



Motivation of Volunteers and Refugee Settlement Service Providers in Australia

The presentation is based on the PhD thesis by Anja Wendt, currently prepared as a student at the University of New South Wales. In case of questions, email: anja.wendt@student.unsw.edu.au

Background:

Australia resettles around 18,000 officially recognised refugees annually, offering them a new home and setting them up with comparatively generous settlement assistance. A vast number of volunteers support the sector.

Research Questions:

Why do volunteers engage in the refugee settlement sector?
Why do service providers engage volunteers?

Methodology:

33 semi-structured interviews with two groups (18 volunteers, 15 service providers)

Key Take Aways:

1. All volunteers reported self-oriented motivation (career development, socialising, gaining purpose, learning about different cultures, assuaging guilt) AND all volunteers expressed the desire to help (first responders in refugee communities, giving back, social justice motivated, apolitical helping).
2. Challenges with helping are: volunteer exhaustion and white saviourism. White saviourism is patronising behaviour of volunteers guiding refugees to the 'right' (white) Australian normalcy), disregarding refugee life experiences, skills and qualifications.
3. All volunteers continue volunteering because of the personal connections they form (with refugees, fellow volunteers, service providers and institutions). Connections can be seen as essence of volunteering and are a crucial element in refugee settlement as refugees usually lost all or most of their connections due to their flight. Service providers are motivated to engage volunteers to support this aspect. However, volunteer engagements are usually focused on the service delivery and not on the connection with the refugee.