



# Interim Report 5: Bridges Programmes

## 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 two social connections discussions with people using Bridges Programmes in February 2022. Five people were approached by Bridges Programme as possible attendees, and all were offered further translated information by email. Of those people, two women attended individual discussions held online. Each session was facilitated by two QMU researchers, 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 Bridges Programmes, and participants were invited to complete the social connections mapping survey to explore their wider connections in Scotland.

## Participant profile

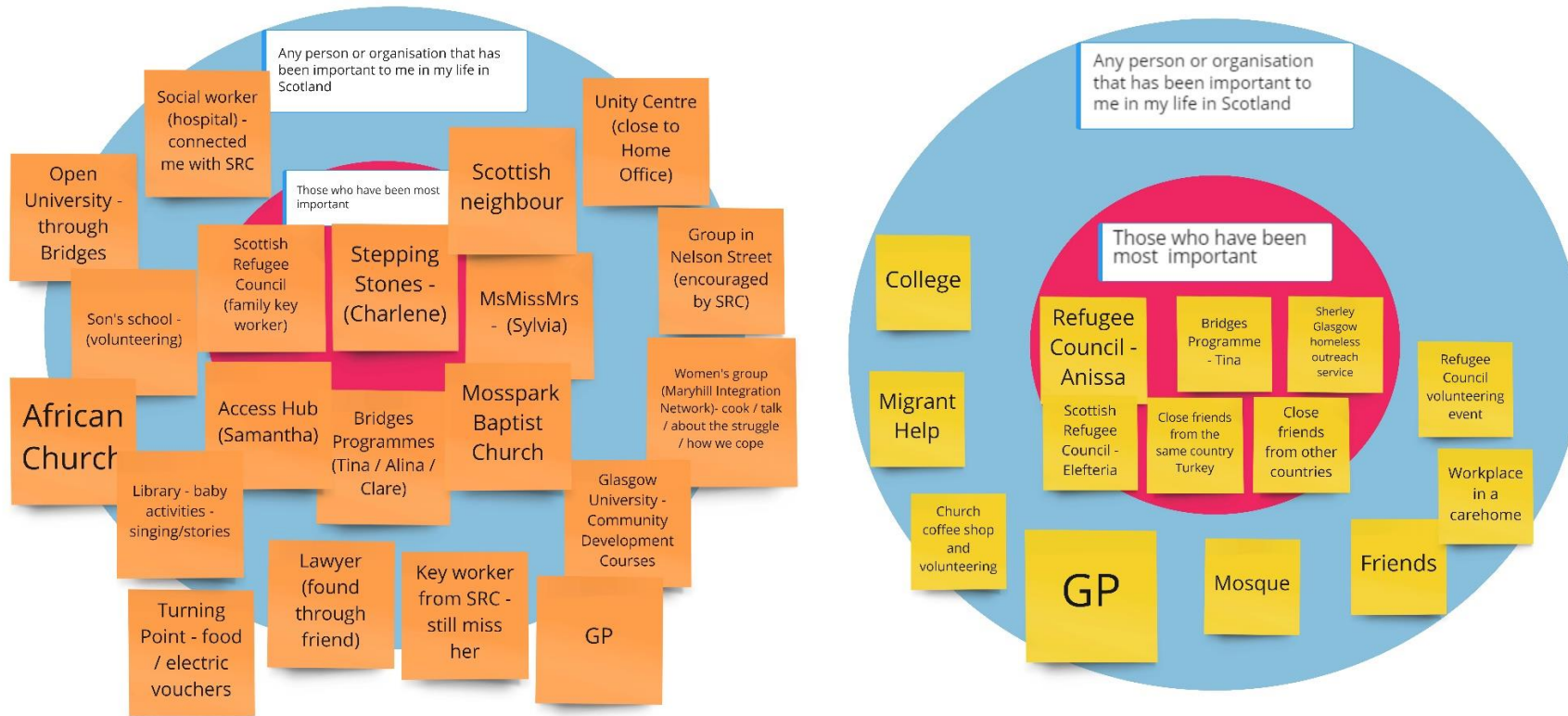
In important ways, the two participants shared some commonality of experience. Both spoken fluent English and were in paid part-time work – one in the care sector, and the other in a community development role. Participant one is a single mother with two young children, participant two lives with her partner and teenage children. They had sought help from a number of family and child-focused services, and notably both participants had, during their time in the asylum process, been supported by Scottish Refugee Council's Family Keywork Service. Both had been in Glasgow for several years and had waited significant periods for the results of their asylum claims, with both noting how difficult that had been in terms of wasted opportunities. However, they had been able to gain experience through volunteering and were engaged with a range of community activities where they not only received but provided help to others.

## Experience of Bridges Programmes

As shown in the individual bullseye diagrams at figure one, both women placed named workers from Bridges Programmes as central connections that had helped them to settle in Scotland.



Figure one: individual bullseye diagrams





Participant one had been involved with Bridges Programmes for several years, including prior to being recognised as a refugee, and in that time had completed several courses including aged care and activity coordinator. At the time of the research discussion, she was undertaking an Open University course again brokered through Bridges Programmes. Participant two had also followed a course with Bridges and then recently moved into a paid work opportunity, related to the training, identified for her by Tina.

*“Tina, my coach, they found this work in [xxx] Care Home. So it’s about six or seven weeks I work [there]. It’s good.”*

Within this workplace, she noted that the training course through Bridges had improved both her confidence and her English language ability, and so was a key experience that had enabled her to move into work. Indeed, for both women it was not only the practical help and support they had received, but also the positive impact on their confidence that had been most important to them. This was a relationship characterised by trust and indeed a very personal feeling that the workers at Bridges Programmes cared for and were working hard for them:

*“Tina encouraged me because I was feeling nervous about working as well so I spoke with her and she helped me with the CV and she encouraged me”*  
(Participant one)

*“[Tina] gave me good advice. I know I can trust her [...] It’s good because you know somebody here, they know some things better than you and they give you good advice, so it’s good, give you good feeling.”* (Participant two)

The importance of voluntary sector organisations and the staff working within them in building feelings of confidence emerged strongly in our previous interim reports.

## Role of Scottish Refugee Council

As in Interim Report 3 both women identified Scottish Refugee Council as a key connection, before and after they had been recognised as refugees and granted leave to remain. The duration, depth of support and many ways in which Scottish Refugee Council had helped over time was strongly felt by both women, with each feeling an ongoing strong connection with the named workers who had walked with them along their path at different periods and for different reasons up to and including the present day.

Participant one had been referred to Scottish Refugee Council by a hospital social worker shortly after giving birth to her second child. From that point on, she described how her involvement with the Family Keywork Service had resulted in practical achievements such as opening a bank account and applying for additional monies during pregnancy; and also the importance of the close relationship she had built with the keyworkers who had supported her at that time:



*“The first person that I worked with in Scottish Refugee Council, my first key worker. Sharon. Yes. I love her [...] I really miss her, and ... There’s somebody that worked with her, too, a man [...] they were really important people to me... my son he likes going to the office to see them, he sees them as uncle and auntie...”*

Participant two spoke in similar terms. She had been referred to the Family Keywork Service during the asylum process by her GP. From that point on, her keyworker became a central figure who not only helped with practical matters but provided emotional support and countered her feelings of isolation.

*“When you come this country, there is nobody, and you don’t know anybody, you’re just alone, you know? And she [Anissa –SRC Family keyworker] take this loneliness from me, every week she calls us and she do – she tried to do something. And she did. She just not try, you know? She did everything for us.”*

Having now received her refugee status, participant two was supported by the Integration Service team. Her description of the support provided highlighted the ways in which different elements of the service can work together to provide a holistic package of support. Her Integration Adviser had, in her words, *“made a good team for me”*. It was this central contact who had put her in touch not only with SRC’s in-house Employability Service but also with Bridges Programmes. Once again, she appreciated not only the practical support and advice they provided but the fact that they had encouraged and motivated her:

*“She [Eleftheria, Employment Adviser] explained everything, and she has really good energy. Just when you talk to her, you want to do everything.”*

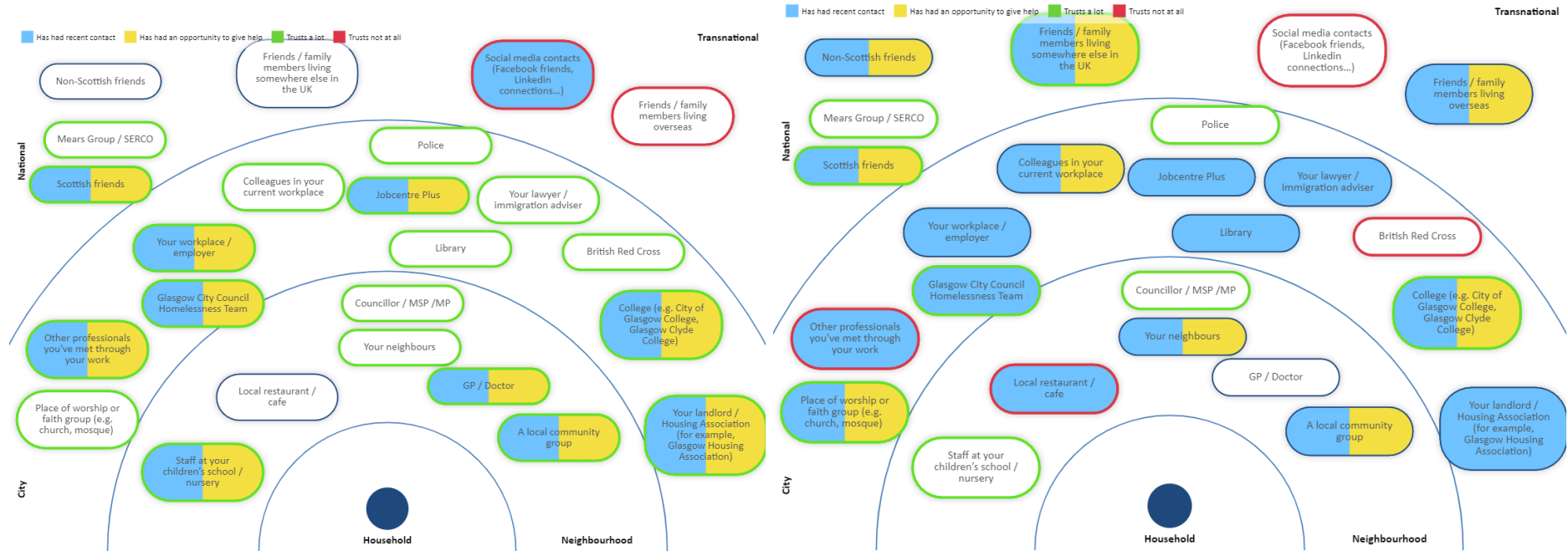
Her description of the different and ongoing support provided by this team made clear that SRC and Bridges had, along with some of the wider connections explored below, had a hugely positive impact on her wellbeing and her ability to identify and work towards her longer-term employment goal of becoming a midwife.

## Pathways to social and economic inclusion

As shown in the individual connections maps (Figure 2), both women had a large number of connections with whom they had had recent contact, trusted a lot and, for eight connections on each woman’s map, to whom they had been able to offer some measure of help or support. Each interview offered rich and detailed information on the participants’ experiences, therefore for the purposes of this report we focus only upon three of the connections that both identified as people who had helped them most: friends, places of worship, and statutory services.



Figure two: Individual Connections Maps





## Friends

For participant one, a women's group run by Maryhill Integration Network had been the first place where she had met other adults outside the home after the birth of her child. It had become a space where she could take part in different activities and share the difficulties of her circumstances at that time.

*That was like the first group that I was really involved [...] I looked forward to going there to meet people because I was just with the baby and my son. we cook, we talk, we talk about the struggle, how we cope. We just have fun, really, being together.*

However, she placed this as a connection of importance primarily in the early stages of her life in Glasgow. As shown on her map (Figure 2), it seemed now to be Scottish friends with whom she had had most recent contact, and who she both trusted and with whom she had relationships that enabled her to reciprocate some form of help or support. People she mentioned included colleagues and managers at work, and a Scottish neighbour who had helped her navigate a difficult time with social work.

Participant two also spoke at length about people from within the Kurdish community that she appeared to have met at the early stages of her days in Glasgow. One was an interpreter whom she met through her lawyer and who had offered, and continued to provide, a mixture of practical support and reassurance:

*He's Kurdish, and at the beginning, he starts to help us 'til now, 'til now we see each other [...] when I move on another place, he came and took me and my children, and he teach [me how to find] a GP, a dentist, and everywhere [...] And sometimes when it's raining and we don't have enough money to go somewhere, he just come and pick us up and drop up – yeah. And really he was good. Every time, he was good. He was really kind with us.*

However, the same participant recounted some ambivalence about building connections of friendship with people from a similar national or ethnic background, and this is reflected in the seeming lack of trust she noted in her survey as regards 'non-Scottish friends'.

*In this country when I came, usually Turkish people doesn't want to talk another people who knew come from Turkey, it's like refugee. It's like asylum seeker, actually, they don't want to be friends and close with them.*

This ambivalence around connecting with others from a similar background emerged too when participant one spoke of her involvement in faith groups as we explore below.

## Places of worship / faith groups

Both women were involved in faith groups. Participant one attended two churches. The most important was a Baptist Church local to her asylum accommodation that she had found with the help of her health visitor. The pastor and congregation



there provided her with practical support during the asylum process and beyond, ranging from letters of support for her immigration case to kitchen utensils and good quality clothing for her children. She described the congregation at this church as being predominantly Glaswegian and contrasted her experience of welcome and support there with a less positive experience in an “African Church” which she also attended from time to time.

*They always say how beautiful, how gorgeous I am, but in African Churches, they won't come to say that or anything. But they always cherish whatever I'm wearing in my Moss Park.*

When she was still seeking asylum, she had in fact preferred to avoid the African Church as she felt that people there were judging her negatively for her appearance and economic poverty, whereas this was not the case in the Scottish Baptist congregation.

Participant two was a practising Muslim who attended the Central Mosque in Glasgow and volunteered there for food delivery to people in need. However, as regards wider social integration, she was more positive about her involvement with local church groups where, although she did not share a faith background, she had been able to volunteer her time and, as a result, benefit from opportunities to practise her English:

*I just asked mosque, and at the church as well. I said, “I want to do volunteering here if it's possible.” They said, “Yes, it's possible.” So I did. In mosque, volunteering, it wasn't so excited, you know? It's just, we prepare the bags and foods in the morning, and we make them ready 'til one o' clock, and at one o' clock we give the people. Yeah, it is a good feeling, but it wasn't really good for me or for English. On church it was better. It's like you work on the coffee shop because people come [...] So when I start volunteering there, I was more comfortable. Even I was [in beginners English class] ... everybody was shocked, they said, “No, you are not beginning because you can talk really good,” it was because of church. Everybody is a foreigner, no one is from Turkey, and I had to talk good English.*

As in Interim Report 3, faith-based groups played a role that went beyond worship, including playing a social function and providing opportunities to practice English.

### Statutory Services

Previous research has demonstrated that refugees can face significant systems barriers when seeking to navigate statutory systems<sup>1</sup>. However, for both interviewees, statutory services had not only been accessible but played a key role in enabling further social connections. For both women, it was health professionals

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<sup>1</sup> (Baillot et al, 2021) <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/media/i1jnruei/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf>

(Strang et al, 2017) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341717>



who had referred them to Scottish Refugee Council, and so acted as catalysts for one of the key connections in their lives. Regarding other statutory services, the individual maps show that both women had not only had recent contact with the Glasgow City Council homelessness team but had high levels of trust, and in one case, had been able to provide some form of reciprocal help to this agency. Both participants named workers within homelessness services as key connections that had helped them to settle in Glasgow and described their involvement with these workers in very positive terms. Participant one had first met her connection – Samantha – through Access Hub, a partnership project between Glasgow City Council and homelessness charities in the city. Having benefited from the support of this homelessness project, she had gone on to become a volunteer there, and undertaken a course of study. It was again a named worker, this time Shirley within an outreach service provided by the local authority homelessness team, who had provided assistance to our second participant.

*She calls me, and when I have paperwork and I don't understand [...] I just call her, and when I call her she give me appointment, she come to me and she tell me everything, and about house as well. I was waiting for GHA, and one day I see she bring a lot of paper and she says, "This is the application for a new house for another company, and we do it together." And she explained to me what I need to do, and what is going to be done. So it was good, and she's really good.*

These positive experiences contrast somewhat with some of the assumptions about people's experiences of statutory housing services that have emerged through discussions with practitioners. For example, in recent practitioner workshops, some advisers expressed the view that refugees' engagement with homelessness services is one of necessity rather than a positive social connection (Interim Report 4). Given that the named staff members appeared to be working within community-focused projects, this could indicate that these models of working are more successful in terms of providing positive links to statutory services than more traditional models of provision.

## Conclusion

Discussions with these beneficiaries of support from Bridges Programmes through the AMIF Project illustrate once again the multiple roles that key connections can play in people's pathways toward economic and social inclusion. Support and assistance may be related to specific times in people's lives -for example, early intervention when people face destitution at the outset or during asylum claims; or be ongoing and cover multiple points in the pathway. The role of statutory services as access points to community and voluntary sector support was prominent in these discussions and illustrates the depth of partnership working across sectors that can exist in dispersal cities such as Glasgow. As in previous discussions (Interim Report 3), women with children who have accessed Scottish Refugee Council's Family Keyword Service speak highly of the organisation's continuity of care through the





asylum process and into the period after a grant of status and so highlight the importance of embedding an integration from day one approach into service provision. Pathways to inclusion begin long before official recognition of a person's refugee status. The same observation holds for the support offered by Bridges Programmes, who play a role not only in providing functional assistance but in building confidence and encouraging people's ambition and aspirations even before a final asylum decision.

The wider social worlds of the women who participated in these discussions, comprising faith groups, friends and other informal contacts are also critical and a reminder that organisational support is not, in and of itself, sufficient to promote social and economic inclusion. People's lives take on new shapes well beyond the boundaries of professional support, and opportunities for work, education and friendship emerge from sometimes unexpected avenues. Mapping these pathways through research discussions offers the opportunity to develop a holistic picture of the role that different connections can play in influencing and shaping people's lives in Scotland.



*This work was undertaken as part of the AMIF-funded 'New Scots Integration – A Pathway to Social and Economic Inclusion' ABM3 Project.*