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Article abstract

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ABSTRACT

Although millions of local community members have come together in various ways to sponsor and resettle refugees for decades, scholars are just now beginning to study why people get involved and how they organize themselves to accomplish the practical, organizational, and emotional tasks community sponsorship requires. This article contributes to this emerging literature with a meso-level analysis of actions taken by one student-led local committee (LC) to revitalize the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (SRP) nested at its university. Over 2,200 refugee youth have been sponsored through the WUSC SRP to study and settle in Canada since 1978, yet little is known about how campus LCs navigate their responsibilities or evaluate and sustain their program. Analysis of in-depth interviews with executive members was guided by and informs research on community sponsorship and theories of group action, community of practice, and stewardship.

KEYWORDS

Canada; WUSC SRP; refugee resettlement; private sponsorship; meso-level analysis; community of practice; stewardship theory

RESUMÉ

Bien que des millions de membres de communautés locales se soient unis de diverses façons pour parrainer et réinstaller des réfugiés pendant des décennies, les chercheurs commencent à peine à étudier les raisons pour lesquelles les gens s'impliquent et comment ils s'organisent pour accomplir les tâches pratiques, organisation-nelles et émotionnelles requises par le parrainage communautaire. Cet article contribue à cette littérature émergente avec une analyse de niveau méso des actions prises par un comité local étudiant pour revitaliser le Programme d'étudiants réfugiés (PÉR) d'Entraide universitaire mondiale du Canada (EUMC). Depuis 1978, plus de 2200 jeunes réfugiés ont été parrainés à travers le PÉR EUMC pour étudier et s'installer au Canada. Cependant, on sait peu de choses sur la manière dont les comités locaux sur les campus s'acquittent de leurs responsabilités ou évaluent et maintiennent leur programme. L'analyse d'entretiens approfondis avec des membres exécutifs a été guidée par et contribue à la recherche sur le parrainage communautaire et les théories de l'action de groupe, de la communauté de pratique et de l'intendance.

INTRODUCTION

Although millions of local community members in Canada have come together in various ways to sponsor and resettle refugees for decades, scholars are just now beginning to study why people get involved and how they organize themselves to accomplish the practical, organizational, and emotional tasks that community sponsorship requires. This article contributes to this emerging literature with a meso-level analysis of actions taken by one student-led local committee (LC) to

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revitalize the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (SRP) nested at its university since 1985. Over 2,200 refugee youth have been sponsored through the WUSC SRP to study and settle in Canada since 1978 (WUSC, n.d.), yet little is known about how independent LCs navigate their responsibilities or evaluate and sustain their program.

This qualitative case study investigates the SRP renewal campaign initiated by the LC at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia (StFX).[1] Analysis of in-depth interviews with executive members was guided by and informs recent research on community sponsorship and theories of community of practice, stewardship, and small groups. Program renewal was ignited when its executive members confronted and appraised the low graduation rate of sponsored students. This led the LC to secure multi-year financial support and revise its integration supports.

There is evidence of the campaign's success. When it started in September 2016, only two SRP students were registered at the university. In September 2022, eight of the nine students sponsored[2] since 2016 either completed their degree or were pursuing degree programs on a full-time basis. Historically, the StFX LC sponsors one SRP student annually, yet the LC agreed twice to sponsor a second student at WUSC's request. The LC continued to welcome SRP students during the COVID-19 pandemic, while some LCs paused. Regarding economic integration, SRP graduates have full-time employment, most students have full-time work in the summer, and those who want work while studying have jobs. Having this increased capacity is partly explained by the fact that

campaign targets were reached, including securing new financial resources through a levy referendum and negotiating multi-year in-kind donations for SRP students with the university. Beyond securing enhanced resources, our analysis reveals that embracing a new leadership style that Hernandez (2008) describes as promoting stewardship behaviours was an unintended consequence of setting new SRP support targets, and that doing so invigorated the LC's community of practice. Participants shared that the focus on stewardship served to increase LC members' engagement and contributions, build a more welcoming community, and shape local–global citizenship identities.

Locating the WUSC SRP in Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) provides the legal framework for WUSC's SRP. Located alongside Canada's Government-Assisted Refugees Program, the PSRP provides a "complementary pathway to refugee protection through civil society mobilization" (Hyndman et al., 2021, p. 1). For our purposes, we highlight that the PSRP permits only **groups** to apply to sponsor and resettle refugees, including Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), Constituent Groups (CGs), and "Groups of Five" (G5s). SAHs are incorporated organizations approved to sign an agreement with the minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada specifying how many refugees a SAH can sponsor alone or with CGs (i.e., community group) or G5s (five individuals who apply together). The program requires sponsors to live in the community of resettlement; raise the federally defined amount of sponsorship money that provides newcomers with one year of financial support; provide newcomers with settlement assistance for a

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[1] About 5,000 students enroll annually at this small, primarily undergraduate university, located in this rural university town (population 4,165, including only 435 visible minority) (Statistics Canada, 2016).

[2] The 9th student began 2nd semester.

year (e.g., housing, education, employment, health, everyday living); and foster newcomers' independence and integration. SAHs hold executive responsibilities to oversee CGs and G5s (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, n.d.). WUSC serves as the SAH for its SRP to provide guidance and oversight to sponsoring campus LCs.

Space does not allow us to give attention to criticisms of the PSRP, including the significant apprehensions raised about its neoliberal aspects, selection unfairness due to sponsors being able to "name"[3] who they will sponsor, and fears about overprotective or exploitative resettlement volunteers (Labman, 2016; Labman & Pearlman, 2018; Ritchie, 2018). Some concerns may apply less to the WUSC SRP as SRP beneficiaries are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and typically come from deeply entrenched refugee contexts. These and other criticisms require further research, debate, and policy analysis as the complex and expanding global refuge crisis presents significant challenges for the world community that will require a multi-faceted response.

When the PSRP launched, WUSC leveraged its local (campus), national, and overseas programs and relationships to create the WUSC SRP (Peterson, 2010). Once approved as a SAH in 1978, WUSC began inviting its LCs across the country to join the SRP (i.e., to become a CG). Because WUSC established education programs in UNHCR refugee camps and elsewhere, its inter/national offices facilitate the preparation, selection, and placement of SRP candidates. WUSC serves as

the SAH to provide training, guidance, and oversight of LCs at participating universities, colleges, and CEGEPs in Quebec, as well as administrative tasks related to sponsorship. To address the inevitable turnover of LC student volunteers, WUSC requires a paid employee of the university to volunteer as adviser to the student-led LC. The adviser and LC executive members work with WUSC's campus engagement team and regional liaison officer, and they coach their LC members to navigate the SRP calendar of sponsorship, settlement, and campus outreach activities. WUSC hosts national and regional SRP conferences to facilitate training, connectivity, and information sharing among LC volunteers and SRP students (McKee et al., 2019; Plasterer, 2010). For post-secondary students facilitating SRP resettlement in Canada, the program provides opportunities for youth civic engagement (McKee et al., 2019) and transformational adult learning (Peterson, 2010; Plasterer, 2010).

Because LCs participate in the WUSC SRP as the sponsoring group (i.e., the CG), each one assumes responsibility to (a) raise local funding to cover the minimum one year of living expenses and university costs, (b) provide sponsored refugee students with peer-to-peer settlement assistance, and (c) build a welcoming community by organizing activities to engage youth and community members in refugee issues (McKee et al., 2019). Locally, most LCs cover the mandatory first-year living and university costs through a student levy, fundraising, and in-kind donations from campus administration. With different institutional sizes and histories, some LCs evolved their funding formula to provide multi-year financial supports to SRP students. Peterson (2010) notes that funding diversity "has become an ongoing source of tension within the program" and that since "each sponsoring institution is

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[3] Local sponsor groups sponsored two SRP students' family members. One SRP student described the welcome of her extended kin (two sisters and their five children) as improving her well-being, social network, and sense of belonging. These sponsorships reveal the potential for "naming" to help highly vulnerable refugees, as these sisters grew up in a Dadaab refugee camp and, as single parents, have an increased risk of gender-based violence.

responsible for raising its own funds, there appears to be little chance of remedying this problem under the current funding model" (p. 114). WUSC encourages LCs to review their financial models and it provides resources for LCs that endeavour to develop their SRP financial supports; yet it is up to LCs to activate these resources and adapt them to their local campus context.

Framing Community Sponsorship as Local, Group-Based Practice

More than four decades on, WUSC is among the 130 SAHs and thousands of CGs and G5s that coordinate the resettlement work of millions of community members who have collectively sponsored and resettled more than 325,000 refugees since 1978 (Hyndman et al., 2021, p. 1). Bond (2021) estimates that the PSRP "enabled more than 20 percent of the Canadians population to either welcome a refugee newcomer or see a member of their own social network do so" (p. 164). Given this, we are struck by the dearth of research examining the work of sponsor groups. Except for studies on WUSC's SRP (McKee et al., 2019; Peterson, 2010; Plasterer, 2010; Shankar et al., 2016; Wong, 2013), we found only one SAH study and only two studies of a CG. Enns et al. (2020) examined the work of the Mennonite Central Committee, Canada's oldest, largest, and most active SAH, reporting an "institutional synergy" between its SAH and its CGs that rests upon "mutually supportive and constitutive relationships". Morris et al. (2022) outline the diverse, responsive, and "extraordinary" refugee protection work done by "ordinary people" through the Refugee Outreach Committee (ROC), a CG that formed in 1990 at St. Joseph's Parish in Ottawa. Pearlman (2020) examined the decision of a new CG in Winnipeg, Manitoba, named Operation Ezra, to commit to building a local Yazidi

community to help address the deep trauma of a people targeted for genocide. Pearlman concludes that Operation Ezra's "influence and capacity underscore how private sponsorship can be a bottom-up, people driven mechanism for refugee protection" yet given the CG's decided to also assist Yazidi government assisted refugees, Pearlman notes that community sponsorship "can have both positive impacts and unintended consequences for refugee protection and for Canada's resettlement program as a whole" (p. 113). These studies demonstrate the potential of civic engagement for shaping diverse and responsive resettlement communities of practice.

In research focused on refugee resettlement volunteers, academics are reframing "private sponsorship" as "community sponsorship," defined as "programs that empower groups of ordinary individuals—as opposed to governments or professionalized agencies—to lead in welcoming, supporting, and integrating refugees" (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019, p. 88). Like Pearlman (2020), Hyndman et al. (2021) contend that "private sponsorship is a community **practice**, a routine action that is part of a collective commitment, a way of connecting local community actions to global politics of injustice and displacement" (p. 1). Indeed, the Canadian federal government's 2015 initiative to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees sparked "thousands of organizations and businesses, and millions of citizens across the country" to get involved in community sponsorship, with CGs and G5s resettling 13,000 of the 28,000 Syrians refugees arriving between December 2015 and February 2016 (Bond, 2021, p. 156). This included a surge of participation in a match-funding program designed to encourage sponsorship of vulnerable refugees (McNally, 2020). The WUSC SRP also grew. In 2016, 61 LCs sponsored 100 refugee stu-

dents for a total of 1400 SRP beneficiaries welcomed since 1979 (Shankar et al., 2016 citing WUSC). Just six years later, 100 LCs were sponsoring 150 students annually, for a total of 2200 welcomed since 1979 (WUSC, n.d.).

Consistent with literature on grassroots movements, research shows that community-based mobilization for refugee justice facilitates place-based innovations that includes inviting others to join or support a community of practice. For instance, (then–)Ryerson University's Lifeline Syria Challenge campaign invited community members to join 25 teams dedicated to raising sponsorship money and organizing settlement assistance for 25 Syrian refugee families. They "created a new, highly transferable model of social innovation that (brought) together new partners, new processes, and new resources" (Cukier & Jackson, 2018, p. 224). Its crowd-funding strategy inspired more than 4,000 individuals to donate, and the group leveraged access to university and community resources and created viable avenues for student and community engagement. Three other Toronto area universities followed suit, each forming 25 CGs to sponsor and resettle 75 refugee families. A campus-based community initiative at StFX raised $100,000 for a CG sponsoring Syrian refugee families by inspiring campus teams to form and host fundraising events (Verberg & Khoury, 2017). The rapid welcome of Syrian refugees also mobilized the legal community to help sponsor groups navigate the application process (Lange, 2020). These studies reveal how small groups engage community members to play various roles to accomplish shared goals.

Research also highlights the community development fostered through civic engagement in grassroots resettlement projects, an often-overlooked by-product of grassroots community work. Bond (2021) argues that

sponsorship activities strengthen community ties long before newcomers arrive because they spawn "sponsorship-related collaborations between local businesses, settlement service providers, and community volunteers preparing to welcome refugee newcomers" (pp. 159–160). Kyriakides et al. (2020) found that sponsors in rural settings "actively defuse local discourses hostile to refugee resettlement and establish the worthiness of the yet-to-arrive refugees" (p. 199). This reflects Bond's (2021) insight on the "exceptional bifold power" of community sponsorship:

> It **depoliticizes**, by shifting divisive macro-level policy debates about refugees to non-threatening conversations about finding a bike for the new kid next door, but it also **politicizes**, by mobilizing in a sustained way a wide-ranging and diverse constituency with the potential to positively influence national politics. (p. 165)

Given that anti-immigrant and refugee resettlement discourses have the potential to create apprehension and fear, relationship building through community sponsorship provides opportunities for individuals to form independent judgements resting upon trust of one's personal network and meeting newcomers.

Theorizing Community Sponsorship

Guided by our inductive analysis and community sponsorship research, we draw from three theoretical perspectives on the work of organizations and civil society groups: community of practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pyrko et al., 2017; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), stewardship theory (Bennett et al., 2018; Hernandez, 2008; West et al., 2018), and meso-level theory of group culture and civic engagement (Fine, 1979, 2010, 2019).

We adopt Fine's (1979, 2010, 2019) meso-level approach of examining "tiny publics" to frame this research. As shown below,

elements of community of practice and stewardship theory are captured in Fine's theory, which focuses on how the group dynamics and idioculture of small groups explain their significance for influencing the social order. Fine (2010) encourages the study of groups or "micro-communities with common histories and joint imagined futures" as a means "to uncover the processes through which innovation, socialization, and change are constituted in practice" (p. 356). He contends that group-established routines, rituals, and traditions guide interactions among group members, theorizing that "small communities of interest and experience provide the basis of civil society" (p. 361). Fine (1979) introduced the concept of idioculture as "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (p. 734). For our purposes, while WUSC's guidance as the SAH sets parameters and standards for the work of an SRP LC, informal rules created through members' interactions influence their sense of belonging and loyalty, which frames the ongoing actions and interactions of group members. For this reason, Fine encourages meso-level research focused on observable group interactions to reveal how groups contribute to cultural formation.

Based on recent research and our data analysis, we contend that community sponsorship requires the sponsor group to form a community of practice (CoP). CoPs are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). The three characteristics of a CoP are domain, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The **domain** for WUSC SRPs (i.e., for all com-

munity sponsorship groups) is the legal and policy domain of the PSRP, which mandates that sponsorship be accomplished by groups in their **local community**. Emerging research defines community sponsorship as **practice**. Hyndman et al. (2021, p. 4) emphasize that "sponsorship is fully reliant on the funding and hard work of volunteers who engage in this transnational community of practice at the local level." Likewise, Macklin et al. (2018) discovered that the "performance of the myriad tasks associated with newcomer settlement and integration demands time, flexibility, and a range of interpersonal and intercultural skills" and "requires a willingness to leverage social capital in the form of connections, information and 'know how' on behalf of the sponsored refugees" (p. 45). This reflects Pyrko et al.'s (2017) view that "**CoPs come to life from the trans-personal process of thinking together**, rather than … a community being 'set-up.'" (pp. 390–391).

CoP theory holds that accomplishing group-defined goals rests upon "situated learning" that generates social innovation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Social innovation is defined as initiatives undertaken to find solutions to emerging social issues, with solutions being **place-based** and informed by local geography, resources, culture, and social relations (Martin & Upham, 2016; Martiskainen, 2017). Civil society is a rich site for the formation of a CoP when people seek bottom-up solutions that reflect the interests and values of their communities (Kitamura et al., 2018; Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Grassroots social innovations are assumed to happen in local settings, yet Vergragt et al. (2014) observe that national and international networks of social economy and civil society actors share common concerns, values, and beliefs. Place-based innovations are often shared among such networks (Heiskanen et al., 2015). Emerging research on community sponsorship indi-

cates that navigating fundraising and settlement best practices rests upon a core group using its social capital and networks to inspire sparkles of contributions, far and wide. Such contributions often come from people who are interested in supporting initiatives but unable to join the sponsor group (Phillimore et al., 2022).

As illustrated in our findings, the StFX LC embraced program stewardship to engage LC and community members in revitalizing the SRP. Stewardship theorists purports that people will take action to steward something to the extent to which they understand and agree with it (Bennett et al., 2018). Thus, stewardship invites collaborative action by people who do not identify as members of a group or organization. The concept of stewardship is deeply woven into the language of the environmental movement, where organizations and grassroots projects work to inspire environmental stewardship on the part of local community members. Bennett et al. (2018) define local environmental stewardship as "actions taken by individuals, groups, and networks of actors, with various motivations and levels of capacity, to protect, care for, or responsibly use the environment in pursuit of environmental and/or social outcomes in diverse social-ecological contexts" (p. 599). Stewardship theorists emphasize the relational aspects of stewardship (Hernandez, 2008; West et al., 2018). Hernandez (2008), for example, "conceptualizes stewardship as an outcome of leadership behaviours that promote a sense of personal responsibility in followers for the long-term well-being of the organization and society" (p. 121). Leaders can encourage stewardship by involving people in ways that build community around an ethic of care, one that provides individuals with opportunities to consider the moral implications of their actions. The

expansive potential of stewardship to garner community support of refugee resettlement is suggested by recent research highlighting how sponsor group volunteers inspire community members to steward refugee resettlement as a form of refugee protection by making a financial donation or "helping out" in diverse ways—hence the reframing of private sponsorship as community sponsorship (Hyndman et al., 2021).

METHODS

This case study was informed by qualitative approaches to research (McCracken, 1988) and with approval of the university's Research Ethics Board (File #23645). Initial research questions were informed by a literature review; then both the research questions and literature review evolved through the cyclical process of data collection and analysis (Jackson & Verberg, 2007). Participants include two LC faculty advisers, six LC executive members, and one SRP student. Students held different executive and leadership roles over the two-year renewal period. One faculty adviser served alone in the first year, then as a co-adviser the following year (for succession planning). Authors interviewed participants in-person or by phone in 2018 and 2019, and an LC faculty adviser did a follow-up interview in 2021. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The authors collaborated on coding and data analysis (Miles et al., 2020). Participants are identified by a pseudonym: their verbatim quotations are indicated with the use of quotation marks.

We acknowledge that "insider perspectives" inform this study (see Chavez, 2008; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). MacDonald was an StFX WUSC LC member from 2015 to 2018, serving as communications coordinator and vice-president, and he played key roles on the Program Renewal Committee. MacDonald was interviewed as a

participant prior to collaborating on this project. Verberg co-chaired a grassroots campus fundraising campaign that raised $100,000 in sponsorship money for a local CG and participated in an SRP renewal consultation session organized by the LC. Each author accepted invitations from the co-presidents of the 2018 graduating class to participate in a campaign to raise $50,000 to establish a refugee newcomer bursary. Being "insiders" can involve bias in data collection, analyses, and interpretation and requires acknowledging one's privilege (Chavez, 2008). As insiders, we observed the energy and interactions of LC members, how they navigated challenges and strains, and their campus presence. Our experiences also shape our critical appraisal of criticisms of private sponsorship.

FINDINGS

Participants describe how their engagement in the StFX SRP CoP triggered an awakening that the LC was responsible to not only administer the SRP but to **steward** it. They indicated that situated learning led them to initiate and guide a campaign to secure multi-year financial support and better academic supports. CoP theory identifies situated learning as essential to groups figuring out how to organize and execute their practice to address known and emerging information. Realizing the low graduation rate of SRP students and attributing this to inadequate financial and academic supports, executive members sought ways to renew and sustain the SRP. Participants describe how their evolving sense-making of the SRP structure guided their reimaginings of what the StFX LC's responsibilities "should be." As Fine (1979) contends, working within one's local history and culture, group action is guided by established rituals and practices as well as members' commitment to the group's mission. The decision to generate

better financial and academic supports had the unintended consequence of revitalizing their LC's SRP CoP as it also marked a fulsome shift in leadership style.

With guidance from "Big WUSC," as it is affectionately called, and informed by the local context (a review of the StFX SRP financial model), the LC executive came to appreciate that its SRP is a community-supported sponsorship model resting on a student levy and in-kind donations from university administration. Participants describe realizing that the SRP renewal campaign therefore required support of the campus community. With this realization, executive members embraced a leadership style Hernandez (2008) describes as **promoting stewardship behaviours among followers**. Significantly, participants contend that doing so extended and enhanced youth engagement in the LC (a goal of the WUSC SRP), and it served to build the welcoming community (also a WUSC SRP goal) by encouraging the members of the campus community to play a role in stewarding the SRP. Participants describe employing relational and motivational supports to encourage members of the campus community to learn about and feel a sense of loyalty to the SRP. They did so by framing the StFX SRP as a (then-)33-year-old, community-supported "Xaverian" social justice project and by taking decisive steps to build relationships and encourage inter-personal and institutional trust to connect Xaverians with the project. As Hernandez (2008) contends, providing information and building trust in the SRP LC helps community members have the "moral courage" to take action to continue refugee resettlement at StFX through their support of the renewal project.

Problem Recognition Through Situated Learning

Participants highlighted multiple instances of **situated learning** that led to problem recognition and the decision to engage in a leadership style to promote program stewardship. First, at a time when LC members realized that, in recent years, many SRP students left StFX before graduating, incoming LC president, Mary, attended a national WUSC conference. Mary learned:

> "Some schools sponsored three or four students and some schools sponsored students for all four years, where StFX was sponsoring one student in full for just their first twelve months. Then they had nothing."

At that time, the StFX SRP financial model rested upon university in-kind donations covering tuition, compulsory fees, and a residence meal plan from September to April for the first year, as well as revenue from a four-dollar annual student levy and fundraisers covering the SRP student's start-up costs (e.g., cellphone, laptop, toiletries, bedding, clothing), monthly stipend, December recess stipend, federal travel loan, and summer accommodations and living expenses. After one year, the student received only the December recess stipend. Upon returning to campus, Mary asked the SRP adviser, Samantha, if the budget would allow for multi-year SRP financial support. With a review of "the books," Samantha said:

> "[I] realized we don't have enough money. We've been doing this for 33 years and we are getting the same cheque. Tuition is rising. The cost of a meal plan is rising. Inflation is rising. And yet we are getting the same amount of money as we did years ago. Something is not right!"

Second, building relationships with SRP students taught LC members about the depth of deprivation experienced by youth living in entrenched refugee contexts. This shaped their understandings of the financial barriers SRP students face, especially in a context of rising university costs. Without prompting, all participants said it was "unethical" to sponsor a refugee without adequate supports. Samantha said, "You want to set people up to succeed, not to fail, and I don't think [the StFX SRP was] doing that at that time." LC members also learned about the "chalk and talk" education method at refugee camps. In light of this, they surmised that the SRP had been inadequately preparing sponsored students to use their new personal computers and navigate the university's information systems. These realizations compelled the StFX LC to commit to revitalizing its SRP model to better support students' integration.

Soon into the 2016–2017 academic year, the LC set out to rebuild its funding model to expand financial supports for SRP students beyond the first year of study and develop new kinds of academic and integration assistance. Tailoring guidance from WUSC to their local context, the StFX LC decided to (a) ask Students' Union leadership to agree to hold a WUSC SRP referendum to double the annual student levy from four to eight dollars, (b) negotiate with the university for additional in-kind donations of a second year of residence and meal plan, and (c) establish new funding partnerships to cover upper-year SRP students' compulsory school fees and dental and medical expenses not covered by the student medical plan. They also sought to develop new university department relationships to help newcomers with their first-year academic transition, job searches, and applying for bursaries and financial aid. Participants describe building stronger connections with Big WUSC to guide local practices, identifying WUSC's referendum toolkit as a valuable resource containing guidance, promotional materials, and messaging guidelines. With the advice

of a faculty member, an LC member wrote the renewal proposal as a "business plan" to share with existing and new partners. By integrating a brief history of the StFX SRP as a community-based model and outlining the campaign details and rationale, it became a valuable tool for organizing meetings and reinforcing the narrative that the StFX SRP is a decades-old "Xaverian" social justice initiative.

Building a Welcoming Community Through Program Stewardship

To garner support for a multi-year funding model, the LC strategized to remind campus partners of **their** long-standing support of the WUSC SRP since its inception at StFX and explain the rationale for rebuilding the SRP financial model. Samantha noted:

> "You can't just ask them for more money or in-kind donations. You have to explain why support-ing [the SRP] is going to enrich the StFX commu-nity. You have to focus on highlighting StFX's long commitment to social justice and how providing education to a refugee is a form of creating a just society."

With WUSC SRP LCs collecting an annual levy from more than a million post-secondary students and in-kind donations from 100 universities, WUSC understands that the sus-tainability of each campus SRP depends on its LC's ability to connect with the community around refugee awareness (McKee et al., 2019, p. 77). Participants told us that "WUSC [was] the best well-kept secret at StFX for too long" despite the LC having faithfully hosted annual events to "build a more welcoming community." These realizations shifted their approach to leadership.

Deeply woven into participants' descrip-tions of the LC's execution of the renewal campaign is their adoption of a leadership style that promotes stewardship of the SRP among diverse campus constituents. Using multiple platforms, the LC enlightened the campus community that "StFX has a 30-plus year legacy" of resettling refugee youth at StFX—and that this can only continue if the SRP funding model is updated. As Hernan-dez (2008) highlights, because stewardship involves taking moral action, leadership be-haviours that engage followers in ways that build interpersonal and institutional trust provide followers with confidence to act in ways that steward programs. Whether asked to make an executive decision (i.e., Students' Union leaders asked to host a levy referen-dum; administration asked to commit more in-kind donations; unions asked to approve small grants) or an individual decision (i.e., to join the LC; to help LC members; to vote "yes" in a referendum), the LC was required to provide community members with relevant information and highlight the value of the SRP as a collective initiative.

Building Capacity Through Stewardship

Youth-led, peer-to-peer resettlement is uni-que to the WUSC SRP. A core theme emerg-ing from the data was that adopting a lead-ership style that promotes stewardship en-hanced the involvement, connections, ex-periences, and benefits of the program for LC members. This happened because the LC executive shifted its leadership style to enhance a team-based approach, a move that adviser Samatha had been encouraging during her leadership. Several participants emphasized that the decision to establish a funding renewal campaign was decided **with** LC general members. Further, they contended that this created energy and focus among members. This finding reflects insights from stewardship theory as well as Fine's (2019) emphasis on joint membership as a catalyst for productive civic action via identity formation, viewing oneself a part of a collective, and feeling a moral obligation

to contribute to achieving group-defined goals. Participants noted higher attendance at weekly meetings and members giving more of their time and talents to facilitate the SRP responsibilities and funding renewal. As Andrea noted:

> "What I found was that more people were starting to get involved from when I started. … We had exciting change. We wanted more to happen. We got more involved and more engaged and hosted more events. I feel the new energy really helped with all of that. There were more roles and new people. … To watch them get really excited was good. Like, 'Oh my goodness! This is a wonderful society [i.e., the StFX WUSC Society]! This should be celebrated more! Let's raise awareness around it!'"

Members were encouraged to help in ways that reflected their interests, talents, and availability—and to activate their networks (e.g., sports team, residence floors, roommates) to participate in WUSC events. Ian noted:

> "We had done a great job of recruiting more students … who had the same vision, and who had different talents. Everyone kind of picked and played their own role. Everyone wanted to see this happen. So we were all working towards a common goal, so everyone took a lead."

By taking on existing and new responsibilities, these youth learned together and formalized the key results of their shared learning through "**artifacts**" (Wenger, 1998), such as writing the funding renewal proposal as a business plan, managing social media pages, selling WUSC SRP shirts, writing articles for the student newspaper, introducing the referendum campaign in classes, attending annual campus events, and so on. Hernandez (2008) highlights that the authentic involvement of members is crucial to stewardship as it facilitates followers' "ability to influence internal processes and better understand the implications of organizational actions" (p. 124).

To their surprise, LC leaders found their work supported by students in other refugee campaigns on campus. Participants were not sure how to make sense of their renewal campaign happening concurrently with other local refugee campaigns, yet their efforts led to being identified, and celebrated, as part of a broader resettlement community. In Antigonish town and county, three CGs formed in 2015 to sponsor Syrian refugee families, and a grassroots group formed at the university called StFX for SAFE to raise $100,000 in sponsorship funding for a CG called SAFE (Verberg & Khoury, 2017). Mary said their concerns about the "hype around SAFE and StFX for SAFE" shifted when students from the StFX for SAFE group attended a WUSC coffeehouse and were excited to learn about the SPR campaign. They proved to be allies and supporters who offered valuable suggestions. In fall 2017, the Class of 2018 Legacy Committee launched a project to raise $50,000 to create a refugee student bursary to extend the work of the WUSC SRP LC and StFX for SAFE. An LC member was encouraged to join the Legacy Committee, with the understanding that working together could help amplify the LC's levy referendum campaign. When that group organized an event called X-Talks: Hope and Education, an SRP student readily accepted an invitation to be one of four presenters. She told the audience that she found hope in a program WUSC had offered at her refugee camp called Shine a Light on Girls Education, designed to promote girls' education. Andrea noted:

> "[Her story] reached the many students [about 300] that were able to attend, and it was also live-streamed on Facebook. So there is definitely an impact directly on the students by raising awareness, bringing different events to campus, and informing them of the work we do. That changes people's perspectives around refugees,

around education, and I feel awareness of it all is the most important."

Navigating the referendum would turn out to be a two-year process that started with a request of the Students' Union (SU) to host a levy referendum. The SU's support of the SRP levy is evident given that the SU ran the levy referendum in two consecutive years. When the first referendum showed very strong support for the levy increase but did not meet voter-turnout quorum, the SU agreed to hold a second levy referendum in conjunction with elections of the SU Executive, where turnout would be more assured. Having already successfully negotiated a second-year residence and meal plan, the landslide passing of the second referendum meant that the LC achieved its goal of establishing multi-year financial support for SRP students (the LC now pays SRP students' tuition for their second year of study). LC members also innovated new academic and social supports, such as creating service-learning placements where students volunteer to introduce an SRP student to Canadian living. Academic transition advancements resulted from working with the Office of Internationalization and the Student Success Centre. Beyond the campus community, the LC began connecting with the local community, including asking shops for donations. In 2018, the LC co-organized a Refugee Awareness Day event on campus with local sponsor groups.

Building Local–Global Citizenship Identities

A resounding theme raised by most participants was that membership in the WUSC SRP helped shape their socio-political identities and locations on refugee-related issues. Samantha observed:

> "[The WUSC SRP] provides the opportunity to create global citizens because the SRP LC members

identify themselves as a member of an international network of people involved in humanitarian aid and refugee justice."

Mary said:

> "You're entering not only a kind of political realm. You've entered into a new world of refugee resettlement. You find out that there's SAFE and there's C.A.R.E. and there's Tri-HEART [local CGs] and there's all these different causes, and there I stand in this world devoted to immigration, refugee resettlement, and justice."

Samantha commented,

> "One student was saying that it helped her to find out who she is, like to place herself as a citizen. Which is cool, right? You know, you do this and you're kind of like, 'Oh! I'm standing with refugees! Oh, that is who I am!' So you know, it was a discovery for her."

Likewise, John described,

> "Being able to be part of that [SRP campaign] at a time where you are starting to see who you are as a person is really fascinating because it's an opportunity. Your own unique form of citizenship will be crafted. It was really a big learning opportunity for me to enter into the refugee resettlement space."

Participants realized that their civic engagement through community sponsorship served to shape their social location on political issues, a theme reflected in recent studies (e.g., Bond, 2021; Macklin et al., 2018; Phillimore et al., 2022). In many ways, learning about the refugee crisis disrupted taken-for-granted beliefs about there being a "just world." It encouraged both LC members and members of the broader community to explore their positions on refugee resettlement as a form of refugee protection. Applying stewardship theory, participants attributed their transformative experiences with the SRP at StFX with giving them the "moral courage" to locate themselves on evolving socio-political positioning around immigration and refugee resettlement. Likewise, Fine

(2019) contends that productive civic action rests upon group members collaborating on a project they believe betters society. John described working through "pushback on refugee resettlement" in different contexts and recognizing,

> "We did get some negative reactions about what we were doing. So you have to deal with it and work through it. You're educating and you're trying to change people's perspectives about certain things."

This reflects Phillimore et al.'s (2022) observation that "engagement in community sponsorship might be considered a combination of social protest and prosocial behaviour" (p. 387) and Fine's contention that identity formation arises through one's interactions with groups, which in turn serves to shape culture and institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study offers new perspectives on the WUSC SRP by using a meso-level framework to examine the interaction domain of the StFX LC and the application of stewardship and CoP theories. Fine encourages analysis at the level of small group interaction, arguing that through their interactions, groups have the capacity to shape culture and structure. Applying CoP and stewardship theories was guided by the findings of our inductive data analysis. CoP theory highlights that working to achieve group-defined goals happens in a dynamic learning environment whereby thinking together forges the community of practice and enables groups to innovate and adapt to address new circumstances. As Pyrko et al. (2017) would say, the StFX LC came to life through "the trans-personal process of thinking together" (p. 390). Thinking through how to address the low graduation crisis, the LC established a campaign to increase financial and integration supports. In strategizing how to accomplish those goals,

LC executive members adopted and navigated program stewardship, which proved to be a catalyst for deepening its LC's CoP. We frame the adoption of a stewardship style of leadership as an unintended but critical outcome of the renewal campaign, one that appears to continue to guide the StFX LC. While participation in small groups and communities of practice are often guided by members valuing the group's purpose or mandate, there is a different kind of intentionality and action implied by the concept of stewardship. As stewardship theorists note, there is something expansive about stewardship, where community members can encourage others to find a role to play, as in the case of environmental stewardship. CoP theorists too note that people may not know they are part of a community of practice, yet even the most mundane action (a conversation, offering help) taken by community members can contribute to projects they support.

Building a responsive CoP at StFX rested upon WUSC's joint-partnership model of community sponsorship. Participants described that situated learning happens at the juncture of theory and practice; that is, what is learned through WUSC SRP's training and guidance informs, and is informed by, the students' sponsorship and resettlement work done locally. Leadership promoting stewardship provided the community and LC members with more meaningful connections to the SRP and more opportunities to identify with and contribute to the SRP, thereby encouraging them to find the "moral courage" to support the SRP as a collaborative project through their actions. Additionally, their civic engagement in community sponsorship shaped members' political identities, which also informed their work.

While not the focus of this study, challenges were identified by participants in

areas that could not be addressed in the renewal campaign, some having to do with WUSC policy. Participants expressed frustration with the policy that prohibits pre-migration communication between the LC members and sponsored SRP students, suggesting that it creates transition challenges for newcomers, in part because SRP students have little or no information about the university or its programs, and because LC members know little more than a student's age and gender and have only an inkling of their academic interests. Members often discover that their pre-selection of courses for the sponsored student during registration may not fit the student's program choice, thereby creating challenges to rework the SRP student's course selection and schedule before classes start. Circumstances like these are exasperated when SRP students arrive only days before, or after, the term starts. Participants recommend that SRP students arrive two weeks prior to the start of the academic term and that there be more opportunities for pre-migration communication. In 2017, the faculty adviser had the LC develop succession planning for both the LC executive and a new faculty adviser, given the significant learning curve related to administering the SRP.

This single case study of one LC that elected to rebuild its SRP in the face of crisis contributes to an emerging literature on community sponsorship. The sample appears small, yet most leadership team members involved in the renewal process were interviewed. Whether the lessons learned from this study are transferable to other LCs specifically or CGs more generally is untested. We recognize that the StFX renewal took place at a time of great interest in refugee resettlement, yet the interview data convey that the renewal campaign stemmed from the LC leader's realization of a local program crisis, something their LC could – and should

– address. Adopting stewardship as a key guiding tool helped them to rebuild the StFX LC resettlement CoP. Our results highlight Fine's (2019) theory that the actions of small groups or "tiny publics" can shape culture and the broader social system.

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