The Possibilities for Connections and Connections Being Made Between Newcomers and Locals in Germany

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About the author

I spent nine weeks in Germany between November 2016 and January 2017, with the support of an Australian-German Association (AGA) and Goethe Institute Fellowship.

I conducted research in Berlin, Hamburg, and Hoyerswerda to find out what connections are being made, and what are the possibilities for connection between Newcomers and Locals in Germany.

My first foray into the German language was by way of Language Other Than English (LOTE) classes in Grade 6 and 7 at Jindalee State Primary School in Brisbane. During secondary school, I completed a German Immersion Programme, followed by a German Extension course, at Kenmore State High School. In Grade 9, I recited 'Rosen, Tulpen, Kieselstein' by Dorothée Kreusch-Jacob at the Goethe Verse poetry speaking competition. I'd like to offer an apology, retrospectively, for my lacklustre performance. I recall feeling some sympathy at the time, and I still do, for the judge who patiently sat and listened to that performance. After high school, I wondered if I would ever use my German skills again …

I hold a Masters in International Affairs from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva and Bachelor degrees in Arts and Laws from the University of Queensland. I completed the second year of my Masters programme on exchange at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin in 2013/2014. I work as a lawyer in Melbourne.

Contents

1. Introduction

1. It's a luxury to have nine weeks to think about one thing. I arrived in Berlin on 20 November 2016, in time to complete a four-week German language intensive class before Christmas.

2. On my first morning, I walked through the Tiergarten, along Unter den Linden and past the Alte National Galerie on my way to the Goethe Institute. I was delighted to be back in Berlin. The last of the autumnal leaves, blue skies, crisp air, Berlin's particular smell, a sense of history and open space wherever you go.

3. I really enjoyed German classes at the Goethe Institute. Our class was made up of students from all over the world, and our teacher Martin was excellent. Martin would begin a lesson by asking a question. The answer to that question would lead into tangents and discussions on topics far, far away from our starting point. There is something very satisfying about constructing and deconstructing language, building meaning by piecing smaller components together, or deriving meaning by breaking something complex into its component parts. I loved that some German words made perfect sense to some people in our class. While for others, there were no neat translations or parallels in other languages.

4. During the German course, each person in our class presented a 'Referat'. The topics were diverse – from the symbolic value of the owl, to a particular kind of Argentinian tea, to exploring ideas of what 'mother tongue' means when you have Iranian and Polish parents and you grew up in France. I spoke about the ANZAC biscuit – the (contested) history of the biscuit, and of the ANZACS.

5. One afternoon in our final week of German class, I arrived a few minutes late to find Martin talking to a student from Japan about what he had eaten for breakfast – apparently he had found a 'traditional English breakfast' somewhere in Berlin. Martin had drawn various kinds of eggs on the board. Fried. Scrambled. Hard-boiled. As someone who really enjoys a boiled egg, I was delighted to find that they had made their way into our German class. The discussion moved to beans. Martin drew different kinds of beans on the board. Green beans. Runner beans. Baked beans. I had just been to an interview with an organisation that described itself as a 'Verein'. I wasn't entirely sure that I understood the concept of a 'Verein' and so at the end of the English breakfast discussion I asked Martin. Martin wrote the word 'Verein' on the board and gave a short explanation. I took a mental snapshot of the board that afternoon. It was a wonderful example of the full gamut of topics that we covered in those classes – from a quiet boiled egg, to a baked bean, to a 'Verein'. Wonderful.

6. I also took full advantage of the Goethe Institute's cultural programme. I loved wandering through galleries in Mitte on a freezing, rainy Saturday afternoon, to find an exhibition of pictures made up of photos that had been folded into 3D pieces, and walking through Prenzlauerberg on a freezing but sunny December morning, past the Wasserturm and the old breweries and wineries and bookshops.

7. For the first month, I lived in a homestay in Prenzlauerberg with Veronika. Veronika was open and welcoming, always extending an invitation to dinners at her house, or to Advent celebrations with her neighbours. In the weeks before I left for Berlin, I would never have imagined spending a Sunday afternoon eating cake and listening to two small German children play Christmas carols on their recorders. Or, breakfasting on Lindner goodness and raspberries with a female journalist from Lebanon who was also staying with Veronika while she visited Berlin. Or, sitting next to an engaging woman at a dinner party only to discover someway into the conversation that she is Rudi Dutschke's wife.

8. And then there were my own adventures: trips to the cinema to watch films in German, visits to galleries and museums, a trip to the Berliner Philharmonie to hear a choir of more than seventy voices, an extensive amount of general wandering, navigating the policies and procedures of public swimming pools in Berlin, and feeling quietly indignant about laissez-faire approaches to lap swimming. This is why we travel!

2. Background

The idea

9. When I first pitched my project to the AGA and Goethe Institute, the topic was to be 'Positive encounters between asylum seekers and their new communities'. Just before I left, I shifted the focus of my project to two questions. I wanted to find out:

    (i) What are the possibilities for connections between Newcomers and Locals in Germany? and/or
    (ii) What connections are being made between Newcomers and Locals in Germany?

10. Given the number of people who have arrived in Germany seeking asylum, particularly since the European summer of 2015, I was keen to find out what connections were being made between individual Newcomers and Locals. I wanted to collect stories from Newcomers and Locals about the possibilities for connection and connections being made in Germany.

11. During the project and in this paper, I used the word 'Newcomers' to describe people who have come to Germany as asylum seekers and refugees, and the word 'Locals' to describe the existing communities in Germany. Over the course of my project, I heard many different people use many different words to describe the people involved in these connections. 'Newcomers' and 'Locals' are useful words because they capture people who have arrived and are seeking asylum, as well as people who have been granted refugee status or another status. Likewise, 'Locals' is broad enough to reflect that the existing communities are made up of German people, and people from other backgrounds.

12. Before I left for Germany, and during my time away, many people commented that it would be interesting to see what connections are being made in the former East Germany and how this compares to approaches in the former West Germany. I did not have the time available to me to do justice to such a research question and so, although my project does include a story about a connection made in Hoyerswerda, that story appears in this project simply as an example of one of many connections being made.

13. This collection of stories is largely one of positive encounters. But of course this space is not without complexities, difficulties, and negative encounters. All of these aspects were apparent in discussions overheard on the U-Bahn, in media reporting following the lorry attack on a Berlin Christmas market in December 2016, in general discussions about the German elections in 2017 and the rise of the far right party Alternativ für Deutschland, and in the experiences of Newcomers and Locals themselves.

Objectives

14. I hope that this collection of stories might spark an idea or inspire someone to think about creating or generating their own possibilities for connections between Newcomers and Locals in Australia or elsewhere.

15. I also hoped that this project would culminate in a collection of personal stories, told at eye level by Newcomers and Locals. Such a collection offers a more personal perspective on the topic of 'asylum seekers and refugees' – a topic that exists in much of the general public discourse as a fairly abstract and impersonal concept.

What did I do?

16. I met with Newcomers and Locals in Berlin, Hamburg and Hoyerswerda. I interviewed Newcomers and Locals in their homes, workplaces, and cafes. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. Some of the interviews were in English, some in German, and some in Arabic translated into German.

17. I had nine weeks to complete my research and because I started my project in Berlin, most of the stories are Berlin based. This is by no means a comprehensive collection of what is happening in Germany or even in Berlin right now. My project was necessarily limited by time and geography. These stories reflect the people and places I was able to access in the short time available to me. It took time to find out about the connections being made, to make contact, to establish my own connection, and then to meet with Newcomers and Locals to hear their stories.

18. In some instances, I emailed people and organisations to introduce the project, and myself and to request an interview. I was also lucky to be introduced to a number of the Newcomers and Locals by friends and connections in Berlin.

19. For example, I was put in contact with a journalist in Berlin, Cosima Jagow-Duda, who has significant experience, contacts and interest in this topic. Cosima was incredibly generous with her time – inviting me for dinner with her family when I first arrived, making introductions, and taking me along to a German language class for Newcomers in Marienfelde. I went along to a Thursday morning class almost every week while I was in Berlin. On the walk from the S-Bahn to the German class was the Marienfelde Refugee Centre Museum. Learning about the history of Marienfelde was an important part of being able to place the arrival of Newcomers to Germany today in historical context.

20. I am grateful to Cosima, and also to Inge, and Nicolas for sharing their connections. I am also extremely grateful to all of the people who shared their time, personal stories, and thoughts with me, often in circumstances where we had met only once or twice: Hussam, Nebras, Lasse, Leonie, Konstanz, Tilman, Melissa, Sarah, Teresa, Sven, Carmen, Nasser and Jasmin Kassem, Walid, Hanna, Feras, Ali, Lana, Angelika, Farzana and Linn.

21. I struggled with how much to press people for details that they did not volunteer themselves, especially about their reasons for coming to Germany, family members, and their journeys. In the end, I think that the way people navigate their own histories, that is, what they share, how they share it, and what they leave out also tells a kind of story of its own.

3. The possibilities for connection, and the connections being made

A. Café Saliba, Hamburg

22. *On my first weekend in Berlin, I meet with friends for dinner. Inge tells me that she has a friend in Hamburg whose father, Hanna Saliba, has recently started a café run by Syrian Newcomers. Inge puts me in contact with her friend, who puts me in contact with his parents. Hanna Saliba suggests I meet him in Hamburg the following Sunday afternoon. The Café Saliba story is about a very recent space that has been created in a Hamburg neighbourhood, where Newcomers from Syria and Locals have the possibility to connect with one another.*

The train to Hamburg

23. I share a train compartment with a family and two women, who picnic their way from Berlin to Hamburg. It's grey and rainy. I stare out at flat farmland and pine forests and wonder how this will go. Hamburg Hauptbahnhof is busy. I hop on the U-Bahn to Chrisus Kirche. It's a short walk to Eppendorfer Weg, past a bike path that winds along a canal, and through a neighbourhood of white apartment buildings and small independent shops, including one selling Scandinavian specialties. Hanna later tells me that this neighbourhood is one for small things starting up.

Hanna Saliba

24. Hanna Saliba is from Syria but has lived in Germany for forty-five years. He used to captain freight ships, travelling all over the world, and this is why he moved to Hamburg. Hanna stopped working on ships when his family was young. He would be away for eight or nine months and back for two months, and when he returned, his children wouldn't know him anymore. Hanna used to visit Syria a few times each year, but since the war started, he hasn't been back. Hanna says that no one could really have anticipated the war.

25. Hanna opened Restaurant Saliba in the Alster Arkaden on the Hamburg waterfront in 1985. At that time, the Alster Arkaden was a very different area and not as bustling as it is today.

Café Saliba

26. In October 2016, Hanna opened a Syrian café at 91 Eppendorfer Weg. So many Syrian people came to Restaurant Saliba asking Hanna for work that he decided to open the café. If people hadn't been asking for work, he probably would not have started something like this.

27. Fifteen people work in Restaurant Saliba and four people work here at the cafe. The goal is to make the café a self-sustaining project. Hanna is looking for young Syrian people to work in the café - people who are not already too established in a particular direction and who feel a connection to the food that they are making. If he finds the right kinds of people, Hanna will consider opening another café elsewhere in Hamburg.

28. The neighbourhood is important to the success of the project. Hanna describes this neighbourhood as 'open' and 'cultivated'. The cafe is not just about jobs for people who have come to Germany from Syria. Rather, it's about creating connections and exchange between the employees and the neighbourhood. Through this kind of connection and exchange, the Newcomers can also improve their German.

29. The space at 91 Eppendorfer Weg used to be a Greek Restaurant, but it's been renovated and Hanna has a ten-year lease. Hanna tells me that it's important to seize the Zeitgeist and to create something that fits the time and place. The cafe is small and cosy. A counter at the back displays the various dishes, a large menu hangs on one wall. There is a high communal table with stools in the centre of the space, and a counter with stools running along two walls. A collection of round, gold lamps with tiny perforations hang from the ceiling. Large bunches of red and white amaryllis stand in the front window.

Feras Mekhail from Homs

30. Hanna asks me if I would like to meet some people. I say that I would. Hanna has a short discussion with Feras, who is working behind the counter. I get the sense that Feras is very busy and has other things that he needs to be doing. However, Feras kindly joins me at one of the high benches and I tell him about my project.

31. Feras and I are both B2 German speakers and this makes for fairly easy conversation. When I tell Feras about my project and why I came to Germany, he begins by saying that of course not all Syrian people are the same. He explains that each person approaches his or her new life in Germany differently. Some people maintain that Germany owes them something because Germany is partly caught up in the war. Feras says that no one expected the war. People had different beliefs in Syria but no one asked each other about them. He uses the word 'verboten', that is, that is was forbidden to do so, but then agrees that it just wasn't an issue.

32. I ask Feras if he will tell me about how he came to Germany, his life in Germany so far, and what his hopes are for the future. Feras is 34 and he comes from Homs. He completed a four-year course in business management over six years, "Because you also have to live a little," and then worked for about a year. After one year of the war in Syria, Feras flew to Turkey in March 2012. He says that the decision to leave was quick. He decided that there were no other possibilities.

From Syria to Germany

33. Feras spent seven days in Istanbul and then travelled to Greece. He travelled by car with a group of Somalians and others, on foot, and over a small river on a kind of raft – ten people at a time. Feras says that you can organise anything with people smugglers in Turkey and also in Greece - Greece is a place where you can buy and sell anything and everything.

34. After three months in Greece, unable to find work, Feras bought false papers for 300 euros and flew to Sweden. There, the brother of the person who arranged his false papers bought him a train ticket to Hamburg. When I ask Feras why Germany, he says that he came to Germany for work, opportunities, and support from the State. He didn't know anyone in Germany.

Arriving in Germany

35. Feras arrived in Germany on 1 July 2012. He smoked a cigarette outside the police office. He went for one day without food, because he wanted to save his last 50 euros. At the police centre, he was given papers to go to a Newcomer accommodation centre. Feras spent three and a half hours standing on the spot trying to work out how to get there. After seven days at the initial centre, and a further three months at another centre next to Hamburg, Feras returned to the first centre. He moved from there to another centre for one and a half months, and finally a centre next to Hamburg, where Feras lived for six months.

36. Feras started a German language course in December 2012. The waiting time for German classes was much shorter then than it is now. As Feras' German improved, his English started to disappear.

37. In January 2013, Feras received his 'status', which enabled him to remain in Germany for three years. In April 2013, he found a flat in Hamburg through a share house website. At first, Feras lived alone. Feras' sisters, brother and mother have since come to Germany, and Feras now lives with his mother.

38. On 1 March 2013, through a friend he had met at one of the Newcomer accommodation centres, Feras found a job as a kitchen hand in a Turkish restaurant. He was keen to do something else and he had heard about Restaurant Saliba. Feras says that every Syrian in Hamburg knows about Hanna Saliba. A friend from Feras' German class introduced him to a Ukrainian restaurateur. The Ukrainian restaurateur told Feras that she wanted him to meet a friend of hers. That friend was Hanna Saliba. Feras says that it was a complete surprise. He had tried so hard to find Hanna Saliba and then all of a sudden, there he was. Feras told Hanna that he wanted a job.

39. Feras worked at Restaurant Saliba in the Alster Arkaden from November 2013 until October 2016, when he started working in the café at 91 Eppendorfer Weg. I ask Feras about the differences between the restaurant and the café. Feras tells me that at the Alster Arkaden, the kitchen is separate from the dining area, so there is always some quiet space. In contrast, it can be quite chaotic in the café, when all of the customers arrive at once. You need to be able to chat to people, make food, clear, and serve. One customer likes to watch the food being prepared and always asks Feras lots of questions. Feras laughs and says that sometimes when customers want to chat it can turn into a Katastrophe! However, this is great for life and for learning German, and when he bumps into customers on the street they greet one another and chat.

40. Feras asks me whether I have noticed that he can recall all of the dates of significant events since he left Syria. I tell him that I had noticed and that I found it quite remarkable. He explains that he has told his story so many times since the café opened a month ago, that the dates are now stuck in his head.

41. In July 2013, Feras passed his B2 German test. He wanted to go back to university, but it was just too difficult to do it alone. He would need to pass C level German before he began university, and he would not have a job during this time. Feras recently sat the next level German test, but did not pass. He tells me that it is difficult to study while he is working. He works from 8am until the evening, six days a week.

42. I ask Feras what is was like to arrive in Germany without knowing anyone, and without speaking German. He says it was really difficult without knowing anyone. At times he didn't want to stay. Sometimes he felt like he didn't know what to do or where to go, and that there was no one to help him out. In those times, he would talk to his family, and they would tell him to have patience. Feras mentions that his German teacher was a great support. She was very patient and would stay back to answer questions, the lessons were very practical, and she made sure that every person in the class understood the lessons.

The future

43. I ask Feras what the future holds. He tells me that there isn't any past or future and then says that although the past is the past, it still stays with him. Feras stays in contact with friends in Syria through Facebook and WhatsApp. Syria remains his homeland and he can imagine going back for short visits, but he doesn't want to live in Syria. His work and his city are now in Hamburg and he wants to make this his neighbourhood. Feras says that his earlier dream was to be an accountant, but not anymore. Feras wants to be another Hanna Saliba, on an international level.

January 2017

44. In January 2017, I return to Hamburg. I have emailed Feras to tell him that I am coming but I haven't heard back and I hope that he is working. This time, as I wander along Eppendorfer Weg, I pay closer attention to the details of the neighbourhood.

45. A man and a woman are leaving the café just as I arrive. I recognize them from my earlier visit. For some reason, Feras didn't receive any of my emails. He tells me that he kept checking and wondered if I would be coming back. I ask Feras about the couple who have just left. They are regular customers and they live in the neighbourhood. On the day of my first visit, they were having a party for thirty people, and the café was catering.

46. Feras introduces me to the small dishes on display in the cabinet. I choose a selection and take a seat in the front window. The dishes arrive with bread and falafel. There are butter beans, cauliflower, hummus, walnut spread, and parsley salad. All of the food is delicious but the butter beans and falafel are my favourites.

47. As we chat, a man in his twenties - with a beard, white sneakers, and elements of hipster - leans his bike against the front window and peers into the cafe. He and Feras banter and laugh through the window. The man comes inside and Feras tells him it's only five euros to look at the menu. The man laughs, perusals the menu, and agrees to come back another time. Feras says that he's never met this man before, but you have to have some fun with the customers. Feras says that lots of people stand at the window peering in to see the menu. For the first two months that the cafe was open, a temporary bus stop was placed right outside their door, while traffic was diverted for road works. The bus stop was very good for business. I wonder aloud whether Feras should consider re-installing a bus stop. An elderly couple arrives for a late lunch. They chat with Feras about the lamps and the food.

48. I ask Feras about his free time. I've read that it was Feras' idea to open the café on Sundays. It was his idea and Sundays are usually busier than Mondays and Tuesdays. Free time is scarce for Feras because he works long days, eats dinner at home with his mother, and then sleeps. Feras' mother is over seventy, and she wants to be in Germany so that she can be close to her grandchildren. However, it's difficult to start life anew and to learn German at that age. Feras is also working towards his German driver's licence. He has finished the theory component and is now accruing driving hours. A licence is important for his job, so that he can collect supplies rather than relying on deliveries. Right now, Feras is working towards a goal. Eventually, he wants to travel and do other things.

49. Feras asks me how long it takes to get to Australia and we talk about opposite seasons in the different hemispheres. Feras tells me that it's not easy to get an interview with Hanna Saliba. I explain how I heard about café Saliba through my friend Inge, and her friend, who is Hanna's son. We talk about networks. I'm conscious that much of this project has been made possible through networks and I think about what it takes to start from scratch in a new country, to build your networks all over again. Feras is in that process right now. Feras strikes me as someone who is driven, hardworking, and who has a charm and humour about him that make him extremely likeable. I wish Feras the best and I wonder whether in the future, it might be extremely difficult to get an interview with Feras Mekhail.

B. Querstadtein, Berlin

50. *In late 2016, I read an article in The Atlantic about walking tours of Berlin guided by Newcomers. I register online for a tour of Neukölln in late November 2016. A few weeks after the tour, I interview Tilman Höffken, a project manager at Querstadtein. This is an organisation creating opportunities for eye level encounters and dialogue between Newcomers and Locals through walking tours of Berlin led by Newcomers.*

A walking tour of Neukölln

51. On a Sunday in late November, our tour group meets outside Woolworths in Neukölln. It's cold but sunny and even though it's 2pm, the light quickly starts to fade. The group is a mix of people - several German couples, three American women, and I. Our guides are Samer and Arij, a young couple from Syria. Samer hands out headsets and as I put mine on, he asks about my mittens, which are a combination of fingerless gloves and mittens. I tell him that they are 'Handschuhe'. Samer says that he likes them.

52. As we walk through Neukölln, Samer and Arij talk about their journey from Syria to Germany, which took thirty days through Turkey, Greece and the Balkan route, and they share their experiences in Germany so far. Samer talks about some of the challenges of living in refugee accommodation centres – not being able to cook your own food, and eating at a canteen at set times in the day when you are trying to keep appointments and organise the rest of your new life in Germany. The significance, for Newcomers, of food and cooking comes up repeatedly during my time in Berlin.

53. Samer and Arij lead us past places that are significant for Newcomers in Neukölln. I've walked or cycled through some of these streets, and waited outside some of these buildings, but the tour adds detail and another perspective to the streets and spaces. We finish outside Sharehaus Refugio, a share house for Newcomers and Locals, where Samer and Arij are now living. Samer and Arij are frank, engaging and funny and the tour is interactive. Samer and Arij ask questions, the participants ask questions, and we are given challenges and tasks along the way, to gain a sense of what it's like to see these streets and spaces through the eyes of a Newcomer.

54. At the end of the tour, I tell Samer about my project and ask if he might agree to an interview. We exchange contact details and I send Samer an email but I don't hear back. I'm not surprised. As Tilman later tells me, there has been a lot of interest in this project, and Samer and Arij are also busy establishing their own lives in Berlin.

55. *In early December, I meet Tilman and Melissa (who is interning at Querstadtein) outside Sharehaus Refugio and we walk to a Turkish restaurant around the corner for lunch.*

The idea

56. Katharina Kühn and Sally Ollech founded Querstadtein. They knew of tours run by formerly homeless people in Hamburg, London and Copenhagen but could not find anything similar in Berlin. After a planning phase in 2012 Querstadtein established a full team of volunteers in early 2013, and ran their first tour in June 2013.

57. The goal was to initiate dialogue between different groups of people, and create awareness through walking tours led by people who were previously homeless. As the demand for tours increased, in 2014 Querstadtein employed a project manager. In early 2016, Tilman took over this role. Querstadtein currently employ two project managers (Tilman and Isabel), a project assistant, and ten tour guides – three people who were previously homeless, and seven Newcomers. On the day we meet, Melissa is starting an internship with Querstadtein.

Development and funding

58. Querstadtein is currently a 'Verein' but will shortly transform into a 'social business', a company that exists to support a social goal. Querstadtein was developed in the Social Impact Lab, a co-working space in Berlin funded by SAP, Germany's largest IT company. Tilman tells me that many 'social businesses' have developed or are developing in the Social Impact Lab.

59. During 2014 and 2015, Querstadtein was fully funded by the Auerbach Stiftung, a foundation. Although this funding arrangement was comfortable because it covered running costs, it meant that Querstadtein was dependent on this funding. When the Auerbach Stiftung shifted its focus and the funding ran out, Querstadtein had to look elsewhere. This is one of the reasons why Querstadtein is keen to become a self-sustaining social business.

60. The main source of funding at the moment is the tours, which cover around 70-80% of expenses. But Tilman points out that there's another reason why Querstadtein wants to become financially independent. "Because we have a product that we can sell, if you think in a bigger way, the money that we get, some other organisation does not get and there are a lot of organisations out there who can't earn their own money, so I think it is kind of a duty for us." The goal is to cover their running costs through the tours, and only rely on external funding for projects, such as developing new tours.

61. Development of the Newcomer tours was funded by the Bundes Zentrale für Politische Bildung (the BPB). Tilman laughs as I try and repeat this, and then says, "Welcome to Germany,", and offers to write the name down for me. The BPB supports political education projects, especially for young people, and although it receives State funds, it is an independent body. In 2015, the BPB set up a special programme to fund Newcomer projects. Querstadtein received BPB funding in 2015 and 2016 and is currently applying for the 2017 funding round.

62. Querstadtein is currently undergoing other structural changes to cope with the rapid expansion of the tour programmes. In 2015, they ran around 240 tours and in 2016 that increased to around 400 tours. The goal for 2017 is to run 600 tours. Tilman explains that they want to develop more efficient structures to help them achieve this goal, and to ensure that they use their own small budget, and any external funds, as efficiently as possible.

Developing the tours

63. The idea for the Newcomer tours came about in 2015. Developing the tours took about six months and the location in Neukölln was chosen because this neighbourhood is significant for many Newcomers to Berlin.

64. The core idea behind the tours is to set up a space for easy dialogue between groups of people who might not come into contact with one another in any other way. Tilman explains that, "The tours also raise the voice of a group of people which is spoken about a lot, but which rarely has its own channel to speak."

65. Networks and networking have been very important for finding Newcomer guides. Querstadtein has met most of the Newcomer guides through contacts who are working in the Newcomer space. Social media has also been important. Some guides got in contact after Querstadtein posted a job description on Facebook. Tilman explains that one of the most important points to emphasize at the beginning is that this is not a real job for Newcomers. Tour guides are not doing this to earn money, rather to share their stories and to raise awareness of their situation. Querstadtein pays their guides a fair wage, but the role is primarily about social impact.

66. Development of a new tour takes Tilman, Isabel and a guide around two hundred collective hours. The whole process from meeting a guide, to getting to know one another, to developing a tour takes around three months. This varies between the Homeless tours and the Newcomer tours. The tours run by former homeless people are very personal - it's a tour of their own story through different parts of Berlin. The Newcomer tours follow an established path, but each guide tells their own story.

A new tour in Mitte

67. In November 2016, Querstadtein ran the first Newcomer tour of Mitte. The tour was developed in close consultation with the guide, and incorporates many of his ideas. This tour connects the history of Berlin after the war - a history of decades of refugees - with the recent history and experience of the Newcomer guide. In this way, the tour helps people place what is currently happening in Germany in a broader historical context. As Tilman explains, "It's not a new phenomenon in Germany." He tells me that he recently read an article in Der Spiegel, written in the 1980s about East German refugees. He says that the article could apply equally to Syrian refugees in Germany today. Tilman comments that every society has its problems, and Newcomers have always been a visible group. It's easy to put the two together and say that these problems exist because of the Newcomers.

Expanding into other parts of Berlin

68. Querstadtein are interested in expanding the Newcomer tours into different parts of Berlin. However, this will partly depend on the Newcomer guides they meet. One possibility is a tour of Moabit, where the Landes Amt für Gesundheit und Soziales (the LAGESO – the State Office for Health and Social Affairs) is located. During the Summer and into the Winter of 2015, Newcomers lined up for eight to ten hours a day, some sleeping outside, waiting to get a number to register at the LAGESO. Melissa describes the situation as a kind of State failure. She says that the authorities weren't prepared for the numbers of Newcomers and the registration processes couldn't cope. Many individual citizens and organisations stepped in to support the Newcomers during this time. Melissa adds that some political parties in Germany and elsewhere used the images of Newcomers waiting outside the LAGESO in 2015 as powerful images in support of anti-immigration agendas.

Who signs up for a tour?

69. Many of the people who take part in the tours live in Berlin, including individuals, and organisations working in the community and social spheres. School groups are also an important target audience for Querstadtein. The Newcomer tours also attract international visitors and tourists. Tilman thinks this might be partly due to international media coverage of the Newcomer situation in Germany.

Creating spaces for encounters and changing minds

70. I ask Tilman whether the goal of Querstadtein is to *change* minds or whether it is really about creating a space for people to encounter one another, and creating awareness. Tilman says that most people who participate in the tours are already welcoming of certain ideas. However, engagement with school groups provides an opportunity to generate awareness, educate, and develop positive mindsets for the future. He adds that the tours provide an important space for setting up a dialogue. It's impossible to close your eyes to the stories and the experiences that the guides share on each tour. A person might be open and welcoming towards Newcomers, but hearing a personal story from an individual who has experienced so much, told in their own words, is completely different from reading about it in the media. Tilman comments that many of the participants are really impressed just by hearing another person tell their story in their own words, and this is really what Querstadtein is about – giving people a chance to tell a personal story, and giving others a chance to hear it. That kind of experience, Tilman says, might change minds or prompt someone to take action in this space.

71. I tell Tilman that I hope that my project might spark an idea, or prompt someone to start a similar project in Australia. Tilman says, “And then they should call us!” When I suggest that with 600 tours planned for next year, Querstadtein might be too busy, Tilman laughs and says that for a trip to Australia, he is never too busy. Querstadtein are keen to develop further because it’s a simple way for people to connect and to challenge ideas and ways of thinking. Melissa adds that it’s really important that these tours are on eye level. She points out that there are many possibilities for people to engage within a dichotomy of ‘refugees’ and ‘volunteers’. On these tours, Newcomers lead Locals through their own city, showing them things they have never seen, or from another perspective. The tour space encourages people to engage more with Newcomers, having heard a person talk about their experience, not as a victim, but openly and with confidence, using their own words and their own voice.

C. Sharehaus Refugio, Berlin

72. *The week before Christmas, Cosima arranges an appointment for us to meet with Sven Lager, one of the founders of Sharehaus Refugio. Sharehaus Refugio is a five floor building on Lenauer Straße, Neukölln, with three floors of living space, a ground floor café and events space, office and studio space and a rooftop garden.*

73. *After establishing a similar project in South Africa in 2013-2014, Sven and his wife, Elke Naters, returned to Berlin. Following much consultation with their local community and with the support of the Berlin City Mission, they opened Sharehaus Refugio in summer 2015. Since then, around forty Newcomers and Locals have been living together in the Sharehaus.*

74. *We sit with Sven in the café and as we talk, he waves and greets people as they come and go from the building.*

Sven Lager and the South African experience

75. Sven Lager grew up in Germany, the son of a Swedish immigrant mother. He grew up without knowing his father. He says that as a Swedish national whose home country is Germany, he understands the feeling of not belonging, "I never felt fully here or fully there."

76. Sven and Elke had many different careers before they began writing books in their thirties. They wanted to live in different cultures and so they moved with their children to different countries. On their spiritual journey, they were unable to find in Germany what they ultimately found in South Africa. Sven was raised and remains an atheist and he describes his wife as having something like an esoteric interest. Sven describes what he learned in South Africa as a kind of revolutionary thinking about what human beings are, and what society should be. It was this kind of thinking that later opened doors for the project in Berlin.

77. Sven says that the understanding of faith in South Africa was completely different and it was a very strong bond. "It clicked with us and we thought … that makes sense all of a sudden." Sven says that churches in South Africa provided an amazing platform for people to heal, because in that space, people were at eye level, whereas socially, they were still very different. They decided to open up this idea into a more cultural space, and they called it the Sharehouse.

78. The Sharehouse was a different kind of setting where people could interact at eye level. The two key principles underpinning the Sharehouse were that every person has ability and talents, and that the community should enable every person to further their ability and talents. Sven says that they wanted to combine two things, which he felt were deeply Christian, and to take those things out of a church context and make them available to everyone. The first was the commitment to strong community and serving the community that he observed in South Africa. The second was recognition of the importance of helping individuals prosper.

The return to Germany

79. After ten years in South Africa, Sven and his family returned to Germany. They had moved to South Africa for simple reasons – a warmer climate, a beautiful and interesting country. They returned to Germany because their children had grown up and wanted to go back. Sven says that they also felt a calling to go back. It was time to start something like Sharehaus Refugio, and to help people with similar projects. Sven says that the networks he has developed so far have been amazing, and that this project has been a mix of being able to do what he loves, while meeting a need in society as well.

Berlin beginnings

80. Berlin is a different setting, and because the Sharehaus takes a holistic view of a person and a society, it necessarily depends on what those people and that society want. They started a small project in Kreuzberg, and listened to what people wanted. Many creative and young people were keen to do something with Newcomers, as they saw this as the major social change happening in Germany. But many people were also hungry for change themselves because they could not find opportunities to thrive in their society. Slowly, they developed an idea for Berlin, and with the support of the Berlin City Mission, who were aware of the project in South Africa, they opened Sharehaus Refugio on Lenauer Straße. When we meet, it's roughly a 60/40 split between Newcomer and Local residents in the house.

Sharehaus Refugio – a place of refuge, community and renewal

81. The project had to be holistic and inclusive of all of the residents. When they asked Locals and Newcomers what they wanted the most, the answer was a place of refuge. For Newcomers, says Sven, it was obvious that privacy and dignity were important. Sharehaus Refugio has thirty-three rooms. Each room is rented to one person and is at least twenty-two square metres, with a bathroom, fridge and cupboard.

82. They called it a Refugio (monastery) because it's also a place where people seek a new life, or start something new. Sven says that monasteries were in many ways places of renewal, education, innovation, healing and hospitality. Sharehaus Refugio is the kind of modern monastery that they dreamed of. Sven says that renewal is natural for a person who has arrived from Syria because they have truly lost everything, and they have to start new. They have no choice. However, many Locals also expressed a desire to start something new, because the life they are living is not the one that they want to be living. Sven says that he thinks that people were hungry for a change in society.

83. Finally, Sven emphasizes that the core of the project is community building and everything else is built around this goal. Sharehaus Refugio is a community where people live together, cook together and spend time together, because integration doesn't happen when you just visit people who have arrived. The question is how do you build a diverse, multicultural, multi-religious community? Sven says that this community fails in the same ways that any student community fails, and the two key factors are communication and contributing to the community. Sven emphasizes that what they are doing is not really new – it's what students in share houses are doing everywhere in the world, but in a different context. "So people think it's very extreme to have Muslims from Syria or from Somalia or Afghanistan to move in with Locals and to have a mix of everything. But it's interesting that people are people. It's more on a level of personality than that of culture. I mean there's a culture clash of course, but it's not more difficult than let's say, someone from North Germany and South Germany moving in together. I think that is also a culture clash."

84. Part of the community building process is working out how to develop understanding and find common ground among the residents, and how to make decisions. Groups of residents take responsibility for particular topics, chosen by the residents. For example, house safety, decision-making processes, and interfaith relations. Sven comments that it takes time to establish democratic processes, and later he describes a recent values and ethics workshop in the Sharehaus, designed to develop understanding and establish common ground among the residents. The workshop was open to all residents, and they wrote down values and ethics that they considered to be important, and began to talk about them. Sven says that there are lots of topics that people want to talk about, and it's important to listen and make sure that the concerns, ideas and dreams of all people are heard. Sven says that there is an amazing amount of common ground but points out that it's a mistake of Western thinking that agreement means that we understand one another. People might agree on something, but once the topic has been discussed and people have listened to one another, it moves from an agreement and an intellectual understanding to a relational understanding.

85. The Sharehaus community runs the café and roof garden, and they take part in story-telling, cooking, coaching, language tandems and other events. They are also connected to the broader community in many ways. For example, the roof garden was built in cooperation with the Über den Tellerrand community and students from the Technische Universität. Other organisations working with Newcomers, including Querstadtein and Rückenwind, rent space within the building.

Moving in and moving out

86. I ask Sven about how they find and select residents – I've seen an online registration form. In the beginning, applicants were asked three questions. What do you want to achieve in eighteen months? What do you think this community can give you to help you do that? What can you give back into that community? Now, they ask applicants to spend at least one month volunteering in the house, to demonstrate that they really do want to move in and contribute to the community. Sven says that they really need active people who will participate in the community, and that if a person really wants to move in to a project like this, they find the time.

87. So far, a leadership team has been responsible for pre-selecting potential new residents, and then a decision is made at a house meeting. However, in many ways, Sven says, people select themselves. "If people show up and really invest themselves in the house and volunteer, and there's very few who really do that, then that means they are in." Right now, there is a waiting list, and Sven says that they are keen to find people who can act as peacekeepers and help solve conflicts, because with a house full of young people, it's inevitable that they will seek help to deal with their conflicts.

88. Initially, the idea was that people would live in the house for eighteen months, and then move out into a better situation. This timeframe was designed to encourage residents to think ahead, and to identify and set goals - perhaps to learn German, to get to know some people, and then start an education. Sven says that encouraging this kind of forward thinking was particularly important for Newcomers whose asylum situation was unclear. Sven says that they dreamed of opening more houses, so that people who started in Lenauer Straße could help start other houses, and the project would multiply. However, everything has taken longer than expected. Some people have found apartments and moved out. For others, it's not easy to find an apartment in Berlin. They have started to build a network of ambassadors, and the community has grown to such an extent that it would be crazy, Sven says, to rip it apart now. The eighteen-month limit still applies, but it's flexible, and they maintain the idea that when residents do move out, it should be into a better situation.

89. In a few cases, people have moved out because they did not want to integrate in any way, or they preferred to live in a private apartment, or they already had full lives and did not have time to contribute to the community.

Faith

90. Although Sharehaus Refugio is a Christian led house, and is supported by the Berlin City Mission, Sven emphasizes that whether or not you are religious is not determinative of the actions you take. He comments that during 2015, when Newcomers were sleeping outside the LAGESO, he met many people providing support, who were not religious. Yet, they were doing something that was very faith based, because they believe in the good and that they should support others who are in need. Sven says that this is a generation with a sense of social responsibility that does not depend on a religious background, but on something that you do from your heart. The point is, he says, that we should live in a society where we do the things that we believe are important in creating social change. "When you do this, it opens up a completely new field of discussion to learn from Muslims and Buddhists and Atheists what really triggers us."

91. These kinds of discussions are ongoing within the Sharehaus, and Sven maintains that it all comes back to faith - Why are we here? What does it mean to be a human being? How can we live or work together? Discussions about faith are not about what a book of religion says. Rather, they focus on their experiences and journeys. He says that it's nice to return to those questions, to talk about them at eye level with people from different backgrounds, and to learn from one another what we dream of, and what we want in our lives.

Change in Germany and perceptions

92. We talk about what this point in time means for Germany. Sven says that he thinks that Germans have changed, and that if the Newcomers had not arrived, "We would have slept on. Now, there are a lot of questions."

93. Sven comments that the current situation in Germany is sometimes described as a 'crisis' and a 'flood of people', and some people complain about the cost of housing Newcomers (in large reception centres under neon lights where they are not able to cook for themselves because the regulations don't allow it). This perception, according to Sven, is all wrong. His view is that Germany has the infrastructure and the funds to handle the arrival of Newcomers. Sven points out that we are talking about 1.5% of the population arriving in Germany as Newcomers, and that one hundred people could easily take care of two Newcomers. Sven also points out that Germany has done this before – dealing with millions of refugees, who had nothing, following the Second World War, and later, refugees from the former East Germany.

94. Sven suggests that rather than perceiving this a 'crisis', the focus should be on what do Newcomers bring to Germany? Why not welcome Newcomers and empower them to contribute to society by inviting them to start a project? If you welcome Newcomers, and they feel like they belong, integration happens more quickly. People learn the language because they feel like a vital part of the society. Sven says that the potential in people is often under-utilized, and Germany needs to learn how to do this, and that now is a good time for this kind of learning.

95. Sven maintains that both Locals and Newcomers in Germany have much to learn from one another. Some Newcomers bring with them strong family values and a generosity of spirit that would benefit Germany, where many elderly people are no longer cared for by their families. Sven also points out that Germany can learn from the energy and entrepreneurial drive of Newcomers to start something new and do something with their lives.

96. Sven also believes that people want to live in a society where people respect one another and their ideas, and that when people stick together, amazing things can happen. This is the greatest power for social change. Despite the rise of right wing politics, and the demand for security and new ideas and simple solutions, Sven thinks that the undercurrent is a longing for meaning and justice. He says that the biggest challenge in the United State and Germany and other Western countries is how can we do this with people from different countries? How can we respectfully learn from one another and build a society on shared values? Sven says that it's easier than he first thought. "People struggle with a few ideas, gender equality and so on, but tough luck, that's what we have achieved in the West, and I think it's very right."

97. I ask Sven whether a struggle over ideas about gender equality has played out in the Sharehaus. He says that it has. Some Newcomers have arrived with a different understanding, but because they have arrived in Germany, they have to live with the fact that there are different rules, and that they cannot change those rules. Sven says that it's important to welcome people but it's equally important to emphasize that they have a responsibility to stick to Germany's founding laws and social agreements, and that people who are welcomed into a community, tend to do so.

Expansion and the future

98. There has been interest from all over the world in Sharehaus Refugio. Sven maintains that it can be done anywhere in the world, especially Australia. He tells me that you need crazy people to start it - people who love what they do, and don't count the hours - and someone with the funding and infrastructure. "With these two things, you can go very far." Now that the Berlin house is established, Sven will help others to start future projects, but he thinks that it's important not to stay too long in a project like this, because some people have a talent to innovate, and others have a talent to stabilize. "So you start with the crazy people, but you need the stabilisers as well."

99. Ideally, the project will expand, and residents from the Berlin house will help to establish communities in new houses. One possibility is to open a house in the country. Sven says that they are looking for people who have already achieved something locally, or have a love for a particular place. "It's a very important thing. You can't just go somewhere and start something. You need the Locals to start it – somebody who says I always wanted to do that … people who have a dream."

100. It seems to me that it takes the right kind of people to get a project like this off the ground and to keep it going. Sven agrees. "You need the people. It's a very relational thing, very personal. I feel very blessed that I have found so many new friends, even though they are much younger. But it's not work, it's what we called for in life, I think - relations, true relations, listening to each other and being there for one another. So this has really started to be a community, which I enjoy a lot. So it's not just work and I'm tired. I gain a lot from it. But you need a heart for it, to really love it. It can't be a job."

D. Über den Tellerrand, Berlin

101. *Über den Tellerrand (UDTR) began by creating opportunities for Newcomers and Locals to connect over food and cooking but has expanded to include many other activities. What I love about this organisation are it's humble but brilliant beginnings, the ideas and programmes that have developed since those beginnings, and the collaborations with other organisations, such as university students from the Freie Universität Berlin and Kitchen on the Run.*

The cooking class - Über den Tellerrand Kochen

102. I sign up for an evening cooking class at Über den Tellerrand Kochen, on the last Sunday evening before Christmas. Farzana Hosseini will be leading the class. Farzana and her family moved to Berlin from Afghanistan about thirteen months ago. The class is held in UDTR's specially designed Kitchen Hub on a quiet street in Schöneberg, just near S-Bahn Julius-Leber-Brücke. I decide to walk the twenty minutes to the Schöneberg address. It's freezing and apartment windows and balconies twinkle with Christmas lights.

103. The Kitchen Hub is an extremely cosy and welcoming space against the cold and dark outside. The corner apartment has high ceilings, beautiful Altbau 'Stuck', and blond timber worktops and chairs. There is a long bench in the centre, a cook top and sink, and shelves of spices, candles, cookbooks and crockery line the walls. I notice a heaped plate of decorated biscuits, left over from a Christmas event last night, on one of the side tables.

104. The evening is in German. Farzana leads the cooking, and Lisa, the facilitator, makes sure that the evening runs to plan. Lisa explains that it's important that we finish up on time, because this is a residential neighbourhood. There are ten people in our class, mostly women. My worktop neighbor for the evening is from Ireland but she now runs an Irish pub in Berlin. She heard about the cooking class on the radio, and also through Facebook. She wanted to 'do something' with Newcomers. She had thought about offering a room in her home to a Newcomer, as her children are now grown up and she has the space, but she felt that that was quite an undertaking. She signed up for the cooking class instead. Tonight, there is also a young couple, three friends, and two older women. As an icebreaker, we introduce ourselves to the group, and share a story about a really great food experience or a really unusual food experience. Farzana explains what we will be cooking, and we are each assigned tasks.

105. I'm in charge of chopping cabbage for a salad. It's slow going on my part and so I subcontract some of the work to my neighbor. Later, I separate egg whites and yolks for the dessert. Farzana stops by to see how I'm going - so far, so good. My pavlova making experience is really coming into play this evening. Farzana is twenty years old and she is the eldest of nine children. Three of her sisters remained in Afghanistan when the family moved to Germany. Farzana loves cooking but there are no cooking facilities in her Newcomer accommodation, just the canteen. The food is sometimes OK. She says that the canteen food is supposed to be Turkish or Arabic, but it isn't really.

106. Farzana shows us how to make lentil soup, rice with barberries, sheep quark stew, a vegetable dish, and a sharp and fresh salad of slightly pickled cabbage. We finish with a chocolate sponge roll filled with fruit, nuts, jam and cream, and cardamom tea. At the beginning of the evening, conversation is cautious and a little stilted. I think everyone is feeling a little shy. As the cooking and eating progresses, conversation begins to flow and by the end of the evening, the three girls and the couple sitting next to Farzana are chatting and asking each other questions.

107. Between courses, Lisa gives a presentation about UDTR, and Farzana gives a presentation about her home city Herat, the second largest city in Afghanistan. During Farzana's presentation, one member of the group asks why her family came to Germany. At first, Farzana says that the story is too long and that there isn't time. Later, she decides to share her story, and towards the end of the story, begins to cry. Everyone is frozen for a moment until Lisa steps forward and gives her a hug. We take a break. Someone thanks Farzana for sharing her story. Someone else asks if we can put on some music. The night slowly resumes. Lisa tells us that they invite any questions, but the hosts decide what they want to share.

108. At the end of the evening, I ask Lisa if I can arrange a time for an interview and she gives me a business card. I arrange to meet with Linn, one of UDTR's permanent employees in the first week of January. When I arrive at the Kitchen Hub, Linn and her colleagues are finishing lunch in the front room. I sit with them as they finish eating, and then Linn makes coffee and we chat.

The idea

109. UDTR began as a student project in 2013. Four students from the Freie Universität Berlin took part in a project that was to run for eight weeks, but could cost no more than five euros. At the time, there was a camp at Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg where refugees were trying to raise awareness of their situation in Germany. The students noticed that thousands of people passed the camp daily without any interaction between the Newcomers and Locals. They wondered who are the *people* who make up these so-called 'waves' and 'currents' of refugees. The students took a camping stove and pot to Oranienplatz and invited the refugees to cook with them, to share recipes, and to get to know one another. The final product of the project was a small book containing a collection of recipes and stories from the Newcomers at Oranienplatz.

Developing the idea

110. UDTR then developed in two directions. First, they started a crowd funding campaign, and invited Newcomers to send in their recipes and stories, to be published in a cookbook. They hoped that the cookbook, published in November 2014, would help raise awareness of integration and asylum in Germany.

111. Second, UDTR created ongoing opportunities for Locals and Newcomers to get to know one another. They began by hosting cooking events in the homes of friends and relatives. In the beginning, UDTR visited refugee accommodation centres and invited Newcomers to their cooking events. Now, UDTR rely on their established social networks and word of mouth. Linn tells me that around ten Newcomers have been with UDTR since the very beginning, and some of them run the cooking classes.

112. The cooking events are not about learning how to cook, and the Newcomer hosts are not trained chefs. Rather, the events provide a space for people to share their stories and experiences in their own words, and to get to know one another and a new culture through cooking and food.

113. I've heard several Newcomers in Berlin mention that there is no opportunity to cook in refugee accommodation – all of the food is provided in a canteen. If food and cooking are important parts of your life, this can be an additional challenge when you first arrive. Linn agrees that food is home and says that if you can make a space where Newcomers can cook and feel a little more at home, and also create an encounter project where Locals can join in, then it's easy.

The Kitchen Hub – a permanent home

114. In November 2015, UDTR rented a permanent space in Schöneberg. It includes the Kitchen Hub, which can be used as a kitchen, dining room and events space, a separate kitchen, and an office. The location was simply luck. It was the first space that worked out and the neighbourhood is open and supportive.

115. The benches, tables, chairs and shelving were purpose built through a collaborative project. Students from different disciplines at the Technische Universität worked together with Cocoon – Contextual Design, volunteers, and Newcomers, to design and build modular multi-purpose furniture that can be adapted for use in different ways.

116. I mention to Linn that I was struck by the cosiness and warmth of the Kitchen Hub space. Linn agrees and says that the cooking classes have a really nice ambience in the evening. She says that the Kitchen Hub is the perfect size – it can comfortably fit around forty people, meaning that everyone can move around, chat, and get to know one another.

Developments since 2013

117. Since 2013, UDTR have produced three cookbooks of recipes and stories from all over the world. UDTR is a registered non-profit, employing five permanent staff, and around twenty permanent volunteers. There are UDTR cooking events in twenty-five cities across Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Other encounter projects

118. UDTR also hosts other encounter projects, where Locals and Newcomers come together for sports, language tandems, movie nights, readings, a bee keeping project and a community garden. There are regular women cooking events and teenage cooking events, which provide opportunities for women and teenagers to get to know one another through cooking. UDTR have also established a 'Building Bridges' project, where teams of people, including a Local and a Newcomer who has been in Germany for at least one year, who can speak German and who is no longer living in shelter accommodation, work together to support a newly arrived Newcomer.

119. One of UDTR's most popular community-cooking events is '50 Shades of…', held each month at the Kitchen Hub. UDTR select one ingredient and then invite people to cook a recipe using that ingredient. People submit their recipes and UDTR arrange the ingredients. Each 'host cook' has a cooking station at the Kitchen Hub and people join one of the cooking stations to help prepare that dish. Linn says that at the start, people are a little shy, but as they start cooking together, the conversation begins and the events are always lots of fun. So far, they have had '50 Shades of Lentils, Tomato, Eggplant, Zucchini, Cheese, Dessert, Potato, and Egg.

Collaborations

120. UDTR have collaborated with university students, professionals and other volunteers on different projects. In Summer 2016, UDTR was approached by a group of architects who wanted to create an encounter project with Newcomers, designing and building urban gardening boxes. The furniture in the Kitchen Hub was designed and built in collaboration with students, volunteers, design professionals and Newcomers. Finally, Kitchen on the Run, a mobile kitchen and dining space in shipping container founded by a small group of friends, has become something of a 'mobile ambassador' for UDTR.

121. The founders of Kitchen on the Run wanted to build a mobile kitchen and dining space to travel through Europe, stopping in different cities and inviting people to come together to cook and eat. They had read about UDTR and thought that it made perfect sense to collaborate. For four months last summer, Kitchen on the Run travelled through Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, bringing Locals and Newcomers together to cook and eat in their mobile kitchen and dining space. Apart from the cooking encounters, they hoped that some of the connections made during those evenings might develop into a more permanent network for the future.

Funding

122. Like many small non-profits, funding is an ongoing topic for UDTR. They generate funds from the sale of cookbooks, cooking classes, and online fundraising. The 'Building Bridges' project is funded for the next three years by the Bundes Amt für Migration and Flüchtlinge (the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees). Linn says that they try to support each of the volunteer projects, like the language tandems and the gardening projects, with funds to cover basic supplies.

The future

123. As we finish up, Linn comments that one of the long-term challenges more generally in Germany is to continue to support Newcomers, but in different ways. In 2015, many Locals were willing to donate clothes, provide food and offer short-term accommodation to Newcomers. However, this kind of engagement seems to be waning, even though there are still many people who need ongoing and different kinds of support. For example, support to find a job or a flat. Linn says that while it is possible to do this on your own, it's much easier if you have the support of someone who knows the system.

124. UDTR hope to expand their Kitchen Hub into other districts of Berlin to help spread the idea, and to make the project easily accessible to Newcomers living in other parts of Berlin. Many of their Schöneberg neighbours have engaged with the project so far, and the weekend community cooking events attract people from all over Berlin.

125. Linn says that in an ideal world, eventually there would be no need for UDTR because Newcomers and Locals would encounter one another in their daily lives. So far, UDTR encounters have led to friendships and ongoing connections, especially between volunteers and Newcomers. Linn says that many volunteers do all kinds of other activities with Newcomers in their free time, beyond UDTR. Linn hopes that this will continue and increase over time.

E. Rückenwind, Berlin

126. *On my second day in Berlin, I meet my friend Nicolas for lunch. It's a quick lunch, because Nicolas is going to the tooth doctor. I tell him briefly about my project and he suggests that I contact his friend Lasse, who volunteers at a bike workshop for Newcomers in Neukölln. The following week I meet with Lasse in a café. Lasse tells me about Rückenwind (which means tailwind). He suggests that I visit their workshop and puts me in touch with Leonie Volke.*

127. *In mid-December, I arrange an interview with Leonie, one of the founders of Rückenwind. The evening before the interview, I chat with a journalist from Lebanon who is holidaying in Berlin. We are standing in the hallway, as she gets ready to go out for the evening. I tell her about the project and the bike workshop. She says, "So it's the question of can they integrate? I have the answer but people don't want to hear it. I'm from Lebanon. We are four million people with two million refugees." As she steps into her shoes, she waves her hand and says to me, "Let them build bikes until the end of time."*

128. *The Rückenwind workshop is next door to Sharehaus Refugio on Lenauer Straße in Neukölln, and Leonie suggests that we do the interview in Sharehaus Refugio's café. Afterwards, Leonie shows me Rückenwind's bike cellar, full with wall-to-wall racks of bikes, and the ground floor workshop. I stay on in the workshop for the evening. Konstantin, another of Rückenwind's founders, is working on bikes with a young boy. Later, we are joined by three young men - from England, Uruguay and Iraq. They are all relatively recent arrivals in Berlin and they work together to dismantle a bike for parts, and they fix the pedals on another bike called 'The Nederlander'. Konstantin explains that Thursday night workshops are for learning new skills, and dismantling bikes for parts. Sometimes, they repair bikes in preparation for the bike building workshops with Newcomers the following week.*

The idea

129. In late 2014, Leonie and a group of friends decided that they wanted to get engaged in some way with Newcomers. They had lots of ideas but one of the group noticed that Moabit Hilft – an organisation supporting Newcomers while they waited to register at the LAGESO – was calling for bikes for Newcomers. Leonie says that seven people in a share house kitchen put their heads together. They decided that a project providing bikes to Newcomers would give Newcomers mobility and the chance to get to know their new city for free. They knew that Berlin was full of spare bikes, sitting in cellars, that people no longer needed or used. They decided to collect these bikes, repair them, and provide them to Newcomers. They began to look for a space to store donated bikes, and to connect with people who had the skills to repair them.

The first 'Action Days'

130. Rückenwind planned their first Action Day with the Über den Tellerrand community. They collected bikes, and members of the UDTR community gave them a space near Mehringdamm for bike storage. At that time they didn't have a dedicated space to meet and work, or very many tools. They collected thirty bikes and on the first Action Day, Newcomers and bike mechanics worked together to repair them. There was a high demand for bikes, and the idea quickly took off, with another three Action Days in March and April 2015. In June 2015, the storage space that Rückenwind had been using was no longer available. Leonie explains that they had a long-term plan to find their own workshop and storage space, but in June 2015, they didn't have much money. They were back to square one.

A permanent workshop space and funding

131. Two things happened in the second half of 2015. First, Rückenwind took part in a competition, 'Hero Tour', run by a large firm in Berlin. Employees of the firm rode around Berlin looking at different projects to support. Rückenwind planned a giant Action Day to coincide with the competition. Newcomers and Locals worked together to repair forty-eight bikes. Rückenwind won eight thousand euros and this was their first main source of funding.

132. Around the same time, Sven Lager was preparing to open Sharehaus Refugio on Lenauer Straße in Neukölln. Rückenwind thought that this was a great concept, and were keen to move in to part of the space. Leonie explains that Sharehaus Refugio and the Kreuzberg Project are the main tenants of the space on Lenauer Straße, which includes many communities. There are three floors of share house living space, a café and roof garden, artist studios, and office space. As they had limited funds, Rückenwind were able to rent a space for their workshop relatively cheaply. Using their competition funds, they renovated and fitted out the workshop. In September 2015, Rückenwind opened their workshop at number 3 Lenauer Straße.

133. Rückenwind currently rely on a crown funding campaign, and annual membership fees (they are a 'Verein') for funds. Leonie says that there are funds that they could apply for, but it's a lot of work to complete the applications and the outcome is always uncertain.

The workshops

134. Rückenwind have established regular workshop hours, a large volunteer community, and a team of organisers and bike mechanics. They run two bike repair workshops each week, completing four bikes per workshop. Newcomers choose a bike from the bike cellar and work together with a bike mechanic to repair the bike. When we meet, they have around eighty bikes on hand in the cellar, and they accept ongoing bike donations. The workshops are open to everyone, but most of the Newcomers are young men, many from Syria. Sometimes they bring their families. Rückenwind have also organized special bike workshops for children. These workshops are more challenging, because they have to find the right size bike for each child.

135. The demand for bikes is high. In the first twelve months, Rückenwind repaired around five hundred bikes. Leonie estimates that there are more than two hundred people on their waiting list, which is the equivalent of more than six months of workshops. Through word of mouth and Facebook, they have become a well-known project.

136. Rückenwind meet regularly with the volunteer bike mechanics to collect feedback on what works well and what can be improved. Recently, they've added the Thursday workshop, for people who want to learn how to repair bikes. It's a chance to learn skills, and to prepare bikes and parts for the workshops with Newcomers. Four people are involved so far. In 2017, Rückenwind will add a third weekly workshop, which means that they can repair twelve rather than eight bikes per week, and move through the waiting list more quickly. However, Leonie emphasizes that it's important that they are still able to spend time with people, so that there is time for exchange and so that Newcomers can do their own repairs and get a sense of the project.

137. Rückenwind are also developing the idea of a training programme for Newcomers, in cooperation with a firm or business, so that Newcomers can train and work with Rückenwind and earn a qualification. A Newcomer from Iran has recently been placed at Rückenwind as part of a State supported voluntary service programme. He will work for twenty hours per week for twelve months, and during that time he is supported with a small wage, a travel card, and a German language course. At the end of the year, the idea is that he can either continue to work at Rückenwind, or open his own workshop.

The success of the project

138. I ask Leonie about the challenges so far, and the reasons for their success. She tells me that it's a combination of factors. Many people have contributed lots of time and energy into the project and the success of Rückenwind really hangs on those contributions.

139. The organisers work together as a team and are committed to supporting the project and developing it further. They meet regularly and communication channels are always open. Each person has their own area of responsibility but when things don't work, they say so. Leonie says that she thinks that the energy and attitude that each person brings is also very important. It helps the team to think creatively, to get things done, and to develop further, "The feeling that we can do this. I think that's very important". Leonie says that the skills, time and support provided by the volunteer mechanics are also very important. Relying on volunteers to run the workshops can be challenging, and Rückenwind are developing a self-organising system, something like an online roster, to make sure that they have the right number of mechanics for each workshop.

140. Leonie says they have received feedback that the Rückenwind volunteers feel like they are treated as equals, and that they are welcome to bring their ideas to the project. Leonie says they are really pleased to hear this, because it's important that volunteers feel like they have some responsibility and want to work to develop the project.

The future

141. Rückenwind's organising team is mostly students. So far, they have been careful to maintain time for their studies and lives beyond Rückenwind, but sometimes that can be difficult. Leonie says that they can't predict what might happen when they finish their studies. But if people do move on, it will be a gradual transition, and they are conscious that it's important to bring fresh energy into the organisation and attract people who want to take responsibility for the longer term. They are hopeful that Newcomers will take on responsibility for the workshops, which will provide them with skills and experience, and ensure the longer-term sustainability of the project.

142. In 2015, Rückenwind received many requests for bikes from Newcomers in cities around Germany. Rückenwind are currently working on an App, which will enable Newcomers to find a bike repair workshop in their town or city. Leonie says that lots of similar projects popped up all over Germany during 2015, as more and more Newcomers arrived.

143. Reflecting on their success so far, Leonie says that it's amazing, and also funny. She says that she is surprised when she thinks about what they knew when they started the project, and how they have grown. She tells me that they used to have meetings on Friday – it was a terrible idea because everyone just wanted to start their weekends, and no one wrote anything down. Now, it's much more professional. Someone always takes notes.

144. Rückenwind remain focused on three key objectives: to work with Newcomers to provide mobility and independence; to achieve this using environmentally friendly means (pedal power and recycled bikes); and to contribute to the integration of Newcomers. The training programme is one opportunity for Newcomers to come together with Locals to develop their skills and experience, and to take on new responsibilities. In 2017, Rückenwind are keen to organise more community events, like bike tours and parties. Their first party in December 2016 was a huge success, held in the Kultstätte Keller, a club in Neukölln with gallery and performance spaces over several floors. They combined floors of techno and house music, bands from Syria playing acoustic music, a gallery space, catering, and a tombola (the prize was a bike).

145. As we finish up, I ask Leonie if there is anything else she would like to share. She says that Rückenwind are always looking for bike mechanics to join the team – people who are good at repairing bikes, who like to share their skills, and who can come along regularly to their workshops. They are also always open for bike donations.

2017

146. In 2017, I check back in on Rückenwind's Facebook page. It has been a busy start to the year. In the first few months of 2017, Rückenwind organized an art exhibition, with the proceeds from the sale of art going towards their project, and a charity bike auction. They participated in the Berliner Fahhradschau, and built a Banana Bike - a bike powered blender to make mobile smoothies - for Velo Berlin. Rückenwind also took part in a podium discussion hosted by Chancellor Merkel where volunteer organisations working with Newcomers in Germany shared their experiences and hopes for the future.

F. Start with a Friend, Berlin

147. *This is a story about an organisation started by three friends in Berlin in 2014. Their goal is to achieve sustainable integration through tandem partnerships and community events, where Locals and Newcomers can encounter one another at eye level. In mid-December 2016, I go to a community event organized by Start with a Friend (SWAF), and before Christmas, I meet with one of the founders, Sarah Rosenthal. In January 2017, I meet with Teresa Rodenfels. Teresa is one half of a tandem partnership with Mohamad Eiz Alddin from Syria. Teresa shares her tandem experience, from the perspective of a Local.*

Start with a Friend meets Firas Alshalter at Sharehaus Refugio

148. In late November, Cosima sends me a link to a Facebook Event – Start with a Friend meets Firas Alshalter at Sharehaus Refugio. SWAF and Sharehaus Refugio have combined forces to host an evening with Firas Alshalter, a filmmaker from Syria. Firas is known for his funny and perceptive videos about integration and life in Germany from the perspective of a Newcomer. He has recently published a book about his experience in Germany, 'Ich komm auf Deutschland zu'.

149. The afternoon of the event, the organisers post a Facebook message to say that they are expecting more people than the events space at Sharehaus Refugio can accommodate. Cosima and I arrive at the same time and as we go inside to the Sharehaus Refugio café, where people are waiting, we meet Hussam. The weekend prior, Cosima celebrated her birthday, and Hussam cooked Syrian food for the party. Hussam shows me a photo. On top of the dish, the words 'Happy Birthday Cosima' are written in nuts. It's delightful.

150. We move from the café into the events space. It's atmospheric - a large room painted dark green, with high ceilings and a glass chandelier. Seats have been set out in rows facing a small stage. As we go inside, Cosima introduces me to Sarah Rosenthal from SWAF. Sarah gives me her business card and says that I should get in touch. We find seats. The room rapidly fills up, with people standing in the aisles.

151. Sarah introduces Firas and Firas talks about his experiences in Syria and Germany, and his film projects. Firas reads from his recently published book and shows us some of his videos. Firas calls them 'sugar lumps'. "Today I have for you another sugar lump," and then he launches into a funny lesson about refugees, integration, and Germany. One video is titled 'Integration: Wir backen das'. In another, Firas takes the phrase, 'I have nothing against refugees, but …' and replaces the word 'refugees' with 'cats'.

152. Some of Firas' observations as a Newcomer to Germany are things that I also noticed when I came to Germany in 2013. Firas observes that it takes time to make friends with German people, but once a friendship is established, you know you are on solid ground. He also mentions that German people tend to exclaim that he speaks excellent German, even when all he has said is, "Hello, my name is Firas."

153. During the discussion, Firas shows us footage of Syria. Hussam and the rest of our row squash towards the centre of the room so that everyone can see the screen. At one point, Hussam taps excitedly on my shoulder, points to the screen and whispers, "That's Damascus – that's my home." I hear an intake of breath and a long sigh.

154. At question time, a tall, striking man, in a polished suit walks from the back of the room towards the front as he speaks to Firas in German. He says, "I am from Iran and I am also a refugee. Lots of countries have destroyed your country. I want to say sorry and to give you a hug." The audience breaks into applause as the man gives Firas a hug. A woman from Syria stands up, and says to Firas, "Ich bin stolz darauf" – I'm proud of you. When I interview Sarah a few weeks later, she tells me that the event was such a success that at the end of the evening, they had to ask people to leave.

Sarah Rosenthal from Start with a Friend

155. In late December, I arrange an interview with Sarah Rosenthal, one of the founders of SWAF. I arrive at Wiclef Straße in Moabit just before 11am. It's sunny and foggy and a German postal van is hovering at a nearby intersection - a yellow beacon in the foggy sunlight.

156. The SWAF office is a ground floor apartment facing the street. Inside, the rooms are painted bright white and in the front room there is a long table with benches, a whiteboard and colourful streamers on the walls. Sarah brings coffee from the kitchen and we sit at the large table.

The idea

157. SWAF began in late 2014, in the living rooms of Marten, Franziska, and Sarah. Martin and Franziska were studying law, with a focus on asylum law, and Sarah is an economist, with an interest in integration, education and migrants. They decided to set up a programme facilitating one-on-one connections between Newcomers and Locals in Berlin.

158. Franziska was already a tandem partner with a Newcomer from Syria, organized through her church. She signed up, and they sent her an email address. Franziska needed different kinds of information to support her tandem partner. She thought that it would be great if this information were written down somewhere. She also noticed that talking about Syria and the challenges faced by her tandem partner, was also challenging for her. She felt that it would great if she could meet and talk to people in a similar situation.

159. The idea for SWAF was to bring people together one-on-one and to create valuable and sustainable relationships between Newcomers and Locals. In doing so, SWAF were keen to do three things. First, to provide their tandems with information about Newcomer topics in Berlin. Second, to support their tandems and provide opportunities to share their experiences. Third, to offer flexibility. Sarah knew many people who wanted to get involved, but needed to make this work within their existing lives. So that was the idea – bringing people together, supporting the tandems, and providing flexible opportunities to engage. Importantly, the encounters were to be on eye level – two autonomous adults, both with previous lives, and both with future plans.

160. First, Franziska and Martin wrote and published an online guidebook with information about Newcomer organisations, lawyers, language courses, counseling and social supports in Berlin. Next, SWAF took their idea to refugee counseling organisations. SWAF initially relied on referrals from these organisations. They also connected with 'Refugees Welcome', an organisation bringing Newcomers together with share houses in Berlin. Newcomers and Locals registered online and SWAF started matching their tandem partners.

It's a match!

161. SWAF meet with every Newcomer and every Local who registers for the tandems. Sarah explains that they want to get to know each person, to find out their interests, and to bring people together who have something in common and will be a good fit. SWAF meet with each Newcomer individually. However, for Locals, because there is no language barrier, SWAF run group information evenings where they explain the idea of SWAF and what it means to have a relationship on eye level. Afterwards, they chat individually with each Local.

162. SWAF check in with each tandem after two weeks, ten weeks and six months. Sarah says that it's important they get to know their tandems and so they also host at least one community event per month that is open to everyone - concerts, sports events, movie nights. If the connection isn't working, people can start again with a new tandem partner.

163. The SWAF matching process makes me think of online dating. Sarah tells me that during the Summer and Autumn of 2015, when Newcomers became a big topic in Germany and many people wanted to get involved, several people suggested to her that it would be much quicker for SWAF to use an algorithm or an App to match their tandems. SWAF didn't think this was a good idea. Sarah explains that it's important that their tandems get to know SWAF, so that they realise that they have a safe space, and a person to contact if they have a problem.

164. SWAF ask that their tandems commit to at least six months. After that, people can decide whether they want to continue. Sarah tells me that when a tandem turns into a friendship, it sticks. Some of the first tandems from April and June 2015 are still together. Sarah emphasize that being part of a tandem isn't really 'work' – it can be an enriching experience and it's also fun to meet new people.

The first tandems – from April 2015 to December 2016

165. The first tandems met in April 2015. At that time, it was just Sarah, Franziska and Martin. Franziska and Martin met with the first Newcomer, and they held their first information event for Locals. In the beginning, SWAF held one information evening per month for Locals. Now, they run seven or eight per month. In 2015, SWAF brought together 120 tandems. Since then, SWAF have expanded into ten cities in Germany and have brought together 1700 tandems. They had no idea that the project would expand so rapidly in just eighteen months. However, people in other parts of Germany contacted SWAF, because they wanted to start something similar. SWAF have some minimum requirements – the organisers must meet each person individually, and they must also run community events alongside the tandems. SWAF have also developed a Code of Conduct.

A permanent office, funding, employees and volunteers

166. In March 2016, SWAF set up a permanent office in Berlin. April 2016 was the first paid month of work for Sarah. For the first eighteen months, she worked a thirty-hour week with SWAF, alongside her full-time job. SWAF employ eight people (including six full-time staff) and have more than 2500 volunteers. SWAF run workshops and training in Berlin for their volunteers, including the 'Arrangers', who meet with Locals and Newcomers, suggest matches, and support the tandems. Two 'Arrangers' work on a part-time paid basis, alongside twenty-five volunteer 'Arrangers'. Volunteer 'Arrangers' are asked to commit to SWAF for twelve months. They work around four hours per week – some more, some less. Sarah says that four hours per week can be quite a lot for a volunteer, but it also takes a lot of time to meet each person individually.

167. SWAF are financed by the Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and are a form of non-profit. This funding is available for a period of three years, but SWAF are required to apply each year. They don't know what will happen after the initial three-year period, and the German elections in Autumn 2017 add to the uncertainty.

The people

168. SWAF welcome people of all ages. However most of the Newcomers and Locals are in their twenties and thirties. The founders of SWAF reached out to many of their friends, who in turn reached out to their friends. The advantage, comments Sarah, is that tandems tend to do the kinds of things that young people do together. But anyone is welcome to join, and tandems don't need to be the same age – Sarah's mother is one half of a tandem with an artist from Syria who is twenty-five. SWAF have also started family tandem projects in Berlin and Cologne, bringing Newcomer and Local mothers together. One of the benefits of the family tandems is that they provide opportunities for Newcomer mothers to learn informally about things like healthcare and education systems in Germany.

169. It's important for SWAF to find a balance between the numbers of Newcomers and Locals. In some cities, there is a waiting list for Newcomers, and in Berlin and Hamburg,

Newcomer registrations have recently closed, temporarily. In 2015, SWAF had more Local registrations than Newcomer registrations because at that time, Newcomers were focusing on other aspects of their new lives in Germany. Now, Newcomers are starting to think about jobs, education, integration, and friendships.

Community projects

170. SWAF's community projects are also important. Sarah says that they started with the one-on-one approach,"But in the end we need to build a community of refugees and locals that live together quite easily." Recently, SWAF in Cologne organized a concert with six bands. More than six hundred people attended. "You couldn't say it was sold out because we didn't sell tickets, but people couldn't get in after one hour. It was just great – such an incredible experience because everyone just celebrated together." In Berlin, the book reading and interview with Firas Alshalter, hosted by SWAF at Sharehaus Refugio is another example of a community event. SWAF also organise events in collaboration with other Newcomer organisations, such as Über den Tellerrand Kochen. Sarah says that it makes sense for them to work together (UDTR do the cooking and SWAF bring the people), and that most people who work in this space have a common desire for a society that is engaged, and that works together.

Teresa Rodenfels – one half of a SWAF tandem

171. *On an evening in January 2017, I meet with Teresa at SWAF. The most recent snow has turned to slush and when I arrive at Wiclef Straße it's already dark. We drink tea as Teresa tells me about her experience as the Local half of a SWAF tandem.*

172. Teresa and Mohamad started as SWAF tandem partners in October 2015. Mohamad is twenty-seven and comes from Madaya in Syria. His background is in IT. Teresa is German. She studied philosophy and culture and she tells me that she always felt that it was important to have contact with people, not just books, and to have some kind of social impact.

173. Teresa explains that in late 2015, when many Newcomers arrived in Germany, there was a strong community movement to welcome Newcomers. Teresa felt that she didn't have any opportunities for contact with Newcomers, and she also felt a little uncertain about how to approach Newcomers. She felt that because Newcomers had experienced so much, she needed to tread carefully. SWAF's tandem programme brought Teresa and Mohamad together in an "uncomplicated way". Teresa explains that of course there was uncertainty at the start, but piece-by-piece you build up a connection as human beings.

174. Teresa also took part in SWAF workshops and training, which she really enjoyed. She then volunteered as an 'Arranger', meeting with Locals and Newcomers and matching tandems. Teresa says that facilitating encounters was a really nice process, and during the Local evenings she would immediately see good tandem matches. In September 2016, Teresa took up a paid position with SWAF in Berlin.

The matching process

175. I ask Teresa if she will tell me more about the matching process and her previous role as an 'Arranger'. Newcomers and Locals register on the SWAF website. Around fifteen Locals come together for each information evening. The 'Arranger' introduces SWAF and answers any questions. Afterwards, the 'Arranger' meets with each Local individually and takes their details. The 'Arranger' also meets with each Newcomer one-on-one. They explain the programme, answer questions, take down details, and manage expectations. This means explaining what SWAF does and does not do, and the ideas behind the programme.

176. The ideal scenario is to have a Newcomer interview followed by a Local evening, so that you have an impression of the person fresh in your mind. After the Local evening, Teresa says, it's usually clear, "That person with that person, and that person with that person." Most of the matching is based on personality plus some other common factors. Those factors might be similar professional backgrounds, similar expectations of the tandem process, people who want to spend free time together, or people who want to establish friendships. If people are seeking support or want to learn German, or need assistance with bureaucratic questions, SWAF bring them together with Newcomers who would like to, above all, provide that kind of support.

177. The 'Arranger' sends a tandem recommendation to each Local and Newcomer. If both people agree to the recommendation, they exchange contact details. The 'Arranger' is a contact point for the tandem for a period of six months. The six-month minimum period gives the tandem relationship stability and a chance to develop. SWAF recommend that tandem partners commit to at least two hours per week. For Newcomers, this can seem like a very small amount of time because they don't yet have so many contacts. For Locals, it's about what they can manage, next to work and family and life. Ideally, with time, the tandems develop into a friendship and people simply spend time together, rather than making an appointment each week.

Tandem expectations

178. Many Newcomers want to get to know people, make connections, find a sense of community, and practice their German. Teresa comments that often, Newcomers have very little contact with Locals. There are very few contact points with Locals in language classes and Newcomer accommodation centres, apart from professional relationships with teachers, social workers and staff. In the private realm, there are limited opportunities for Newcomers to speak German with Locals, and to develop contacts and relationships with Locals. SWAF offer an encounter that is less about intensive bureaucratic support between a 'Newcomer' and a 'Local' and more about enabling encounters between 'people'. However, there are still many common goals that people want to reach. For example, Newcomers face many challenges in finding employment, and Locals are well placed to assist them, and are happy to do so. Local tandem partners are looking for similar things. Teresa says that some Locals who register with SWAF are also seeking new friends because they feel lonely, or they want to expand their horizons. So the tandem encounters provide something for both sides.

Teresa's experience as a tandem partner

179. Apart from living nearby to one another, Teresa and Mohamad didn't have much in common when they first met. However, over time, it became clear that they 'fit' very well together. Teresa considers Mohamad a close friend. What is also special about their friendship is that it has developed in the context of many challenges. Teresa describes the situation at the LAGESO in 2015 as a "Katastrophe", and says that against this backdrop, she and Mohamad were completely thrown together. More recently, Mohamad's hometown of Madaya, a small town in the mountains north of Damascus, was besieged. Relief efforts were unable to reach the town and people were starving. These events have had a great impact on Mohamad and have added a kind of intensity to their friendship.

Walking and talking

180. In the beginning, Teresa and Mohamad would meet for coffee and go walking. They started with English and later switched to German. Teresa says that above all, they went walking and talked, and then there were the practical things like working out a resume, practicing phone calls, looking for a flat, and navigating the bureaucratic aspects of Mohamad's arrival in Germany. Teresa and Mohamad have visited the opera with SWAF, and the Berlin Christmas markets. Teresa's partner is a musician and so Teresa invites Mohamad to concerts, or they go to the cinema, or invite one another to their homes for meals.

A particular kind of friendship

181. Teresa describes her friendship with Mohamad as very particular, and something quite different from her other friendships. The context in which they met meant that it was impossible for them to engage only at a surface level, and the result was a genuine sense of openness. Teresa always felt that she could be very open with Mohamad, as he was very open with her, and this created a really special connection, one with intensity and depth.

Mohamad

182. Teresa tells me a little more about Mohamad. Having the chance to speak and improve his German has opened up opportunities. Mohamad is an IT technician and he had a computer shop in Madaya. Since arriving in Germany, Mohamad has completed an internship in a computer shop in Berlin. However, his asylum status is complicated. He first applied for asylum in Bulgaria. He applied again in Germany but waited eighteen months for his interview. Without education or training in Germany, it is likely that he will have to return to Bulgaria. Mohamad is currently doing an 'Einsteigs Qualifizierung'. This is a nine-month course, which includes an intensive German language course to C1, followed by a specialised IT language course. After that, he can start an 'Ausbildung'. Teresa says that Mohamad feels under pressure because his future in Germany depends on these courses. On top of this, he is anxious about his friends in Syria, and is dealing with his own refugee experience. Mohamad left Madaya when he could no longer be sure that he wouldn't be shot on his way home from work.

183. Teresa says that so far, Mohamad feels at home in Berlin. It's a good city for Newcomers, because it's very international, there are lots of things to do, and you are never alone, despite living in a big city. Mohamad has developed a network of mostly Syrian friends who he met in Newcomer accommodation when he first arrived. However, it's been more difficult to make German contacts. At the moment, he lives with a retired teacher. When he first arrived in Berlin, Mohamad was often out and about meeting new people. Since he started his 'Einsteigs Qualifizierung', his focus has shifted to his studies. It's a difficult balance to strike – studying is one part of arriving in Germany, but it means that there is less time to be social and to 'arrive privately'.

Ripple effects

184. I ask Teresa whether she thinks that the tandem encounters create ripple effects. Teresa says that they do, and that this is important. Teresa's partner is a musician and in his industry, there are few contact points with Newcomers. Locals might be interested in connecting with Newcomers but there are few contact points in their everyday lives. Teresa comments that right now, there are so few cross over points that Locals really have to seek out these kinds of encounters. On top of this, establishing a new life in Germany can be a full-time job for a Newcomer – registration, appointments, language classes, and finding accommodation and jobs – even before they begin to build their social networks.

A chance for Germany

185. Teresa describes what is happening in Germany as a really big chance. She says that the refugee situation, the war, and the reasons why people have left their homes are tragic and unfair. However, much has come from this movement in society – both good and bad – and this is really just the beginning. This is a chance to think and learn about how we live together and how we can live together, and to use that learning to create something new.

186. Teresa maintains that programmes like SWAF bring a real fullness and openness to your life. They provide opportunities for people to learn from one another and to step outside their daily grind. The effect of this mutual openness in a tandem is that you get to know one another, not necessarily as a refugee or as a Syrian or as a German, but as human beings. Teresa comments that when you do this, you realise that there are common factors, and many more than we think. Programmes like SWAF also provide a chance for individuals to participate as part of something bigger, to help shape the kind of society that they wish for in the future. Teresa points out that for people who are already politically engaged, that kind of participation is normal. But for the majority of people, this is a really great experience, to see the influence you can have when you are part of a something bigger.

G. Vom Guten Hirten, Marienfelde, Berlin

187. *Cosima volunteers at a German class held in a church in Marienfelde called Vom Guten Hirten. She invites me to join the Thursday morning class. I join in for three weeks before Christmas and then return again for two weeks in the New Year. I join Margot's class. Margot is a retired teacher, and her class is roughly B level German. There are usually between four and ten people in the class - Newcomers from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. In January 2017, I interview Angelika Padberg, the founder of the German classes, and two Newcomers, Lana and Ali, a couple from Syria and Libya, who I meet at class.*

188. *This story is about how one woman has created a space where Newcomers and Locals can come together to learn and speak German. It highlights how important it is for Newcomers to have accessible opportunities to learn and practice German with Locals. This story also touches upon the significance of these encounters for the Locals running the German classes. Finally, the history of Marienfelde helps to situate what is happening in Germany today, in a broader historical context.*

Marienfelde Refugee Centre Museum

189. I take the S-Bahn to Marienfelde and then walk to Vom Guten Hirten. The walk takes around twenty minutes, depending on snow. On the way, I pass the Marienfelde Refugee Centre Museum. Just before Christmas, I visit the museum. Since opening in 1953, Marienfelde has been a point of first contact for Germans expelled from Poland, Romania and the former Soviet Union after the Second World War, for guest workers arriving in Germany after 1955, and asylum seekers from all over the world. Around 1.35 million refugees from the former East Germany (out of a total of around four million refugees) also passed through the Marienfelde Reception Centre. It was the main reception centre for refugees from the former East Germany until 1990 and in 1989, fifty thousand people from the former East Germany registered in West Berlin. From 1990 until 2010, Marienfelde was the central reception centre for 'Aussiedler' from Russia and the former Soviet Union. Since 2010, Marienfelde has served as a transitional home for asylum seekers and refugees from all over the world including Syria, Iran and Afghanistan.

190. I chat to the Museum Attendant in the foyer. She tells me that around seven hundred Newcomers currently live at Marienfelde. It used to be the place of first registration for asylum seekers, but now that happens at the LAGESO and then people are sent to emergency accommodation centres, for example the Tempelhof Airport. Refugees live at Marienfelde until they find their own homes. It takes about four years for most people to find a home and it's especially difficult for people with children. Most people with children try to stay in the area, to provide continuity with schooling. Around one third of the residents here are children and the Museum Attendant says that the children tend to pick up German very quickly and then interpret for their parents. She also mentions that some of the German courses for Newcomers are far away and difficult to get to, which is why Vom Guten Hirten, just around the corner, is so important.

German class

191. The building where the Vom Guten Hirten classes take place, sits among a cluster of buildings of dark brick. Through a heavy door is a bright kitchen with a large table, and then another room with a coat rack, a table tennis table folded against the wall, and stacks of chairs and tables. There is a cross on the wall, which I don't notice until Angelika points it out during our interview. Through the large room is a smaller room, where several volunteers look after children. People arrive, hang up their coats, and unpack chairs and tables and cushions around three large tables.

Angelika Padberg's idea

192. Angelika is the founder of the Vom Guten Hirten German classes for Newcomers. Angelika was volunteering with a parish in Dahlem and thought that she could start something similar in Marienfelde, where she lives. She asked the church if she could use the space for German classes for Newcomers and at first they suggested that she could use the space once a week. Angelika thought that one class per week was not enough and so she offered classes four mornings per week. Each morning, there are three classes at different levels. Fourteen volunteers, all of them women, teach the German classes. Most volunteers teach one class per week, but Angelika is there every day as she has the key. She laughs and tells me that this is quite important.

193. When the German classes began in February 2016, there were only two or three Newcomers. Angelika approached Newcomer accommodation centres and asked if they would like to take part in the German classes. One centre said that they would prefer German classes 'in house'. Angelika thought that it was important that the classes be external, so that Newcomers could develop some independence by getting out of the centres and taking the bus. Angelika asked in another centre and they were very positive and supportive of the idea – that was around Easter 2016.

The Newcomers

194. Now, between fifteen and twenty Newcomers come to class each morning. Many of the Newcomers live in the accommodation centres nearby, but a few already have their own homes and still come along to the German classes. Many of the Newcomers are Yazidis from Northern Iraq. They arrived in Germany after attacks by the Islamic State in Northern Iraq in 2015. There are also Newcomers from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan and Libya.

195. Some of the Newcomers are professionals, while others have never been to school or have had limited formal education. Many of the Syrian Newcomers have already learned some English at school, while many Newcomers from Afghanistan and Iraq have learned English from television. Knowing at least some English makes learning German easier. However, for some Newcomers with limited education and no English, they must start right at the very beginning with the alphabet. Angelika says that for those Newcomers, learning German takes a very long time, and this makes it difficult when Newcomers want to find a job.

The importance of job specific vocabulary

196. Job specific vocabulary is very important for some Newcomers. Ali, one of the Newcomers in the class I visit, is a gardener. To work as a gardener in Berlin, Ali needs gardening specific vocabulary. It's a topic that most Newcomers would not cover in German classes or even at school. Ali approached Angelika and she worked with him, developing a list of vocabulary that he could learn and practice. The importance of having opportunities to learn and practice job specific vocabulary was a theme that came up again, when I interviewed Lana and Ali.

Finding a home

197. Angelika has noticed that finding a home seems to be the biggest challenge for Newcomers and many people ask her for help. Angelika says that if she were a refugee and had fled with her children, she would do all that she could to try and provide everything for her children – a place for her family, like a bird that needs a nest.

German classes for women

198. Angelika is a retired teacher, and her original idea was to teach German to women. As a teacher, Angelika noticed that it was always the women in Newcomer families who struggled to learn German. The men would go to work, and the children would go to school. Angelika says that when she needed to talk to the mothers, their children would often translate. She laughs and says that sometimes the children would translate selectively (only the good things), meaning that the whole point of meeting with the mothers was pointless.

199. At the moment, at least as many women as men attend the German classes, and sometimes more. But it wasn't always so. At the start, very few women came to the German classes. Angelika developed a good relationship with a social worker in one of the Newcomer accommodation centres, and she encouraged women to attend. Initially, some women were uncertain about coming to the classes, but over time, they have developed a relationship of trust. Angelika explains that the women who come to class know that it's a good space, it's calm, and they don't need to worry. Once a month, they meet after class for tea and coffee and cake. It's a good chance to talk, and for women to ask questions and discuss problems.

200. Angelika also noticed that many women would only come to class when they could find someone to look after their children. So, she started a 'Kinder Zimmer'. Every morning one or two volunteers check to see whether any children need to be looked after and if they do, they take the children out for walks or play with them in an adjacent room. At first, some children were reluctant to leave their parents, and would sit on their mothers' laps, which made it difficult for parents to concentrate. Now, the children are used to the space and they are content to be looked after while their parents are at class.

Other activities

201. Apart from German classes and coffee afternoons, Vom Guten Hirten have also organized collections of winter clothes for Newcomers and last Autumn, they collected second-hand bikes, worked with Newcomers to repair them, and distributed the bikes to Newcomers to help reduce their travel costs.

202. I ask about Christmas activities. Angelika says that it can be difficult. The volunteers, if they are religious, are mostly Christian. Many Newcomers are Muslim and some have other faiths. At the start, Angelika wondered how people might react to the large cross that sits on one of the walls. She noticed one young man, early on, who looked at the cross and he didn't come back again. She wondered if this was the reason why. However, Angelika emphasizes that this programme is about learning German, and not about religion. They invited Newcomers to share in Christmas activities – a trip to a local Christmas market, and an afternoon of Christmas songs, with candles and biscuits and an Advent wreath. Angelika explains that those activities were not about the church and religion. They talk about Easter and Christmas and other holidays and celebration days in the German classes, but it's in the context of a discussion and exchange where Newcomers also share and explain their holidays and celebration days. Angelika feels that the Newcomers understand that for the volunteers, this is not about religion, it's about teaching and learning German. Angelika comments that seeing Newcomers sitting next to the large cross on the wall, some wearing headscarves, and learning German is wonderful. This, in her view, is tolerance. Angelika thinks it's important to emphasize that there above it doesn't matter, and here below it also doesn't matter.

Funding

203. The German classes have had limited financial support. One of the volunteers wrote about the programme and at the end of 2016, Vom Guten Hirten won a Caritas prize of one thousand euros. This goes some way to the cost of books, paper, photocopying and printing. So far, the volunteers have covered these costs themselves. Angelika says that she doesn't see many possibilities for further funding in the future. She also did not expect the German classes to continue for as long as they have. She thought that the classes might last for a few months, and then other organisations would step in to fill the gap. The original idea was to provide a German class for Newcomers who were not yet enrolled in an official German language course. One year later, some Newcomers go to their official German classes in the afternoons and still come to Vom Guten Hirten in the mornings. Angelika says that this is good and practical because if people can access both morning and afternoon classes, they will learn German more quickly.

204. Angelika mentions that she doesn't know what will happen in the 2017 elections but she wishes that there was more support from the Government - it would be easy to look at programmes like hers, to see that they are doing good work, and to provide support so that they can continue.

The teachers

205. A couple of the volunteers are retired teachers. Others have no background in teaching and at first were anxious about how they would go. Angelika says that while it might be easier for people with a teaching background, the other volunteers are also capable teachers. Some of the volunteers are very independent and they organise their own teaching programmes each week. Others will ask Angelika for assistance. When I ask about the future, Angelika laughs and says that she had no idea. Every month, she prepares a rough timetable and the volunteers let her know their availability. Every month, she hopes that it works and so far, it has.

Exchange in two directions

206. The German classes are an opportunity for exchange and contact not just Newcomers but also for the volunteer teachers. Teaching the Newcomer classes is fulfilling and mentally stimulating for the volunteers, and they have the chance to learn from the experiences and perspectives of the Newcomers. Angelika mentions that one of the volunteers, a woman in her seventies with no prior teaching experience, finds the classes very fulfilling and she volunteers two days per week. Angelika also tells me that in the past, she felt that she didn't really understand Newcomers and felt cautious when she came into contact with Newcomers on the bus. Through the German classes her perspective and understanding of Newcomers has changed, and over time, she has become much more open and at ease.

The context – Marienfelde and Germany

207. Vom Guten Hirten is based in Marienfelde quite by chance. Angelika lives nearby, the church had space available for the classes, and Angelika had a network of friends in the area. We talk about the history of Marienfelde as a backdrop to the classes. Angelika comments that the area really has a history. Since the Second World War, Marienfelde has been a reception place for people seeking asylum from Russia, Poland, and later, from the former East Germany. Angelika wonders whether people in Marienfelde are more used to Newcomers, because the reception centre has been there for decades. She suggests that perhaps, for many people in the area, Newcomers are "Kein Thema". She mentions that there are parts of Germany where there are very few refugees and fewer foreigners, and this can create problems.

208. I tell Angelika about an exhibition I recently saw at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich. An artist had imagined and created a house of the future. In the text accompanying the exhibit, the artist suggests that people are often fearful of what is new, because anything new is by definition 'not normal'. When I read that text I was staring at a house of the future, but it made me think about this project. Angelika says that she isn't sure if that might be something that is particularly German, or if perhaps Americans or the French or the English are also like this. But she comments that German people have a sense of order and when something upsets this order, it becomes a problem. This might be something that all people experience, but she thinks that it is particularly so in Germany.

209. We talk about the approaches towards Newcomers in Australia and Canada and New Zealand and the United States. Angelika says that it is obvious, from reading the newspapers, that the topic of Newcomers in Germany is difficult. Angelika says that she can understand why some people feel unhappy about supporting Newcomers. She explains that it's easy for her to say that Germany should welcome Newcomers. Angelika and her family have a house, jobs, and everything that they need. She says that she understands that when you are not so comfortable, you might feel that the Government should be supporting you, rather than Newcomers. But Angelika maintains that it's right that Newcomers also receive assistance – they are refugees and many of them do want to work.

210. Angelika says that as long as the German classes are needed, and so long as volunteers are available to teach, the classes will continue.

Lana and Ali

211. Lana and Ali were often at Margot's Thursday morning German class. Both Lana and Ali are competent German speakers and Ali also has a good sense of humour. In one class, we ask one another questions from a long list of 'getting to know you' questions. "What does your mother do?" Ali tells the group that his mother is a housewife. He says that he has fourteen siblings and therefore his mother didn't have time for anything else. I say to Ali, "That sounds like a full time job right there." He laughs and says, "Ja, auch mit Überstunden." Later, we are asked whether our grandparents are still alive. Most people's grandparents have passed away. The next question is, "Where do they live?" Margot quickly intervenes and suggests that perhaps we will skip this question. But before she finishes, Ali says, "Paradise or Hell – I'm not sure."

212. After class in January, I take the bus with Lana and Ali to Lana's apartment. Lana's mother and her younger brother live in an apartment next door. Lana cooks lunch and we talk, in German, about how they came to Germany, their experience so far, and their hopes and plans for the future. Lana is from Libya and Ali is from Syria. They met after they both arrived in Germany and they are expecting their first child in 2017.

213. **Lana grew up Tripoli.** Her father, who has passed away, is from Syria and her Oma and Opa on her father's side live in Homs. The family used to spend summer holidays in Syria. Lana's mother is Palestinian and grew up in Lebanon.

214. Lana studied chemical engineering in Libya and worked in medical laboratories. In 2009, after her eldest brother finished his studies, the family moved to Syria. They stayed there for one year and when the war in Syria began, they returned to Libya. The war in Libya began and life became difficult. Lana says that people were being killed for no reason. It was dangerous for women to travel alone because of the risk of kidnapping. Lana's sister had worked as a journalist under Gaddafi, and when Gaddafi fell, it was no longer safe for her to live in Libya. She went to Syria and later moved to Iraq with her husband. In Tripoli, the family lived near an oil refinery. In July 2014, petrol tanks caught fire and they exploded. Lana says that they were told over the radio to drink milk and oil, to protect themselves against the gases they were inhaling.

From Libya to Germany

215. In 2014, Lana's family decided to leave Libya. Lana and her mother and two brothers travelled to a point on the coast and took a boat to Sicily. The journey took twenty hours and was very difficult. Lana says that the seas were very high, and her mother suffers from heart problems and her younger brother suffers from blood pressure. The boat was crowded and broken and carried about four hundred people, with room only to stand. Lana's boat carried men, women and children from Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Turkey and Morocco. Two children died during the journey.

216. I ask whether it was easy to organise the boat journey. Ali says that it isn't easy. He waited for two months on the coast before he got on a boat. There was nothing to eat or drink and the smugglers were violent. He says that the people smugglers have no respect. For some people the journey costs 1000, for others it costs 5000.

217. I ask Lana and Ali about the decision to take a boat. They explain that the alternative is to travel overland through Syria, Turkey and Greece. Ali says that both journeys are difficult. By boat, there is no walking, but you have to wait and you have no idea when you will leave. Lana adds, "Maybe you arrive in Italy, maybe you don't."

218. In Sicily, the women, men and children were sent to different accommodation centres. Lana says that so many people were arriving in Sicily, no one had phones, and many people were trying to find their families. Lana's family stayed together. They remained in Italy in an accommodation centre for about a week. Italian people gave them clothes. Some asylum seekers, but not all, were required to register their asylum applications in Italy. Lana explains that it's just luck.

219. Lana and her family travelled to Germany because they have family here – aunts and uncles. Lana says that because her homeland was in a war, the family needed to stay together. They later took a train from Italy to Munich, and then from Munich to Berlin.

Arriving in Germany

220. Lana arrived in Germany in August 2014. She lived in a Newcomer accommodation centre in Berlin, registered at the LAGESO, and started learning German. Lana received her 'Aufenthaltgestattung' in January 2017. Lana says that her older brother, who is 28, has not yet received his 'Aufenthaltgestattung' but he has already been able to work as an engineering project manager. Lana was also able to work while she only had an 'Ausweis'.

221. Lana explains that with an 'Ausweis' you can live in Germany but you are waiting to see if you will get your 'Aufenthaltgestattung'. You can't study or work and you don't know if you will be allowed to stay. However, if you are qualified you can apply to have your qualifications recognized, and then find a position and seek permission to work. Once you have your 'Aufenthaltgestattung', you can study, travel and work.

222. Lana and her older brother, who also speaks English, sought permission to work. They went to the Agentur für Arbeit. They were asked to provide their original qualifications. They were asked whether they wanted to learn German or to work. Lana says that she came to Germany to work, not just to get the money at the LAGESO. Lana completed a German course and then found an internship position in a laboratory at Humboldt University. Her older brother found a position in a large firm and did a project management course. Her younger brother studied for his Abitur. Lana comments that not all Newcomers are the same. She says that some people already have their 'Aufenthaltgestattung' but they don't go to German classes, they haven't reached B1 German, and they just want to take the social support and go to the Job Centre.

Learning German

223. I ask about learning German. Ali started learning German in the accommodation centre. "But it was always the same - the orange juice, the orange juice, the orange juice. Next week - the orange juice." Lana heard about Vom Guten Hirten through her neighbor. Lana explains that they use Viber to learn German grammar but they have very little contact with German people. The reason they go to the Vom Guten Hirten German classes is because they want to be able to speak German.

224. I ask about the German integration courses. Ali and Lana both studied German for four months. Lana found the German course to be good – lots of verbs and grammar. However, there were about twenty people per class, with varying levels of German proficiency. They both found it difficult to speak German around classmates who were very confident German speakers. Lana says that she felt like her sentences were all wrong. This is why the Vom Guten Hirten classes are very good. Ali and Lana also mention that there were many different accents in their German classes – Ukrainian, Russian, Afghani, Pakistani – and this made it difficult to understand and to work out what is correct. "We hear ich and isch – what is right? I don't know."

Next steps

225. Lana is very keen to find a job but while she is pregnant she is looking for an internship because it's difficult to start a new job when you are soon to have a baby. Another challenge, is to learn job specific language. She tells me about the internship at Humboldt University in Berlin. She interned daily for one month. Everything was in German and she worked with two people from Germany, one person from Mexico and one person from India. They all spoke German and she still has contact with the friends she made during this time. After the baby arrives, Lana wants to find a job, and so far, to remain in Berlin. I ask Lana where 'home' is for her. She says that Syria and Libya are her home, and naturally also Palestine, even though she doesn't live there.

226. **I ask Ali if he would like to share anything about his experience in Germany so far.** The first thing that Ali mentions is that he is a construction engineer with ten years experience. His biggest challenge, is that he needs to learn job specific German language skills in order to work. He was offered a position in a car firm. He took his qualifications and resume along and told the firm that he can speak some German. But it wasn't enough. "I must speak Fachsprache. I don't know what that means, and that … and they say sorry but you don't fit."

227. Ali is from Syria and has been in Germany for one and a half years. He received his 'Aufenthaltgestattung' after eight months. Ali worked for ten years as construction engineer, including working in Iraq, in Saudi Arabia for Toyota, and in Libya for Bosch Car Service. He was based in Libya when he left for Germany. He made the same journey as Lana, travelling from Libya to Italy by boat. There were no police in Italy and so he travelled on to Paris and then Berlin. He says that the Italians were very nice but there is no work in Italy. His future is in Germany where there are large firms and lots of industry development. He says that this is very important for the future. Ali's dream is to become an engineer for BMW or Volkswagen.

Ali's arrival in Berlin

228. When Ali arrived in Berlin, he lived in many different kinds of accommodation. At the moment, he is living in a hostel, but is looking for a flat. He says that it's very difficult to find a flat and it's much easier if you have help from a German person. Lana was lucky – a German friend found her flat online, Lana applied at the LAGESO, and she was given permission to rent the flat. Ali says that sometimes you have to pay someone up to 1000 euros to find a flat for you and when you're not working, that's too expensive.

229. Ali's current hostel has a shared kitchen and bathroom. It's clean but there is no peace. He can't have visitors, he is always being asked for his card, and he feels like he is always

being monitored. He says that residents are not permitted to have a TV or an internet router, and although he would like to study at night, at 10pm, they must sleep. Ali also says that it feels uncertain and he doesn't know if tomorrow or the next day he will have to move.

Finding a job

230. Ali is desperate to find a job. He has always been independent and he doesn't want to be sitting waiting for social support. Ali also needs to get back into the workforce so that he can keep abreast of industry developments. In the eighteen months that he has been in Germany and out of the workforce, things have already changed. Ali points out that keeping up with industry changes is also important for Lana, as a chemical engineer. Lana adds that finding work is also important for their baby. They want their child to see both parents working, so that the child appreciates the importance of study and work. "Then we have a good child and Germany has a good person, not someone who just wants help from the Job Centre."

231. In addition to the language requirements, Ali is finding that it's difficult to navigate the job market as a Newcomer to Germany. He is unsure of where to go, who to approach and what to do. I mention Start with a Friend and I write the details on a piece of paper.

Contact with German people

232. Ali is very keen to improve his German but his biggest challenges are finding opportunities to speak German and to have contact with Locals. Today, he tells me, is the longest period of time that he has spoken German since he arrived in Germany. He says that some of the German classes are very repetitive. "I don't have any use for glass, glass, glass." He emphasizes again how important it is for him to be able to learn 'Fachsprache' and to have opportunities to practice speaking German with German people.

233. Lana makes soup, and chicken with nuts and rice for lunch. It's delicious but I eat quickly because I have to get to another interview on the other side of Berlin. I thank Lana and Ali and I wish them all the best with the baby, the job search, and learning German. As I step out of the apartment building I'm met by a freezing head wind. I think about Lana and Ali's current situation, pushing forward against a kind of invisible resistance, gaining small steps. As I take the bus back to the S-Bahn, I think again about the importance of networks in order to navigate new environments – to make job contacts and to meet German people. I wonder if Lana and Ali will register with Start with a Friend.

H. Familie Kassem and Carmen, Hoyerswerda

234. *Talking with Familie Kassem, Carmen and Walid about their experiences makes me think about the importance of a Local connection for Newcomers arriving in Germany, as well as the need for engagement by both Locals and Newcomers.*

Hoyerswerda

235. Hoyerswerda is a town of about thirty thousand people, four hours south east of Berlin by train, in the former East Germany. In 1991, right wing radicals attacked refugees and foreign workers living in Hoyerswerda. Following riots and attacks, including petrol bombs thrown at an apartment building where refugees were living, the refugees were evacuated and many foreign workers left town.

Familie Kassem, Carmen and Walid

236. Almost twenty-five years later, at the start of 2014, Nasser and Jasmin Kassem and their young daughter arrived in Germany from Lebanon. They moved into a newly opened accommodation centre for Newcomers on Dillinger Straße in Hoyerswerda, where Carmen Beyer worked as a volunteer.

237. Carmen was born in Neuruppin, north of Brandenburg, and her parents later moved to Hoyerswerda. Carmen works as a 'Diplom Informator' at a university library, the Standortbibliothek Senftenberg at the Brandenburg Technical University of Cottbus-Senftenberg. Carmen has three (almost) grown up children. Carmen's son still lives with her in Hoyerswerda and is completing his 'Abitur'. One of her daughters lives nearby, and the other lives in Greifswald. Carmen started volunteering in the childcare room at Dillinger Straße when it opened in early 2014.

238. Cosima met Familie Kassem and Carmen in 2014, when she made a documentary programme for German television about the opening of Dillinger Straße, and a citizens initiative supporting Newcomers in Hoyerswerda, 'Hilf mit Herz'. Cosima puts me in contact with Carmen, Familie Kassem, and Walid. In 2002, Walid moved to Germany from Tunis. He now works as a social worker and translator for Newcomers in Hoyerswerda.

Meeting Familie Kassem, Carmen and Walid in Hoyerswerda

239. In January 2017, I take three trains from Berlin to Hoyerswerda, through vast expanses of industry covered in snow, then forests, fields, small villages, and, confusingly, a train station called 'Brand Tropical Islands'. I take a photo. Carmen later tells me that this is the site of a massive dome structure that was originally an airship hanger. The site was used as a military airfield by the Luftwaffe and after WWII was one of the largest military airports in East Germany. In 2003, the site was converted into the Tropical Islands resort.

240. I arrive in Hoyerswerda in the afternoon. The snow on the platform is sparkling in winter sunlight but the temperature is the kind of cold that makes your head hurt. My plan is to take a taxi from the station to Familie Kassem's apartment, but there is no taxi rank. I find a sign on the station wall with the number of a taxi company. I call the number. The next available taxi is forty-five minutes away. The man suggests that I take a bus. I walk to the bus stop but I can't work out the timetable or route and I decide to walk.

241. It feels like I've arrived on a movie set, and everyone has already gone home. It's so quiet. I notice the streetlights. They are a different shape to the lights in the former West Germany. I find a supermarket and I stop in to buy flowers. I choose bright tulips and I wrap their dripping stems in a plastic bag from the fruit and vegetable section. The lady at the checkout scans the flowers and then tells me that the plastic bags are only for fruit and vegetables. Not for flowers. I tell her that I understand. I feel sheepish about upsetting the plastic bag system. There is a café in the front part of the supermarket and I decide to order a coffee and try calling another cab. This time I have success, and in a short time I'm standing in the dark outside a tall and rectangular apartment block, which sits next to and opposite many other tall and rectangular apartment blocks.

242. I arrive a few minutes before Carmen and Walid. I walk up a few flights of stairs and Nasser and Jasmin greet me at the door. I meet their young daughters who play in living room while we talk. Nuts and biscuits are set out on the table, and we drink coffee as we chat.

Arriving in Germany

243. Jasmin and Nasser arrived in Berlin on 1 January 2014. For the first month, they lived in Newcomer accommodation centres in Berlin, Chemnitz, and Schneeberg before arriving in Hoyerswerda. This was the first time the family had been to Germany. Carmen asks whether they knew anything about Germany. Jasmin explains that there are many people from Lebanon living in Berlin, including her sister, who moved to Germany and married here. Other people moved to Germany from Lebanon to study, or to start businesses. Jasmin comments that when there is a war, people will move.

244. Although there are many people from Lebanon in Germany, there are few in Hoyerswerda – Familie Kassem and one other family. Carmen asks whether that was a shock for them when they arrived in Hoyerswerda. Jasmin says that it was and when she first arrived she wondered, "What is this place?", and wanted to return to Lebanon. Carmen presses Jasmin about what she found shocking. Jasmin replies that it was the people, and then quickly apologizes. Carmen reassures her that it's no problem and says that she can well imagine how that might feel in reverse – you don't know the people, or whether they like you, or whether they think you should be here. Jasmin explains that she was the first woman in Hoyerswerda to wear a headscarf. When she arrived, people stared at her, and she had problems when she went out in public. With time, the situation has improved. Jasmin says that in Berlin it was "Kein Thema" – it just wasn't an issue, but Chemnitz and Schneeberg felt a little like Hoyerswerda, because there were very few foreigners.

Finding a home

245. Familie Kassem lived in the Newcomer accommodation centre on Dillinger Straße for fifteen months. Finding a flat was a combination of hard work and luck. They were pregnant with their second child. When Dillinger Straße opened in 2014, there was a lot of support from local citizens and people felt that with a new baby, the family needed their own home. So, Carmen explains, they applied some pressure to move the family into their own apartment, and it worked. Without that pressure, Carmen says, the family might still be living in Newcomer accommodation. There are other families who arrived around the same time as Familie Kassem who are still living in Newcomer accommodation.

246. Dillinger Straße was closed when the lease expired and the number of Newcomer arrivals to Hoyerswerda decreased. A second Newcomer accommodation centre, with space for four hundred people, opened in Hoyerswerda on Thomas-Müntzer Straße on November 2015. Walid works there as a social worker and translator.

247. Walid and Carmen explain that many Newcomers, who have been granted asylum, have already moved into their own homes in Hoyerswerda and other towns nearby, including the small nearby town of Bernsdorf. Carmen explains that the available flats are often in places where people do not want to live. For example, Bernsdorf is a very small town in a fringe region and the infrastructure is not very good, but around twenty Afghani refugees have been given accommodation there. Jasmin adds that refugees from Chechnya, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya and some Palestinians have also moved to Bernsdorf. Jasmin knows one woman from Lebanon who has moved to Bernsdorf – she says that she would prefer to live in Hoyerswerda because Bernsdorf is a village, and there is nothing there, but it's OK. Carmen considers this kind of constellation problematic and says that it's important not to build ghettos, but that is what is happening. I ask whether it's possible for refugees to move elsewhere. Carmen says they would need a good reason – perhaps a sick child, or for education reasons, for example there is no Gymnasium in Bernsdorf.

Finding jobs

248. We talk about Jasmin and Nasser's work. For the past two years, Nasser has been working as a barber in Hoyerswerda at a large, established salon called Haar Schneider. The owner is one Haiko Schneider. The salon has around forty employees and staff members are sent to cities across Germany and Europe for training.

249. The salon caters for women and men separately, which is not so common in Germany. Nasser and Jasmin explain that in Lebanon, there are separate salons for men and women, and usually women cut women's hair, and men cut men's hair. Nasser specializes in men's haircuts but now, he explains, he works in a salon with thirty-seven women (and Henry, who works in the office).

250. I ask Nasser how he found the job and he exclaims, "Carmen! Carmen found me a job, a house, everything!" We laugh. Carmen explains that without a contact in the community, it's almost impossible for a Newcomer to find a job, particularly if they don't speak German. Nasser completed language courses in Chemnitz and Hoyerswerda and then completed a three-month internship at the salon. Carmen says that the owner of the salon is a really great man, and when she asked if Nasser could have a job, he agreed. Nasser works full-time at the salon and has travelled to Dresden and Leipzig for training and work events.

251. Jasmin trained and worked as a nurse in Lebanon, specializing in nursing for children and pregnant women. The Monday after we meet, Jasmin will begin a one-month internship at a nearby hospital. She expects to work around four to six hours each day, as she needs to fit her work around her two children and her German studies. It's a start, but Carmen thinks that Jasmin will likely have to do further training in Germany before she can practice as a nurse. Carmen says that she is hopeful that the internship might open a few doors and lead to something else for Jasmin, like it did for Nasser, but it's uncertain. Jasmin has already made a few contacts at the hospital. She went to a seminar delivered by a Kurdish doctor from Syria and met a female doctor from Lebanon. There is also a refugee clinic in the hospital, and there might be opportunities for Jasmin to work as a translator at the clinic.

252. After the internship, Jasmin is focusing on her B1 German test. Although she passed all her tests at school, Jasmin feels worried about this one, especially the listening test. However, she says that this is a chance for her, and she needs to study hard. At the start, Jasmin and Carmen spoke in English, and Jasmin says that learning German is not difficult, it just takes time. She has access to a three month German course, with six hours tuition per day, which she has to juggle with caring for her two young children, and her study.

Meeting people

253. As more Newcomers have arrived in Hoyerswerda, Locals have become more familiar with women wearing headscarves and long clothing and it has become a little more 'normal'. Jasmin feels that now it's OK. In terms of meeting people, Jasmin feels hesitant about her German skills, especially when she says something and the response is "Wie bitte?" Carmen comments that much of the family's contact with Locals has come through Nasser's work. It's not a situation where people approach the family to say, "Hello, so nice that you are here." In their apartment building, over the last two years, Jasmin says that only two women have visited and talked to her, the others look away. There is some opportunity for contact at the Kindergarten, but Jasmin says that the parents can be a bit funny. At school, the teachers are all very nice and the German kids are prima! Carmen says that Jasmin and Nasser take every opportunity to go out and to attend school events – parent afternoons, Christmas celebrations, and other activities. Not all families do this. Carmen comments that this is integration – to do all that you can, but the most important factors for integration are learning the language and finding a job.

Waiting for a decision on asylum status

254. When I meet the family, three years after they arrived in Germany, they are still waiting to hear whether their asylum applications will be granted. If their applications are granted they are entitled to remain in Germany. If their applications are rejected, there is still the possibility to remain in Germany, but on a more limited basis. Every three months, their residence permits are extended for a further three months.

Where is home?

255. Nasser and Jasmin's families are in Lebanon. Jasmin has a sister in Berlin, and Nasser has a brother in Cottbus who arrived in Germany aged sixteen. I ask Nasser and Jasmin where is home for them now, and for the future? Nasser says that he has a good job in Hoyerswerda, and because he doesn't work on Tuesdays, he can buy groceries, and take the children to kindergarten and school. Jasmin says that in Hoyerswerda, everything is OK. In five or six years, they aren't sure. Nasser says that he would return to Lebanon to visit, but not to live as they have no home or work there. In Hoyerswerda, he has a job, a home, school for the children (and Carmen and Walid). We laugh, and Jasmin adds, "Yes, without Carmen…" Carmen suggests that the children have more possibilities in Germany and comments that one of the children already has a Saxonian accent.

Locals and Newcomers

256. Later, Walid talks about his experience as a social worker in Hoyerswerda. Walid arrived in Germany in 2002 as a student from Tunis, and lived in different parts of Germany before settling in Hoyerswerda. Walid works at the new refugee accommodation centre. Around three hundred people live there at the moment. Walid used to work as a translator and he is in high demand with Newcomers, because he understands them. Walid says that the job is not easy – you need to have a way with people, to understand them and look after them. Most Newcomers are good people, but Walid says that some Newcomers do arrive with false impressions of life in Germany, and they struggle to understand how things work. For example, some Newcomers expect that they will be provided with their own home (Carmen adds that she thinks part of this might be a translation issue with the words for apartment and house), and others expect that they will be supported without needing to work. Walid says he challenges people about these ideas, and that over time, they learn. Walid also points out that the attitudes of Newcomers towards women and relationships are varied - some align with German attitudes, while others are very different.

257. Walid also comments that at work, Locals are often surprised when he introduces himself and asks how he can help – they look at him differently when they realize he is a social worker. He says it's the same with speaking German. When people hear that he speaks German, they are immediately more friendly, and willing to engage. With time, people are changing. At first, some people in Hoyerswerda wanted nothing to do with Newcomers, but they have since developed friendships with Newcomers, or they now come and support Newcomer initiatives. Carmen agrees that with so many Newcomers arriving in a short time, and without any previous experience of Newcomers, Locals have taken time to adjust. She comments that it's important that Locals do engage with Newcomers, because it's through engagement that they realize that Newcomers are also people, and this is important for developing understanding and shifting perspectives. Walid emphasizes that integration has to work in two directions – some Locals expect that Newcomers should adapt to be exactly like them, but this connection requires adaptation by both sides. Carmen adds that it's enriching to connect with and learn from people from other countries. Walid agrees and comments that you become more open and more intelligent in your thinking - how you see and interpret the world - when you get to know different cultures.

258. Arriving in Germany from Tunis in 2002 as a student was not a problem for Walid. He says that he found German people to be open and he feels like he has a community here. The biggest shocks for him on arrival were German bureaucracy, and the differences that he noticed between people in the former East and former West. Walid found people in the former East to be friendlier and 'herzlicher' than in the former West, where he found that people tended to be more 'surface level' and focused on themselves. I ask whether this has something to do with socialism. Walid and Carmen think that it does, the idea that everyone should have social support and somewhere to live, and communities should celebrate and socialise together. Carmen thinks that over the next few generations, these differences will disappear.

259. Towards the end of the evening, Carmen and I chat more generally about connections between Newcomers and Locals. Carmen tells me that she doesn't want to live in a parallel community, she wants communities to function and work together, and she thinks that it's possible for them to do so. She considers that the idea of every country for itself to be nonsense. Carmen drops Walid home and takes me to the train station. We drive past one of the accommodation centres, now closed. I thank Carmen for her time and her willingness to support my project and she tells me she is happy to answer any questions by email. I take the three trains back to Berlin, arriving shortly before midnight.

Carmen

260. After I return to Australia, I wonder about Carmen. I email her and ask if she will tell me some more about her connection with Familie Kassem, and her own background. Carmen volunteered in the childcare room at Dillinger Straße for around twelve months. She got to know the children, and through the children, she met their parents - Jasmin and Nasser. Carmen says that she started to support the family initially because there was a great need for support. There were so many forms to fill out. During Jasmin's pregnancy, Carmen saw that the family really wanted to integrate and Carmen wanted to support them in this. During the summer, Carmen invited the family to spend time in her garden, so the children could play, and she supported the family with the practical aspects of their new lives in Germany. Over time, this has developed into a true friendship. Carmen adds that she also feels something of a responsibility towards Familie Kassem.

261. On a broader level, Carmen explains that she wanted to show another side to Hoyerswerda, to counter the negative associations from the events of 1991. She has always tried to put herself in the place of a Newcomer and she feels it's important that people are welcomed without prejudice and with friendship. Carmen says that this has much to do with her upbringing and her mother, and she is certain that growing up in the former East Germany also plays a roll. In Carmen's eyes all people are equal, regardless of religion, although Carmen is not religious herself. Finally, Carmen writes that her encounters with Newcomers have enriched her life. They have also highlighted how prosperous life in Germany really is, and also how wasteful. She writes that no one can choose where they are born, but they should be free to choose where they live, and above all, to provide their children with the best opportunities that they can.

I. Hussam, Nebras, Lyall, Cosima and Familie Jagow-Duda

262. *On my last Friday evening in Berlin, Cosima invites me to her house for dinner. In December 2016, Hussam, a 20 year old refugee from Damascus, moved in to a spare room in the home of Familie Jagow-Duda in south-east Berlin. Hussam and his friend Nebras have agreed to tell me about their stories so far. Cosima has also invited Lyall, a mutual friend who introduced Hussam and Cosima.*

263. *This is a wonderful story of a very recent and very positive connection that has been made between a Newcomer and a German family. What I love most about this story is the random sequence of events that led to the introduction of Hussam to Familie Jagow-Duda, and the strength of the connection, just two months later. According to Cosima, this all came about because of Lyall's pet bird…*

Lyall

264. **When I arrive at Cosima's house, I meet Lyall.** Lyall is from Damascus and she has been studying in the Czech Republic and Germany for her PhD. Lyall has just arrived back in Germany this afternoon after one month working with children in Syria. She is distressed about what she has seen. Cosima is making lasagna and we chat as we wait for Hussam and Nebras to arrive. Cosima tells us that the theme this evening is truly international, with Arabic snacks, an Italian main course, and an Australian pavlova, which I have bought with me on the S-Bahn. The pavlova has travelled, unassembled, remarkably well.

265. Cosima's youngest son, Florian, has a friend sleeping over this evening. Every now and then, Florian and his friend waltz through the living room in fancy dress, laughing hysterically. Hussam and Nebras arrive. Hussam brings fruit juice to dinner and Florian enthusiastically offers up his glass. Georg, Cosima's husband, tells us that Florian loves the fruit juices that Hussam brings home. After dinner, Cosima takes Lyall home and I sit and talk with Nebras and Hussam. Nebras and I speak in German, and then Nebras acts as a German/Arabic interpreter for Hussam and I.

Nebras

266. **Nebras is twenty-three years old and comes from Damascus**. His father is Syrian and his mother is Palestinian. For sixteen years of his life, Nebras lived in Al Yarmouk, a Palestinian district of Damascus. In 2012, Nebras' parents separated and his mother remarried and moved to Florida. His father also remarried and his elder sisters married and moved out, so Nebras and his brother, who was nineteen or twenty at the time, lived together. They were both studying Wirtschaft. Nebras received full marks in his Abitur and while he was studying at university, he worked part time as a private maths tutor. In June 2015, Nebras did not graduate from his final year of university because he wanted to get a further postponement of his military service.

267. Nebras wanted to move to Florida to live with his mother. But he couldn't get a visa and his mother suggested that he should go to Germany. It was a difficult decision to make, as his friends, father and sisters were in Syria. However, it was also very difficult to live in Syria at that time. Sometimes there was no water and no electricity. Nebras says that there was bombing in Damascus, but not like Aleppo. Sometimes there were problems at checkpoints and Nebras wasn't able to get to university. In Syria, men from the age of eighteen are required to do military service. Military service used to be for a period of eighteen months, but now it's until the end of the war. Nebras explains that you require a 'Verschiebung' to get through the checkpoints – a document confirming the postponement of your military service. You are excused from military service while you are studying. But as soon as you finish studying, you are obliged to join the military. Some people fail their studies in order to get a further postponement.

Leaving Syria

268. The decision to leave Syria was quick. In August 2015, Nebras' mother suggested that he go to Germany. In September 2015, Nebras travelled with his brother and a friend to Beirut to collect Hussam, who was visiting his father. They travelled by car and passed through many checkpoints. Nebras says that the guards at the checkpoints know what people are doing, but they will allow you to travel onwards if you give them money or cigarettes.

269. From Beirut they flew with Hussam to Istanbul, then travelled to an island in Turkey and took a boat to Greece. The boat journey was just under two hours. The journey from Turkey to Greece was organized through smugglers. Nebras says that it was easy to find them, because so many people were trying to reach Germany at that time. The smugglers collected them in taxis and delivered them to a point on the coast, where they met other smugglers. There were about thirty people in their group, including some very elderly people, but no children. They were mostly Syrians and Palestinian Syrians. The person who drove their boat was a seventeen year old from their group, "Someone like me," says Nebras. When I ask Nebras how he felt at that point in the journey, he says, "You cannot think. When you are on the sea, you cannot think what might happen, just that I must get to Greece." The boat journey cost twelve hundred US dollars.

270. They travelled through three Greek Islands and from Leros, bought a boat ticket to Athens. They travelled from Athens to Macedonia by bus then took a taxi to Serbia and a bus to Croatia. From Croatia, the Red Cross took them to Hungary, where they boarded a train to Vienna. In Vienna, they bought tickets to Passau, on the Austrian border. In Passau, Nebras and Hussam were 'met' by German police. Nebras explains that his brother was not 'met' by police because he doesn't look like a 'real Arab'. They were fingerprinted and sent to a town about six hours away by bus. Nebras says that they didn't want to stay there, so they bought a bus ticket to Berlin.

Arriving in Germany

271. Nebras left Syria on 27 September 2015 and arrived in Germany on 9 October 2015. He arrived in Berlin on 13 October 2015. Nebras was 'lucky' and waited only three days at the LAGESO to register for asylum. His brother waited for two days. Hussam waited for twenty-five days. I ask Nebras why there was such a difference in the waiting times. He says that it's just luck - no one knows. Nebras explains that each day from 9am until 6pm you would have to wait outside the LAGESO and look for your number on a large screen. Nebras had his first asylum interview on 11 February 2016. He received permission to stay in Germany for three months, and this was extended by one year to 11 May 2017, without an interview. On 9 December 2016, he had his second interview, and now he is waiting to see what will happen.

272. For the first month in Germany, Nebras stayed with friends and then he and his brother and friend moved into a hostel. It was really a large house that had been converted into a hostel. At the end of each month, they would go back to the LAGESO to arrange for their rent to be paid for the next month. The owner of the hostel was patient and they were allowed to continue living there, even when they had to wait for their rental papers. The German neighbours invited the residents of the hostel to 'Meet and Eat' events. Nebras says that this was great, because their neighbours helped them out with anything that they needed, and they got to know German people.

Moving out and moving in

273. In May 2016, they had to move out of the hostel, because the owner decided to renovate. Their German neighbours, worried about where the Newcomers would live, posted photos and biographies on Facebook, asking if anyone had rooms available. A German family responded and said that they would like to offer a room in their home to a musician. Nebras plays the guitar. A German friend who had given him a guitar, introduced him to the German family.

274. I ask Nebras how he felt when he first met the German family. He felt worried but then thought - everything will be good. I ask Nebras if he recalls where that feeling came from. He says, "I am strange. I don't have anything. To meet new people, they don't know who is that, what does he do? They don't know anything about me. But then I smiled and thought, I am not a man from Mars."

275. The family was really nice right from the start. The moment they opened the door and smiled, Nebras' worries disappeared. The family explained the rules – no parties (Nebras laughs), and Nebras explained to the family that he is very quiet. In May 2016, Nebras moved in with his Germany family, a theatre director in his eighties and his wife. On moving day, Nebras and his brother both cried. They had always lived together and at the start, it was difficult to be apart. This was especially so, because they didn't have any other family in Germany. Nebras' brother lived in the hostel until he found a share house of his own. After the first week apart, everything was OK. Nebras says that the house is very quiet, and he often reads or studies in his room. The family has different schedules and so they don't always eat together. But they sometimes go out to restaurants and sometimes Nebras cooks Arabic food. Nebras is a good cook, and the family enjoys his cooking. I remark that Nebras' new family is very lucky. Nebras laughs and says that he is also very lucky.

German classes

276. Nebras started German classes in December 2015. He passed his B1 test in August 2016, with almost full marks, and later passed his German Orientation test with full marks. Nebras explains that you are given a book of three hundred questions, and thirty-three of these questions appear on the test. Cosima overhears this and asks Nebras whether he still has the book. She says that she would love to know if any Germans can answer the questions. Despite having one hour to complete the German Orientation test, Nebras finished in seven minutes. He smiles and says that when he left, most of his friends were still writing their names. Nebras completed an internship as a German translator at his language school. Next week, he starts a contract to work for three hours each week, while he studies for his B2 German test.

Developing a network and the future

277. Many of the early opportunities for Nebras to meet Locals in Berlin were through the neighbours near the hostel. They were mostly older German people who organised picnics and events because they wanted to support Newcomers. But Nebras says that there are always Facebook events where you can meet German people, and that he has also been to a few events organised by 'Give something back to Berlin'. Cosima remarks that she also knows of this organisation, and then turns to me and says, "That would also have been good for your project, but I forgot!"

278. I ask Nebras how it feels now, more than a year later, to be living in Germany, and how he feels about the future. He says that it feels really good to be in Germany. Here, he can do so many things, and he can discover something new – the people and the culture. There are lots of opportunities in Berlin to play music, and Nebras has heard that Berlin universities are very good. He is keen to continue his Wirtschaft studies and then go on to study Medical Engineering. Nebras shows us a video of him playing guitar with a friend at a summer festival in Berlin – he's really good. Nebras hopes to stay in Berlin. He likes the atmosphere, the international mix of people, and that you don't feel like a foreigner in Berlin, because everyone seems to be from somewhere else. I laugh and agree that sometimes it can be difficult to find a real Berliner. Nebras feels like he has a network here, and he has met a really international mix of people, which he finds really cool.

279. Nebras stays in touch with his parents every day and his siblings every few days. He shows us another video that he made when his mother visited Berlin in 2016. Nebras was nineteen when his mother left Syria for the United States. When she visited Berlin, they had not seen one another for more than three years. The video is touching, sad and delightful. Cosima asks Nebras whether he ever had moments when he wanted to go back to Syria, or if he ever wished that he had not come to Germany. Nebras says that he has not, because he knows that there aren't any opportunities in Syria at the moment. He needs to take a new step here in Germany and he has done that. To improve and develop, it's important for Nebras to find a good place and good chances, and here in Germany, he feels that he has found both. If the situation in Syria improved, Nebras says that he might consider returning, but not immediately. He wants to finish his university studies, and he also points on that it's difficult to always be making a new life. I agree. It feels like you are always taking in tiny steps.

Hussam

280. **Hussam is twenty and comes from Damascus**. In Damascus, Hussam studied Wirtschaft and lived with his Oma, whose home was close to the university. For almost a year, Hussam had been thinking about leaving Syria, but he didn't have enough money. Hussam finished his first year of university. He wanted to study Communication Engineering but there was bombing near the university. Hussam went to visit his father, who was working in Lebanon selling construction materials. While Hussam was away, Nebras told him that he was thinking of going to Germany. Hussam didn't want to go back to Syria and he told Nebras that he would come too. On the very last day before Hussam was due to leave Lebanon, his father gave him the money for the journey. He didn't have a chance to say goodbye to family and friends in Syria.

281. I ask Hussam what his parents thought about him leaving Syria. Hussam's father didn't want him to leave. But he also told Hussam that he needed to discover his own life and that there were no chances to study in Syria. Hussam's mother came to Lebanon to say goodbye. She didn't want Hussam to go. Cosima says, "That I can understand, she wanted to hold you close." Hussam says that this felt very difficult, but his mother told him that his future is more important than feelings. I ask Hussam whether he would have left Syria, had it not been for Nebras. Hussam says that he would have left eventually, because he had been thinking about it for a year. They decided to go to Germany because they had heard that you can study in Germany, and that people will help. Lots of Hussam's friends also wanted to leave Syria and many have also come to Germany.

Waiting in line at the LAGESO

282. As Nebras has already described their journey to Germany, we skip to Hussam's arrival in Berlin. On his first day in Berlin, Hussam slept on the street because he wanted to get a number to register at the LAGESO. It was October 2015 and it was very, very cold. Hussam spent twenty-five days waiting outside the LAGESO to get a number to register. He took the bus every morning at 2am, waited in line until 6pm, and made no progress – no number, no money, no place to sleep. During this time, he stayed with friends. Hussam then lived in a refugee accommodation centre with thirteen people per room until he found a place in a hostel, supported by the Sozial Amt.

283. Hussam found his arrival in Germany very difficult. He wondered why he had come to Germany and wanted to return to Syria. Nebras told Hussam that it was only the beginning and that things would improve. Cosima mentions that when Hussam and Nebras arrived in October 2015, things were particularly difficult at the LAGESO because so many Newcomers were arriving and the registration system could not cope. Hussam shows us a video of the line at the LAGESO at night, and another video of what he and Nebras call 'The Wave'. There are so many people standing up, and standing so close to one another as they wait outside the LAGESO, that when people start to move, everyone else moves with them, because they can't do anything else. Hussam shows us photos of himself waiting in line in the early hours of the day, "Look at my eyes!" They are wide and tired.

284. I ask Hussam what he did while he waited in line and whether he talked to the people around him. Hussam says that there were people from Russia and Afghanistan who would claim to be Syrian, so Hussam would ask them what they knew about Syria or he would tell them that he was also from Afghanistan. Cosima mentions that when she made the documentary in Hoyerswerda in 2014, Newcomers from countries in North Africa and Afghanistan were upset about the Syrians, because they received their passes more quickly.

285. When Hussam had his second asylum interview in January 2016, he asked the woman at the interview if she could please process his application quickly so that he could get his passport. Fifteen days later, he received a letter confirming that he would receive his passport in March 2016. At that time, he still felt like he wanted to go back to Syria.

German classes

286. In April 2016, Hussam started a German course but he stopped after two weeks because the teacher was not very good. He completed an 'Alphabet Course' and then switched to an A1 German course in September 2016. In between, Hussam had ten free days and he went to visit his cousin in Sweden. Hussam is now completing an A2.1 German course. He goes to classes every day at the same language school where Nebras is about to start his part-time job next week.

The connection – Hussam meets Lyall

287. **Hussam met Lyall on the Berlin U-Bahn.** Lyall was upset and crying. Hussam didn't know that Lyall was Syrian, and so he said to her in English, "Why are you crying, you must not cry, you must be stronger." Lyall asked Hussam where he was from and they discovered that they are both from Damascus. They remained in contact and became friends. Lyall knew that Hussam had been looking for a room in Berlin for almost a year.

288. **Cosima met Lyall through her church.** In late 2016, Cosima was helping Lyall with a project planned in Syria for late 2016 and early 2017. Lyall was at Cosima's house working on her project.

289. **Lyall is very close to her pet bird.** Usually, when Lyall goes away, Cosima looks after the bird. However, Cosima and her family were going to be away over Christmas 2016, at the same time that Lyall was going to be in Syria. Cosima asked Lyall what she was planning to do with her bird, while she was away. Lyall told Cosima that she had a refugee friend and that he was really nice and he was going to take care of the bird while she was away. Then Lyall said to Cosima, "Actually, I also need to find a flat for him, can you help me find him a flat?"

290. **Cosima and her family had been thinking for some time about hosting a Newcomer**. There were always advertisements in the newspaper seeking homes for refugees and minors. Familie Jagow-Duda had the space, but they were not sure if this was something they wanted to do. Cosima knew a family who had hosted a refugee child and in the end, she says, it was really a catastrophe. Cosima was worried that if you take someone into your home and they are traumatised or it doesn't work out, you can't simply walk away, because you have a responsibility. In the end, Cosima decided to wait and see whether fate would intervene. She had so many connections through her work to people and organisations working with Newcomers.

291. **As Cosima tells the story, "And so then came Lyall and she tells me that her refugee friend is going to look after her bird. And that he's a really nice guy. And that I must find a flat for him. Can I help her find him a flat?"** At first, Cosima told Lyall that she had no idea, that finding a flat for a refugee was really important, but also really difficult. Then Cosima thought that perhaps they could host Lyall's friend. When Cosima suggested this to Lyall, Lyall said to her, "Are you crazy? You want to give your room to a refugee? OK, but if you do give your room to a refugee, you should give it to Hussam because he's not a terrorist,

he's a good guy." Lyall called Hussam, and Cosima spoke with her family, who were very supportive of the idea. They decided that they would offer a room to Hussam for six months while their eldest daughter was in Nicaragua.

The first meeting

292. Lyall and Cosima met after church one Sunday to talk about Lyall's project and Hussam came along with Lyall to meet Cosima. Cosima says that when she first met Hussam, she had a good feeling. She says, "It's important that you have a good gut feeling and that you think OK, yes this can work, because you are inviting someone to live in your home and you really don't know who that person is." Nebras tells me that Hussam called him after the first meeting with Cosima and said, "The mother is very nice. I like her. I like her!"

The second meeting

293. Cosima invited Hussam to breakfast to meet the family. Hussam was hesitant about coming to breakfast without Lyall, but Cosima felt that it was important that he come by himself. On the way to Cosima's house, Hussam practiced German sentences and thought about what he should say. I ask Hussam whether he can recall any of the sentences. He says that he can, "I'm happy that I can live with you" and "I hope that you will trust me." Cosima remembers Hussam saying this to her when they met. Cosima also recalls that around this time, Lyall would say to her, "Hussam really is not a terrorist." Cosima would reply, "Yes, I know that they are not all terrorists," and Lyall would reiterate, "OK, but Hussam *really* is not a terrorist."

294. I ask Hussam what it felt like to meet Cosima and the family for the first time. He says it was stressful. Cosima explains that both meetings were kind of rushed and that she felt worried about meeting with Hussam after church, but that was the only time she could organise with Lyall. And then there were only three weeks before Cosima's daughter left for Nicaragua, and she was really keen to meet Hussam before she left.

295. Nebras tells me that Hussam was sad when he couldn't find a home in Berlin and when Lyall called Hussam about Cosima's room, Hussam was really happy. Nebras remembers a phone call from Hussam in November 2016, "Nebras! I've found a room. AAAAGH! It's not only you who lives with a German family. Now me too! And it's not just your German father who is an important man. My German father is a professor!"

The day-to-day at Familie Jagow-Duda as at January 2017

296. In the few weeks that Hussam has been living with Familie Jagow-Duda, his German has really improved, but he is not yet fluent and he is keen to continue to improve. Hussam now feels good about moving to Germany and he feels like Familie Jagow-Duda are also his family. Moving in to a home has been another step forward and he is sad that it's only for six months. Hussam feels like Cosima is a second mother, and he wants to improve his German because there are lots of things that he wants to say, but he can't express them. Hussam sometimes he misses his family. He used to have daily contact but now he only gets in touch every few days. He says that he found it difficult to stay positive and focus on his studies after phone calls with his mother when she was sad, or when she would talk about her problems.

297. Hussam feels that in this environment he can really do something. As a child, he dreamt of being an engineer, and Hussam says that he wants to be a good man, someone who is independent and who can help other people. His plan is to finish his German studies and then start university. We talk about hobbies. Hussam says that he loves music and reading and we talk about his favourite book, The 40 Rules of Love by Elif Safak, a French born Turkish writer.

298. I ask about the day-to-day at Familie Jagow-Duda. Hussam gets up with the family. They eat breakfast together and then Cosima and Hussam have an Arabic coffee and 'German Hour'. They chat, but Cosima says that it's also really German practice. Hussam usually goes to class around midday and returns around 8pm or 9pm. Sometimes, if Hussam is at home, he cooks for Florian. Hussam feels like Florian is his little brother, and Florian loves having Hussam at home and feels like he is a new older brother. Florian misses his older siblings, who have now both moved away, but Hussam has been a wonderful gift. Hussam cooks Arabic food for Florian and makes him cocktails - they share a love of exotic juices.

299. It's after midnight when Cosima drops me back to the S-Bahn. In the car, she says that a number of people have asked her whether she is sure about this – hosting a Syrian refugee. Cosima says that she is surprised by these comments, but thinks that perhaps people are wary after the Christmas market attack in Berlin in December 2016, and the murder of a German girls in Freiburg in October 2016 by an Afghani man who arrived in Germany as an unaccompanied minor.

300. On the other hand, Cosima says that Florian's classmates have all asked when they can meet Hussam, and another family she knows has started to think about whether they might also host a refugee. Cosima says that she thinks Hussam is really a party kid. When he came to her birthday celebration before Christmas, he spent a lot of time dancing with the younger crowd.

301. As I take the S-Bahn home, I think back to the delightful short interlude between dinner and dessert. Florian and his friend are desperate for us to go downstairs to dress up and dance. Hussam, Cosima and I go downstairs. Florian and his friend want to film the dancing. Unfortunately, they are having significant and unforeseen technical difficulties. Cosima tells Florian that they have a few minutes and then we are having dessert. She pulls out some dress-ups from a very well stocked dress up cupboard (Cosima later explains that she grew up in Cologne) and hands a silver cape to Hussam. I hear Hussam say, "What is this?" Cosima replies, "Put it on. It will be great. It will really suit you." I find this short exchange to be heartwarming and hilarious. Cosima hands me a hat and some beads and then leaves the room, with her own dress-ups in hand. Hussam quietly returns the silver cape, and selects his own costume. We stand in our costumes, at the bottom of the stairs, while Florian and his friend try and work through the technical difficulties. They have no success. In the circumstances, Cosima, Hussam and I dance for a short moment on the spot, return our costumes, and then go back upstairs for pavlova.

4. Conclusion

302. I am reluctant to draw any conclusions from this project. I was privy to only a very small slice, of a much larger and very complicated pie. I prefer to let the stories speak for themselves. However, there are some common themes and ideas that I noticed during the project.

303. First, it is one thing to read about 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' and it is another to meet with a person and to hear their stories, told in their own words. The same applies to the experiences of Locals. It is important to create spaces for dialogue and encounters between Newcomers and Locals.

304. Second, and related to the first point, is the emphasis on eye level encounters. Many of the people I met during my project emphasized that Locals and Newcomers need possibilities to meet one another at eye level and to encounter one another, not as refugees or Germans, or victims, or volunteers, but simply as human beings.

305. Third, a number of Locals described what is happening in Germany at present as a chance. A chance to think about what kind of society they want to live in, how they want to engage with one another, and what kind of a society they want to build for the future.

306. Finally, it seems important to place what is happening now in Germany in historical context. Of course this generation of Newcomers is different in many and in important respects from previous generations of Newcomers to Germany. However, Germany has done this before. So when language is used to describe the recent Newcomers to Germany as a 'wave' or a 'current' or a 'crisis', it's important to think about what is happening now, within the broader historical context of Newcomer arrivals to Germany.

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