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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Yes, we can; but together': social capital and refugee resettlement

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Resettled refugees need a network of relationships to ensure they can live meaningful lives in New Zealand. These relationships are complex and exist between individuals and communities at local and national levels. Conceptualised as social capital, these relationships provide the invisible glue holding society together. Drawing on data from a research project on the Somali community in Auckland, this paper reflects on contemporary developments within the refugee sector and highlights the ways in which social capital provides further insight into the experiences of refugee integration at a local level in New Zealand.

Keywords: refugee integration; refugee resettlement; social capital; social policy; Somali

Introduction

New Zealand's ethnic diversity has increased over the past few decades, due largely to changes in immigration policy. In the past 25 years, nearly 25,000 refugees from more than 50 countries have arrived in New Zealand under the Refugee Quota Programme which is New Zealand's major contribution to the world refugee situation (Gruner & Searle 2011). A network of social relationships underpins successful refugee resettlement (Zetter et al. 2006) and cement concepts of citizenship and refugee rights—social, cultural and economic (e.g. employment, housing, education or health)—and civil and political rights (e.g. language, security or residency/citizenship). This paper explores the use of the concept of social capital to help understand and illustrate some of the experiences and challenges of refugee resettlement.

Social capital is a contested term and has been defined in a number of ways. Putman (2007) saw social capital as the relationships between people and their social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. These relationships provide the invisible glue holding society together. Relationships can result in measureable outcomes, although these might not be directly related to the relationships themselves. Putman's definition is used here as it is the one used predominantly by New Zealand policy makers. For example, Statistics New Zealand (2002) views social capital as a social resource, which can be accrued and is embedded in interpersonal relations. Putman's definition was also the basis of Ager & Strang's (2008) analysis of the way in which social capital contributed to refugee integration.

A number of themes run through the literature on social capital where 'networks, reciprocity, trust, shared norms and social agency' feature in most references (Leonard & Onyx 2004, p. 11) and the concept has been a pervasive social policy driver over the past 25 years internationally (Zetter et al. 2006) and in New Zealand since the late 1990s (Robinson 1997, 2002).

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Social capital and refugee resettlement

Ager & Strang (2008) set out a four-level framework for refugee integration containing 10 domains. Social connections (social bridges, social bonds and social inks) make up the second level of this framework built on the concepts proposed by Putman (2000, 2007). Developing these concepts further is useful as there are currently gaps in New Zealand's social capital indicators in reference to new migrants (Statistics New Zealand 2002). Although the concepts underpinning social capital appear to be embedded in the 2012 Refugee Resettlement Strategy, especially in the goal of participation—'refugees actively participate in New Zealand life and have a strong sense of belonging here' (Immigration New Zealand 2012, p. 3).

The first level of bonding social capital (social bonds) highlights the importance of common identity (NCVO 2010). It is characterised by strong relationships (Marlowe 2011); family connections and connections with people from the same ethnic community so that cultural practices and settlement experiences can be shared (Pittaway et al. 2009) and familiar relationships maintained. Connections with members of similar ethnic groups also assist in integration through increasing health and well-being and providing opportunities for employment (Lamba 2003). For social bonds to develop within and between ethnic groups, refugee community organisations need to be formed in order to strengthen a sense of identity and safety (Spencer 2006). Through community activities, community networks that have been eroded by war and exile can slowly rebuild (Spaaij 2012). The formation of refugee community groups often counter the exclusion of refugees in society, mark their multiple identities, but preserve their culture and express solidarity as well as providing an organised front to take part in wider societal activities (Zetter et al. 2006).

Bridging social capital is based on the formation of a network of looser connections with other groups within civil society (Edwards 2010) and therefore relates to diversity (NCVO 2010). Bridging social capital is built through dialogue as refugees participate in activities in the wider community, possibly through religious activities, employment or education courses (Harris & Young 2010). Through dialogue within and between communities, collective norms, values and governance processes can emerge (Dale 2005), while Zetter et al. (2006) notes that refugees strive to re-establish relationships and networks as a way of establishing a meaningful exilic life whilst maintaining their identity.

Ager & Strang (2008) see bridging social capital as being built through friendly neighbourhood encounters that contribute to refugees feeling at home and secure. Similarly, religious institutions provide a space and voice for refugee communities (Liev 2008) and provide essential emotional and social support. Religious institutions appear to have different functions depending on whether groups are from a majority or minority religion. For example, Christian refugees may use a church to develop bonding and to bridge social capital, whereas the mosque and madrassa[1] create mainly bonding opportunities (Allen 2010).

Linking social capital refers to the connections refugees and refugee groups have to state structures and institutions, and therefore relates to power and authority (Pittaway et al. 2009; NCVO 2010). This can be through accessing state services or through advocacy activities aimed at influencing government policy. Through a series of relationships at this level, refugees can gain access to power, resources and greater opportunities to participate meaningfully in civil society.

At the level of influencing decision-making, and challenging established power and authority, there have been a number of developments in recent years which has seen the New Zealand refugee sector evolve from a grassroots charity approach, where refugees were viewed only as service recipients, to a situation that is more responsive to refugee needs because people from refugee backgrounds are integral to policy and service development, (Gruner & Searle 2011) and in some areas of service delivery (Human Rights Commission 2010). In 1990, the Auckland Refugee Council was established to advocate for refugee rights. Its founding constitution ensured that someone from a refugee background was the chair and people

from a refugee background made up at least 51% of the committee. This provided a direct opportunity for former refugees to work collaboratively with members of other organisations (Gruner & Searle 2011).

In 2006, Immigration New Zealand established the Strengthening Refugee Voices (SRV) initiative in the four major resettlement cities (Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch,) aimed at strengthening the relationships between refugee groups at a local level. Modest levels of funding enabled refugee groups to meet and discuss issues affecting their communities, leading to a shift in power relationships between refugee groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as refugee communities were more able to voice their collective needs and views (Gruner & Searle 2011). These regional groups provide opportunities for refugee leaders, in particular, to interact within their own communities and across community boundaries (i.e. opportunities for both bonding and bridging; NCVO 2010). But, finding the balance between bonding and bridging in order to promote cohesion can be difficult and takes time (Gruner & Searle 2011). For example, the Auckland Refugee Community Coalition (ARCC) provides a space where refugee leaders can come together and advocate for their communities' voices to be heard. Recent years have seen this collaboration strengthen from informal beginnings to more formal organisational arrangements, whilst acknowledging inherent tensions within and between refugee groups; particularly during times of resource scarcity.

The establishment of the SRV initiative is an important platform of advocacy for community members whose resettlement is made stressful by lack of access to government departments (ARCC Management Team 2013). SRV also enables refugee community members to participate in, and contribute to, setting the agenda for the annual National Refugee Resettlement Forum (NRRF), which is the key annual national consultation event between government agencies and the NGO and refugee community sector, in order to inform decision making on refugee resettlement (Human Rights Commission 2012). Prior to the inclusion of people from a refugee background in all aspects of the NRRF, refugee leaders felt that their presence was tokenistic and the discussions lacked real understanding of needs or community perspectives (Gruner & Searle 2011).

In 2009, the National Refugee Network (NRN), composed of representatives from the regional SRV groupings, was established to provide a collective voice for refugees at a national level. NRN leaders have been closely involved in the development of the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (Immigration New Zealand 2012) and sit on the External Reference Group. The NRN is based on the basic principle of: 'Nothing about us should be without us: People from refugee-backgrounds should be involved in all stages of policy or service delivery development' (Refugee Sector Strategic Alliance 2013, n.p.); thereby highlighting the importance of linking social capital in refugee resettlement. National level NGOs and government agencies also employ a limited number of people from refugee backgrounds, and recruit refugees as volunteers in governance roles (Skyrme 2008), providing another important avenue for the generation of linking social capital.

Despite its potential, social capital can be seen as aspirational, rather than reflective of the complex realities of refugee resettlement and integration. Critics comment that the concept's simplicity adds to its appeal, whilst minimising the complexity of power relationships inherent in community organisation formation and relationships (Griffin 2012), the tensions that often operate below the surface and the way in which it overlooks structural inequalities in society (Leonard & Onyx 2004). Using the concept of social capital as a catchall phrase minimises the essential differences in the types of social capital for each refugee community in each setting. Immigration status, community demography, experiences before arriving in the country (Griffin 2012) and length of residence in New Zealand all determine the nature of social capital, adding complexity to refugee resettlement and integration. Furthermore, the development of strong social bonding can lead to community segregation rather than integration (Spoonley et al. 2005).

Women from refugee backgrounds are more likely to form groups than men (Zetter et al. 2006) and thereby generate bonding social capital. However, women are less likely to have access to English language classes than men, which has flow on effects in terms of accessing government services (DeSouza 2012; Ibrahim 2012). For example, Perumal (2010) found that African refugee women's access to healthcare could be compromised by a lower than expected proportion holding a community services card.[2] Similarly, at the community level, despite the strength of the refugee voice within the New Zealand refugee sector, the voice of youth and women is frequently lacking (Human Rights Commission 2010), while men represent their needs and opinions to service providers and government agencies.

Assessing social capital relies not only on the existence of relationships but on the quality of those relationships, which can only be assessed in context (Spellerberg 2001). The concept of social capital can help analyse resettlement experiences and can serve as a guide to policy formation. Emphasising bridging and bonding social capital allows for an analysis of the challenges of resettlement for refugees; the balance between adapting to life in a new setting whilst paying homage to one's homeland (Marlowe 2011). Taking bonding, bridging and linking social capital together provides a framework for 'intra-community, inter-community and community–public agency, by which social groups invest in and share social capital within and between themselves' (Zetter et al. 2006, p. 9). This paper presents a qualitative study that examines these bonding, bridging and linking relationships with the Somali community based in Auckland to explore how they have integrated into the wider New Zealand society.

Methods

This study gathered data through indepth interviews conducted in October 2013 with eight Somalis (four men and four women) who have lived in Auckland for at least 10 years and were over the age of 20 when they arrived in New Zealand. Participants were invited to take part in the research via an advertisement on the noticeboard at the Somali Community Centre and at the local mosque. Those selected came from diverse backgrounds in terms of clan membership, educational and social background, marital status and region of origin in Somalia. The interviews were conducted in either Somali or English depending on the participant's preference.

In addition, a focus group composed of service providers from a number of governmental organisations and NGOs who work with Somalis was conducted to further explore the themes that emerged in the participant interviews. The eight focus group participants were selected because of their depth of experience working with Somalis in Auckland.

This study is limited in that it focused only on the Somali community and included a small sample size. According to the 2013 census, 420 Somalis live in Auckland—a reduction of 27% since the 2006 census (Reid 2013). Because the community is small, and all participants belonged to the Somali community organisation, no identifying data is presented in this paper to preserve their anonymity.

Results

This section draws on the data gathered from the interviews to illustrate how bonding, bridging and linking social capital developed and is important to the Somali community.

Bonding social capital

> I think without the community you would feel a bit lost and bit of culture shock

Bonding social capital develops through relationships with others from the same background. Relationships between members of the same community enhance well-being and are fundamental to refugees during resettlement. All participants in this study spoke of having significant levels of bonding social capital which is important to their feelings of well-being as the quotes below highlight:

> There is a bond that unites Somalis like the language, culture even if you have friends outside Somali

> community, they can never be like one of your own community.
>
> We meet often; we meet every week, because we feel they are part of our life, so we always come together. And also you don't have your relatives here, but you have some people like a relative.

Community events and rituals marking rites of passage in an individual's life bring community members of all ages together, as the following quote shows:

> Somalis were always united for events such weddings, funerals, giving birth to a child or when there is special circumstance.

The Auckland Somali Community Association Inc. (ASCA) formed in 1997 and provides a range of services to members. Somali community members express the importance of the organisation:

> I think that is part of what made it easier to live in Auckland, just having that support from the community it has made it such a huge difference, I think without the community you would have feel a bit lost and bit of culture shock, so I think the Somali community has been great in that sense of just making you fit in.

The mosque and madrassa are also important for cultural maintenance and preserving identity in New Zealand. ASCA facilitates connections between community members from different regions of Somalia who were strangers on arrival in New Zealand, thus cementing social cohesion within the community as expressed below:

> When Somalis came here, we didn't know each other, we came from different areas of Somalia, here we united together as a community … We have some activities like events English classes, play groups, and women's group activities, through all of these we have come to know each other,

Community organisations require active leadership to ensure intracommunity relationships are forged and maintained. Leaders play a number of roles, including supporting newcomers:

> When I arrived at Mangere, I remember members of the Somali community especially the executive members visited us. It was Ramadan and they organized a breakfast before sunrise for us and Iftar (fast breaking meal), they used to come to us and pick us up and take us to one of the community members for meals.

It can be seen that the Somali community developed bonding social capital through the mosque, the community centre and the community association. These bonds enhanced feelings of well-being and were essential in making community members feel at home. Nevertheless, they took time to develop, and appeared dependent on strong community leadership.

Bridging capital

> Some people accept you as how you are with your culture, dress, believe, language and identity. For me, mostly I am connected to the school community and they are all ok with accepting who I am.

Ager & Strang (2008) note that bridging social capital can be built through friendly neighbourhood relationships that over time contribute to refugees feeling settled and useful in society. One Somali woman explains her neighbourhood relationships below:

> I currently have two friends in my neighbourhood one from India and the other is from Pakistan. There is also another Lebanese lady who is also my neighbour and new to the country that I helped with her settlement like getting stuff for her like furniture.

All of the participants in this study had friends outside the Somali community. Community members mentioned the crucial role that neighbours, work, schools and tertiary institutions play in developing a sense of belonging and building connections so that they felt part of New Zealand society. Women members of the Somali community highlight the importance of schools to them:

> My children have friends at school, so we have relationships with their parents.

Ager & Strang (2008) note that relationships between refugee community members formed through employment can be deeper and more intense than those fostered at a neighbourhood level. Five out of eight of the participants' experiences at work illustrated this. As one expressed it:

> If you get job you meet people, you know more people and make friends so that is what makes it easier for people to settle and that is what made my life easier.

One of the women interviewed explained that, without work, making friends with members of other ethnic groups is more difficult:

> Basically you can make friends when you work but when you are a mum you don't have the chance to meet many people.

Another respondent noted the differences in his own life between neighbourhood relationships and relationships in the workplace, explaining:

> When you meet people in the streets they are OK, they talk to you, smile with you but when you meet them in an office or at work they are totally different people. It's very hard to engage with them to get a job. They only prefer people they know, but others like us they don't give them a chance and probably it is because they don't trust us.

Echoing the findings of Gruner & Searle (2011), some Somali believed that Auckland's diversity made it easier for them to settle and feel they belong:

> Honestly, Auckland is the only city when you look how multicultural it is that one can easily live. You can find so many different people and you feel that you are one of those people. Like even though you are new, you can see thousands of others who are also new and you are just one of them. It would be very hard to integrate if it was a city with one race or ethnic group. Then you could feel isolated and different. But now you are one of those multi ethnic groups. This plays a crucial part in settling easily and integrating.

The formation of ASCA also enabled Somalis to interact with other New Zealanders, building social capital and assisting integration:

> Through the Somali community we integrated with other people, we got to know each other, what their culture is, and what their activities are and how we can settle with New Zealand society.

Some members of the community also belong to multi-ethnic community groups, which they see as assisting members become New Zealanders. Multiculturalism is seen as a positive force contributing to a sense of security and social cohesion, as expressed below:

> Before we were called Somali Women Incorporated but after 2007 we became an organisation for all ethnic groups from different countries, and they became members of the Executive. Like Indian, not only refugees, so we have a lot experience about multiculturalism, and that is really good because we learn from one another. We know their culture, they know our culture, we integrated and at the end of the day we are New Zealanders.

> I strongly support living in a multi-cultural society where everyone's culture and belief is respected and tolerated. This makes communities stronger, safer and enhances developments. It also encourages people to take part in community development.

Bridging social capital and integration can also be undermined through unfriendly acts at a neighbourhood level, as discussed by Ager & Strang (2008). A number of New Zealand studies (e.g. DeSouza 2012) report discrimination against Muslim women because of their clothing. This was also the experience of several of the women in this study. Encountering racist comments in their daily lives affected the women, making them feel unwelcome and insecure. One woman explained:

> There was a time that my friends and I experienced extreme abuse on the road, we were crossing the road and one of the girls was wearing a veil and we were all spat on and called some very abusive words like what are you doing here, go back to where you came from.

The experiences of the Somali community highlighted the importance of friendly neighbourhood encounters, local schools and tertiary institutions alongside work as important in building bridging capital resources. Without work, members struggled to form and maintain friendships outside the community.

Linking capital

Linking social capital refers to relationships with state structures. For refugees, great effort is needed, from communities themselves and the wider community, if there is to be true equality of access (Ager & Strang 2008). This requires committed

community leaders and volunteers welcoming newcomers and linking community group members and services. One Somali community member illustrates this by reflecting:

> I had a great sense of belonging of being a Somali even though I was not contributing much. I used to like helping them like interpreting for them with Work and Income. When I was in Christchurch I used to volunteer at schools to help parents understand the New Zealand school settings. I used to translate school newsletters into Somali so parents understand the basic things like events at school and important things.

Now living in Auckland this community member continues to volunteer in a similar way:

> I take the kids to meet other mothers who also bring their children as well. So in these groups we discuss issues at schools and I explain to them how they could better engage with the school like parents school meetings and other important events,

As Searle et al. (2012) note, community leaders provide a crucial link between the community and public service providers. The Somali community leader participant discussed the way in which his work provided an opportunity to link community members with government and NGO services. But holding a leadership position within the community not only confers duties to represent others, it also provides opportunities for the leaders to develop connections at a personal level:

> I have a lot of New Zealand friends, because one of my privileges is I represent the Somali community in many areas and that gave me a lot opportunity to meet a lot of people, create friends, meet agencies both Government and NGOs … so I feel more privileged than a lot of members of my community and what gave me that mainly was the privilege I get to serve them the Somali community and that opened a lot of doors for me.

Gruner & Searle (2011) note the trend towards refugees being more involved in government policy making and voicing concerns in recent years. Focus group members believe the Somali community was instrumental in the development of policies and services for refugees through their participation in national level discussions and in policy consultations as the following quotes illustrate:

> The Somali Community have had great input into ensuring that the voices of refugees were heard at the National Refugee Forums and in policy development as well.

> The local District Health Boards are far more interested in refugee populations, and a lot of this has happened because refugee communities turned up at consultation processes relentlessly since 2000 and now it would be inconceivable that you wouldn't invite refugees who give views on whole range of facts.

The voluntary commitment of leaders enables linking social capital to develop and contributes to government programmes being successful. Talking about the value of the work of one of the Somali community leaders an official noted:

> It's incredible the hours he works and how hard he works and his respect within the community and the way our programme was so successful is really I think the foundation that was the relationship between the Somali Community and the programme.

For most Somali it took time before they were able to access services independently. One participant acknowledged this, noting the sense of ease they now felt in accessing services:

> We have settled and integrated well because we have been here for quite some time. Now we don't need any assistance for whatever we need, we can fill applications without any help, if we need to go to the doctor or take children to hospital we can without any help. We can go anywhere we want or access any office and ask what we want.

Discrimination, denial of service or perceived ill treatment by a government agency can have a detrimental effect on how Somalis feel about their position in New Zealand. Several focus group participants were concerned about the unsettling nature of ethnic profiling by law enforcement agencies; which undermine community members' feeling of belonging and eroded linking social capital. At an individual level, mistreatment by a government agency has greatly influenced how this Somali community member feels about New Zealand and his citizenship:

> The day I was granted the New Zealand citizenship, I was very happy and excited and regarded myself as a New Zealand national with all the rights like any

> other New Zealander and I took the oath for this nation. But the way [government agency] treated me, changed my position a lot, this makes me rethink how I belong here.

Discussion and conclusion

After living in New Zealand as permanent residents for five years, former refugees can apply for New Zealand citizenship. This appears to be an important milestone for people from a refugee background. Searle et al. (2012) found that 97% of former refugees had applied for or been granted citizenship after 10 years. When asked why they had done so, most replied that they felt New Zealand was their home, they wanted to feel part of New Zealand society or because they had lived in New Zealand for a long time. This desire to belong and to become fully part of New Zealand society was evident in the views of Somalis in this study.

A number of themes regarding the way in which notions of social capital can explain their integration at a local level emerged. Higher levels of bonding social capital (formed through friendships and relationships within the community and with other Muslims) were found than bridging social capital (which was mainly developed through work), as has been reported in other studies (Kenny et al. 2005). Religion was an important form of bonding social capital, with the mosque and madrassa important in fostering this. Alongside these schools, workplaces, the community centre, hired halls, Somali owned shops and coffee shops appear crucial in building bonding and bridging social capital. Relationships between members of the Somali community and the wider community appear to differ by gender. Women are more likely to make friends with other parents through their children's schools, while men made more friends through work, suggesting social capital resources have a gendered dimension in relation to the meaning and purpose of social capital.

As noted by Spencer (2006), community organisation formation reinforces refugee identity and makes community members feel safe, which are essential considerations for social bonding to occur. Over the past 25 years, formal community associations have developed within the New Zealand refugee sector facilitating interactions between refugee community members (Gruner & Searle 2011) as the bedrock of settlement. The formation of ASCA enhanced social capital at all levels, and was highly valued as a way to overcome isolation, reinforce a sense of Somali identity, but also meet others in the wider community. As the community is not homogeneous, activities to promote internal bonding between different parts of a community proved essential. ASCA allowed connections to form between community members from different regions of Somalia who were strangers on arrival in New Zealand. Community events marking milestones in an individual's life also contributed to enhancing intergenerational connections (Stuart et al. 2009). Refugee community organisations are often called upon to fill the void left by the reduction of the welfare state (Zetter et al. 2006) and, as illustrated, can be crucial to the success of government programmes, yet these contributions frequently go unnoticed by mainstream resettlement agencies (DeSouza 2012).

The New Zealand civil society sector is diverse and heterogeneous. The leaders of refugee community organisations are crucial in building an understanding and respect for the experiences of refugees within the wider community, and in enhancing connections between different sections of civil society (Kenny et al. 2005; Harris & Young 2010). Building bridging and linking social capital in particular relies heavily on the voluntary input of refugee community leaders who commit many hours supporting members of their community to assert their rights and gain access to resources from other civil society organisations and government agencies (Searle et al. 2012). The wider Somali community benefited from the links their leaders built, and the leaders themselves also gained personally from these links. Through the early efforts of Somali community leaders, consultation with refugee community members has now become normalised in policy development.

The New Zealand refugee resettlement system relies on volunteers to assist families in their first year in the country, and to provide support for

women with young children and older people learning English. Building connections with others in New Zealand society (Spoonley et al. 2005), abiding friendships and learning across cultures often develop from these relationships, thereby potentially developing bridging social capital as volunteers share what they learn with others, 'creating a domino educational effect' (Walcott & Bassett 2007, p. 9). Zetter et al. (2006) believes such a mesh of relationships is necessary for resettled refugees to lead meaningful lives whilst maintaining their identity. These relationships were summed up by one Somali participant:

> I feel that I have integrated well, I still have my culture, religion and I have the right to practice, I have learned other cultures and respect, created friends and meet them. I don't feel lonely. I felt very welcome and part of the society

At a community level, the need for such relationships is stressed by the ARCC Management Team (2013) in discussing the importance of close working relationships between all involved in refugee resettlement to ensure refugees participate fully in New Zealand society:

> Many issues affect these communities, and then we asked ourselves again, can we help provide solutions to alleviate the living conditions of our people? We answered, "YES WE CAN, BUT TOGETHER!"

The strong impetus to participate in wider society is a motivator for many refugee community leaders who want to move pass tensions within and between communities. One refugee leader, in research on the development of the refugee sector (Gruner & Searle 2011), put it thus:

> [W]e need to move on or move away from the back-home politics and just focus here. Simply to say, 'Here's our country, here's our home'—how can we be part of this?

Being fully 'part of this' requires linking social capital, whereby refugees' networks include government agencies at two levels. The way the Refugee Resettlement Strategy is implemented will provide an opportunity for social capital to be built. It will have significant implications for linking social capital resources, which are essential for bonding and bridging social capital to thrive. At a fundamental level, refugees need access to services, respect for their rights, and engagement in New Zealand society. At a higher level, to be fully integrated, resettled refugees need to be part of governmental decisions affecting their lives as illustrated by the findings of this study.

Notes

1. The madrassa is a Muslim educational facility and is often part of a mosque.
2. A community services card entitles adults who are permanent residents to access cheaper primary healthcare. http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/a-z-benefits/community-services-card.html.

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