



**Starting again: refugee children, resilience, school and belonging**  
Bill Bolloten, EAL Academy  
billboll1@mac.com

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## EAL Academy



- We are a team of teachers, school improvement specialists, consultants and leaders in the fields of literacy, English as an additional language and ethnic minority achievement.
- We work with teachers, school leaders and municipalities in Denmark:  
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## Mimesis

My daughter  
wouldn't hurt a spider  
That had nested  
Between her bicycle handles  
For two weeks  
She waited  
Until it left of its own accord



Fady Joudah

If you tear down the web I said  
It will simply know  
This isn't a place to call home  
And you'd get to go biking

She said that's how others  
Become refugees isn't it?

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## Displaced and uprooted

- People are travelling hundreds and thousands of kilometres over land and over water, from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, risking everything in the hope of reaching safety.
- Amid this crisis, children are the most vulnerable of all. Many are travelling with their families; others are on their own.

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*"Everywhere we look - on boats, in buses  
and at borders - there are children"*



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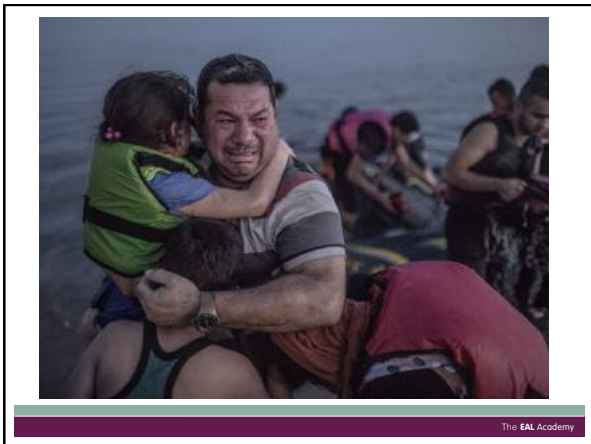
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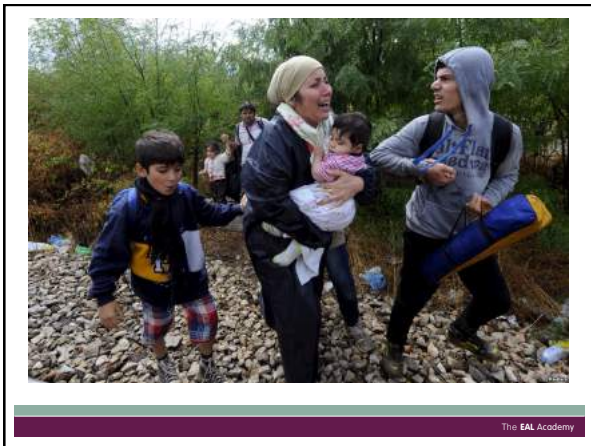
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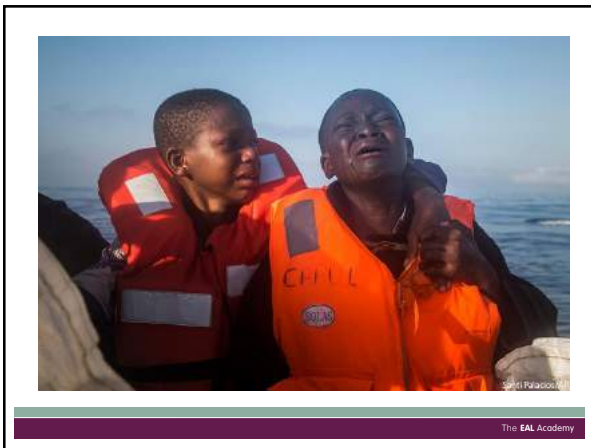
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This Syrian mother told Medecins Sans Frontieres: *"All I want is a future and safety for my children. Nothing more."*



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**Uprooted (September 2016)** 

- Children now make up more than half of the world's refugees.
- 28 million children forcibly displaced.
- Nearly one in 200 children in the world is a refugee.
- Two times more child refugees in 2015 than 2005.
- Nearly 1 in 3 children living outside their country of birth is a refugee.
- 7 in 10 children seeking asylum in Europe are fleeing conflict in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

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## Starting points

- Children's rights and entitlements.
- Understanding experiences better.
- The importance of normalised routines and structures.
- Rebuilding the social world.
- The importance of school.

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### UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

These are the 4 Guiding Principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each of the articles in the Convention is informed by these principles.

- 1 Non-discrimination**  
treat everyone fairly and with respect.
- 2 Right to life, survival, & development**  
children & youth have a right to the basic things to live, survive, & develop
- 3 Best interests of children & youth**  
always ask yourself: "is the decision I'm making good for kids?"
- 4 Respect the views of children & youth**  
children & youth need to participate and have their views considered when decisions are being made that affect them.

everychild.ca

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## Rights-based approaches

- Universally agreed standards give legitimacy and authority.
- Allow us to create a shared vision and develop holistic approaches.
- Emphasise children's participation and inclusion in the process of service development and decision-making.

Other approaches	Rights-based approaches
Action is voluntary or optional	Action is mandatory
Children deserve help as result of charity	Children get support as an entitlement
Children seen as passive beneficiaries	Children are actors in their own development

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## BBC: Seeking Refuge



<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01k7c4q/clips>

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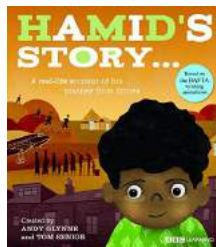
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## Hamid's story

- Why are friends so important?
- How does it feel to be in a new situation, with new people, and a completely different language?
- How can friends help
- What can they say and do to make adjusting to a new life easier?



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### Refugee children are diverse

- Diversity of languages, cultures and countries of origin.
- Different experiences in countries of origin and different migration journeys.
- Varied experiences in countries of refuge.
- Like adults, children vary in how they cope with adversity.
- Many children remain highly resourceful and resilient despite their experiences.
- Important to avoid stereotypes and generalisations.
- Our responses need to be flexible and not 'one size fits all'.

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### Understanding experiences

- Refugee children need to adapt to abrupt and major changes in almost all aspects of their lives.
- Conceptualises this process of adaptation:
  - Pre-migration factors
  - Trans-migration factors
  - Post-migration factors



**Educational interventions for refugee children:  
Theoretical perspectives and implementing best practice**  
Richard Hamilton and Dennis Moore (2004)

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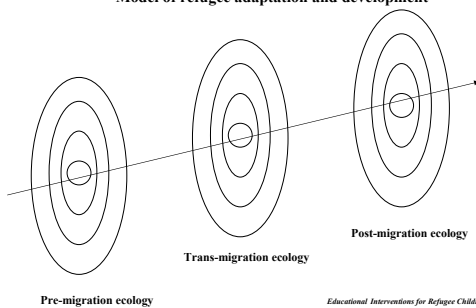
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### Model of refugee adaptation and development



*Educational Interventions for Refugee Children*  
Richard Hamilton and Dennis Moore (2004)

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### “atypical conditions”

- An “atypical condition” is anything that does not support or which interferes with the normal development of the child.
- Stressful and disruptive events.

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### Pre-migration experiences

- Death of parent or family members.
- Witnessing violence, killing, torture or injury.
- Separation.
- Bombardment/shelling.
- Witnessing parent fear and panic.
- Physical injuries.
- Scarcity.
- Disruption of normal routines and functioning of society (such as health services, schools etc.).

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**2016 the worst year for Syria's children**

- More than 1.7 million children inside Syria are out of school.
- One in three schools cannot be used because they are destroyed or damaged.
- More than half of public health facilities closed.
- Immunisation levels dropped from 80% to 41%.
- Two-thirds of people in Syria cannot access tap water regularly.
- Children are working in more than 75% of households.

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**“Explosive violence”**

April 2017 report:

- 85% of refugees from Syria and Iraq had directly experienced “explosive violence”.
- Near half said that their homes had been obliterated.



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**Trans-migration experiences**

- Transitioning through several countries.
- Long and dangerous journeys.
- Separation from parents and other family members.
- Living in refugee camps.
- Risks of exploitation.
- Settlement and schooling in other countries before arrival in the country of refugee.

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## Post-migration experiences

- Family stress.
- Loss of status.
- The asylum process.
- Isolation.
- Difficulties in accessing services, including health services and schools.
- Racism and public hostility.

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### Interacting factors

- Refugee children and families **do not have compartmentalised needs.**
- Therefore, supporting refugees is a collective responsibility across different services (not a job for separate 'experts').

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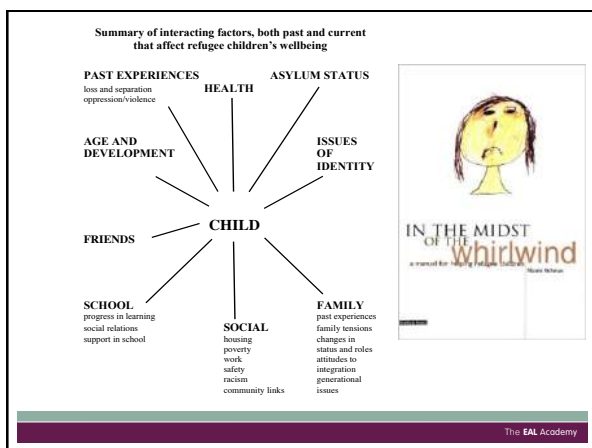
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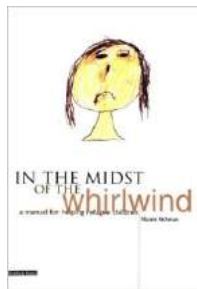
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*'Children and families are affected by events from the past, current stresses and positive aspects in their lives. **Support therefore needs to be multifaceted,** to promote positive factors that can outweigh negative ones, building on children's strengths, giving them hope for the future.'*



Naomi Richman (1998)

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### Developing policy and practice

- **Holistic approaches that attend to a range of issues that affect children and families.**
- A range of different strategies and interventions.
- Attention towards the totality of child's experience rather than focusing exclusively on the psychological aspects of health and well-being.
- Listening to children.

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### What young refugees say is important (Research summary)

- Going to school.
- Making friends.
- Caring, supportive and friendly teachers who are confident and interested in teaching children from diverse backgrounds.
- Being included in all activities.
- Opportunities to do activities with refugee and non-refugee peers, both in and out of school.
- Being in a school that values and celebrates their languages and cultures.

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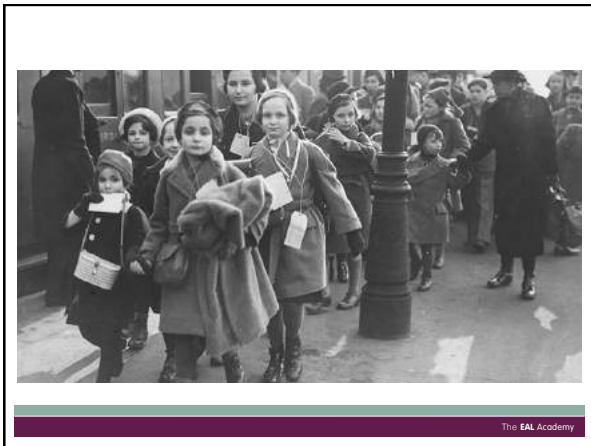
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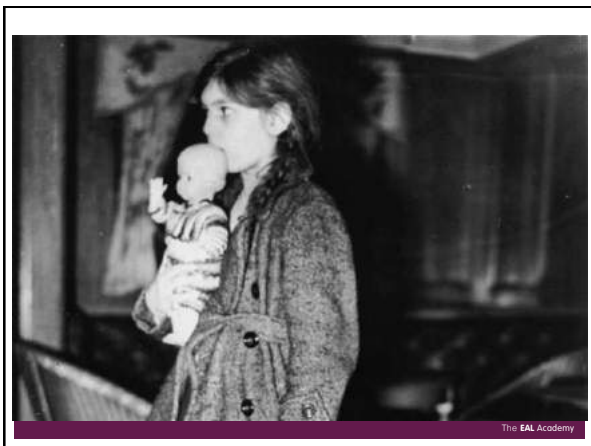
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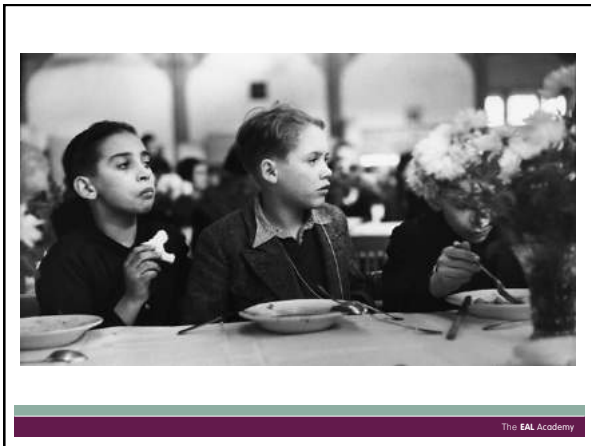
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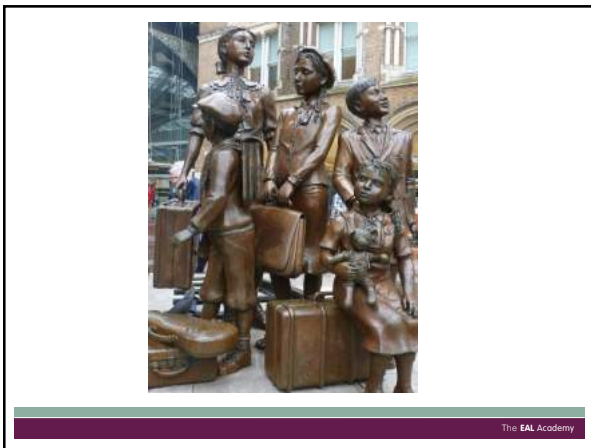
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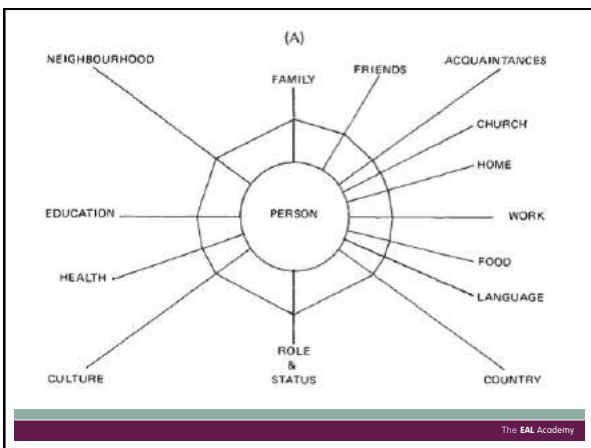
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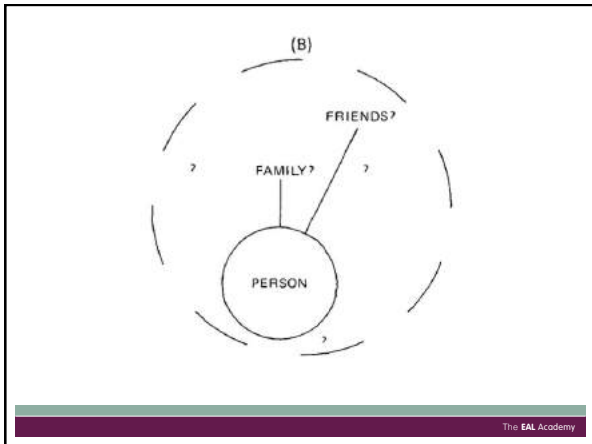
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**Rebuilding the relationship web**

***“Such help will be, or ought to be, directed towards rebuilding this relationship web in a variety of ways.”***

**Refugees: An overview of an international problem** in Baker, R. (ed) *the Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, The Refugee Council (1983)

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**Challenging the discourse on ‘trauma’**

- The hegemony of discourses on trauma has a major impact on how refugee children are viewed.
- This often frames discussion.
- An over emphasis on trauma might lead to neglect of post-exile experiences and barriers to integration.
- The difficulties children and families experience may be pathologised.

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### The concept of PTSD may offer only a partial view

- Other aspects such as loss, bereavement, separation and current stressors related to asylum, housing, integration and public attitudes are equally important.
- It's wrong to assume that all children are automatically "traumatised" or even permanently damaged by their experiences.

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### "A medicalised idiom"

- A reductive idea of "the refugee" soaked through with medicalised and psychological assumptions.
- The medicalised view of human experience suggests that the pathological effects of war are found inside a person and the person recovers as if from an illness.



Dr Derek Summerfield  
Honorary senior  
lecturer at the Institute  
of Psychiatry

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### "Recovery"

*"Recovery" is not a discrete process: It happens in people's lives rather than in their psychologies. It is practical and unspectacular, and it is grounded in **the resumption of the ordinary rhythms of everyday life** - the familial, sociocultural, religious, and economic activities that make the world intelligible.'*



Dr Derek Summerfield  
Honorary senior  
lecturer at the Institute  
of Psychiatry

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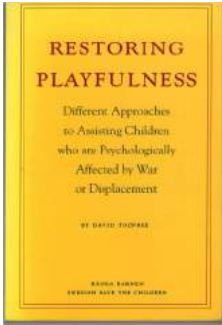
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**RESTORING PLAYFULNESS**  
 Different Approaches to Assisting Children who are Psychologically Affected by War or Displacement  
 BY DAVID JOHNSON  
 BOKUN FUKUDA  
 FOREIGN AID FOR CHILDREN

**“Resilience means the capacity to recover one’s shape after being stretched or stressed, or more colloquially, the ability to ‘bounce back’ after difficult experiences” (1996)**

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### Resilience

- An emphasis on resilience doesn’t mean that people who are resilient do not experience symptoms of distress.
- We are shifting the paradigm away from “vulnerability” and “trauma” to resilience.
- We can view refugee children as **ACTIVE SURVIVORS**, rather than **PASSIVE VICTIMS**.
- We can acknowledge children’s considerable inner resources for coping, and how they mitigate the impact of stressful experiences through personal and **collective** strategies.

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### Resilience

<p><b>Rather than focus on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathology</li> <li>• “Trauma”</li> <li>• Symptomatology</li> <li>• Individual ‘treatment’ or therapy</li> </ul>	<p><b>We should focus on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schooling</li> <li>• The social situation</li> <li>• Access to services</li> <li>• Rebuilding family and community structures and networks</li> <li>• Children’s competence and agency</li> </ul>
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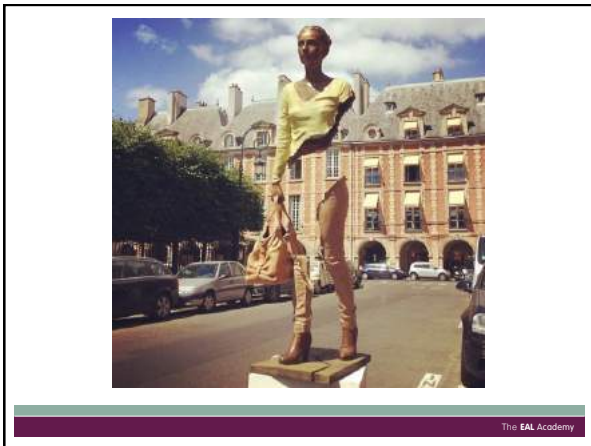
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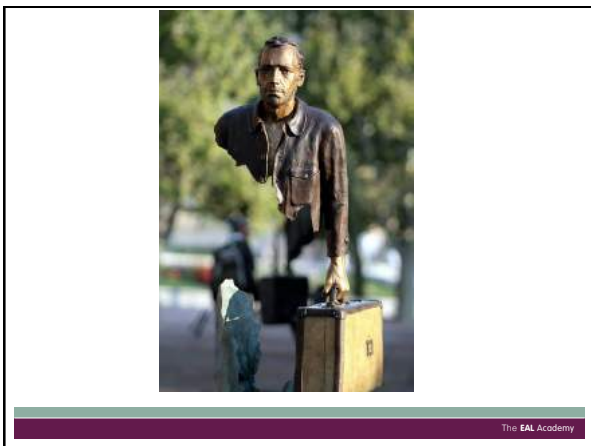
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### Factors promoting resilience (protective factors)

- Going to school and having friends.
- Supportive parents or family members.
- Social supports within and beyond family.
- Positive self-esteem, identity and a sense of belonging.
- Sports, play and leisure activities.

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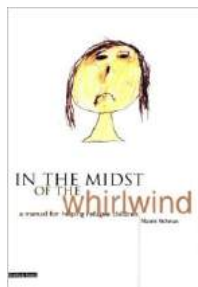
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### The importance of school

*“It is no exaggeration to say that refugee children’s wellbeing depends to a major degree on their school experiences, successes and failures...School policies are a powerful tool for helping refugee children feel safe and normal again.”*

Naomi Richman



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### The local school

- The heart of the community.
- A normalised environment.
- Daily routines and structure.
- Peer support.
- Introduces host community children to other cultures and a broader view of the world.
- A pathway to integration into the local community.

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Beyond performance in school, an indication of how well immigrant students are integrating into their new community is whether, and **to what extent, they feel they belong to their new surroundings.** (2015)

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### Best practice in schools

- Admission and induction systems and procedures for new arrivals.
- Listening to refugee children.
- Confidence and skills in teaching children acquiring a new language.
- Peer support and friendship building.
- A culturally inclusive curriculum that values diversity, and includes learning about refugees.
- Tackling bullying and derogatory language.
- Engaging with families.

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### When specialist help may be needed

- Persistent unhappiness – related to bullying, lack of support at home.
- Child protection concerns.
- Persistent neglect.
- Threats or attempts at self harm or suicide.
- Prolonged or severe difficulties in conduct/behaviour
- Bizarre or disturbed behaviour.
- Risk of leaving home.

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### Vision, goals and aspirations



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### 1. Take refugee children seriously as competent interpreters of their own lives



- Can we orient practice towards listening and receptivity?
- Refugee children themselves may be the best resource for understanding problems and challenges and they face.

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## 2. Enhance refugee children's own capabilities



- What kind of capacity can we build or invest in that will promote and enhance children's resilience and capabilities?

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## 3. Sustain holistic approaches that offer integrated programmes of social, educational and emotional support



- This implies that we need to be receptive to diverse needs, and have some flexible ways of working, including inter-agency work.

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## 4. Recognise the impact of ongoing events on refugee children's lives



- This suggests that we need to orient services towards the 'here and now' of children's lives.
- And that we need to be much more aware of far-right narratives on migration and Muslims and their impact.

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**5. Engage with families, neighbours and communities**



- This suggests that involving refugee children's families and friends should also be part of what we do.

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**6. Reinforce school values that emphasise a sense of belonging for everyone**



- Should be a core value and should be reflected and reinforced on every level.

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**7. Mobilise around our values and show compassion and solidarity.**



- Can we work with children and young people to move beyond awareness and empathy to engage in active citizenship and solidarity?

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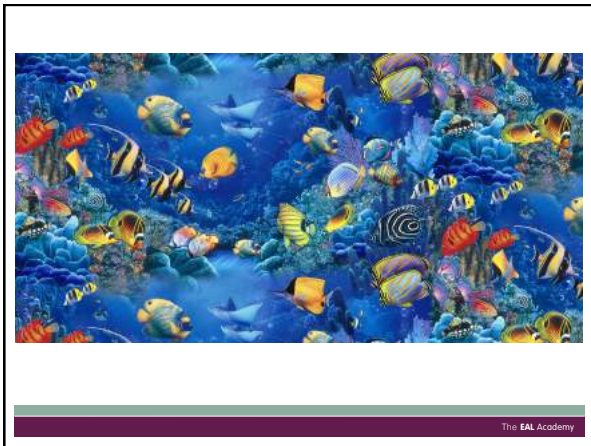
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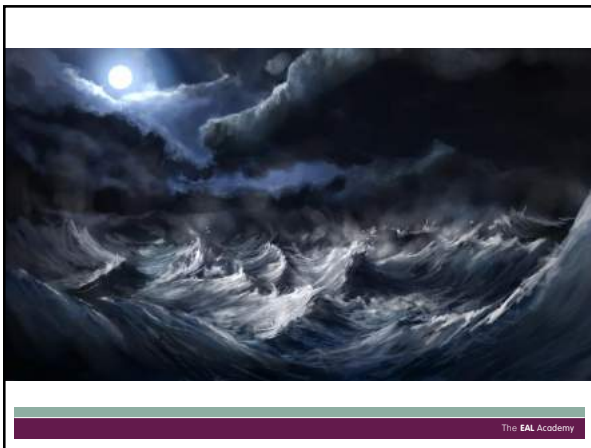
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- How can the fish be helped to get back to a sea?
- And how can we begin to turn the tap water into something more resembling the sea, in partnership with the fish?



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