



# 5 Years of Welcome and Community 2020 - 2025

*Building Belonging Together*



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## Foreword from the Members

Dear friends, members, and supporters of Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle,

As we celebrate five years of ERSC, we are deeply moved by all that we have built – and look with joy, hope and excitement towards the future.

In times increasingly marked by division, ERSC continues to be a living example of the strength and beauty of diversity. We are proud that ERSC continues to demonstrate how people of different backgrounds, faiths, and experiences can live peacefully – and beautifully – together.

At the heart of what we do lies this simple truth: everyone deserves a safe place to call home, a community to belong to, and the chance to contribute to something meaningful.

Our mission has always been to walk with people seeking sanctuary – not as distant helpers, but as neighbours, friends, and co-creators of belonging. We don't just support – we stand alongside. In our work, we don't deliver welcome: we co-create it. We believe that welcome and community are built, one small act of care at a time and through reciprocity - by humans, with humans, for humans.

From our beginnings in May 2020 as a small group of Edinburgh friends determined to share the city we love, we have grown into a registered charity with a warm, diverse, and passionately engaged membership. Together, we have opened safe, legal pathways for refugee families and individuals through the UK Community Sponsorship scheme. We have provided practical support, from housing and ESOL tuition to navigating schools, health services, and employment. And beyond logistics, we've built real connections – through shared meals, advocacy, and community events.

We also carry in our work a deep awareness of the journey that brings people here: the trauma, the uncertainty, the courage. Our circle was born from the lived and learned experience of those perils – and from our belief that welcoming others is part of a long, global legacy: people fighting for safe, legal routes to sanctuary. That understanding continues to guide everything we do.

All of this amazing work - the uncountable positive memories - has only been possible because of your care, your time, your energy, and your belief in our mission. Whether you have volunteered, donated, advocated, or simply lifted us up in your thoughts – thank you. Your commitment turns compassion into real, everyday action.

As we look ahead, we are inspired. There are new homes to open, new friendships to nurture, and new stories of welcome to write. Let us keep doing this together - as we have been - with warmth, humour, solidarity and hope.

With love and solidarity

*Fae Mira Gerlach*

On behalf of the Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle Board & Community

## Foreword from the Members

Hello lovely ERSC Community,

This year, ERSC achieved a landmark success by doubling its operational impact, successfully managing to receive two families within a single twelve-month period—a significant increase from the organisation's usual one family annually. This achievement challenged and expanded the organisation's standard operating model, appreciating the strength of the collective efforts and dedication of everyone involved. The ability to assist twice the number of beneficiaries highlights the vital role each team member plays in the mission to provide durable solutions for refugees facing increasing insecurities and difficulties in making ends meet in Kenya and other parts of the world.

The organisation's most recently welcomed families were overwhelmed with gratitude for the comprehensive support they received, which addressed all necessary requirements for their relocation to the UK. I hope more individuals and families benefit from this awesome opportunity come next year and in the future.

Through a robust, collectively built support system, ERSC facilitates the integration of families and individuals into an entirely new community. The organisation redeems their hope by securing safe housing, linking them to vital opportunities, and providing essential support, despite their previous experiences of turmoil where they come from.

The transition process orchestrated by ERSC is holistic, connects individuals with essential support groups, leisure and recreational opportunities, assists with school enrolment, and bridges access to necessary medical support for their mental well-being and a pursuit of a productive and meaningful life. The organisation's efforts ensure every individual has a foundation from which to thrive, utilise opportunities, integrate fully into their new lives with dignity, and most importantly, feel part of a reliable family structure provided by ERSC.

Personally I have been receiving all sorts of support needed from the team and the host community ever since I came to Scotland. My hope for a brighter future has been rejuvenated, I am over joyed by the love and care. The hospitality of the whole team deserves an applause at this five years journey celebration.

I am so thankful for everyone's effort in making the UK a better and safe place for all.

*Rose Tebugulwa*

## Our Story & Strategy

The Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle (ERSC) emerged in 2020 at a time when global displacement was at record levels and local communities across the UK were beginning to explore the potential of Community Sponsorship as a practical, rights-based response. Founded by a small group of residents from diverse backgrounds — including people with lived experience of displacement — the Circle was created with a clear purpose: to build a locally rooted, community-driven model of welcome for people seeking sanctuary.



From the outset, ERSC positioned itself not only as a sponsorship group but as a collective committed to a particular approach to welcome. Our work has always been grounded in an understanding that displacement is both a structural and deeply personal experience, shaped by trauma, loss, resilience, and hope. This insight, held by several members with lived experience and by those who have worked in regions affected by conflict or restrictive asylum systems, forms the basis of how we design and deliver support.

Over the past five years, we have developed into a registered charity with a growing and varied membership, encompassing skills in community work, health, housing, education, legal practice, hospitality, research, safeguarding, and the arts.

# Our Core Principles

ERSC's strategy is anchored in several interconnected approaches:

## Trauma-Informed Practice

Recognising the short- and long-term impacts of displacement, and ensuring interactions, planning, and support avoid re-traumatisation and promote safety and agency.

## Rights-Based Thinking

Situating our work within international human rights frameworks and affirming that people seeking sanctuary are rights-holders, not beneficiaries.

## Person-Centred Support

Prioritising autonomy, informed choice, and recognition of the strengths and aspirations individuals bring, not just their vulnerabilities.

## Inclusivity and Strength-Based Work

Ensuring barriers to participation are reduced, cultural and community differences are respected, and the skills of volunteers and resettled families alike are valued, nurtured and integrated.

## Systems-Critical Analysis

Informed by collective experience of the UK's restrictive asylum landscape, acknowledging that individual support must be paired with outspoken solidarity and broader advocacy for structural change.

# Timeline of Our Journey

September 2021



Arrival of Family 1.

July 2020



ERSC registered as a charity.

March 2023



Arrival of Family 2.

Arrival of Family 3.



August 2025



Arrival of Family 4.

July 2025



Founding of our sister charity:  
Edinburgh Community Sponsorship  
Homes (ECSH)

## How Our Story Shapes Strategic Focus

While our early work focused primarily on sponsoring and supporting families during their first year in Edinburgh, our experience has shown that genuine integration, stability, and flourishing require longer-term thinking and an awareness of broader systemic pressures — particularly in housing, employment, language provision, and access to community spaces. While our practical support is particularly intensive in the first months after arrival, we are confident that “community” doesn’t have an end date and that the magic happens where trust, relationship and belonging is built consistently and open- endedly.

This understanding directly informs our strategic priorities for the coming years.



# Our Strategic Priorities

## 1. Expanding Sponsorship Capacity

Building on the successful resettlement of two families and two individuals, ERSC aims to increase its capacity for further sponsorships. This involves strengthening governance structures, securing housing and financial resources, enhancing training, and ensuring our operational model can scale up without losing the personalised support and community base that is central to our work. We are looking forward to welcoming two more families in 2026 and to continuing to support Refugee Community Sponsorship Glasgow in welcoming their first family. We will continue to promote Community Sponsorship across Scotland and the UK and will offer support any groups that get in touch.



# Our Strategic Priorities

## 2. Strengthening Welcoming Environments Across Scotland

ERSC now plays a role not only as a sponsor group but as part of a wider ecosystem of organisations shaping community-led welcome. Our strategy includes supporting emerging sponsorship groups, sharing learning, and working collaboratively with charities, community initiatives, and local institutions to broaden the reach of inclusive, community-based welcome across Scotland. We currently Co-chair the Edinburgh New Scots Integration Network, engaging with and building power with organisations across Edinburgh that support New Scots.



## 3. Embedding Inclusive Decision-Making

We are committed to ensuring that resettled families and volunteers contribute meaningfully to organisational decisions. This requires formalised mechanisms for participation, regular consultation, and governance structures that reflect the diversity of our community. We are excited to have started our Family Committee which will now support us in choosing, arranging and prioritising activities and other support.



## Our Strategic Priorities

### 4. Contributing to National Advocacy and Systems Change

Given the persistent challenges within the UK's asylum and resettlement systems, ERSC will continue engaging with national partners to advocate for humane, trauma-informed, and rights-based policy. We will use our insights to inform the Community Sponsorship Alliance and contribute to wider public conversations about safe routes and community-led welcome.



### 5. Responding to Housing Challenges

Housing remains one of the most significant obstacles to sustainable resettlement. In recognition of Edinburgh's acute housing pressures, ERSC is exploring long-term solutions, including potential investment or fundraising models for securing stable, affordable, trauma-informed accommodation for future families. We have been successful in launching our new sibling charity, Edinburgh Community Sponsorship Homes, with hopes to purchase a one bedroom flat in Spring 2026.

## What We've Done (Activities & Achievements)

### Education & Employment

- Supported primary school and secondary school sign up, access to school uniforms, bus passes and free school meals, supported navigating the school system
- Supported families in navigating post-school opportunities and access to college education
- Facilitated access to sport and creative activities for children
- Offered at home weekly Maths and English support for children
- Supported College registration for 5 adults, including ESOL, Early Childhood Practice and Nursing and Health Care
- Supported access to meaningful volunteering opportunities for 3 adults (including ceilidh volunteering, Project Esperanza and One World Shop)
- Referred to further support via Volunteer Edinburgh, X
- Arranged and resourced access to Food Hygiene training
- Helped creating CV's, sending applications and preparing for interviews
- Referred to Smart Works for further interview preparation
- Supplied references for Employment
- Financially supported access to driving lessons
- Helped with signing up for drivers license for 5 adults



## What We've Done (Activities & Achievements)

### ESOL

- Arranged weekly ESOL support focused on Drivers license test
- Provided twice weekly (1 adult) and once weekly (1 adult) in house ESOL sessions
- Financed ESOL material (including college books)
- Provided Netflix accounts for informal language learning
- Referred to SPACE for IELTS ESOL classes



## What We've Done (Activities & Achievements)

### Benefits and Finances:

- Signed up for all relevant benefits (including Universal Credit, PIP, Carers Allowance, etc)
- Accompanied all 6 adults to job center and other benefits appointments
- Supported with disputes and advocated where needed
- Supported with understanding the benefits system
- Referred to Advice Shop and many other support services
- Registered bank accounts and savings accounts for all 6 adults.
- Supported access to Discretionary Housing Payments, Warm Homes Discounts and other resources
- Supported learning to use online banking
- Supported initial living costs as well as with financial shortcoming due to benefits delays
- Supported with budgeting and income maximisation



### Health

- Registered all adults and children with GP and Dentist
- Accompanied to appointments
- Registered and accompanied to further specialised medical appointments
- Assisted with using pharmacies and accessing subscriptions
- Advocated for translation and interpretation as well as timely and appropriate access to support
- Supported with purchasing items relevant for health conditions (such as glasses, walkers etc.)
- Signed up for Edinburgh Leisure Access Card, swimming classes (4 adults) and therapeutic surfing sessions
- Arrange bikes (via Bikes for Refugees) for all adults and children, arrange bike riding classes for 4 adults

## What We've Done (Activities & Achievements)

### Family Support and Housing

- Arranged digital welcome packs (phones, laptops, sim cards) for all arriving individuals
- Supported with digital skills (including referring to The Welcoming), navigating Google Maps and other relevant phone apps
- Cleaned, decorated and prepared 4 homes for arrivals
- Helped with accessing Food and Clothes Banks, learning about charity shops and Vinted/Facebook Marketplace
- Helped with decorating and refurbishing flats
- Liaised with STAR Edinburgh and Salaam initiative for Christmas and Eid gifts
- Referred to Energy Advice via ChangeWorks and The Welcoming
- Assisted all adults to sign up for relevant Utilities and Council Tax
- Supported with initial utilities costs
- Supported with sign up for Warm Home Discount and Council Tax exemption
- Supported with sign up for Voting and education about Voting Rights
- Accessed Edinburgh Trust grants
- Supported understanding Renters' Rights and liaising with Landlords for repairs/requests etc
- Signed up for Library cards and facilitated access to library services
- Attended and celebrated birthdays and milestones
- Registered for travel documents
- Arranged a Camping Trip
- Arranged a London Trip for 1 Family
- Supported with booking travel for family visits (including booking special assistance)
- Supported with bus passes for 6 months for all adults as well as with accessing free bus passes via college
- Spoke together with Families in Scottish Parliament and Glasgow City Hall
- Arranged trips to: Botanic Garden, Zoo, Royal Yacht Britannia, Loch Lomond, Kelpies, Wallace Monument, Stirling Castle, Arthurs Seat, National Museum, Football Games, Fringe shows, Ceilidhs, Glasgow, Tapestry of Scotland, Firth of Forth Boattrip, North Berwick, Edinburgh Peoples Museum, Beltane Festival, Three Hares Woodland, Gorgie City Farm, Canal Boat. Edinburgh Christmas Market, Safari Park, Climbing, Circus shows, cinema, Portobello Beach, Sea Life
- Collaborated with Families on Fundraising events
- Assisted in creating fundraising pages for causes the families are passionate about and help fundraise (for example Women's 10k run)
- Organised Syrian Supper Club in collaboration with Bikes for Refugees
- Annual End of Year party, Summer Barbecue and Eid celebrations
- Activities such as: crafting afternoons, baking sessions, pumpkin craving, bowling, ice hockey games and ice skating
- Provided emotional support through crisis, anxiety, family tragedies, mental and physical ill-health, and other struggles

## Looking Ahead

ERSC's story is one of steady, intentional growth. While rooted in community action and solidarity, our strategy ensures that our work is structured, sustainable, and aligned with our core values. As we move forward, we remain committed to refining our model, strengthening partnerships, and contributing to a wider culture of welcome across Scotland – one that recognises diversity as a source of collective strength and honours the rights and dignity of everyone seeking sanctuary.

Together, we are weaving a Scotland where welcome is not a programme but a way of life; where newcomer and neighbour stand side-by-side; where people's gifts, skills, and contributions are celebrated; and where belonging is built—one connection, one step, one friendship at a time.

### **The Next Chapter (2025–2026 and Beyond)**

- Launch of Family Committee (families guiding ERSC strategy).
- Arrival of Family 5 (March 2026).
- Preparation for Family 6 (once ECSH acquires a one-bed property).
- Exhibition with STAR Edinburgh in March 2026.
- Continue and expand our programme of social activities.
- Support the expansion of Community Sponsorship in Scotland.
- Continue to stand in solidarity with people arriving in the UK as asylum seekers and the groups supporting them.

## Acknowledgements & Partners

As a grass-roots organisation, every ERSC achievement comes together from a team of passionate people who decide to put their time and hearts into creating a real change. We would like to extend our greatest thank you to all volunteers, past and present, for creating and being a part of Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle.



Annette Gilchrist  
Sheilagh Guthrie  
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Robin Taylor  
Gail Williamson  
Ruairidh Alexander  
Raisa Ahmed  
Rania Qussasi  
Eilis Armstrong  
Zina Howard  
Gill Simpson  
Jamie Gracie  
Kajsa Arnlund  
Irsa Kadilli  
Madaleine Dimingo  
Ewa Katarzyna Miko  
Cecily Burnett-Stuart  
Erin Smith  
Lyle Aiken

Deirdre Fitzpatrick  
Lydia McQuaker  
Maria-Sofia Ioannidou  
Kerri Bissoonauth  
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Mehreen Qureshi  
Renite Gosal  
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Sam Smith  
Dan Martin  
Heather Sherriffs  
Eliza Poor  
Kate Deans  
Ahmad Farghaly  
Lorna Perry  
Laila Barakat  
Wan Bakarat  
Ahin Bakarat  
Lara Balkwill  
Malak Albakri  
Rawan Ammar

Svenja Niederfranke  
Jessica Leech  
Georgia Cole  
Alice Agazzi  
Fiona Oliver-Larkin  
Ciara Regan  
Sara MacKinnon  
Mohamed Tonsy  
Kana Emery  
Chantelle Lalli  
Romany Howarth  
Louise Taylor  
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Zozan Yasar  
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Gisele Jetti  
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Kaan Hauser  
Carrie McAlinden  
Robert Abel  
Allan Traynor



## Acknowledgements & Partners

We believe in the power of coming together - and we are proud to be a part of an ever-growing network of community sponsorship groups across the country, actively creating hope and showing what is possible when people unite.

We collaborate with organisations who share our heart for welcome:

- **Groundswell Scotland:** providing therapeutic surfing sessions for women.
- **Bikes for Refugees:** Providing bikes to refugees and kindly hosting our Supper Club
- **Student Action for Refugees (STAR):** empowering young people to act, advocate, and support a fairer refugee system. Our enthusiastic partners in fundraising, exhibitions and more.
- **Community Sponsorship Alliance:** enabling local groups to lead in welcoming and resettling refugee families.
- **Edinburgh New Scots Integration Network:** connecting community-led initiatives across Edinburgh to share learning, grow together, and amplify good practice.
- **RESET, Sponsor Refugees and International Rescue Committee (IRC):** Supporting Community Sponsorship groups across the UK to welcome families.
- **City of Edinburgh Council:** Continuing to approve and support Community Sponsorship.



## Community Stories

### Case Study 1: Confidence, Connection & Contribution

ERSC's work demonstrates that Community Sponsorship creates benefits far beyond immediate resettlement support. It generates opportunities, confidence, and mutual growth for everyone involved. The experience of A and O illustrates how community-led welcome can build pathways that are both personal and collective, shaping long-term outcomes for volunteers and newly arrived families alike.

A joined ERSC as a volunteer in 2021, after many years as a stay-at-home parent. Although she had extensive life experience and strong interpersonal skills, she felt unsure about re-entering the workforce and hesitant about her own employability. As she became involved in activities ranging from family support to community events, her confidence grew steadily. Volunteering gave her a supportive environment to use her strengths, develop new skills, and reconnect with a sense of purpose.



## Community Stories

Over time, this renewed confidence translated into a readiness to apply for work. With encouragement from fellow volunteers and the practical experience she had gained through ERSC, A successfully applied for a role in a charity providing childcare services. This transition marked a significant milestone — a shift from feeling uncertain about returning to work to stepping into paid employment in a field aligned with her values.

Four years later, in 2025, A found herself supporting O, a newly arrived woman resettled through ERSC. Through close, trust-based support, the team learned that O also held a strong interest in childcare. Working collaboratively, volunteers were able to secure a place for her on a college course that leads to a recognised childcare qualification.

Around this time, vacancies emerged at A's workplace. ERSC supported O through each stage of the recruitment process: developing her CV, preparing her application, arranging a referral to Smart Works for interview coaching and professional clothing, and offering consistent encouragement throughout.



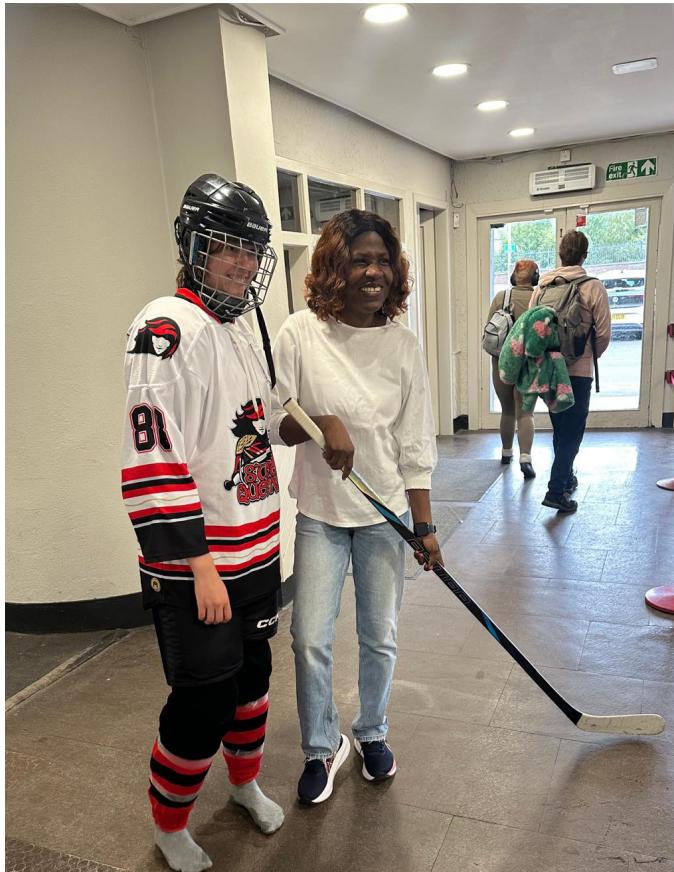
O was offered the job. She is now employed alongside A, working in a sector that aligns with her aspirations and offers stability, professional development, and the opportunity to contribute to her new community.

## Community Stories

This case highlights several aspects of ERSC's impact:

- Community sponsorship supports volunteers as well as resettled families, offering pathways into new roles, skills, and relationships.
- Trust-based relationships can reveal aspirations that might otherwise remain hidden, enabling tailored, person-centred support.
- Collaboration between volunteers, employers, training providers, and specialist organisations creates real and long-lasting opportunities.
- Resettlement is not a one-directional process: volunteers and families support, inspire, and empower one another, strengthening the wider community in the process.

The story of A and O demonstrates how community-led welcome generates expanding circles of confidence, opportunity, and solidarity. It is a reminder that when people are supported to recognise their strengths — whether they have lived in a place for decades or arrived only recently — communities become more resilient, more connected, and more capable of creating meaningful change together.



## Community Stories

### Case Study 2: Support, Adventure & Shared Activities

When D arrived in Edinburgh in 2023 through Community Sponsorship with her mother, she had no English and very limited familiarity with life in the UK. One of ERSC's first priority was to ensure she had the language support she needed. We enrolled her in ESOL classes at college, but also recognised that structured classroom learning alone can be overwhelming for someone newly arrived and still adjusting to a different culture, environment, and pace of life.

To create a more supportive and personalised learning environment, volunteers began visiting D at home each week for one-to-one English sessions. These consistent visits helped build trust, routine, and confidence. They also provided an important social anchor: reliable, friendly faces who could meet D where she was, work at her pace, and explore topics that felt relevant and engaging to her.



## Community Stories



Part of effective, person-centred support is noticing what brings someone joy and motivation. In D's case, it quickly became clear that she loved adventure, trying new things, and being active. When she discovered that one of the ESOL volunteers was a surfer, she immediately expressed a wish to experience surfing herself. Volunteers took her interest seriously and explored what might be possible.

Volunteer L was able to identify free swimming lessons through a local provider, giving D the foundational skills and comfort in the water needed for any future ocean-based activity. Meanwhile, Volunteer A, drawing on her own networks in the Scottish surfing community, connected with Groundswell Scotland — an organisation specialising in therapeutic surfing for women. She also identified a grant that could fully fund D's participation.



What began as a single opportunity for D evolved into something much wider. ERSC organised two group days with Groundswell Scotland, enabling D and other women resettled through ERSC to take part in a therapeutic surfing session. For most, it was their first time in the sea. The day was transformative — creating shared memories, moments of empowerment, and a sense of freedom.



## Community Stories

The impact extended to volunteers as well. Experiencing the sea together, learning new skills side by side, and sharing in collective excitement strengthened relationships and helped blur the traditional boundaries between “supporter” and “supported.” This is a hallmark of Community Sponsorship at its best: activities that foster reciprocity and connection.

ERSC is now collaborating with Groundswell Scotland to secure continued funding for monthly therapeutic surfing opportunities for women in our community. What began with D’s curiosity has grown into an ongoing partnership that benefits multiple families, widens access to wellbeing activities, and builds bridges between resettled families, volunteers, and local organisations.



## Community Stories

This case study demonstrates several key aspects of ERSC's impact:

- Language support becomes more effective when paired with trust-building relationships and meaningful activities.
- Taking individual interests seriously can unlock wider opportunities — not only for one person but for whole groups.
- Volunteers' networks, skills, and personal passions can become powerful tools for inclusion and wellbeing.
- Shared experiences — especially those that are new to everyone involved — strengthen community bonds in profound ways.
- Community sponsorship can create unexpected partnerships, bringing together organisations, volunteers, and families around shared goals.

Through D's journey, ERSC's model of support shows its full depth: beyond English lessons, housing, and practical assistance, it creates space for confidence, joy, and connection — the foundations of long-term wellbeing and genuine belonging.



here's to the next 5 years of welcome...



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 @communitysponsorshiphomes

 Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle

 Edinburgh Community Sponsorship Homes



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