

Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages: A Pilot Peer Education Project for New Scots' Social and Language Integration

(January - June 2017)
Evaluation Report

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Bios and Acknowledgements

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Emily Bryson (Peer Education Programme Manager) is an ESOL Lecturer at City of Glasgow College. She has taught all levels of ESOL learners and has developed a host of vocational ESOL courses for the College. In addition, she is a mentor for the Teaching Qualification for Further Education. Her secondment to the Scottish Refugee Council was preceded by secondments to the ESOL Network Project and Scotland. She also writes English language teaching materials for publishers such as MacMillan and the British Council.

The *Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages* Advisory Board was established to provide advice and support throughout the duration of the project.

The board included:

Alison Phipps, University of Glasgow
Alison Strang, Queen Margaret University
Jackie Walder, Scottish Government
Jonathan Sharp, Stirling Council
Mandy Watts, Education Scotland
Mhoraig Green, COSLA
Wafa Shaheen, Scottish Refugee Council

The primary host organisations:

Aberdeenshire Workers' Educational Association
Dundee International Women's Centre
Midlothian Council
Renfrew YMCA

The secondary host organisations for comparison:

Aberdeen City Council
Moray Council
Perth and Kinross Council
Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary

This evaluation project has been possible thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Scottish Refugee Council to support communities in flux across Scotland and to the Scottish Government for providing the financial support. Project developers, programme and group coordinators, peer educators, and all the peers directly involved

in this project have dedicated their time, support for each other, and hard work. The success stories captured in this report would not have been possible without everyone's commitment to learn and share their experiences. This report is a reflection of their admirable work *over a very short time period!*



Executive Summary

Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages: A Pilot Project for New Scots' Social and Language Integration has been designed, developed and implemented by the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) with members of the advisory group in response to the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme for Syrian Refugees. The pilot project was delivered in four primary local authorities, including Dundee International Women's Centre, Aberdeenshire Workers' Educational Association, Midlothian Council, and Renfrew YMCA. Group activities, integration events and programmes were also evaluated in four comparative organisations: Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary, Perth and Kinross Council, Aberdeen City Council and Moray Council.

Building on a [peer education model](#), the project enabled peer groups to bring together non-native English speakers and local community members under the coordination of peer educators. Peer sessions aimed to support the development of social connections, language learning and cultural exchange between multilingual peers. The pilot project aimed to complement the existing ESOL provision by providing group-based activities which aided language acquisition.

The Peer Education Model

- Peer Educator Coordinators (PECs) received training and identified Peer Educators (PEs) in their local communities to help form peer groups.
- PECs delivered training sessions to PEs who learned about the peer education model, the project's objectives and outcomes, and strategies for peer engagement and learning.
- Each peer group conducted a series of peer sessions which explored the participants' social connections, group and individual needs, common interests and hobbies and ideas for collective actions.
- Each peer group planned and conducted collective actions which helped peers to expand their connections with the wider community and to practise their language skills.
- Peer sessions continue beyond the collective actions with a plan to identify new needs, group activities and future collective actions.

Participants

The pilot project benefitted more than one hundred participants engaged in different roles. Peer groups were coordinated by 5 PECs and 15 PEs. A total of 61 peers attended group sessions regularly, and a total of 110 participants (including peer groups) were involved in collective actions in the four local authorities. Peers were diverse in age (under 1 - 65 years old), gender, linguistic and cultural background, and physical abilities.

¹ As outlined on p55 of the *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities 2014 - 2017: Final Report*

“I’ve gained new contacts and knowledge related to language learning and ESOL.” – Peer Educator

“I feel here like in my family. I left my family there in a bad situation and the long journey, a hard one to come here so I found this group just like my second family. I’m really lucky to see this group and their lovely faces.” – Peer

“previously I knew some words but I never put them into a sentence so I learned that” (trans. from Arabic) – Peer

Project Outcomes

Despite the very short timescale, the project had a positive impact. The following project outcomes were achieved:

- Peers formed positive social connections and engaged in the wider community.
- Peers shared multicultural traditions, values and practices in a welcoming environment.
- Peers shared information about local services, programmes and resources.
- Peers developed an awareness and appreciation of languages.
- Peers practised and acquired English in a multilingual environment.
- Peers identified common interests and acted upon them by making a difference in local communities.

- PEs developed skills in working with non-native English-speakers.
- PECs expanded their professional competencies by providing social support to multilingual members of their communities.

Key Recommendations

- Expand the project timeline to allow for the development of more group activities, the sharing of skills and evaluation of impact.
- Develop the current set of resources into a Toolkit which can be widely shared to support future and current groups with peer activities. Accompany this with bespoke training sessions for new groups across Scotland.
- Expand the scope and context of the project to allow participation on a larger scale and measure the impact of a larger sample of participants and approaches.
- Engage more local peers with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Use multiple strategies to reach out to News Scots via digital platforms and mobile group meetings.
- Provide multimodal opportunities for language acquisition such as using artefacts, images and videos.
- Support peer sessions by focussing on common peer experiences, artefacts and collective actions.

Introduction

Local authorities across Scotland are currently working to develop a wide range of services, programmes and approaches to the social integration of Syrian New Scots². In line with the [New Scots; Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities](#) strategy, local authorities are encouraged to take a holistic approach, drawing upon multiple service providers whose coordinated efforts can facilitate Syrian refugees' experiences of resettlement. Identified as one of the key areas, language education has remained at the core of many activities in local authorities. Syrian New Scots recognise the importance of acquiring English that enables them to access services, connect to the local community, and plan future pathways towards personal development and wellbeing.

In response to the Resettlement Programme, Scottish Refugee Council designed and delivered the pilot project, *Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages*, in four primary local authorities. Four comparative localities were also included in the project to identify and record the wide range of activities initiated locally in relation to Syrian New Scots' pathways to social and language integration. The project aimed to complement the [Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) Strategy](#) by creating opportunities for flexible and creative community learning. To do so, the project set out to increase participants' social connections with members of local communities and their opportunities to practise English outside language classes through the planning and delivery of collective actions.

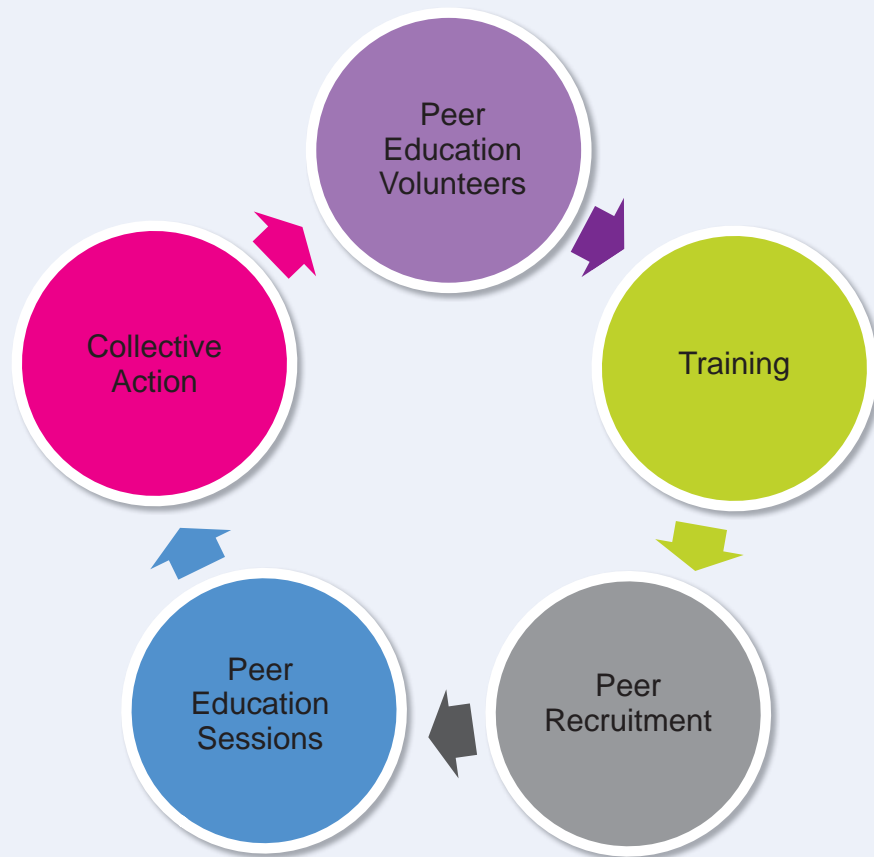
The pilot project builds on a Peer Education Model, already tested and implemented in a different context by the Scottish Refugee Council and NHS (see the [Refugee Peer Education for Health and Wellbeing](#) Programme). Multilingual peer groups were formed in the four different local communities, bringing together Syrian New Scots and local speakers of English as a first or additional language. Each group was initially organised by a Peer Educator Coordinator (PEC), and all group meetings were guided by Peer Educators (PEs).

Building on Alastair Ager and Alison Strang's [Indicators of Integration](#), the current evaluation has mapped out peers' social connections and monitored changes in individual social networks over the course of the pilot project. Based on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evidence, the report has also identified and assessed language learning opportunities in line with [Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020](#). Recommendations included in this report are grounded on local expertise and practices, as well as participants' needs and aspirations.

Description of the Project

The pilot project was delivered across five stages, beginning with the recruitment of four host organisations and their Peer Education Coordinators. The Scottish Refugee Council trained the PECs, introducing them to the project objectives, outcomes, resources, facilitation activities and information on supporting refugees. The [Scottish Peer Education Network](#) also provided training on peer education and interactive session activities. After identifying peers in the local communities, PEs facilitated peer sessions and helped coordinate collective actions.

² In this report, Syrian refugees are referred to as Syrian New Scots as they have joined local communities under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme.



Main Objective

The Peer Education project will increase the social connections and opportunities for language acquisition for all participants.

Outcomes

1. Participants are more confident in communicating with each other in English or another new language.
2. Participants are more confident in communicating with others in the wider community.
3. Participants increase their social connections.
4. Participants are confident in their awareness of and access to local services.
5. Participants develop an increased understanding of each other's experiences and circumstances.
6. Participants develop an increased understanding of each other's cultural heritage.
7. Participants learn new skills (such as employability, art, singing, etc.)
8. Participants have an improved sense of wellbeing.

Peer Education is

- an informal way of learning that empowers and gives independence
- a type of education which is not delivered by a teacher or trainer but by sharing personal knowledge and experiences with others
- non-conventional learning that is flexible to individuals' needs
- an approach focussed on group sharing and “equal teaching equal”
- an approach that changes existing attitudes and beliefs about learning, especially if previous experiences have been negative
- Peer education is for everyone!
- Peer education and training are based on the belief that people are the experts on their own lives. It gives an equal focus to the PROCESS of completing a set task rather than only focusing on the PRODUCT of a task. This gives an opportunity for those involved to gain knowledge and skills for their own personal development.

Peer Groups and Principles of Peer Education

In each of the four primary local authority areas, groups were formed along the following guidelines and principles of peer education:

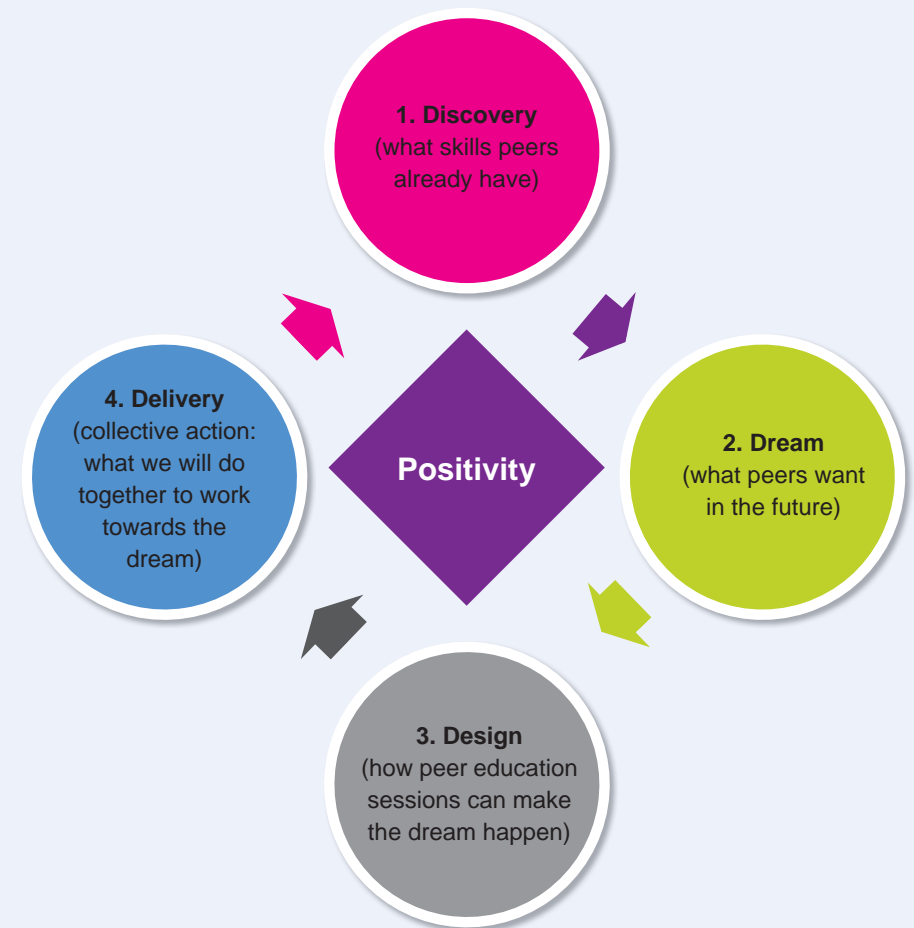
- each group should include 5-12 participants under the coordination of an English speaker and an Arabic speaker (or a speaker of any other language). Each group should consist of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Peer Educator Coordinators (PECs) can include locals with experience in language learning and/or community development, interested in coordinating and supporting Peer Educators.
 - PECs identify PEs and provide appropriate training for the delivery of group sessions
 - PECs identify potential group members (peers) and support the PEs with the first group session(s)
 - PECs have a supportive role throughout the sessions although they may decide not to be actively involved in the group sessions at all times
- Peer Educators can include volunteers with a good level of English who can support peers to increase their social connections and knowledge of their local areas.
 - PEs facilitate and encourage the group to identify language learning goals, skills and knowledge, interests and needs that can be acted upon and implemented through collective actions.

- PEs may be members of a pre-existing formal or informal social group (e.g., choir, allotment group, football club, etc.).
- PEs could be a UK citizen, refugee, asylum seeker, EU national, or any other New Scot.
- Peers can be anyone interested in gaining more knowledge of their local community, increasing their social connections and gaining a greater understanding of each other's cultures.
 - Peers may have any level of English proficiency (from complete beginner to proficient speaker of English).
 - Peers could include UK citizens, refugees, asylum seekers, EU nationals, or any other New Scot.

Appreciative Inquiry

The pilot project built on an appreciative inquiry approach that focusses on capacities, positive communication, outcomes and best practices. Instead of identifying problems or things that are not working properly in different communities, appreciative inquiry encourages people to build on what they can do to achieve their goals.

In the peer education model, peer groups identify what they are good at and how they can use individual and group strengths to carry out meaningful activities and experiences.



Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

- In every location or group, there are skills and capacities that can be used to bring about a positive change.
- Dreams can become achievable.
- Every individual has unique dreams and aspirations that are valuable for their communities.
- Engaging with individuals through asking questions and listening actively supports the process of appreciative inquiry.
- People become more confident and active if they can use their knowledge and skills from past experiences.
- The future should start with an appreciation of the best bits from the past.

Collective Actions

All peer groups established during the pilot project had the planning and delivery of collective actions as a goal. These are actions taken by peers to increase social connections and opportunities to use English. They also give the participants the possibility to learn new skills and actively engage in the wider community.

Collective actions can include different planned activities, such as joining a local club or hosting an event to meet local people.

Collective actions should

- be decided by the peers through reflections and shared interests;
- be a group decision;
- increase the social connections of the group;
- provide opportunities to practise English;
- benefit as many people as possible;
- continue to be used or be repeated by the peers after the project ends.

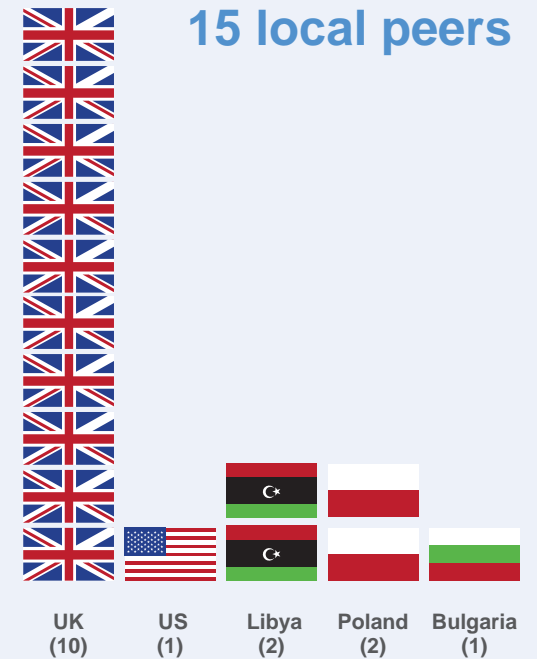
Participants

The project was implemented and delivered in four primary local authority areas across Scotland via host organisations: Aberdeenshire Workers' Educational Association (Inverurie), Dundee International Women's Centre (Dundee), Midlothian Council (Penicuik and Dalkeith), and Renfrew YMCA (Renfrew). The pilot project aimed to evaluate the feasibility and impact of the Peer Education model in local authorities over a wide range of contexts:

- local authority areas which are new to supporting refugees and have minimal established support services
- local authority areas with an established refugee population and support services
- rural and urban areas

- areas with sufficient numbers of people settled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
- areas where refugee peers are likely to encounter other people settled under the Syrian VPRS and/or other refugees and migrants.

The pilot project delivered in the four primary localities benefitted from the participation of:



14 PEs proficient English-speakers

1 PE proficient Arabic-speaker

15 PEs

5 Male



10 female



5 PECs

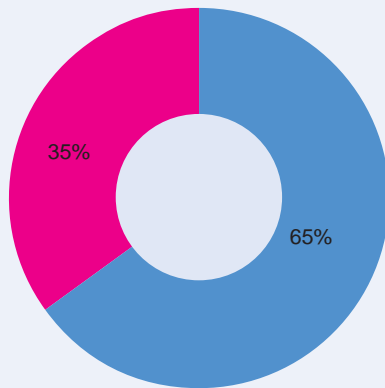


Syrian New Scots

Profile of Syrian New Scots

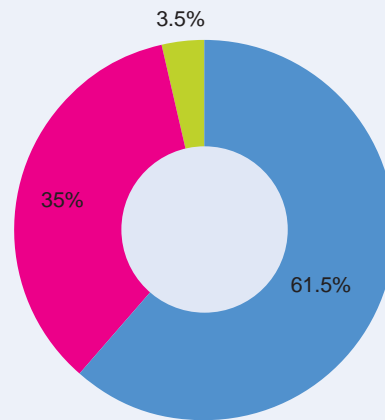
The peer groups included a diverse cohort of Syrian New Scots who first arrived in Scotland at the end of 2015 and continued to grow as Syrian communities during 2016-2017. In the four primary local authorities, Syrian peers participated in a language attitudes survey. 26 of the total 32 adult Syrian peers involved in the pilot project completed individual profiles which reveal the following characteristics:

Distribution by gender



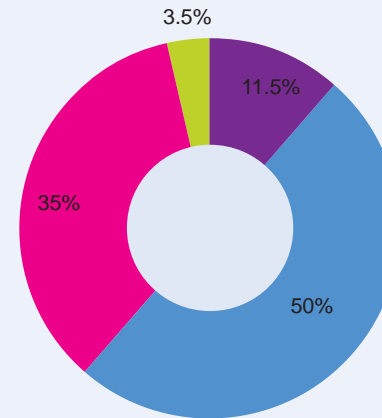
■ 17 males
■ 9 females

Distribution by age



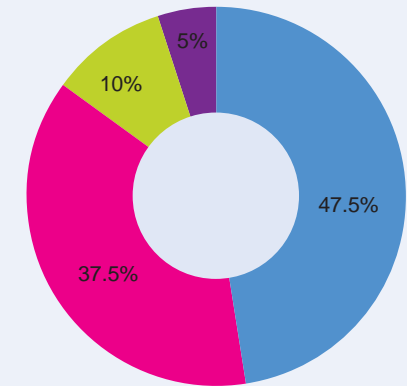
■ 20-39 years old
■ 40-59 years old
■ 60+: 1

Distribution by education level



■ No school
■ Primary school
■ Secondary school
■ University

Distribution by language proficiency (English)



■ Beginner
■ Elementary
■ Pre-intermediate
■ Upper-intermediate

As presented later in the report, all participating Syrian peers have close connections with other Syrian families who arrived in the area during the same time period. All Syrian families also have immediate family members living in Germany, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Norway and Syria.

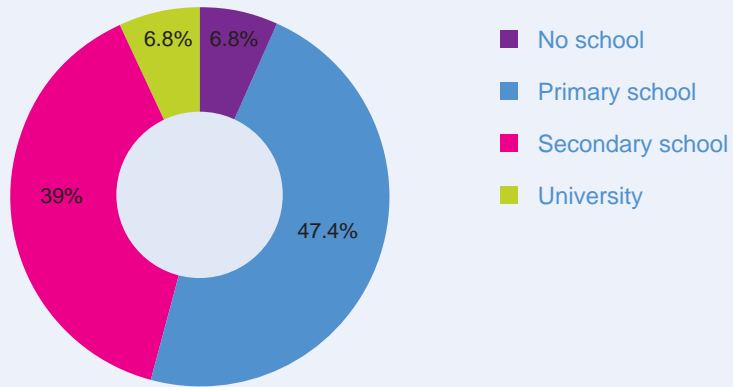


To evaluate the delivery, outcomes and impact of the pilot project, the report also identified and reviewed activities, groups and programmes in four other local authorities selected to be comparison areas for the project. Organisations in comparative localities included: Aberdeen City Council (Aberdeen), Moray Council (Forres), Perth and Kinross Council (Perth), and Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary (Stirling). The four comparative organisations have already implemented similar group-based projects or have provided significant support services for New Scots in their local communities.

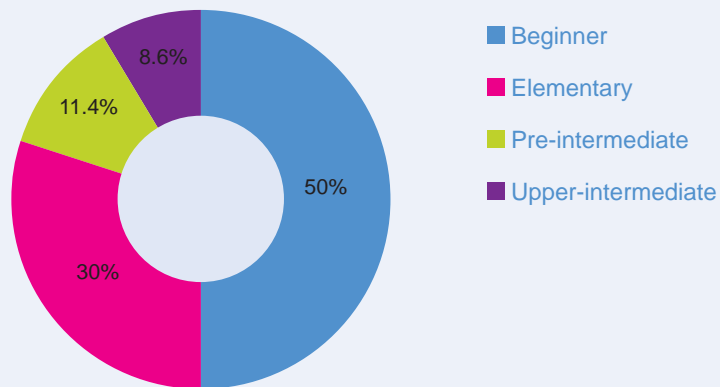
Distribution of Syrian New Scots across the Comparative sites (June 2017)	
Aberdeen City Council	35 adults + 37 children
Moray Council	12 adults + 11 children
Perth and Kinross Council	15 adults + 18 children
Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary	39 adults + 53 children

The group of Syrian New Scots in comparative local authorities have shown similar distributions of proficiency in English and educational backgrounds:

Distribution by education level



Distribution by language proficiency (English)



Sample Schedule of Peer Sessions

Session 1

Aim: To introduce the peers to the pilot project and to agree on group rules

Activities:

1. Icebreaker (bean bags and multilingual name tags)
2. Introducing evaluations based on emojis
3. Tour of the centre where peer group meets
4. What is a peer?
6. Group agreement and housekeeping
7. Designing a poster about my country

Session 2

Aim: To create a relaxing environment, to share aspects of different countries and strategies for language learning

Activities:

1. Welcome
2. Icebreaker: practising self-introduction expressions
3. Colour-coded sweets game: practice common questions about recent activities
4. Presentation of country posters
5. How we learn English
6. Mapping social connections exercise

Session 3

Aim: To create a relaxing environment, to share aspects from our cultures and languages and to create a group list of existing social connections

Activities:

1. Welcome
2. Colour-coded sweets game: sharing recent activities
3. Presentation of country posters
4. What helps you learn English?
5. Evaluation of social connections
6. Post-session evaluation

Session 4

Aim: To create a relaxing environment, to share locations in relation to peers' homes, local public spaces and services in the area

Activities:

1. Welcome
2. Colour-coded sweets game: sharing recent activities
3. Poster presentation of the group's existing social connections
4. Map activity and the A to Z Street Atlas
5. Learning English vocabulary and mini-session in Arabic
6. Human Bingo about hobbies and interests
7. Post-session evaluation

Session 5

Aim: To share languages and learn Arabic words and to do initial planning for group's collective action

Activities:

1. Welcome
2. Evaluation: the jar of words
3. Colour-coded sweets game: sharing recent activities
4. Mini-lesson in Arabic
5. Schedule update; choosing a collective action
6. Planning the collective action
7. Post-session evaluation

Session 6

Aim: To finish planning and prepare for the collective action

Activities:

1. Welcome
2. Colour-coded sweets game: sharing recent activities
3. Jar of words
4. Finish planning the collective action
5. What to do and see during the collective action
6. Programme updates

Session 7:

Collective Action (group walk and meal)

Aim: To practise English and to expand peers' social connections

Programme:

1. Group meets and travels to walk location
2. Pairing up and walking with representatives of local walking groups
3. Tea and Coffee
4. Group walk
5. Lunch
6. Group departs and travels back

Session 8

Aim: To evaluate the programme and share experience from the peer group

Activities:

1. Welcome
2. Programme evaluation
3. Brainstorming future sessions, activities and collective actions (e.g., paper quilling, a cultural activity: drawings and puzzles)

Methodology

To measure the extent to which key objectives and outcomes were met, the evaluation researcher undertook a systematic assessment that complemented the delivery process of the pilot project. The present report builds on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data collected in collaboration with group and programme coordinators, local stakeholders, PECs, PEs, and peers participating in the group sessions. Data was collected in three stages:

1. pre-pilot data collection through questionnaires with PECs and PEs, reflective self-evaluations, initial assessment of activities in primary and comparative localities;
2. data collection over the course of peer sessions through participatory activities, self-assessment tools, session materials, observations and reflections;
3. post-pilot data collection through case studies, interviews with PECs, questionnaires and interviews with PEs, focus groups with peers, peer surveys and mapping activities.

The evaluation was carried out to capture the experiences of all participants involved in the project in different capacities. Evidence included in this report reflects all stages of the project across all eight primary and comparative local authorities.



Peer Education Coordinators and Peer Educators

“we are not tutors” – PE

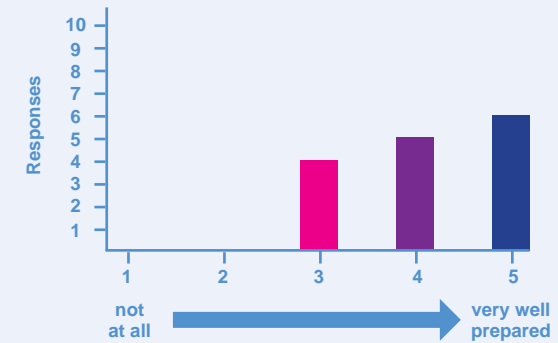
5 Peer Education Coordinators (PECs) and 15 Peer Educators (PEs) joined the pilot project, bringing together rich experiences in ESOL, community development, volunteering, and peer support. PECs conducted training sessions with PEs; between 1-4 sessions, depending on previous experience. Training sessions took an interactive and hands-on approach, demonstrating to PEs how they can engage with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. PEs reflected on the strengths of a peer education model and identified key qualities of peer educators. A rich packet of activity ideas and resources was made available to the PECs and PEs at the beginning of the project. Training sessions addressed culturally sensitive issues, role boundaries, and strategies for adapting English to different literacy needs.

At the end of the training sessions, PECs and PEs engaged in a self-reflection exercise that captured their readiness to deliver the pilot project:

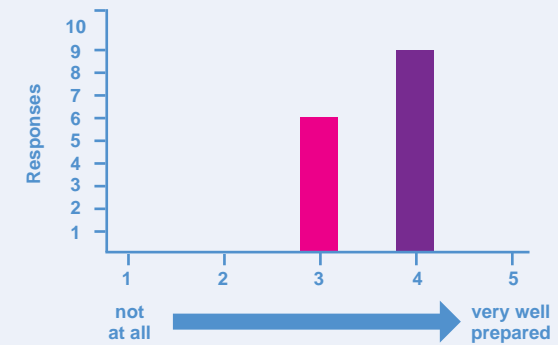
With a wide range of past experiences, PECs and PEs could build on knowledge of teaching ESOL (English as a Second Language), work in the culture and heritage sector, language cafes, sports and community centres, and support for refugees internationally. Only three PEs had no volunteering experience but felt well supported during the programme by learning from their peers and adopting an open attitude towards peer groups. While one PE was an Arabic-speaker and one PEC was an intermediate Arabic learner, all other PEs and PECs (fluent in English) have had experiences of learning a second language.

PECs' and PEs' Readiness to Conduct the Project

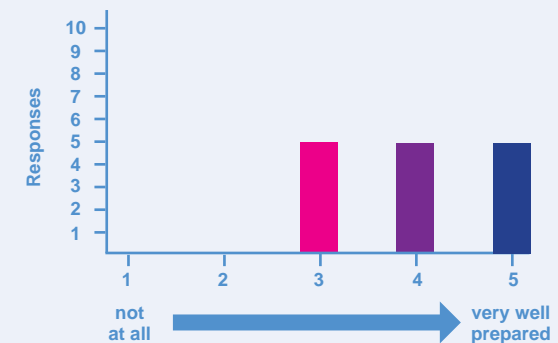
I am prepared to support my peers' learning of English.



I am prepared to help peers build connections with other community members.



I am prepared to start my sessions with peers.



PEs had knowledge of French, German, Spanish (one PE was a native Spanish-speaker), Polish, Italian, conversational and basic Arabic, and Doric.

Project Benefits for PEs and PECs

Expanding Social Connections

The PEs and PECs appreciated the opportunities created by this project which enabled them to expand their own networks by meeting new peers and professionals, as well as representatives of local services in the wider community.

“I was also adapting to first-time motherhood and I wanted to stay engaged with the community and wider world at large whilst staying home with a small child.” – PE

“I benefitted in a professional way - it has helped refresh / update my experience of working with refugees (I last did this in 2006). [...] It has strengthened some of my instincts and thoughts about language development, communicative achievement and experiential learning.” – PEC

Learning New Approaches to Community Development and Language Learning

At times, PECs and PEs felt challenged to implement the peer education model as they did not have a prescribed way of conducting the sessions. However, as they gained more confidence in building rapport and providing support to the peers, they valued the possibilities for sharing and learning from each other.

“I have learned that being a peer educator is not about teaching but to facilitate learning from each other. [...] We all have different gifts and personalities, therefore, we all have something different to offer to peers.” – PE

“we’re learning as much from them [PEs and peers] as they are from us” – PEC

PEs and PECs with ESOL background valued the creative and flexible approach underlying the project. PEs gradually adopted more hands-on and flexible activities that encouraged peers to remain engaged and open to English practise.

“I’ve gained new contacts and knowledge related to language learning and ESOL. I gained knowledge regarding peer learning styles and ESOL-based activities.” – PE

Surprise and Enjoyment

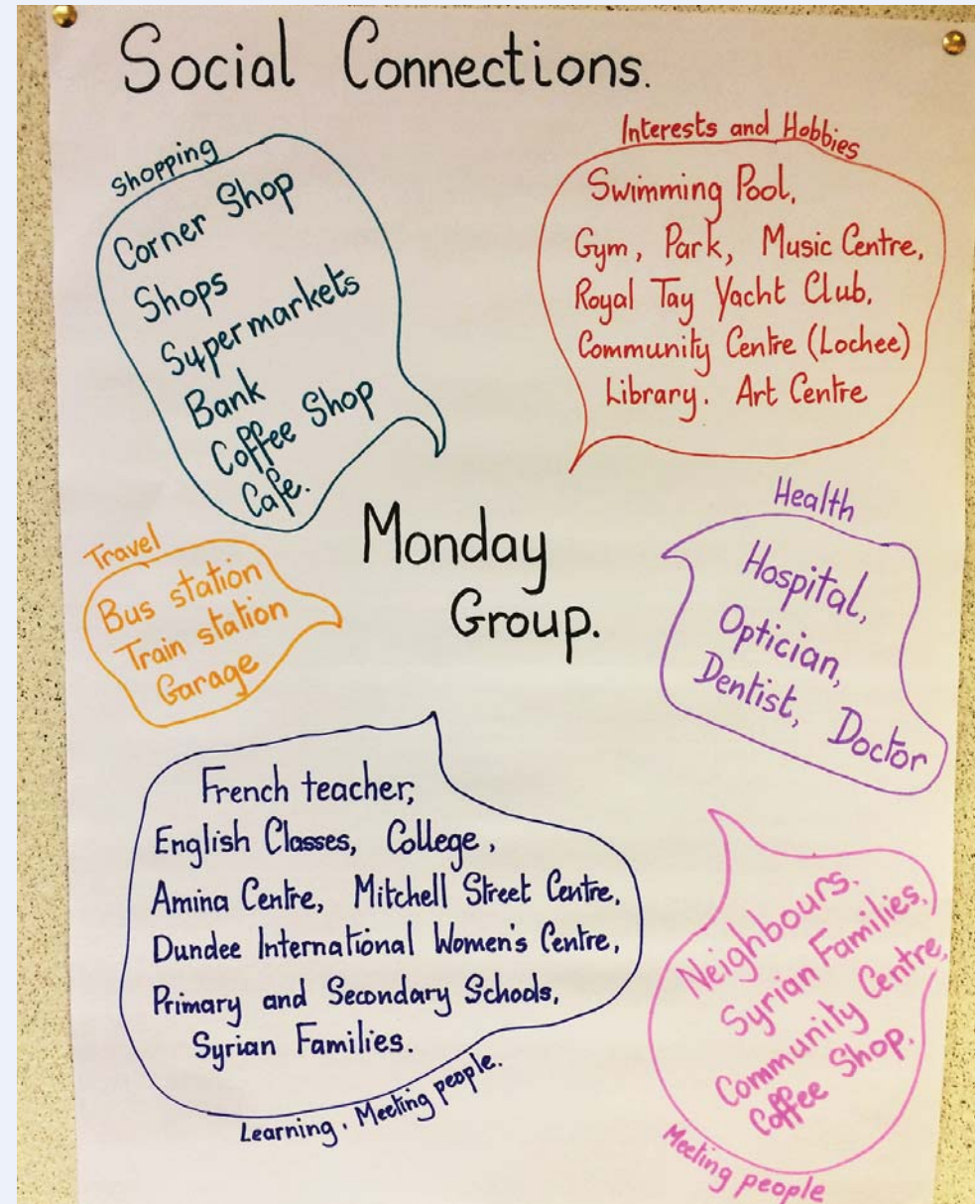
PECs and PEs recognised that at the beginning of the programme, they were surprised at the many challenges that emerged from language barriers and some of the peers' low literacy levels. However, once they identified what strategies worked best in their groups, they relaxed and enjoyed the process.

"I tried new experiences and I had fun" – PE

Confidence and Trust

At the end of the project, the PEs and PECs felt a sense of accomplishment as they successfully managed to create peer groups with their own identities and common interests. If at the beginning of the project some of the PEs had a few doubts about being able to build strong connections with the peers, the collective actions and the peers' feedback confirmed that the PEs' and PECs' work had been valued and built in-group confidence and mutual trust.

"I am proud to be a peer educator because I didn't speak English 5 years ago and would have never thought I could be in such a project. Now I can help myself and I can help others." – PE



Case Studies

Peer Groups in Four Primary Local Authority Areas

Scottish Refugee Council identified suitable host organisations across Scotland. These host organisations selected Peer Education Coordinators (PECs) at a local level. PECs in each location provided information about the pilot project and conducted training workshops on a wide range of topics, essential for the implementation of the project. The interactive workshops:

- introduced the Peer Educators (PEs) to the peer education model,
- included demonstrations of facilitation and peer education activities,
- provided cultural support on how to appropriately engage with peers in local communities, ranging from local speakers of English to Syrian News Scots and multilingual peers interested in joining.

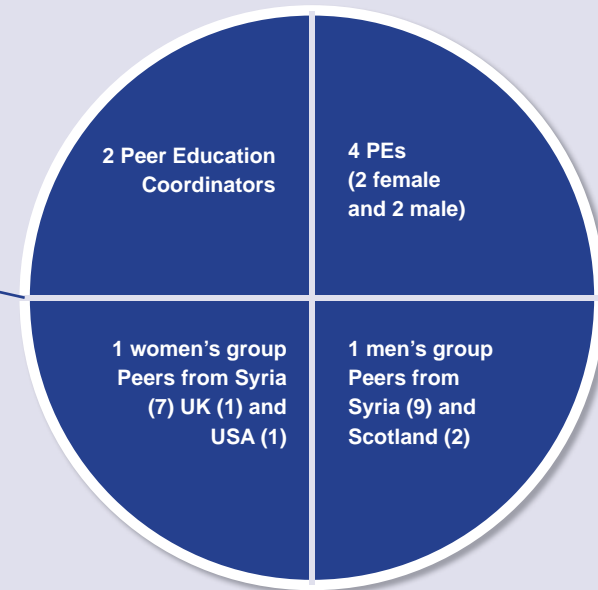
Groups formed in each of the four primary local authority areas			
Aberdeenshire Worker's Educational Association (WEA) (Inverurie)	Dundee International Women's Centre (DIWC) (Dundee)	Midlothian Council (Penicuik and Dalkeith)	Renfrew YMCA (Renfrew)
2 PECs (ESOL)	1 PEC (ESOL)	1 PEC (ESOL)	1 PEC (non ESOL)
4 PEs	8 PEs	1 PE	2 PEs
2 groups men's group (11) women's group (9)	2 groups women's group (8) mixed group (9)	1 group women's group (5) children's group (14)	1 group young people's group (5)
<i>Collective Actions</i> • Baking Event (women's group) • Gardening Event (women's group) • Wellbeing Festival (men's group) • Group Walk (both groups)	<i>Collective Actions</i> • Group Walk (women's group) • Playing Tennis in the Park (mixed group)	<i>Collective Action</i> • Beach Walk and Family Day Out	<i>Collective Action</i> • Community Garden Project

The following case studies provide a description of each group and the context in which they emerged. Unique achievements are identified, while group evaluations of project outcomes are presented collectively (p50 - p63 of the report).

CASE STUDY 1:

Aberdeenshire Worker's Educational Association (WEA)

Location: Inverurie



Context

"I was thinking this morning how our peers will be learning English listening to Scottish, English, Irish AND Pennsylvanian accents all at the same time. I'm not sure if that's overkill or they are really lucky." – PEC

The Inverurie team identified PEs with a wide range of volunteering experiences and provided training sessions by tailoring discussions to the PEs' experiences and needs. During the first stage of the project, gender-related conversations initiated by the PEs determined the PECs to form two peer groups (a women's and a men's group).

The participants for the peer groups were selected in collaboration with The Amal Project (The Project of Hope), a local group of 40+ Syrian New Scots. Although each PEC focussed primarily on their group, the two coordinators worked together, building a strong partnership which allowed them to exchange experiences and creative ideas to support both groups. While efforts were made to engage more local peers in the groups throughout the sessions, the two groups were fairly homogenous, including the Syrian News Scots peers and the local PEs (proficient speakers of English). Opportunities to engage with the wider local community were actively pursued through the organisation of several collective actions which allowed the peer groups to establish new social connections.

Women's Group

The group embraced the peer education model and built strong connections among its participants. Because the PEs were not living in Inverurie and commuted from other locations to join the group, the Syrian New Scots took an active role introducing the PEs to the local area and the services they were familiar with.

“When we first met the peers they greeted us in typical Western fashion. By the end of the first session, a few of the peers departed with the Syrian double kiss greeting and by the start of the next session, all of the peers greeted us with the Syrian greeting.” – PE

Language Learning – Initially, the peers made great efforts to communicate with the PEs, and language barriers were successfully negotiated through the sharing of local knowledge and an increased confidence built through participatory games. Image-based dictionaries were used consistently and many incidental conversations emerged based on images that caught peers' attention.

Collective Actions – The women's group explored multiple opportunities and exceeded their initial goals by planning and engaging in two collective actions: a gardening activity and a baking event. Building on their personal interests, the peers worked closely with Home-Start Garioch (a charity supporting families with parenting and well-being activities).

Together, they organised a gardening event where all the participants planted flowers and shared gardening skills along with language sharing activities, 'get to know you' games, and a peer's birthday celebration.

“Although an outsider would definitely highlight language as a major barrier, I just saw a group of women having a giggle over coffee and cakes. There were no barriers to laughter and sharing food which was lovely to see and be a part of.” – PEC

“The event increased their sense of health and wellbeing by offering them a safe and supportive environment to communicate freely with local people.” – PE

The baking event, hosted by a local community kitchen, brought together peers and local volunteers who exchanged Scottish and Syrian recipes. The participants demonstrated cooking practices and habits in “baking pairs” and did demonstrations of cooking skills. During the activities, peers also exchanged information and stories about their families and lives. The group has documented their activities, shared their achievements in the local press, and is currently planning the publication of a book of Syrian and British recipes that will be shared with the local community. The PEC is also currently planning to continue and support a women's peer education group by engaging them in a Confidence to Cook programme in partnership with the same community kitchen.

Men's Group

The men's group gathered energetic and highly motivated Syrian New Scots. The peers were determined to improve their English skills, particularly in relation to practical skills needed for driving and DIY projects. The group adopted a problem solving approach and the peers were interested in learning English in relation to previous work experiences. Encouraged by this approach, one of the peers brought his toolbox in an effort to learn the names of his tools in English. During the sessions, they shared past experiences from their jobs as mechanic, farmer, chef, wood-staining specialist and electrician.

Language Barriers – To negotiate language difficulties, one of the PEs taught himself common Arabic words and phrases (e.g., salutation phrases, family relationships) in an effort to reach out and facilitate group conversations. Despite such efforts, the group was challenged in their implementation of the peer education model:

“The method adopted in the face of the language difficulties was a more traditional group leadership model albeit highly consultative and inclusive; emphasising that decisions were theirs [the peers’].”

– PE

The PEs made efforts to communicate with the peers and establish action-oriented activities. Because of individual challenges experienced in English classes, some peers wanted to work on

materials from their classroom sessions and the PEs sometimes felt obliged to move into a 'tutoring' role.

“we provided structure at the start and we even provided a plan every week but they actually took over. We didn't say to them bring your stuff from the English classes” – PE

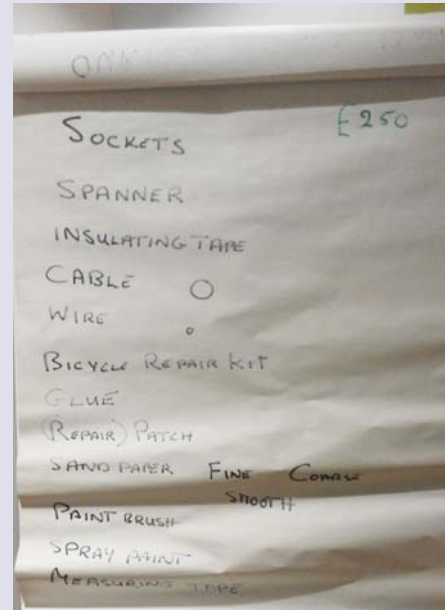
Peer Language Support – Language difficulties were successfully negotiated among peers. Two of the nine participants acted as translators when needed and provided language support. These peers were developing their own language skills and took the opportunity to translate as a way of practising their recently acquired knowledge. The other peers also used mobile phones and Google Translate to acquire new words shared within the group.

Collective Action – Due to personal reasons and emergent commitments, the PEs were not able to organise a collective action and had to withdraw from the project after four sessions. At this stage, the PEC joined the project and successfully acted as a PE, facilitating the peers' participation in the Aberdeenshire Wellbeing Festival – a Conversation Cafe Gathering. This event gave attendees (160+) the opportunity to meet local people from other Conversation Cafes from the Aberdeenshire area and learn about local services. They participated in taster workshops (e.g., arts and crafts, dancing) and chose football as their favourite. The peers are currently planning to engage in a football club that will continue to foster and expand their social connections.

Other Events – The women’s and men’s groups also had the opportunity to attend a common event. The PECs supported the groups with arrangements for a whole group walk at Pitmedden Garden and Museum of Farming Life. This event allowed the peers to explore the local community, share group experiences, and strengthen in-group bonds.

The Syrian peers in the women’s group invited the PEC and the PEs to a dancing event. Peers were joined by their daughters and their daughters’ friends from school (proficient speakers of English). The event involved dancing and learning new moves to Syrian and Scottish rhythms.





Sessions promote social connection

HOME-START Garioch have been working with the Scottish Refugee Councils Sharing Lives Sharing Languages Project in response to the resettlement programme which welcomes Syrian refugees to Scotland.

In total this was a six-month programme where the main aim was to increase the social connections and opportunities for non-native English speakers to use their English outside the classroom.

Home-Start Garioch welcomed local Syrian women on Thursday to a session on cultural heritage.

The project was organised by project co-ordinator for Home-Start by Katrena Wilkie and six women attended the programme, which was very successful and there is a definite increase in awareness of local services and their confidence to use them.

Last week's gardening project brought together the community with a better understanding of each others cultural heritage.

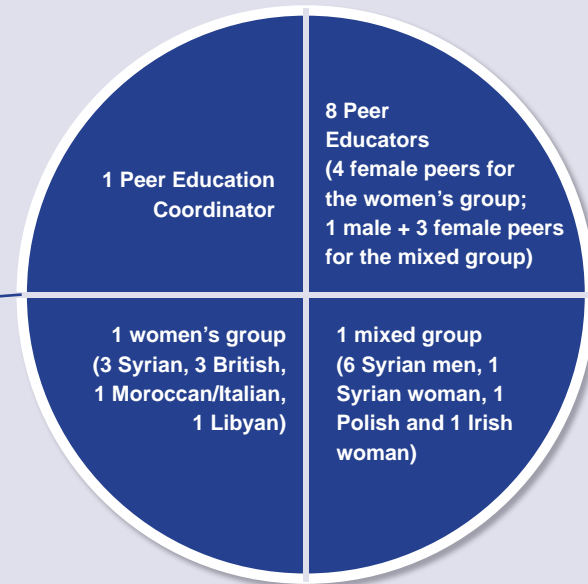


Flower power: Home-Start Garioch welcomed six Syrian women to take part in their gardening project last week. Photograph by Christy Annand

CASE STUDY 2:

Dundee International Women's Centre

Location: Dundee



Context

The Dundee team involved in the project used the support of a PEC (with intermediate knowledge of Arabic) and a large group of PEs who decided to work in two peer groups. The PEC recruited peers with help from Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre. The PE team included participants with diverse linguistic backgrounds, including a native Arabic-speaker and a Spanish-speaker. The peer groups met in the same room but at different times during the week. Each group displayed their work on their 'group wall' which allowed peers to share creative ideas. While securing consistent attendance was a challenge during the first few sessions, the peer groups successfully established group identities

and action plans. Given the popularity of the groups, new Syrian peers have joined over the course of the sessions. The groups had the local support of a crèche, enabling female participants to get fully involved.

“they are like little families” – PEC

Women's Group

The group focussed on mapping their locations, in the town and on the world map. They identified local services that participants were aware of, such as the bus station, airport, hospital, library, parks and swimming pools. The peers created country posters to represent beautiful/particular/special aspects of their country. They shared experiences by answering the same set of questions at the beginning of each session: "What was the best thing you did? What made you laugh? Where did you visit? Who did you see?" During one of the sessions, representatives from two Conversation Cafes joined the group and introduced their own groups and services.

Two-way Language Learning – The Arabic speakers in the group took an active role in teaching their peers new words and phrases. The two-way exchanges between English and Arabic gave speaking confidence and learning motivation to all the participants. Mini-lessons of Arabic occurred consistently and spontaneously across sessions and gave the English-speaking peers the opportunity to experience the challenges of a language learner.

"Fascinating to see that sharing languages became today part of the group's identity." – PE

Collective Action – The collective action included a group walk (with the participation of three representatives of established walking groups in Dundee) and a group lunch. During the walk, each peer

paired up with someone they did not know. During lunch time, the peers learned about walking, singing, and yoga groups and about several upcoming events around the area. A short demonstration showed them how to use walking sticks. To feel prepared, the peers had practised in advance strategies on how to engage in small talk, ordering food, and taking a taxi. As a result of this collective action, one Syrian peer joined one of the walking groups.

Mixed Group

The group included a diverse range of peers and benefitted from the involvement of a native Arabic-speaker PE. This support was important during the first sessions, especially when the information the PEs wanted to share included abstract concepts. At the beginning, the PE tended to provide quite substantial support with translations in Arabic, but as the sessions progressed, translations were no longer necessary. The Syrian peers' confidence increased and their language skills improved to the point that they no longer turned to her for support.

The group enjoyed hands-on activities and shared common likes, dislikes, favourite places, hobbies and activities. The activities seemed to take longer than expected but this was seen as a positive sign of group engagement.

"they have things to say and they wanted to put it out."
– PE

Learning to learn – In the first sessions, Arabic-speakers were quite hesitant to speak although they understood English quite well. After gaining more confidence and knowledge about the group dynamics, they became more open to engage in small conversations, without the fear of making mistakes. As the group provided an informal space for sharing, they took more opportunities to try out the knowledge gained in their English classes.

Collective Action – The group was keen on learning a new skill and for their collective action they learned how to play tennis. In the last sessions, participants reviewed relevant vocabulary and planned the event. Several native speakers of English joined the collective action and the group lunch that followed. The peers' confidence was reflected in their ability to talk freely and play with language: **“Could I have a bottle of... water / wine / coffee!”**.

At the restaurant, they engaged with the restaurant staff and discussed table rituals in various cultures.

Other events – A few peers shared their interest in gardening which prompted one PE and one PEC to organise a visit to a local community garden in the company of 5 peers. During the visit, the peers talked to local residents who owned allotments and the community garden project manager. Two Syrian peers volunteered to work in the garden and one has recently visited it with his young son.





Ahlan wa Sahlan = Welcome أهلاً وسهلاً
 Marhaba = Hello مرحباً
 Keifa Hallok = How are you كيف مالك
 Salam Aleikom = Peace to you (greeting) سلام عليكم
 Shukran = Thank you شكراً
 Men fudlik = Please من فضلك
 Anna Assif = I'm sorry أنا أسف
 Sabah Alheir = Good morning صباح الخير



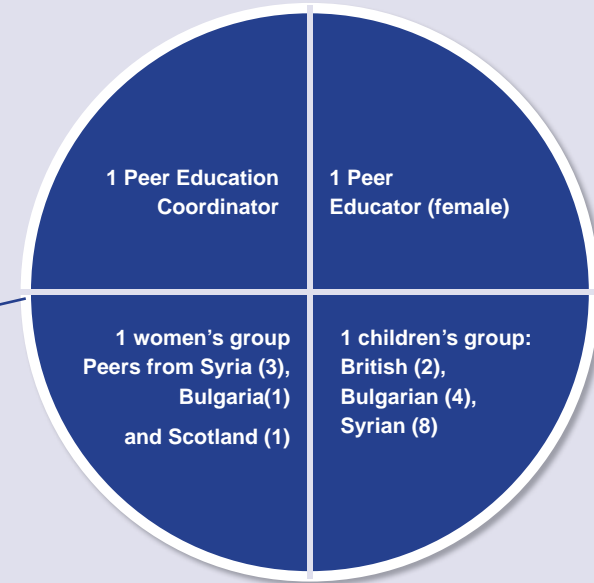
[Book] Tomorrow
 Boklem (tomorrow)
 nām et she slept nam he dept
 SABA HALHAE "Good morning"
 river نهر
 private خاص
 KAREBA [Close]
 Bird
 SYRR (Secret)
 [MA HATA] he sorry / read wrong
 Secret سر سر
 ANGRY غضب



CASE STUDY 3:

Midlothian Council

Location: Penicuik



Context

As the number of Syrian peers in the area was quite low, this group was coordinated by one PE with an ESOL background. A second PE participated in the training; however, due to the low numbers in the group, she joined the sessions as a peer. The local peers (from Penicuik and Dalkeith) included a multilingual speaker and a native speaker of English who were well connected in their communities. The PEC had the constant challenge of arranging transport for some of the female peers in the group and decided to run parallel sessions for children who came along with their mothers.

“You’ve got to make it easy for people to come to things, to support them” – PEC

Syrian men in this local authority seem to have several opportunities to establish social connections. They attend computing classes, walk to classes together and socialise with their colleagues from the local community. The gym is another venue for socialisation. The PEC determined that the women’s group did not have any comparable opportunities to engage with other peers in their community. The women’s group was established to provide them with such support.

Women's Group

The group conducted sessions that allowed the peers to introduce themselves by pointing out locations on the map (of the area, of the country, of the world). A series of participatory activities revealed common experiences (e.g., learning to drive), personal hobbies, life stories (e.g., ***“How I met my partner”***), peers' mobility in the area, as well as favourite locations and services accessed in the community. Dice games with pictorial representations were used to encourage peers to share stories from their lives and show photographs of their families on mobile phones.

“One of the peers chose the side of the dice showing a sun and told the group: ‘hair like the sun.’ This is the phrase that children used to tell her when she was young. She had blonde, slightly frizzy hair up until the age of about 10 (and showed us a photo).” – PE

Another Syrian peer

“chose the key, which turned out to be the object she had brought with her. It's the key to her mother's bedside table which is where they always kept their special things at home - like a memory box. Now she just has the key to remind her. She also shared a photo she had on a key ring - it was her when she finished 12th grade at school and talked about the memory of her school graduation ceremony.” – PE

Common Activities – The links formed among the peers enabled them to organise independent outings during the spring school holidays when the group was not in session. These included a walk with the children in the park and meetings with other parents and children in the playpark. These events gave families more confidence to speak to other local families at the school gates.

Collective Action – For the collective action, the peers organised a Family Day Out which included a beach walk and a picnic. The immediate families accompanied the women's group and other local families joined in. The new peers were a mix of native-speakers of English and multilingual peers. They shared their own background and links with various public services and places in the area (e.g., school, library, swimming pool). The Bulgarian and Syrian families were able to share similar experiences and feelings about living in a new community and country.

Children's Group

As crèche arrangements could not be made during the women's group meetings, the PEC, with a rich background in family development and community support for young people, conducted craft activities with the young people (e.g., making face masks, playdough, objects made out of clay, picture frames and paper airplanes). The group included children as young as one, as well as primary and secondary school-aged participants. The children's group and the women's group were coordinated in separate rooms; however, an open door rule allowed children to visit their mother's or have their support if needed.

Children's Social Connections – The group developed a series of internal rules (e.g., “Please”, “share”, “don't snatch” and “ask”) as the children were not used to cooperating with each other or working across language differences.

“Initially, the British children were quite suspicious of the Syrian kids because they did not know what they were saying and the British kids haven't been in a situation where they were in the minority.” – PEC

“At the very end, what I noticed was that the younger Syrian kids and the British boys were really starting to play together.” – PEC

Learning to Make Things – A few Syrian children had difficult journeys coming to Scotland and initially found it hard to understand their roles and the activity-based format of the sessions. After the first meetings, they began to become more cooperative and engaged in their tasks.

“By the end, he was fully aware of the roles because he would ask me questions [...] he was becoming more confident and he learned the rules of how to interact with other people and share and give and take” – PEC

“They were really enjoying making things. They were very creative.” – PEC

Family Learning Session – One of the sessions for the women's group could not be coordinated by the PE and was conducted as a family learning event. The adult peers joined the children's group in the craft activities and built conversations with the support of the PEC. This session was identified as a potentially useful format for the long-term group planning.

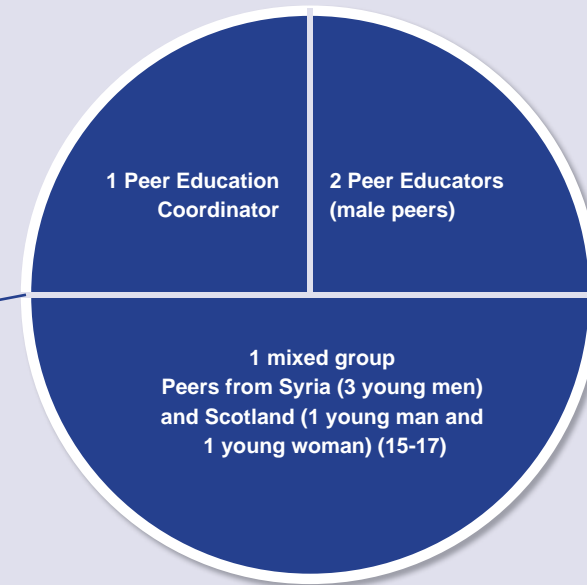




CASE STUDY 4:

Renfrew YMCA

Location: Renfrew



Context

The Renfrew team made several attempts to gather adult members from the community to join the project. After reviewing local priorities, responses, and needs, the Renfrew team decided that a peer group would benefit the most if it included young people. The PEC started with a boys' group which evolved into a mixed group when it was joined by one female and one additional male peer, both proficient speakers of English.

Young People's Group

During the first sessions, the peers worked hard to establish trust and connections with one another. Despite significant language barriers, the peers opened up around games and discussions about popular culture (e.g., well known singers and rap music) and sport (football and football players). During break times, the Syrian peers shared short stories about their lives, including house work and personal hardships.

“When it first started, they would only speak with the person they came with; now, they speak more with each other.” – PEC

Language Learning – The group drafted their own rules and learned emotion words to express their likes and dislikes (e.g., happy, sad, angry, scared, shocked). As the peers did not feel engaged in school or in their studies, they wanted to have a different group experience which started with action words (e.g., jump, sing, talk).

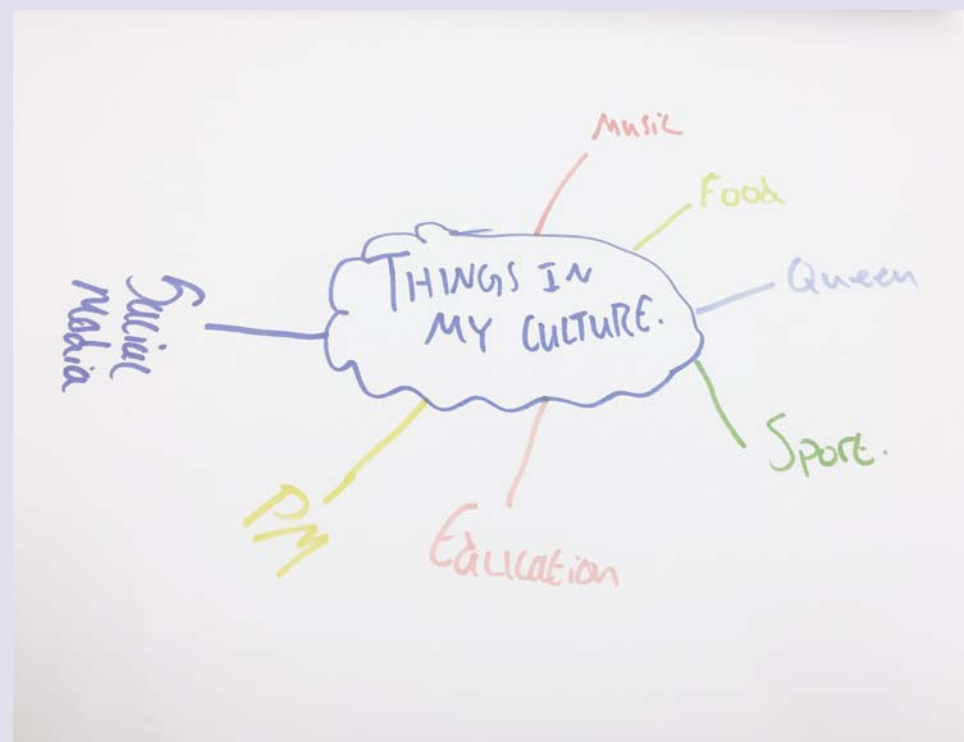
Local Connections – The peers had many connections with the Syrian community which became apparent at a larger event organised in the area. The Syrian peers and the PEC participated in this event and learned about nine Renfrewshire organisations that presented their services.

The peers were visited by representatives of three organisations that offer support and mentoring to young people who want to prepare for employment or engage with the larger community. The Syrian peers supported each other with translations as two of the peers had stronger English skills.

Collective Action – In the past, the peers have worked with Engage Renfrewshire and the Environmental Training Team. Based on these initial connections, the group was given permission to work on a Community Garden and had the freedom to create their own garden design. The peers spent time planning and began working in the garden.

Learning New Skills – The group allowed the peers to practise and acquire group work skills, communication skills, planning and gardening skills. The Syrian peers learned new social media skills (e.g., vlogging) by recording trial videos of their work in the garden.

“They are trying to realise what their social connections are and how they can work in the community.” – PEC





HAVE FUN
NO VIOLENCE
RESPECT احترام
LISTENING
NO SWEARING
HELP EACH OTHER



HOPES
FUN / GAMES
WORK
SEE MATCH
PLAY FOOTBALL

FEARS
STUDY
ART

Comparative Sites

During the implementation period of the pilot project, the independent evaluator identified and collected activities, events, and scheduled programmes in comparative local authority areas. The following four case studies present the context and range of activities in each local authority, highlighting strengths and unique approaches to local challenges. Particular attention was given to comparable groups that aim to address the same two main objectives of the pilot project: increased social connections and opportunities for language practice and learning.

Comparative Local Authority	Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary	Perth and Kinross Council	Aberdeen City Council	Moray Council
Group	Befriending Scheme Snack'n'Chat (2016)	New Horizons (2013)	Volunteers Strategy Ladies' Group (2016)	Volunteers Mothers and Toddlers Group (2016)
Attendees	40-50 participants	13-15	7-10	7
Known Languages in the Group	English, Arabic, Kurdish, Thai, French, German, Dutch	English, Bulgarian, Polish, Arabic, Turkish, Czech	Arabic and English	Arabic and English
Actively Used Languages in the Group	English, Arabic, Kurdis	primarily English	Arabic and English	Arabic and English



CASE STUDY 1:

Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary (SCfS)

– a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation since March 2016

Location: **Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils**



Context

In the area, Syrian New Scots families are engaged with local volunteers in various activities under a Befriending Scheme. The SCfS collaborates with 50 active volunteers to address ‘people-intensive needs’ through one-on-one and group support. The SCfS has benefitted in the past from the support of The Robertson Trust, Stirling Family Life Centre, Stirling School of English, Stirling Voluntary Enterprise, Rotarians and The Islamic Society of Stirling University, MacRobert Arts Centre, Bannockburn Primary School and Wellsfield Farm. Given that in the Forth Valley area, the Syrian families do not live close to each other, SCfS makes efforts to increase the social connections between families and their local communities.

Snack’n’Chat Group

The group was created to bring Syrian families together with their befrienders and people from the wider community. During the meetings, the Syrian News Scots have the opportunity to strengthen their bonds, bring and share snacks, and find out more information about local activities. Each session includes open informal discussions among participants, with occasional short informative talks and workshops.

Support Hub – The Material Needs Team has organised support events for the group, sourcing donated items such as car seats, furniture, clothes, bedding, toys and refurbished laptops. These were provided in conjunction with training workshops (e.g. ‘How to repair a bike’) to increase the utility of the items provided.

Cultural Training – The group has taken an active role in raising cultural awareness about practices, traditions, and customs in different contexts. A multilingual couple with vast international life experiences has provided cultural training to local volunteers and cultural support for Syrian News Scots. Building on their knowledge of British and Syrian cultures, they provided sessions to address a wide range of topics including: social taboos; cultural perceptions of time; structure and order; relationship building; communication patterns; hygiene and privacy; brief introductions to different faiths; key words and expressions in Arabic and English; hospitality rituals; funeral-related practices; First Aid and road safety.

Family Cultural Events – SCfS has organised a series of family events including “Play in the (King’s) Park”, a day trip to St. Andrews beach and Craigtoun Park, ‘Weans in the Wood’ panto in Stirling, a trip to Wellsfield Activity Farm, a Christmas Celebration event with Syrian music. Befrienders often join families on trips and/or activities in the community, including swimming, local Highland games, soft play, allotment tending and Safari Park visits.

The Snack’n’Chat group has supported links with families in the wider community. New Syrian families who moved to Falkirk have recently visited and learned about local services and support networks by participating in one of the Snack’n’Chat meetings.

Social Connections and Pathways towards Employment –

The befrienders have worked closely with different Syrian family members to facilitate social connections that could lead to employment opportunities. These include volunteering activities in a bookshop and football coaching. Befrienders have also benefitted from Arabic lessons provided by one Syrian New Scot.

Clackmannanshire Council has introduced a number of Syrian men to work placements at various companies (e.g., Ace Recycling, Marshalls Construction). One of these placements later led to employment. SCfS is currently helping a Syrian woman to explore the possibility of working in catering; encouraging her to attend A Food Hygiene Course which will build her qualifications.

Language Sharing – The activities conducted during Snack’n’Chat meetings reflect strong bonds between befrienders and Syrian New Scots. While the sessions do not make language learning an explicit immediate goal, they do offer a place where participants can practise English, Arabic and Kurdish. More importantly, individual support has allowed Syrian families to become more confident in using English. The befrienders have worked closely with the Syrian families to support children with school homework, as well as the adults with their language learning (e.g., spelling contests, sharing life stories, exchanging food).

“there is a lot of goodwill on both sides, however talking about things is the only way to increase mutual understanding” – Group Coordinator (Stirling)





CASE STUDY 2:

Perth and Kinross Council

Location: Perth



Context

Local communities in the area have provided many opportunities for social and cultural engagement. A Cultural Connections Café and the Minority Communities Hub (an information and advice centre) work with multicultural families (from India, Pakistan and Syria) and a large Eastern European community. Groups such as the Men Only Walking Group and Jar of Jewels bring people together around cultural celebrations such as the Eid, Diwali, Burns Day and International Women's Day. Group trips were organised to Glasgow Science Centre for families (50 people) and the Scottish Parliament for International Women's Day.

CommunityKnowHow – A series of community-based adult learning courses were offered to ESOL learners of different nationalities. The courses aimed to build community involvement and encourage the use of English to explore topics of interest. The participants visited local places such as the Fire Station, Museum, and the Court, and they discussed articles in newspapers and made presentations. In addition, they explored the meaning of citizenship during meetings attended by participants from Syria, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, the Philippines and France.

New Horizons Group

New Horizons is an informal learning group for women which meets weekly and organises family activities (e.g., sports-related, arts and crafts, cooking and games). Through the group, women and their families attend local community events such as Fun Days, Information Days and Play events in the park. The group collectively designed its logo and drafted its own constitution. Its members benefit from the support of a crèche.

The group relies on 13-15 core participants with a variable number of other participants with partial attendance. Over the years, the group has supported 50+ women. As participants gain more confidence in the group, some move on to other learning courses such as classes in college, volunteering and employment (e.g., Hairdressing, EAL support, Childcare HNC, Art and Visual Communication).

Art of Making/Making of Art – The group focusses its activities on arts and crafts; designing and making coasters, felt flowers, cups, origami, Easter bunnies, fused glass, ceramic tiles, memories books and Memory Fidget Busy Blankets for individuals who suffer from Dementia, Alzheimer's, and ADHD.

Art workshops led by various local artists are currently arranged to facilitate creative activities with all the group members. Art-based initiatives are identified as a highly effective means to explore culture and heritage beyond language barriers. The unique pieces will form an exhibition and will be open to the larger community.

Skills Sharing – The group gave women the opportunity to share skills related to cooking, dancing, art making, hairdressing, beauty therapy, parenting, communication and job seeking skills. The group meets on the premises of a school which enabled the women to engage with pupils from various classes, facilitating intergenerational knowledge exchange (e.g., knitting with hands). Participants frequently share opportunities for volunteering in the community.

Language Sharing – The group members come from very diverse linguistic backgrounds and English is used as the common language that most participants aim to improve. Dictionaries and mobile phones are used to facilitate conversations, while the activities help group members to move beyond their language challenges.

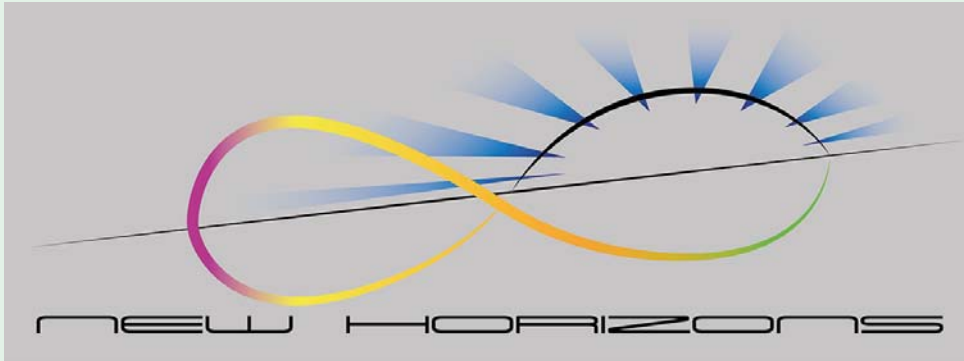
“when you don't have language, art is a good way”

– Group Coordinator

“This group has given me courage, confidence, support and the most important thing - that feeling of belonging.”

– Group Member





CASE STUDY 3:

Aberdeen City Council

Location: Aberdeen



Context

The team working with Syrian New Scots in the area have made great efforts to address “people’s wants, needs, and wishes.” Since the arrival of the first Syrian families in March 2016, the support team (all migrant Arabic speakers) has worked to provide a wide range of services and programmes to increase the independence of the families. The current strategy of local integration includes one-to-one and group support, along with ESOL classes and an Enrichment Programme.

Social Connections – Instead of relying on befrienders, Syrian News Scots preferred to work with volunteers who offer social and emotional support. Connections with volunteers were established during an event where families and volunteers paired themselves according to common interests and needs (e.g., perfume making, football, craft making, sports-related interests, childcare, English conversation). Naming a Syrian baby by the name of the volunteer or calling female volunteers “mothers” and “grandmothers” are a few examples that demonstrate, according to our independent evaluator, the success of this approach. Volunteers (~100 active individuals) received training during “Getting to know you” events. During these sessions, local participants learned about how they can work as volunteers and how meaningful and appropriate activities can be developed.

Local connections include established families in the area (refugees, migrants and other Arabic speakers) met through the local Mosque. Aberdeen has a very diverse population where 1 in 5 individuals is not a native English speaker, which makes it, according to our evaluation, a good environment for building social connections across communities.

New Scots were able to connect with other Syrian families during an event hosted in Aberdeen during the Refugee Festival (2016). There have now been visits to refugee families in Moray, as well as others in Glasgow, Edinburgh and across Scotland.

Conversation Cafés run weekly and offer opportunities for socialisation with local communities. A Conversation Café dedicated to women has started in April 2017 to provide women with a social space where they can meet and share experiences.

Fostering Independence – The support team in the area has worked to build confidence, trust and independence. In the first period after Syrian families' arrival in the area, family ESOL provided one-on-one support. In time, families became more knowledgeable of the area through their involvement with volunteers, the Mosque and the Islamic Centre. With an increased sense of confidence, Syrian men and women are currently taking ESOL classes in a centralized location.

This has enabled volunteers to channel their support in other areas of need, such employment and health literacy (e.g. how to request medication, how to book an appointment for a sick child). Current resources are allocated in the direction of employment training and the development of a project on employability.

Skills Sharing – Volunteers have been instrumental in establishing connections for future employment. Some volunteers have facilitated contacts with different business owners. They have also helped arrange visits to different businesses around the area.

Syrian News Scots have welcomed opportunities for volunteering to gain experience and build future work-related pathways. Some have gained volunteering experience in a Barber Shop, at the Botanical Gardens, in the local Mosque and at a local kitchen. Others have offered to employ their painting and decorating skills.

Ladies' Group

“everything was a lot harder than we thought it would be [...] now we have a good group of women to join activities” – Support Services Manager

Syrian women have created strong bonds which allowed them to gradually explore, as a group, opportunities to establish social connections within their immediate community. The ladies' group emerged from a desire to engage in group activities in a safe space with like-minded people. Crèche support was an added benefit which allowed women to meet and do activities together.

Currently, the group is working with a Local Dance Agency that helped with the development of an exercise programme. Sessions include dance exercise with a mixture of Scottish and Syrian dance elements. The programme has addressed women's interest in becoming more physically active while increasing their sense of well-being. Syrian women have invited other local friends to join the group. These were social connections (Arabic-speakers) established outside the immediate group. Two volunteers have also joined the women's group.



CASE STUDY 4:

Moray Council

Location: Forres



Context

Syrian News Scots in Forres benefit from many resources and forms of support provided by an active team. 7 volunteers are currently working to meet individual and group needs to build social independence, improve mental health and physical wellbeing, and enable access to public transport. Two volunteers have ESOL knowledge and experience, and two are qualified secondary education teachers. Third Sector local organisations (e.g. Third Sector Interface) are currently planning networking events and volunteering opportunities.

A volunteer is currently working with parents to enable them to assist their children with homework. Volunteers' support is also aimed at helping parents become more confident and socially active individuals, which decreases the chance of children becoming carers for their parents.

Fostering Independence – All families were provided computers to assist with home studying. Ongoing liaison with housing support aims to reduce the families' reliance on services. Specific ESOL lessons are planned around banking, making appointments with NHS, ordering and collecting prescriptions, and routine repairs to the home. Classes include on-site learning such as being given shop lists and having to ask shop assistants for the items on the list or going to the Health Centre and making an appointment as a class. The group is also scheduled to attend a Community Event in Inverness so that greater ties can be fostered between the refugees in Highland and the refugees in Moray.

Quarterly meetings with the Fire Department and the Police aim to increase safety, trust and good links with public services. Highway code classes have been offered to increase mobility in the area. The families also attend events in Aberdeen where they have formed close relationships with other Syrian families.

Employment Opportunities – One of the Syrian men is working part-time at a 3rd sector organisation that recycles, rebuilds, and repairs computers. According to the local ESOL Project Coordinator, his English has improved considerably as a result of this experience.

Language Learning – Syrian families have many opportunities to develop and practise English. Trips to a local football match and a local museum, a child-friendly event at the Scottish National Chamber Orchestra and a craft session are some of the events organised for the Syrian families to increase social integration. Outings facilitated by volunteers support learners who need additional help.

Monthly Language Cafés are scheduled to open in July for any ESOL learner (e.g., Polish) where people can practice their conversational skills.

Three Syrian adults have been referred to Essential Skills/Adult Literacies and benefit from 1:1 lessons in literacy and numeracy. The lessons are conducted in English and provide another venue for language practice.

Mothers and Toddlers Group

A weekly mother-and-toddler group brings together Arabic and English-speaking mothers with their children. The group aims to provide a safe environment where mothers can share parenting skills and concerns, play with children and share languages. In addition, mothers can join a local [Step-by-Step](#) group where they can meet other mothers and toddlers of different nationalities.

The group often goes out for visits to parks and other public spaces where Syrian and British children can learn how to interact with one another.

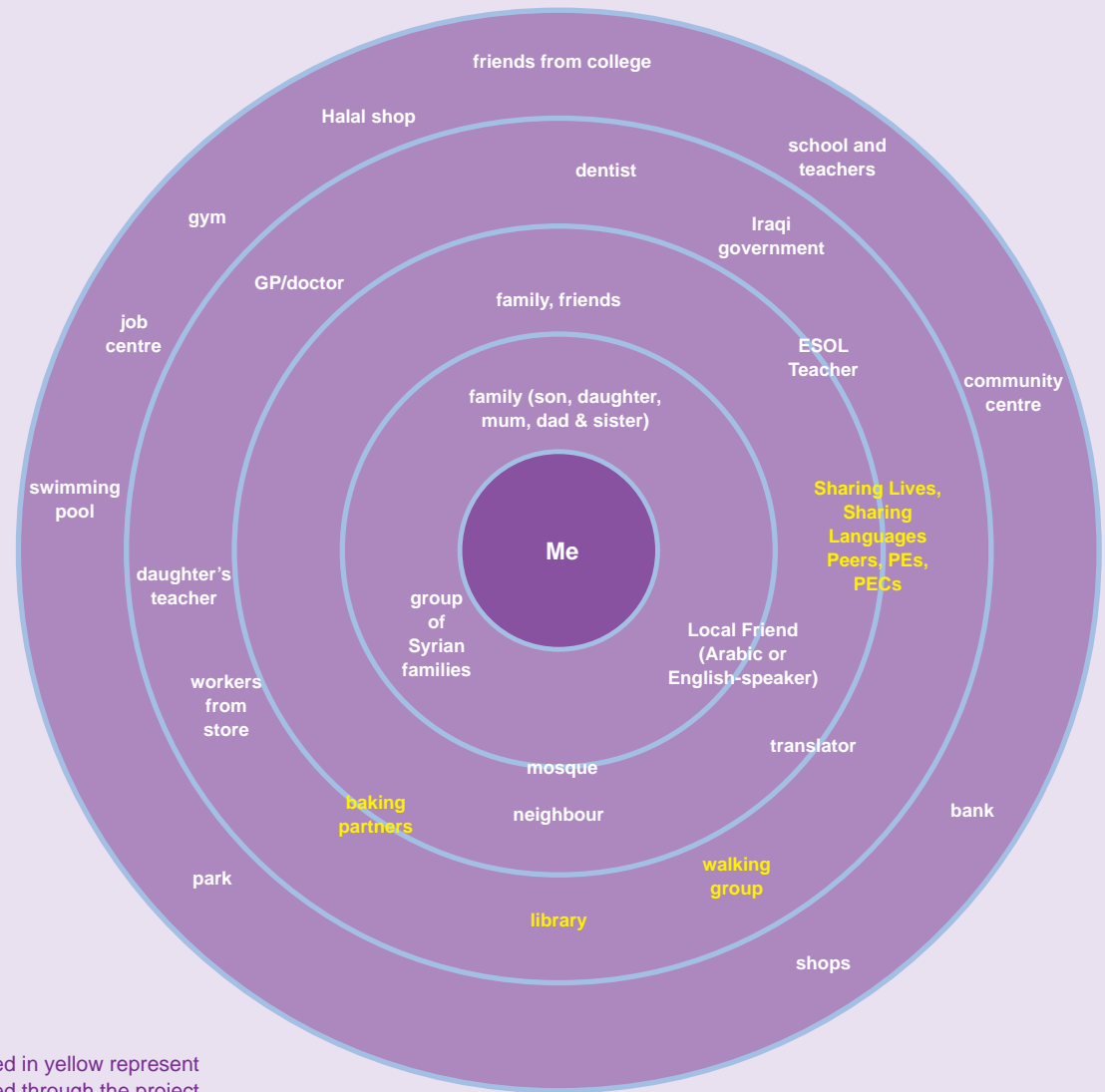


Outcomes

Outcomes: Mapping Social Connections

At the beginning and end of the pilot project, the peers were invited to map their social connections. To present the range of relationships developed locally, peers placed close links in the inner circles and other wider social connections in the outer circles, depending on the degree of closeness and support. The map was designed to capture the range of social connections identified by Ager and Strang in [Indicators for Social Integration](#):

Distribution of Syrian Peers' Social Connections



Social connections marked in yellow represent new social links created through the project

Types of social connections (cf. Ager and Strang)

“Social bonds (connections within a community defined by, for example, ethnic, national or religious identity);

Social bridges (with members of other communities);

Social links (with institutions, including local and central government services).”

30 peers out of a total of 47 in all groups across the four primary local authority areas participated in this exercise. At the beginning of the project, Syrian peers listed 10 active links on average at different levels, with half of these links within the immediate two circles. Individual social connections ranged from 5 (the lowest number of links indicated in individual networks) to 18 (the largest number of social connections). Names of family members, friends, the mosque, and Syrian local groups were included among the 4-5 immediate connections and revealed the peers' awareness and engagement with a vibrant close community.

The aggregate diagram includes a wide range of connections in the 3rd, and 4th circles. However, testimonies from Syrian peers suggest that these connections are peripheral, with limited engagement and language use. Social connections in the 1st and 2nd circles were identified consistently by multiple peers (“social bonds”). Connections in the 3rd and 4th circles (“social bridges” and “social links”) were present only once or twice on individual diagrams.

“we sometimes hide from neighbors because we are shy and worried that we won't understand them and they can't explain things to us”

(trans. from Arabic) – Peer

In comparison, the social connections established by proficient speakers of English and multilingual peers represented a denser network of relations, with an average of 31 active links distributed across all four circles.

“we came here to make our social net bigger, to know about Dundee and people from other cities and countries” – Peer

“I feel here like in my family. I left my family there in a bad situation and the long journey, a hard one to come here so I found this group just like my second family. I'm really lucky to see this group and their lovely faces.” – Peer

A British Peer's Network



A Syrian Peer's Network



Social connections marked in yellow represent new social links created through the project

At the end of the project, the peers revisited their social connections maps and added new relationships formed as a result of their participation in the project. All the peers added the names of individuals in their peer groups, including those of the PEs and, in a few cases, the name of the centre where the sessions took place. Syrian peers consistently placed these new connections in the 2nd and 3rd circles.

“we [PEs] are their social connections” – PE

Local peers who have lived in Scotland for more than two years added walking groups and other individuals met during collective actions. In comparison, less than a third of the total number of Syrian peers added these connections to their individual maps. Although a number of links with community centres, local volunteering teams and media were established during the project, these have not appeared consistently on the Syrian peers’ maps. These choices demonstrate that, for the Syrian peers, social connections made during collective actions may require more time to become active points of contact on individual social networks.

Evidence from comparative local authorities have indicated similar emergent networks. In cases where a Befriending scheme was in place (e.g., Stirling), befrienders noticed a shift in the nature of their relationships with the Syrian families. Befrienders have closely engaged with different family members and facilitated other connections towards employment and socialisation. The amount of support provided by the befrienders has brought them into the inner circle, turning “befrienders” into “family friends”. Links with the wider community are still evolving and being established through a wide range of activities (see individual case studies

of comparative local authorities). Overall, the pilot project helped all participants to become more aware of how they engage with the wider community.

“the bigger thing is that they [peers] have become more aware of connections that they already had, even just from talking about shopping, the connections that they have with shop keepers or going to the doctor with the receptionist, they didn’t think about that as a social connection.” – PE

Increased Network Awareness – The mapping exercise was revealing not only for the Syrian peers, but also for the PEs and other multilingual peers in the groups. Established peers in the areas had the opportunity to learn about the connections among Syrian families and the possibilities of engaging with these communities.

Mobility – Syrian peers value mobility and opportunities for networking. According to their feedback, groups such as the ones formed through the *Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages* project positively contribute to increased mobility. Other routes towards becoming more connected and mobile in host communities included acquiring a volunteering position or a job which Syrian peers were very much interested in.

In the four comparative local authorities, mobility remains an important challenge and goal as well. Having settled in their communities, Syrian families are now eager to find ways in which they can expand their local connections. At the same time, they are also more and more anxious to visit and reunite with their dispersed families. Such mobility is often limited by legal status or finances.

Outcomes: Sharing Lives

Learning about Communities – In all eight local authorities involved in the project, group sessions were used consistently to gather, share and exchange local knowledge about services, places, and organisations that support local groups and individual activities. As some of the PEs were not from the towns where the peer groups met, the sessions genuinely gave all peers the opportunity to share and build common knowledge about their areas. Peers and PEs with wide networks in the community shared those links with their groups.

Practising New Social Roles – The peer education model gave the participants the opportunity to explore new social roles. Knowing how to act as a peer was a learning process for the majority of the participants, and a challenge for the men's group. As the network mapping exercises demonstrate, peers reflected on their place in the group and considered the role of the new social connections established via the project.

“I came into the project seeing myself as a facilitator, but actually there's all sorts of different roles within it which was interesting and, as far as I am concerned, it was ideal; sometimes we were just sitting one-to-one, one friend-to-another friend so there were varied roles throughout.” – PE

Individual Opportunities – The pilot project fostered the development of individual abilities to integrate in a group. Many Syrian peers have been approached by different organisations as a family. However, the majority of women appreciated the opportunity to do something for themselves, different from their family-based duties and activities.

“They do a lot of family work with the other organisations whereas with us it was more individual. What do you like to do? What are your dreams?”
– PE

“A lot of the Syrian women make contacts through the kids rather than on their own: the playground is easier for them” – PE

Traditions, Hobbies, and Other Practices – In all the groups formed across the four primary local authority areas, the peers had the opportunity to share: traditions (e.g., Lent and Ramadan, wedding traditions), customs and hobbies (e.g., swimming, playing football), and other current regular activities (e.g., cleaning, cooking and shopping). Conversations focussed on both similarities and differences (e.g., comparing Syrian and Bulgarian dishes), showing an appreciation for all the experiences shared over the course of the sessions.

Sharing Current Events – While many sessions were focussed on engaging activities and kept the peers busy, discussions of political current events emerged. The PEs respected these brief conversations which often took place in Arabic and gently brought back the attention of the group to the main activities.

“Previous experiences had been hard but people were happy to be safe and keen to make the best of the move to Scotland. Asking about peoples’ jobs and listening with respect was a major breakthrough. People were following events in Syria very closely and some space had to be given to that some weeks - also sharing concerns about family and friends still in Syria or in camps.” – PE

Impromptu Demonstrations – As the peers grew more comfortable with each other, skill demonstrations such as dancing happened without any prompting from the PEs. Peers discussed their occupational histories and some felt confident to bring in their toolbox to ask their PEs for support with learning the English equivalent of their tools.

Culture Exchange and Learning – Many English-speaking peers value the opportunity to learn about the Syrian culture. In primary localities, peers were concerned about the larger political landscape and wanted to engage in this project to overcome the barriers between people portrayed in the media. Local peers wanted to help support the Syrian community to feel welcome and to integrate in the local environment.

“They were also very lighthearted and always up for a laugh and a party ... which is very different to the popular images of stoic Muslim women, dressed in black and repressed by men, that the media portrays.”
– PE

“Personally, I think it’s opened my eyes a lot to how it must be for somebody to come and try and settle where we live.” – PE

“it’s a small thing I can do to help people who are here, who are refugees, and you kinda feel like there’s a lot of negativity and this is a small positive thing I can do to say “Well, I’m on this side” – Peer

The genuine interest and support from the local English-speakers encouraged the Syrian peers to open up and make efforts in communicating and bonding with each other.

“we were willing to learn which also happened with the posters: ‘we want to learn about your country and your language’ it was really important for the group; there was a shift in attitude, there was not more them and us; what was left of that was gone and we were so enthusiastic to talk about their country and to trust us with their language” – PE

Such cultural exchanges are well aligned with the principle of diversity included in [Scotland's ESOL Strategy](#). Valuing the cultural backgrounds of all learners is an important outcome acted upon both in the four primary locations, as well as in the groups in the four comparative local authority areas.

A Positive Environment – The groups in all eight locations have created a supportive space for their participants. Despite language barriers, group members have supported each other emotionally and have created a positive ethos for each group. The project enabled peers to feel comfortable and eager to attend group meetings, including the youngest members of the groups:

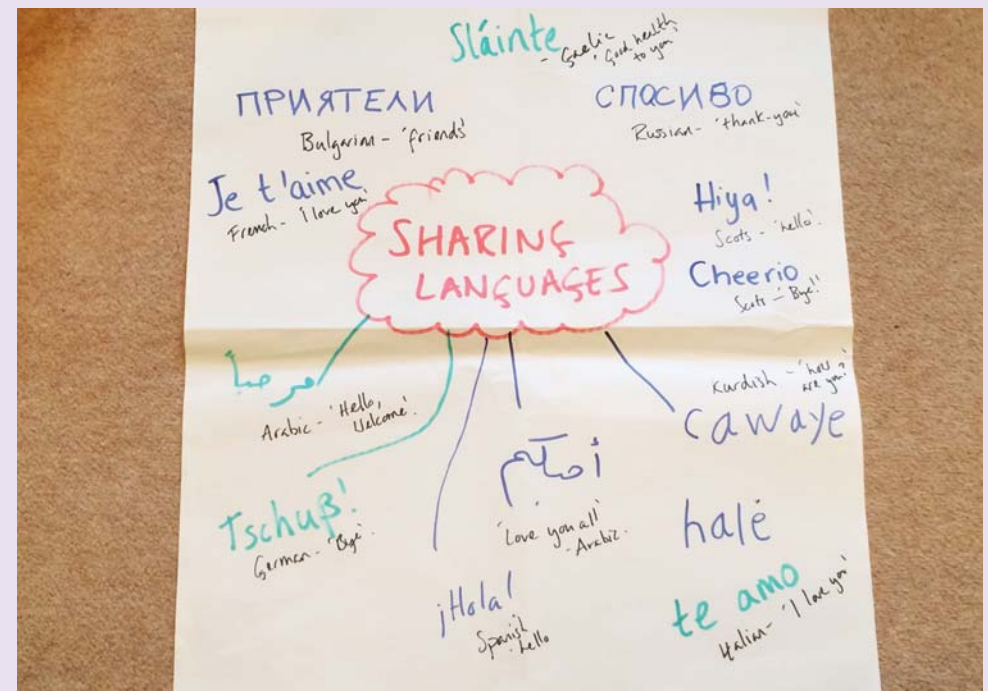
“the kids were waiting every Friday to come here although they are indoors, it’s only on Friday that they want to get out” – Peer

Multilingual participants who had been in the country for several years wanted to share their experiences and help Syrian New Scots in their transition process. Having been through the process of integration, local peers wanted to provide emotional support:

“I thought if I joined this group I could help other people to see that since I’ve been here so long it’s fine to come in. I do have my friends but when I come here I feel good that I can help them to see that they are learning and they are putting so much effort into it, and it’s nice to meet new people.” – Peer

Creating a Group Identity – The first few sessions conducted in the four primary localities contributed to the formation of a group identity. The groups had multiple opportunities of sharing aspects of their lives as well as activities that allowed the group to build common stories, jokes, and plans for their collective actions. All these instances created a sense of belonging and mutual commitment.

“you get such a strong core, they don’t want to miss it and that’s what happened through this group” – PE



Unanticipated Outcomes

Reconnecting People – The participation of multilingual peers in the four primary locations revealed that even those peers who have moved to Scotland a few years ago are still struggling to develop social connections beyond their immediate ethnic groups. Migrants to the area or asylum seekers have established good connections with people from their own cultural background, but they have not always managed to connect to groups other than their immediate ones.

“I have just Arabic friends, not English or other” – Peer

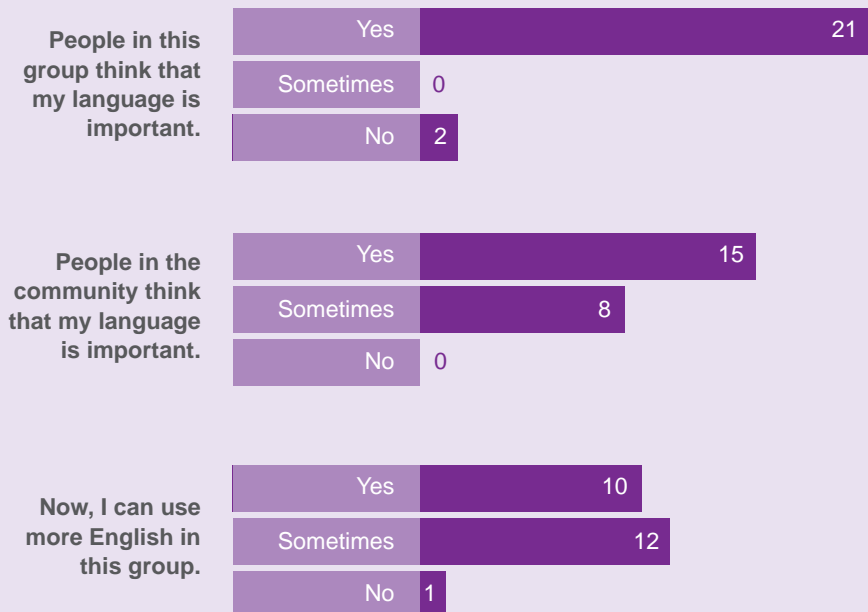
Portable Skills – The peer education model equipped local English-speakers with the skills necessary to support not only the peers within the group, but also other non-native English speakers. One peer shared her experience in the workplace where she could provide valuable assistance to a new Syrian couple. The peer used nonverbal language and adapted her speech to facilitate her interaction with the couple. These skills were developed as a result of her participation in the group.

“it was a better experience for them because of my experience in the group” – Peer

Outcomes: Sharing Languages

“No one ever understands everything which is being said at all times, but everyone ensures that everyone else understands enough not to feel left out and to enjoy the numerous spontaneous discussions the group has.” – PE

Syrian Peers' Language Attitudes



Vocabulary Learning – On-site observations and peer reflective accounts demonstrate that peer groups shared a wide range of vocabulary items related to health (e.g., “tooth fillings”, “kidney”, “dialysis”), favourite foods (“green salad and chips”, “tuna”, “hummus”), places and hobbies (e.g., sewing, cooking, knitting, make up), DIY, weather (e.g., learning the seasons), emotions (e.g., “happy”, “sad”, “frustrated”), family relationships (wife-husband, mum-son and daughter, sister-sister and brother) and skills (e.g., driving, spray-painting, playing tennis, farming).

Peers practised conversational English by sharing and learning common words, phrases and expressions. These phrases were applied during the collective actions when peers engaged with taxi drivers, garden and restaurant staff. Syrian peers were also very interested in learning Scottish words such as “lad”, “lassie”, “laddie” and slang such as “tata!”

Progression from Words to Sentences – A few Syrian peers noticed a significant progress in their language development. The peer groups enabled them to move from communicating through isolated words to forming full sentences.

“previously I knew some words but I never put them into a sentence so I learned that”

(trans. from Arabic) – Peer

Refining Language Learning – Building on language learnt from ESOL classes, Syrian peers used the groups to clarify and better understand the differences between certain words. Examples of language differentiating include occupation/job, corner shop/supermarket, love/like, I/we, bill/bell, bill/receipt, vegetarian/vegan.

“I love the jar of words and the peers love it too. We always have interesting language conversations when we use it. For example, today we talked about the difference between clothes/close.” – PE

Needs-based Language – The pilot project is in line with the guidelines of the Council of Europe regarding [the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants](#). Peer sessions encourage the identification of language needs shared by group participants. The programme recognises that language development does not involve a linear progression and should serve learners’ needs, expectations and abilities. Such flexibility is evidenced by instances of language learning variable in difficulty and specialisation. One peer session, for instance, moved from practising conversational phrases (e.g., self-introductions) to the learning of specialised job-related vocabulary (e.g., “pliers”, “insulating tape”, “cable”, “sockets”) within the same session.

Sharing life experiences and group games have facilitated the sharing and learning of variable language (e.g., “candle”, “skydive”, “love at first sight”, “zip wire”, “worm”, “bear”, “motorbike”, “picnic”, “kite”, “crocodile”, “teenage”, “ferris wheel”).

Language Learning Strategies – The explicit goal of language learning made peers aware of the strategies that facilitate language acquisition. Peers developed a series of practices to help them retain new words:

“I take the words from here and write them down at home and try to use them when I go shopping and I try to put them into a sentence.” – Peer

Other peers have used mini-performances to demonstrate the meaning of words and help peers learn through association. In one group, this learning happened with the collaboration of multiple peers:

“One would say something and the other would act it.”
– Peer

“I can see huge improvement in the skill. Like when we started, I translated each word but now, day by day, I can say a lots of time they didn’t ask me to translate for them. They want to learn a lot of words if the words come from our discussions. They bring paper, they write it, they practise how to pronounce and we are really having laughing time how to pronounce the words.” – PE

Two-way Language Learning – Peer groups actively recognised and appreciated Syrian peers’ linguistic heritage. Bilingual name tags and mini-lessons in Arabic allowed for language exchange:

“Those words in Arabic that they taught us, I loved that. I took note of it and made myself flashcards that are now in my bedroom so I do remember some of those words. I would like to learn some more words and prepositions now so I can make some sentences in Arabic. I was taught a lot and that’s something tangible in my room.” – PE

“I got to learn Arabic and I do want to learn it in the future. I know a little bit of Arabic so I can pray.”
– Peer

Instances of language exchanges were noted consistently in the four comparative localities as well, with similar positive impact (see the Snack’n’Chat group).

Multimodal Language Support – To negotiate language difficulties, PEs and peers with higher levels of English proficiency used a wide range of visuals, including digital photographs, pictures from dictionaries, emoticons and flash cards. A wide range of artefacts were used to explain concepts and to facilitate effective communication. Colour-coded objects, games, role-plays, signs and symbols, and other hands-on activities enhanced peers’ language comprehension.

“We also talked about non-verbal communication and what different signs meant in every country.” – PE

“It was good to have a few fun emojis (eating pizza or being hungry) as it gave the peers more options [...] One lady said she was hungry, which was fun.” – Peer

Humour: The Universal Language – Humour was an integral component of all the peer groups’ activities. Peers shared jokes to create a positive group environment. Language mistakes were often followed by jokes as a way to show support and camaraderie among peers.

“What I didn’t expect was humour. They’re joking so much of the time with each other and then explaining to us. Now there’s a lot of jokes in English as well. I didn’t expect that. I thought in terms of communication it will be more laborious.” – PE

“what really helped is that we had so much humour in the group and humour cuts so many barriers” – PE

Valuable Language Practise – All Syrian peers appreciated the opportunity to practise English with proficient speakers in their community beyond the context of their ESOL classes.

“when I go to the Council classes it is not the same, I feel that I’m just sitting and not practising and it’s a lot of writing” – Peer

Language Work and Patience – All participants in the peer groups made great efforts to create language bridges through words, phrases, objects, shared food, and smiles. However, all the activities took more time than the PEs initially anticipated. The Syrian peers learned the importance of patience in this process and appreciated that other group members offered them constant support and encouragement:

“the most important is the fact that they’re patient” – Syrian Peer

“the most important thing for us now is English. The language is like a barrier for us to have a job, to go out, to do things so we want to continue like this programme or any programme that keeps us to talk to native English – to break the barrier.”
– PE, learner of English

A Personal Story

One of the PEs, a native Arabic speaker from Iraq, shared the following personal account:

“It’s not easy. I live in my home 10-12 years and I still don’t have friends from my neighbours. I’ve lived here for 15 years but I don’t have that chance. This is the first time I talked to PEs as native English. Because I’m working in crèche, I’m stuck in the crèche with the kids, so to me even 15 years now in [town], and I don’t have that opportunity to talk to people. Sometimes even in a bus I feel like shy: do I speak or not? Sometimes the old women say: Oh, it’s really hot today or it’s really nice, it’s really cold. And we talk about weather. I say “yeah, yeah, yeah, you’re right” and that’s it. It’s not easy to talk.”

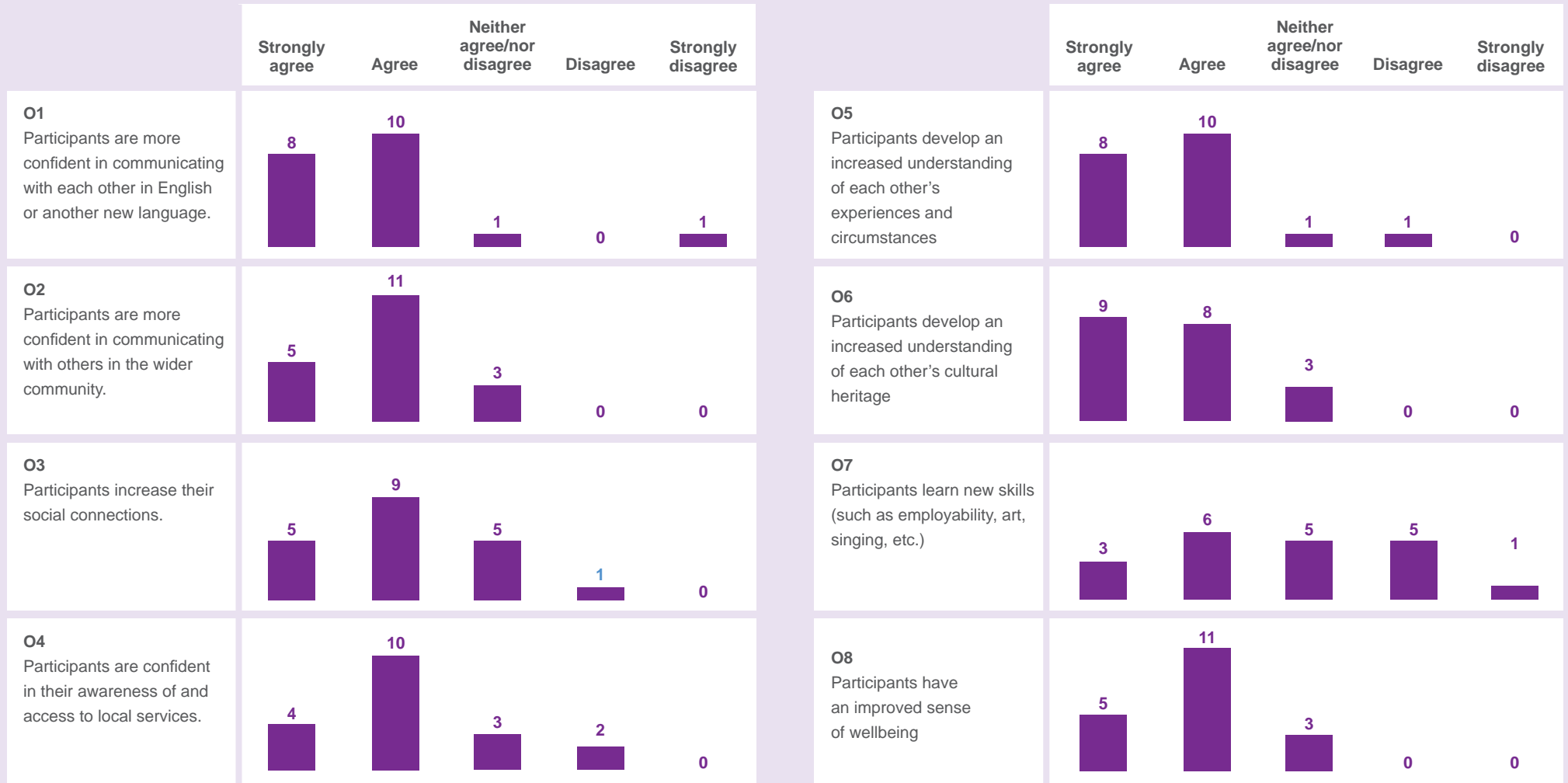
After being with the peer group, the PE acknowledged that the project had a great impact on

“[Her] confidence. I wasn’t thinking at all I would work and talk to native English speakers. [...] I didn’t imagine I will stand up in front of lots of people and explain something. I was panicking to write something. My spelling maybe not really good. But now, even I know my speaking is not really good, but I can write and I am not panicking or feel ashamed. I’m confident to ask for help as well. It gives me a lot of knowledge. Now I am planning to do course in Teacher Assistant. That’s give me next dream for me. I wasn’t sure I can do that [...] That to me is really huge thing.”



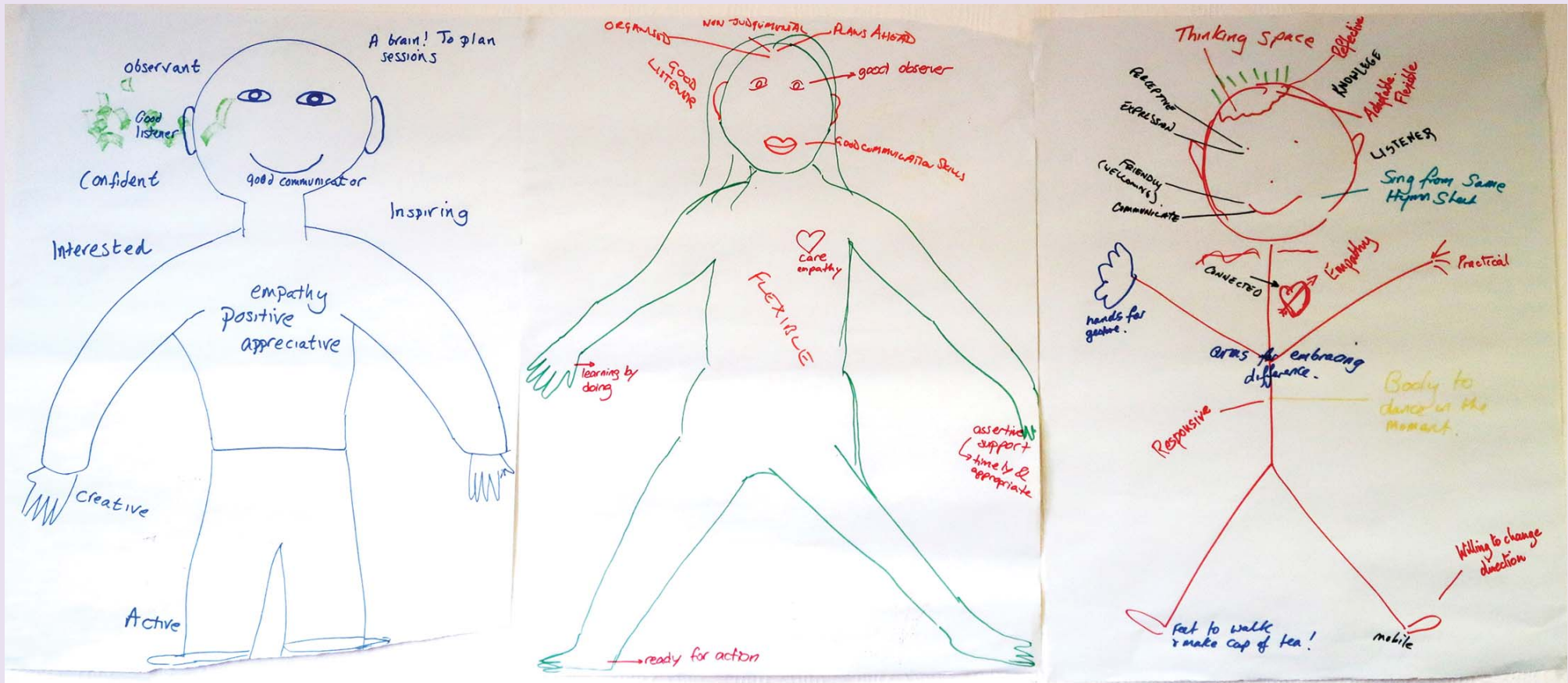
Evaluating Outcomes

At the end of the project, PECs and PEs in the four primary localities evaluated their groups' work against the eight outcomes of the project. Their responses are outlined below:



According to PEs' and PECs' responses, seven of the eight outcomes were accomplished over the course of the pilot project, and the majority of facilitators "agreed" and "strongly agreed" that the programme had many positive benefits for the peers. Outcome 7, related to learning new skills, was rated as more challenging: 9 PEs and PECS agreed that their groups accomplished this

outcome, while 10 PEs did not see this outcome carried through the sessions. As the follow-up project assessment revealed (see the Challenges sections), not all PEs had sufficient time to work on all eight outcomes. Peer sessions allowed some of them to build strong groups with common interests and social connections, planning to work on shared skills in future sessions.



Challenges

Challenges: Delivery of the Programme

Working with a Short Timeline – The PEs across all peer groups noted that the timeline of the project was one of the most significant challenges they faced during the pilot project. The main objectives of the programme were ambitious. Social connections are key to establishing long-term pathways towards social integration; however, these connections require more time for people to build trust and long-lasting bonds.

“It’s right to speak about the peer education model, but again that’s a long-term goal” – PE

“Although we reached the outcomes, I realised that the planned activities are going to take much longer than anticipated.” – PE

Presenting the Programme – The PEs found it difficult to introduce the project to the peers, especially in those groups where English proficiency was low and no Arabic speakers could help with translation. Concepts such as “peer”, “peer education” and “collective action” were learned in time, through interactive activities rather than at the beginning of the project.

From the English Class Format to Peer Education – In the early sessions, some PEs were tempted to deliver activities in an ESOL format, relying on paper-based activities and trying to teach rather than engage with Syrian peers. Activities have gradually become more interactive because the PEs were very sensitive to peers’ responses and readjusted their approach. Nevertheless, the timeline for the project remained a challenge and PEs observed that more could be done to develop peer-to-peer activities and collective actions.

“It’s about giving them their place as well.” – PE

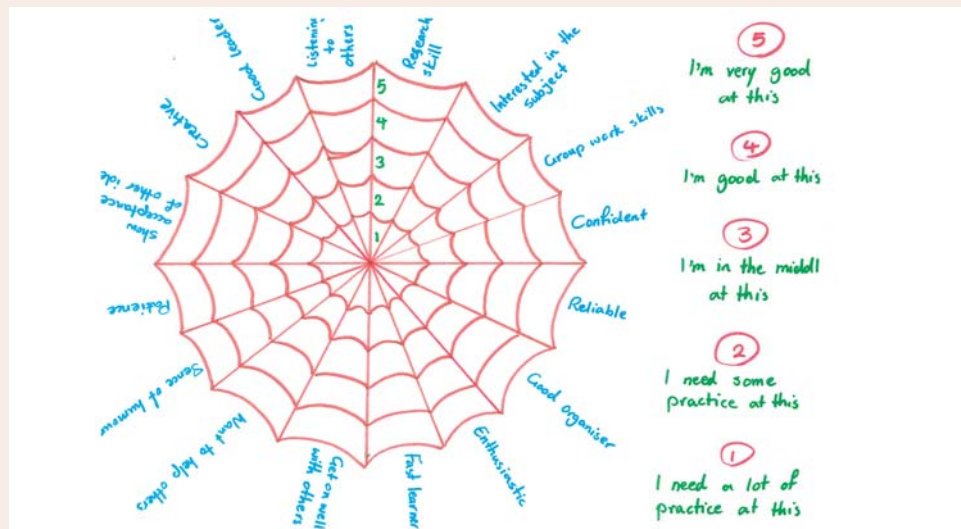
“the people from Scotland do have to take a more active organising role at least to start with but [they must] be prepared to hand it over” – PE

Making Appropriate Use of Social Media – One of the groups that used WhatsApp for various communications with peers and PEs had to establish clear guidelines about the use of social media for information transfer and internal communications. As a few messages were sent to the wrong groups several times, the guidelines were introduced to avoid future miscommunications.

“we used a combination of social media tools, which sometimes led to miscommunications or tech issues” – PE

Time Commitment – In most groups, PEs did not expect that some of the peers would have very low proficiency levels in English. PEs had to invest more time than initially planned in order to prepare for the sessions, conduct self-reflections and evaluate the project. An additional challenge was the time that PEs took to commute to the groups’ meetings.

Establishing Peer Groups – The PECs found it difficult to identify local peers who would be interested in participating in the project. In one case, the PEs formed a group with Syrian participants without the involvement of any other local community members. The timeline of the project did not allow the PECs to identify new local peers. PECs are currently trying to reach out to members of their communities and to explore alternative ways of expanding social connections.



Challenges: Social Connections

Understanding and Respecting Cultural Values – One PE remarked that programme coordinators need to remember that strategies and activities for social integration are always driven by values and perspectives. Participants in such programmes may or may not share the same values. The challenge for programme and group leaders is to maintain a needs-based attitude and a culturally informed mindset.

“we need to be careful not to be too Western like we were trying to speak about hobbies and interests. They [Syrian peers] socialise and the men play cards and the women seem to look after the children and cooking and gardening came out and DIY, but just this concept of a hobby, it’s not a hobby; it’s very much about practical day-to-day living, and so you have to come at it in a different kind of way” – PE

Creating Deeper Social Connections – Mapping social connections in each peer group showed that Syrian New Scots have already made a number of important contacts with key people and services within their communities. The pilot project has also created significant new links that Syrian peers added to their networks. However, connections established during the collective actions are yet to be fully developed.

“It was impossible to make valid and sustainable social connections in such a time frame. I would suggest that local and Syrian ladies would be able to plan ahead for future activities.” – PE

“I also felt that the project was almost asking too much in regards to social links.” – PE

Traveling to the Group – Several Syrian peers had to withdraw from the project because they moved to new locations or travelled from long distances. Traveling difficulties were noted across all eight local authority areas and considerable efforts were made to accompany peers and facilitate the mobility of all group members.



Challenges: Language Learning

Visibility of ALL languages – Peers from linguistic backgrounds other than English and Arabic were involved in several peer groups. These participants actively contributed to the activities; however, not all of them felt that their own linguistic heritage was visible in the groups. These were isolated cases and instances of language appreciation did occur in several groups. Asked about the most memorable moment in one peer group, a Syrian peer noted:

“when we picked a word from different languages and we built a sentence from different words”
(in Arabic, Bulgarian, English, Scottish, French)

Peer sessions could therefore continue to support English language learning while also valuing all languages represented in the group.

Language as a Constant Barrier – Peers have worked hard to support Syrian peers’ language development. The language barrier remained a constant challenge. Difficulties in communication determined PEs and other peers to identify creative ideas to engage with one another.

“they would like to learn more about social integration but it’s the language that stops them” – PE

“they would be able to mix with people and let them know about their customs and their traditions if their language was about 40% where it needs to be” – PE

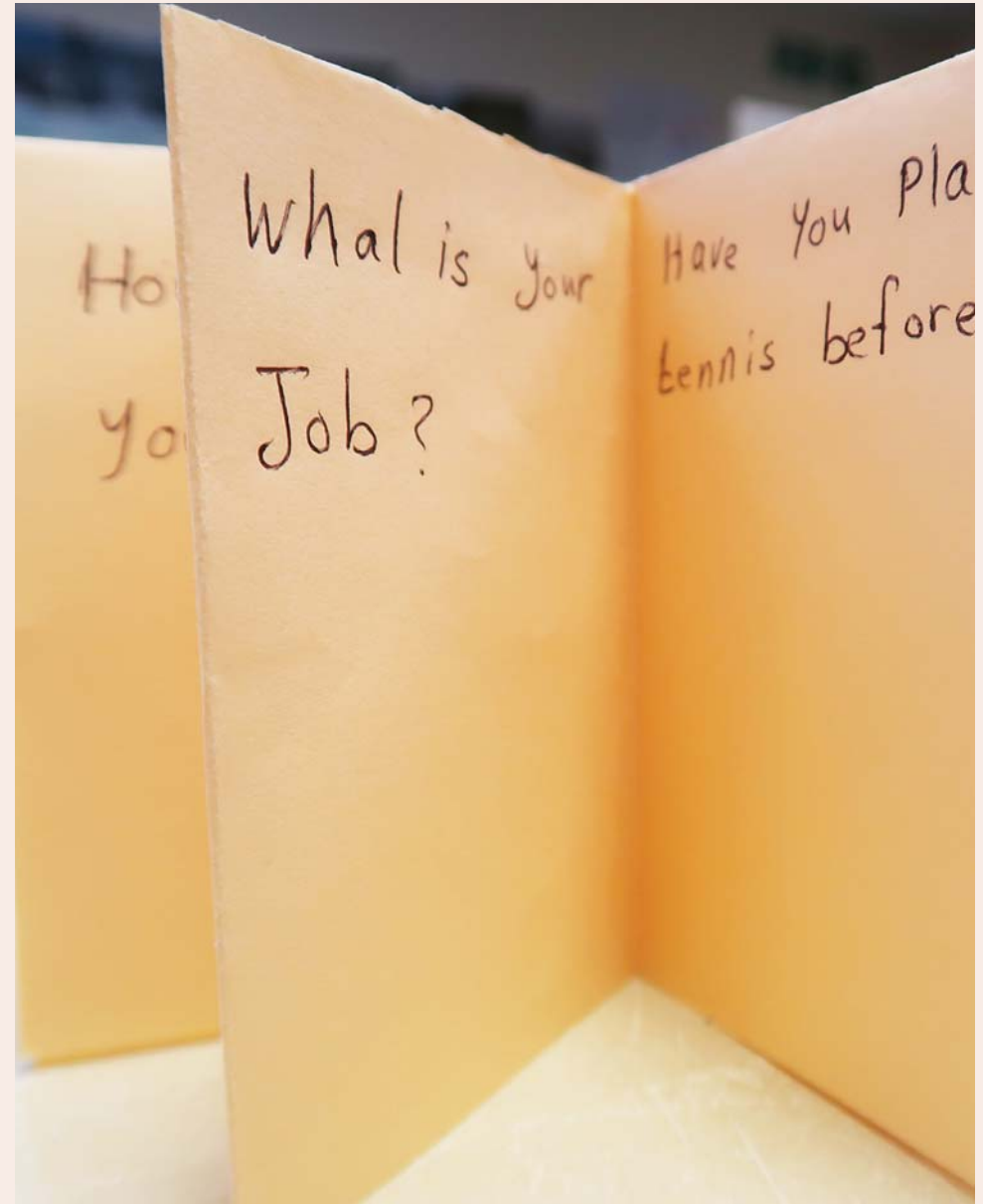
“there was so much difficulty with language at the very start, it was certainly not what I expected” – PE

Language Progress – Syrian peers often expressed disappointment at the slow progress they made in learning English. Yet, they valued the peer education sessions because, unlike ESOL classes, they could learn at a pace that suited their needs.

“we spent a whole lesson to explain the word conversation so now it’s in my mind” – Peer

Adapting Language – PEs and peers had to constantly adjust their language to communicate effectively. The need to share complex ideas or abstract terms challenged the peers to identify language strategies:

“I think that content of topics needs to be presented in scaffolds, first presenting key words, then speaking in short sentences and a friendly pace, and then checking for understanding. I think this process is not long and tedious if we use short sentences planned in advance to ensure they are simple (which can be complicated to do!).” – PE



Addressing Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020

The previous two sections have outlined the unique strengths and outcomes of the project with significant impact on all the participants. Overall, the peer education project implemented in the four primary areas and the wide range of activities in the comparative localities have consistently and successfully complemented Scotland's ESOL strategy 2015-2020 in regards to the following principles and goals:

Providing language support to facilitate social inclusion –

The pilot project successfully achieved the goal of “social inclusion” by using language learning and social connections as facilitators in the process of social integration. The project built on a needs-based and peer education approach which allowed the inclusion across gender, age, social class, cultural and linguistic background, learning and physical abilities (two peers in two different groups had physical disabilities, while a PE joined his group to challenge his own learning difficulties).

Addressing language and social barriers – The current pilot project has recognised and successfully addressed language and social barriers together. In the four primary local authority areas, project coordinators reached out to language learners with very low levels of English proficiency and provided integrated and holistic language support. Well-connected peers and more proficient speakers of English welcomed and constructively supported the efforts of

beginner learners who gradually noticed increased confidence and more active language practice in public contexts.

Interviews with programme coordinators in the four comparative local authority areas have captured a wide range of sustained activities that expose learners of English to social events, groups, networks, and community services. These activities are vital components of language learning journeys and encourage all participants to maintain active lives within their communities.

Supporting active citizens – The pilot project gave the peers the opportunity to be part of social actions in the wider community. While becoming an active citizen is a much longer process that involves repeated engagements with others, this project has allowed the peers to recognise their potential as community members, to activate their social capacities and to confidently act upon their strengths.

Complementing and enhancing ESOL support – All language learners involved in the project have benefitted from and are currently attending English language classes. Based on peer testimonies, such support is highly valuable and appreciated by the learners. However, peers noted that language classes tend to take a traditional ‘school-based’ approach. Language learners do not have the opportunity to actively practise newly acquired skills because they do not have the necessary social connections where they can use English. The current project has directly addressed these needs by complementing the work of ESOL providers.

“at English lessons she was just learning, and at peer education she was talking and doing things” – PE

“the most important thing I learned is that I could come here, ask questions about things that I learned in other classes and cement this knowledge” – Peer

Referring learners to appropriate paths of learning – The success of the project is evidenced by feedback from other organisations in the community that work with the peers in various other contexts. Several ESOL tutors became familiar with the pilot project through discussions with peers. A few ESOL teachers referred beginning learners to the peer groups to enhance and further support their language learning.

“Our feedback from two organisations in [town] who work with the same Syrian refugees: ‘learners who have been attending your project have been and are both enjoying and remain dedicated to it’” – PE

Offering alternative modes of language learning – Given the participants’ low levels of literacies, English classes do not always match peers’ experiences, abilities and aspirations for language learning. Adult learners struggle with writing skills and prefer to focus on learning English for conversation as a first step towards connecting with local communities. Peers had the opportunity to engage with each other in a wide range of modes and modalities, such as introductory conversations, discussions of personal photographs and other images, and planning of collective actions.

“Some of them do not want academic education, classrooms; they prefer here. Even they learn less words but they have fun, they know more about culture, about how to deal with things around.” – Peer

Engaging peers in active learning – Through the planning of collective actions, peer groups have actively acquired new language through a wide range of activities: cooking, baking, playing tennis, gardening, and group walking. If for some groups, planning skills are still emerging, peer engagement has led to an increased awareness of their participation in active community life. Hands-on activities provided language learning experiences that were practical, relevant and purposeful.

Co-designing learning experiences – In light of the challenges encountered by some groups (both in primary and comparative localities), programme coordinators are constantly consulting and tailoring activities to the learners’ needs, skills and abilities. Due to the short timeline of the pilot project, peers in primary localities collectively decided on the goals and planned the collective actions. However, English language learners have not always been involved in all the planning stages. In some cases, PEs or PECs took a more active role in ensuring the completion of the collective actions. With a wider timeframe, this goal will be fully reached because the peer model is fundamentally designed on principles of co-learning and co-action.

Recommendations

Recommendations: The Implementation of the Project

Project timeline – A longer timeline will strengthen the impact of the pilot project. PECs, PEs and peers noted that more sessions would have allowed them to strengthen social connections formed inside and outside of the group and learn new skills. A longer project would also be more realistic in its expectations for language acquisition. Given that language progression requires a sustained and long-term approach, the current peer education project will benefit from a more generous timeline.

“The programme needs more time to reach all its objectives. The weeks so far were good for forming a group identity, to get people to know each other, to get more comfortable, to plan one activity that we can do as a group, but now, we can think about what other volunteer opportunities are there” – PEC

Timing Sessions – Some peers reported that sessions conflicted with other ESOL classes or hospital and GP appointments. Future groups should consider carefully the schedule of their sessions as many peers wanted to be part of the project but could not always rearrange their time commitments.

Appreciative Inquiry as a Process – The implementation of an appreciative inquiry approach should be recognised as a longer process. Peers who are not familiar with such a framework or may have experienced traumatic events in their recent past have not immediately noticed the benefits of this approach. PEs and peers need support to familiarise themselves with the approach and its potential impact on the peers’ learning and socialising processes.

Follow up Assessment – Most groups involved in the implementation of the pilot project have expressed a desire to continue their work. The peers also indicated a willingness to remain in the group and develop new collective actions. These are great indicators of the sustainable nature of the project and it is highly recommended that follow-up assessments can monitor these future activities. This will include mapping already established and new social connections, as well as tracking the peers’ progress in language learning.

Peer Roles – During interviews, a few peers (all proficient users of English) observed that they wished they had received more training related to working with cultural differences. These peers were often uncertain about how to approach Syrian peers because they did not want to offend by making any inappropriate comment or action. Cultural training has proved very valuable in some of the comparative local authorities (see the Snack’n’Chat’s cultural sessions).

The PECs also wished they had a more active and flexible role during the sessions. In most cases, PECs provided the training and handed the delivery of the sessions to the PEs. During the peer sessions, the PECs continued to offer significant support while the PEs spent a considerable amount of time preparing

materials for the sessions. However, this support was sometimes thought as a constraint on the PEs' actions. A stronger and more flexible partnership between PEs' and PECs' roles could address these aspects.

Digital Knowhow – During the project, PECs and PEs engaged with different digital devices, platforms and applications to report their activities and capture on-site evidence. Given that not all peers have the skills or knowledge on how to best engage with these tools, the peers would benefit from general guidance (including how to optimise and transfer information and how to secure image privacy).

Resources for Communities of Practice – PEs in the primary local authorities greatly appreciated the activities provided in the programme. A centralised open access set of materials would continue to support the groups and provide connected sharing of creative ideas among different locations where the programme is implemented. This would be particularly useful to those groups that may not have that much experience in community and language development.

A resource package could also be successfully used to introduce local neighbourhoods and communities to strategies of welcoming new members in their environments. This could be complemented by the delivery of bespoke training sessions or webinars.

Given the initial challenges that PEs encountered in introducing the project to their groups, it is also recommended that video and audio materials be developed in Arabic. These materials could introduce the project and its goals in a language that would be accessible to Arabic speakers with different literacies.

Recommendations: Expanding Social Connections

Ripples in a pond – The most important success of the project is reflected in the strong relationships that peers were able to form within their groups. As a next step, most PEs and peers have suggested that the groups should open up to new peers and welcome other members from the community to join. In order to build stronger social bridges and links within their communities (cf. Ager and Strang²), peers should continue their activities within a peer educational model for a longer period of time that would allow them to strengthen their connections.

Enlarging the groups has been identified as a challenge. As one peer confirmed, “lots of people want to help refugees but they don't know what to do”. Strategies to open up peer groups could include:

- bringing a member of the peers' immediate family (e.g., “Bring a Partner/Friend,” “Bring a Neighbour”)
- using social connections that more established members in the community already have (e.g. one PE had contacts with the library and a tennis coach)
- inviting more local peers who are proficient users of English (to model and support language learning)
- connecting with retired language teachers (to support groups that may be less confident in addressing issues of language learning)
- connecting with members of other communities (e.g., the Polish community)

² Ager and Strang's “Indicators of Integration” (2004) can be accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr28.pdf>

“They love talking about their families. Maybe, one of the things we can do is bring their families together and the children - which I think they would love because they are quite keen for their children and families to meet us. Once you’ve got your first circle [making reference to the mapping of social connections activity], maybe let it go to the other circles.” – PE

“In an English class you have a teacher and the students, and the English teacher knows where it’s going and there’s a structure, but when it’s looser, when it’s not that structured, if another person comes, that’s going to be an asset to have someone new, a fresh face - a guitarist to teach us how to play the guitar - maybe they came up with that, maybe someone who just has a friend and just shows up. I think that sort of informality is allowed and that makes it sustainable ‘cause the group continues on.” – PE

Opening the group would involve the maintenance of a core group of peers who should consistently support the development of new activities. Among these peers, having PEs with ESOL and community development backgrounds would be very beneficial and important for the future development of the group. Around this core, peers and newcomers can engage flexibly. The success of such a model is already evidenced in this report (see the long-term experience of the New Horizons group).

Mobile Sessions – Syrian peers have indicated that older adults in their communities tend to struggle connecting with others. Significant personal concerns about their future and their dispersed families often lead to social isolation. To reach them, peer groups could visit them in their homes to introduce themselves, build rapport, and offer support through teaser activities. Syrian peers indicated that such an approach would be welcomed:

“she [a Peer’s mother] likes someone to come to her home and talk to them in English because mum never wants to get outside or to classes” – Peer

Mobile sessions would benefit peers who cannot join the programme regularly due to the distance from the group’s meeting place. In one group, for instance, two peers stopped attending because they lived too far away from the group’s meeting place.

Connected online and in person – Interviews with peers have revealed that the majority of the participants have smartphones and are regular users of WhatsApp and Facebook. Phones are used to maintain social connections with family members and other peers in different locations across Scotland. During this project, three peer groups have created their own digital groups to keep in touch with one another. Befrienders and Syrian families in comparative localities often use phones to communicate and even correct/learn English. A future analysis of the role of digital devices in relation to group dynamics, social connections and language learning could provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which pathways to integration evolve in multiple ways (physically and digitally).

Peer groups for all – Peer groups should continue to form locally, based on peers' needs. In some local authorities, women's groups may benefit more from a peer education programme, especially if peers want to discuss personal issues related to women's health and wellbeing. Yet, men may also want to engage in similar efforts. In this project, for instance, the mixed group showed that men greatly valued the programme:

“The men loved the programme. They leave the classes (i.e., English classes) early because they do not want to be late and they say, ‘Oh, I have a class at the Women’s Centre’” – PE

“being in a men’s group has made it really important: it’s made it much better: we could relax more and have our laugh, it was absolutely the right decision to have a men’s group and a women’s group” – Peer

Social Connections and Employment – Programme and group coordinators in comparative local authority areas observed that a growing challenge is the identification of opportunities for employment and volunteering. Future groups could develop strategies to support peers in sharing their skills, learning the language associated with these skills and helping peers develop pathways towards progressing to employment. The focus on social connections and language learning of this pilot project remain highly appropriate for these goals.

Recommendations: Language Support

Supporting Emergent Language Skills – To address difficulties in communication, resources should be designed to provide language support for participants with low levels of language or literacy proficiency (e.g., limited writing skills). The peers valued the materials designed for the pilot project and would benefit from a wider range of resources if they decide to run the projects for a longer period of time.

Designing Introductory Materials – PEs used valuable time during the first sessions to introduce the project and the various roles of its participants. This time could be maximised if introductory video or audio materials were made available in Arabic. These materials could be very useful in peer groups where language facilitation is quite difficult.

Providing Multimodal Opportunities for Language Learning – A multimodal approach would best serve learners with low levels of English proficiency. This approach would involve the development of creative visual, arts- and performance-based activities, games, as well as artefact-based experiences (e.g., sharing of cultural objects). The use of digital resources (e.g., images and videos) could also be used to plan interactive activities.

The Need for Differentiation – Most Syrian peers have settled in Scotland in 2015-2016; however, new Syrian families have recently joined local communities. Peers from these families make great efforts to learn English and do recognise significant differences between their English competencies and those of established Syrian peers. Peer education groups provide the emotional support

and encourage language development. However, differentiated and individual support may still be needed for peers who are new to their local communities. In peer groups, individual support was provided by other Syrian peers who helped with translation.

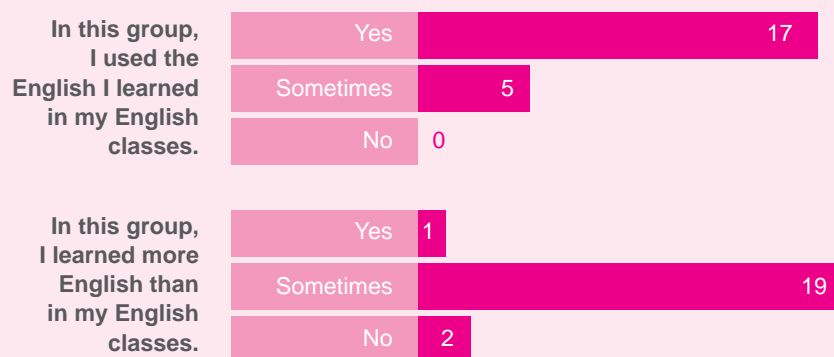
Aligning Sources of Language Support – During focus groups, peers remarked that ESOL classes are highly valuable sources of language support, but sometimes they are too challenging in content and expectations. In this sense, a future implementation of the current project over an extended period of time could be aligned with the assessment of ESOL classes. An integrated approach to language learning that takes into account multiple providers and support programmes could map out points of strengths, complementarity, and potential misalignments (cf. 4.1 ESOL Strategy). With the recent increase in the number of ESOL hours (e.g., from 6 to 12 hours/week in Inverurie), it is important to monitor and assess learners’ progress.

Building on Language about the Self – Syrian peers’ confidence and comprehension skills increased as a result of their participation in the programme. In comparison, peers’ language production has remained low. The most successful moments, when Syrian peers seemed to make the most efforts to use their English skills, was in relation to personal stories, habits and other regular activities related to peers’ direct experiences. Language-related activities should begin with a focus on the “self” and gradually move out to a wider language and experiential range.

“any talk about myself, short story, maybe we learn more, and everyone know the other, more than we talk about general things” – Peer

“when they [Syrian peers] produced the most language was when they talked about themselves more” - PE

Syrian Peers’ Language Attitudes



Building on the Peer Experience – The involvement of a Syrian peer in a coordinating role (as a PE) had multiple benefits, showing other peers that mastery of English is not a requirement for that role. Building on their initial experience in the groups, other peers could be encouraged to apply their emergent language skills and become involved in the organisation of similar groups.

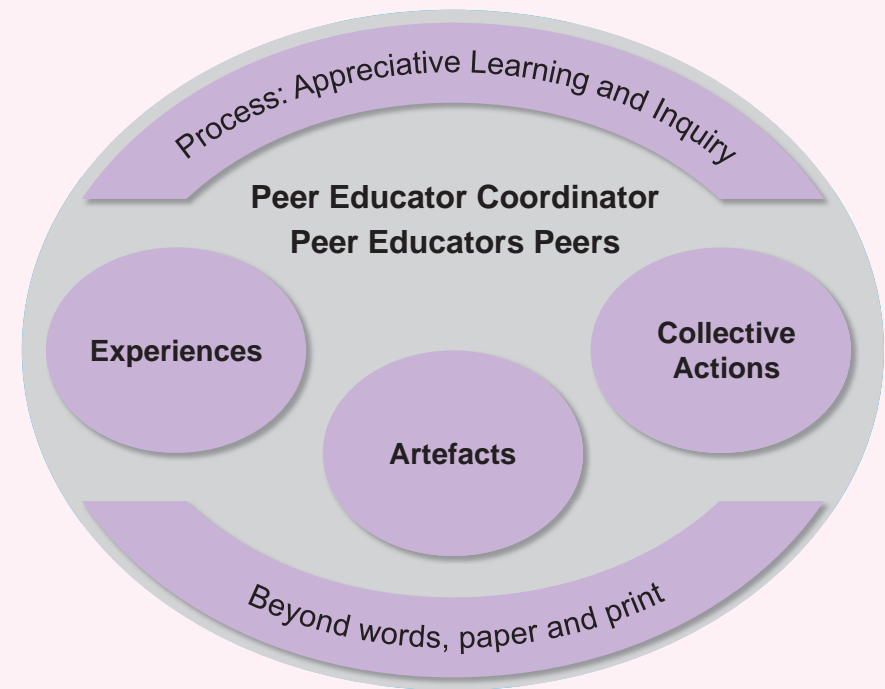
Future Pathways

All peer groups have found the experience of the *Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages* project very rewarding and inspiring. PECs in each of the four primary localities have identified clear pathways for supporting the groups' future. Peer sessions continue beyond the publication date of the present report and PECs are making local arrangements for groups to continue their activities. A Syrian peer is also looking into coordinating a women's crafts group based on her experience with the peer education model.

According to PEs' experiences, the *Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages* project already has all the necessary components to be a sustainable project. The degree of informality within the groups, the creative structure behind the programme, the engagement of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the emphasis on peer support are all valuable assets that will enable the programme to thrive in a wide range of communities. The many achievements of this pilot project demonstrate its strengths and future potential.

An Operational Peer Education Model

The peer groups were actively engaged in finding strategies, activities and approaches that worked effectively across language and cultural barriers. The peer education model and the appreciative inquiry approach have been essential in facilitating group work and peer support. Drawing upon the activities, suggestions, and practices of peer groups in primary locations and the groups in comparative local authority areas, the following peer education model could be used to support future peer groups:



The proposed model builds on the same principles of peer education, involving at its core PECs, PEs and peers from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The proposed model provides more guidance in the types of activities and strategies that would best support the development of social connections and language learning:

- **Experiences** – Peer sessions will focus on supporting peers through group experiences. Experiences could include peer sessions at the railway station or at the library. In the pilot project, peers appreciated being out in the community, on various locations where language and social connections could be explored on site.
- **Artefacts** – Peer sessions will focus on sharing and discussing artefacts, including cultural objects, tools, personal objects, crafted objects, etc. A focus on objects generated rich conversations in some of the peer groups and encouraged the participation of all language learners.
- **Collective Actions** – Peer sessions will plan collective actions. Collective actions involve a multistage approach to planning, organising and engaging in group activities. These events allow the participants to actively use languages, to make a difference in their communities, and to enhance the connections established in the group.

Examples of activities carried out in each group in the four primary local authorities and presented in this report demonstrate that experiences, artefacts, and collective actions have been integral dimensions of the pilot project. Peer feedback also points to the many positive outcomes that future groups may experience if they were to implement the proposed model.

“we cooperate together much more actively. When we sit at the table, it’s not like in school, but it’s still static. Go outside and it’s more interactive. You can meet other people, not from the circle.”– Peer

The development of group materials should continue to be delivered in multiple modes and media to engage all language learners. During the pilot project, peers appreciated opportunities to share photographs, to discuss images relevant to their past experiences and current interests, and to draw images representing their own countries and homes. Activities that go beyond a word- and print-based approach will support the interactive format of the sessions, as initially designed in the pilot project.

Collective actions

drawing
painting
Museum drama
Theatre
Dancing
GOLF
art & craft
botanic gardens
cycling
climbing
hatch.

Conclusion

“It is about giving people space. People need that creative opportunity to do whatever they want to do.” – PE

“One of the strengths of this project is that it responded to needs flexibly and it should continue to do so.” – PEC

“for me, there is a reminder of the old values we used to have here in Britain - the extended family. This project brought back some of the basic values that we have actually lost - observing them, it’s a different kind of lives.” – PE

“in my age now, the way I am here with my health, instead of sitting at home in a shell, they gave me an opportunity to come here and see people from other country, they gave me time to talk and say what I want to say” – Peer

- Processes of social integration, networking, and language learning can be successfully addressed with patience, community support, mutual understanding and learning.
- Responding flexibly to the needs of New Scots’ communities remains a fundamental goal in the process of social integration.
- Building strong bridges through peer education projects can successfully address the challenges of social isolation and low literacies levels.
- Giving New Scots opportunities to share their experiences and voices is a fundamental reciprocal experience that benefits new communities, as well more established ones.
- Forming relationships with peers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is an integral dimension of the language learning process.
- The peer education model provides an inclusive framework to social integration by enabling the participation of peers across gender, class, age, learning and physical abilities.