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**“Help goes around in a circle”:  
Young unaccompanied refugees’  
engagement in interpersonal relationships  
and its significance for resilience**

**Brighton Resilience Forum**

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# Purpose of this session

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- ❖ Present an outline of my research on the psychosocial health of young unaccompanied refugees in Norway
- ❖ Main focus on the article “Help goes around in a circle”, about relationships and resilience, but also some preliminary findings from a second article.
- ❖ Open up for a discussion on how my findings might resonate with and relate to your experiences and understandings.

# The smell of the Libyan sea

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- I don't like the smell of fish, because it reminds me of the Libyan Sea.

Nimoon

# About the research project

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- ❖ **Qualitative methodology**, 10-month period (participant observation, interviews and research workshops).
- ❖ Young unaccompanied refugees in Norway, their **experiences** of and **reflections** on their everyday lives and psychosocial health.
- ❖ Need for young **people's descriptions of their well-being** and their interpretations of what is helpful (Førde 2014).

# Vulnerability and resilience

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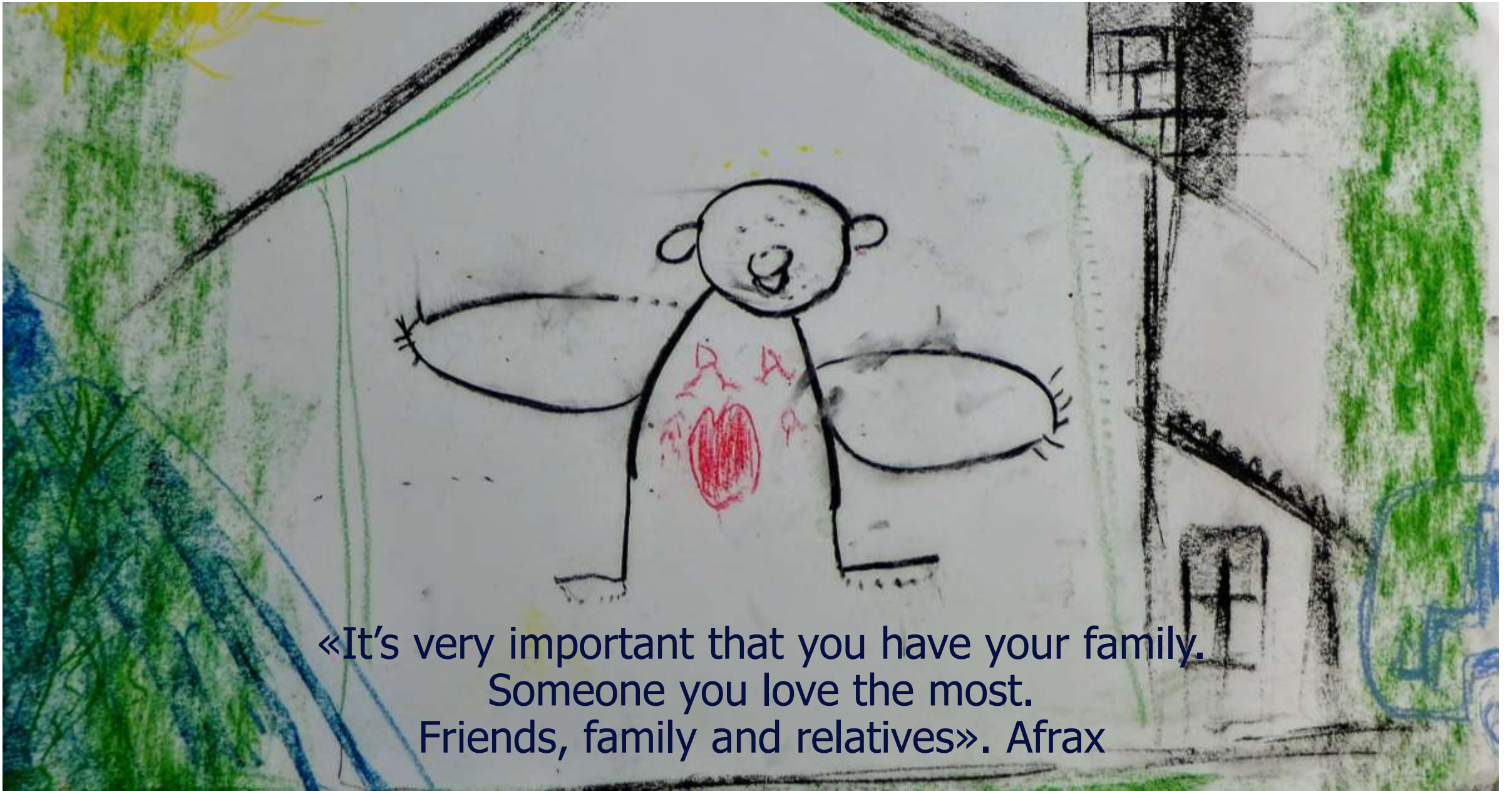
- ❖ Vulnerability, mental health problems
- ❖ Resilience: The capacity to do well in face of adversity.
- ❖ Individual, relational and structural/ socio-ecological dimensions.
- ❖ Relationships contribute significantly to resilience in children and young people (e.g., Luthar, 2006).
- ❖ Relational resilience: *Mutual* involvement and empathy (Jordan, 1992).



# Research questions

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- How do young unaccompanied refugees *actively* engage in relationships?
- What is the significance of these relationships in *doing well* following adversity?



«It's very important that you have your family.  
Someone you love the most.  
Friends, family and relatives». Afrax

# Findings: Significant relationships

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- ❖ Experiences of separation and/or loss
- ❖ Also efforts to build and maintain relationships.
- ❖ Relationships source of joy, safety and well-being - and of pain and worry.
  1. Actively seeking help
  2. Companionship, mutual support and sharing experiences
  3. The intention of helping others
  4. Kindness and social involvement
  5. Coping and individual goals as a starting point.



# Actively seeking help

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- **When I'm stressed, I call my dad** and talk to him. Even if I don't talk about why I'm stressed... but when I talk to him, **I feel better**. I feel **safe**. (...) Because dad and I can talk about everything, about **love**... (...) I **trust** my dad, because he would never do anything bad against me.

Abrihet

# Seeking help from practitioners

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- **When I was sad, I came to [the centre], and [Marie] was here. She tried to help me, talk to me. She showed me videos, colouring books, in order to make me happy... to make me able to live.**

Bahrawar

# Companionship and mutual support

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- I often help friends [...] if they need help [...] and they help me if I need it.

Samiira



# Sharing experiences can be challenging

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- **I don't like to tell [my friends] about my life** because my life is very painful. (...) I want to keep it inside me. (...) I don't want to give it to my friends. Afterwards, they'll get sad.

Samiira

# Sharing experiences may also be vital

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- Sometimes, **it's better to tell someone else, in order to breathe. To get help and recover. (...)** If you tell it to someone else, to friends, then you will feel better. Or to someone else (...) that you can trust.

Samiira

# The intention of helping others

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- I miss, or dream about, a better life, (...) but I always have this consciousness, this question, with me:  
**"Why am I here? Somebody else needs my help."**

Jawad

# Small acts of kindness

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- If you help someone, you feel either happy or proud, because if you helped someone who needed help, then he or she may perhaps help someone else [afterwards]. (...) [The help] goes **around in a circle.**

Sabriye

# Social engagement

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- I can only say that I'm trying my best to help. **It makes me feel good that I can do something.** It's a lot better than sitting at home and watching... I think about it, but (...) I'm trying to do something in practice.


Mirza



# Coping and individual goals: a starting point

- If you are going through difficult times, you cannot help anyone else. First, **you have to begin with yourself**, and then, you can help others.

Sabriye



How do my findings  
resonate with and  
relate to your  
experiences and  
understandings?

# Questions for discussion: Mutuality

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- ❖ What could be the drawback of overlooking the *active* role that children and young people play in building and maintaining relationships?
- ❖ When is mutuality not possible?
- ❖ What are your thoughts and experiences related to this helping families back home?



# Discussion

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- ❖ Different relationships significant in doing well.
- ❖ Active search for help and engagement in mutual relationships
- ❖ Need to receive support, but also for mutuality (Jordan, 1992).
- ❖ Balance receiving vs. giving support (Jordan, 1992).
- ❖ Involvement: Concern for family, friends, strangers.
- ❖ Aspiration to help others: Not only duty.
- ❖ Also need to contribute and belong (Jordan, 1992).
- ❖ Relationships contributed to well-being in different ways.

# Discussion - continued

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- ❖ Social desirability bias (Bryman, 2004)?
- ❖ Also responsibilities, pain and dilemmas.
- ❖ Relationships appeared meaningful.
- ❖ Resilience: a dynamic process (Hauser et al., 2006; Luthar, 2006).
- ❖ Predisposition to use supportive relationships (Hauser et al., 2006).
- ❖ Active involvement in building and maintaining relationships.
- ❖ Ability to reflect on their lives (Hauser et al., 2006).
- ❖ Adversity - could lead to disconnection but also to empathy.
- ❖ Limitations

# Socio-ecological dimensions

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“The concept of resilience has evolved, from an individual-level characteristic to a wider ecological notion that takes into account broader person–environment interactions (Hart et al., 2016).

(...) building on more recent and socio-ecologically contextualized definitions (...) we construct resilience as, “overcoming adversity, whilst also potentially subtly changing, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity” (Hart et al., 2016).

# Preliminary findings (part 2)

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- ❖ Rights and opportunities offered by the Norwegian (welfare) state such as residence permits, housing, schooling and professional help and support.
- ❖ Increasingly restrictive asylum policies
- ❖ Critical political rhetoric concerning refugees and immigrants
- ❖ Perceived lack of understanding of refugees
- ❖ A transnational context of political violence, repression and lack of fundamental human rights in homelands and in transition countries.

# Gratitude and concern

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- I cannot think only of myself. (...) I am grateful for what I have got here, schooling and residence permit, but to be honest, I always look more generally, at the other young people that have come here, those who have been deported, families who have lived here for several years and have been deported.

Jawad







## Lack of understanding

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- (...) there's a lot of negativity, because there's a lack of understanding. They don't understand that people are coming (...) because they have to. (...) When I read the comment sections, (...) I understand immediately that most people misunderstand, or lack an understanding of what a refugee is.

Mirza

# Participants' responses

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- 1) Focusing on their everyday lives and opportunities
- 2) Trying to make sense of politics and even normalising phenomena such as restrictive asylum policies and xenophobia
- 3) Reflecting critically on policies and practices
- 4) Getting socially engaged and trying to do something to change the situation

# Questions for further discussion: Structural dimensions of resilience

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- ❖ How are structural/socio-ecological phenomena affecting young unaccompanied refugees?
- ❖ What are the possibilities of social engagement and change and what are the obstacles?
- ❖ What are the implications for our understanding of resilience?



# Strengthening resilience

How can practitioners working with young unaccompanied refugees strengthen their resilience?

**Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 [www.boingboing.org.uk](http://www.boingboing.org.uk)**

	<b>BASICS</b>	<b>BELONGING</b>	<b>LEARNING</b>	<b>COPING</b>	<b>CORE SELF</b>
<b>SPECIFIC APPROACHES</b>	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Help child/YP understand their place in the world		Engage mentors for children/YP	
		Tap into good influences	Solving problems		Support the child/YP to understand other people's feelings
	Being safe	Keep relationships going			
	Access & transport	The more healthy relationships the better	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Fostering their interests	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
		Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope			
	Healthy diet	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Exercise and fresh air	Responsibilities & obligations			
		Enough sleep	Focus on good times and places	Have a laugh	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Play & leisure	Make sense of where child/YP has come from	Make friends and mix with other children/YPs		
		Being free from prejudice & discrimination		Predict a good experience of someone or something new	

**NOBLE TRUTHS**

**ACCEPTING**

**CONSERVING**

**COMMITMENT**

**ENLISTING**

# Implications for practice

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- ❖ Identify significant relationships together with the young people and encourage them to continue building relationships.
- ❖ Build on their capacity for agency, involvement and mutual support.
- ❖ Encourage empathy, solidarity and wish to do something positive for others.
- ❖ Pay attention to structural dimensions that influence young unaccompanied refugees' lives.
- ❖ Address the need for social recognition of the young peoples' experiences of violence and injustice - in the society at large.
- ❖ Reflect on the limitations of individual social work and the need for change, not only adaptation.

# Comments & questions

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The screenshot shows the Emerald Insight website interface. At the top, the logo 'emerald insight' is on the left, and navigation links 'Welcome Guest user', 'Reset Authentication', 'Register', and 'Login' are on the right. A search bar with the placeholder 'Enter your search terms here' and an 'Advanced search' link is positioned below the navigation. The main content area features the journal title 'International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care' and its category 'Health and Social Care'. A 'Table Of Contents: Volume 15 Issue 4' section highlights a specific article: '"Help goes around in a circle": young unaccompanied refugees\* engagement in interpersonal relationships and its significance for resilience'. The article is by Kristina Johansen and Ingunn Studsrød. A PDF icon indicates the file size is 210 KB, and a 'Reports & Permissions' link is visible. To the right of the article, a small map graphic is shown. Further right, the journal's ISSN (1747-9894), online date (2005), copyright holder (Emerald Publishing Limited), and open access status (hybrid) are listed.

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