

HORIZONTAL LINKS are bonding social capital - strong ties connecting family members, close friends and relatives – and bridging social capital - less strong and equally important ties between people or groups who are in similar economic and political positions, but in different locations, occupations or ethnic groups. Vertical links refer to the alliance between refugees and sympathetic and powerful people or organisations in the host society. These links help refugees to get resources and information.

PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS - these are qualities or situations that help alter or reverse expected negative outcomes. Protective mechanisms work best when communal, volunteer and professional support is in tandem with communal ownership and a focus on both problems and emotions.

WHY DO IT?

Building collective resilience has incremental benefits: working with groups of people builds community so that more people may gain support from community. It also increases the spread of people who hold knowledge about the ways of the host society, thus building social capital. It has been shown that re-creating community structures generates collective resilience, which is a powerful aid to recovery from trauma and resettlement.

HOW IS IT DONE?

By using groupwork and community practice the strengths and experiences of refugees are garnered to collectively address the tasks of recovery and resettlement. Refugees are strengthened through sharing the functional and emotional aspects of community: the functional referring to the tasks of everyday living; and the emotional referring to memories and connection with the past, status and role, and sharing feelings and values.

We must first address risk factors which are strongest in the early resettlement stages, when everything is new and foreign. We can reduce them in the following ways:

- In the *welcome stage*, new arrivals can gain strength from being with people who share history and culture, and who can provide a sense of familiarity. Orientation and practical assistance to link new arrivals with services works best as a staged process – accompany the person and model how to deal with new organisations – and supplement with group discussions about rights and obligations, support and information. Cluster housing in the early period of resettlement can reduce loneliness and isolation.
- During the *early support and transition stage*, refugees are short of time and resources. It helps to have someone from the same culture available for support as the need arises. This must be balanced with the strain it can put on any one member of the community to be the source of resettlement information. It also helps if refugees can discuss settlement challenges with service providers in community/group settings. This allows for information sharing; connections with familiar customs; meeting new people; provides opportunities to recognise strengths; and creates supportive networks.
- *Long term resettlement* can be aided by people coming together for functional and emotional reasons. The functional aspects provide leadership, resources, and communal learning. Emotionally, people draw from community/group the strength to survive; hope for the future; to celebrate; and to retain important links with the past. In this way community grows and becomes a source of strength and collective resilience is enhanced.

WORKING WITH GROUPS AND COMMUNITY

The following points are research-based and intended to guide practice.

- Use groupwork and community practice to build collective resilience. Refugees benefit from working on the tasks of resettlement collectively. When shared social structures are developed, social networks, norms, trust and resources are created. By approaching these tasks collectively refugees can perform acts of kindness, leadership and active citizenship. These are the building blocks for collective resilience.
- Recognise that by the time refugees arrive in a country of resettlement, they will have experienced community/group formation and change in different and difficult circumstances a number of times. It will help if the community/group has both a functional and emotional focus.
- Be aware that emotional aspects of forming and being in community will reflect nostalgia and trauma from the past, together with frustrations and pressures of present experiences. It may not be a straight forward task focussed activity. Aim to create a safe space for the community/group to discuss confusion, difficulties, learning new ways, integrating old and new knowledge, and sharing experiences and wisdom.
- Do not confuse acts of leadership with selection of a leader by outsiders. For refugees, the experience of selecting and dealing with a new leader has recurred a number of times, with a variety of outcomes. During the formative stages of communities in resettlement, leadership will change hands and will not be consistent.
- Develop effective consultation: discuss in advance strategies for contacting acceptable representatives; pay attention to who could represent the needs and views of the community/group; do not call meetings at short notice, and if there is no choice information should be shared and participation arranged by other means.

- Seek out and collaborate with natural helpers. Such links encourage participation within the community/group. These links should support community processes and positive community efforts as this will generate trust.
- Make sure leadership and helping tasks are shared among more people, with no single person seen as representing the community/group views. These tasks require coordination and communication which can be difficult during the challenging resettlement stage and when a community/group is new.
- Because refugees have lost access to their own place, land, economy and resources, it is important to work with the intangibles of community/group, such as: shared vision and power; involvement in decision making; pride and optimism; belief in and support for education; mutual assistance and cooperation; attachment and building supportive relationships. These form protective mechanisms.
- Support refugees to develop horizontal bridging and bonding links that create social capital: the social bonds with other members of their culture, neighbours and with the host society that build collective resilience.
- Establish vertical links between refugees and the host society for access to employment and education, to generate resources and to build an economic base. Long term resilience depends upon this asset enhancement.
- Facilitate recovery from trauma through individual intrapsychic healing and repair and reconstruction of social connections. This combination is necessary for risk prevention/reduction, asset enhancement and the protective mechanisms that maintain resilience.

- Match the most appropriate community practice model with the problem identified through consultation with all stakeholders. Do not define problems in technical terms, as issues will be complex with physical, social, economic and emotional aspects, and require multi-level multi-pronged approaches. During resettlement and integration the issues change, as will the services needed. The strength of a community practice approach is its focus on process, or how problems are addressed.
- Maintain a dialogical space in which contentious issues can be discussed and negotiated respectfully. For young people, women, men and elders, every cultural role has been disrupted, as have tribal, religious and cultural rituals and differences. This creates tension, despair, misunderstanding and competition.
- Collective resilience is built when there is community to keep hope alive; to discuss and manage big problems; to share knowledge and skills; to celebrate important occasions; and to hold ceremonies with others who share values.

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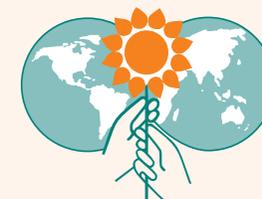
TIPS FOR BUILDING COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE WITH REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

It is working with groups of traumatised refugees whose old communities have been destroyed and who are learning to survive in a new world, where community may be non-existent, new or emerging, or multiple. Refugees must adapt to whatever environment they find themselves in, and the evidence shows they are stronger when they do this together. This link between recovery from trauma and resettlement and the social bonds and networks that strengthen and protect people is called collective resilience. To build and maintain collective resilience we need:

RISK PREVENTION OR REDUCTION – risk factors are disabling cultural, economic or medical conditions that deny/minimise opportunities for people and place them in jeopardy of failing to become meaningful members of the community. Refugee experiences of the loss of status, home, security, culture and familiar environment, the trauma of violence and torture, and the underlying emotions of fear, despair and grief, are risk factors that must be reduced.

ASSET ENHANCEMENT – this is linked to community support, networks, trust, empowerment, participation, communal coping and resources embedded in a shared



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social structure. This makes up the social capital that helps people to cooperatively pursue common interests and shared objectives. The social capital of refugees has been shattered. To re-build their social capital, we must create horizontal and vertical links.