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Expeditions Fund Report

Investigating the recent refugee crisis in Finland

I have been conducting my final year dissertation research in Finland's metropolitan area. Recently there has been a record breaking flow of refugees coming in through the borders of Finland, both from its Russian and Swedish borders. Having lived in Finland all my life, it sparked my interest to look further into the issue when I read about the crisis it was facing in terms of accommodating these newcomers. For the past two years I have had the opportunity to work as an interpreter at the different refugee camps, however because of the rules of my job I was not able to ask any of my clients further questions even if I was burning to know more. Because of this I had access to various refugee camps and a chance to be a part of different volunteer groups working with refugees, which helped me with this research. Immigration and humanitarian aid have always been issues I have been passionate about, therefore because of my opportunities I found that this was the perfect research topic for me. After seeing how much some of these people have struggled in their lives, been taken away from their homes and ordinary lives, I just wanted to help somehow. I felt like the media was portraying the problem as something completely different from individual stories therefore I wanted to talk to these people and get their voices heard about the crisis to make officials realise it is not about the mass of people but about each unique life like yours and mine.

Starting June this summer, I started recruiting my participants for this qualitative research investigating a year in a refugee's life. These included questions about their journey to Europe, their life at the refugee camps on the way and after arriving to Finland, and their future aspirations in this new 'home'. At first starting the whole research process was daunting. It was hard to imagine we were being left alone with such big research topics as such inexperienced researchers who have never done anything this big before. However, after deciding my final interview questions with my supervisor, the idea of my research started to clear out in my head and I was confident enough to start the process. Gathering a sample of participants was challenging at times because of the regulations at the refugee camps,

therefore I used Facebook groups and different opportunities to find my participants. The first interviews I conducted were at the World Refugee Day in the city centre of Helsinki, where there was a stage with performances and speeches and volunteers gathering money for the refugee initiative with the Finnish Red Cross. These volunteers were the ones I got the chance to interview. From this celebration I found out about an art exhibition which was an initiative by the Helsinki Art School combined with talented refugees. After a few weeks I attended this exhibition which was an amazing portrayal of the refugee crisis in Europe. Each work had its own story of the journeys they went through to get to their destinations to safety, and the most striking of them all were the ones about how they crossed the seas to get to land with many drowning on their way to the Greek Islands from Turkey. At the exhibition I attended the guided tour and found three of the artists and volunteers whom I got the privilege to interview, and had the most to say. The other interview participants were recruited via Facebook groups and through links and were carried out one on one at different public locations. I conducted my last interviews in August.

The research method was semi structured interviews which lasted from twenty minutes to up to one and half hours. Language barrier was often an issue while interviewing my participants which made the lengths vary, however they all managed to get their points across in English but also in Finnish in some cases. After conducting a few interviews similar answers started to emerge which meant I had patterns in my data. After this I started putting things together.

Overall I am very satisfied with how my research process went. As I said at times it felt like it was very difficult to find participants to interview, however in the end it all worked out as snowball sampling also worked, through gathering participants through other participants. My expectations of the data I received was fulfilled as my original motive was to help these refugees and get their voices heard and I felt like a lot of my participants were passionate to talk about their stories and wanted their names to be heard so that something could be done about those facing this now and in the future.

The Expeditions Fund Award helped me significantly for this research process. It was mainly used for transportation around the metropolitan area when I had several interviews in different cities in one day, and for my travels to Finland, as well as for treating the participants in some cases when the interviews were carried out at cafes for example. I would like to thank this initiative by the university for students like me to reach their goals and ambitions and

improve their chances academically. I believe because of this opportunity I will be able to do further research in the field or help my career plans for the future.