

# The role of schools in refugee well-being

*Reflections on belonging*

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# Needed focus





Post-migration environment

# Issues specific to refugee children

- All the problems that socially marginalised populations suffer
- AND
  - Forced migration
  - Experiences of persecution
  - Emotional and physical trauma
  - For Unaccompanied minors: Loss of primary caregiver
- Insecurity at important stage of development
  - Can enhance or threaten well-being
- Diverse needs for support

# Strengths

- Majority have Good outcomes
  - Sudanese adolescents did better if felt safe and supported
  - Australian refugee school-children self-report mental health scores higher than local population

# Schools and refugee children

- Natural point of contact
- Language
- Peers
- Sense of belonging
- Facilitate access to other services
  - Mental health services
  - Community supports

# Belonging

- Need a developmental, multi-level, and interdisciplinary view
  - Sense of relatedness
  - Close, reciprocal, supportive bonds of belonging
- To people, places and communities
- OxWell Student Survey
  - Loneliness
- For refugees at school



# Young Person's Account 1

My, how did I come out from that depression . . . and that's it. It was, from the kids in the school, really from the kids, really they help me a lot, you know I was struggling alot, I didn't have a confidence with my English language. I would say to myself, ah it's still another year to go, and I'm gonna speak, you know, pure English with them.

I remember my presentation. . . . It was back in year 11, we were doing an activity, really I told John [therapist] how difficult it was, you know, cos Year 9 and 10 I didn't see anyone . . . And, year 11, I'm gonna do a presentation in front of 400 people, I got on the stage, I was really, really terrified



# Young Person's Account 1

All was going through my mind, I was saying everyone, every single person, sitting in front of me knows that I'm scared, and that's why I'm sweating, cos I was sweating, I was like, I'm sweating. Bloody hell, you know. That is just, you know, I'm going down hell.

And, how the words came out from my mouth, d'you know, how I said it and how I made everyone, everyone laughing, it was just remarkable. And afterwards, every-one after my presentation, everyone came, you know, it was fantastic, really.

# Young Person's Account 1

We had two minutes to prepare. I don't know, it just came out, really was a miracle, I dunno, they came through. And people tapping on my shoulder, they say, I thought it was good. No one spot about my sweating, no one said you sweating, you are foul or anything really. All they said, your presentation was good, you made it, you made us laugh. You broke the ice. And, I was like, seriously? Did I do that, really? Which was like, unbelievable, it was that time.

That was the time I started, you know, to speak about it, you know. That's the time...after this. That was absolutely the motivation. The kids are all, you know, the kids really, really just helped me a lot. They just said, Ali, you did well, you really did well.

# Reflection: pivotal role of schools

- Moment of change
- 2 sides of the same coin
- Current experience of school staff
- Limited opportunities in mental health services

# Young Person's Account 2

- I don't know find a way to try and make them feel welcome because there's not so many people that makes them feel like they're welcome. .. Jamie was our main source in the way that he was the first person that made us feel welcome, in school... he's a student but he was the best one ever... that's what I need you know because if you didn't have Jamie we wouldn't be here,
- *Really where would you be?*
- I don't know, nobody would know us, Jamie was like the main asset to the school, just like a pole, people liked Jamie and he was a pole that makes the school stand up

# Young Person's Account 2

- *What did he do?*
- He help me, he didn't care who thought about what, he lost friends over helping us.. because they were thinking oh you spend more time with them than us
- *Did the school ask him to help you?*
- I don't know I don't think the school did, but he did. Yeah he just did it, out of curiosity, oh these people came new I'll help them
- *And what did he do to help you?*
- I don't know, be with us, whenever we needed the help he was there, even we needed money we would ask Jamie, I'd say Jamie we need money to go there, ok here you go, he would give it. Alright obviously we borrowed the money, but he would do it... the teacher would say, me and Ivan, we are the main assets, no I don't think so, it was Jamie

# A Simple School Mental Health Toolbox



# How do I look after myself?





Impact on wider system

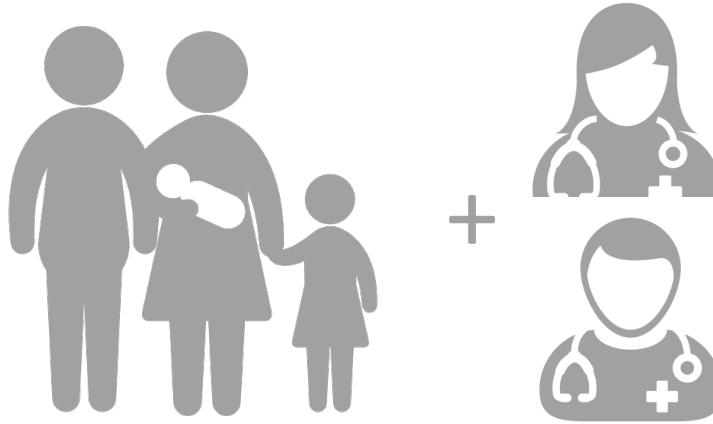
# Oxford Child Mental Health InReach Service



# Oxford Refugee Health Initiative (ORHI)



Medical students  
receive training on  
issues relevant to  
working with refugees



Medical students are matched with  
refugees families and UASCs to help  
them better understand and  
navigate the UK health system



# Conclusions

- Integrated approach
  - Across social, economic and health care sectors
  - Can lead to significant improvements for other populations
- Prevention focus
  - Restoring and supporting the social and physical environment
- Host population & Belonging
  - Isolation
  - Insecurity
    - Racism and bullying
  - Essential role of schools & peers
    - Longing for acceptance *'blend into environment'*