Understanding the wellbeing and support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children in your care

A training session for social workers and foster carers

Naomi Rizk-Youth Project, Nottingham Refugee Forum
Housekeeping

- Format of session
- Toilets
- Breaks
The work of NNRF

**Our Mission:**
To support Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Nottingham & Nottinghamshire to gain fair and just outcomes, rebuild their lives and integrate into society.

**Our Vision:**
A society where Asylum Seekers and Refugees are welcomed, receive just and compassionate treatment and support in rebuilding their lives.

Services:
Anti-destitution//One stop Shop//Welfare Rights//Legal project//Into the Mainstream//General Advice//Children and Families//Young people’s Project//campaigning
NNRF Youth project work

- Case work/advice/advocacy
- Support work - dependents/vulnerable YP
- Weekly youth group (with talks/workshops)
- Orientation group for newly arrived young people
- Bike project
- Monthly sessions with NTU
- Arts sessions in collaboration with Nottingham Contemporary and Lakeside Arts
- Trips/activities-targeting new arrivals/vulnerable YP
Film link

https://www.dropbox.com/s/hg4s1rh6bvoryee/Refugee%20Forum%205.mp4?dl=0
Introductory Questions

- Have you had experience fostering/working with asylum seeking/refugee young people?
- What do you think are some of the key challenges in working with these young people?
- What are some of the most positive aspects?
- What would you like to get out of this training session today?
A **refugee** is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group

*(1951 United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees)*

An **Asylum Seeker** is someone who has asked the government for refugee status and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.
An unaccompanied asylum seeking child is a child who is:

- applying for asylum in their own right; and
- is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so.

In 2017-2026 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in the UK

Top 9 countries of origin:

Sudan, Eritrea, Vietnam, Albania, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria

89% males,
71% aged 16-17    22% aged 14-15

(Source: Refugee Council, May 2018)
Relevant legislation

- The Refugee Convention
- The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Human Rights Act 1998
- Dublin Regulation
- Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009
- Immigration Rules
- Children Act 1989
- Immigration Act 2016
Dubs Amendment

- Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016

Dublin Regulation

- Part of European law to transfer asylum cases from one European country to another. In the case of UASC they can apply to be transferred to another EU country where they have a relative to have their claim processed.

- (in 2016 - 769 children transferred from Calais under this route)

The National Transfer Scheme was launched in 2016 to encourage all local authorities to volunteer to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) so there is a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the country. Under the scheme, a child arriving in one local authority area already under strain caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children may be transferred to another council with capacity.
Quiz

1. Most refugees flee to neighbouring countries and remain in their region of origin
   ▶ True/False

2. Which of the following countries hosts the most refugees?
   ▶ Germany Turkey Lebanon Pakistan Iran UK

3. In 2015, how many unaccompanied children were estimated to be in Europe?
   ▶ 10,000 7,000 95,000 3,000

4. How many unaccompanied children sought asylum in the UK in 2017?
   ▶ 957 2,026 6,478 9,452

5. Which European country took in the most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in 2015?
   ▶ UK Germany Austria Sweden Hungary
6. How many UASCs were in the care system in England in 2017?
   - 9,457  
   - 4,560  
   - 3,200  
   - 7,687

7. Can you name 4 countries where UASCs are more likely to come from?

8. Age assessment is an accurate method for establishing the age of a child without documentation?
   - True/False

9. What was the success rate for initial asylum claims for UASCs in 2017 (a grant of refugee status) on initial application to the home office?
   - 25%  
   - 87%  
   - 56%  
   - 41%
Quiz!

- True
- Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran - At the end of 2016 Africa and the Middle East hosted about 47% of all refugees (7.73 million refugees) while Europe hosted about 31% (approximately 5.15 million refugees).
- 95,000
- 2,026
- Sweden (UK came 9th)
- 4,560, 6% of total number of LAC
- Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Albania, Vietnam, Iran, Ethiopia, Syria
- To be debated!
- 56%
A CHILD IS A CHILD FIRST AND FOREMOST

Safeguarding and welfare must come before Immigration control
Age Assessment

- Why is a person’s age important?
- How do you accurately check someone’s age?
Age assessment should only be carried out where there is significant reason to doubt that the claimant is a child. Age assessments should not be a routine part of a local authority’s assessment of unaccompanied or trafficked children.”

(Dept of Education, ‘care of unaccompanied and trafficked children, 2014)
AGE ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Guidance to assist social workers and their managers in undertaking age assessments in England

OCTOBER 2015

http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/Age_Assessment_Guidance_2015_Final.pdf
Local Authority Age assessment:
(responsibility of the first LA a YP is picked up in)

- Holistic- appearance, demeanour, background
- Age should not be determined solely on appearance
- Medical, family, social history, education
- By 2 experienced trained social workers
- Appropriate adult (independent)
- Children should be given the benefit of the doubt
- Assessors should offer a Child friendly and child sensitive approach, checking understanding offering breaks
- Decision should be in writing with information on right to challenge the decision
- Can be challenged by community are solicitors via judicial review within 3 months
A young person may be in foster care while being age assessed - it is a process not a one off event (28 day guideline).

If following age assessment YP found to be over 18, the LA should arrange for their safe transition to adult support usually through the home office asylum support.
Challenges

- YP may look/act older due to experiences in home country and long and difficult journey to the UK
- YP may have given different ages to different professionals/authorities on their journey to the UK where to be identified as a child may have been perceived as placing them in greater danger
- Boys in some parts of the world grow facial hair earlier than boys in Europe. In Afghanistan it is common to grow a beard at age 13 or 14
- A young person may not now their date of Birth. DOB is not important or recorded or celebrated in the same way as in the UK and calendars may rarely be used.
- Different calendars are used in different countries. Converting from one calendar to the other can be difficult-mistakes can be made and the wrong DOB provided.
- Some children may be traumatised and/or illiterate and this may have an impact on their ability to communicate and provide information in a coherent manner
- Expectation of children and Social workers: children may believe they should claim certainty about their age when they do not know, and SWs may feel that children must be a certain age because they have travelled alone.
The asylum process

- Refer young person for legal advice (SW)
- Screening interview at home office centre
- SEF (statement of evidence) form- 20 day deadline
- ARC card (asylum registration card)
- Solicitor complete SEF form and witness statements
- Substantive interview
- Decision
Asylum seekers

- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work or claim public funds (benefits)
- Cannot do an apprenticeship
- Can have difficulty opening a bank account
- Will not have a NI number at 16 if still AS
- Are not allowed to travel outside the country
- Limited ID may cause issues accessing services, but can access education and health services.
Outcomes of an asylum claim

Limited leave as a UASC

- UASC leave is used in cases where the only reason for giving leave is that the applicant is a child and cannot be returned.

- Granted for 30 months or until they reach 17.5 years - whichever is shorter

- UASC leave does include right to work/benefit/NI number (incl. at 18 if in time extension application is being processed)

- UASC who have reached the age of 18 are more likely to have their asylum claims refused

- SHOULD ALWAYS APPEAL!!

Refugee Status

- 5 years leave to remain, with automatic right to apply for ILR afterwards, and then British citizenship.

- Right to work and benefits

- Can apply for convention travel document

- In 2017, there was 56% grant of refugee status to UACSs
Simplified asylum process for unaccompanied child
Processing asylum applications from children

- Section 55 of the Borders, Citizen and Immigration Act 2009 places a duty on the UKBA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The Immigration Rules make specific provision for asylum-seeking children and the safeguarding and promotion of their welfare during key parts of the asylum process:

- Home office guidelines- 6 months to decide claim. In reality far longer.

Access to Education

Up to age 16
Compulsory education should not be affected by status

16-19yrs Further education
Asylum seekers/refugees eligible
Can be practical problems providing ID/status

Higher education
Asylum seekers/refugees eligible
BUT MAY NOT eligible for student finance/loan:
Article 26/Schwab and West-heimer/Refugee Support Network
Specific Educational Challenges

- Delays in accessing education - can be related to age disputes/being moved
- Different prior educational system - exams not recognised/valued
- Interrupted education
- Previous trauma affects learning/concentration
- Unresolved immigration status at 18 - affects entitlement to student finance/university

New threats in immigration bill:
Reducing leaving care support at 18 for ARE Young People.
Access to Health

- All Looked after young people are eligible to access health services
- Registration at GP may require a letter from LA especially if no ARC card in place, to confirm name and DOB and looked after status.
- Post 18 and not in education may require a HC2
- Doctors/dentists should provide interpreters if required
Transition at 18/care leavers

- Waiting for decision post 18

- If ARE, further legal advice/fresh claim

- Voluntary return

- Forced Return

- Abscond

- Unable to work
- Difficulty accessing further/higher education

- (UASC) support under the Children (Leaving Care) Act If looked after for 13 weeks (sec 20)
Mental health needs of UASCs

- Looked after children are approximately four times more likely to have a mental disorder than children living in their birth families (NSPCC)

- “As with all refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people, unaccompanied minors are likely to have experienced trauma within the country from which they fled, during their journey from this country to the one in which they seek refuge and on arrival in their host country. Issues of loss may be exacerbated by a lack of support systems, such as family and community life, and associated isolation” Elliot (2007:141)

- Experience higher rates of trauma than their accompanied peers (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006)

- Primary trauma, resulting in post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), affective and anxiety disorders (Hodes, 2000).
What affects the mental health of AS/refugee young people?

- Pre-migration: exposure to war and disaster
- Survivor guilt
- Journey- Separation from family, exploitation, survival, kidnapping
- Post migration; language, culture, education, social support
- Discrimination and stigma
- Uncertainty of future

This is alongside the usual post migration stressors such as the quality of relationships young people are able to forge with those in and around the home, establishing of their own identities and the usual adolescent challenges which are all known to affect emotional health (Wade 2012)
Key stresses related to the asylum process

- Age assessment
- Retelling stories/credibility/memory
- Delays in interviews/decisions/appeals
- Reporting episodes
- Fear of refusal/deportation
- Exploitation/trafficking-pressure to pay back debts
- Navigating complex processes-immigration and care
Grief and Loss- What can be experienced as Loss?

- family and friends (through death or separation)
- community
- home
- way of life
- freedom
- security
- trust
- wealth
- cultural identity
- time
- control certainty, and safety

Many young people will be experiencing symptoms of grief and unresolved mourning
How may emotional distress present in UASC Young People?

- Erratic Sleep patterns
- Poor Diet
- Anxiety- especially around key trigger points
- Lack of trust in adults
- Lack of willingness to engage in ‘therapy’
- Low mood/Depression
- Intrusive thoughts and memories

- PTSD symptoms- dissociation
- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Silence/withdrawal
- Placement instability-inability to ‘settle’
- Headaches
- Generalised body pains
- ‘numbing the pain’ of loss through denial, avoidance and minimisation
The importance of a secure base

A secure base which promotes resilience and coping ability has been found to be of vital importance for young people to begin to make the transition to living a new and successful life in the UK. Focusing on the tangible conditions in which these young people can re-create a ‘secure base’ can help to reduce inequality and promote healing and recovery needed for them to overcome past trauma and current obstacles. (Groark, Sclare, Raval 2010).

This environment needs to involve “…nurturing empathic attunement, validation of their subjective experience, containment of feelings, and soothing from the adults involved in their care.” (Amey, S. 2009).

“…Opportunities to move forward from troubling experiences, re-centre their lives, and find new purpose in every day routines and activities” (Wade et al 2005)
Attachment in separated adolescents

“It is important to remember that despite the often traumatic circumstances surrounding the flight from their homeland the majority of these children are likely to have come from otherwise secure, stable family backgrounds”


Separation from a primary attachment figure can be painful and result in feelings of isolation and insecurity. Stabilization is the first priority for these young people and a key part of this will need to be a consistent and available carer, such as a foster family, mentor or support worker. Once this level of “stability” has been achieved some young people will be able to make sense of their experiences, move on and build a new life for themselves

(Groark, Sclare, Raval 2010).
Resilience and protective factors

Resilience is defined as the ability to maintain a stable, healthy psychological and physical functioning despite exposure to trauma.

Resilience is influenced by wider social support, community and environmental factors and can be further built upon by influencing these factors.
What practical strategies have you /could you use to help a UASC settle into life in the UK?

► BRAINSTORM IN GROUPS
Resilience and protective factors: within the wider environment

- Access to a range of sport and leisure facilities/exercise
- Continuity with past relationships, customs and cultures
- Opportunities to create new social networks in host country
- Peers/friendships
- Engaging in hobbies and leisure pursuits
- Contacts with family/key contacts from own community
- Meaningful use of time
- Access to purposeful education - school/FE
- Sense of belonging and participation in society
- Supportive relationships with key adults, Foster Carers and Social Workers - consistency and communication
- Cultural integration
- Not experiencing discrimination and stigma (labelled ‘asylum seeker’)
Practical strategies for Social Workers and Foster Carers

- Get to know young people as individuals, avoid generalisations due to culture, religion, country of origin
- Trust takes time to build - be flexible and organic
- Be warm and attuned, flexible and caring
- Allow for silence
- Don’t ask ‘big’ questions too soon
- Find predictable patterns, shapes and rhythms of living
- Involve young people in ‘normal’ day to day routines
- Find activities that don’t require ‘language’
- Use internet to explore their home country, language, culture, music
- Food as welcome, acceptance and belonging
- Getting back into a good sleep routine
There is evidence to show that beyond the legal permission to continue to remain, asylum seeking children begin to feel safe in the day to day by finding predictable patterns, shapes and rhythms of living, by being in a good school, getting prompt medical care, and finding trustworthy, reliable and companionable people, adults and peers.

If offered resettlement, UASCs appear to do well, practically, socially and educationally. In circumstances of prolonged uncertainty when they do not know where they will end up, feeling successful is difficult, no matter how strong the will.

..the capacity to regroup practically and psychologically is based on holding onto a broad sense of solidarity that extends to political and religious loyalties and affiliations from the past and to trustworthy people in the present, and the wish for ordinary family like....” (Kohli, 2011)

Useful resources


Useful handouts on culture, language and religion plus links to other resources
Useful resources

- Coram factsheets, advice line and website  
  https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/resources/ 0207 636 8505

- Refugee Council-Children’s Panel Tel: 0808 808 0500

- No Recourse to Public Funds Network  
  www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk

- The Immigration Law Practitioner Association  
  www.ilpa.org.uk

- Refugee Support Network - Education advice/support  
  highereducation@refugeesupportnetwork.org

DOWNLOAD THIS RESOURCE!  
https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/resources/seeking-support/
Useful Resources

**Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People**
Creating a family life across a ‘world of difference’

Jim Wade, Ala Sirriyeh, Ravi Kohli and John Simmonds
Use of interpreters- see guidance sheet

LAC reviews- explain the purpose of meetings and the different roles of professionals

https://miclu.org/who-is-who
Closing thoughts..

Avoid burnout, empathy and compassion fatigue! Be an advocate! Believe in your own inner strength and resilience. Look after your own mental health!
Nottingham and Notts Refugee Forum
The Sycamore Centre
33a Hungerhill Road
St Ann’s
NG3 4NB
0115 9601230/9601239

naomi.jemmett@nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk

www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk
https://www.facebook.com/nottsrefugeeforum/
https://twitter.com/NNRF1