



WEA Learner Workshop Summary

Introduction

As part of the social connections research element of the ABM AMIF3 funded project 'New Scots: Pathways to Economic and Social Inclusion' project, we held a connections mapping workshop in-person in early December 2021. Two women learners from Workers' Educational Association's pre-intermediate class attended. The class had been invited by their class teacher, with a translated flyer for the workshop distributed online and further publicised by a member of the research team who attended one of the learners' classes.

Learners were offered reimbursement of travel expenses, but both refused this as they had made alternative arrangements to reach the workshop location. The research team used the same venue as had been used previously for some of the ESOL classes. Refreshments were provided at the end of the workshop.

The session was facilitated by one QMU researcher, who used participative mapping methods to discuss the people and organisations that had been helpful to participants in their lives in Scotland. The session comprised additional questions around their experiences of Workers' Educational Association classes, and participants were invited to complete the social connections mapping survey to explore their wider connections in Scotland.

Experience of WEA class

Both women expressed their satisfaction with the WEA class. They appreciated not only the content but also the teacher's style which they found friendly and engaging:

She is on time, we are late sometimes, it is friendly, even when she asks you questions she won't force you, even if she can pass to another person, she knows how to treat the students (Participant one)

Both appreciated the opportunity to meet others through the class, and indeed at the start of the workshop the women enjoyed greeting each other as they had not met in person before, although they had attended online classes together:

It's nice, you meet different people... the class is very nice but I am sad because it is finished now., it is a good class, Emma is a good teacher... easy way she explains... I never missed the class ... Emma is a very good teacher. (Participant one)

There was evidence that the class met diverse learning needs. One woman, who was confident in her spoken English, explained that the WEA class was most important to her as she needed to widen her vocabulary and improve her grammar:

She is very good to speak some words, before I'm not using that words, before I didn't know 'shouldn't', 'couldn't', I was just talking fast, I was that happy, of course I have problem with English spelling, that one she teaches



me... Me I'm not good on grammar, now when I start with Emma class I give attention so it's better now... (Participant one)

The other participant felt that she required help – and was receiving this from the class – more with her confidence in spoken English.

*[my] Reading and grammar assessment very good but my speaking not good
[...] Yes, Emma is very diligent...and friendly, very good teacher...
[...]Speaking better, making new friends... (Participant two)*

While both women generally preferred face-to-face provision, the attendee who was a single mother felt that online provision had been beneficial as she had been able to attend even without having childcare in place. This was crucial as her son was not yet eligible for government-funded pre-school childcare. The other woman had been able to rely on her husband to look after her youngest child and was now attending college four days a week in person. The only part of WEA provision that either participant would have changed would have been for there to be more hours available, with one woman noting that “*you need lots of hours*” to work on English skills.

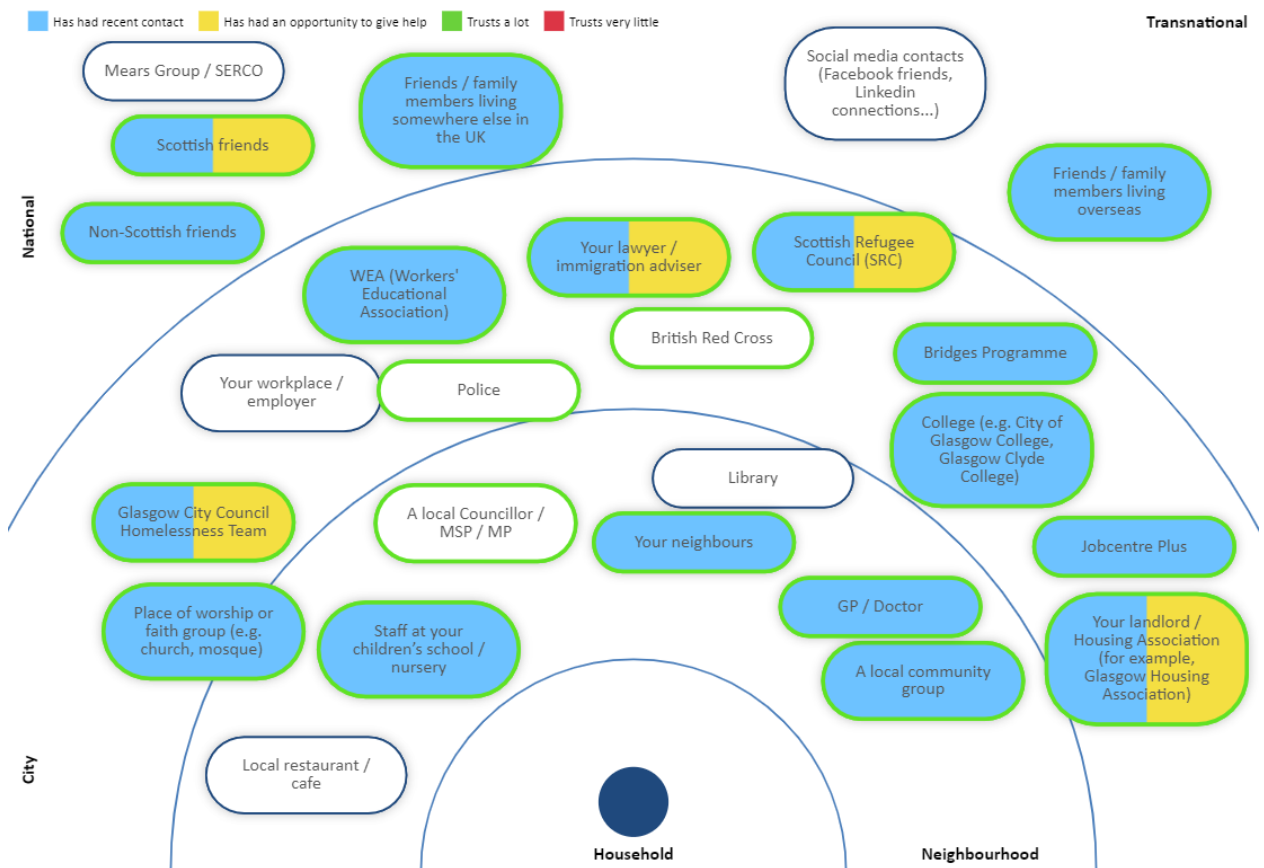
Role of other Integration Service partners

Both women identified Scottish Refugee Council as a key connection, before and after they had been recognised as refugees and granted leave to remain. For participant one, SRC had offered support at a number of critical moments, most importantly when she had been faced with destitution; and since then, with integration support. She was clear that they were the main connection that had helped her with life in Scotland, beginning when she was released after a period in immigration detention:

When I was out [of detention] I was homeless, no house, no money, no food, so Refugee Council they arranged I have to live with one white Scottish woman ... when I back to HO accommodation, they help, they are doing very hard job ... after I get refugee remain, they finish all the child benefit... I don't know the system, I stayed seven years this country but... anything they are doing...Refugee Council from the reception to the manager, yes I've known them for seven years... for refugees, even asylum even when I was asylum I go to take some money when HO stop support, when I have leave to remain they help me for any application. (Participant one)

She had found out about WEA provision through her SRC caseworker and had also made contact with Bridges Programmes. She was due to begin a childcare course through them in January when her son would begin nursery, giving her the time to pursue her ambition of becoming a childminder. She was keen to encourage the other workshop attendee to approach Bridges to enquire whether they could assist her with her career ambitions, explaining that they would help her to get a job she wanted. While the second participant also identified SRC as a key connection who

Individual connection map – participant two



Discussions revealed that beyond contacts with agencies working to support refugees, the two women had relatively different experiences of building connections in Glasgow. Participant two was very focused on her home life, explaining that her home was the most important place in her life in Scotland. Her husband was the person who mediated her contacts with most outside connections, mainly due to his fluency in English:

My husband speak with them, he works, all things Refugee Council, phone... I can't speak, just slowly a little...

Although she was a practising Muslim, she did not attend mosque, as this was the preserve of her husband and sons. Her principal activities and contacts outside her family were with the health visitor in relation to her youngest son's health problems, through attending English classes, and with a community project in Cambuslang, south of Glasgow, where Turkish people met together to plan and enjoy artistic and cultural activities.

Participant one had lived for some time in Glasgow before she had her son. She was a football fan and had met many Scottish friends through watching football games in bars near to her first flat in the city. Scottish friends had supported her



when she was still an asylum seeker, coming with her when she had to report to immigration following her release from detention:

I have some friends they are going with me in the Home Office when I have sign because I was stressed that time especially after they take me to detention, I never go myself, I take someone with me, after at reception they explain why they come there, they going in with me... they are happy, when I told them my history, two three people I take to the Home Office... Scottish people are very friendly.

For this woman, the Church was, alongside Scottish Refugee Council, the organisational connection she identified as most important to her life in Scotland. She explained that she would go to Church when she felt sad to think through her problems. However, Church also had a social function. Through attending a local Church which made space for a largely Ethiopian and Eritrean congregation to meet every Sunday, she could spend time with friends from her country of origin and re-visit traditions together:

Most of time I spend with Scottish [people] but you have to spend time with friends and it's nice even. We make traditional coffee something like that, we talk ... we forget about the country when we're meeting here...

Church was not just then a place where she could connect with her faith, but also with people with whom she shared a language and cultural background.

Conclusion

Discussions with the participants in this workshop were invaluable in gaining a better understanding of women's experiences of building connections. Both participants were mothers with pre-school age children, but their social networks outside the home were different in scale and purpose. These participants were less confident in their English skills than in previous research workshops, and so their views are vital contribution to building a more complete picture of the varying experiences of refugees settling in Glasgow. The QMU research team will welcome further opportunities to explore the role of social connections with WEA learners in the remainder of the project.

Suggested citation

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