Refugee Resettlement: A New Perspective

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Table of contents

Isolation

Recommendations and Concluding Statements

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Executive Summary

Within the sphere of immigration and the resettlement of migrants in destination countries, the original research proposal focused on the benefits of rural as opposed to urban resettlement, as not only would newcomers be able to access greater opportunities, the influx of labour and skills could potentially revive local communities that are ailing economically. Furthermore, the ambition of increasing diversity in smaller community settings, where ties of familiarity are stronger, is more likely to foster understanding, acceptance and resilience to change. The author, through her roles in the Refugee Council in North Yorkshire, has been able to assess the UK context, and by further research gathered information relating to attitudes and experiences, both amongst recently resettled refugees and from host community members, particularly those who work in the resettlement field.

Recognising room for improvement in how resettlement and integration are managed, the author took her research to Canada, a country renowned for its success in implementing schemes that help resettle refugees. However, initiatives in other countries such as Sweden, Italy and Australia were also explored. Interviews and associated online research revealed insights that, regardless of whether newcomers were placed in urban or rural settings, pointed to more progressive thinking towards inclusivity and healthier engagement in building communities together. These findings and the conclusions drawn from them are also discussed in this report.

There is an added dimension to the way the findings and conclusions are explored and discussed in this report, and that is through the lens of existential psychotherapy. The author's personal journey of earlier trauma and then cultural adaptation in the UK was strongly supported not only by such therapy, but by a thorough grounding in its principles, which led to a deeper understanding. There are four pillars of existential psychodynamics: **Death, Freedom, Meaning** and **Isolation**. The author found compelling connections between these existential concerns, the experiences of the refugees, the way different communities manage their resettlement schemes and the degree of success that follows.

With a chapter devoted to each existential pillar, the concepts are explained and their relevance to the refugee and host community experience are examined, drawing links to what is happening in both the UK and Canada in terms of how communities manage the

implementation of resettlement schemes, against a backdrop of cultural and political influence. It is recognised that all the existential concerns described are inextricably linked; that the human condition cannot be neatly compartmentalised; that **life is lived holistically**.

In the chapter on '**Death**', the premise is that the notion of death is a fundamental aspect of life, that its presence influences our beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in a profound way. For example, an unhealthy fear of death can lead one to approach life as an exercise in risk aversion, belittling the notion of a life lived fully. For refugees moving to another country to escape war or persecution, the experience is a fundamental rupture to their relationship with a sense of home, with their friends and family, with their culture. It is a metaphor for 'death', but it is also an opportunity for 'rebirth'. This urgent experience can be liberating, leading to feelings of gratitude, empathy and a mindfulness of being, especially if the support they receive guides them to take responsibility for paving their own way in life. However, the chapter also considers migration from the host community's perspective. What might an influx of refugees mean? Competition for resources? A dilution of culture and values? A death of a nation as they know it? In the UK, there is a pervasive anxiety about migration; there is no doubting that the tabloid press incites fear, suspicion and even hostility. It is therefore not surprising that when charity organisations and volunteers engage in helping refugees resettle, the general public are not approached for their views or participation. Furthermore, in order to counteract the perceived indifference or animosity, this seems to have led to a misguided and overzealous compassion within some of the volunteer groups – treating the refugees as victims, instead of empowering them with the tools to achieve some kind of self-sufficiency. With a greater focus on exclusive services and attention on incoming migrants, resentment and an 'us and them' mentality is fostered.

By contrast, Canada shows a solidarity of purpose and a constancy of message from the top, at government level, down to the municipalities, the private sponsors and the community members themselves, welcoming the refugees as 'newcomers' or 'new Canadians'. Discrimination is discouraged and the focus is on inclusivity. That is, newcomers and host community members are encouraged to work together to seek opportunities that support everyone; issues that arise are everyone's issues, to be resolved together. Supporting this, the chapter examines another stark difference – Canada invests heavily in education and training, especially in cross-cultural awareness, with a focus on embracing diversity. Many examples are cited.

The chapter concludes that Canada has a more life-affirming approach to helping newcomers resettle and integrate, with a positive acceptance that with migration, change follows. There is an acceptance that missteps may be taken, but also a strong creative impetus to find solutions that correct wrong turns.

The chapter on '**Freedom**' ignores political escape in favour of a more fundamental existential truth, where freedom relates to the acceptance of responsibility by a person to become an author of their own life. Despite the existence of externally perceived chains and limitations, a person can choose to think, feel and act according to innate values and strength of character, with openness and flexibility. The author sees examples everywhere of newcomers wanting to grasp rather than evade responsibility; to be able to make decisions that positively affect their lives. Furthermore, they seem to want to fit in and contribute.

With this in mind, the author explores an undermining force in the UK: the actions of the tabloid press, who use scapegoating to demonise refugees, despite their powerlessness in controlling decisions that seal their fate. In fact, one can go as far to say that responsibility is therefore abandoned and opportunities thwarted, as it becomes more difficult to forge collaborations between newcomers and host communities when negativity is amplified in this way. Furthermore, there is a tendency to hide or evade institutional problems lest they undermine confidence in resettlement policy, so an approach of experimenting and learning is not encouraged.

By contrast, Canada ensures myths about refugees are dispelled, and centralises information so that everybody can access a consistent picture about immigration and the various schemes available to help resettle newcomers. The unity of vision leads to belief in and support for the mission, which is for newcomers and host communities to seek opportunities for positive collaboration. This approach means responsibility is not only run at an institutional level, it trickles down to the residents of the community, who are willing to acknowledge teething problems as they occur and try out innovative solutions to make things work. This is bolstered by investing heavily in training for private sponsors, and in pre-emptive initiatives to tackle racism and housing issues and create employment opportunities. Also, mainstream organisations share responsibility for educating newcomers and host community members. In the UK, this tends to fall mostly into the hands of the charity organisations alone.

Within this framework, Canada also promotes the opportunities to be had and the benefits gained from rural resettlement. Placements are **encouraged and promoted**, especially for families that seem well-suited to rural life. However, the choice is with the newcomers, and the freedom to choose is a well-understood principle. **Schemes exist to boost rural resettlement, making it attractive to newcomers**; an added motive is to assist ailing communities where skills and labour are lacking. In the UK, placements, rural or urban, are pre-planned, with the element of choice removed, leading to problems down the line.

Some of these ideas are returned to in the chapter on '**Meaning**', which asserts that living life meaningfully is a fundamental human need. If we question objectively what is the purpose or meaning of our lives, we can dig ourselves into a hole of meaninglessness, and so we come back to responsibility and its role in finding meaning. As a basis, it seems we need moral courage, fortitude and a path that leads us away from self-absorption and towards engagement in activities that transcend the self. In this light, the author shares her own battle with her search for meaning. The relationship with the world (family, friends, work, culture) from which migrants had built a purposeful life is ruptured and so, in a new environment, there is a need to rebuild meaning beyond the basic needs of housing, food and security. Culturally adrift, it is easy for refugees to become disengaged and dispirited, especially with so many practical barriers to overcome, diminishing their opportunities to explore ways of building independence.

The chapter goes on to examine how Canada appreciates these hurdles and that for resettlement to evolve into successful integration, the local communities are encouraged to implement schemes that build resilience and promote social connectedness as reception strategies, as these provide a good platform for finding meaningful work or social activities that bolster self-esteem. The schemes share a common aim of strengthening a sense of belonging, but embrace a diverse focus: women, children, employment sectors (such as construction, or setting up entrepreneurial businesses) and rural resettlement. For this last point, host communities are very active in wanting to see their smaller communities thrive, and are very adaptive to the idea of newcomers providing much-needed labour and talent. Often, to make it attractive and to make it work, there is recognition of the need to recruit driven individuals who can play a key role in experimenting with innovative solutions, and that it is helpful to invest in their vision, rather than holding them back in favour of bureaucracy. Examples of this in Italy and Sweden are also described.

The chapter also looks at the UK context – with the conclusion that there is neither the same unity of vision nor sufficient focus on education and training. Furthermore, local government seems reluctant to devolve responsibility to a wide range of interconnecting organisations that could work together to provide a range of services aimed at both refugees and non-refugees.

The last existential concern to explore is '**Isolation**' and this is covered in the final chapter, which starts by looking at interpersonal isolation and its many causes, and how it can be exacerbated by cultural factors. More profoundly, existential isolation is another facet of the human condition, a recognition that we are all essentially cut off from one another. However, we manage to ward off its intrusion by immersion in the everyday, even if the cloak of that illusion occasionally evaporates. The author explains that isolation is an unavoidable and often acute part of the refugee experience, as migrants are wrenched from the familiar and plunged into the unfamiliar.

However, the chapter goes on to explain that careful training and support can help to show the benefits of isolation and that coming to terms with it is key for building up resilience. It also recognises that supporting newcomers with social integration cannot be forced – it needs to evolve naturally, with time, patience and sensitivity, and with timely, perceptive interventions by those providing assistance. Without this, the author goes on to explain, isolation can lead to intense loneliness or to poorly chosen behaviour, where emotional dependency can lead to destructive relationships.

Isolation is the one existential concern that is overtly discussed by those working with and supporting newcomers. The chapter explores the context in Canada, where settling newcomers in rural areas is sometimes recognised as the antidote to isolation. The calmness and beauty of the environment reduces anxiety, it is easier to make connections within the community, easier to learn English and easier to access opportunities for employment or engagement with social activities. Both newcomers and host community members seem to be more predisposed to investing time and resources in building healthier, more supportive relationships. Although conventional employment is a useful route out of isolation, it is not always suitable, and so the chapter goes on to explore how Canada recognises that alternative routes are needed, such as widening the concept of employment, volunteering and network building. Identifying that there is a diverse range of needs, Canada tends to be proactive in its preparation for the arrival of new families. Owen Sound, in Nova Scotia, is looked at as one prime example of how a caring community, employing due diligence with its investments,

can bring in newcomers to turn around an ailing community. Furthermore, its ethical responsibility towards newcomers, which is a mindset embedded in the community, has led to good retention of newcomers in the area.

Introduction

The original proposal on which a Churchill Fellowship was offered to me was to examine the refugee resettlement question with a particular emphasis on rural as opposed to urban resettlement. In addition, I had a specific interest in viewing this phenomenon as a potential means to reviving local communities where shortages of skills and labour were threatening their economic survival. Furthermore, by focusing on rural communities, could bringing in cultural diversity be a solution to be celebrated rather than a burden to be endured? Ultimately, is there a good case for rural resettlement? Might that work more successfully than urban resettlement and, if so, what factors determine better outcomes away from the larger metropolises?

As a project worker and then a community development officer working for the Refugee Council in North Yorkshire I had a strong sense that rural resettlement could provide great opportunities for refugees arriving in the UK – opportunities that may elude them in a city environment. Furthermore, looking at it from the alternative perspective, it seemed there were benefits that could be realised at the local community level, especially if those communities were threatened by internal migration of its youth to larger urban areas, where greater opportunities for social excitement and diverse employment were more appealing. Newcomers could potentially address resultant labour shortages and apply or acquire skills to help revive ailing communities. Also, having a more culturally diverse community unified in its goals could break down barriers and encourage a greater sense of understanding, tolerance and resilience, which are very much needed when social divisions are felt to be on the increase.

Rural resettlement in the UK is a relatively recent phenomenon and initial investigation suggested that not only had this trend been practised for longer in countries such as Canada, but that Canada had learnt lessons along the way, and was doing it well. My experiences in North Yorkshire, although positive in many cases, introduced me to problems and challenges that I felt could be addressed if we adopted more enlightened and sophisticated approaches. I wanted to learn from Canada and bring those lessons back to the UK.

In one sense, nothing has changed; it is still the intention of this report to share those particular findings and present a case for rural resettlement, albeit with certain conditions attached.

However, in another sense, the remit of the investigations broadened, as it became clear to me that not only was Canada more successful at bringing in newcomers to rural communities, it was also more experienced and learned in general in its approaches to integrating newcomers.

This is due, on one hand, to institutional structuring[1] (how resettlement is handled by the various organisations that support it and how they interact) and, on the other, attitudinal perspectives that seem to be embedded in the people working for the agencies that implement policies on the ground. For example, Canada refers to refugees as 'newcomers', emphasising a connotation that is more friendly and welcoming. For this reason, I will explore these factors too, as rural resettlement in the UK could well benefit from looking at a larger canvas.

As a migrant to the UK myself, one who has undergone both trauma and transformation, and one who has gone through a period of cultural adaptation, it seems very pertinent to draw upon what I have learnt through the very significant therapeutic techniques that have helped my own recovery and integration. These techniques have a philosophical underpinning that can help one navigate difficulty and nurture a healthy approach to living, especially when such a person is in the position of needing to rebuild a life. This philosophical treatise is embodied by the four pillars of existential psychotherapy: Death, Freedom, Meaning and Isolation. By better understanding how these pillars define our own nature as a human being and by acknowledging what controls and restrictions they afford us, we can manage our own suffering and access our potential far more successfully. These existential concerns are potentially applicable to everyone, as any person may, at one time or another, fall prey to existential doubt and suffering. However, they seem especially applicable to refugees, who have been uprooted from their friends, family, culture and nation, with the uneasy prospect of having to start life anew, in a strange and often hostile environment.

[1] It is worth referring to the appendix to see which schemes supporting resettlement operate in both the UK and Canada. In the UK, the schemes are numerous and subject to constant change, often causing conflict and confusion, whereas in Canada, the scheme structure is more comprehensible and stable.

Fear and uncertainty come crashing in, yet there is a chance to seize opportunities to regain a sense of meaning and social integration, and a hope that life can be lived fully, if the path ahead is paved with understanding and sensitivity.

Of course, it would be a rare thing for any newcomer or anyone supporting newcomers to consciously dwell on these existential concerns, and yet my research suggests that policies and practices that take these concerns into account, whatever the origin of their intent, seem to be the ones that successfully rebuild lives and help communities to thrive.

I will devote a chapter to each of these four pillars, explain the parameters of each existential concern, and map their significance to how we live, attempting to draw out why each has a bearing on the topic of resettlement. The findings that have emerged from the research show how the conditions that lead to either the success or failure of resettlement and integration have a strong connection with the ideas that run through existential psychotherapy.

I will outline here, very briefly, what these existential pillars of psychotherapy concern themselves with, though each of the main chapters will elaborate on the themes more fully. A key textual source for these existential pillars is the book *Existential Psychotherapy* by Irvin D. Yalom (BasicBooks, 1980). However, there is much online content too, which is referenced throughout the report.

Yalom was a pioneer in developing existential psychotherapy as a discipline. It does not supplant the psychiatric disciplines developed by the likes of Freud, Jung and Adler, but it extends them into new territory. It emphasises that mental health problems are frequently caused by struggles with existence and the essential nature of the human condition. It is a style of therapy that places emphasis on the human experience as a whole, taking a far more holistic approach. It uses a positive approach that applauds human capacities and aspirations while simultaneously acknowledging human limitations.

- **Death** – the central idea is that fear of death can belittle our experience of life, if we let it. Developing an acceptance of death (and its many metaphors) can help us approach life with greater joy, vitality and authenticity.

- **Freedom** – the notion of freedom is inextricably tied to the acceptance of responsibility; that if we value freedom, then we must take steps to be the authors of our own experiences, believe in that and not believe we are always at the mercy of external forces.

- **Meaning** – it is tempting to fall prey to a sense of meaninglessness, but along with freedom and responsibility, we need to take on that struggle and find our own meaning.

- **Isolation** – there are many reasons for feeling isolated, and yet we need to develop the strength to accept isolation as a fundamental human condition before we can tackle the anxiety it brings and move comfortably and authentically into spaces that embrace social inclusion.

When looking at policies and practices (as well as underlying attitudes), it is clear, both philosophically and psychologically, that these existential concerns are interlinked and that what people do and how they behave cannot simply be labelled as a 'Death' or 'Freedom' related action, for example. They cross-cut all the time. Therefore, the division into four separate chapters may seem a little contrived. However, I sincerely believe a chapter is needed for each existential concern to bring all the related ideas into sharp focus. A better understanding of each will help the reader appreciate their significance, both individually and as a collective.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions and the uncertainty around travel, a decision was taken to pursue the research online. I made contact with a number of people in Canada (and other countries too, such as Sweden), all supporting resettled families in one role or another. All the Zoom interviews were recorded and have been published (albeit privately) on YouTube. Links to the interviews and the transcripts can be provided on request[2] . I also interviewed a number of refugees, either via Zoom or via email correspondence. The interviews very much focused on the experiences and views of the interviewees with particular attention on what they believed were the factors that led to successful resettlement and integration, but also highlighting any

[2] By emailing Sep.Mojabi@gmail.com

missteps, where things could go wrong and where lessons had to be learnt. It was my pleasure to not only discuss their work, but also to listen to their frank truthfulness about failures as well as successes.

In addition to the interviews, I followed up on website links that were sent to me or I found through my own labours. There I found a wealth of material and, where applicable, these links have been shared in each relevant chapter.

Before I started my research on Canada, I conducted a survey in the UK, asking more than 200 UK residents from a range of backgrounds about their views on immigration, with a particular focus on urban versus rural resettlement. In addition, I conducted extensive interviews with resettled refugees in UK rural areas, learning about their experiences and how they felt about those experiences. All of this has contributed to much of the content included in the 'UK Context' sections of each main chapter.

As well as each of the main chapters, I have drawn up a list of conclusions and recommendations. These look at the contexts of the UK and Canada and draw out which policies, practices and behaviours appear to be helping newcomers and host communities work together successfully; what seems to be helping communities thrive and social integration work. Within this discussion, there will also be notes on what factors need to be taken into account in order for rural resettlement to work successfully.

Death

"A denial of death at any level is a denial of one's basic nature and begets an increasingly pervasive restriction of awareness and experience.

The integration of the idea of death saves us; rather than sentence us to existences of terror or bleak pessimism, it acts as a catalyst to plunge us into more authentic life modes, and it enhances our pleasure in the living of life."

Irvin D. Yalom

I. Background

In this first chapter on key existential concerns, we look at the interdependence of life and death and how that might be relevant to refugee resettlement. The following paragraphs take a holistic view of how the notion of death impacts on our lives in general and reflects on the way certain experiences can shift the way we consider the life-death dynamic. I propose that one such experience is the refugee experience – that such a fundamental rupture to one's relationship with family, friends, livelihood and culture is an 'urgent experience' that forces a search for a connection with life itself. It is a rebirth of sorts, but one that is not sought after; it is a consequence of trauma and it places individuals into an arena of such insecurity and uncertainty that a sense of direction needs to be rediscovered. Yet, quite paradoxically, this 'urgent experience' also brings an appreciation of life to the fore, a heightened sense that life is to be lived fully.

Although I make a case that the understanding of this and what follows in this chapter is central to both the refugee and host community experience, **I need to emphasise that this is not consciously embraced as a means to informing policy when it comes to refugee settlement. Yet when one examines the policies on refugee resettlement and the positive or negative impact they seem to be having, it is not difficult to see that their relative success or failure can be interpreted through the lens of these key existential concerns**. Moreover, if we accept the existential view of psychodynamics as having a central place in our lives, then, in fact, assessing the value of proposed or adopted policies through this prism is unavoidable.

Irvin D. Yalom, a renowned and published existential psychologist, recognises that 'Death' plays a major role in our internal experience – its unsettling presence is ever on the periphery of our consciousness, reminding us of our impermanence and our powerlessness to overcome it – so we attempt to defy it through the illusion of permanence.

What is the influence of death in our lives? Yalom asserts that the more people have reflected on this question, the more it becomes apparent that death is in fact a driving force behind all our modes of behaviour: biological (progeny), theological (afterlife), creative (influence), experiential (intense engagement). Much of human behaviour is an attempt to ward off anxiety, particularly the anxiety of death (the mother of all anxiety), which is pervasive. Our efforts to control risk, to manage the use of our time, to immerse ourselves in fads that prolong health, to internally justify our behaviour in the face of interpersonal anxiety, in fact the very construction of our belief system – all reflect a response to the notion of death – whether that be physical or spiritual. Our cultural edifices and ambitions are attempts at death transcendence (our quest for immortality); a means to ensure a legacy of permanence, or an extension of our will to beat death off. The fear of death permeates the fabric of our social structure, reflecting our eternal conflict with it.

If we face death, we can begin to live (because denying death is allowing fear to belittle our lives). We attempt to control the uncertainties and the risks that potentially threaten us, investing heavily (both physically and mentally) in our defences of any peril (real or imagined), insulating ourselves from the encroachment of death. We thereby encourage a 'forgetfulness' of being rather than a 'mindfulness' of being.

However, philosophers throughout the ages have concluded death is a part of life and that consideration of death enriches rather than impoverishes mankind. **Although the physicality of death destroys man, the idea of death saves him. What does this mean? In the mindfulness of being mode, not only is one aware of the fragility of life, but one is also aware of the responsibility one has for that life. Death acts as a catalyst to plunge us into a more authentic life mode and it enhances our pleasure in the living of life.** It should be noted that this is not a conclusion arrived at just by philosophical and literary contemplation; for years, clinicians have seen the remarkable impact that failed suicide attempts and near-death experiences have had on individuals in terms of their attitudes (feeling greater empathy), relationships, mental and physical health. In short, the way they chose to lead their lives from that point on changed dramatically.

II. Refugee Context

These concepts are especially important for refugees, whether at a conscious or unconscious level. Not only have they fled persecution or the horrors of war, they are, in a sense, and against their will, uprooted in order to be granted safety in another country. They are starting from scratch in an environment that can be supportive on one hand, but difficult and even hostile on the other. One form of insecurity has been replaced by another. The cushioning effect of the 'everyday' is not present; any kind of normality is replaced by struggle. Their 'urgent experience' jolts them into a mindfulness of being. They want to 'live' but what is the path to attain that 'aliveness'?

However, it is also interesting to note that the existential concept of death can be reflected upon, not just from the point of view of the refugees fleeing war or persecution, but also from the perspective of the local communities engaged, whether directly or indirectly, with the task of making refugees feel welcome.

Many locals are, of course, extremely supportive. However, others are fearful, even hostile to an influx of individuals who are ethnically and culturally different. **The antipathy can be summarised simply as 'Where will it end?' This may refer to the number of refugees allowed into an area or it may refer to the impact the migration may have on local communities, answers to which are steeped in uncertainty and, in many cases, which are prone to the exaggerating effects of fear and prejudice**. **If under threat, most people adhere to the judgements of the 'social tribe' they most identify with.** Any change is a threat to the current 'normality' that one has adapted to – and yet **resisting change, in order to safeguard that 'normality', may have a strangling effect on the way life is lived and so, paradoxically, the potential positives are sequestered away by an overriding negative. Embracing the change and its implications may be the better way forward.**

In many senses, this has been witnessed in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been an undeniable and unprecedented health crisis, but one where this existential threat, if not to life itself, then certainly to livelihoods or lifestyles, has given rise to positive responses.

If we examine the other side of the coin, for those organisations directly engaged in providing services to support refugees, many of the individuals on the front line may regard their role with a lack of belief, commitment and competence, through no fault of their own, but because

they feel overwhelmed and unprepared for a reality they have no real experience of. They are put into a role of care where empathy and understanding have not been encouraged or developed. Certainly in the UK context, from the survey I conducted, there is evidence of a lack of background or educational support for many mainstream organisations responsible for delivering services to newcomers, e.g. Job Centre, NHS. The difficulty of the situation is worsened by the lack of a consistent message regarding how we should view refugees. Both the Government and the press, for example, exhibit ambivalence at best, and outright hostility when they are at their least tolerant.

Covid-19

More than any other event in recent history, Covid-19 has confronted humanity with an undeniable, unprecedented crisis. Yet, despite the appalling disruption and death toll, the pandemic also prompted reflection of a more positive nature.

- The pandemic has pushed commerce to online platforms. For many international ventures, the growing use of digital technology means cheaper and greater access, better coordination, higher productivity, and lower costs.
- During the Covid-19 crisis, local authorities have engaged with their communities at an extraordinary level and pace. Whether it is recruiting volunteers to support the shielded, helping local communities respond to the challenges or engaging with business about decisions on opening. COVID-19 communications: Community engagement and local democracy | Local Government Association
- During the outbreak of Covid-19, we heard on the news that the communities had sprung into action. Neighbours connected and looked out for each other more than usual, informal support groups in local areas organised to support people in need.
- Solidarity was felt in communities across the world towards those who are helping us all. Many people have stepped forward as formal volunteers; in the NHS, community hubs and local charities. The community response to coronavirus (COVID-19) - UK Health Security Agency (blog.gov.uk)
- But most importantly, the pandemic provided a moment to stop, think, and potentially reset current practices. It is possible to make use of this window of opportunity and 'build back better' (OECD, 2020).

Like any large-scale crisis, Covid-19:

a. Pulled individuals out of their routines
b. Prompted pause and reflection on habitual patterns of thinking, experiencing, relating, and behaving
c. Called into question what people take for granted and, thus,
d. Served as an 'urgent experience' that has the potential to spark a sense of revitalising intentionality. It provided opportunities for existential learning, in which **something about a person's life circumstances [is] *changed* such that [one] cannot go on as before.**

So although Covid-19 wreaked terrible suffering, being responsible for 515,192,979 confirmed cases, including 6,254,140 deaths, as reported to WHO (as of 9 May 2022), the above observations highlight a paradox associated with death, and that is the way life can assert itself, perhaps in unexpected ways.

The prospect of death, or an encounter with it, even in a metaphorical form, can lead to a variety of responses. Through his notes on psychiatric cases, Yalom has identified three types of response.

- One is that we employ psychological defences as a means of denying death, pushing it away to make the associated anxiety less toxic, less invasive. An associative behaviour, Yalom stated, is individuation, whereby some people exhibit a kind of death-defying specialness, an urgent pursuit of self-sufficiency, where any kind of dependency is to be avoided.

- A second response is to give in to an obsession with the gloomy veil of death, allowing it to pervade our thoughts and attitudes with negativity. The overall effect can be crippling.
  According to Yalom, an associated behaviour here is attachment to a rescuer – to individuals or organisations that hold a key to their safety. But this leads to a life-denying dependency.

  This is a theme that will be picked up again in the chapter on 'Isolation', as both these responses encourage forms of loneliness – either people are pushed away or they pull away. Death anxiety, in this way, can compromise one's ability to make positive life decisions.

- However, a third type of response, which we can paraphrase as the 'most mature' response, for which Covid-19 provides plenty of opportunity, is to **celebrate and choose life** knowing that **one will die eventually** and to actively embrace the reality of one's mortality in order to come alive more fully. Confrontation with mortality provides a '**turning point'** conducive to '**radical personal change'**.

Individuals become better capable of engaging in life **authentically, courageously, creatively and responsibly in accordance with their values** by engaging fully in the present moment, knowing they have **a future of their situated choosing**. This leads to greater compassion and self-empowerment.

With this in mind, if we accept that the urgency of the life/death paradox is keenly experienced by refugees, that they move to a different, higher level of being, where trivial preoccupations are replaced by a focus on what is paramount, then we need to be mindful of how they may respond to their situations and how, as a result, everyone gauges the type of support provided.

In the communities, care needs to be taken not to adopt the role of the rescuer too stridently, whereby refugees are seen as victims only and support is heaped upon them. This may either be rejected, causing confusion or even ill-feeling in the host community–refugee relationship, or it may lead to a kind of dependence that is difficult to be weaned off.

Given the kind of narrative that has been explored in this chapter, it seems understandable that the refugees would be predisposed to embracing life rather than being diminished by the harshness of past experience or being defeated by the obstacles of present realities. However, it also seems a sensible proposition that in order to embrace life there needs to be opportunities which can be grasped in order to follow their potential.

Also, rather than encouraging dependence, the opportunities presented need to be open enough for refugees to take responsibility for the direction they take; that they have a sense of shaping their own destiny.

One of the problems with a helper-rescuer mentality among the host community is that it actually promotes a sort of segregation – a kind of 'us and them' – 'the needed and the needy'.

This is likely and fails to capitalise on what can be achieved through inclusivity – where the problems of the community are not focused on the plight of the newcomers, but the newcomers can participate in helping with the problems faced by all of the community.

Such inclusivity makes for a more stable and safe environment – it is mutually supportive and allows trust to develop. However, such a rosy ideal needs time and patience, and an acceptance that missteps can happen along the way – ones that need clear analysis. It needs to be realised that for that harmony to develop within a multi-identity community, there needs to be mutual recognition of difficulties and frustrations and an honest discussion of fears and feelings. **To this end, it seems sensible to tackle misunderstanding through education, awareness-raising, reflection and a willingness to listen without judgement, appreciating the emergence of diverse perspectives.**

Personal Experience in North Yorkshire

When I was working as a community development worker, one of my main focuses was to highlight the resilience, resources and contribution of refugees. I have always admired the courage and strength of those who embrace life and look to build a better future for themselves and their families. During lockdown many resettled families got involved in their communities, supporting vulnerable people. You can read more here:

Refugees take on key roles in Selby community response | North Yorkshire County Council

Throughout my work I heard so many heroic stories from our clients. Yet, I was so confused about why many would only see refugees and asylum seekers as victims. Despite the good intention, some get into the habit of either trying to rescue the newly arrived families or maligning them for taking up space in the UK.

In Canada, as in many other countries, a large number of refugees are more likely to face unemployment, low educational success rates, unstable jobs, and other types of marginalisation. The Mental Health Commission of Canada highlights that 'over-pathologizing refugee populations is counterproductive to their mental health', and advocates for the promotion of resilience and self-management at individual, family and community levels.

One key factor of my own healing in life was coming to see and understand my strengths. As a result of that, I was then able to make the right choices for myself and ultimately create the necessary changes in my life. Without that acknowledgment I would not have been able to make any fundamental changes within myself or externally.

> "To improve is to change, so to be perfect is to have changed often."
>
> Winston Churchill

Change is necessary for existence. Without change we cannot grow, develop, experience, build relationships, form friendships or overcome challenges. A universe without change cannot exist, because change is necessary for the formation of anything and everything.

However, one of my experiences of living in the UK is that '**change**' is not always seen as a positive trait. The comments I read in media outlets and in my own personal life made me believe that many perceive change as a weakness and perhaps a way of giving in.

So the question remains: **How can we encourage change in such a society?**

Change and existentialism are inextricably linked. In existentialism, much value is placed on the application of free will in response to awareness of the human condition and how we suffer as a result. We have the choice to pursue a worthwhile life, banishing behaviours that are destructive or life-denying, and opting for behaviours that nourish the soul. This direction of travel is effected through conscious change, through taking steps to think, feel and act positively. Therefore, **change is at the heart of existential growth**.

Yet people fear change, as change is a harbinger of the unknown, an announcer of uncertain consequences. Change can upset the accepted order of reality and threaten the status quo.

III. UK Context

Change is a trigger for prejudice, bias and bigotry, which are nothing more than an outcry of fear, an anxiety at the pit of the stomach. Such a reaction stifles opportunities for learning and growth.

And yet, despite the hostility to change, change is inevitable. It is a fundamental component of social evolution. The trend of continued globalisation will ensure that change will continue to make its mark in ways that are unpredictable and disruptive. Resistance to that change will cause even greater existential suffering, as we cling to stability in our threatened identities and to our experience of the everyday.

Globalisation and migration are unavoidable changes, and whatever pressure and fear this gives rise to, adapting to them is essential for creating social harmony.

Promoting diversity and inclusion, rather than resisting its onward march, and accepting them as a force for positive change, despite the challenges to be overcome, is a way of strengthening resilience.

Ultimately, accepting change and addressing its challenges with eyes wide open is the only response that makes sense for a positive future.

It seems a paradox for me that although the UK has undergone a large amount of social change over the previous decades, many individuals and institutions oppose it, as if resisting it can somehow reverse the tide of change that has occurred.

UK Survey

At the beginning of lockdown in 2020, I carried out a survey to better understand the issues locals in rural areas believe they are facing. Below are some of the responses:

"My local community is overwhelmingly white and British. There are not many places I can think of that are less diverse and generally people locally seem to have the opinion that it's been that way for as long as there have been people living here so ***why should we change****? There are many tourists who visit the city who are met with* ***hostility*** *and the same can be said for the foreign students at the universities here.* ***The people can be very resistant to change*** *and are in many cases very entitled about 'their' city not having to make changes to accommodate others. Personally I find it ridiculous and we should be proud that refugees and immigrants have chosen to settle here – rather than being offended by their values and cultures that differ from our own."*

"I feel the main challenge is that ***many refugees do not wish to engage in British culture*** *and British people are largely taught our culture is somehow wrong. This leads to an unwillingness to settle as one culture, hence the animosity between different subcultures."*

"From my experience with the young men, refugees need to want to integrate with a small community ***– it's a two-way process, and if all they want is their own community, language, foods and culture then fitting into small communities will be very difficult for them; exhausting, mentally damaging and isolating****."*

"I think this needs clever thinking ***on how to change resistant hearts and minds*** *more subtly, and what partners (e.g. local branches of NFU, WI, youth clubs) could effectively collaborate to make it happen."*

Other findings about the UK context follow. They contrast sharply with what is happening in Canada.

When looking at how information surrounding immigration and the schemes in place to help resettle refugees is disseminated, there are multiple information sources, resulting in confusion and inefficiency, ranging from inaccurate or duplicated data to incorrect filing of compliance information. **By centralising data sources in the UK, we could increase productivity and optimise collaboration leading to more confident decision-making.**

In the UK, there is a lack of **creative** outlets to educate and inform the nation of the need for a united community who can live in peace, despite ethnic and cultural differences.

One key difference between Canada and the UK is that there is a much greater unity of purpose in Canada around migration and resettlement programmes being a force for good. The messages both from central government and the municipalities are mutually supportive. There is little dissent from the press, and access to centralised information keeps the messages on point for everyone.

The information on UNHCR – Asylum in the UK lacks vital information or contradicts what politicians discuss and base their policies on. Furthermore, the voices most often heard, both from the tabloid press and the political parties, counteract any positive moves made by agencies working on resettlement programmes. The overall effect is that there is little solidarity, and unity of purpose is replaced by confusion.

There is a lack of partnership with mainstream organisations such as libraries, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, there is a lack of prioritising inclusive information and services for **all** citizens – instead, most services aimed at refugees are exclusive to them.

Even though there are a number of national dates or campaigns in the UK to promote awareness of migration, none has been mentioned through the Government official website. Apart from Refugee Week celebrations, none of the others have been prioritised to be celebrated. There is not much awareness around those events. Also, there is lack of funding for agencies to invest in such events.

Refugee Crisis

It is interesting to note that the migration of refugees is called a 'crisis' and yet the Chinese pictogram for crisis is a combination of two symbols: 'danger' and 'opportunity'.

It is this aspect of 'opportunity' which will become a theme throughout. An example of where a crisis was also interpreted by many as an opportunity was the Covid-19 pandemic.

Studies show that the pre-modern migration of human populations began with the movement of Homo erectus out of Africa across Eurasia about 1.75 million years ago. Human migration has been sparked by wars, disasters, and now climate. Homo sapiens have been on the move from almost their beginnings. Climate-caused floods, drought and water shortages will likely join the list of reasons to migrate.

So why is it now that we keep hearing that there is a Refugee Crisis? Is the problem actually the people who migrate to save their lives? Or does refugee migration point to a more fundamental crisis in the world?

As the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman pointed out, there is no '**shortcut solution to the current refugee problem. Humanity is in crisis – and there is no exit from that crisis other than the solidarity of humans'.**[3]

There are now more than 82 million refugees and displaced people around the world. The UN migration agency has said that 4,470 migrants died along migration routes worldwide in 2021, exceeding the 4,236 deaths registered in 2020 (InfoMigrants, 14 Dec 2021).

Julian Simon, in *A Life Against the Grain*, makes the following observation: 'Here we are, a room full of freedom-loving people, where it is safe to cheer for freedom and to denounce repression. Yet even in such a room of fellow travellers, there is one topic that is sure to stir up anxiety and friction. And that topic is "**immigration**", which can divide a room faster than almost any other.'[4]

[3] Bauman, Zygmunt and Evans, Brad. "The Refugee Crisis Is Humanity's Crisis." The New York Times, 2 May 2016.
[4] Simon, J L. (2003). *A Life against the Grain: The Autobiography of an Unconventional Economist.* Transaction Publishers.

There are many reasons why people around the globe seek to rebuild their lives in a different country. Some people leave home to get a job or an education. Others are forced to flee persecution or human rights violations such as torture. Millions flee from armed conflicts, other crises or violence. Some no longer feel safe and might have been targeted just because of who they are or what they do or believe – for example, for their ethnicity, religion, sexuality or political opinions. These journeys, which all start with the hope for a better future, can also be full of danger and fear. Some people risk falling prey to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Some are detained by the authorities as soon as they arrive in a new country. Once they're settling in and starting to build a new life, many face daily racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

The question I would ask you as my reader is:
In such circumstances, what is there to admire and loathe?

Many people feel overwhelmed by the numbers and see people moving across borders as a global crisis. There doesn't seem to be a crisis of numbers. The people who are trying to survive are not the problem. Rather, the problem lies in the causes that drive families and individuals to cross borders and the short-sighted and unrealistic ways that politicians respond to them.

IV. Learning from Canada

The movement of people in Canada has sparked debate on how to best engage and mobilise actors at all levels to provide safe and inclusive environments for newcomers. Municipalities have come together to discuss and address the relevant issues.

- There is a growing trend in Canada to centralise information and integration services for newcomers in the community ('one-stop shops'). See Toronto's Newcomers Office.

- The City of Montréal, through the International Observatory of Mayors on Living Together, organises an international webinar with francophone cities in order to share experiences on social cohesion and inclusion from Douala, Montréal, Namur, Québec and Strasburg.

‘**What if, away from tensions around questions of identity and the fear of others, we had found other realities? What if we had stories to tell of audacious citizens who, with a strong desire for people of different beliefs to live together in harmony, have found ways of reinventing family, education, social relations, culture, and work ... and have done so despite existing difficulties and frictions? What if, thanks to these stories, gathered from around the world, we can begin to see the emergence of what could be the multi-identity and yet harmonious world of tomorrow? And what if we all took part in it?’ ‘All of Us’, a film by Pierre Pirard**

- Canada developed a document dispelling myths about refugees and irregular border crossings in Canada. The UNHCR-Canada website provides key information for asylum seekers, information on national legislation, statistics and facts, etc.

- Public libraries in Pictou and Antigonish counties were recognised in 2017 as Newcomer Welcome Centres. This initiative provides places for all newcomers to have any questions answered as they settle into the area, for example: New to Antigonish? | Community (townofantigonish.ca). It includes a website that provides community information and resources to newcomers. An online language training tool called Rocket Languages, made possible by a grant from the Municipality of the County of Pictou, is also available. With support from Michelin and Northern Pulp, the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (PARL) staff was also able to access additional diversity training through the Provincial YREACH programme through YMCA Immigration Settlement services. The initiative was made possible through a partnership between the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce, the Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, and PARL, with support from numerous community groups and businesses. Recently, PARL also partnered with TD Bank to purchase a collection of books regarding diversity.

- In Canada special international or national dates or campaigns are used to raise awareness on migration, inclusion and diversity related issues or to celebrate and commemorate specific events or groups
  - Black History Month (February)
  - Asian Heritage Month (May)

- International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21)
- International Day of Living Together in Peace (May 16)
- World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May)
- Canadian Multiculturalism Day (June 27)
- International Day of Peace (September 21)
- Human Rights Day (December 10)
- International Migrants Day (December 18).

By revisiting the main points in this chapter and comparing the UK and Canada contexts, we can extract the following:

- Migration has been a constant process throughout the history of mankind and there will always be forces in the world that will drive migration; resisting is futile, whatever attempts are made to reduce or contain it.
- This phenomenon is mainly viewed negatively; it brings change and challenges and the consequences are largely unknown.
- As a result, the responses tend to be ones of fear and hostility. However, it needn't be this way; if we can adopt a more positive attitude and embrace the change by assessing the challenges realistically and implementing suitable policies, the so-called crisis can be turned into opportunities that can benefit whole communities at large.
- These opportunities can be better realised if we learn to see that newcomers are people who existentially want to embrace life and give back to the communities who are hosting them. Furthermore, if this is mutually realised, then the host communities can engage in the resettlement process in more meaningful ways that can potentially transform the existential threat of migration into a learning experience that provides life-enhancing experiences.

V. Resources

- existcovid.pdf – *Andrew M. Bland, Department of Psychology, Millersville University, Susan P. Luek Hall Room 223-A, P. O. Box 1002, Millersville, PA 17551, USA. Email: andrew.bland@millersville.edu-Journal of Humanistic Psychology 2020, Vol. 60(5) 710–724 © The Author(s) 2020 Article reuse guidelines: sagepub.com/journals-permissions DOI: 10.1177/0022167820940186 journals.sagepub.com/home/jhp*
- Frontiers | Looking Through the COVID-19 Window of Opportunity: Future Scenarios Arising From the COVID-19 Pandemic Across Five Case Study Sites | Psychology (frontiersin.org)
- Stoicism & Dealing With Change (orionphilosophy.com)
- Charter for compassion – YouTube video
- History of human migration – Wikipedia
- Refugee crisis | International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Opinion | The Refugee Crisis Is Humanity's Crisis – The New York Times (nytimes.com)
- Rising migrant deaths worldwide top 4,470 in 2021 – InfoMigrants
- Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Migrants – Amnesty International
- Coping with Change and Transition: An Existential Management Point of View (philosophy2u.com)

Freedom

"Freedom means that one is responsible for one's own choices, actions, one's own life situation."

Irvin D. Yalom

I. Background

Viktor Frankl believed that the ultimate human freedom is the freedom to control our attitude toward the situations we inherit. It is the personal freedom we each have. No one can take this freedom away. Individuals self-determines how they will respond to circumstances.

Given that many refugees are seeking refuge from war or persecution, it is tempting, in this context, to regard freedom as being essentially political in nature. It is an escape from oppression where for one or a number of reasons relating to the individual's circumstances or choices, be that political or religious affiliation, gender, sexuality, that person is targeted as a *persona non grata* – a person to be bullied, incarcerated or even killed.

However, when a refugee successfully escapes persecution, and is allowed to resettle in another country, a different notion of freedom comes to the fore. Of course, persecution may still be felt, as racism or even simply an encounter with an uncertain or hostile reception to their 'newcomer' status presents a different kind of challenge. This will be discussed but, firstly, it is important to grapple with the existential view of freedom and why that is central to the refugee experience.

Freedom is, essentially, freedom to 'create' your own life, starting with freedoms to desire, choose, act and change. This allows the notion of 'authorship' to be revealed, the ability to exert your will in response to the situations you face. Of course, external obstacles will get in the way and may even never be removed, but the exertion of will to define attitude and character in the face of those obstacles allows one to become author of one's own story. You choose to be 'victim', 'influencer' or 'fighter'; you choose to be 'broken' or 'resolute' – at a fundamental, existential level.

Closely associated with this notion of freedom is the notion of responsibility – ultimately acknowledging you are responsible for your own feelings, choices, your own suffering, even your own destiny.

Viktor Frankl, a 20th-century psychiatrist who founded the field of logotherapy [a therapeutic approach to help patients find meaning in their lives] and author of the best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning*,[5] was a Holocaust survivor, who himself came to realise this while incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp during the Second World War. All manner of freedoms were removed, but he still recognised he had the freedom to choose how he mentally coped with his situation, that he could still instil resolve to derive enjoyments and inspiration from the merest of circumstances.

This philosophical attitude has been reflected on in treatises and literature for the last two centuries. For example, Sartre and Heidegger both regarded external reality as formless and disjointed, frighteningly so, if we allow feelings of meaningless to manifest in our lives. They realised that we all, to one extent or another, struggle with this creeping void, but that the way to defeat it is to acknowledge that meaning is derived from within us, rather than from without, as we can never truly apprehend objective reality, and that in fact we constitute the world around us through our own consciousness – and that it is our responsibility to do that in meaningful ways. The metaphysical corollary to this is that we are effectively 'doomed' to freedom – for by being responsible for one's own life, **one is not only responsible for the actions one takes, but also for the actions one fails to take.** Behind choice is uncertainty, especially around the consequences of what is done and not done, so navigating a path can be fraught with risk and indecision. Once a person has understood the meaning of responsibility in this sense and fully acknowledges it, it can be frightening, leading to a sense of groundlessness. That is, by understanding that one's death also means the death of the world one has had the responsibility for creating, there is a confrontation with nothingness. These ideas of self-creation and nothingness can also lead to an existential loneliness which is far more profound than any social loneliness. These ideas are picked up again in the chapters on 'meaning' and 'isolation'.

[5] Frankl, V E. (1997). *Man's Search for Meaning.* Simon & Schuster

Under that umbrella of responsibility also comes mental attitude, strength and resilience. As we progress through this chapter, and discuss some of these ideas in relation to refugee resettlement, there is also an underlying recognition that **the pursuit of education, honest conversation, curiosity and openness are a sound basis for strengthening a resolve to achieve responsibility and accountability as this supports making positive decisions that align with a set of fundamental values.** In fact, the existential approach considers human nature to be open-ended, flexible and capable of an enormous range of experience. The person is in a constant process of becoming. 'I create myself as I exist.' There is no essential, solid self, no given definition of one's personality and abilities. This existential approach is also committed to exploring one's position in the world with a receptive attitude and an open mind, rather than a dogmatic one.

II. Refugee Context

Regarding notions of freedom, responsibility and moral conduct, the interviews I have conducted with resettled families in the UK show a fundamental grasp and affinity with those concepts. The idea of being dependent upon a state for support may seem realistic, especially at first, but, generally, it is not a state of affairs that sits comfortably with them. They want to fit in; they want to contribute to the society in which they now find themselves. Responsibility is sought, if not manifestly so, then fundamentally so. **The key is how the transition from dependence to relative independence can be achieved.**

Having acknowledged this, we cannot ignore the social and political ramifications here – existential freedom and its attendant responsibility are, to a large extent, independent, individual concerns. However, it is not realistic to simply lay responsibility at the feet of newcomers for their own destiny, as if being in a new country constitutes their only need, the only basis on which the resettled families can attain achievement and independence; nor is it desirable to completely go the other way, to remove that sense of individual responsibility, handing it over to external forces that act on their behalf. This can result in the conditions for psychopathological responses, where responsibility avoidance becomes a prominent feature.

If we accept this need for balance, it can be seen that the ideal to perhaps strive for here is for responsibility to be shared and an underlying sense of responsibility nurtured. In a refugee resettlement context, what does this mean? As well as individual responsibility, there is responsibility within the government, within the institutions that operate in the resettlement sphere and within the communities that host refugees. Finally, opportunities for responsibility need to be seeded in the refugees themselves.

This suggests something quite complex within the ecosystem. If responsibility is forsaken in a key area, then we can see adverse social and political consequences arise.

An example of this can be seen in the UK. If we accept the role of responsibility in the shaping of the definition of freedom, we need to also see how the avoidance of responsibility has an impact on the experience of freedom.

III. UK Context

In the UK, despite the commitment of a number of organisations in the management of resettlement (and this a point we need to return to later), the tabloid media has been instrumental in influencing social debate, often channelling any constructive and nuanced discussion about the way the country deals with newcomers into a cliched kneejerk response about the privilege refugees have when it comes to jobs, housing and benefits at the expense of born and bred Britons, who are being deprived as a result. These headlines are typical examples:

By swaying public opinion in this fashion, newcomers trying to settle in Britain and wrest some control of their destiny are seeing that the possibility to do that with some kind of dignity is being eroded, as hostility becomes evident on one hand, and feelings of confusion, guilt and shame are being provoked on the other hand.

I had my own encounter with negative opinion and the shame that led to – even if that was mostly vicarious, working alongside my clients, but being hyper-aware of what was happening socially.

I often came across comments such as these:

" I am tired of this political correctness. We have totally lost our freedom of speech "

" I don't mean you. I mean the fake migrants and illegal ones. "

" Look, they have been here this long and are unable to even speak English "

" Immigrants are here to steal our jobs, using our benefit system and the NHS "

" It is time now to give back to the community"

" Why are they not grateful? "

" Go back home "

The attribution of blame amounts to an abandonment of responsibility, especially when migrants have little choice in what happens both in social discourse and in how operations are put in place to attend to their needs.

Hostility is directed at the migrants themselves rather than at the powers that create and implement policies, if protest is indeed required to challenge how migration is being handled. However, if migrants are made to feel unwelcome, this serves as an extra challenge to resettling and an almost insurmountable burden when it comes to the idea of integration. Paradoxically, this atmosphere is not only undermining positive feelings about being in the UK, it is also undermining the very assumption of responsibility needed to strive for independence – in fact, to not be so much of a burden to the state.

The impact of this kind of journalism is potentially harming social relations, and behind it is an abnegation of responsibility – deliberately manipulating public opinion by using migrants as scapegoats[6] rather than engaging in intellectually honest investigative journalism.

Reading the above comments on an almost daily basis used to make me feel ashamed, enraged, curious and confused. I remember once I approached a friend who is a business owner in construction and asked him if he was happy to train some refugees under the Talent Match Scheme.[7] He did not even listen to me to find out what the programme was, all he said was: 'No, it will be perceived as cheap labour'. The conversation did not go any further. A few days later, I saw his post on social media about how Nigel Farage had nailed it on the head, in terms of approaches towards migration.

I felt ashamed of being an immigrant. I just wanted to pack my bags and leave. Even though the comments were made about my clients, and not me personally, I was unable to stop relating to them as individuals who had left their country to start a new life in the UK. I thought to myself, I do not belong where I am not wanted. It was in that session that I learnt about Scapegoat theory:

Scapegoat Theory Summary

- Scapegoating is an analysis of violence and aggression in which people who have undergone or who are undergoing negative experiences – such as failure or abuse by others – blame an innocent individual or group for the experience.
- Although the term scapegoat is biblical, Emile Durkheim was the first to talk about it in a sociological context. Durkheim believed that the practice of scapegoating is fundamental to the structures of societies, and that every event that generates negative emotions must have a scapegoat.
- Scapegoating can take place between individuals, between an individual and a group, between a group and an individual, and between groups. Sociology is most concerned with the last of these conditions.

[6] This topic was brought up in my own therapy sessions, where I had been finding it difficult to avoid feelings of anger and shame, as a response to the way the Brexit discourse was unfolding.
[7] talent-match-briefing.pdf (tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

- Scapegoating has been explained in terms of Freud's theory of displaced aggression.
- Other researchers have identified factors that make certain groups more likely to be scapegoated than others.
- Scapegoating has occurred throughout history to numerous groups, often triggered by a distressing event and as a means to justify discrimination or mass-murder.

The UK Government does little to counteract the attempts of the press, who create in the general public feelings of insecurity and suspicion, referring to the Channel crossings from France as a crisis, without really **explaining why it is a crisis and for whom**. The emphasis is on the migrants themselves and the potential harm to UK society, rather than on the responses by either the UK Government or the powers entrusted with dealing with the influx. The overall impression is that there is a 'lack of control' and somehow the migrants and those that assist in their journey are solely to blame.

Neither does the UK Government assert or publicise the facts around the status of migration and its processing in a cogent manner. It is difficult to assess the success or failure of the overall programme or its component parts. There is a risk that migration policies in countries with negative public perceptions of migration will be increasingly shaped by fears and misconceptions rather than evidence. This restricts the ability of policymakers to manage migration effectively.

There are a number of factors that contribute to negative public perceptions of migration. These include media coverage that focuses on the negative aspects of migration, such as crime and poverty, and a lack of understanding of the complex reasons why people migrate. Negative public perceptions can lead to calls for stricter immigration policies, which can in turn lead to human rights abuses and a further deterioration in public opinion. It is therefore essential that policymakers are able to counter these fears and misconceptions with accurate information and evidence-based policies.

"If freedom is responsibility, how do I act?"

J Krishnamurti

IV. Learning from Canada

- By contrast, through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Canada has publicised a document (Quiz) dispelling myths about refugees and irregular border crossings in Canada. The UNHCR-Canada website provides key information on asylum seekers, as well as information on national legislation, supplemented with various facts and statistics.

The difference between UK and Canadian attitudes is made more stark by their stated positions. In Canada, safeguarding for those seeking asylum is paramount[8]:

To enter Canada without prior authorization is NOT ILLEGAL.
The purpose of seeking asylum is not a crime under international and Canadian law.

Why? Because it is not always safe or even possible for a person running for his/her life to obtain proper travel documents to reach safety in another country.

In the UK, this compassionate perspective is replaced by a much harsher attitude. Furthermore, recent initiatives within the Government have sought to delegate responsibility by forming a partnership with Rwanda, a destination planned for many migrants entering the UK. The UNHCR regards this with serious reservations: UNHCR – The Nationality and Borders Bill.

[8] Text in box is taken from this web page: https://www.unhcr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Facts-About-Irregular-Border-Crossings-Feb2019.pdf

The correct response to this is a kind of collective responsibility. Without it, everyone suffers, because hostility affects both the perpetrators and the targeted individuals. It poses a serious risk to health; in fact, evidence links the traits of anger and hostility to increased risk of cardiac disease, morbidity and mortality.

Worse, hostility can easily be inflamed and, like a fire, it can readily spread, as it is born of feelings of fear and mistrust, feelings of uncertainty and feelings of cynicism. These behaviours are contagious and the negative impacts can be hard to control.

Observing this in communities was an eye-opener for me. Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically, not long after I arrived in the UK, I prepared for and took the British Citizenship test, and one of the first and most important sections relates to the knowledge of British values, which are defined as the following:

Democracy

A culture built upon freedom and equality, where everyone is aware of their rights and responsibilities.

The rule of law

The need for rules to make a happy, safe and secure environment to live and work.

Individual liberty

Protection of your rights and the rights of others around you.

Mutual respect & tolerance of different faiths and beliefs

Understanding that we all don't share the same beliefs and values. Respecting those values, ideas and beliefs of others whilst not imposing our own onto them.

Despite this stated position, while working as a community development officer in the Refugee Council, I came to see these values being championed by some, but undermined by others.

In my role, at the beginning of lockdown in 2020, I carried out a survey to better understand the issues residents in rural areas believed they were facing. Among those who saw the rejection of these values, the following comments were made, and they typified the reactions of locals who had more liberal views.

UK Survey

"Greater celebration of individuality meaning that everyone can feel free to be whoever they want to be; greater connection with global culture and heritage; ***sharing of skills and knowledge, such as sustainable practices and food growing****."*

*"****The media is toxic and sadly has enormous impact on people's thinking. I think it's very important to question people's assumptions made from the ridiculous lies they are fed from the media, and we all have a role to play in this****. All refugees should have choice about whether they want to 'integrate' – this should certainly not be a prerequisite of settlement."*

*"****I have lived in this country for 20 years and I am shocked at how hate messages are allowed to be promoted by British tabloids, claiming 'free press' discourse****."*

What follows are some of the responses to my interview questions from resettled families in rural areas:

"We don't fully feel welcomed here I think that is because ***we look so different like an outsider****."*

"There is lack of diversity here."

*"****The local community should be more aware of new families coming prior to us arriving. Especially neighbours. They also need to know a bit about our culture the same as our resettlement program. Maybe things can be available online to those if they don't come to our sessions can read online information****."*

"There needs to be a break through the ***phobia of foreigners****."*

"Our kids at school feel isolated by other kids, because ***they look different*** *this is breaking my heart but teachers are great –* ***my daughter is Muslim and wears scarf****."*

So what can be done differently to address this kind of perception of negativity? If we turn to Canada, we can see the approach is more pre-emptive and more mindful of the ways in which problems can develop.

- One of the ways to improve integration, which is being embraced by Canada, is to not allow the resettlement process to be run at an institutional level only; responsibility is shared out, so that it filters through to the communities themselves. The Government provides the financial and administrative support, but the NGOs and sponsors take the programmes into the communities and support ways in which they can and wish to make a contribution. Also, there is a feedback process which informs the ways policies adapt to learning.
- There is evidence of political foresight to engage members of the local communities in appreciating the undertaking of bringing in refugees even before the event happens. This encourages constructive thinking and planning in terms of what to anticipate and how to deal with it. If there is any negativity or hostility to the notion of introducing newcomers to an area, the community can discuss it and address the underlying concerns through dialogue and action, before the problems manifest.
- The Canadian Government publishes a great number of facts and figures relating to newcomers and the resettlement programme, explaining its mission, values, aims and policies. This information is accessible in different multimedia.
- Also, the resettlement programme is open to exploration and adaptation – so if something isn't working well, there is a built-in process for identifying and acknowledging it and then working on a way to correct the issue. It is important to be open to finding problems and learning from them.

These points are explored in the conversation I had with Sabin Lahr.[9] She explains some of the key factors about private sponsorship in Canada, a set-up that has only relatively recently been established in the UK. Within it is a strong emphasis on learning through doing and that **an evaluation of outcomes informs future decision-making.**

[9] The full transcript can be requested by emailing sep.mojabi@gmail.com

For example, private sponsors receive experience-based training on how to manage their own and their newcomers' expectations when it comes to how long it may be before employment can be found for each newcomer and what factors tend to play a role in what that period is. Private sponsors at the front line will need guidance and that is where people like Sabine come in. They see the problems at the operational end of the spectrum over time and learn what that can bring to bear on future action.

In the UK, it is my impression through various interviews within the migration sector that problems are often seen as unwanted impositions rather than opportunities to learn and adapt. The reasons for that are perhaps not surprising. Through conversations with migration workers, many, following some honest reflection, admitted to feeling a cultural imperative: that the raising of perceived problems undermined confidence in the institutions and their policies, signalling criticism of the implementations; and that perhaps our state of maturation was not yet resilient enough to withstand such scrutiny – denial rather than acceptance.

Furthermore, acknowledging the existence of problems potentially means the need to rethink and take remedial action; and if the resources are under strain, then the desire to do so is weakened. With devolved responsibility to the communities in Canada, the willingness to learn was readily felt.

In the UK, although there are many organisations committed to supporting migrants, there is little investment of effort in engaging with the members of the community (general public) where refugees will be hosted, whether this be of a practical nature relating to the supply of needed services or whether this be a means to pre-emptively tackle any concern, discrimination or hostility.

- In Canada, rather than only treating resettlement as a set of practical measures that allow a migrant family to acquire basics, such as housing and access to primary services, for example education and healthcare, the sense of responsibility towards effective resettlement has flowed downward from a strong ethos at the top.

The Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has articulated in his style of leadership the need for fairness and equality that is inclusive of all groups, and this has led to a favourable dispensation of support for refugees, one of the admission classes entitled to enter Canada for the purposes of permanent immigration.

- The IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada), since its inception in 1994, has funded a number of refugee programmes, e.g. 25,000 Syrians in 2016, and has an integrated capacity to provide resettlement support. Via the initiative '[Settlement](#) [Program and Resettlement Assistance Program](#)', settlement organisations across Canada can access updated application forms centrally to assess funding opportunities. The programme also supports partners in providing services that enable the smooth transition for the settlement of newcomers. The services can vary from the provision of language skills training in both official languages (English and French), to finding employment opportunities for newcomers based on their educational backgrounds and skills. The four main areas of focus for the programme are:
  - information and orientation;
  - language training and skills development;
  - labour market access; and
  - welcoming communities.

This has led to a greater pre-emptive initiative in promoting activities that tackle racism and discrimination in the community, and eliminating barriers that limit opportunities.

- There are lists of resources (publications, guides, tools and toolkits) for municipalities to help inform the development of policies, programmes and initiatives related to welcoming newcomers to Canada. They also try to ensure that basic services are provided for all citizens, that they have access to equal opportunities and face no discrimination, regardless of their migration status, so that '*no one is left behind'*.
- [Intercultural Training Program.](#) The city of Montréal trains municipal staff and corporate services to better take into account ethnocultural diversity through its service offerings. The city aims to increase employee skills in intercultural communication and diversity management. The programme creates a workplace that is open to diversity and strengthens its employees' anti-discrimination and intercultural skills.

V. Rural Resettlement Initiatives

- **In the interests of responsibility and freedom, the institutions managing resettlement in Canada allow choice and some degree of self-determination – and they do that by presenting and advocating various choices, including the opportunity to settle in rural areas, which has become an attraction to many migrants who might have been otherwise directed to live in cities, had the idea of personal responsibility and freedom of choice not been brought into the resettlement frame.**

As a result, some 9% of migrants from 2011 to 2016 chose to settle in rural areas (non-CMAs) of Canada. Furthermore, studies show a growing number of newcomers settling in smaller municipalities and that this number is likely to increase in coming years.

However, sponsors have learnt not to force this direction; they recognise it is very dependent upon needs, background and preferences.

For example, if an individual has complex healthcare needs, the family or caregivers need to be located with that in mind, and this may influence the ultimate choice, whatever other factors are at play. Recognising this, sponsors and support organisations have learnt to predict needs and present options accordingly, so placements are not pre-ordained without due diligence and consultation – instead, the discussion of needs and choices is encouraged, as that is the best approach to avoid issues and derive mutual benefit.

By contrast, the UK still resolves, through designs around efficiency, to pre-plan placements based on quotas and timing, with little regard for personal circumstances that may dictate need or choice.

- Given the perceived benefits of rural settlement for some immigrant families, the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and the Atlantic Immigration Program (the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot is a five-year pilot) were designed to boost smaller communities with ageing populations and labour shortages, which often struggle to attract and retain new immigrants. The Government of Canada is working with local communities to use immigration to:

- help meet local labour market needs and support regional economic development
- test a new pathway to permanent residence in rural Canada for skilled foreign nationals at various skill levels
- create welcoming environments that encourage and help new immigrants to stay in their new communities.

Although not aimed specifically at the integration of migrants into a new community, it is clear that schemes like 'Know Your Neighbour' (adopted in some communities in Australia) have a role to play in helping neighbours get to know one another and in creating connected neighbourhoods and communities. This promotes an open dialogue and can lead to greater cultural awareness.

One thing which is noticeably lacking in the UK is that the institutions endowed with the responsibility of delivering a resettlement programme do not take this to the local communities beyond the charity organisations and the volunteers directly involved, whether before or during the introduction of newcomers. For example, it was a conscious decision not to inform neighbours if a migrant family were due to be resettled in a community; yet, the migrants themselves and members of the general public revealed they would welcome such information being accessible.

This lack of engagement is an opportunity lost, for it is becoming clear that local communities engaged in the resettling of refugees feel it is being foisted upon them, that they have to accept it whether they like it or not. This is not only going to foster resentment, it is setting up barriers to integration.

Getting the communities engaged early (i.e. prior to arrival) in terms of moving discussions towards understanding, acceptance and involvement, inviting suggestions on how to tackle practical concerns, organising events whereby the local community can meet the newcomers in a sustained manner – these are the means towards better integration that need to be at least explored and hopefully developed in an adaptive way. When schemes are set up in Canada to support refugees, these are based on open participation for all, whereas in the UK, such support schemes are mostly exclusive to newcomers. This tends to deny opportunities for newcomers to meet members of the general public, where forging new dialogues and relationships would be fruitful.

Finally, in the UK, the charity organisations, such as the Refugee Council, have to shoulder more of the responsibility for educating the newcomers, organising briefing sessions, as well as providing direct practical support, in contexts where resources are scarce. In other words, other organisations, such as the Job Centre, the NHS and the council, do not get fully involved in helping newcomers to navigate through their policies, rules and regulations.

By contrast, Canada sees this responsibility being equally shared out across these organisations; furthermore, they work together to deliver that knowledge-sharing.

- In Canada, there is an initiative, called the 'Living Together' approach, aimed at improving integration. It refers to a dynamic process involving various stakeholders in order to foster inclusion and a sense of safety and belonging in the city. Promoting 'Living Together' means recognising all forms of diversity, fighting discrimination and working to facilitate peaceful coexistence.

To implement 'Living Together', local stakeholders must work together to identify common values that contribute to positive interactions and social cohesion (Standing Committee on Living Together of the Association Internationale des Maires Francophones – AIMF, 2018).

> *Living Together at the municipal level is facilitated by clear political positioning. Without political leadership, it will not be possible for the concept of Living Together to be embraced by the municipal administration and translated into concrete terms that will be understood and supported by citizens.*

In the UK, there is a clear lack of initiatives to promote a positive attitude towards diversity and inclusivity, certainly ones which are driven top-down by political will.

Another further initiative in Canada which has no direct counterpart in the UK:

The Saskatoon Open Door Society is a non-profit organisation that provides different services including Cultural Bridging, which they believe fosters cross-cultural awareness between newcomers and the local host community, bringing together diverse cultural groups to share and learn from each other. By providing cross-cultural opportunities such as workshops, presentations and events, bridges of understanding are built. This shared transfer of cultural knowledge and experience creates a more harmonious community where everyone can participate in the social, economic and cultural life.

VI. Resources

- Ethical Principles of Responsibility and Accountability (psu.edu)[10]
- Existentialist ethics – Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Reflections on existentialism, logotherapy, and responsibility (apadivisions.org)
- Is it really a hostile community or is it a community reacting with hostility?
- Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census - Canada (statcan.gc.ca)
- Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees to Canada – The Role of Municipalities: Toolkit for Inclusive Municipalities in Canada and Beyond – BC Refugee Hub
- The Existential Approach | The NSPC
- Freedom, Responsibility, and Agency – Existential Therapy (existential-therapy.com)

[10] A login needs to be arranged to view this.

Meaning

"We humans appear to be meaning-seeking creatures who have had the misfortune of being thrown into a world devoid of intrinsic meaning. The question of the meaning of life is, as the Buddha taught, not edifying. One must immerse oneself into the river of life and let the question drift away."

Irvin D. Yalom

I. Background

The question of meaning in our lives has been a troubling and mystifying one, pondered deeply by many philosophers, mystics and artists. 'What is the meaning of life?' 'Why are we here?' and, more personally, 'What purpose do I serve?'. The questions themselves seem to be very 'human': we see no evidence that such questions invade the consciousness of other species; they seem to act according to their own nature; for them, there is no self-questioning. Humans, however, burn with questions, so many questions, to the extent that we challenge the meaning of our own existence. And we acknowledge that such questions necessarily carry a negative answer; they implicitly point to feelings of dread – self-doubt, futility, emptiness. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any answer that is objectively satisfactory; any answer to the question 'Why am I here?' is deeply personal, emotional, existential. It needs to be found from within.

The Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, was tormented by those questions, so much so that, because he could never arrive at a satisfactory answer, he reached a state of 'life arrest' and eventually contemplated suicide. Even thoughts of success, fame and fortune could not appease his sense of futility. Albert Camus, the existentialist writer, regarded the meaning of life as the most urgent question we all face. C J Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, regarded a sense of meaningless as a malady, an illness to be treated. Victor Frankl and many other psychoanalysts share this view. It is interesting and indeed relevant to consider an 'evolutionary' aspect to the quest for meaning.

As societal development has progressed and, certainly in the West, as we have adopted more secular, materialistic viewpoints, it seems that the illness of aimlessness is ever more acute. It has been posited that perhaps in the past, when there was a greater emphasis on life-supporting tasks and a greater centring on family and community within a broader religious context, any questioning of our meaning or purpose would never have come to the fore.

However, in the last 300 years, we have become increasingly shaped by greater scientific understanding and since Darwin, ultimately, we may see ourselves as simply products of a blind evolutionary process. The pervasive influence of science has destabilised the old belief systems, and if we are not God's creation with an in-built will to improve and complete his project so that we can redeem our fallen selves to become God-like, then what are we? Even if we dispel the question of 'Why do we live?', we are still left facing the question 'How shall we live?'.

II. Refugee Context

If we accept that a sense of meaning is a central existential concern, it is not difficult to understand that its power can affect anyone, regardless of their situation or status. When refugees escape war and persecution, and move to a new country, like children they are overwhelmed by difficulties they have to learn to manage, but unlike children they have a past, a relationship with the world, from which they may have previously constituted a purposeful life, before they were struck by circumstances beyond their control. **Finding that sense of purpose again, and leading a goal-oriented and meaningful life, will be of paramount importance**. It is critical not to overestimate the sense of peace and safety refugees feel when they evade harm – as if that should be their sole concern. After all, the dangers they fled from will be replaced by others, perhaps not as extreme, but as disorienting.

This chapter, then, explores the concept of meaning both from a psychological point of view, but also from a practical one. What are the factors of one's circumstances that can bring a sense of meaning into one's life, and what have we learnt in that regard from the context that a refugee faces?

Not only are deep-thinking writers and philosophers drawn to suicide in their darkest moments, refugees, having embarked on a new life, also face these existential crises, many of them wanting to return home, many of them contemplating thoughts of taking their own lives. This is because they find their new circumstances restrictive; their autonomy is crippled and gaining a renewed sense of independence is extremely challenging. In the film 'The Swimmers' (2022), based on a true story, the Syrian refugee Yusra Mardini, who escaped to Germany, had to make a herculean effort to find a meaningful role, representing refugees as a swimmer in the Rio Olympic Games (2016). However, the film also explores the journey she had to make and the constant demoralisation she had to overcome.

Our lives require meaning, so much so that if we ignore the question, we potentially create an environment that leads to the onset of mental illness. We need to remember that refugees also face those same challenges, perhaps even more so, since they are deeply aware of what they have lost. And yet meaning is not so obviously found. There are no absolutes, there is no clear external, objective sense of what 'life meaning' is – it is wholly derived or constituted by each individual – in fact, if we look back to the chapter on 'Freedom', we could easily arrive at the conclusion that it is part of the responsibility we face – i.e. **we are responsible for finding our own meaning**.

Perhaps one psychologist, more than any other, has devoted his life to exploring the implications of needing a meaningful life, and that is Victor Frankl, who even wrote a book entitled *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Frankl realised that life was not about Freud's pleasure principle or even abstinence from suffering and **'one must live not in a tensionless state, but rather a striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him'**. He further realised that seeking pleasure as a goal is self-defeating, and that there is a 'hedonistic paradox': the more you seek happiness, the more it eludes you. This observation has been repeated time and time again, confirming Frankl's key message: 'Happiness ensues, it cannot be pursued'. Frankl developed his own practice of psychotherapy, called 'logotherapy', and one of its key messages is that the search for meaning becomes a primary motivational force in the adult, whereas he felt that Freud's 'will to pleasure' and Adler's 'will to power' were childhood and adolescent concerns respectively; as we mature into adults, our attention shifts away from pursuits that only focus on self-interest, an important point to reflect on when we turn to the plight of refugees.

We shall see that refugees are only interested in matters of security and comfort, not as an end in themselves, but as a base from which to pursue more meaningful activities and to contribute to the community they now find themselves in.

It is this striving for some kind of 'self-actualisation' (the famous psychologist, Abraham Maslow, recognised this as a higher-order need in the 'hierarchy of needs'), as opposed to being driven only by instinctual forces, that is part of what being a human is; it is what separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom. **There is a need to fulfil our own potential, utilise what talents we have and pursue what interests us the most.**

In fact, Frankl believed human beings have a tendency to go beyond self-actualisation and recognised that we are also 'self-transcendent', i.e. we have a basic need that takes us outside of ourselves; rather than only focusing on self-interest, we want to escape ourselves and find meaning through physical, emotional and intellectual pursuits to the point where we forget our own situation. This includes focusing on and caring for others.

Through this framework of thinking, Frankl identified three categories of meaning:

- meaning can be derived through acts of creation that one feels compelled to perform;
- also through experiences that confer a sense of harmony with the world; and
- finally, through one's attitude towards suffering – that it is met head on with humility and dignity.

I personally relate to all that has been written in the previous paragraphs. In my 20s and early 30s, I had an encounter with an existential crisis of my own. I really struggled to find meaning in my life. I was constantly drawn to reflect on my own personal suffering and felt distraught, with a sense of worthlessness. This lack of engagement with anything outside of myself meant I was unable to appreciate values such as aesthetic beauty or any kind of harmony. I tended to crave for validation from outside of myself, rather than realising that self-worth and self-respect needed to be built up from within. Eventually, I started to have suicidal thoughts. Amidst my mental struggles, I started reading a book I mentioned earlier: *Man's Search for Meaning*. Initially, I remember how critical of that book I was. I thought that being so internally broken, how on earth could I find a tool to search for any meaning in my life?

However, over the years, with the help of therapy and by working on myself, I came to realise that it was only through engaging with life itself, by forcing myself to participate in various activities, and surrounding myself with others to support me, that I could begin to ascribe value to what I did. Whether personal or social, I realised I could relate to certain things, but not others. That self-discovery, honestly articulated to myself, was a foundation of empowerment.

Meaning in Suffering

> "Suffering in and of itself is meaningless; we give our suffering meaning by the way in which we respond to it."
>
> Viktor E. Frankl

In the 1950s, the Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski studied World War II survivors and how they had coped with traumatic experiences during the war. This was Poland, so the context had been extremely horrifying. These people had experienced or witnessed mass starvation, bombings that turned cities to rubble, the Holocaust, the torture of prisoners of war, and the rape and/or murder of family members, if not by the Nazis, then a few years later by the Soviets.

As Dabrowski studied the survivors, he noticed something both surprising and eye-opening. A sizeable percentage of them believed that the wartime experiences they had suffered, although painful and indeed traumatic, had actually caused them to become better, more responsible, and even happier people. Many described their lives before the war as if they had been different people then: ungrateful for and unappreciative of their loved ones, passive and consumed by petty problems, entitled to all they had been given. After the war they felt more confident, more sure of themselves, more grateful, and unperturbed by life's trivialities and insignificant annoyances. Obviously, their experiences had been horrific, and these survivors were deeply affected by having had to experience them.

Many of them still suffered from the emotional scars the horrors of war had left on them. **But some of them had managed to draw on those experiences in order to transform themselves in positive and powerful ways.** And that is something that can perhaps be better understood when we substitute war with other painful challenges.

For many of us, our proudest achievements come in the face of the greatest adversity. Our pain often makes us stronger, more resilient, more grounded. Dabrowski argued that fear and anxiety and sadness are not necessarily always undesirable or unhelpful states of mind; rather, they are often representative of the necessary pain of psychological growth. And to deny that pain is to deny our own potential. Just as one must suffer physical discomfort to build up muscular strength, one must go through emotional discomfort to develop greater emotional resilience, a stronger sense of self, increased compassion, and a generally happier, meaningful life.

Access to meaning perhaps should not be regarded as an intellectual pursuit, but as a kind of by-product of steering a path through inescapable anguish, savouring the difficulties we face, rather than letting them beat us, making us both hopeless and helpless.

As an interpreter, a lot of my work has been with the NHS. I have worked with various mental health professionals supporting newcomers. It was surprising that most of the sessions with GPs and pain management professionals were actually around mental health and ultimately its impact on individuals' physical wellbeing. I had many sessions with refugees and asylum seekers who had thoughts of suicide or had even attempted suicide. During those sessions, I often wondered how come one can make such a heroic journey across many lands to safety and then, in a supposedly more protective context, come to want to kill oneself.

My survey and interviews with the resettled refugees showed that the majority of those who showed signs of depression belonged to groups who were disengaged for one reason or another: either they were unemployed, or were handicapped and isolated, or not in education, or suffered through lack of friendship and social interaction. **It was not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that, fundamentally, the more engaged an individual was, the more meaningful their life would become.**

Below are some of the statements the resettled refugees in rural North Yorkshire made in my interviews:

"*I was very depressed at the beginning and wanted to commit suicide – Our social life was different to the community we are resettled – it is a different culture. – We felt isolated in some ways and family reunion didn't happen.* ***But now our lives have changed because we are finding friends; we feel at home now. We have adapted now and we feel free and safe – We created a new life – I wanted to die when I first arrived but now I feel happy I want to stay here and I have ambitions*** *– We were a rich family but we lost everything and that was a big change, starting from scratch. A sense of belonging and finding friends and making ties was a turning point."*

"Lack of job opportunities are the worst, it upsets me that I can't work – (I love everything about Knaresborough) – ***I want to feel proud of myself – I want to be doing something useful****."*

"To start with we were bored, nothing much to do here, slow pace of life, we are used to cities and that's why it was so difficult. ***We now have a car; that was the best thing that ever happened; that changed our lives****."*

*"****Getting a driving licence will be the game changer****. I would love to have a car it will help me a lot."*

These comments suggest there are blocks, and that if they are removed, it is not simply a direct removal of suffering that counts, but it is access to life experiences that are more meaningful; that although it might be understandable to regard safety and the provision of basic needs as the only priority, it is not long before needs associated with ties to a more meaningful life begin to surface quite dramatically.

Meaning in Life and Resilience Building

As well as removing barriers so that practical opportunities to lead a more meaningful life are created, there is evidence to suggest that, in accordance with Frankl's observations about attitude to suffering, having a sense of meaning in one's life allows one to develop resilience – an ability to deal with setbacks and personal suffering. It may even be seen as a positive feedback loop – that development of resilience as a feature of personal growth can also assist one in accessing inner resources to seek out or realise deeper meaning.

A number of studies have been conducted where the impact of 'life-meaning' (the degree to which one perceives a sense of meaning in their lives) tends to create resilience to suffering and the presence of stress.

Building resilience includes developing an understanding of the self, including one's strengths and limitations. This can be done by exploring interests, abilities and values, as well as identifying areas that need development. It also involves learning to cope with difficult emotions in a healthy way, such as expressing and communicating them with others in a healthy manner. Developing positive relationships is another key factor for acquiring resilience, having supportive individuals who will provide guidance and encouragement when challenges arise. Additionally, engaging in physical activities has been found to help foster resilience through increased confidence levels and decreases in stress hormones. Finally, learning effective problem-solving strategies encourages individuals to look at situations from different perspectives which allows them to create solutions even under challenging circumstances.

Examples of resilience and wellbeing programme

The iNEAR is a resilience and wellbeing programme in the UK, consisting of a classroom-based set of activities designed to facilitate the formation of positive identities through the acquisition of skills for growth and personal flourishing. It looks at ways in which positive, psychological interventions can resource individuals to better respond to adversity, coercion and personal uncertainty.

It is recommended that courses that include resilience building should be provided for newly arrived refugees in the UK. Such sessions could focus on topics such as psychological adjustment to a new environment, personal development, problem solving and communication skills. These sessions could also address specific refugee issues such as dealing with trauma or loss and developing strategies for managing stress in the context of displacement. In addition, providing support networks that connect recently arrived refugees with those who have been living in their host country for some time can be beneficial in helping them adjust to life in a new place. Ultimately, these courses should provide resources that will empower refugees to successfully integrate into their new societies and become active members of their communities over time.

III. UK Context

While researching the way in which Canada has enterprisingly established a number of political and social mechanisms to guide newcomers to take up opportunities to become more socially active and develop more meaningful lives through engagement in a number of community-led activities, it becomes clear that the UK is lagging behind. There are very few initiatives that mirror what is described above and the local host communities tend not to get involved, apart from the charity sector and a number of well-meaning volunteers. The concepts that have been developed in Canada, encouraging support for newcomers to flourish, do not seem to exist in the UK.

In the UK, the attitudes towards refugees is far from ideal. Mixed messaging both from Parliament and in the media has created an atmosphere of suspicion, even if that is tempered with a kind of abstract compassion towards their plight. However, in some quarters of UK society, that suspicion has advanced into fear and resentment. Rather than feeling supported, those in the front line working with refugees feel they are pushing against a tide that is largely negative in character.

This is making it difficult for local authorities, who are pressured to financially support policies affecting other marginalised groups. The conflict of interest creates added tension. Also, local government as a whole has not yet embraced the array of possibilities that exist to devolve or delegate the authority it has to other organisations or private sponsors that are more suited to creatively ease the situation.

Instead, actions are hurriedly put together and not well thought out; they haven't evolved organically with the host communities and newcomers working together in tandem. An example is the knee-jerk response that happened in late 2022 in response to a refugee housing shortage.

The practices are damaging on multiple fronts. Many refugees are being housed in hotels, which are appropriated for this sole purpose. Not only has this angered local residents, many of whom are currently experiencing a cost of living crisis, it is not helping the refugees, who are being isolated from the communities they really need to integrate with.

Another issue in the UK is the tendency to measure success quantitatively rather than qualitatively.

In other words, if local authorities can show the Government that a certain percentage of refugees in employment has been reached, that is a measure of how well they are doing; this is regardless of whether the jobs they are encouraged to take up bear any relation to the skills or experience the refugees had gained in their home countries. The effect produced is dispiriting at least and in many cases degrading. This is likely to lead to hopelessness, cynicism and even depression, all in the name of box-ticking, amounting to exoneration from further scrutiny or questioning. The job is done and we are supposed to move on.

UK Survey

Comments from a survey taken in the UK (with both refugees and charity organisations who support them) seem to point to where the issues are, very much reflecting a recognition that the success factors that are in evidence in Canada are sadly lacking in the UK.

"Integration and acceptance has to come from the community. ***The assistance practically to enable this I think is through government****."*

"Communities are responsible for making anyone feel welcome – whether it is a refugee from another country, or a British born person moving from one town to another. Whilst there are some responsibilities which lie with the state to help aid integration, I do believe communities have a big part to play in helping ensure that all people feel welcome. ***Perhaps further support to communities on how this can be done would be useful****."*

*"**Integration is a two-way street**. Communities should be willing to learn about and **listen** to new refugees, and **should look to adapt and improve services to make them more inclusive**. We need to make a welcoming environment in order for new refugees to feel at home and to **settle**."*

"Challenges: when politicians make immigrants their scapegoat to cover for their policy failings, increasing the prejudice and reducing the chances of successful integration."

*"With regards to integration, it's always easier to stick in a community of people who you know and their culture is the same as yours. **It's up to both us and the refugees to work together to integrate into the community**."*

*"Whether refugees will find it easier in the city depends on their particular circumstances and expectations. **Often there are better sense of community and integration with indigenous community in rural setting, but may be more isolated from people of their original culture and language. Different people will prioritise these differently**."*

*"I believe that there is some work to do with regard to integration from the perspective of the host communities and also with refugees in terms of being part of those communities. **Mutual respect and discussion is vital. All media is an integral part of public perceptions and care must be taken to use appropriate language and balanced (not stereotyped) ways to report the refugee crisis**."*

*"**Refugees can place extra pressure on public services in the short term, I believe these pressures are often outweighed by long-term benefits. Some people are more welcoming/social than others** – this applies to hosts and refugees – about individual. **This may change over time.** Also depends on what mean by integration – **I don't think it means someone moving to my area and being like me – I think it is around someone moving to my area and being happy, and able to contribute to the community in a way that suits them** – no prescribed way to be involved. City life can be easier – jobs, transport, food, other like yourself but can be harder to make friends or have friends that stay in same area for length of time."*

IV. Learning from Canada

- In order to promote social connectedness and resilience-building, Canada has implemented a range of initiatives. These include:
  - **community development initiatives** – such as providing funding for local projects that strengthen connections between people
  - **social enterprise programmes** – which encourage the growth of businesses with positive social impacts
  - **investing in mental health services** – including mental health promotion and prevention programmes, as well as early intervention services
  - **supporting youth through education and employment opportunities** – such as creating pathways to meaningful employment opportunities for young people
  - **developing social infrastructure** – like investing in public transportation systems or building safe and secure public spaces.

  These initiatives are intended to create an environment where people can build relationships and foster trust among each other across all sectors of society. By doing so, these collaborative efforts help build resilient communities that are better prepared to manage ongoing challenges, emergencies or crises.

  During the so-called '2015 Refugee Crisis', Canada became a model for progressive and humane practices and attitudes toward humanitarian resettlement, welcoming 77,090 refugees between January 2015 and April 2017.

  Canada refugee statistics for 2021 were 130,125.00, a 19.15% increase from 2020. Canada refugee statistics for 2020 were 109,214.00, a 7.33% increase from 2019. In 2021, four in five (80.7%) eligible immigrants were naturalised Canadian citizens.

  In light of increasingly restrictive and, in some cases, discriminatory immigration policies around the world, it has remained important that Canada continues to welcome newcomers and reaffirm its status as an open and inclusive host country.

- Encouraging newcomers to participate in sport and physical activity. Sport and physical activity has been an important vehicle for helping newcomers feel that they belong, which has helped better integration into wider communities.

"A sport is a sport and a fan is a fan, no matter where in this world you were born. Sports are familiar, safe spaces to connect to new people. By playing together, we build connections, community, and ultimately, our country."

Gillian Smith, Former Executive Director and CEO, Institute for Canadian Citizenship

What is heartening about the charities listed below is that they are targeted at **any group marginalised by lack of access to funds**. So although newcomers are encouraged to join, so are other members of the local community. It is key to boost opportunities where new ties can be strengthened.

- KidSport1 and Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities provide grants to eligible participants demonstrating financial need.
- The International Women of Saskatoon is an organisation that provides support, programmes and services that respond to the needs of newcomer women and their families in Saskatchewan. They offer Summer Youth Programs that include sports, games and recreation activities along with the opportunity for youth to develop skills, leadership and empowerment to be positive role models in the community.
- On line: Integration of Refugees Through Sport course – Online Learning by ISCA.

- Through the settlement service providers funded by Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Government also offers **cultural orientation courses designed to introduce newcomers to Canadian values and culture while equipping them with knowledge about local laws and customs.**

"The social integration and well-being of new Canadians is greatly influenced by the quality of their host society's reception strategies."

- This is very much the aim of the Government in Canada: that what is happening at the local implantation level is aligned with and directly supported by public policy. The message that refugees are welcomed is reinforced at every level of society, i.e. the messages are not mixed. This makes it easier to build more inclusive communities.

- A trade union in Canada's construction industry offers language training and certification in the native languages of new members – including Arabic-speaking refugees. The Laborers' International Union of North America (LiUNA!) Local 506 in Richmond Hill recognises that inclusion does not mean treating everyone the same. **It means providing the different supports its members need to have equal access to training and employment**. For example, offering safety training in native language ensures that members are prepared for safety training, recertification or more rigorous provincially mandated exams. Improving English skills remains essential to moving into jobs in other sectors, or with other employers – but members proceed at their own pace.

- Trellis Society works with children, youths and families to bring out their potential and support their growth. Its programmes focus on improving access to resources, developing family and community support structures and building people's capacity to deal with life's challenges. It works in every quadrant of Calgary and in surrounding communities. Trellis is based in the city of Calgary but expands its services by working with other partners, including funders and other agencies who share the same values.

- DIVERSEcity helps newcomers find a sense of belonging in the Canadian and British Columbian culture and community through its many community-focused programmes. It provides free, multilingual programmes and services in settlement, language, employment, community engagement and mental health. It provides newcomers with information, skills and connections for their journey toward success and belonging. **DIVERSEcity services are being offered virtually as well as in-person by appointment only.**

- The Halifax Partnership's Connector program facilitates networking opportunities that connect established community, business and government leaders with talented newcomers and help them build their professional networks.

Resilience-Building and Social Connectedness

As we have discussed, resilience is a process of positive adaptation to one's environment despite hardship. Frankl observed that a sense of meaning in one's life can be encouraged by 'experiencing something or encountering someone', and **many of the initiatives seen in Canada's resettlement programme focus on providing various opportunities for building social connections through meaningful activity.** Access to building relationships means access to resources – friendships, personal warmth, advice and chance encounters that introduce you to new experiences. The list could go on.

In a context of adversity, individuals seem to find the capacity to dig deep to access resources they didn't realise they had. This inner resourcefulness then becomes a magnet for the accumulation of other resources: other skills and knowledge that others can provide; a wider network of social connections and friends. This description is similar to what Maurice defines as social connectedness. Originally from Burundi, Maurice arrived in Canada under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) in 2015, after spending most of his life in a refugee camp in Malawi: **'Me knowing a lot of people, knowing resources that will allow me to meet more people. That is social connectedness.'** – Maurice

Psychologist Alex Zautra highlights that 'in response to trauma, people often display considerable capacity to adapt, and they do so not only through inner strength but also through social connections.'

Approaching integration through a resilience framework implies harnessing the strengths of vulnerable persons in order to create positive change.

Facilitating resilience-building through meaningful experience therefore appears to be intrinsically linked to social connectedness. More needs to be understood in this area; new Canadians who arrive as refugees are very likely to face unemployment, low educational success rates, unstable jobs, and other types of marginalisation – factors that deprive them of meaning and even emphasise their hopeless plight. As a result, their stories are often viewed **through the lens of trauma**.

- The Mental Health Commission of Canada highlights that '**over-pathologizing refugee populations is counterproductive to their mental health**', and advocates for the promotion of resilience and self-management at the individual, family and community level. Yet, although there is a gap in research regarding how refugees seem to harness strength in order to combat their predicament, finding that resilience through self-determination combined with community support seems to be very much in evidence in Canada.

V. Rural Resettlement Initiatives

- Local organisations can contribute to support the efforts to attract and retain newcomers. For example, the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) provides services to help new immigrants settle and integrate into rural communities in Southern Alberta. Service delivery includes workshops, information and orientation sessions, and direct client service in either individual or group settings. A wide variety of topics are covered, including housing, employment, education, healthcare and English classes. **CCIS encourages active participation in the community and facilitates the settlement process by bridging local services.** It also helps with application forms and documentation, as well as interpretation and translation.

- The Town of Stratford (Prince Edward Island) continues to maintain a strong relationship with the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce and remains a sponsor of their PEI Connectors Program, which aims to help immigrant entrepreneurs establish businesses in PEI. One-on-one support services are provided to clients in the development and execution of their business plans. Workshops and information sessions are offered to familiarise clients with the local business environment and provide information about support services and programmes for business owners. Volunteer 'connectors' are established, whereby business and community leaders donate their time to help immigrant entrepreneurs become familiar with the local business environment, and integrate into the Island's business community.

Other Examples of Rural Resettlement Initiatives – Canada, Sweden and Italy

In Canada and other countries, dialogues seem to be more open and exploratory.

- In Sweden, a group of migrant women who, during their initial interviews, did not profess to possessing any skills or experience of note (maybe believing that any 'skills of note' being asked for were in the category of 'highly skilled professional') later revealed, upon further enquiry, that they enjoyed cooking and were highly proficient in the kitchen. This led to employment opportunities being set up in retirement homes, where skilled kitchen staff were difficult to find or retain. This simple example throws a light on what meaningful employment can be attained with a bit more exploration and dedication.
- In a similar light, in Canada, refugees have set up a place called 'Newcomer Kitchen', a chain of eateries where refugees exhibit their culinary skills, serving their various nations' recipes, an idea that is popular with both locals and other newcomers alike. Again, this is an obvious way to increase social connectedness.

There are examples around the world where inspired interventions point to how rural resettlement can be achieved.

- One hopeful example of how a rural community can be revived by the arrival of refugees was demonstrated by the 'Riace model'. Riace, a small town in Calabria, southern Italy, more or less abandoned by the local populace, started receiving Kurdish refugees as far back as 1998. The mayor, Mimmo Lucano, was passionate about showing what humanity and ingenuity could achieve, and both locals and newcomers worked together to revive the local community, redevelop local ancient crafts and restore the town. Unfortunately, the project came to a halt when Lucano was prosecuted for the way he allegedly broke the law to ensure the success of the project, a prosecution that has been hotly disputed. Regardless of the legal battle and the project's demise, the 'Riace model' shows that with the right determination and know-how, providing opportunities to refugees can result in a meaningful existence, not just for them, but for the whole community.

- Another example, this time where government support has been sympathetically applied, is in Sweden. Djamal Hamaili is an Algerian immigrant himself, arriving in Sweden in 1991, and has been involved in numerous projects, latterly focusing on successful integration. Over the years he has gained considerable experience in leading projects that support resettlement in rural areas, though his main location has been a small town called Valdemarsvik.

A revelatory interview with Djamal was held on Zoom, where he explained the success factors that he believes contributed to the achievements seen, all hard-won through trial and error, and coupled with honest assessment and reflection. One critical factor that became apparent was his own direct involvement, though this was professed with great humility. Clearly a passionate and charismatic leader, he showed his ability to get funding based on pitching ideas to the Government. Through his conviction, he became the architect of the **'social enterprises'** he runs and uses his wisdom and experience to persuade others to support him. His track record is impressive, and it is not an exaggeration to attribute adjectives like 'historic' or 'revolutionary' to the success of his approach.

He felt it was important that he could bypass much of the bureaucracy and red tape that tends to hamper initiatives, whereby authorities tend to demand detailed reports on what would be done and how, even before a project starts. Djamal believes this is not pragmatic – that it is best to run with an idea in a localised area, see what challenges arise and then find ways to tackle those issues, accepting that not all of them can necessarily be overcome. For example, many refugees were not enthused about coming to a small town; they would either pass up the opportunity or regard it as a place of transition.

Another crucial recognition for him was that the biggest draw of a place is employment opportunity – that this provides meaning and a sense of greater autonomy and freedom. If he could demonstrate that a small town is actually a sensible choice to find employment and set down roots, then he could use any moderate success as an advertisement for others, which is exactly what happened – he found willing refugees disenchanted with city life to come and join him.

However, as well as employment opportunities, he understood that housing and schooling are also important requirements – if one is lacking, the other is not a strong enough reason to stay in a place.

He understood that if he could persuade some newcomers to embark on training programmes that led to employment, then he could build on that success.

What training did he provide? This was not decided upon in advance; it was something he was content to see evolve over time, as his students needed some space to discover themselves. They did not believe they possessed any special skills, so he began instilling a sense of self-belief in them, encouraging them to develop self-confidence, doing what he could to expose what he called their 'hidden talents', things they could do that could be moulded into some kind of entrepreneurial business. To support that process, Djamal sourced 'companions', local leaders who could provide guidance and know-how. What grew out of this was the formation of an NGO that could deliver a variety of services to the community: cooking, baking, cleaning. Initially, these services were aimed at elderly people in care homes. However, invitations were made to other sectors within the community, e.g. factories and institutions, and so their popularity grew.

Success breeds success, so with a template in place, other refugees would come and join the growing community; other towns started to replicate the approach, attracted by its accomplishments. Whatever difficulties were faced, they were surmountable – the project helped people to be active in the community and this has given rise to a 'sense of positivity'.

The impact of gaining employment, autonomy and some kind of meaning in their lives cannot be over-emphasised.

Local leaders tend to be often coaxed into types of training that actually provide little value. For example, cultural or civic awareness. Djamal feels this can be better absorbed over time and that you don't need a course to learn what the temperature range is in the north of Sweden, or who the King and Queen were in 1980.

The employment angle has been strengthened by other factors: their children love the schools they attend; they like the quiet nature of the place; they are not anonymous, as they would be if they were in a big city. As a result, the newcomers stand by their strengths and weaknesses – whereby hard work and positive attitudes are recognised and rewarded; in the city, nothing can be guaranteed.

Djamal has conducted a survey throughout 50 to 60 refugee families and, not surprisingly for him, the clearest conclusion to be drawn was how much employment opportunity played a role among the respondents.

He is aware that attracting newcomers to rural areas needs to be done through a careful combination of encouragement and provision of choice – newcomers should not be forced against their will, but they should be shown the benefits. Certain jobs, for example in the sphere of law, may not be found in rural areas, and if that is the background and skill of an individual, then residing in a city may be the best outcome for them.

Another key area of training has been within the agricultural sector. However, he recognised that farmers from one country cannot simply transfer their skills to another; the soil and topography are different; the farming methods are different. So six-month fast-track courses were developed with a three-month placement on an actual farm. Driving courses were included, as well as language. All of this led to successful full-time placements for all attendees.

VI. Resources

- Quote by Mark Manson: "Dabrowski argued that fear and anxiety and sadn..." (goodreads.com)
- Full article: Meaning in life and resilience to stressors (tandfonline.com)
- https://www.socialconnectedness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Facilitating-Resilience-Building-and-Social-Connectedness-in-the-Refugee-and-Asylum-Seeker-Population-of-Greater-Montreal_ashibon.pdf
- https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CAN/canada/refugee-statistics
- Tunariu et al _ iNEAR resilience intervention_ in press 2017.pdf

Isolation

"One's efforts to escape isolation can sabotage one's relationships with other people. Many a friendship or marriage has failed because, instead of relating to, and caring for, one another, one person uses another as a shield against isolation."

Irvin D. Yalom

I. Background

Of all the existential concerns discussed in this report, isolation is perhaps the easiest to identify with. Loneliness is a common affliction for many and can be felt, even if temporarily, at any age within any social group.

Existential psychoanalysts identify three types of isolation:

- interpersonal
- intrapersonal
- existential

In this chapter, the main focus will be on the interpersonal, though there are relevant cross-cutting concerns with existential isolation, as the latter is not only felt as a result of interpersonal isolation, it also influences the ways in which, as inherently social creatures, we tend to apply ourselves to interpersonal relations.

Our experience of loneliness can be triggered by readily understandable external circumstances, for example, moving to a new area, when a family member dies or when families are rendered apart through quarrels and irreconcilable differences. The causes may be even closer to home, such as having poor social skills or when physical or personality traits are regarded as unattractive or repelling. Urban poverty can also be a reason, as this often means fewer opportunities to socialise.

All of these have been compounded by a growing cultural isolation, where institutions such as the church are in decline, as are notions of the extended family and friendly neighbourhoods. TV, video games and social media, which all encourage virtual socialisation, also keep people physically apart. The gulf between indicators of social success (e.g. number of likes) and 'real' feelings of social inclusion can be very marked, and a trigger for social pain.

For some, such evidence of interpersonal isolation can lead one to reflect more profoundly on the nature of experience and realise that, at a fundamental level, isolation is yet another facet of the human condition, where we recognise that, however intimate relations can be, there is an unbridgeable gap between one person's uncommunicable experience and another person's. One's life, in all its complicated meanderings, cannot be effectively shared or understood.

This recognition of man's basic separateness is at the core of existential isolation; as we mature into adulthood and we assert our individuality, there is deep loneliness that attends our act of self-creation. We tend to push this away from our furthest reach, as we become familiar with people, objects and routines. In other words, we immerse ourselves in the 'everydayness' of experience and see this as something that binds us together collectively. However, we can also experience 'defamiliarisation', where this curtain of 'reality' is pulled open, our surroundings take on an 'uncanny' appearance, our relationship with the world disintegrates, and a terrifying void briefly declares itself. Existential writers, such as Albert Camus, wrote about this experience with great clarity and force. It is also a topic that is returned to when we look at the way isolation affects our attitudes towards relationships.

II. Refugee Context

In the experience of the refugee, who is wrenched from the familiar and plunged into the unfamiliar, where autonomy is displaced and the physical, social and cultural environment is both strange and threatening, the resulting sense of isolation can be acute. The cloak of the everyday has to be reconstructed.

The relationship with isolation is also a complex one, as differing needs rise to the surface, depending on one's circumstances. Many people recognise that, at times, they require isolation as a means to reflect, or as a means to avoid conflict when unresolved tensions are high.

At other times, the desire for social interactions, whether superficial or personally close, can be very powerful. When these needs are not met, especially over prolonged periods, the anxiety produced can be quite painful.

Feelings of isolation can be triggered by so many different factors, including expectation, and so the urban–rural factor may become one that needs probing and challenging when it comes to the refugee experience.

Also, it will be important to reflect on the various responses, personal and social, to feelings of isolation and whether the coping mechanisms one develops are healthy and mature or whether they are ultimately unhealthy and serve to undermine the individual's ability to access inner resources to deal with the struggle of life.

This dynamic, of course, affects everyone, not just refugees, but for the refugee, the stakes may be higher if the path forged isn't a positive one.

Personal Experience in North Yorkshire

In terms of rural resettlement and, indeed, the choice to resettle rurally, the subject of isolation is one that is acknowledged to have a significant impact.

While working as a community development officer at the Refugee Council, one of the biggest issues I struggled with centred around the topic of 'sense of isolation among refugees'. I used to receive emails from volunteers, funders and colleagues asking me about what approaches I had in order to help refugees who were feeling isolated in rural areas of North Yorkshire.

Because we covered eight small to mid-size towns, it wasn't always easy to link families up. In some small towns we only had two families. Due to long distances and lack of transportation, travelling from one area to the other wasn't easy.

Some resettled families would move out of small towns to bigger cities because of the lack of ties with people from their own background and communities. Having said that, throughout my work with newcomers, I also faced cases of racism, family squabbles, tensions and even domestic violence between families from the **same** background.

These conflicts happened in both big cities and small towns. Therefore, it was interesting, if perhaps not surprising then, that many refugees told me that they actually preferred not to be close to people from the same background. The reasons given were various.

> "Fire can warm or consume, water can quench or drown, wind can caress or cut. And so it is with human relationships: we can both create and destroy, nurture and terrorize, traumatize and heal each other."
>
> Dr Bruce D. Perry

Although clear data on this has not been collected, it isn't too difficult to see the nature of the situation; when refugees come over to be resettled, initially, the existential threats are felt very keenly and their resolution must seem very remote. Those early weeks and months are a period of high negative emotion. The tendency to expel this emotion onto those closest to you – physically, emotionally, culturally – is born mainly out of proximal convenience. **Paradoxically, isolation, however painful it is, may be the cushion needed to allow one's situation to sink in, before autonomy can be asserted again.**

But even if a sense of isolation sometimes encourages resettled families to move out of rural areas to bigger cities, after a while some actually decide they want to come back. From my interviews with the refugee families, the following denote the positive side of staying in rural communities:

- learning English by speaking to local volunteers
- the kindness and generosity of neighbours and the general community
- getting to know local people and making friends
- beautiful, green and safe areas

- greater access to GPs, dentists and educational services
- ability to do volunteering work and connecting with the community
- finding jobs more easily through local networks.

In my experience and for many others working in the sector, we have learnt that those who choose to stay in rural towns acknowledge the effect that building relationships with indigenous people is faster.

Some positive outcomes of that are as follows:

- learning English faster
- learning about the British culture
- creating new and supporting relationships that are based on care and love
- better opportunities for employment due to the greater visibility of local networks.*

*The final point above perhaps needs greater clarification. The general expectation is that employment opportunities are more plentiful in cities, rather than in rural areas. However, this needs to be offset against other contextual factors: in rural settings, the local communities tend to embrace a common mindset among both the hosts and the newcomers with a shared interest in helping and supporting others, regardless of background and circumstances. The community wants individuals to succeed and, furthermore, there is a recognition that individuals have individual skills, aptitudes and preferences, and employment opportunities need to align with those. As a result, newcomers in rural communities find it easier to find 'suitable work'. Although there are some isolated examples of this working in the UK, this ethos is particularly developed in Canada, a point that is further elaborated upon later in this chapter.

In the film 'Peace by Chocolate' (2021), based on the true story of a family of Syrians resettling in Canada, who, supported by the host community, re-established connections to the artisan life they had previously led (making high quality chocolate), it is shown how local interest can play a significant role in how newcomers find their way.

It was also interesting to observe that in North Yorkshire, during lockdown, there was a positive shift. Creating links between people got easier as things went online. I started setting up social media pages, a women's group and a youth group, and tried to link the resettled families across North Yorkshire.

Please read more here: [Refugee resettlement during Covid-19 (churchillfellowship.org)]

Benefits of Social Isolation

How do we shore up resilience against the intrusion of isolation, especially when that sense of isolation comes from within? The general response is to place faith and reliance on interpersonal relationships. The German social psychologist Erich Fromm regards isolation as a primary source of anxiety, and in order to avoid this anxiety, we are prone to want to enter relationships to safeguard us against the pain of loneliness. Relationships can be a source of comfort, a way of sharing ourselves and the burdens we face. We may romanticise about a communion of souls, where deeper mutual understanding can be achieved.

However, from an existential perspective, it needs to be acknowledged that isolation can never be eliminated. Without that understanding, there is a tendency for people to both psychologically and interpersonally place demands on the people close to them, that if others fail to understand or appreciate the person's day-to-day needs and the attendant suffering, then it may be seen as a lack of empathy, or worse, an act of betrayal. In other words, we often use people as a salve, a provider of needs, especially needs relating to validation and self-worth.

One possible way to tackle the more crippling aspects of isolation is to understand that isolation and the ability to look it square in the face is a stepping stone to greater inner resolve.

Another stepping stone is to realise the benefits of isolation so that they can be incorporated into one's psychological armoury.

Benefits of Healthy Relationships

Erich Fromm reflected very deeply on the nature of true friendship and true love, explaining that to love means to be actively concerned for the life and growth of another. One must be responsive to the needs (physical and psychic) of the other. One must respect the uniqueness of the other, to see him as he is, and to help him to grow and unfold in his own ways, for his own sake and not for the purpose of serving oneself. But one cannot fully respect the other without knowing that other deeply. True knowledge of the other, Fromm believes, is possible only when one transcends one's self-concern and sees the person in the other's own terms. One needs to experience empathically – that is, one needs to enter and become familiar with the private world of the other, to live in the other's life and sense the other's meanings and experiences.

Dr Perry explains that even though the developmental trauma happens in relationships, healing happens in relationships as well. He talks about how experiences of empathy and belonging can rewire the brain to provide this healing. According to Perry, empathy underlies everything that makes society work, including trust, collaboration, love and charity.

It seems the basis of good community relations between host communities and newcomers needs to be developed along similar lines – with understanding and empathy at the core. There needs to be time to build up that understanding; there needs to be a forum where that understanding can be encouraged; there needs to be effort employed to translate that understanding into policies and practices that take into consideration both the needs of the host communities and the newcomers; there needs to be an acceptance that not every initiative will work in exactly the same way for different individuals.

It is important to note that in order to have a healthy community, we need a foundation on which to build healthy relationships. In order to move from a sense of isolation to a sense of belonging, there is a need for creating healthy, nourishing ties. Such ties will not be established without each person becoming involved and sharing in that collective responsibility.

The following 'Respect' wheel highlights behaviours that lead to building healthy relationships. It is a good tool to look at the ways in which host communities and newcomers interact and assess whether we are heading in the right direction or whether we need to modify our approaches.

The Healthy Relationship Wheel [11]

III. UK Context

Given that isolation is likely to be an issue at various times for refugee families, it is important to see how the problem is being addressed by social policies, and whether they take into consideration the various discussion points that have been covered so far in this chapter.

Refugees and other newly arrived migrants often face a long path to integration in their new societies.

The integration of refugees is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, **including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population**.

[11] Reprinted with permission

The process of integration is complex and gradual, comprising distinct but inter-related legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions, all of which are important for refugees' ability to integrate successfully as fully included members of the host society.

While employment is typically the most effective way to fast-track both social and economic integration, it may not be equally attainable for all, at least in the short term. Groups unable to find work are at high risk of social isolation, for example those who are unskilled, illiterate, or elderly (with many falling into multiple categories of disadvantage).

Work can improve self-esteem and mental health, foster vital social interactions that themselves boost integration outcomes, and even smooth frictions between newcomers and longer-term residents. **In its absence, there is a need to create alternative ways for socially isolated populations to participate meaningfully in their host communities and forge the vital social ties that will anchor them to their new homes**. This could take the form of 'work-adjacent' activities (such as informal crafts or cooking businesses or volunteering in shortage areas) or nonwork programmes to build networks within communities.

For those who will never find traditional employment (or who need a longer-than-average timeline to get there), societies will need to reconsider what 'successful' integration might look like, and how to invest in it.

Promising practices that target vulnerable newcomers can be grouped into three main categories:

- **Economic empowerment programmes**. These widen the definition of what 'work' means for vulnerable groups (such as female refugees) by connecting them to (or creating) opportunities in parts of the labour market that may be overlooked by formal employment services, namely cooking, crafts, child care and gardening. These programmes leverage participants' existing skills (without requiring formal qualifications) while helping them to access a greater degree of financial independence and build social ties and resilience.

- **Volunteering programmes**. Such activities can provide either a stepping-stone to the formal labour market or an alternative to work. For example, volunteering as a health-care assistant or preschool aide provides vocation-specific experience that can be leveraged in the path to paid work (and can bypass the need for certification or even a work permit). Alternatively, volunteering can open doors for individuals who may

lack the skills or qualifications to join the labour market but who can contribute in other meaningful ways to their local communities, as in the case of elderly refugees volunteering in local schools. Volunteer programmes can deliver high value if done well, but they are not cost free – effective programmes require deep investments in training and support (e.g. to facilitate good matches between mentors and mentees, or to equip volunteers to engage with culturally or religiously different groups).

- **Non-work initiatives**. Programmes that boost social ties and connect newcomers with locals serve an important integration tool, even if they do not lead to work. These efforts range from social activities such as sports, arts and community gardening, to mentorship and peer-to-peer programmes that can reach out to socially isolated groups (e.g. women inside the home or unaccompanied minors).

Part of this calculation is determining how much to invest in 'social' versus economic programmes, and whether policymakers are willing to invest in reducing social isolation for its own sake, not just as a path to economic self-sufficiency.

Addressing social isolation for newcomers out of work will require taking risks. Programmes designed to strengthen social ties can be resource-intensive and their outcomes are rarely systematically evaluated, making it hard to demonstrate a clear return on investment. Yet economic empowerment activities, volunteering, or nonwork programmes to build networks within communities can be a vital bridge out of social isolation for the most vulnerable – even if they never lead to traditional employment – and thus benefit society as a whole.

UK Survey

At the beginning of lockdown in 2020, I carried out a survey to better understand the issues locals in rural areas believe they are facing. In this chapter the highlighted issues mentioned by some of the locals will be discussed:

"There are practical challenges for everyone living here with respect to transport (no public transport so a car is essential), some higher living costs with respect to petrol, lack of jobs etc. These are issues for everyone – with ***isolation being an underlying challenge that everyone has to deal with****."*

"I think in my area ***the biggest challenge would be isolation of the refugee family as we are not a multi-ethnic area****, and I have found that asylum seekers get a lot of support from their own social and language groups.* ***Local groups have however settled families through community partnership schemes, and as far as I know this is going ok****. It would be good if there were more refugees settled here so they could also support each other alongside the support the local community gives. We also don't have any mosques or temples nearby which may be problematic for religions other than Christianity. There would be many benefits for our area if we had a more diverse community, but I fear in this area there would also be considerable resistance to this. Also we don't have any shops locally to cater for Halal or other diets, which could be a problem."*

"Loneliness is a real problem. If no other members of same community/language group are near, refugees feel very isolated. ***Travel from rural areas can be a real problem****."*

*"****A down-side relative to cities is isolation****. Distance to a hospital, mosque, appropriate butcher etc can be a problem. Although there are only two Syrian families in Ripon* ***they have seen the great advantages for their children going to schools where their background is cherished by increasing diversity****. In a relatively isolated rural setting the presence of Syrians in the community brings huge benefits for the community. Those who have never encountered refugees but simply read about them in the worst of the red-tops have their views greatly changed when they meet refugees who present no threat and contribute positively to society."*

"The countryside may be isolating for refugees who will therefore struggle to find food, faith venues, co-ethnic friends etc that are suitable for them, it is important that refugees can keep

their culture and not assimilate. ***However, their reception from hosts may be better, not having a large amount of co-ethnics will lead to more involvement with host members, services and jobs may be more accessible. This is a huge, very interesting question****."*

"Whether refugees will find it easier in the city depends on their particular circumstances and expectations. ***Often better sense of community and integration with indigenous community in rural setting, but may be more isolated from people of their original culture and language****. Different people will prioritise these differently."*

IV. Learning from Canada

Working with newcomers in rural and smaller urban communities comes with its own unique set of challenges and opportunities in Canada and in many other places engaged in the practice of resettlement. Language barriers, social isolation, a lack of adequate support services and transportation are all common challenges for newcomers and refugees settling in less populated areas. Many rural communities also have demographic challenges, such as the migration of youth to urban areas and an ageing labour force population, which can adversely impact local economies.

However, despite these common challenges, what differentiates the countries is how they respond to these challenges. What is notable about Canada is that it is embedded in the collective mindset that the institution and implementation of policies not only encourages rural resettlement where it is appropriate, but it also positively focuses its will on ensuring newcomers are welcomed, that they are recognised as individuals with differing needs and desires, and that attending to these has an overall beneficial effect on the communities as a whole. There is a recognition that better integration is achieved when individuals undergo a kind of bespoke social and employment journey suitable for them.

Furthermore, this attitude and approach is borne out by the many interviews conducted.

For example, many rural areas and small cities across Canada are eager to attract more newcomers. **The availability of appropriate and timely social support is critical for social inclusion**. Beyond acquiring human capital (i.e. skills, knowledge and experience), newcomers who build social capital (i.e. networks and relationships) in their new communities are more likely to successfully integrate.

A couple of the interviews, for example, focused on one particular regional centre, **Owen Sound in Nova Scotia,** which has moulded this mindset into a model approach. The focus clearly is on the getting the whole community working together.

Mokhles Hassan, himself a refugee from Iraq, settled in Canada in 2001 and his story demonstrates how investing in key individuals, such as himself, has benefited the community.

He meets with all the newcomers who arrive at Owen Sound and acts as a kind of social glue, getting people to meet with others when they are ready or when social isolation emerges as a problem. He is aware that a sense of belonging evolves over time through engagement volunteered by the individuals themselves – that 'forcing' them to indiscriminately belong just to any social group is a strategy that does not work. It is creating opportunities for social inclusion, while bearing in mind that newcomers should be allowed to retain their own cultural identity that is important. **Sharing and discussing these cultural differences is a means to understanding and appreciation.** The host communities recognise this and encourage communication and cultural exchange, realising that even with language barriers, applying effort to teach and learn (e.g. using Google Translate) can lead to the building of trusting relationships. This happens in both work and social settings and fosters better integration – people are less inclined to stay isolated and more inclined to take risks, in order to get to know people better.

Mokhles worked with other local organisations, such as the church, and propagated the idea that newcomers were social capital and that their skills and knowledge, if harnessed appropriately, could bring benefits to the community. Initiatives could develop organically from the resources on the ground. It was a question of recognising what the resources were and tapping into them. Mokhles also recognised that promoting a moral attitude of charity and kindness within the host community and among the newcomers themselves was an integral part of the solution. **Essentially, people felt a responsibility towards one another.** One newcomer, a woman, was completely illiterate when she arrived. Supported by the community, she now reads and writes in English, and her attainment of Canadian Citizenship was celebrated by the community as a whole.

This growth of community spirit has helped retain newcomers, who, generally, are less likely than ever before to leave Owen Sound.

The success of Owen Sound highlights the importance of investment in support and social capital – that eventually, there is a payoff. **It also highlights that investing in smaller communities can contribute to the revival of those communities**. The commercial and industrial sectors at Owen Sound have grown, with numbers of retail outlets and employers increasing. https://www.owensound.ca/en/investing/economic-development.aspx

Amidst this successful regrowth, it has been acknowledged that immigration was a key factor in the success of the area, addressing key labour shortages.

https://www.owensoundsuntimes.com/news/local-news/immigration-key-to-addressing-labour-shortage-officials-say-as-jobless-rate-drops-to-3

Other initiatives have helped communities too. For example, the Habitat for Humanity scheme has allowed poorer people, including newcomers, to access affordable housing.

https://habitat.ca/en/about-us/home-building-in-canada

Brian Dyck, a consultant with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) who has worked with the Immigration Department, echoes many of these observations. Essentially, resettling in a rural community can confer more advantages, such as social connectedness and better means to practise English or French. Perhaps, overall, the fact that a newcomer is cared for by the community at an individual level means that they are embraced by a 'big hug', and feel better predisposed to social integration.

Municipalities and service providers can improve the integration process and foster more inclusive environments by preparing in advance for the arrival of new families, rather than 'reacting' to emerging issues in these communities. Small and rural municipalities have many unique assets they can use to attract and retain newcomers, such as close connections to the community and proximity to local issues.

CCIS (Calgary Catholic Immigration Society) is a non-profit organisation which provides settlement and integration services to all immigrants and refugees in Southern Alberta. Its mission is to empower refugees to successfully resettle and integrate, and its vision is to work towards a more inclusive society where immigrants and refugees can reach their full potential.

CCIS believes:

- in an environment which enhances self-esteem and respect for all
- that each individual is unique and of value

- ❖ that we all have a responsibility to build a healthy community
- ❖ in a holistic approach when working with individuals and community
- ❖ in constant attention, sensitivity and flexibility throughout the ongoing process of relationship building
- ❖ in ethical practices
- ❖ in volunteerism
- ❖ in innovation and creativity.

The organisation acknowledges certain key refugee issues. One example is trauma: it has developed a holistic approach to therapy that builds on inherent resilience and encourages newcomers to develop the inner resources to better achieve their potential. Another service is Employment First, a programme where refugees can gain hands-on work experience, workplace skills, and one-on-one support that will help them secure and retain employment.

- ➢ CCIS also provides a programme called Companion Housing to address housing affordability and reduce isolation. It is an innovative approach to addressing multiple issues, providing benefits to both the host (additional income) and the 'renter' (provision of affordable housing; a social opportunity to fend off isolation). This mechanism to do this is carefully thought out and works by placing together people with shared values and interests.
- ➢ The Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria has information about Indigenous Peoples and also a list of videos and links that explore the themes surrounding racism and its impact on communities, giving newcomers an opportunity to learn more about who they are will be integrating with and some of the historical issues 'First Peoples' have had to cope with, as well as more contemporary racial issues and ideas in the US and Canada.
- ➢ The City of Brooks hosts a Taste of Nations event where several cultures within the community are able to represent their nation by showcasing their food, dance and clothing. This is a well-attended event attracting thousands of people during Alberta Culture Days. The celebration provides a fun opportunity for families and people of all ages to come together and experience a wide variety of cultures, for example breakfast events.

- Vancouver Local Immigration Partnership in partnership with Passages Canada, has a national online story archive to collect stories from Vancouver immigrants. They collect stories from local immigrants about the successes they have had and the challenges they have faced.

- In the Faces of Brooks programme, the City of Brooks connects with citizens and captures their stories and quotes, which are then displayed on the city's social media platforms. **The objective is to exhibit that regardless of our backgrounds, we all have goals, barriers and challenges, yet each individual's goals, barriers and challenges may be different.** With this, we are able to see different perspectives while allowing citizens to gain more insight.

V. Rural Resettlement Initiatives

- A research project[12] based in three rural Ontario communities focused on how to enhance newcomer engagement and build social capital to cultivate social inclusion. The findings suggest newcomers and stakeholders will benefit by focusing on four essential areas:

    1) Providing intentional community leadership from municipalities and municipal leaders.
    2) Reducing system barriers in employment, culture, transportation, housing, etc.
    3) **Building relationships between newcomers and other community members.**
    4) Developing robust support systems like programmes and services, faith communities and networks.

- The Newcomer Interagency Network (NIN) is a network of organisations and employers in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo committed to working together to enhance the lives of newcomers within the community. It was created to share expertise, enhance collaboration between agencies, and support projects and initiatives to better meet the needs of newcomers to the region.

[12] Details of the associated research project can be found here and here.

VI. Resources

- Beyond Work_ Reducing Social Isolation for Refugee Women and Other Marginalized Newcomers.pdf
- Integration_discussion_paper_July_2014_EN.pdf (unhcr.org)

Recommendations and Concluding Statements

I. Background

Drawing on my own experiences while working for the Refugee Council in North Yorkshire, I was able to gain valuable insights into how the resettled refugees were responding to the challenges they were facing as newcomers to a new and strange culture and to the ways they were feeling and thinking as that culture responded to their arrival. In my roles, I also encouraged myself to view the arrival of refugees from the host communities' perspectives, and how their ambivalence and conflicting attitudes were shaped by compassion, but also coloured by the dominating force of the media, who tend to carve a very negative view of immigration into the public consciousness.

Also, as a migrant myself, and as a human being, who was not only coming to terms with my own experiences in the UK, but as a person dealing with the repercussions of trauma, I had the good fortune to channel my search for answers and for comforting guidance through the discipline of existential psychotherapy. The more I became familiar with its concepts and its underlying philosophy, the more convinced I became of its relevance to the experiences of refugees, who are simply, after having been uprooted from their family and culture, trying to seek out an existence that is positive, meaningful and reciprocal in its relationship with the community they are living in. Existential psychotherapy regards all people as individuals, as people who respond variously to the human condition, and tackle the resulting suffering, possibilities and limitations in different ways – some that are healthy and some that are unhealthy.

Not only did I recognise that the culture of a nation can exhibit healthy and unhealthy behaviour through these existential concerns, I came to recognise that different nations, particularly if we focus on the experience of refugees, can develop and encourage healthier attitudes towards the migration question, making the experiences felt by both refugees and host communities much more positive.

In this light, I will be comparing what happens in the UK with what happens in Canada, as well as countries such as Sweden, taking into account the limitations of my own experience, but compensating that with the insights and wisdom of others, to set out a number of conclusions based on the nations' different approaches and making a number of recommendations applicable to the UK context. The basis of what follows is extracted from the findings in each chapter. It needs to be emphasised that the underlying work was qualitative in nature and not quantitative. Although the views expressed are my own, I feel there is a sufficient body of evidence that supports them. The comparison particularly extends to how newcomers are treated in a rural context, as this is an area of focus for the research.

II. Conclusions and Recommendations

Messaging and education

One of the first conclusions to be drawn from the findings is the solidarity around the messaging, and the content and consistency of that messaging in the immigration space.

A simple but significant example is the way both the UK and Canada refer to migrants: in the UK, migrants, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers are terms most often used in the press, on government websites and in general parlance. As immigration is often referred to as a problem, or sometimes worse, as a crisis, the terms listed above tend to carry a negative connotation, and generally incite fear, suspicion and even hostility, such is the power of language. Human beings are very adept at categorisation, taking in large volumes of chaotic and conflicting data and then simplifying and structuring it. We do that to make sense of the world and communicate our ideas to others. But our addiction to categorisation can warp our view of reality and allow in all sorts of bias and prejudice, blocking out nuance and multiple perspectives. Furthermore, categorical thinking can lead to dangerous consequences. When we categorise, we compress category members, treating them as more alike than they are; we *amplify differences* between members of different categories; we *discriminate*, favouring certain categories over others; and we *fossilise*, treating the categorical structure we've imposed as static. In other words, the term 'immigrants' encourages us to see them as a separate group, apart from 'us', and their differences (whatever they may be) as far more significant than their similarities.

In Canada, the friendlier terms ‘newcomers’ or ‘new Canadians’ are used – and used consistently in the media and on government and agency sites which disseminate information about the schemes to help migrants settle and integrate. The emphasis is on welcoming migrants into Canada, and making them feel a part of the overall community.

Furthermore, this welcoming tone is consistently used throughout, from top government ministries all the way through the municipalities to the agencies working on the frontline. It amounts to a shared vision. In the UK, the water is muddied, as the messaging is ambivalent or confusingly inconsistent. The UK Government itself sets up schemes to support refugees on one hand but, on the other, ministers are often ‘concerned’ about what immigration means for the country, especially if uncontrolled. The agencies on the ground are supportive of refugees, but may feel conflicted when the media is generally hostile, as if they are somehow betraying their ‘own’ people.

The recommendation is that this messaging needs to be reviewed, and efforts need to be made to extend a welcome for migrants arriving in the country. Realistically, this would need to start from the ground up, as solidarity on the initiative would be slow or even non-existent, but at least the newcomers themselves would feel more welcomed. Whatever decisions are taken about the amount of immigration that should happen in the UK, it is clear that whoever is allowed into the country on an existing scheme should feel they have the country behind them.

This is surely common sense, as supporting refugees will improve their chances of integration and becoming contributing members of the community. To make them feel unwelcome is only going to stir up feelings of antipathy, threatening the chances of fruitful collaboration. Embracing positive choices is life-enhancing; falling prey to negative choices is a metaphor for ‘death’.

This notion of positive communication can lead to further steps. Why let the press shape the attitudes of the nation? In Canada, there is a unity of purpose in educating the nation about the facts surrounding immigration, dispelling many of the myths. This starts at the top, via government institutions, and trickles all the way through other channels in society. This information is centralised, easily accessible and consistent in its messaging. Furthermore, this messaging promotes the positive impact of having both diversity and unity in their communities, focusing on the benefits of encouraging better understanding, greater resilience and acceptance.

It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that having fellow feelings towards your neighbours enriches your own life, and yet the human condition, if not guided helpfully, allows us to disfavour that diversity, and all kinds of resentment can follow.

In the UK, the messaging is far more conflicted, with the overall impression being that immigration is a problem to be endured, rather than an opportunity to be cherished. The impact this has on feelings of isolation is not only detrimental to the refugees coming in, it tends to discourage positive societal shifts, thereby leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is difficult to access facts on immigration, and what information there is comes from multiple, unconnected sources, so building a unified picture requires much effort and patience. As people are therefore generally in the dark about what is happening, the imagination intrudes and misinformation leads to more anxiety, suspicion and bigotry.
Furthermore, there is no apparent fighting back against this state of affairs, suggesting the powers that be are content to let negative attitudes continue to drift.

It is recommended that much more effort is made to centralise and control information around immigration in the UK. This would require agencies working within the resettlement sector to form an alliance with this particular purpose in mind, lobbying the Government to take on board both the purpose and content of the messaging and to follow suit in the way information on immigration becomes more centralised, easier to access and more consistent. Efforts should also be made to highlight the benefits of immigration and emphasise how diversity, if handled well, can promote the well-being of communities. This aspect of communication is lacking in the UK, but very apparent in Canada. To raise awareness further, the UK should follow Canada's lead by not only celebrating key dates in the international calendar, but also publicising these celebrations through government websites.

This brings me to another important aspect of how immigration/resettlement is approached and involves all sectors of the host community, including the general public.

Community schemes and services

The way private sponsorship works in Canada allows community members to foster more intimate links between newcomers and members of the local communities. Former newcomers often act as a link for recent newcomers, as they can better anticipate and make requests to the local community as issues surface. Organisations work together to educate the communities on what services are available. Furthermore, these services are not just exclusively available for resettled refugees; they are available to all community members, meaning needs are not segregated. Social issues are shared and this brings people from diverse backgrounds together. **In Sweden, communities will get together to create customised programmes where increased diversity may lead to perceived gaps in available services. Their emphasis will be on incoming migrants, but essentially, in principle, the new services will be available to all.** In the UK, segregation of needs and services does occur, so that incoming resettled families are treated exclusively in order to address certain requirements e.g. ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) or training programmes. This segregation even extends to different migrant groups, whereby separate categories of 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are coined. This creates unnecessary division, encourages a perception of favouritism (a phenomenon that is exploited by the press) and therefore keeps refugees and host communities separate, as if they are two distinct species, with different needs. This should not be the case. In Canada, there is no such distinction. 'Newcomers' is the term required and, furthermore, there is no favouritism or penalisation as a result – all newcomers are treated equally.

A recommendation for the UK, a practice that is working in some parts of Canada, is access to affordable housing via innovative schemes that encourage house-sharing or even house-building. As already emphasised, this is not a scheme that should only be available to newcomers, but to any person in the community that is facing housing affordability issues.

The recommendation here is that organisations should collaborate with charities who support the resettlement of refugees and look at the provision of services at a community-wide level – so that what is available is accessible for both newcomers and host community members alike. The community is then perceived to be addressing problems equitably, and not addressing resettled families as a separate case. This will reduce incitement to resentment and will also create better opportunities for newcomers and host community members to come together in shared contexts.

A much-needed add-on to this approach concerns the subject of training. Canada invests quite heavily in cross-cultural training, ensuring newcomers get to know a lot about the indigenous people, including their various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There is much greater signposting too of the services that are available to them. Similarly, this training extends to the local communities too, so they get to learn about the culture of any incoming newcomers. Furthermore, this raised awareness encourages not only greater empathy, but also to see what specialised services might be needed to cater for a more diverse community. This in turn has led to greater investment in the building of new services and amenities to serve the diversity of the community, often encouraging newcomers to not just take on any employment opportunity, but take on jobs better suited to their skills and interests, all aimed at widening the range of services available for the wider community.

Although fledgling examples exist, this kind of training and investment has not taken off in a big way in the UK as yet. However, it is recommended that if organisations and charities can get together, investment in promoting cross-cultural awareness is not just a 'nice-to-have' benefit, it is an **essential** cornerstone to building better communities. In fact, **education and training is the key recommendation** that emerges from this research. This is not just classroom-based training, there is a huge gap which can be filled by designing online courses. My intention is to return to North Yorkshire so that I can bring communities together through training forums.

Host community engagement

One area that Canada does well is how agencies organise meetings and events that allow both newcomers and host community members to get together in open dialogue. The purpose, on one hand, is to discourage a segregation of responsibility, whereby the host communities take on responsibility to look after all the newcomers' needs. In fact, the opposite is encouraged – that newcomers are supported to find ways in which they can take responsibility for themselves, thereby increasing their sense of independence, their sense of freedom (to choose how they live their lives) and their sense of meaning (by finding work and/or activities that match their skills and interests).

In the UK, this tends not to happen as frequently or as well. Host community members tend not to be engaged in the process of finding out about and helping newcomers, with the responsibility falling on the agencies, organisations and volunteers which have that specific remit. This disengages the community at large, which is a wasted opportunity. Furthermore,

there is a tendency, especially among volunteers, to treat incoming migrants as 'victims', meaning the support offered can be smothering and over-zealous. Despite the empathic underpinning of this attitude, it can be counterproductive, as it is ignoring the key existential principle of encouraging newcomers to seek out their own path and gain an important sense of self-sufficiency. Canada is particularly successful in supporting this principle as it seeks ways to get newcomers to participate in meaningful dialogue with the host communities, via various social events, so that mutual interests can be identified and acted upon. In this way it is possible to more readily encourage newcomers to take on responsibility for their own development.

It is recommended that the training mentioned earlier includes a means to recognise these important existential principles. This would be particularly useful for volunteers who mean well but do not have the experience to appreciate the nuances that exist in the resettlement context. The training should also serve as a platform for investigating and experimenting with ways that newcomers and host community members can get together in a way that seems natural and unforced. One example could be sport, as that is a universally recognised arena where people can get together. Another could be international cooking or arts and crafts.

There are a number of possibilities that could be explored. I would recommend that the local authorities take on the role as leaders in such initiatives, encouraging communities to take part in building a healthier community. An extension of this would be to create social networks whereby newcomers can get to meet people from all kinds of business sectors. There is a wealth of potential in the newcomers that reach our communities, and we should explore ways to tap that potential in a way that both benefits the newcomers themselves and the businesses who can see opportunity in recruiting them.

Advantages of rural resettlement

All of the above conclusions and recommendations could apply to both rural and urban settings, but my research showed there were added advantages to resettling refugees in rural areas. However, before continuing to explain, it is important to add one caveat. Whether within the UK or Canada context, it isn't simply a question of making the decision to resettle newcomers in rural towns and villages. Although the benefits can be promoted to the newcomers, as a means of persuasion, they should be allowed the choice. A number of factors could dictate that urban resettlement is, in fact, more appropriate. For example, a

family may have a member who is disabled or requires complex treatment. In such cases, a suitable hospital may not be conveniently nearby, and an urban location may serve the family better. Also, a newcomer may have particular skills and experience in an employment sector that can be readily found in the bigger cities, and may be scarce or even non-existent in rural areas.

Having said that, rural resettlement can work in favour of the newcomers. It may seem counter-intuitive, but often more appropriate employment opportunities can be readily secured in the smaller towns, as the opportunities for better and more personal networking allow good matches to be found between newcomer and employer. If the newcomers have farming backgrounds, there may be opportunities to work on a farm – although that needs to be carefully assessed. Often, farming techniques and practices may be so different between the experience of the newcomer and the experience of the local farming community, that the transfer of skills does not work. However, that should not deter the exploration of allowing newcomers to exploit their farming skills in small plots of land where cottage industries could potentially flourish. The key point here is to explore possibility in creative and entrepreneurial ways. Another point to take into account is schooling. Newcomers with young children may prefer smaller communities as research has shown that it is easier to find places. However, it should be stated that this comes with the recommendation of ensuring the schools in these communities implement cross-cultural awareness training, so that understanding of diversity is encouraged. What has shown to work, and examples can be found in Canada, Sweden and Italy, is that individuals with creative solutions not only succeeded in promoting the benefits of rural resettlement to both newcomers and host communities alike, they also created migrant schemes that revived dying crafts, injecting more vitality back into the communities.

Appendix

Item A

The following embedded links are to documents that depict the resettlement schemes in both Canada and the UK.

UK

< UK resettlement schemes >

The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) was launched on **25 February 2021**, replacing the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). Below, there is some information about the programme from the Government's website.

< UK global resettlement >

Here you can find more details about resettlement programmes in the UK.

Canada

< Canada resettlement schemes >

Here you can find more details about resettlement programmes in Canada.

Item B

What follows is a list of the interview questions and transcripts (with my appended notes) for each of the individuals I interviewed. *Access to these files will be restricted due to confidentiality. Full access may be possible upon request.*[13]

1) **Brian Dyck** – Bryan is an associate program coordinator at MCC Manitoba in Canada – Migration & Resettlement Program – and has been working in MCC for 17 years.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript>

[13] Please email sep.mojabi@gmail.com

2) **Djamal Hamaili** – Djamal is an integration coordinator in the municipality of Valdemarsvik in Sweden and has been working in that role since 2006. Djamal is originally from Algeria and arrived in Sweden in 1991.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript>

3) **Sabin Lahr** – At the time I interviewed Sabin, she was a Manager of the Private Sponsorship Programme at the ICA.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript>

4) **Fawad Popalyar** – Fawad is an Analyst Principal at Protection Policy, Refugee Affairs Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, working for the Government of Canada. I had two interviews with Fawad. One preliminary to discuss the purpose of this research, which was conducted on Zoom, and the second one through email.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded docs shared by Fawad: Knowledge scan, IRCC deck on regional pilots >

5) **Mokless Hassan** – Mokless is a workplace language worker at Grey Bruce Settlement and Language services, working at the YMCA in Owen Sound, Grey Bruce.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript>

6) **Linda Van Del** – Linda is one of the volunteers working on the sponsorship programme. Linda is from Toronto but she has lived most of her life in the small town of Port Perry. She stated that her involvement started in 2017 when Port Perry's small community attempted to raise money and managed to sponsor four families.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript>

7) **Rebecca Louise Shortt** – Rebecca is one of the volunteers working on the sponsorship programme. Rebecca is from Ottawa and she moved to Norfolk for work. Rebecca is an agricultural engineer. She became involved with sponsorship programmes in 2002 through her husband's church.

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript>

8) **Resettled refugees** – I interviewed four resettled individuals in rural areas of Canada. The individuals prefer to remain anonymous. They were all resettled through private sponsorship and all in rural settings. The names of their towns are as follows:

- **Oshawa, County Durham**
- **Bowmanville, County Durham**
- **Owen Sound, Grey County**
- **Port Dover, Norfolk**

<embedded interview questions>

<embedded transcript> <embedded transcript >

Item C

What follows is a list of the interview questions and answers for each of the individuals I interviewed in the UK prior to carrying out my research. *Access to these files will be restricted due to confidentiality. Full access may be possible upon request.*

<embedded interview questions and answers >

Item D

What follows is a summary of the data collected from the survey carried out in the UK prior to my start of my Fellowship.

<embedded survey summary data >