IPPR

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS IN YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

A TOOLKIT

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to support councils, service providers, voluntary and community groups and others, working with refugee, migrant and receiving communities in the Yorkshire and Humber region, to combat social isolation and loneliness, build the foundations for meaningful social connections and promote social cohesion.

We are focused in particular on the experiences of refugees and other new arrivals in Yorkshire and the Humber, and how new migrant communities can be supported to make connections in their new homes. It takes the whole community to build the foundations necessary for social connections to happen. Therefore the research underpinning this toolkit was inclusive of people from a refugee and migrant background, as well as people who have lived in the region all their lives.

This toolkit encourages the reader to think about how they can contribute to creating villages, towns and cities that are welcoming and which invite everyone – no matter their immigration status – into the fold. Connecting with others has personal and societal benefits. The toolkit signposts how policymakers, officials, practitioners and residents of Yorkshire and the Humber can have a role in forging these connections.

WHY SOCIAL ISOLATION AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER

This is an important and timely topic. As a nation many of us are feeling more isolated. Since the pandemic, according to the Office for National Statistics,[1] the number of people who say they feel lonely often or always has increased from 5 per cent to over 7 per cent. That's over a million people more that feel lonely after the pandemic. People in the Yorkshire and Humber region experience one of the highest rates of loneliness in England. Available data shows that in 2020/21, 8 per cent of people were lonely in Yorkshire and Humber often or always.[2]

However, there are also factors that make some people more likely to experience loneliness.[3] For instance:

The manifesto developed together with residents across the region shows that feeling connected to others around us is integral for being able to live a good life. Creating the conditions for social connections to happen is not simply a 'nice to have' but foundational for happier, healthier and stronger communities.

The toolkit is designed to:

- provide an evidence base and share our research findings
- inspire action through the words of Yorkshire and the Humber residents
- showcase best practice through local and national case studies
- offer practical guidance and tools
- be a repository of key resources.

In the recent Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Strategy, 'community and belonging' are named as a strategic priority for action in the region. This toolkit supports councils, service providers, voluntary and community groups and others to work toward this priority through providing evidence that connections matter and through practical advice to help forge connections in the region.

- living in an urban area or a traditional mining area
- living in an area that is ethnically diverse or that has high levels of unemployment
- people aged under 25 or over 65.

There are also additional factors that increase the risk of isolation for people that have moved to the UK from another country. For a number of reasons – such as being separated from family members, not knowing the language, uncertain legal status, few local contacts etc – living somewhere new and unfamiliar can be an isolating experience.[4] A survey of organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers, for instance, found that over half (55 per cent) of the people they supported reported feeling isolated and lonely.[5]

According to a comprehensive study by the Sheffield Centre for Loneliness Studies,[6] there are high levels of loneliness among ethnic minority and migrant communities. They found that this occurs due to four main reasons.

- **Lack of positive social ties and interactions** (resulting from too few opportunities to spend time with people with whom they share an identity or with people from a different background; being separated from family members; lack of resources, time or energy to get involved in events and activities; and lack of confidence or poor health).
- **Negative social interactions** (such as stressful family relationships or facing racism and microaggressions in day-to-day life).
- **Not feeling valued or valuable** (resulting from, for instance, being in an unfamiliar place following migration and loss of status).
- **Dissatisfaction with existing social ties** (as a result of, for instance, being unfamiliar with the social and cultural context of their new home and the loss of significant relationships as a result of migration).

Particular migrant groups at risk of isolation and loneliness include older people,[7] children and young people who are new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers[8], women (in particular pregnant women and mothers),[9] single asylum seekers,[10] and people who do not speak English.[11]

Social isolation is not a phenomenon that has come about solely because of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown periods.[12] Rather the pandemic exacerbated already existing feelings of isolation for new arrivals.[13] As we learn to live with Covid, responding to the needs of those who have felt increasingly isolated in the last few years is paramount.

Social connections are the natural counterpoint to isolation – and they have wider benefits for the community too. As the Relationships Project,[14] an initiative championing the importance of relationships for a better society, put it:

"A community with high levels of connectivity… will be better able to respond to adversity, more likely to channel conflict or tension into constructive energy, and best placed to support and sustain the wellbeing of all its members."

HOW WE DEVELOPED THE TOOLKIT

Over the last 18 months, IPPR, in collaboration with peer and community researchers at Migration Yorkshire,[15] has conducted a research project to understand how people that migrate to the Yorkshire and Humber region can be supported to connect with others in their new home and, in turn, how we can reduce social isolation and loneliness.

The project was born out of previous research undertaken by IPPR for Migration Yorkshire, the Communities up Close project, which highlighted the importance of social connections between migrant and receiving communities[16] for building cohesion and strengthening support for migration generally. Facilitating social contact between settled residents and newcomers was a key recommendation for policymakers, in order to bring down barriers, address misconceptions and build relationships. This research extends this work, focusing not only on social connections between migrant and receiving communities, but more broadly on measures to reduce isolation and loneliness.

Methods

10 focus groups were conducted with 70 residents from across the region, in Barnsley, Kirklees, Leeds, Scarborough and York. We asked participants who they feel connected to in their area, what makes it difficult to connect with others, and how things should be changed to make them feel more connected locally.

We held the following focus groups.

- Two in Barnsley. One with a mixed group of residents from migrant and receiving communities. The second with asylum seekers living in the town.
- Two in Kirklees. One with a mixed group of residents from migrant and receiving communities, recruited through an open-call shared among local organisations and groups. The second with asylum seeking and refugee women, co-facilitated by a community researcher.
- Two in Leeds. One with Eritrean refugees and the second with migrants from French-speaking African countries. These were led by a community and peer researcher respectively, and were facilitated in Tigrinya and French.
- Two in Scarborough. One with a mixed group of residents from migrant and receiving communities. The second with Polish-speaking migrants living in and around Scarborough, and facilitated by a local organisation offering advice and support to new arrivals.
- Two in York. One with a mixed group of residents from migrant and receiving communities. The second with refugees living in the city.

20 interviews were conducted with stakeholders working with communities across the region, drawn from local authority community and cohesion teams, the voluntary and community sector, refugee community organisations and schools. Researchers also consulted with expert groups such as the Regional Refugee Integration Forum.[17]

An online deliberative workshop was held over a weekend with 14 residents from across the region, to explore in more detail why social connections matter and what policy solutions can support social connections in the region. The group wrote a manifesto, in their own words, setting out why action needs to be taken and how.

Data has been analysed by researchers from IPPR alongside peer and community researchers at Migration Yorkshire. Key themes and recommendations structure the main body of the toolkit. Case studies are derived from conversations with stakeholders, residents and through desk-based research.

HOW YOU CAN USE THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is not designed to be read beginning to end, but rather for you to dip in and out of according to your interests and area of work. Where sections are targeted at particular audiences these are indicated using the icons below. However this is a guide only, please feel free to read whatever you are drawn to.

This toolkit is accompanied by a manifesto for action – a document detailing the motivating and inspiring conversations contained within our deliberative workshop with Yorkshire residents. Here you will find a compelling case for why it is necessary for policymakers and people in power to prioritise laying the foundations for social connections in the region.

The next section draws on focus group data to we outline the challenges and barriers that people face when it comes to forming connections in the region. This section is brief, but true to the words of our participants and the struggles they described.

The main body of the toolkit is split into five themes that are centred around key actions that

should be taken to tackle social isolation, promote social connections and improve cohesion locally. In each of these sections you will find further information about why this action is necessary – reflecting on learning from our research as well as the existing evidence base, case studies to share best practice, and practical guidance and tools to support the development of policy and practice in this area.

The five thematic areas are as follows.

1. Holding activities that bring people together.
2. Creating public spaces and infrastructure that work for communities.
3. Investing in inclusive education, skills and training opportunities.
4. Including diverse communities in decision-making.
5. Transforming systems to meet community needs, including:
   - joined-up working
   - tackling discrimination, prejudice and hate crime
   - trauma-informed care.

Throughout the toolkit there are links to external resources that can support officials, policymakers and practitioners in their efforts to support communities to connect. Appendices contain further resources organised thematically and a glossary of key terms.

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COUNCIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

EMPLOYERS

BARRIERS TO SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

People face multiple and interlocking barriers that can prevent them from making meaningful connections with others locally. Drawn from the focus group and interview data, this section highlights barriers that we heard about from both migrant and receiving communities.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

THE COST OF ACCESSING EVENTS IS PROHIBITIVE

Many people are simply priced out of taking part in local events and activities. Even if they are free, there are other expenses, such as travel and food costs. This is especially challenging for people seeking asylum and families where the cost of tickets and other expenses are multiplied.

THE FEELING OF LIMBO AS A RESULT OF THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

Asylum seekers face severe financial barriers to taking part in social events. Barriers to work for the vast majority means that many are barred from making social connections via the workplace. Long delays in the asylum process, sometimes for many years, prevent people from feeling entirely at home in their communities.

FEARS ABOUT FACING RACISM OR PREJUDICE

Some migrants and ethnic minority communities feel excluded because they have actually experienced racism, prejudice or discrimination – or they fear it. New arrivals may feel unwelcome or unsafe and may avoid engaging in community activities with people they do not know or in activities and events perceived to be in majority white spaces.

RESTRICTED BY BUREAUCRACY AND CHALLENGES ACCESSING FUNDING FOR EVENTS

Some communities want to put on events and activities but cannot, either because they have to tackle bureaucratic processes, or they don't know how to go about getting funding for their idea.

BUSY LIVES DEPLETE THE RESOURCES THAT PEOPLE HAVE TO ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

After long work days to make ends meet, some people find themselves with little energy or time to commit to or engage with community events.

CONCERNS ABOUT HOUSING, WELFARE AND IMMIGRATION STATUS OVERSHADOW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION

Facing huge issues accessing basic needs or feeling unsafe in the home mean that people are not able to engage with social opportunities. Issues such as damp and disrepair, problems with neighbours, lack of access to welfare or delays in asylum claims take up a lot of mental and physical energy.

INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONAL BARRIERS

LOW CONFIDENCE AND A LACK OF TRUST IN AUTHORITY

Some people lack the confidence to access local shared spaces where social connections may occur. A lack of trust in people and institutions can mean some are reluctant to engage in events, activities or spaces that they associate with those people or organisations.

PAST AND ONGOING TRAUMA CAN PREVENT PEOPLE FROM TAKING PART IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Refugees and asylum seekers are likely to have experienced some amount of trauma in their country of origin, on their journey and as a result of experiences while in the UK. This can be detrimental for health and wellbeing and contribute to experiences of isolation.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS PREVENT PEOPLE FROM TAKING PART IN SOCIAL EVENTS

Not speaking English, compounded with inadequate access to ESOL classes, increases feelings of isolation as people feel unconfident or unable to get to know others in their new home.

WORRIES ABOUT FAMILY BACK HOME PREVENT ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES FROM PARTICIPATING FULLY IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Some new arrivals might feel occupied by concerns about their families safety and wellbeing back home, the desire to reunite with loved ones, earning money to send back home, or otherwise dealing with homesickness. This can make it difficult to invest in the here and now, and in their new communities.

DESIGN BARRIERS

INFORMATION ABOUT EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES IS NOT REACHING COMMUNITIES

While some parts of Yorkshire have great opportunities and events for communities, we frequently heard how people simply did not know what was happening in their local area. Some praised social media while others prefer non-digital modes of communication.

PEOPLE FEEL LOCKED OUT OF DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Many people feel that they do not have a stake in how decisions are made about their communities. For refugees, asylum seekers and new migrant communities this sense is even more palpable.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES DO NOT ACTUALLY REFLECT WHAT PEOPLE THEMSELVES WANT TO DO

For instance, we heard from some asylum-seeking men that they are less inclined to engage in activities that are about 'sharing their culture' and how they would prefer to take part in activities that offer training and develop their skills.

PLACE-BASED BARRIERS

LACK OF THINGS TO DO LOCALLY

Some parts of Yorkshire, particularly in some out-of-town areas, have few facilities or activities to engage with people. This could be for various reasons, such as the area's remoteness or community hubs closing down.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT IS UNAFFORDABLE, INFREQUENT AND INACCESSIBLE

Some struggle to afford to use public transport to get to events, community spaces, or even to essential appointments. Buses can also be infrequent and unreliable – particularly in more rural or out-of-town locations – and inaccessible or unwelcoming for some (such as parents of young children in buggies).

THERE ARE TOO FEW COMMUNITY SPACES TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS AND PUBLIC SPACES ARE NOT ALWAYS DESIGNED FOR CONNECTION

In some parts of Yorkshire, community spaces that are accessible, free to use, and conveniently located are few and far between. Without spaces to hold events and activities, opportunities for connection are limited. Public space, such as parks and high streets, do not always feel safe or welcoming.

PLUS...

BAD WEATHER CAN PREVENT PEOPLE FROM STEPPING OUT OF THEIR FRONT DOORS!

Travelling to and from appointments, heading out to events or taking part in outdoor activities can be severely hampered by rain, wind and cold weather. New migrants, especially those on a low income, may not have the clothing and equipment necessary to enable them to go outdoors comfortably in inclement weather. Furthermore, for many refugees (and others) who come from temperate climates, the winter season can contribute to feeling low.

1.
HOLDING ACTIVITIES THAT BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

THIS SECTION IS AIMED AT:

COUNCIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Asked about how people in Yorkshire and the Humber could be supported to connect with one another, participants spoke about the need for more opportunities to meet, spend time with and get to know others in their community.

Many participants, from receiving and migrant communities, recognised that meaningful contact with people from different backgrounds was vital for a whole host of reasons. For receiving communities, this tended to be framed as culturally enriching – people wanted to learn from and about other cultures – their traditions and cuisines, for instance. For new arrivals, they also appreciated this cultural enrichment, but in addition they also spoke about how relationships with the receiving community helped them to 'get on', such as through orientation, practicing English, and support with understanding British culture and norms (see box 1.1).

Box 1.1: Why meeting people from different backgrounds is beneficial

We often talk about bringing people together from different backgrounds, and here Yorkshire residents, from receiving and migrant communities, spell out the reasons why this is so important. Use this as a resource to share with decision makers, to show the value of funding community events and engagement work in your area.

Meeting people from different backgrounds enables us to learn about one another and can be personally enriching.

"You can't really expand your view of the world unless you talk to people who have other experiences of it. And I tend to thrive on stories. So, hearing other people's stories, hearing about other people's lives, is really important to me."
Female, British, 45-54, Kirklees

"It's an opportunity to learn. You learn that there are different truths. If you grow up and are confined in one community, your worldviews are framed by that community only. However, if you meet people from other backgrounds, you can learn about different perspectives. You learn a lot about yourself..."
Male, Eritrean, 45-54, Leeds

Connections with the receiving community are potentially helpful and supportive for new migrants.

"When I have built a relationship with these people of course when I need any support, I will find it... So that will make [my] life easier...."
Male, Syrian, 35-44, York

Mixing with the receiving community helps new migrants to learn and practice English.

"How can we improve our language skills if we do not interact with people from the receiving communities?"
Male, Congolese, 55-64 Leeds

Actively building relationships with people from different backgrounds is crucial for creating a sense of community and social solidarity.

"Two years ago, we initiated a project which aimed to bring communities together and create social solidarity. The idea came from the grass root, and we would organise activities such as football parties. We did integrate people from migrant backgrounds and people from the local communities were also invited... There is a proverb which says that a 100-year-old person who just lived in the same place will have less experience to share than a young one who has visited 100 different places. Meeting with people from different backgrounds always makes a huge difference."
Male, Cameroonian, 45-54, Leeds

Connections across difference can help children to learn that all cultures and faiths are equal.

"We want our children to grow up knowing as much about as many different cultures as possible, because it is a global world. We deliberately put ourselves in situations where we expose ourselves and our kids to different cultures. So, when the local mosque had its open day we took the kids along, because we want them to see that it's not just one religion that exists in this world, and all religions are as equal and as important as each other."
Male, Northern Irish, 35-44, York

However, we also heard how relationships with people from a similar background or who have gone through a similar experience are also vital to nurture. See box 1.4 for further reflections on this.

WHAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER?

Answers to the question of what brings people together are almost limitless, reflecting the huge diversity of likes, interests and opportunities available to people in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Firstly, conversations with residents often turned to the joy that comes from celebratory events in the community. These were seen as vital for building a shared sense of belonging and community and many had fond memories of events they had attended over the years, sharing stories about street parties, carnivals, employer-sponsored fun-days and many more.

One man spoke about the sense of community and belonging he felt following a community Iftar in Batley:

"...we had half the side where there was some poetry being read, some school children playing and things, and some talks given, and then on this side we said prayers in the open on a summer's evening. It was absolutely beautiful. And we had a diverse group of people around us, some people who were not Muslims as well, and I've never felt more comfortable or more safe outside saying my prayers."
Male, 45-54, Kirklees

A Polish resident of Scarborough spoke about being invited to a bank holiday barbeque by his neighbours:

"There was a national holiday in England ... We met in a group where I was the only Polish person, the rest of neighbours were all English people. The event was something to do with the army. It was nice, we organized a barbeque. We were integrating well."
Male, 45-54, Scarborough

However, there was also a recognition that to truly develop meaningful connections, encounters between different groups cannot only be at one-off or irregular events but these must be sustained and ongoing. Understanding where people are likely to meet others and who has the power to bring people together on an ongoing basis, is critical for developing such connections (see case study 1.1).

Case study 1.1: How the Jo Cox Foundation is cultivating belonging

The Jo Cox Foundation, alongside an expert facilitator, brought together a small, diverse group of Batley and Spen residents over a series of eight weeks to explore what it means to belong and to not belong. The group were supported to consider how they can take an active role in supporting people to feel a sense of belonging in their communities.

The group co-designed and facilitated a great get together event, called the 'Great Create Together' which had inclusivity at its heart.

Through the course of the workshops, participants came to build genuine connections and friendships, and some reflected that their preconceived notions of people different from themselves had been changed through the group.

At a deliberative workshop hosted by IPPR, Hafeezah Soni, Yorkshire programme manager at the Jo Cox Foundation shared her learning from taking part in these workshops and challenged us to consider the following questions.
• Where have you felt like you belong?
• How can you help foster and cultivate spaces and places where people feel like they can belong?

Find out more about the positive connections facilitated by these workshops by reading the evaluation report or this Yorkshire Post article. For more information contact Hafeezah Soni at hafeezah@jocoxfoundation.org.

For a number of people that we spoke to, in particular young men, taking part in or watching sport[18] was a key draw for getting involved in activities that enabled them to spend time with others. Other key ingredients highlighted by participants as important for bringing people together include food, nature, arts and culture. The following case studies highlight examples of successful events that have utilised these to good effect.

Case study 1.2: Breaking bread in Hull at the Freedom FEASTival

Supported by the Hull Food Partnership, for several years the city hosted free community feasts where attendees were encouraged to enjoy a meal with a stranger, in order to meet, talk and eat locally grown and cooked produce.

The organisers recognised that 'connectivity is as vital as the food we eat', and the feasts were part of a programme that championed food equity, empowerment and community cohesion.

Food for the feast was grown in local allotments, they were catered for by local volunteers, and theatrical performances running throughout the event ensured that guests had something to talk about. In this way, the 'FEASTival' nourished communities as well as bellies.

Case study 1.3: Art in unexpected places with Creative Scene

Creative Scene is a programme which receives Arts Council England Investment under their Creative People and Places scheme, and works in Kirklees to make art a part of everyday life. It is their mission, in spite of a challenging funding landscape, to create a thriving cultural scene in this part of West Yorkshire.

They co-produce events and arts programmes with local communities, ensuring that residents and local places are at the heart of their work. They work with the diverse communities of the area, and they try to reach beyond the usual suspects by putting on work in non-traditional spaces. Venues have included pubs, parks, museums, community centres, a canal boat, a biscuit factory, train stations, churches, libraries, sports clubs and an Indian restaurant.

In 2020, during the pandemic, they partnered with 6Million+, an arts charity that creates opportunities for refugees and migrants to tell their stories, on 'small contentments' which sought to commemorate lives lost in Srebrenica by digitally connecting refugees and migrants with local people. They sent participants a starter pack, including information about someone who lost their life at Srebrenica, creative materials and a packet of Bosnian coffee and other Bosnian delicacies. Participants then contributed to a film to share and collate their reflections.

WHERE DO PEOPLE COME TOGETHER?

Asked what activities and events are available in their local area to socialise and build social connections, the answers given by migrant and receiving residents differed considerably, suggesting they do not overlap a great deal in terms of where they spend their time. Places where there was more likely to be shared use included libraries, religious buildings, leisure centres, gyms, community centres, parks and other outdoor spaces.

For policymakers and practitioners interested in bringing people together, it is critical to understand which places and activities are important to people, what drives people's preferences for these, and what might exclude people from some spaces. In addition, councils and partners could work with spaces that are more likely to see shared usage from migrant and receiving communities, in order to utilise the space more effectively for the purpose of generating meaningful social connections.

Box 1.2: A typology of spaces that facilitate belonging

Researchers at Migration Yorkshire identified three types of places that are vital for supporting new refugees to feel a sense of security, familiarity, community and hope in their new homes.

Can you identify places in your community that fulfil the following functions? Or can you use the below typology to start a conversation with new arrivals about the places that matter to them?

- **Know-how places.** Places that help people to understand how things are done in their new home, such as libraries, education settings, workplaces, children's centres, community organisations, and community centres.
- **Places of familiarity.** Places that are reminiscent of people's previous homes and routines and therefore allow them to feel 'at home', such as stores and markets with familiar food, cafes and restaurants, green spaces with outdoor seating, and religious institutions. For instance, in Leeds, Eritrean residents described the city as 'Little Asmara', a term of endearment reflecting the fact that Leeds's Eritrean community has put down roots (for instance through Habesha tea shops), and as such it resembles home and a place where refugees can lead "a good life".
- **Hope enabling places.** Places that generate a sense of a better future filled with opportunities and the possibility of growth, such as workplaces, community centres, education and training settings, specialist women's groups, and football clubs.

Adapted from 'Living the weathers and other stories' (Migration Yorkshire 2021).[19]

WHO BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER ALREADY?

A range of organisations, groups and individuals work hard to bring people together across the Yorkshire and Humber region, in ways that support individual and community wellbeing. Participants most often spoke about the following as having a role to play in creating connections locally.

- **The voluntary and community sector (VCS)**, including formal organisations and grassroots groups. The voluntary sector plays a particularly key role in supporting 'bonding' activities,[20] through providing opportunities for people with a shared background or experience to connect with one another. In particular we heard about numerous organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers through busy schedules of events and activities. These included trips to the theatre, the countryside and seaside, and to art galleries and museums, as well as facilitating creative and sporting activities such as local football tournaments, puppet making workshops, embroidery workshops, and many more. Such activities tend to be focused on bringing people together who are all themselves refugees and asylum seekers, with a much more limited focus on bringing together people from receiving and migrant communities.

- **Faith groups**, such as mosques and churches. Religious spaces were frequently mentioned by participant's as welcoming spaces in which people are able to meet people from different nationalities. Shared faith can be a very powerful point of connection for people who might otherwise have very different life experiences. We also heard in our research how some mosques and churches reach beyond their congregation, to people of all faiths and none. As one man in Kirklees told us "At the local mosque, no matter who comes... whether they're Muslim or non-Muslim, you're welcomed with open arms." However, some also felt that religious institutions should not be the sole hub of a community, and that secular spaces to meet others are also needed. For instance, when asked what needs to change in York, one woman replied that she wished for a community venue that "is not the mosque, so the one Hindu friend I have, she would come."

- **Schools**. In some places, we heard how schools put on events and activities that extend beyond the student body and reach out to the wider community. As one of the community researchers on this project reflects in box 1.3, schools have the potential to be key connectors in Yorkshire and the Humber's communities (case study 5.3 offers an example).

- **Individuals and communities**. We heard how individuals themselves are often the first to extend their hand to others in their community, be that through organising street parties, inviting neighbours round for a brew, or inviting people to share food over a barbeque. One man in Leeds told us how it was important that individuals "throw the bridge to build up relationships with others". However, generally people also considered that this was not something easily done without support or resources.

- **Councils**. Many participant's felt that councils have a key role in convening, facilitating and supporting local people and organisations to deliver activities that bring people together. Co-producing events and activities with local people was a key recommendation made by residents at our deliberative workshop. While people frequently referenced funding cuts, councils are seen as gatekeepers to the resources necessary to put on events and activities.

Box 1.3: Inclusive communications: sharing information about events and activities with migrant communities – reflections from a community researcher

As noted in the barriers section, one of the key complaints that we heard from participants was that information about events and activities does not reach communities, in particular individuals who may be most marginalised.

Throughout my time working as a community researcher on the social connections research project, I noticed that there is a need for councils and public services to pay greater attention to ensuring that events and activities are inclusive of, and actively promoted to, migrant communities.

In Kirklees, I helped to recruit to and co-facilitate a focus group of women refugees and asylum seekers, some of whom were single mothers. They shared with me their honest accounts of accessing events and activities in the local area and the challenges that faced. They spoke of how information about events was not accessible for numerous reasons, such as being unfamiliar with where to find information or information not being available in their own languages.

This is an issue that I am familiar with from my time volunteering with DASH, a voluntary sector organisation working with destitute asylum seekers in Huddersfield. There we have heard how families have had negative experiences when attending what they understood to be a free family event, only to learn that food, as well as children's activities, came at a cost – one that they simply could not afford. Had they known upfront, they would not have attended.

To avoid such disappointing scenarios, councils and services should consider how best they can reach marginalised members of their community. My experience has shown me that information barriers are not merely a question of translating information into community languages, but rather it is a matter of taking the time to help new migrants – who may be unfamiliar with the local area or lack confidence – to understand what to expect should they attend a community event. The participants in the Kirklees focus group indicated that information was best transmitted through people with whom they shared an identity or who understood their needs. Ensuring that information is shared with refugee community groups, and with 'community champions' (see box 4.2) is key to reaching migrant residents who may otherwise face substantial barriers to taking part in local activities.

Participants also talked about what has worked well for them. Schools are key connectors in communities and are well placed to share relevant information about local events and activities for children and their families, as well as to use their space for accessible community events.

To ensure that migrant communities are included in local events and activities, councils and service providers must consider how best they can disseminate information far and wide. It is vital that conversations are had with migrant groups in the design and evaluation of such events so that organisers can take strides to include all parts of the community in opportunities for social connection. In building these bridges, we all have much to gain.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO MAINTAIN EXISTING CONNECTIONS

In the main, this section has looked at how communities can be supported to connect across difference. While relationships that bridge are important, they are not the be all and end all. As one woman told us:

"I think it is also really important to have your own community as well... I was just around British people for most of my life. So, being able to have a group of people that I could call my own, my own community, as in my own Indians that I could just be around who know the social cues, and that I don't have to explain about, if that makes sense. Because sometimes it can get exhausting, talking about your culture so much as well."
Female, 18-24, York

An important principle to remember is that relationships and connections across difference must be nurtured in a way that feels mutual and has the consent of all parties.

In particular, when thinking about tackling isolation and promoting individual wellbeing, bonding activities are crucial for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. For instance, we heard how informal community groups, set up by diaspora communities, are important sources of social connection, support and solidarity. They can be a safe space of kinship, where familiar people and activities create a sense of home and belonging.

Similarly, an Eritrean man in Leeds told us how shared identity friendships are critical for his wellbeing.

"Personally, I go out to 'breathe', you know... for example Kidane[21] is my close friend – I would want to go to him and share anything that burdens me. The same with politics, you want to go to someone with whom you can share your thoughts. I call that breathing. Sometimes, you need to leave the house and breathe."
Male, 35-44, Leeds

Box 1.4: Supporting migrants to maintain existing relationships – reflections from a community researcher

Support for refugees and people seeking asylum that are feeling isolated requires a multipronged approach. As well as help to create new meaningful connections in the local area, and psychological and practical help to overcome barriers to social connections, it is equally important to consider how people can be supported to maintain existing relationships with their families and communities – whether those loved ones are in the UK or in another country.

To help refugees and asylum seekers maintain vital connections with their family, friends and communities in the UK and transnationally, we make the following recommendations.

1. Local authorities in asylum dispersal areas should work with private asylum accommodation providers such as Mears and SERCO to provide accommodation within or near to areas where people seeking asylum can access the spaces and activities that support them to maintain vital connections with their community. For instance, asylum seekers can mitigate isolation and loneliness by having access to:
    -   community spaces where migrant community groups, asylum seekers and local residents can gather and socialise
    -   places of worship and faith-based organisations
    -   social activities and events
    -   refugee community organisations
    -   English language classes (besides improving their English, access to ESOL classes can also serve as important pathway for asylum seekers to make new friends, connect with their local communities and use the internet facilities of ESOL providers to stay in touch with family and friends).

2. Asylum accommodation providers should ensure that asylum houses have internet connection. If provided with internet services, asylum seekers can maintain and re-establish connections with their families and friends both in the UK or abroad. This can also help them develop their digital skills and learn English, and thus contribute toward effective integration.

3. Local authorities and refugee organisations should explore partnering with organisations such as Solidaritech that provide devices and digital skills training to refugee groups. Providing broader access to phone credit, mobile top-ups and international calling cards, for instance through the provider White Calling, can also help refugees and asylum seekers maintain connections with their loved ones.

4. Local authorities should work alongside and resource community organisations to provide welcoming support systems for new arrivals so that they can maintain or re-establish social connections with their loved ones in the UK and abroad. In particular, 'welcome projects' can help new arrivals to settle in their new environment. A good example of such an initiative is the Welcome to Leeds project run by Leeds based charity, RETAS.

5. Those in positions of authority, including MPs, councillors and staff in asylum, migration, and community cohesion teams, should consider and engage with the political situations from which refugees and asylum seekers in their local community have fled. Understanding the transnational context of refugee groups will help to build empathy and a greater understanding of the distress and difficulties that residents from refugee and asylum seeking communities may be experiencing, as many of them will have family and friends still in those countries. Where possible, conveying messages of support will also send a message of solidarity to refugee residents which will help to develop a greater sense of respect and belonging in their new home.

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2.
CREATING PUBLIC SPACES AND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WORK FOR COMMUNITITES

THIS SECTION IS AIMED AT:

COUNCIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

This section focuses on a key finding from our focus groups, that in some places across Yorkshire and the Humber, improved public spaces and transport are needed to bring communities together. Throughout this section we explore this need through community hubs, community businesses, green spaces, and public transport.

The built and natural environment have a profound impact on our wellbeing. Our surroundings influence how we connect with family, friends and neighbours, access health services and other vital amenities, and how we spend our time. Cities and towns need places where people can freely spend their time, without feeling pressured to purchase something, and where there is the possibility for having chance encounters with others. Such social interactions in public spaces can provide:

"Relief from daily routines, sustenance for people's sense of community, opportunities for sustaining bonding ties or making bridges and can influence tolerance and raise people's spirits".[22]

COMMUNITY HUBS

A community hub can look different from one neighbourhood to the next – it can look like a library, a shop, a park, a leisure centre (see vignette 1), a place of worship, or perhaps even a communal garden where neighbours can stop to chat. They can be used for socialising and bringing communities together and often as essential information hubs to support the integration of new migrant communities.

While participants understood the importance of community hubs for meeting people that come from a different background to themselves, many felt that a lack of these prevented such opportunities.

In addition, the loss of spaces for children and young people was a concern for some residents:

"There have been so many services cut. Sure Start, family centres, youth club etc... it seems that everything bit by bit is being taken away to a point where there not many places for people to go now for all ages."
Female, 35-44, Barnsley

Similarly, a participant in the Polish speaking focus group in Scarborough told us:

"We don't have any family-friendly places, there are pubs for men or for women only. So, if you wanted to go with your family, with children, there is none. The only place is a playpark. Which, as I mentioned before, only has two small benches."
Female, 35-44, Scarborough

Vignette 1: Whose space matters? Tourism and residents in Scarborough

Sarah,[23] a teacher in a local school in Scarborough, is acutely aware of the barriers that students face in trying to enjoy amenities in the area. The cost of getting involved in local activities and events have shot up and it can feel like the area is geared more towards tourists than local people these days. This was starkly illustrated by the pulling down of a local swimming baths "that was probably five pounds to get in", only to be 'replaced' by a commercial park with water slides. She said:

"That to me is criminal, really. They're not looking after the residents because it is appealing to the tourists who come to the area once a year and will think fifteen or twenty pounds is okay to pay to go swimming. Whereas for the residents who want to swim every week and develop their skills to be an Olympic athlete aren't going to be able to afford that."

This was an especially bitter pill to swallow, as poverty is clear to see at the school where Sarah works. She shared that some local families rarely go to the beach with their children, despite living so close to the coast. While a beach trip might seem like an inexpensive day out for a family, costs of transport, ice creams and snacks, and a bucket and spade can all add up and deter people from venturing out. Sarah's observations clearly show that having amenities for everyone to enjoy matters – but it is important to ensure such spaces are accessible to tourists and locals.

COMMUNITY BUSINESSES

As well as not having access to community spaces, many in the focus groups spoke about the decline of highstreets and town centres in their local area. One woman in Kirklees spoke about a concerning number of empty shops in her area. People in Scarborough also had similar views, with one man describing the town centre as "depressing" and "desolate".

Research by Power to Change has shown that community businesses are focal points in communities, and many operate as hubs. They can also revive high streets in local areas that might be suffering from decline.[25] A community business is run by local people to benefit the local community. They come in many shapes and sizes – they can look like shops, cafés (such as The Kindness Hub in case study 2.1), or even community-owned housing associations. Because these kinds of businesses are rooted within the community, they can create a sense of belonging and empowerment among local people. As a result, they positively impact the wellbeing of local people and help build community resilience.[26] See box 2.1 to learn how to identify and engage with community businesses in your area.

Box 2.1: Repurposing empty spaces for community use

Often, our streets are filled with empty spaces that have the potential to offer much to local communities. If you identify anempty space that has the potential to be brought into use, consider the following.

1. Who owns the empty space, and have plans already been put in place for it by the teams responsible for housing and regeneration in your council?
2. Can the empty space be used as temporary space for a local community group, or is it possible for it to come under community ownership more permanently?
3. In the short term, is it possible to identify local community groups that are looking for a place to gather, or a local business that could use the space as a pop up?
4. Consider whether it is appropriate to look into the process to obtain a temporary use lease for the space (also known as meanwhile use leases).
5. In the long run, can the empty space be nominated as an 'asset of community value', and how can the council support empty spaces to come under community ownership?[24]

You can follow the results of a recent government consultation on the community causes that 'dormant assets' (financial products that haven't been accessed fro a long time and which are unlikely to be in the future) should be used for.

Partly adapted from Hope Not Hate guidance – 'Using Empty Spaces'

Case study 2.1: The Kindness Hub

Based in Todmorden, The Kindness Hub is a community business that describes itself as a "creative and intelligent space where people from all backgrounds and walks of life can potentially dine, hang out, socialise and relax".

The Kindness Hub hosts a community café at the heart of the town centre and beyond that, delivers support programmes for people dealing with addiction recovery. They are also working on building partnerships with other community businesses. The hub also aims to develop social enterprise activity, which will boost opportunities for people living locally in the area to gain skills, work experience, and access to training and qualifications.

Identifying community businesses in your area will help build an understanding of the difference they are making in your area to local people's lives, and point to ways in which councils and the voluntary sector can partner with such businesses to achieve shared goals for local communities. Below are some ways to start mapping and engaging with community businesses.

1. Start a mapping exercise, to gain a better understanding of community businesses that exist in your area. Power to Change have one that you can use as a starting point.
2. Learn more about how community businesses are operating in the area, what services they provide the community, and what opportunities and challenges arise from their work.
3. Consider ways that you might support the business. The support could range from advertising their services on the council website or social media, signposting to funding pots, and linking them up with relevant forums such as a local social enterprise network. .
4. Ask them if they would like to learn more about social isolation and loneliness and signpost them to relevant materials (such as this toolkit!), so they can make relevant adaptations to their service offer and support those most isolated in their community.

GREEN SPACES

Public spaces that are safe and centred around the community are essential for wellbeing and for forging social connections in communities. Having access to parks, gardens, and nature was incredibly important to many of the people we spoke to in our focus groups. For some, parks were focal points in their area as they are used as venues for community events like 'Eid in the Park', 'Tea in the Park', carnival, or Parkrun. Having access to parks to participate in sports also helped some maintain their health and socialise. Nature was seen as a great way to connect with other people, often in a fleeting but nonetheless meaningful way. For many, going out for walks in nature helped with their mental health, especially at the height of the pandemic. As one person said:

"The Greenway has been an absolute godsend in pandemic times, especially for my mental health. You see people bringing their dogs down, and you meet people on there that you wouldn't necessarily meet if you were just wandering up to the shop."
Female, 35–44, Kirklees

However, inadequate access to green spaces or spaces that do not cater to the community's needs also creates barriers to fostering social connections.[27]

This was brought up by one woman who struggles to meet other parents when visiting the park with her children:

"I don't think there are proper playparks for children here in Malton. And if there happens to be a bigger one, it only has two benches, on which people cannot and are not able to mix and mingle. Mothers don't talk to each other because they have no way of doing it."
Female, 35-44, Malton

Research by Friends of the Earth reports that places with high levels of deprivation may not benefit significantly from green spaces.[28] This is more acutely seen among migrant and marginalised communities, 40 per cent of whom live in England's most green space-deprived neighbourhoods and who are more than twice as likely as a white person to live within England's most green space-deprived neighbourhoods.

Participants wanted to see public spaces that were designed with their needs put at the centre. The following sections explore how creating inclusive spaces (box 2.2), and how community ownership schemes can give local people a say in how their neighbourhoods are designed (box 2.3).

Thriving and inclusive public spaces have the ability to support people to connect with others who they may not otherwise have met, and they enhance public health, among other benefits.

Setha Low, a professor of anthropology at the City University of New York, looks at how public spaces can promote social justice. She developed the following questions for those designing and evaluating public space, each based on a 'realm of justice'.

Think about the neighbourhoods or spaces in which you work with communities, how do the following questions help you to evaluate what exists and what might be missing locally? What could you learn from asking these questions of local residents?

- **Distributive**: Who has physical access (either by walking, bike, public transport or car) to a public space?
- **Procedural**: Do people have influence over the design of a public space? What about how it is managed? Or the kinds of events and activities that the space is used for?
- **Interactional**: What makes people feel welcome or unwanted in a public space?
- **Representational**: Do people feel their experience and history is represented in a space?
- **Care**: How do people demonstrate their care for the space and each other in it?

Adapted from Setha Low's five realms of justice in public space

The Community Ownership Fund is a £150 million fund, run by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). It aims to support community groups that wish to take ownership of much-loved local assets and amenities that are at the risk of being lost. The Plunkett Foundation have carried out research that has found that communities with high levels of deprivation can and do take ownership over amenities, given the support. Below is an overview of the fund.

- Communities can apply for match funding to purchase and renovate community assets.
- Strategic objectives include to:
  - provide targeted investment for communities to save and sustain community assets
  - strengthen capacity and capability in communities
  - empower communities
  - strengthen direct links between places across the UK and the UK government.
- It is a two-stage application process. First, an always open expression of interest (EOI) form to check your likely eligibility and second, following the outcome of the first round, a full application submitted in one of three bidding windows per year.
- DLUHC aims to inform applicants of the outcome around two months after the closing date of each bidding window.
- Plans to provide additional early support to applicants who need it most through project proposal development and support to run a successful community business.
- See more in the prospectus.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Many participants told us that public transport in their area was unaffordable and unreliable – which presented a huge barrier to getting involved in community activities, carrying out volunteer work, or simply meeting up with loved ones. As one asylum seeking woman told us:

"If I want to invite [people] to this place, they need to take the bus and it is terrible, especially now. You can be at the bus stop for one hour...I have a problem with my back. it is difficult sometimes when I am at the bus stop for one hour. In that time, I would normally cry."
Female, 35-44, Kirklees

The cost of public transport can be highly prohibitive especially for asylum seekers who must live on approximately £5.66 a day. A survey by Asylum Matters found that 95 per cent of asylum seekers stated they could not afford to travel by public transport.[29] However, in other parts of the UK, some initiatives are being taken to make transport more accessible for refugees and asylum seekers, as seen in case study 2.2.

Case study 2.2: *Free transport for refugees and asylum seekers*

Many parts of the UK have participated in pilot schemes where free public transport passes are offered to refugees. Such schemes have become particularly prominent since Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the UK.

The Welsh government launched the 'Welcome Ticket' Scheme, where eligible persons had free unlimited travel on local bus and rail services within Wales, as well as services that cross the border to England. The free travel scheme started on 26 March 2022, and will continue until 31 March 2023 pending a further review.[30] Similarly, between 4 January and 31 March 2022, a pilot scheme was run where eligible asylum seekers in Wales could apply for free bus and train tickets across Wales.[31]

While a review of these schemes is ongoing, this willingness to pilot new ways of supporting new arrivals is part of the Welsh government's plan to make Wales the first 'nation of sanctuary'.

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3.
INVESTING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND TRAINING

THIS SECTION IS AIMED AT:

COUNCIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

EMPLOYERS

Improved access to education, training and job opportunities was a priority for many of our focus group participants and residents who participated in the deliberative workshop. Most agreed that it was essential to help build foundations for social connections in the region. Participants explained that this was because having a job helps build confidence and self-esteem, while being economically stable reduces worries about spending money and makes people feel more inclined to join in with community activities.

In this section we highlight the importance of three key areas when it comes to supporting refugees, asylum seekers and migrant communities into ESOL, volunteering and work opportunities. Readers should look out for upcoming toolkits relevant to much of this section, soon to be released by Migration Yorkshire (see box 3.1).

ESOL (ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES)

Access to different forms of education and skills training are essential to set asylum seekers, refugees and migrants up to find good quality jobs that offer opportunities to lead meaningful and dignified lives. In particular, English language acquisition is a priority for many members of asylum-seeking and refugee communities. According to a study conducted by Refugee Action, the inability to speak English is one of the most often cited causes of feeling lonely and isolated.[32] In addition, a report from the Together Initiative highlights that acquiring English language skills helps people to gain confidence and feel independent and able to navigate their new home.[33]

The primacy of learning English was highlighted by participants across all areas of Yorkshire. For instance, one refugee in York told us:

"Language is very important and maybe you can consider it a power, it gives you more power to know the people."
Male, 35-44, York

However, even where people had access to ESOL classes, some highlighted that the provisions were inadequate as classes were infrequent –

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering can be a valuable activity for bringing people together from different backgrounds to build connections and solidarity, as well as for providing opportunities for meaningful activity and skills development that contribute to building a sense of purpose and responsibility.

We heard from participants and stakeholders how volunteering was the cornerstone to much community action locally – be that through volunteers organising day trips and collections for new arrivals or through refugee and asylum seekers providing support for others in similar circumstances. Volunteering to

thereby hampering progress, the timing of the classes clashed with work, or the courses were not based locally.

"I don't have access to English class at the moment... the problem is the transportation for us in this moment, because it costs every time."
Female, 25-34, Kirklees

help others often happens quite organically, as one refugee told us:

"We also go out to help people in our community. This can be to help with interpreting or if any incidents happen... Sometimes, we even visit people in their homes – we signpost them to local services, we accompany them to appointments and interpret for them."
Male, Eritrean, 35-44, Leeds

However, we also heard about the limitations of volunteering for some. Participants that were seeking asylum spoke of spending their time volunteering,

completing courses, and acquiring new skills, yet still facing barriers to meaningful and gainful employment because they did not legally have the right to work. For some, this led to the feeling that they were wasting their time or that volunteering was a fruitless endeavour. As one asylum seeking woman in Barnsley told us, while volunteering can be a "reward" in itself, eventually – without prospects for employment – "even volunteering gets boring".

These frustrations were also recognised by a stakeholder working with asylum seekers and refugees in South Yorkshire:

"I think there's also pressure on people to do things like volunteering. I know that in the last few years there's been a big push on asylum seekers to volunteer, and I understand why that works, but I think it's a misconception that it works for everybody. I think it's a really great thing for some people, and it's just another pressure for others."
Voluntary sector manager, Sheffield

ROLE OF LOCAL EMPLOYERS

Even if a person has the right to work, they can still have challenges in securing a job. Amhara's experiences in job hunting clearly shows the kind of barriers people face (see vignette 2). It is important to acknowledge the important role that local employers can play in providing opportunities for people, and crucial to this is that employers must be equipped to understand right to work regulations.

Our research suggests that volunteering opportunities must be tailored to individuals, and it should be understood that not all volunteer roles provide a sense of reward or satisfaction. Opportunities that provide people with the chance to give something back to their communities, as well as to meet other likeminded people working towards the same goal, will offer the highest chance of fulfilment and connection.

Supporting social connections between migrant and receiving communities can also be achieved through encouraging and incentivising individuals from the receiving community to offer targeted support to new arrivals in their local area. Initiatives such as befriending schemes can support newly arrived people with getting to know their new home, provide advice and support navigating such things as setting up a bank account, and be a source of friendship and socialising for both volunteers and new arrivals (see for instance Reset's Neighbours for Newcomers scheme).

Box 3.1 signposts to upcoming resources targeted specifically at employers who can support refugees into work. To help address some of the barrier's refugees and asylum seekers face, some voluntary organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber are running projects that aim to set people up with the skills, qualifications and confidence that they need to find work (see case study 3.1).

> ### Case study 3.1: The Millside Centre Refugee Café, Bradford
>
> The Millside Centre's 'Welcome Cafe' is a partnership with Bradford College, that aims to support refugees and asylum seekers in acquiring catering, culinary, customer service and basic hygiene skills. Refugees can obtain qualifications as well as gain experience by running a café. Students that had experience of working in the catering industry in their country of origin use the café to build upon their skills and gain relevant qualifications to work in the UK.
>
> "Food is a uniting factor", Juliet Adoch, the centre manager at the Millside Centre told us, "and where there is food, there is belonging." The café serves food from all over the world, representing the cultures of the students running the café. Through training and guidance, students build their confidence and are empowered to run the cafe. Profits made from cafe sales are invested back into the business to keep the cafe running. The success of this project has led to one cohort catering their first event.
>
> This initiative is a clear example of how people who have recently come to the country can gain recognised and transferable skills, build their confidence and their interpersonal skills by interacting with customers, and share their culture through food – a key ingredient for social connection.

Vignette 2: The right to work? Asylum seekers and the search for employment – Amhara's story

Amhara[34] arrived in Yorkshire a year ago as an asylum seeker. She attended college in a local town and has now received a qualification in computing. She also applied for permission to work and – though the criteria for asylum seekers to be able to work are strict – she has received a work permit.

However, Amhara has faced many challenges in finding employment. Despite her qualifications and expertise in a field on the shortage occupation list, she has had no luck finding work. She believes it is because local employers do not understand the permission to work rules for asylum seekers.

"I have an ID for work permit, for temporary ID and insurance. But the agency, they don't want to assist or give any jobs...I can work but they don't want to accept me."

Amhara has faced barriers in her employment journey because of a lack of local understanding, on the part of employers and employment agencies, about the permissions that some asylum seekers can gain that allows them to work legally. Though many of the jobs on the shortage occupation list tended to be for very specialist roles such as civil engineers, veterinarians and architects – the list was recently expanded to include a wide variety of jobs that are more accessible for asylum seekers who might not have specialised qualifications.

Greater information, guidance and support is needed so that businesses and employers can open up opportunities to people such as Amhara. This will stop the potential of the region's residents going to waste.

Box 3.1: Toolkits from Migration Yorkshire

Migration Yorkshire have developed several toolkits to specifically provide guidance on volunteering, employment, and ESOL provision. These will offer an in-depth look at how to support refugee communities in the Yorkshire and Humber region to access employment, volunteering and education.

The first and second toolkits are due out in December 2022, so look out on the Migration Yorkshire website for updates.

Doing volunteering well

A toolkit supporting volunteering with and by people who have experienced forced migration. The toolkit aims to offer information and tools that can support organisations and individuals to do volunteering well. It will integrate contemporary ideas around accessibility, equity, intersectionality, and trauma informed practice, and will identify the knowledge we could collectively create to support volunteering in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Refugee employment: why is it good for business?

This toolkit was designed with two audiences in mind: employers and those who support refugees into work. It provides practical information and helpful tips for each stage of the employment journey. In addition to this toolkit, Migration Yorkshire also has an Employer Engagement Coordination group that aims to increase employer engagement opportunities in Yorkshire and the Humber for the benefit of refugees and other migrants.

ESOL for refugees

This toolkit is aimed towards ESOL practitioners and commissioners and draws together good practice on language and learning for refugees. Offering practical insights on planning, funding and the delivery of ESOL, the toolkit is a vital resource for all agencies supporting refugees to learn English.

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4.
INCLUDING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN DECISION-MAKING

THIS SECTION IS AIMED AT:

COUNCIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

Focus group participants spoke at times of feeling disconnected from people in positions of authority. Being meaningfully included in decision making was seen as important so that communities can have a say in how the foundations for better social connections are built. This section will explore the representation of diverse communities in positions of authority, and how people from all parts of the local community can be involved in public participation.

REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY

As representatives of their communities, councillors should reflect the profile of the communities they serve. An under-representation of women, people of colour, and people with other protected characteristics will adversely impact local democracy, equality, and legitimacy.

People we spoke to in Scarborough and York displayed a lack of belief that councillors listen to and represent the views of communities, which consequently leads to a lack of trust in local councils. As such, there was a demand for better representation of local people at all levels of governance. Many wanted to see people in positions of authority taking a proactive approach to developing their communities:

"You should be speaking to your local councillors; those are the people that have been elected to represent you on the council. I hear many times in all these groups that we're not getting what we want, and we need to start making the councillors responsible for representing us locally … these are the people that put themselves forward to represent us and then we don't make them accountable, and perhaps we should."
Female, 25-34, Scarborough

Some people expressed distrust towards local service providers and public services, such as the police and health services (see vignette 3 and box 4.1 for further reflections on this).

People in positions of authority must ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive and centred around community voices.[36] Increasingly, councils across the UK are giving thought as to how to engage with migrant communities (see case study 4.1).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There is now more reliance on individual service users' and residents' knowledge and experiences to ensure that policies are centred around communities needs and voices.[37] For example, some councils work with community champions to learn more about communities in their local area, and to communicate with them (see box 4.2), or they run deliberative events to co-produce policy ideas with communities (see case study 4.2)

Case study 4.2: *Our Zero Selby*

Our Zero Selby is a pilot project, that aims to develop a community-led vision for Selby's future. The project uses public participation methods to answer the question: "What would a community-led approach to tackling climate change look like?"

They created several platforms for community members to share their ideas, including group workshops, surveys, local business forums, conversations in local venues, and participatory sessions in schools and college. This was done to 'break down barriers that can make addressing climate change feel huge, distant or overwhelming by focusing on the everyday elements and benefits that engage and sustain the people of Selby.'

Our Zero Selby ran a decision-making event, that included 40 local residents that reflected the local population of Selby in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, education and other categories. A group of representatives from local businesses and councils were also part of the decision-making event. As a result of the event, 25 projects were prioritised that were deemed to benefit the future of Selby's community. By the end of the event, 97 per cent of participants reported feeling a lot can be done to tackle climate change in their local areas, and 69 per cent believed that they were able to influence decisions that are made about their local area (this was an increase of 33 per cent since the start of the process).

Activities that require public participation must be built on equality, inclusion, and accountability principles to ensure that all members of communities have equal access to participatory events. For example, efforts should be made to include a cross-section of local communities, making a special effort to reach out to members of communities that are less likely to participate in such activities.[38] Box 4.3 provides an overview on the steps we took to ensure IPPR's deliberative workshop was inclusive.

Box 4.3: *IPPR's approach to participatory research*

As part of our research on social connections, IPPR conducted a weekend-long deliberative workshop with 14 participants who had taken part in previous focus groups for this research.

Below are some of the steps we took to ensure that the workshop was inclusive.
- In the recruitment process, we ensured that participants came from all five research sites, and we sought a balanced group in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age. Participants came from both migrant and receiving communities.
- We offered an incentive of £50 per half day, plus childcare expenses. We also sent each participant a gift box of teas and baked goods so that we could share a brew – even if remotely.
- A pre-workshop call supported participant's to use Zoom and informed people about what to expect in the workshop. Detailed joining instructions explained the workshop's purpose and what was required from those joining.

All the above arrangements ensured that participant's, as far as possible, had equal opportunities to access the participatory event and have their voices heard on social isolation, loneliness, cohesion, and community development.

We concluded the event by asking participants to prioritise policies that they felt should be acted on locally. The manifesto was the outcome of our deliberations and has been central to the development of this toolkit.

For a more detailed practical guidance on working with communities when doing participatory research, refer to Involve's framework on community cohesion and participation.

REFERENCES

35   'Fufu' is a common food in West and Equatorial Africa, it is made of boiled, mashed cassava mixed with plantain or yams. They are sold in Afro-Caribbean and Asian stores in Leeds in dry powdered form. 'Acheke' is a traditional cuisine from West Africa and very popular amongst people from Cote d'Ivoire. Very similar to fufu, the dish is prepared from fermented cassava pulp that has been granulated. Both dishes are served with soup mixed with fish or meats.

36   Sillet J (2017) *Diversity in political representation in the UK,* LGIU. https://lgiu.org/publication/diversity-in-political-representation-in-the-uk/#legal-context

37   Involve UK (2022) 'Community cohesion and participation – A practical framework', website. https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Everybody-Needs-Good-Neighbours-a-study-of-the-link-between-public-participation-and-community-cohesion.pdf

38   ibid

5.
TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

THIS SECTION IS AIMED AT:

COUNCIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

SCHOOLS

When speaking with stakeholders and residents about how they see local councils in Yorkshire and the Humber supporting improved social connections locally, the conversation often turned to the very core needs that people have – to have food and shelter, to feel safe, to feel that their health needs will be met, and to be understood.

This section looks at three of the key ways in which local authorities and other partners can take action to transform systems and address systemic issues in order to meet the needs of their communities.

JOINED UP WORKING

The need for greater partnership working was one of the key development areas identified by stakeholders interviewed for our research. Working across departments, rather than in silos, and with other community anchor partners, such as the voluntary and community sector (VCS), faith organisations, schools and colleges, cultural and arts organisations, and healthcare providers, was seen to be vital to manifest the conditions for greater social connections locally.

Importantly, joined up working should also mean working with communities themselves. As one stakeholder reflected:

"[I had] a conversation with one of our volunteers recently, and he said, 'why are there no asylum seekers on that multi-agency forum meeting that you go to?', and I had to say I don't know!"
Voluntary sector manager, Sheffield

One such initiative that is bringing stakeholders together with a wide range of professional and lived experience, is the Regional Refugee Integration Forum, which seeks to promote integration in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Members include representatives from the local authority, the VCS, and public services, as well as refugees with lived experience of the asylum and immigration system (see also case study 5.1 for further good practice in the region).

Box 5.1: Supporting effective partnership working

Given the centrality of working with partners effectively for building strong foundations for social connections, councils and public services should ensure that collaborative partnership working is a core competency when recruiting staff – one that is prominent in job descriptions.

Moreover, those working with communities directly or who have a role in making decisions about neighbourhoods and communities (including, for instance, local councillors), should have appropriate support in order to fulfil their roles in relation to partnership working.

The Kings Fund, a charity working to improve health and care in England, has developed a reflective learning framework to support the learning and development of partnerships (specifically in relation to health and social care, but applicable more widely), centred on the following five questions and points to consider. Taking these as a starting point, how are the partnerships that you're involved with functioning?

- What is the purpose of the partnership's work? Who should benefit from your work together? What impact do you want to have?
- What is the distinctive role of this partnership? How do you see your work leading to the desired change? What other related work is going on in your area?
- Who are the partnership's members and stakeholders? How are you learning from each other? Who are you accountable to?
- How is work being shared and recognised within the partnership? How does the partnership build on the skills and experience of members? What role is there for a leader? How will you communicate with each other? Are there any power differentials to be aware of? Do some partners require payment for their time?
- How is the partnership learning and adapting? How can you balance the delivery of your mission, how you work together, and what you've learned? How are you recording and sharing learning?

Adapted from The King's Fund's 'A reflective learning framework for partnering'

Case study 5.1: Barnsley drop-in for migrants

In Barnsley, a coalition of groups – Migrant Action, Feels Like Home, The Polish Library and the Educational Learning Support Hub (ELSH) – have banded together to form the Migration Partnership, which, with the backing of the local council, is delivering a multi-agency drop-in service to new migrant communities living in the town.

Every Wednesday, organisations and services from across the borough come together in a modest church hall, with tea and coffee, to offer a unified one-stop-shop for Barnsley's newest residents. The offer is diverse, with attending organisations and groups including those offering specialist support to refugees and asylum seekers, local colleges and adult education services, domestic abuse support charities, council departments offering integration support to new arrivals, local libraries, community groups that (among other things) put on trips to various cultural destinations, recovery and substance misuse support services, and charities with volunteering opportunities, among others.

The aim of the drop-in is threefold.

- To offer a practical and safe space for collaborative service delivery and effective and holistic service provision.
- As a means of community engagement and a hub for strengthening relationships across services, migrant communities and the local authority through hosting conversations and facilitating a better understanding of the experiences of migrant residents.
- As a catalyst for change, ensuring that there is a feedback loop between the council and communities that brings about improved access to services, ensures effective integration and contributes to building stronger communities.

As part of Barnsley council's commitment to developing stronger communities, the drop-in has received three years of funding from the council's Public Health and Communities Directorate.

To find out more, contact migrationpartnershipbarnsley@gmail.com

Working in partnership across council departments to deliver for communities is also vital. Box 5.2 considers how those with responsibility for social cohesion and integration locally can work alongside those tasked with addressing social isolation and loneliness in an area, in order to combine resources and expertise for the benefit of communities.

Box 5.2: At the interface of social isolation and social cohesion

Tackling loneliness is a high public health priority for many local authorities. Increasing numbers of councils have devised loneliness or public health strategies that seek to make sure their communities are supported to become more connected (see for instance, Barnsley council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy or Southwark council's Loneliness Strategy).[39] In recent years, there has been increased backing from national government to tackle social isolation and loneliness.[40]

At the same time, communities are becoming more diverse as people move to make their home in the Yorkshire and Humber region.[41]

Linking up these two policy areas, often sitting in distinct departments, is crucial for the wellbeing not only of individual residents, but communities overall. Consider the following.

- If you're working in, or closely with, a local council, do you know whether you have a loneliness strategy? If so, has it engaged with migrant and refugee communities to understand their experiences and how they might be best supported?
- Do different departments and teams talk to and work with one another effectively? Are those with responsibility for public health, social care, neighbourhoods, etc working with teams supporting new migrants, such as resettlement and cohesion teams? Can you start a conversation about how best to work together on common goals?

With the introduction of the Shared Prosperity Fund comes a golden opportunity for local councils to work alongside the VCS and others to deliver interventions that can support social connections locally. Box 5.3 offers more information on the fund.

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Box 5.3: About the Shared Prosperity Fund

The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) was announced by the government as the fund replacing EU structural funds, following the UK's exit from the European Union.

Key information

- Administered by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- It is a £2.6 billion fund for the period 2022-2025.
- Follows on from the Community Renewal Fund (£220 million in 2021/22).
- It aims to support 'levelling up' objectives:
  - boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards
  - spread opportunities and improve public services
  - restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging
  - empower local leaders and communities.
- Mayoral combined authorities, district councils and unitary authorities lead the application process, submitting an investment plan outlining how their allocated funds will be spent.
- Decisions are made centrally by DLUHC, with first payments due from October 2022 (see DLUHC for updates).
- Funding can be delivered locally via competitive grant funding, procurement, commissioning or via in-house teams.
- Lead authorities convene a 'local partnership group' with a diverse range of local and regional stakeholders to identify needs and opportunities.
- See more in the prospectus.

Making use of the SPF

Local authority officers should make use of the Shared Prosperity Fund to drive partnership work with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), among other partners, in the delivery of their investment plans.

The VCS are in a good position to support councils to effectively spend the £159 million that the Yorkshire and Humber region is set to receive over the next three years.[42] However, very few local authorities are publishing their investment plan setting out how councils will spend their allocation. Consequently, it is unclear how the VCS can be involved in delivery.

Sharing these documents publicly and as soon as possible will enable the sector to know how they can support local authorities in delivering their plans in a timely fashion.

Currently available plans in the Yorkshire and Humber region include:

- West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- North Yorkshire County Council.

South Yorkshire Combined Authority and Hull have not yet published their submitted investment plan, though they both make reference to their existing Strategic Economic Plan as a basis for their plans.

While investment plans have been written up, for successful authorities there is still flexibility in which projects are delivered over the course of the three years. IPPR has previously argued that – give the historically important role that the EU Structural Funds played in supporting the social inclusion of migrant communities – that integration should be among the core priorities for local councils when spending their SPF allocation.

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TACKLING DISCRIMINATION, PREJUDICE AND HATE CRIME

While on the whole participants tended to tell us that they found Yorkshire and the Humber to be a welcoming region, residents who had migrated, as well as Yorkshire residents from an ethnic minority background, spoke about their experiences of – or fears of facing – racism and discrimination. From negative media portrayals to facing microaggressions to being the victim of a hate crime, all of these factors influenced their decisions about where to go, who to spend time with and the extent to which they participated in their local community. The fear of being attacked, or of being verbally abused, has an isolating effect as people feel unwelcome and unable to engage in activities and events locally.

As one stakeholder said:

> *"Occasionally I hear horror stories of how people have been in dispute with neighbours, and they've been very racist. Whether that would be something for the government, certainly the councils have to look at it, because in their housing policy they have to, you know, make sure it's a safe area to put people."*
> **Therapist, Kirklees**

In particular, participants from a Muslim background spoke of the prejudice and discrimination that they have faced. One refugee living in York suggested that specific efforts to tackle Islamophobia are required in receiving communities:

> *"May I suggest make the people have more background about Muslim, about Islam? And then [they will know the] right facts about Muslim's and that make them more accepting of us... People still feel worried about hijab and that is [a] problem. When the government or the council make the people have the right facts about the Muslim that will make the connection easier."*
> **Male, 35-44, York**

Tackling racism is an issue that is important for the region to reckon with, not only for the benefit of new migrant communities – but for the whole community. As one British Asian man illustrated, with reference to a white-Australian person in their focus group (names have been anonymised):

> *"...between George and myself, if we both walked into a room and there was someone sat here and it was a case of, okay, who's the migrant? Who are they going to point to? The one who's been born and bred in Batley. That's the reality. And this is the problem that we've got, and there's this divide. And if I'm honest with you, I've not seen it as bad as I've seen it now... If you are a different race, even though you're born here – my children [were born here] ... This is the only place they've known. And yet when they're out and about, they're going to still be seen as migrants."*
> **Male, 45-54, Kirklees**

Indeed, some of our participants from a white, Eastern European background also experienced prejudice and conveyed how it deterred them from taking part in their community:

> *"I don't go out as such. There are no spaces to meet new people. People are receiving vile [misinformation], because of TV, newspapers and mass media... Brexit created hate towards the foreigners... [As such] there are no places and there are no ways to meet new people who are English."*
> **Male, Polish, 35-44, Malton**

There is therefore a need to ensure that, when looking at how to support refugees, asylum seekers and new migrants to build connections locally, plans include a long-term vision for tackling discrimination, prejudice, hate crime and misinformation.

Case study 5.2: Who is Your Neighbour?

"People felt not heard, fearful of change – they weren't suddenly racists"
Tariq Bashir, at IPPR's Deliberative Workshop panel for Yorkshire residents.

Tariq directs Who is Your Neighbour? (WiYN?), a charity that helps facilitate dialogue in South Yorkshire communities. The work began in 2010, when far-right groups like the British National Party were gaining popularity in the county and elsewhere. "What the BNP did very well was hear people talk about their worries when nobody else was," said Tariq.

WiYN? creates safe spaces for conversations, to alleviate anxiety. Participants can discuss – frankly – their views on immigration, how they feel about its impacts, their experiences of change in general and their hopes and fears for their neighbourhoods.

Facilitators work on the assumption that most people are sincere, even if what they say is not easy to hear. They do not aim to change minds but to spark curiosity, encourage reflection and create an openness to learn more about those 'not like us.'

When WiYN? was launched, its conversations were held in predominantly white communities. It has since worked in more culturally mixed parts of Yorkshire where 'them and us' talk, or divisive narratives, might exist between groups. WiYN? specialises in 'intra-community' dialogue – where those from one community group can talk and listen to one another.

Tariq and his colleagues are now working with partners to increase WiYN?'s impact and share expertise. In 2022, they started partnerships with the Local Government Association, the Housing Diversity Network and Methodist Church Regional Learning Networks to embed far and wide learnings on intra-community dialogue.

Box 5.4: Approaches to tackling prejudice, discrimination and hate crime

How you approach the issue of prejudice, discrimination and hate crime will depend on the particular issues that are of concern locally. Working in partnership with grassroots organisations who are embedded in, and have the trust of, communities is vital to develop the most appropriate response.

Below are a number of ideas and approaches, with links to case studies where available.

- Community conversations between shared identity groups or inter-community dialogue (see case study 5.2).
- Critical thinking interventions (Bradford council).
- Bystander training (Brighton council).
- Promote anti-racist workshops in schools, colleges and adult education settings (see for instance, Brighton and Hove's anti-racist education strategy).
- Promoting good relations through inter-community initiatives (see for instance, Hope Not Hate's inclusive events guide).
- 'Human library' initiatives that challenge stereotypes and build connections (Bradford council).
- Pledging to become an anti-racist council (eg Brighton council and York council).
- Mediation, coaching and support for victims (Surrey council).

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Several stakeholders emphasised the need for greater awareness and understanding of the likely traumatic experiences that some of Yorkshire's refugee and asylum-seeking communities have faced. Both at a service level and an individual practitioner level, the need for sensitivity and trauma-informed care is paramount:

"The asylum journey is very traumatic, so people have come through conflict, have come through violence, and one of [our] service users described it as 'we arrived here broken'. When they arrive here in that state the asylum system itself also re-traumatises them… When you are in that frame of mind it is very hard to be expected to be sociable and to be outgoing and energetic and doing all of these things."
Voluntary sector manager, West Yorkshire

Similarly, a therapist in Kirklees specialising in work with asylum seekers and refugees, spoke about the "very real physical effects" of trauma that can prevent people "from wanting to be with other people or wanting to do things".

Trauma can be a contributing factor for why some refugees and asylum seekers may have few meaningful social connections or may not engage with community events and activities. Acknowledging this is important, as – perhaps despite the efforts of organisers – some people may feel unable to attend or join in with activities and events.

At the same time, as box 5.5 demonstrates, forging social connections is a crucial part of supporting traumatised people to rebuild their lives. And case study 5.3 demonstrates how caring for those that may have experienced trauma is not simply about therapeutic intervention – but about creating an environment for joy and playfulness.

Box 5.5: A guide to trauma-informed care with refugees and asylum seekers

1. Be aware of the common traumatic experiences that asylum seekers and refugees may have faced.
   - In their country of origin.
   - On their journey to the UK.
   - Once in the UK (ie as a result of the asylum process and prejudice/discrimination).

2. Understand how trauma may impact people in multiple and unique ways.
   - Physiological symptoms.
   - Mental health effects.
   - Impacts on day-to-day life.

3. Respond appropriately to the individual in front of you (there is no one-size-fits-all approach).
   - Make efforts to ensure the physical and emotional safety of the individual and staff/volunteers to prevent re-traumatisation.
   - Create a welcoming and inclusive environment.
   - Ask permission to discuss potentially difficult subjects.
   - Be transparent and build trust with the individual.
   - Offer choices for how decisions are made about the individuals care and support.
   - Collaborate with the individual to overcome challenges.
   - Support people to connect and build relationships with peers and their local community and to maintain healthy relationships with existing friends and family.
   - Empower individuals by sharing power and ensuring that they have a voice in decision making.
   - Work in partnership with other trusted services and organisations to offer wraparound support
   - Transform trauma, grief and anger into action through advocacy.

(Adapted from multiple sources: Trauma-Informed Practice for Scotland, Ukraine Psychological Wellbeing Advice Pack – Guidance for Services, Applying Trauma-Informed Practices to the Care of Refugee and Immigrant Youth: 10 Clinical Pearls)

Case study 5.3: 'Equally important, equally different', care in a North Yorkshire school

Just below the town of Richmond lies Catterick Garrison, a military town home to the largest garrison of the British Army – and also to Le Cateau Community Primary School.

The school has a highly mobile and diverse student population, with 23 nationalities represented and almost one-fifth of the school an EAL (English as an Additional Language) learner. This is primarily a result of the training camp which trains soldiers from countries such as Nepal and Fiji, but in recent years the area has also been home to refugees from Syria and Afghanistan. As such, the school is highly experienced at supporting students and their families who have faced upheaval and trauma.

The school is committed to providing care and guidance to all those coming through their door, and they do this through a keen understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These are traumatic or stressful experiences that children face, which have the potential for long-term impacts. Le Cateau have observed that while most children might face one or two such experiences – a family bereavement or parental separation, for some of their children from a refugee background they might have experienced eight or nine ACEs by the age of 10.

For Le Cateau, promoting a culture that celebrates diversity is crucial for supporting the wellbeing of their students. This means that it is not only the staff that support new arrivals, but the entire student body. As Ian, the headteacher, says:

> *"The best place for the kids to be is on the playground. The common language of football, or the common language of sport… that is where our children with EAL [English as an additional language] pick up so much."*

The school has close relationships with students and their parents, meaning they can readily spot if children or parents are feeling isolated or low, and take steps to help.

The school has two lessons for others.
- To build trust you have to nurture relationships. Be visible and welcoming, ask parents how they are, provide support and help where you can.
- Create a culture where everyone is equally important, and diversity is celebrated. Taking the time to understand student's background and what's important to them creates a sense of belonging. Celebrating Diwali, for example, is as important as celebrating Christmas.

These efforts have reaped benefits beyond the school gates. In a community where one person has "grown up in the foot of the Himalayas" and another in "inner-city Leeds", creating the conditions for friendships to flourish in school rubs off and creates connections in the wider community too.

REFERENCES

39   The Local Government Association has further resources for councils looking to tackle loneliness, see: https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/must-know-loneliness-your-council-actively-tackling-loneliness#resources-for-further-information

40   Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) *A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness

41   You can find out more about the migration trends in your area by visiting Migration Yorkshire's statistics webpage: https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/statistics

42   Shaw J (2022) 'Where next for the Shared Prosperity Fund?', IPPR, blog post. https://www.ippr.org/blog/where-next-for-the-shared-prosperity-fund

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS: A CHECKLIST

Drawing on comprehensive research, this toolkit has set out to offer practical guidance, tools and resources to help policymakers, officials, practitioners and residents to combat social isolation, forge social connections and promote social cohesion across the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Through talking with policymakers and practitioners, as well as residents from migrant and receiving communities, it is apparent that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to creating social connections, rather there are multifarious and interlocking actions that, taken together, can help build the foundations for a more connected region – one that is ultimately happier, healthier and stronger.

Below is a checklist, summarising many of the key actions found throughout this toolkit. This is intended to offer an overview, and an at-a-glance look for you to assess how your council or organisation is doing in relation to the five elements of this toolkit, and to help direct conversations about where gaps and future priorities may lie.

Organised by theme, you can find more detail about each of these in the corresponding sections.

BARRIERS

☐ You're familiar with the barriers to social connections for migrant and receiving communities, and are proactive in addressing these.

HOLDING ACTIVITIES THAT BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

☐ You understand the significance of events and activities that are inclusive of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers for building social connections, cohesion and belonging in your local area.

☐ You can identify the different types of places in your local area that support migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to feel a sense of belonging in their new home.

☐ You've thought about ways to share information about events and activities so that it reaches migrant communities.

☐ As well as bringing people together from different backgrounds, you're aware of the importance of supporting migrant residents to maintain existing relationships with their families and communities in order to support wellbeing and prevent isolation.

CREATING PUBLIC SPACES AND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WORK FOR COMMUNITIES

☐ You understand the significance of community venues and public spaces for supporting social connections locally.

☐ Your council is aware of the role of community businesses in reducing isolation and creating opportunities for communities to come together and you're able to identify opportunities for reusing empty shops for community businesses.

☐ You know the value of green space for supporting community wellbeing and are able to assess how such spaces can be inclusively designed.

☐ You can signpost and support residents to apply for the community ownership fund.

You're exploring models of public transportation that meet the needs of communities, including provision for asylum seekers.

INVESTING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND TRAINING

☐ You're aware of the significance of supporting English language acquisition, volunteering opportunities and employment for enabling people to feel connected to others.

☐ Employers in your local area are supported to understand how they can support asylum seekers and refugees into the local workforce, and adult education providers offer meaningful skills development and training opportunities.

☐ You're familiar with resources available on the Migration Yorkshire website to support refugee communities in the Yorkshire and Humber region to access employment, volunteering and education.

INCLUDING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN DECISION-MAKING

☐ Residents have meaningful opportunities to feed into decisions made about their communities, and migrant communities are included in these.

☐ Your council is aware of how diverse communities are represented in positions of authority, and supports opportunities to move into leadership positions.

☐ You understand the value of community champions for representing migrant communities and are actively exploring opportunities for compensating or funding such roles.

☐ Participation activities in your local area include a cross-section of local communities.

TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

☐ Your council or service is committed to effective partnership working, and understands that this must also include people with lived experience themselves.

☐ Your cohesion and resettlement teams are working collaboratively with council departments with responsibility for reducing isolation and loneliness and vice-versa.

☐ You're aware of the Shared Prosperity Fund, the investment plans in your local area, and opportunities for joined up working to deliver interventions that support social connections locally.

☐ You're aware of issues related to prejudice, discrimination and hate crime locally and options for tackling these.

☐ You know the effects that trauma can have on people seeking refuge and are implementing best practice approaches to trauma informed care.

APPENDIX 1: FURTHER RESOURCES

GENERAL RESOURCES

The Jo Cox Foundation and Meta
Unlocking Connection: 7 keys for unlocking social connections within communities from the Connection Coalition

MiFriendly Cities
A guide to developing a MiFriendly City

Everyday Integration
The Everyday Integration Toolkit

Belong
Beyond us and them: Policy and practice for strengthening social cohesion in local areas

HOLDING ACTIVITIES THAT BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

British Future and Spirit of 2012
Seizing the moment: Why events matter for social connection and shared identity

Hope Not Hate
How to run inclusive events: A practitioners guide

The Challenge
All together now: Meaningful mixing for a more integrated society

CREATING PUBLIC SPACES AND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WORKS FOR COMMUNITIES

Power to Change, Local Trust and Locality
The Community Hub Handbook

The Cares Family and Power to Change
Building our social infrastructure: Why levelling up means creating a more socially connected Britain

Hope Not Hate
Using Empty Spaces Toolkit

Plunkett Foundation
Guidance on applying for the Community Ownership Fund

INVESTING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Migration Yorkshire
ESOL for refugees: a toolkit for commissioners and practitioners

Migration Yorkshire
Employer Engagement Coordination Group

Refugee Council
Supporting refugees into employment

INCLUDING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN DECISION-MAKING

Involve
Community cohesion and participation – a practical framework

Traverse
Inclusive Practice resources

Migration Yorkshire (forthcoming)
Refugee Participation and Inclusion

JOINED UP WORKING

The Kings Fund
A reflective learning framework for partnering

RESET
Community Sponsorship – local authority toolkit

TACKLING DISCRIMINATION, PREJUDICE AND HATE CRIME

London Councils
Race Equality: Good practice

Brighton and Hove Council
Becoming an anti-racist city

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

UK Trauma Council
How to support refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people who have experienced trauma

Freedom From Torture
Therapy and Practical Help

Scottish Government
Trauma Informed Practice: A toolkit for Scotland

APPENDIX 2: BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

Challenge / barrier	Potential avenue to address barrier
Prohibitive cost of events and activities	• Provide free events and activities. • Reimburse travel costs for those on low incomes, including asylum seekers. • Budget for childcare costs for attendees. • Provide food to attendees. • Explore partnering with local business[1] to sponsor community events.
Lack of spaces for people to connect with others	• Be creative! Utilise public spaces such as libraries, schools, theatres, sports clubs and cafés for creating meaningful connections. • Incorporate a social connection lens into all development and redevelopment plans – how does the space create the opportunity for connection? • Explore options for bringing spaces and land into the hands of communities, eg assets of community value.[2] • Use empty spaces[3] for community purposes on a temporary and permanent basis. • Ensure green space locally is accessible[4] and welcoming to diverse communities (eg through a green spaces strategy).[5] • See section 2 of the toolkit for more ideas.
Information about local events and activities is not reaching communities	• Partner with schools, businesses, colleges, universities and/or local community and faith groups to spread the message about an event. • Publicise in multiple places to reach different groups (eg social media, noticeboards in public buildings and local shops, on local radio, local newspapers and newsletters, via local community groups). • Ensure that visuals are inclusive and diverse. • Translate information to reach linguistically diverse communities. • Reach out to 'community champions' and trusted community members/groups to share information about events via word of mouth.
Language barriers prevent people from connecting with others or from accessing local events and activities	• Review access to and provision of formal ESOL provision, including work specific ESOL classes or classes targeted at supporting people to pass their driving theory or life in the UK test. • Support access to informal opportunities to practice English, ie through conversation clubs, walking classes that help people to get to know their local area, museum visits, crafts and arts, etc. • Translate materials to publicise local services, events and activities. • Celebrate the many languages of your local population. For inspiration, see the Stories From Home project and Levenshulme Language Day.
Experience and fear of racism, prejudice and hate crime	• Work with communities to promote neighbourliness, reduce tensions, tackle prejudice, hate crime and misinformation. • Link into befriending schemes that pair new arrivals with those who have been in the area longer to build trust incrementally. • Utilise the SAFER-R Model[6] of crisis intervention that outlines an approach for supporting people to move from a state of crisis to co-producing solutions to the problems they face.
New arrivals are not familiar with how to find out about what's happening in their local area	• Provide orienteering support, including guidance about where to find information online, eg see RETAS' Welcome to Leeds project. • Share information about events and activities with refugee and community groups. • Consider providing information in community languages.
Particular groups or demographics are not engaging with events or activities locally	• Consult and assess what barriers different groups are facing when it comes to engagement. • Work with relevant community groups that work with the target group to establish what could work well. • Where families are not engaged consider how cost (of activity itself and travel/food) might prohibit engagement. • Where men are not engaged, consider training, skills, and sports-based activities that may encourage involvement. • Consider (and acknowledge) if they have their own forms of engagements that may go unnoticed.
New arrivals lack confidence or are anxious to engage with local events and activities	• Link into befriending schemes that can build confidence in a one-to-one capacity. • Consider the associations that people have with places locally. Some may be fearful of places associated with authorities (for instance, people seeking asylum who may have been through a difficult asylum process and/or faced persecution in their home country). Consult with communities that you're trying to reach to understand what spaces they currently use – can you go to them?

1   Belong (no date) Everybody's business: The role that business can play in supporting cohesive communities, report. https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/everybodys-business-report/
2   Sandford M (2022) Assets of community value, House of Commons, research briefing. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06366/SN06366.pdf
3   Hopeful Towns (no date) 'Using empty spaces', guidance. https://www.hopefultowns.co.uk/using-empty-spaces
4   Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace: A new review for 2020, report. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf
5   See for instance, Leeds City Council (2022) 'Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2022 to 2032', webpage. https://www.leeds.gov.uk/plans-and-strategies/parks-and-green-spaces-strategy
6   Refugee Action Good Practice (2022) Responding to hate crime: A toolkit for organisations in the UK refugee and migration sector. https://www.ragp.org.uk/reports

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

It should be noted that each of these terms are variously defined in the existing literature. Here we set out how these terms have been utilised in this research and in the toolkit.

Social isolation

Social isolation is experienced by an individual who lacks social contact or support. It can occur when someone feels cut off   or distant from their usual social support networks, such as friends, family and neighbours. There are specific factors that contribute to facing social isolation, such as being unemployed, moving to a new place, and losing mobility. The state of being socially isolated can contribute to the feeling of loneliness.

Loneliness

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone or isolated. While social isolation can lead to loneliness, someone may feel lonely in circumstances even where it appears to others that they have adequate social networks. Loneliness therefore is felt when an individual believes their relationships and social ties are somehow lacking. Feeling lonely has negative consequences for people's mental health and wellbeing.

Intergroup contact

Intergroup contact (or social contact) refers to relationships between people from different backgrounds. Positive intergroup contact should be ongoing, positive and meaningful as opposed to negative, fleeting or unintentional. It is seen to be important for breaking down prejudices between people from different social groups.[7] If social connection is about relationships as a whole, social contact is about those relationships that specifically cut across difference.

Social connection

Social connection is the logical counterpoint to social isolation. It references the relationships that people enjoy with others around them, including with friends, family, colleagues, neighbours or any other social group. It is the feeling that an individual belongs to a group and has people that they can call on if they are in need. Feeling socially connected is thought to have positive benefits for individuals' physical and mental health.

Bonding and bridging

Drawn from literature on social capital,[8] bonding relationships occur between people belonging to an existing group, network or community (such as family and friend networks or groups of people who understand themselves to be from a similar background). Bridging is intergroup contact that occurs between people from different backgrounds and social groups (such as class, migrant status, ethnicity, and educational background). Connections that bond and connections that bridge are seen to have different benefits for individuals and societies.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion pans out from individual experiences of social isolation and social connections and focuses on the community and societal benefits of positive social connections. Social cohesion is a process that has three elements, in which people within the society:

- have good general wellbeing, a sense of belonging and wish to contribute voluntarily to the good of society

- are tolerant and promote multiple values and cultures

- are granted equal rights and opportunities.[9]

This indicates that for social cohesion to occur, meaningful social connections and social contact across difference are required. However, there also needs to be parity between people that are connecting, a key challenge when society is faced with substantial and persistent inequalities.[10]

Social cohesion is used to reference relations between all groups of people from diverse backgrounds and it is place based, tending to focus on the local or neighbourhood level.[11]

Integration

Integration is taken to refer to a process that looks at the relations between people who migrate and the wider society. It requires migrants and the receiving society (inclusive of services providers, amongst others) to go through a process of cooperation and change in an effort to create an 'integrated' society, for the wellbeing of individual's and society.

The Integrated Communities Strategy[12] set out what integration looks like for the Home Office. They write of 'communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities'.

Integration theory has developed from something that was seen as a one-way street (ie migrants alone are tasked with integrating), to a two-way street (ie migrants and the receiving community have a reciprocal role to play in integration) and now as something that is multi-directional.[13] In this way, every person, service and institution in society should be responsible for contributing to creating an integrated society.

Integration includes multiple dimensions, including economic, social and cultural. For instance, priorities mentioned in the Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Strategy[14] include:

- housing and environment
- economic integration
- health and wellbeing
- community and belonging
- families and children.

Integration should be a strategic priority for those interested in supporting social connections among migrant communities. Without action on the above domains, migrant groups will likely continue to face isolation and loneliness.

'Receiving' communities

We use this term to refer to residents of Yorkshire and the Humber that have typically lived in the UK most, or all, of their lives.

We recognise there is no clear delineation between 'migrant' and 'receiving' communities, and that receiving communities includes people who may have migrated themselves a while ago (ie moving to the UK as a child) and who have families with migration histories.

'Migrant' communities

This term refers to people who have migrated to the UK more recently, or who self-defined through the course of the research as a migrant.

When we talk about 'migrant communities', for brevity this includes people that are refugees and asylum seekers, as well as people who have moved to the UK for some other reason (ie for work, family or to study). We recognise that this is a heterogenous group, and throughout the toolkit we refer to specific groups as relevant.

7   See for instance, Mayblin et al (2015) 'In the contact zone: engineering encounters across difference', *The Geographical Journal*, 182(2), 213-222. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12128

8   See, for example, Putnam R (2000) *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Simon & Schuster

9   Adapted from the definition put forward in Fonseca X, Lukosch S and Brazier F (2018) 'Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterise it', *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 32(2). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2018.1497480

10   Broadhead J, Kierans D and Mort L (2020) *Covid-19 research and policy briefings: Connecting communities*, IPPR and Global Exchange on Migration & Diversity. https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/inclusive-cities-covid-19-research-and-policy-briefings/

11   Rutter J (2013) *Back to basics: Towards a successful and cost-effective integration policy*, IPPR. https://www.ippr.org/publications/back-to-basics-towards-a-successful-and-cost-effective-integration-policy

12   Home Office (2019) *Indicators of Integration*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019

13   ibid

14   Migration Yorkshire (2021) *Making connections, building resilience: The Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Strategy*, strategy paper. https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/news/making-connections-building-resilience

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