

A work programme tailored to the needs and skills of the arriving families could give an opportunity for people to remain motivated and engaged while developing their language and work skills.

It would also send a clear message about future expectations that people will work and contribute.

...the government should have some kind of work programme... because when they arrive they want to work... their expectation is that they're going to have to work... it's our systems and processes that mean that they can't... and then by the time... two years down the line, they've still done no volunteering, their language isn't good, they've still got no English references... you're still starting from zero...

...in Germany they put them on work programmes from the day they get there, they have to be in work... I think there should be an expectation that they're doing something... so that you're building up English experiences, you're using your language and your gaining English references... but because this isn't something that they have to do... they're just like – No...

6. APPENDICES

CASEWORK SUPPORT SERVICES

2.4 The Recipient will ensure that Beneficiaries are provided with a welcome pack of groceries on their arrival

2.5 The Recipient will provide a cash/ clothing allowances for each Beneficiary of £200 – this is to ensure they have sufficient funds to live on while their claim for benefits is being processed.

2.6 The Recipient will provide advice and assistance with registering for mainstream benefits and services and signposting to other advice and information giving agencies – this support includes:

2.6.1 Assisting with registration for and collection of Biometric Residence Permits following arrival

2.6.2 Registering with local schools, English language and literacy classes

2.6.3 Attending local Job Centre Plus appointments for benefit assessments

2.6.4 Registering with a local GP

2.6.5 Advice around and referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture as appropriate

2.6.6 Providing assistance with access to employment

2.7 The Recipient shall put in place a support plan for each family or individual for the 12 month period of their support to facilitate their orientation into their new home/area.

2.8 The Recipient shall put in place arrangements for the provision of English language classes which Beneficiaries should be able to access within one month of arrival. This should be provided following an assessment to determine the appropriate level of provision. This provision should be delivered by an accredited English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provider. This ESOL provision should be made available until such time as suitable mainstream provision becomes available or until 12 months after arrival (whichever is sooner). The purpose of the language tuition is to ensure that Beneficiaries are able to carry out basic transactions within the communities in which they have been placed.

2.9 Throughout the period of resettlement support the Recipient will ensure interpreting services are available.

2.10 The above services will be provided through a combination of office based appointments, drop in sessions, outreach surgeries and home visits.