RETAS (Refugee Education Training Advice Service): The “Steps to Settlement Project” in Leeds, West Yorkshire, UK.

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Introduction

RETAS Leeds launched in 2002 (and gained independent charity status in November 2007), and was founded by the London-based charity Education Action (which has now closed). RETAS began with the aim of providing educational and professional re-qualification advice for asylum-seekers and refugees in the West Yorkshire region. Today, RETAS has expanded its remit, with the aim of assisting asylum-seekers and refugees with all aspects of education, employment, requalification and integration, and through providing outreach services in the region. As RETAS Leeds succinctly argue: “We strive to build confidence and hope in our clients, and empower them to build a safe and secure life here in the UK.”

This report will critically evaluate the “Steps to Settlement Project” in particular, which is a 10-week course focused on equipping newly-arrived migrants, such as asylum-seekers and refugees, with skills that will aid them settle in the UK. Such skills encompass Job Skills, CV writing, Money Skills, and IT skills. The Steps to Settlement Project is a pilot, and thus the only project of its kind running in the UK at present. Therefore, this report will evaluate not only the inherent value of the Steps to Settlement Project, but also its potential as a program that could be emulated by various organizations that assist newly-arrived migrants, such as asylum-seekers in the refugees, in the UK. This report will begin by firstly contextualizing the reader within the social and political context of newly-arrived migrants, specifically asylum-seekers and refugees, in the UK, and the provisions that have historically been provided for them (or lack thereof) in order to assist them to integrate within mainstream UK society and become independent citizens. The report will then move on to introduce the Steps to Settlement Project, before moving on to critically assess it in light of the social and political context in the UK in which it operates, and with a particular focus on the social and political context of asylum-seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire. The report will also assess the Steps to Settlement Project as a prototype, and consequently its potential as a project that could be emulated nation-wide (and elsewhere). Finally, this report will conclude by providing that, in light of the evidence provided by the S2S clients, and as reinforced by the literature in the field; the historical experience of asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK; and the present social, political, and economic context, a programme like S2S is not only

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2 RETAS Leeds, ibid.

3 RETAS Leeds, ibid.

positive and beneficial to asylum-seekers and refugees and to UK society as a whole as a consequence, but imperative and even urgently necessary.
Asylum-seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom: the social and political context, and the provisions that have historically been provided (or lack thereof) to assist them to integrate within UK society and become independent citizens.

The Coalition government’s present asylum and immigration policy is one of “minimising opportunities for abuse and being more selective about the criteria for entry [...]”\(^5\). The Government thus aims to attract the “brightest and best migrants” whilst reducing overall net migration levels. Indeed, “The Government intends that as a result of its reforms net migration levels will reduce over the course of this parliament from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands.”\(^6\) The Home Secretary’s (Theresa May) first speech in Government on immigration also reiterated the desire to reduce net migration levels, specifically of non-EU migrants, whilst at the same time still wanting to attract the “brightest and best” migrants “to ensure our companies remain competitive and our standard of living remains high.”, particularly in the face of globalization.\(^7\) Both the Coalition government and Theresa May’s speech particularly and explicitly, thus framed migrants exclusively as being welcome and beneficial to UK society solely if they can be exploited in the capitalist economy. In the same speech, Theresa May emphasized the core desire to deliver a “sustainable level of migration”.\(^8\)

The Coalition government has introduced a number of measures in order to carry out its goals of ensuring the UK has an “internationally competitive visa system and an efficient and effective enforcement operation”\(^9\). One of the measures has been to split the UK Border Agency into two separate entities, with one that deals with immigration and visas, and the other that deals exclusively with immigration law enforcement (the Border Force). With regards to possible new legislation, there is the Illegal Immigrants (Criminal Sanctions) Bill 2013 – 14. As the legislation eponymously suggests, it aims to make provision for criminal sanctions against those who have entered the UK illegally, or who have remained in the UK without legal authority. Further, the Queen’s annual speech on May 8 2013 stated that the Government is preparing a new Immigration Bill that would be introduced this year. The briefing notes to the Queen’s speech provided that the Bill will have three main goals: to stop immigrants accessing services they are not entitled to; to make it easier to remove people from the UK and harder for people to extend their stay with “spurious” appeals; and specify

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\(^6\) Ibid.


\(^8\) Ibid.

that foreign nationals that commit serious crimes, except in extraordinary circumstances, be deported.\textsuperscript{10}

The social, political, and historical context in the United Kingdom has largely been hostile towards asylum-seekers and refugees. Since the late 1990’s, for example, one can highlight the fact that public concern with regards to asylum-seekers and refugees has been mirrored and fuelled by the media: Lynn and Lea have argued that asylum-seekers are routinely depicted as a social, administrative, welfare and security problem\textsuperscript{11}. Lynn and Lea, drawing on the work of Stuart Hall further suggest that over the past 50 years (now 60 since the publication of their article) Britain specifically has been in a period of post-colonial decline, and consequently there has been a need for the reaffirmation of British identity.

The immigration and asylum system that New Labour inherited has been described as inefficient and excessively complex, with many asylum claimants having to wait years until their case was resolved. In the late 1990’s New Labour was also being pressured by Conservatives that accused the party of being a pushover on so-called “bogus” asylum-seekers. Thus, in July of 1998 the white paper “Fairer, Faster and Firmer: A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum” was published, from which the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 consequently emerged.\textsuperscript{12} The Act itself attracted a lot of criticism, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Act replaced welfare benefits with food vouchers, worth £35. (The vouchers were replaced in November 2009 with the Azure card: the card itself presents a number of problems that will be discussed later on). Secondly, the Act introduced dispersal to reduce the concentration of asylum-seekers and refugees in the London and South-East England, and thus allowed for the dispersal of individuals to areas where there is a surplus of housing stock. However, this also meant that individuals were sent to areas that experienced economic decline, and therefore urban poverty, and high levels of crime and violence.\textsuperscript{13} This is without mentioning the hostility they may face from already-existing communities, which sometimes manifests into racist attacks.\textsuperscript{14} As Zetter and Pearl argue, this strategy “raises fundamental questions about the impact of imposing marginal groups on locations that are, 

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
already, areas of housing deprivation and social exclusion."15 In addition, there is also the potential for individuals to be removed from areas where they have kin or social networks.16

Since major legislative changes in the late 1990’s, destitution amongst asylum-seekers has increased enormously.17 The coalition of over 50 organizations “Still Human Still Here” forcefully underlines the problem of destitution that a large number of refused asylum-seekers face. A report by Dr. John Lever on destitution amongst asylum-seekers in Bradford has highlighted that destitution further leads to ill-health, malnutrition, poor living conditions, street homelessness, and the potential for exploitation, and constitutes a serious humanitarian crisis.18 The Lever report drew upon 66 destitute individuals in Bradford, 10 of which were children. Some of the individuals in question had been destitute for up to and even over 10 years. It was further difficult for these individuals to access legal provisions that would allow them to make a renewed claim, due to cuts in legal aid.

Section 55 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act also allows the state to deny any support in the form of housing or state benefits to asylum-seekers who have lodged their claim for asylum more than 72 hours consequent to their arrival. This has resulted in further cases of destitution.19 As Shelter reports:

“From January to December 2003, s.55 of the legislation denied asylum support to 9,415 destitute people. Such was the impact of the legislation that it threatened to undermine the Government’s own target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds.”20

A series of legal challenges led to a House of Lords ruling21 that Section 55 was a breach of asylum-seekers’ rights, where there was strong evidence that the application of the Section would amount to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as per Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. On 25 June 2004, the Home Secretary issued guidance to immigration officers that had the effect of mitigating the test of applying for asylum as soon as reasonably practicable, but Section 55 itself has not been repealed.22

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19 Stewart, E. (2005), supra, n. 16.
21 Regina v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Appellant) ex parte Adam (FC) (Respondent); Regina v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Appellant) ex parte Limbuela (FC) (Respondent); Regina v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Appellant) ex parte Tesema (FC) (Respondent) (conjoined appeals) [2005] UKHL 66; [2006] 1 A.C. 396 (HL).
22 Shelter (2010), supra, n. 20.
In 2004 there was community opposition in rural areas of England (Oxfordshire and Nottinghamshire) with regards to the construction of asylum centres in the area that Phil Hubbard has persuasively argued may be, to a degree, about sustaining the dominance and hegemony of white, heterosexual, English nationalistic ideals that are correlated with the countryside. As he argues: “In such protests, the idea asylum seekers constitute a dangerous threat to the ‘rural community’ is one played up by protestors acutely aware of the key symbolic role that the English countryside plays in the definition and consolidation of national values”. The construction of accommodation centres in Bicester, Oxfordshire and Newton, Nottinghamshire, have since been cancelled (with one of the arguments propounded with regards to Newton specifically being that it is located on Nottingham’s Green Belt). Hubbard further argued that the socio-spatial exclusion was based on “notion of cleanliness, order and propriety” that is deeply rooted in Western cultures, as well as how “notions of criminality, deviance and sexual threat are characteristically projected onto minorities who appear to threaten white, rural privilege.” Moreover, Hubbard argues that his focus on the rejection of asylum-seekers in rural spaces should not exclude an acknowledgement and awareness of the rejection that asylum-seekers also face in some urban spaces.

Some of the discrimination that asylum-seekers endure is written in the legislation that governs their existence in the United Kingdom. The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 makes provisions for two sets of support schemes: one for whose asylum claims are on-going (Section 95 support, as per Section 95 of the Act) and one for those whose claim has been refused (Section 4 support, as per Section 4 of the Act). Under Section 95, single asylum-seekers receive £36.62 a week, which equates to just over £5 a day to live on. Still Human Still Here argues that this amount does not cover the essential living needs of food, toiletries, and clothes required to pursue an asylum claim. Still Human further argued that just under £45 a week is required to allow for a “balance[d] diet, a small number of clothes items, household cleaning items, toiletries, cold/flu remedies, paracetamol, phone charges (£1), travel costs and one first class stamp.”

Section 4 of the 1999 Act applies to those whose claim has been refused (families with children continue to receive Section 95 support) and whom the Government accepts cannot return immediately through no fault of their own (they are too sick to travel; there is no safe

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid: p. 3.
26 Supra, n.14: p. 15.
27 Supra, n. 14: p.16.
route to return to the country from which they fled; there is an outstanding judicial review to be made; the person is taking steps to leave the UK; or not providing accommodation would amount to a violation of rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998). The support is worth £35.39 per person per week\(^{31}\); further, most asylum seekers either do not meet the criteria under Section 4, or are do not apply for it because they are afraid to sign up for voluntary return. In addition support under Section 4 is provided in the form of a card system, i.e. the Azure card. The Azure card is a stigmatizing and discriminatory mechanism of allocating subsistence funds, and places limitations on where individuals can shop. Individuals also cannot buy bus passes and sometimes have to walk considerable distances in order to reach a shop that accepts the Azure card. Individuals can also experience trouble buying the necessary food in order to meet dietary, religious or cultural requirements.\(^{32}\)

Emma Stewart has also argued that asylum seekers in particular are a vulnerable population for a multitude of reasons: firstly, they face heightened visibility and a regimentation of their daily routines and mobility by the government. Secondly, they also inhabit a liminal position until they are granted immigration status or UK citizenship, and this “suspended identity” is in itself a source of vulnerability\(^{33}\) that disallows asylum seekers the fully live a life as citizens who can work, freely travel, and possess the same rights as everyone else. As Stewart argues with regards to interviews she conducted with asylum seekers in the UK: “[…] being an asylum seeker meant waiting and uncertainty: a suspension of life. Waiting on the immigration decision created anxiety about the future.”\(^{34}\) In addition, the liminal position asylum seekers find themselves in may also be a product of a “gap in culture or emotion between the UK and the country of origin.”\(^{35}\)

The social exclusion is also spatial in dimension, as asylum seekers (and refugees) can experience racism. Individuals may also avoid going out to public places due to a lack of social connections. Their very limited financial resources can also mean that they are partially excluded from commercial spaces in cities. All these can contribute to feelings of isolation. In addition, asylum seekers and refugees may also feel embarrassed or ashamed about their position as forced migrants, and may attempt to hide it in order to avoid negative reactions. In addition, individuals may feel ashamed about seeking charity and may view seeking asylum as receiving charity; this shame may be compounded in individuals from a professional background, as evidenced in Stewart’s research.\(^{36}\)

Further, asylum seekers’ vulnerability is, amongst other things, a product of social exclusion: the various ways in which this exclusion is effected is through detention, dispersal, and potential or actual deportation. Restrictive policies such as detention function not only as methods of exclusion, but as methods of deterrence as well.\(^{37}\) Moreover, the fear of

\(^{31}\) Supra, n. 22.


\(^{33}\) Stewart, E. (2005), supra, n.16: p. 505.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Stewart, E. (2005), supra, n.16: p. 506.

\(^{36}\) Stewart, E. (2005), supra, n.16.

\(^{37}\) Stewart, E. (2005), supra, n.16.
deportation or expulsion distinguishes asylum-seekers from other migrants in that asylum-seekers faced the additional fear of being returned to life-threatening situations.\textsuperscript{38}

One of the most pertinent issues concerning the effective integration of asylum-seekers and refugees has been the Coalition government’s cuts to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) funding. Due to the cuts, “Asylum seekers will have to pay 50\% of their course fees, and will have to pay registration fees, exam fees and childcare expenses themselves […] Refugees who have been given status will also miss out.”\textsuperscript{39} The consequences of this could be consequential. As James Lee of the Refugee Council argues:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The majority of refugees are on low incomes so are unlikely to be able to afford fees and will therefore be confined to low skilled and low paid jobs where English is not a necessity, even if they are highly skilled doctors or lawyers for example. Without access to English classes, the feelings of isolation many asylum seekers and refugees face will be exacerbated. As people are forced to rely more on their own families and communities to interpret for them, therefore restricting their access to mainstream services, it will encourage the segregation of communities […] }\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Thus, the general situation for asylum-seekers and refugees is one that is characterized by hardship, historically, socially, politically, and economically. This is without mentioning the fact that a number of asylum-seekers suffer from mental health problems, inclusive of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that may be attributed to their having to flee persecution, as well as the traumatic experience of leaving everything they know to enter a wholly new and different environment in which their knowledge of the language, culture, customs, and all the other associated mechanisms of the society is alien to them.

The challenging context is also the one in which community-based organizations and charities like RETAS operate within. The survival of organizations like RETAS is dependent on the securing of funding within a context of extremely limited resources and limited options with regards to fund-raising. Voluntary sector agencies that support asylum-seekers and refugees, inclusive of RETAS, have had to deal with overwhelming cuts that have been instituted by the present Government. Further, the Coalition government has also argued that “We also believe it is important to look at how we can refocus the advisory services to ensure they support the Government’s wider objectives, especially in the context of a much reduced intake of asylum seekers.”\textsuperscript{41} The Refugee Council, the largest independent refugee charity in

\textsuperscript{38} Stewart, E. (2005), supra, n.16.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
the UK, has had to deal with Government cuts of 61.7\%.\textsuperscript{42} Significantly, due to the cuts, the Refugee Council’s Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) ended completely in September 2011, which as the Refugee Council chief-executive Donna Covey argued, meant that “for the first time in living memory there will be no UK government statutory funding to support refugees to integrate in the UK”.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus, voluntary agencies are not only dealing with reduced financial resources; they are also dealing with a government that is largely hostile towards their goals and objectives (i.e. to make asylum-seekers and refugees feel welcome and to receive all the necessary resources that they need in order to successfully integrate within UK society) Such a stance is not exclusively limited to the ideologies and policies of the Coalition government; as evidenced earlier, it is in accordance with general recent political and media rhetoric with regards to asylum-seekers and refugees.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
The “Steps to Settlement Project”

The Steps to Settlement Project (S2S) is a prototype, and the only project of kind running in the UK at present. The project was authored by Duncan Wells and Chris Brooks; the evolution of the project to its present state was guided by Chris Brooks, although the ongoing evolution and provision of the project is an ongoing collaborative effort between Chris Brooks, Noma Moyo, the co-ordinator of the project, and RETAS staff and volunteers. Funding for the project was secured on August 2012, and the first S2S session took place on September 24 2012. The project was created in order to provide a structured and holistic program of training, with the aim of progression and an eventual certificate of completion, in order to help combat the irregular lifestyle, (and consequent potential for inconsistency in attendance of training and courses), that asylum-seekers and refugees may lead.

All clients to the project firstly receive a ring-binder (the contents of the ring-binder can be found in detail in the Annex, n.1) that introduces them comprehensively to S2S. As the RETAS website provides:

“The Steps to Settlement programme is a package of informal learning activities for newly arrived refugees and Asylum Seekers, which covers basic steps towards successful integration and settlement in Leeds. The 10 week programme has four themes: Sanctuary, Serenity, Skills and Settlement. The range, of sessions covers a number of topics, including Employability, Financial Management, Volunteering and Sexual Health.”

S2S entails a number of workshops and events. Over a ten-week period, these workshops and events (events generally entail trips out to the museum or other local visiting sites) include:

- Conversation
- Welfare Benefits
- Employment
- Education & Training
- See Leeds
- IT Skills
- Empowerment
- Cooking & Life Skills
- Managing Money

\[\text{Supra, n.4.}\]
**Feedback from S2S clients**

The interviews with the S2S clients consisted of a focus group and a separate interview with a single S2S client. The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions and were conducted on the RETAS premises. The feedback that was received was overwhelmingly positive, and was as follows.

**Group 1**

When asked about which S2S sessions they found most useful to them, and why:

Participant 1:

“I will suggest the session that was about health, and it was about HIV AIDS, how you know, HIV AIDS is spreading very quickly, and how we can prevent ourselves from HIV AIDS... This one. And the other session was about healthy eating, how we can, you know, adopt healthy eating and could be healthy on a very low budget. Could be very useful for us, so I will prefer these two sessions most. There was another session, specially, I really enjoyed and I never ever know about this session before, and about this particular information about housing, housing benefit system, and general benefit system of the UK. So, I really find it very useful for me, suppose...if I get my status, after that I was you know, I don’t know what should I do. When I attend this session, I found it really, really perfect for me. That after getting status, what we should do, where we should go, and how we can apply for different benefits, and specially for a house...so it was very beneficial for me, I think so.”

Participant 2:

“For me, very interesting session about CV, writing CV. Because all people who come here I think look for a job, looking for a job, need job. But today we had very good training about writing CV, and training interview. For me, it’s very important this session. Because I need job.”

Participant 3:

“I am here in RETAS school. I learning...how to apply for job. I learn this. And I learn, also for CV, how to do, how to write CV. And for health, yesterday I know for HIV AIDS, for health, very nice. I learned this. This good.”

Participant 2:

“Very interesting session about depression, what we can do when have depression, very good session.”

Participant 1:

“Yeah, it was very helpful. You know, he told us that when you are feeling stress, too much, you are thinking about how you can divert your attention. And he also specified some
places where we can go and we can get help from these places, to manage our stress. To get
a kind of opinion from them to manage our stress. It was a very useful session for us. And
then he specified some ways to decrease our stress, and to divert our attention, and how we
can divert our attention from that worrying point, so yeah, it was a very, very good session
for us. Especially in this condition, we are having a lot of depression and stress on our
minds, so it is really helpful for us.”

Participant 4:

“This project for me very big information about live in the United Kingdom. About
benefits system in the United Kingdom. Very help for me. All sessions.”

Participant 5:

“All sessions are useful for me. Before, I don’t have any friend, before come to here,
that means, before come to RETAS. I stay alone, and I’m depressed. When I come to here, I
communicate with many people. I learn meditation, healthy food, how to write CV, how to
apply jobs, and how to….house. About the benefits system, and as well, Universal Credit. So I
am happy with that. I get many friend from here.”

Participant 6:

“Steps to Settlement is very useful because when you claim asylum, after you have
refugee...to know how to integrate...the English culture, to know how to apply about job, to
know how to speak, about everything...to know how to integrate. I’m taught English culture.
To know about government, to know about people...to know actual how to speak English.
English lesson, I am very very very happy with English lesson...it’s very very useful.
Because...when I came here, I was French, am Frenchman. I didn’t speak English. The best
thing you can do here to break the language. If you can’t speak English, you can’t do
anything, you can’t understand English, you can’t do anything. That’s why I think the best
use was learned English.”

Participant 1:

“There was not a single....all sessions were very useful. They were all quite new for
us.”

Participant 2:

“All very positive sessions.”

Participant 1:

“We don’t know about those things that we learn through RETAS...Combinely (sic)
we think that every session was very valuable for us and quite new and informative for us.
Every single session was good. Not a single session, we can’t say that it was not useful and
that we don’t need it. We need all those information that we get from RETAS. So all sessions
were very good, organized and informative.”
Participant 2:

“I think more lesson English would be good. Because only...6 week. I think it’s no good, maybe more than 6 week would be good.”

Participant 1:

“Because with the Steps for Settlement, we have another class of English, ESOL classes. And these classes were ended...from last three weeks we don’t have English class. Everyone says that we need more English to learn, and we need more classes to attend with the Steps for Settlement. As before, we had first time, from half 10 to half 1 we have Steps for Settlement, and after that we had proper English class, and from last three weeks this class has finished...they adjust our time to something else to teach us about society, money matters and about housing benefits system...so...everyone think that we need more English classes.”

Participant 6:

“Yeah I agree with that, more English is the best thing...More English, and more time for English.”

Participant 1:

“I want to add one thing. You asked how we can improve Steps for Settlement course...as before, we had some visits, we had visits to Compton library, we had visits to Feel-Good Factor [a healthy living centre in Leeds]. I will suggest that if we have more these kinds of visits, like museum, like Solace group [Solace is a Leeds-based charity whose core activity is providing psychotherapy for asylum seekers and refugees]...those place that RETAS and Steps for Settlement...we come to know these places as well, we can go over there. So if we can have one visit for that place, like historical places, more libraries...those places where asylum-seekers and refugees can get help. Specially (sic) in education and learning English, because we need more English to learn. Our English is still not very good and we can’t speak proper English. So I will suggest more visits should be included in the Steps for Settlement.”

“RETAS is like a short-cut, that you come here, they work on your basis (sic). They try to teach you the basics...they try to teach you how to make a sentence. They try to build up very quickly, but very briefly our basic self-English. I think so, in my opinion, RETAS is the best institution to learn English. It's very quick, easy, no formalities, you don’t have to do too much paper-work, you don’t have to wait for a long long time to get room in the class, so I think so, RETAS is best.”

Participant 7:

“Cooking...though it was two times. I liked it, most important for me.”
Participant 8:

“We need more of each class.”

Participant 7:

“It’s better to be longer [S2S]. Maybe it’s twenty-weeks, it’s good, should be twenty-weeks. Longer time.”

Participants also discussed the English classes being split in accordance to beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. There was a consensus that this would be ideal.

Participant 1:

“If you have some more people to join us and they sit with us on the computer, and they teach us how to use the computer, if you wanted to write something, how you can write, how you can copy, save, paste. Like this kind of basic things.”

“I would like to say that this is very beneficial course and it should go on. The people who claim asylum, after claiming asylum, they are very alone, scared, have no direction to go. When they come to RETAS...I will give my own example. When I come here, I don’t know what to do, where I am, and who I am anymore. When I come here, I meet with new people, I find new friends. I learned about new things. Specially, before claiming asylum, I don’t know that the UK also have a kind of benefit system. I come to know in RETAS that they have some kind of certain benefit system, and it was totally new experience for me. I met with the people who told us how to manage your stress, what is HIV AIDS, and how you can adopt a healthy lifestyle with healthy eating. That’s really really good course, and these guys are doing a great job and it should go on. It should not be stopped, it should not be.”

Participant 8:

“I hope in the future RETAS [should] become a college.”

Participant 6:

“No it’s better than a college”.

Participant 1:

“Yeah, it’s better than a college.”
One-to-one interview

Participant 1:

“I think the Settlement here in RETAS is very good for me...RETAS taught me the settlement...about how I can live here in England, how can I adopt (sic) here in Leeds, about how I can build my confidence...And they taught me about Job-Centre, about housing council, they taught me more things. And they taught me some things about my skills in English, to improve my English, and they taught me for example grammar and literacy, and more things. I consider RETAS like a good family.”

“Me, I like the...settlement about English class. English classes. And the cooking. Because you know, for example, me I come from Africa, the wife cooking. But we men not cooking[...] But it is important to improve my English, and RETAS helping me for that.”

“Don’t like, not very interesting for me to visit some place in the UK. If I visited this place in my own story, I don’t remember that. The...old church...we took a long time to visit this old church...they explain the history about the old church...but if I meet another people...it is interesting for me because we change the idea about how you can live in the UK, how you can search the job...but in the old church, we don’t talk about the job...it’s only about the old church”.

“To make it better, classes...include the hours per week. Because we study two days, on a Monday and Tuesday, and...there is more things we needed to explain more, and RETAS...should time to explain more things. For example, the cooking, there is two hours only per week. And we did four hours only. If you increase hours that’s right. In the English classes two hours is few hours, if you increase the hours that’s right. They will make me better and they will make us better[...]. Me, I want to increase the hours, for example: Monday, three hours; Tuesday, three hours; Thursday, three hours; Friday, five or three hours. Per week. [Me: “So you would like about 14 hours?]. 30 hours...6 hours per day. Most people who come here, we haven’t anything to do. Most people haven’t a job...most people come here are new here in the UK. They need the time...to study more things how they can adapt to here in the UK. Probably here in Leeds [...] It’s a school [...] RETAS taught me everything, but the timing is not enough.”

“Now I can explain myself for example when I am going in the Job-Centre, or when I am in the housing council, I can explain myself without interpreter...because RETAS build my confidence, and they taught me...no fear...go, no fear. Do anything, no fear. If you speak a mistake, no problem. This is how they build my confidence. Because before when I don’t come here in the RETAS...I cannot explain myself, I have fear. And RETAS show me the way I can use...how I can explain using the polite...ask for something in the polite...yeah. I’m ready. I know everything. I know everything now.”
Analysis

The feedback from the clients with regards to S2S was overwhelmingly positive. The clients consistently spoke in approbatory terms of the lessons they received, specifically ones that dealt with their health, ones in which they learned about the housing and benefits systems in the United Kingdom, ones in which they learned about how to write CVs and attend job interviews, and cooking classes. There was a consensus that the session about how to deal with depression and stress (which Participant 1 of Group 1 argued are common among asylum-seekers and refugees) was helpful and beneficial to them. The most valued lessons were English lessons. S2S thus recognizes that the integration process for asylum-seekers and refugees does not just involve learning about the culture, the customs, the legal structures and the politics that govern society in the United Kingdom; it is also about recognizing that the asylum-seekers and refugees may be dealing with mental health issues that must, first and foremost, be acknowledged, and that clients must be guided to the appropriate services and professionals in order to seek assistance if they need it, before a successful integration process can take place. Refugees are characterized from other migrants by their lack of choice, and as Nicholas G. Procter has argued, may have a tendency to suffer from mental health problems. These may mental health problems may be further exacerbated by the process of claiming for asylum itself. Through S2S, RETAS is therefore not only acutely aware of the stress and other mental health issues that asylum-seekers and refugees may experience, but further actively seeks to do something about it.

Although the participants were specifically queried about S2S, there was a tendency towards a diversion in which RETAS as an organization was discussed and evaluated as a whole. Nonetheless, the feedback given was incredibly useful in that S2S serves as a smaller model through which to consider and evaluate RETAS as a whole. It was evident from the Group 1 participants that the clients did not solely view RETAS as a source of information and support. There was a general, powerful consensus that RETAS is like a “family” or a home, and for one participant in particular (participant 3 from Group 1), RETAS was a “school”. Participant 1 from the one-to-one interview also stated that he considered RETAS to be “a good family”.

Participants also repeatedly emphasized the importance of being able to access English lessons, and the fact that it was hard for them to access them outside of RETAS; RETAS therefore filled, albeit minimally due to financial constraints, this gap. With regards to visits to places such as museums and churches, there was a mixed reaction. One participant in particular (Participant 1 in the one-to-one interview) emphasized that the visits were not helpful or interesting to him; he found English lessons to be more important (whereas there was a consensus within Group 1 that visits were actually beneficial, and should be continued). Participant 1 from the one-to-one interview also emphasized the fact that visits

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46 Ibid.
were not constructive because he would rather have spent his time learning about how to live in the United Kingdom, or how to search for a job.

All of the participants unequivocally emphasized the importance of English lessons, and the fact that they would not only like them to continue, but that they should be increased. There was also a strong emphasis that S2S classes should be longer, with Participant 1 from the one-to-one interview going as far as stating that 30 hours per week would be ideal (6 hours per day/5 days per week). Through S2S, RETAS is thus also playing a pivotal part in attempting to fill in the gap that has been left through Coalition cuts to funding for ESOL classes.

Further, since the Refugee Council had to cease its Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) in September of 2011 due to funding cuts, there has not been UK government statutory funding to support refugees to integrate in the UK\textsuperscript{47}. Through S2S, and without government funding, RETAS is attempting to fill an additional gap that has been created due to Coalition cuts. One can further measure the contribution S2S makes to integration specifically by utilizing the conceptual framework for integration developed by Ager and Strang\textsuperscript{48}, which is composed of: achievement and access to employment, housing, education and health; fostering and ensuring citizenship and rights; enabling social connections to develop within and between groups; and dealing with structural barriers to such connections related to language, culture, and the local environment. S2S has comprehensively attempted to tackle all of these areas, and the client feedback has evidenced that all aspects of the conceptual framework for integration, although they may not be wholly fulfilled (not least because asylum-seekers cannot seek permission to work, unless they have been waiting for longer than 12 months for an initial decision on their case), through S2S is at the very least preparing them for the potential eventuality of their full integration in the UK if they receive refugee status.

\textsuperscript{47} Supra, n. 42.

Conclusion

S2S can function as a prism through which to regard RETAS as an organization as a whole, partly due to the fact that the clients often conflated S2S with RETAS generally. There was a consideration of RETAS as a school and even as a family. The clients were strongly approving and appreciative of S2S, and the unequivocal feedback was that the hours of S2S should be increased, particularly with regards to English lessons. It is clear from the evidence gathered that clients regard RETAS as providing an invaluable service, not just with S2S but as an organization as a whole; in a social, political, and economic context that is largely hostile to them, and in which they have exceptionally limited resources, the clients found that RETAS provided them with what they needed (albeit insufficiently, due to the limited resources that organizations such as RETAS also face) in an environment that welcomed them. Through S2S and as an organization as a whole, and alongside other voluntary and charitable bodies, RETAS is effectively filling in all of the gaps that are necessary in order for asylum-seekers and refugees to integrate successfully in Leeds and the UK as a whole. However, they are doing so with exceptionally low funds. The repeated urgings by clients to increase the contact hours that they have, particularly with regards to English lessons, is a reflection of the cuts to ESOL funding in particular. RETAS is attempting, on extremely low resources and limited staff, to fill in a large number of gaps that are required for asylum-seekers and refugees to have a decent quality of life, and a decent chance to successfully integrate in the United Kingdom. To conclude, in light of the evidence provided by the S2S clients, and as reinforced by the literature in the field; the historical experience of asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK; and the present social, political, and economic context, a programme like S2S is not only positive and beneficial to asylum-seekers and refugees and to UK society as a whole as a consequence, but vital and even urgently necessary.
Annex

1. The ring-binder for clients of S2S

[All of the participants on S2S individually receive a ring-binder, which they can personalize (it is white and has a blank label). “Steps to Settlement: Integration programme: Participant’s Handbook and Record of Achievement”.

The ring-binder contains detailed, yet easy to understand information about S2S.]

Sheet 1

“Steps to Settlement” is a new programme delivered by RETAS Leeds in association with a wide range of partners.

The purpose of Steps to Settlement is to help refugees and asylum seekers who have arrived in the UK in the last two years to learn about and adapt to life in Leeds, to help them settle and integrate, and to enhance their general wellbeing and employability.

Steps to Settlement includes a range of informal learning experiences which focus on well-being, confidence building, digital learning, financially sustainable living and developing skills for employability.

In Steps to Settlement learning experiences are provided over 10 weeks:

- Conversation
- Welfare Benefits
- Employment
- Education & Training
- See Leeds
- IT Skills
- Empowerment
- Cooking & Life Skills
- Managing Money

Steps to Settlement programmes are for 20 participants and are delivered over 10 weeks.

Sheet 2
“Conversation”

This module will help you improve your English and develop your confidence in speaking and listening to English.

1. Learn to talk about important topics such as staying healthy, education and work.
2. Find out more about life in the UK.
3. Find out more about living in Leeds from the teachers and other participants.
5. Learn how to use an English learning website.
6. Complete a conversational mock interview

(Comments, and Module sign off and date).

Sheet 3

“Welfare Benefits”

This module will help you understand the benefits system in the UK. We will look at the different types of benefits, who they are accessible by, and how to go about applying for these.

1. Learn why benefits are paid.
2. Learn about the different types of benefits.
3. Identify which benefits you are eligible to claim.
4. Learn how to read and complete benefit forms.

(Comments, and Module sign off and date).

Sheet 4

“Employment”

This module focuses on the knowledge and skills needed to find and apply for jobs. From preparing your own CV, to filling out an application form and attending an interview, this module will equip you with all your job search needs.

1. Learn how to write a CV.
2. Learn how to present yourself and take part in a job interview.
3. Learn how to complete job application forms.
4. Learn how to do a job search.

(Comments, and Module Sign off date).

Sheet 5

“Education & Training”

Interested in going to university or college? This module will look at the processes you have to go through to achieve this, and at the different ways to fund your education.
1. Options of courses to enrol on.
2. Help to apply for courses of your choice.
3. Advice and help on funding for fees.
4. Assistance with the UCAS application process.
5. Assistance on requalification in different professions.

(Comments, and Module sign off and Date).

Sheet 6

“See Leeds”

This module focuses on Leeds. You will visit different places and learn more about the city in the past and in the present.

1. Visit interesting places, including museums and parks.
2. Learn about the history and geography of Leeds.
3. Learn about public transport in Leeds and how to use it.
4. Interesting things to do in your leisure time.

(Comments, and Module sign off and Date).

Sheet 7

“IT Skills”

This module focuses on helping you improve your IT skills. You will learn new skills to help you find information on the internet and communicate with other people using words and pictures.

1. Learn how to use a personal computer.
2. Learn how to find information and images on the internet.
3. Learn how to send and receive email messages and fill in forms online.
4. Learn about blogs and websites and how to put information on a group blog.

(Comments, and Module Sign off and Date)

Sheet 8

“Empowerment”

This module focuses on raising your awareness of your own talents, abilities and personal qualities and on ways of drawing on your existing strengths.

1. Learn about the rights and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers.
2. Reflect on challenges faced by refugees.
3. Advocacy and what it means.
4. Presentation skills.

(Comments and Module Sign off, and Date).
Sheets 9

“Cooking & Life Skills”

In this module you will learn about choosing and preparing nutritious food and about healthy lifestyles.

1. Learn about nutrition and buying healthy food.
2. Learn new cooking skills.
3. Practice making a simple healthy meal.
4. Go on trips outdoors.
5. Learn about the benefits of exercise.
6. Practise relaxation techniques.

(Comments and Module Sign off, and Date).

Sheets 10

“Managing money”

In this module we take a look at how to use your money sensibly. This includes different ways of banking, saving, borrowing and spending. An opportunity for you to find out anything you want about finance.

1. Identify the different types of bank accounts.
2. Complete your own budget.
3. Record your spending patterns for a week.
4. Explore two comparison websites and find two insurance quotes.

(Comments, and Module Sign off, and Date).

Extra blank sheet for “Notes”, plus a lined notepad provided.