



Community Sponsorship Explained:

Community Sponsorship (CS) was introduced in 2016 by the then Prime Minister David Cameron and is a **Home Office-backed scheme** which allows friends and neighbours to resettle refugees in their community.

CS is part of the VPRS programme – also known as the Syrian scheme – which was launched in 2015 where the Conservative Government committed to welcome **20,000 refugees by 2020**. When resettlement flights were halted, **19,768 refugees had been resettled across the UK** by Local Authorities and Community Sponsorship Groups.

When flights resume, and 232 refugees have arrived, we will see the launch of a new resettlement programme – **UKRS, where local authorities will resettle 5,000 refugees in one year and every refugee resettled through CS will be in addition to**, not part of government pledges. **UKRS HAS GOVERNMENT SUPPORT UP TO MARCH 2021, THE SCHEME HAS NOT BEEN GIVEN APPROVAL BEYOND THIS DATE SO FAR.**

Numbers:

To date, 449 refugees have been welcomed by 91 Community Sponsorship Groups across the UK. **20% of these refugees have arrived in the South West of England**. Currently, **150 Groups are working through applications to be ready to welcome refugees** when resettlement flights begin again. **WE NEED FLIGHTS TO RESUME URGENTLY TO BE ABLE TO OFFER A SAFE AND LEGAL PATHWAY FOR THE RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES.**

At the time of writing, the South West has the second most number of Community Sponsorship Groups in the whole of the UK. <https://resetuk.org/blogs/community-sponsorship-uk-august-2020>

Community Impact:

Community Sponsorship isn't about one person or one organisation, it's about individuals and communities coming together to use their skills and experience to welcome people just like them. The only thing that differentiates a refugee from anyone else is circumstances. Not only do communities grow, develop and learn through Community Sponsorship, but their communities are enriched through diversity and learning about new cultures. **Here is an opportunity for your group to share how your community and neighbourhood has been impacted and changed by CS. Local examples are very important.**

A recent South West evaluation of the scheme asked groups to share their experience of being a Community Sponsor, here are some of their words:

- **Life-affirming**
- **Life-changing**
- **Humbling**

- **Beneficial**
- **Profound**
- **Mind-broadening**
- **Community bonding**
- **Deeply memorable**

Groups join together, across the South West, to form a robust and effective network who work together, learn together, share good resettlement practice and bring about change which makes a difference to community led sponsorship. CS sees involvement throughout the community, from restaurants to churches, from hairdressers to schools, from gyms to hospitals, from local authorities to colleges all working together to provide high quality resettlement for families and successful grass roots community networking and cohesion. CS encourages us to unlock the social capital that's in every street in our communities. **Again provide local examples of how this has worked for you in supporting your family or working together to get approval to welcome a family.**

In our recent SW evaluation 82% of our respondents shared that between 11 – 25 volunteers had provided **direct support to a refugee family** and 59% shared between 6-25 volunteers had provided **indirect support** such as furnishing and painting the house the family would live in. On top of that 20% reported that over 50 volunteers (over and above those mentioned above) had been involved in the sponsorship of a family. **CS is deeply impacting and motivating in a community.**

Refugees & Covid 19

Refugees arriving through Community Sponsorship have contributed so much in communities across the UK, through lockdown and in this time of restriction. Refugees have become the befrienders to their community providing shopping for vulnerable CS Group members and others who have had to shield. They have sewn scrubs, cooked and delivered food to key workers and participated in online activities with members of their Groups who support them in sharing the value and difference of CS.

Refugees arriving through CS do so through a safe and legal pathways. Their cases and need for resettlement is assessed by UNHCR and their entry to the UK is agreed by the Home Office. All refugees of working age are encouraged to do so, to volunteer and learn English as they go. Young people go to school, join youth activities in their communities and create friendships.

Legacy of CS:

Community Sponsorship has led to members of our communities reporting a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods that they have never felt before. New friendships are formed, loneliness reduced, broadening the minds of people and communities to the challenges and responsibilities in our world. The value of welcome and hospitality have been accelerated in the actions and thoughts of individuals.

We have found from our regional evaluation that volunteers for CS have gone on to either welcome more families or pour their recent experience into other community projects for vulnerable people. CS is a scheme that mobilises skills and experience and encourages investment back into the community, creating a wonderful sense of togetherness and kindness at a difficult time when isolation and individualism could breed. One of our respondents says:

The impact on our community - and certainly those involved directly in this project - has been significant in terms of bringing people together, helping us to know and work together, in terms of giving a wider sympathy and understanding of the issues of refugees and their resettlement, an understanding of so many issues around discrimination, Islamophobia, trauma - oh, in so many ways.

The legacy has been life-changing for several of us, and of course those we help who have become our dear friends. We are planning already to sponsor a further family. I hope we shall keep going, bringing more and more members of our community into the wonderful experience of really making a difference to real people who need our help. Being involved with CS changes everything!

Additional resources:

A message from the Immigration Minister, Chris Philp MP which was shown on a recent international call of Community Sponsors across the world [Link](#)

A wonderful film produced by the Pickwell foundation (North Devon) sharing the impact of CS on individuals, communities and refugees in the South West [Link](#)

List of SW CS groups (both approved, approved in principle and forming) and their local MP:

CS Group	Constituency	MP	Party
Cheltenham	Cheltenham	Alex Chalk	Conservative
Falmouth & Penryn	Truro & Falmouth	Cherilyn Mackrory	Conservative
Bude	North Cornwall	Scott Mann	Conservative
Kingsbridge	Totnes	Anthony Mangnall	Conservative
Mortenhampsted	Central Devon	Mel Stride	Conservative
Exeter	Exeter	Ben Bradshaw	Labour
Budleigh	East Devon	Simon Jupp	Conservative
Sidmouth	East Devon	Simon Jupp	Conservative
Ottery St Mary	East Devon	Simon Jupp	Conservative
Uplyme	Tiverton & Honiton	Neil Parish	Conservative
Bridport	West Dorset	Chris Loder	Conservative
Tarka	Torridge	Geoffrey Cox	Conservative
Chulmleigh	North Devon	Selaine Saxby	Conservative
Barnstaple	North Devon	Selaine Saxby	Conservative
Braunton	North Devon	Selaine Saxby	Conservative
Georgeham	North Devon	Selaine Saxby	Conservative
Goodleigh	North Devon	Selaine Saxby	Conservative
Taunton	Taunton Deane	Rebecca Pow	Conservative
Bath	Bath	Wera Hobhouse	Liberal Democrat
Corsham	Chippenham	Michell Donelan	Conservative
Cricklade	North Wiltshire	James Gray	Conservative
Clifton, Bristol	Bristol West	Thangam Debbonaire	Labour
Westbury, Bristol	North West Bristol	Darren Jones	Labour

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE IN WRITING OR MEETING YOUR MP:

- 1 Ask for the resumption of flights urgently and/or a timeline for when this will happen, so CS groups can plan.
- 2 An extension of the refugee resettlement scheme beyond March 2021
- 3 Invite your MP to the Refugee Still Welcome event in December (see below)
- 4 A photo opportunity with your MP and/or a letter of support for CS to be able to use for future national lobbying and support locally to welcome more families

National Event: Refugees Still Welcome 6th December 3-4.30 pm

<https://actionnetwork.org/events/refugees-still-welcome-assembly>

We would encourage you to invite your MPs to this event which is being hosted by Citizens UK and Sponsor Refugees, they have invited Chris Philp, MP (Immigration Minister) to attend. The purpose of the event is to:

1. Celebrate the resettlement of 20,000 refugees (many of whom are children) between 2015 and 2020;
2. Recognise all the people and organisations who took action to make this possible through Community Sponsorship and council-led resettlement;
3. Call on the UK Government to 'extend the welcome' to 25,000 more refugees by 2025;
4. Issue an urgent demand for resettlement to resume, if the current scheme is still frozen at that time.

Social Media campaign: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram

CHARIS will use our social media platforms to share the action of SW CS groups and would encourage you where possible to do the same. If your MP is on social media please tag them along with CHARIS we will use the following hashtags #RefugeesStillWelcome #RestartResettlement #CommunitySponsorship