POWER, POLITICS AND THE POTENTIAL OF PRIVATE HOSPITALITY: VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES OF THE UK COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP SCHEME

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Institute of Research into Superdiversity

School of Social Policy

College of Social Sciences

University of Birmingham

October 2024

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ABSTRACT

In 2024, over 120 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, with the majority seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. This unprecedented increase of global displacement has driven the exploration of alternative solutions to the global refugee situation. Attention has been paid to refugee sponsorship, which involves collaboration between Governments and private actors to facilitate resettlement in communities. Initiated in Canada in the late 1970s, sponsorship has gained traction in the last decade, with over 20 countries piloting national programmes. The UK introduced Community Sponsorship (CS) in 2016, the second of its kind globally.

Despite growing popularity, research on sponsorship, especially concerning volunteer experiences and their broader political implications, remains limited. This gap is notable given that refugee sponsorship relies heavily on volunteers. If national sponsorship programmes are to be developed and sustained they must recruit, motivate and retain volunteers. Bringing together scholarship on sponsorship and critical and volunteer humanitarianism, this study addresses knowledge gaps around the role of volunteers focusing specifically on how volunteers' engagement in CS influences relationships with sponsored refugees and ongoing voluntary activity. Employing a qualitative methodology, I utilise walking interviews and online photo-elicitation interviews to explore volunteer experiences across three timepoints of the CS process: before, during and after the arrival of sponsored families.

Through the lens of hospitality, this study's conceptual framework encompasses a broad understanding of power and political action. Findings indicate that volunteers engage with power dynamics in complex ways over the two-year resettlement

support period. Volunteers awaiting the arrival of a family exhibit a paternalistic perspective on power. However as relationships developed, by the second timepoint they began to engage with diverse forms of power, involving both dominant and more empowering dynamics, including recognition of refugee agency in the resettlement process. By the end of the two-year formal support period, volunteers in the final timepoint demonstrated increased political engagement to advocate for refugees. This engagement took place overtly, through direct political advocacy, but also in a more micropolitical form, through forms of quiet, everyday politics. Overall, while dominant power dynamics persist in some volunteer/refugee interactions, CS demonstrates the potential to foster more balanced, reciprocal relationships and increased engagement in political support for refugees, which evolved from initial, humanitarian acts of care. Though community-based resettlement models face critique, these findings underscore the importance of motivating and sustaining volunteer involvement in CS and similar national schemes, as they offer a pathway towards more reciprocal refugee resettlement.

For Juno.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express sincere thanks to my supervisors, Professor Jenny Phillimore, Mr Angus McCabe and Dr. Jennifer Allsopp, for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and kindness over the past few years. I could not have asked for a more inspiring and supportive supervisory team.

I am fortunate to have had the encouragement of colleagues and friends throughout this process, especially Dr Gabriella D'Avino, Dr Marisol Reyes and Dr Annavittoria Sarli – thank you. Special thanks also go to Elin, Kirsty and many others who have been a steadfast source of support along the way.

I am grateful to several institutions, especially the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub and the team at York University, for hosting me on two occasions, and enriching my research and thinking in distinct and invaluable ways. Thanks also to the Social Policy PGR support team and the team of researchers and administrators within the Institute for Research into Superdiversity.

To my loving family and my second family in Malvern, thank you for your unwavering care and reassurance during the moments when it was most needed. Special thanks to my sister, Ellise, for her friendship and to my parents, Nicola and David, whose belief in me and hands-on support have made this achievement possible.

Finally, a special thanks to George, my life partner and very best friend. You have supported me unconditionally through every step of this journey – the highs and the lows. Thank you for bearing the weight of the difficult days; I look forward to sharing the brighter days ahead with you.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BVOR: Blended Visa Office Referred Programme (Canada)
CP: Complementary Pathway
CPRS: Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Programme (New Zealand)
CRISP: Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot Programme (Australia)
CS: Community Sponsorship
CSP: Community Support Programme (Australia)
ESOL: English for speakers of other languages
EU: European Union
GAR: Canadian Government Assisted Refugee
GRSI: Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative
HC: Humanitarian Corridors
HO: UK Home Office
JAS: Joint Assistance Sponsorship Programme (Canada)
MOAS: Migrant Offshore Aid Station
MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières
NesT: New Start in a Team Programme (Germany)
NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations
NHS: National Health Service
OPEI: Online Photo Elicitation Interview
PSR: Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme (Canada)
RCO: Refugee Community Organisation
RTSO: Refugee Third Sector Organisation
SAR: Search and Rescue
UKRS: UK Resettlement Scheme
UN: United Nations
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VCRS: Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme
VFI: Volunteer Functions Inventory
VPRS: Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

'The likelihood of our living in a world that does not continue to produce refugees is very slim'

(Morton, 2009, p571).

The global displacement crisis is unprecedented. By May 2024, more than 120 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, including 43.4 million refugees (European Commission, 2024). The Syrian civil war, the Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan, the conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza have exacerbated the situation[1] (UNHCR, 2024a). These crises highlight the urgent need for more international protection solutions.

Refugee Sponsorship, a complementary pathway, is gaining prominence as an additional form of resettlement. Sponsorship began in Canada in the 1970s; however, less is known about experiences within other, different, national models. This study examines the experiences of UK volunteers supporting refugees through Community Sponsorship (CS). This is the first scheme of its kind to be introduced outside Canada.

This thesis examines how volunteers involved in CS shape their relationships with sponsored refugees, and how their volunteering roles evolve throughout the resettlement process. It is guided by four key research objectives: 1. To assess existing knowledge of CS volunteering; 2. To explore how volunteers define their roles prior to refugee arrival; 3. To understand how these roles shift as relationships develop and power dynamics change; and 4. To examine how volunteer work transforms across the resettlement process. To address these aims, I adopt a qualitative, recurrent longitudinal approach, making this the first study to capture

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[1] At the end of 2023, the largest refugee populations globally were from Afghanistan (6.4 million), Syria (6.4 million), Venezuela (6.1 million), Ukraine (6 million), and Sudan (1.5 million) (UNHCR, 2024a).

volunteer experiences across three distinct phases of sponsorship. The study makes three core contributions: it offers new empirical insight by exploring the full temporal scope of CS; it introduces the concept of negotiated hospitality to theorise evolving volunteer-refugee relationships; and it innovates methodologically by using walking interviews and online photo elicitation to explore the role of space and place in CS.

1.1: Responses to the global crisis of displacement

Resettlement, one of UNHCR's three durable solutions, alongside voluntary repatriation and local integration, involves relocating refugees from their initial country of refuge to one which agrees to grant protection. Despite increasing need, resettlement remains underutilised (Van Harten, 2023), with only 159,700 refugees resettled in 2023, a small fraction of those needing protection (UNHCR, 2024a). Refugees are unequally distributed globally because resettlement is voluntary and most refugees are hosted in low and middle-income countries neighbouring their country of origin[2] (Hyndman, 2019), though this has received less scholarly attention (FitzGerald and Arar, 2018). During the 'so-called refugee crisis', Europe was hyper-focused on the arrival of over a million refugees, despite newcomers only representing 0.2% of the EU population (Rea *et al*., 2019).

Increasing numbers of arrivals to Europe in 2015 spurred interest in alternative solutions to accommodate and support the growing refugee population (Tan, 2020). Complementary pathways (CPs) represent one option (Van Selm, 2020b), aiming to augment available resettlement opportunities (UNHCR, 2023b). Introduced in the 2016 New York Declaration and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (Van Harten, 2023), CPs provide 'safe and

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[2] At the end of 2023, the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted the largest number of refugees worldwide (3.8 million), followed by Turkey (3.3 million), Colombia (2.9 million), Germany (2.6 million) and Pakistan (2 million). 75% of refugees were hosted by low- and middle-income countries, with 69% of refugees living in countries neighbouring their country of origin. (UNHCR, 2024a).

regulated avenues for persons in need of international protection that provide for a lawful stay in a third country where the international protection needs of the beneficiaries are met' (UNHCR, 2023b). CPs are especially prominent in Europe, but also exist in other countries, for example Japan (Phillimore *et al.,* 2021). UNHCR uses 'complementary pathways' to describe five forms of CPs (Stoyanova, 2023), involving both 'bottom-up' approaches initiated by private actors or organisations[3], and 'top-down', state-led approaches (Varjonen *et al*., 2021, p102). CPs focus on protection, but also education[4] (Evans *et al*., 2022; Share Network, 2023g), labour mobility[5] (Baker *et al*., 2022), family reunification and humanitarian corridors (Ambrosini and Schnyder von Wartensee, 2022; Kulska, 2020), with sponsorship the most employed form of CP.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 1.2 discusses the origins of sponsorship and its global expansion (1.3). Section 1.4 explains how volunteer humanitarianism during the 'so-called refugee crisis' led to the introduction of UK Community Sponsorship (CS) in 2016 (1.5). Section 1.6 outlines key terms, while Sections 1.7 and 1.8 set out the research problem and the study aim and objectives respectively. Section 1.9 outlines the contributions, and Section 1.10 sets out the thesis structure.

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[3] An example of a 'bottom up' approach is the Italian University Corridors in Italy programme (UNICORE) - an educational pathway operated by Italian universities, partnered with UNHCR, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and faith organisations including Caritas Italiana, Diaconia Valdese, Centro Astalli and the Gandhi Charity. It was initially initiated by the University of Bologna which sought to resettle a small number of Ethiopian refugees to Italy. UNICORE has now spread to involve 24 universities across Italy (Varjonen *et al.,* 2021).

[4] Education pathways provide safe access to a host country in the form of an educational scholarship and usually in a higher education setting. Examples include the German Academic Exchange service (DAAD), the French Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (UNIV'R) with Migrants in Higher Education Network (Réseau MenS). In the UK in 2017, Kings College London partnered with UNHCR, the UK Home Office (HO) and Citizens UK to sponsor a family through CS, whilst also providing a higher education opportunity. Since then, the scheme is developing a University Sponsorship Model. In 2022, Leuven University in Belgium partnered with Fedasil and Caritas International to offer a higher education pathway (Share Network, 2023).

[5] Labour mobility schemes provide safe access to a host country through employment. For example in Canada - Hospitality Industry Welcomes Refugee Employments (HIRES by WUSC) and in the UK, the Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot Scheme (DTMPS) (Share Network, 2023).

1.2: The origins of sponsorship

Sponsorship involves collaboration between governments and private actors or organisations (Zanzuchi *et al*., 2023). National schemes vary, but all follow a similar model: 'a public-private partnership between governments who facilitate legal admission to refugees and private actors who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle refugees into the community' (European Resettlement Network, 2017, p11). UNHCR (2023a) distinguishes 'private' sponsorship of named refugees – from 'community' sponsorship, which follows UNHCR referrals (UNHCR, 2023a).

Canada pioneered private sponsorship, formalised by the 1976 Immigration Act[6] (Cameron, 2020). Initially resettling 34,000 Indochinese refugees (Kamran, 2023), today, Canada operates three distinct sponsorship programmes: the Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) programme, the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) programme and the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) programme (Government of Canada, 2023). These programmes differ in selection criteria, Government quota inclusion and support responsibility and duration (Labman, 2022) (see Table One).

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[6] Refugee sponsorship was undertaken informally by religious communities before formalisation of sponsorship through the 1979 Immigration Act (Cameron, 2020).

Programme	Referral – naming principle or UNHCR referral ('sponsor a stranger' model)	Sponsored refugees additional to Canadian resettlement figures	Responsibility for providing support	Length of support
Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR)	Naming principle	Yes	100% sponsorship group	One year
Joint-Assistance Sponsorship (JAS)	UNHCR using criteria of seven categories of vulnerability	No	Government provide 100% financial support and sponsorship group provide resettlement support	Two years
Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)	UNHCR using criteria of seven categories of vulnerability	No	50% sponsorship group and Canadian government	One year

Table One: Canadian models of sponsorship

The PSR programme allows sponsors to select refugees who receive resettlement support for one year (Pohlmann and Schweirtz, 2020; Kamran, 2023). A unique feature is the 'naming principle', allowing sponsors to sponsor specific refugees, often family or ethnonational kin (Yousuf and Hyndman, 2023). Consequently, refugees are often known to sponsors (Hyndman *et al*., 2021). The JAS programme serves refugees with 'special needs'[7] providing combined Government and sponsor support for two years (McNally, 2023, p1). Meanwhile, the BVOR program, introduced in 2013, reduces financial requirements for sponsors for the first six months, with the Government covering the next six months (McNally, 2020b; Labman and Pearlman, 2018). Unlike PSR, refugees are referred by UNHCR (Hyndman *et al*., 2021) and selected by sponsors from a website (Soehl and Van Haren, 2023) with resettlement included in Government targets (Bradley and Duin, 2020; Tan, 2020).

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[7] The definition of refugees with 'special needs' eligible for resettlement via the JAS programme include those who have a greater need of resettlement because of personal circumstances. This could include: a large family, experience of trauma, medical disabilities or the effects of long-term discrimination. One example is a single mother with multiple children (McNally, 2023).

Over four decades, Canada has resettled over 375,000 refugees (Kamran, 2023) - 50% through PSR (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021). While the BVOR programme briefly surged post-2015[8] (Macklin *et al*., 2018) following public outcry over the death of Alan Kurdi (Kamran, 2023; Labman and Cameron, 2020; Morris *et al*., 2022), in recent years, BVOR figures have declined[9] and PSR remains the preferred option due to personal connections (McNally, 2020b; Lehr and Dyck, 2020). The contested 'naming principle' (Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Cameron, 2020) which allows sponsors to select specific refugees, underpins this preference, benefitting sponsors and refugees (Martani, 2020; Agrawal, 2019; Smith, 2020; Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Gingrich and Enns, 2019) and facilitating sustainable sponsorship (Hyndman *et al*., 2021; Chapman, 2014), but also drawing criticism for prioritising family reunification over vulnerability (Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Lenard, 2020; Bond, 2021).

1.3: Global expansion of sponsorship

Interest in community sponsorship has grown due to the increasing global refugee population (Phillimore *et al*., 2022a; Manks *et al*., 2022), with Canada's perceived 'success'[10] influencing global adoption (Bertram, 2022; Bertram *et al*., 2020; Martani and Helly, 2022b; Zanzuchi *et al*., 2023). The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI)[11], launched in 2016, aims to support the international development of sponsorship programmes (GRSI, 2022), though questions remain about the adaptability of Canada's model to other contexts (Smith, 2020). Several global and regional policy frameworks have reinforced this trend, including the 2016

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[8] In 2015, 9,350 PSR refugees were resettled, rising to 19,143 in 2016 (Kamran, 2023). Similarly, the BVOR programme resettled 810 refugees in 2015, increasing to 4,434 in 2016 (Kamran, 2023).
[9] Less than 1,000 people were resettled in 2019 (Rodgers and Porter, 2020), 52 in 2020, and fewer than 80 in 2021 (Kamran, 2023). In contrast, 9,541 PSR refugees were resettled in 2021 (Kamran, 2023).
[10] I caution use of the term 'success' here. Although Canada has undoubtedly been successful in terms of the high number of refugees resettled through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme, it is important to note that UNHCR-referred sponsorship numbers through the Blended-Visa-Office Referred programme (BVOR) and Joint-Assistance (JAS) programme remain low.
[11] The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) was formed from a partnership between the Government of Canada, UNHCR, Shapiro Foundation and the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub.

UN New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the EU's 2020 New Pact on Migration and Asylum (UNHCR, 2016b; UNHCR, 2018; Bertram *et al*., 2020). UNHCR's Three Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (2019-2021) (UNHCR, 2019) further promoted sponsorship, with countries like Argentina, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and Spain committing to introduce or pilot sponsorship (GRSI, 2019).

Over 20 countries now operate or are developing sponsorship (GRSI, 2024). The UK's programme launched in 2016 (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), followed by others in Europe (Share Network, 2023g), Argentina (Kleidermacher, 2019), the USA (Libal *et al.,* 2022), Australia (Kneebone *et al*., 2022), New Zealand (New Zealand Immigration, 2024) and Portugal (Acomunidade, 2024). Italy, France, and Belgium have also established 'humanitarian corridors' (HCs), offering legal entry and support via faith-based organisations (Share Network, 2023f; Tan, 2020). National models vary in selection processes[12], legal status and 'additionality' – whether refugees count towards state quotas (Cortés, 2022). Countries such as the UK, Germany, Italy, France, Belgium and New Zealand practice additionality (Zanzuchi *et al*., 2023; Tissot *et al*., 2024; Home Office, 2021), while Australia, Ireland and Spain count sponsored refugees within their quotas (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023), facing criticism for privatising resettlement (Hirsch *et al*., 2019), and promoting neoliberal migration policies (Dajani, 2021; Ritchie, 2018; McMurdo, 2016; Silvius, 2016). Legal status also varies. Canada and the UK offer near permanent residency on arrival, while France and Italy require asylum approval before full rights are granted (Bertram *et al.,* 2020).

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[12] Countries relying on UNHCR referrals include the UK, Ireland, Spain, Germany, and New Zealand. Other national models are more complex and several countries including Australia (Australian Government: Department of Home Affairs, 2024), New Zealand (New Zealand Immigration, 2024), Portugal (Acomunidade, 2024) and Argentina (Kamran, 2023) have different streams which accept both UNHCR referrals and named refugees.

1.4: The 'so-called refugee crisis'

Despite most of the world's refugees being hosted in countries neighbouring their country of origin (Arar, 2017; Samaddar, 2016), a 'so-called refugee crisis' captured European attention in 2015 (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b). Movement was primarily driven by conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (accounting for 75% of arrivals) (UNHCR, 2015a), plus protracted violence in South Sudan (UNHCR, 2017). In 2016, the UK implemented CS enabling private actors and organisations to take direct responsibility for resettling refugees (Home Office, 2016). CS was prompted by a perceived lack of Government action during 2015-2016 when over a million refugees arrived in Europe, motivating UK civil society to advocate for greater involvement in refugee support (Koca, 2016; D'Avino, 2022b; Van Selm, 2020a).

The influx of refugees challenged Europe's established refugee hosting framework – the 'grand compromise', involving states in the 'Global South' being financed by states in the 'Global North' to host the global refugee population (Arar, 2017, p298). 2015 was unprecedented because Europe was confronted with an emergency close to home as thousands of refugees crossed the Mediterranean, 'disrupting' and 'contesting' the EU migration regime (Rozakou, 2021, p23). There was a fourfold increase in arrivals between 2014 and 2015 (UNHCR, 2016a). The unpreparedness of Europe led to a 'temporary collapse of the European Border regime' (Hess and Kasparek, 2017, p63), as registration was overwhelmed, and normal procedures were waived allowing refugees to travel north (Borton, 2020).

The period between 2015 to early 2016 is often labelled a 'crisis' which has been widely problematised (Phillimore, 2021). Critics of the term argue it oversimplifies the situation, which they argue was more a crisis of EU governance (Pace and Severance, 2016),

European values (Gozdziak and Main, 2020), refugee reception (Arar, 2017; Rea *et al.,* 2019), or humanitarianism (Pries, 2019). Europe had been attempting to limit migration for years (Holmes, 2014) and warnings of escalating refugee numbers had emerged since the 2011 Arab Spring (Hess and Kasparek, 2017). Europe's response remained minimal until 'tragedies started occurring with frightening frequency and Lampedusa became a town with ill forebodings for the managers of Europe' (Samaddar, 2016, p101). Safe resettlement options within Europe were lacking (Fleischmann, 2019) and despite the unprecedented number of arrivals in certain European countries (Phillimore, 2021), crisis terminology only emerged as refugees arrived in Europe in large numbers.

Some scholars contest the term 'crisis', instead referring to the period as the 'European refugee humanitarian crisis' (Carrera *et al.,* 2018, p237) or using quotation marks to question the framing (Chouliaraki, and Zaborowski, 2017; Kyriakidou, 2021). Others prefer the term 'long summer of migration' (Kasparek and Speer, 2015). I use 'so-called refugee crisis' to distance myself from the implications of 'crisis' terminology (Pries, 2019; Hamann and Karakayali, 2016), while providing a concise reference to the high migration period of 2015-2016 (Chouliaraki, and Zaborowski, 2017). My choice acknowledges that the 2015 influx was influenced by flaws in European reception policies (Triandafyllidou, 2018) and that the number of refugees arriving in Europe was small compared to those hosted by less resourced countries (Pace and Severance, 2016; Phillimore, 2021).

1.4.1: Routes during the 'so-called' refugee crisis

In 2015, most refugees arriving in Greece, Italy, and Spain hailed from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea, comprising 85% of total arrivals (UNHCR, 2015b). Refugees travelled via

several main routes: the Western Mediterranean route from Morocco to Spain[13]; the Central Mediterranean route from Libya to Lampedusa, Sicilian ports such as Palermo and Catania, and nearby islands[14] (Clayton, 2020); and the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to islands in Greece, mainly Lesbos, Chios, Kos and Samos. The latter became the most popular route in 2015 due to increased interception of boats travelling to Italy[15]. After reaching Greece, refugees travelled through the Western Balkan route to Central and Northern Europe (UNHCR, 2015b; Sardelić, 2017). This was the most common route during 2015 (Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018), used by over 80% of refugees (Edmonta, 2018). Figure One illustrates the three transit routes and arrival numbers.

Figure One: Key refugee transit routes during 2015/2016. From left to right (in yellow circles) the Western Mediterranean, Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes. The blue shape illustrates the Balkan route. Data source: UNHCR 2015

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[13] The Western route involved sea crossings from Morocco to Spain as well as land crossings to Spanish enclaves in Morocco.

[14] Including the island of Malta.

[15] After a boat carrying 675 refugees sank off the coast of Libya in 2015, the European Commission launched Operation Sophia with the intention of seizing boats used by human traffickers. As a result, the number of refugees using the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece greatly increased.

By autumn 2015, the Western Balkan route shifted as countries built fences and tightened

border controls, causing a 'domino effect' of border tensions throughout the Balkan states

(Bobić and Šantić, 2020, p7). Figure Two illustrates the Western Balkan route and how it

changed through 2015.
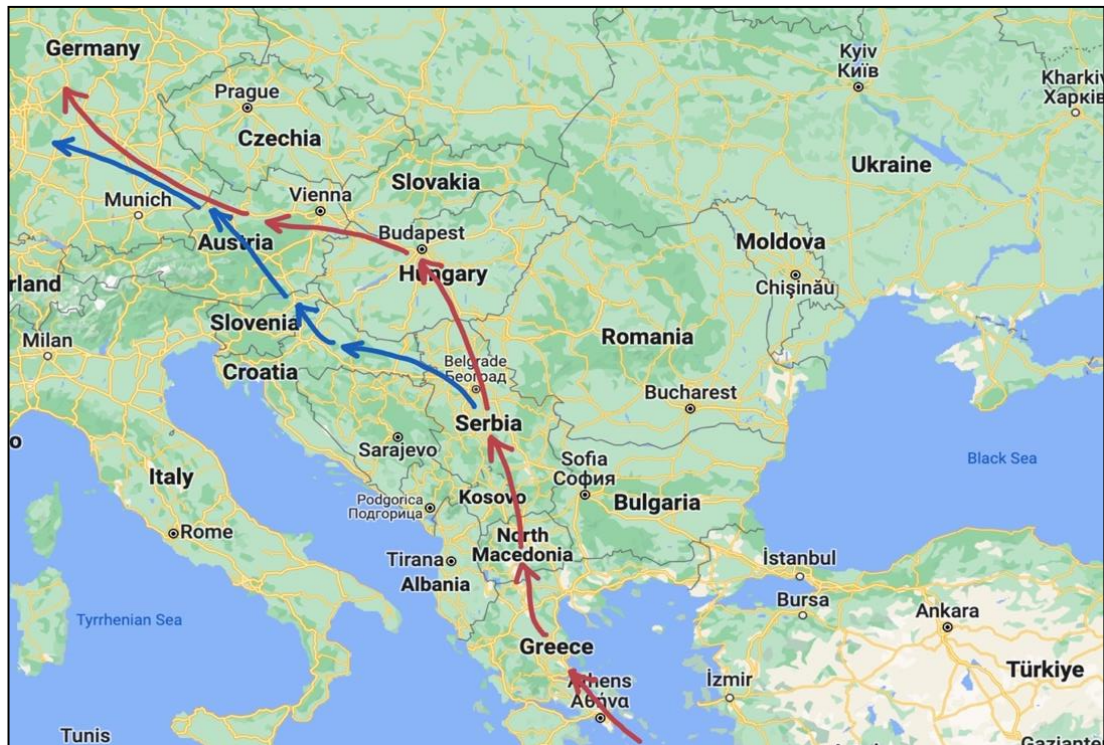
Figure Two: The Balkan route in 2015. The line in red represents the initial route for refugees whilst the blue line highlights how the route changed over the course of 2015. Data Source: Bobić and Šantić, 2020

Initially refugees travelled through Serbia and Hungary, but the route later shifted west to

Croatia and Slovenia (Bobić and Šantić, 2020). After the EU-Turkey agreement in March

2016, the central Mediterranean route became more popular despite a longer and riskier

journey by sea (Borton, 2020).

1.4.2: State hostility and hospitality

In response to the 'so-called refugee crisis'. the European Commission proposed establishing 'hotspots'[16] at border crossings to process asylum applications and initiate a resettlement plan for refugees across Europe (Rea *et al.,* 2019). However, implementing a quota-based relocation scheme proved challenging. The UK Government, led by then-Prime Minister David Cameron, opposed the EU's quota plan and chose to manage its own resettlement policy, launching the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in September 2015 (Koca, 2016). Denmark, Ireland, and several Balkan states also resisted mandatory reallocation (Borton, 2020). Amid the EU's struggle to unify its response, several European countries erected fences and walls along their borders. There was a polarisation of attitudes towards migration (Ataç *et al.,* 2016; Simsa, 2019) with news stories fluctuating between border security and 'narratives of care' (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017, p614). Media coverage functioned as a 'symbolic border', portraying refugees either as strangers to be feared or guests to be welcomed (Kyriakidou, 2021, p134). Yet, increasing securitisation and xenophobia were met with a countervailing culture of welcome and hospitality from civil society (Hinger *et al.,* 2019).

Several countries including Germany, Sweden, and Austria initially supported refugees (Rea *et al.,* 2019; Funk, 2018). In April 2015, Sweden's Prime Minister declared there was 'no limit' on admissions (Bevelander and Hellstrom, 2019, p83), later stressing - 'my Europe does not build walls' (Scaramuzzino and Suter, 2020, p166). In late August 2015, then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced an open-door policy with the slogan 'Wir schaffen das [We can manage it]' (Hinger *et al.,* 2019, p62). Shortly afterwards, Merkel suspended the EU Dublin III Agreement, allowing refugees to seek asylum in Germany regardless of their initial

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[16] Hotspots are areas at external border points with high concentrations of refugees and where refugees are fingerprinted and registered (Carrera *et al.,* 2018).

EU entry point (Funk, 2018). Special transport was organised to move refugees trapped in Hungary to Germany, where they were warmly received, prompting many to redirect their journeys (Rea *et al.,* 2019). Even traditionally anti-refugee media outlets joined campaigns to assist newcomers (Herrmann, 2020). Along the Balkan route, countries directed refugees towards destinations like Germany and Sweden, bypassing asylum claims in transit countries.

Aside from these exceptions, state action towards refugees in 2015 and early 2016 was hostile (Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017), particularly in peripheral EU states like Hungary (Bender, 2020; Bernát *et al.,* 2016) as the Balkan states called for border closures (Rea *et al.,* 2019). In July 2015, Hungary built a fence along its border with Serbia, only allowing crossings through two transit zones and threatening arrest for those attempting to cross elsewhere (Bender, 2020). By mid-September, Hungary closed its border with Serbia under Viktor Orbán's directive, opposing Germany's open-door policy (Rea *et al.,* 2019). Throughout the late summer of 2015, fences and walls were erected between Bulgaria and Turkey, and Macedonia and Greece.

By autumn 2015, destination states began imposing daily resettlement quotas and increasing border checks. Sweden initially welcomed refugees but introduced border control and temporary ID checks from November 2015 (Bevelander and Hellstrom, 2019) - 'Sweden's "exceptionalism", thus, came to an abrupt halt' (Scaramuzzino and Suter, 2020, p166). Austria shifted to stricter controls due to political pressure from right-wing parties (Simsa *et al.,* 2019). States erected borders, especially between Hungary and Croatia, and Bulgaria and Turkey (Rea *et al.,* 2019). The situation worsened after the Paris attacks in November 2015 (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016), and in Cologne during New Year 2016 (Vollmer and Karakayali, 2018). In March 2016, the EU-Turkey deal aimed to stop the refugee flow to Europe by closing the Balkan route (Rea *et al.,* 2019). The EU agreed to pay Turkey six

billion euros and accept one refugee from Turkish camps for every refugee prevented from entering Europe. However, the deal was 'morally problematic' (Funk, 2018, p290) because it left many refugees stranded in transit countries like Greece, Italy and Serbia (Boersma *et al.,* 2019; Chtouris and Miller, 2017).

1.4.3: Volunteer humanitarianism

The influx of over a million refugees to Europe during 2015 spurred a massive civil society response as states struggled or resisted providing support. In response, 'citizen humanitarians' offered practical aid and political solidarity (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1489). A focus of academic attention during 2015-2016 was the rise in ordinary Europeans organising to support refugees (Rea *et al.,* 2019; Della-Porta, 2018). Not unlike state action, civil society's attitudes towards newcomers were polarised. While some saw refugees as threats, others, like Greek fishermen rescuing refugees from the sea, mobilised to provide support (Fouskas, 2019). Despite polarity, 'hostility towards refugees was less pronounced in the public sphere than acts of hospitality' (Rea *et al.,* 2019, p23). While some Amsterdam residents opposed refugee shelters, others welcomed them (Boersma *et al.,* 2019). In Greece, local authorities rejected building reception centres, while pro-refugee groups provided food (Ambrosini, 2019). During this period, tension existed between the EU's exclusionary politics and the largely positive welcome from civil society (Allsopp, 2017). While the EU exhibited 'violent inaction' (Davies *et al.,* 2017, p1263), civil society filled the humanitarian gap (Evangelinidis, 2016; Clayton, 2020; Bernát *et al.,* 2016; Pries, 2019), forming a 'refugee welcome' movement (Della Porta 2018). Later, the clash between 'humanitarianism and securitization' (Allsopp, 2017 p2) led some humanitarian actors to frame their work as political resistance against public (in)hospitality (Stierl, 2018; Fleischmann, 2017; Sandri, 2018).

Individuals and grassroots organisations mobilised to provide immediate help (Evangelinidis, 2016), including locals and volunteers who travelled to help (Simsa *et al.,* 2019) - many of whom had never previously supported refugees (Karakayali, 2016). Four types of groups were active - non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations, social movements and private individuals (Ambrosini, 2021). They engaged in 'vernacular humanitarianism' - everyday ways of supporting refugees (Brković, 2023, p1) including providing food, medicine, accommodation and transportation, plus setting up informal kitchens and providing legal support and language classes (Simsa *et al.,* 2019; Koca, 2016; Hamann and Karakayali, 2016; Karakayali and Kleist, 2016; Sinatti, 2019; Ambrosini, 2019; Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019). They helped refugees find housing (Mayer, 2018), sometimes providing accommodation (Tsavdaroglou, 2019; Boersma, 2019). Notable housing initiatives include the City Plaza Refugee Accommodation Centre in Athens (Tsavdaroglou *et al*., 2019) and Maximiliaan Park in Brussels (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019; Depraetere and Oosterlynck, 2017).

'Care and cruelty were intertwined' as states attempted to criminalise civilians aiding refugees (James, 2019, p3). In Greece, volunteers used car headlights to help boats land safety, while the Greek police threatened volunteers with anti-smuggling legislation (James, 2019). In Hungary, grassroots organisations provided support at railway stations as the Hungarian Government blocked refugees from boarding trains to Germany (Bernát *et al.,* 2016; Feischmidt and Zakariás, 2019). Volunteer action often followed state hostility. When borders closed, volunteers quickly provided resources to stranded refugees (Borton, 2020) and some volunteers moved from their native countries to provide assistance at European hotspots (De Vries and Guild, 2019; James, 2019). Even in countries with low civic activism, such as Hungary (Milan, 2019; Bernát, 2016) and Sweden (Bevelander and Hellstrom, 2019) volunteers provided humanitarian support. These combined efforts created a temporary 'European civil society' (Sandberg and Andersen, 2020, p6) and a new 'culture of welcome' (Hamann and Karakayali, 2016, p69).

The swift volunteer response across Europe was hailed an act of solidarity (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019a), creating a celebrated new movement of volunteering with refugees (Karakayali and Kleist, 2016). In Hungary, approximately 190,000 people volunteered during the emergency period (Kovats and Mazzola, 2019). In Germany, two-thirds of the population supported newcomers, with 27% of participants in self-organised groups and 19% in spontaneous projects, aside from established organisations (Hinger *et al.,* 2019). Berlin alone saw around 150 new projects in 2015, excluding church-based support and established NGOs (Mayer, 2018). Similarly, the Church of Sweden estimated around 37,000 congregants supported refugees monthly (Bevelander and Hellstrom, 2019).

My study contributes to scholarship on 'citizen humanitarianism' (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1489) by focusing on CS as a form of 'private' hospitality supporting refugees (Monforte *et al.,* 202, p675).

1.4.4: UK response

The UK did not experience an elevated number of arrivals in 2015, but two events spurred public engagement in supporting refugees. Firstly, the public observed and sometimes participated in spontaneous volunteering efforts across Europe. While 2015 is often considered the peak of civil involvement in refugee solidarity (Borri and Fontanari, 2017), refugee organisations existed in the UK and other European countries before 2015[17] (Griffiths *et al.,* 2006; Zetter *et al.,* 2005; Borton, 2020; Garkisch *et al.,* 2017). However, many groups refocused and expanded their efforts in 2015 as the situation worsened, resulting in a surge of public support. Approximately 80,000 Britons supported refugees in 2015: travelling

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[17] For example, the Boaz Trust was set up in Manchester in 2004 to support destitute asylum-seekers in the city. In 2005, the Sanctuary movement began in Sheffield, encouraging UK citizens to provide support and solidarity to refugees. Since then, hundreds of cities, towns, schools, universities and local spaces have been awarded sanctuary status.

to European 'hotspots' and fundraising for grassroots initiatives (Clayton, 2020). The Refugees Welcome UK movement linked local efforts with international campaigns in Calais and the Greek islands, emphasising cross-border solidarity with refugees (Koca, 2016; Mayblin and James, 2019). Individuals and grassroots organisations formed informal groups, engaging in activities such as befriending (Askins, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016), home-based hosting (Monforte *et al.,* 2021), advocacy (Mesarič and Vacchelli, 2021), and ESOL classes (Pries, 2019).

The photograph of Alan Kurdi, the toddler who tragically drowned in the Mediterranean on 2nd September 2015, altered wider UK attitudes (Armbruster, 2019; Papailias, 2019), humanising the 'emergency' for ordinary Britons and evoking profound emotions of anger and empathy (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b). Prior to this tragedy, the UK press portrayed the 'emergency' negatively, using 'metaphorical' language which 'othered' refugees largely considered a threat to UK security (Langdon, 2018, p93). The toddler's death marked a pivotal moment, prompting a shift towards a more cosmopolitan perspective and fostering greater awareness of shared humanity (Langdon, 2018). There was a strong parental response to the image, illustrating how deaths are perceived more profoundly once the victim is no longer viewed as foreign or distant (Burns, 2015), transforming the refugee 'emergency' into a relatable and understandable issue (Prøitz, 2018). The public response was swift and unprecedented (Prøitz, 2018), sparking campaigns, petitions, aid collections, and widespread volunteering both locally and abroad (Vis and Goriunova, 2015; Allsopp, 2017; Doidge and Sandri, 2019; Sandri, 2018). Domestically, communities initiated hosting programmes, befriending schemes, food and clothing collections, language classes, advocacy efforts, and legal aid (Maestri and Monforte, 2020; Gunaratnam, 2021). The grassroots response reflected evolving motivations, shifting from responding to distant crises like those 'in the eastern Mediterranean or the "Jungle" camp in Calais', into more 'local place-based action' (Guma *et al.,* 2019, p103). This period of volunteer humanitarianism (Sandri, 2018) is pivotal to this

study because it foregrounds the introduction of UK CS and underpins the scholarly exploration of volunteer-refugee dynamics discussed in Chapter Two.

1.5 UK Community Sponsorship

During the peak of attention on refugees fleeing to Europe, public outcry for active involvement in refugee support grew (Allsopp, 2017). The effort to relocate child refugees from Calais to the UK was likened to the Kindertransport, with Lord Alf Dubs, a former child refugee himself, leading the campaign (Allsopp, 2017). Public sympathy for refugees sharply contrasted with criticism of the UK Government for its perceived lack of support (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b), especially after the image of Alan Kurdi (Arar, 2017). Consequently, on the 4th of September 2015, then-Prime Minister David Cameron extended the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020[18] (Karyotis, 2021; Diamond, 2022; Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017)[19]. The VPRS represented a shift in UK policy towards the Syrian war, previously focused on humanitarian aid and geopolitical support (Foley, 2020). However, criticism included its exclusion of religious minorities (Diamond, 2022) and the creation of a two-tier support-system (Karyotis *et al.,* 2021; Flug and Hussein, 2019). It relied on UNHCR referrals from refugee camps, reinforcing a narrative of deserving versus undeserving refugees who had already travelled to Europe. Samaddar (2016, p93) described the UK 'as an example of a typical European country pledging and talking big in pious and liberal terms and doing almost nothing'. In contrast, civil society organisations pressed for a more direct role in resettlement (Van Selm, 2020a; D'Avino,

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[18] The VPRS was formally announced by Teresa May, the then UK Home Secretary in January 2014. It was extended in September 2015 to resettle 20,000 refugees of Syrian nationality by 2020. In July 2017, the scheme was further extended to include people from other nationalities who had been affected by the Syrian conflict. The VPRS worked on a referral basis. Refugees were identified by UNHCR for resettlement according to 'vulnerability' criteria set by the UK Government. Once identified by UNHCR, individuals were screened by the UK HO who decided whether resettlement would be offered (Diamond, 2022)

[19] The full quota of VPRS refugees eventually arrived in 2021, after delays caused by COVID-19 (UNHCR, 2021).

2022b; Kamran, 2023), prompting the UK Home Office (HO) to introduce CS in 2016 (Home Office, 2016).

Until 2020, the UK operated four resettlement schemes: the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), Gateway and the Mandate Scheme (Wilkins and Sturge, 2020). In 2021, the VPRS and VCRS ended, and the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) replaced Gateway, expanding its global reach (Home Office, 2021). Since 2021, CS refugees have been additional to UK Government targets (Home Office, 2021). However, additionality was not consistently applied in the UK. Until 2020, CS formed part of the 20,000 quota under VCRS and VPRS (Alraie *et al.,* 2018). The UKRS, launched in 2021, includes CS and supports vulnerable refugees globally (Reset Communities for Refugees, 2023), with CS resettlement currently additional and uncapped (Van Selm, 2020b). CS partially mirrors Canada's BVOR programme, emphasising additionality and resettling refugees referred by UNHCR based on vulnerability (Kamran, 2023). In 2018, the charity RESET was established by the UK HO to promote CS.

Since 2016, 1,034 refugees have been resettled through CS (Home Office, 2023a). The programme involves two phases: preparation before the family's arrival and resettlement support afterwards (Reyes-Soto, 2023). Groups seeking to resettle a family must have at least five members and charitable status, either independently or under a lead sponsor like Citizens UK, Sponsor Refugees, and Caritas, who assumes legal responsibility. (Home Office, 2024a). They must demonstrate available funding of at least £9000 and secure suitable accommodation for two years, requiring local authority[20] consent and submission of a resettlement plan, safeguarding policy, and complaints policy. Groups must also complete

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[20] The HO specifies that CS groups must receive written consent from the relevant local authority, but the format of this consent is determined by each local authority area, which in some cases will be a unitary authority or a two-tier authority, depending on the specific location of each group (Home Office, 2024a).

training with RESET before the arrival of sponsored families (Home Office, 2024a). CS facilitates resettlement across the UK, encompassing both rural and urban locations (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020). CS groups include faith organisations, neighbours, sports clubs, pro-migrant groups, and universities (Kings College London, 2020). Organisations from faith and civic backgrounds like Citizens UK, Sponsor Refugees, CHARIS Refugees, and Caritas, are instrumental in encouraging engagement (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Many organisations are lead sponsors and alongside RESET, offer information, training, and guidance to volunteers

On arrival in the UK, families receive indefinite leave to remain with the same rights and benefits as UK citizens and the right to apply for permanent residency after five years[21]. Sponsors initially provide each family member with £200 for living expenses until welfare benefit claims are processed[22]. Furthermore, sponsors assist in obtaining biometric residency permits, enrolling children in school, registering with healthcare providers, and initiating welfare benefits claims at job centres. Throughout the first year, sponsors provide interpreting services, English language lessons, job seeking assistance and facilitating community connections (Home Office, 2024a). See Table Two for further details of CS group tasks.

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[21] Indefinite leave to remain (ILtR) is given for an unlimited period and refugees can apply for citizenship after they have been in the UK for five years, at a cost of £1580 (2024 price).
[22] After a claim is submitted for welfare benefits through the UK Universal Credit system, the minimum wait period for the first payment is five weeks.

Requirements to apply for Community Sponsorship	CS group responsibilities when families initially arrive	CS group responsibilities during the first year
• Charitable status or partner with 'lead sponsor' • Available funding of at least £9,000 • Suitable and affordable housing for a minimum of two years • Written local authority consent • A full resettlement plan • A Safeguarding policy • A Complaints policy • Completion of RESET training	• Meet family at the airport • Provide welcome groceries and £200 per person for essentials whilst the benefits claim is processed • Provide information on transport, local shops and services • Ensure family members receive biometric residence permits • Register children with local schools • Register family with healthcare providers • Advise on accessing mental health support • Support family to apply for benefits (Universal Credit)	• Provide interpreting • Assist with social connections in the community • Support with accessing employment • Provide formal English language tuition (minimum 8 hours per week with an ESOL-qualified teacher) • Supplement English language learning with conversational practice

Table Two: Community Sponsorship group tasks

1.6: Key terms

The key terms in this thesis are private and community sponsorship, refugees, sponsors and volunteers and community. They are used as follows:

- UNHCR's differentiation between **private and community sponsorship** is utilised. Private sponsorship allows individuals to name the refugees they wish to sponsor. Conversely, community sponsorship involves sponsored refugees being 'selected and admitted independently' (UNHCR, 2023a). I refer to all sponsorship programmes

as forms of 'sponsorship' but differentiate between 'private' and 'community' sponsorship when discussing programmes allowing 'naming' and those which do not.

- **Refugee** refers to the formal UN definition as someone who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (sic) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (sic) of the protection of that country' (United Nations, 1951) (Article 1.A.2). An asylum-seeker is someone who 'intends to seek or is awaiting a decision on their request for international protection' (UNHCR, 2024b). UK CS only supports refugees, therefore 'refugees' are more commonly discussed in this study. I acknowledge critical debates on refugee labelling allowing states to create 'systems of hierarchy' (Sajjad, 2018, p56) 'fractioning […] the refugee label, and […] de-labelling refugees' by creating different terms (Zetter, 2007, p90). However, for clarity, I use the term 'asylum-seeker' where necessary to distinguish between refugees supported by CS and those who lack support because they arrive in the UK independently (asylum-seekers).

- The terms **sponsors and volunteers** are used through the sponsorship literature. Both refer to private actors involved in sponsoring refugees. 'Sponsor' is commonly used in Canada and Europe, while 'volunteer' is used in the UK. I use both when discussing different national programmes.

- **Community** is understood as 'a group of people who share an identity-forming narrative' encompassing both communities of place, identity and/or interest (Lowe, 2021). I use the term to refer to communities of local people focused around the formal CS group of volunteers.

1.7: Arriving at the research problem

Research on volunteering with refugees and sponsorship has increased since the 2015 'so-called refugee crisis', although such volunteering is not new (Zetter, 2000; Zetter *et al.,* 2005; Garkisch, 2017). 'Private' hospitality (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p675) often contrasts with state action. In 2010, the then Home Secretary Theresa May introduced the 'hostile environment', a series of policies designed to make life in the UK difficult for asylum-seekers (Goodfellow, 2020). The hostile environment severely restricts support for asylum-seekers, pushing them into destitution (Allsopp et al., 2014; Mayblin *et al.,* 2020). Conversely, 'spaces of encounter' (Koca, 2019b, p552) between volunteers and refugees provide crucial sources of support. CS exemplifies this form of 'private' hospitality (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p675) where volunteers integrate refugee families into their communities. CS was introduced in response to civil society protests against the UK Government's unwelcoming policies. Unlike other forms of 'volunteer humanitarianism' (Sandri, 2018, p65) or 'subversive humanitarianism' (Vandevoordt, 2019, p245) which involve volunteers supporting refugees in opposition to the state, CS operates *alongside* the UK Government (Macklin, 2020; Ambrosini and Schnyder von Wartensee, 2022). The public/private partnership makes CS a unique subject to explore how volunteers perceive their role and negotiate their involvement alongside exclusionary Government policies, and whether participating in a 'space of encounter' (Koca, 2019b, p552), alongside the state, fosters more equitable host/guest relations.

Despite an increase in scholarship on volunteering with refugees post-2015, studies on sponsorship, especially outside Canada, remain limited (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019). Research on sponsor experiences is especially scarce (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Elcioglu, 2023). This gap is important to explore as over 20 countries are now implementing

or considering sponsorship or humanitarian corridors[23] (GRSI, 2022). The EU is incorporating sponsorship into future policy, and UK CS has inspired similar initiatives like the Homes for Ukraine programme (HFU) (Burrell, 2024; Machin, 2023). CS groups provide full resettlement support to refugees for 12-24 months with limited government assistance (Kamran, 2023) and these programmes fundamentally depend on volunteers, without whom they could not operate (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Understanding volunteer dynamics is crucial for the success and sustainability of sponsorship, especially as more countries adopt similar models (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b). As sponsorship gains importance in the Global North, it is essential to understand volunteers' experiences to shape the development of programmes and better support volunteers. Though programmes exist as global resettlement pathways, they operate at 'scales that are intensely local and based 'at home' necessitating a micro-level exploration of how they operate (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021, p4).

Where sponsored refugees are additional to government quotas, sponsor experiences directly impact resettlement numbers and negative experiences can reduce participation. In the UK, CS is one of few safe and legal routes to resettlement within a hostile environment for refugees. Promoting and sustaining CS directly impacts how many refugees have access to UK resettlement. Despite the global adoption of Canada's sponsorship model, CS has not expanded as expected in the UK and Europe. Some groups have not received families or stopped after one (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b) and resettlement numbers remain small. By early 2024, CS had resettled just over 1,000 refugees (Home Office, 2023a), Belgium welcomed 61 refugees, Germany 152, and Ireland 157, numbers considerably below expectations (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023, p7). More research is needed on 'sponsor a stranger' models like CS.

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[23] Countries implementing, planning or exploring sponsorship schemes include Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Sweden, Finland, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, and Brazil (GRSI, 2022).

Most scholarship has examined Canada's PSR programme focusing on 'named' refugees (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019). Understanding sponsors' roles is crucial due to the power they hold in the resettlement process (Lim, 2019). Sponsorship offers rich terrain for exploring host-guest relations over time, linking literature to studies on volunteering with refugees and critical humanitarianism (Christopher *et al.,* 2018). Using CS as a prism, I explore how common criticisms of humanitarian action, such as asymmetric power dynamics and depoliticised support, are negotiated by volunteers over time.

1.8: Research aim and objectives

The research gaps identified in the literature review led to the development of the research aim and four research objectives which guided my study.

This thesis aims to examine the ways in which volunteers' engagement with Community Sponsorship shape their relationships with sponsored refugees and the nature of associated volunteering activity. Through my reading around the topics and my own knowledge of volunteering with refugees, I developed four research objectives which guided the study:

1. To assess the state of knowledge around volunteering within community sponsorship groups.

2. To explore how community sponsorship volunteers define their roles in relation to the sponsored refugees before their arrival.

3. To understand the ways in which volunteers perception of their role might change over time as the sponsored refugees become more integrated into their local community and there is potential for the power dynamic to change.

4. To examine the ways in which the volunteering work undertaken by CS volunteers evolves over time, in relation to their exposure to the sponsored refugees.

To address these objectives, I explored the experiences of CS volunteers through a qualitative, recurrent longitudinal approach. By dividing the four research objectives into three timepoints (before the family's arrival, during the resettlement period, and after the formal support ends), it addresses the limitations of scholarship which only considers one or two periods within sponsorship. Using three timepoints allows for a comprehensive examination of the whole CS process considering changes over time in terms of roles, relationships and the lasting effects of volunteer involvement. This is the first longitudinal study in the field.

1.9: Contributions

My study advances understandings of sponsorship in three key ways. Theoretically, it reframes sponsorship through 'negotiated hospitality', moving beyond a static model of charity to show how volunteers and refugees continually negotiate power, care and political action over time – extending theories of sponsorship, power dynamics and evolving volunteer motivations. Empirically, it offers the first longitudinal analysis of volunteer experiences across pre-arrival, resettlement and post-resettlement, uncovering how motivations, tensions and multiple expressions of power shift over the sponsorship process. Finally, methodologically, the study innovates by using walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews to explore the role of space and place in the CS process, the first time such methods have been used in this way to explore sponsorship. Together, these contributions deepen scholarship on migration governance and volunteerism beyond community sponsorship.

1.10: Thesis outline

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework through a narrative literature review on sponsorship, volunteering and critical humanitarianism. In Section 2.1, I review the sponsorship literature, homing in on the experiences of sponsors as my key focus. In section 2.2. I connect sponsor experiences with broader literature on volunteering and critical humanitarianism. I identify two research gaps: understanding dynamic power relations and whether prolonged involvement with refugees leads volunteers to address structural barriers faced by refugees.

Chapter Three outlines the conceptual framework, synthesising gaps in scholarship to explore how volunteer engagement with CS shapes relationships with refugees and ongoing volunteering. I utilise Bulley's definition of hospitality (2016), extending beyond the point of arrival, and combine the Expressions of power framework (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) with Transformative power (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021) to explore power dynamics (Allen, 1998). Additionally, I incorporate a broad definition of politicisation (Hamidi, 2023) and political action (Fleischmann, 2020) to examine both overt (Hankins, 2017), and implicit (Askins, 2015; Hankins, 2017; Pottinger, 2017) expressions of political engagement.

Chapter Four details how the study responds to the four research objectives. It presents an overview of the research design (4.1) and the philosophical underpinnings (4.2), outlines the qualitative methodology and recurrent cross-sectional study design (4.3), and justifies the use of walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews (4.4). The chapter outlines the use of three timepoints (4.5), ethical considerations (4.6), and the reflexive thematic approach to data analysis (4.7).

To ground the subsequent findings chapters, **Chapter Five** presents contextual data on all 30 participants, addressing the first research objective. It examines the profiles of CS volunteers, their previous volunteering experiences (Section 5.2), motivations (5.3) and experiences with the application process (5.4).

Chapter Six addresses the second research objective, focusing on how volunteers perceive their roles before the families arrive. It uses data from ten participants at timepoint one, identifying two volunteering approaches: paternalistic and partnership.

Chapter Seven focuses on the third research objective exploring whether the power dynamic between volunteers and sponsored refugees evolves over time. It analyses data from ten participants supporting newly arrived families (Timepoint Two) using a broad framework of power (Allen, 1998), the four Expressions of power (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) and transformative power (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021). The conceptual framework highlights how power is negotiated between volunteers and refugees, showing both positive and negative manifestations.

Chapter Eight examines how volunteers manage the end of formal sponsorship after two years and whether involvement raises awareness of and addresses the structural barriers encountered by refugees. It analyses data from ten participants who supported families who arrived over two years ago, exploring politicisation (Hamidi, 2023) and two forms of political action, overt (Hankins, 2017) and implicit (Askins, 2015, Hankins, 2017, Pottinger, 2017).

Chapter Nine integrates the findings with existing literature, highlighting areas of convergence and departure. First, it examines sponsor and volunteer profiles, noting strong social justice and political motivations, consistent with politically-driven refugee support. It then explores pre-arrival expectations, contrasting paternalistic and partnership approaches,

shaped by prior experiences and group dynamics. Pre-existing power imbalances were noted, shaped by volunteers' previous experiences and internal group tensions. Third, it unpacks evolving power dynamics, applying five expressions of power (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021) —from negative (Power Over) to transformative (Transformative power) and balanced (Power with)—while acknowledging refugee agency (Power within and Power to). Finally it situates findings within debates in humanitarianism and activism, linking findings to scholarship recognising humanitarian care as inherently political. It expands prior research by identifying both overt activism (Hankins, 2017) and subtler political acts within CS (Askins, 2015, Hankins, 2017, Pottinger, 2017).

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis by discussing contributions (10.1), methodological limitations, (10.2), generalisability (10.3) and implications for future research (10.4). In Section 10.5 I offer a final statement and conclude with a set of recommendations aimed at policymakers and refugee support organisations.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMING OF VOLUNTEER/REFUGEE RELATIONS

This thesis is informed by three threads of scholarship: sponsorship, volunteering and critical humanitarianism. A narrative review guided the selection process to map the current state of knowledge in these areas. First, I map current knowledge on sponsorship (Section 2.1), before focusing on the experiences of sponsors and volunteers (Section 2.2). In Section 2.3, I connect identified gaps in sponsorship research with broader scholarship on volunteering with refugees and critical humanitarianism. In Section 2.4, I summarise the key findings of the literature review.

2.1 Sponsorship

2.1.1: Sponsorship as a field of research

Canada's sponsorship model originated during the Indochinese crisis, resettling over 200,000 South-East Asian refugees between 1976 and 1997 (Casasola, 2016). Early research centred on this group (Roma, 2016), addressing health (Beiser 1999; Morton, 2009; Beiser, 2010), mental health (Beiser and Fleming, 1986; Beiser *et al.,* 1989), language (Beiser and Hou, 2000; Feng and Morton, 2006), employment (Morton and Feng, 2001) and integration (Lanphier, 2003). Studies compared private and government-sponsored refugees, examining employment (Tran, 1991), health and integration (Morton, 2003; Soojin *et al.,* 2007), and housing (Robert, 2008). Scholarship was initially sparse (Molloy and Simeon, 2016), often limited to specific national groups (Cameron, 2020). Media coverage during the 'so-called refugee crisis' (Drolet *et al.,* 2018; Lenard, 2016)[24], revived interest post-2015[25]

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[24] Interest in sponsorship grew significantly after 2015 due to the Syrian war and the 2016 Global Compact on Refugees. However, countries like Germany, Argentina, Ireland, Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand had already tested short-term sponsorship schemes before 2015 (Lenard, 2016).
[25] Hyndman and colleagues (2021) note a 400% increase in sponsorship over the past decade, with PSRs comprising the majority of those resettled. Over 40,000 Syrian refugees have been privately sponsored in Canada

(Kamran, 2023), especially in relation to Canada's Syrian response (Hynie, 2018), bolstered by newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's pro-refugee stance (Labman, 2019).

Since 2015, scholarship has re-examined the Indochinese experience (Molloy and Madokoro, 2017; Hou, 2017), exploring the future of sponsorship (Casasola, 2016; Kumin, 2015). Recent studies focus on Syrian refugees (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b). Alongside global export of Canada's model (Bond and Kwadrans, 2019), research on other national schemes has grown since 2015, including the UK (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020; Hassan and Phillimore, 2020), Australia (Hirsch *et al.,* 2019; Vogl and Hirsch, 2019) and Germany (Pohlmann and Schweirtz, 2020; Tissot *et al.,* 2024), reflected in both academic and policy literature (Tan, 2020).

Thematically, research on sponsorship can be divided into two areas: national evaluations (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Share Network, 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e; 2023f; Agatiello *et al.,* 2020; Tan, 2019; Fratzke *et al.,* 2021) and specific aspects of sponsorship including: legal and policy frameworks, impact, critical perspectives, integration, place, and sponsor experiences (See Sections 2.1.2.a-2.1.2.e).

2.1.2: A framework of sponsorship research

2.1.2.a: Legal and Policy Framework

A sub-field focuses on the historical development of Canadian sponsorship (Hyndman *et al.,* 2017a; Treviranus and Casasola, 2003; Lanphier, 2003; Labman and Pearlman, 2018), largely considered successful (Labman and Pearlman, 2018), prompting research into global

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through the PSR programme, with an additional 5,000 through the BVOR programme (Government of Canada, 2023).

policy transfer[26] (Krivenko, 2012; Kumin, 2015; Bertram, 2022; Bertram *et al.,* 2020). Sponsorship can be enacted without complex legal structures – enabling an increase in resettlement and representing an 'an international "durable solution"' (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021, p11). However, concerns persist regarding the applicability of a 'one-size-fits-all-model' (Bertram *et al.,* 2020, p254), particularly in Europe, given sponsorship's specific origin in Canada's political context (Smith, 2020).

2.1.2.b: Impact of Sponsorship

Research highlights the positive impact on sponsors (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019), including forming friendships, acquiring skills, and finding fulfilment (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b; Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021). Sponsor-refugee relationships often evolve into friendship (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Labman, 2016), offering insight into refugees' pre-settlement lives (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019; Blain *et al.,* 2020). These relationships can shift negative public attitudes (D'Avino, 2022a; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023), even in less diverse communities (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020). Embedded sponsors share positive experiences (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019) and act as 'trusted messengers' (Bond, 2021, p164) helping to create environments where 'fears about refugees are harder to sow' (Lenard, 2020, p733). Contact between local people and sponsored refugees facilitates quicker integration (Lim, 2019), and dispels misconceptions (Bond, 2021; Gingrich and Enns, 2019) as interaction correlates with greater acceptance (De Coninck *et al.,* 2021). Private actor involvement fosters ownership of resettlement (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019), challenging the view of refugees as a state burden as sponsorship is largely[27] privately funded (Lim, 2019). In the US, recent adoption of sponsorship (Libal *et al.,* 2022) has bolstered

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[26] Policy transfer is where one country – in this case Canada – encourages other governments to adopt a particular policy – in this case, refugee sponsorship (Bertram *et al.,* 2020).
[27] Most sponsorship programmes are privately funded. However, the Canadian BVOR programme shares costs between private groups and the Canadian Government, with the Government covering half the sponsorship cost.

resettlement support, suggesting public engagement enhances acceptance (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022).

2.1.2.c: A Critical Examination of Sponsorship

As sponsorship programmes expand globally, critical examination of their structure and impact is essential (Elcioglu, 2023; Cortés, 2023; Lenard, 2016). Concerns include delays, paperwork (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; McNally, 2020b) and the 'administrative burden' (Sabchev and Hennessey, 2024, p1), which hosts sometimes experience 'vicariously' (Tomlinson *et al.,* 2024, p1). Beyond bureaucracy, critique focuses on naming, additionality, and the privatisation of resettlement.

Canada's PSR programme[28], Australian programmes (Australian Government: Department of Home Affairs, 2024) and some programmes in New Zealand[29] (New Zealand Immigration, 2024), Argentina[30] (Patrocinio Comunitario, 2024), and Portugal (Acomunidade, 2024), allow sponsors to 'name' refugees. Naming is a double-edged sword (Lehr and Dyck, 2020). It can aid integration[31] (Martani, 2020; Agrawal, 2019; Felder *et al.,* 2020), through pre-existing social networks (Smith, 2020 p298) and motivate sponsors (Gingrich and Enns, 2019), sustaining engagement [32] (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021) through the 'echo-effect' [33](Chapman,

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[28] The Canadian BVOR and JAS programmes do not allow named sponsorships and rely on UNHCR referrals.
[29] The New Zealand Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa permits both UNHCR referrals and named refugees by approved community organizations.
[30] Argentina's Syria programme allows 'called' refugees (named by Argentinian relatives) and 'requested' refugees (referred by UNHCR).
[31] I caveat this point because while named sponsorships are valued, they are not always successful. Some privately sponsored refugees face challenges when sponsored by distant relatives who were unprepared to provide adequate resettlement support (Martani, 2020, Agrawal 2019). Family support networks are not always positive, but there is also a negative aspect, including where family members financially abuse the refugee family members to whom they are offering a home (Felder *et al.,* 2020).
[32] Even where they feel tired and lack resources, sponsors linked to refugees often persevere due to family or ethnonational ties (Hyndman *et al,.* 2021)
[33] The 'echo-effect is where resettled refugees sponsor family members, serving as de-facto family reunion. Of 530 privately sponsored Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada after November 2015, more than half of the sponsors have since been asked to support additional family members and ethnonational kin (Labman *et al.,* 2019).

2014, p9). It can reduce financial strain on refugees[34] (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023) and

address family separation (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022a; Phillimore

et al., 2023). Some scholars argue naming should extend to more urgent humanitarian cases

(Krivenko, 2012; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023).

Yet, debates persist about resettlement's purpose (Bond, 2021; Hyndman *et al.,* 2021),

especially where naming favours 'connected' refugees over the most vulnerable (Lenard,

2020). However, 'sponsor a stranger' programmes struggle with recruiting sponsors.

Canada's BVOR programme (Lehr and Dyck, 2020), despite financial support[35] (Morris *et al.,*

2022), has only resettled 9,201 refugees since 2013, compared with 108,600 though PSR[36]

(Kamran, 2023). Without existing social networks, resettling strangers proves more

challenging (Morris *et al.,* 2022). Like the BVOR programme, other sponsorship models

which rely on UNHCR referrals[37] face sustainability challenges (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Ball,

2022), as seen in Germany's NesT [38] (Tissot *et al.,* 2024) and UK CS[39] (Phillimore *et al,*

2021). Without some element of naming or family reunion, there is a risk that sponsorship

may struggle to maintain longevity (Lehr and Dyck, 2020).

Additionality, the principle that sponsored refugees are over and above government quotas

(Martani, 2020; Labman, 2016) is key to evaluating success (McNally, 2020a). Initially,

Canadian sponsorship aimed to boost overall resettlement, with the Canadian Government

matching each sponsored refugee (Casasola, 2016), guarding against accusations of

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[34] Resettling family members in Canada reduces the need for resettled refugees to send financial remittances abroad.

[35] Despite an American charity, The Shapiro Foundation, offering to fund BVOR sponsorships, the programme still fell short of the Canadian Government target of 1,500 refugees (Morris *et al.,* 2022).

[36] Since 1979, 374,121 refugees have been resettled through the PSR programme (Kamran, 2023).

[37] In the UK, Ireland, Spain (Basque region), Germany, and Belgium, refugees are referred by UNHCR based on seven vulnerability criteria (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023).

[38] Germany's pilot NesT programme aimed to resettle 500 refugees between 2019 and 2021 but only resettled 118 (Tissot *et al.,* 2024).

[39] UK CS has resettled just over 1,000 refugees since 2016, whereas 131,000 Ukrainians received visas through the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme, which allowed specific refugees to be named for resettlement (Burrell, 2024).

privatising resettlement (Labman, 2016) and expanding protection (Lim, 2019). In Canada, PSR refugees are additional, while BVOR and JAS refugees are included in Government figures, leading to critique of partial additionality (Lenard, 2016). Globally, additionality varies (Cortés, 2022). UK CS now complements Government targets[40] (Home Office, 2021), as do Germany's NesT[41] and Humanitarian Corridors in Italy, France and Belgium (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023). Other countries – like Ireland and Spain – include sponsored refugees in state quotas (Irish Refugee Council, 2023; Share Network, 2023a) whereas Belgium employs various approaches[42] (Share Network, 2023d). Argentina's programme is criticised for replacing state-led resettlement (Cortés, 2023) and Australia's programmes count towards quotas and are costly[43] (Vogl and Hirsch, 2019; Hirsch *et al.,* 2019). Conversely, New Zealand practices additionality, despite prioritising job-ready refugees like Australia (New Zealand Immigration, 2024).

States favour sponsorship due to private funding (Martani, 2021; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b). In Canada, PSR refugees now outnumber Government-resettled refugees, raising concerns that sponsorship is obscuring Government responsibility[44] (Elcioglu, 2023). Critics warn against growing reliance on private actors (Ritchie, 2018; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), especially where programmes lack additionality (Hirsch *et al.,* 2019). Canada is accused of promoting 'privatising international protection' (Smith, 2020, p297), echoing past concerns (Treviranus and Casasola, 2003). Sponsorship may function as a migration management tool, admitting 'deserving' refugees (Bradley and Duin, 2020; D'Avino, 2022b), with

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[40] When CS was introduced in 2016, it formed part of the UK Government pledge to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. However, since the end of the VPRS and VCRS in 2020 and introduction of the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) in 2021, CS resettlement has been additional to Government resettlement targets (Home Office, 2021).
[41] In Germany, additionality was key to sponsor motivation (Tissot *et al.,* 2024).
[42] Belgium operates both a humanitarian corridors programme and a sponsorship programme, the latter included in Government resettlement targets.
[43] Sponsoring a family in Australia can cost up to $20,000 per person, limiting access to those who can afford it (Hirsch *et al.,* 2019).
[44] Canada plans 22,500 spaces for PSR, almost double the 12,500 Government-assisted spaces and 1,000 BVOR places (Elcioglu, 2023).

welcoming narratives outsourced to communities (Labman, 2016), seen as neoliberalism in action (Dajani, 2021; Ritchie, 2018; McMurdo, 2016; Silvius, 2016). It may also reflect a form of 'domopolitics' (Gunaratnam, 2021, p717), as the state transfers responsibility for resettlement but governs 'who gets to stay and […] to be cared for' through community goodwill (Dajani, 2021, p10). Mavelli (2018, p489) argues vulnerability-based resettlement commodifies refugees as 'emotional capital that can strengthen the humanity capital' in a neoliberal framework. Finland has hesitated to adopt sponsorship for this reason (Turtiainen and Sapir, 2021). Critique from outside migration studies draw parallels to foodbanks (Garthwaite, 2016) and food donations (Poppendieck, 1999) – which act as a 'smokescreen' for the government to 'institutionalis[e] charitable forms of support' (Williams *et al.,* 2016, p5).

2.1.2.d: Refugee Integration

Many states introduce sponsorship with integration as a primary goal (Bond, 2021; Kamran, 2023) because sponsorship enhances integration in three areas: 'human capital', 'social networks', and 'physical and financial resources' (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019, pp.3-4). Despite varying support[45] (Agrawal, 2019; Fratzke *et al.,* 2019), and challenges[46] (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Martani, 2021), sponsors help refugees access services (Ball, 2022; Fratzke *et al.,* 2019; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), healthcare (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Alraie *et al.,* 2018), and support with transport, language learning, childcare, and employment (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023), improving refugees' wellbeing (Altinay *et al.,* 2023). Sponsors also provide emotional

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[45] Sponsors play a crucial role in refugee integration, but support levels vary due to sponsors' diverse experiences and refugees' circumstances (Fratzke *et al.,* 2019). A Canadian study found that PSRs do not always receive better support than GARs, with outcomes depending on sponsor characteristics and relationships Sponsors were categorised into three groups: well-resourced church groups, those meeting only legal minimums, and those abandoning refugees either because they had already agreed they would not provide support or because sponsors lost the means to look after them.
[46] Sponsors face structural challenges like housing shortages and accessing healthcare (Hassan & Phillimore, 2020; Martani, 2021).

support (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020), sometimes forming close bonds[47] (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), acting as 'initial anchors', with greater social capital (Ali *et al.,* 2022, p482).

Canadian research primarily focuses on economic integration. Privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) find jobs faster and earn more initially due to sponsor (Beiser, 2003; Hyndman *et al.,* 2017b; Mata and Pendakur, 2017; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), and family networks (Hynie *et al.,* 2019). In the US, community support increases refugee language class enrolment and employment (Linn, 2022). PSRs may secure jobs faster due to limited financial support, motivating quick employment (Lenard, 2019). However, challenges persist, including pressure experienced by sponsored refugees to accept low-skilled jobs (Silvius, 2020), rapid employment hindering language learning (Hyndman and Hynie, 2016), and problems with qualification recognition (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Of course, these barriers also apply to all refugees and there is no sign that these can be alleviated by sponsorship.

Research diverges on whether these economic advantages are sustainable in the long-term (Kamran, 2023), or if differences reflect demographic disparities between groups of refugees like higher education and language skills (Hynie *et al.,* 2019; Martani and Helly, 2022). Research also fails to differentiate between refugees resettled through PSR or BVOR programmes (Soehl and Van Haren, 2023), leading to varied integration outcomes, especially in the short term (Kaida *et al.,* 2022). Scholars urge more nuanced distinctions between sponsorship programmes and outcomes (Agrawal, 2019), addressing pre-arrival differences (Ball, 2022, Stansbury, 2022).

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[47] Several studies report that while close relationships were formed, some UK refugees felt uncomfortable when sponsors connected them with others from similar backgrounds (Hassan & Phillimore, 2020).

2.1.2.e: Impact of Place

Rural sponsorship is gaining attention (Haugen, 2019). While urban resettlement dominates due to better services, greater diversity (Hynie *et al.,* 2019; Agrawal and Seraphine, 2017; Belkhodja, 2020) and lower-cost housing (Glorius *et al.,* 2016), sponsorship expands resettlement to rural communities (Haugen *et al.,* 2023). Canada's PSR programme engages communities nationwide, unlike Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), typically resettled in cities (Labman, 2016). During the 'so-called refugee crisis' rural Canadian communities saw increased sponsorship involvement (Neelin, 2020), with 350 communities participating (Haugen, 2019). Similarly, UK CS involves groups from urban and rural areas[48] (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Rural resettlement presents challenges including isolation, limited services, and transportation barriers[49] (Haugen, 2019). UK volunteers can face difficulties obtaining local authority approval and report low CS awareness in rural areas (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Male refugees report feelings of isolation (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), along with challenges learning English, accessing services and finding employment[50] (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Phillimore and Reyes-Soto, 2019). Racism and discrimination are ongoing concerns (Ewart-Biggs, 2023). While sponsors can't eliminate these problems, they work to pre-empt issues through community engagement and information-sharing (Neelin, 2020; Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020). Increased visibility of refugees and sponsors can spark local support through 'reception diffusion', where sponsorship supporters engage sceptics (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2020a, p285).

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[48] A 2020 UK study involved 15 families who lived in urban areas, while 10 resided in small towns in rural areas (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020).

[49] Transportation is an issue. Purchasing a car and passing a UK driving test are costly and limited by language ability (Phillimore *et al*., 2020). Lack of a car in rural areas also hinders employment access (Hassan & Phillimore, 2020). Evaluations recommend gathering refugee preferences before arrival to inform resettlement and providing additional support with driving, especially in rural areas (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Hassan & Phillimore, 2020). Some sponsors in Canada and the UK help refugees with driving lessons and access to a car (Haugen, 2019; Hassan & Phillimore, 2020).

[50] Men report cultural problems using the bus, seeing it as a marker of poverty (Hassan & Phillimore, 2020).

Despite challenges, sponsors develop solutions to facilitate rural integration (Haugen, 2019), drawing on religious communities to ease concerns pre-arrival (Neelin, 2020). In areas with limited services (Drolet *et al.,* 2018; Drolet *et al.,* 2020), sponsors fill critical gaps and close-knit rural communities can foster 'enhanced social capital' supporting employment and belonging (Haugen, 2019, p55). Housing is reportedly easier to secure in rural areas (Phillimore and Dorling, 2020), and refugees are more likely to remain if they feel welcomed (Haugen, 2019). The notion that rural communities are less welcoming to refugees is increasingly rejected (Haugen *et al.,* 2024) as research shows sponsorship benefits both refugees (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2020a; Haugen, 2019; Haugen *et al.,* 2024) and rural communities - bringing new skills, social capital and diversity (Haugen, 2019). Scholars advocate for more rural resettlement, though research in this area remains limited (Haugen and Hallstrom, 2022).

2.1.3: Sponsor experiences

In Chapter One, Section 1.7, I argued it was important to focus on sponsors because new resettlement programmes are increasingly reliant on private actors. Research on sponsors is limited (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Elcioglu, 2023) and scholarship prioritises refugee experiences (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Hanley *et al.,* 2018; Ali *et al.,* 2021; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Research which considers both refugees and sponsors[51] (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023; Haugen, 2019; Haugen, 2023; Hyndman *et al.,* 2021), involves fewer sponsors[52] (Agrawal and Sangapala, 2021). With some exceptions (Reyes-Soto, 2023; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Tissot *et al.,* 2024), most scholarship is Canadian, and features 'named'

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[51] One study focused on the role of faith organisations in refugee resettlement rather than on the sponsors themselves (Derksen & Teixeira, 2023).
[52] Another study involved 15 GAR refugees but only included two representatives from sponsoring organisations (Agrawal & Sangapala, 2021).

sponsorship (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Elcioglu, 2023; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Blain *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Hyndman *et al.,* 2021).

Research on sponsors can be categorised into four sub-themes (see Figure Three): profiles and motivations, host/guest relations, the end of sponsorship and post-involvement effects on sponsors.

Figure Three: Overview of sponsor experiences within scholarship

2.1.4: Sponsor profiles

A consistent sponsor profile is identified across national programmes. Sponsors possess financial means and time to participate and are often white[53], over 50, and retired (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023). Most are female[54] and Canadian sponsors report high levels of income and education[55]. Recent studies confirm this common profile (Elcioglu, 2023; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Neelin, 2020), with minor differences, such as a larger proportion of retired sponsors in the UK compared to Canada (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Recent reports indicate small changes in UK sponsors, showing a more balanced age distribution and a more equal split between retired and working volunteers[56] (Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021). Canadian programmes also feature former refugees who, despite being essential, are rendered 'invisible' (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021, p2). There is a need for greater diversity in sponsor groups, especially regarding race and socio-economic background. The predominance of white, middle-class women creates difficulties for refugee men who prefer support from male volunteers (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020; Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021; Haugen, 2019).

2.1.5: Sponsor motivations

Newly engaged (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), and long-term sponsors, including resettled refugees (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021) have diverse and multiple motivations (Blain *et al.,* 2020). These include religion, personal networks, migration history, civic

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[53] In the UK CS evaluation, all but four participants were white British (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). In Canada, 88% of participants identified as having 'European heritage' (Macklin *et al.,* 2018).

[54] 74% of Canadian sponsors are women and 75% of UK volunteers are women (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020, Macklin et al., 2018).

[55] 54% of Canadian sponsors earned over $100,000 (Macklin *et al*., 2018).

[56] A report from the UK charity RESET in 2021 outlined that a broader age range of volunteers are becoming more active in CS, with the same number of volunteers in the 35-54 age groups, as those aged over 65. Additionally, while the 2020 evaluation report found most volunteers were either retired or semi-retired, more recently, the split has become more balanced with a 50/50 split between those who are working and those who are retired. (Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020).

engagement, personal fulfilment (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023) and humanitarian concerns (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Tito and Cochand, 2017; Janzen *et al.,* 2021; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b; Tissot *et al.,* 2024; Alrawadieh *et al.,* 2024). The 'so-called refugee crisis' and the image of Alan Kurdi, catalysed action amongst first time sponsors (Reyes-Soto, 2022; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2018)[57]. Both positive and negative emotions play a role in motivating and sustaining sponsorship (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b; Jasper, 1998; 2011), reflecting 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin, 2012) – an emotional response to suffering that foregrounds compassion over rights (Korteweg *et al*., 2023, p3959).

Faith is a prominent motivator in the UK (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), Canada (Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Bramadat, 2014; Chapman, 2014; Morris *et al.,* 2022) and Europe (Zanzuchi *et al., 2023*; Tissot *et al.,* 2024). 50% of UK sponsors are affiliated with faith organisations, with religious leaders urging participation[58] (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). In Canada, Mennonite groups align sponsorship with both religious values and their historical experiences of displacement[59] (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021; Gingrich and Enns, 2019). Social networks also shape involvement (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Neelin, 2020), with personal invitations and existing connections playing a key role (Reyes-Soto, 2023; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). These motivations align with broader volunteer motivations. The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary *et al*., 1998) includes six motivations - values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement, many of which are also relevant to sponsors, though the 'career' element is less significant. Meijeren (2023) identifies four specific motivations for volunteering with

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[57] Media coverage was a significant motivator for many sponsors, with the image of Alan Kurdi's body being particularly impactful in the UK (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). However, Canadian sponsors showed varied responses to this image, with 37% marking it as 'very important' and 46% as 'somewhat important', compared to 76% who found general media coverage 'very important'. It is suggested that this is because the experiences of some Canadian sponsors preceded the 'so-called refugee crisis' and the Syrian crisis (Macklin *et al.,* 2018).
[58] Both the Pope and the head of the Church of England urged congregations to participate in CS when it was launched (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020).
[59] In Canada, Mennonite sponsors were motivated by faith and personal connections to 'refugeeness,' with over half citing family refugee stories and the Mennonite Central Committee's history in resettling Mennonites from the Soviet Union in the 1920s (Good Gingrich & Enns, 2019).

refugees: 1. Seeking a meaningful role, 2. Pragmatism, 3. Emotional reasons, and 4. Media exposure. Additional studies also add 'social justice' (Jiranek *et al.,* 2013).

Canada's sponsorship history provides insight into long-term sustainability (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021). Long-term sponsors[60] fall into two groups: those driven by social justice, and those seeking to reunite family members through named sponsorship reflecting a sense of reciprocity and 'community practice' (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021, p5). Even refugees resettled through the BVOR programme later seek support with named sponsorship of family members (Macklin *et al.,* 2018). Positive experiences often leads to continued involvement[61] (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Haugen, 2023). However, 'sponsor a stranger' models face recruitment challenges. Expensive housing and the need to provide ongoing support to existing families deters some groups from re-sponsoring[62] (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Van Buren, 2021; Hyndman *et al.,* 2021). In Belgium and Ireland, sponsors commonly need a break, with less than a third open to re-sponsoring (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023). Similarly, less than a third of Canada's BVOR sponsors support more than one family (Zanzuchi *et al*., 2023), with most preferring to support current refugees (McNally, 2020b), and 65% unprepared to sponsor again due to the time and effort required (Elcioglu, 2023). These findings raise concerns about the sustainability of 'sponsor a stranger' programmes like UK CS where sustaining involvement is crucial (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b).

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[60] Long-term sponsors are those who have been involved in sponsorship for over ten years, though some who had been involved for five years were also included (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021).
[61] Haugen found that 40% of sponsor groups continued supporting another family (Haugen, 2023), and Macklin found 64% were willing to sponsor again, with 88% recommending it to others (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a).
[62] The UK evaluation was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 (January 2017-March 2018) included 14 groups, and Phase 2 (March 2019-March 2020) included 8 more groups. In Phase 1, 6 of the 14 groups were supporting or preparing to support a second family, and 2 were considering a third. In Phase 2, 37.5% of groups decided against further sponsorship due to problems accessing housing and concerns about ongoing support for first families (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020).

2.1.6: Asymmetric power dynamics

A scholarship sub-field focuses on the interpersonal dynamics between sponsors and refugees (Blain *et al.,* 2020; Ali *et al.,* 2022; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Van Buren, 2021). Sponsors use familial terms to describe relationships with refugees[63] (Derksen and Teixeira, 2023; Ali *et al.,* 2022; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Blain *et al.,* 2020; Reyes-Soto, 2023), comparing their role to 'mothering' (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023, p10) and referring to 'Syrian grandchildren' (Neelin, 2020, p86). Scholars argue these 'kin-like' relationships are encouraged by sponsorship policy designs which prioritise family resettlement (Macklin *et al*., 2020a).

However, familial dynamics imply both care and control (McNally, 2020c). Sponsors provide support, but also perpetuate inequality and hierarchy (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Ali *et al.,* 2022) through paternalistic attitudes (Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), infantilising refugees and impeding their integration as equals (Lim, 2019). Kinship analogy underscores the power asymmetry between sponsors and refugees, posing ethical concerns (Lim, 2019). Refugees appreciate sponsors' care (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), but feel uncomfortable with paternalistic behaviour. For example, when sponsors dictate employment choice (Ali *et al.,* 2022), or arrange social events (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020), experiences which are exacerbated by language barriers (Ali *et al.,* 2022; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Scholars examine this relationship through a hospitality lens (Hutchinson, 2018; Haugen, 2023; Neelin, 2020; Macklin, 2020; Reyes-Soto, 2023). While sponsorship extends welcome, it also establishes unequal power dynamics, with sponsors in control (Haugen, 2023), and refugees vulnerable to varying support (Lenard, 2016; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Hospitality has two sides:

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[63] In a survey, sponsors often described their relationship with refugees as 'friendship' rather than a 'service provider and client' dynamic, even without prompting (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a p184).

'The positive valence of hospitality emphasizes openness and welcome, and potential

initiation into deeper and transformative relations, including evolution in the roles of host and

guest; the negative valence focuses on the ineluctable asymmetry of power, conditionality

and boundedness embedded in the host-guest dyad' (Macklin, 2020, p34).

Though not a feature of UK CS, Canadian (PSR) sponsors influence refugee selection and

family reunification through 'naming' refugees. As '"gatekeepers" in the immigration system'

(Elcioglu and Shams, 2023, p98), PSR sponsors shape relationships within and beyond

Canada, influencing international ties through family reunification and remittance sending[64]

(Elcioglu and Shams, 2023). However, this creates inequality where some refugees lack

access to family reunion (Morris *et al.,* 2021), and others are reliant on subjective decision

making by sponsors[65] (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023). This leads to unmet expectations and

disappointment (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), and raises ethical concerns about private actors

making pivotal choices (Elcioglu, 2023; Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Hutchinson, 2018; Elcioglu and

Shams, 2023). For some, the peculiarity of sponsorship being utilised as a form of family

reunion without Government oversight, led sponsors to acknowledge Canada's 'coercive

side' for the first time (Elcioglu, 2023, p108).

Sponsors often portray refugees as victims, reinforcing unequal power dynamics (Hyndman,

2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), with sponsors positioned as saviours (Kyriakides *et al.,*

2019c). This view overlooks refugees' agency (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Hyndman, 2019),

reducing refugees to statistics[66] (Labman and Pearlman, 2018), and oversimplifying their

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[64] Some Canadian sponsors discouraged remittances, fearing they might impede resettlement, while others supported transnational ties by agreeing to sponsor family members from overseas (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023).
[65] For instance, some sponsors refused further sponsorship until the first family was no longer claiming state welfare, prioritising those perceived as hardworking (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023).
[66] Unlike the Canadian PSR programme, which allows sponsors to 'name' refugees they wish to resettle, the BVOR programme does not have this feature. Instead, BVOR sponsors can view profiles of refugees selected by UNHCR on a website to find a match.

experiences (Steimel, 2017). It erases refugees' 'pre conflict identities' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b, p26), treating them as 'universal humanitarian subject[s]', (Malkki, 1996, p378). Media coverage reinforces this perception (Haugen, 2023; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), depicting 'true' refugees as desperate individuals requiring salvation (Haugen, 2023, p10), shaping expectations on both sides of sponsorship (Gingrich and Enns, 2019, p16). Language barriers further homogenise refugees' experiences (Reyes-Soto, 2023).

2.1.7: Relational tension

Between volunteers and refugees

Tension between sponsors and refugees is noted within scholarship (D'Avino, 2022a; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021; Tissot *et al.,* 2024; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023); however, research has not fully explored these dynamics. Challenges emerge when refugees do not meet sponsor expectations, fail to show gratitude, or have different sponsorship goals. Sponsors also struggle to balance providing support with encouraging independence (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Phillimore *et al*., 2022b). Additionally, intra-group disagreements among sponsors regarding expectations can cause conflict (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023).

Some sponsors expect refugees to fit a narrow image of vulnerability, viewing those from refugee camps as 'real' refugees (Haugen, 2023). This can create confusion when refugees have lived in urban settings or held pre-resettlement jobs (Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Misaligned expectations can cause friction, as refugees are often assessed based on perceived 'vulnerability' rather than individual 'pre-conflict status eligibilities' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a, p 13). One study highlighted the tension within a Canadian sponsor group who had anticipated welcoming vulnerable Syrian widows, but instead received Iranian refugees who did not align

with the group's expectations of vulnerability[67]. The refugee women asserted their

independence and wished to make their own decisions regarding sponsorship which caused

friction within the sponsor group[68] (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018). In the UK, volunteers'

unfamiliarity with refugees' pre-conflict lives complicates the provision of suitable support,

such as offering second-hand items (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Sponsors sometimes overlook

basic needs like SIM cards and internet access, which refugees were accustomed to and still

require (Van Buren, 2021). Additionally, cultural misunderstandings, especially around

gender roles and parenting, exacerbate tensions (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Hutchinson, 2018).

Sponsorship relationships also carry an expectation of gratitude (Haugen, 2023; Lim, 2019).

Rooted in 'conditional multicultural[ism]', refugees are welcomed but expected to adopt host

community norms (Besco *et al.,* 2018, cited in Haugen *et al.,* 2020, p564). Drawing on

Maussean gift exchange theory, some sponsors consider their support a gift, and anticipate

reciprocal thankfulness (Van Buren, 2021). This expectation limits the space for hospitality to

be realised (Hutchinson, 2018), and strains relationships when refugees do not express

gratitude (Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Lenard, 2016) or are prevented from expressing their honest

feelings for fear of appearing ungrateful[69] (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a; Hassan and Phillimore,

2020; Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Others feel pressured to quickly secure employment to repay

sponsors (Silvius, 2020). Sponsors may assess refugees based on their 'initiative, desire to

contribute, or anticipated future contributions' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3965), resulting in

criticism or praise. This dynamic is complex, as sponsors initially expect 'vulnerability' (a

criterion in 'sponsor a stranger' models), but emphasise economic independence and rapid

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[67] The consideration of Syrian refugee as more deserving is not limited to sponsorship, and was also a feature of studies on the 'so-called refugee crisis' (Kyriakidou, 2021).
[68] The sisters found their sponsors overbearing and wanted to move out of their home, but faced resistance from the sponsor group, who feared losing face. They could only move out with financial support from someone outside the sponsor group (Christopher *et al.,* 2018).
[69] In one study, refugees were hesitant to raise concerns directly with their sponsors and instead shared their concerns with an Arabic-speaking researcher (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020).

integration post-arrival. This tension between protection and financial self-sufficiency highlights varying perceptions of refugees' value, where attributes seen negatively by some, are 'celebrated by others as evidence of resettled Syrians' worth' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3967).

Differing sponsorship priorities regarding language learning and employment also create tension (Hutchinson, 2018; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Lenard, 2019; Haugen, 2023; Haugen *et al.,* 2020). Disagreements arise when refugees prioritise employment over learning English[70] (Hutchinson, 2018), frustrating sponsors (Neelin, 2020). However, sponsor priorities vary: some emphasise language learning, while others prioritise immediate employment (Lenard, 2019). Tension occurs when refugees reject jobs like cleaning toilets (Lenard, 2019), which they see as 'survival jobs' (Gingrich and Enns, 2019, p19), that underutilise their skills and offer inadequate pay (Steimel, 2017; Ritchie, 2018; Lenard, 2016). Some sponsors are disappointed if refugees, especially men, do not show expected progress in independence and integration after a year (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). Challenges recognising refugees' prior employment skills exacerbate the issue (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021).

Sponsors must balance supporting refugees while promoting their independence (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Lenard, 2019). This creates strain as sponsors try to establish supportive relationships while determining appropriate levels of assistance (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). Finding the right approach can be challenging (Gingrich and Enns, 2019), further complicated by cultural misunderstandings and differing expectations[71] (Neelin, 2020). Sponsors guide refugees through important decisions, like buying a car (Lenard, 2019; Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a) or

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[70] For example, one sponsor objected to providing a TV to a family, believing it would hinder their English learning due to excessive Arabic TV watching (Neelin, 2020).
[71] Some sponsored refugees expected to live near their family or receive more financial support upon arrival (Neelin, 2020).

sending remittances abroad (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023). These 'sites of parentalistic interaction' (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b, p15) create tension when refugees reject advice (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b). Blurred role responsibilities further complicate relationships, with some sponsors assuming too much control (Lim, 2019). One scholar differentiates between 'soft' (means) paternalism, which respects individual choice while guiding how goals are achieved and 'hard' (ends) paternalism which influences the choice of goals (Lim, 2019, p315). Excessive interference, like overly frequent visits (Blain *et al*., 2020), strains relationships and compromises refugee privacy. However, support needs vary, especially for trauma survivors who require extended assistance (Derksen and Teixeira, 2023), highlighting the need for flexibility in sponsorship relationships.

Intra-group tension

Sponsorship involves collective effort, with diverse group configurations (Korteweg *et al*., 2023; Kamran, 2023). Intra-group disagreements arise regarding sponsor roles and expectations (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b). Especially within programmes of 'named' resettlement, such as the Canadian PSR programme[72], tensions emerge[73] over preferences for nationality[74] (Neelin, 2020), religion[75] (Haugen, 2023) or family composition[76] (Van Buren, 2021). The period after families arrive is key in terms of negotiation between sponsors (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). They may have different ideas on addressing challenges and how refugees are to be supported which becomes 'the focus in sponsor-sponsor humanitarian bargaining to sustain involvement in the sponsorship endeavour' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023,

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[72] Intra-group tension over 'who' to sponsor only occurs in the Canadian PSR scheme, as BVOR, JAS, and UK CS do not allow named sponsorship.
[73] This tension has been studied in Canadian PSR programmes but might also affect other national schemes that allow naming, though this is not yet explored in scholarship.
[74] In some rural Canadian communities, Syrian refugees were seen as most deserving due to media coverage of the refugee crisis, leading some groups to prioritise sponsoring Syrians (Neelin, 2020).
[75] In one case, two churches in the same sponsorship group had different preferences: one was flexible, while the other insisted on sponsoring a Christian family, which was eventually prioritised (Haugen, 2023).
[76] Some sponsors also preferred families with children due to media portrayals of such families (van Buren, 2021).

p3968). Tension arises when refugees do not meet sponsor expectations (Haugen, 2023), or where there are disputes around living arrangements[77] (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), refugees wishing to relocate nearer family[78] (Hutchinson, 2018), sending remittances abroad[79] (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023), and transitioning to government welfare support[80] (Lenard, 2019; Hutchinson, 2018).

Balancing support and independence also creates intra-group tension (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). These tensions impact refugees by delaying access to resources like internet and financial support (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Neelin, 2020), exacerbating power imbalances within sponsor-refugee relationships. Some groups strengthen in response to tension, while others fracture or dissolve (Hutchinson, 2018), potentially deterring future sponsor involvement (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023). Intra-group tension is a key challenge in volunteer-driven resettlement, where 'the work is unstable and unenforceable, revealing a limit of volunteer-driven, privatised resettlement efforts' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3968).

2.1.8: Potential for power dynamics to change

Power imbalance is inherent within sponsorship. One scholar notes: 'inequality […] is not a contingent feature of sponsor/refugee relations; it is the very premise of the scheme' (Macklin

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[77] In one study, two Iranian sisters were unhappy living with their sponsors and requested money to move. The sponsor group was divided: some felt the sisters were not 'real' refugees and should not receive support, while others believed the sisters had the right to choose their living arrangements and withdrew from the group in protest (Christopher *et al.,* 2018).

[78] Another study found that a Canadian family preferred living near relatives rather than staying close to their sponsors. Some sponsors respected this choice, but others viewed it as ingratitude, causing a rift (Hutchinson, 2018).

[79] In another example, a sponsorship group argued over a sponsored family sending money to relatives in Iraq. Some members wanted to provide more funds to support this, while others sought to discourage the practice. Ultimately, the family was persuaded to stop sending money (Emine Fidan and Tahseen, 2023).

[80] In Canada, refugees sponsored under the PSR or BVOR programmes do not receive Government welfare support until after 12 months, with initial support provided either entirely by sponsors or through a sponsor-government partnership. Disagreements arose when transitioning to Government support in month 13. Some sponsors believed refugees should focus on employment rather than welfare, while others felt welfare support could help refugees improve their language skills or pursue education for better job prospects (Lenard *et al.,* 2019; Hutchinson, 2018).

et al., 2020a, pp.193-194). However, opportunities for more balanced interactions do exist. Like all relationships, sponsorship dynamics are nuanced and not necessarily dictated by simplistic power dynamics (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). Sponsors are observed 'grappling' with their roles (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a, p193), sometimes offering guidance without infringing on refugee autonomy (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Haugen, 2023). While sponsors are motivated by humanitarian motives to 'save' refugees, sponsorship extends past the point of arrival (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Macklin, 2020). It has a 'temporal arc (one year) and a destination (self-sufficiency)' (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b, p20) and it is within everyday interactions after arrival where 'tensions […] are enacted, negotiated and sometimes transformed' (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b, p20). Despite asymmetric power relations, sponsorship holds potential to challenge power structures and foster reciprocity (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). A small body of scholarship notes refugees challenging sponsor expectations (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a; Iqbal *et al.,* 2021; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2020b), and sponsors recognising refugees' agency (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018).

Some refugees reject the 'refugee' label (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a; Veronis *et al.,* 2018; Hyndman, 2019). Having experienced 'journey[s] of self-rescue', they challenge the 'victim' narrative (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a, p2). Agency manifests in everyday decisions, such as rearranging sponsor-provided accommodation (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), choosing formal education over sponsor-provided ESOL (Neelin, 2020) or refusing financial aid and donating to charity themselves (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Research on Syrian mothers resettled in Canada reveals complex emotions - gratitude, discontent, and dissent – forming 'fragile obligation' as they navigate resettlement challenges (Iqbal *et al.,* 2021, p1). They express gratitude but resist pressures regarding employment and child-rearing practices, asserting their own preferences and values. Some prioritise family time over higher-paying jobs, challenging assumptions about successful resettlement (Steimel, 2017).

Just as refugees should not be defined by their status, 'neither is it valid to deny the capacity for relationally autonomous thought and action on the part of sponsors' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018, p71). Sponsors adapt to refugee agency with varied responses (Iqbal *et al*., 2021). Some view refugees who reject advice as ungrateful or difficult[81] (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), while others see refugees as equals (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Haugen *et al.,* 2020) and create 'spaces of hospitality where sponsors and newcomers […] take on the role of guest and host' (Hutchinson, 2018, p27). Where sponsors recognise refugees' pre-conflict experiences and involve them in decision-making processes, like housing (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), and food choices (Bhattacharyya *et al.,* 2020), relationships improve and power dynamics balance. Some recognise refugees as 'persons of self-rescue', (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018, p59). By supporting refugees' pre-conflict roles, sponsors create 'publicly acknowledged transactions of worth' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2020b, p201) affirming refugees' agency beyond victimhood and fostering more equitable integration (Haugen, 2023; Haugen *et al.,* 2020).

Pre-arrival communication between sponsors and refugees builds trust and challenges 'cultural scripts of refuge' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018, p72) establishing a 'a digital third space of refugee resettlement' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b, p25). This exchange, termed 'resettlement knowledge assets', counters orientalist views (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b, p25), provides information about refugees' needs (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023), and alleviates sponsorship concerns (Neelin, 2020). However, not all sponsorship programmes involve pre-arrival contact (Elcioglu, 2023). CS does not, and refugees arrive without their input considered and sponsors unaware of their needs (Phillimore and Reyes-Soto, 2020).

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[81] In one study, a highly educated Syrian man was frustrated with receiving informal ESOL support from sponsors instead of formal college classes. He blocked the volunteers from coming to his home, which led the sponsors to view him as 'nasty' and ungrateful. Eventually, he was enrolled in college and learned English quickly (Neelin, 2020, p69).

While sponsor groups vary in their approach (Blain *et al.,* 2020), limited research has explored how sponsors enact their roles, with some exceptions (Haugen *et al*., 2020; Blain *et al.,* 2020). One study identifies three sponsorship approaches – 'paternalistic', 'passive paternalistic' and 'mutualistic' (Haugen *et al.,* 2020, p560). Paternalistic sponsors assume a parental role, dictating decisions for refugees, while passive paternalistic sponsors withdraw support if advice is not followed. Mutualistic sponsors, however, engage with refugees as equals, prioritising understanding their needs even when they disagree with refugees' choices, such as smoking (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b). This finding suggests the potential for a more balanced power approach, indicating sponsorship can be equitable rather than asymmetrical.

Evidence shows sponsors becoming more responsive to refugee agency over time (Gingrich and Enns, 2019), reflecting on previously overlooked refugee agency (Van Buren, 2021) and points where refugees might have been overwhelmed, such as initial arrival periods (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Despite orientalist views initially held, some sponsors adapt their behaviour, working 'with… [refugees] based on their humanity' (Haugen, 2023, p12). Some defer decisions until after refugees arrive, allowing them to make their own choices (Neelin, 2020). As sponsorship progresses, the humanitarian impulse to 'save' refugee lives transforms into 'humanitarian bargains' in relationships with refugees, fellow sponsors and the state, navigating the transition from arrival to ongoing support. Some sponsors form emotional bonds with refugees, and in some cases, evaluate their worth on their potential to become 'good citizens' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3966). As relationships mature, they can evolve into 'mutual trust, respect and confidence in one another' (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b, p16), indicating potential for more balanced power dynamics. These small shifts in power dynamics align with recent scholarship towards multidirectional integration (Phillimore, 2021;

Janzen *et al.,* 2022) which emphasises the shared responsibility of integration, promoting mutual respect and equality (Haugen, 2023).

2.1.9: Navigating the end of formal sponsorship

Formal resettlement support commonly lasts between one year and two, depending on the national programme. Both refugees and sponsors face uncertainty at the end of the support period. Canadian newcomers are expected to achieve self-sufficiency within one year (Lenard, 2019) and sponsorship emphasises financial independence by this point (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). In contrast, UK refugees receive two years of accommodation and one year of resettlement support[82]. They also have immediate access to welfare benefits, which eases the financial transition. Canadian newcomers are only entitled to Government support after the first year. The end of sponsorship is a concern for refugees (Iqbal *et al*., 2021; Bhattacharyya *et al*., 2020; Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021; Phillimore *et al*., 2020) and sponsors (Lenard, 2019; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Phillimore *et al*., 2020; Van Buren, 2021). Refugees worry about securing employment, transitioning to welfare support (Iqbal *et al*., 2021), including concerns about reduced finances (Bhattacharyya *et al*., 2020), and feelings of being abandoned by sponsors (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Refugees are also concerned about potential housing instability and the impact on children's education (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore *et al*., 2020).

Maintaining relationships post-sponsorship is beneficial to refugees who value sponsors' social networks and emotional support (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). 'Independence' is the aim after resettlement support ends, but the reality is often 'messier' with different approaches to

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[82] Formally, the HO requires that CS groups provide resettlement support to refugees for one year, and housing support for two (Home Office, 2024a). However, there is confusion from the HO about this requirement. An earlier report from the Home Office which stipulates funding support for local authorities states that within CS, volunteers provide resettlement support for two years (Home Office, 2023b).

the sponsor role (Lenard, 2019, p64). There are two approaches to 'independence', one focused on developing skills like education and language and the other on developing the right attitude to integrate, including 'the capacity and willingness to shift habits' (Lenard, 2019, p67). There is some distinction between passive support, when sponsors reinforce refugees' dependence, and active support, in which sponsors create opportunity for refugees to help themselves (Lenard, 2019). Passive support has some similarities with the paternalistic and passive paternalistic approaches to the sponsor role discussed above, while active support has more in common with a 'mutualistic' approach, promoting refugees needs rather than dependence (Haugen *et al*., 2020). In terms of support after 12 months, mutualistic sponsors have a broader view of success beyond economic independence (Haugen *et al*., 2020).

The timeframe for refugee 'independence' is contentious. Some Canadian sponsors criticise refugees for perceived lack of effort to achieve independence within 12 months (Macklin *et al*., 2020b) and are disappointed when refugees transition onto social security (Lenard, 2019; Haugen *et al*., 2020). Others view 12 months as insufficient and continue to provide support, including financial, beyond the formal period (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). These sponsors adopt a 'humanitarian stance that merges their own ethical and moral responsibility with the goal of independence, while refusing the strict temporal terms that inform sponsors' humanitarian bargain' by extending their support (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3969). Other Canadian studies confirm the continuation of support after 12 months (Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Neelin, 2020).

Post-sponsorship relations persist (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), sometimes transitioning from practical support into affective connections (Van Buren, 2021). Scholars suggest these relationships may transform into more equal connections beyond the state-imposed support timeframe (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). However, the choice to continue contact can position sponsors as the primary

decision-makers, potentially overlooking refugees preferences for ongoing relationships (Gingrich and Enns, 2019). Some sponsors step back to allow families to gain their independence (Neelin, 2020).

2.1.10: Post-involvement effects on sponsors

Despite challenges, sponsors largely view programmes positively, finding personal and emotional satisfaction (Macklin *et al*., 2020a; Hutchinson, 2018; Phillimore *et al*., 2020; Elcioglu, 2023). Sponsorship involves significant emotional and financial investment (Hyndman *et al*., 2021; McNally, 2020b), which can lead to burnout (Reyes-Soto, 2022) and cultural clashes (Phillimore and Reyes-Soto, 2019). Nevertheless, most sponsors find that the rewards outweigh the costs, with mutual benefits for sponsors and refugees (Korteweg *et al*., 2023), including fostering relationships, strengthening community ties, gaining intercultural experiences and broadening global perspectives (Hutchinson, 2018; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Phillimore *et al*., 2022b).

While personal and to some extent, community impacts are evident, scholarship on the structural effects of sponsorship is limited (Elcioglu, 2023). Connecting sponsorship with broader debates from critical humanitarianism (Malkki, 2015; Malkki, 1996; Ticktin, 2011; Ticktin, 2014; Fassin, 2012), it remains unclear if prolonged contact with refugees leads sponsors to engage with broader structural barriers or if their focus remains on fulfilling immediate needs (Elcioglu, 2023), driven by 'humanitarian reason' (Korteweg *et al*., 2023, p3958). Sponsors are aware of problems with housing (Phillimore *et al*., 2020) and employment (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), but it is unclear whether awareness leads to

advocacy. Only a few recent studies have explored this question (Elcioglu, 2023; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Ritchie, 2018).

Some research suggests that focusing on immediate support reinforces social and economic disparities (Gingrich and Enns, 2019). A Canadian study found sponsorship heightens awareness of challenges faced by refugees but limits sponsors capacity to address broader barriers such as accessing housing, employment and family reunion, due to programme constraints (Elcioglu, 2023). Developing the earlier work (Ritchie, 2018), this study notes that sponsors experienced 'neoliberal fatigue' and were overwhelmed by the administrative demands of resettlement within a context of neoliberal austerity, treating 'politically structured, public issues as logistical, private troubles they had to solve on their own' (Elcioglu, 2023, p98). The author stressed that there was a key difference between 'compassion fatigue', which was not felt by sponsors, and 'neoliberal fatigue' which was 'a political lassitude stemming from a particular policy environment' which develops 'during the hustle to help others find individual and makeshift solutions to systemic social service gaps' (Elcioglu, 2023, p109). Sponsors were too drained to view sponsorship as politically transformative and emerged 'with fatigue rather than with a critical lens on Canadian society' (Elcioglu, 2023, p98).

Contrastingly, a UK study (Reyes-Soto, 2023) found CS volunteers do engage politically. By advocating for sponsorship to be introduced and challenging negative refugee stereotypes through public conversations (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020), volunteers 'gained an awareness of the challenges faced by refugees and identified structural barriers to their long-term integration' (Reyes-Soto, 2023, p1952). Unlike Elcioglu (2023), Reyes-Soto (2023) observed UK volunteers taking political action, though the extent to which these actions address structural barriers affecting refugees remains unclear. Additional studies highlight sponsors supporting family reunion individually in the UK, recognising the impact of

separation on integration (Phillimore and Reyes-Soto, 2019; Hassan and Phillimore, 2020).
However, this aspect requires further exploration.

2.1.11: Summary of sponsor experiences

Examining sponsor experiences reveals two gaps in understanding. Firstly, while studies acknowledge power imbalances between sponsors and refugees, recent scholarship suggests potential for more balanced relationships. Some sponsors facilitate refugee autonomy through pre-arrival communication, moving towards more mutualistic relationships. However, further exploration of power dynamics is needed, particularly regarding whether they change over the sponsorship period. Secondly, although sponsorship provides positive experiences for sponsors, there is limited research on whether sustained engagement motivates sponsors to address structural hurdles facing refugees. Though sponsorship raises awareness of injustice, 'neoliberal fatigue' hinders sponsors from tackling systemic barriers such as housing and employment (Elcioglu, 2023, p.98). UK research indicates initial political activism among volunteers, yet the impact on addressing structural hurdles remains unclear, highlighting the second research gap.

This summary sets the stage for connecting these gaps in scholarship with broader literature on volunteering and critical humanitarianism in the second part of this literature review.

2.2: Connecting sponsor experiences with broader 'spaces of encounter' between volunteers and refugees

This section contextualises sponsor experiences with broader volunteering and social movements and critical humanitarianism, focusing on:

1. Understanding the dynamics of power, including potential shifts and broader interpretations.

2. Examining whether volunteer engagement in sponsorship may lead to involvement with broader structural barriers faced by refugees, exploring the interplay between volunteer humanitarianism, state policies and political action.

The 'so-called refugee crisis' sparked an outpouring of volunteerism as over a million refugees arrived in Europe (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019a; UNHCR, 2017). Ordinary citizens - 'new internationalists' (Clayton, 2020, p1) - played a crucial role in providing aid, often engaging in refugee support for the first time (Rea *et al*., 2019). As volunteering with refugees increased (Maestri and Monforte, 2020), this period marked a 'watershed moment' for migration research (Stierl, 2022, p1083), leading to increased scholarly attention on the role of private actors in refugee support (Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020a; Boersma *et al*., 2019). While much of this volunteerism was framed as humanitarian aid, refugee support exists within a deeply politicised space, shaped by state policies, legal frameworks, and societal attitudes towards migration (Fassin, 2012; Mayblin and James, 2019).

Volunteer humanitarianism with refugees did not begin in 2015[83] (Hess and Kasparek, 2017; Ambrosini, 2017). Rather, it has evolved within both established NGOs (Kovats and Mazzola, 2019; Simsa *et al*., 2019) and grassroots initiatives (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019; Karakayali and Kleist, 2016). Movements like 'Refugees Welcome UK' exemplified this 'new social movement' (Koca, 2016, p96) as private actors, previously uninvolved in refugee support,

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[83] Initiatives like Germany's 'Refugees Welcome' movement (Rea *et al.,* 2019; Hinger *et al.,* 2019), and longstanding efforts by NGOs and solidarity groups in Greece (Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019), and the UK laid the groundwork for the 2015 humanitarianism surge (Squire and Darling, 2013; Koca, 2016).

mobilised in response to the crisis (Merikoski and Nordberg, 2023). The introduction of UK further reflects the growing role of civil society in refugee resettlement, emerging from demands for greater citizen involvement (Van Selm, 2020a; D'avino, 2022; Koca, 2016). However, while CS may appear as an empowerment of civil society, it also raises questions as to whether sponsorship challenges restrictive asylum policies or functions as a UK government strategy to offload responsibility to volunteers.

Scholarship on critical humanitarianism (Fassin, 2012, Malkki, 2015) highlights the tensions between humanitarian aid and state control. In some contexts, volunteer engagement with refugees has resulted in criminalisation rather than state support. Volunteers providing direct aid to refugees – such as those supporting informal camps – have been criminalised in several European states, reinforcing the notion that volunteer support is inherently political (Allsopp, 2017). Outside migration scholarship, studies of volunteer activism in areas such as environmental justice (Saunders, 2013), disaster relief (Whittaker *et al.,* 2015), mutual aid (Spade, 2020) and foodbanks (Strong, 2020) illustrate how grassroots initiatives often emerge in response to state failures, creating alternative systems of care and support. These perspectives help situate refugee volunteering within broader debates on citizen-led humanitarianism (Malkki, 2015) and the emotional dimensions of volunteering (Jasper, 1998). Refugee support initiatives, while often framed as humanitarian, can therefore be understood as a form of political participation. Volunteer engagement is not only about responding to immediate needs but also about engaging with systemic inequalities (Maestri and Monforte, 2020). This study explores whether sponsorship leads volunteers towards deeper political engagement, or whether it remains within the confines of state-sanctioned humanitarianism.

This section further explores these themes by examining the role of private actors in the refugee solidarity movement, focusing on civil society organisations, social movements, and

ordinary citizens – three of the humanitarian subjects identified by Ambrosini (2021, p381).

While the primary focus remains on sponsorship, it is important to acknowledge that refugees

themselves have also engaged in humanitarian support and political action, for example

through protests (Mayer, 2018; Monforte and Dufour, 2013) and housing occupations

(Dadusc *et al.,* 2019; Atac *et al*., 2021). To broaden the theoretical scope beyond

sponsorship and refugees, this section will also engage with wider literature on volunteering

and social movements situating sponsorship within wider debates about the interplay

between volunteering and state policies and the political dimensions of humanitarian action.

2.2.1: Volunteer humanitarianism during the 'so-called refugee crisis'

The 'so-called refugee crisis' saw unprecedented mobilisation of ordinary citizens (Della-

Porta, 2018) as grassroots solidarity contrasted with often inadequate state responses

(Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020b; Betts and Collier, 2017). Exceptions included Germany,

Sweden and Austria, but other states were actively obstructive (Koca, 2019a; Koca, 2019b).

The divergent responses of European states were exemplified by then-German Chancellor

Angela Merkel's invocation of 'welcome culture' ('Willkommenskultur') (Funk, 2018, p292), in

contrast to Hungary's decision to block refugee travel by train (Bernát *et al*., 2016). As state

responses faltered, private actors and organisations stepped in to fill the gaps (Evangelinidis,

2016). Local people and volunteers mobilised spontaneously, providing time, resources and

services (Simsa *et al.,* 2019) in informal settings like 'railway stations, parks and informal

camps', as well as more formal 'hotspots, reception centres and detention centres' (De Vries

and Guild, 2019, p2). These spaces became crucial sites for 'bottom-up' humanitarian

support (Boersma *et al.,* 2019, p728).

The role of NGOs during this period was contentious. Some were criticised for their slow

response (Borton, 2020; Dany, 2019), while others opposed hostile state policies, for

example by rescuing refugees from the Mediterranean (Ambrosini, 2021). In some instances, NGOs lacked national consent to operate (Borton, 2020). Most support in the infamous Calais 'Jungle' camp came from charities and private actors because UNHCR's could not operate without recognition from France (Sandri, 2018). In contrast, grassroots efforts were widespread and diverse, providing support in camps (Sandri, 2018; Monforte and van Dijk, 2023), railway stations (Bernát *et al.,* 2016; Feischmidt and Zakariás, 2019; Sinatti, 2019; Simsa *et al.,* 2019; Bevelander and Hellstrom, 2019), cities (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019b, and public parks (Kovats, 2019; Obradovic-Wochnik, 2018). Volunteers provided food, clothing, medical supplies and shelter (Simsa *et al.,* 2019; Koca, 2016; Hamann and Karakayali, 2016; Karakayali and Kleist, 2016; Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018). They set up informal kitchens (Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019), offered legal support (Ambrosini, 2019), language classes, translation services, and provided help with administrative appointments and finding housing (Mayer, 2018), sometimes providing housing (Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019). In Greece and parts of Italy, international volunteers converged on 'hotspots' like Lesvos (Guribye and Mydland, 2018) and Chios (Tsartas *et al.,* 2020), to assist local efforts in rescuing (Stierl, 2018), and supporting refugees arriving by sea (Chtouris and Miller, 2017)[84].

Initially, volunteer activities focused on humanitarian aid, addressing immediate needs with food, clothing, medical supplies and shelter (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019a). Over time, efforts diversified (Allsopp, 2017), to include networking, legal assistance and political advocacy (Ambrosini, 2019). Three types of solidarity were identified during this period: 'autonomous solidarity' within micro-communities, 'civic solidarity' alongside institutions, and 'institutional solidarity' enacted by cities opposing exclusionary practices[85] (Agustín and

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[84] Later, some volunteers were criticised as 'voluntourists', raising questions about their motivations and sustainability (Cabot, 2019, p261).
[85] Autonomous solidarity occurred within small, micro-communities, such as a housing project in Athens for homeless refugees. Civic solidarity involved support from both movements and institutions, like the Danish network Venlignoerne ('friendly neighbours'). Institutional solidarity involved cities challenging national exclusionary practices, such as Barcelona creating a city of welcome to oppose such practices (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019a; Agustín and Jørgensen, 2021).

Jørgensen, 2019a, p49). After 2016, volunteer efforts transitioned from emergency response to long-term support and integration assistance. Some grassroots groups professionalised into NGOs, while others continued to operate informally, adapting to ongoing needs (Boersma *et al.,* 2019; Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019) and volunteer activities gradually shifted towards long-term support (Karakayali and Kleist, 2016; Hinger *et al.,* 2019).

While volunteer responses during this period were frequently framed as exceptional, they align with broader patterns of crisis-driven volunteerism (Cloke *et al.,* 2017). Studies on foodbanks (Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Williams et al., 2016; Garthwaite, 2016), austerity measures (Monforte, 2020), natural disasters (Whittaker *et al.,* 2015), environmental activism (Saunders, 2013) and COVID-19 mutual aid (McCabe *et al.,* 2020) highlight how volunteers step in to fill gaps left by the state. These acts of volunteering are not only practical interventions but also carry emotional and political significance (Jasper, 2011). The role of emotions in mobilisation is particularly relevant here, as volunteers are often driven by moral sentiments of solidarity and outrage at state inaction (Jasper, 2011; Feischmidt and Zakarias, 2019). This perspective allows volunteer humanitarianism to be understood not as an isolated response to migration, but as part of a broader civil society response to crisis and state inaction.

2.2.2 Longer term 'Citizen humanitarianism'

Refugee support organisations existed prior to the 2015 'emergency' (Zetter *et al.,* 2005; Zetter and Pearl, 2000; Garkisch *et al.,* 2017) but 'citizen humanitarianism' (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1489) increased in response to growing hostility towards refugees in the UK (Mayblin, 2019), and across Europe (Koca, 2022). This shift highlights the increasing political engagement of citizens, where volunteering not only addresses immediate humanitarian need but also reflects political ideologies that critique government policies.

Since the early 2000s, UK policy has increasingly restricted asylum-seekers' rights (Mayblin, 2019), through a series of policies designed to make life difficult (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021) – for example, preventing asylum-seekers learning English (Bouttell and Livingston, 2024) and restricting healthcare access (Phillimore and Cheung, 2021). The last four years have been challenging due to COVID-19, political upheaval, austerity and associated deepening poverty, and increasing political polarisation (Grove-White and Kaye, 2023). The draconian Nationality and Borders Act (2022) and the Illegal Migration Act (2023) further criminalise asylum: creating a two-tier protection system according to UK entry (Nationality and Borders Act, 2022), formalising the use of reception centres to house asylum-seekers and removing those who arrival 'illegally' (Illegal Migration Act, 2023). Bordering occurs within everyday situations, where different 'categories' of refugees receive varying access to welfare and rights (Koca, 2022, p69). 'Everyday bordering' (Yuval-Davis, 2018, p228), has created poverty within the UK asylum system, described as a 'poverty producing machine' (Allsopp *et al.,* 2014, p35), and a form of 'slow violence' (Mayblin *et al.,* 2020, p107). The controversial Rwanda plan for offshore processing faced criticism (Parker and Cornell, 2024; Drakeley, 2023; Sen *et al.,* 2022), until it was cancelled in July 2024 following the election of a new Labour Government (Francis, 2024).

Studies both pre- (Allsopp *et al.,* 2014), and post-2015 (Mayblin and James, 2019), note refugee support in the UK increasingly comes from private actors, organisations and faith groups. Refugee-Third Sector Organisations (RTSOs) are defined as 'organisations, of any size who specifically focus their charitable work on supporting those who have been or are going through the asylum system' (Mayblin and James, 2019, p378). A 2019 study identified 142 UK RTSOs registered with the Charity Commission (Mayblin and James, 2019). However, a 2023 crowd-sourced list details 754 RTSOs (refsource, 2023), suggesting many

groups may operate informally, 'below the radar'[86] (McCabe *et al.,* 2010, p1). RTSOs are found across the UK, but concentrated in urban areas with high refugee populations (Mayblin and James, 2019). These organisations fill gaps left by the state, offering welfare services, capacity development (including education and employment), advocacy, and research activities (Garkisch *et al.,* 2017). They are often staffed by volunteers (Grove-White and Kaye, 2023), and play a central role in the lives of refugees and asylum-seekers (Käkelä *et al*., 2023). Activities includes practical, humanitarian support, and sometimes activism, contesting the hostile environment (Mesarič and Vacchelli, 2021). Despite increased demand for services, funding has decreased as Government support has shifted to private contractors (Mayblin and James, 2019). As refugee support becomes increasingly reliant on volunteers, the experiences of volunteers intersect with broader political struggles. Some volunteers, engaged in anti-deportation campaigns and cities of sanctuary (Flug and Hussein, 2019; Squire, 2013; Bernhardt, 2023), not only provide practical humanitarian assistance but are also directly involved in challenging state power.

This section explores three prominent forms of volunteering with refugees: refugee community organisations (Darling, 2011), homestay programmes (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023; Bassoli and Campomori, 2024) and befriending and mentoring schemes (Askins, 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016).

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs)

Refugee community organisations (RCOs), otherwise known as 'refugee associations, refugee organisations, refugee-based organisations, refugee community organisations or refugee community-based organisations', fill gaps in public support by providing essential

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[86] Below the radar is a 'short-hand term often applied to describe small voluntary organisations, community groups and more informal or semi-formal activities in the third sector' (McCabe *et al.,* 2010, p1).

services (McCabe *et al*., 2010, p10). While the state's involvement is minimal, RCO's play a crucial role in addressing the needs of refugees. They often operate under precarious financial conditions, without paid staff or fixed premises (Darling, 2011), relying on volunteers to provide support which might otherwise by unavailable. Services include providing resources, advice, interpretation, training, advocacy, mediation with other agencies plus social opportunities for refugees (Bloch, 2002; Darling, 2011). They signpost refugees to other local services (Käkelä *et al*., 2023; Calò *et al.,* 2022) and sometimes provide job or volunteering opportunities (De Jong, 2019). They often provide drop-in services for support with Universal Credit, housing support and accessing English classes (Ellul-Knight, 2019) and are valued for the 'care, understanding and kindness' offered (Käkelä *et al.,* 2023, p12).

The decline of state-provided welfare services – exacerbated by austerity measures and hostile immigration policies - has led to an increase in the reliance on voluntary organisations to meet basic needs. As one scholar noted, 'the scale and scope of the voluntary sector as a vehicle for service delivery for the vulnerable has increased in lockstep with the receding welfare state' (DeVerteuil *et al,*. 2020, p925). As the state withdraws from providing support, volunteers increasingly fill this gap, engaging in what Kirwan and colleagues (2016) call the everyday practice of citizenship where individuals take on responsibility for addressing social welfare needs. Like refugee support, similar volunteer-led spaces of care have emerged, such as foodbanks (Williams *et al.,* 2016; Cloke *et al.,* 2017), emergency homeless shelters and drop-in centres (Evans, 2011). These initiatives have grown in response to neoliberal policies, with the state expecting the third sector to take on the mantle of providing 'care' (Power *et al.,* 2022). This dynamic highlights the intersection between volunteerism and neoliberalism, with RCOs situated within broader movements of care and resistance against neoliberal austerity policies.

Homestay schemes

Homestay schemes, otherwise known as 'home accommodation' (Merikoski and Nordberg, 2023, p2), 'private' domestic hospitality' (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p675), or 'in-house refugee hosting' (Luczaj, 2023, p2) provide refugees with a place to live in a shared domestic space (Campomori *et al.,* 2023, p162). Administered by volunteers, NGOs, or governments[87] (Luccioni, 2023), homestay schemes involve private actors hosting refugees unknown to them. Financial incentives and hosting durations vary, but the common element is refugees being hosted in a home setting (Ambrosini, 2019). Hosts assist refugees with basic needs and integration without straining local housing resources (Bassoli and Campomori, 2024) These schemes can be open to all refugees or cater to specific groups, such as minors, recognised refugees (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023, p5) or those who are destitute (Gunaratnam, 2021).

Homestay schemes gained prominence during the 'so-called refugee crisis' (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023). In the UK, longstanding initiatives like 'Room for Refugees' (established in 2002) expanded after 2015, alongside newer organisations like 'Refugees at Home', which launched in 2016. This surge in support was driven not only by altruism but also as a direct response to the failure of government resettlement schemes. By 2023, 18 UK organisations provided homestay (refsource, 2023), with similar schemes in France ('Utopia 56') and Italy ('Refugee Welcome') (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p676). The 2022 Ukraine war intensified the use of homestay (Merikoski and Nordberg, 2023; Burrell, 2024; Machin, 2023). Hosting become popular across Europe, and states set up schemes to support displaced Ukrainian refugees (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023), even in countries like Poland, where hosting was previously

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[87] To address overcrowding in detention centres, the Australian Government established the Community Placement Network (CPN) to place processed asylum-seekers in the homes of volunteer hosts. This programme was managed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in collaboration with the Australian Homestay Network (Ahn, 2010).

uncommon (Luczaj, 2023). In the UK, 'Homes for Ukraine'[88] (Burrell, 2024) involved 73,756 private actors welcoming 131,000 refugees between March 2022 and August 2023 (Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024). Similar European schemes, such as the European Commission's Safe Homes initiative implemented in nine European countries (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2024), were celebrated for reducing pressures on local housing (Hegedüs *et al.*, 2023).

Despite their success, these newer schemes have faced criticism for being designed primarily for Ukrainian refugees. Unlike pre-2022 schemes, with little state support, Ukrainian refugees receive 'unquestioned' (Merikoski and Nordberg, 2023, p94) and 'uncharacteristically benevolent' (Burrell, 2024, p2) hospitality, while Middle Eastern refugees face restricted asylum access and substandard housing (Burrell, 2024). This 'racialised conditionality of hospitality' (Crossley, 2023, p7) led to accusations of 'discrimination, hypocrisy, and racism' within the UK Government's approach (Grove-White and Kaye, 2023, p17). Similar patterns of acceptance and rejection based on refugee origin are observed across Europe. Poland welcomed over two million refugees in one month during 2022, but refused entry to Middle Eastern refugees at the Belarusian border in 2015 (Moll, 2023). This shift is attributed to cultural similarities and Poland's migration policy favouring neighbouring countries (Andrejuk, 2023). Other reasons include a lower perceived threat from Ukrainian refugees and a greater threat to Europe from Russia than from conflicts the Middle Eastern (Moise *et al.*, 2024). This differential treatment of Ukrainian versus Middle Eastern refugees illustrates that volunteerism, especially in the context of homestay, is political, shaped by perceptions of who is deemed 'deserving' of help.

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[88] In response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UK Government launched the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme. This programme allows British hosts to match with and house Ukrainian refugees. Refugees receive a three-year visa, £200 on arrival, access to public services and benefits, and the right to work. Hosts receive a £350 monthly 'thank you' payment from the UK Government which increased to £500 per month for stays longer than a year (Burrell, 2024).

Though there is some suggestion that support for Ukrainians may increase support for other refugees (Moise *et al.,* 2024, p376), sponsorship programmes may struggle to recruit volunteers as individuals instead focus on supporting Ukrainian refugees. In Germany, interest in the NesT sponsorship programme declined after 2022, partly because private actors focused on supporting Ukrainian refugees (Tissot *et al.,* 2024). UK 'Homes for Ukraine' also faces criticism for its 'temporal uncertainty', offering only a three-year visa, and for shifting hosting responsibilities onto private actors (Burrell, 2024, p3). Critics argue this approach transfers state responsibilities to citizens while controlling who can receive support (Burrell, 2024), constituting a form of 'domopolitics' (Crossley, 2023, p1), akin to CS critiqued as a 'tool of migration management' (D'Avino, 2022b, p328).

Befriending and mentoring

Befriending and mentoring programmes provide similar support to homestay schemes but without shared living arrangements (Campomori *et al.,* 2023). Befriending, or 'buddy schemes' (Stock, 2019, p128), pair individuals lacking support networks with volunteers who act as companions for a period (Behnia, 2007, Chambon, 2008). These models are not unique to refugees; similar programmes support other vulnerable groups, such as people with mental health issues (Thompson *et al.,* 2016), children with learning difficulties (Płatos and Wojaczek, 2018), their parents (Blake *et al.,* 2019), and the elderly (Lester *et al.,* 2012; Andrews *et al.,* 2003), to improve wellbeing and facilitate integration (Behnia, 2007).

Befriending schemes for refugees have expanded since 2015 (Fell and Fell, 2014). They offer 'emotional, informational, and instrumental supports including assistance in learning about the new society and language, searching for a job, and locating accommodation' (Behnia, 2007, p3). Like homestay, they can be open to all refugees or focus on specific

groups including pregnant women (Mccarthy and Haith-Cooper, 2013), university students (Vickers *et al*., 2017), and destitute asylum-seekers (Bernhardt, 2024). Refugees sometimes participate as peer befrienders, increasing confidence and reducing loneliness (Balaam *et al.,* 2023). Certain programmes focus on mentoring, connecting trained volunteers with unaccompanied refugee youth (Raithelhuber, 2019b; Scheibelhofer, 2019; Raithelhuber, 2019a), or adult refugees (Atkinson, 2018). Such programmes assume refugees lack the resources for integration into society and pair refugees with mentors in a structured one-to-one relationship (Raithelhuber, 2021).

Both befriending and mentoring programmes rely on volunteers' social, cultural, and economic capital beneficial to aid integration but differ in terms of formality. (Walker, 2011). Befriending programmes sometimes allow relationships to develop organically, focusing on shared social activities like shopping and cooking together (Askins, 2014b). In contrast, mentoring programmes are more goal oriented, focused on setting and achieving goals. Building on civil society goodwill, as seen with CS and Homes for Ukraine, there are calls to establish new befriending schemes as part of local welcoming hubs to support refugee integration in the UK (Katwala *et al*., 2023).

2.2.3: Comparing sponsors and volunteer humanitarians

Sponsors are often female, white, over 50, and retired, from a specific socio-economic background (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Haugen *et al.,* 2020). This profile is also common amongst volunteers involved with homestay schemes (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023), refugee community organisations (Braun, 2017), befriending schemes (Behnia, 2012), as well as broader patterns of volunteerism (Wilson, 2012; Williams *et al.,* 2016). Despite

some exceptions[89] (Askins, 2015), these volunteers are typically 'native born […] female […] mostly in their forties and older' (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023, p16), 'with a bourgeois background' (Braun, 2017, p39). However, the 2015 'emergency' temporarily altered this profile. Movements such as 'Refugee Welcome UK' (Koca, 2016) and initiatives in Germany brought together a 'motley and fragmented group' of volunteers from all walks of life, creating a more inclusive culture of welcome (Mayer, 2018, p237).

As discussed in section 2.1.5, sponsor motivations include humanitarian concern, emotional connection, faith, social ties and media influence. While some of these factors also drive other volunteers, a key distinction lies in political intent. Sponsorship is generally framed as a partnership with the state (Ambrosini and Schnyder von Wartensee, 2022), marked by compassion and a desire to alleviate suffering (Fassin, 2012), with limited direct criticism of state policies[90]. In contrast, outside sponsorship, volunteers are more politically motivated. During the 2015 'crisis', 'distrust in the government's ability or willingness to supply sufficient services' was a key motivation for private actors (Simsa *et al.,* 2019, p 86). Across Europe (Koca, 2016; Sandri, 2018), volunteers expressed distrust in state responses (Boersma *et al.,* 2019), and frustration with 'government hostility' (Farahani, 2021, p667). In this context, volunteers were often divided into those cooperating with the state for humanitarian ends and those using their involvement to seek political change. While the former were inclined to cooperate with state authorities, the latter linked their efforts to political demands (Hinger *et al.,* 2019). Homestay volunteers, for example, sometimes framed their participation as resistance to national refugee policies, seeking to subvert exclusionary narratives through everyday acts of hospitality (Monforte *et al.,* 2021). Similarly, in state-run refugee hosting

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[89] A more diverse range of volunteers were identified within a refugee befriending programme in Northwest England, challenging the 'white, middle-class volunteer' stereotype (Askins, 2015, p473).
[90] Recent Canadian studies note some limited criticism of the state after sponsors have been engaged in providing support to families (Korteweg *et al*., 2023; Macklin, 2020).

programmes, volunteers sometimes challenged institutional frameworks, underscoring the

blurry line between humanitarianism and activism (Hebbani *et al.,* 2016).

For other volunteers, motivations were multiple (Mayer, 2018) blending humanitarian concern

and political motivation (Koca, 2019b; Mescoli *et al.,* 2019; Monforte *et al.,* 2021). On the

Greek islands, volunteers were driven by various factors, including moral obligations to

relieve suffering, career development, and political activism (Chtouris and Miller, 2017).

Some identified as 'solidarity citizens', aligning their support with resistance against the

'dehumanization of refugees' and distancing themselves from purely humanitarian

motivations (Chtouris and Miller, 2017, p73). Other volunteers focused on practical support

without overt political involvement (Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019). Over time, some charity-

oriented projects became more politically engaged, (Karakayalı, 2017; Kovats and Mazzola,

2019). These comparisons reveal an important distinction: while both sponsors and other

volunteers are driven by compassion, the extent to which their actions challenge or

collaborate with state institutions differs markedly. Those involved in sponsorship are less

likely to view their actions as a means of pursuing political change; instead, they are primarily

motivated by humanitarian concern.

2.2.4: Critical humanitarianism

Despite creating 'spaces of care' (Turcatti *et al.,* 2024, p1), volunteering - across sponsorship

and in other forms – is not without critique. As with sponsorship (Bradley and Duin, 2020;

D'Avino, 2022b), volunteer humanitarianism is often scrutinised for contributing to the neo-

liberalisation of care (Koca, 2019b; Fry and Islar, 2021; Braun, 2017; Schweitzer *et al.,* 2022

where state responsibility for social welfare is outsourced to civil society actors. Volunteer

efforts to support others in place of the state occupy an 'uncomfortable position' as they are

'both a manifestation of caring communities as well as an undesirable feature of neoliberal

government' (Surman *et al.,* 2021, p1090). Rather than challenging systemic inequality, such efforts may reinforce it, as voluntary aid stands in for more robust state support (Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2018). As volunteers fulfil the role of the state, 'in a paradoxical manner, humanitarianism's efficacy distorts the root of the problems it attempts to redress' (Theodossopoulos, 2016, p180). This dynamic is evident in practices like food donations and other forms of grassroots aid, which have been criticised standing in for the state (Williams and May, 2021), without addressing structural symptoms like poverty, inequality and precarity (Poppendieck, 1999). Volunteers become both agents of care and unwitting agents of containment as they try to mitigate crises without the tools or the mandate to confront the root causes, therefore only offering a 'sticking plaster' solution (Pallister-Wilkins, 2019, p380).

Critical humanitarian scholars (Malkki, 2015; Malkki, 1996; Ticktin, 2011; Ticktin, 2014; Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2012) have long critiqued humanitarianism's focus on providing immediate, temporary relief, which they argue depoliticises the refugee experience and sustains existing power dynamics. Ambrosini (2021), has noted the growing criticism of humanitarianism's negative impact since the 2000s, highlighting how 'grassroots mobilisation' is linked to 'depoliticized humanitarianism', where the underlying political dimensions of refugee care are obscured[91] (Ambrosini, 2021, p 379). This critique is particularly evident in the context of solidarity initiatives during the 'so-called refugee crisis' (Ambrosini, 2022), with parallels drawn between '"third world aid" and current welcome culture' (Braun, 2017, p39). These forms of charity, while well meaning, are criticised for offering tokenistic solutions to crises like hunger without challenging broader issues of structural inequality (Poppendieck, 1999; Poppendieck, 2012).

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[91] For example, NGOs' management of humanitarian efforts (Kemedjio and Lynch, 2024; Agier, 2011) are criticised for isolating refugees in camps (Fassin, 2012), sometimes exacerbating suffering (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b).

In her 1996 study of Hutu refugees from Rwanda, Malkki (1996, p377) illustrates the depoliticising effects of humanitarian aid. She argued that well-intentioned support can silence refugees, reducing them to 'speechless emissaries', akin to Agamben's concept of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998, p1) – life stripped of political meaning. Rajaram (2002) argues that humanitarianism creates 'a depoliticized, dehistoricized and universalized figuration of the refugee as mute victim', obscuring the political and historical contexts of displacement (Rajaram, 2002, p248). Fassin (2012) further critiques humanitarian care for creating power imbalances by positioning refugees as passive recipients of aid expected to show gratitude. While humanitarianism may be motivated by compassion, Fassin argues that it often perpetuates dependency, reinforcing the power structures that create and sustain refugee crises. Ticktin (2011) builds on this, suggesting that the politics of care within humanitarianism often operates as a form of 'anti-politics', producing 'casualties of care' – those rendered visible through suffering, but silenced politically (Ticktin, 2011, p5). Building on this critique, Pallister-Wilkins (2017, p85) introduces the idea of 'humanitarian border[s]' – spaces where care and control coexist. Rescue operations at sea, for example, can save lives but can also serve to contain and manage displaced people, embedding aid within broader exclusionary practices (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017, p85). Thus, humanitarianism may not only fail to challenge structural violence but can also inadvertently sustain it.

From the critical humanitarian perspective, two main criticisms emerge. First, the compassion inherent in humanitarian aid often serves to perpetuate power hierarchies, as those 'helping' hold a position of authority over recipients. Second, by prioritising immediate needs over long-term rights-based solutions, humanitarian aid depoliticizes the refugee experience, reducing complex political struggles to simple issues of charity. I discuss these two points in more detail in the following sections.

2.2.5: Humanitarian care reinforcing the refugee 'label'

Humanitarian care, while framed around compassion and support, has been widely critiqued for reinforcing the very hierarchies it seeks to mitigate. Care often rests on unequal power relations, where volunteers – positioned as benevolent actors – exercise control over recipients framed as passive and grateful (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011; Peterie, 2019). Fassin (2012, p2) calls this 'humanitarian reason', where moral sentiment becomes the foundation for asymmetric relationships. Volunteers feel compassion towards suffering, but such compassion is apolitical and does not engage in tackling structural change (Vitellone, 2011). As Chambron (2008, p109) notes, these relations are structured by assumptions about the 'distinct type[s] of knowledge' posessed by volunteers versus refugees, exacerbating exclusion (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a). This dynamic is evident in how refugees are framed and responded to in everyday interactions. During the 'so-called refugee crisis' for example, volunteers often focused on women and children as 'victims' (Hamann and Karakayali, 2016), losing interest once they realised they were not the refugees' saviours (Mescoli *et al*., 2019). These narratives are not unique to refugee support. In other spaces of care – such as foodbanks (Cloke *et al.,* 2017), or children's centres (Jupp, 2013), volunteers are similarly positioned as moral actors, while recipients are framed through the lens of need, dependency and deservingness. These spaces can reproduce the figure of the 'poor other', reinforcing the social distance between provider and recipient (Surman *et al.,* 2021; Williams *et al.,* 2016). This boundary-making is often sustained by conditionality. Foodbank users, for example, are sometimes only eligible with a referral, and can only access a three-day package of food, three times a month (Trussell trust model). As DeVerteuil and colleagues (2020, p928) argue, spaces of care often contain within them the potential for both ''boundary-making' and 'boundary-breaking''.

Derrida's (2000, p3) concept of 'hostipitality' – the entanglement of hospitality and hostility – offers a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. Acts of generosity often mask underlying control, revealing power dynamics (Behnia, 2012). While sponsorship and other hosting schemes offer welcome, they also establish hierarchical relations between host and guest (Hutchinson, 2018; Haugen, 2023; Neelin, 2020, Macklin, 2020). Despite intentions of welcome, hosts retain the power to define the terms of welcome, reinforce behavioural expectations, and determine who is deserving of care (Hyndman, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.*, 2018; Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017). Volunteer initiatives and solidarity efforts can perpetuate social hierarchies, reinforcing power imbalances (Fleischmann, 2020; Mayer, 2018; Maestri and Monforte, 2020; Hernández-Carretero 2023).

This unequal structure is mirrored across various refugee volunteering initiatives (Monforte *et al.,* 2021). Mentoring and befriending schemes, for example, often pair middle class volunteers with 'marginalised' refugee mentees, reinforcing social and cultural hierarchies (Raithelhuber, 2021, p251). Volunteers typically have more social, financial, cultural and civic capital than those they support and are often older, white and middle class (Williams *et al.,* 2016; Gunaratnam, 2021; Stock, 2019; Mogstad and Rabe, 2024). In these settings, even language reflects power, as terms like 'befriender' and 'befriendee' reinforce asymmetry (Askins, 2016, p520). Critics highlight the paternalism in civil society support for refugees (Koca, 2022; Braun, 2017; Mescoli *et al.,* 2019), portraying volunteers as saviours and refugees as victims (Monforte and Maestri, 2022b). For example, the UK Homes for Ukraine scheme depicted Ukrainian women as 'passive, in need of protection, and constrained to their home' (Crossley, 2023, p6). In Germany, older female volunteers emphasised not only language education, but also tried to guide refugees on living 'correctly' in Germany (Stock, 2019; Braun 2017) reflecting a 'politics of mental motherhood' (Braun, 2017, p42). This creates 'vertical', hierarchical support relations (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b, p4).

However, this phenomenon is not restricted to refugee contexts. Scholars note that similar hierarchies are produced in other welfare-related volunteer spaces, such as foodbanks (Horst *et al.,* 2014), housing aid centres (Monforte, 2020) and family centres (Jupp, 2013). These dynamics are further shaped by emotional expectations. Drawing on Jasper's (1998; 2011) work on emotions and political action, emotions such as compassion not only motivate volunteering but also set the terms of participation. Volunteers may withdraw care when their emotional expectations – of friendship (Hebbani *et al.,* 2016; Monforte *et al.,* 2021), or having similar cultural values (Behnia, 2012) are not met. A failure to perform gratitude, such as rejecting a gift (Braun, 2017), or declining advice (Stock, 2019), is often read as a moral failing on the part of the individual being helped (Gardner *et al.,* 2022; Scheibelhofer, 2020; Rozakou, 2012)

Volunteering with refugees can also inadvertently reproduce bordering practices. Bordering can occur in daily interactions, enacted by volunteers who selectively support some refugees, while excluding others (Ticktin, 2006). Everyday actions create distinctions between refugees considered '"worthy of protection"', and those who are not (Koca, 2019b, p547). With increasing neo liberalisation of refugee support, 'civil society might […] become agents of formal state structures and […] of local border regimes' (Koca, 2019b, p549). Attempts by refugees to reciprocate or disrupt these dynamics – for example, by offering services in return – may be met with discomfort or rejection, as reciprocity challenges the humanitarian frame of one-way care[92] (Koca, 2022). These bordering practices are visible in homestay programmes where volunteers favour refugees who reciprocate emotional or cultural familiarity (Monforte *et al.,* 2021). The power to 'name' a refugee – central to Canada's PSR programme, further underscores the host's dominance in defining the terms of welcome (Elcioglu, 2023; Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Hutchinson, 2018; Elcioglu and Shams,

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[92] In one study, refugees felt uncomfortable reciprocating the care they had received by offering cooking classes when participants offered extra money despite already paying to attend (Koca, 2022).

2023). Across contexts, this dynamic reinforces the 'conditionality of hospitality', where care is contingent on the refugee's compliance with host expectations (Crossley, 2023, p8). Some scholars call for alternative approaches. Braun (2017, p420) calls for a decolonial approach to 'render visible the way in which these historical and colonial sedimentations surface in contemporary welcome culture' (Braun, 2017, p42), while Darling (2011) urges a shift towards frameworks that support refugee political agency, not just humanitarian care.

2.2.6: The transformative potential of 'citizen humanitarianism'

While humanitarianism is critiqued for creating and reinforcing unequal power dynamics, a growing body of scholarship highlights the duality of humanitarian support (Koca, 2019b; Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020a). Volunteering can both 'subvert humanitarian borders, but also participate in the construction of new types of borders' (Monforte and Maestri, 2022b, p59). It opens up 'new spaces of encounter' between volunteers and those who receive care (Koca, 2019b, p552), enabling care-receivers to contest the label of being 'helped' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a; Iqbal *et al.,* 2021; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2020b; Williams *et al.,* 2016), and volunteers to negotiate unequal power relations (Macklin *et al.,* 2020; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018). Studies on volunteering highlight the 'hopeful potential' within these encounters, which can challenge asymmetric power dynamics (Burrell, 2024, p1196). Relationships of care between private actors and refugees for example, offer opportunities for reflexivity and solidarity (Peterie, 2019), and new forms of volunteering which critically engage with power dynamics offer potential for more equitable distributions of power (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024).

The transformative capacity is rooted in the relational, affective, and negotiated nature of humanitarian care. While vertical power relations exist between helpers and those who are helped, scholars also note evidence of more equal, horizontal ties that mitigate power

asymmetries (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b; Fleischmann, 2020). Refugee support

initiatives, for example, can simultaneously reinforce and contest power relations, offering

nuanced forms of hospitality that embrace diverse social relationships (Farahani, 2021;

Darling, 2011; Stock, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2020). Despite sometimes aligning with existing

bordering processes, civil society actors can also develop 'multiple and novel strategies to

open up new spaces of inclusion and new subject positions for refugees and asylum seekers'

(Koca, 2022, p67). For example, refugee sponsors in Austria sometimes reinforced power

dynamics by expecting gratitude from those they supported. However, over time, they also

developed close emotional bonds with the refugees which motivated the sponsors to

advocate for refugee rights, both within their personal circles and in the broader political

sphere (Scheibelhofer, 2020). German buddy schemes show how volunteers and refugees

engage in a 'logics of care' (Stock, 2019, p129) that reinforces but can also transform

unequal power dynamics, fostering greater awareness and 'moral values […] conducive to

transformative politics' (Stock, 2019, p136). Examples from foodbanks offer useful analogies.

While these spaces often contain mechanisms of deservingness, innovations such as

reconfiguring foodbanks as cafés (Garthwaite *et al.,* 2015) or as 'social supermarkets' that

preserve user agency (Holweg and Lienbacher, 2011) demonstrate how even within

constrained systems, more dignified and relational forms of care can emerge.

2.2.7: Alternative forms of power relations

Examining the transformative potential of volunteer/refugee relations reveals how 'spaces of

care' (Turcatti *et al.,* 2024, p1) *can* offer an alternative approach to welcome that moves

beyond traditional humanitarian paradigms. Rather than framing refugees solely as aid

recipients, these spaces allow for dynamic, shifting power relations between 'host' volunteers

and 'guest' refugees, fostering 'close and symmetrical relationships' (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019,

p202) that resist the logic of 'paternalistic humanitarianism' (Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023,

p4). Framing these relationships through a lens of 'care ethics' rather than humanitarian reason highlights the potential for reciprocity, balancing uneven needs with values of 'recognition, trust, and solidarity' to foster personal and social integration (Herrmann, 2020, p210).

Scholarship provides examples of reciprocity in action (Boersma *et al.,* 2019). Braun (2017), for example, explored how initial patriarchal tensions in volunteer-refugee interactions gave way to more participatory practices, with both parties benefitting from their involvement and refugees increasingly involved in shaping the support they received (Hebbani *et al.,* 2016). In Soye and Watter's (2024) study of a church-run foodbank, refugees moved beyond passive roles to help redecorate and cook, actively shaping the space. Similarly, Strong (2020) notes how foodbank users sometimes take on volunteer roles themselves, dissolving rigid boundaries between 'giver' and receiver' (Strong, 2020). These blurred lines mark a subtle form of resistance to vertical care models. In some contexts, the careful avoidance of direct gift-giving aims to prevent hierarchical dynamics from forming (Rozakou, 2016). As Rozakou (2016, p193) argues - gifts can be 'potentially dangerous, because they invoke the vicious circle of reciprocity'. Recent work on 'reverse hospitality' (Birger *et al.,* 2024, p3954) furthers this discussion as Birger and colleagues describe moments where refugee 'guests' extend care and support to their 'hosts', inverting the traditional power dynamic. This approach allows for a 'more nuanced perspective that recognises the complexities and hybridity of hospitality' (Birger *et al.,* 2024, p3954).

Relational approaches to care and solidarity are central to disrupting established hierarchies (Monforte and Maestri, 2022b; Williams *et al.,* 2016). Williams and colleagues (2016) show how affective connections between food bank clients and volunteers – forged through humour or shared interests – can destabilise helper/helped boundaries. These affective ties reflect what Jasper (2011) calls 'moral emotions' – feelings like empathy, shame or pride that

motivate people to act and sustain commitment. Similarly, in kinship-based support models, volunteers and refugees co-create emotionally significant ties (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024; Stock 2019; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023; Ali *et al.,* 2022; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Blain *et al.,* 2020; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Scheibelhofer, 2019; Stock, 2019). While these relationships do not eliminate asymmetry, they may help to challenge notions of deservingness through cultural exchanges and shared experiences, potentially fostering 'transformative' behaviour (Stock, 2019, p136). The idea of a 'quiet politics of encounter' further emphasises the subtle, yet radical potential of such interactions (Askins, 2015, p471). Everyday forms of solidarity – such as befriending, mentoring or hosting – may initially appear apolitical. However, these actions can unsettle established authority structures and border regimes through 'micro-politics, which challenge "established patterns of control and authority"' (Staeheli *et al.,* 2012, cited in Askins, 2015, pp.475-476). Rather than reinforcing hierarchical power dynamics, these practices nurture reciprocity and mutual support (Askins, 2014b; Stock, 2019; Peterie, 2019). These everyday encounters are not emotionally neutral' they are often charged with hope, frustration, affection or disappointment – feelings that, Jasper (2011) notes, play a role in shaping political subjectivity. In this way, 'citizen humanitarianism' (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1489) diverges from traditional humanitarian models by underscoring the 'transformative' (Stock, 2019, p136) potential of navigating differences and forming close bonds based on shared experiences (Askins, 2015).

However, scholars caution against idealising these relational models. Familial or kin-like bonds can reproduce exclusion when volunteers favour those refugees who 'fit' their emotional or moral expectations (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b; Mogstad and Rabe, 2024; Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023; Monforte *et al.,* 2021). Emotional intimacy, rather than always subverting hierarchy, can reinforce it. As Jasper (2011) emphasises, emotions are unpredictable and potentially potent – they can generate solidarity, but also withdrawal, discomfort, or burnout. Kin-like ties, though emotionally rich, are fragile and

conditional, vulnerable to breakdown when expectations are unmet or when emotional labour becomes unevenly distributed. As Monforte and Steinhilper (2023, p15) note, 'solidarity in border zones is not only transformative, but also ambivalent, requiring a reflexivity to acknowledge that it remains incomplete and precarious'. Similarly, Brkovic (2023, p8) reminds us that grassroots support is not inherently 'politically promising or progressive' but can also reinforce exclusion, hierarchy and power imbalances. Despite these challenges, it remains crucial to recognise the capacity for diverse relationships to form (Ticktin, 2014) as well as the transformative potential that can emerge from encounters between volunteers and refugees (Monforte and Maestri, 2022b; Phillimore *et al.,* 2024).

2.2.8: Humanitarian care as de-political care

For some scholars, volunteering is perceived as an apolitical act, separate from political action and social change. Motivated by compassion (Vitellone, 2011; Surman *et al.,* 2021), volunteering is seen as focused on immediate humanitarian aid rather than engaging with broader political claims or addressing the structural causes of inequality (Monforte, 2020). In some cases, volunteers explicitly avoid politicising their actions, viewing their work as a form of care rather than a catalyst for political transformation (Eliasoph, 1998). This view aligns with the second critique from critical humanitarian scholars: that compassion-driven care creates de-politicised subjects (Della Porta, 2021). In this way, volunteer humanitarianism may act as a 'moral safety valve,' preventing more transformative social movements from challenging the political structures that perpetuate injustice (Poppendieck, 1999). Rather than challenging the structural injustices that create crises, this type of aid tends to focus on alleviating it's immediate symptoms. As Vandevoordt (2019) notes, this approach risks failing to engage with the 'socio-political subjectivities' of those being helped (Vandevoordt, 2019, p245) risking 'repairing the harshest consequences of a malfunctioning system without addressing the system itself' (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b, p117). Examples from

volunteering with refugees illustrate this apolitical tendency in action. For example, Stierl (2018) highlights the work of the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), which is funded by philanthropists. MOAS focuses exclusively on saving lives at sea, portraying refugees as victims to be saved, 'from scrupulous smugglers, but also from themselves' (Stierl, 2018, p14) and framing their efforts in strictly humanitarian terms. Similarly, studies on foodbank volunteers (Williams *et al.,* 2016; Surman *et al.,* 2021; Dowler, 2013) have found that many view their involvement as life-saving, without engaging in any deeper political critique of the systems that create food insecurity.

Some organisations, despite their desire to engage politically, find themselves constrained by their dependence on state funding or private donors. Volunteers avoid framing their work as political to protect their funding and ensure continued operational support (Allsopp, 2017; Gordon, 2013). For example, Escarcena (2020) found that in Italy, some volunteer organisations were discouraged from discussing concerns about state activity within hotspots for fear of losing financial support from the Italian government. In the UK, limited funding (Mayblin and James, 2019) means refugee support organisations prioritise securing funding over advocacy (Koca, 2022; Koca, 2019b). As Grove-White and Kaye (2023) suggest, the decline of state funding for refugee support organisations has led to increased reliance on civil society actors. Additionally, small staff sizes and the reactive nature of advocacy in a hostile environment further constrain proactive change (Grove-White and Kaye, 2023). This has been described as a 'disciplinary modality of policing' (Carrera *et al.,* 2018, p255), a form of implicit state control where private actors are used by the state to address 'unwanted mobilities' (Koca, 2022, p77), thereby reducing the 'transformative power of grassroots initiatives' (Koca, 2019b, p556). However, organisations that are less reliant on funding from states or private donors can afford to be freer in terms of their potentially political activities (Deverteuil *et al.,* 2019). This depoliticization of volunteering is part of a broader critique that

charity and humanitarianism, particularly in neoliberal contexts, absolve the state from its responsibility to address systemic inequalities (Cloke *et al.,* 2017).

However, recent scholarship has begun to challenge the traditional view that volunteering, particularly in humanitarian aid contexts, is inherently apolitical. In response to political and economic crises such as austerity (Monforte, 2020) and the so-called refugee crisis, many scholars argue that the boundary between humanitarianism and political action is increasingly difficult to maintain (Sinatti, 2019; Cuttitta, 2017; Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Monforte and Maestri, 2022a). Traditionally, civil society focused on apolitical immediate relief, while social movements were more 'transgressive, contentious and/or confrontational' (Della Porta, 2020, p3). However, emerging scholarship suggests that the distinction between humanitarian action and politics is less 'rigid' (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a, p176) but more 'entangled' (Sinatti, 2019, p140), 'blurred' (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a, p123), and 'fuzzy, shifting or contested' (Mayer, 2018, p237).

As noted by Sinatti (2019) and Cuttitta (2017), grassroots humanitarian actions – such as volunteers assisting refugees – are increasingly becoming spaces where humanitarian care intersects with political protest. For example, in Greece since 2015, volunteers have not only provided essential services but have also actively protested the poor treatment of refugees, demonstrating how humanitarianism can coexist with, and even amplify, political activism (Tsavdaroglou *et al.,* 2019). The political nature of volunteering is especially evident in Mediterranean rescue operations, where *some*[93] organisations have used their humanitarian missions as platforms to critique European Union policies on migration - showcasing a 'wide spectrum of humanitarian imaginary' (Stierl, 2018, p6). In the UK, food banks – once viewed as apolitical spaces of care – have become increasingly politicised in the wake of austerity

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[93] Some organisations, like MOAS, focused exclusively on preventing deaths, but Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Sea Watch framed their actions as critiques of EU policies (Stierl, 2018).

politics (Williams *et al.,* 2016; Cloke *et al.,* 2017; May *et al,.* 2020). Volunteers have started to view their work not just as providing immediate relief, but as a catalyst for broader political change, rejecting the notion of charity as a 'moral safety valve' (Williams, *et al.,* 2016). Though foodbanks may not specifically resist dominant political systems, they can reinvent spaces of care by 'opening out rather more progressive and hopeful spaces of political conscientization, invention and reorientation' (Cloke *et al.,* 2017, p721). In a study of emergency homeless shelters, Evans (2011) argued that these spaces of care carry political significance as they are 'entangled with broader processes of defining who belongs and who does not' in terms of citizenship. By operating a flexible coming and going process, the homeless shelter in the study attempted to reduce barriers to social rights for those socially excluded from society. These findings illustrate the varied relationships between humanitarianism and politics, highlighting the existence of 'alternative imaginaries […] within humanitarian reason' (Stierl, 2018, p16).

Fleischman and Steinhilper (2017) argue that humanitarianism, particularly when directed at refugees, is inherently political, challenging the notion of apolitical humanitarianism as a 'myth'. Their study of German welcome culture highlights how mass volunteer participation in 2015 not only embedded 'refugee solidarity in humanitarian parameters' but also created spaces of political engagement, even while avoiding overtly political contexts (Fleischman and Steinhilper 2017, p22). They suggest that volunteering in such contexts is political because it creates 'spaces of encounter between established residents and the newly arrived refugees' fostering interpersonal transformations that implicitly challenge state-imposed borders (Fleischman and Steinhilper 2017, p22). This form of engagement is a type of micropolitics – individual acts of kindness and care which subtly challenge the established narratives of labelling and bordering (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024). These acts of everyday resistance contradict restrictive state policies, reinforcing human solidarity in opposition to official practices of bordering and exclusion.

Several scholars (Karakayalı, 2017; Hamann and Karakayali, 2016; Ambrosini, 2022) argue that grassroots actions have increasingly bridged humanitarian aid and political action (Youkhana and Sutter, 2017) as 'social movements now provide various concrete services to asylum seekers; social activists take part in demonstrations alongside political activists; and volunteers assert the political significance of their activities' (Ambrosini, 2019, p169). Ambrosini (2023) supports Fleischman and Steinhilper's (2017) view that volunteering with refugees is inherently political, even when volunteers do not explicitly frame their actions as such. The notion of 'active citizenship' - providing food, resources or shelter to refugees, creates 'de-bordering solidarity'. This form of solidarity challenges asylum and border policies without necessarily pursuing radical political change (Ambrosini, 2021, p382). De-bordering solidarity occurs when private actors and groups engage in humanitarian work which aligns with political action, pushing against restrictive state policies on migration (Ambrosini, 2021).

During the 'so-called refugee crisis', many governments were reluctant to welcome refugees, and as a result, humanitarian support became an inherently political act – 'against the political tide' of exclusion (Vandevoordt, 2019, p249). These acts of debordering solidarity often manifest as micropolitical actions. Although such actions may not be intended as political, they become so by resisting the restrictive bordering of refugees (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024). This is particularly significant in the current context of the 'criminalisation of migration' (Carrera *et al.,* 2018, p237) where volunteers face criminal charges for supporting refugees (Dadusc and Mudu, 2022; Fekete, 2018; Carrera *et al.,* 2019; Cusumano and Bell, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2019; Allsopp, 2017). Volunteers are subjected to three 'policing modalities': intimidation, discipline and criminalisation (Carrera *et al.,* 2018, p261) and humanitarian search and rescue (SAR) operations are especially affected (Allsopp *et al.,* 2021). In Italy, the intensified policing of humanitarian SAR vessels has led volunteers to refrain from certain activities out of fear of legal repercussions (Moreno-Lax *et al.,* 2021). Instead, they may

engage in less risky activities like 'boat spotting' (Carrera *et al.,* 2018, p253). Others have continued their work despite their activities being increasingly criminalised (Carrera *et al.,* 2018).

The complexity of volunteering with refugees challenges the traditional division between humanitarian support and political action (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Fleischmann, 2020; Monforte and Maestri, 2022a). Recent scholarship highlights the political significance of volunteering with refugees (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a; Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020a), even when volunteers' intentions are not explicitly political (Sandri, 2018). Sandri (2018, p65) argues that in contexts like the 'Jungle' camp in Calais, volunteers' humanitarian work, through framed as aid, becomes political as it counters violent European border practices. Volunteers daily interactions with refugees often brings then into contact with the oppressive realities of border practices, turning acts of care into subtle forms of political resistance (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a; Merikoski, 2021).

This blurring of lines between humanitarianism and political action is conceptualised as 'subversive humanitarianism' – acts which acquire political significance by implicitly opposing the dominant socio-political climate (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b). By providing food and shelter, volunteers challenge the existing social order (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b; Mescoli *et al.,* 2019). Encounters with refugee suffering led volunteers to view refugees not only as people in need 'but also as a subject of law' (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019, p201), prompting a shift from charity to political activism. Similarly, for some foodbank volunteers, direct encounters with clients led some to see the need to go beyond charitable care and engage with wider issues of social inequality (Williams *et al.,* 2016). In Liege, humanitarian efforts transitioned to advocating for undocumented refugees (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019). Scholars observed volunteers securing funds for refugees' legal representation as they became more politically active (Braun, 2017). In Brussels' Maximiliaan Park, volunteer

support evolved into political campaigns challenging government policies (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019) and Hungarian volunteers became involved in protests organised by advocacy groups (Kovats and Mazzola, 2019).

The emotional dynamics at play whilst volunteering are key to understanding how seemingly apolitical acts of humanitarian aid can evolve into political action. Jasper (2011) underscores the central role of emotions in driving political behaviour, especially within social movements. According to Jasper, emotions like anger, empathy, and solidarity are not only personal experiences but are also shared collectively in protest movements and social activism, often motivating individuals to engage in political acts. For volunteers supporting refugees, the emotional impact of witnessing suffering and injustice often serves as a catalyst for political engagement, even when their actions are not consciously framed as political. The relationships volunteers build with refugees amplify these emotional responses. Strong bonds between volunteers and refugees create 'thickening obligations' (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1496) where volunteers feel morally compelled to support their 'kin' when faced with deportation threats (Stock 2019, p135) or asylum rejection (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024). This sense of familial duty leads some volunteers to engage in illegal acts, such as crossing borders, highlighting the subversive nature of their actions (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024). The '"conversion" of asylum-seekers to kin made these obligations feel "non-negotiable"' and despite their illegality, volunteers saw these actions as morally necessary, resisting state neglect and brutality towards asylum-seekers (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1497). Jasper's framework allows us to see how volunteers, through their emotional investment, can transform acts of humanitarian assistance into political action, even when those acts might appear apolitical on the surface.

Finally, the intertwining of humanitarian and political actions is reciprocal (Fleischmann, 2020). Humanitarian efforts have become more political, while political action has adopted

humanitarian forms. Practical actions within social movements are not purely apolitical but are interwoven with political protest (Zamponi, 2017). Rozakou (2016, cited in Cantat and Feischmidt, 2019, p10), described how the 'gift taboo', where practical aid was viewed with suspicion by political activists, broke down after 2015. Instead, 'the idea of giving and forms of material generosity […] gained a central place in practices of solidarity, and have also been enacted by actors traditionally hostile to "humanitarian" types of relations' (Cantat and Feischmidt, 2019, p10).

2.2.9: Quiet Politics

'Quiet politics' (Meier, 2023) or 'quiet activism' (Pottinger, 2017, Hackney, 2013) involves everyday decision-making that can gradually shift dominant norms and foster social change (Hankins, 2017, p2). Fleischmann (2020, p18) notes that 'practices of refugee support can turn political […] by enacting alternative modes of togetherness and belonging', like the idea of 'affective activisms', where political actions emerge from relationships and shared activities (Howard, 2014, p17). Examples of quiet political action are found in refugee befriending schemes (Askins, 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016), refugee community organisations (Soye and Watters, 2024) and homestay programmes (Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023; Merikoski, 2021). These forms of volunteering with refugees are 'quietly political' because personal relationships and acts of care that, over time, can foster a 'transformative politics of encounter' (Askins, 2015, p473). The intimacy and empathy involved in these interactions provide a counter-narrative to state-driven policies, challenging the very structures of exclusion and marginalisation that refugees often face.

Merikowski (2021) introduces the idea of 'contentious hospitality' to describe how, within the private space of the home, refugees' rights are claimed through solidarity and care, therefore disrupting state-led refugee reception processes. This framework aligns with a subsequent

study which frames the home as a site of 'domestic humanitarianism' where contentious questions about refugee inclusion are both domesticated and politicised (Boccagni and Giudici, 2022, p2). In these spaces, close relationships developed through everyday acts of care disrupt 'processes of "ordering and othering' (Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023, p13), offering an alternative form of solidarity that challenges exclusionary state practices. While these actions may seem 'modest', or even apolitical in nature, they contribute to the 'construction of new, hybrid, forms of prefigurative politics in which agents do politics through […] small-scale acts of compassion' (Monforte and van Dijk, 2023, p33). This process does not necessarily challenge state policies head-on but contributes to a broader, subtler political shift, helping to reframe the ways in which refugees and marginalised groups are understood and treated.

In Austria, for example, efforts to integrate refugees and counter policies of isolation exemplify this quiet political action (De Jong and Atac, 2017). Blank (2021) notes how volunteer interactions in a Frankfurt welcome initiative adjacent to an asylum accommodation centre, foster care and promote 'debordering' through volunteer networks that transcend institutional boundaries (Blank, 2021, p1656). Visiting volunteers play a key role in this process, as their presence helps to break the silence and isolation often experienced in asylum accommodation centres (Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023). Studies on refugee support in France and Britain (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a) and within homestay schemes (Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023) demonstrate how everyday acts of kindness help refugees to navigate bureaucratic challenges and access essential services (Baillot *et al*., 2023). Supporting refugees' 'bureaucratic needs is a political task in itself', especially helping refugees deal with the 'nightmare of Universal Credit' (Burrell, 2024, p1204). For refugees affected by gender-based violence, micropolitical acts of kindness can inspire a belief in the possibility of belonging (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024). This resonates with studies of foodbanks, where volunteers may also experience 'micropolitical transformation' as their perception of broader

structural issues sharpens through their interactions with service-users, sometimes disrupting previously held views on poverty (Williams *et al,.* 2016, p14).

2.3: Summary

This literature review explored the current state of knowledge on sponsorship, linking sponsor experiences with broader scholarship on volunteering, social movements and critical humanitarianism.

As national sponsorship programmes have developed globally, scholarship in this area has expanded. Six thematic research areas were identified: legal and policy frameworks, impact, critical perspectives, integration, place, and sponsor experiences. However, there is a notable gap in sponsor experiences (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Elcioglu, 2023), especially outside Canada (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Elcioglu, 2023; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Blain *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2018). Most research focuses on the Canadian PSR programme, which allows specific refugees to be named. Other national programmes which rely on UNHCR referrals, such as UK CS, remain underexplored. These programmes face recruitment challenges (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023) highlighting the need to examine the sponsor experience more thoroughly.

Asymmetric power dynamics form a key aspect of sponsor/refugee relationships. Sponsors, often from higher economic backgrounds (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), are largely motivated by compassion driven by 'humanitarian reason' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3959). They extend hospitality (Haugen, 2023) based on perceiving refugees as vulnerable victims (Hyndman, 2019). This conditional hospitality (Kant, 2016) leads to relational tension when sponsor expectations around vulnerability (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), gratitude (Haugen, 2023; Lim, 2019) and sponsorship priorities (Steimel, 2017) are challenged (Iqbal *et al.,*

2021) or unmet (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). Additionally, there is limited focus on intra-group tension among sponsors (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Lenard, 2019, Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023). Though power asymmetry is foundational within sponsorship (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a), my findings indicate potential for more balanced interactions over time (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Macklin, 2020). Some sponsors (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Haugen, 2023) and refugees (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018) contest their roles within the power dynamic, suggesting that relationships can evolve. However, this potential for equitable relations is under-theorised in sponsorship research, representing a research gap.

Another sub-theme concerns post-involvement effects on sponsors. While many sponsors report positive experiences, despite challenges (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Hutchinson, 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), it is unclear whether prolonged engagement with refugees leads sponsors to address structural barriers facing refugees such as housing, employment and family reunion, or remain focused on immediate help (Elcioglu, 2023). Research is limited and divided on this point (Elcioglu, 2023; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Ritchie, 2018), constituting the second research gap.

Critical humanitarian scholars argue that humanitarian support can inadvertently create hierarchical power dynamics, and de-politicise refugees by depriving them of their agency and rights. In other studies of refugee solidarity volunteering (Fleischmann, 2020; Mayer, 2018; Maestri and Monforte, 2020) and within broader forms of volunteering (Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Jupp, 2013; Surman *et al.,* 2021; Williams *et al.,* 2016) similar asymmetric power dynamics were noted. Volunteers, like sponsors, often had more capital than those they supported (Gunaratnam, 2021; Stock, 2019; Mogstad and Rabe, 2024; Williams *et al.,* 2016) and sometimes perpetuated the power dynamic through paternalistic acts (Stock, 2019; Braun 2017), reinforcing 'vertical' relations (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b, p4).

However, as with sponsorship, there is evidence of power dynamics being subverted through 'spaces of encounter' which can help to bridge the distance between those who need help and those who provide help, offering potential for more balanced relationships (Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Garthwaite *et al.,* 2015; Holweg and Lienbacher, 2011).

Unlike sponsors, there is more evidence of political motivations in broader forms of volunteering (Sandri, 2018; Monforte and Maestri, 2022a; Cloke *et al.,* 2017), with blurred boundaries between humanitarian support and political action (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021). Studies highlight the political significant of volunteering with refugees (Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020a), through both overt (Mescoli *et al.,* 2019; Braun, 2017; Kovats and Mazzola, 2019) and quieter forms of political action (Askins, 2014a).

Gaps in knowledge

Further research is needed to understand how power dynamics in sponsorship evolve over time (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Macklin, 2020) and how sponsors negotiate these changes. Additionally, the political potential of sponsorship requires deeper exploration. While broader forms of volunteering increasingly blend humanitarian and political action, sponsorship research has not fully examined whether sponsors become more politically engaged after sponsoring refugees.

The next chapter introduces a conceptual framework guiding the research design outlining the aims, objectives, and concepts to explore the identified research gaps.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the conceptual framework outlining the theories and concepts underpinning the research design and development of research tools.

Scholarship on volunteer support for refugees – such as hosting, befriending, mentoring, and sponsorship – often highlights asymmetric power relations. While some studies suggest that contact between volunteers and refugees can foster more equitable relationships, there is limited empirical evidence on how sponsors manage and negotiate power dynamics beyond asymmetry. Additionally, broader research links humanitarian support for refugees with political action, although this connection is underexplored in the context of sponsorship. Existing studies offer mixed conclusions on whether sponsoring refugees translates into political action or if sponsors address the broader structural challenges faced by refugees. To address these gaps, I set out the following aim and objectives:

3.1: Aim and objectives

Research Aim:

This thesis aims to examine the ways in which volunteers' engagement with Community Sponsorship shape their relationships with sponsored refugees and the nature of associated volunteering activity.

Research Objectives:

1. To assess the state of knowledge around volunteering within community sponsorship groups.

2. To explore how community sponsorship volunteers define their roles in relation to the sponsored refugees before their arrival.

3. To understand the ways in which volunteers' perception of their role might change over time as the sponsored refugees become more integrated into their local community and there is the potential for the power dynamic to change.

4. To examine the ways in which the volunteering work undertaken by CS volunteers evolves over time, in relation to their exposure to the sponsored refugees.

Research Objective One aims to assess current knowledge about volunteering with a CS group, providing context for the study. As sponsorship is a relatively new research area, it is important to explore who CS volunteers are, their motivations, activities and methods. Objectives Two, Three and Four follow a chronological sequence, examining volunteers' experiences at different stages of the CS process: before the family's arrival (RO2), during resettlement (RO3), and after the formal two-year support period ends (RO4). Objectives Two and Three focus on power dynamics. I explore how these dynamics develop over time, starting with how sponsors perceive their roles relative to sponsored families before arrival (RO2). Next, I examine any changes to the power dynamics during the sponsorship period (RO3). RO4 investigates the long-term impact of CS participation on volunteers, specifically how supporting families influences their engagement with the broader structural barriers faced by refugees.

3.2: A conceptual model

To explore the aim and objectives, I integrate several concepts from the broader scholarship into a conceptual model (See Table Three).

Objective	Concepts
Overall conceptual lens	Hospitality (Bulley, 2016; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000; Dikec, 2002; Dikec *et al.*, 2009) Hostipitality (Derrida, 2000)
1. To assess the state of knowledge around volunteering within community sponsorship groups.	Humanitarian reason (Fassin, 2012)
2. To explore how community sponsorship volunteers define their roles in relation to the sponsored refugees before their arrival.	Power (Allen, 1998) Expressions of Power Framework (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) Transformative Power (Rye, 2015b; Van Baarle *et al.*, 2021)
3. To understand the ways in which volunteers perception of their role might change over time as the sponsored refugees become more integrated into their local community and there is the potential for the power dynamic to change.	
4. To examine the ways in which the volunteering work undertaken by CS volunteers evolves over time, in relation to their exposure to the sponsored refugees	Politicisation (Hamidi, 2023' Cloke *et al.*, 2017) Political action (Fleischmann, 2020) 'Loud' politics (Hankins, 2017) 'Quiet' politics (Askins, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016; Hall, 2020; Pottinger, 2017)

Table Three: Concepts used to explore the aim and objectives

3.2.1: Hospitality

Hospitality is a 'metaphor for engaging with the stranger', a concept that has gained prominence since the 'so called refugee crisis', as states grapple with growing numbers of forcibly displaced people (Kyriakidou, 2021, p133). The challenge of 'how to deal with strangers' (Pitt-Rivers 2012, p501) is not new – it has long been considered a reflection of a society's character (Isayev, 2017). Many religions regard the protection of strangers as a moral duty (Friese, 2010; Mavelli, 2017), and sacred buildings historically served as

sanctuaries (Marfleet, 2011). In some contexts, such religious practices of protection continue today (Macklin, 2020).

Scholars have also engaged with the idea of universal hospitality (Cavallar, 2017). Immanuel Kant, for example, proposed that hospitality is a natural law – an entitlement extended to all humans by 'virtue of [their] common right of possession on the surface of the earth' (Kant, 2016, p138). He distinguished between the 'right to visit (Besuchsrecht)' and the 'right to reside (Gastrecht)' (Brown, 2010, p308). The latter is broadly accessible, whilst the latter is conditional, requiring special agreement. Kantian hospitality, therefore, applies to temporary guests, not permanent residents. Critics argue that Kantian hospitality is a negative right – granted only to those who present their documents properly, for a limited time, and within the framework of state authority (Dikeç *et al.,* 2009). Strangers are welcomed only when their rejection would result in destruction (Brown, 2010) and guests may be turned away, so long as this 'can be done without causing [their] death' (Kant, 2016, p138). While promoting tolerance, this approach remains inherently conditional (Brown, 2010).

Jacques Derrida exposed the contradictions within Kantian hospitality. While cosmopolitanism advocates for universal welcome, Derrida argued that it is undermined by the laws of individual states. He described a fundamental tension between the unconditional law of hospitality and the conditional law(s) of hospitality imposed by states (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). According to Derrida, state power over who can be hosted corrupts the very idea of universal hospitality. Derrida instead advocated for unconditional hospitality – an open welcome without conditions, documents or expectations. He advocated for a deconstructed reading of the 'traditional gift paradigm of hospitality', which relies on reciprocity (Ahn, 2010, p249), instead arguing that hospitality should not rely on mutual benefit. As he explains:

'I have to welcome the Other whoever he or she is unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context, or a passport. That is the very first opening of my relation to the Other: to open my space, my home – my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state, and myself. I don't have to open it, because it is open, it is open before I make a decision about it: then I have to keep it open or try to keep it open unconditionally. But of course this unconditionality is a frightening thing' (Derrida and Bennington, 1997, p5).

However, Derrida acknowledges that such absolute hospitality is ultimately impossible. Hospitality requires sovereignty – control over one's home and the power to exclude (Derrida, 2000). Without the capacity to choose, there is no hospitality to offer. To welcome some, the host must retain the ability to refuse others. This tension reveals an 'internal contradiction' between the 'law of unconditional "absolute hospitality"' and the laws imposed by the state (Challinor, 2018, p96). Hospitality and hostility coexist, reflecting both positive and negative aspects (Macklin, 2020). Derrida coined the term 'hostipitality' to capture this paradox (Derrida, 2000), where hospitality and hostility reflect 'two sides of the same coin' (Rozakou, 2012, p565). Hospitality cannot exist without the shadow of hostility, they are not opposites, but both are in constant tension and negotiation (Humphris, 2019). Strangers, who occupy the space between 'hostile stranger' and 'community member', exist in a liminal space without rights, where welcome and rejection are both possible (Pitt-Rivers, 2012, p504).

In a globalised world, how we respond to strangers has become a matter of international ethical urgency (Dikeç *et al.,* 2009). In the context of rising displacement, Dikeç suggests it is timely to ask: – 'What will "we" do for or to the immigrant/stranger?' (Dikeç, 2002, p242). Since the 'so-called refugee crisis', both the 'practice and the metaphor' of hospitality have gained renewed scholarly attention (Luccioni, 2023, p12). The concept is frequently used to

analyse power dynamics in encounters between volunteers and refugees (Rozakou, 2012; Rosello, 2001), including hosting (Burrell, 2024; Farahani, 2021; Gunaratnam, 2021; Monforte *et al.,* 2021) and sponsorship (Hutchinson, 2018; Haugen, 2023; Neelin, 2020; Macklin, 2020; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Krivenko, 2012). Outside the migration scholarship, researchers have used the conceptual framework of hospitality to highlight the exclusionary dynamics embedded in food charity (Kravva, 2014), or to highlight how hospitality can simultaneously include and marginalise (Lugosi *et al.,* 2014).

Some scholars distinguish between private and public hospitality. Private hospitality is 'a value, a responsibility and an individual practice', whereas public hospitality refers to its legal and institutional forms (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p2). Similarly, Dikeç (2002, p237) contrasts 'institutional' hospitality with 'interactional' hospitality – the latter involving everyday acts of welcome by individuals and groups. In some cases, private hospitality emerges in response to a lack of public hospitality. When states are inhospitable, volunteers may offer welcome as a form of resistance (Rosello, 2001; Monforte *et al.,* 2021), even in contexts marked by 'dominant dehumanisation' (Rozakou, 2016, p195). This form of action has been termed 'contentious hospitality' (Merikoski, 2021). Critics argue that state-based, rights-driven models of hospitality are too limited. In contrast, individual acts of hospitality often push beyond these restrictions (Chatty, 2017). During the 'so-called refugee crisis', hospitality was a key factor in the mobilisation of volunteers (Monforte *et al.,* 2021).

Dikeç (2002) and Bulley (2016, 2015) build on Derrida's idea of hospitality as an ongoing process involving multiple spaces and actors. Bulley extends Derridean hospitality beyond the state as the sole provider of welcome, examining the role of various spaces, actors and power relations involved (Bulley, 2015). He emphasises the need to consider the interplay between 'ethics, power and space', suggesting that hospitality should be viewed as a dynamic process where the roles of hosts and guests can shift and reverse (Bulley, 2015).

Bulley defines hospitality as a 'spatial relational practice with affective dimensions', focusing on its negotiation not only at the moment of initial encounter but also in the ongoing, everyday interactions that follow (Bulley, 2016, p7). While Derridean hospitality focuses on the moment a stranger crosses a threshold, Bulley (2016) and Dikeç (2002) argue that the concept extends into a space of ongoing negotiation and contestation between hosts and guests. Dikeç contends:

> 'Hospitality is not about the rules of stay being conditioned by a duality of host and guest with unequal power relations leading to domination; it is about a recognition that we are hosts and guests at the same time in multiple and shifting ways. Hospitality […] is a refusal to conceive the host and the guest as pre-constituted identities […] they are mutually constitutive of each other, and thus, relational and shifting as all identities are' (Dikeç, 2002, p239)

This analysis of hospitality beyond the moment of arrival provides a deeper understanding of how power and ethics are negotiated in shared spaces (Bulley, 2016). Research has found that the roles of 'host' and 'guest' are fluid as both parties continuously manage and reinvent their roles (Bulley, 2016; Lynch *et al.,* 2011; Gill *et al.,* 2022), for example, by offering their own hospitality, such as sharing food (Rottmann and Nimer, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2017). As Bulley explains:

> 'Subjects are always becoming and never complete; guests becoming hosts and hosts becoming guests. They exercise power over themselves and others whilst resisting the management of their behaviour by the other, producing dynamic, shifting spaces of belonging and exclusion' (Bulley, 2016, p4).

By focusing on the shared space beyond the initial welcome, we can more fully explore how power relations evolve over time. Recent research on sponsorship indicates that temporality may enable sponsors to shift from initial humanitarian motives to renegotiating their roles once refugees have arrived (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). However, there is a lack of research that examines the entire sponsorship process – before, during, and after the refugees' arrival.

CS provides a framework to study the fluidity of 'host' and 'guest' roles over the two-year support period. Like refugee hosting, sponsorship involves everyday interactions. This study seeks to explore the 'everyday ethics'[94] of hospitality (Bulley, 2024, p3). After two years, volunteers' responsibilities end, raising the question: what happens to their roles once the refugees are no longer considered 'guests'? (Pitt-Rivers, 2012). The negotiation of hospitality between hosts and guests is central to my analysis. I challenge the idea of fixed roles within sponsorship and aim to understand hospitality as a 'process of engagement, negotiation and perhaps contestation' (Dikeç, 2002, p237), a constantly shifting dynamic (Rozakou, 2012; Dikeç, 2002). Against the 'extravagant generosity of hospitality', the concept of reciprocity allows for ongoing role negotiation and challenges the idea of fixed roles (Rozakou, 2016, p190).

3.2.2: Power

There is little agreement on a universal definition of power (Pansardi and Bindi, 2021; Lukes, 2005), reflected in the diversity of interpretations (Rye, 2015b). Historically, two opposing traditions have emerged: one which views power as coercive, while the other views it as enabling (Rye, 2015b, p1054). These are often referred to as 'power over' and 'power to'

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[94] Everyday ethics are defined as 'the multiple ways in which people negotiate complex, often clashing responsibilities, values, emotions and intuitions that are embedded in the structures and realities of conducting normal, often repetitive, relationships. Understandings of these negotiations, if and when they are the subject of reflection, are generally expressed in vernacular languages that navigate the local and the global, the personal and political, the general and the particular' (Bulley, 2024, p3).

(Ledyaev, 2021; Haugaard, 2012). 'Power over' involves domination and is typically viewed through a 'zero-sum' lens, where one party's gain in power means the loss of power for another (Lukes, 2005; Hayward and Lukes, 2008). One commonly cited definition describes power as: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' (Dahl, 1957, p80). In contrast, other scholars emphasise the potential for power to have a positive impact, viewing it as the capacity for agency and action (Haugaard, 2012) – termed 'power to' (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009). Allen (1998, p22) distinguishes between these two camps, labelling them - 'domination theorists' and 'empowerment theorists'. While Arendt did not explicitly use the terms 'power over' and 'power to', she argued that power is enacted through cooperation and communication, whereas violence stems from the imposition of power (Arendt, 1970, cited in Pansardi and Bindi, 2021).

A one-sided view of power, either as domination or empowerment, oversimplifies the complexity of power relations (Allen, 1998). More recent scholarship considers power not as a single concept, but as 'a cluster of concepts' (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009, p3). Drawing on Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance' (Wittgenstein, 1953, cited in Haugaard and Clegg, 2009), Haugaard and Clegg (2009, p4) suggest that ''power' covers a cluster of social phenomena central to the constitution of social order'. Scholars have moved beyond a binary view of power by adopting a more multidimensional approach (Rowlands, 1997; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Allen, 1998). Haugaard (2015, p293) emphasises that 'power is not a singular entity, but a collection of elements, which include both empowerment and domination' which often coexist. This perspective recognises that both positive (power to) and negative (power over) forms of power continuously operate through social relationships (Ledyaev, 2021). To capture these various forms, Allen (1998, p36) offers a broad definition: 'the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act'. This definition avoids the limitations of a one-sided view, which Allen critiques in both 'domination' and 'empowerment' theories, and allows for a more nuanced understanding of power's multiple expressions (Allen, 1998).

Building on the recognition that power operates both positively and negatively, scholars have increasingly sought a more comprehensive framework to capture the complexity of power dynamics. This expanded view considers not only the different forms that power can take, but also how it operates across various dimensions and contexts. Lukes (2005) introduces a three-dimensional view of power. The first dimension focuses on observable power, while the second addresses how power can limit the scope of discussion. Lukes expands this framework by adding a third dimension: power as a hidden influence that shapes perceptions and understanding. Gaventa (1982, 2006) builds on this by analysing how power operates across different spaces - closed, invited, and claimed - and at various levels - from global to local. These interactions are visually represented in the 'Power Cube', which illustrates the interplay between the forms, spaces and levels of power. (See Figure Four).
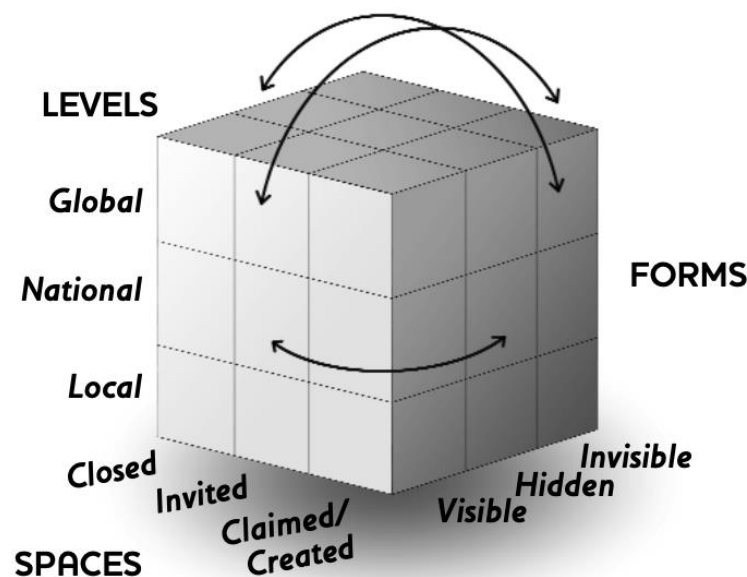
Figure Four: The three 'faces' of the 'Power Cube' (Gaventa, 2006, p25)

The first face of the Power Cube outlines Lukes' (2005) three forms of power: visible, hidden, and invisible. Visible power is evident in explicit rules and structures, while hidden power shapes who participates in decision-making and controls the discussions. Invisible power manifests when the beliefs and values of those in power subtly dominate the agenda, often

going unnoticed by those being controlled (Gaventa, 2006). The second face of the Power Cube examines the spaces in which power is exercised: closed, invited, and created. According to Gaventa (2006), these spaces exist on a spectrum. In closed spaces, decisions are made behind closed doors, with occasional invitations to outsiders. Created or claimed spaces emerge when less powerful groups assert their own influence. The Power Cube is used to 'understand and illuminate' the 'nature and dynamics of power' (Gaventa, 2019, p129), and to explore the interactions among its various aspects. Addressing a criticism that the Power Cube presents power as something static, Gaventa (2019, p130) suggests:

'Each dimension should be seen as a spectrum, interacting with the other dimensions in a highly dynamic way. For instance, the possible spaces for action (closed, invited, claimed) open and close over time. Similarly, the levels of power (and which are most important) are far more complex than the 'local, national or global', and can range from the household to the village, county, state, national, regional, global and others, depending on the local context. Spaces and levels interact with forms of power, and shift over time.'

Primarily used to analyse power dynamics by development actors and NGO's, the Power Cube has more recently been utilised across other fields, including environmental issues, fair trade, health, humanitarianism, human rights and access to housing (Gaventa, 2019). It is also employed in studies on community development to explore how individuals experience power and how they can bring about change (Wang, 2024). Some studies explore power through all aspects of the Power Cube framework, while others focus on one specific aspect to analyse a particular space. For example, a study in the Netherlands explored participatory spaces for refugees as a form of 'created' space (Ghorashi and Rast, 2018). Other studies have explored refugees gaining power through participation in political action (Edström and Dolan, 2019).

Further developing the Power Cube, VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) introduce four expressions of power: 'power over', 'power to', 'power within' and 'power with'. These expressions help to explain how different types of power operate. 'Power over' is the most recognised form of power and often carries negative connotations, involving one person exerting control over others. While typically associated with dominance, 'power over' can also occur when individuals are unaware of their own power (Pansardi and Bindi, 2021; Allen, 1998; Lukes, 2005). 'Power to' refers to an individual's ability to exercise agency or act. A pre-requisite for this is 'power within', which relates to an individual's awareness of their own capacities, such as self-worth and confidence, motivating action. 'Power with' refers to finding common ground among different groups and collaborating to create more equitable relationships. Emphasising the importance of 'power with' in the feminist movement, Allen (1998, p35) defined it as 'the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of a common or shared end'. These expressions are valuable for exploring power relations, highlighting that power can have positive dimensions beyond dominance.

A fifth type of power, 'transformative power', bridges the gap between 'power over' and 'power to'. Rye (2015a), drawing on Wartenberg's idea of 'transformative power' (Wartenberg, 1990, cited in Rye, 2015a) explains that while transformative power involves one person having power over another, it does not involve domination. Instead, the power-holder uses their power to enable the subordinate's growth, such as investing in their skills. Van Baarle and colleagues (2021) further develop this idea, viewing 'transformative power' as a distinct form of power, on par with 'power-over' and 'power-to' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021, p535). They define it as 'the transformation towards "power to" facilitated by "power over", which includes the practices that powerful actors use to increase the power to act by others' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021, p534). In a later paper, this is conceptualised as 'enabling power' – 'the enacted capability to use power-over-others to grow and/or sustain the power-to-act of

another' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2024, p146). Distinguishing 'transformative power' from 'power over', Van Baarle and colleagues note that tensions may arise when different actors adopt different power stances. For example, when one actor engages in empowerment through 'transformative power', while another relies on domination through 'power over', 'potential tensions […] are likely to arise from the distance between the actors' power stances' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021, p542).

Specific definitions of power within sponsorship research are limited (Ali *et al.,* 2022; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023). To date, Lim (2019) is the only source providing a clear definition, describing power as the 'capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world' (Fricker, 2007, cited in Lim, 2019, p319). Lim notes that power can operate 'both actively and passively' (Lim, 2019, p319). Much of the existing research on power in sponsorship focuses on asymmetric power dynamics (Lenard, 2016; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021) and paternalistic behaviour by sponsors (Ali *et al*., 2022; Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Lim, 2019).

There has been some initial exploration of how 'new spaces of encounter' (Koca, 2019b, p552) might balance asymmetric power relations (Macklin *et al*., 2020a; Haugen, 2023; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). While research acknowledges that 'asymmetrical power relations do not necessarily equal domination' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2024, p146), studies on sponsorship predominantly focus on power in its negative form - 'power over' (Lukes, 2005; Hayward and Lukes, 2008). Scholars have called for a deeper understanding of the dynamics between refugees and volunteers, particularly concerning 'empowering aspirations and asymmetries of power' (Ambrosini, 2022, p11). However, research on dynamic power relations within sponsorship remain scarce. To address both empowerment and unequal power dynamics, a more comprehensive, multi-dimensional view of power is needed (Rowlands, 1997; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Allen, 1998).

Adopting a broad definition of power, Allen (1998), allows for the exploration of the

'ambivalences of acts of hospitality' (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p2), and the examination of both

horizontal and vertical power relations (Kekstaite, 2022). The four expressions of power –

'power over', 'power to', 'power within' and 'power with' (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) –

along with 'transformative power' (Rye, 2015b; Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021) are valuable for

exploring the different types of power in sponsor-refugee interactions. While previous studies

have examined these expressions separately, I follow the approach of scholars who have

explored the interplay of different power expressions to 'shed light on the complex relation[s]'

between power practices (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021, p533). Viewing these types of power as

fluid allows for the exploration of potential shifts in power dynamics over time.

Allen (1998) argued that these expressions are not distinct but are often present in a single

interaction, highlighting the complexity of power relations. While 'power over' generally

suggests negative dynamics, 'transformative power' and other expressions offer more

positive ways to engage with power. This framework is well-suited to examine sponsor-

refugee relationships and explore whether sponsors utilise positive forms of power.

Therefore, an adapted framework that includes 'transformative power' is most appropriate for

this study. Expanding the definition of power to encompasses both positive and negative

aspects does not aim to 'romanticis[e]' the sponsorship process', but rather to critically

examine power and 'explore its effects, including the exclusionary ones' (Monforte *et al.,*

2021, p3).

3.2.3: Politicisation and political action

As discussed in Chapter Two, the line between humanitarian volunteering and political action

has become increasingly blurred (Zamponi, 2017; Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Monforte, 2020). While

often framed as apolitical, acts of care – such as supporting refugees (Monforte and Maestri,

2022; Fleischmann, 2020), or distributing food or other support during austerity (Williams *et al.,* 2016; Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Bosi and Zamponi, 2015; Theodossopoulos, 2016) - can challenge exclusionary state policies. These practices create spaces of encounter that foster critical awareness of injustice and prompt reflection on state responsibility (Cloke *et al.,* 2017). This has led growing recognition of politicisation as a process through which individuals reframe personal engagement as political. It involves evolving awareness and relational change, whereas political action refers to the diverse ways individuals can act on that awareness. This distinction is central to my analysis of how volunteers perceive their roles (RQs 2 and 3), and how these understandings may translate into forms of political practice (RQ4).

Definitions of politicisation vary. Patsias and Patsias (2024, p329) describe it broadly as 'the process of making a topic or situation political' (Patsias and Patsias, 2024, p329), while others define it more specifically as 'action, collective or individual, that makes issues or identities into topics of public deliberation or contestation' (Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2018, p469). For this thesis, I adopt Hamidi's (2023) three-part framework which offers a nuanced account of how people become politically engaged. First, politicisation can be shaped by how people view their relationship to political institutions - whether someone sees themselves as part of the political system or excluded from it. Second, it involves recognising shared social problems that demand a collective, political response, moving beyond individual experiences to see one's concerns as part of broader patterns of injustice. This echoes other scholar's emphasis on the collective nature of politicisation –where people see their actions as relevant beyond the personal or local (Eliasoph, 1998; Monforte and Maestri, 2022; Patsias *et al.,* 2024). Finally, Hamidi adds an important relational dimension – 'the capacity to consider other narratives, other ways of seeing the world, and being willing to be transformed by other people's points of view' (Hamidi, 2023, p71). Her concept of politicisation includes a willingness to be transformed through relationships with others. Hamidi's research in a

church-based organisation found that politicisation often emerges not through explicit critique, but through relationships that expose structural inequality and foster new awareness.

Importantly, politicisation is a process (Monforte and Maestri, 2022), not an endpoint, and it does not always result in political action. Eliasoph (1998) found that many American volunteers avoided political language, framing their work instead in terms of morality or compassion to preserve group cohesion. Other scholars describe the 'messy middle ground' (May and Cloke, 2014, p895) where humanitarian volunteering and political action overlap in complex and sometimes contradictory ways (Monforte, 2020). Surman and colleagues (2021), in their study of foodbanks, offer a typology that illustrates this complexity: 'compassion for' users (rooted in charity and pity), 'compassion with' (solidarity and mutual understanding), and 'compassion within' (reflexivity and structural awareness). These orientations can exist in the same individual or shift over time, revealing the fluid nature of volunteer practices. As Williams and colleagues (2016) observe, foodbanks often reflect a mix of political beliefs shaped by who is present at any given time. While not all forms of politicisation lead to action, they do create the conditions for it. Building on the previous section, which presented politicisation as a reframing of volunteering in political terms, this section considers political action as one possible – but not inevitable – outcome of that awareness.

Fleishman (2020), drawing on Ranciere (1998, cited in Fleischman, 2020), defines political action as 'moments when conditions of exclusion, domination and discrimination in migration societies are challenged, contested, interrupted, altered or reformed in favour of a different alternative' (Fleischmann, 2020, p17). Political action, therefore, encompasses a spectrum – from direct protect to subtle practices that enact alternative modes of belonging. These forms of political action can either be overt or quiet (Fleischmann, 2020). Overt political actions

include demonstrations, campaigns and advocacy – which directly confront policies or laws. These have been termed 'volunteer humanitarianism' (Sandri, 2018, p65), 'subversive humanitarianism' (Vandevoordt, 2019, p245) or 'solidarity humanitarianism' (Rozakou, 2017, p99). Often labelled as 'loud' (Hankins, 2017, p2) or 'contentious' politics (Ataç *et al.,* 2016, p530), these forms of engagement typically occur in in public spaces and are explicitly political (Ataç *et al.,* 2016; Merikoski, 2021).

However, political action does not always take such explicit forms. A growing body of scholarship has highlighted the significance of 'quiet politics' (Meier, 2023) or 'informal' political participation (Monforte and Maestri, 2022). These practices are embedded in everyday activities – such as art, sport or cultural practices – that open up alternative spaces of inclusion (Benwell *et al.,* 2023; Hall, 2020) and subtly contest dominant narratives around migration and belonging (Pottinger, 2017). Such practices can be understood as a form of 'slow resistance' (Sheringham *et al.,* 2024, p3361), where volunteers challenge the violence of asylum regimes through sustained and caring engagement (Benwell *et al.,* 2023; Mayblin *et al.,* 2020). Solidarity in this context is enacted across different scales (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019a; Agustín and Jørgensen, 2021), and within diverse spaces (Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023). Quiet political action may also unfold in private settings, forming spaces 'of encounter in which networks and relationships between citizens and non-citizens are formed' (Merikoski, 2021, p93). Unlike overt political protest (Hankins, 2017, p2), these 'small, quotidian acts of kindness, connection and creativity' (Pottinger, 2017, p215) aim to challenge exclusionary migration politics and reshape social relations (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a, p132). This micro-political focus (Mann, 1994, p1) – the 'quiet politics of the everyday' (Hankins, 2017, p2) - creates opportunities for 'solidaristic potential' where care builds relationships and networks that supports refugees in practical ways (Darling, 2022 p173). Such practices form 'spaces of encounter' (Cloke *et al.,* 2017) that facilitate new understandings of belonging.

3.3: A conceptual framework of negotiated hospitality

The conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in Figure Five. Centred around the lens of hospitality, the framework of 'negotiated hospitality' offers a way to examine CS volunteer experiences by exploring the interconnections between power and political action.
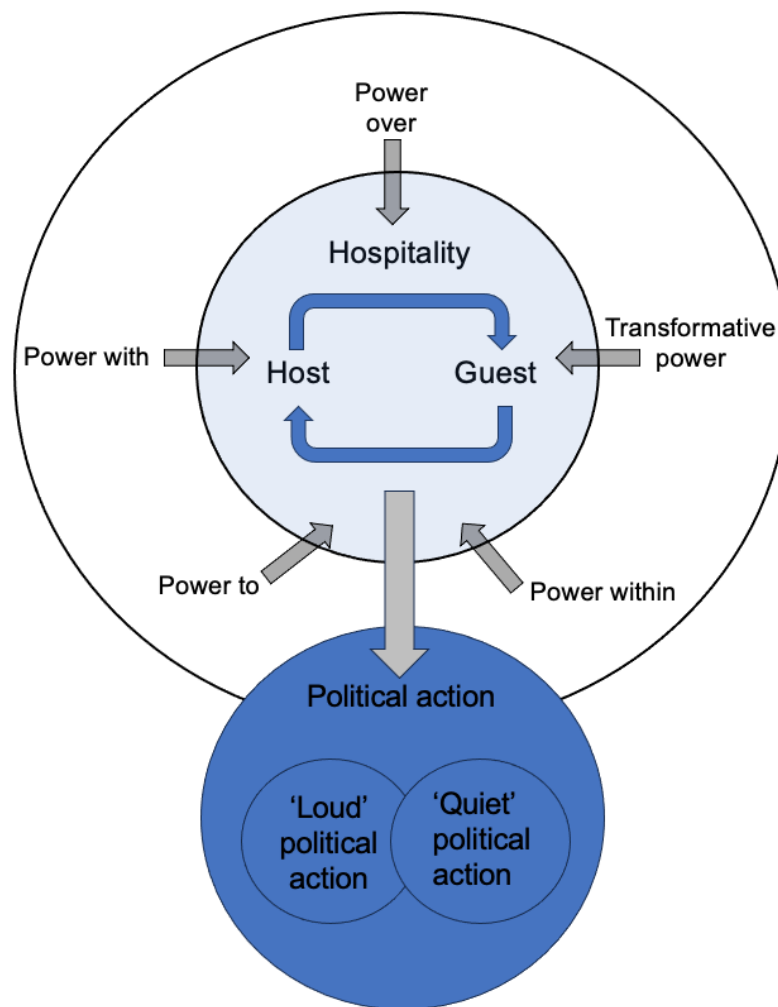
Figure Five: A conceptual framework of negotiated hospitality.

A hospitality lens enables an analysis of the asymmetrical nature of host-guest relations, treating hospitality as a dynamic and negotiated process rather than a fixed state (Rozakou, 2012, p563). Depicted as a circular relationship, the framework reflects the fluid and ongoing interaction between hosts and guests (Dikeç, 2002; Dikeç, 2009; Bulley, 2016; Bulley, 2015).

Taking inspiration from other scholars (Challinor, 2018; Humphris, 2019), and departing from the linear 'hospitality-hostility continuum', this perspective sees hospitality as reciprocal and evolving – where host and guest roles may shift over time (Challinor, 2018, p108). Guests may enact hospitality when they are in their own space (Pitt-Rivers, 2012), through reciprocity (Rozakou, 2016) or through revering traditional roles (Rottmann and Nimer, 2021; Gardner *et al.,* 2022; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016). This approach acknowledges that hospitality is not limited to the moment of welcome but continues through changing relational dynamics over time (Bulley, 2016; Dikeç, 2002).

To explore the complexity of volunteer-refugee relations, the framework incorporates a multidimensional understanding of power. Moving beyond conventional notions of asymmetry (Lenard, 2016; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), it draws on Allen's (1998) broad conceptualisation of power and integrates the Expressions of Power model (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002), alongside the idea of 'transformative power' (Van Baarle, 2021). By considering both positive and negative power dynamics, this adapted framework allows for the exploration of both 'hospitality' (transformative power, power to, power within, power with) and 'hostility' (power over) in sponsor/refugee interactions (Derrida, 2000; Rozakou, 2012). These five expressions are positioned around the host-guest relationship to examine how power dynamics shape volunteer experiences and relationships in sponsorship.

The framework also links these power dynamics to politicisation and political action by considering how volunteers' evolving awareness of the structural barriers faced by refugees may lead to various forms of political engagement. Using Fleischmann's (2020) broad definition, political action is understood to include both overt (Hankins, 2017; Ataç *et al*., 2016; Merikoski, 2021) and implicit forms of engagement (Meier, 2023; Pottinger, 2020, 2017; Askins, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016). This allows the analysis to consider "loud" political actions - such as protests or public campaigns (Hankins, 2017; Ataç *et al.,* 2016; Merikoski,

2021) - as well as "quiet" forms of resistance and care expressed through everyday practices

(Meier, 2023; Pottinger, 2017). In doing so, the framework connects theoretical discussions

of hospitality and power with real-world practices of solidarity and transformation within

sponsorship.

The next chapter outlines the methodological tools used to explore these dynamics and

address the study's four research objectives.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter situates the study's methodological framework within broader research paradigms and outlines the approach used to address the research questions. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 provide an overview of the research design, methodology and philosophical underpinnings. Section 4.3 outlines the methodological approach - a recurrent, cross sectional longitudinal design. Use of walking interviews and online photo-elicitation interviews is discussed in Section 4.4. Sampling methods are addressed in Section 4.5, ethical considerations in Section 4.6, and an overview of data analysis is provided in Section 4.7.

4.1: Overview of research design and methodology

This study focused on exploring the roles and experiences of CS volunteers before, during, and after the two-year sponsorship period. In the literature review, I underscored the lack of research on volunteers at various stages of sponsorship, highlighting the significance of temporality in the research design. Employing a recurrent cross-sectional longitudinal approach, the study utilised a temporal lens to study CS at three distinct time points. Interviews were conducted with different volunteers from each timepoint to explore volunteer roles, relationships, ongoing volunteering, and to discern differences between timepoints (see Table Four).

Timepoint one	Timepoint two	Timepoint three
CS volunteers preparing to welcome a family	CS volunteers whose family arrived within the last two years	CS volunteers whose family had arrived more than two years ago, past the formal two year period of resettlement support

Table Four: Three CS 'timepoints'

Timepoints one to three aligned with research objectives two to four (See Table Five).

Research Objective	Method
1. To assess the state of knowledge around volunteering within community sponsorship groups.	Walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews to establish contact with volunteers across *all three timepoints*.
2. To explore how CS volunteers define their roles in relation to the sponsored refugees before their arrival.	Walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews with participants in *timepoint one* to explore how volunteers defined their roles prior to the arrival of a family.
3. To understand the ways in which volunteers' perception of their role might change over time as the sponsored refugees become more integrated into their local community and there is potential for the power dynamic to change.	Walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews with participants in *timepoint two* to understand how and why roles and relationships between volunteers and refugees may have changed over the period of resettlement support.
4. To examine the ways in which the volunteering work undertaken by CS volunteers evolves over time, in relation to the exposure to the sponsored refugees.	Walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews with participants in *timepoint three* to examine how volunteer involvement in CS impacted the future volunteering trajectory of the CS volunteers.

Table Five: Research objectives and associated research methods

Inclusion of 'place' stemmed from an interest in understanding how communities outside CS groups supported the scheme and if community support replaced group support over time. Participants were given a choice between two methods for exploring 'place': 1. walking interviews, and 2. online photo elicitation interviews.

4.2: Interpretivist framework

Borrowing the language of Kidder and Fine (1987), this study adopted a 'big Q' qualitative approach, focused on exploring multiple meanings. (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p48). Unlike a 'small q' approach which uses qualitative methods within a positivist paradigm, this study focused on the interpretative exploration of volunteer experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p48). Through a qualitative methodology, the analysis sought to understand how volunteers interpreted their experiences, capturing multiple understandings of the volunteer experience across three timepoints (Creswell, 2007). The study prioritised a nuanced depiction of

volunteer experiences over producing generalisable findings. The interpretivist approach contrasts with a realist interpretation of reality, which aims to describe a singular objective truth. Instead, interpretivists seek to make sense of varied experiences and accept that truth may differ for everyone. This study aligned with interpretative phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990), and focused on *understanding* rather than *explaining* volunteers' experiences and exploring the meanings participants attached to their actions.

Situated within a social constructivist interpretative framework (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 2023), the study acknowledges the subjective nature of reality, shaped by social interactions and individual perceptions, experiences and beliefs (O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). Participants' diverse life experiences and motivations for volunteering with CS underscored the need to consider varied contexts in understanding volunteer experiences. Rather than seeking a single 'right' narrative about how volunteers engaged with sponsored families, I captured a range of experiences (Sullivan, 2019). A relativist epistemology was employed, acknowledging the subjectivity of reality, influenced by environmental, historical and cultural factors (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2017). Acknowledging my own subjectivity I incorporated personal experiences of volunteering with refugees into the study, valuing subjectivity over 'bracketing' my own assumptions (Gough and Madill, 2012).

4.3: Methodology

Initially, I planned a narrative longitudinal approach (Bäckström *et al.,* 2010), intending to collect data from participants preparing to welcome a family, with follow up interviews at subsequent timepoints. I aimed to explore volunteer roles over time as families settled into their new communities and to understand post-sponsorship volunteer activities. By employing a temporal lens, I sought to shift from the fixed conceptualisation of volunteers as 'hosts' and refugees as 'guests', exploring whether roles and relationships evolved over time.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the first and second year of my PhD, necessitating adaptations to comply with UK lockdown measures and due to the suspension of refugee resettlement in the UK during 2020[95].

The first UK lockdown was announced as I was developing my research design in March 2020. As a result, UK resettlement was put on hold throughout much of 2020. Due to time constraints and uncertainty regarding the resumption of resettlement, implementing a narrative longitudinal approach became impractical. Instead, I adapted the study into a recurrent cross-sectional design (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016)[96]. While the initial design involved following the same participants over time, (Patrick, 2014; Donnellan *et al.,* 2019; Dang *et al.,* 2017; Velloza *et al.,* 2020; Lewis and Buffel, 2020), the revised approach involved different volunteers at each timepoint (Corden and Millar, 2007; Ruspini, 1999, 2002).

4.4: Research methods

4.4.1: Semi-structured interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection to capture the intricacies of participants' experiences. This method had a dual advantage. I could explore the key points of my study, but it also allowed participants to steer the conversation towards areas I had not considered. The semi-structured format offered flexibility, particularly during walking interviews, allowing participants to pause the interview while maintaining a structured framework for continuation (Carpiano, 2009). Interviews loosely adhered to a set of

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[95] UK refugee resettlement did restart in a limited form in the autumn of 2020.
[96] Typically, there are two approaches to longitudinal qualitative research (Neale *et al.,* 2012). Initially, I planned to use the most common approach, which involved following the same participants over a specific period. Other longitudinal studies have utilised an approach which involved speaking to different participants over a series of timepoints – the repeated recurrent cross-sectional approach (Corden and Millar, 2007; Ruspini, 1999; Ruspini, 2002).

questions, whilst also allowing participants room to share their perspectives on their roles as CS volunteers and their overall experiences.

Participants were offered a choice between two interview methods to explore the role of 'place' and the wider community in supporting resettled families. The primary method was participant-led walking interviews. Online photo-elicitation interviews (OPEI) served as a secondary option for inclusivity and to address potential COVID-19 interruptions. This inclusive approach aimed to accommodate participants' preferences, particularly considering pandemic-related social restrictions. The online method also served as a backup plan for unforeseen circumstances, such as inclement weather or participant illness. Several walking interviews had to be cancelled during the data collection phase due to COVID-19, and online interviews were conducted instead.

4.4.2: Walking interviews

Walking interviews, otherwise known as mobile interviews or go-along interviews (Carpiano, 2009), involve conducting interviews while researchers and participants walk together. Typically conducted outdoors, interviews take place in various environments, with questions posed while observing participants' interactions with their surroundings. This method yields rich, in depth data influenced by the chosen walking route (Bergeron *et al.,* 2014), providing insights into the relationship between the self and place, as environmental features impact the collected data (Finlay and Bowman, 2017; Evans and Jones, 2011). The method has been applied across different fields to explore diverse research subjects, such as the relationship between public health and place (Berg *et al.,* 2023, Carpiano, 2009), outdoor learning and education (Lynch, 2019; Lynch and Mannion, 2016), refugee youth access to sexual health services (Botfield *et al.,* 2019), the perception of local issues in neighbourhoods (Kusenbach, 2003), and people's understanding of place (Evans and Jones,

2011). More recently, walking interviews have been employed in conducting interviews with vulnerable groups within a participatory research approach (Lenette and Gardner, 2021; O'Neill, 2018). Despite their increasing popularity, walking interviews have been underutilised with volunteers. Daly and Allen's (2021) study is the exception though the method remains unexplored in the context of CS in the UK.

Walking interviews are versatile, capable of functioning as a stand-alone method or integrated with complementary research tools like GIS mapping (Jones and Evans, 2012; Evans and Jones, 2011; Bergeron *et al*., 2014), arts-based methods (O'Neill, 2018), and video techniques (Pink, 2007, 2016) including body worn video (Brown *et al.,* 2008; Battista and Manaugh, 2017). This adaptable method is suitable for one-to-one interviews and group settings (O'Neill, 2018). Walking interviews can be participant-led or researcher-led. In some studies, researchers set the route or offer participants a choice from predetermined settings (Inwood and Martin, 2008; Jones *et al.,* 2008; Botfield *et al.,* 2019), whereas participant-led interviews involve participants designing the route (Carpiano, 2009). Empowering participants as tour guides can rebalance the power dynamics between participants and researchers (Garcia *et al.,* 2012), aligning with participatory principles and drawing from feminist methodologies to create non-hierarchical research that promotes mutual learning. Co-construction of knowledge allows participants to shape the interview direction focusing on what matters most to them (Holton and Riley, 2014).

This study employed participant-led walking interviews (Berg *et al.,* 2023; Carpiano, 2009). Participants guided me on a walk in their local area, either following a pre-devised route or walking to a location significant to their CS volunteering experience. The interviews followed a semi-structured format and were recorded using an unobtrusive handheld audio device. To maintain participant anonymity, the audio-recorder was discreetly carried, and a small card with key interview guide words was used instead of a larger version for easy concealment.

Interviews commenced at various locations, detailed in Table Six. While routes varied, they often included a tour of the neighbourhoods of sponsored families or participants, with volunteers pointing out significant places for themselves, their group, or the sponsored family. Routes encompassed parks, cities, towns, villages, green spaces, and religious institutions. Occasionally, breaks were taken at cafes, community centres, or religious institutions. To protect participant anonymity, location names were anonymised, and specific details were replaced with generic labels. For instance, a particular church was renamed 'church.'

After each walking interview, I recorded reflective memos documenting the route, notes and personal reflections[97]. These memos were transcribed, and the information put into a spreadsheet for comparison during analysis. The additional data proved invaluable for recalling the walk route and extracting additional meanings associated with the places visited.

Of the 30 interviews, 16 were conducted as walking interviews. Timepoints one and three each included five[98], while timepoint two had six. On average, the duration of a walking interview was one hour and 47 minutes, with the shortest lasting an hour and 15 minutes, and the longest spanning two hours and 36 minutes. For details of timings, meeting points, and routes, see Table Six. All participant and refugee names are pseudonyms.

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[97] Information included participants' biographical details, interview time, date, and location, the route with a small sketch of key stopping points, observations, contextual conditions, details of any encounters, non-verbal indications from participants, and instances when the recorder was turned off (Berg *et al.,* 2023).
[98] T3 participants Chloe and Matthew requested a joint interview, resulting in the same walking route being used.

Participant	Duration (minutes)	Meeting point	Details of route
Timepoint One – preparing for the arrival of a refugee family			
Tahoor W 1	126	Educational institution	Short walk due to hot weather.
Nathaniel W 1	79	Entrance to park, city outskirts	Walked around two parks, across the city and into residential area of participant.
Rohan W 1	79	Mosque	Toured mosque, visited a café for a drink, toured sponsored family's house, and local area.
Leroy W 1	142	Local park	Walked around park, village, visited the church, local transport stops, shops, and cafes.
Eric W 1	155	Local town	Met in nearby town, walked through town to family's house, passing churches, a garden centre and cafes on route to Eric's village.
Timepoint Two – refugee family arrived within the last two years			
Sophia W 2	115	Train station	Walked through park to city library where we stopped for a coffee.
Beth W 2	74	Participant's house	Torrential rain – interview at participant's house.
Zellie W 2	102	Educational institution	Short walk due to hot weather, interview in local café.
Victoria W 2	129	Train station	Walked through town past the first house of the family. We continued through the town, towards a local stately home and through the grounds, walking past a football club, towards a community centre where we stopped for lunch.
Hazel W 2	92	Educational institution	Walked to city viewpoint of the city overlooking a number of churches, then through a park and to outskirts of city to another viewpoint looking towards the rural area where the family lived.
Martin W 2	156	Town marketplace	Walked through town past bank and job centre, stopping at participant's church for a break. Then walked back through the town passing a church and shops before stopping near family's house. Walked back through town passing a nature walk and several volunteers' houses.
Timepoint Three – refugee family arrived more than two years ago			
Mark W 3	107	Church	Tour of church and drink before tour of local area on the way to another church where we met colleagues of the participant, stopped for a drink, and had a tour of the second building before retracing our steps to the first church.
Kathleen W 3	77	Church	Walked from the church to the first house of the family and through the local area, passing shops, nurseries and schools.
Kit W 3	76	Train station	Walked through local area, passing school, a number of residential areas before walking past family's house, through a housing estate into a local wood and then into a field. We walked back through a farm track into the local area of the participant and stopped at a café for a drink.

Chloe W 3	88	Train station	Walked through the area where both the participants and sponsored family live, along a busy road which led into the city, walking past the family's house, school and community centre. Then we walked through a park into another residential area, past a church and through the areas where most of the volunteers lived
Matthew W 3	88 minutes	Train station	Same as above

Table Six: Summary of walking interviews

Participant-led walking interviews provided several advantages. Asking participants to plan a walking route beforehand encouraged reflection on their experiences prior to the interview. This allowed them to prioritise significant topics and places, as they had the opportunity to contemplate them in advance. Additionally, being guided through different places exposed me to different meanings attached to places and buildings which might have been overlooked had I relied on a more stationary method (Lang, 2001). Using a gentler method of collecting data by walking through everyday spaces used by volunteers and sponsored families, I focused on quotidian experiences which might otherwise be overlooked (Pottinger, 2018; Pottinger, 2020). The physical activity of walking also contributed to a relaxed interview atmosphere, facilitating conversation as participants guided the route (Evans and Jones, 2011). Observing participants' body language allowed conversations to naturally unfold. This was useful when discussing sensitive or difficult topics (Garcia *et al.,* 2012), allowing participants to share their experiences authentically, rather than feeling pressured to provide the 'right' response (Finlay and Bowman, 2017; Garcia *et al.,* 2012). Following a walking interview with Victoria, I reflected that this approach provided participants with space to speak at their own pace (See Figure Six).

> **(Reflective memo following Victoria's interview)**
>
> *Victoria appeared quite wary at the beginning of the interview and gave the impression there were certain things she didn't want to discuss…She mentioned she had an uncomfortable experience with her CS group because of a clash in opinion about how the sponsored family should be supported. At the beginning of the walking interview Victoria took me to the street of the first home of the family. As we walked nearby and stopped to talk, Victoria mentioned that they no longer lived there because of a problem with the neighbours. I wanted to ask her for some more details, but in that moment, it was clear from her body language that she didn't want to discuss it any further. Later on, as we walked back through the town and spoke about other parts of her experience, she referred back to the first house and elaborated on the story. The family had been relocated to another town because of a noise dispute with a neighbour. She had tried to support the family to reconcile with their neighbours but this approach was not welcomed by the rest of her CS group, who felt it was more appropriate to find the family another house in a different location. Clearly, there was considerable tension between volunteers in the group and how they felt that they should be supporting the family.*

Figure Six: Transcribed reflective memo excerpt following a walking interview with Victoria.

The method allowed me to explore how communities outside the CS group contributed to CS. As we walked through different places, participants pointed out places such as organisations, institutions and businesses who had offered support and I was able to ask follow-up questions about how these spaces had supported the resettled family (Cao *et al.,* 2019). This approach unveiled the interconnectedness between the CS group, the resettled families and communities outside the group. T1 participants, who were preparing to welcome a family, pointed out places that had helped with fundraising or pledged assistance once the family arrived. T2 participants directed routes around locations where the family had received post-arrival support, such as the Job Centre, Community Centre, schools, religious institutions, and residents' houses. I had lunch with Victoria at a community café that had offered Anaan a job.

The geographic diversity of CS groups allowed me to explore how different places influenced relationships between volunteers and refugees, an aspect which had received limited research attention in the context of CS. While research has examined the impact of dispersal

on asylum-seekers and refugees arriving in the UK spontaneously or via other resettlement schemes (Griffiths *et al.,* 2006; Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; Glorius *et al.,* 2016), little attention had been given to the different geographic locations participating in CS. However, understanding the impact of access to different resources in diverse geographic locations on the roles and relationships of CS volunteers is crucial to explore whether different groups need more support for CS to be successful. The impact of access to resources was a key point explored through walking interviews, which aimed to explore whether wider communities were involved in supporting CS and whether the geographic location of groups affected families' independence from the CS group. I explored factors like transport links, job opportunities, and social opportunities available to refugee families.

While not a substitute for ethnography, walking interviews provided some benefits of participant observation without an extensive time commitment (Finlay and Bowman, 2017) and without the cost of ethnography (Carpiano, 2009). They also provided the opportunity to gather multiple types of data simultaneously, enabling me to develop a visual understanding of community spaces which supported resettlement through CS used by the refugee family and participants (Gibbs and Block, 2017). Finally, walking interviews provided a means of face-to-face data collection during the pandemic, ensuring data collection occurred in a safe environment despite ongoing concerns around social mixing[99].

However, several practical limitations needed to be considered, including weather conditions, choice of recording equipment, the need for a contingency plan, and the impact of COVID-19. Weather conditions posed a significant challenge, as walking interviews were susceptible to rain and wind, influencing both recording quality and participants' willingness to participate. To mitigate these efforts, most walking interviews were conducted during the summer and

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[99] Though data collection took place during the summer and autumn of 2021 when most of the UK lockdowns had been lifted, considerable concern remained about the spread of COVID.

autumn months. The choice of recording equipment was also key. It was necessary to use a device that could withstand outdoor recording environments, including wind, while remaining lightweight. After testing several devices, I selected the Sony ICD-PX370 for its suitability. COVID-19 precautionary measures included alternating between three recording devices, sanitising them between interviews, and occasionally having both participants and I hold a recorder. Finally, contingency planning was essential. Unforeseen circumstances in four instances required alternative plans due to unexpected weather changes and participant preferences[100], highlighting the unpredictability of walking interviews and the need for flexibility (Warren, 2017; Daly and Allen, 2021). Additionally, several walking interviews were rescheduled at short notice due to participants and myself needing to self-isolate[101]. Though costly and inconvenient, rescheduling was necessary to ensure adherence to COVID-19 rules.

4.4.3: Online photo elicitation interviews

Participants who were unable or uncomfortable taking part in a walking interview were invited to take part in an online photo elicitation interview (OPEI) as an alternative method. Partly preserving the place-based focus of walking interviews, OPEIs allowed participants to participate online.

OPEIs involve pairing interviews with photos as prompts for discussion. The technique is used in various fields and is particularly beneficial in studies involving children and

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[100] Sophia (W2) initially agreed to take part in a walking interview, but indicated on the day that she would be more comfortable talking in a private space. On this occasion, we walked for a short while and then conducted the remainder of the interview on an outside terrace of the local library. Three other walking interviews were affected by the weather. During Beth's (W2) interview, we sat inside her house because it was pouring with rain. Both Tahoor (W1) and Zellie (W2) indicated that they would prefer to sit inside because of the heat. I had identified a backup inside location near to each of the planned meeting places. However, in all four cases, participants suggested their own contingency plan.
[101] On one occasion, I had already undertaken a long train journey and was on route to the interview location, when my participant let me know that she had been 'pinged' by the NHS Track and Trace app on her phone, and we needed to reschedule.

teenagers, because it offers a clear prompt during discussions (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Pyle, 2013). The method is recognised for three key advantages: (a) using photos as stimuli encourages in-depth interviews, (b) yields diverse information that may not be captured by other methods, and (c) subverts power relations between researcher and interviewee (Van Auken *et al.,* 2010).

Participants were asked to plan a route they would have taken during a walking interview and capture photos of places significant to their volunteering along this route, allowing me to partly replicate the essence of a walking interview for those unable to participate physically. To address confidentiality concerns, participants were encouraged to focus on their environment rather than photographing individuals. Photos were emailed to me and were then used as prompts in an online interview (Van Auken *et al.,* 2010). OPEIs, conducted on Zoom, lasted around an hour. During interviews, I used the photos as conversational prompts. In total, 52 photos were generated, showcasing a diverse range of subjects, including volunteers with the family, previous volunteering experiences, religious buildings, family and volunteer residences, local green spaces, schools and leisure facilities, shopping areas, celebration events, and abstract images like vegetables, the sea, and trees (See Table Seven).

Participant	Interview length	Photo details
Timepoint One – preparing for the arrival of a refugee family		
David Z 1	69 minutes	N/A
George Z 1	79 minutes	N/A
Jackie Z 1	58 minutes	N/A
Memory Z 1	48 minutes	• Herself with group
Joe Z 1	52 minutes	• Sea/waves
Timepoint Two – refugee family arrived within the last two years		
Sally Z 2	63 minutes	N/A
Mick Z 2	83 minutes	Photo of: • Building in Calais • Church of the group

		• Mick and his daughter winning a pub quiz Mick also provided a series of links to photos of the local area
Ella Z 2	112 minutes	Photo of: • Bluebells • Road and car • Park • Road crossing • Pavement • High street • Residential area (x2) • Church • New development of houses • Dog in a field • Rainbow (x2) • Residential area with rainbow • Garden
Lily Z 2	73 minutes	N/A
Timepoint Three – refugee family arrived more than two years ago		
Sarah Z 3	49 minutes	N/A
Katy Z 3	77 minutes	N/A
Jenny Z 3	59 minutes	N/A
Evelyn Z 3	120 minutes	Photo of: • Road out of the town • Restaurant • Residential street • Family sat in a field • Family sat in Evelyn's garden • A birthday party for one of the family's children • The family's children playing in the park (x 2) • Birthday celebrations in the parish hall • House of the family • Family in their house • Church who initiated the sponsorship • Youth club • Parish hall play group • Library

		• Residential area • Allotments (x 2) • Primary school (x 2) • Swimming pool • High street (x 3) • House of volunteer (x 2) • Family on bikes • Mother of the family manning fete stall • Family members sat on sofa
Kirsty Z 3	62 minutes	• Tree • Field (walk close to the house of the family) • Vegetables from a shared allotment

Table Seven: Summary of online photo elicitation interviews

The method yielded mixed results with only six of the 14 participants providing photos. Where available, the photos served as a means of communication between the participants and I, alongside the interview guide. I asked participants why they had taken specific photos, and they also referred to the photos themselves. The images sparked discussions on various topics, including participants' role perception and how communities either planned, or had supported resettled families. Photos also prompted critical reflection on the local areas, stimulating discussions around employment opportunities and transport links. While the primary purpose of the photos was to stimulate discussion, they inadvertently became a tool for eliciting further information about volunteers' experiences.

Data generated through OPEIs allowed participants to reflect on the multiple layers of meaning within photos, focusing conversations on points which might have been overlooked in face-to-face interviews. Two examples illustrate this point. Mick shared an image of a building in Calais (see Figure Seven) and reflected on his experiences volunteering in the

Calais Jungle camp. The specific photo content became secondary, and its significance emerged during the interview. Mick explained he felt that involvement in CS had a more significant impact on supporting refugees compared to volunteering in a refugee camp. His role in Calais was limited to improving immediate living conditions, while CS enabled him to support a family on a long-term basis, highlighting the importance of tangibility to volunteers. This motivation was echoed by other participants and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Figure Seven: A photograph taken by Mick (Z2) of Calais (cropped for confidentiality)

Evelyn shared a photo of a local restaurant. Again, the specific photo content was secondary. Instead, it served as a catalyst for a discussion on employment opportunities within her rural area. Evelyn expressed concerns about the availability of employment in the area, although she was relieved that Maryam had found work at the restaurant. However, she remained apprehensive about Shakeel, who had struggled to secure a job. The conversation

transitioned into Evelyn's ongoing sense of responsibility for the family. She was concerned Shakeel had not secured work, but stressed she needed a break from volunteering, after a strenuous two years of providing support to a family that had several additional needs. Green spaces were commonly photographed. Ella provided a photo of bluebells (see Figure Eight) and emphasised the significance of green space to the family, noting it made them feel 'safe'. She emphasised that ensuring the family felt safe and protected was an important part of her role (Discussed further in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2).

Figure Eight: A photograph taken by Ella (Z2) of an area of bluebells close to where the family lived.

Photos also facilitated critical reflection on the local area, demonstrated by Kirsty's photo of a local green field. Like Ella, Kirsty reflected on the area's safety as crucial in welcoming a family. However, she then discussed the challenges associated with the rural area. She was

concerned about the family's ability to find jobs in an area characterised by seasonal employment, compounded by a lack of public transport.

4.4.4: Interview guides and research questions

Two interview guides, A and B, were tailored to align with the respective timepoints of participants (See Appendix One). T1 participants preparing to welcome a family were asked about their preliminary CS experiences, planning, expectations about the volunteer role and their anticipated relationship with the family. For T2 and T3 participants, who had already welcomed a family, the focus was shifted to their current roles, relationships with the sponsored family, changes in roles over time and future volunteering intentions. While small adjustments were made to account for differences between timepoints, questions were kept as similar as possible to enable data comparison (Kneck and Audulv, 2019). Adhering to a constructionist approach, questions were intentionally open-ended (Creswell, 2007), allowing for flexibility during interviews. Supplementary questions were asked whenever participants shared anecdotes or experiences not covered by the initial questions or prompts. The interview guides served two purposes. They provided a structural framework for the conversation whilst accommodating deviations triggered by participants' memories or experiences walking or viewing photos. Where the conversation drifted, I used the guides to refocus it, ensuring a balance between spontaneity and coherence. In terms of analysis, the guides outlined key topics which helped to facilitate continuity across the data set, easing the comparison between different timepoints (Neale, 2018; Saldana, 2003).

The inclusion of retrospective interviews, particularly in interviews during timepoints two and three, focused on exploring participants' current experiences as CS volunteers, while prompting reflections on their past involvement with the sponsored family. This 'partly' retrospective design allowed participants to consider their own significant timepoints during

the CS process, contributing additional temporal dimensions to the study. A 'partly' retrospective design enabled participants to reflect on current experiences as well as earlier stages in resettlement or preparation. T3 participants were able to reflect on points in the past when the sponsored family made local friends or obtained jobs. Additionally, it allowed for the reinterpretation of experiences over time, potentially revealing new meanings, rather than interpreting events in the heat of the moment (Van Parys *et al*., 2014; Bauer *et al*., 2015).

Data were created in two ways. Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder (walking interviews) or the built-in recording feature on Zoom (OPEIs). Participants were informed recording would take place, and they were told about the option to pause or stop the recording at any point[102]. Full transcripts were produced using Otter Ai to generate an initial transcript, which was then manually checked for accuracy and anonymised[103]. Reflective memos served as another source of data, capturing fieldnotes and post-interview thoughts. I recorded memos after each walking interview and after online interviews. This reflective practice encouraged me to reflect on my own subjectivity, values and beliefs after conducting interviews (Snyder, 2012). These data played a role in the subsequent data analysis stage. Reviewing transcripts alongside reflective memos and listening to both forms of data allowed me to reacquaint myself with the interviews and generated initial ideas about coding during analysis.

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[102] One participant, Sophia, asked me to pause the recording when giving specific details about the employment details of a member of the sponsored family, to protect his confidentiality. Though she was happy for me to take notes.

[103] In cases where two audio recorders were used, additional time was required to combine and synchronise transcripts into a coherent interview.

4.5 Sampling design

The central focus was to explore temporal changes in the relationship between volunteers and refugees, along with the long-term impact of participating in CS on future volunteering. CS involves volunteers providing housing support for two years and resettlement support for one year[104]. After this period, the HO expects families to sustain themselves independently, without group assistance. Employing a recurrent cross-sectional approach enabled the comparison of volunteer roles at three distinct time points, offering a comprehensive view of volunteer experiences throughout the two-year process and beyond. This approach captured both the down and across elements of qualitative data, enabling analysis of change over time (Spencer *et al.,* 2021).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. The aim was to capture a diverse range of volunteer experiences within CS. Efforts were made to recruit participants from across the UK; however the majority hailed from England, with some from Wales. Recruitment in Scotland was challenging, possibly due to the low number of CS groups there. Northern Ireland was excluded due to fieldwork budget constraints.

Recruitment was conducted through various channels. I designed a research poster (see Appendix Two) which was shared on Twitter and disseminated by organisations involved in CS. Additionally, I contacted a list of volunteers from a prior formative evaluation of CS. In some cases, I encountered gatekeepers to CS groups, such as lead sponsors or church organisations. Challenges were sometimes encountered in sharing project details directly with volunteers without the information being filtered through the organisation. One group I contacted referred me to their lead sponsor who asked to see the interview guide ahead of

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[104] Despite the HO requiring groups to provide housing support for two years, but only resettlement support for one year - all but one of the participants (Sarah), were under the impression that resettlement support lasted for two years and intended to provide such support for the two-year period.

time, but after it was provided, I received no further communication from the organisation. On Facebook, I corresponded with CS groups through Facebook 'chat', inviting volunteers to take part and asking them to share my poster with their group members. This method proved the most effective, given the widespread use of Facebook by CS groups for communication and organisation. After conducting several initial interviews, I used snowball sampling to reach other participants. Following initial contact, interested individuals were emailed the consent form and participation sheet (see Appendix Three and Four). Participants were given the choice between the two interview methods, with detailed explanations provided if needed.

Recruitment was difficult and took longer than expected. Potential T1 participants felt they had little to share, considering themselves in a preparatory stage. Several T2 participants who had recently welcomed a family expressed time constraints, citing they needed to balance their personal life with supporting the sponsored family. Participants who had welcomed a family more than two years ago (T3) were generally the easiest to recruit, eager to share their volunteering experiences. However, two volunteers declined to take part due to a desire for a break from CS after several years of commitment, highlighting the substantial support and time investment required, a theme which is explored in Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.

4.5.1: Participants

In total, 30 interviews were conducted across England and Wales - 14 OPEI's and 16 participant-led walking interviews. I intended to undertake ten interviews within each time point. However, recruitment resulted in ten participants for T1, nine for T2 and eleven for

T3[105]. Across the sample, the gender split weighed in favour of women - 18 women and 12 men took part, reflecting the tendency for CS volunteers to be female. Participant ages ranged between under 30 and over 65, with the largest age group to take part being 50-65 years old (nine), closely followed by those over 65 (eight participants). There was a nearly equal distribution across the under 30, 30-40 and 40-50 age groups. Most participants identified as White British (21), with the remaining nine identifying as Asian British, Black British and White other (three participants each). In terms of employment, the largest group were in full time employment (15), followed by retirees (12), two full-time students, and one participant who was on temporary furlough from her job. Table Eight summarises participant demographics, organised by time point. All names are pseudonyms.

Participant (organised by time stage group)	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation status	Sponsored family details
Timepoint one (T1) (preparing to welcome a refugee family)					
Tahoor W 1	Male	40-50	Asian British	Full time employment	N/A
David Z 1	Male	40-50	White British	Full time employment	N/A
Nathaniel W 1	Male	>30	Asian British	Full time employment	N/A
George Z 1	Male	40-50	White British	Full time employment	N/A
Rohan W 1	Male	40-50	Asian British	Full time employment	N/A
Leroy W 1	Male	50-65	Black British	Full time employment	N/A
Eric W 1	Male	30-40	Black British	Full time employment	N/A
Jackie Z 1	Female	65>	White other	Retired	N/A
Memory Z 1	Female	30-40	Black British	Full time employment	N/A
Joe Z 1	Male	>30	White British	Full time student	N/A
Timepoint two (T2) (family welcomed in the last two years)					

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[105] During the initial email with one of the T3 participants, there was a mix up with the date when the sponsored family arrived (it was a year earlier) and so this participant was moved into T3.

Sophia W 2	Female	50-65	White British	Retired	Alia, Samir, four children
Beth W 2	Female	65>	White British	Retired	Rafqa and Khaleed, one child (Family that arrived later) Shayna and Hadi, three children
Zellie W 2	Female	50-65	White British	Full time employment	Zahra and Adil, three children
Sally Z 2	Female	65>	White British	Retired	Rafqa and Khaleed, one child (Family that arrived later) Shayna and Hadi three children
Mick Z 2	Male	50-65	White British	Full time employment	Yashira and Halim, two children
Ella Z 2	Female	50-65	White British	Furloughed	Yashira and Halim, two children
Hazel W 2	Female	30-40	White British	Full time employment	Zahra and Adil, three children
Lily Z 2	Female	30-40	White British	Full time employment	Yashira and Halim, two children
Martin W 2	Male	50-65	White British	Retired	Nabeel and Aayun, 4 children
Timepoint three (T3) (family welcomed more than two years ago)					
Sarah Z 3	Female	>30	White other	Full time student	Tasmeem and Gilad, five children

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Mark W 3	Male	65>	White British	Full time employment	Fatima and Yusef, 3 children
Victoria W 3	Female	65>	White other	Retired	Anaan and Khalil, 4 children
Kathleen W 3	Female	65>	White British	Retired	Fatima and Yusef, 3 children
Katy Z 3	Female	65>	White British	Retired	Maryam and Shakeel, 3 children
Kit W 3	Female	50-65	White British	Retired	Hanan and Rahim, 3 children
Jenny Z 3	Female	40-50	White British	Full time employment	Tasmeem and Gilad, five children
Chloe W 3	Female	50-65	White British	Retired	Abal and Barkat, 3 children
Matthew W 3	Male	50-65	White British	Retired	Abal and Barkat, 3 children
Evelyn Z 3	Female	65>	White British	Retired	Maryam and Shakeel, 3 children
Kirsty W 3	Female	>30	White British	Full time employment	Sabi and Daoud, three children

Table Eight: Participant demographics

The higher proportion of Asian British and Black British participants in Timepoint One was not intentional but could reflect a broader shift in CS group formation in more recent years. While earlier CS groups were typically situated in wealthier, white areas and often linked to Church networks, more recent groups have emerged in more diverse areas, including initiatives led by mosques or community organisations. The diversity of participants in Timepoint One may suggest a development in the evolving demographic landscape of CS volunteers, however these findings are not intended to be generalisable and reflect the perspectives of a specific sample of 30 volunteers.

Timepoint One (T1)

Prior to HO approval, groups must satisfy several requirements. Figure Nine outlines the key

stages of preparation, including forming a group, raising £9000, securing accommodation,

being approved by the local authority (LA). These steps may occur in different order, but full

HO approval is the final stage before a family's arrival date is set (Home Office, 2024a).
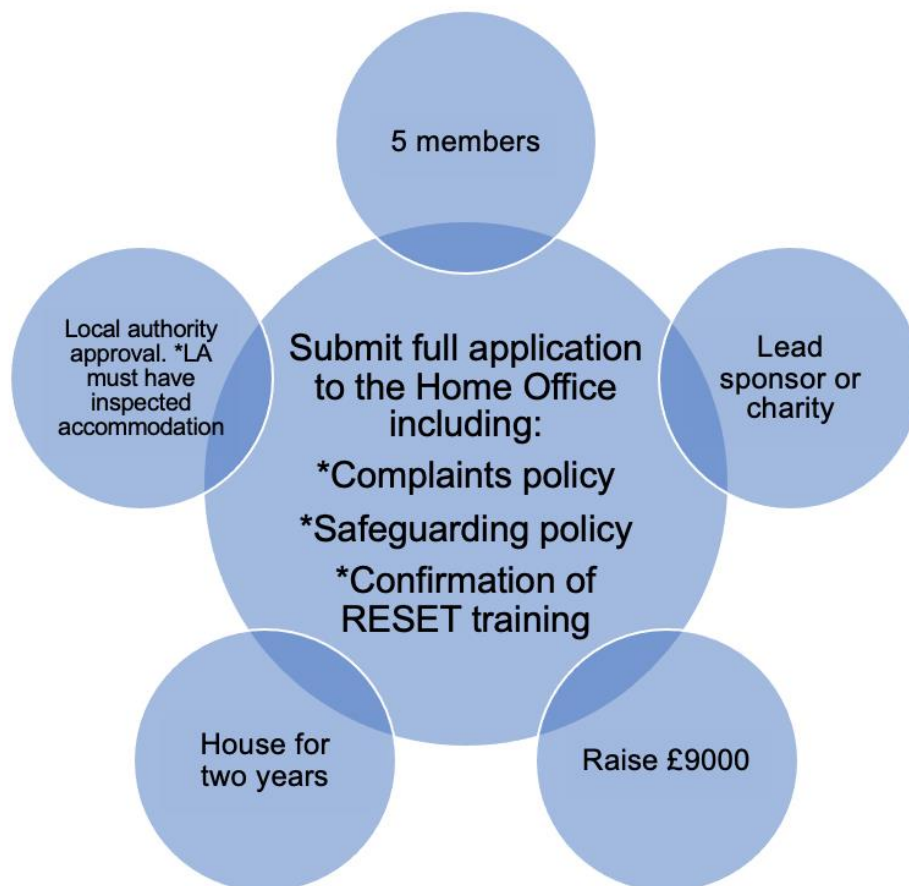
Figure Nine: CS application stages (Home Office, 2024a)

T1 participants were in the process of preparing to welcome a refugee family (See Table

Nine). While several participants had been involved in volunteering with refugees, all were

new to CS. At the point of interview, all participants had received local authority[106] approval

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[106] When used by participants, the term 'local authority' was used loosely by participants to refer to any level of local government.

and raised at least £9000. Nine had secured accommodation for two years; however George's group faced challenges. Three were awaiting a family, post HO approval, including Jackie, who expected a family to arrive within six weeks. Of those remaining, three were awaiting final HO approval, one was ready to submit a full application, and three were still preparing their full application.

Name of participant	Approval received from local council	Raised at least £9000	Secured accommodation for two years	Application submitted to the Home Office	Approval from Home Office	Expectation of when a family would be matched with the group
Tahoor W 1	x	x	x	x		
David Z 1	x	x	x	ready		
Nathaniel W 1	x	x	x	x		
George Z 1	x	x				
Rohan W 1	x	x	x	x		
Leroy W 1	x	x	x		x	
Eric W 1	x	x	x	preparing		
Jackie Z 1	x	x	x		x	6 weeks after interview
Memory Z 1	x	x	x		x	
Joe Z 1	x	x	x	preparing		

Table Nine: T1 participants – stage of application

Timepoint Two (T2)

There were nine participants in T2 and all had welcomed a family within two years, though they were at various support stages (See Table Ten). Contrary to the HO expectation that resettlement support would last for one year, all believed their commitment extended to the full two years. All had hosted a family for at least six months, with most providing resettlement support for seven to nine months. The remainder had supported a family for over 18 months, with Sophia nearing the two-year point.

Name of participant	Family arrival	Time between arrival of the family and interview
Sophia W 2	September 2019 (interview was July 2021) so 22 months	22 months *(Interview July 2021)*
Sally Z 2	1st family July 2018 and 2nd family December 2019	20 months *(Interview August 2021) This volunteer had previously welcomed another CS family in 2018. However, the volunteer advised they were in T2 because they were providing resettlement support to the second family at the time of interview.*
Beth W 2	1st family July 2018 and 2nd family December 2019	20 months *(Interview August 2021) This volunteer had previously welcomed another CS family in 2018. However, the volunteer advised they were in T2 because they were providing resettlement support to the second family at the time of interview.*
Martin W 2	January 2020	19 months *(interview August 2021)*
Hazel W 2	March 2021	9 months *(Interview December 2021)*
Zellie W 2	March 2021	9 months *(Interview December 2021)*
Lily Z 2	February 2021	8 months *(Interview October 2021)*
Ella Z 2	February 2021	7 months *(Interview September 2021)*
Mick Z 2	February 2021	7 months *(Interview September 2021)*

Table Ten: T2 participants – stage of resettlement support

Timepoint Three

In T3, eleven participants had welcomed a family over two years ago (See Table 11). The longest post-duration was Kathleen and Mark's, who welcomed a family three and a half years before the interview. The shortest was two years, with most interviewees having welcomed families between two and three years ago.

Name of Participant	Family arrival	Time between arrival of the family and interview
Evelyn Z 3	September 2019	2 years
Katy Z 3	September 2019	2 years
Kirsty W 3	June 2019	2 years, 2 months
Victoria W 3	March 2019	2 years, 5 months
Jenny Z 3	March 2019	2 years, 6 months
Kit W 3	January 2019	2 years, 8 months
Sarah Z 3	March 2019	2 years, 9 months
Chloe W 3	November 2018	2 years, 10 months
Matthew W 3	November 2018	2 years, 10 months
Mark W 3	February 2018	3 years, 5 months
Kathleen W 3	February 2018	3 years, 6 months

Table 11: T3 participants – stage of resettlement support

The decision to conclude data collection was guided by 'information power' rather than data saturation (Malterud *et al*., 2015, p1753). Increasingly, scholars have criticised the use of saturation as the gold standard in qualitative research (Low, 2019; Sim *et al*., 2018; O'Reilly and Parker, 2013; Nelson, 2017). Instead, I aligned with philosophical underpinnings which reject the existence of a fixed point where all data have been exhaustively obtained (Braun and Clarke, 2021a; Braun and Clarke, 2021b). Rather than being found in the data, meaning is interepreted by the researcher. Analysis rested on ongoing engagement with the data, understanding that as long as data collection continued, so too would fresh interpretation.

Instead of relying on saturation, a combination of 'information power' and practical considerations guided the decision to conclude data collection (Malterud *et al*., 2015, p1753). 'Information power' relies on the idea that the more 'information power' a sample holds, the fewer participants are needed. Five dimensions impact the information power of a sample: a. study aim, b. sample specificity, c. use of established theory, d. quality of dialogue, and e. analysis strategy. The study's narrow aim and specific sample characteristics reduced the need for a larger participant number. Use of purposive sampling bolstered sample specificity, while the study's reliance on established theory diminished the need for a larger sample size.

Quality of dialogue was ensured by my previous research experience and skills. While the use of narrative analysis dictates the use of fewer participants compared to cross-case analysis, a larger participant number was chosen to facilitate comparison across the three timepoints (Malterud *et al*., 2015). Practical considerations, including a limited budget and potential constraints due to the evolving Covid-19 situation also influenced the decision to end recruitment (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013)

4.6: Ethics and reflexivity

Ethical approval was granted from the University of Birmingham's ethics committee. Four central ethical considerations were specifically addressed: confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and the avoidance of harm.

Confidentiality was ensured by assigning each participant a pseudonym. The list of pseudonyms was securely stored in a password-protected file separate from contact details. Participants were given the option to select a name, but the majority asked me to assign one. To ensure anonymity, specific details were removed from quotes to prevent them being attributable to participants. Recognising the challenge of complete anonymity within a reasonably small community of CS volunteers, efforts were made to anonymise locations discussed during walking interviews. Detailed descriptions of local areas were presented in generic terms, such as 'a city in the Midlands', rather the specifying actual names. Moreover, only anonymised photos were included and potentially identifying information, such as job roles, were omitted from the data to minimise any risk of identification. However, participants were informed about the risk of 'deductive disclosure', (Kaiser, 2012, p457) where descriptions of locations or individuals might lead to their identification.

Adhering to the principle of informed consent, potential participants were provided with comprehensive information to enable an informed decision about participation (Bryman, 2016). Those who expressed an interest in the study were sent a digital consent form and participant information form, requesting them to sign and return the consent form before the interview. Participants were told they could withdraw from the study until a month after the interview, with any data destroyed. Consent was iterative (Mackenzie *et al*., 2007). Ahead of each interview, participants received a reminder email emphasising that interviews would be audio-recorded and reitering their right to withdraw. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded of their right to stop or pause the interview at any point.

To ensure that participants were comfortable discussing their experiences, it was essential they felt supported during interviews. Building trust was prioritised during initial phone calls and the early stages of each interview. Some participants opted not to have specific details audio-recorded during walking interviews to protect their privacy. Ensuring participants' well-being extended to considering my own safety especially during solo walking interviews in unfamiliar locations. To mitigate risks, I shared meeting details and timings with my partner and shared my live location via WhatsApp to keep him informed of my walking route in real-time. After each interview, I contacted my partner to confirm my safety.

To address the impact of COVID-19, additional precautions were taken during fieldwork. Walking interviews were chosen as a method to balance in-person interaction with safety measures. An alternative online method was offered to participants in the form of an OPEI for those uncomfortable with or unable to participate in a face-to-face interview. To minimise COVID-19 risks, strict adhere to UK Government advice was followed during the data collection period (July to December 2021)[107]. Social distancing guidelines were observed,

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[107] In the UK, this period allowed outdoor meetings and unlimited walking.

and participants were consulted on face mask preferences, with the option of providing them with FFP2-standard masks. Additionally, face masks and hand sanitiser were carried during each walking interview, and participants were encouraged to choose less crowded times and locations to maintain social distancing.

4.6.1: Positionality

My personal characteristics, including gender, class, ethnicity, personal history, age and life experiences, inevitably influenced the research design. Whilst it is challenging to ascertain the extent of this influence, it is crucial to reflect on my positionality, to contextualise my role in the study. Diverse personal experiences volunteering have likely shaped my motivations and perspectives. My personal motivations for volunteering have ranged from gaining work experience to contributing to causes I am passionate about and making use of my skills. Volunteering as an adviser at a Refugee Centre in the East Midlands exposed me to the power dynamics inherent in volunteering, which fuelled my interest in exploring the balance of power between volunteers and sponsored refugees within CS.

During interviews, my identity as a young, white, female pursuing a PhD was apparent to participants who sometimes commented on a perceived shared identity. This sometimes facilitated openness, with participants referencing shared experiences such as knowledge of the UK education system. Though I am not a CS volunteer, my engagement with the wider UK refugee support community gave me a 'partly' insider role. Though I acknowledge the impossibility of fully separating my subjectivities from my research, I maintained a neutral stance during interviews, allowing participants to share their own experiences. While I inevitably benefitted from participants sharing their experiences, several participants explained that they, too, gained value from taking part. Those who had a positive experience expressed enjoyment reflecting on the benefits of CS. Conversely, participants who had

encountered challenges said they appreciated the opportunity to talk and reflect on their experiences. Reflective practices, including recording reflexive memos after each participant interview and maintaining a reflective journal during data analysis, helped me navigate and reflect on my values and beliefs throughout the study (Nowell *et al*., 2017; Berger, 2015).

4.7: Two stage approach to data analysis

My key focus was to explore the experiences of CS volunteers over the formal two-year period of resettlement support and to analyse how roles and relationships evolved over this time. Analysing data collected over multiple timepoints can be approached in different ways (Kneck and Audulv, 2019). For this study, I employed a two-stage analysis process (Neale, 2018) (See Figure Ten). Each timepoint was treated as an individual 'time pool' and I conducted an analysis of each pool individually *(stage one),* before comparing the analysed data from across the three timepoints *(stage two)* (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016; Jackson *et al*., 2022; Saldana, 2003).
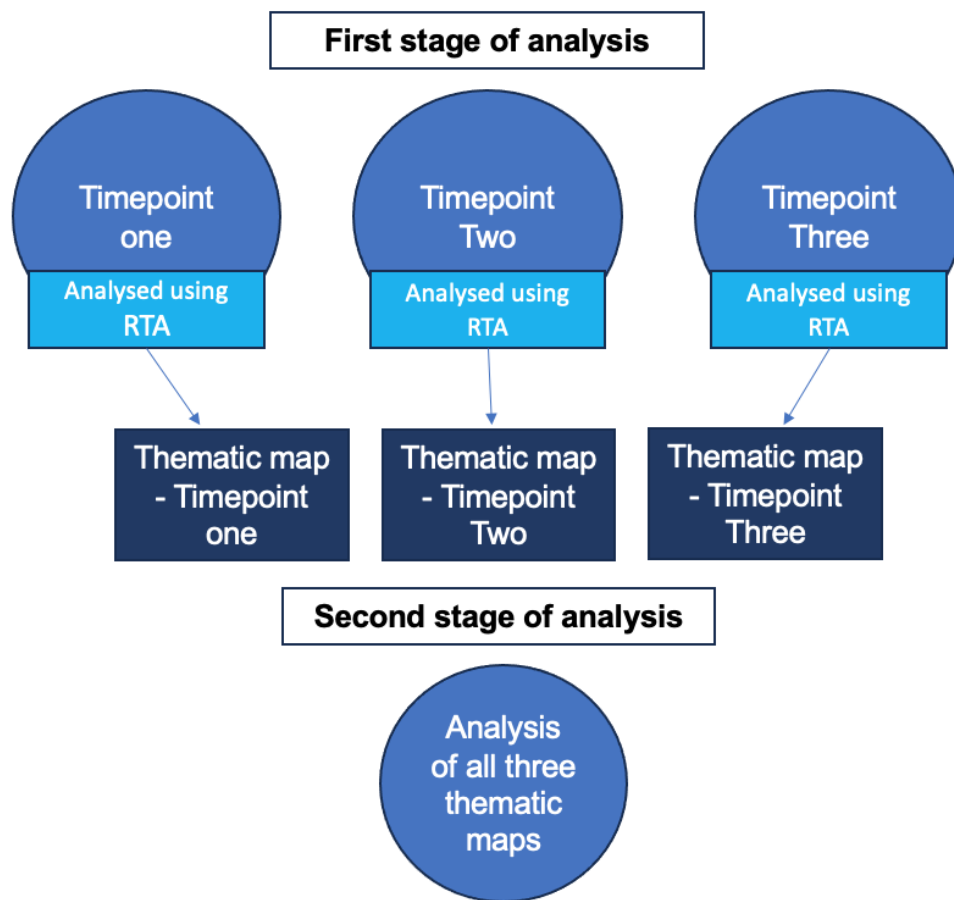
Figure Ten: Two stage analysis process

A two stage process allowed for both synchronic analysis, examining data within each time

point, and diachronic analysis, exploring changes over time. (Tuthill *et al*., 2020; Neale,

2018). In the first stage of analysis, data from the three timepoints were analysed using

reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2021a; Braun *et al*., 2022; Braun and

Clarke, 2019). Other longitudinal studies have applied thematic analysis in this initial stage

(Kinnafick *et al*., 2014), while some have used content analysis (Kneck *et al*., 2014) and

interpretative description (Audulv *et al*., 2012). RTA was chosen because it focused on

interpreting meaning rather than solely describing data, making it more suitable than content

analysis.

Data from the three time points were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), following Braun's and Clarke's six-stage process (Braun and Clarke, 2021a; Braun *et al.*, 2022; Braun and Clarke, 2019). In RTA, the researcher's subjectivity is integral (Braun and Clarke, 2021a), with codes and themes created through personal interpretation and subjective positioning (Braun and Clarke, 2019). While the data were initially analysed inductively, RTA allowed for both inductive and deductive approaches, incorporating theoretical flexibility. During a later stage of analysis, coding was utilised to explore theories around power and hospitality and to capture latent codes. A critical reading of language complemented the social constructionist approach, facilitating an analysis that went beyond experiential and empathic interpretation (Terry and Braun, 2011). The six-step RTA process (Braun and Clarke, 2006) guided the analysis of data individually for all three time points resulting in three thematic maps (see Figure 11).
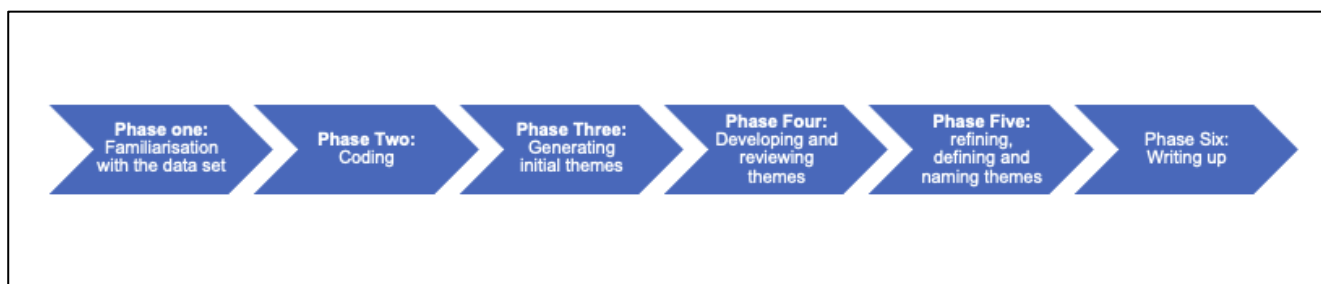
Figure 11: Six-step process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021)

Phase one: Familiarisation with the data set

Phase one involved immersing myself in the data to ensure familiarisation. Transcripts were generated using Otter Ai which were then manually edited and checked for accuracy. I listened to the audio recordings while reading through the edited transcripts, making notes to highlight pertinent sections of data. During this phase, I aimed to develop my 'analytic

sensibility' to uncover deeper meanings in the data and connect them to broader research

themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Additionally, I conducted a note-taking exercise to

identify potential patterns of meaning across each entire timepoint (See Figure 12).

Figure 12: Timepoint One visual familiarisation note

Throughout the analysis process, I maintained a reflexive journal to document my thoughts at

each stage (Saldana, 2013). The journal served as a flexible space for self-reflection, and I

avoided framing it too strictly. It allowed me to contemplate and reflect on codes, examine

different data elements and later, explore how codes could be used to form initial themes

(See Figure 13).

- Phase 1: familiarisation with George's interview (Z1)

George seems quite tired by the process. He is committed to his role but in a way, it has become more than he anticipated because initially he started just intending to be involved in the communication, but ended up becoming a key member of the group.

He distances himself from the decision that was made not to accept the first family that was offered – clearly there was some disagreement within the group and between the volunteers here. One which caused the group to lose the house and which now presents them with the issue of having to find another one. The situation with the first family the group were offered is interesting – I wasn't aware that groups were able to say yes or no to a family, I presumed it wasn't optional. Clearly the group has some power over the family that they resettle.

I think at this point as well it's interesting to reflect on how George perceives his role to only just 'start' once the family have arrived – he expects that they will need more support over the two year period and that really, he appreciates his role has only just started, even if it's taken his group a long time to get to this point (and they don't even have a house secured yet). To contrast this with Tahoor who perceives that his role will almost 'end' when the family arrive and he has organised for another organisation to take over – he doesn't imagine that his role will continue, whereas Nathaniel and George anticipate that their roles will, or at least George is open to the idea of his role continuing in a way that will help the family.

This interview also covers quite interesting information about the differences between the type of people who volunteer. George references people with different political beliefs from him, he sees himself as a political 'leftie', but talks about people who volunteer being quite different to him politically. For example, there is someone or a couple of people in his group who don't agree that asylum seekers should be in the UK, but perceive CS to be ok because it's a former scheme for legal refugees. So you have this kind of spectrum between George who accepts both CS and asylum seekers, this person within his group who does not agree with asylum seekers and then George also references talking to someone outside of the group who doesn't agree with CS. George engages in a kind of 'quiet' politics, sharing about how CS works and explaining the scheme. He seemed surprised at the differences of good refugee/ bad asylum seekers expressed by his colleague.

Figure 13: Excerpt from reflexive journal

Phase two: Coding

During phase two, I engaged in code generation. A key feature of RTA is the generation of codes prior to themes. Initially, coding was inductive, capturing surface-level meaning, but I gradually shifted to a more deductive approach, as I was influenced by existing theory like

the Expressions of Power Framework in Timepoint Two (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002). I prioritised critical examination over description, in line with the constructionist study framework. NVivo facilitated coding and organisation of data into three distinct timepoints, with separate folders for each. I included the photos from OPEIs and coded them alongside transcripts, leveraging NVivo's utility for longitudinal data analysis. Throughout coding, I referred to familiarisation notes, reflective memos, and transcripts for additional context, especially regarding the significance of place. Each coding stage was documented, with a list of code labels and their corresponding meanings. Multiple rounds of coding were conducted to ensure I didn't miss out on any potentially interesting data relevant to my research questions. After completing coding for each timepoint, I reviewed all code labels to ensure consistency in meaning across each data set. This involved deleting repeated codes, clarifying the meaning of code labels and introducing new code labels. Refining codes marked a shift towards more interpretative coding, identifying more latent codes. The outcome was three lists representing the final iteration of codes for each timepoint.

Phase three: Generating initial themes

To begin phase three, I printed out the final list of codes and cut out the individual code labels. I clustered codes into 'candidate themes' around patterns of meaning focused on responding to the research questions. I spent time arranging the cut-out codes into themes and created several different versions (documented in my reflexive journal) before switching to an iPad to move candidate themes digitally. Phase three involved many iterations of candidate themes. Once I was happy with the 'candidate themes', I created another version of the final list of codes, to clarify which codes I had used, and which had not been used. To finish phase three, I created a clearer mind map displaying all the 'candidate themes' using PowerPoint, (excluding the codes for clarity) to begin to consider the relationships between the themes (see Figure 14).
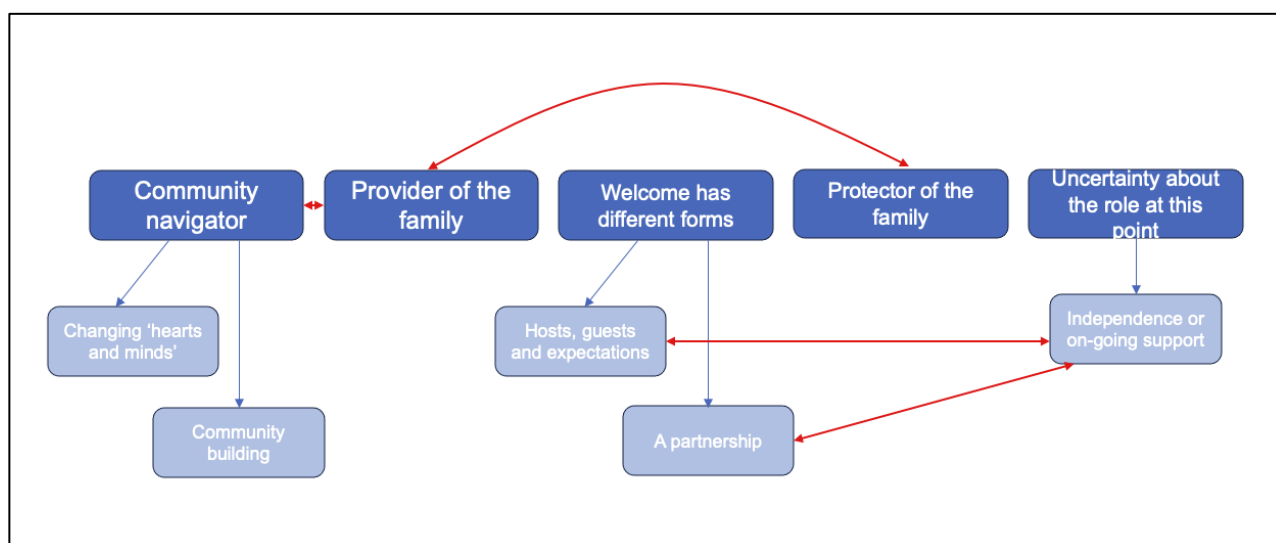
Figure 14: Candidate themes (without codes) (RTA phase three)

Phase four: Developing and reviewing themes

At the beginning of phase four I created a word document for each 'candidate theme' and copied over the coded data aligned to each theme from NVivo so I could review coded data against each 'candidate theme'. For example, for timepoint one, I created five documents. To help establish my argument around each theme, I wrote a description for each theme and sub theme, outlining what was included and excluded. Figure 15 provides an early theme definition which was eventually included in Chapter Six, Section 6.3.2 as 'a paternalistic approach':

Reviewing 'hosts, guests and expectations' sub-theme notes

This sub theme is part 1 of two sub themes from the above main theme capturing the core idea that for some of the CS volunteers, there was an idea of their role as being the 'hosts' but that this specific role had certain boundaries around it and that there was also a time limit. Volunteers viewed this as a 'project' with defined roles as a 'professional' volunteer with certain boundaries to the relationship with the family and that also there is a clearly defined end point to the 'project'. There was an emphasis on encouraging independence within the family at the end of the two year point, because by that time, the 'roles' will have ceased. This also had an impact on the boundaries set by the volunteers – that they had to be clear and professional. As the volunteers perceived themselves as the 'hosts' and the refugees were the 'guests, there were also clear expectations on how some volunteers felt the family should behave (especially in relation to jobs, education and learning English).Some reference to 'making the best of it' and a perception of CS as being an opportunity. Arranging jobs for the family etc. The intention is kind, but the way in which it's delivered can be quite paternalistic (care and control and presumption about refugee social networks). There is a perception that the refugees NEED to be helped, and that they are being SAVED by the CS process and that CS is/ life changing for the family. Also expectations in terms of succeeding. The volunteers are presented as those who have the power and the relationship weighs in favour of the volunteers to make the decisions. Also a lack of awareness of the power dynamic. Also – generally don't see this as a mutually beneficial relationship, rather, it's just the refugees who benefit.

Figure 15: Example of RTA Phase Four – defining themes as recorded in my reflexive journal

At this stage I created a mind map focusing on how the themes and sub-themes connected to one main theme. The aim was to create an overall story about the data with a logical, connected narrative (see Figure 16).
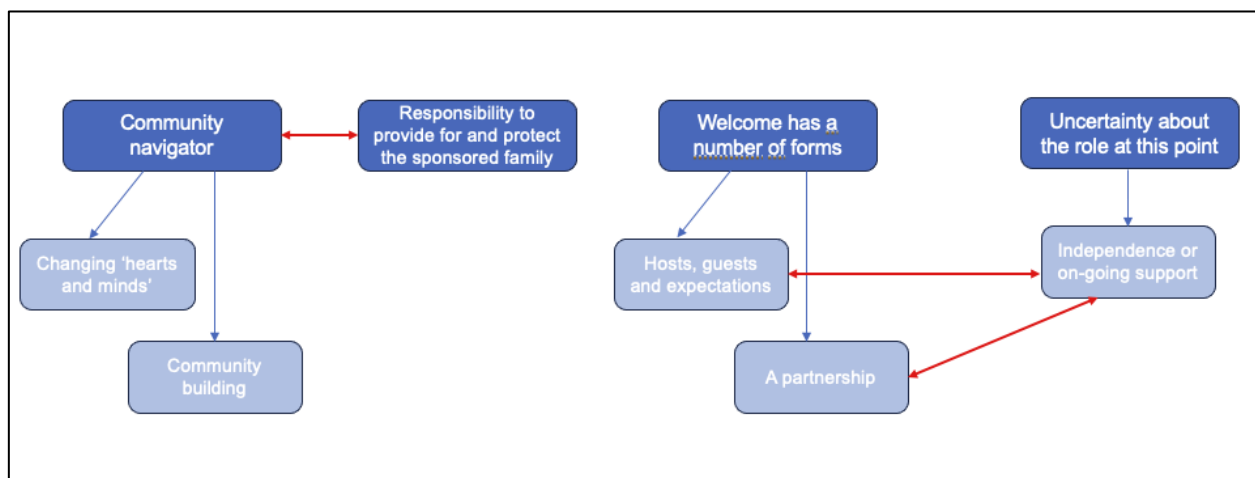
Figure 16: Later iteration of candidate themes (without codes)

Phase five: Refining, defining and naming themes

Once I was happy with the arrangements of my themes, I finalised the names of each theme and wrote down the ordered story that I wanted to write about each timepoint. Finally, I reviewed the narrative I had written against the full transcripts for each timepoint. Coding had moved me away from my dataset and during theme development, I worked with the coded data extracts, rather than the full dataset. This final step enabled me to check that my themes and 'story' about the data worked with the full data set.

Phase six: Writing up

I completed stages 1-6 of RTA for the three timepoints resulting in three thematic maps. Next, I moved on to the second stage of the analysis which considered data from all three timepoints. The second stage focused on exploring the data as a whole, comparing the three separate theme maps from each timepoint. This approach made use of both the 'down' and 'across' aspects of the experiences of the CS volunteers, focusing on each time point individually and then considering the whole process. A similar two stage approach has been utilised in other longitudinal studies to explore themes at each stage and then as a whole data set (Walter and Fox, 2021; Darcy *et al.,* 2019).

4.8: Summary

In this chapter, I presented the philosophical approach and research design. I employed a recurrent cross-sectional approach to explore how volunteer engagement in CS shapes their roles and relationships with the sponsored refugees, as well as their broader volunteering activities. I divided CS into three distinct time points. Volunteers from each of these timepoints were interviewed to build a comprehensive understanding of their experiences

before, during, and after the formal two-year sponsorship period. I utilised a multi-method qualitative approach using both walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews to explore the influence of spaces and places on volunteer experiences. First, data from each timepoint were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Secondly, data from all three timepoints were analysed collectively to identify any changes over time. I now move to outlining my findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: SITUATING THE CS VOLUNTEERS

5.1: Introduction

This descriptive chapter situates the following three analytical chapters by providing an overview of the context of CS volunteering. I explore the experiences of 30 CS volunteers including their previous volunteering experiences (5.2) and their motivations (5.3). Next, I consider the CS application process (5.4) including charitable status (5.4.1), local authority approval (5.4.2), fundraising (5.4.3) and accommodation (5.4.4). Through this exploration, this chapter addresses the first research question:

1. What is the state of knowledge around volunteering within a community sponsorship group?

In presenting the findings in this chapter and subsequent chapters, pseudonyms are used to safeguard the anonymity of the refugee family members involved (see Chapter Four, Table Eight). Female names represent adult refugee women sponsored by the group, while male names denote adult male refugees. Some aspects of the qualitative data are quantified by recording specific, countable elements, such as the number of participants in each specific role. However, when recounting participants' feelings and recollections, I use terms like 'some', 'many' or 'several' as these insights were not systematically collected but depended on what participants' chose to share in response to the interview questions.

5.2: Previous volunteering experiences

Of the 30 participants, 27 had previous volunteering experience before participating in CS, whilst three volunteers - Rohan, Memory and Sally - did not. Table 12 provides an overview

of participants' volunteering roles, categorised into two groups: 1. Volunteering with refugees and asylum-seekers, and 2. All other volunteering experiences. These categories are further divided into current (a) and past roles (b).

1.a: Current roles volunteering with refugees and asylum seekers	1.b: Previous roles volunteering with refugees and asylum seekers	2.a: Current 'other' volunteering roles	2.b: Previous 'other' volunteering roles
- Sorting clothes donations - Teaching ESOL - Refugee mentor - Befriender	- Refugee and asylum seeker advice centre advisor - Befriender - CS group befriender (with another CS group) - Volunteer at refugee camp in Greece and 'Jungle' camp in Calais - Teaching ESOL - Campaigning for VPRS	- Mosque communications - Children's playground charity - Disability charity - Community benefit society - Sports committee - Gardening association/friend of local park - School governor - Amnesty international - Church volunteer - Political party - Riding for the disabled - Citizen's advice - Foodbank - Communications (charities) - Young women's mentor - Trustee of community centre - Advisor – social enterprise	- Early years volunteer - Local councillor - School governor - Playgroup volunteer - Church community worker - Disabled children's play charity coordinator - Chair of community charity - Chair of parish council - Duke of Edinburgh scheme – school volunteer

Table 12: Previous volunteering experiences

Most participants (27) brought diverse volunteering experiences to CS, including roles as school governors, charity trustees, mentors, political party volunteers, and involvement with welfare organisations like Foodbank or Citizens' Advice. Some were also engaged in leisure activities such as sports committees or gardening groups. Many were members of faith communities involved in outreach, with CS being one such project. For example, Lily had previously supported night shelters for the homeless as part of her church outreach team.

Many described themselves as serial volunteers, with Kathleen noting she had been involved for *'years and years and years' (Kathleen W3).* Despite their varied experiences volunteering, most participants (17) had no prior experience working with refugees. Several admitted they had no interest in refugees until their involvement with CS prompted a change in perspective. In contrast, 13 participants had previously volunteered with refugees, with three having prior involvement with CS. For example, Sarah had volunteered as a befriender with another CS group before supporting a family through her own group. Two participants from the same group had also initiated a refugee support network, advocating for their county council's participation in the VPRS, which later evolved into a CS group[108]. Reflecting on this, Sally (Z2) said:

> *We started together really, we started [CS group] in 2014. Never thinking and never*
> *intending that we'd actually be supporting families in the very, very intense way that*
> *we've ended up doing (Sally Z2).*

The remaining ten participants had no prior involvement with CS specifically, but had volunteered with refugees both within and outside the UK. Their roles included providing advice, befriending, mentoring, teaching ESOL, sorting donations and fundraising. Martin, from a church-based group, fundraised for refugee projects and organised collections of clothes and toiletries for refugee camps abroad, which inspired his church to form a CS group. During the 'so-called refugee crisis', two participants – Joe and Mick – had volunteered in refugee camps, providing practical support. Joe described his time in Lesvos, Greece, while Mick worked in Calais, France, both highlighting the manual work they did, such as damp-proofing shelters and sorting donations. Three participants, including Memory

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[108] The two volunteers in this group were part of all three timepoint stages – they had finished their support for one family (Timepoint three), but they were also actively providing resettlement support to a second family (Timepoint two) whilst preparing to welcome a third family (Timepoint one). They are considered to be Timepoint two participants because that was the stage of support they felt they were providing at the point of interview.

made a distinction between volunteering and activism. Memory saw CS as a way to combine her activism, such as advocating for Black rights, with volunteering, noting. *'I think the two can kind of come together' (Memory Z1)*

5.3: Motivations

Participants described varied, often overlapping motivations for engaging in CS[109]. Many were driven by humanitarian concern (Fassin, 2012), especially after heightened media coverage of the 'so-called refugee crisis', and the emotional impact of witnessing refugee suffering (Jasper, 1998). Others were influenced by personal or family migration experiences, religious values, or a desire to build community. Some found meaning through CS during personal hardships like grief. Social justice concerns and a desire to challenge government hostility towards refugees also featured strongly. Each motivation is considered in turn.

5.3.1: Humanitarianism

Many joined CS to alleviate refugee suffering. For Mick, retired for ten years, the plight of refugees - *'really sad…so tenuous and insecure' (Mick Z2)* – compelled him to act. He felt retirement gave him the time and space to help. Like others, he was moved by media coverage, especially during the 'so-called refugee crisis'. Chloe found CS a way to channel helplessness into action:

> *You see all the worse things…Afghanistan and Ethiopia…you feel helpless but at least this is a little way of trying to do something (Chloe W3).*

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[109] Given that motivations were often multiple, it was not possible to provide precise figures for each category.

Several participants cited the image of Alan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler on the beach, as pivotal. Sophia explained:

> *The little boy on the beach was what inspired a lot of people to start joining community sponsorship groups (Sophia W2).*

For some, the suffering felt personal:

> *My heart…when I saw the pictures on TV, I saw my aunties and uncles and brothers and sisters. I can be quite emotional about it (Mark W3).*

The 2021 Taliban resurgence also spurred new interest. George noted an influx in volunteers, while Leroy, deeply affected by ongoing Channel crossings, wanted to expand support beyond CS:

> *All the boats in the news again…those people are really the same as our family…escaping the same thing…they need help in the same way…I don't want us to lose sight of those other people. I want to try and bring them into the fold at some point (Leroy W1).*

5.3.2: History of migration

Several participants reflected on personal or familial migration experiences as a key motivator. Victoria reflected on her family's journey from Ireland to England during the 1840s and the discrimination they faced:

My family came over…after the Irish famine…they had a hell of a time…no dogs, no

blacks, no Irish (Victoria W3).

Having migrated herself from another Western country, Victoria saw parallels with refugees and challenged anti-refugee sentiments among friends:

Look, I am an immigrant…I did the same thing they're doing…why are you

responding differently to them than to me? (Victoria W3).

Nathanial referenced his parents' migration to the UK, contrasting their favourable welcome with the treatment of asylum-seekers:

My parents came here…they were given a paper by the state that says they're

allowed to be here…asylum-seekers escaping war and persecution, they don't get

that same qualification (Nathanial W1).

Martin, though not an immigrant, related through his own relocation within the UK:

You've broken that link from your culture…it was just a shock…this could be anybody

that this happens to (Martin W2).

5.3.3: Tangibility

Participants were also drawn to CS for its visible, practical impact. They valued seeing the outcomes of their efforts – something they felt other refugee support work lacked. Sophia described the appeal of seeing the results, while Zellie highlighted the manageability of CS:

> *It feels more manageable…it's partly about it being achievable…none of us know what to do about what's going on in Calais…But it's easy to support one small family because we've all got some spare cups or towels…it's so easy (Zellie W2).*

Ella echoed this with the metaphor of *'helping your one starfish' (Ella Z2),* offering a way to make a small but meaningful difference. Lily, joined after her previous campaigning yielded few tangible results, and she wanted to create a more significant impact on the lives of refugees. Others, like David, found CS a much needed contrast to the frustration of his day job in advocacy:

> *It has been nothing but failure and feeling impotent…just seeing successive Governments pass more and more restrictive laws…although this refugee project is just a drop in the ocean…at least it's something positive, you know, to relieve that (David Z1).*

Eric and Leroy, both previously involved in volunteer refugee support, found CS more rewarding because they could provide direct support. Leroy noted the emotional toll of working with asylum-seekers, and Eric reflected on the limits of that support:

> *These were different sorts of refugees, they hadn't got their papers or anything…they couldn't work, or really study… it started to feel a little bit intense…I felt really sorry for the guy, but I felt a bit like it was too much (Eric W1).*

5.3.4: Faith

Religious organisations played a central role in CS, with calls from Pope Francis and the Church of England spurring many into action. More recently, mosques and Islamic

organisations have also established CS groups. Amongst participants, fourteen belonged to faith-based groups - eight from churches, two from a mosque, and four from interfaith organisations[110].

Participants drew inspiration from religious teachings and stories, translating their faith into tangible actions to support refugees. Martin spoke of the church's duty to support the '*poor and the needy' (Martin W2)*[111], while Ella saw refugees as her *'brothers and sisters' (Ella Z2)*, reflecting her interpretation of Catholicism. Matthew likened CS to the Christmas story – helping a persecuted couple find shelter – which he said CS brought *'a little bit to life' (Matthew W3)*. Mick emphasised the role of Christian service, saying '*we are here to do God's will and to serve one another' (Mick Z2),* and shared a photo of his church (Figure X) as a symbolic representation of faith in action.

Figure 17: A church window shared by Mick (Z2)

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[110] The remaining sixteen participants were from secular groups.
[111] This participant was very involved in his local church and explained how his motivation to support refugees started with praying for the Iraqi Yazidi population who fled their homeland alongside many Christians after persecution from Daesh. His support for refugees began with prayer, but he wanted to do something more tangible and so he started raising money to send items to Syria before becoming involved with CS.

In some cases, participants' ethnic backgrounds shaped how they approached sponsorship. For example, two Asian British participants from Timepoint One described developing support networks through their mosque, drawing on Islamic principles of hospitality and a desire for their mosque to contribute positively to their local community. Rohan for instance, was motivated by the core Islamic principles of aiding the less fortunate, such as *'feeding the hungry and clothing the homeless' (Rohan W1).* Both Tahoor and Rohan explained that CS allowed them to focus their charitable efforts locally, in line with the Islamic tradition of giving a portion of wealth to those in need through Zakat[112]. Beyond the religious obligation, they hoped to enhance their mosque's image in the local community and counter negative stereotypes about Muslims. To this end, they advocated for their mosque's name to be prominently featured in the CS application, showcasing their commitment to local charity and aligning with the visibility seen in church-led CS projects.

5.3.5: To utilise previous skills and experiences

Many participants saw CS as a way to apply their existing skills while giving back. They drew on experience in communication, navigating local council and benefits systems, project management, and ESOL training. Victoria, for example, highlighted her intercultural communication skills:

> *I've always had a love and a heart for people that I didn't know…it doesn't scare me not to be able to talk English…there's so many ways of communicating (Victoria W3).*

Others had previously volunteered with refugees and felt they could meaningfully contribute to CS groups. Leroy noted that his previous experience volunteering at a refugee centre

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[112] Zakat is an Islamic financial term. It is one of the pillars of the Muslim faith and stipulates Muslims must donate a certain percentage of their wealth (2.5%) to charity, once the value of their possessions and wealth reaches a certain level. This point is called Nisab and is defined as the value of 87.48 grams of gold or 612.36 grams of silver.

made him a valuable asset. In some cases, participants were invited to join CS groups because of specific expertise. Lily, for example, had supported church-run night shelters and was approached by her vicar. Similarly, Kit was asked to join due to her skill set, despite not being initially motivated to support refugees, seeking CS as a natural extension of her experience and retirement goals:

> *'There was a need, I got asked and it fits my skill set' (Kit W3).*

5.3.6: Social

Strengthening or forming social connections motivated many participants. Often, CS groups stemmed from existing social networks, making recruitment easier and often resulting in demographically similar members. Zellie joined because her friends were already involved:

> *It's a very small, small community…so the people that I know, this is one of the things they will do. So for me, it was partly a social thing…it's what my social group do…I also just thought it would be interesting (Zellie W2).*

Kirsty and Sophia were invited by friends, while Jackie admitted:

> *My friend…who is very passionate about helping refugees. I'm a bit more selfish (laughs)…I got involved because it was a quite social thing (Jackie Z1).*

Others saw CS as a chance to make new connections. Memory, new to her area, valued the opportunity to meet people. In secular groups, participants emphasised the dual benefits of community service and friendship:

It's definitely a lot about community, building community and making friendships…it's one of the main aspects I think (Sarah Z3).

For Jenny, the community-building element was more central than refugee support goals:

I'm very, very, very involved in the community…I've set up businesses and things that are very much about community connection…it's not necessarily about the refugee or asylum kind of sector (Jenny Z3).

5.3.7: Personal reasons

Several participants were motivated to do something meaningful – especially during life transitions. Rohan longed to connect with traditional values of unconditional giving:

I think that element of giving something without expecting something back has become very alien these days…community sponsorship is quite important, because it's unconditional love…because you don't know them (Rohan W1).

Others used CS to navigate personal challenges. Sophia, coping with grief, was inspired by refugee resilience:

I wanted something different…wallowing in my own grief…these refugees have been through so much and were still going through so much…I just felt I needed to reach out and help them (Sophia W2).

Similarly, Kirsty joined after university and a relationship breakdown, while David, who worked with refugees professionally, saw CS as emotionally restorative:

It's such a depressing world, you know, so....it can be so grim dealing with refugee cases and arguing them. So yeah, I think maybe it's part of a sort of something that's good for me, actually, rather selfishly, something good for your mental, one's mental health (David Z1).

The mental health benefits of volunteering were echoed by George, who described CS as a way to gain purpose:

If you're suffering from low self-esteem or mental health issues, it gives you a potential purpose…you get a lot out of it (George Z1).

Ella, aware of her privilege, felt a moral duty to act:

We're quite an affluent area…there's no way…our jobs were threatened or our kind of livelihoods or any of the things that people say when they're spouting hatred against immigration…it doesn't really affect us like that. In my middle-classness…therefore we should do more (Ella Z2).

5.3.8: Social justice

Many participants were driven by a strong sense of social justice, rooted in a belief in shared humanity and equal opportunity:

What we're doing is to do with being humane and with other humans…it's nothing to do with anything that they need to be grateful for (Katy Z3).

> *The idea is to make a difference to someone…to…set an example to the community of how to be welcoming (Ella Z2).*

Memory and Nathaniel articulated their commitment to advocating for refugees' rights. Memory emphasised that support should go beyond the basics to help families realise their aspirations:

> *Getting a family here isn't just about giving them a house and helping them apply for benefits, it's about actively trying to help them achieve what they want (Memory Z1).*

Nathaniel, informed by his prior experience volunteering in a refugee centre, saw CS as a form of justice, not charity:

> *I don't want it to be about charity, I want it to be about justice…I see community sponsorship as a form of redistribution…we're redistributing the fact that we live in a safe, secure community…It's not like (sighs) 'these poor people' kind of thing. The rest of the world needs to step up, because you can't have a refugee crisis on the scale that we do. And just pretend it's not happening. Especially when we've had a hand in destabilising the regions that people come from (Nathaniel W1).*

Rohan and Tahoor echoed this, highlighting a shared human responsibility to respond to global crises like the war in Syria:

> *That's what is humanity…that's what it boils down to…the reason for the Syrian refugees was to kind of try and give that back' (Tahoor W1).*

5.3.9: Politics

Political motivations were also prominent, particularly opposition to the UK's hostile environment policy[113]. Some, like George and Tahoor, suggested that CS tends to attract those with left-leaning values. Tahoor criticised the contrast between his CS group's welcoming values and the unwelcoming policies of the local Conservative council. Participants frequently voiced frustration with government policy. For example, Leroy criticised dispersal strategies:

> *It's awful, really awful…it's much better if people are placed in proper communities and then they can have the community support (Leroy W1).*

For Joe, volunteering in Greece during the summer of 2015 sparked his political engagement:

> *I felt quite angry about the whole situation…I was quite affected by the people I met (Joe Z1).*

For several participants, involvement in CS represented a challenge to governmental inaction and a way to foster an alternative narrative of welcome. David framed his participation as resistance:

> *I wanted to help disadvantaged people and underdogs fight back against, you know, bullies and the state (David Z1).*

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[113] Participant voting preferences were not a focus here, therefore I do not have the details for all participants. However, in several interviews, participants stressed their political affiliation as a key part of their motivation for getting involved in CS.

The understanding that community sponsorship was in addition to government resettlement figures was pivotal for some participants. David remarked:

> *I had not appreciated that the community sponsorship schemes were additional…I thought…if it's additional…maybe that's good scheme to start up (David Z1).*

Kirsty explicitly described her engagement as an act of resistance against governmental failures, expressing her frustration with inaction despite widespread media coverage of the refugee crisis:

> *Doing this, is a way of like, being resistant… I kind of hope that loads more people do it, to kind of act against the Government…I think its unlimited, so lets…you know, get loads of people over…they can't do anything about it (Kirsty Z3).*

While acknowledging that CS is a necessary response to fill gaps in government support, participants emphasised that refugee resettlement should ultimately be the government's responsibility. Some, like Sally, were initially reluctant about CS, believing it was the *'Government's job' (Sally Z2)* and that civil society was being used as a *'get out clause' (George Z1)*. Nonetheless, many felt compelled to act in response to perceived governmental failures, as Lily articulated:

> *I'm an inherently big Government person…I both try and change the Government and also make up for all the ways in which I think they're crap…I don't feel like we are stopping the Government doing anything, because I don't think they are doing it anyway (Lily Z2).*

5.4 Application process

The CS application process involves multiple stages: gaining charitable status or partnering with a lead sponsor, obtaining local authority approval, fundraising £9000, securing affordable housing for two years and submitting a full application form and resettlement plan to the HO.

5.4.1: Charitable status

CS groups must obtain charitable status or partner with a lead sponsor, a registered charity who assumes legal responsibility for the group[114] (Home Office, 2024a). The majority of participants (21) were part of groups aligned with lead sponsors, primarily Citizens UK/Sponsor Refugees (13). The other eight were supported by Caritas, CHARIS refugees and their church's charitable arm[115]. While my study identified only three lead sponsors, the UK hosts a broader number of lead sponsors as part of a network facilitated by Reset[116]. Nine participants opted to obtain charitable status for their CS groups. Some formed their groups from networks of refugee supporters who met while volunteering. Others pursued charitable status to retain autonomy and avoid fees sometimes charged by lead sponsors:

> *We didn't really want anyone else telling us what to do… we didn't want to be almost under the control of a wider organisation. Also, the money! (Memory Z1).*

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[114] Lead sponsors provide their own guidelines and support to groups and take responsibility for the refugee family if the group is unable to continue with the resettlement plan for any reason. They must also act as a guarantor for the £9000, take legal responsibility for the sponsor agreement and must approve all resettlement plans for the group, as well as working with the group and the HO to attend pre and post arrival visits and completing monitoring and evaluation as requested by the HO.

[115] Of the remaining eight participants, three aligned with Caritas, one with CHARIS refugees, and four were supported by their church's charitable outreach as lead sponsor.

[116] Other lead sponsor organisations active in the UK include: Aid for People Affected by War (APAW), Ashtead Churches Community Trust, Bath Welcomes Refugees, Bigg Community Interest Company, Caritas Plymouth, Caritas Salford, Caritas Shrewsbury, Catholic Care, CHARIS, Citizens UK/Sponsor Refugees, Diocese of Chelmsford, Diocese of London, Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle, Falmouth and Penryn Welcome Refugee Families, Good Neighbours, Hillsong, Malvern Welcomes, Nugent, Refugee Support Europe, Salvation Army, The Pickwell Foundation, Tyneside Welcomes, Waltham Forest Community Sponsorship Partnership and Audacious Church.

5.4.2: Local authority approval

As part of the HO approval process, CS groups must obtain written permission from their local authority to apply for CS, as well as sign off on the proposed property after an inspection (Home Office, 2024a). Approval formats varied across local authorities, but typically focused on local service capacity, potential community tensions, and the group's capability to support vulnerable refugees (Home Office, 2024a).

At the time of interview, all participants had received local authority permission, although their experiences differed significantly. Seven participants encountered no issues, while nine found the process challenging and time-consuming due to concerns over expenditure, employment opportunities, transport and local resource availability[117].

Some participants were pleasantly surprised by the local authorities' positive reactions. For example, Eric and Memory, who expected a more negative response based on feedback from other CS groups, found the process to be *'fine and quite quick' (Memory W3)*[118]. Kathleen's group also had a positive experience, partly attributed to a local authority representative attending their CS group meetings. Lily speculated that the migration background of her local authority leader may have influenced the positive permission received.

However, many participants reported negative experiences. Nathaniel's group initially faced rejection due to the local authority's lack of awareness regarding the CS scheme. After

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[117] The remaining 14 participants were either unaware of their local authority's stance or had not been involved in that aspect of the application.
[118] Later in the interview, Memory (W3) added that they did have a contact within the local authority which may have helped them to navigate the process of gaining permission to apply.

several meetings and clarifications that the group—not the local authority—would take responsibility for the family, approval was eventually granted:

> *A lot of councils don't want to have to take any responsibility…they just need putting at ease really that we will be doing the work…that took a long time…we got a meeting with the person who made the decision…once we had actually talked to him, he was like, Okay, fine (Nathaniel W1).*

Approval times varied widely, with delays ranging from *'ten weeks' (David Z1)* to *'nine months' (Nathaniel W1)*, which affected groups activities and led to a sense of stasis.

Some participants noted an increasing risk aversion among local authorities. Tahoor described the process as *'difficult',* involving *'lobbying councillors'* and *'having quite frank discussions with the council's housing team',* where political factors influenced the approval processes *(Tahoor W1).* Beth pointed out concerns about increased expenditures among councillors in a predominantly Conservative council:

> *One of the council staff was asked to write a report…that came out very negatively…concentrating on how much it would cost the county council…the councillors…a Tory majority…were very concerned about expenditure (Beth Z2).*

Rohan criticised his local authority for requiring petitions to gain approval, while Tahoor emphasised the need to tailor their presentation of the scheme to a Conservative-led authority:

> *We had to play the game…what sold it to the Conservative Tory councillors was, oh this is a great initiative. The community's taking responsibility…it fits with the ideology*

for those who follow the ideology that way…the Tory Council, it was a case of look

we're going to deal with this, there's no headache to you guys. There's no money

coming out of your pocket. Because they are cutting back left right and centre (Tahoor

W1).

Martin faced significant resistance from a Conservative local authority and UKIP supporters. Despite being told that their rural area lacked sufficient bus services and mental health provision for refugees, he engaged in several *'heated'* meetings - *'I mean I proper went for them, the county council',* challenging the *'really…really, anti-community sponsorship'* stance of the local authority which he attributed to *'pure and utter racism' (Martin W2).* He confronted discriminatory remarks regarding refugees fitting into the community:

I said…would you mind if I wrote an article in the local paper saying…councillor says

bus services in [East Midlands] aren't good enough for refugees, but they are good

enough for local people, is that what you are saying?...he said, 'No, no, I'm not saying

that...but refugees don't have a car'…I said, 'how do you know that?...are you saying

that the people in Lincolnshire, everybody has a car, and they don't use the bus

service? (Martin W2).

Eventually, after involving the local MP, they pressured the local authority to relent:

Eventually, begrudgingly, we got the local MP, a Conservative MP, involved…we said,

'it's your Government's community sponsorship scheme and your council aren't giving

us permission… I said, 'what's the...what is the most scary thing about a family of

people that have coloured skin…slightly different to yours, what's the more scary this

thing about that…because it doesn't frighten me?'…they went, 'well, we don't think

they might fit in the community'…I said, 'I don't fit in this community…I have a totally

different outlook on life…but that doesn't mean that that I can't live here' (Martin W2).

5.4.3: Fundraising

In addition to obtaining permission to from local authorities, CS groups were required to raise at least £9,000 to support the arriving family. Most participants emphasised that fundraising '*wasn't an issue at all'* because people were, *'amazingly generous' (Sally W2).* Groups employed various methods for fundraising, including sponsored activities, quizzes, charity meals, bake sales and music events. Contributions from local businesses and community organisations significantly bolstered these efforts. Some groups received substantial donations from community events:

> *The yoga group and the pantomime gave half their profits which was several*
> *thousand pounds (Chloe W3).*

Standing orders and regular donations also played a vital role in their fundraising success. Chloe and Matthew's group exceeded their target by raising £20,000, partly due to the consistent influx of regular donations. Wealthier communities were particularly effective in fundraising, with connections to affluent individuals facilitating access to funds. Evelyn noted:

> *The chair…he's in touch with all the rich list…if we're running short of money, he just*
> *talks to someone, and we get an extra £1000…remarkable (Evelyn Z3).*

Religious communities significantly contributed to fundraising efforts. For example, Mosques collected donations through Friday prayers:

One of the pillars of Islam is Zakat…a kind of a charity…2.5%...you give to people

who are vulnerable and needy…from that 9000 pounds, two and a half thousand

pounds of it was categorised as Zakat (Tahoor W1).

Ella (Z2) shared a photo of her church (Figure 18) to illustrate the key role of religious institutions in the fundraising process. She explained that as part of an interfaith group, they had not encountered difficulties in raising funds. The church, alongside other religious organisations, played a central role in securing donations and mobilising support.

Figure 18: A photo of a church window shared by Ella (Z2)

Fundraising events not only raised money but also increased awareness of CS within the local community. George's group organised a fundraising evening celebrating Syrian culture, which he viewed as a crucial step in both raising funds and fostering awareness:

It was a really positive meeting of like-minded people…all sorts of people…Muslim

people, Christians…other people…it was a really, really successful event…I think it

was one of the best things I've been involved in (George Z1).

Hazel emphasised the interconnectedness of fundraising and outreach, noting that these events helped spread awareness beyond the immediate group, sharing information about CS and the global refugee situation with a broader audience:

If the core team is 12 people or whatever, the message you are spreading gets to 100

or even more people…fundraising…its quite hard work but it's really a worthwhile part

of it (Hazel W2).

5.4.4: Accommodation

Securing suitable and affordable housing was a *'mission' (Leroy W1)* which was *'very, very*

difficult' (George Z1). Many volunteers within groups were involved in finding a house due to

the complexities of finding suitable affordable accommodation. Most groups struggled to find

housing within social housing rent rates, supplementing costs themselves by up to £500 per

month[119] or settling for properties that were located further away from the volunteers. At the

time of interview, all participants except George had secured housing. George's group faced

significant setbacks, losing three potential properties. The difficulties were compounded by

internal disagreements regarding the suitability of a proposed family:

We were offered a Christian Iraqi family…the premise of the group had been set up

that we were going to help a Syrian family and integrate them…all the money had

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[119] Five participants (three CS groups) topped up the rent of the private rental properties adding money from their fundraising to the housing benefit allowance – One by £500 per month, the second by £170 per month, and the third by £280 per month - for the two-year period of housing support.

kind of been raised on that kind of premise. A lot of the speakers…were from that

kind of background…I think it was a bit of a curveball…they just felt, well, the two

people making the decision…felt that it wasn't the right fit…not everyone agreed with

that. And we ended up losing the house because of it (George Z1).

For some groups, the process of securing housing took up to a year. Seventeen participants obtained homes through private landlords, with some landlords reducing the rent due to their social connections with the CS group. Seven properties were owned by churches or religious organisations, facilitated by the social networks of CS volunteers. Four participants secured housing through housing associations (HAs), while another group accessed a flat through a local housing cooperative designated for positive social purposes.

After two years, the majority of families remained in their original homes, with rent paid through housing benefit[120]. Only two families relocated. Kathleen and Mark utilised their social networks to secure a housing association property, which included pastoral support:

We were lucky…they have now got a really nice house with two bedrooms…they took

over from the support work that I had done (Kathleen W3).

Another family, supported by Victoria's group, moved to a different town toward the end of the two-year period. Victoria felt that the move was orchestrated by volunteers to facilitate a smoother disengagement from the programme. Intra-group tension was a significant concern for Victoria, who was visibly upset during the walking interview about how the family had been treated:

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[120] Most participants expressed concern about future rent increases and housing stability.

It ended up…if they didn't move then they would be evicted…they have now been

rehoused…It was very, very sad… whereas they began to make ties…they had been

tripped off…to move communities, which is tragic (Victoria W3).

5.5: Summary

Chapter Five addressed the first research objective - to assess the state of knowledge around volunteering within a CS group, setting the foundation for the subsequent findings chapters. Some 30 participants from 20 groups in England and Wales, predominantly women, participated, with most over the age of 50 and in full-time employment. While the majority had prior experience volunteering, over half of the participants engaged with refugees for the first time through CS. Their motivations were varied, encompassing both altruistic and self-serving elements, with participants typically citing multiple motivations.

Participants reported mixed experiences with various aspects of the CS application process. Fundraising was generally straightforward, largely due to strong community support. However, interactions with local authorities varied significantly. Some volunteers enjoyed positive experiences, with local authorities granting approval quickly, while others faced considerable challenges, including risk aversion, political obstacles, and lengthy approval times. In several instances, participants had to actively lobby for approval, attending numerous local authority meetings to advocate for the acceptance of CS initiatives. This underscored the divergent attitudes of local authorities toward refugee resettlement, manifesting in their willingness to support CS efforts. The political climate in certain areas posed additional barriers to gaining local authority support, especially in regions that were more resistant to refugee resettlement.

The most significant challenge identified was finding and securing suitable housing. All participants reported difficulties accessing adequate accommodation with some groups resorting to supplementing rent or finding housing far from where most volunteers lived. This geographical distance created logistical challenges, as some sponsored families were situated far from many of their supporters. Broader issues such as rising housing costs and a scarcity of social housing, affecting many across the UK, also heavily impacted CS groups, particularly given the disadvantaged position of refugees in the housing market (Shankey and Finney, 2020; Brown *et al.,* 2024). The difficulty in securing affordable housing represents a substantial barrier for CS groups aiming to facilitate refugee resettlement.

CHAPTER SIX: TIMEPOINT ONE – PREPARATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

6.1: Introduction

Chapter Six, explores volunteers' preconceived roles before the arrival of sponsored families by asking:

2. How do volunteers define their roles in relation to the sponsored refugees before their arrival?

While CS volunteers were aware they were resettling a vulnerable refugee family, they had limited information about the family prior to arrival. Unlike in Canada, where pre-arrival contact between volunteers and refugee families is standard (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023), this practice is absent within UK CS (Home Office, 2024a). In the UK, volunteer groups welcome strangers and receive minimal information from the HO about the family before they arrive.

This section examines participants' perceptions of their roles before families arrive. Three overarching themes and five sub-themes were identified (see Figure 19). Saldana (2003) suggests that within the 'time pools' defined by the researcher – in this case, T1 - further distinctions can be made conceptually or temporally which Saldana called 'time ponds', reflecting a subdivision of longitudinal data into distinct phases (2003, p73). In this study, T1 was split into: **(1) preparations**, which encompassed practical considerations, including completing the application form[121], and **(2) expectations,** where participants began to

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[121] At the point of interview, all participants had received approval from the local council, fundraised the minimum £9000 and nine of the participants had secured accommodation. Three participants were part of groups who had received approval from the HO and were awaiting the arrival of a family. Of the remaining seven participants,

contemplate their roles as preparations neared completion and the arrival of the families

drew closer. Due to the lack of pre-arrival contact, participants had little information on which

to base their expectations. This absence led volunteers to rely on assumptions and prior

experiences, which shaped their perceptions of what their roles would entail once the family

arrived.
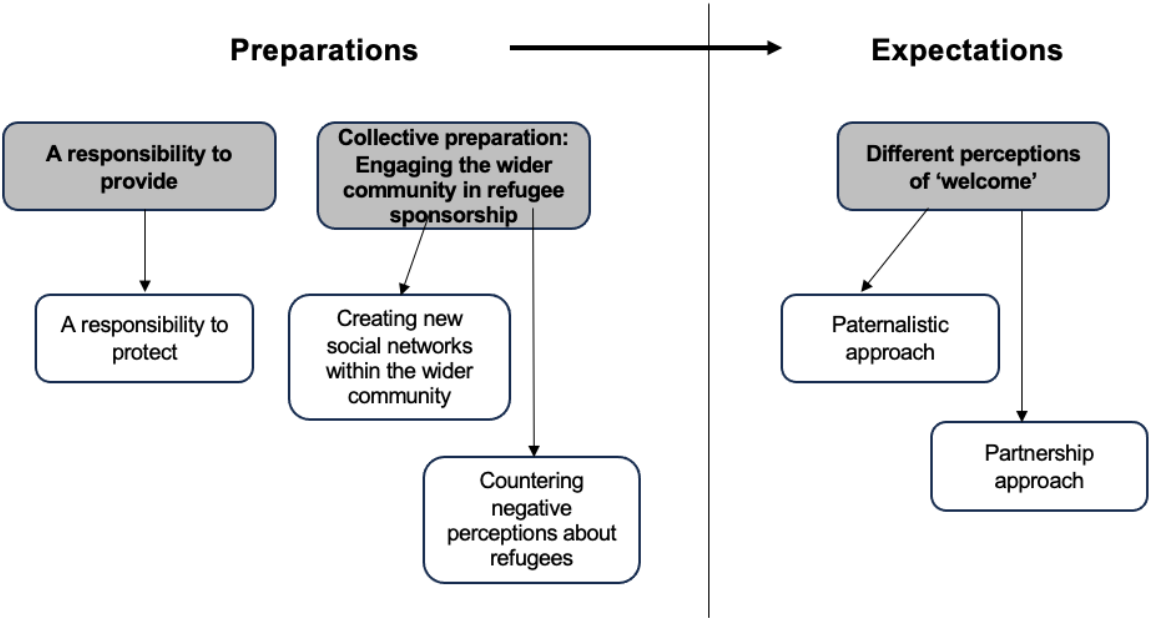
Figure 19: T1 thematic map

6.2: Preparations

During the preparatory phase of T1, participants engaged in practical preparations to support

refugees, valuing this aspect of CS as a practical manifestation of their support. They also

articulated a need to 'protect' the family, especially in terms of selecting accommodation

conducive to creating a welcoming environment. The wider community provided significant

three were in the later stages of preparing their application, one was imminently submitting their application, and
three had submitted their application to the HO and were waiting on approval.

support, offering resources, financial assistance, and help securing accommodation. This collective preparation fostered social networks within and beyond the CS groups. Additionally, as participants gained insight into problems faced by refugees, they shared their understanding with others in the community to counter negative attitudes towards refugees and promote support for resettlement. Participants' commitment to these preparations reflects the broader neoliberal shift in responsibility in which civil society actors increasingly assume roles formerly held by the state (Mayblin and James, 2019).

6.2.1: A responsibility to provide

Welcoming a family required considerable preparation. The majority of volunteers had either submitted, or were in the process of preparing to submit their full application to the HO. Interview discussions focused on fundraising, securing and preparing accommodation, recruiting volunteers and completing paperwork.

As noted in Chapter Five, the tangibility of CS significantly motivated volunteers. They viewed these practical tasks as direct ways to support refugees, appreciating the hands-on approach essential at this stage. For many participants, making a meaningful impact in a refugee family's life through 'real' and 'concrete' support was a driving force. Memory described CS as the '*perfect opportunity' (Memory Z1)* to effect tangible change. Eric, a volunteer with prior experience supporting refugees as a befriender, emphasised the need for a more hands-on role:

> *I really wanted…something a bit more practical…where we would actually be able to see the changes we could make to a person's life (Eric W1).*

Participants often used language of care, describing the process as morally charged and personally meaningful. For some, volunteering with CS was contrasted with the frustration of engaging in structural or policy-based advocacy, which felt more abstract and less impactful. The chance to do something 'real' was framed as a way to reclaim agency in an otherwise disempowering policy landscape:

'I've been campaigning in refugee rights for my whole career …it has been nothing but failure…feeling impotent…seeing successive Governments pass more and more restrictive laws…this refugee project is just a drop in the ocean…at least it's something positive (David Z1).

We can't do anything about helping or improving the lives of 1 million. But we can do it for one family (Rohan W1).

Joe, who had provided practical support at a refugee camp in Greece and campaigned for refugee rights in the UK, found CS to be a more effective way to support refugees locally:

I didn't want to just be doing the campaigning…there was something more…practical that I could do…it kind of gives me the chance to do what I was doing in Greece but being able to do it here (Joe Z1).

He shared a photo of the sea (see Figure 20) from his time volunteering in Greece, which he felt encapsulated both his past and present motivations to help refugees. Despite the initial wave of volunteer activity during the height of the refugee crisis, Joe explained that he felt frustrated that people were not taking sustained, practical action.

Figure 20: A photo of the sea in Greece shared by Joe (Z1)

Rohan emphasised the micro-level impact of supporting a family through CS, contrasting it with the difficulties of effecting macro-level change via policy campaigning:

> *We can't do anything about helping or improving the lives of 1 million. But we can do it for one family (Rohan W1).*

During preparations, the aim of providing a 'better life' for the incoming families was a central focus for many volunteers. While the tangible aspects of support were significant motivators, several participants emphasised the importance of offering a higher standard of assistance. There was a prevailing sentiment that refugee families deserved an improved quality of life compared to their previous experiences. George highlighted this commitment to quality, expressing his reluctance to provide worn-out items:

> *We were just offered…multiple sets of battered old cutlery and crockery…my mum bought them a new kettle…rather than giving them an old one…a lot of families they*

want nice things when they arrive…they associate Britain with a better life rather than a load of battered old stuff (George Z1).

Similarly, Tahoor emphasised his group's insistence on purchasing new appliances, rejecting second-hand items. He articulated his concern for the dignity of the incoming family:

I don't want anything second hand in the house…we don't know what the situation those people have been through in the refugee camps…if they turn up and they found some mouldy sofa, they're going to think is this what I'm worth (Tahoor W1).

Comments about the quality of the items provided illustrate the careful attention volunteers paid to the symbolic weight of their preparations. Hospitality here functioned not only as offering shelter, but also as a statement of value. Yet, these initial decisions also reflect the conditional nature of hospitality (Derrida, 2001) – where the welcome offered is structured by the host's judgement about what is appropriate. Many felt pressured to ensure a high level of support, especially when comparing their preparations to those of other local CS groups. Tahoor, for instance, felt compelled to match the perceived high level of assistance offered by another CS group to uphold the reputation of his mosque, which led his group's efforts:

I've been to their house…its bloody good…We need to make sure we are giving that kind of support. The last thing I want is the refugee family saying oh they've got this, we haven't got that…it breaks down Methodist and Muslims (Tahoor W1).

For Tahoor, CS represented a visible demonstration of his mosque's commitment to community support, reflecting the Islamic principle of Ummah (community). In this account, hospitality was entangled with performance and accountability – both to the incoming family and to the wider mosque community.

6.2.2: A responsibility to protect

Preparing for a family's arrival was perceived as a *'huge responsibility' (Rohan W1)*, and *'morally fraught' (Nathaniel W1).* The arrival was not simply about offering housing, it was about ensuring safety, emotional well-being and a positive experience of resettlement. Nathaniel stressed the importance of ensuring that the resettlement experience was positive, especially given the trauma the family had already experienced in being displaced. Memory shared her concerns about potential challenges, having witnessed hostility toward refugees in the past. She worried that the family might encounter similar negativity and stressed the need to safeguard their well-being:

> *You can see the way that other people are treated…not treated in the street…in the newspapers…on Facebook. I read a lot about Muslims coming here…I'm a bit worried about the family experiencing things that I've experienced…It's not really something my group have spoken about a lot because most of them are white…for me, it's a worry, because it's something I have experienced (Memory Z1).*

This concern for safety underscored the protective element inherent in the preparations. Many volunteers recognised the challenges faced by other refugees and racialised minorities in the UK and were determined to ensure that the sponsored family would receive the necessary support and protection.

The 'right' house in the 'right' area

CS groups are mandated to secure suitable housing for two years, but volunteers often interpreted 'suitability' as finding the 'right' house in a welcoming area. While the Home Office

requires local police to assess accommodation suitability (Home Office, 2024a), volunteers prioritised neighbourhoods that were friendly to refugees. They relied on local knowledge to identify areas that might harbour xenophobic or racist sentiments and actively engaged in fostering a positive reception by talking to neighbours about CS. During walking interviews, participants emphasised the importance of location. Eric structured our route around various housing options his group considered, dismissing certain areas due to concerns about unwelcoming attitudes, particularly in neighbourhoods with high unemployment:

> *We're…passing through one of the places…we just felt it wouldn't be the best place to bring a refugee family…a lot of unemployment…it's not exactly the place I would put a family who looked a bit different… we tried to find somewhere where they might find…sympathetic neighbours…*[whispers]…*that was quite important (Eric W1).*

Eric noted the potential for xenophobia in some neighbourhoods and preferred areas where residents were more likely to be supportive. He later guided me through another area characterised by higher housing costs and green spaces, referring to it as the *'better side'* (Eric W1) of town, where he believed the community would be more hospitable because residents were more *'leftie' (Eric W1)*[122]. Similarly, Ella (Z2) shared this sentiment, emphasising the importance of placing the family in an area where people would be friendly to refugees. During her interview, she shared a photo of a leafy street (see Figure X), explaining that she felt such environments, with their green spaces and welcoming atmosphere, would be ideal for fostering a sense of community for the refugee family.

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[122] In the UK, often, but not always, left-wing political parties have demonstrated more support for refugees, than right-wing parties.

Figure 21: A photo shared by Ella (Z2) of a street in her local area (cropped for confidentiality)

Despite a desire for proximity to volunteers, affordability often took precedence, leading them to select a location about an hour's walk from most volunteers:

> *We would have liked for the family…to be based closer…it is about an hour's walk…the price was kind of the big factor (Eric W1).*

George echoed Eric's concerns, expressing reservations about placing the family in a "deprived" area and favouring neighbourhoods with better economic conditions:

> *A house that's big and affordable…not in a dodgy area is very, very difficult…they are probably more affordable...the ones that are dodgy. I don't like to use that word. I would say deprived socially…we probably would have to place them in a deprived area (George Z1).*

The theme, 'a responsibility to provide' illustrated a pattern in the T1 data. Initially, participants acknowledged the need to prepare for a family's arrival through their application and accommodation efforts. Further analysis revealed a sub-theme where participants leveraged their local knowledge to ensure the family's safety and well-being.

6.2.3: Collective Preparation

The second theme within this phase is 'collective preparation'. I found that preparing for a family's arrival was not solely the responsibility of CS volunteers; it involved significant contributions from other local people in the community[123] (Share Network, 2023f; Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Throughout T1 interviews, it became evident that community support was crucial during the planning stage, facilitating the creation of new social networks (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021) and providing opportunities for participants to share information about CS and challenge negative perceptions about refugees.

As suggested within its naming, community is central to CS, with many participants expressing a desire to take action within their own community. Engagement with CS was driven by a motivation to do something locally. The project enabled participants to address global issues on a local scale and all participants highlighted the support they received from others who, despite lacking formal roles, came together to assist in resettling a family. The wider communities surrounding CS groups played an instrumental role in providing resources and assistance in securing accommodation. Participants frequently relied on their social networks for housing support:

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[123] I draw upon Lowe's (2021) definition of 'community' as 'a group of people who share an identity-forming narrative', encompassing communities of welcome and communities of place and communities of interest.

One of our people…he knows someone at the Salvation Army… he happened to know…this property had been vacated and the Methodist church were looking to occupy it (David Z1).

Community involvement was particularly important for fundraising efforts. With a requirement to raise £9,000, CS became a focal point for community activity. Tahoor explained that much of his group's funds were donated through Zakat at the mosque, while other community members contributed by purchasing essential household items.

During walking interviews, participants elaborated on local contributions to the preparation process. Various businesses and organisations hosted fundraising events or provided free venues:

I wanted to bring you here…[green in front of church]*…this is where we hosted a lot of the fundraising (Leroy W1).*

As we explored the local area, Leroy highlighted other supportive businesses, including a café that helped organise an event and another that offered food for a welcome party once the family arrived. Jackie noted that the local school provided its playground for a fundraising event. Additionally, George described how other local groups hosted events and donated their proceeds to the group:

We got a donation from an organisation of Muslim women… they did a sort of tea event to raise money under the guise of integrating into society, to bring their culture to [a city in the Midlands] *(George Z1).*

The potential of CS extended beyond mere community support; it also included the ability to leverage additional funds when necessary. Leroy underscored the advantage of having a close-knit and relatively affluent community:

> *We have the benefit…of being able to take advantage of a close and relatively wealthy community (Leroy W1).*

Many participants emphasised that the high level of support available through CS, which combined support from the group and local people, presented the best opportunity for successful refugee resettlement. There was an emphasis on embedding refugees within a community and building *'community around that family'* (Nathaniel W1) as the best way to facilitate integration. Two participants expressed concerns that failing to involve sponsored families in community activities could create tensions between locals and resettled refugees. Consequently, CS groups acted as *'mediators' (Eric W1)* promoting inclusion and a sense of belonging for the resettled families. Some participants contrasted the extensive support provided through CS with the limited assistance available to refugees under other resettlement schemes, such as the now-defunct Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and support for asylum-seekers. CS was lauded for enabling refugee resettlement in diverse geographic areas rather than concentrating them in urban dispersal areas, which allowed refugees to benefit from community support:

> *If people are placed in proper communities…then they can have the community support…I don't really agree with…just putting people in all the same places, in the cities…it's much better if people are placed in proper communities (Leroy W1).*

6.2.4: Creating new social networks locally

Participants acknowledged that involving local people in the 'collective preparation' for a sponsored family fostered connections across diverse social networks. For some, engagement with CS created new communities of people eager to support refugees (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021). Rohan highlighted the importance of *'taking the community with us' (Rohan W1)*, during the preparation process. CS was viewed as a means for individuals interested in refugee issues to contribute locally, particularly in rural areas where such opportunities might be scarce:

> *Most people…they won't travel into the city…they are generally so happy to help a family that will be based here. It's kind of an investment into their own community (Leroy W1).*

Both Leroy and Tahoor described how CS opened up their religious institutions to local people. Leroy (W1) said CS helped '*open up the church to the community',* while Tahoor stressed the role of CS in uniting communities, suggesting that *'more and more mosques should do it' (Tahoor W1).* CS acted as a catalyst for building social connections among individuals and groups from various backgrounds, each with distinct motivations for involvement. It provided opportunities to interact with a wide array of participants:

> *People from the community came along from quite wide networks…a few from the church…local people… all sorts of backgrounds…Muslim people, Christians and other people who are just interested (George Z1).*

This form of community connection was especially important during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a positive opportunity for connection amidst challenging times:

It's been really good to do something quite positive…especially after COVID, it's been

something that's been quite like a connector for people in the

community…fundraising and things like that…it's got people out of their shell and

back into doing things (Eric W1).

The pandemic posed challenges for participants and communities, and several participants described CS as a source of hope and focus amidst ongoing difficulties. Participants stressed the significance of community-driven initiatives like CS in fostering a sense of togetherness and collective action. Moreover, CS was seen as a means to channel the heightened community spirit witnessed during the pandemic into tangible endeavours. Jackie explained:

COVID…brought the community together…I want to harness that kind of community

mindedness into doing something good…I also want to get people involved in doing

something good together, to keep the community feeling alive (Jackie Z1).

6.2.5: Countering negative perceptions about refugees

For six participants, volunteering with CS was their inaugural experience of volunteering with refugees[124]. Preparing to welcome a family enabled them to expand their understanding of the broader challenges confronting refugees:

I didn't know anything about community sponsorship, I didn't really know the

difference between an asylum-seeker and a refugee…I didn't know what the issues

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[124] Tahoor, David, George, Rohan, Jackie, Memory had no previous experience volunteering with refugees. The remaining volunteers within T1 had previously volunteered with refugees – Nathaniel (refugee advice centre), Leroy (refugee advice centre), Eric (Befriender with refugee and asylum-seeker charity) and Joe (Volunteer at a refugee camp in Greece).

were. And I didn't know what the particular stories might be, I didn't know much about

Syria…you learn a lot through it (George Z1).

This newfound awareness motivated George to act as a 'trusted messenger' (Bond, 2021) and share his knowledge with the wider community, aiming to inspire greater engagement with CS. His group integrated fundraising efforts with information sessions, inviting speakers to discuss the challenges refugees face and the impact of CS:

What we did with events was to try and have speakers, so if people turned up for a

quiz or food, they might actually learn something about community sponsorship and

the impact people can have (George Z1).

Proactive volunteers like Eric also worked to challenge negative attitudes toward refugees (Share Network, 2023c; Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020). In his role organising accommodation (see Chapter Five, Section 5.4 for discussion of specific roles), Eric engaged with the local school and community to shift perceptions. Through initiatives such as collecting donated items and sharing knowledge, Eric hoped to foster a more positive mindset:

It's quite a traditional like area…it could be a place that has kind of like specific views

about…refugees and asylum-seekers…sorting the house…and talking to people…I

hope it's kind of opened some people up to thinking a bit differently and kind of doing

their bit to help people that they might not have thought about before (Eric W1).

Similarly, George recounted a conversation with someone at a fundraising event who initially opposed CS. By calmly explaining the legality and effectiveness of the programme, George alleviated the individual's concerns:

They thought it was too complicated…caused too many issues…it was a bad

idea…when I said it was legal, you know, it was actually a legal scheme run by the

Home Office that did sort of pacify them a bit (George Z1).

Furthermore, some participants viewed CS as a model which would inspire broader support for refugees beyond sponsored families. Joe and Leroy, both with prior experience volunteering with refugees, envisaged that CS could serve as a *'blueprint' (Leroy W1)* expanding support to *'other refugees and asylum-seekers' (Joe Z1),* leveraging the local enthusiasm for CS to advocate for increased support for refugees already in the UK.

6.3: Expectations

In this section, I shift the focus to participant expectations regarding their roles after the arrival of the sponsored family, marking the 'expectations' phase within T1. As most participants were in advanced stages of readiness to welcome a family, they contemplated their forthcoming roles. I distinguish between the preparatory phase, (as discussed in section 6.2), and the expectation phase, characterised by completing most practical arrangements and entering a period of waiting. During this interim period, volunteers anticipated their approach to providing support once the sponsored families arrived.

6.3.1: Different perceptions of welcome

Participants received advice from other CS groups regarding their relationship with the sponsored family. Advice often centred on the notion of independence, defined as the

family's ability to live autonomously without relying on the CS group for support[125]. Some participants were advised by other CS groups to prioritise early independence to prevent the family becoming overly reliant on the group after the end of the two years. One participant recounted that, when he raised concerns about the distance of the family's proposed housing from the group, a volunteer from another CS group suggested that the distance might be beneficial – because it might limit how often the family could request help, thus encouraging independence. Advice from previous volunteers also included cautions about doing *'too much' (David Z2)*, with some recommending early conversations about the two-year limit of CS support to manage expectations. These attempts to pre-emptively establish boundaries reflect broader power asymmetries embedded in CS, where sponsors – rather than refugees - define the terms and duration of support (Neelin, 2020; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023).

Interestingly, within the same group, conflicting opinions about welcome coexisted. Some volunteers prioritised promoting independence, while others emphasised creating a warm and hospitable environment. This internal divergence illustrates the coexistence of paternalistic and mutualistic orientations within individual groups (Haugen *et al.,* 2020). David articulated this tension, recognising the need to find a balance between being *'tough and being cruel to be kind' (David Z1)* and providing unwavering support.

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[125] The emphasis from T1 participants was on independence being about the family being able to go about their daily lives without the input of the group. Though it was also about families being able to have a job, economic independence was not the sole focus (as has been the case in some of the Canadian studies on sponsorship), because refugees in the UK are entitled to welfare benefits from when they initially arrive, and this financial support continues after the end of the formal resettlement support after two years.

Tension caused by different expectations

Diverging expectations sometimes led to tension among group members. Volunteers
reported uncertainty and disagreement over the type of relationship they should build with
the family:

> *Everyone's different in what they think is best. That's the only difficult thing about*
>
> *this…there are a lot of different ideas flying around about how we deal with things*
>
> *(Joe Z1).*

These internal frictions underscore how power dynamics are negotiated not only between
sponsors and refugees but also among sponsors themselves (Macklin *et al*., 2020b;
Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). This diversity of perspectives surfaced during
group discussions, especially concerning plans for a welcome event. Memory voiced her
opposition to a proposed large welcome party, advocating for a more sensitive approach:

> *A couple of people felt that we should have like a big welcome party…we don't think*
>
> *it's maybe right to do that…it might be a nice idea, but…these people might be really*
>
> *traumatised…I think that this really has to be considered. They might not want a party*
>
> *(Memory Z1).*

Her pushback illustrates an emerging partnership approach, grounded in empathy and
reflexivity, where refugee choices are prioritised. Memory highlighted the contrasting opinions
within her group, categorising fellow members as either motivated by charitable impulses or
driven by a rights-based approach. While other group members were motivated by charitable
instinct or compassion (Fassin, 2012), Memory's involvement was grounded in a
commitment to social justice and political advocacy, aligning with feminist models of

hospitality (Reyes-Soto, 2023). In contrast, she perceived some of her fellow group members as leaning toward a more paternalistic approach focused on immediate self-sufficiency rather than long term empowerment:

> *The other people are more…like your typical volunteers…really nice and kind… I don't think they are involved because of the rights aspect and the kind of social angle that I'm interested in…it's more that they want to support their community…it's the kind of thing they have always done (Memory Z1).*

Two approaches to providing resettlement support

Using a hospitality framework, two distinct approaches to providing resettlement support emerged: (1) a paternalistic approach, and (2) a partnership approach. Memory highlighted the differences between these two mindsets:

> *There are some…Conservative people as part of the group who want to try and encourage the family to…get jobs straight away and try and support themselves and make a real success of their life in the UK. They are giving them an experience…they are saving them from their old life.* **[1. A paternalistic approach]** *For me…I'm really approaching it in a different way…like a social justice kind of angle, like a political thing…***[2. A partnership approach]***…more as trying to provide a welcome to refugees that I don't think you see very much in the way the Government deals with refugees (Memory Z1).*

A paternalistic approach is marked by a lack of awareness regarding the unequal power dynamics inherent within sponsorship (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018). Participants perceived themselves as leading the resettlement, adhering to clearly defined roles within the two-year

support period, after which the sponsored family is expected to achieve independence.

Refugee 'guests' were viewed as passive recipients, with CS seen as a way to 'rescue' them

from their former lives. Consequently, volunteers had expectations regarding refugee

behaviour upon arrival. Conversely, a partnership approach considered volunteers equal

collaborators alongside refugees in the resettlement process. Roles were more flexible, and

the skills, experiences and rights of refugees were recognised and prioritised. Volunteers

avoided having expectations about refugee behaviour, for example, saving discussions about

employment until after refugees had arrived and could express their own preferences. Table

13 summarises both approaches:

Differences in expectations	Paternalistic approach	Partnership approach
Asymmetric power dynamic	Less awareness or effort to minimise power imbalances	Increased awareness and efforts to reduce power imbalances
Perception of role	Volunteers see themselves as 'hosts' leading the resettlement	Volunteers see themselves as 'partners' in equal resettlement support alongside refugees
Role boundaries	Clear, rigid role boundaries within a two-year limit	Fluid roles with fewer boundaries, aware that it was for refugees to decide on extending relationship beyond sponsorship
Pre-conflict lives of refugees	Refugees seen as passive and in need of 'rescue'	Acknowledgement of refugees' agency and pre-conflict lives
Conditionality of hospitality	Conditional welcome based on meeting volunteers' expectations including employment	Focus on realising refugees' rights without conditional expectations, including leaving discussions of employment until after the sponsored family arrives

Table 13: A paternalistic and a partnership approach

Participants aligned with one of the two approaches, though some overlap was inevitable. The two approaches influenced how volunteers perceived their roles in preparing to welcome sponsored refugee families.

6.3.2: Paternalistic approach

The majority of participants (six) adopted a paternalistic approach. Inevitably, CS involves an asymmetric power dynamic (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a), as participants with resources welcome a family of strangers into their community. This act of hospitality necessitates the involvement of those with the means to extend such a welcome. However, participants who aligned with a paternalistic approach appeared unaware of the power dynamic and consequently did not take steps to minimise power imbalances. Drawing on the hospitality framework developed in Chapter Three, these participants saw themselves as hosts, with the family positioned as guests (Derrida, 2001). While hospitality implies welcome, in this context it also embedded asymmetrical power, with volunteers holding all of the control and the potential for the wishes of the sponsored family to be overlooked. As Derrida argues, hospitality always carries a tension between welcome and control – a paradox he called hostipitality (Derrida, 2000).

Paternalistic volunteers tended to view their role as task-oriented, focusing on specific services such as providing accommodation support or teaching ESOL, with little overlap with other roles. Eric, for instance, cited his full-time job and busy life as reasons for his reluctance to commit to additional responsibilities beyond his designated housing role. When asked about plans for the family's arrival, Eric deferred to the welcome team in his group, because he did not consider this as within his remit. Some of the paternalistic volunteers anticipated reducing their involvement post arrival, planning for another group of volunteers to provide pastoral support. They saw their role as primarily strategic:

The moment the refugee family turned up and we put them in the house…I'm

washing my hands of that…I'm done and then it's for them to look at. Tahoor (W1).

Rohan, whose involvement stemmed from his expertise in council departments, viewed his volunteering as an extension of his professional duties. He aimed to conclude both roles simultaneously, perceiving CS as part of his professional portfolio to be addressed before departing from his job as a council employee:

In terms of my portfolio of work, getting community sponsorship over the line was

definitely one of those things where I thought…let me get this fixed before I head off

(Rohan W1).

The absence of personal relational intent was notable. Paternalistic volunteers often framed themselves as service providers and, at the time of interview, did not intend to form friendships or develop personal connections with the sponsored family:

My main job is to help with the benefits…something I had done a lot of…at the

refugee centre…I had some knowledge and it was nice to be useful and…have a skill

rather than just being there to be their friend (Leroy W1).

This echoes research by Lim (2019), who argued that such functional framings of support can inhibit refugee integration by limiting opportunities for meaningful social relationships. Participants described setting boundaries aimed at safeguarding their time, focusing on task completion rather than providing personal care. Strategies such as a rota system were planned to distribute responsibilities among volunteers and prevent one person from feeling overwhelmed. Some participants, like Tahoor, asserted their right to disengage from CS at

any point – a stance that underscores the asymmetrical power embedded in the host/guest model:

> *If I don't want to get involved, I'll just email the group saying, I don't want to get*
> *involved. I'm ending it now…I might tick off a few people for a day or two. But*
> *ultimately, I don't get paid for it. So it's not my problem (Tahoor W1).*

This dynamic reflects broader critique from scholars who argue that humanitarian care given to refugees by volunteers risks becoming conditional and hierarchical, infantilising refugees (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), who are positioned as recipients of charity (Rozakou, 2012; Hyndman, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019c). In addition to maintaining clear role boundaries, paternalistic volunteers perceived their role as tied to the two-year duration of sponsorship. They considered CS a finite 'project' with a distinct endpoint wherein volunteers roles would cease[126] :

> *Our plan is to support the family for the two years…hopefully by then, they will sort of*
> *have their own jobs… made their own connections and be able to support*
> *themselves. Two years is quite a long time really…we can help with a lot of things*
> *over that time (Jackie Z1).*

Little attention was paid to potential variations in the family's needs or vulnerabilities beyond the checklist provided by the HO. Despite CS being designed to offer protection to refugees who were most 'vulnerable', such as refugees with disabilities, some volunteers perceived

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[126] Interestingly, all participants in T1 anticipated providing resettlement support for the entire two-year period, despite the official requirement by the HO for only one year of resettlement support and two years of accommodation support.

the arrival of a family as simply the next step in fulfilling the HO's requirements, without considering the potential for ongoing support.

There was a recurring theme of expectation-setting regarding refugee success – reflecting the conditional nature of the hospitality extended by paternalistic volunteers (Derrida, 2001). Participants perceived refugees as being 'saved' or 'rescued' from their displacement (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018) and given a 'second chance' to thrive in the UK. They imagined the refugees' lives in their home country and contrasted the relative safety of the UK compared with their previous *'dire and desperate' (Rohan W1*) situations. Jackie emphasised the imagined differences between the refugees' previous experiences in a 'warzone' and the safety they would find in their new environment:

> *The places they will have come from, they won't know anything like this place and how green it is (Jackie Z1).*

Memory referred to this belief of 'saving' refugees, when she discussed the attitudes of other volunteers:

> *There's a feeling like they are giving them an experience…kind of like a savour sort of thing…they are saving them from their old life (Memory Z1).*

This was accompanied by expectations of gratitude and productivity. Volunteers invested considerable effort preparing for the arrival of a family, however such hospitality was conditional (Derrida, 2001) in that families were expected to arrive prepared to succeed - to '*take the opportunity they've been given'* and *'make the best of it'* (Eric W1) without considering the family's needs or expectations.

Participants emphasised the importance of providing support to help the family become independent and thrive. Jackie described CS as a '*one off chance for a refugee family…to benefit from all of the support we can give them'* (Jackie Z1). Describing CS as a 'one-off' opportunity implies that support through CS is the sole chance for a refugee family to succeed without acknowledging that families may draw upon their own or other resources. With the help of participants, it was expected that refugees would find employment. The idea of the 'super-refugee' emerged in multiple accounts – an idealised figure who arrives highly skilled, resilient and ready to give something back:

> *A lot of these refugee families have ended up doing things…one of them just recently graduated as a doctor…another one opened a bakery in Manchester…they want to give something back (Tahoor W1).*

Some participants expressed optimism that 'their' family would achieve similar success using language that implied expectations:

> *These people might be doctors…teachers…professionals…my experience of Syrians is they're resilient…a very entrepreneurial community…you'll see lots of cafes and restaurants…opened by former Syrian refugees…they do have this innate knack of making good things (Rohan W1).*

In contrast, if such qualifications were absent, any job was considered acceptable – again revealing a limited engagement with actual aspirations or constraints faced by refugees themselves. While participants expressed a desire to assist the family in finding work, there was an underlying expectation that they should secure a job. Participants displayed care in that they intended to *help* them find a job, but this was based on the assumption that adult refugees were *expected* to find a job. Participants sometimes made employment

arrangements on refugees' behalf prior to arrival. During walking interviews, volunteers referred to businesses where they intended to ask for a job, on behalf of the family – a *'coffee place' (Eric W1), 'hotels' (Leroy W1)* or other *'Muslim businesses' (Rohan W1)*. The dichotomy between the ideal of (1) 'super refugee' success and (2) the willingness to accept any job underscores the limited consideration of the family's agency and individual employment aspirations.

Additional expectations emerged around driving and socialising. While framed as supportive, these anticipatory decisions were often made without consulting refugees. In rural areas where driving was crucial for employment, Jackie emphasised that the family would be encouraged to drive:

> *One thing we need to get on top of quite soon is…the driving aspect…I know that a lot of refugees do drive here, I don't quite know how it works with the license and that kind of thing…that's quite important though because of the house and also being in a way a bit rural (Jackie Z1).*

They also expressed hopes for families to socialise with other refugees describing plans to connect the families socially:

> *I would like to…connect the family…I know some Syrian families who came under the Government scheme. They live in the city…I think that might be helpful for the family to have that connection (Leroy W1).*

Similarly, Rohan and Tahoor mentioned arrangements to connect the expected family with existing Syrian families in the local area. These intentions, though grounded in care, echoed the same power-laden assumptions described by other scholars (Ali *et al.,* 2022; Hassan and

Phillimore, 2020), where sponsors act on behalf of refugees without including them in the process. Across these dimensions – employment, transport and social connections – the defining feature of the paternalistic approach was a limited recognition of refugee agency. My findings reinforce critical scholarship (Hyndman, 2019; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021) by showing how such expectations reproduce existing hierarchies (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019c) but also actively shape the opportunities for refugees on arrival (Lim, 2019).

6.3.3: Partnership approach

The remaining four participants aligned with a partnership approach. Drawing on the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Three, this approach can be seen as a reconfiguration of the traditional host-guest dynamic. While hospitality imposes a hierarchy in which hosts retain control and define the conditions of welcome (Derrida, 2000) – shown through the paternalistic approach – participants aligned with a partnership approach actively worked to destabilise this hierarchy. Rather than assuming authority or ownership over resettlement, these participants framed their role as collaborators in a shared project. Nathaniel, for example, described the structural disadvantages faced by refugees, noting:

> *There's massive power asymmetry…there's so many systems where their relative position is in a weaker position…they are facing so many social obstacles as soon as they arrive (Nathaniel W1).*

This recognition echoes Derrida's (2000) notion of the conditional nature of hospitality, where the very act of welcome also involves the power to withdraw it. In contrast, these participants sought to minimise the conditionality of their support, emphasising the importance of being mindful of their relative positions of power and avoiding assumptions about refugees' needs or desires:

They are very vulnerable…they won't object…you might be one of these people, paternalistic, patronising…you might be fine if someone said, 'Thanks, but no', but you need to have the awareness that someone may not be able to say that (David Z1).

Participants demonstrated a willingness to reflect on their roles as volunteers. They acknowledged the inevitability that they would make mistakes through the resettlement process and recognised the need to learn and evolve alongside the sponsored family:

It's gonna be an imperfect process…there's no perfect resettlement process…there are ways in which we will fail and we will learn and strive to do better (Nathaniel W1).

In contrast to a paternalistic approach, those aligned with a partnership approach viewed CS as a collaborative effort, with participants and the family viewed as equal partners. Participants were aware that sponsored families might have their own aspirations, social preferences and boundaries, and intentionally deferred key decisions until families could make their own choice:

*They might not want us as a Facebook friend (laughs)…they might not even want our support, they might have their own people…it kind of needs the time to develop organically rather than setting up any kind of…**this** is how we will treat the family (Joe Z1).*

The choice of waiting to make decisions, rather than assuming or planning demonstrates an intentional withdrawal from dominant scripts of charity. It reframes sponsorship not as 'doing for' refugees, but as 'being with' them. Partnership volunteers extended this relational ethic to

their handling of relationships and boundaries. Unlike paternalistic volunteers, they hoped to establish deeper relationships with sponsored families. Memory noted that with the formalities of her role largely completed during the preparation stage of T1, she felt empowered to create her '*own role going forward with the family' (Memory Z1)* once they arrived. Crucially though, partnership volunteers recognised the agency of the sponsored family in determining the extent of their relationship with volunteers. Joe emphasised the importance of allowing the family to decide whether they wanted a closer relationship beyond sponsorship. Unlike paternalistic volunteers, who often emphasised limits to protect their own time and energy, partnership volunteers saw boundaries as mutual responsibilities, necessary to protect the privacy and autonomy of the refugee family. Memory explained that her group had decided not to add the family on Facebook to ensure that both parties felt comfortable and respected each other's privacy, allowing the family to live their own lives without intrusion.

While both paternalistic and partnership volunteers discussed connecting the family with local refugees, partnership volunteers approached this with an awareness of the family's autonomy. They recognised that while making introductions could be beneficial, it was ultimately up to the family to decide whether to engage with suggested connections. Nathaniel emphasised that it was important not to be '*presumptuous…just because someone's from your country, doesn't mean you're going to want to talk to them' (Nathaniel W1).* David acknowledged the possibility that some families might prefer to maintain a distance from others of the same nationality and there was a clear acknowledgement of the need for choice. This mutual respect reflects an effort to undo the hierarchical structure inherent in host-guest relations, creating space for refugees to define their own terms of involvement and aligning with studies in which volunteers and sponsors try to move away from the role of 'host' (Gingrich and Enns, 2019).

Partnership volunteers recognised the trauma that refugees might have experienced and understood the importance of allowing them time to rest and settle upon their arrival in the UK. Discussions around a welcome event highlighted this understanding. Joe expressed reservations about holding such an event explaining that a welcome party might not align with the family's needs and preferences:

It feels a bit like…maybe a bit too celebratory…for the family…it might not actually feel like that for them…it's better to let them kind of find their own way a bit…let them rest and recuperate (Joe Z1).

A recurring theme was the desire to support rights, not offer charity. Participants viewed their role as allies in helping families navigate British systems and access their rights. Nathaniel, drawing from his previous experiences volunteering at a refugee support organisation, sharply contrasted a rights based approach with what he had observed among other volunteers:

Other volunteers were older, retired white folk…in their language…how they spoke about clients…There's this idea of charity…'oh all these poor people…this fellow was so nice…it's terrible what's happening to him, we should do something for them' (Nathaniel W1).

For partnership volunteers, sponsorship encompassed more than just facilitating practical aspects like housing and schools. It also involved actively assisting refugees to achieve their aspirations. Memory emphasised the importance of supporting refugees to pursue their desired careers or lifestyles, viewing sponsorship as a platform for social justice:

Getting a family here isn't just about giving them a house and helping them apply for benefits, it's about actively trying to help them achieve what they want in the UK (Memory Z1).

The partnership approach focused on offering support rather than imposing directives:

We don't know whether they will be able to get jobs…it's a bit of a wait and see really…depends on the family…whether or not they actually want any more support (Memory Z1).

This rights-based lens aligns with critical scholarship (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018) that challenges humanitarian paternalism. Volunteers recognised the need to wait and assess the families preferences and needs after they arrived. This approach embraced flexibility and responsiveness to individual circumstances, in which volunteers refrained from making assumptions and sought to protect refugee autonomy in shaping their own resettlement (Sinatti, 2019). These findings develop scholarship which found that volunteers enact their roles in diverse ways (Haugen *et al.,* 2020). Importantly, this orientation emerged before refugees arrived, revealing a pre-arrival ethics of sponsorship overlooked in existing scholarship. While Haugen and colleagues (2020) conceptualise 'mutualistic sponsors' in post-arrival contexts, my findings expand this by identifying mutualistic dispositions in early volunteer expectations.

6.4: Summary

This chapter set out to respond to the second research question:

How do CS volunteers define their roles in relation to the sponsored refugees prior to their arrival?

I argued there exists two time 'ponds' (Saldana, 2003, p73) within timepoint one: (1) preparations, and (2) expectations. During the preparation stage, participants focused on practical tasks such as fundraising, completing the application form, securing accommodation, and gathering resources. Actions taken were motivated by a desire to support refugees in a tangible way. Alongside provision, volunteers also prioritised the safety and wellbeing of the sponsored families, focusing on finding the right home in a welcoming environment. These preparations for CS extended beyond the efforts of the group. Support from the wider community played a crucial role, with individuals contributing through fundraising, donating resources, and helping to find housing. Collective preparation not only helped to facilitate the practical aspects of resettlement, but also contributed to the creation of new social connections and in some cases, helped to counter negative perceptions about refugees.

During the expectation phase, participants turned their attention to the anticipated arrival of the family. At this point, different understandings of the volunteer-refugee relationship emerged, resulting in two overarching approaches - paternalistic and partnership. The majority adopted a paternalistic approach, shaping expectations around refugees' behaviours and integration trajectories. Within this framing, refugees were cast as passive recipients of support, reflecting a form of conditional hospitality, in which volunteers, consciously or not, imposed expectations that reinforced asymmetrical power relations. In contrast, four participants aligned with a partnership approach, grounded in a more reflexive and mutual understanding of sponsorship. These volunteers recognised the power imbalance between themselves and the sponsored families, and sought to mitigate this by prioritising refugee autonomy and viewing CS as a collaborative effort.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss how participants navigated the power dynamic after families arrived and resettlement support had begun.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TIMEPOINT TWO – NEGOTIATING POWER

7.1: Introduction

This chapter explores the perceptions and actions of volunteers following the arrival of sponsored families throughout the two-year support period (T2) by asking:

3. Does the volunteer perception of their role change over time as the sponsored refugees become more integrated into their local community and there is potential for the power dynamic to change?

This chapter assesses potential shifts in perception of the volunteer role and the nuances of resettlement support. It explores the possibility of refugees influencing their own resettlement trajectory and considers whether the roles of 'host' and 'guest' can change as resettlement support is provided. I identified one overarching theme, four broad themes and seven sub-themes from the reflexive thematic analysis (see Figure 22)[127].

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[127] COVID-19 had a significant impact during T2. Some families faced delays due to travel restrictions and arrived during a national UK lockdown. Given the comprehensive impact of the pandemic on all aspects of this period, I have integrated the theme: 'the impact of COVID-19', as an overarching theme, addressing it within each theme and sub-theme rather than discussing findings in a distinct section.
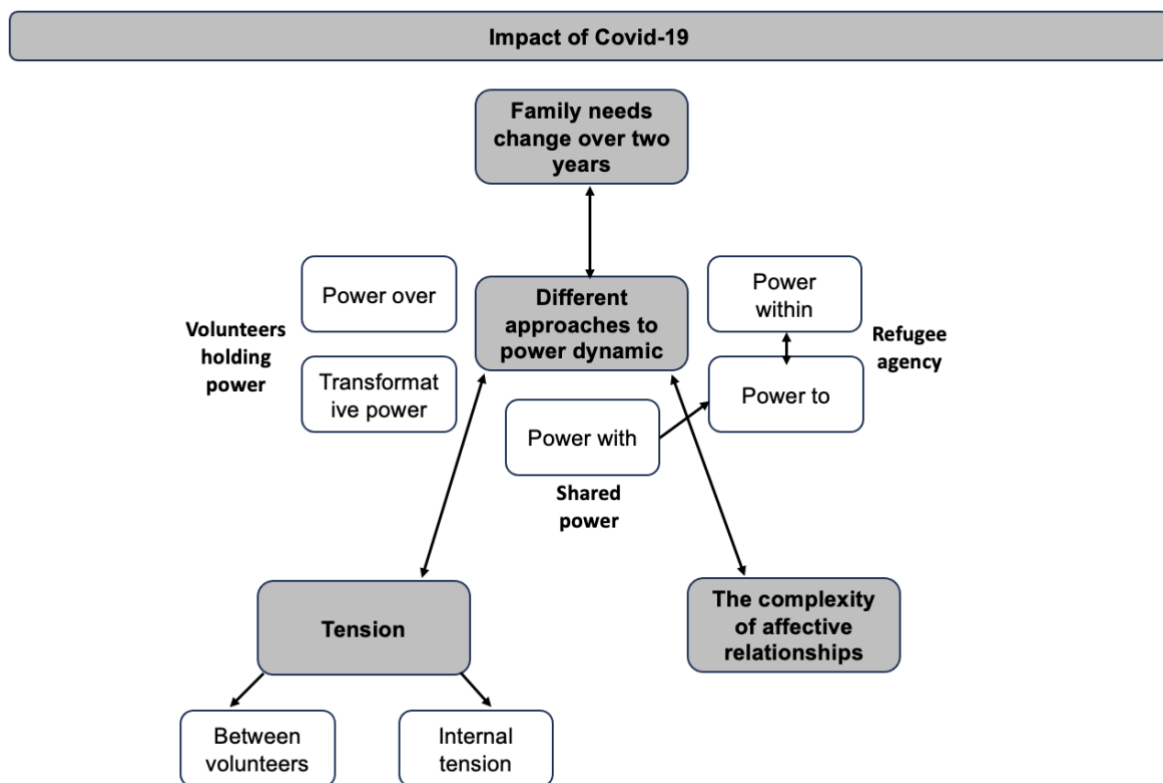
Figure 22: T2 Thematic map

7.2: Family needs change over two years

The arrival of sponsored families marked the onset of T2. Initial plans were adjusted as groups needed to cater to families' specific needs, which sometimes differed from expectations. Saldana (2003) described how during a longitudinal analysis, it is not only the researcher who adds time 'pools' to data analysis. Participants also understand the important time 'ponds' during their involvement - T2 participants described several different junctures during the two-year period of providing resettlement support (See Figure 23).
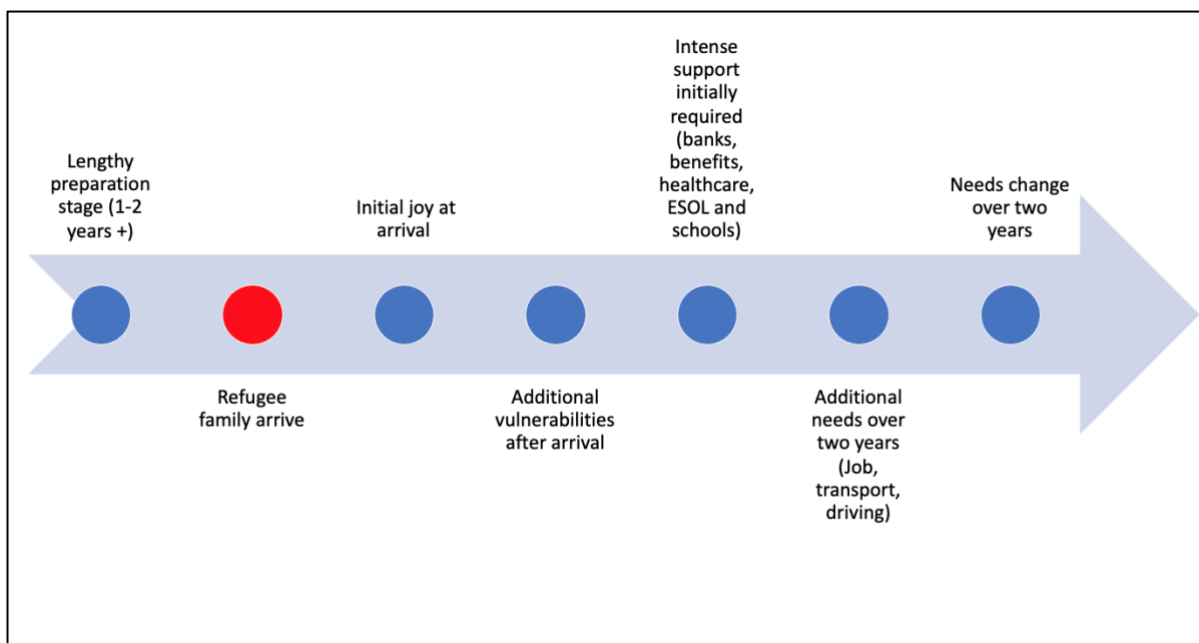
Figure 23: T2 'Time ponds' (Saldana, 2003)

Preparation spanned up to two years, culminating in a celebratory arrival (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020):

> *They were so delighted…we were delighted with them…so enthusiastic, so sweet (Zellie W2).*

The initial months were busy[128], with participants providing *'daily support' (Beth W2):* registering with the GP and Job Centre, assisting with shopping and childcare and introducing the family to the local area. During the initial period, several participants sought help from other refugees who provided support to groups. Some families had medical vulnerabilities, necessitating adjustments and additional support. Beth and Sally's group supported a man with physical disabilities and a child who required hospital treatment.

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[128] Support included applying for bank accounts, welfare benefits, registering with healthcare providers, ESOL classes and schools for any children.

Balancing HO obligations with family needs was challenging. Groups were responsible for collecting the family from the airport, providing groceries and £200 per person for initial resettlement costs (Home Office, 2024a). Within a week, families had to attend a benefits assessment and register with a GP. Within two weeks, children needed to be registered at school and ESOL classes arranged within the first month (Home Office, 2024a). Participants found it difficult to balance allowing the family to rest whilst ensuring compliance with HO requirements:

> *We went to the job centre at 10 o'clock…we left the job centre at 3.30pm…Aayun, when we got home, she was in tears, tired…the number of questions…the hoops we had to jump through…the stress…it was awful…You're trying to settle them in…give them a friendly outlook…they get that, bang, fill that in (Martin W2).*

Like T1 participants, there was a sense of responsibility to safeguard the family. Martin recounted accompanying them to the Job Centre and expressed frustration when met with confrontation from a staff member:

> *If it has been a standard English family…I would have just shouted at that security guard. But they won't understand…they will just see the aggression…they will think, oh no, what is this (Martin W2).*

Walking interviews pinpointed the places refugees had to navigate. Martin guided me past the bank and explained he had tried to arrange an account before the family arrived but faced barriers because of the family's refugee status. Martin was concerned as he had hoped to organise a seamless start for the family. Other participants described similar challenges setting up bank accounts, and often resorted to online banks like Monzo.

Certain initial needs were finite, such as registering for the doctor and at schools. However, support beyond these points was not straightforward. Over the two-year period, additional needs emerged, including employment, transportation, and medical requirements. Most participants acknowledged that as the family settled down, they were likely to need ongoing and different support:

> *Things don't necessarily get easier….initial resettlement…that's more finite…after one or two years looking for a job…things get harder (Sally Z2).*

Additional medical problems sometimes arose. Beth was aware of the importance of supporting the family with their mental health but faced challenges due to the lack of Arabic-speaking counsellors. For some adult refugees, underlying pain caused by trauma, only surfaced when participants gained their trust:

> *Gradually…there were a lot of things happening trauma wise…that has to do with how much they trust you…more things have come out…shoulder pains…carrying children…they come…relax a bit…things that have been building up...different things hit you at different times (Sophia W2).*

COVID-19 further complicated resettlement, creating a challenging, *'roller-coaster' (Hazel W2)* experience for volunteers and sponsored refugees. Two families were delayed by over a year when the UK borders were closed. Zellie's group lost their initial housing, and several volunteers left due to pandemic-related effects[129]. Ella's group were also delayed by COVID-

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[129] Eventually, after a year, the same family who were originally due to arrive, were resettled by the same group after the group had secured a new house, having lost the first house when CS was delayed due to the closure of the UK borders during the initial COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.

19. The family were emotional when they arrived, as they were concerned they had lost their opportunity to be resettled:

> *A year earlier…they'd lost that because of COVID…they were panic stricken that it was going to happen again. This little girl was coughing…they were saying, 'Stop! Drink some water!...' But it was just a normal cough for her age. (Ella Z2).*

The pandemic also affected families who had already arrived[130]. Lockdown disrupted social interactions and hindered integration as the closure of public spaces such as libraries and shops limited the opportunity for families to explore their local area and engage with community services. Isolation was challenging, especially for those who had recently arrived, and refugees missed out on opportunities for social interaction:

> *The mum did some volunteering in a school…she loved it…that all stopped with COVID…that was difficult (Beth W2).*

Restrictions on social mixing meant that one or two volunteers undertook all the in-person support, which was *'super stressful' (Lily Z2)* for those volunteers. It also meant families missed out on opportunities to integrate into their new community:

> *Two years…no chance…If you took COVID out…you spend 12 months getting them up to speed with English…but…instead of it being a year, it's gonna be two years…two years before we'll get those connections going and his English is good enough to really start getting him a proper job (Martin W2).*

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[130] In the UK, the second national COVID-19 lockdown lasted from January 2021 to July 2021.

While initial preparations and resettlement efforts were marked by enthusiasm and dedication, the ongoing support for sponsored families presented significant challenges, especially balancing bureaucratic requirements, addressing changing needs and overcoming unforeseen barriers such as COVID-19.

7.3: Different approaches to the power dynamic

Exploration of power dynamics during T2 was guided by a broad interpretation of power (Allen, 1998) and the Expressions of Power Framework (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) which encompasses both negative and positive manifestations of power across four different forms of power. The introduction of a fifth category of power - 'transformative power' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021), expanded the analysis beyond a zero-sum understanding of power. This adapted framework facilitated a nuanced examination of power dynamics, acknowledging the potential for negotiation and agency in reshaping volunteer roles (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024; Stock, 2019).

Post-arrival, power dynamics became intricate, characterised by interchangeability and negotiation as the hospitality enacted by volunteers in some cases challenged the asymmetric labels of 'host' and 'guest' (Bulley, 2016). Unlike T1 volunteers who generally aligned with a paternalistic or a partnership approach, T2 volunteers did not adhere to a uniform stance on power, instead power was dynamic and interchangeable. While some articulated instances of 'power over', confirming that sponsorship is not always transformative (Monforte *et al.,* 2021), most engaged with all five dimensions of power, encompassing negative and positive aspects, highlighting the negotiation that takes place within a relationship of hospitality (Rozakou, 2016). Power fluctuated between volunteers and sponsored families, demonstrating fluidity rather than permanence (Dikec *et al.,* 2009; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). At times, power was also shared, emphasising the nuanced and

evolving nature of relationships within sponsorship. While participants rarely framed their own actions as overtly political, their practices often blurred the lines between humanitarian support and political engagement. As they negotiated power dynamics and made decisions that identified gaps in state provision, their roles subtly shifted. Drawing on the idea of 'quiet politics' (Meier, 2023), these moments can be seen as part of a gradual politicisation (Hamidi, 2023), not in the form of activism, but in how participants came to navigate, and at times, subvert, the structural constraints placed on refugee support.

7.3.1: Power over

Dominant power, often conceptualised as 'power over,' is the most widely understood form of power, representing a negative manifestation involving one person holding power over another. This dynamic was evident in several post-arrival volunteer practices, especially around employment and financial decisions. These findings align with Rozakou's (2012) idea of the 'worthy guest' – refugees were expected to comply with sponsor preferences and hospitality 'rules' to maintain support. When participants enacted 'power over', they often believed they were acting in the best interests of refugees, but they inadvertently undermined refugee autonomy and agency. Employment was a key site where 'power-over' was exercised. For example, Martin pressured Nabeel, to take a job in a pub, despite Nabeel's clear discomfort due to religious reasons:

> When Nabeel found out it was a pub…there was a problem…I'm saying, 'listen, as long as you're not pouring it out and you're not drinking it, I can't see the issue'. And they are saying, 'well, you don't really understand'…I said, 'if he offers you a job in the kitchen…if someone walks in with a big tray of drinks to be emptied out and washed, can you do that?', and he said, 'yes'…so I said, 'well, let's send the letter then' (Martin W2).

Martin's insistence, despite Nabeel's discomfort, reflects a form of dominant 'power over', where employment was prioritised over cultural and religious sensitivity. This resonates with Flesichmann's (2020) framing of the 'dark side' of refugee support, where well-meaning volunteers may inadvertently produce paternalistic control. Similarly, Zellie's group made employment plans for the family – such as opening a restaurant or working in a supermarket – without first consulting them. Though motivated by a desire to help, these examples suggest a belief that volunteers knew what was best, aligning with the 'paternalistic' sponsor type identified by Haugen and colleagues (2020).

Another form of power over' emerged in how volunteers managed donated funds. Ella used community donations to purchase underwear for Yashira without consulting her:

> I'm going to use it for… take her to Marks and Spencer to look at underwear…nice stuff for herself…these are the things that nobody thinks of, aren't they (Ella Z2).

Although well-intentioned, this decision was made without Yashira's input. The presumption of need – deciding what constituted care – excluded her agency. As Fleischman (2020) and Ambrosini (2022) argue, such practices reflect subtle forms of control rooted in Western norms of what constitutes help or care. These actions can reinforce hierarchical relationships and diminish refugee agency. Participants also described instances of other volunteers asserting authority inappropriately. For example, Ella explained another volunteer tried to discourage Yashira from having any more children and another who chastised Halim for contacting the 'wrong' person:

> The college changed when it was doing something…to clash with a Universal Credit appointment…Halim contacted me, 'I can't do both, what do I do'…The person who

deals with the college…she said, 'I'm speaking to Halim…I'm telling him, he mustn't

bother you and ask you these questions!'…she used that phrase 'bother you'…I was

thinking…he isn't doing that, he's finding me and asking me a question...like you

would ask your mother…they do need someone like that (Ella Z2).

This example illustrates how the notion of refugees as a 'burden' can emerge even in supportive roles, aligning with Rozakou's (2012) critique of the hospitality relationship and the implicit moral judgements it can carry. The expectation that refugees should remain passive and grateful reproduces power asymmetries.

The enactment of 'power over' was not only shaped by individual attitudes but also by structural pressures. Several participants referenced feeling accountable to the HO or funders, reinforcing their gatekeeping roles. Mick, for instance, described tension around the family's use of the TV. The group felt pressured to ensure the family learned English (required by the HO) while also ensuring they felt comfortable at home. Similarly, Sophia struggled with balancing requests for financial support with expectations from the church community:

Sometimes I've said I think…you need to pay for this yourself…Or maybe we could

go halves, but I always ask the [church] steering group what they think because you

can't just keep buying things (Sophia W2).

These examples demonstrate how structural obligations can encourage paternalistic behaviours. Volunteers, situated within a formalised system of sponsorship[131]., often felt compelled to ensure compliance – highlighting the tension between care and control.

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[131] CS groups sign a 'community sponsorship contract' with the Home Office

7.3.2: Transformative power

I integrated 'transformative power' (Van Baarle 2021) into the conceptual framework, following an initial, inductive analysis of the dataset. While 'power over' typically carries a negative connotation, arguably it only becomes negative when used for domination rather than empowerment. (Van Baarle *et al*., 2021; Chambers, 2023). Acknowledging that power imbalances inevitably exist – especially in a context like CS, where sponsors possess language proficiency, social connections, financial resources and legal status – this lens helps to explore how power can be used to empower, rather than control. While instances of participants exercising power negatively, termed as 'power over', existed, the predominant approach among T2 participants involved leveraging power in a way which was transformative rather than dominant (Fleischmann, 2020).

Transformative power was evident even before families arrived, as participants drew on their social networks to secure housing and coordinate with local institutions like banks and GP surgeries. Post-arrival, they continued leveraging those networks in ways that supported the specific preferences and aspirations of sponsored families. For example, Sally explained how a volunteer arranged a job for a man who wished to work as a chef:

> *She was teaching him English…she decided to open this restaurant…it worked through networking (Sally Z2).*

Here, power was exercised in a way which aligned with his aspirations, rather than a job being imposed upon him. This relational approach counters the hierarchical tendencies of 'power over' and reflects an understanding of care as a collaborative process. Similarly, Martin facilitated practical autonomy by helping the family connect with local shopkeeper so they could pay bills directly and avoid running up large costs.

Participants often acted as cultural and bureaucratic intermediaries, advocating within institutions on behalf of families. Hazel arranged for interpreters at appointments and Ella intervened to help Halim book an in-person GP appointment:

> *COVID makes things difficult…he had to fight to get seen…they're not having many face to face appointments…I went in…basically sweet talked the receptionist to give him a face-to-face appointment…that's the advantage of him having community sponsorship, isn't it? (Ella Z2).*

Acts of care were deeply responsive to the specific needs of families. Sophia's group, for example, bought bikes when they realised the social importance of one child not being excluded among peers. These small acts – from advocating with GPs to working around financial issues – were rarely described in political terms by participants. However, they also reveal an emerging awareness of, and engagement with, the systemic barriers facing refugees. In this sense, what can be understood as practical support, also constitutes a form of 'quiet politics' (Askins, 2014) as these micro-level interventions (Meier, 2023) – through not framed as political – become forms of civic engagement that subtly challenge the state's limited provision in supporting refugees.

In Chapter Six, I explained how local people from the wider community were involved in preparing for a family. This support continued after families arrived. Participants were offered music lessons and computer equipment and support from local people:

> *He came round on a different cycle, it was nice…a mountain bike…I asked him, 'have you bought it?'…'no, no… neighbour'…the neighbour had given it to him…wanted him to have a decent bike (Martin W2).*

This example illustrates how transformative power can ripple outward – generating 'power with' by drawing in broader networks of solidarity. Another example was when Martin's group facilitated a free holiday offer to a rural cottage from a partner charity. When the family declined – citing fears about isolation and a lack of WIFI – the group supported their decision without pressure, showing a refusal to impose help:

> *They get frightened…when they can't reach the family…they can't leave…they don't want to be isolated. I think it is a refugee thing, it's this fear of isolation or being stuck and not being able to get any help…they always have the phone (Martin W3).*

Instead of insisting, Martin's group paid for them to visit another city in the UK which the family wished to visit and could connect with people they knew, illustrating a willingness to collaborate based on the specific needs and choices of the family.

Expanding support to refugees outside CS was another expression of transformative power. Beth and Sally's group offered equitable support to all local refugee families, including those resettled by the council, despite initial tensions within their group. Similarly, Sophia described continuing support for refugee friends of the family, as the support they had from the council was not 24/7:

> *It's not like you can phone them* [the council team] *in the middle of the night if you have a problem…sometimes I get phone calls because there's nobody else (Sophia W2).*

In extending their support beyond the formal boundaries of CS, these volunteers not only demonstrated a commitment to equitable care, but they also subtly challenged unequal resettlement provision. Although participants rarely framed these actions as political, such

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processes can be understood as part of a broader politicising process. As their involvement with the families deepened, they increasingly encountered, and responded to, gaps and unequal provision in refugee support. In doing so, they enacted a form of informal, everyday politics (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a).

7.3.3: Power with

Among T2 participants, the most prevalent approach to support was 'power with', which involved acknowledging the family were partners in the resettlement process, akin to Haugen and colleagues (2020, p569) finding of 'mutualistic' sponsors. While 'Transformative power' involved the strategic use of privilege to empower refugees, 'power with' represents a deeper shift – an effort to reposition the family not as passive recipients but as partners in the resettlement process. The move away from a paternalistic framing towards shared agency could also be read as a form of quiet politicisation (Meier, 2023). As volunteers acknowledged families not as passive recipients but as partners, they subtly resisted dominant narratives of refugee dependency.

Participants were aware of existing power imbalances and made explicit efforts to redress them. This was sometimes as simple as changing the language, rejecting the state definition of a 'refugee' (Rozakou, 2012):

> *We don't use the word refugee anymore we use the word family…they're not refugees…they are a family (Martin W2).*

There was also recognition that CS was a learning experience and that participants could reflect on their mistakes and improve their support:

They had a big part to play in choosing the school…we've only since realised…of course it wasn't really an informed decision at all…the boys have moved to another school…that's been a lot better (Beth W2).

The ability to adapt based on reflective practice hints at an evolving volunteer role – one that is less managerial and more cooperative. Subsequent preparations for new families were explicitly shaped by feedback from previously sponsored refugees. Beth's group made a video for future refugees who may be illiterate and Sophia's group adjusted their interpreter strategy based on the experiences of the first family who found it difficult to keep repeating their story to different people:

We have an interpreter new to us…who is going to work with the family for two weeks…before…we had different interpreters (Sophia W2).

In this way, participants collaborated with previously sponsored families, suggesting a transformation in the host/guest relationship, with reciprocal benefits for both volunteers and sponsored refugees (Gardner *et al.,* 2022; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2026).

Respecting family privacy was another feature of this approach. For example, Beth was not prepared to share the address of a new family with people who wanted to offer support before the new family had consented because they had *'a right not to have it broadcast' (Beth W2).* Sophia's group was also welcoming another family, but she refrained from talking

specifically about them during the interview[132]. During a photo elicitation interview, Mick explained he could not send photos of the family because he had to respect their privacy[133].

T2 participants demonstrated a growing understanding of the sponsored families' past lives, education and experiences (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). While T1 participants had largely perceived families in need of 'saving', participants in T2 formed relationships with families and grew to know them as individuals (Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Beth emphasised that Khaleed held *'a high-powered role'*, while Sophia emphasised Samir's proficiency in English, acquired through a university education. This relationship-building subtly disrupted any notions of refugees as passive victims waiting to be saved (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018) as volunteers came to learn and value the pre-conflict 'status eligibilities' of sponsored refugees ((Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a, p13). Participants became aware of the trauma endured by the families and the challenges they faced upon arrival:

> *People think…'I'm a refugee'…over they come. But…it was it was nearly three years…really tough (Sophia W2)*

Participants also recognised the importance of maintaining connections with extended family members who were dispersed globally or who remained displaced. Mick stressed the group should support the family with remaining in contact. Martin observed that Arabic TV provided comfort to the family, despite suggestions from other resettled refugees to watch English TV to help improve their English. These examples further reflect how participants became attuned not only to practical needs but also to the emotional and cultural lives of the families.

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[132] Sophia (W3) briefly mentioned that her group planned to welcome a second, and hopefully a third family. The second family were due to arrive 'soon', but she explained she did not wish to speak about them during the interview, out of respect for their privacy.
[133] In contrast, several participants had to be reminded the family should not be included in photos without their written permission and I had to discard photos for this reason.

In doing so, they also acted as cultural intermediaries, negotiating multiple value systems. This positioning subtly resisted dominant narratives that expect refugees to fully assimilate, instead promoting a more reciprocal and culturally sensitive model of integration. As participants developed personal connections with the families, they gained insight into resettlement from the families' perspectives which allowed for a more empathic and individualised approach to support.

Crucially, this approach reframed ideas of success. Unlike T1, where independence was viewed by paternalistic volunteers as a fast-track goal, the majority or T2 participants had fewer expectations and acknowledged the long-term nature of resettlement:

> *One of the things that we have definitely learned is that it takes quite a lot of time…to be able to be employed because of the need for English (Beth W2).*

There was an understanding that moving to a new place was difficult for everyone, not just refugees:

> *It's not easy for any of us…we often draw on other people who are more able to do it, don't we? (Mick Z2).*

The mutuality at the heart of 'power with' was deeply lived by volunteers and refugees, with reciprocity forming a key part of the volunteer/refugee relationship. Sharing food played a key role within relationships as families regularly invited volunteers for coffee and meals - in these examples, the power dynamic was subverted as sponsored refugees 'hosted' the 'guest' volunteers in their homes (Rottmann and Nimer, 2021). Participants recognised that they, too, gained from the experience:

It works both ways…I feel very needed, which is what I need to feel…my two children

are grown up…I don't want them to feel the burden to them…I don't feel a burden to

this family because I feel I'm giving (Sophia W2).

This mutual benefit complicates the framing of volunteering as altruistic, compassion-based charity work. Instead, it suggests a deeper politics of relationality, where volunteers and families co-create meaning and belonging through shared experiences. For some participants, this reframed their understanding of 'help' as reciprocal – a shift which arguably carries political significance. Though participants acknowledged reciprocity from families, several emphasised that gratefulness was not a prerequisite:

There could be a family that's more difficult or doesn't get on or doesn't want to

engage…it's very important that that kind of thing shouldn't get in the way of how we

help them (Sally Z2).

Respecting families' autonomy also meant recognising the limit of volunteer input[134]. On occasion, participants disagreed with a family's choice, but accepted the right of families to decide for themselves. Martin disagreed with the family's decision to take their daughter out of religious education (RE) lessons, but ultimately respected their parental authority. Lily, wary of influencing the family's decisions, was reluctant to take them to a meeting of her local political party:

I would have loved to take them to do some...but obviously, you can't…it would have

been wrong…because they say yes to stuff, I would not feel that they were

particularly informed (Lily Z2).

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[134] On several occasions during interviews, participants deferred to the family when I asked certain questions, explaining they preferred not to speak on their behalf.

Participants also acknowledged that families should be free to form their own relational networks within the group. Ella noted that families naturally gravitate towards certain people, and felt strongly that the family should be able to choose who they asked for support:

> I don't think you can spread the load evenly…it doesn't work like that…human beings don't tend to behave that way…they find certain people easier to get on with than others (Ella Z2).

Ella was upset when another volunteer in her group chastised Halim (power over) for contacting Ella about something outside of her remit. She was especially frustrated because she felt it was important to respect the relationships the families chose to develop, rather than rely on specific volunteer roles which were allocated at the beginning of the process.

Importantly, the collaborative nature of 'power with' extended into future planning. Several refugees already supported by the groups indicated their willingness to offer support to the new families. Some sponsored families were already involved with providing advice on housing and household items. Sophia asked Alia to assess the suitability of window coverings for a new Muslim family:

> This house has got blinds. I wanted to know whether that was okay, or whether we still needed net curtains…she said yes, the blinds are fine, she would be happy with that (Sophia W2).

This involvement signals a subtle reworking of the sponsor-refugee relationship as refugees become advisors (Gardner *et al.,* 2022). This shift empowers refugees but also underscores the reciprocal nature of sponsorship whereby refugees are not merely recipients of support

but active contributors and potential future volunteers. Involving refugees in supporting new arrivals disrupts the binary of 'helper' and 'helped', suggested a more horizontal model of volunteering. This reorientation can be read as an emergent form of 'quiet politics' (Pottinger, 2017) – one grounded in inclusion rather than protest. This approach has the potential to foster a stronger sense of community and mutual support among all involved in CS. However, these efforts were not without friction. In Martin's group, the sponsored family wished to support a second family, but were unable to attend planning meetings because they were held in a church which they would not visit. This situation underscores the ongoing complexity of power within CS, highlighting how structural and cultural factors can persist even in well-intentioned efforts towards inclusion.

7.3.4: Power within

'Power within' refers to self-confidence and belief to act. Participants described how members of the family expressed self-confidence and determination to achieve, particularly in relation to language learning and finding a job:

> *To their credit, they're both keen to learn English…it's an enormous uphill struggle for them (Mick Z2).*

Participants also expressed feelings of pride about the family's approach.

> *Our family have jumped headlong in, they're loving it, they're doing really well with English and they're super keen to do stuff…they're using Monzo to manage their budgeting…they're doing a good job (Lily Z2).*

'Power with' and 'power within' were linked. Halim had cooked falafels for the group and Ella's group suggested he should start a business. However, Ella advocated for Halim, who didn't wish to cook as his job, making space for his own 'power within' and creating the space for him to choose his own job:

> *He said, 'I don't want to run my own business'…'I don't even want to cater, if I get my English better I want to do something totally different…I'm only doing this job because it's the only job I could get' (Ella Z2).*

7.3.5: Power to

'Power within' often led to 'power to' as refugees acted independently, particularly around employment[135]. While 'transformative power' sometimes facilitated job opportunities, some refugees secured employment through their own initiative. Sophia described a refugee who printed his CV and approached a local business, securing a job. Sophia did not wish for the specific details of the job to be recorded but was happy for it to be noted that the man had secured himself a job. This is a further indication of 'power with' as Sophia asked for the recorder to be turned off to maintain the individual's privacy. Similarly, Mick explained that Halim's confidence approaching an employer (power within) led to a job offer (power to):

> *All credit to him…he said to them, 'oh, you know, I'll come and do some work for you for free'…they gave him a trial period…then they took him on to work on a 24 hour a week basis (Mick Z2).*

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[135] At the time of interview, of the five families involved in T2, three of the adults were working (one as a chef, one was trying to seek self-employment, and one was working part time in a restaurant). One of the older children was also working. One man was unable to work because of illness and his wife was his carer.

Participants observed notable improvements in the English language skills of refugees with work. Refugees also initiated their own social connections, either with assistance from participants or independently:

> *They all help each other…one of them, who doesn't speak English…he is brilliant at woodwork…the family I look after had a leak late…they phoned him, and he came right round and sorted it…they're kind of supporting each other (Sophia W2).*

Some refugees extended their support to other refugees who were due to arrive in their local area, reaching out to offer them support through Facebook:

> *This new family…they have put [a county in the South]. So the father, he checked with me first, which was lovely…I said, reply, but not from [religious organisation], but from you. 'Yeah, I live here, is there anything I can help you with' (Sophia W2).*

Despite support provided by participants and the refugees' own determination, barriers to independence existed, primarily around transport, employment and learning English. Employment posed several challenges, especially in rural areas lacking Arabic-speaking employers. Jackie (Z1) reflected on these rural challenges during her interview, sharing a photo of a tree (Figure 24) taken near where the resettled family lived. She explained that the area felt safe and was surrounded by green space – features she saw as positive for the family's well-being and sense of security. However, she also acknowledged the rural setting posed serious limitations, especially in terms of employment opportunities.

Figure 24: A photo of a tree shared by Jackie (Z1)

Refugees also faced bureaucratic hurdles, especially in terms of navigating self-employment:

> *There's an awful lot…I mean should he have a business bank account? Invoices,*
> *quotes...things are so much stricter here...insurance…he will need insurance…to*
> *expect people to be able to sort of suddenly do it after two years? (Beth W2).*

Beth's frustration reveals not only the complexity of bureaucratic systems, but is also an implicit critique of how ill-prepared the UK is to support refugee autonomy. In helping refugees to navigate these systems, participants were not just offering practical help, but stepping into roles more akin to intermediaries within a difficult environment. Additionally, foreign qualifications often went unrecognised, leading to underemployment for some refugees. Zellie supported a refugee (from outside her CS group) who was working in a factory which he found *'very demoralising'* (Zellie W2), when he had previously worked as a

lecturer but was unable to have his qualifications recognised in the UK. This mismatch between past expertise and current employment highlights how the UK employment sector devalues non-western knowledge and experience – functioning as a form of structural exclusion. Zellie's support, then, becomes a form of 'informal' politics against this devaluation as she tries to support the man to have his qualifications recognised. Transport was another obstacle, particularly in rural areas with limited public transport options. Several refugees faced challenges passing driving tests due to language barriers, further complicating access to employment.

Some participants were concerned the emphasis on learning English over gaining work experience would hinder refugees' employment prospects. Zellie and Hazel felt it would be better to support families into volunteering or employment alongside learning English. Conversely, Ella criticised the HO expectation of refugees finding employment quickly, suggesting that supporting them to pursue further education would be more beneficial in the long run:

> *Where is the advantage to push people off into low paid work? How does that set up a family to live in the UK? I just don't get it. Why isn't there some facility where if they decide to study, it'll be fine. It sends a feeling like they are penalised (Ella Z2).*

Ella frames the push towards low-paid work not as support but as sanction. Her critique highlights how integration policy can function as a form of conditionality – where inclusion is tied to economic output and refusal can be interpreted as a failure. Her stance marks a form of resistance to the HO expectation of quick economic assimilation.

7.4: Tension

I observed two forms of tension in T2. As in T1, I discussed how intra-group tensions manifested prior to the arrival of refugees due to differing role expectations. These tensions persisted and evolved during T2 as competing interpretations of how to enact support surfaced – especially around the exercise of power (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021). I also identified internal tension, as participants personally grappled with decisions about how to approach their role. Some volunteers experienced internal conflict as they navigated different approaches, for example moving from a directive, 'power over' approach to a collaborative 'power with' approach.

7.4.1: Tension between volunteers

Tensions between volunteers were not only interpersonal but were shaped by differences over what it means to offer hospitality. Volunteers like Ella framed their actions though religious duty, offering practical and emotional support even where it conflicted with her group. She admitted keeping some of her support hidden from the group to avoid conflict because she knew they advocated a more hands-off approach. On Yashira's request, Ella accompanied her to a hospital appointment without telling the group:

> *They've all got good hearts…they're all willing to go to meetings, but…hands on doing things, has actually been a different matter…and I'm a doer basically! (Ella Z2).*

Others advocated for less involvement, arguing that too much support could hinder long-term independence. Mick highlighted this tension between support and autonomy:

Like going to see the dentist…there were some people saying…'they can just go, the appointment has been made for them'…another faction…saying, 'well…they might get confronted with…a bill…or being told something that we didn't expect'…if there's nobody there to mediate for them then things can go wrong (Mick Z2).

These examples illustrate how intra-group conflict stemmed from different understandings of power - especially the clash between 'power over' and 'power with' approaches. Zellie disagreed with another volunteer in her group who had tried to dissuade Zahra from having more children, highlighting a 'power over' mindset' which clashed with the 'power with' approach Zellie favoured. Similarly, Ella was frustrated when a fellow volunteer scolded Halim for not contacting the correct volunteer regarding an appointment clash, demonstrating a *'territorial' (Ella Z2)* attitude and a 'power over' mentality that conflicted with Ella's belief in a more flexible and supportive, 'power with' approach. In another example, Ella's group were concerned about Halim being paid below minimum wage in his job. While some volunteers told him to quit the job because they were concerned working 'illegally' might affect his legal status with the HO, reflecting a 'power over' approach. Ella empowered him to address the situation himself, with help from an interpreter, demonstrating a more collaborative and supportive 'power with' approach. With the support of an interpreter, Halim was able to speak with his employer and worked out that he would be paid the minimum wage and there had been a confusion initially about the rate of pay.

Tension also arose where volunteers were responsible for leading other volunteers. For Beth and Sally, managing volunteers was a crucial part of their role. Managing interactions between refugees and volunteers added another level of complexity:

We've had some really, very difficult situations because everyone's doing their own thing… trying to rein that in is something I found very difficult (Sally Z2).

Sometimes arose when volunteers became involved and then suddenly withdrew, creating gaps in support and emotional strain for families and remaining group members. These issues with volunteer consistency resonate with findings from Korteweg and colleagues (2023) who highlight the fragility of the 'humanitarian bargain' of volunteers in CS.

As described in Section 7.3.2, some participants extended support to other refugees outside CS, exercising 'transformative power'. Yet, this approach was not devoid of tension. Beth and Sally's decision to support other local refugees led to internal group disagreements, especially when some trustees proposed tracking refugee 'progress' through formal assessments – echoing HO expectations:

> *Someone drafted a form, how often do the children have friends coming home from school? Can you make a phone call in English?...looking back, it's been very useful…it makes you a lot clearer about what you're about. But no, I wouldn't want someone coming into my house and asking intrusive questions (Sally Z2).*

Sally found the idea intrusive and felt it conflicted with her view of resettlement as a gradual process. The group later formalised an equitable approach after there was a change in the management team of their group.

Tension also arose regarding different views about the family's future. Ella aimed to use 'transformative power' to enhance the life of the family and had explored funding options for further education:

> *I should have the same aspirations for this young man and young woman, as I have my own children…I would not aspire for them to work….on minimum wage…But the community sponsorship group…not everyone's aspirations are the same (Ella Z2).*

This approach contrasted with group members who considered that any job would be suitable for Halim. Similarly, Lily anticipated potential group tension due to varying opinions on Yashira's choice to stay at home instead of seeking employment:

> *There are some people in our group they don't like that she wants to stay at home (Lily Z2).*

Disagreements among volunteers sometimes culminated in disengagement. Zellie described conflict with another volunteer over the need for Arabic interpreters in school, which left her feeling undermined and undervalued as a volunteer:

> *I was so, so offended…I was so gobsmacked…I had done a lot of work…it did sour my relationship with this person…made me realise that they are quite controlling…quite undermining (Zellie W2).*

The breakdown in this relationship led Zellie to take a temporary break from supporting the family and ultimately decline to participate in supporting a second family. Her experience, like others, highlights how intra-group tension can undermine sustainability in CS – a finding supporting by existing scholarship (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Neelin, 2020; Haugen, 2023).

7.4.2: Internal tension

Beyond intra-group tension, participants also experienced internal tension as they navigated the complexities of their role. This form of tension was less overt but emerged through participants narratives during interviews as they explained how they sometimes questioned their decisions or adjusted their approaches. Identifying internal tensions highlights that the volunteer experience is not only about relationships between volunteers, but it is also a personal challenge that may affect group cohesion. A key source of internal conflict stemmed from the dual role many volunteers held: they were both friends and supporters, personally invested in the families, while also accountable to the HO as part of CS. Martin's evolving reflection of his relationship with Nabeel illustrates this complexity (See Figure 25). Initially, he described Nabeel as a friend, suggesting an emotional closeness that blurred the boundaries between his personal and volunteer roles. However, as the interview progressed, Martin reconsidered this framing, recognising the difficulty of maintaining clarity around the nature of their relationship and the need to maintain a boundary between friendship and his responsibilities as a volunteer.

> *There was one point where the family felt that they wanted to live in [a city in the Northwest]. And, we went, fine…that's fine, if that's what you want to do. And they were like,* **they were really upset because they treat us as friends, which we are.** *And they felt they were letting us down. and we said, no, you can live where you want to live. (Martin W 2)*
>
> Later on during the interview
>
> **We don't…he's not my friend…***Because you've got to keep a certain distance, because one day I might have to tell him that his biometric residency permit doesn't exist anymore… He comes to talk to me, like when he was thinking about moving to Manchester, he will say...and this is quite an Arabic phrase, he will say, 'Can I speak to you like a brother?'. And he's meaning like in an honest, really honest way and you advise me like a brother. And we will do that, and if he's ever got a problem, he will come round. So yeah,* **we're very friendly. But just keep... because sometimes I have to…not tell him off…but tell him certain things that he has to do** *you know, (shakes hand to gesture moving something along)…log onto your Universal Credit and things like that. (Martin W 2)*

Figure 25: Martin's internal tension about his role as a 'friend'

Other participants expressed uncertainty about the level and type of support they were providing:

> *It's also a constant challenge… are we supporting them in the right way? Are we doing too much…not doing enough? (Beth W2)*

Volunteers sometimes shifted their stance on power dynamics when supporting the family. In Martin's case, his early support for Nabeel's job involved a directive, 'power over' approach. He described encouraging Nabeel to apply for a job in a pub, despite it conflicting with Nabeel's religious beliefs. However, later during the same interview, Martin adopted a more reflective tone. He acknowledged that a slower, more gradual adjustment into employment – sensitive to Nabeel's mental health and prior unemployment – might be more appropriate:

> *It will take Nabeel quite a while...I could probably make a call, getting him a job doing 12-hour shifts…But he wouldn't last a fortnight…he's not up to speed…what kind of organisation like the Home Office...loads of people have been swimming in that* [unemployment] *a long time and they can't cope…how is he going to be able to cope? (Martin W2)*

This shift highlights the internal negotiation volunteers experienced when deciding how best to support sponsored refugees. Martin's frustration with the HO expectation around rapid employment was also evident, pointing to a tension between policy pressures and personal relationships. Zellie similarly struggled with internal conflict about whether to address her concerns about the refugee father's behaviour. She recognised the boundaries of her role as a volunteer but felt a sense of responsibility to intervene when she was concerned he was withdrawing from daily life:

I'm really worried…I don't feel it's my place. I've heard…the men find it harder…they
get depressed…they haven't got a role or an identity…But…I'm looking at this bloke
and thinking, 'bloody hell…what the hell are you doing..?'!'…if it carried on…I'd have
to say something (Zellie W2).

Zellie's reflection highlights how internal tension was shaped not only by uncertainty over what to do, but also by anxiety over whether a volunteer even had the right to act – an ethical question that emerged across several other interviews.

Financial considerations also provoked internal conflict, as participants tried to balance assistance whilst fostering independence. Most T2 participants aimed to continue support beyond two years, but all expected financial self-sufficiency after that point. Sophia's group set clear financial parameters and would only purchase things to do with health and education. Holding back from purchasing items the family wanted caused internal conflict for Sophia, but she believed it was necessary to ensure the family's eventual self-sufficiency:

I found it really hard…I was thinking, I could buy that for them…But…they have to
learn not to rely on me…sort of to be cruel to be kind (Sophia W2).

Sophia also expressed concern about how her future involvement with the first family might impact others. Her group were planning to sponsor a second family, and she was concerned that the emotional bond she had with the first might lead to comparisons and feelings of inequity. She noted that such comparisons were already happening among other CS families in the area. One sponsored family was told they would inherit their house from their landlord, while another was benefitting from reduced rent in exchange for maintenance work. By contrast, Sophia's family faced a rent increase:

Our family, after their two years, their rent is going up…it's…all a bit…'that's not fair'

(Sophia W2).

These reflections underscore how internal tension extended beyond individual decisions to broader questions of fairness. They also highlight the fragile emotional labour involved in volunteering with CS – volunteers were not only supporting families, but also managing expectations, navigating policy constraints and contending with their own doubts and concerns.

7.5: The complexity of affective relationships

Most participants described an affective connection with sponsored families. Only Mick and Lily considered themselves volunteers without a social or emotional connection with the families. Mick explained:

We don't see each other outside of the business that has to be done (Mick Z2).

Others described strong bonds, often referring to the families as friends or 'like family'. Sophia described a deep emotional bond, saying she spoke to the family daily and felt that they shared a mutual, reciprocal relationship:

I love it…one of the most amazing things I've ever done…you feel like you're making a real difference…being able to invest time… He says, you are like her mother, you come here, and we look after you like our mother (Sophia W2).

To some extent, roles and personalities influenced relationships. Sophia attributed her strong connection to being the sole contact during COVID-19, while Ella felt her multicultural background helped her relate:

> *They still ring me first…they know darn well, I'm going to have to ring someone else…it's almost like… I will hear their complaint, and I'll work out who should be dealing with it (Ella Z2).*

However, despite the creation of affective bonds, these relationships also brought challenges. Sally noted the lingering power imbalance despite feeling like friends:

> *It just felt like being with a friend…that's probably a bit misleading…I am very aware there's still a power dynamic there….I see them as friends. But I don't want to come across as naïve (Sally Z2).*

Sally felt torn between her dual role as friend and CS volunteer and found it difficult to decline requests for help. Similarly, Ella, found the emotional involvement as a *'second mother' (Ella Z2)* difficult to balance:

> *It's pressure…you're thinking, well, who else has she got? But I've got my life too…it's tricky (Ella Z2).*

Enforcing HO expectations added another layer of complexity. Navigating friendship and the reality of being a CS volunteer was delicate, especially where it involved discussions around legalities, jobs and housing. Mick described having to intervene when the family violated rental rules by getting a pet and the group had to have an uncomfortable discussion with the

family telling them they needed to rehome their much-loved cat. Refugees also had to stay within the legal framework regarding employment:

If he was accepting…black market work…there would be a whole thing of it being illegal and it having to be reported…that kind of thing would put the group in an uncomfortable position (Mick Z2).

As relationships developed, so too did boundaries. Beth's group, initially cautious about fostering reliance, provided more support once they realised the family had such a limited support network. Ella's group shifted from only visiting in pairs to inviting the family into their homes. She reflected:

If you were going to help your neighbour next door, would you take someone with you?...Generally you wouldn't, would you…(Ella Z2).

Ella captured this transition in a photo of a rainbow at her local park (see Figure 26), a space that initially served to orient the family but later became a shared site of connection.

Figure 26: A photo shared by Ella (Z2) of a rainbow in her local park

However, navigating this transition was not without challenges. Beth struggled to define the relationship:

> *Possibly as a friend…I will always be a [CS group] volunteer…I mean, what's a friend? I see myself as a volunteer…I think I would use the word friend…all friendships have boundaries don't they…if a friend rings up and says…'Can you do something?'…if you don't think it's appropriate…you don't do it (Beth W2).*

Sally limited social invitations to her house to ensure fairness among the multiple families she supported. Another volunteer, Zellie, resisted involvement in family reunion:

> *She has started to say, which is difficult…she trusts me…how could she get her other family here…that's difficult…She's never going to see them...I really do feel we can*

afford…financially, and in every other way to bring in the odd family but…if everybody comes and then wants to bring another 50, that's quite difficult…financially…ethically and morally…they did ask me that the other day and I just thought oh no [worried expression]…*I really don't want to have this conversation (Zellie W2).*

Zellie's discomfort with the family reunion request not only reflects her personal boundaries but also highlights the political dimension of her involvement. The question of family reunion forced Zellie to confront the restrictive immigration policies which limit the family's ability to reunite. While some volunteers may be prompted to engage in political action, such as advocacy or lobbying for changes in policy, Zellie chose not to be involved, signalling a limit to the political nature of her involvement. Arguably, while Zellie become more politicised as she learned about the inequalities facing refugees through her close relationship with the sponsored family (Hamidi, 2023), for her, this politicisation did not translate into political action. Families also struggled to navigate evolving relationship dynamics. Sally recounted an incident where one family were hesitant to accept hospitality at her house, reflecting mutual uncertainty about shifting relational boundaries:

They were very reluctant to sit in the garden…if I go to their house, there's no question of me not going in…I was really trying to unravel that and thinking why would someone who I know so well…why were they so, stiff? (Sally Z2).

7.6: Summary

Chapter Seven set out to respond to RQ3: *Does the volunteer perception of their role change over time as the sponsored refugees become more integrated into their local community and there is potential for the power dynamic to change?*

Employing an adapted 'Expressions of Power' framework, supplemented by 'transformative power', I described how participants negotiated the power dynamics throughout the two-year resettlement period. Negative manifestations of power (power over) were observed (Monforte *et al.,* 2021). However, participants also wielded 'transformative' power, empowering rather than dominating sponsored families. This highlights sponsorship as a space where the power imbalance between 'helper' and 'helped' could shift towards empowerment rather than domination (Stock, 2019), and the host/guest framework is subverted (Bulley, 2016; Dikec, 2009) after the initial point of arrival (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). Participants also embraced 'power with', considering resettlement as a collaborative partnership between themselves and sponsored families (Haugen *et al.,* 2020). I describe examples of refugee agency conceptualised as expressions of 'power within' and 'power to' where refugees sought to support themselves independently. However, I also identified several barriers to independence, including employment, language learning and the impact of COVID-19.

Building on the theme of tension introduced in Chapter Six, I describe how intra-group tension was also a factor amongst T2 participants. Some disagreed about the right balance between providing support and fostering independence. Internal tenson was also evident as personally struggled to choose the right way to support refugees. Both forms of tension underscored the challenges inherent in collaborative refugee resettlement, where diverse participants have different ideas about how to support refugees.

The chapter concluded by exploring participant expectations about post-two-year support. The majority formed affective bonds and anticipated providing ongoing support, while those who identified as 'volunteers' envisaged their roles and support concluding after the end of the two-year resettlement support period.

CHAPTER EIGHT: TIMEPOINT THREE – FUTURE INTENTIONS

8.1: Introduction

In Chapter Eight, I explore the nature of sponsorship relationships *after* the end of the formal two-year period of support, deepening existing scholarship which has typically only explored the period before and during the resettlement period (Hutchinson, 2018; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). I also consider the future volunteering trajectory of CS volunteers by asking:

4. Does the volunteering work undertaken by CS volunteers evolve over time, in relation to their exposure to the sponsored refugees?

Three broad themes and eight sub themes were created following reflexive thematic analysis. (see Figure 27)*.*
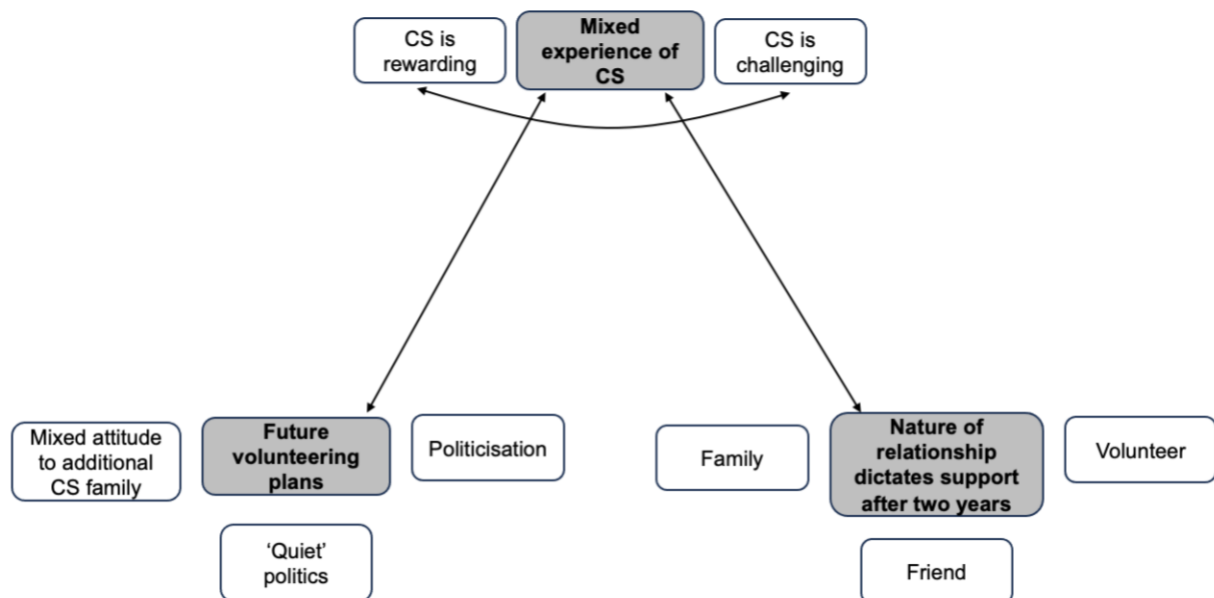
Figure 27: T3 thematic map

8.2: Mixed volunteer experiences

Participants described CS as both rewarding and challenging:

> *Up and down…I'd be lying to say it's all been brilliant…it's been interesting. (Katy Z3)*

Volunteers formed deep emotional bonds with families and each other. Moments like birthdays and shared meals built friendships beyond practical support. For some, helping become mutually transformative:

> *It's like in a mentoring relationship…statistically the mentors were getting more out of it than mentees (Jenny Z3).*

These emotional experiences could be read as a form of relational politicisation (Hamidi, 2023). The frequent care, the emotional labour of supporting the family, and the reciprocal transformation that volunteers describe reflect a quiet, embodied politics. For some, CS offered a *'proper purpose' (Matthew W3)* - a way to tangibly respond to distant crises:

> *You feel like you're doing something…at the moment in Afghanistan and Ethiopia…this is a little way of trying to do something (Chloe W3).*

CS enabled participants to utilise and enhance their life experiences and skills. Sarah found that CS enhanced her confidence leading a group. For Kathleen, it showcased the strength in grassroots action:

> *The beauty of community sponsorship…people…are all doing it, because they want to…people are at the core…they extended out to the local community, to get the*

community to join them…to be able to support a family when they come into a community…having that gives them that extra strength, the community-based support (Kathleen W3).

This sense of community was evident in everyday interactions. Kirsty, for example, shared a photo (See Figure 28), of salad grown at her allotment, where the father worked alongside local people, many of whom had never met a refugee before.

Figure 28: A photo shared by Kirsty (Z3) of salad grown at her allotment.

Two participants suggested CS benefitted local people as much as refugees:

It's definitely a lot about community…building community and making friendships…it's one of the main aspects (Sarah Z3).

Volunteers also gained awareness of the challenges faced by refugees. They gained insight into protracted resettlement situations and awareness of refugees' problems accessing

healthcare and employment in Lebanon and Jordan. Kit described how political divisions among Syrians affected integration – the sponsored family she supported avoided mosques and other Syrians due to *'politics with a small p' (Kit W3).* Others connected with extended families of sponsored refugees through video calls and saw the worsening conditions abroad:

> *I know how bad it is for that family in Lebanon…the situation has gone far, far worse (Chloe W3).*

Several become more aware – and critical – of UK systems. Matthew reflected on welfare barriers:

> *The awful bureaucracy…it's there to stop people getting what they need (Matthew W3).*

Here, state institutions are no longer abstract but encountered up close through the struggles of the families. In gaining awareness of UK welfare and housing barriers, several volunteers began to question the fairness of national systems. Whilst not always described in overtly political terms, these reflections suggest a shift in perspective as volunteers become more aware of the structural barriers faced by refugees and other vulnerable groups within UK society. Through their involvement in CS, six participants became critical of the UK Government (see sections 8.5-8.6).

Despite the benefits of CS involvement, several participants explained they appreciated the opportunity to discuss the more challenging aspects of CS, including navigating barriers to independence, and tension. Reflecting on a recently received email from a lead sponsor praising CS success, Victoria questioned the failure to discuss less positive experiences:

> *I was thinking, well, where is the other side? Can you also listen to those of us who actually haven't had a good experience? (Victoria W3).*

After two years, most participants had less contact with sponsored families. For some, this signalled success: '*they sort of replace you gradually' (Chloe W3).* However, independence was not straightforward. COVID-19 disrupted progress learning English, gaining employment and social integration. Several participants were upset that numerous lockdowns limited the time spent with families. One participant even formed a support 'bubble'[136] to provide support to Anaan, who had recently given birth:

> *I bubbled with them…to give them, just contact, with the outside world (Victoria W3).*

Katy explained Maryam had begun working with a local baker, to gain the skills to start her own business, but lockdown ended the opportunity. Several participants felt that refugee adults' education levels hindered their ability to adapt. Refugees with limited prior education experienced greater problems:

> *He's not literate in his own language…he doesn't read or write in Arabic…he was not educated beyond about nine years old (Chloe W3).*

The low educational attainment of several male refugees compounded the challenges faced by families striving for indpendance within two years. Language proficiency was crucial to other aspects of independence, including employment, learning to drive, and establishing a social network. A gender gap emerged, with women often showing stronger English – possibly due to higher education before resettlement:

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[136] During the COVID-19 UK lockdown, households with children under the age of 14 were permitted to create a 'childcare bubble' with one other household to provide childcare support.

Maryam is better educated…she left school when she was 11, or 12…she has a real thirst for learning and was upset about leaving school so young (Evelyn Z3).

Employment also varied by gender. Maryam secured work, but her husband struggled:

He can't do sums…really, he doesn't know very much at all about anything (Evelyn Z3).

Mental health was another concern. Daoud had *'quite acute'* (Kirsty, W3) issues and needed private support when NHS provision fell short. Similarly, Katy and Evelyn worried about the impact of trauma on both adults and children[137]:

Ehsan…he has no idea how to relate to people…that's interrupted childhood and terrible trauma…whether he has learning difficulties caused by PTSD…dyslexia…he has learning difficulties that come from emotional stress (Katy Z3).

The emotional strain caused by the seperation of families from extended relatives posed an additional problem. Several participants had direct communication with the extended family of the sponsored family through video calls and saw how reunification could ease integration:

They would be much more likely to settle easily if the family are here…it's so obvious (Chloe W3).

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[137] The group put paid support in place for both, in the form of a befriender and a 1:1 English teacher for Shakeel for a limited period because the group had additional funding available.

8.3: Tension with refugees

As in T2, tensions continued to surface in the post two-year period, especially regarding the level of ongoing support refugees should receive. Participants were divided between those advocating for increased self-reliance and those believing continued support was still necessary. Financial disagreements, especially concerning Daoud's ongoing health needs caused conflict within Kirsty's group as some questioned whether leftover funds should be spent on private healthcare or sponsoring another family. Similarly, Victoria faced opposition when she tried to support Khalil in his education over her group's preference for him to work. These disagreements highlighted a broader cultural disconnect, where Victoria's understanding of the family as an extended part of her own contrasted with others in her group who viewed their involvement as a finite project:

> *Our trustees…saw themselves as having a task to administer…a project that ended in two years and I could go back about my life. But how could you go back to your life when you have brought a family into your life? (Victoria W3).*

Several participants described tension with the families, particularly around their perceived dependency after two years of support:

> *You need to have a loving heart, but also you need to have a firm hand…at some point, they do need to get a job. They do need to learn English. They do need to be responsible citizens. They do need to be a good advocate for the programme because people are watching (Mark Z3).*

Some volunteers felt refugees should be more self-sufficient, and others were frustrated with requests for help in non-emergency situations, such as late-night calls. A common issue was the perceived lack of focus on learning English:

> *Everything about being in England depends on him learning English… basically he needs to pull his finger out…his response to that was to say 'well, who's going to look after us'…I think he's incredibly dependent on us (Evelyn Z3).*

Jenny described the sponsored family as, '*a little bit needy'* and *'a bit naughty'* due to their reliance on the CS group. She found it challenging to empower them, as her job role involved fostering independence:

> *Sometimes I'm a bit like, fucking hell, if I had got...I don't think I would push it that far…I would try and be a bit more independent (Jenny Z3).*

Tension also arose from comparing families' progress, especially in terms of employment and education. Disparities in employment were especially notable, with volunteers aware of other refugees who had secured jobs in restaurants or established businesses. Mark, for example, expressed frustration with the family's reluctance to be more proactive, despite understanding their safety concerns:

> *Our family…are, cautious about their face being seen on the public arena…they think…if they portray themselves as, 'oh we are in the land on luxury'…the bad guys in Syria…will actually go and kill their family members who say, 'yabu!, you haven't won'…we know that has happened. And so, I was frustrated with our family by not being more gregarious and ready for photo calls and setting up a business (Mark W3).*

Other volunteers compared language learning progress, with some families appearing slower to integrate into the community. Matthew, for instance, contrasted the language-learning progress of the family he supported with that of another refugee - a *'go getter' (Matthew W3),* who had passed a security guard course and started higher education within 18 months of arrival. Similarly, Katy and Evelyn compared the family to another refugee they knew in the local area:

> *He is employed and runs his own business, knew that he had to study English…*
> *Shakeel hasn't got it, he thinks it's just going to come without any hard work (Katy*
> *Z3).*

The tension between supporting families and enforcing UK laws and HO expectations on independence become more pronounced in T3, as some volunteers grappled with the dual role of offering support while also reminding families of their legal responsibilities[138]. Evelyn reflected on the difficulty of trying to enforce rules while maintaining a friendly relationship:

> *We have a friendly relationship…But sometimes…my job is to say, 'you've got to do*
> *this or…the law is'…'you know, it's against the law for you to leave your children*
> *unattended'. I have to really bring it down to them, that's my job in a way (Evelyn Z3).*

These contradictions were illustrated by a photo Evelyn shared of a tea party (see Figure 29). The event was a moment of warmth and togetherness, yet Evelyn acknowledged these positive interactions did not erase the underlying difficulties. The photo acted as a prompt for a wider discussion about the contradictions within the sponsorship relationship – how

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[138] Several participants described ensuring the family adhered to lockdown rules, met parenting expectations, and adhered to HO requirements concerning learning English and seeking work.

moments of celebration and closeness coexisted with the challenge of setting boundaries and managing expectations.

Figure 29: A photo of a tea party shared by Evelyn (Z3) (cropped for confidentiality)

At times, participants found themselves mediating between families and local people. Katy described a situation where Shakeel's customer dissatisfaction led to a public Facebook post criticising his work, resulting in a loss of business and further complaints about his communication and pricing:

> *She basically insisted on having her money back…she sent a message on Facebook…a public message…lambasting Shakeel's work…since then he's had no work… we've had other complaints from people…about his sort of brusqueness… lack of communication…somebody felt that he'd overcharged them (Evelyn Z3).*

Jenny encountered cultural tension when she pushed for a child to attend swimming lessons despite the family's discomfort with mixed-gender changing rooms, prioritising her view of safety over their preferences through a 'power over' approach:

I really pushed it with them… it was madness. I said, 'Are you ever going to go and take her to get swimming lessons?'. And they said, 'No'. And I went, 'well, you're missing an opportunity here for her and it's about her safety'…I'm not afraid to push those kinds of things with them (Jenny Z3).

Burnout emerged among several volunteers, particularly Katy and Evelyn, who continued limited support beyond two years due to COVID-19. They arranged additional support for Shakeel's English learning and appointing a paid befriender for one of the children, but expressed fatigue and uncertainty about the future. Evelyn noted how stress affected her sleep, while both women described struggles with unfamiliar family dynamics, such as a young son's authority over his mother:

The most challenging bit…there is a hierarchy that goes dad, son…I sort of say Ehsan, stop that, stop it…it's not your job to tell your mum what to do'. But actually in their house, it is his job (Evelyn Z3).

Katy spoke of frustration when families didn't follow through with plans:

On a difficult day, I will think…I'm just a resource…well I should just be a resource but if I'm feeling particularly human…I say, 'Oh, fuck it, I'm just a resource, (laughs) 'I've set up this meeting for you, but you've decided to go into [a city in the South]' (Katy Z3).

Such moments revealed the emotional complexity of the role – volunteers juggled care and resentment, warmth and frustration. Katy reflected on this duality:

We have to be, not saints, we have to be human…we have to get cross and not feel bad about getting cross…I personally find that quite hard anyway, I'm not driven to rage easily. I think I would probably just grumble inwardly and then go out and be incredibly kind, which is really hypocritical…but you learn about…yourself doing this sort of thing (Katy Z3).

Some participants acknowledged the limits of their capacity. Katy found it challenging to address Shakeel's anger, recognising the boundaries of her expertise and the potential risk to volunteers who lacked specialised support:

He gets very angry, not physically, not dangerously, but you know, very, very angry…you worry about those things because you don't feel, you don't feel trained enough to deal with them (Katy Z3).

Chloe and Matthew also highlighted a barrier to full resettlement, especially the inability to support family reunification:

They can have all these lovely people supporting them, we can get them into school…we can be friendly with them…support them as best we can. But the end of the day, the whole point about the scheme is for them to be independent and truly settled…there's no way you can be truly settled if these big issues are there still (Chloe W3).

These examples underline the emotional toll on volunteers and the need for broader HO support to address the multifaceted challenges faced by families after two years.

8.4: Relationships after two years

After two years, the majority of participants continued to provide support[139], with many describing relationships as enduring friendships or 'like family'. A smaller group maintained a clearer volunteer identity.

Marker event

While the HO expected a plan detailing the 'controlled closure' of sponsor support after two years (Home Office, 2024b, p20), participants often created informal 'marker events' to signal the end of formal support[140]. These ranged from meetings and picnics to small parties. Jenny's group held a simple meeting due to COVID-19 where they informed the family that - *'the formal stuff had ended' (Jenny Z3).* Similarly, Chloe and Matthew's group presented clear boundaries of ongoing and discontinued support. The family reacted emotionally, prompting concerns that they hadn't fully grasped the group's focus on fostering independence:

> *'it's not that we don't love you', but we'd always stressed independence. Our aim was that they would be independent. Barkat says, 'before you say anything, we just want you to know that if you lot go off the scene, we are going back to Syria' (Matthew W3).*

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[139]Mark (W3) was the sole exception, who viewed his role as more strategic and believed that his responsibilities to the specific family ended after two years.
[140] Marker events were not mandated by the HO, but I noted that this practice developed as an informal practice among most participants.

Sarah, Katy and Evelyn's groups prepared families gradually, starting six months before the end of the two-year period[141] Katy highlighted the value of a marker event in reinforcing shifting boundaries:

> *We want…a marker…so that they will know that we expect less contact…in terms of, 'can you help me contact?' if you want to go for a cup of coffee, that's different. Or, you know, occasionally come around and the kids can play I guess? (Katy Z3).*

Only Kathleen and Victoria rejected the idea of a marker event, choosing to continue offering open-ended support:

> *'I will be there for as long as they need me' (Kathleen W3).*

After two years, participants described their relationships in three ways: those who viewed families as friends, those who saw them as family, and those who maintained a formal volunteer role. Some, like Chloe, Matthew and Kit described themselves as friends who supported but didn't overstep. Despite emotional bonds, they aimed to empower rather than create reliance. However, balancing friendship with the goal of empowering the family to live independently proved challenging. Navigating the transition after the end of the formal support period was difficult for Chloe, who struggled when the family reacted negatively to the group trying to put boundaries in place after two years:

> *We were a bit worried…our idea was that they'd be self-sufficient…we could have a friendly relationship still, and they wouldn't ever disappear from our lives…our aim was to get them there (Chloe W3).*

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[141] Sarah was the only volunteer within the overall cohort of 30 who considered the resettlement support role to end after one year, with housing support continuing for two.

Others, like Kathleen, Victoria and Jenny described their roles in familial terms. Kathleen explained, *'I am her mum here. I get Mother's Day presents' (Kathleen W3)* and spoke of the children in familial terms, expressing pride that they were doing well in school. This familial relationship led Kathleen to decrease ties with her CS group, focusing instead on increasing her ties with the sponsored family:

> *They arrived at my house a couple of days before Christmas with Christmas presents. I got a bag of Christmas presents for them, so we swapped Christmas presents, the same as everybody else does (Kathleen W3).*

Jenny had a close bond with the women and children, expressing love for them akin to her own family:

> *I love them all, I really do…I do really love the women…I love them (Jenny Z3).*

Despite occasional frustrations, she likened the relationship to that of her own mother, suggesting a sense of duty and love. Similarly, Victoria saw herself part of the family's extended network, referred to as *'their sister' (Victoria W3)* although she remained mindful of cultural disparities in relationships:

> *What's poorly understood is the culture…this is a culture of extended families…they will see us as extended family. We don't see ourselves as extended family…that is very troubling to them…they want you to come…have a meal…we don't reciprocate the same…Which I think leaves them lonely…a culture clash (Victoria W3).*

Victoria stepped back from her trusteeship to focus on her personal bond with the family and was grateful when the formal two-year period ended so she could focus on her *relationship* with the family rather than her *role* as a volunteer. All three participants planned to continue supporting the families because they had deep emotional connections and recognised the mutual benefits from each other's company. During walking interviews, Victoria and Kathleen pointed out locations along the route where they had formed positive relationships with the children, eagerly sharing photos on their phones like proud relatives.

A third group – including Mark, Sarah, Evelyn, and Katy – maintained a more distanced, task-focused approach. Mark took a strategic role, leaving pastoral care to Kathleen, whose closer bond with the family highlighted how group members fulfilled different roles within the same group based on personal strengths and connections with the family. Sarah, open to friendship, found no shared interests but supported the family while prioritising empowerment:

> *I understand that benefit can be really hard to understand…even if you are British, even if you know English…but…if the volunteers keep on doing that, the family will never learn…I understand…you want to help but you need to let them do it (Sarah Z3).*

Evelyn and Katy, both experiencing burnout, set firm boundaries early, framing their roles as practical rather than personal[142] and defining interactions as *'business contacts' (Evelyn Z3).* Evelyn avoided social context because she found the children to be, *'a bit feral' (Evelyn Z3)*

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[142] As a further example of volunteer burnout, Evelyn and Katy were initially scheduled to participate in walking interviews but had to cancel at the last minute after one of the children in the sponsored family contacted COVID-19. Both participants expressed relief at having a break from the family whilst they had to isolate – '*I've been in isolation this week, and I thought, "yay, I can't do anything"' (Evelyn Z3).*

and the parents unable to control them, describing the relationship as *'one built out of necessity'*. Katy echoed this, resisting familial labels:

> *When you've had this sort of very intense relationship…especially being an older woman…I end up being the…great granny in their opinion…it's a relationship we need to cool down a bit (Katy Z3).*

Both acknowledged the strain of long-term involvement and planned to step back after Christmas [2021], yet remained committed to limited ongoing support:

> *We've said…from September, we'll be available one afternoon a week to help her…how we manage this, we just don't know (Evelyn Z3).*

Attitudes to sponsoring again

These evolving dynamics informed participants' attitudes toward sponsoring another family. Unlike T2 participants – many of whom expressed willingness to sponsor again – most T3 participants had decided against it. Only Kit planned to sponsor another family, prompted by unfolding events in Afghanistan. Others, like Evelyn and Katy, felt limited by their rural town and the emotional strain of long-term support. Victoria was open to further involvement but faced resistance from her original group, who had *'exhausted the resources of their particular friends'* (Victoria W3). Meanwhile, Sarah, Jenny and Mark[143] supported new CS groups in reduced roles due to time and energy constraints:

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[143] Though he had only been directly involved in resettling one family, Mark's group were funding a second group, and he was offering strategic support to a third group.

> *I don't want to take on that level of work… it's not the time necessarily, it's the energy (Jenny W2).*

Kathleen, now retired, chose not to sponsor again, focusing instead on her own family, and her ongoing relationship with the first sponsored family.

While some volunteers stepped back due to personal or logistical reasons, others – like Chloe, Matthew and Kirsty – found their experiences within CS had altered their political outlook. As they grew closer to the families and became more familiar with the structure of CS, they began to question the scheme's underlying logic. They recognised how CS often operated within a HO-defined model of welcome – one that offered care on conditional terms. For Chloe and Matthew, the emotional toll of the lack of family reunion options was especially troubling:

> *The separation is huge…this is what troubles me a lot…it almost puts me off... I have been frustrated…I still am, because of issues…I actually think, it would put me off doing it again…unless these things could, I felt could be resolved…I don't understand how they can't be resolved…things like, the family reunion aspect (Chloe W3).*

Kirsty, disillusioned by CS's distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' refugees, withdrew entirely, redirecting her efforts to broader refugee rights advocacy. This shift reflects what Derrida (2000) describes as hostipitality: the paradox at the heart of hospitality, in which welcome is entangled with exclusion, control and the power to withdraw. For these volunteers, CS came to symbolise not just a practice of welcome, but a mechanism of conditionality – offering refuge to some while implicitly legitimising the rejection of others.

8.5: Politicisation

As volunteers became more deeply involved in supporting resettled refugees through CS, many developed a heightened awareness of the structural barriers and systemic challenges facing the sponsored families. While few participants described their actions in explicitly political terms, their close relationships with families often prompted frustration with Government policies and practices. I argue this reflects a form of relational politicisation (Hamidi, 2023), in which volunteers who were engaged in emotional and practical support developed a more critical awareness of broader socio-political issues.

Though different participants took part in each timepoint, making direct comparisons between the three time periods impossible, the T3 interviews offered some insight into this evolving political consciousness. When reflecting on their initial motivations, most participants described being driven by compassion. Jenny (Z3) and Sarah (Z3) , for example, recalled wanting to contribute to their community's response to the 'refugee crisis', while others - like Katy (Z3), Evelyn (Z3) and Victoria (W3) - highlighted the emotional impact of media coverage. Several participants from religious backgrounds – including Kit (W3), Kathleen (W3), Mark (W3), Matthew (W3) and Chloe (W3) – framed their engagement as a moral duty rooted in faith. Only Kirsty (Z3), however, framed her initial motivation in overtly political terms, explaining that she saw CS as a 'loophole' to help resettle as many refugees as possible in response to restrictive UK immigration policy.

Yet even participants who did not initially see their involvement as political began to question the policies and assumptions underpinning refugee resettlement as they reflected on their two-year engagement with a sponsored family. As several scholars have noted (Stock, 2019; Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Fleischmann, 2020), everyday acts of care and solidarity can acquire political significance through their effects, even when not consciously framed as

such. In this case, volunteers' frustrations reflected an emerging critique of the UK Government and the HO, alongside a recognition that voluntary efforts were being stretched to compensate for a lack of state support for refugees (Peterie, 2019). This politicisation was particularly evident in the context of inadequate state support for housing and employment. Several participants, including Matthew (W3) and Chloe (W3), described their sustained efforts to help Barkat, a professionally trained HGV driver, to re-enter the workforce. Despite his experience, systemic barriers – such as restrictive language requirements and the absence of tailored support – prevented him from getting a job. Matthew noted that Barkat wanted a job aligned with his skills, not just a job '*refugees would get' (Matthew W3)*. Chloe recounted researching Arabic-language test options and contracting a HGV trainer:

I spoke to this person and said, 'you know about this test, you know, doing the HGV driving training test, is it true you can do it with voiceover'. And they said, 'oh yes, you can at most of our centres in N. Ireland, you can do it with an Arabic voiceover (Chloe W3).

These efforts revealed the gaps in government provision and highlighted the need for specialised employment assistance from the Government, '*especially if you've got a shortage of* [HGV] *drivers' (Chloe W3).* Frustration with these systemic failures led some participants to question the wider politics of resettlement. Sarah (Z3) for example, criticised the way CS was used to promote to carefully curated image of the UK as welcome, while deflecting attention from the broader asylum regime rooted marked by hostility and exclusion:

The Government uses community sponsorship to create this narrative of 'oh, what a wonderful and welcoming country we are' (Sarah Z3).

Others challenged assumptions about integration timelines, particularly the expectation that refugee families would achieve full independence within two years:

The Home Office has assumptions that are quite often beyond possibility. Like, get a job and learn English at the same time - I mean, What? You know, it's not possible (Katy Z3).

Sarah criticised the overly aspirational narrative prompted by the HO:

'Every refugee will now have to become a businessman, open a restaurant and do great things, go to university' (Sarah, Z3)

These reflections exposed a growing awareness that while CS enabled acts of welcome, it also obscured deeper systemic inequalities. Several volunteers began to recognise how the scheme shifted public focus towards so called 'good' refugees, neglecting those in more urgent need of assistance. As a result, their engagement subtly evolved. Volunteers not only provided interpersonal support to families, but also increasingly recognised the structural contradictions embedded within UK resettlement. This process reflects Hamidi's (2023) idea of relational politicisation – the process of becoming politicised through close, affective relationships. For these volunteers, long term support, emotional connections, and supporting families to navigate life in the UK became the grounds through which broader critique of HO policy, power and inequality emerged. In this way, politicisation emerged through their care work.

8.6: From politicisation to action: loud and quiet activism

While some participants did not initially identify as political, their sustained involvement in CS gave rise to a deeper awareness of the structural inequalities faced by refugees – a politicisation rooted in everyday acts of care (Hamidi, 2023). This awareness sometimes evolved into political action, encompassing both explicit and more subtle forms (Fleischmann, 2020). Several participants engaged in overt political action, making direct claims on the state and its policies (Fleischmann, 2020). Motivated by frustration and a sense of mural urgency, they moved beyond personal support to engage in campaigning, protesting and advocacy - forms of 'loud' (Hankins, 2017, p2) or 'contentious' politics (Ataç *et al.,* 2016, p530) that openly challenged state practices.

Family reunion emerged as one area of volunteer advocacy. Chloe's experience exemplifies this shift. Initially motivated by humanitarian concern, her relationship with the resettled family deepened into a bond that exposed her to the emotional and bureaucratic challenges of family separation. Witnessing Abal's struggles to rebuild her life in the UK while her wider family faced hardship in Lebanon intensified Chloe's political engagement. Her frustration with UK Government inaction – and perceived indifference from institutions like the UNHCR, led her to engage in direct advocacy but also to question her future involvement in CS:

> *I understand all of the pressures of the Government. But it's really bad…there's no way that a family…you build up this relationship...the Government love community sponsorship, because community groups are doing this work, and the family are settling much better…the flipside of that is that you have a proper relationship with a family…And if you have a proper relationship…you get into those deeper questions. And she is really shy…she won't talk about it too much, but you know it's a massive, massive hurt and upset for her (Chloe W3).*

During a walking interview, Chloe stressed it was her *'personal quest'* to support the family to apply for family reunion, which she vowed to *'never give up' (Chloe W3)*. Although she did not initially see her engagement as political, her actions - writing to solicitors, contacting the Immigration Minister and appealing to UNHCR – reflect a turn towards political advocacy. Framing her support in terms of the '*right to life, right to family life'* and the *'right to a future'* *(Chloe W3),* Chloe's engagement exemplifies how relational ties shifted into political action.

Unlike Chloe, Kirsty entered CS already politically engaged, driven by disillusionment with UK resettlement policy. As discussed in Chapter Five, she had participated in marches and viewed CS as another way to act in solidarity with refugees and a tangible way to increase refugee resettlement in the UK. However, her two-year involvement sharpened her critique. For her, the experience revealed the ideological contradictions underpinning CS – where the state welcomed 'deserving' refugees through managed routes while criminalising others:

> *Community sponsorship, is just feeding into this whole neo-liberal Government agenda…I have been watching the bill…I do feel uncomfortable being a part of…that distinction between the lovely vulnerable family who are allowed to come…then those poor people who have to pay a lot of money to come on a boat…I don't want to be a part of that system…I feel bad…it feels like I am depriving a family…but no, I have to stay true to myself and that's what I've decided…I am going to be really focusing my campaigning on getting the Government to stop with this bill. I feel really passionate about it (Kirsty W3).*

For Kirsty, supporting a family revealed the broader exclusions embedded in UK migration policy. Her political identity ultimately became incompatible with continued participation in CS, prompting her to withdraw and focus her efforts on opposing the Illegal Migration Bill.

Sarah, by contrast, tried to translate politicisation into group-level action by encouraging her CS group to support causes like the Windrush campaign. But she encountered resistance from members who perceived their involvement with CS as apolitical or felt that CS was already a significant contribution given their other responsibilities such as work and a family life. Their reluctance illustrates the limit of politicisation – while relational engagement can generate political awareness, it does not always translate into collective or sustained action (Monforte and Maestri, 2022).

Not all forms of political action took the form of overt advocacy. For other participants, long-term support for refugee families gave rise to quieter, relational forms of engagement (Fleischmann, 2020) – described as 'quiet politics' (Meier, 2023; Pottinger, 2017; Phillimore *et al.,* 2024) – everyday actions that resist dominant discourses without explicitly naming themselves as political (Askins, 2014a). Rooted in care and relationship-building, these subtle practices contested exclusionary norms and helped shift local narratives around refugees in more inclusive directions.

Mark, for instance, challenged anti-refugee attitudes within his church by drawing on shared religious values, reminding members of their commitment to compassion and their support for the homeless. Victoria, shaped by her own migration background, confronted friends who were *'vicious' (Victoria W3)* in their attitude towards Middle-Eastern refugees, challenging them by drawing direct comparisons with her own experience:

> *'I did the same thing they're doing…why are you responding differently to them than to me?' (Victoria W3).*

Kathleen focused on raising awareness about CS within schools, job centres, and healthcare settings – helping to humanise the families and educating others about the realities of

resettlement. Though participants did not frame their actions as political, they reflect a quiet, everyday advocacy that worked to reshape local perceptions and foster belonging. CS created what other scholars have called 'spaces of encounter' (Koca, 2019b; Cloke *et al.,* 2017) where refugee families and local people could interact. These sustained, interpersonal relationships fostered empathy, often transforming initial scepticism into solidarity. Chloe and Kathleen, for example, praised the job centre as *'absolutely brilliant' (Kathleen W3),* and *'really supportive' (Chloe W3).* Community responses also extended beyond institutions. Katy recalled how, following critical comments about a child from the sponsored family on a local Facebook group, the wider community rallied in support:

> *What was interesting was that there was a whole sort of community backwash saying, 'he is a refugee boy, don't criticise'…these people were defending him… basically there were enough people in the community who came out…supportive of them (Katy Z3).*

Evelyn shared the story of a local man, who, upon learning a family would be welcomed through CS, decided to refresh his Arabic skills so he could spend time with the family, taking them on leisure trips every weekend. After his unexpected death, his funeral raised £3,000 for the family from individuals previously unaware of CS. Evelyn reflected:

> *This guy…his family…pony club…hunting, Daily Telegraph…not your usual suspects…that just made me show my own prejudices…it's just interesting that people's reactions to it...people that I thought would be sympathetic are not…then other people, I'm very surprised at how sympathetic they are (Evelyn Z3).*

These examples illustrate how CS facilitated relational encounters that could quietly challenge assumptions -— both among participants and their wider networks – subtly

transforming local attitudes. Several participants shared stories where individuals who previously held hostile views toward refugees changed their opinion after forming relationships with the family. Kit described how Rahim joined a local voluntary gardening group where members initially held anti-refugee views, but through regular interaction, came to embrace him:

> *Once they got to know him, as an individual, they welcomed him with open arms…it started to kind of make them see differently…they have accepted him. Whereas their politics might have led them to be hostile…they realised what a horrible time he's experienced…he comes and wants to contribute to our society (Kit W3).*

Evelyn described a similar transformation when an elderly couple living opposite the family moved from being cautious, to welcoming the family, even inviting them to dry their clothes in their back garden, demonstrating a newfound sense of neighbourly hospitality. These examples suggest that 'quiet politics' – embedded in everyday actions, small acts of solidarity, and sustained relationships, can be just as meaningful as louder forms of protest. While not framed as political, these actions support long-term integration and challenge exclusionary discourses from within everyday spaces.

8.7: Summary

Chapter Seven set out to respond to the fourth research question:

4. Does the volunteering work undertaken by CS volunteers evolve over time, in relation to their exposure to the sponsored refugees?

Participants found the experience rewarding: fostering friendships, building community ties and learning about broader barriers faced by refugees. However, CS was also challenging. After two years, most refugees still required support and tensions emerged concerning the extent of such support. As with T2 participants, there were examples of intra-group and internal tension. Participants also experienced tension *with* refugees as some became frustrated when independence was not sufficiently achieved. Cultural differences and the need to balance support, whilst enforcing rules, added to tensions.

Over time many participants developed deep, affective relationships with sponsored families – describing themselves as friends or 'like family' - while others maintained more bounded roles citing tension or lack of a deeper connection. For some, this bond extended their involvement beyond the formal two-year period, while others sought a break from volunteering.

Importantly, these relationships led to a growing awareness of structural barriers faced by refugees in the UK. Drawing on Hamidi's (2023) idea of relational politicisation, this chapter highlighted how close, sustained relationships gave rise to a broader critique of HO policy and barriers affecting refugee independence. For some, this politicisation led to overt forms of political action, such as advocating for family reunion or reigniting activism efforts. For others, political action emerged more subtly through relational, everyday practices. Acts of care, education and community building, while not framed as political, nonetheless challenged exclusionary norms and reshaped local attitudes towards refugees. Chapter Eight examined the multifaceted impact of CS on volunteers, showcasing evolving relationships, different tensions, plus a subtle but significant shift towards supporting refugees politically.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION

9.1 Introduction

This penultimate chapter explores the connection between my findings and existing scholarship on sponsorship and host/refugee relations, with a focus on temporality.

Chapter Five presented findings from across the entire cohort of participants. Chapters Six to Eight presented findings from three distinct timepoints in the CS process: T1, where volunteers prepared to welcome a family (Chapter Six), T2, where volunteers supported a newly arrived family (Chapter Seven), and T3, after the formal resettlement period ended (Chapter Eight).

Previous research has primarily examined sponsor experiences at specific stages, such as during the resettlement period (Derksen and Teixeira, 2023; Haugen, 2019; Haugen, 2023; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018) or after the formal end of sponsor support (Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Lenard, 2019; Ali *et al.,* 2022; Neelin, 2020). Some studies have looked at two stages, typically during and after resettlement support (Blain *et al.,* 2020; Hutchinson, 2018; Hyndman *et al.,* 2021; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023)[144]. However, there is limited research on the full sponsorship process. To date, only one UK study has explored the entire process (Phillmore *et al.,* 2020; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b). Reyes-Soto (2023) identifies two phases: before and during a family's arrival. My study adds a third phase - after the end of formal resettlement support – contributing to existing scholarship by examining the whole CS process from the volunteers' perspective.

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[144] Several studies do not specify the stage of sponsorship they focus on, instead involving sponsors engaged during certain dates without clarifying the exact point in the sponsorship process (Elcioglu, 2023; Emine Fidan and Tahseen, 2023; Good Gingrich and Enns, 2019).

Initially, I intended to use a traditional longitudinal design, following the same group of CS volunteers throughout the CS process. However, COVID-19 disruption led me to adapt my methodology, resulting in a recurrent cross-sectional longitudinal design with different participants at each timepoint.

This chapter is structured around four research objectives (ROs). Section 9.2 examines how my findings align with existing knowledge on volunteering within a CS group (RO1). ROs Two and Three explore perceptions of power among CS volunteers. First, I consider how volunteers perceive their roles before the families' arrival (RO2). Then, I explore how this power dynamic evolves during the resettlement support period as refugees settle into their new community (RO3). Section 9.5 focuses on the final stage of the CS process, after the formal two-year resettlement period. Here, I explore whether participation in CS influences volunteers' broader political engagement. Finally, section 9.6 summarises the key points of the discussion.

9.2: Research Objective One: Volunteering with a CS group

> *To assess the state of knowledge around volunteering with a CS group*

Research on sponsorship outside of Canada is expanding. This section draws on data from Chapter Five, which includes findings from the full cohort of 30 volunteers.

9.2.1: CS volunteer profiles

Thirty participants from 20 groups across England and Wales took part, with almost equal representation from each timepoint[145].

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[145] Ten participants were preparing to welcome a sponsored family (T1), nine participants were from groups whose family arrived in the last two years (T2) and eleven participants were from groups whose sponsored family had arrived more than two years ago (T3), after the formal end of resettlement support.

My findings align with existing studies, which consistently show a higher proportion of female than male volunteers. Like research from Canada (Macklin *et al.,* 2018) and the UK (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021), 60% of participants were women, reinforcing the idea of 'gendered volunteerism' (Hyndman, 2019, p7). However, it is important to note that my sample was not representative, so these observations are limited to my study. Interestingly, the gender disparity in my findings was less pronounced compared to other UK studies, where 75% of volunteers were women (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). This difference likely stems from a higher participation of men in my study rather than indicating a broader demographic shift[146].

Previous studies have shown that most volunteers are over 50 (Macklin *et al.,* 2018, Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), a trend my findings support, with 57% of participants over 50[147]. However, recent evidence suggests that sponsor profiles might be diversifying. A 2021 UK study (Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021) reported a more balanced age distribution and a more equal split between retired and working volunteers compared to the 2020 evaluation (Phillimore *et al*., 2020). My findings reflect this trend, showing greater age diversity: 43% of participants were under 50, with almost equal representation across younger age groups (17% aged 40-50, 13% aged 30-40, and 13% under 30[148]). This contrasts with previous studies, which reported higher percentages of older volunteers, such as 74% in a Canadian study (Macklin *et al.,* 2018) and a predominance of white British women over 50 in UK groups (Phillimore *et al*., 2020). While my findings suggest a broader

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[146] Despite the high number of female volunteers involved in sponsorship, several studies have stressed the need for more male volunteers to get involved with sponsorship to provide more support for male refugees (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020; Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021; Haugen, 2019; D'Avino, 2022).

[147] In my study, the largest group of participants were aged between 50-65 (nine participants), with the second largest group over the age of 65 (eight participants) totalling 17 participants aged over 50.

[148] 13 participants were under the age of 50, 5 participants were aged between 40-50, 4 participants were aged between 30-40 and 4 were under the age of 30.

range of ages among CS volunteers, my sample was not representative, limiting the generalisability of these observations.

In Chapter Two, Section 2.1.4, I highlighted disparities in the employment profiles of sponsors in Canada and the UK. In the UK, more sponsors were retired or semi-retired (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020) compared to Canada (Macklin *et al.,* 2018). Initially, 75% of UK volunteers were retired or semi-retired[149] (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), but a later study showed a more balanced 50/50 split between retired and working volunteers (Reset Communities for Refugees, 2021). I found that most volunteers were employed full time (50%), with retired volunteers forming a smaller group (40%)[150]. However, this could be influenced by the non-representative nature of my sample and the snowball sampling method, which may have attracted more working-age participants.

Previous studies have shown that volunteers and sponsors are predominantly white (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2018). In the UK, 97% of volunteers identified as white British[151], (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), while 88% of Canadian sponsors had European heritage (Macklin *et al.,* 2018). My findings are consistent, with 70% of participants identifying as White British. Although 30% of participants identified as Asian British, Black British and White Other[152], I cannot claim this as a deviation from existing research due to the non-representative sample.

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[149] The formative evaluation of UK CS found that out of 145 volunteers involved in the study, a total of 109 were either retired or semi-retired (58 in phase 1, 51 in phase 2).

[150] The remaining three volunteers were full time students (2 participants), and one volunteer was on temporary furlough from a part time job. Furlough was a UK scheme devised by the Government during the COVID-19 pandemic in which workers were temporarily not working (because their job was not needed), but they were paid a percentage of their salary by their employer, funded by the UK Government.

[151] The formative evaluation of CS in the UK found that out of the 145 volunteers involved in the study, a total of 141 were white British – 97% of participants.

[152] 10% of participants in my study identified as Asian British, 10% as Black British, and 10% as white other (three participants from each ethnic background).

Prior research often identifies a *'prototypical'* volunteer profile (Reyes-Soto, 2023, p1943) – mainly white, retired women over 50 (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Elcioglu, 2023; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023). This profile is also common[153] in studies on volunteers supporting refugees (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a; Monforte and Maestri, 2022b), through befriending (Stock, 2019), mentoring (Raithelhuber, 2021) or hosting schemes (Bassoli and Luccioni, 2023). My findings confirm the prevalence of this prototypical profile.

9.2.2: Motivations

Motivations for engaging in sponsorship (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b; Reyes-Soto, 2023) and volunteering with refugees (Meijeren *et al.,* 2023) have been widely studied, covering both first-time (Macklin *et al.,* 2018; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020) and long-term sponsors (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021). Research indicates sponsor motivations are diverse and often multiple (Blain *et al.,* 2020; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). Similarly, I identified a wide range of motivations, with many volunteers driven by multiple reasons. Consistent with other studies, motivations were both 'altruistic and egotistic' (Reyes-Soto, 2023, p1939). Volunteers were drawn by an emotional pull to alleviate suffering (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023) and as an expression of their faith (Derksen and Teixeira, 2023). Other motivations included influence from social networks (Reyes-Soto, 2023), personal or family migration histories (Gingrich and Enns, 2019), and the desire to use specific skills or to address personal problems like grief (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Malkki, 2015; Sandri, 2018).

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[153] I write the 'majority' and not 'all' previous studies which explore host/guest relations because I found one study which did involve a more diverse range of volunteers (Askins, 2015). The study, which explored a refugee befriending programme, identified a more diverse range of volunteers involving different ages, socio-economic positions and life experiences, including former refugees themselves.

Similar to studies that highlighted positive experiences of 'doing community through CS' (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b, p7), and the ability to provide 'direct contact and personalized support' (Reyes-Soto, 2023, p1947), I found tangibility to be a significant motivator (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a). Participants valued seeing the direct impact of their efforts, which made their involvement feel like a concrete expression of their desire to help and to address problems faced by refugees at a local level. This commitment to tangible outcomes aligns with Meijeren *et al.*'s (2023) argument that one motivation specific to volunteering with refugees is the ability to engage in practical actions that feel truly helpful. Several participants contrasted CS with other forms of assistance, such as volunteering in a refugee centre where clients may not return, or participating in broader advocacy campaigns, which they perceived as less impactful.

Faith was also a primary motivator, consistent with studies from the UK (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Reyes-Soto, 2023), Canada (Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Bramadat, 2014, Chapman, 2014; Morris *et al.,* 2022; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023) and Europe (Agatiello, 2022; Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Aligning with a UK study that found half of CS volunteers were connected to faith organisations[154] (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020), I found 14 of the 30 participants came from faith-based groups. CS was seen as a tangible way to translate humanitarian values into action, echoing observations from other studies (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023). Furthermore, affect was a significant motivator for participants, consistent with other studies (Sandri, 2018). Media coverage of the 'so-called refugee crisis' – particularly the poignant image of Alan Kurdi - evoked strong emotional responses (Reyes-Soto, 2022; Phillimore *et al*., 2022b; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Monforte *et al.,* 2021). Korteweg and colleagues (2023) note that 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin, 2012, p2) was a key motivator for Canadian sponsors of Syrian refugees post-2015. Both emotional reasons and media

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[154] In the 2020 formative evaluation of UK CS, 11 groups identified as secular, and 11 groups identified as non-secular.

exposure were identified as specific motivations for volunteering with refugees (Meijeren *et al.*, 2023)[155]. Participants were moved by media images of refugee suffering, prompting their involvement. During my fieldwork in 2021, the crisis in Afghanistan similarly spurred an increase in support, echoing the increase in donations and volunteers during the 'so-called refugee crisis' (Olesen, 2018). The varied motivations for participating in CS align with broader scholarship on volunteering, confirming five of the six functions outlined in the Volunteer Functions Inventory – values, understanding, social, protective and enhancement (Clary *et al.*, 1998). The sixth function, 'career', was not evidenced, which aligns with studies involving older volunteers (Meijeren *et al.*, 2023).

However, my findings diverge from existing sponsorship research in two key areas: the relationship between affect and social justice, and political motivation. I identified both social justice and politics as motivators. Several participants felt compelled to share their UK-born privilege with those less fortunate, promoting a shared vision of humanity. Others viewed their involvement in CS as a political stance against the UK Government's hostility towards refugees and asylum-seekers. The UK has increasingly adopted hostile policies towards asylum-seekers including punitive border controls and restrictions on working (Mayblin and James, 2019), learning English (Bouttell and Livingston, 2024), and accessing healthcare (Phillimore and Cheung, 2021). State control has expanded beyond traditional border spaces, such as asylum interviews, to 'everyday bordering' (Yuval-Davis, 2018, p228), pushing migrants into poverty – a form of 'slow violence' (Mayblin *et al.*, 2020, p107).

Critical humanitarianism scholars (Ticktin, 2011; Malkki, 1996; Fassin, 2012) argue that compassionate 'care' can inadvertently undermine rights. Fassin (2012, p2) suggests that 'humanitarian reason' can transform refugees into passive victims because it mobilises

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[155] In addition to 'emotional reasons' and 'media exposure', the other two motivations specific to volunteering with refugees are 'to see a meaningful role in life' and 'pragmatism' (Meijeren *et a.,* 2023).

'compassion rather than justice' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3959). While care aims to relieve suffering, it can also perpetuate inequalities and depoliticise refugee support (Ticktin, 2011). In a Canadian study on sponsors of Syrian refugees post-2015, Korteweg *et al.* (2023) applied the concept of 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin, 2012, p2) to examine how sponsorship evolves after the initial desire to 'rescue' fades. They found that while humanitarian reason was a primary motivator, it sometimes perpetuated the negative aspects of 'care' (Ticktin, 2011; Malkki, 1996; Fassin, 2012) reinforcing hierarchies. They note:

> 'Despite the premise of equality that underwrites the equal valorisation of all lives embedded in humanitarian reason, the relationship of humanitarian actor to recipient is indelibly marked by hierarchy' (Korteweg *et al*., 2023, p3959).

In sponsorship scholarship, affect, and the emotional desire to 'rescue' suffering refugees are primary motivations, with less focus on the realisation of rights. However, my findings differ from existing scholarship in several ways. First, the identification of social justice as a motivation is uncommon in the sponsorship literature. Additionally, my findings diverge from criticisms of critical humanitarianism scholars (Ticktin, 2011; Malkki, 1996; Fassin, 2012) and studies on sponsorship (Korteweg *et al*., 2023), which argue that care, through resettlement support, undermines the realisation of rights due to a prevailing humanitarian impulse. While my study confirmed that affect and the emotional drive to alleviate suffering are significant motivators, consistent with other studies (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Tissot *et al.,* 2024), I also identified social justice as a motivation. This supports Jiranek's (2013) argument that social justice should be incorporated into the Volunteer Functions Inventory. Some participants were motivated by a desire to promote social justice, even before their families arrived, focusing on helping refugees claim their rights, rather than 'saving' them. Identifying the presence of social justice as a motivation to

participate in CS, my findings show that some participants moved beyond charity, concentrating on rights realisation from the start of the sponsorship process.

A second point concerns political motivation. Research shows some volunteers engage in 'hospitality' towards refugees to criticise inadequate government support for refugees (Sandri, 2018; Fleischmann, 2020). During the 'so-called refugee crisis' many volunteers were motivated by the hostile treatment of refugees and the inaction of European states (Clayton, 2020). This form of 'volunteer humanitarianism' (Sandri, 2018, p65), was a key aspect of the refugee solidarity movement at that time. CS was introduced in 2016, partly due to civil society and faith groups pressuring the UK Government to act (D'Avino, 2022b; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Van Selm, 2020a). Despite campaigning to introduce CS, studies (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Phillimore and Reyes-Soto, 2019; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b) generally do not find political criticism of the Government as a key motivation for joining CS groups. While broader research on refugee volunteering highlights political motivation (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a; Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a), sponsorship often involves more humanitarian than political motivations.

My findings differ. Several participants were motivated by frustration with the UK's hostile environment towards refugees. They viewed their involvement in CS as a way to oppose the Government's anti-refugee stance and offer an alternative narrative of welcome. They saw CS as an opportunity to demonstrate public support for refugees, despite it being a public-private partnership. Unlike other studies which found political motivation less prominent among new volunteers (Meijeren *et al.,* 2023) and that political motivation develops over time (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023), I found that several volunteers displayed political motivation from the start of their engagement. This aligns sponsorship literature with broader literature on volunteering with refugees where private hospitality (in this case, sponsorship) is enacted as

a form of resistance to the 'exclusionary politics enacted by European governments' (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p4).

The key difference is that 'unlike actors who resist or critique the state from the outside…sponsors may embrace, challenge or subvert humanitarian reason with varying degrees of reflexivity about their own role within it' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3972). CS operates as a public-private partnership alongside the state (Ambrosini and Schnyder von Wartensee, 2022), unlike other humanitarian actions that function outside state frameworks, such as 'volunteer' (Sandri, 2018, p65), 'solidarity' (Rozakou, 2017, p99) or 'subversive humanitarianism' (Vandevoordt, 2019, p245). Despite this, some participants viewed CS as a form of opposition to the UK Government's hostile environment, using CS as a practical state 'loophole' to extend private hospitality. This finding aligns with two Canadian studies (Macklin, 2020; Korteweg *et al.*, 2023), which show that sponsors can both oppose and collaborate with the state. Macklin (2020) noted that church congregations involved in sanctuary and resettlement demonstrated both opposition and collaboration with the Canadian state. She stressed: 'there is more collaboration [with the state] in sanctuary and more opposition [to the state] in sponsorship than one might suppose' Macklin (2020, p43). My research builds on this by finding that some CS volunteers, while acknowledging the hostile environment, chose to work within state limits, viewing CS as a way to support refugees while engaging in 'tactics' (Macklin 2021, p43). They saw CS as an effective way to support refugees, engaging with the 'politics of hospitality' shaped by their understanding of justice and humanitarianism within the existing legal framework (Macklin 2021, p43).

9.3: Research Objective Two: Initial perception of the volunteer role

ROs Two and Three explore the dynamics of hospitality and power in sponsorship, focusing on how volunteers navigate these aspects while supporting refugees. They address a gap in previous research, which often treats the initial impulse to help as static, without acknowledging the potential for shifts in attitudes and actions during the resettlement period (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). While I focus on CS, the discussion connects with broader scholarship on refugee support, wherein the responsibility of resettlement shifts from the state to private actors. This practice has increased since the 'so-called refugee crisis' (Mayblin and James, 2019).

In Chapter Two, I identified a research gap around how sponsors perceive their role and form expectations before refugees arrive. Hence, RO2 sought to understand how sponsors initially perceived their role, before later analysing whether the volunteers' initial perception changed and whether there was potential for the power dynamic to shift during the two-year period of resettlement support (RO3). Findings regarding the preparation to welcome a sponsored family were categorised into two distinct time phases: preparations and expectations (Saldana, 2003).

9.3.1: Preparations

My findings align with aspects of preparing for sponsorship discussed in the literature review. Participants reported challenges in obtaining approval from their local authorities (LA) to apply to the HO. The 'administrative burden' of applying for sponsorship (Sabchev and Hennessey, 2024, p1) involved sometimes long waiting times and a cumbersome application

process. A small number of participants believed their LAs obstructed CS applications because of racist attitudes. Conversely, fundraising was generally straightforward, particularly for those in affluent areas. Most participants described themselves as 'middle class', saying the local area had a 'rich list', or, implicitly, through discussions around their education and professional experiences, houses and lifestyles. Only one volunteer described himself as 'working class', but his group easily raised funds through their church. Finding suitable and affordable housing was a common concern for all groups, consistent with studies from Canada (Van Buren, 2021; Elcioglu, 2023) and Europe (Zanzuchi *et al*., 2023; Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Share Network, 2023b; Share Network, 2023c; Tissot *et al.,* 2024).

One important aspect of my findings is the role of local people from the wider community in preparing for a refugee family's arrival, which I term 'collective preparation'. CS groups involved their social networks to secure housing and raise funds. Support extended beyond the CS group volunteers to leverage assistance from local people. Existing scholarship highlights similar community involvement. In Italy, local communities help prepare houses for refugees (Share Network, 2023f) and in Germany, sponsors leveraged their networks, including church institutions, to find housing (Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Canadian research on 'echo-effect' sponsorship (Chapman, 2014, p9), shows that previously sponsored refugees often sponsor their own kin (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021), creating a 'community practice' (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021, p5). Although CS does not permit sponsorship of named refugees, my findings suggest a 'community practice' in CS. Identifying 'collective preparation' illustrates how CS can engage broader communities, fostering new social networks and collaborative efforts to support refugees (Share Network, 2023c). Where CS is 'performed' by local people outside CS groups, it can lead to community being 'created' (Hyndman *et al.,* 2021, p5).

Moreover, 'collective preparation' helped counter negative attitudes towards refugees (Share Network, 2023c). I found participants acted as 'trusted messengers' (Bond, 2021), creating positive narratives about refugees and engaging in challenging conversations to address misconceptions. My findings align with existing research indicating that sponsor engagement with local people can positively influence public attitudes towards refugees (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; D'Avino, 2022a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Bradley and Duin, 2020; Bond, 2021), especially in less-diverse areas (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020). Sponsors, well-connected in their communities, share their positive experiences with sponsored refugees (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019; Hutchinson, 2018). The contact hypothesis suggests that the large number of sponsors in Canada helps to reduce negative attitudes (Lenard, 2020). Additionally, sponsors sometimes collaborate with local schools to support refugee children's education (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020), challenging stereotypical attitudes towards refugees (Share Network, 2023c).

9.3.2: Expectations

Using a hospitality framework, I identified two main approaches among T1 participants: 'a paternalistic approach' and 'a partnership approach'[156]. Six volunteers adopted a paternalistic approach and viewed their role as part of a two-year project aimed at making the sponsored family self-sufficient. They did not acknowledge nor address the inherent power imbalance between themselves and the refugees. Paternalistic hosts saw the refugees as 'guests' in need of rescue, reflecting an orientalist view (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018) which ignored the refugees' pre-conflict identities and skills (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a). They also imposed conditions on their support, expecting that refugees would quickly gain employment, learn to

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[156] Though I categorise volunteers to make clear the differences between the two approaches to the role, there existed some examples where volunteers did not fit into the exact description of each category.

drive, and engage socially. A key feature of a paternalistic approach was the limited recognition of refugee agency and autonomy in decision-making.

Power differentials are central to sponsorship (Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Agrawal, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021; Neelin, 2020; Kamran, 2023; Gingrich and Enns, 2019) and paternalism is inherent in sponsorship policies (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). In Canada, the 'naming principle' within the PSR programme amplifies sponsor power by allowing sponsors to select whom they resettle (Neelin, 2020), raising ethical concerns (Elcioglu, 2023; Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Hutchinson, 2018; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023). Even well-intentioned sponsorships can establish unequal power dynamics (Haugen, 2023; Macklin *et al*., 2020a). While sponsors may practice 'feminist hospitality' (Reyes-Soto, 2023, p1950), caring for refugees can reinforce existing hierarchies.

Paternalistic approaches to sponsorship can infantilise refugees (Haugen *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021), hindering their ability to engage with the host community as equals (Lim, 2019). Sponsors' attempts to control job choices (Ali *et al.,* 2022; Share Network, 2023c) or arrange social connections can create uncomfortable situations for refugees (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020). The depiction of refugees as passive victims and sponsors as saviours - found in my study - echoes previous critique that paternalism within sponsorship reinforces orientalist perspectives and exacerbates power imbalances (Hyndman, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019c). Viewing refugees as victims homogenises their experiences (Steimel, 2017) and denies their political agency (Ilcan and Connoy, 2021). Paternalism within sponsorship has been criticised (Lim, 2019; Lenard, 2016; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), with scholars noting that power imbalances are intrinsic to such programmes (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a). My findings align with this perspective, showing that most T1 participants adopted a paternalistic approach. However, unlike most

research, which focuses on post-arrival interactions (Haugen *et al*., 2020), my findings reveal these asymmetric power dynamics are evident even before refugees arrive. In addition to existing volunteer training, there is a need for more detailed information about refugees' lives before resettlement and a better understanding of their diverse backgrounds and how to navigate power dynamics in a more equitable way.

My findings uncovered a second perspective on volunteer expectations. Four participants adopted a 'partnership' approach, perceiving CS as a collaborative effort to be undertaken with sponsored refugees. They wanted to support refugees to make their own choices and made space within resettlement planning for families to make their own decisions post-arrival. These participants recognised the inherent power imbalance and realised that refugees might not always feel able to say 'no' to their suggestions. A partnership approach prioritised assisting refugees to access their rights and pursue their own goals, rather than offering charity. Participants acknowledged that refugees might have their own aspirations and aimed to support them. While some paternalistic volunteers aimed to introduce families to other refugees, partnership volunteers understood that socialising choices were the family's prerogative. They wanted to wait for the family to arrive before making decisions.

Although 'partnership' volunteers were in the minority, evidence of a more mutualistic approach before the arrival of sponsored refugees highlights a promising shift towards more equitable sponsor/refugee relations. This finding aligns with scholarship that challenges the passive 'refugee' label (Kyriakides *et al*., 2018; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a; Iqbal *et al.,* 2021; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2020b) and recognises refugees as individuals (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018), focusing on empowerment rather than direction (Sinatti, 2019). This finding develops the discussion around diverse sponsor roles, identifying a more nuanced understanding of the role of CS volunteer as 'host'. I expand upon a previous study which categorised sponsor approaches into 'paternalistic', 'passive

paternalistic' and 'mutualistic sponsors' based on post-sponsorship interactions (Haugen *et al*., 2020, p560). Paternalistic sponsors asserted authority, while passive paternalistic sponsors withdrew support if advice wasn't followed. In contrast, mutualistic sponsors treated refugees as equals, engaging in dialogue and respecting their agency. My findings expand previous understandings of diverse sponsor roles (Haugen *et al.,* 2020) by highlighting the existence of sponsor expectations before refugees arrived, an area previously underexplored.

The difference between participants who embraced a paternalistic approach and those who leaned towards a partnership approach largely stems from their prior volunteering experiences (see Chapter Five, Section 5.2). Most of the volunteers (four out of six) who adopted a paternalistic approach lacked previous experience with refugees which likely inclined them towards a paternalistic view, possibly reinforced by stereotypes. Although two had some prior experience, their negative encounters led them to seek roles with clearer boundaries.

My findings connect with limited scholarship on pre-arrival contact between sponsors and refugees. Where possible, establishing such contact can foster trust and dispel stereotypes (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b). In the Belgian CS programme, refugees explained that pre-arrival video calls helped build trust and made the experience feel 'real' for volunteers (Share Network, 2023d, p20). Similarly, in Italy, pre-departure phone calls in the Humanitarian Corridors programme were essential for fostering 'mutual knowledge' between refugees and hosts (Share Network, 2023f, p15). Despite benefits (Martani, 2021), pre-arrival contact remains relatively uncommon. Even where it is part of sponsorship policy, sponsors sometimes struggle to access it, leading to 'blind' decision making without refugee input (Tito and Cochand, 2017, p61). Although pre-arrival contact is not a feature of CS, the four volunteers who aligned with a partnership approach had prior experience volunteering or

advocating for refugees. Their background likely made them more attuned to a partnership approach. Their previous involvement and understanding of broader problems faced by refugees helped them to see refugees as individuals with agency.

9.3.3: Intra-group tension between volunteers

Differences in volunteer expectations, particularly regarding whether they aligned with a paternalistic or partnership approach, sometimes led to intra-group tension. Tensions were especially reported by volunteers who favoured a partnership approach, feeling that other volunteers overlooked the potential wants and needs of the refugees when planning for their arrival. This finding contributes to the limited research on intra-group tension among sponsors (Macklin *et al*., 2020b; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). While tension between sponsors and refugees has received more attention, understanding how volunteers experience sponsorship – including any barriers to their participation – is crucial. This is especially important to UK CS (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b), and other European schemes, where sponsorship has not resettled as many refugees as initially expected.

Several Canadian studies have shown that disagreements among sponsors often arise at the outset of sponsorship, before the families arrive (Neelin, 2020; Haugen, 2023). These tensions centre on the choice of 'who' should be resettled, such as whether to sponsor a Christian or Muslim family (Haugen, 2023), a family versus single refugees (Van Buren, 2021), or whether Syrian refugees were most deserving (Neelin, 2020). However, these specific tensions did not apply to my study, since CS operates as a 'sponsor a stranger' programme. Instead, I found that tensions before refugees' arrival were more about roles and expectations. My study contributes to scholarship by showing that in 'sponsor a stranger' models, early-stage tensions among volunteers often stem from their differing experiences (or lack thereof), with refugees, which shape their expectations of their CS roles.

9.4: Research Objective Three: Negotiating the power dynamic

> *To understand the ways in which volunteers' perception of their role might change over time as the sponsored refugees potentially become more integrated into their local community and there is potential for the power dynamic to change*

The third research objective builds on the second by using data from participants who had been providing resettlement support to families that arrived in the past two years (T2). I considered whether volunteers' initial perception of their role - paternalistic or partnership – shifted after the refugees' arrival. Additionally, I explored whether the power dynamic between sponsors and refugees evolved as they navigated the resettlement process together.

9.4.1: Towards a broader understanding of power and hospitality

Scholarship on host/guest relations often acknowledges asymmetric power dynamics, but rarely defines power in the context of volunteering with refugees. Most studies discuss power in an abstract sense (Ali *et al.,* 2022; Derksen and Teixeira, 2023), with only one study on sponsorship providing a specific definition (Lim, 2019). Typically, power is viewed as something volunteers hold over refugees – a negative and simplistic perspective. In Chapter Two, I challenged this narrow view, arguing that power is not only negative but can be understood in different forms. In Chapter Three, I advocated for a broader understanding of power, recognising the various ways sponsors and refugees can exert and negotiate power. Drawing on Allen's broad interpretation of power as 'the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act' (Allen, 1998, p36). I incorporated the four expressions of power: 'power over', 'power within', 'power to', and 'power with' (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002), along with

'transformative power' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021). This framework allowed me to explore different forms of power and how they are negotiated between sponsors and refugees.

Combining this understanding of power with a hospitality lens, I examined how hospitality might challenge asymmetric power relations over time. By focusing on power dynamics beyond the initial arrival and throughout the two-year resettlement process, I adopted Bulley's view of hospitality as 'spatial relational practice with affective dimensions' (Bulley, 2016, p7). This perspective extends beyond Derrida's emphasis on the moment of arrival (Derrida, 2001), allowing for a deeper analysis of how ethics and power coexist in shared spaces (Bulley, 2016). I also drew upon Dikeç and colleagues (2009) to view sponsorship as a form of private hospitality not solely controlled by the host (in this case, CS volunteers). Inspired by recent Canadian research (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023), I explored how negotiations within host/guest relationships unfold beyond the initial point of arrival. My focus was on how volunteers engaged in 'shaping' the lives of sponsored refugees, beyond the initial humanitarian impulse to save lives.

9.4.2: Complex and changing power dynamics

Consistent with existing research (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020; Macklin *et al.,* 2020b; Tissot *et al.,* 2024), the arrival of families was celebrated by participants. However, providing support was messy (Macklin *et al.,* 2020a) with COVID-19 adding complexity (Share Network, 2023c). Many participants adapted their support by using digital tools for support and, in some rarer cases, 'bubbling' with families, aligning with previous findings (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2021). After the initial arrival, CS volunteers approached their roles in varied ways, highlighting the intricate power dynamics in host-guest relationships (Fleischmann, 2020; Rozakou, 2012) and the negotiations inherent in hospitality (Bulley, 2016; Rozakou, 2016). Using the Expressions of Power Framework (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002), alongside

Transformative Power (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021). I found that unlike T1 participants who indicated a particular 'power stance' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021, p542), aligning with either a paternalistic or partnership approach, T2 participants exhibited diverse approaches to power dynamics throughout the resettlement period.

In some cases, participants reinforced boundaries between host and guest. Some exhibited a dominant 'power over' approach, especially concerning employment. Participants sometimes expected refugees to conform to the role of 'worthy guest […] who complied with the rules of hospitality' (Rozakou, 2012, p563) by adhering to sponsor advice. Participants occasionally asserted authority in ways which were detrimental to the families, pressuring them to accept jobs which conflicted with their religious beliefs and reprimanding them for questioning these decisions. This approach reduced refugees' choice, positioning them as receivers of 'humanitarian generosity' with 'limited agency' (Rozakou, 2012, p563). In some cases, volunteers made decisions on behalf of the families, interpreting this as a form of 'care'. For instance, donated funds were allocated by volunteers for specific items of personal clothing as a 'treat', without consulting individual family members about their preferences. This 'power over' approach reflects the 'dark side' to refugee support (Fleischmann, 2020, p21), where 'mainly Western educated women of the middle class…exercise forms of paternalism…assuming an educational and emancipatory mandate…revealing a background of colonial stereotypes' (Ambrosini, 2022, p5). Building on Ticktin's work, Fleischman argues such practices can be 'antipolitical', aggravating 'conditions of exclusion and discrimination in contemporary migration societies' (Fleischmann, 2020, p21). The 'power over' approach aligns with the 'paternalistic' ideal type described by Haugen and colleagues (2020), where sponsors prioritise their own choices in the belief that they know best. My findings support the presence of a paternalistic sponsor orientation in resettlement support but differ from Haugen and colleagues' (2020, p560)

identification of a 'passive paternalistic' sponsor type, which involves withdrawing support if they felt unappreciated. I did not observe any instances of sponsors withdrawing support.

While power imbalances are inherent in refugee support, they do not always have negative outcomes. Although power imbalances can reinforce hierarchies between volunteers and refugees, they also offer opportunities for positive impact. Distinguishing between 'power over', which implies domination, and 'transformative power' (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021) allowed for a nuanced exploration of how power can be used constructively within CS. Volunteers, leveraging their resources and networks, can support refugees in achieving their own goals and empowering them (Fleischmann, 2020). Power asymmetry, where some hold power while others do not, is inevitable (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021; Chambers, 2023). Within sponsorship and other refugee support efforts, power imbalance is inherent due to differences in resources between helpers and those who are helped (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b). Such imbalances can be negative when they lead to domination, when volunteers make unilateral decisions or restrict refugees' choices. However, power imbalances are not inherently negative. Rather, they only become problematic when used to dominate (Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021; Chambers, 2023). 'Power over', can be transformative if wielded to empower others. In Chapter Seven, I found that participants used 'transformative power' when they recognised the power imbalance. Overall, CS volunteers used their networks, finances, social confidence and local knowledge in ways which empowered, rather than dominated refugees. They used their transformative power to create job opportunities, advocate for families, secure additional funding, and connect refugees with further support, such as additional resources or holidays. Several T2 participants worked to provide equitable support to all local refugees, regardless of whether they were resettled through CS or local authority resettlement programmes.

The third form of power identified in CS volunteer roles was 'power with'. This approach involved sponsors partnering with families as mutual partners, like the 'mutualistic' approach characterised by 'treating newcomers as equals' (Haugen *et al.,* 2020, p569). My findings support and extend this idea by showing that volunteers who embraced a mutualistic approach exercised their power through 'power with'. Participants valued the hospitality extended to them by refugees – sharing food and social events and acknowledging this as a demonstration of the family's agency as hosts (Rottmann and Nimer, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2017). Some volunteers considered themselves as guests, sharing food with refugees and perceiving their contributions as 'reciprocated gifts of guests' (Rozakou, 2012, p563). Others rejected the 'bureaucratic definition' of the 'refugees' (Rozakou, 2012, p571), specifying that they considered them a 'normal' family. Unlike T1, where most volunteers adopted a paternalistic 'power over' approach, in T2, a 'power with' approach emerged as the principal way in which CS volunteers engaged with their role, more akin to the partnership approach identified in T1, recognising families as active partners in the resettlement process. Participants acknowledged the need to reflect on their actions and recognised points where they may have made mistakes. Some volunteers accepted feedback from refugees they had previously sponsored and adjusted their support to enhance the process for future families. Additionally, some volunteers involved previously sponsored families in preparing for new families, indicating a collaborative effort with reciprocal benefits for both sponsors and refugees. In these situations, previously sponsored refugees became 'host-guests' (Gardner *et al.,* 2022, p627), or 'hybrid hosts' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016, p26) as they negotiated the initial role of guest, to welcome other refugees as host. Furthermore, as participants got to know the families they sponsored, the families were 'no longer anonymous or generic' (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3965), and often developed close relationships with them (Tissot *et al.,* 2024). Volunteers recognised and valued the 'pre-conflict status eligibilities' of refugees (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019a, p13), acknowledging their skills and experiences rather than viewing them as passive victims (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018). They also respected the privacy of

families and were mindful of the trauma and challenges refugees had faced prior to arriving in the UK, including the ongoing emotional effects of family separation.

Participants enacted power in three ways – 'power over', 'transformative power' and 'power with'. In Chapter Seven, I also identified instances where volunteers recognised refugee agency, specifically, 'power within' and 'power to'. These insights enhance scholarship on refugee agency within sponsorship programmes. Some participants observed that refugees were beginning to support themselves, demonstrating 'power within' through confidence and drive, and 'power to' by acting independently. Some refugees secured jobs on their own and made their own social connections. However, barriers to 'power to' were also identified including challenges with employment, language barriers, and the insufficient two-year resettlement period.

9.4.3: Sponsorship as a site of continual negotiation

My findings, which identify the diverse ways participants supported refugees, both align with and extend existing scholarship on how CS volunteers enact their roles and the potential for reflexivity among volunteers (Peterie, 2019). Kyriakides and colleagues (2018) acknowledged the capacity for sponsors to engage with their role in different ways, emphasising that just as refugees should not be homogenised by their status, 'neither is it valid to deny the capacity for relationally autonomous thought and action on the part of sponsors' (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018, p71). Other scholars have suggested that sponsorship can create spaces where both sponsors and refugees assume shifting roles of host and guest, fostering a reciprocal relationship (Hutchinson, 2018). In a later study, Macklin and colleagues (2020, p194) introduced the concept of 'structural parentalism', acknowledging the inherent power asymmetries in sponsorship relationships while also recognising that these relationships are not solely defined by simplistic power hierarchies. Sponsor roles are

not necessarily about controlling refugees' choices, but rather involve a complex balance of both guidance and respect for autonomy (Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Haugen, 2023).

My findings align with two of Haugen and colleagues (2020) sponsor orientations: 'power over' (paternalistic) and 'power with' (mutualistic). However, by utilising the Expressions of Power framework and Transformative Power, I identified even greater nuance in how CS volunteers enact their roles compared to previous studies (Haugen *et al.,* 2020). Specifically, I found evidence of volunteers employing all five expressions of power, revealing a wide spectrum of approaches (which also changed across the CS process). This finding is important because it underscores that volunteers are not a homogenous group – they differ greatly in their motivations, actions and approaches to supporting refugees. Often, participants were new to supporting refugees and had little knowledge of refugee resettlement prior to their involvement in CS. This variability is crucial for policymakers to consider when shaping sponsorship programmes. A one-size-fits-all-model would fail to capture the diverse motivations and capacities of volunteers, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of such programmes. Recognising and accommodating these differences is key to creating more adaptive and successful sponsorship efforts.

Research on volunteering with refugees (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024; Stock, 2019) suggests that initiatives like buddy schemes could foster 'more dignified, empowering or political humanitarianism' (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1502). My findings partly support this potential. While instances of 'power over' were observed, I also identified examples where volunteers, aware of the power imbalance, adopted 'power with' approaches and acknowledged refugee agency through 'power within' and 'power to'. Unlike previous studies (Haugen *et al.,* 2020) which predominantly portrayed sponsors as either directing the sponsorship process (paternalistic/passive paternalistic) or working alongside refugees in their resettlement (mutualistic), my findings reveal a more complex dynamic. Specifically, I identified examples

of 'power to', where volunteer support was not always needed. At times, refugees

independently leveraged their own networks and initiative, such as securing employment

without volunteer intervention. This recognition of refugee agency goes beyond the framing

of sponsorship as a helper-recipient model, or even a more reciprocated version of the

former, instead acknowledging refugees as active participants capable of initiating their own

solutions. Recognition of refugee agency not only enhances the dignity of refugees but also

enriches the sponsorship process, making it a more empowering process for everyone

involved.

Other studies have observed shifts in power dynamics within sponsorship relationships over

time. Initially, sponsors often hold more power as they assist with resettlement tasks.

However, as the relationship develops, some sponsors become more passive, focusing on

listening to refugees' needs rather than directing support (Gingrich and Enns, 2019). In other

studies, sponsors have reflected on how they may have previously neglected refugee agency

(Van Buren, 2021), such as overplanning the initial arrival period and potentially

overwhelming refugees (Phillimore *et al.,* 2020). In response, some sponsors sought to

prioritise refugee agency by allowing refugees to make certain choices, such as selecting

their own clothes after arrival (Neelin, 2020). Other studies have shown that sponsors,

despite orientalist views, have been able to challenge their own expectations and adapt their

behaviour to 'work with them [refugees] based on their humanity' (Haugen, 2023, p12). Over

time, sponsors have reported that their relationships with refugee families evolve, marked by

'mutual trust, respect and confidence in one another' (Macklin *et al.,* 2020b, p16).

Despite these more positive examples, dominant power dynamics were still present in my

findings, reflecting the 'ambivalences of acts of hospitality' (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p2). While

sponsorship can create welcoming spaces that challenge asymmetric power dynamics

through 'power with', it remains true that 'spaces of private hospitality are also ambivalent as

they do not necessary disrupt the conditional character of hospitality' (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p2). Although sponsorship holds the potential to create a welcome which subverts asymmetric power dynamics, the presence of 'power over' actions indicates volunteers can still reproduce exclusionary politics, as they 'engage in processes of distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" refugees' (Monforte *et al.,* 2021, p2). This is evident in examples where participants expected refugees to act in specific ways, such as accepting a job suggested by volunteers through a 'power over' dynamic.

Though Haugen and colleagues (2020) acknowledged that their host orientations were not mutually exclusive, I go further herein to suggest that power dynamics were continuously renegotiated by sponsors while providing resettlement support. This indicates that sponsorship relationships are complex and evolving, highlighting the importance of fostering environments where refugee agency is not only recognised but actively encouraged.

9.4.4: The development of intra-group tension and emergence of internal tension

In section 9.3.3, I discussed the intra-group tensions that emerged among volunteers prior to the arrival of refugees (T1), primarily stemming from differing role expectations. This tension persisted into T2, the period of active resettlement support, where it manifested in more complex and pronounced ways. Participants sometimes found themselves at odds over their approaches to power dynamics. For instance, some volunteers tried to push a refugee man into a particular job (power over), while others advocated for supporting his individual career aspirations (power with). This interplay of conflicting approaches underscores the challenges inherent in volunteer dynamics, aligning with Van Baarle and colleagues (2021, p543), who noted that 'relational tension' arises when actors adopt different 'power stances', especially between 'transformative power' and 'power over'. My findings align with existing research

which highlights the prevalence of intra-group tension during the provision of resettlement support (Neelin, 2020; Haugen, 2023; Kyriakides *et al.,* 2018; Hutchinson, 2018; Elcioglu and Shams, 2023; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). For instance, one study found that tensions escalated when the shared goal of achieving self-sufficiency for sponsored refugees within a certain timeframe diverged due to differing support approaches (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). They noted that the 'humanitarian bargain in which sponsors work as a team and equitably share the work is unstable and unenforceable' revealing limitations in volunteer-driven resettlement (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3968). My findings deepen this scholarship, noting intra-group tension as a potential barrier to effective community-based sponsorship which could undermine volunteers sponsoring a second family or lead them to reflect negatively on their experience to others who might be interested in taking part in CS.

Beyond intra-group tension, I identified another form of tension which I termed 'internal tension'. This internal struggle occurred when volunteers struggled with determining how best to support a family, often questioning whether they were doing too much or too little. This uncertainty sometimes led to a shift in their support strategies, complicating their roles further. By introducing the idea of internal tension, my findings indicate that the volunteer experience is not just a matter of interpersonal dynamics but also an individual challenge that can affect the effectiveness of support provided to refugees. The implications of recognising both intra-group and internal tensions are significant. My findings indicated that volunteer roles were messier than those set out by Haugen and colleagues (2020). My study reinforces scholarship by echoing the existence of intra-group tension while providing resettlement support (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). It also develops existing scholarship by introducing the idea of 'internal tension' as an additional form of tension experienced within individual CS volunteers.

9.5: Research Objective Four: The end of formal resettlement support

To examine the ways in which the volunteering undertaken by CS volunteers evolves over time, in relation to exposure to the sponsored refugees.

The final research objective addresses a second gap identified in the scholarship by exploring how sustained interpersonal engagement between volunteers and sponsored refugees affects ongoing volunteering. In Chapter Two, I highlighted that while personal and community benefits of engaging in sponsorship are documented, empirical research on its structural impact is limited. It remains unclear whether volunteering through CS leads volunteers to attempt to address broader structural barriers faced by refugees or if their focus remains on immediate needs. Although political action based on solidarity gained attention following the 'so-called refugee crisis' in 2015-2016, this aspect remains underexplored in the context of sponsorship.

9.5.1: Humanitarianism and political action

Critical humanitarianism scholars argue that humanitarianism, while well-intentioned, often focuses on immediate relief over addressing structural barriers perpetuating inequality (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011; Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002; Malkki, 2015). This 'anti-politics' of care (Ticktin, 2017, p581) can inadvertently reinforce rather than challenge the systemic inequalities affecting refugees. Traditionally seen as apolitical, humanitarianism has focused on alleviating suffering without tackling broader barriers in society, whereas social activism involves explicit political engagement (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a). However, during the 'so-called refugee crisis' many volunteers across Europe engaged in new forms of supporting refugees (Karakayalı, 2017; Hamann and Karakayali, 2016). These 'grassroots' efforts (Ambrosini, 2022, p3), involving less professional aid agencies and more direct involvement

from ordinary people (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017), challenged the distinction between 'apolitical' humanitarianism and political activism (Youkhana and Sutter, 2017; Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021b). Zamponi (2017) highlighted that 'direct social action', rather than being separate from political protest, has a dynamic relationship with it, representing 'a first step in the development of political participation on a specific issue, both at the individual and collective level' (Zamponi, 2017, p99).

Some scholars argue that labelling actions as strictly political or humanitarian oversimplifies their complexity (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Fleischmann, 2020). Supporting refugees, even apolitically, does not occur in a political vacuum (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017). In today's polarised climate, humanitarian acts are 'loaded with political meaning' (Ambrosini, 2022, p6), especially when volunteers face criminalisation (Dadusc and Mudu, 2022; Fekete, 2018). This growing scholarship emphasises the political significance of humanitarian support for refugees (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a; Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020a). Ambrosini introduced the idea of 'debordering solidarity', where private actors support refugees in ways that merge political and humanitarian efforts (Ambrosini, 2022, p11). Sandri (2018, p65) described 'volunteer humanitarianism' in the Calais 'Jungle' camp as an alternative to formal aid, countering violent border processes across Europe. Similarly, 'subversive humanitarianism' (Vandevoordt, 2019, p245) and 'strategic humanitarianism' (Schwiertz and Steinhilper, 2020) describe acts of humanitarian support that challenge hostile political climates. By creating spaces for interaction, volunteering with refugees can be seen as extending solidarity. This practice not only involves providing humanitarian care but also establishes welcoming environments which contrast with the typically unwelcoming spaces for refugees (Maestri and Monforte, 2020; Sandri, 2018).

Other scholars draw parallels between seemingly 'apolitical' acts of care toward refugees and increasing political engagement among volunteers (Stock, 2019; Fleischmann and

Steinhilper, 2017; Fleischmann, 2020). Activities such as befriending are political acts, as volunteers often engage out of discomfort with the way refugees are treated by the state (Peterie, 2019). Witnessing the challenges faced by refugees firsthand can inspire volunteers to become more politically active (Stock, 2019). Through befriending schemes, volunteers are provided with opportunities to reflect on their own social position in relation to those they support. Helping refugees with tasks such as attending job seeker appointments and navigating societal intricacies can lead to deeper involvement in advocacy work, as volunteers become more aware of the negative attitudes and bureaucratic barriers encountered by refugees. Even when volunteering does not result in overt political action, the simple act of supporting refugees on an individual, everyday level represents a micropolitical form of resistance within a hostile political landscape (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024). These seemingly small acts of kindness and solidarity are significant because they challenge exclusionary narratives and subtly resist restrictive politics enacted by governments, fostering a form of quiet but impactful defiance.

While the intersection of humanitarianism and solidarity in volunteering with refugees has been explored, especially post-2015 (Della-Porta, 2018), the question of whether sustained engagement through sponsorship leads to increased political involvement has only recently attracted scholarly attention and remains underexplored. My findings address this gap by bridging literature on volunteering with refugees, which suggests that acts of care can have political dimensions, with emerging studies on sponsorship. Few studies have explored whether volunteer engagement in sponsorship constitutes political action or solidarity (Elcioglu, 2023; Reyes-Soto, 2023). While I observed 'power over' actions that reinforced inequalities between volunteers and refugees, I also identified forms of 'transformative power' and 'power with' which open up 'transformative political possibilities' (Fleischmann, 2020, p30). This is significant because CS not only provides a supportive space for resettlement within the UK's hostile environment, but also acts as a catalyst for political

action. By enabling refugees to integrate into the community on their own terms, CS shifts the narrative of refugee support from mere survival to empowerment and collaboration. It fosters an environment where volunteers and refugees can work together, challenging exclusionary practices and dominant migration narratives. Consequently, CS can cultivate politically engaged communities who resist draconian and exclusionary policies and practices, demonstrating how broader acts of kindness can resonate with broader political action. Echoing Fleischmann (2020), I respond to Ticktin's (2014) call to avoid overly negative views of humanitarianism. Instead my research examines 'new and emergent meanings of the political in and around humanitarian spaces' (Ticktin, 2014, cited in Fleischmann, 2020, p31) by exploring the political potential of volunteering with CS.

9.5.2: Volunteer politicisation and political action

As discussed in Chapter Three, I draw on Hamidi's (2023) three-pronged idea of politicisation, which offers a relational view of how people become politically engaged: 1. through their perceived relationship to political institutions, 2. By recognising shared social problems as requiring collective, political responses; and 3. Through relational openness - a willingness to be transformed by the perspectives and experiences of others. I view politicisation as a process rather than a fixed outcome (Monforte and Maestri, 2022), and one that may – but does not necessarily – lead to political action. For political action, I adopt Fleischmann's (2020) broad framing, which builds on Ranciere's earlier work (1998, cited in Fleischman, 2020) – as 'moments when conditions of exclusion, domination and discrimination in migration societies are challenged, contested, interrupted, altered or reformed in favour of a different alternative' (Fleischmann, 2020, p17). This definition captures both overt political protest and quieter practices that 'enact different alternatives on the ground, without directly making claims towards the state' (Fleischmann, 2020, p17).

Few studies have explicitly examined whether sponsors, through their interpersonal support for refugees, become politicised or engage in action which addresses broader structural barriers faced by refugees (Elcioglu, 2023; Reyes-Soto, 2023; Good Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Ritchie, 2018). One Canadian study found that efforts to support refugees without addressing wider structural barriers may inadvertently perpetuate long-standing social and economic disparities (Good Gingrich and Enns, 2019). This finding aligns with critical perspectives on humanitarian action (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011; Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002; Malkki, 2015). In a more recent study which builds on earlier critical work by Ritchie (2018), Elcioglu (2023) explored whether sponsorship increased political awareness among Canadian sponsors. While she found that sponsors did became more aware of the challenges faced by refugees, their ability to act on this awareness was constrained. This limitation stemmed from the design of Canadian sponsorship, which imposes a 12-month time constraint on sponsors, forcing them to seek quick solutions to systemic problems. The idea of 'neoliberal fatigue' is used to describe how the time-consuming task of resettlement under neoliberal austerity led sponsors to perceive politically structured public barriers as private problems they had to solve on their own (Elcioglu, 2023, p.98). This fatigue dulled the potential for structural critique, with sponsors feeling overwhelmed rather than politically awakened (Elcioglu, 2023).

In contrast, Reyes Soto (2023), writing about the UK context, found evidence of deeper political engagement. Though the study did not explicitly use Hamidi's framework of politicisation, it is possible to interpret volunteers' growing awareness of systemic barriers – through relationships formed with refugees – as aligning with Hamidi's (2023) third dimension of transformation through relational connection. Unlike the Canadian study (Elcioglu, 2023) which found limited political engagement among sponsors, Reyes Soto (2023) argues that CS volunteers actively engage in solidarity efforts. These efforts include combating negative stereotypes about refugees by participating in public debates, demonstrations, and face-to-

face conversations about their volunteering (Reyes-Soto, 2023). However, the study does not extensively address sponsors' involvement in tackling structural barriers like housing, employment, further study and family reunion. Some UK studies do note that CS volunteers have tried to facilitate family reunion on an individual basis, having recognised the emotional toll of family separation on integration prospects (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore and Reyes-Soto, 2019).

My findings diverge from those of Elcioglu (2023) and further the findings of Reyes-Soto (2023). While I observed signs of 'neo-liberal fatigue' (Elcioglu, 2023, p98), where volunteers struggled to support refugees amid the cost-of-living crisis and limited Government support, I also found that participants become politicised through the affective and relational dimensions of their engagement, echoing Hamidi's (2023) emphasis on politicisation as a form of relational transformation. As participants supported sponsored families to navigate life in the UK, they became aware of structural barriers, especially related to housing, employment, higher education opportunities and family reunion. This echoes Mogstad and Rabe's (2024) finding that close relationships between volunteers and refugees can lead to a critical view of state policies.

In some cases, this awareness translated into political action. Echoing the findings of other studies (Stock, 2019; Mogstad and Rabe 2024), I found that some volunteers, due to their close 'kin' like relations with refugees, felt it was 'non-negotiable' to support them in tackling structural barriers (Mogstad and Rabe, 2024, p1502). As a result, participants supported sponsored refugees in navigating difficult employment situations and advocating for family reunion, a critical issue within sponsorship (Share Network, 2023c). These findings resonate with Sinatti's (2019) observation that humanitarianism can evolve into political action through intimacy and proximity. Volunteers also became increasingly critical of the structural expectations embedded in CS – especially the HO expectation of refugee 'independence'

after two years, rejecting the initial 'humanitarian bargain' they had made with the state (Korteweg *et al.,* 2023, p3968). Unlike Canadian sponsorship, where sponsor support only lasts for 12 months, the two-year commitment in the UK may explain why 'neoliberal fatigue' was less prominent (Elcioglu, 2023, p.98). Importantly, some participants came to question the selective logic underpinning CS, recognising how it reinforced the good/bad refugee binary. As Darling (2011) argues, even well-intentioned practices of sanctuary can be co-opted into forms of domopolitics where care is conditional and exclusionary. One volunteer, after two years of supporting a family, became critical of how CS might inadvertently perpetuate exclusionary practices and contribute to the hostile environment's two-tier asylum system. As a result, she chose to disengage from taking part in future sponsorship, opting instead to return to campaigning as an example of more 'clearly politicised' action (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a, p131).

Across the study, I observed both 'quiet' and overt forms of political action (Monforte and Maestri, 2022a). Some participants became involved in 'more visibly politicised forms of engagement such as social activism' (Monforte and Maestri 2023, p132) such as advocacy, public protest or lobbying. Others enacted a quieter form of politics (Meier, 2023) – through subtle, everyday 'acts of kindness, connection and creativity' (Pottinger, 2017, p215). This aligns with Fleischmann's (2020, p18) recognition of political action as a spectrum – ranging from direct confrontation to the enactment of alternative 'modes of togetherness and belonging on the ground'. In particular, CS created 'spaces of encounter' (Cloke *et al.,* 2017) that facilitated new ways of relating across difference. Within these spaces, kindness, trust, and solidarity took on micropolitical significance (Mann, 1994), subtly reshaping dominant narratives around migration and belonging (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024; Sheringham *et al.,* 2024).

As previous work in geography has shown (Askins, 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016), these mundane, everyday encounters – through small in scale – can carry political significance.

'New spaces of encounter' (Koca, 2019b; Cloke *et al.,* 2017 created through CS can foster a form of 'quiet politics'. The act of participating in CS itself constitutes a form of everyday 'quiet politics' or 'micro-politics', deepening the argument of Phillimore and Reyes-Soto (2020) who emphasised the potential of CS as 'a quiet force for change, creating opportunities for movement towards more openness to diversity, and building new kinds of social relations, whilst pushing back concerns generated by negative media' (Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2020, p19). I observed that CS creates spaces of 'quiet activism' (Pottinger, 2017), where volunteers and sponsored refugees come to know one another, and 'daily acts of compassion and kindness towards refugees […] become the expression of a political subjectivity that challenges dominant politics around migration' (Monforte and Maestri, 2023, p133). Gentle acts of care and kindness expressed from volunteers to refugees were 'micropolitical' in that although they were small in scale, they also functioned as '"tactics" for subverting and pushing back against controlling "strategies" used by those who hold power' (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024, p14). In this case, the spaces of care created through CS formed a 'tactic' against the hostile treatment of refugees by the UK Government, by demonstrating to refugees that 'they are not alone, there are people who care about their well-being and there is hope of belonging albeit precarious' (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024, p15).

Like other scholars, I caution against overhyping the 'transformative potentiality of citizen humanitarianism […] as an expression of a more empowering or egalitarian humanitarianism' (Mogstad and Rabe, p1502) due to the inherent legal inequalities and power asymmetries within CS and other forms of volunteering (May and Cloke, 2024; Surman *et al.,* 2021; Williams, 2016). However, it is important to emphasise the importance of exploring 'new or alternative questions about humanitarian care and obligations' (Mogstad and Rabe, p1503) and considering whether new ways of supporting refugees, grounded in rights rather than charity, are possible.

9.6: Summary

In this chapter, I have synthesised the findings from the previous four chapters, addressing the four research objectives which guided the study and contextualising my findings within the broader body of existing scholarship. The final chapter will explore the implications of these findings from an empirical, theoretical and methodological perspective. Additionally, I will outline my study's limitations and offer recommendations for future research to explore remaining gaps in knowledge. Finally, practical implications are discussed, including recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter outlines the theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions of my findings (Section 10.1), demonstrating how they enhance our understanding of private hospitality, power dynamics and the politicisation of volunteering with refugees. I discuss study limitations (Section 10.2), reflect on the generalisability of my findings (Section 10.3) and discuss the implications for future research (Section 10.4). I conclude with a final statement and a set of policy and practice recommendations (section 10.5)

10.1: Contributions

This study has made theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to research on hospitality, volunteering with refugees and sponsorship.

10.1.1: Theoretical

This study offers a new conceptualisation of sponsorship through the lens of 'negotiated hospitality', integrating and extending existing theories of hospitality, power, and political action within migration and volunteer studies. My central theoretical contribution is the development of a conceptual framework of negotiated hospitality, which reframes sponsorship not as a static act of charity but as a dynamic and relational process. This framework draws on theories of hospitality (Bulley, 2016; Dikec *et al.,* 2009), power (Allen, 1998; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021), politicisation (Hamidi, 2023) and political action (Fleischmann, 2020) to capture the ongoing negotiation between 'host' volunteers and 'guest' refugees, across all three stages of sponsorship - before, during and after the two-year period of formal resettlement support (See Figure 30). In doing so, this

study responds to calls for deeper analysis of the volunteer-refugee dynamic (Ambrosini, 2022).
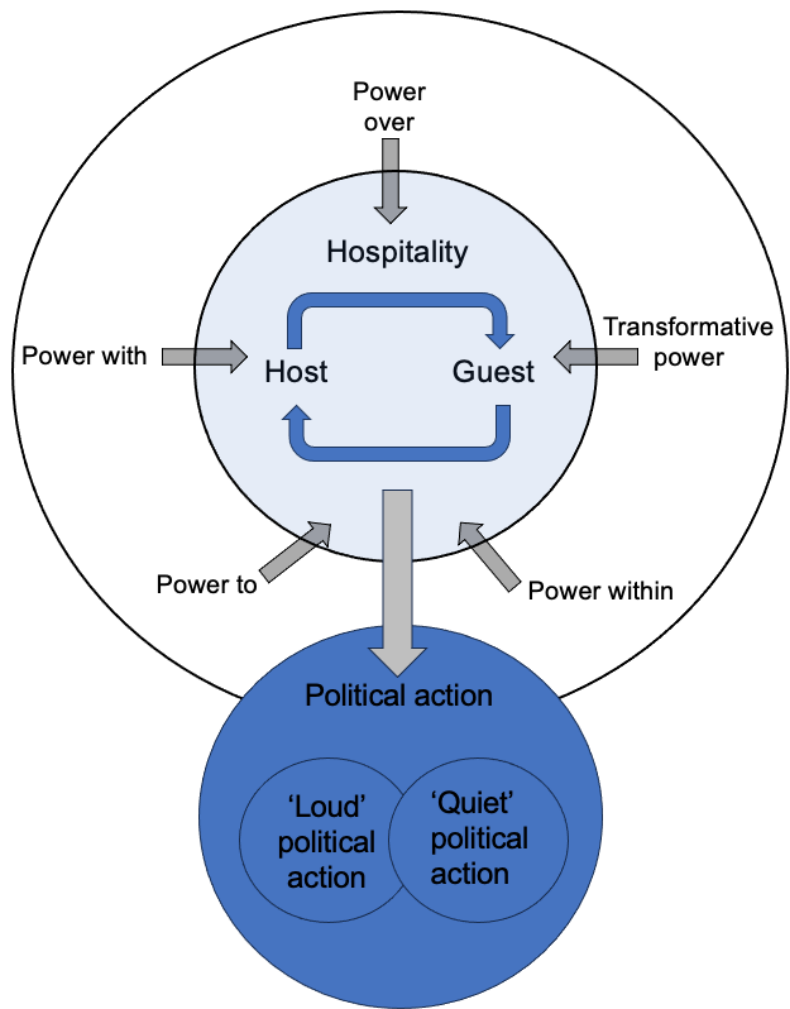
Figure 30: A conceptual framework of negotiated hospitality

Depicting hospitality as a circular and continuous model, this framework extends the field's understanding of hospitality beyond the initial point of welcome to encompass how relationships are renegotiated over time (Bulley, 2016; Dikeç, 2002).

A second theoretical contribution lies in the advancement of power theory. While prior research often frames sponsorship as a space in which volunteers hold and exercise dominant power (Lenard, 2016; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021; Ali *et al.,* 2022), my study presents a more holistic and relational account of power. Unlike most previous studies (with the exception of Lim, 2019), my study explicitly defines power (Allen, 1998) and combines a broad definition with Veneklasen and Miller's (2002) Expressions of Power model and Van Baarle and colleagues (2021) notion of 'Transformative Power'. This combination provides a framework for understanding how power is negotiated in volunteer-refugee relationships, highlighting both hospitality and hostility within host/guest, volunteer/refugee relations (Derrida, 2000; Rozakou, 2012). The integrated framework reveals how power within sponsorship is not just exercised over refugees, but also with, to, and within them – allowing for solidarity, mutuality and refugee agency. It challenges hierarchical framings and extends theorisations of power in both migration studies and community-based volunteering. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to merge these specific power concepts to explore power dynamics holistically within sponsorship.

A third contribution extends theories of politicisation (Hamidi, 2023) and political action (Fleischmann, 2020), by applying them to the context of sponsorship. This study demonstrates how some volunteers, through relationships with sponsored refugees, become politically conscious – recognising and critiquing the structural conditions shaping refugee lives. In doing so, I apply the concept of politicisation to sponsorship for the first time, connecting theories of sponsorship to other forms of 'apolitical' volunteering that involve resistance to exclusionary state policies (Monforte and Maestri, 2022). Additionally, by incorporating a broad, nuanced definition of political action (Fleischmann, 2020), including both overt and implicit forms, my study contributes to growing scholarship on quiet politics (Meier, 2023; Hall, 2020; Pottinger, 2017). It shows how care-based practices within sponsorship can function as everyday political acts, even when not formally recognised as

political action. This contributes to scholarship which bridges the divide between humanitarianism and activism, further challenging the binary that separates 'apolitical' volunteerism from 'political' action (Zamponi, 2017; Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Monforte, 2020). In doing so, the study contributes to broader debates about political agency in volunteerism and the politics of care in neoliberal contexts (Williams *et al.,* 2016; Cloke *et al.,* 2017; Bosi and Zamponi, 2015; Theodossopoulos, 2016; Surman *et al.,* 2021).

10.1.2: Empirical

Empirically, this study offers novel insight into the lived experiences of CS volunteers over time and across different phases. My primary empirical contribution is the examination of CS volunteer experiences across all three stages of the CS process – pre-arrival, during resettlement, and post-resettlement. By exploring volunteer activity across three distinct stages – pre arrival (T1), resettlement (T2) and post-resettlement (T3) – my study provides longitudinal data on how sponsorship evolves during each time point. This extended temporal approach is unique in CS research, which often focuses narrowly on the early post-arrival period. By exploring how roles, relationships, and power dynamics shift over time, my study highlights how initial humanitarian motivations can give way to more complex and reflective forms of engagement.

First, through interviews with all 30 participants, the study captures a complex spectrum of volunteer motivations. While traditional volunteer motivations such as faith, compassion, personal networks, emotions and personal migration history were present (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Jasper 1998), I also identified political motivations. Some participants became involved in CS to compensate for or to resist the state's limited support for refugees, treating sponsorship as a form of grassroots workaround (Macklin, 2020; Korteweg *et al.,* 2023). This finding complicates dominant narratives of CS as a smooth public-private partnership, by

showing how it can also serve as a form of quiet resistance to neoliberal policies. Some volunteers saw themselves not only as hosts offering hospitality, but also as critics of restrictive migration policies. Building on Macklin (2020) and Korteweg *et al.* (2023), these findings highlight the political ambivalence within CS: while some volunteers collaborate closely with the state, others use sponsorship strategically to oppose its limits. This dual role of working with and against the state shows how CS volunteers navigate the political and humanitarian challenges of refugee sponsorship.

Second, I highlight multiple layers of tension within sponsorship, both intragroup (between volunteers), internal (within volunteers) and between volunteers and refugees. These tensions emerged throughout all stages of sponsorship and reflected differing values, expectations, and approaches to refugee support. The identification of tension between volunteers in the same group, and within the volunteers themselves, highlights that all volunteers approach their role differently, and in some cases this causes intragroup tension. After the formal support period ended, I found that volunteers valued their experiences with CS, which led to friendships, increased community ties, and greater awareness of the broader barriers faced by refugees. However, the experience was also challenging, with evidence of intra-group and internal tension continuing into this period, as well as tension emerging between volunteers and refugees. While most volunteers maintained affective relationships with refugees after the formal support period, a small number needed a break after these challenges. These findings reveal new empirical evidence of the struggled within volunteer groups and the emotional labour volunteers perform as they navigate competing commitments and limited resources – a topic largely unexplored in existing sponsorship scholarship.

Third, drawing on the integrated power framework (Allen, 1998; VeneKlasen and Miller; Van Baarle *et al.,* 2021), I identified diverse expressions of power within volunteer-refugee

relationships. Empirically, I document not only dominant forms of power ('power over'), but also instances of transformative, collaborative ('power with'), and internal power ('power within' and 'power to') – highlighting the existence of both horizontal and vertical power relations within sponsorship (Kekstaite, 2022). These findings substantiate the conceptual framework and show how power is fluid and multifaceted across the sponsorship lifecycle.

Finally, I observed that politicisation does not always lead to political action (Monforte and Maestri, 2022; Eliasoph, 1998), yet both overt (Hankins, 2017) and implicit (Pottinger, 2017) political actions were evident in participant behaviour over time. This included leaving the CS group to campaign for the rights of all refugees in the UK, rather than just a single refugee family, and addressing structural barriers like housing and employment (Hankins, 2017), but also quiet politics (Askins, 2015; Hankins, 2017; Hall, 2020), a form of micropolitics enacted through everyday moments of kindness and interpersonal connection that challenged exclusionary systems in subtle ways (Phillimore *et al.,* 2024). This is the first empirical study to explicitly identify these different political outcomes within sponsorship, demonstrating how volunteer engagement can evolve into politicisation and sometimes multiple forms of political action over time.

Overall, by tracing how volunteers' motivations, relationships, and practices develop across the full lifecycle of sponsorship, this study provides new empirical evidence on the transformative potential and limitations of sponsorship as a model of refugee support.

10.1.3: Methodological

My study makes a methodological contribution by employing walking interviews and online photo elicitation interviews to explore the role of place and space in the CS process. Though the use of walking interviews has been gaining momentum more recently within other

disciplines, use of the method within migration research is scarce and this is the first time walking interviews have been utilised within the field of sponsorship. Walking interviews enabled me to engage with participants in the actual locations where resettlement activities occurred - community centres, churches, parks, and local businesses. This method enabled me to observe and discuss these spaces directly, enriching my understanding of how physical locations function as sites of community engagement. While walking interviews did not provide access to local people, they revealed how these spaces facilitated interactions and support between volunteers and refugees. Several participants walked me past local businesses which had donated money or goods to support a sponsored family. This spatial perspective, highlighting the important, and often overlooked, role of place in the CS process, offered insights often missed in traditional interview settings. For participants who could not participate in walking interviews, online photo elicitation interviews served as an alternative method. This approach allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions of local spaces through photos, providing complementary insights into the spatial dimensions of resettlement. Despite limitations, due to confidentiality and a low quantity of photos, this method offered some perspective on how participants viewed significant spaces in the resettlement process, even where those spaces could not be physically walked.

Both methods offer a novel perspective on how physical environments shape the involvement of local people in refugee resettlement. Thus, the application of walking interviews and online photo-elicitation interviews to sponsorship is a key methodological contribution of my study.

10.2: Limitations

Before discussing the generalisability and implications of my findings, I highlight several methodological limitations to be considered.

The first limitation is related to the timing of the study. COVID-19 coincided with the first and second year of my PhD. As discussed in Chapter Four, initially I planned to undertake a narrative longitudinal approach, tracking the same participants over the three stages of the CS process. However, COVID-19 and the cessation of resettlement in 2020 made this approach unfeasible. Consequently, I adopted a recurrent cross-sectional design (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016). This involved interviewing different volunteers at each of the three timepoints (Corden and Millar, 2007, Ruspini, 1999, Ruspini, 2002). Adapting the design retained the focus on temporality because the time points remained consistent, but data collection was expedited by involving different volunteers.

While a longitudinal approach using the same participants could have captured both vertical (within participants) and horizontal (across timepoints) changes over time (Thomson and Holland, 2003, Fadyl *et al.,* 2017), by contrast, a recurrent cross-sectional approach focused on group-level, rather than individual changes (Ruspini, 2002, Butler *et al.,* 2022). Consequently, I could not track individual transformations and experiences over the whole sponsorship process. Instead, interviews within each timepoint examined a specific research objective, acknowledging that different volunteers were involved at each stage. I was unable to capture how individual volunteers' perspectives and actions evolved throughout the sponsorship process. This limitation affected the depth of insight into the personal experiences of volunteers. Observing the same participants could have revealed how initial expectations and motivations formed in T1 were reshaped by experiences of providing resettlement support to a particular family in T2. By involving different volunteers at each stage, the study instead captured a broader snapshot of experiences at each timepoint, but at the cost of understanding the continuity that a longitudinal approach would have provided.

Despite these constraints, the modified approach yielded rich data into collective volunteer experiences over time, capturing patterns and changes across the whole process (Butler *et al.,* 2022; Ruspini, 2002). By focusing on group-level dynamics, the study provided valuable insights into the collective experiences of volunteers across each timepoint. Moreover, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) effectively highlighted cross-case patterns, offering a robust framework for understanding change and temporality in this context.

Secondly, the use of online photo elicitation interviews presented several challenges. These primarily hinged on participants' willingness and ability to provide photos. Of the 14 participants who chose this method, eight did not submit any photos because they forgot, they were too busy or due to confidentiality. Confidentiality concerns impacted the data collection in two ways. Some participants opted not to send photos due to privacy worries. Others submitted photos that included identifiable images of the sponsored family or fellow volunteers which could not be used without formal consent. Although participants were instructed to avoid including identifiable faces, some wanted to showcase positive experiences, such as birthday parties or celebrations, which inadvertently featured recognisable individuals. The absence of photos in some interviews limited the depth of data on how specific places influenced participants' experiences of CS. To improve this method in future research, clearer communication about the purpose of the photos and the importance of confidentiality is essential. Re-emphasising the need to avoid images of identifiable individuals and providing participants with sample photos could help mitigate these problems.

Finally, partly retrospective interviews, used during the second and third timepoints, involved asking participants to reflect on both their current experiences and their earlier involvement with CS. While this approach allows participants to reflect on the importance of their experiences over time, potentially revealing new meanings (Van Parys *et al.,* 2014; Bauer *et al.,* 2015), it also presents limitations. The passage of time can lead to memory lapses,

causing participants to overlook or forget specific details. To address this, caution was

exercised during data analysis. There was a risk of participants presenting a selectively

positive view of their experiences. However, building rapport and asking follow-up questions

helped to address this bias, and my findings revealed both positive and negative aspects of

CS.

10.3: Generalisability

Having reflected on the methodological limitations above, here I discuss limitations linked to

the generalisability of my findings.

First, the qualitative nature of my study, involving a sample of 30 participants is not intended

to represent all CS volunteers. Participants were mainly from CS groups in England and

Wales, predominantly older women and over the age of 50. Consequently, the findings reflect

the perspectives of a specific demographic, which may not represent younger volunteers or

those from different regions of the UK or diverse backgrounds. The timing of this study is

also relevant to generalisability. The study was conducted during a period when the UK was

heavily affected by COVID-19 which inevitably influenced participants' experiences and

perceptions. The pandemic may have impacted the motivations and challenges faced by

volunteers, potentially amplifying the roles of older volunteers who were more likely to be

available during lockdowns, compared to younger individuals who may have had different

work and family obligations. While the findings provide insight into the experiences of a

specific group of volunteers during a unique period, they may not fully capture the dynamics

of volunteering with CS in non-pandemic conditions.

Additionally, the context of UK CS is shaped by a specific national policy on refugee

sponsorship. Whilst other countries have similar models, such as Canada's BVOR

programme and Germany's NesT programme, the policy environment in the UK is distinct. This limits the applicability of my findings to other countries with different resettlement systems, cultural contexts or political climates. Experiences of sponsors in countries with varying approaches to additionality or the naming principle within sponsorship may differ significantly, reducing the generalisability of my findings.

Another important consideration is how volunteers may have presented their experiences during interviews. Throughout the data collection period and during the time of this PhD, there has been significant attention and interest in sponsorship both within research and in the media. This visibility may have led volunteers to portray their involvement positively, emphasising success and altruism while downplaying more negative aspects of their experiences or group dynamics. This tendency to present themselves and their involvement favourably might have affected the generalisability of my findings. However, using longer, more in-depth interviews, such as walking interviews, helped mitigate this limitation to some extent. These interviews provided participants with opportunities to reflect deeply and revisit earlier experiences, fostering a more relaxed atmosphere that encouraged candid sharing of both positive and negative aspects. Indeed, I was able to capture a spectrum of experiences, as evidenced by the emergence of tension as a theme across the three timepoints, highlighting both intra-group conflicts and individual uncertainties.

Moreover, the way volunteers engage in providing support is inherently personal, as reflected in the various expressions of power they utilise. Volunteers come to the experience with different resources, and their intentions for continued support beyond the initial two years also vary. This diversity is a strength of CS, allowing volunteers to decide how they wish to engage with the scheme. However, it also presents a limitation regarding generalisability, as no two volunteers will approach sponsorship in the same way or possess identical resources. Within the HO framework, groups can design how they deliver resettlement support, which

will inevitably differ between volunteers (Horst *et al.,* 2014). These individual factors necessitate caution against generalising my findings. Additionally, the evolving nature of refugee sponsorship means that the dynamics within CS groups may shift over time, particularly in response to changes in public policy or social attitudes toward refugees. My study captured a snapshot of CS during a specific period; thus, while it provides valuable insight into the complexities of volunteer-refugee relationships, including power dynamics and political action, it may not fully reflect how these dynamics could evolve in future iterations of CS.

Furthermore, my personal background in the refugee advocacy movement may have influenced my interpretation of the findings. My awareness of the challenges and potential political actions related to refugee support might have heightened my sensitivity to examples of political engagement among volunteers. While this perspective provided valuable insights, it also proposed a risk of bias in data collection and analysis. To mitigate these potential biases, I was mindful of my positionality throughout the research. I engaged in reflective practices during data collection, such as writing reflective memos (Snyder, 2012), and continued this reflection while interpreting the data by maintaining a reflective journal (Nowell et al., 2017; Berger, 2015). Both methods allowed me to critically examine my values and beliefs and consider their influence on the research process, thus helping to ensure a more balanced and nuanced analysis. Despite these attempts to address personal biases stemming from my own life experiences, I acknowledge that these factors may have impacted the data collection and interpretation of findings in some way. The interplay between my advocacy background and research objectives could have shaped the focus of my inquiries or the interpretation of certain themes, particularly those involving political actions or tensions within CS groups.

These limitations may affect the generalisability of my findings to other national sponsorship programmes as my findings are rooted in the unique environment of UK CS, reflecting a particular cohort of volunteers during a specific point in time significantly shaped by COVID-19. Nevertheless, the insights gained from this research offer significant contributions to understanding approaches to power dynamics and political action within forms of private hospitality.

10.4: Future research

While this study has addressed some of the gaps in knowledge surrounding volunteer experiences of 'sponsor a stranger' programmes, it is clear there remains much research to be conducted in this field. The findings of this study have enabled the identification of several key topics for future investigation.

One important avenue for exploration is further longitudinal research on power dynamics and political engagement. The impact of COVID-19 prevented me from undertaking a study involving the same participants to examine how their approaches to their roles evolved over the two-year period of resettlement support. Although I was able to identify volunteer experiences across three distinct timepoints in the CS process, further research which utilises a traditional longitudinal approach would provide valuable insights into the in-person changes related to power dynamics and political engagement. By tracking more volunteers over time—before, during, and after their involvement with CS—researchers could gain a deeper understanding of how various attitudes, resources, and personal approaches to sponsorship influence volunteers' interpretations of their roles. Undertaking research over a two-year process would also enable researchers to explore how political changes and public attitudes to refugees and migration might impact how volunteers engage with their role. Certainly, undertaking the PhD over the past two years has involved the introduction of both

an Afghan and Ukrainian resettlement scheme, which may have provided interesting points of exploration had I been undertaking a traditional longitudinal study.

Additional research should consider the complexities of tension within CS. While I identified some forms of tension, the limitations of this thesis precluded a more thorough examination. A fruitful direction for future research would be to adopt a multi-governance level framework to investigate the different relationships involved in sponsorship. This includes exploring the dynamics between refugees and volunteers, the interactions among group members (which I have touched upon), and the relationships between these groups and their lead sponsors or the Home Office. Understanding how these relationships shape the power dynamics adopted by volunteers could reveal significant insights into how they approach their roles as sponsors.

Moreover, there are significant opportunities for comparative research involving sponsorship schemes in other countries. It would be beneficial to examine power dynamics and political engagement within different sponsorship models, particularly those where refugees are referred by UNHCR, as opposed to named sponsorship schemes like the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme. Most current research on sponsorship tends to rely on Canadian models for comparison, yet UK CS and Canadian PSR programmes differ significantly in how refugees are referred. Many sponsored refugees in Canada have kinship links to their sponsors, making it crucial to explore how volunteers negotiate power dynamics with refugees who are strangers. Investigating programmes like Germany's NesT (Tissot *et al.,* 2024), which operates similarly to UK CS, could offer interesting insights into these dynamics.

Finally, the conceptual framework established in this study, especially regarding power dynamics, should be extended to encompass the perspectives of refugees. Investigating how

refugees perceive the support they receive from CS volunteers and how they interpret power relations would provide valuable insights into the CS experience from the refugees' angle. Understanding whether refugees view the volunteers' collaborative approach as a form of partnership characterised by 'power with' is essential. This study supports the argument that a mutualistic, partnership approach is beneficial for resettlement through sponsorship, as it allows refugees the space to shape their own resettlement. However, empirical work with refugees is necessary to test this theory. Future studies should explore the experiences of refugees in the UK and those sponsored through similar programmes in Europe to identify which forms of support they find most effective for their resettlement and integration.

To summarise, whilst my study made important contributions to understanding the diversity of power dynamics and the political engagement of CS volunteers, these four suggestions for future research serve as a starting point for more comprehensive studies on sponsorship, particularly outside the Canadian context. Future scholars might consider exploring in-person changes through longitudinal research, diversifying the understanding of tension by examining the multiple levels of sponsorship, conducting comparative research with similar national models and investigating how refugees perceive power dynamics. This research will illuminate the complexities of the sponsorship experience, enhancing our understanding of the nuanced relationships between volunteers and refugees. Additionally, it will inform policies and practices aimed at improving the effectiveness and sustainability of sponsorship initiatives. Ultimately, expanding research in these areas can lead to more inclusive and supportive frameworks that empower both volunteers and refugees in their resettlement journeys.

10.5: Final statement and recommendations

Given the exponential rise of displaced individuals globally (UNHCR 2024a), and the predominance of refugees being hosted in countries neighbouring their country of origin (Arar, 2017; Samaddar, 2016), policymakers in Western countries are increasingly interested in promoting sponsorship as a mechanism to expand the number of available refugee resettlement places. Despite the recent resurgence of sponsorship programmes across Europe and beyond, critics argue that by involving private citizens in refugee resettlement, governments aim to facilitate the passage of 'good' refugees, while criminalising and deporting 'bad' asylum-seekers, effectively providing a veil for an increasingly hostile society (D'Avino, 2022b). Others contend that forms of private hospitality reflect a trend towards increasing government neoliberalism (Dajani, 2021; Ritchie, 2018; McMurdo, 2016; Silvius, 2016; Mavelli, 2018), representing a form of 'domo-politics' (Gunaratnam, 2021, p717). Whilst acknowledging these valid criticisms, it is crucial to recognise that CS currently represents one of the few safe and legal pathways for refugee resettlement in the UK. Given the limited number of resettlement places available and the ever-increasing number of displaced people globally, we must explore ways to enhance the sponsorship model to increase the number of resettlement opportunities and improve the experiences of both volunteers and the sponsored refugees whom they support.

Scholars working in the area of volunteering for refugees (Mogstad and Rabe 2024; Monforte and Maestri 2022b; Koca 2019a; Burrell, 2024; Mescoli *et al.,* 2019; Birger *et al.,* 2024; Phillimore *et al.,* 2024; Kekstaite, 2022) have recognised that in some cases, 'spaces of encounter' (Koca, 2019b, p552) between volunteers and refugees can lead to a form of 'transformative politics' (Stock, 2019, p136), as relationships created through interactions with refugees can pave the way for hierarchical power dynamics to be subverted and negotiated and volunteers to become more politically engaged. However, to date, there has been a lack of exploration of these topics within sponsorship, especially outside of the Canadian context. Through a qualitative, temporal study of CS volunteers, I offer several

theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to our understandings of how hospitality is negotiated through CS and the effect that wider engagement with refugees has upon volunteers' political engagement.

My findings reveal that CS, as a form of private hospitality, enacted alongside, rather than in opposition to the state, provides a valuable space of encounter between volunteers and refugees. I align with other scholars who caution against the view that such encounters represent a radical shift in the reception of refugees in the UK (Braun, 2017), as CS volunteers acted within a 'complicated terrain in which different care practices and values…intersect' (Stock, 2019, p133) and in some cases, volunteers reinforced hierarchical power dynamics (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019b; Monforte and Steinhilper, 2023; Monforte *et al.,* 2021; Brkovic, 2023). Nevertheless, volunteers also promoted more balanced and reciprocal relationships. These mutualistic interactions highlight the 'transformative' potential of CS (Stock, 2019, p136). Despite resettling a relatively small number of refugees - 1,034 since 2016 (Home Office, 2023a) – the strength of CS lies in its capacity to build support for refugees and interpersonal connections at the community level.

Drawing directly on the findings of this study, I present several evidence-based recommendations for UK policymakers and refugee support organisations aimed at enhancing and expanding UK CS. These recommendations are rooted in the lived experiences of volunteers and reflect the challenges and opportunities they identified across the sponsorship process. For practicality, recommendations are divided into two categories. The first are actions that do not require extensive policy change but can be quickly implemented in the short term. The second set comprises larger, more complex changes that are costlier to implement and require more policy planning but are essential to pursue in the long term.

Before considering specific recommendations to improve sponsorship, it is important to highlight one aspect that must remain unchanged: refugees resettled through CS should continue to be additional to the Government's official resettlement figures. This study confirms that the policy of bringing additional refugees to the UK – not merely displacing state responsibility – is a key motivating factor for volunteers. In the current hostile climate surrounding migration in the UK and following the recent change of government in the summer of 2024, it is vital that any future policy modifications to CS uphold the principle of additionality. Given the low number of refugees resettled through CS in the UK thus far (Phillimore *et al.,* 2022b), maintaining the principle of additionality may encourage more individuals to volunteer. Comparative evidence from Germany supports this conclusion (Tissot *et al.,* 2024).

Short-term recommendations

Pre-arrival communication to address paternalistic attitudes

Findings show early power asymmetries and paternalistic dynamics are common in the initial stages of CS. Unlike sponsorship in Canada, there is no such arrangement for pre-arrival communication within CS. Allowing for structured pre-arrival communication – such as video calls between groups and families – can foster more equitable, partnership-based relationships from the outset. Several Canadian studies have stressed the benefits of pre-arrival contact (Kyriakides *et al.,* 2019b, p25). It provides information to sponsors about the needs of refugees (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023) and helps to alleviate refugees' concerns about resettlement (Neelin, 2020). Drawing on the Canadian model, the UK should pilot a communication mechanism whereby UNHCR could work with the HO to set up a video call between the family and the CS group so the group can get to know the family and ask about their needs. The UK could build on the experience of the Canadian Government, to set up a

contact mechanism. This approach would help to encourage volunteers to engage in a partnership (my term) or 'mutualistic' approach towards supporting refugees in their resettlement, which other scholars have identified as the best way to support sponsored refugees (Haugen *et al.,* 2020).

Additional volunteer training

Volunteers consistently reported challenges around power imbalances and internal group conflict[157]. While participants praised the training offered by RESET, two key areas require further development: understanding power relations, and managing tensions with fellow volunteers and sponsored refugees. Training focused on power relations is essential to prevent volunteers from adopting a dominant 'power over' approach. Although RESET mentions an 'empowerment approach' in its training materials, it lacks detailed guidance on what this entails. I recommend integrating the Expressions of Power Framework (Veneklasen and Miller, 2002) and the concept of 'Transformative Power' into the mandatory training modules. It is important for volunteers to recognise that while they should avoid 'power over,' they must appreciate that refugees may prefer to handle certain tasks independently (power within and power to). Further, practical sessions on group dynamics, intercultural tension and managing burnout would better prepare volunteers for the emotional labour of CS. Ensuring accessible channels for anonymous reporting to RESET would also improve group cohesion and retention as some volunteers hesitated to reach out due to communication barriers with group leaders.

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[157] Before approval and family matching, volunteers must complete mandatory RESET training (Home Office, 2024a). Additional informal training is provided by other lead sponsors, such as Sponsor Refugees and Citizens UK. During the study, RESET enhanced its training programme and developed a specialised website offering guidance for different stages of the CS process.

Long term recommendations

Housing support

Housing is a key issue for CS volunteers and within other sponsorship programmes globally. The cost and complexity of securing housing deters participation and strains sponsor groups. It often takes a long time for groups to secure housing, which is expensive and requires the group to supplement the rent, sometimes by as much as £500 per month. The HO should work with local authorities to help provide subsidised housing options to CS groups. Enhanced housing support could encourage more volunteers to participate in CS and alleviate some of the administrative burdens related to housing that groups currently face.

A greater awareness of the link between vulnerability and expectations of 'independence' after two years

CS is designed to resettle 'vulnerable' refugees in the UK (Home Office, 2024a). Despite the programmes focus on resettling those with additional needs, there remains a strong emphasis on achieving independence within just two years. This timeline is unrealistic, as volunteers frequently continue support informally beyond this period and structural barriers hinder refugees families from securing employment and becoming fully self-sufficient. A key finding of this study is the emotional and practical strain this places on volunteers, leading some to withdraw from further sponsorship. To better support both CS volunteers and refugee families, the Home Office should collaborate with local authorities to extend support beyond the two-year period. This continuation of assistance could help alleviate the pressure on volunteers who remain committed to their families and provide a more realistic timeline for integration, which is increasingly recognised as a lengthy process. Currently, CS groups are required to submit a plan to end support within six months of the family's arrival. However, it

would be beneficial for the Home Office to establish a formal programme for post-sponsorship support, offering specific guidance on employment, education, and housing options. This initiative could be administered through local authorities and aligned with other resettlement schemes, such as the Homes for Ukraine programme.

Support with applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILtR) status after five years

A specific concern regarding the extension of support for sponsored families after two years is the application process for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILtR). This process affects families differently based on their arrival dates in the UK. Refugees arriving after November 4, 2021, automatically receive ILtR upon arrival. However, families who arrived between July 2016 and March 2021 must apply for ILtR online after five years and pay a fee. Those who arrived between March 1 and November 4, 2021, must also apply but are exempt from the fee. While the introduction of the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) alleviates some of these concerns for newer arrivals, families affected by the earlier rules may face challenges. As formal sponsorship support ends after two years, there is a risk that these vulnerable families will have to navigate the ILtR application process without assistance and face a costly charge[158]. Additionally, the Home Office does not remind sponsored refugees of their upcoming application deadlines, which further complicates the situation. I found that some volunteers feared these families may face legal insecurity after sponsorship ends. Based on participant concerns, I recommend to the HO that any planning for ongoing support for sponsored refugee families should include mechanisms to track those required to apply for ILtR before the end of their five years in the UK. This plan should ensure that families receive timely reminders about their application obligations and offer support with the associated costs, as

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[158] In 2024, the cost for an individual to apply for ILtR is £2,885 per person.

applying for ILtR can be expensive. A broader recommendation would be for the Home Office to waive the ILtR fee for all refugees welcomed to the UK through CS.

Improved access to Family Reunion

I found that the emotional toll on volunteers supporting families unable to reunite with loved ones is a key deterrent to ongoing involvement in CS. Unlike Canada's PSR programme (Yousuf and Hyndman, 2023), UK CS does not allow sponsors to name specific refugees. While the naming principle is debated (Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Cameron, 2020); it offers clear advantages (Martani, 2020; Agrawal, 2019) and correlates with higher uptake compared to non-naming Canadian schemes (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Kamran, 2023). Research also shows that limited access to family reunion hinders refugee integration (Hassan and Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore *et al.,* 2022a; Phillimore *et al.,* 2023; Tissot *et al.,* 2024). My findings indicate that enabling refugee families to be reunited with relatives could reduce stress on volunteers and encourage re-engagement with CS. While the 'naming principle' raises ethical concerns, its introduction could align the UK programme more closely with Canada's more successful PSR model (Yousef and Hyndman, 2023). Named families typically require less volunteer support (Smith, 2020) and local family connections could relieve pressure on volunteers and foster mutual support (Phillimore *et al.,* 2023). Given that 'sponsor a stranger' models in European countries are not meeting resettlement targets (Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023; Ball, 2022; Tissot *et al.,* 2024), incorporating the naming principle in the future development of CS could attract more sponsors (Lehr and Dyck, 2020; Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Zanzuchi *et al.,* 2023).

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Appendix One: Interview Guides A and B

Interview Guide A (Timepoint one)

> *The questions for participants in Timepoint one are different because participants within this group are all preparing for the arrival of a refugee family. The questions focus on the expectations of the volunteers.*

Prior to the interview commencing, the researcher will run through the following with the participant:

- The participant has signed and returned a consent form.
- The participant understands the project and has been able to ask questions about the project prior to the interview.
- The participant is happy to continue with the chosen method of interview (i.e. face to face walking interview, video interview) and for the interview to be recorded.
- (for face-to-face walking interview) The participant is happy that COVID-19 measures have been adhered to and is comfortable continuing with the interview.
- The participant has been reminded of their right to choose not to answer a specific question and of their right to withdraw their consent at any point during the interview (and until 30 days after the interview).

Walking Interview: Prior to the interview the participant will be asked to take the researcher on a walk that passes landmarks that have been important in their CS volunteering. The researcher will ask the participant to stop at key places and explain why certain landmarks are important throughout the interview.

Video interview and photo elicitation: If the participant has chosen a video interview with photo elicitation, the participant will be asked to describe their local area using the photos they have shared with the researcher.

1. Background Questions (Beginning of the interview)

Could you provide me with the following information:
> *How would you like me to address you?*
> *Age?*
> *Working status (i.e. full-time student/working/retired)?*
> *What stage of the process are you at?*
> *Could you tell me the name of the CS group who you volunteer with?*

Walk Begins/ OR photos are shared

- Could you talk to me about your previous volunteering experiences?

- Can you tell me about your experience as a CS volunteer so far?

(Prompts about: other group members; how they have found the process of locating a house; how funds were raised; problems with the process?)

- Can you talk to me about your motivation for taking part in CS?

- Could you tell me about your specific role in the group?

- Have there been any changes to your role as you have gone on? If so, can you tell me about them?

(Prompts: how do your group organise yourselves; what do you like/dislike about your role; do you play any additional roles; is there a role you would have preferred)

- How are you feeling about a family arriving?

(prompts: what kind of relationship do you anticipate having with the family; do you have any concerns about supporting the family; how do you feel about a family arriving in the UK?)

- Can you talk me through any plans you have made for the arrival of a family?

(Prompts: do you anticipate any social events; are there some things you have left for the family to organise for themselves; do you anticipate the family will provide anything to you)

- Have you considered any boundaries to your support?

- Do you anticipate that your support to the family will change as they spend more time in the UK?

- Have you thought about how you will approach the end to the two-year period of support?

- Can you tell me about how have you found the experience so far?

(Prompts: have you found anything challenging; how has your relationship been with other volunteers; has the experience been as you expected; have you learnt or gained anything as part of the process?)

- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience as a CS volunteer that has not already been discussed?

(Prompts: would you like to say anything about your role; feelings you might have about the family arriving; personal impact)

- *If relevant – why did you choose a walking interview?*

Walking interviews – smaller guide

During walking interviews, a card was created with prompts for each of the questions as it was difficult to hold the whole guide and balance a recorder.

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Timepoint one

Name	Motivation	Boundaries
Age		
Work status	Role	Support changing
Stage of CS		
Name of group	Role changes	Two-year period
Previous volunteering	Family arrival	Feeling about CS
CS experience so far	Plans for arrival	Anything to add

If relevant, why a walking interview?

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Interview Guide B (Timepoints two and three)

Prior to the interview commencing, the researcher will run through the following with the participant:
- The participant has signed and returned a consent form.
- The participant understands the project and has been able to ask questions about the project prior to the interview.
- The participant is happy to continue with the chosen method of interview (i.e. face to face walking interview, video interview) and for the interview to be recorded.
- (for face-to-face walking interview) The participant is happy that COVID-19 measures have been adhered to and is comfortable continuing with the interview.
- The participant has been reminded of their right to choose not to answer a specific question and of their right to withdraw their consent at any point during the interview (and until 30 days after the interview).

Walking Interview: Prior to the interview the participant will be asked to take the researcher on a walk that passes landmarks that have been important in their CS volunteering. The researcher will also ask the participant to stop at key places and explain why certain landmarks are important throughout the interview.

Video interview and photo elicitation: If the participant has chosen a video interview with photo elicitation, the participant will be asked to describe their local area using the photos they have shared with the researcher.

1. Background Questions (Beginning of the interview)

Could you provide me with the following information:
        How would you like me to address you?
        Age?
        Working status (i.e. full-time student/working/retired)?
        What stage of the process are you at?
        Could you tell me the name of the CS group who you volunteer with?

Walk Begins/ OR photos are shared

- Could you talk to me about your previous volunteering experiences?

(Prompts: have you supported or worked with refugees before?)

- Can you tell me about your experience as a CS volunteer so far?

(Prompts about: other group members; how they have found the process of locating a house; how funds were raised; problems with the process?)

- Can you talk to me about your motivation for taking part in CS?

- Could you tell me about your specific role in the group?

- Have there been any changes to your role as you have gone on? If so, can you tell me about them?

(Prompts: how do your group organise yourselves; what do you like/dislike about your role; do you play any additional roles; is there a role you would have preferred)

- Can you tell me about your relationship with the family?

(Prompts: do you socialise with the family; do they host you or vice versa)

- How do you feel about being a 'volunteer'?

- Can you talk to me about any boundaries with your role?

- Can you talk to me about how your role has or hasn't evolved over the time you have known the family?

(Prompts: relationship then and now; any changes to the support that has been offered)

- Can you talk to me about how your family have adapted to life in the UK?

- Can you tell me about the family's life now?

(Prompts: have they got jobs/school/volunteering; have they made friends; do they still live in the same house; are they involved in the local community?)

- Can you tell me about how you have found the experience so far?

(Prompts: have you found anything challenging; how has your relationship been with other volunteers; has the experience been as you expected; have you learnt or gained anything as part of the process?)

- Can you talk me through your approach to the end of the two-year period of support?

- Can I ask about your future plans with CS and volunteering after the end of the formal two-year period of support

(Prompts: do you have any future volunteering plans; multiple CS families?)

- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience as a CS volunteer that has not already been discussed?

(Prompts: would you like to say anything about your role; feelings you might have about the family arriving; personal impact)

- *If relevant – why did you choose a walking interview?*

Walking interviews – smaller guide

During walking interviews, a card was created with prompts for each of the questions as it was difficult to hold the whole guide and balance a recorder.

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Timepoints two and three

Name	Motivation	Role changes
Age		
Work status	Role	Family life
Stage of CS		
Name of group	Relationship with family	Feelings CS
Previous volunteering	Volunteer?	Two-year period
CS experience so far	Boundaries	Future volunteering
Anything to add		

If relevant, why a walking interview?

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Closing (End of the Interview)

Following the interview, the researcher will run through the following with the participant:
- The participant has the right to withdraw from this project up until 30 days after the interview has taken place – (date for the specific participant provided)
- The participant can contact the researcher if they have any follow up questions after the interview

Appendix Two: Research poster used to recruit participants

Research Callout: UK Community Sponsorship Groups

I am undertaking research exploring volunteers in the UK Community Sponsorship Scheme.

- I am currently recruiting sponsorship group members to take part in my study in early summer 2021.
- **The research aims to examine the ways in which volunteers' engagement with Community Sponsorship shapes their relationships with sponsored refugees and the nature of associated volunteering activity.**
- I am recruiting participants to take part in a face-to-face walking interview around your local community (with strict COVID-19 social distancing and safety measures) or a video interview where I ask you to take photos of your local community and discuss these photos during an online video interview.

- If you are a volunteer in a Community Sponsorship Group in the UK and you fit into one of the below groups, please consider getting involved in my research:
    - If your group is preparing for the arrival of a refugee family
    - If your group welcomed a family between one year and 18 months ago
    - If your group welcomed a family over two years ago.

Please contact me for further details or to register your interest:

@Tash_Nicholls

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Appendix Three: Participant consent form

'Volunteers and the Community Sponsorship Scheme: The evolution of the volunteer relationship with the refugee family and their journey as a volunteer'

Researcher: Natasha Nicholls
Project Supervisors: Professor Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe
Address: University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham UK B15 2TT
Contact Details: ██████████████████████████████

Please complete this form after you have read the participant information sheet. If you require any further information prior to completing this consent form, please contact the lead researcher – Natasha Nicholls. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep and refer to at any time.

Participant's Statement

I confirm that

- I have read the notes above, and the participant information sheet and I understand what this research project involves.
- I understand that if I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researchers involved up to 30 days after my interview and withdraw my data and consent.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study.
- I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the UK's Data Protection Act 1998.
- I agree to my interview being recorded via audio and video and I consent to the use of this material as part of the research project.
- I understand that the lead researcher will take notes during the interview, and I consent to the use of this material as part of the research project and/or associated publications.
- I understand that the lead researcher may use photos I have taken, and I consent to the use of this material as part of the research project and/or associated publications.
- I understand that information from my interview will be published as a PhD dissertation and may be published as part of other material including but not limited to journal articles, books, reviews. Information will also be used in presentations, conferences and seminars.
- I am assured that the confidentiality of my personal data will be upheld through the removal of identifying information.
- I agree that the research project has been explained in a satisfactory way and I consent to take part in this study.

Name of participant:
Signature:
Date:

Name of researcher: Natasha Nicholls
Signature: *N.Nicholls*
Date:

Appendix Four: Participant information form

'Volunteers and the Community Sponsorship Scheme: The evolution of the volunteer relationship with the refugee family and their journey as a volunteer'

Researcher: Natasha Nicholls
Project Supervisors: Professor Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe
Address: University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham UK B15 2TT
Contact Details: ████████████████████████████

The Research Project

My name is Natasha Nicholls, and I am a doctoral researcher based at the University of Birmingham. You are invited to participate in a research project that focuses on the UK Community Sponsorship Scheme (CS). You have been invited to participate in this study because you as a volunteer member of a sponsorship group. Specifically, the study will explore the role of volunteers within the scheme. I am interested in how volunteers relate to the sponsored refugee families and how the volunteering journey may change during the sponsorship process and beyond. I will be conducting interviews with 18 volunteers, from three different stages of involvement in CS. I will recruit six volunteers from groups who are preparing to welcome a refugee family (and have submitted their Home Office application), six from a group whose family arrived between one year and 18 months ago, and six volunteers from a group whose family arrived more than two years ago.

The Interview Process

If you agree to take part in this interview, you have the choice of the type of interview that will suit you best from a choice of two methods. During the interview, the researcher will ask questions about your experience as a CS volunteer, your relationship with your sponsored family and your volunteering experience more generally.

Option one is taking part in a **socially distanced walking interview** with the lead researcher in an area of your local community that you feel is important to your volunteering. Strict social distancing will be adhered to (2 metres plus) and you will be required to use a face mask and hand sanitizer. If requested, a FFP2-standard mask and hand sanitizer can be provided by the researcher. For the safety of yourself and the researcher, this option will not be available if you are unable to wear a face covering.

The second option is for you to take part in a **video interview.** Prior to the interview I will ask you to take photos of an area of your local community that you feel is important to your volunteering and we will then use these photos to guide the discussion in a video-interview conducted via the platform of your choice i.e. Zoom or Skype. To take the photos, you can use your smart phone or camera and send them to me over email or WhatsApp (or another preferred method). Please note that these photos may be published in the write up of this PhD and/or associated publications. However, to protect confidentiality, where photos contain identifiable features, for example a street sign or pub name, this will be blurred out using computer software. Though it is permissible to take photos in public in the UK, where possible I would encourage you to take your photos where people cannot be easily identified. Where faces can be identified, these will also be blurred out to protect the confidentiality of those photographed.

Information about Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate I will schedule a short discussion via phone or video-call (i.e. Zoom) to explain the three methods of interview and following this conversation, you can let me know which method you would prefer, and we will schedule a date for the interview. Each interview will last for approximately 60-90 minutes. The face-to-face walking interview will be recorded via an encrypted audio recorder and another encrypted audio recorder will be used as a back-up measure. The virtual walking interview will be recorded via an encrypted audio recorder and the video interview will be recorded via the platform you choose for the interview (i.e. Zoom or skype recording). It is your choice whether you feature in the recording, your camera can be turned on or off.

Data Collected

The data collected in this study will be used to write my PhD thesis at the University of Birmingham where I study as part of a team working on Community Sponsorship. It may also be used within other publications such as journal articles, books and reports as well as conference proceedings and seminars.

If you agree to take part in this study, participation is entirely confidential, and your personal details will not be shared in any way. You will be asked to select a pseudonym (a fake name) which will be used instead of your name within the research. Following data collection, I will email you a summary of my findings which you will have the opportunity to discuss in a group focus group with other participants.

The transcript of your interview and recording of the interview will remain within a secure data storage facility at the University of Birmingham for at least ten years from the date of any publication to ensure that the study complies with the UK data protection act. Data that is collected will only be accessible by the researcher and their supervisors.

Withdrawing from the Study

You can withdraw from this project at any point up until 30 days after the interview has taken place. You can tell me at any point that you do not wish to answer a particular question or if you wish to take a break or to end the interview. If you wish to withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed within 24 hours.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study before completing a consent form, please contact the lead researcher - █████████████████████████

What should I do if I have any concerns about this study?

If you have concerns about this study please feel free to contact my lead supervisor Professor Jenny Phillimore: █████████████████████ You can also raise any concerns through the University of Birmingham's ethical review process. Further details about the process are available here:
https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research project.