Derrida's 'Hostipitality' in action: Sponsor experiences within the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme

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Abstract

This working paper is based on research conducted during my time as a student in the MSc Migration Studies programme 2023-2024. It investigates the experiences of sponsors in the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) for resettled refugees. Understanding these experiences is essential for ensuring the continued participation of sponsors and the long-term viability of CSS and similar refugee sponsorship programmes. Despite the increasing prominence of community sponsorship, there is limited research on CSS in the UK, particularly on the sponsor experience. This study addresses this gap by drawing on in-depth interviews with sponsors, exploring their motivations, challenges, and the rewards they experience. This research utilises Derrida's notion of 'hostipitality' to explore the tensions inherent within CSS. The research ultimately finds that the sponsor journey is multifaceted, characterised by a complex interplay of motivations, emotions, rewards, and challenges. By examining these experiences through the lens of Derrida's hostipitality, the study offers insights into the tensions and complexities inherent within CSS, especially as it operates within the UK's hostile environment. These findings hold value for informing policy and programmatic improvements to improve the sponsorship experience and secure the long-term flourishing of community sponsorship schemes – in the UK and beyond

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Introduction

This working paper is based on research conducted during my time as a student in the MSc Migration Studies programme 2023-2024. The paper examines the experiences of sponsors within the United Kingdom's (UK) Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) for resettled refugees. Understanding sponsors' experiences is crucial to ensuring their continued participation in CSS, and hence the long-term viability of this scheme – and similar refugee sponsorship schemes around the world. Yet there is a paucity of research on CSS in the UK – and almost nothing on what it is like to sponsor refugees under the programme. This research addresses this gap by drawing on in-depth interviews with sponsors within CSS. The research explores the motivations that drive individuals to become sponsors, the challenges they encounter throughout the sponsorship journey, and the potential rewards and constraints associated with this experience. By shedding light on these aspects, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of CSS and inform its development.

With the number of refugees worldwide increasing yearly, from 26.4 million in 2020 (UNHCR 2020) to 42.5 million in 2025 (UNHCR 2025), resettlement programmes play a crucial role in offering refugees safety and a path to rebuilding their lives. However, traditional resettlement programmes face limitations, often leaving many refugees in limbo or situations of protracted displacement. Despite a growing need – in 2025, UNHCR projects that over 2.9 million refugees will require resettlement – only a small fraction are likely to be resettled (van Buren 2021; UNHCR 2023c). In 2024 just 188,800 refugees were resettled to third countries, equivalent to 6.5% of the need (UNHCR 2024). The UK's CSS has emerged as a promising complementary approach to refugee resettlement.

Despite the growing popularity of community sponsorship programmes worldwide, a significant gap exists in knowledge regarding the experiences of those involved, particularly sponsors (Ali et al. 2021; Labman & Cameron 2020; Macklin et al. 2018). As Macklin et al. (2018: 36) point out, community sponsorship provides a unique opportunity to explore the dynamics of citizen-refugee encounters that are "both highly personal and constituted and mediated by the state." Sponsors interact directly with refugees in everyday life, but government regulations establish the framework underpinning that relationship. Examining the motivations, challenges, and rewards experienced by individual sponsors provides a valuable lens through which to understand the everyday enactments of government-mediated civil society within the context of CSS.

The research ultimately finds that the sponsor journey is multifaceted. By examining these experiences through the lens of Derrida's hostipitality, the study offers insights into the tensions and complexities inherent within CSS, especially as it operates within the UK's hostile environment. These findings hold value for informing policy and programmatic improvements to improve the sponsorship experience and increase the repeat volunteering that is essential for the long-term flourishing of the scheme.

Background

Scholarly literature related to the UK's CSS is limited (though see: Bond et al. 2020; D'Avino 2022; Phillimore et al. 2022; Reyes & Phillimore 2020; Reyes-Soto 2020). This study focuses on addressing the discernible gap in the literature related to sponsors' experiences.

The success of CSS is heavily reliant on individuals' initial willingness to act as sponsors and their subsequent willingness to engage in sponsorship again, either by directly sponsoring refugees or by indirectly supporting other sponsors. Scholars note that "the impact [of sponsorship] on private refugee sponsors [...] remains virtually unaddressed" (Macklin et al. 2018: 36), with "little consideration [having] been given to the role of emotional labour in refugee work and how volunteers manage emotions" (Phillimore et al. 2022: 389; see also Hyndman et al. 2021). Furthermore, previous studies have not thoroughly explored how the complex relationship between sponsors and those they sponsor could positively or negatively impact resettlement outcomes (Kyriakides et al. 2018). More investigation is required to examine the elements influencing volunteer experiences, where "such research might consider group dynamics and structure and personalities as well as the role of emotions" (Phillimore et al. 2022:394). Finally, Haugen et al. (2020: 572-572) explain that the sparsity of research "has left sponsors, scholars, policy makers and practitioners without much evidence to suggest best practice" in terms of negotiating complex intercultural relationships and navigating challenging sponsor-refugee situations.

The UK's CSS was launched in July 2016 and enabled, for the first time, the British public to support refugees directly through a 'safe and legal route' to the UK. Defined as programmes empowering ordinary individuals to lead in welcoming, supporting, and integrating refugees, CSS represents a public-private partnership between governments and private actors facilitating the legal admission and settlement of refugees (Bond & Kwadrans 2019). In contrast to spontaneous asylum, CSS involves the planned, orderly movement of refugees and thus is often seen, along

with resettlement schemes more generally, as more politically acceptable in nations of the Global North (Hashimoto 2018).

CSS emerged as an initiative alongside government-funded resettlement programmes, with the aim of augmenting refugee resettlement numbers while alleviating the financial burden on public resources. CSS not only facilitates increased resettlement but also aims to foster positive public sentiment towards refugee integration (Bond 2021; Valcárcel Silvela 2019). By bringing together diverse stakeholders, CSS endeavours to mitigate polarised narratives about refugees, thereby promoting social cohesion (D'Avino 2022b). As of March 2023, 1,034 people have been resettled under the UK's CSS (Home Office 2023). This is relatively few. The UK's other safe and legal routes offered status to approximately half a million people from 2015 to 2023 (Home Office 2023). The small number resettled under CSS emphasises the importance of research related to sponsor experiences because, on the premise that community sponsorship is a worthwhile programme, an increase in the numbers would be a positive development.

CSS entails individuals, organisations, or communities supporting the reception and integration of individuals who have been accepted into a country through a referral by the UNHCR. The sponsored individuals are selected and admitted independently of the sponsor, and the sponsor's role commences after the arrival of the sponsorship beneficiaries in the UK. Community sponsorship groups have emerged in a wide variety of contexts, encompassing faith-based organisations, sports teams, and other community-driven initiatives. Upon formation, these groups establish partnerships with "Lead Sponsors" – registered charities or community interest companies – which assume legal responsibility for the resettlement process. Sponsorship groups must provide financial and social support for one year, and housing for two years. Sponsors must raise £9,000 for the resettled family before their arrival. While CSS groups do not receive financial support from the government, refugee families are able to claim welfare benefits on arrival (UK Government 2024). Finally, while community sponsors play a significant role in supporting refugees, the UK Government retains ultimate responsibility for sponsored individuals, for example, in scenarios involving breakdowns in sponsor-refugee relationships (Home Office 2024a).

Prior to 2021, refugee resettlements facilitated through CSS were not additional to the UK Government's refugee resettlement targets. Instead, refugees were brought to the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS); thus, community sponsor cases were included in the figures for the VPRS and VCRS (UK Home Office 2024b). This policy resulted in a decrease in the direct management of

resettlements by the Government, as sponsorship groups assisted in fulfilling commitments made by local authorities and meeting central government targets and led to concerns about community sponsorship's potential to offload governmental responsibilities onto the voluntary sector (Kumin 2015; Ritchie 2018). However, from February 2021 onwards, CSS has operated independently from the Government's core refugee resettlement commitments. While the Home Office oversees the scheme's procedural aspects, including application review and issuing refugee documentation, sponsors manage the reception and integration process, demonstrating a collaborative approach between government and civil society (Bond & Kwadrans 2019; Reyes-Soto 2023).

Sponsors are tasked with supporting a resettled refugee family from the moment of their arrival in the UK. Support includes but is not limited to:

- Meeting the family at the airport
- Providing cultural orientation
- Sourcing suitable accommodation which is available for a minimum of 2 years
- Assisting with registration with a local GP
- Assisting with registering any children with local schools
- Arranging for English language tuition for adults within one month of arrival and monitoring progress of each individual
- Supporting registration with a local job centre
- Providing interpreting services for 12 months from arrival
- Providing assistance in navigating social welfare provision
- Providing support towards employment and self-sufficiency

(UK Government 2024)

Conceptual framework

While much existing literature would be helpful in exploring the implications of this study's data, not limited to Anderson's (2023) work on belongingness and integration, Bourdieu's (1986) conceptions of social capital, Foucault's (2007; see also Walters 2012) governmentality, Massey's (2004) constructions of space and geographies of responsibility, and Said's (2019) orientalism, I have chosen to utilise Derrida's (2000) neologism 'hostipitality'. Given the exploratory nature of this study, not all the themes which emerged from the interviews connect to Derrida's notions of hospitality and hostility; however, his theories largely capture the tensions present within CSS,

both in relation to the interpersonal relations between sponsors and refugees, but also more broadly to the UK's hostile political and policy landscape, alongside the hospitality of individual sponsors – both of which were themes that dominated much of the research participants' experiences.

Hostipitality: A contradictory imperative

In the context of refugees and forced displacement, several researchers have applied Derrida's concepts to analyse the experiences of hosts and refugees and the broader implications of their actions (Bell 2010; Burrell 2024; Chiovenda 2020; Dikeç et al. 2009; Hutchinson 2018; Macklin 2021; Merikoski 2020; Sirriyeh 2013). These studies provide a rich backdrop for understanding the significance of the findings from this research; however, less research focuses on how hospitality is enacted politically, both by individuals and through government policy; this, therefore, is the focus of this discussion.

While historians have noted the evolving meanings and practices of hospitality over time (Pohl 1999; Walton 2000), and Derrida (2002) himself notes that all cultures have their own laws of hospitality, all notions of hospitality encompass a "complex and power-laden set of relations between people and place" (Bell 2010: 240).

Derrida's (1998, 2000, 2005a, 2005b) concept of hospitality introduces a complex interplay between hospitality and hostility, which he terms 'hostipitality'. This neologism describes displays of hospitality, caution, and negotiations of power and reciprocity. For Derrida, hospitality and hostility are closely interlinked yet seemingly contradictory concepts and processes. On this view, hospitality is always conditional, often exemplified through expectations of gratitude and conformity to the hosts' or sponsors' rules or norms on the part of the 'guest' or refugee and includes within it the potential for hostility (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018). Derrida argues that hospitality is a word of "a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it" (Derrida 2000: 3). To capture this constitutive duality, he coined the term hostipitality.

Derrida (1998) also differentiates between unconditional hospitality, which is the pure, unrestricted welcome of the other without any expectations or preconditions, and conditional hospitality, which is limited by various requirements and controls imposed by the host. Within the context of migration governance, hospitality, as a contradiction, involves a double or contradictory imperative: on the one hand, unconditional hospitality offers the right of refuge to all immigrants and newcomers, but on the other hand, it must be conditional with some

limitation on rights of entry. Critchley & Kearney (2001) argue that all the political difficulty of immigration consists in negotiating between these two imperatives.

In the context of this study, I argue that CSS constitutes a form of hostipitality. The process of community sponsorship "establishes the conditions and parameters of welcome" (Neelin 2020: 103), enabling observation of the multifaceted dynamics between established communities (hosts/citizens/natives) and those seeking refuge (guests/refugees/Others). Hostipitality is also manifested in tensions between the UK's hostile environment and CSS in that the scheme itself is 'hospitable' – albeit conditionally – to refugees, yet refugees and the sponsors supporting them are forced to navigate resettlement within the context of a broader environment of restrictive (or 'hostile') migration policies.

Within this study, I use the term 'hostile environment' to refer not only to the formal set of Hostile Environment policies introduced in 2012 by then-Home Secretary Theresa May (now referred to as the 'compliant environment'), but also the broader inhospitable environment that has existed for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the UK for many years prior to the enactment of the hostile environment policies (Conlan 2023). As Sales (2002: 457) argues, despite the UK's diverse population, migration has, for many years, been viewed "as a concession to be granted reluctantly" rather than a beneficial contribution to the economy or society. It is within this context that hostipitality is explored and analysed.

Empirical Findings

Pre-sponsorship: Motivations, support, and accommodation

Sponsor Motivations: Diverse and multifaceted

The motivations behind research participants' choosing to become sponsors are varied and multidimensional. The findings in this study complement those of the existing literature, especially with respect to sponsors' motivations deriving from commitments to social justice, personal responsibility, and prior experience working within the humanitarian and migration field.

Many sponsors were driven by a commitment to humanity and justice, aligning with Hyndman et al. (2021), who found that sponsorship is often predicated on values of social justice and human rights. For instance, Peter expressed a critical perspective on government policies, stating that "it was a general feeling that the government really doesn't care, or is actively hostile to refugees."

Katja's motivations combined ideological beliefs with a desire for "tangible and positive" action, further explaining that her motivations were a mix of a belief in the "free, dignified movement of people, and in the value that [refugees] bring to our communities."

John highlighted his motivation to participate in CSS once he found out that "sponsorship was additional to the very low numbers that were admitted on the resettlement schemes". Katja also decided to sponsor after learning that CSS had shifted to an additionality model, pointing to these sponsors' awareness of the broader refugee UK resettlement landscape.

Other sponsors were motivated by their previous work in the field of migration but were looking to make a more direct impact within their communities. Sarah had previously done work related to migrants and refugees that "was quite theoretical" and sponsoring was "a chance for [her] to get back around to what [she] really enjoyed, which was the interaction and the chance to really support and welcome a family." Katja, who also had years of experience in the charity and aid sector, echoed this motivation, explaining that after doing "really structural work where you can't really tell if anything ever changes", sponsorship offered an opportunity for direct action. This reflects the findings of Macklin et al. (2018), who reported that many sponsors have prior experience in community advocacy, seeking direct engagement rather than purely theoretical or policy-based work.

The motivations of sponsors in this study therefore align closely with existing literature, highlighting themes of social justice, direct impact, community response, personal responsibility, empathy, and broader societal values. These motivations illustrate the complex interplay of personal beliefs, societal contexts, and the desire for tangible action in the realm of community sponsorship.

Pre-arrival support for sponsors: Well-meaning yet insufficient

Pre-arrival support, or the lack thereof, was another key theme that emerged from the interviews. Many participants expressed that they felt underprepared for the bureaucratic complexities and the unpredictable needs of the refugee families, despite their willingness and dedication to support. Existing literature highlights significant gaps in support for sponsors, noting the devolution of refugee integration responsibilities to volunteers rather than the state. Phillimore et al. (2021; 2022) argue that this lack of state-supported infrastructure results in inconsistent quality of support as sponsors often have no prior experience with refugee integration challenges.

Several interviewees echoed these sentiments, illustrating the practical challenges they faced due to insufficient preparation and support. Alan remarked, “even though I'm a bureaucrat, [the application itself is] intensely bureaucratic.” Heidi highlighted that “we were quite underprepared for what we were going into”, further explaining why “the training has come so far now [...] it’s informed by the early groups.”

Somewhat contrary to existing literature, which often emphasises the lack of state involvement and comprehensive support structures (D’Avino 2022a; Phillimore et al 2021), some interviewees did note a degree of positive support from individuals within the government administration. For example, Alan observed that “the Home Office, the individuals are very well meaning and quite caring. It’s just a very difficult machine to deal with, the wheels turn very slowly”, and David remarked that while “the job centres in the UK have a reputation for being terrible places [...] that wasn’t our experience. They were magnificent.” These perspectives indicate that while systemic issues persist, individual efforts within the system can still provide meaningful support.

Sponsors explained how the ‘intensely bureaucratic’ (interview with Alan) application, in conjunction with limited support from the Home Office, can result in prolonged application periods. This bureaucratic barrier connects to Derrida’s opposition to Immanuel Kant’s “sovereign-state-regulated hospitality [being] the necessary and sufficient requirement for a peaceful cosmopolitan world” (Astolfo & Boano 2020: 463). According to Derrida, law is associated with violence and exclusion, while justice aligns with the ethics of hospitality. This ethics involves the “process of transforming the law [...] so as to make it more accommodating to the needs of the other” (Astolfo & Boano 2020: 463-464). However, as evidenced in sponsors’ experiences with the application process, in designing the application process as it has, the Home Office’s bureaucratic processes reflect its inherent hostility to refugees. As sponsors are forced to navigate complex administrative processes, only those with sufficient time and resources can successfully sponsor. This means that only a small subset of the population ends up sponsoring, regardless of whether there is wide support from civil society to increase resettlement numbers.

Accommodation: From a ‘bleak’ to an ‘impossible’ situation

Finding and retaining accommodation for the sponsored families was the most significant challenge encountered by sponsors, running across all interviews and throughout the entire sponsorship period. Participants explained that finding accommodation was the single most difficult aspect of preparing their sponsorship application. For many interviewees, the theme of

housing difficulties continued into the sponsorship period and was the main reason why sponsors would not sponsor again.

Existing literature underscores the severe housing challenges faced by community sponsorship schemes. Reyes-Soto (2020) notes that the high cost of housing discourages the involvement of prospective sponsors, threatening the sustainability of CSS. Alraie et al. (2018) also highlight housing as a major barrier in both CSS and government-led refugee resettlement schemes more broadly. The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature; however, participants specifically articulate how the housing situation has collapsed within the last several years. Alan, for example, described the worsening housing situation, stating how “we were surprised at how in three- or four-years’ time, what had been a bleak housing situation had become impossible.” Reflecting on his experience, he noted, “The thing that killed it was the complete dearth of social and affordable housing of any form.” He underscored the disappointment felt by their sponsorship group when they were forced to cancel their second sponsorship application when they already had a refugee family allocated to them.

The issue of housing affordability and availability continued to pose challenges beyond the initial sponsorship period. Peter raised a widespread concern about long-term stability: “What happens after two years when the flat’s needed back?” Sarah also reflected on her group’s struggle with supporting the refugee family to find a new house after the official two-year accommodation support had ended. This issue is particularly acute in London, where housing pressures are immense. John stated:

> *The thing with London is it’s such a good place for refugees because every nationality is there and people can find their communities, [but] one of the disadvantages of the scheme is that in theory anyway, you are plunging a family into poverty effectively, because once they must start to pay market rates for their rent, it’s very, very difficult.*

David emphasised the critical importance of housing whilst suggesting potential policy changes:

> *It would certainly help if there was a pool of housing available so that a group could form and they could then tap into a local housing association or a local authority […] Because every time, you have to start from scratch and it’s a major task.*

David also acknowledged that "there's loads that could be done to bring into use empty accommodation", but that it "generally requires national action" and a supportive government.

Overall, the interviews reflect a deep concern about the housing crisis and its impact on the sustainability of CSS. While the existing literature acknowledges the challenges, the interviewees highlight a pressing need for systemic and structural changes to address the affordable housing shortage, which remains a significant barrier to successful refugee resettlement and ongoing community sponsorship efforts.

Sponsorship: The reality

Navigating the welfare system: 'Dealing with the inadequacies of the system'

Navigating the welfare system was another significant challenge. Interviewees' experiences reveal the complexity of the welfare system and the crucial role sponsors play in helping refugees manage these challenges, although many sponsors felt ill-equipped for this task. The literature emphasises the importance of sponsors in facilitating integration through the development of social capital. D'Avino (2022) highlights that sponsors can help refugees learn the language, access employment opportunities, and build community connections, thereby easing their integration journey. However, this integration is highly dependent on the sponsors' understanding and ability to navigate the welfare system on behalf of refugees. Silvia pointed out the limitations of her group's background, which affected their ability to provide practical support:

> *We were not a diverse group. We were posh, white. I think it affects the relationship with the family a lot, but especially in terms of practical support that we can give the group.*

Both the difficulty of navigating the UK's benefits system and its limitations were recurring themes. Heidi criticised the system's inefficacy, explaining that "the benefits system in the UK doesn't work in anyone's favour." Sarah reflected on the dual-edged sword of sponsor support, where sponsors provide essential support to refugees, but at the same time, it shields them from the real limitations of the welfare system until the sponsorship period ends and refugees are thrust abruptly out on their own. She noted:

> *I worry that it almost gave them a slightly false sense of security for a couple of years and then now they're about to experience the hard reality of what it's like to be a family living on benefits.*

Peter noted the lengths to which their group went to prepare because their largely affluent sponsorship group did not have experience with the welfare system. He stated, "One of our members went and volunteered at Citizens Advice so as to learn about the benefit system because we were very ignorant, and we knew that it would be easy to make a mistake."

David spoke about the broader inadequacies of the welfare system, stating:

> *The problem with the welfare system is it doesn't really support people to live adequately. You can just about get by on it […] It's the broader policy landscape […] anybody who's poor, who's arriving as an immigrant - certainly a refugee - finds themselves dealing with the inadequacies of our system.*

Overall, the interviews reveal significant challenges in navigating the UK's welfare system. These challenges not only highlight the need for better preparation and resources for sponsors but also underscore the systemic barriers that refugees, and the sponsors who support them, face.

Conditional hospitality is evident in the initial welcome of refugees through CSS, but hostility follows closely as refugees and sponsors soon become aware of the gross limitations of the welfare system. Difficulties in accessing benefits creates a less-than-hospitable environment and makes it difficult for refugees to access the benefits to which they are entitled. Even once these benefits are accessed, they are limited, and have become increasingly small in real terms, as evidenced by the 'Benefit levels in the UK' report which shows the UK's benefit levels are among the lowest in the OECD (House of Commons 2024).

Support for sponsors during the sponsorship cycle: 'It feels lonely'

Support for sponsors during the sponsorship period was often viewed by interviewees as insufficient, leaving many feeling overwhelmed and isolated. While the initial pre-arrival phase of sponsorship may involve preparation and training, ongoing support appears inadequate.

Sarah highlighted the unrealistic expectations placed on community sponsors and reflected on the emotional toll and sense of failure when the sponsorship group struggled to meet the needs of the refugee family, particularly as the support period ended: "The two-year end point is probably one of the most important parts of a sponsorship journey. And yet, it's probably the least

amount of support we've had as a group." While the official support period for CSS is one year (and two years of accommodation), many of the sponsors interviewed remained closely involved for the entire two-year accommodation period – and beyond.

A feeling of isolation among sponsors is another recurrent theme. Sarah described the challenges and loneliness her group faced when dealing with housing insecurity: "I've had numerous conversations with Sponsor Refugees about the fact that the family has been told that they must move out. [...] it feels quite lonely, and it feels quite hard." David's experience further illustrates the gap in ongoing support:

> *I don't know how you scale a scheme when it's as challenging as this, and yet it should be scaled, clearly, because it's so fundamentally important. [... It needs] more carrying and support for us, as a group.*

He also critiqued the training provided, noting that it fell short in preparing sponsors for the realities they would face: "The training really doesn't prepare you for the task. The moment the family arrives [...] pretty much all the training is a complete waste of time." Tracy acknowledged some benefits of the available training, such as understanding the emotional journey of refugees, but also indicated gaps in preparing sponsors for the practical aspects of the process: "There wasn't much training around [...] what you're getting yourself into."

Enhancing continuous support and providing more realistic training could significantly improve the experience for both sponsors and refugee families.

Naming: Heartache and hostility

Another challenge faced by sponsors is the emotional labour associated with exposure to the distress of refugee families separated from their loved ones. Sponsors often feel helpless in the face of this trauma, knowing they can do little to reunite families due to restrictive resettlement policies.

Alan expressed the frustration many sponsors feel with the bureaucratic barriers to family reunification: "We tried really hard to get the family reunification card played and [...] it was always stonewalled." The UK Government's resistance to support family reunification characterises the contradiction inherent in CSS, and exemplifies the tensions felt by sponsors taking part in CSS within the UK's hostile environment and its restrictive migration policies – a clear case of hostipitality in action. Peter underscored the emotional toll on refugees and the mental health

impact of family separation, explaining that "there should really be some mechanism because it's causing tremendous mental anguish for [refugees." This sentiment is echoed in the literature, where it is noted that family separation results in negative mental health outcomes (Morris et al. 2021).

In the UK, CSS does not allow for the 'naming' of refugees by their sponsors, which contrasts with the Canadian model of private sponsorship. In Canada, sponsors can nominate specific individuals (often extended family members of the initial refugee family) to join them. This practice, while it has its complexities and places pressure on families to sponsor additional refugees, provides a significant psychological and practical benefit by allowing families to reunite and support each other in their new environment. The ability to sponsor specific individuals potentially introduces an element of unfairness because those refugees waiting for resettlement who have connections to CSS through family members who have previously been sponsored will be at an advantage compared to other refugees with no connections to potential sponsors. However, naming does help to address the critical issue of family separation, which can drastically impact the integration and well-being of refugees.

Katja vividly described the emotional burden sponsors carry in witnessing the profound sadness and injustice of family separation and having to explain to sponsored family members that the sponsorship group cannot resettle their relatives: "It's one of my most hated conversations because it's so sad." However, not all sponsors were as in favour of introducing naming to CSS. David pointed out the potential inequities in the naming process but recognised its overall benefit, explaining that:

> *I'd like to see the scheme grow, so, on balance, I'd like to see naming happen, but I don't think we should pretend there's anything particularly just about it. It would be another unfairness, because our family would definitely have brought some relatives over. But why should our family's relatives be prioritised over anybody else?*

Despite the imperfections, the option to name refugees is offered by Alan, Peter, David, and Katja as a pragmatic solution in the absence of other pathways for family reunification. Overall, participants in this study largely advocate for incorporating the principle of naming into CSS as it would not only alleviate some of the emotional distress experienced by refugees (and by extension sponsors) but also enhance the overall integration and well-being of resettled families.

Sponsors exercise a “sovereignty by individuals” (Krivenko 2012: 597), striving to create a sense of belonging and support for refugees within the constraints of the system. This act becomes a form of resistance to the state’s hostility, as argued by Chiovenda (2020). Sponsors must navigate the conditionalities set out by the state, in this case, restrictions to family reunification. In several cases, sponsors described formal attempts to advocate for changes to immigration policies on behalf of the refugee families they sponsored (Interviews with Katja and Alan). This tension between state control and community hospitality reflects the essence of Derrida's hostipitality (Farahani 2021).

Moreover, the government’s decision not to allow naming likely limits the scalability of CSS. In the interviews, David and Silvia predicted that introducing naming would lead to a “massive increase in the number of people applying to be sponsor groups” (Interview with David). Literature from Canada supports this, where “naming sustains sponsorship groups” (Hyndman et al. 2021: 8), as sponsors support refugee family members’ resettlement in subsequent sponsorship cycles. In restricting naming from CSS, the UK Government’s hostility is laid bare. CSS functions as a cover for the government, allowing it to come across as welcoming to refugees whilst simultaneously limiting the number of refugees resettled through both restrictions on naming and the lengthy, complicated application processes for sponsors to take part in CSS in the first place.

Sponsor-refugee relationships

Community sponsorship initiatives have been celebrated for their role in building social capital and improving integration outcomes for refugees (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). Although social connections between sponsors and newcomers can be challenging, they hold the promise of evolving into intimate and reciprocal relationships (D’Avino 2022). Sponsors often form deep, personal connections with refugees, seeing their role as not just logistical support but as a form of intimate friendship. As Sarah articulated, “those moments where you feel like you're a special part of their life.”

This sentiment aligns with findings in the literature where sponsors and refugees describe their relationship as friendships or as being family-like (Ali et al. 2022; Amnesty International 2018). However, these relationships are often complicated by underlying power dynamics and cultural differences, especially given the rather homogenous make-up of most sponsorship groups, where most sponsors are white, middle-class individuals. This notion of family-like relationships can be both positive and problematic. While it implies a close bond and genuine care, it can also mask underlying hierarchies and dependencies. As noted by Macklin et al. (2020), this notion of

family-like relationships can signal both intimacy and inequality, with sponsors potentially adopting paternalistic attitudes that undermine refugee autonomy. This dual nature of the sponsor-refugee relationship is echoed in the interviews, where sponsors expressed a range of emotions from deep affection to discomfort with navigating intercultural relationships and the power dynamics inherent in CSS.

Furthermore, community sponsorship schemes rely heavily on volunteer sponsors, and analysis of the demographics of sponsors in existing literature reveals a notable lack of diversity. Studies indicate that volunteers involved in sponsorship initiatives are predominantly white, middle-class, older individuals, with a significant majority being women, and many affiliated with Catholicism (D'Avino 2022b; Reyes-Soto 2023). This demographic homogeneity raises concerns about the representativeness of sponsorship groups and their ability to effectively support refugees from diverse backgrounds. For example, Michael mentioned that sponsorship "did always feel a bit, not white saviour, but…". The overrepresentation of certain demographic groups within sponsorship programmes, particularly older, upper-middle class white women, can result in a limited understanding of the needs and experiences of refugees from different cultural backgrounds (Reyes-Soto 2023).

Navigating religious and cultural differences

Sponsors can become advocates for equity and social justice, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive society (Environics Institute for Survey Research 2018; Schmidtke 2018). Sponsors often serve as trusted messengers, disseminating positive narratives about refugees within their social networks and counteracting negative attitudes (Bond 2021). Consequently, private and community sponsorship programmes play a pivotal role in reducing stereotypes and false beliefs about refugees both at the individual and community levels (Amundson 2018). For example, Kyriakides et al. (2018: 75) assert that while "the media-policy-migration nexus informs 'refugeeness', the concomitant micro-conditions of resettlement are created through contestation which (potentially) move refugee-host relations beyond Orientalist scripts of refuge" where refugees are seen within a 'victim-pariah' dichotomy and must simultaneously perform as passive victims whilst proving that they do not pose a threat to Western society.

Cultural differences and communication barriers between sponsors and refugees can also pose challenges to building trust and fostering meaningful relationships (Lenard 2016). Research illustrates that while sponsors from ethnic minorities in the UK make a significant impact in providing language interpretation and offering insights into Middle Eastern culture and

traditions, these volunteers make up a minority within sponsorship groups (Reyes-Soto 2023). Despite undergoing some training regarding Middle Eastern culture, sponsors interviewed in Reyes-Soto et al.'s (2020) formative evaluation of CSS generally lacked sufficient understanding of what to anticipate or held an essentialised view that all individuals from Arab backgrounds shared a single, unified culture; while they expressed a desire for more comprehensive and detailed information, they were unable to access it. While many of the sponsors interviewed in this study were aware of cultural differences and made an effort to learn about and from the sponsored refugees, there remained challenges related to gender dynamics and religious practices.

Navigating gender dynamics was a recurring theme in both the literature and interviews. Many sponsors struggled with the traditional gender roles observed in some refugee families. For instance, John noted, "The man is sort of in the front room and the woman is in the kitchen, literally", and Alan noted the group's concern about patriarchal structures: "one thing we were a bit worried about was whether [the mother] would be sort of dominated by the father". These observations reflect the difficulty of balancing respect for cultural differences with the promotion of gender equality. Furthermore, Michael mentioned, "there were some discussions about the role of women and how the women would stay in the house. Some of the group wanted to encourage them to become a bit more exposed," highlighting a tension between supporting autonomy and imposing Western norms. This aligns with Kyriakides et al. (2018), who discuss the complexities of refugee reception and the inherent power dynamics involved. The challenge is to support refugees without overstepping boundaries or undermining their cultural practices and personal agency.

Conditional hospitality is manifested here through sponsors who value contemporary gender norms and view some of the traditional gendered practices of the refugee families as problematic and thus seek to encourage them to adopt more Western gender norms. According to Derrida, unconditional hospitality is a moral imperative (Dikeç et al. 2009), and "demands [...] a welcome without reserve [...] without limit to whoever arrives" (Derrida 2005b: 6). However, as Chiovenda (2020: 2442) argues, "this sounds beautiful, but in practice, it is very difficult" and it is essential to recognise that Derrida is "presenting ideal types." This difficulty is evidenced through sponsors' apprehensions in supporting refugees whose beliefs about gender do not align with their own.

Paternalism and autonomy

Macklin et al. (2020) highlight that the very premise of sponsorship schemes is rooted in social, economic, legal, linguistic, and political inequalities. The relationship between sponsors and refugees often embodies a form of "structural parentalism," where sponsors are expected to provide guidance and support, resembling parental roles (Macklin et al. 2020: 194; see also Phillimore et al. 2022). This paternalism is further emphasised by official and informal representations of sponsors that often depict them as guiding refugees from reliance and dependency to self-reliance and autonomy; this portrayal aligns with narratives of familial care, utilising language and tropes that may perpetuate paternalistic expectations and behaviours (Macklin et al. 2020).

Paternalistic attitudes among sponsors can sometimes undermine the autonomy of refugees. However, structural parentalism does not dictate relationships in straightforward ways; instead, it creates conditions for various dynamics to emerge, and Macklin et al. (2020: 182) view "sponsorship as a structurally unequal relationship that can - not must - give rise to a dynamic of parentalism". While certain sponsors actively question parentalist assumptions, others may unintentionally perpetuate these norms. Thus, while not inherently negative, the structural inequality of community sponsorship necessitates critical scrutiny. Further, paternalism is not exclusive to community sponsorship; D'Avino (2022b) notes that in traditional resettlement programmes, paternalism can also be found in the relationship between newcomers and government caseworkers.

Heidi shared an instance where the sponsorship group's expectations clashed with the family's desires: "The group fell out with the family once they arrived, because the family weren't keen to do all these things that were set up for them" and some members of the group "wanted a bit more gratefulness from the family." Issues like this are well-documented in the literature, where paternalism is noted to impede the development of authentic, equal relationships (Ali et al. 2022; Haugen et al. 2020). Tracy provided a practical example:

> *One volunteer was saying she really didn't like the way that the woman was doing everything in the house, and I was like, honey, you haven't got kids. [...] That's how it goes, even in the most 'enlightened' households.*

This comment illustrates how personal biases and expectations can affect the sponsor-sponsor and sponsor-refugee relationship, emphasising the need for sensitivity and adaptability. Moreover, the power imbalance present in sponsor-refugee relationships may be exacerbated by sponsors' limited understanding of refugees' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Reyes-Soto

2023). The previously mentioned lack of diversity within sponsorship groups may contribute to an involuntary homogenisation of refugees' experiences as sponsors are unfamiliar with the situations of refugees (Reyes-Soto 2023).

Refugee-host relations in Western receiving states are characterised by a dominant position held by the host group, reinforced by social, economic, and cultural resources tied to citizenship and national belonging (Kyriakides et al. 2018). This dynamic is influenced by cultural representations of refugees as passive objects in need of rescue, perpetuating power differentials between sponsors and refugees (Kyriakides et al. 2018).

Individual level hospitality: Sponsors and refugees

On an individual level, sponsors in CSS displayed varying degrees of hospitality, often oscillating between conditional and unconditional forms. Some sponsors exhibited actions closely aligned with Derrida's (2000) notion of unconditional hospitality, opening their lives to refugees without stringent conditions or expectations of reciprocity. For example, some interviewees explicitly stated that everyone deserves support, regardless of their character (Interviews with Katja and Peter). These sponsors often embody an ethic of care and solidarity, reflecting a more humanistic approach to hosting (Chiovenda 2020; O'Gorman 2006).

Others, however, engaged in a form of hospitality that is more conditional. These sponsors held certain expectations for the refugees they supported, reflecting an underlying power dynamic where the host retains control and sets boundaries. For example, participants who spoke of members of their sponsorship groups who expected displays of gratitude (Interview with Heidi), or who left the group upon learning that there was ongoing domestic abuse happening within the refugee family (Interview with Peter). As evidenced, this conditionality can manifest through requirements for integration, adherence to certain cultural norms, or participation in specific activities. Such practices, while still generous, underscore the tension and potential for exclusion inherent in conditional hospitality (Bell 2010; Farahani 2021).

This study's findings highlight the everyday politics of hospitality. Sponsors' interactions with refugees often went beyond mere provision of aid, involving deep emotional and social engagement. However, the sponsor-refugee relationship within CSS is marked by both profound personal connections and significant power imbalances. While these everyday acts of hospitality can subvert and resist the depoliticising tendencies of traditional humanitarianism, which Malkki (1996) critiques for stripping away the political agency of both hosts and guests, the dynamics of these relationships often reflect broader societal structures of inequality and cultural differences.

Post-sponsorship: reflections and future intentions

Reflecting on their experiences after the sponsorship period, many sponsors expressed a complex mix of emotions and considerations regarding the possibility of sponsoring again. While they shared a deep sense of fulfilment and achievement, the challenges and demands of the sponsorship process left some sponsors feeling uncertain about their capacity to take on such a commitment again.

The literature highlights the crucial role of repeat volunteers in sustaining community sponsorship programmes (Hyndman et al. 2021). However, the emotional demands of sponsorship are significant factors influencing sponsors' decisions about future involvement. Heidi articulates a common sentiment of exhaustion: "I don't think I've got the energy for it. I've done four where I've been pretty much the chair [of the sponsorship group] […] and that takes it out of you." Sarah reiterated these thoughts, articulating, "I wouldn't say never again, but I wouldn't do it immediately because it has been a huge amount of work". This exhaustion is not unique to Heidi and Sarah; many sponsors describe feeling burnt out after their intense involvement.

Despite these challenges, the sense of community and personal growth experienced through sponsorship is a powerful motivator. Overall, Michael reflects positively on his experience, stating, "It is definitely something I'd recommend for people to do, and probably would like to do it again at some point, not just in terms of helping someone else, but in what I got from it as well." This sentiment is reflected in existing literature that evidences how community sponsorship programmes can contribute positively to fostering connections among sponsors (Amnesty International 2018) and how community bonds are strengthened through sponsorship (Bond 2021).

The reflections of sponsors also reveal a broader critique of the systemic issues within CSS. Tracy speaks to the burnout and the housing crisis, highlighting the need for systemic changes to support volunteers:

> *We are at the point where we're reassessing what direction we're going to go in as a group, because we've resettled three families and we've realised that we need to consider if we want to resettle a fourth family because there's a real debate going on because we feel like community sponsorship is the [only] safe route for people to come to this country… But do we carry on, or can we? Or is it impossible because of the housing crisis and people are actually burnt out.*

Ultimately, while the personal and community benefits of sponsorship are clear, the sustainability of the programme depends on addressing the significant challenges faced by sponsors. As David notes, “It’s one of the most validating things I've ever done in my whole life.” To ensure the long-term viability and success of community sponsorship initiatives, this powerful sense of validation and community support must continue to outweigh the practical and emotional demands.

Overarching themes

Community sponsorship within the context of the hostile environment

CSS presents a fascinating case to explore the interplay of hospitality and hostility at a societal level. While the scheme facilitates localised acts of welcome by sponsors, it operates within the broader policy framework that is hostile to migrants and refugees, with significant implications for both sponsors and refugees. As an ideal state of complete openness and acceptance towards the ‘other’ (in this case refugees), the Law of unconditional hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2001) is in constant contradiction with the laws (of the state). The laws of the state “threaten, undermine and deprave” the Law of unconditional hospitality and therefore, the law and the Law are “simultaneously antinomic and inseparable” (Stronks 2012: 74). In other words, even as they contradict each other, the laws of the state and the Law of unconditional hospitality somehow exist together. This section explores this paradox, focusing on how tensions between individual hospitality and state hostility shaped the experiences of sponsors.

The literature underscores the tension between the openness and hospitality of individual sponsors and the suspicious and hostile bureaucracy of the state (Krivenko 2012). In interviews, sponsors expressed frustration with government policies that undermine the spirit of community sponsorship. Alan lamented, “the government policies pay lip service to there being routes, but in reality, there aren’t,” and Heidi questioned: “How can you have a scheme that’s pretending to be this super positive thing, and also you’ve got a government that’s doing the Rwanda policy?”

The hostile environment exemplifies the government's conditional hospitality towards refugees (Bell 2010). Stricter visa requirements, limited access to services, and a rhetoric of deterrence create significant challenges for migrants seeking to rebuild their lives (Chiovenda 2020). Through CSS, the state retains control over who receives care and under what conditions, while offloading the practical responsibilities onto civil society (Dajani 2020; D’Avino 2022a; Spencer & Delvino 2018). This delegation aligns with several neoliberal principles — devolution of authority, privatisation, and managerialism (Benson 2016), where the state maintains its sovereign power through the management of civil society volunteers while at the same time offloading much of

the financial costs, social work, and emotional labour required for the welfare of refugee families onto civil society (Dajani 2020).

The promotion of community sponsorship as an alternative to government resettlement efforts can also undermine the state's commitment to refugee protection (Labman & Garnier 2021) and create hierarchies of deservingness among refugees (D'Avino 2022a), specifically between the 'good' refugees who 'wait their turn' to be resettled by the UNHCR and 'bad' refugees who seek asylum after arriving spontaneously in the UK, such as those who cross the English Channel in small boats. This hierarchisation justifies hostile asylum policies as spontaneous asylum arrivals are portrayed as less deserving given their 'illegal' entry. The discourse around 'good' and 'bad' refugees exemplify Derrida's concept of conditional hospitality and its enactment through a powerful host (Bell 2010; Chiovenda 2020), in this case, the UK Government. Refugees resettled through CSS, or any of the UK's other 'safe and legal humanitarian routes', are those refugees who have been deemed worthy by the state to be 'saved' and relocated to the UK.

An additional challenge noted by interviewees was a lack of government acknowledgment of the hostile environment within the discourse of community sponsorship. Heidi observed that the hostile environment is hidden from much policy discourse, with there being little acknowledgement that "you're not working in this bubble, you're welcoming [a family] into the UK, which has so many issues and a government that doesn't want to welcome more" refugees, highlighting a disconnect between the idealised narrative of community support and the harsh realities faced by refugees in the UK.

The hostile environment also influences volunteer recruitment and support for community sponsorship initiatives. Peter reflected on the challenges of attracting volunteers in a politically charged climate: "How can we say to people this is what we're doing when the message is so strong against it from the government?"

Despite the hostile environment, sponsors affirmed the resilience and empathy within communities. Tracy highlighted the importance of community solidarity: "If we hadn't had our truth and kindness group and extended it to community sponsorship [...] we might not be aware of how supportive the community actually is." This reflects a consensus among sponsors that for CSS to thrive, there needs to be genuine commitment and support from the government. Heidi emphasised the need for continued advocacy and improvement of CSS: "I know it's a slither of light in a very toxic, hostile environment by our Home Office. But I don't want that to take away the fact that you can still criticise it and change it for the better."

In conclusion, the UK's CSS presents an interesting case of hostipitality at a societal level. While the scheme facilitates acts of hospitality at the community level, it operates within a broader context of state hostility towards refugees, which poses challenges for sponsors and refugees alike. This tension highlights the limitations of conditional hospitality and underscores the complexities of navigating the ethics and politics of refugee support at the local and national level. Despite these challenges, sponsors remain largely committed to supporting refugees and advocating for policy change.

Government responsibility versus civil society in CSS

CSS has sparked debate over the extent to which it represents a government offloading its responsibilities onto civil society versus an embodiment of civil society's moral duty to support refugees. Community and private sponsorship schemes, along with hosting schemes like the UK's Homes for Ukraine, are often critiqued for shifting the responsibility of refugee protection from the government to civil society, effectively transferring the burden of international protection onto private actors. Under private sponsorship (Krivenko 2012) and hosting schemes (Burrell 2024), individuals and community groups fulfil certain international obligations traditionally considered the domain of state sovereignty.

This critique extends to the neoliberal framework underpinning community sponsorship. The 'Big Society' initiative (Baring 2022; Woodhouse 2015), for example, was criticised for shifting societal burdens onto ordinary citizens instead of providing a robust state response (Kisby 2010). Similarly, the UK's response to the 'refugee crisis', by relying on community organisations through various sponsorship and hosting schemes rather than direct governmental action, implies that the community, rather than the state, holds primary responsibility for addressing big social issues (D'Avino 2022a). Simsa (2017) argues that while civil society activities can be more flexible and responsive than those of other actors in addressing refugees' arrivals, placing the responsibilities on volunteers can lead to physical and psychological distress among volunteers, particularly for those who are untrained. At the national level, migration management has thus "borrowed from austerity, introducing cuts that limit local authorities' ability to [...] support refugees, and responsibilising in their stead local communities who act and take responsibility out of solidarity" (Dajani 2021: 66) – a process that was codified into law in 2016 through CSS and the government's awarding of £1 million to a newly established organisation (Reset) in 2018 to provide training and support to communities across the UK to sponsor refugees themselves.

This study's interviews highlight a complex interplay between these perspectives, revealing both the strengths and limitations of the scheme. Tracy expressed frustration with this dynamic: "Sometimes you do think, why are we doing this? Why are we actually doing what any decent government should be paying people who know what they're doing to do?" This sentiment underscores the tension between the ideal of civic responsibility and the practicalities of volunteer support. Despite these criticisms, some sponsors (Interview with David) and scholars (Environics Institute for Survey Research 2018; Schmidtke 2018; Tan 2020) argue that civil society has an important role to play in supporting refugees.

CSS embodies a dual reality: it is both a testament to the hospitality of civil society and a reflection of governmental strategies to offload its responsibilities to provide sanctuary to those in need of protection.

Local responses versus structural issues

Previous research on private and community sponsorship programmes has predominantly highlighted a disconnect between local struggles and broader structural or societal issues (Elcioglu 2023; Ritchie 2018), notably the ongoing housing crisis in the UK. Elcioglu (2023: 100) argues that "perhaps the most damning critique […] is that private sponsorship [in Canada] deters rather than spurs sponsors' political transformation", further explaining that private sponsorship "local[ises] consciousness" and "conceal[s] the relationship between local suffering and the global political economy". This local consciousness can depoliticise refugee issues, reinforcing existing tropes and stifling broader political change. Moreover, studies on civic humanitarianism suggest that the support provided by spontaneous movements of welcome can unintentionally legitimise the current migration regime, reinforcing rather than challenging state policies (Reyes-Soto 2023). However, other research indicates that grassroots advocacy can create political momentum, influencing policy in supportive ways and potentially subverting the status quo (Feischmidt & Zakariás 2019; Vandevoordt 2019).

Contrary to the prevailing narratives evidencing the disconnect between local struggles and structural issues, the participants in this study displayed a high level of awareness regarding the broader structural and systemic issues within which CSS is embedded. This finding is significant and highlights a departure from the commonly reported trends in the literature, of sponsors aware of their personal and local struggles, but failing to see these as emerging from broader national and geopolitical forces. The sponsors and volunteers in my study were not only aware of the systemic barriers but actively engaged in discussions and actions to address them.

It is important to acknowledge that my sample is not representative. The distinct demographics of my participants — many of whom are younger, non-religious professionals working within the refugee and migration field — likely contributed to their heightened awareness of structural issues. Their professional backgrounds and social contexts may predispose them to a more critical and systemic understanding of the challenges faced by refugees.

For instance, Peter mentioned regular meetings with Members of Parliament and highlighted the systemic issues related to housing and social policies. He noted that the challenges in finding accommodation for refugees were symptomatic of broader structural issues, such as the lack of social housing and the inadequacies of welfare policies. David shared these concerns, emphasising the intersection of housing policies and refugee integration: "We need a policy to build a lot more affordable homes [...] It's the broader policy landscape [...] the welfare system doesn't support people to live adequately." Furthermore, David proposed a more integrated approach, "We need to fold the idea of Community sponsorship into the broader refugee debate."

The awareness of structural issues among the participants in this study marks a new and noteworthy finding in the context of community sponsorship schemes. While previous literature has largely depicted sponsors as being absorbed in local, individual-level problem-solving, my study reveals a cohort that is not only aware of but actively seeking to address broader systemic challenges. This divergence highlights the importance of considering the distinct demographics and professional backgrounds of sponsors, which can significantly influence their perspectives and actions. Future research should explore the implications of these findings for the design and support of community sponsorship programs, aiming to foster greater structural awareness and advocacy among sponsors.

Sponsors' critical engagement with structural issues, such as navigating the welfare system and advocating for systemic change, underscores the politically empowering potential of their actions. This aligns with the concepts of "dissident hospitality" (Taylor 2020) and "contentious hospitality" (Merikoski 2020), where local expressions of hospitality become acts of resistance against state-imposed limitations and injustices. By engaging in these practices, sponsors not only support refugees but also challenge and seek to transform the broader political and social structures that affect them.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the experiences of sponsors within the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme for resettled refugees, an under-researched area. Through in-depth interviews with sponsors, the research shed light on the realities of sponsor experiences, most notably, the challenges they face, with the aim of understanding how these experiences can inform the future development of the scheme, to improve sponsorship take-up and repeat sponsoring. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on community and private sponsorship programmes. The findings highlight the importance of providing sponsors with more comprehensive ongoing support, the need for an alleviation of the housing crisis, the complexities of navigating cultural and religious differences and power hierarchies, how sponsors experience partaking in CSS within the UK's broader hostile migration environment, and finally, how local responses and structural issues interact throughout the sponsorship journey.

While individual sponsors may navigate between conditional and unconditional hospitality, government policies in the UK lean towards hostility. Exploring these dynamics through Derrida's concept of hostipitality provided a critical framework for analysing the complexities and contradictions in how refugees are welcomed and integrated into the host society of the UK. This duality highlights the ongoing challenge of reconciling ethical imperatives of hospitality with political realities of sovereignty and control.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of hostipitality by illustrating its complex and multifaceted nature. Hostipitality presented a useful framing for understanding the ethical and relational dynamics at play in CSS. Sponsors' experiences reveal how hostipitality involves not just the act of welcoming but also a continuous negotiation of power, identity, and ethical responsibility. Derrida is sensitive to issues of power but does not give due attention to broader societal power structures as manifested in the highly restrictive migration policy frameworks and pervasive negative political and public discourse that contribute to a hostile environment for migrants in their host countries. In highlighting a second manifestation of hostipitality beyond interpersonal sponsor-refugee relations – the tension between welcoming hosts and hostile states – I broaden Derrida's analysis by refocusing attention to the broader social and policy contexts within which hospitality is embedded.

Policy recommendations

Thus far, my analysis has aimed to be purely analytical. I will now venture some more normative and practical policy recommendations derived from my findings. The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen CSS and enhance the sponsorship experience:

- Increase pre-arrival support for sponsors: Provide sponsors with comprehensive training on navigating the complexities of CSS (in particular, the welfare system and on managing expectations).
- Increase access to pre-arrival information, both for sponsors to understand the needs of refugee arrivals, and for refugee arrivals to have more information about the sponsors and resettlement location.
- Address the affordable housing shortage: Advocate for policies that increase the availability of affordable housing options for refugees.
    - More support at the local authority level
    - Incorporation of a housing strategy within CSS scheme so sponsor groups can source appropriate accommodation from an existing registry
- Increase publicity and promotion about CSS: Highlight the variety of reasons people participate in sponsorship programs to attract a wider range of potential sponsors. Engage and support the participation of diverse sponsors with lived experiences of forced migration, as well as those with cultural, linguistic and ethnic ties to refugee families.
- Enhance sponsor well-being: Develop resources and support systems to address the potential emotional challenges of sponsorship, such as access to support groups or mental health training, particularly at the conclusion of the sponsorship period.

Future research could explore the experiences of refugees within CSS in more depth. It would also be beneficial to examine the long-term impacts of the scheme on both sponsors and refugees. Additionally, research on the perspectives of government agencies and other stakeholders involved in CSS would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the programme's functioning.

CSS offers a promising approach to refugee resettlement, fostering social support networks and promoting community integration. By addressing the challenges identified in this research and by implementing the suggested policy recommendations, CSS can be strengthened to promote a more positive and sustainable experience for all those involved. The transformative potential of

sponsorship, for both sponsors and refugees, underscores the importance of continued investment in and development of the UK's CSS, and sponsorship schemes worldwide.

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