

Bonding and Bridging Friendships among Unaccompanied Refugee Minors in Residential Care

Children in Care Research Forum

March 26, 2018

Trinity College Dublin

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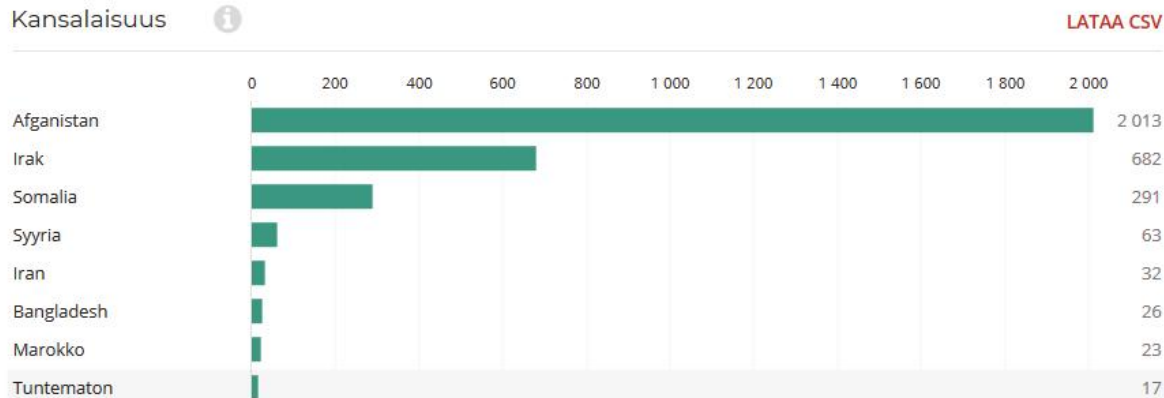
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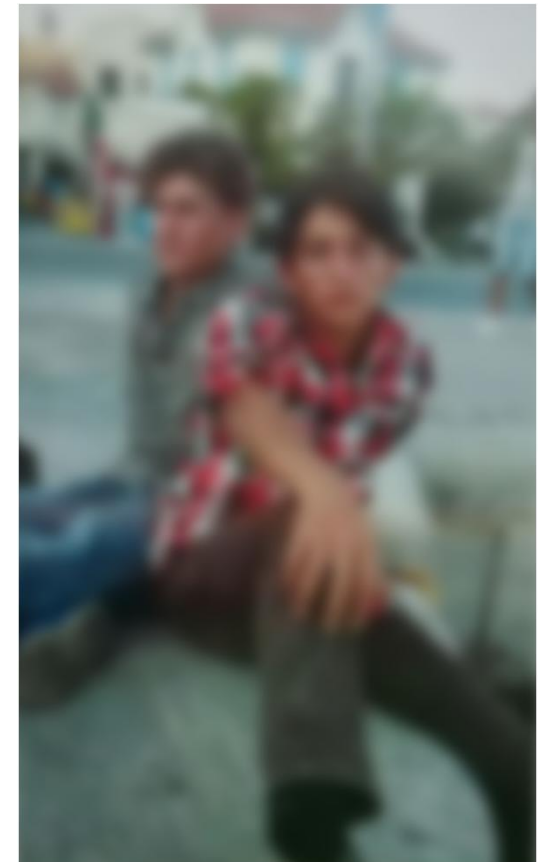
Unaccompanied minors in Finland

- In 2017, 9388 children seeking asylum in Finland, of which
 - 6014 accompanied
 - 3374 unaccompanied
- Number of asylum applications: unaccompanied minor refugees

	Prior 2015	2015	2016	2017
Unaccompanied minors	Approximately 100-250/year	3022	401	142



- 92 % male, 90 % ages 14-17,



Unaccompanied minors in Finland

- Process and decisions:
 - decisions on residence permit (1-2 yrs. fixed term) made by Finnish Immigration Service, processing time 6 months - 2 years
 - 83 % positive, 7 % negative (2015-2017)
- Living arrangement: Group Home
 - Group Home provides for 'accommodation, financial support, health care services, legal aid, and social services: advice, guidance, sorting out of social problems, and other supportive actions that maintain and promote well-being' (Finnish Immigration Service)
- All go to school (preparatory education 1-3 yrs. > integration into basic education)
- Right to work after 3 months in Finland
- Hobbies encouraged and financially supported



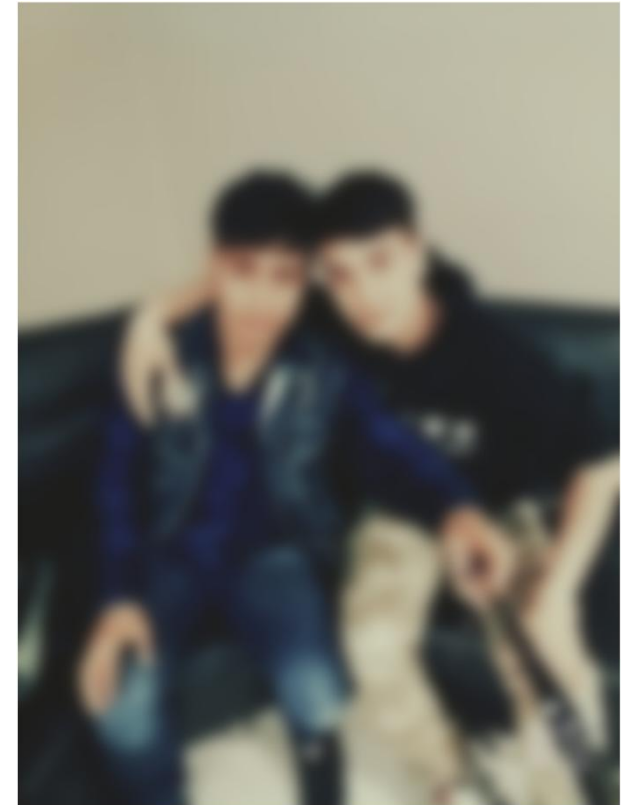
'FRIENDSHIP AS POTENTIAL? Inclusionary friendship practices and managing teenagers' risk of marginalization'

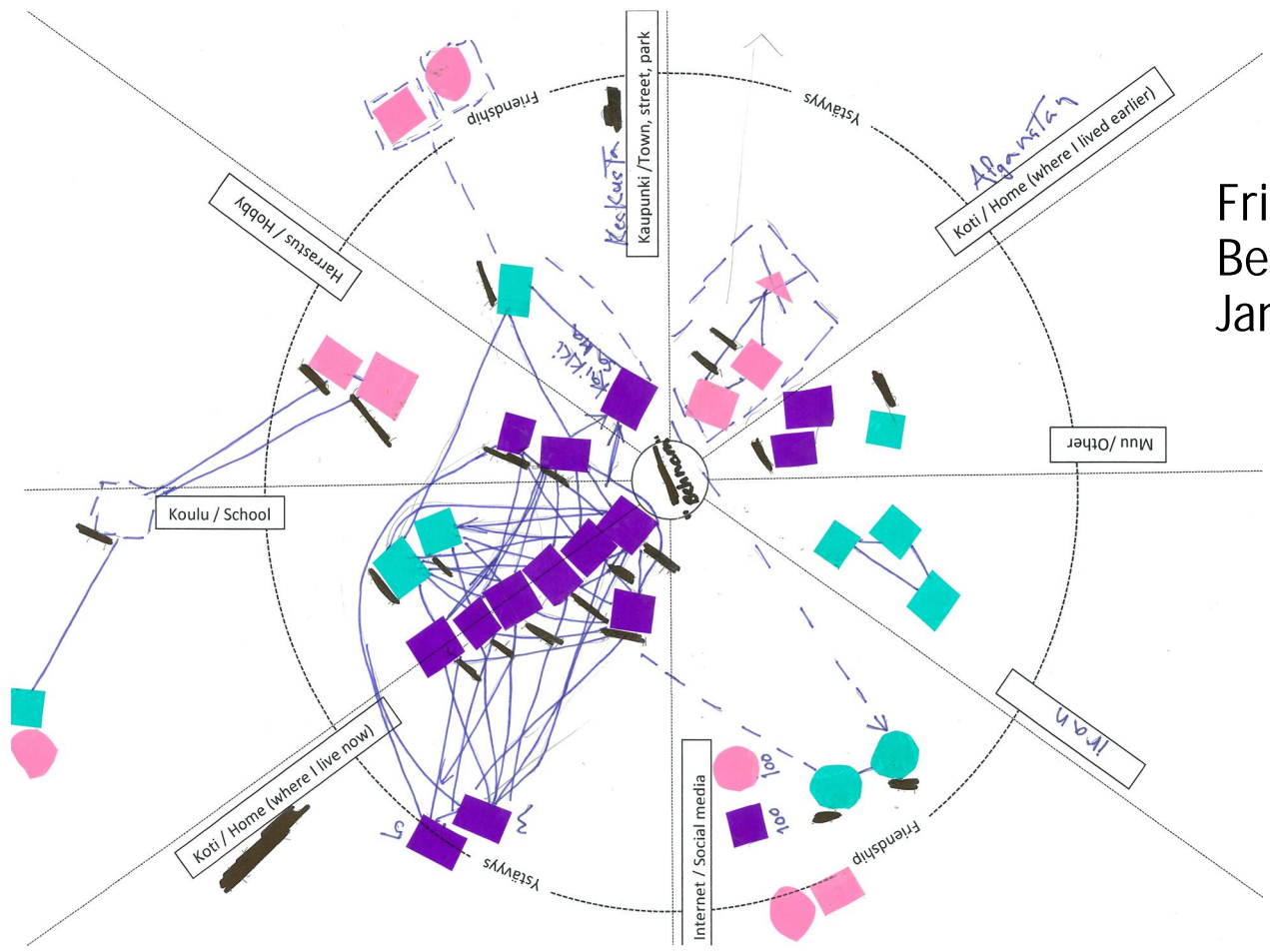
- Postdoctoral research project, Academy of Finland, 2016-2018
- Can friendship nurture inclusion beyond peer group, i.e. in relation to a broader community and/or society?
- Qualitative multi-method study with 31 young people
 - 15 unaccompanied asylum-seekers, 11 accompanied asylum-seekers, 5 refugees
 - 13-18 years of age
- Participants were recruited in a local upper-comprehensive school from preparatory education class groups
- The data
 - 24 friendship network maps and individual interviews based on the markings on the maps
 - photographs about friends and friendship by 14 participants and individual photo-elicited interviews
 - 21 social support network maps, drawings and writings about "what helps you to do well in life now in Finland?", and individual interviews on those



Why friendships?

- 'If we do not interest ourselves in children and young people's friendships, we are missing a huge part of what is important in their lives and focal to their wellbeing.' (Dunn 2004)
- Particularly 'refugees without parents explicate a deprivation of support. For unaccompanied refugee minors, it appears of special importance to create a friendship network' (Sleijpen et al 2017, 360-361).
- Earlier research on young refugees 'has placed the vulnerability of the young people on the agenda, but little is known about how and under what conditions they are coping with life in exile' (Omland & Andenas 2017, 2).

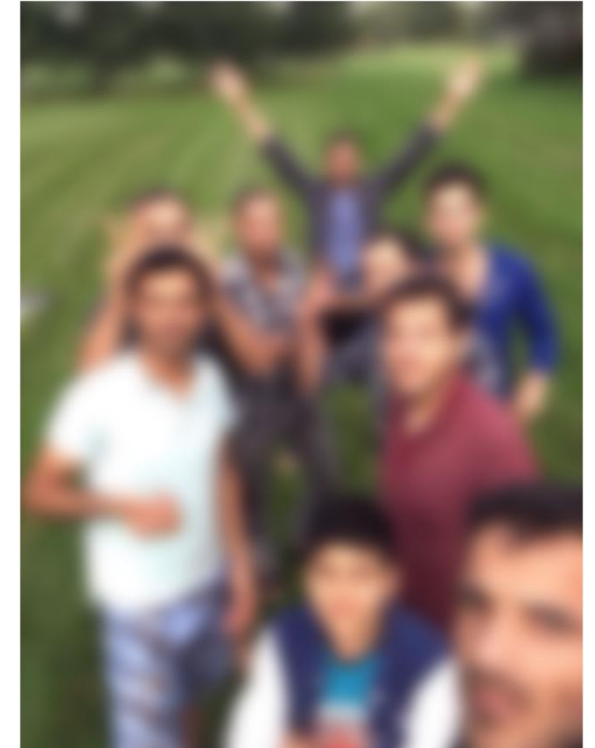




Friendship network
 Behnam, 17 yrs, from Afghanistan
 January 2017

Social capital

- specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks; the functional value of social resources
- *Bonding social capital*
 - based on shared identity and cultural togetherness
 - social support, solidarity, sense of belonging – “*getting by*”
 - “binds” people into tight communities
- *Bridging social capital*
 - established between people and groups that are different from each other
 - interaction between groups and positions of power, crossing structural boundaries – “*getting ahead*”

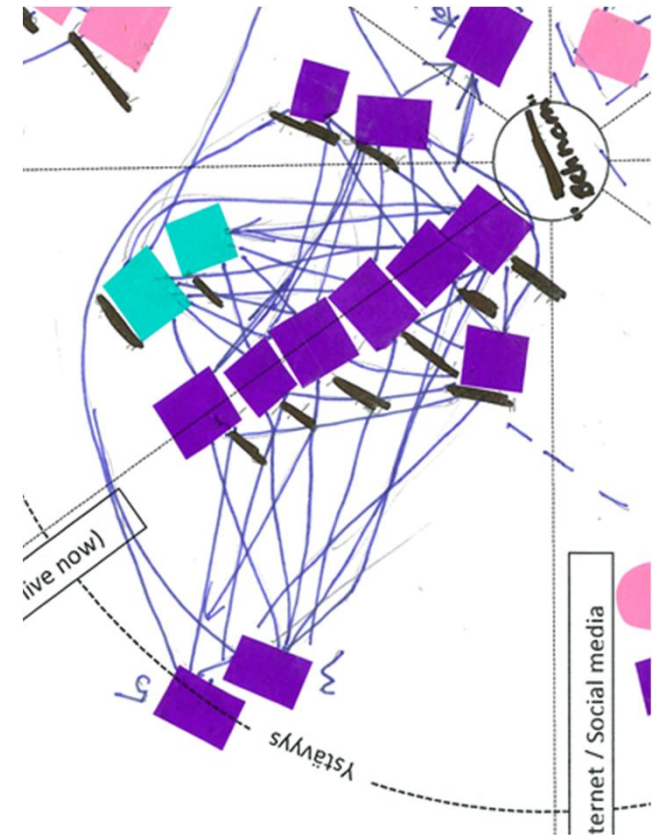


(Woolcock 1998; Putnam 2000)

(Reynolds 2007; Weller 2007; Leonard 2008; Billet 2014)

Friendships and bonding social capital

- Familiarity, shared identity, togetherness
- Companionship
- Social support
- Trust
- Sense of belonging
- Safety and comfort
- Social control



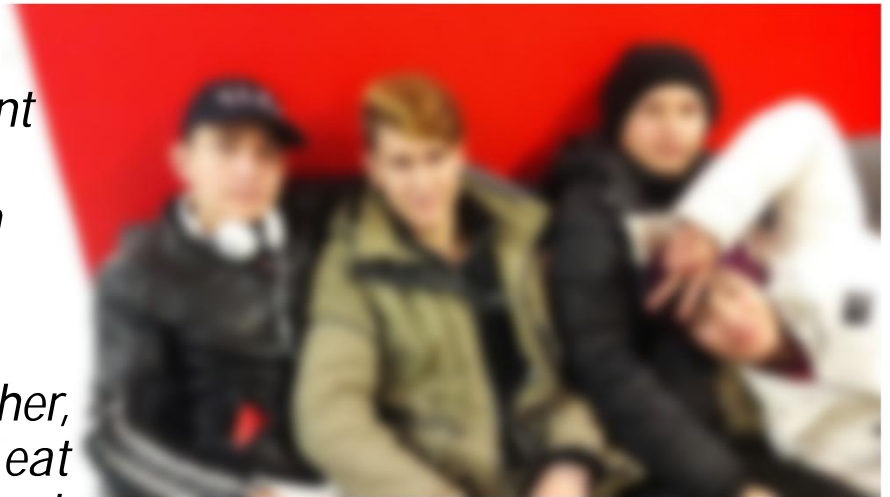
- Familiarity, shared identity, togetherness

"When I came to Finland I had no friends, because I don't speak Finnish and I don't, understand anything. Then I came here, to (the Group Home), and we, they are from Afghanistan too and they speak Farsi, the same language, then we became friends quickly ... because in Afghanistan, things are different, different ways, like everything ... people are different, different manners, different talk ... and they came a long way too, all the way from Afghanistan, and they too are new in Finland." (Behnam, 17)

- Companionship

"They can help me and we do everything together, play games, talk, watch a film sometimes. And eat and go to school and everyone goes together, and the city centre and swimming hall, we go together. ... It's good because then I am not alone and I have a friend and I have something to do." (Hamasa, 15)

"They are all my friends, my best friends ... because they come with me here, to school, and at home, we are a lot, spend time a lot." (Yasir, 16)



- Social support

"If I don't know how to do something, if I go to a doctor, to library, I ask my friend to come along and we go there." (Rashid, 16)

"If I'm sad he comes, asks me why. And for instance if he is sad I say , 'why', and he tells me." (Rashid, 16)

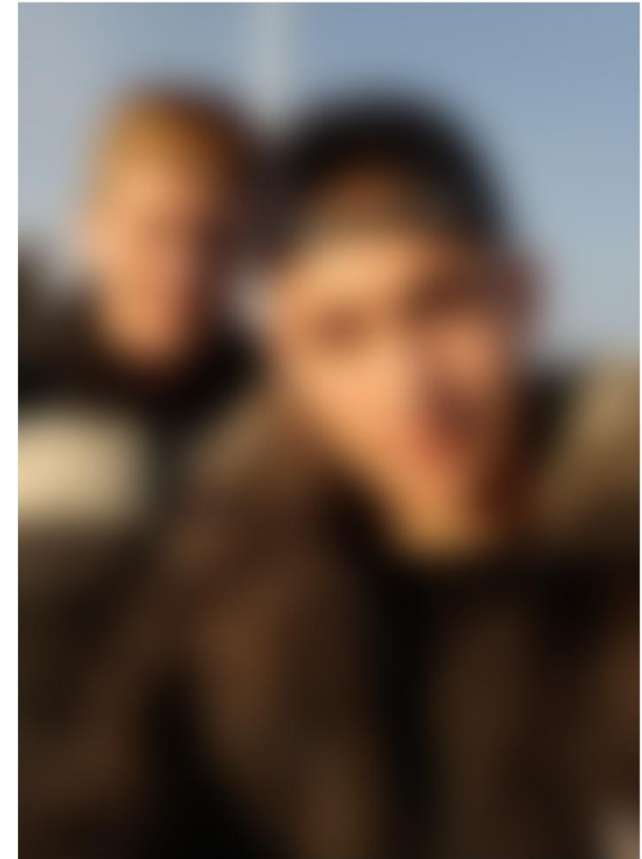
"Friend is important because, for instance, if you have a problem, if you are sad you can talk to them, if you are sick, friend comes to see you. To have a friend in life, I mean, your life is good, nice. I mean, in Finland I have no one, no mum no dad, not my family here, who really cares, but only a friend." (Behnam, 17)

- Trust

"Because I know him well, and he knows me well. I believe him and he believes me. It is important because you can't trust the other person if.. it has to be your best friend. Many times I can not trust someone." (Mehrab, 17)

- Sense of belonging

"We are all together, like all us boys, not Arabs just us Afgans. It is good, like, home, feels home, and it's good. ... Because you know everyone and it's nice and we are all same, similar." (Hamasa, 15)



- Safety and comfort

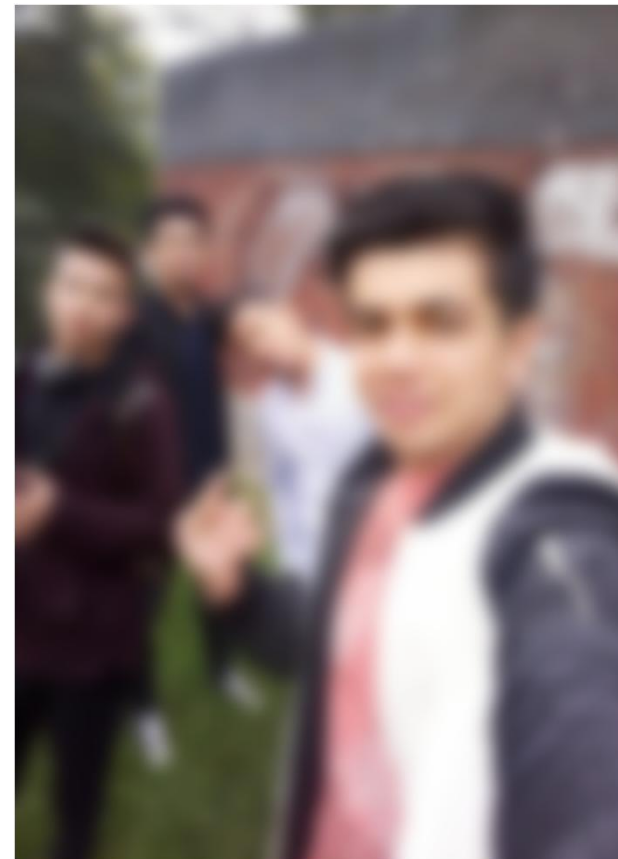
"Home is better because almost everyone talks Farsi and then I know what I can say and what I can do. With Finnish people I don't know. It's difficult because maybe I do it wrong, say it wrong, because I'm different, and maybe I don't know anything. That's why I don't want to go with the Finns, because these friends are better to me." (Behnam, 17)

"I like basketball, but I don't play with a team yet. I went once, two times, but everyone was Finnish, I don't like it yet. I play football with all the boys here (in the Group Home). Maybe if Yusuf comes with me, maybe Jawed, then I go and play basketball with a team." (Qaseem, 16)

- Social control

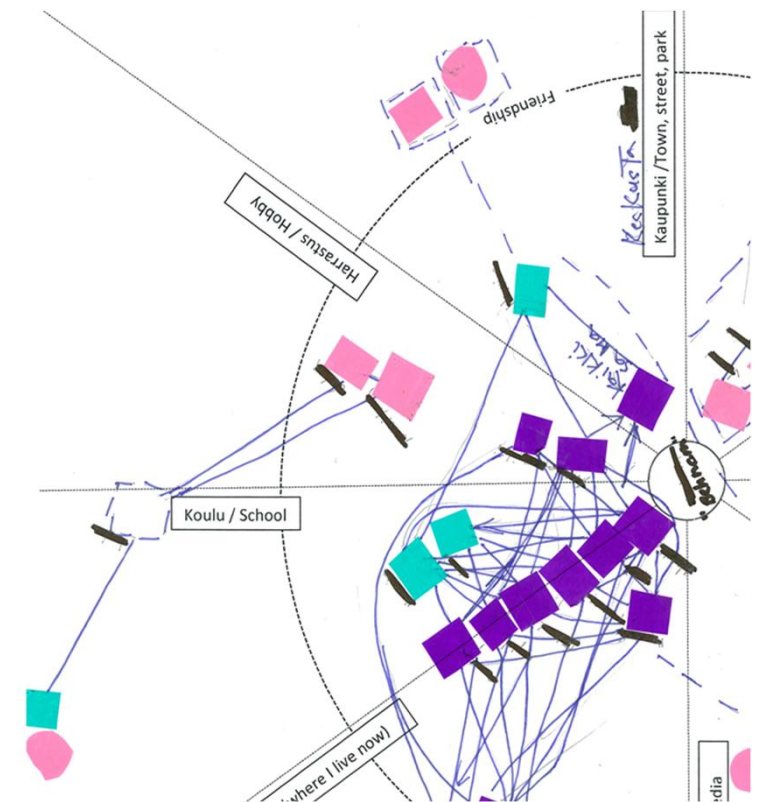
"Because I am, a little different from the other boys, I speak different ... Then they always watch, what you do, why you do. The boys want to be the same, always be the same, do the same." (Amin, 17)

"I don't go to (the local shopping centre), other boys go a lot, every day. ... The boys want me to go with them, and if I don't want, they don't like it. ... They say, 'are you Finnish, you are not Finnish'. I have to go with them every day." (Rashid, 16)



Friendships and the potential of bridging social capital

- “Imagined” or “potential” friendships as a source of positive orientation
- Informational support
- Sense of inclusion
- “Generalized belonging”
- Wider networks
- Integrative bridges



- “Imagined” or “potential” friendships as a source of positive orientation

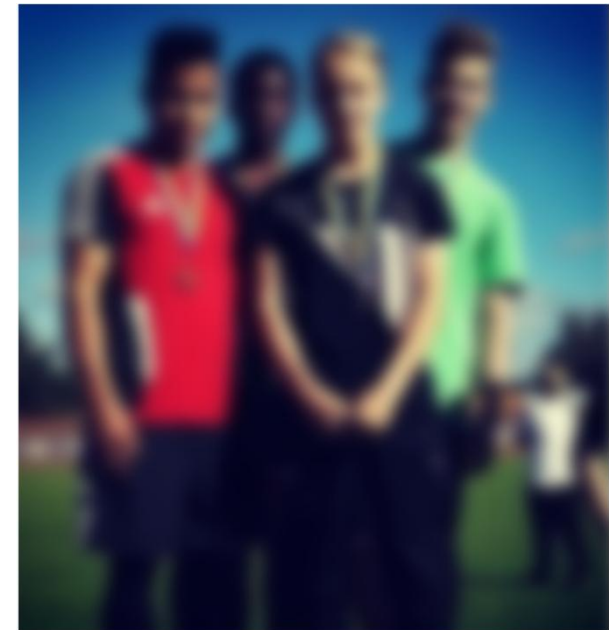
“This is not my good friend yet, this is just someone I say hi to, I don’t have Finnish friends yet. Maybe when I learn Finnish better, then I can go with the 9th grade group. Then I can ask them to help me. ... And I will do stuff with them, and then they will be my friends. I have many ‘hi’ friends in Finland, at school and the shopping centre, but I just put one name. ... Because he is nice to me, smiles, always says ‘hi how are you’. I think he is my friend maybe a little.” (Fahran, 16)

- Informational support

“This is Facebook, I put down two friends, girls, Finnish ... they are nice, girls, and sometimes they help me, if I have a question and I can’t, just some things, they help me. They are good, friends ... if I don’t know where it is, a place, for instance, if I don’t know how to say something in Finnish, they can tell me.” (Behnam, 17)

- Sense of inclusion

“Lauri, he is Finnish, and I don’t remember the other boys’ names. ... We hide from the teachers, and then Lauri yells, ‘teacher comes’, and then we all run. ... And then we go to the locker room. And sometimes we go to the toilet, and it’s small, and we all go, all the boys, and Lauri says ‘be quiet, teacher comes’, and then we laugh and then we run, all the boys, it’s fun.” (Azar, 15)



- “Generalized belonging”

“She visits me, and I go to her house, she has, two small girls and, I go to their house sometimes, and we play with them and we cook, and it is my Finnish friend ... and I like her and she likes me, and then, I think maybe Finnish people are nice.” (Hamasa, 15)

“I’m in the 9th grade now ... this is one boy, Javad, he talks to me, he is in my class, in 9th grade, he has been in Finland for a little more, a longer time, he speaks with all the boys and girls. This is a picture of my class and Javad say ‘come next to me’. Then they are all my friends. ... All my school, they are all my friends.” (Mehrab, 17)

- Wider networks

“My friend from home he is from Iraq, and because he plays football with me, and he speaks Arabia and in school he is friends with another Arab boy. And sometimes I go with them for a break, and sometimes we go to the centre, and he knows other boys and girls, Arabs, Finns, all, and they all talk to me and I meet their friends.” (Zemar, 17)

- Integrative bridges

“And his girlfriend is in upper secondary school, and she shows me the book. Then I say ‘it’s very difficult’ but I say ‘interesting’ and I want to learn, and then I want to go to upper secondary school. Then now I study really hard, Finnish language, then I get it, leaving certificate, then I can go to upper secondary school and learn, all the difficult books.” (Rashid, 16)

“The boss is Fahran’s girlfriend’s dad. And Fahran asked if I can work there too, and then I got it.” (Mehrab, 17)



Sum-up

- Friendship as a 'personal project' in a top-down living situation (cf. Ottosson et al. 2017)
- It is important that the asylum-seeking youths can maintain strong bonds to their immediate community of close friends, which can produce bonding social capital, *and* develop integrative links to broader friendships and communities, which can bring about bridging social capital.
- Bonding community may hinder the emergence of bridging networks, *but*
- bonding ties also work as routes to bridging relationships, *and*
- bonding friendships can be a 'safe base' from which to explore broader relationships and environments.
- The value of "potential friendships" needs to be recognized and emerging friendships promoted. Even encounters that may seem superficial can be sources of "generalized belonging" and inclusion.
- The focus on friendships positions the youths not only as refugees but as *young people*; not only as objects but as *agents*; not only as victims but as people with *strengths and resources*.



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