

**ANTI-RACISM -
GENUINE LISTENING
LEADING TO
MEANINGFUL CO-
PRODUCTION WEBINAR**

Mahdi Saki –Tim Street

**MENTAL
HEALTH**
FOUNDATION



- We work towards **good mental health** for all, focusing **prevention**
- Some communities are at **higher risk** of experiencing poor mental health
- Our work involves **researching** new ways to support good mental health, running national **campaigns**, **advocacy** work, and developing and delivering **programmes**

Why is racism a key focus for the Mental Health Foundation?

- Racism is closely linked to poor mental and physical health.
- People from racialised communities face higher rates of **poverty, discrimination, and adverse life experiences**, all of which harm mental wellbeing (McDaid and Kousoulis, 2020).
- In Scotland, racial trauma is often inadequately recognised in **mental health services** (Foster, 2022), meaning that services are often unresponsive to the needs of those affected by racism.

Voices and Visibility Report

The inclusion of refugees and asylum
seekers in decision-making processes

Our projects working with refugees and people seeking asylum

- Elevate
- Beyond Visibility
- Our Power / Reclaiming Our Power
- Weaving Threads for Wellbeing



Terminology and definitions

- A **refugee** is a person who has fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety
- An **asylum seeker** is person who has fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety, but hasn't been legally recognized as a refugee yet
- A **migrant** is a person who lives outside the country they were born in

Reclaiming Our Power

A two-year, people-led project tackling racist microaggressions by:

- **Improving mental wellbeing** and reducing isolation for people experiencing racism.
- **Reducing self-blame** and building resilience.
- **Raising awareness** of the mental health impact of racist microaggressions among public service professionals.
- **Increasing organisational confidence** in delivering anti-racist services.



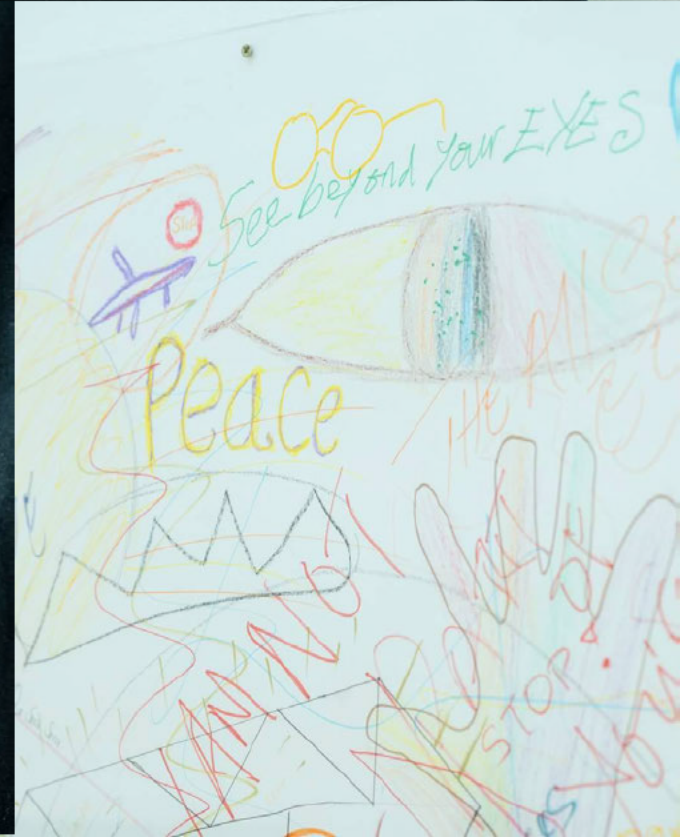
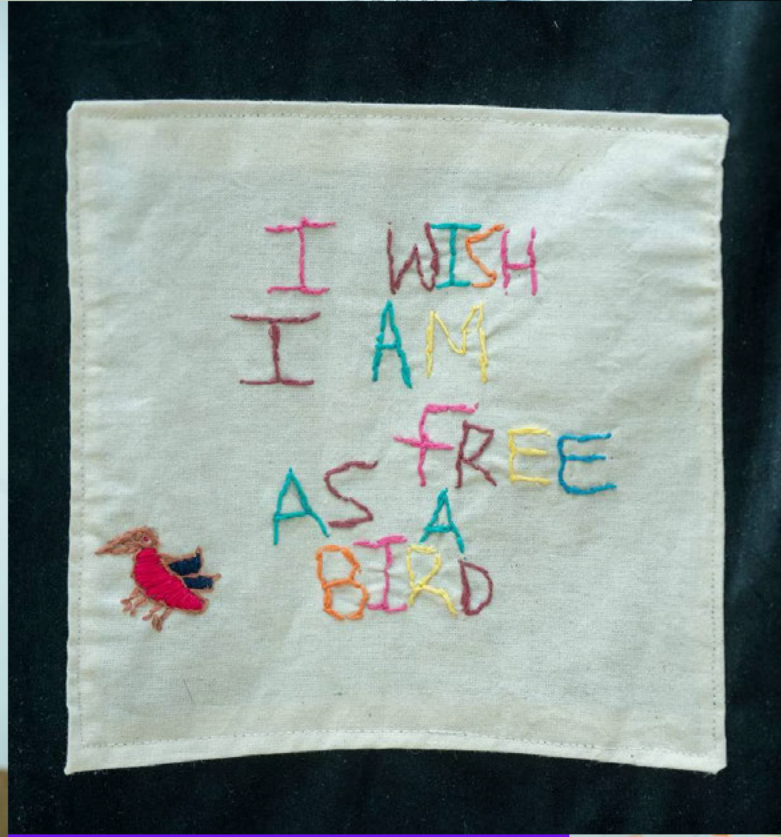
This project is made possible thanks to funding from the National Lottery Improving Lives fund.



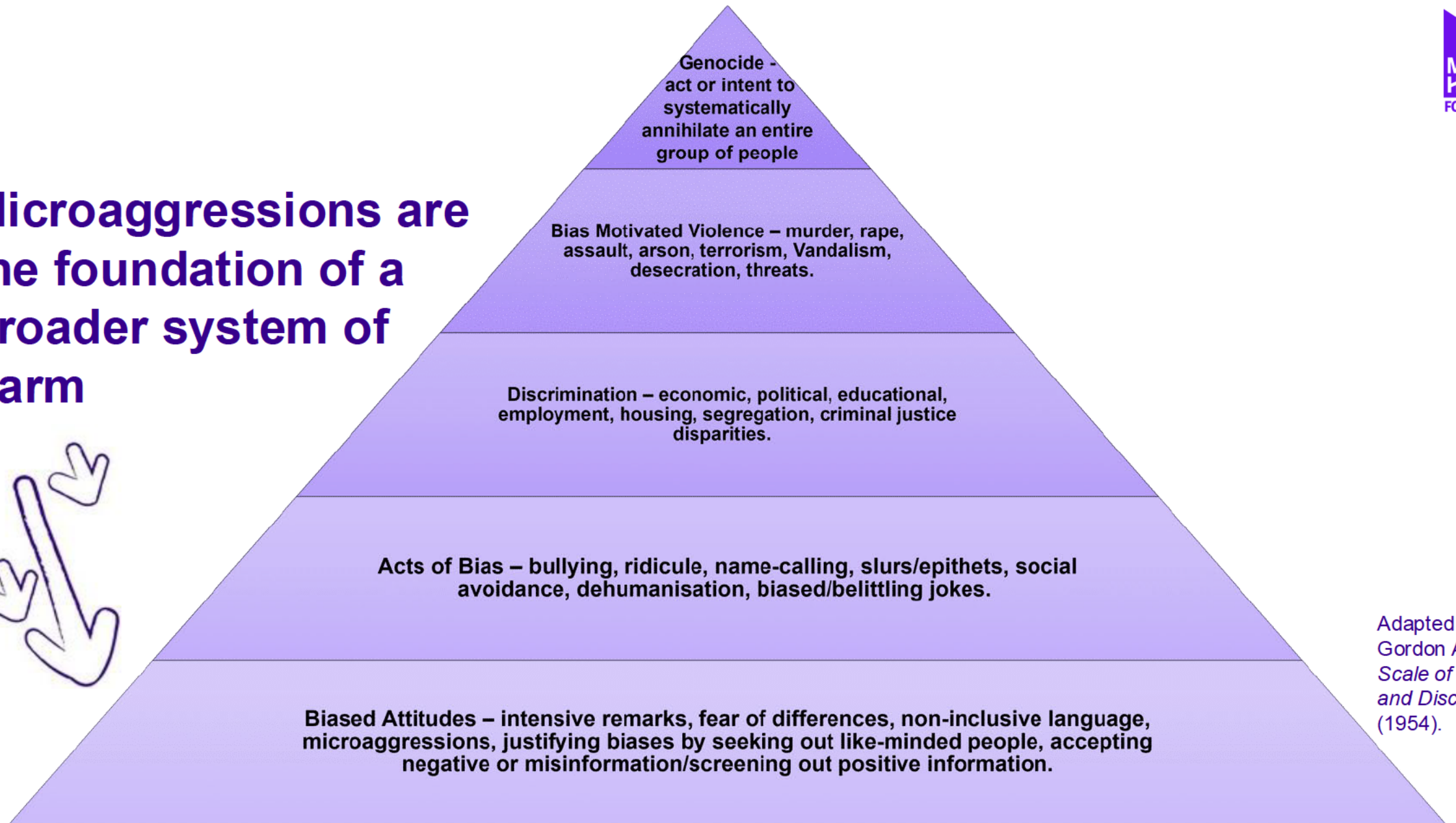
Racist microaggressions...?

'Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities—whether intentional or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.'

Dr Derald Wing Sue et al (2007)



Microaggressions are the foundation of a broader system of harm



Adapted from
Gordon Allport's
*Scale of Prejudice
and Discrimination*
(1954).

Elevate

Public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers

What do you notice about this article?

- WHAT LANGUAGE JUMPS OUT AT YOU?
- HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?
- WHAT DO YOU THINK THE JOURNALIST IS TRYING TO DO?

Priti Patel is warned 65,000 migrants could cross the Channel this year – more than DOUBLE the 2021 figure – as 'Operation Red Meat' plans are considered to fly asylum seekers to Rwanda or Ghana for processing

- Home Secretary warned 65,000 migrants could cross the Channel this year
- Officials say number, more than double last year's figure, is worst case scenario
- Comes as ministers are drawing up plans to deter migrant Channel crossings
- Ministry of Defence will take control of migrant operation in change of tactics
- Navy vessels and RAF support expected to be deployed in UK territorial waters
- Officials hope Armed Forces involvement will have significant 'deterrent effect'
- Last year saw a record 28,300 migrants reach the UK from northern France

By KAYA TERRY FOR MAILONLINE

PUBLISHED: 02:18, 18 January 2022 | UPDATED: 07:02, 18 January 2022



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Priti Patel has been warned that 65,000 migrants could cross the Channel this year - more than double the 28,300 record number in 2021.

Officials have told the Home Secretary that the figure may reach 'worst case scenario' and demonstrates why ministers are looking at 'outsourcing' the asylum process to other countries.

Ministers are said to be drawing up proposals which would see asylum seekers flown to Ghana and Rwanda under Government plans to deter migrant Channel crossings.

What do you notice
about this article?

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Positive.News

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‘I’ve realised my dreams’: the refugee entrepreneurs who are thriving in the UK

Words by
Positive News

January 10, 2022
Economics
Innovation
Society

Research has shown that refugees are a boon for their host nations' economies. We meet three who have prospered with the help of a social enterprise

Refugee-founded businesses have enormous potential to stimulate economies, create jobs and reduce public spending, research has found.

A study of 30 years of data from Western Europe discovered that refugees typically benefit their host nations' economies within five years of arrival – findings that refute the popular misconception that refugees pose a financial burden.



Rights and entitlements of asylum seekers

- People seeking asylum are provided with accommodation while they wait for the outcome of their claim
- They receive £49.17 per week if they are living in uncatered accommodation
- If they live in catered accommodation, they will receive £8.86 per week
- Most do not have permission to work

Rights and entitlements of refugees

- When an asylum seekers receives refugee status, they get permission to work in the UK
- A person with refugee status is entitled to benefits



Impact on mental health



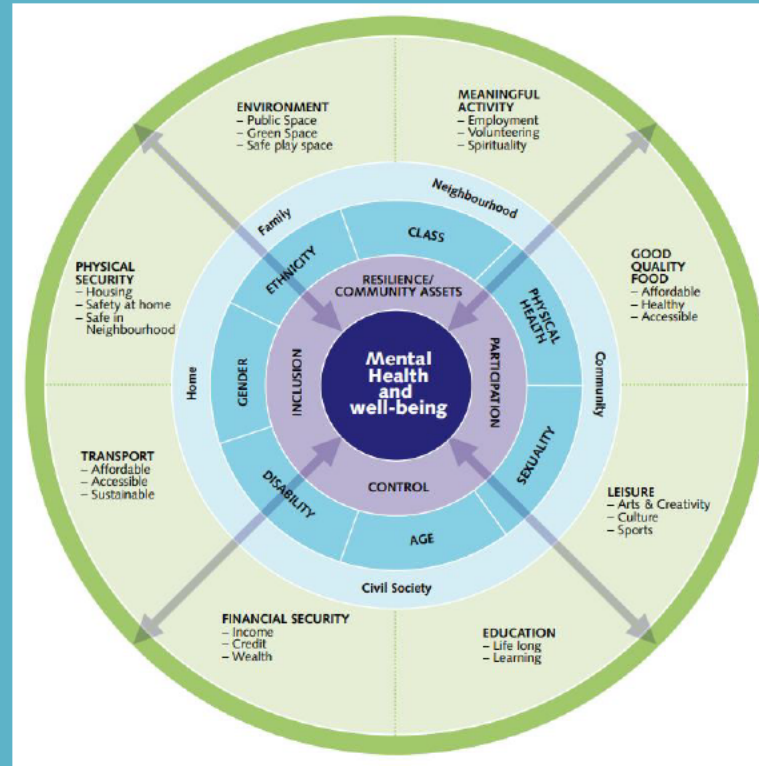
How can being from a refugee background affect a person's mental health?



- Asylum seekers and refugees face unique and complex challenges related to their mental health and they are often at **greater risk of developing a mental health problem**
- The increased vulnerability to mental health problems that refugees and asylum seekers face is linked to **pre-migration experiences** (such as war trauma) and **post-migration experiences** (such as separation from family, difficulties with asylum procedures, and poor housing)
- Asylum seekers are 5 times more likely to have mental health needs than the general population. However, data shows that they are **less likely to receive support** than the general population

Source: Mental Health Foundation

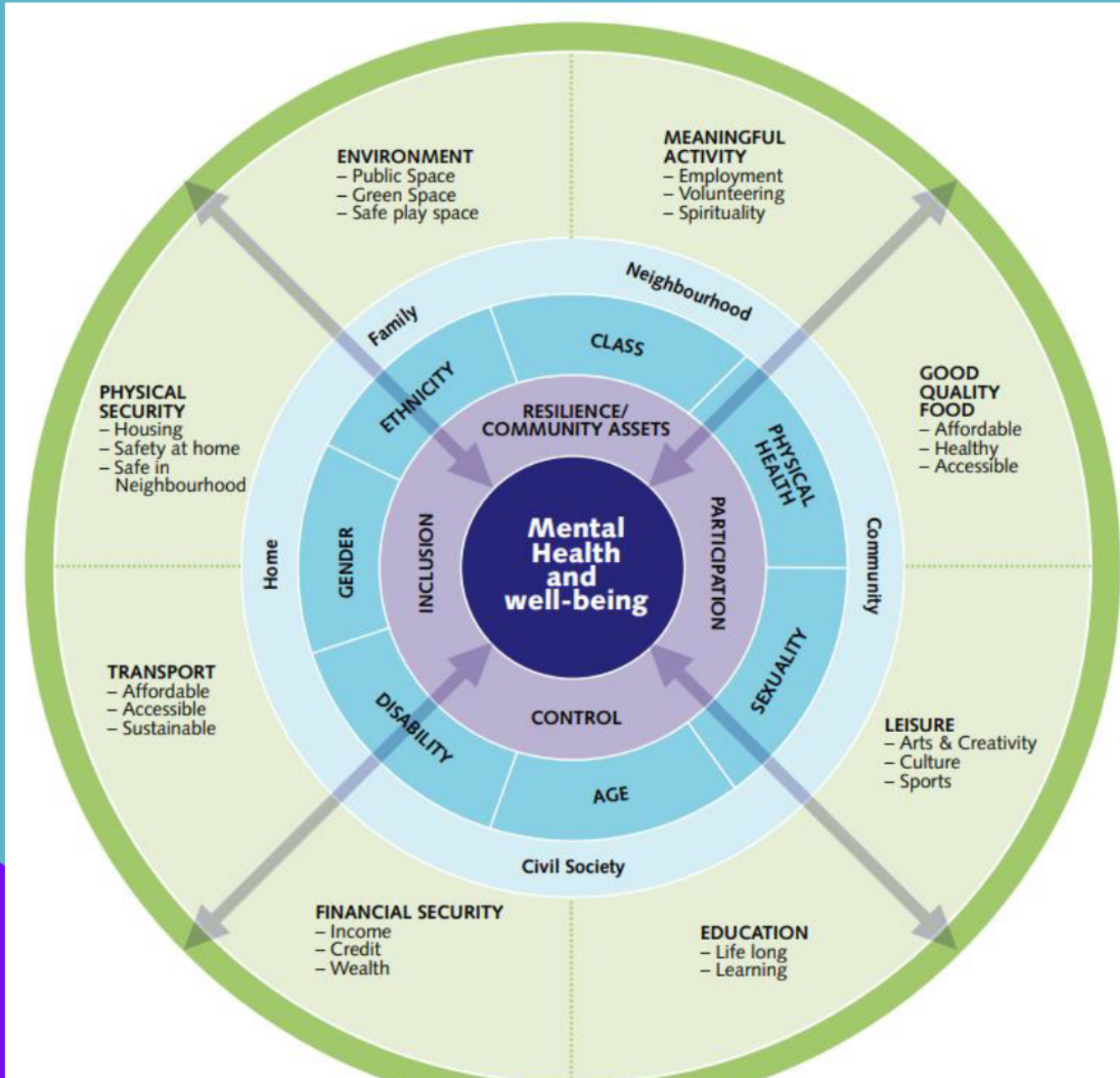
What's this got to do with mental health?



- The 4 protective factors are influenced by all the other elements, which are influenced by social justice and privilege
- The WHO identifies **community empowerment as the first track to promote health and wellbeing**, being the 'process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives'

Source: Lynne Friedli (2011) [Mental Health Impact Assessment Tool](#). National MWIA Collaborative (England)

What's this got to do with mental health?





Recommendations from the Voices and Visibility report



Recommendations from the Voices and Visibility report



What will best support refugees and asylum seekers participate on civic forums?

Buddying

Invest in a buddying/mentoring programme within civic forums between refugees and existing members of the forums to allow the following:

- **Facilitate communication and good relations** between the host communities and refugees
- Support **access to public engagement forums** and demystify these forums for refugee communities to increase participation

Recommendations from the Voices and Visibility report



What will best support refugees and asylum seekers participate on civic forums?

Training

Deliver training about refugee and asylum-seeking communities to civic forums to help them better understand the needs and experiences of people from refugee backgrounds

Opportunities

Breakdown stereotypes and preconceptions about refugees and asylum seekers by creating opportunities to highlight the strengths, skills, aspirations, contributions, and commonalities with the host communities

Buddying

- We **match refugees and asylum seekers with current members of civic forums**, such as parents on the Parent Council at the school their children attend
- People who have an **established life in Glasgow are paired up with people from refugee and asylum-seeking communities** to participate on civic forums
- The hope is that the **refugee buddy can ask their buddy questions** about being on the civic forum and they can **attend meetings together**
- Buddies commit to **checking in with each other** regularly
- We'll be there to **support you** through the process

Buddying

- With Glasgow City Parents Group, we **match refugee and asylum-seeking parents in Glasgow with current members of the Parent Council** at the school their children attend. We want to expand this project across Scotland
- People who have an **established life in Scotland are paired up with people from refugee and asylum-seeking communities** to participate on Parent Councils
- The hope is that the **refugee buddy can ask their buddy questions** about being on a Parent Council and they can **attend meetings together**

Buddying

- **Connect and check in** with your buddy as it suits you both
- **Be understanding and respectful** of your buddy and others in the project
- Attend **training** events where possible
- Attend regular **meetups** where possible
- Adhere to MHF's confidentiality and health & safety **policies**
- **Continue buddying over a period of time** until you feel your buddy does not need the same level of support
- **Maintain good contact** with Mahdi and Rosie about how your buddying relationship is going

Summer Newsletter

June - August 2025

Latest Forum Meeting

The Mental Health Forum on Wednesday 14th May 2025, kindly hosted by our colleagues at **Scottish Fire & Rescue**.

At this meeting of the forum, we gave specific focus around the mental health experiences of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Mahdi Saki of the Mental Health Foundation provided us with a short input on the experiences of Refugees & Asylum Seekers - focussing on common misconceptions, the toll that systemic discrimination can have on their mental health and what we as organisations can do to mitigate them. Mahdi was joined by Tojin & Negar, peer volunteers at the Mental Health Foundation, who gave the forum some powerful detail of their own lived experience. A huge thanks to Mahdi, Tojin & Negar. Partners may benefit from reading the **Mental Health Foundation's Report** into the Mental Health of Asylum Seekers & Refugees.

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Stories from: Programme Development Officer

Mehdi works as a Programme Development Officer in Southside Central.

The Programme development officer creates training or events for their network that help them build knowledge or improve wellbeing. Mehdi's role is targeted towards building a sense of belonging for refugees and asylum seekers living in Glasgow and giving people the opportunity to have their say on societal issues.

In his role he hosts classes that help people to understand what rights they have and what they are entitled to so they can remove some of the barriers that make it difficult to live a normal life. Often the people who attend Mehdi's classes feel socially isolated and suffer from poor mental health so these classes help to reduce some of those anxieties.

They also create courses for topics like community development, where attendees can build stronger community connections and share their feelings on societal issues.

Providing support for refugees and asylum seekers

Mehdi: In my home country, Iran there is a dictatorship and I always want people to understand their rights here in Glasgow. I feel that social justice is important: if you don't raise your voice social justice will not just happen.

When people come to work with us, they don't have much knowledge about the systems in place for seeking asylum and the problems they'll face. This frequently leads to poor mental health. Often, when we get people involved in one of our programmes, they start to feel a real sense of belonging and they start to feel better. We try to create a safe space where you can build a connection with the other people in attendance.

They are engaged, they thrive, they learn something new and hopefully they feel like a part of the community!

1 in 5

people said they feel isolated from family and friends based on the 2022/23 Adult Health and Wellbeing Survey undertaken by NHSGGC

Empowering people to share their opinion

Mehdi: We encourage people to share their thoughts and feelings, everyone's opinion matters and we encourage people to share their voice to create a better society.

Our groups have engaged directly with the Scottish Government to discuss digital inclusion: we've worked with libraries to envision how they can improve in the future and be more inclusive and we've also worked with transport leads in the city. In addition to this we also have classes where attendees can gain qualifications.

“ They are engaged, they thrive, they learn something new and hopefully they feel like part of the community! ”

Community development

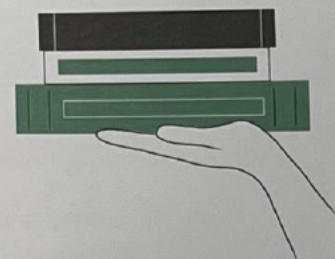
Mehdi: We've run a credited course on community development over the past three years and 60 people have participated.

“ To know that our course has had a lasting impact and kind of encouraged someone to go on to further education was really inspiring. ”

By completing our course, you gain a qualification and many people have told us about how this has instilled a sense of belief in them and they have become more confident.

We had a young man who originally was in one of our youth groups for refugees. He told us about a really tough moment in his life where he was a victim of extreme violence in a hotel that was housing refugees. Luckily he got through it, but this was very traumatic for him.

He was originally part of our Community Connector Volunteers' group where he slowly started to build confidence because he felt welcome and really found his voice in that group. As part of the youth group, they worked with the University of Strathclyde who were doing research on mental health and how this affects young people.



After attending the youth group he shared with us that he wanted to do more, which was partly to do with having more belief but also from learning new skills. Well they got in touch with us to say that he was a great contributor.

Looking to the future

Mehdi: He was interested in our community development course and he grew passionate about the subject, especially when it comes to giving young people a voice in communities and issues around health. He's now studying Community Development at university which is absolutely amazing.

To know that our course has had a lasting impact and encouraged someone to go on to further education was really inspiring. Especially for someone who has had such a scary thing happen to them, it takes incredible resilience.



Reflection

When people think about support — especially in a child poverty context — it's often financial support. But in order to truly provide holistic support we have to consider each person's different needs in order to foster good mental health and wellbeing.

By looking for new ways to develop better, long-lasting relationships, help can be transformative and supports families in building resilience that leads to meaningful, practical steps like further education.

**MENTAL
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The journey to wellbeing: Refugees, transport, and mental health



What we did

**Spoke to 47
people in
focus groups**

**Online
survey with
222
responses**

**31 peer
interviews**

**Report with
findings**

What we learned

What survey respondents use public transport for



84%

of survey
respondents have
been unable to use
public transport
because of the cost



If I spend my money on
the bus ticket, I don't
have enough for food.

Focus group participant



Questions?



Thank you!

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