Stage 1: Social Innovation funding

Befriending Services for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland

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Background

1. The Social Innovation Fund supports collaborative partnerships between third sector or social economy organisations and research institutions to develop, test and scale up new ideas and solutions to tackle poverty and disadvantage. The Fund is designed around a three-stage pipeline approach to social innovation and is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Scottish Government. Stage 1 funding is to develop new, innovative and creative ideas and solutions to social problems. Stage 2 then tests the idea or prototype to find out if it works in practice and identify what works and why. Finally, Stage 3 funding is for supporting and growing social innovations that work.

2. In 2017, Aberlour in partnership with the University of Stirling applied for Stage 1 funding through the Social Innovation Fund to explore the development of a Befriending Service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland.

Context

3. In 2005, the UN stated that for the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin that:

> '*States are required to create the underlying legal framework and to take necessary measures to secure proper representation of an unaccompanied or separated child's best interests. Therefore, States should appoint a Guardian or adviser as soon as the unaccompanied or separated child is identified and maintain such Guardianship arrangements until the child has either reached the age of majority or has permanently left the territory and/or jurisdiction of the State, in compliance with the Convention and other international obligations.*'
>
> [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005]

The statement continued that the role and remit of a Guardian was that:

> '*The Guardian should have the authority to be present in all planning and decision-making processes, including immigration and appeal hearings, care arrangements and all efforts to search for a durable solution (UNCRC articles 18(2) and 20 (1)).*'
>
> [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005]

4. The UNHCR (2017) estimates there are 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide; 25.4 million who are refugees and 3.1 million asylum seekers (the majority of people are internally displaced). The number of unaccompanied or separated children seeking asylum on an individual basis has increased significantly over recent years, reaching the highest levels since UNHCR started systematically collecting such data in 2006, with separated children representing 51% of migrants (UNHCR 2016). In 2015, about 98,400 new individual asylum applications were submitted by unaccompanied or separated children, with 78 countries reporting at least one such individual application. This represents nearly five per cent of all asylum applications in 2015 (UNCHR 2016).

5. In comparison with mainland Europe, the UK receives fewer asylum applications (Home Office 2018) accounting for four per cent of total claims in the EU in 2015 (Eurostat 2018). The UK, however, has the same obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention to support and protect asylum seekers and refugees and, while the legislative responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees is with the Westminster Government, the Scottish Government and Scottish local authorities have responsibility for policy issues relating to migration to Scotland, including the support and protection of UASC.

6. Published figures for aggregated statistics for regions across the UK are rarely published by the Home Office, but in Scotland the arrival of unaccompanied children has been noted as a policy and practice issues since around 2000, when Glasgow became the only Scottish local authority area for dispersal of asylum seekers. The vast majority of separated children have arrived and been looked after in Glasgow and the social work asylum team have been maintaining a record of UASCs arriving in Glasgow since September 2005 (Rigby 2009). More recent figures suggest that approximately 4000 individuals are receiving accommodation and support in Glasgow and 2000 Syrian refugees have come to Scotland through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) (www.migrationscotlocal authorities nd.org.uk).

7. In relation to children, recent legislative developments in the UK, mainly the Immigration Act 2016, require Government to make arrangements 'as soon as possible' to relocate and support unaccompanied refugee children from Europe. In early 2018, the second New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy was published (Scottish Government 2018) with a vision for Scotland being a welcoming place where refugees and asylum seekers are able to rebuild their lives. The strategy recognises that children and young people may require additional support to access the services they need and opportunities to participate in society. Scottish Government also published its draft national strategy to tackle the identified problems of social isolation, such as the quality and quantity of social relationships at individual, groups, and community levels, and loneliness (Teuton 2018). Within its strategy, the Government has acknowledged that children and young people from some minority ethnic communities are less likely to feel they belong to the immediate neighbourhood and experience significantly higher rates of loneliness than the general population, and are at increased risk of being bullied and socially isolated (Teuton 2018).

8. The establishment of the Scottish Guardianship Service in 2010 was a result of the increasing focus on child trafficking during the 2000s, and the EU obligations and directives for member states. The Council of Europe Convention on Action Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) mentioned the special provisions and protection measures required for children; the EU Directive 2011/36/EU, transposed into UK law in April 2013 (EU Anti-trafficking Directive)[1] provides a clearer direction through sections 23 & 24 for the provision of a Guardian. While there was a focus on trafficking, the relationship between UASC and trafficking has been identified in Scotland (Rigby 2009; 2011; SCCYP 2011).

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[1] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:101:0001:0011:EN:PDF

9. The Scottish Guardianship Service aims to improve the separated child's experience and understanding of the immigration and welfare processes and to ensure they receive services appropriate to their needs and entitlements. The SGS works with young people if they have been referred prior to being 18 but Guardians also work with young people over 18 until they have status (immigration status regularised) or if they are returning to their country of origin. SGS works with young people into their 20s, mirroring social work statutory responsibility for care leavers up until age 26, although in reality this is unlikely as decisions on asylum cases have usually been made before then.

10. Guardians assist unaccompanied children in navigating complex asylum, social work, and trafficking victim identifications systems (Crawley and Kohli 2013), but unaccompanied children often have multiple needs: from food, shelter and safety, poverty and social exclusion, to legal and financial advice, health, education, opportunities to develop language skills, and quick, on-going access to services. Many have experienced or witnessed traumatic events in their country of origin and during the journey to the UK; whilst not all are traumatised, and many show high levels of resilience, they are recognised as particularly vulnerable, often feeling overwhelmed and lonely (UNICEF 2015). This impacts on mental and emotional health and wellbeing (Knight et al. 2008), from anxiety to suicidal ideation to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Stressors can include lengthy waits for asylum decisions increasing anxieties about an uncertain future. Professional support alone does not necessarily address this issue, and culturally, many may find it challenging to talk about mental health concerns.

11. The Guardianship role, in Scotland, is not primarily designed to help combat social isolation and loneliness, and with increased numbers of referrals has struggled to offer additional support to potentially isolated young people. Kohli (2007) has commented that unaccompanied children have expressed the importance of social relations as a key contributor to their emotional wellbeing.

12. While the Scottish Guardianship Service (referred to as SGS) provides support to children and local authorities in relation to immigration issues, local authorities remain responsible for the welfare and accommodation of all unaccompanied children through their obligations under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, UK immigration legislation and in relation to children at risk of trafficking the new Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015.

13. From 2010 to date, 410 UASC have been referred to SGS. Nearly 64% of these have been looked after by Glasgow City Council, over six times more than any other local authority area in Scotland. Twenty-five local authority areas have referred to the SGS, although it is recognised there is substantial variation in experience across the country (Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre 2016):

Year	No. of referrals
2010	14
2011	45
2012	37
2013	33

2014	35
2015	60
2016	78
2017	60
2018 (up to August)	48

Aims and methods

14. Stage 1 of this project aims to develop a durable, tailored befriending service model, with the primary aim of reducing social isolation amongst unaccompanied children in Scotland and supporting their fuller integration into Scottish society. Building on existing models of mainstream befriending services, this model would be developed through co-production with unaccompanied children and professionals, reflecting their views and tailored to their needs.

15. The key objectives of Stage 1 were to:

- explore the defining elements of effective befriending and support from the perspectives of children, young people and those working with them;
- identify key themes on what works, as well as any potential gaps in our knowledge in this area; and
- build on existing models of mainstream befriending services developed through co-production with unaccompanied children and professionals reflecting their views and tailored to their needs

16. The data was gathered through:

- Small-scale review of current literature;
- 4 focus groups with unaccompanied children and young people;
- 1 focus group with the Guardianship Service; and
- 15 interviews with those supporting UASC including local authorities and voluntary sector organisations providing welfare, housing, health and mental health support.

Small-scale review of literature

17. This small-scale scoping review brought together current literature on befriending and mentoring services for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Within the timescales it was not possible to undertake a full systematic review, but the scoping review has followed the guidance on systematic reviews (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination).[2] Agreed aims were to explore the defining elements of effective befriending and support from the perspectives of children, young people and those working with them and to also identify key themes on what works, as well as any potential gaps in our knowledge in this area.

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[2] https://www.york.ac.uk/crd/guidance/ Accessed 16th July 2017

Search strategy

18. Psychological, education and sociological databases were searched for peer-reviewed publications available in English and published within the last ten years:
    - Child Development & Adolescent Studies
    - CINAHL Complete
    - Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text
    - Political Science Complete
    - PsycARTICLES
    - PsycINFO
    - SocINDEX with Full Text

19. Search terms included: *asylum**, *refugee** AND *unaccomp** plus *services* AND *support* AND *mentoring* AND *befriending.*

20. From an initial search, 456 peer-reviewed articles were identified from which 40 were identified for initial screening. Articles were excluded if the focus was on issues for cohorts of children which included UASC, but did not necessarily focus on them; issues for parents and accompanied children; a focus on UASC leaving care; or international studies which had little relevance to UK and Scottish policy and legislation. This initial stage resulted in 23 articles eligible for further screening.

21. The next step of filtering considered these 23 articles in more depth. A selection of articles was subject to review by two reviewers, to ensure inter-rater reliability. Reviewers rated the articles, for methodological quality (1 *very good* - 3 *poor/doubtful*) and usefulness of the paper (1 *very good* - 3 *not at all*) to the review question. Articles rated 3 for both were automatically excluded, however, articles which may have scored poor for methods, but were highly relevant, were included. Twelve articles were included in the final scoping review through this search method.

22. The references of these 12 articles, together with their individual abstracts, were shared with colleagues in Aberlour and the research team to ensure that key texts or authors had not been omitted from the search. Additional material including reports and discussion papers were also identified to include in this review. A total of 25 articles and reports informed this scoping review: 12 via sourced peer reviewed articles or papers; and 13 reports, discussion papers or editorials.

Focus groups

23. Four focus groups were held with unaccompanied children and young people. This included one focus group held to inform the original proposal. In total 23 young people (9 female; 14 male) aged between 16 and 22 took part in the groups. Just under half (10 young people) had been in Scotland for less than a year with the remainder living in Scotland between one to four years except for one young person who had resided here for more than five years. Their countries of birth ranged from Europe (Albania), Asia (Afghanistan, Vietnam), Africa (Nigeria, Somalia) and the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Syria).

24. One focus group was undertaken with the Manager of the Scottish Guardianship Service and all six Guardians who form the service in Glasgow. The Guardians had a range of experience with one new to the service

(less than three months) and those with longer-term experience (greater than two years). The Manager has been with the Service since its establishment.

Interviews

25. Fifteen interviews were conducted with a range of professionals and organisations involved in the providing care, support and help to unaccompanied young people. This included 11 local authorities, three voluntary sector organisations and one individual providing befriending support to unaccompanied young people (known collectively as 'other professionals' throughout this report). It was important to ensure that the local authorities reflected the experiences of those delivering services in large urban areas or areas with easier access to urban areas as well as those in more rural locations: seven councils were classed as either large urban or urban; and four as rural or remote rural.[3]

Limitations

26. The small-scale review of literature was limited by the quantity and quality of information accessed within the short timescales. Some studies lacked adequate sample size or sufficient methodological rigour, in terms of study design. A further limitation was that there were few studies that focused on the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, as often this group were included with other young people who had arrived with their families.

Pilot and evaluation of the Scottish Guardianship Service

27. In 2006, the Scottish Refugee Council published research on the experiences of separated children and young people in Scotland and despite the fact most felt safe and able to establish lives in Scotland, many experienced stress and anxiety, experienced feelings of dislocation and isolation from their own communities, and lacked understanding and knowledge of both the asylum system and welfare services (Hopkins and Hill 2010). The research recommended that '*unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland should be given assistance from an independent guardian or advisor*' (p.59) to directly support young asylum seekers and to link and bridge between services to consolidate existing good provisions and to raise standards of practice where required.

28. In 2010, a pilot of the Scottish Guardianship Service (SGS) was established with an independent evaluation commissioned to run simultaneously. From the outset, the role of the Guardian was to be independent to support and act as an advocate for a separated child, particularly through the asylum, trafficking, legal and welfare processes and assist them to participate within these processes. In addition, the Guardians were to support young people to develop skills, and build confidence, resilience and overall wellbeing and helps them plan and prepare for their future. An important aspect of the role was in '*assisting other agencies and organisations to provide appropriate support and information to young people … particularly evident in those areas of Scotland where Social Workers and others have less experience historically of working with separated young people and perhaps have a more limited understanding of the asylum process or of the young person's needs and rights.*' (Crawley and Kohli 2013, p. 48).

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[3] Scottish Government urban rural classification of local authority areas:

www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/About/Methodology/UrbanRuralClassification

23. Between September 2010 and August 2012, 81 young people from 17 different countries were allocated a Guardian as part of the pilot. This involved working with just under a third of Scottish local authorities. In its most recent report in 2017 (Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour), the Service reported it had supported 350 young people since 2010 with the increase in new referrals experienced in 2014-2015 resulting in a clear upward trend. Guardians now work with a wider geographical spread across Scotland, which brings challenges of developing and maintaining consistent local joined-up rapid protection responses that involve the key agencies of the SGS, social work, police and Home Office.

24. As part of the earlier evaluation (Crawley and Kohli 2013), the researchers spoke with 47 unaccompanied young people who had received a service. The responses from young people clearly identified that in addition to help with asylum claims, they emphasised the importance of the Guardians' help in accessing welfare, health and education services and also emphasised the importance of social and cultural activities organised and supported by the Guardians, such as attending individual events important to the young people such as prize-giving events and regular participation groups. This had been achieved through Guardians communicating clearly and kindly, and repeating explanations of processes and information. An important aspect of this relationship to emerge from the evaluation was the ability of the Guardians to appreciate and respect silence while containing and supporting the young people during more challenging times and testing behaviours. Flexibility and being available were highly valued by the young people.

25. The analysis of the case file audit, undertaken as part of the evaluation, identified that significant time was given by Guardians to explaining, supporting and assisting young people through the asylum process. This had allowed trusting relationships to develop. Another aspect of the role was the time Guardians invested in relation to the general well-being of the young people and developing their wellbeing, confidence and resilience through participation activities. They often had a very clear sense of the young person and how he or she was coping, and were quickly and sensitively able to identify changes in mood, attitudes or general presentation. They were able to see 'beneath the surface'.

26. In their report, Crawley and Kohli (2013) commented that the domain of *social networks* had not been part of the original business plan for the SGS, but the need to build resilience became increasingly important as the Pilot developed. The Service had focussed appropriately on asylum and welfare in the first instance, but the Guardians and young people co-constructed this social networks domain from the outset and this work developed as the Service established itself.

27. The authors concluded that: 'During the course of the evaluation we identified evidence of the 'added value' of Guardianship across three important domains of engagement: **asylum, well-being, and social networks***' (p.85) and continued: *'[The] process of normalisation helped young people to re-establish their social contacts and skills and build their capacities to cope with the events taking place in their lives. This, in turn, enabled them to deal with issues in the domains of asylum and well-being more effectively.'* (p.86). The importance of the social networks emerged clearly from this evaluation and, as early as 2013, Crawley and Kohli raised concerns that increases in numbers referred to the service would result in the necessary focus on legal and asylum processes at the expense of social networks resulting in poor integration, greater social isolation and poorer outcomes for young people in the long term.

Needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children and Young People (UASC)

28. During their journey to Scotland, planned or unplanned, unaccompanied young person may have been exposed to direct or indirect violence to themselves or family, exploited or trafficked (Rigby 2011). In addition,

many young people travelling alone experience higher numbers of adverse events than accompanied children (Fazel 2012). Once in the new country, young people may have additional needs relating to their unknown legal status, the adjustment needed to their new circumstances, cultures and environments (Hopkins and Hill, 2010), and feel a loss of status and identity (Chase 2013). For many, the unknown whereabouts of family members often remains (Bronstein, Montgomery and Ott, 2012; Scottish Refugee Council 2013). Young people need to feel safe and secure (Rigby 2011) and such traumatic experiences can impact on their wellbeing, health and mental health, and opportunities for education (Chase 2013; Hopkins and Hill, 2010).

29. From the Service's own records, by the second year of the pilots just under half of the 81 young people had recorded mental health difficulties in terms of flashbacks, blackouts, anxiety, poor memory, depression through to post-traumatic stress (Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour 2017). These cumulative adversities impact significantly on health and mental health outcomes with exposure to violence and the loss of family support impacting on behavioural and emotional mental health outcomes (Fazel et al. 2012). The impact of trauma and adverse experiences is not, however, homogenous across all unaccompanied young people. Individual attributes of optimism, confidence and hope are conducive to coping (Maegusuku-Hewett et al. 2007). An absence of pre-existing vulnerabilities such as long-term physical illness or psychological difficulties, and previous family cohesion and support were strong predictors of future positive emotional wellbeing in their new country (Fazel et al. 2012).

30. Once in their new country, research has identified several factors associated with positive change for young people including clarity in terms of the asylum process, learning the local language (Fazel et al. 2012), access to appropriately trained interpreting services (Rigby 2011), safe shelter (Bronstein, Montgomery and Ott 2012) and access to local educational and health systems, and employment opportunities (Ager and Strang 2008; Fazel et al. 2012). Importantly, social networks and social integration were a crucial part for young peoples' successful transition to their new countries and key to this success was:

- *Developing trusting relationships*: children and young people need to feel safe before they can begin to share their experiences. This is relevant for all children and young people, but particularly for those who may have been trafficked as they often maintain relationships with their traffickers out of fear, a sense of loyalty, or that they may need them again if they are not granted asylum. In some situations, even if the young person is granted asylum, the trafficker may trace them as they or their families owe debt which is to be repaid (Rigby 2011).

- *Social support and community integration*: young people need opportunities for social connection between individuals, groups and the community (Ager and Strang 2008; Fazel et al. 2012). For individual young people it was important to have different opportunities to verbalise or put their trauma into words either through individual interaction or group activities. Young people needed individuals to be available to them to listen and offer comfort (Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Sutton et al, 2006). Group situations offered opportunities to meet others who had shared similar experiences which helped make sense of their own experiences, strengths and resilience (Sutton et al. 2006). Ager and Strang (2008) usefully summarised the different forms of social connections:

> 'Theorists have distinguished between three differing forms of social connection: social bonds (with family and co-ethnic, co-national, co-religious or other forms of group), social bridges (with other communities) and social links (with the structures of the state).'
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> [Ager and Strang 2008, p.178]

- *Activity*: engaging in pleasurable activities can provide distraction from difficult memories and emotions and help affect positive change (Sutton et al. 2006). It can also help young people re-engage with the skills and abilities they already have or develop new skills and interests; both important in terms of re-establishing a sense of self and identity.

- *Religion*: religion for many young people who arrive in Scotland is very important and can help in developing an understanding or meaning of the events which have happened as well as provide a guide for living their lives and provide emotional support through the religious teaching as well as the communities the young people link with (Sutton et al. 2006).

33. In a study of 54 unaccompanied young men and women, Chase (2013) identified that future positive wellbeing – irrespective of the degree of trauma or upheaval – was enhanced by their ability to maintain their own account of who they were and where they had come from, a sense of belonging and attachment and a sense of themselves and the future.

34. The findings from this small-scale review of literature were also borne out in the focus groups with young people undertaken to inform this scoping work. The young people articulated clearly what had been important to them on arriving in Scotland. Key was feeling safe with help to understand the asylum, legal and financial systems and processes. Young people in all groups identified that learning the language was essential in order to communicate and support was often needed to help make friends with people from the same culture and to form new relationships. If support was not in place then the young people reported feeling isolated and unsure where to go to socialise:

    'You close yourself in a room, miss family, friends, it is stressful'.

    [Young Person, Focus group]

    This then impacted on their ability to form new friendships:

    'When you don't feel good you can't be a friend to other people you meet in the groups'.

    [Young Person, focus group]

35. The support the young people received from their Guardians clearly focused on the asylum and legal processes they were involved with. More generally, the young people commented that their Guardians *'help with everything'* and that *'they help us work out what is right and what is wrong'*. Importantly, all groups identified that the Guardians provide emotional, social and practical support:

    'Left one mother for another'

    [Young person, focus group]

    The downside to this was, however:

    'Guardians really important and if they leave then can feel a bad situation as it feels as though your family has gone.'

    [Young Person, focus group]

36. The Guardians helped with health appointments, sorting out practical matters and getting the young person onto the right courses in College. Those interviewed who were working with young people in Scottish local authorities recognised that there could be overlap in the support provided by the Guardians and that provided by social work. All were clear, however, that the knowledge of the immigration, legal and asylum processes lay with the Guardians and they had a role in advocating for the young person. Social workers commented that they coordinated all aspects of a child's plan including their needs in relation to being looked after and accommodated, health, housing, supporting young people to budget and plan and access to training and education.

37. One area to emerge was the support that Guardians had provided in helping young people work with a range of wider professionals such as interpreting, housing and counselling services, which was not always easy for the young person; for example: one young person commented that the support from the Guardian was '*Very good as really helped with asylum seeking and as a foil against the interpreters as sometimes worry that they do not always get the story right. Sometimes feel as though voiceless even though you have an interpreter and it doesn't always help to change interpreters.*' [Young Person, Focus group].

38. Other professionals and organisations involved had more specific roles in advising and supporting the young people such as legal advice or psychological services. One organisation also provided support for young people who did not have a Guardian because they were age disputed, or the age assessment had not yet been completed. This organisation saw it as important to keep young people engaged in purposeful activity regardless of status so supported young people in getting voluntary placements, for example working in charity shops.

39. Guardians also helped young people make connections: '*I was isolated in Edinburgh but the guardian introduced me to my friend*', and through the organised monthly events encourage young people to take part in: '*Activities and meeting each other to exchange opinions and to make friends*'. This was particularly important for those young people who were moving or had moved into independent living and for those living in more rural locations where they may be the only person from their country of origin. Those interviewed from social work and other organisations commented on the importance of the monthly events for the young people to have fun, mix with other young people often in their own language and dialect and build confidence.

40. Social work services in all areas worked hard to link young people to activities locally; for example, contacting local football clubs, community groups and faith organisations, but the opportunities to develop social peer groups and networks differed across the country. In more rural areas, there were very few, if no other, young people in similar situations and services for unaccompanied young people were less developed or did not exist. The numbers of young people in these local authorities were very few and while their individual needs were understood and clearly acknowledged, and staff went to considerable lengths to put support in place, the significant challenge to local budgets and relatively small ethnic minority populations meant that there were few local services developed to meet their needs exclusively. National voluntary organisations also commented that they sometimes struggled to deliver services outside the main urban areas across Scotland's central belt.

41. The focus group with Guardians and the interviews both identified that the initial period when the young person arrives in Scotland can be very demanding on workers in terms of both the emotional and practical needs for the young person. It was acknowledged that this intensity can rarely be sustained over a

longer time period, but that the young person continues to require high levels of support and that developing networks and relationships can take time: '…for many, it can take 12-18 months'. There was rarely time for fun activities such as shopping, simply spending time together or going to the cinema. When asked, few young people could think of changes to be made to the support provided, but three asked for greater access to activities within their local communities and opportunities for fun and social activities.

42. Furthermore, those interviewed often mentioned the pressures placed on the Scottish Guardianship Service and the Guardians: 'Over-worked and have way too many cases' and 'They provide a 'super human' high quality service', but there were also concerns that 'There are not nearly enough Guardians…It's a concern that Guardians do so much…so potential risks in terms of self-care and sustainability.'

A Befriending Service for Scotland

What is a Befriending Service?

43. Within the literature, befriending is often described as a form of support, which although a purposive relationship, is based around friendship and designed to assist specific groups of people to help improve quality of life, help alleviate social isolation and loneliness, provide role models, and contribute to better mental health (Behnia 2007; McVittie, Goodhall and Barr, 2009). People without adequate support systems are matched with volunteers who take positive actions to offer emotional and practical support and information through friendship for a determined period of time (Behnia 2007). Behnia (2007) continues that the literature suggests that befriending programs improve health, increase levels of happiness, reduce the effects of social isolation, and cause the remission of depression. Befriending programmes for refugees in various countries have also facilitated their integration, and help with learning about the new society and language, searching for a job, and locating accommodation.

44. This scoping exercise asked those participating about what they understood by the term *befriending*. There was general consensus from young people, Guardians and others supporting young people that this relationship should be friendship-based with regular contact long-term, but within agreed boundaries. The aim would be to support the young person to develop friendships and social networks with greater social integration to reduce isolation and feelings of loneliness. There should be opportunities to model good relationships and help the young person build trust in adults, and develop confidence, resilience and self-esteem, but also have fun and to allow young people to set the pace and tone for sharing personal information.

45. The scoping work set out to answer some key questions for the possible development of a befriending service for Scotland:

- Should Scotland develop a Befriending Service for unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children and young people?
- Which young people would benefit?
- What should a Befriending Service provide?
- What should be the key attributes or characteristics of a befriender?
- What are the benefits and challenges for setting up a Befriending Service?
- How should a Befriending Service be coordinated and managed?

Should Scotland develop a Befriending Service?

46. The scoping study identified strong support for the idea of developing a Befriending Service. Of all who participated: 14 young people, 14 interviews and seven Guardians, all but one (young person) thought it would be helpful to have a Befriender who works alongside the Guardian to help young people settle into Scottish culture and their local communities.

Which young people would benefit?

47. While all young people could see the value in a Befriending Service, not all would need to draw on its resources. It would be more important for young people in areas where services were less established:

> '*Some of the young people in more rural [or] isolated places without much going, without lots of youth activities, outside of the bigger hubs where there are integration networks/programmes. Having someone they would have regular contact with. Some of the young people want that from their Guardians, but the Guardians have to focus to a greater extent on young people who have statements to complete, interviews coming up, it's hard to spend so much time with young people who don't have anything going on in terms of their asylum case.*'
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> [Guardian, focus group]

48. Young people also thought a Befriender would be helpful where individuals were struggling to make connections and needed additional support. This seemed particularly likely to occur for young people who did not have a local keyworker or consistent social worker identified to support them. One young person felt that due to the length of time in Scotland, they had now established in their communities and social networks, but thought that this support would be helpful to someone who had recently arrived or not made similar friendships. As one Guardian observed:

> '*one of my YP recently moved from a unit to his own accommodation and doesn't have any friends, spends a lot of time by himself in his flat watching TV, and am aware during the holidays he'll be by himself a lot. Would be ideal for him to meet other young people….*'
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> [Guardian, focus group]

49. The Guardians and interviewees could also see a role for Befrienders supporting their work and the young people. Similar to the young people, they thought that the young people should be able to make choices; for example, not all may want a one-to-one befriender exclusively, but meet with Befrienders in groups of two or three as some activities – e.g. bowling – are harder in with only two.

50. There was discussion about when to introduce a Befriender to the young person. Some could see value in the very early period when a young person arrives in Scotland to have someone who is there for the young person and not connected to the asylum and looked after processes. Whereas others thought that it better to introduce a Befriender at a later stage when much of the early activity reduces. All agreed, however, that it would help for someone with whom the young person has developed some trust to introduce the Guardian.

What should a Befriending Service provide?

51. At its heart, the young people asked for someone they could meet or talk with on a regular visit about aspects of their lives which did not necessarily relate to their asylum status. The young people enjoyed meeting in groups, but also wanted the opportunity to meet with someone who was there just for them. The three main groups consulted – young people, Guardians and other professionals – agreed that one-to-one befriending should be offered, but that group activities had much to offer for reasons already discussed. In rural areas where the young person might be living in a more rural location, telephone befriending was thought to be potentially helpful as a means of keeping in touch, but only where a relationship was already established. Some interviewees pointed out the importance of time spent together in person to building rapport; others recognised, however, that many young people are already comfortable with forms of interaction through social media.

52. The young people were clear in their responses about what support a Befriender could provide:

    - *Activities*: social activities were identified in all groups such as going the cinema, to the park or shopping. Young people said they would want a befriender to interact with them to do '*fun stuff with until you settle down*' as well as help meet new friends establish networks.

    - *Emotional support*: some younger members of the focus groups spoke of getting comfort and feeling close to someone as you've lost family; hugs were mentioned by one or two focus group members. Someone to be there to help you see your way through.

    - *Consistent and regular contact*: young people felt it important to meet with someone regularly or feel you can contact the befriender when you feel stressed. Young people asked for long term support and again cited that fact that many have no family in the UK.

    - *Language and culture*: help to learn and practice English was key with help to understand Scottish culture; simple things like help with bus routes and what places are acceptable or appropriate for young people to visit.

53. From discussion with the Guardians and interviews with other professionals, three similar areas emerged, but underpinning this was that the Service should be flexible as different people will want different things.

    - *Orientation*: Befrienders could support young people orientate to their new communities and help '*'own' their city/area*'. Young people may not always feel part of their new city or community, but Befrienders could go with the them to a café for the first time, help with bus routes or train timetables and explain cultural norms such as not throwing rubbish on the street, which may be tolerated in other cultures;

    - *Language*: Having someone to talk with in English without pressure and at their own pace;

    - *Social activities*: these were seen as important to building resilience and some thought *may* actually more directly to building resilience than people who are working with them on the asylum or other processes. Introducing young people to new experiences or activities was also thought key, but takes time; as one Guardian said:

'You can't fast-track resilience"

What should be the key attributes or characteristics of a befriender?

54. There were a range of views on the demographic characteristics of Befrienders such as age and ethnicity, but common views shared by all three groups on key attributes or characteristics.

55. There were a range of views on the ages of Befrienders. Across all the groups of young people, most thought the Befriender should be older than the unaccompanied young people themselves; only a few thought they should be of a similar age, or slightly older. Young people of a similar age have their own lives and interests to pursue whereas someone older might have more time and experience to draw on, particularly if a young person disclosed information about previous or potentially harmful circumstances.

56. Different views were also expressed about whether Befrienders should come from a similar background having shared similar experiences or from local areas and communities. In the first instance familiarity was thought to provide an unspoken understanding of the context of the lives of unaccompanied young people arriving in Scotland, but others thought Befrienders from local communities would help connect young people to local activities and clubs, and young people themselves stated that it gave them some control about how much of their stories were shared. Finally for some, the gender of the Befriender might be important.

57. There were more mixed views on those consulted as part of this scoping work about whether Befrienders need to speak the language of the befriendee. Generally, it was thought that practically this was not possible as the range of languages, and dialects within any one language, was so varied that it would restrict too much the pool from which to draw Befrienders. Instead it was agreed that a range of cross-cultural communication skills – whether verbal, non-verbal or emotional – was more important. Having regular opportunity to practice speaking in English without pressure was also perceived as an attraction for some young people.

58. There was greater consensus on the attributes or characteristics of Befrienders and most agreed that Befrienders needed to be: kind, enthusiastic, energetic, fun and friendly, good listener and empathetic, able to explain things in different ways, attentive to their needs, flexible and has initiative, reflective and, most importantly, committed, consistent and engaged with the young person. As one interviewee perceptively remarked:

> *'Compassionate, honest and clear about confidentiality and limits of confidentiality, allow young people to make decisions as much as possible. A genuinely participatory approach – allow the young people to lead where possible. The young people we're working with can be a very compelling group – separated or not having loved ones, having such uncertainty about their future – it can be really challenging for workers to manage their own feelings about young people, and how this bumps up against our own 'stuff' with our own family. Needs a degree of self-awareness and reflectiveness.'*
>
> [Interviewee]

What are the benefits and challenges for setting up a Befriending Service?

Benefits

59. Research with participants, and evaluations of befriending programmes, have identified benefits to both befriendees and befrienders, but that developing and sustaining a service is not without challenge.

60. In an evaluation of a befriending program in Canada (Behnia 2007), refugees reported that befrienders provided them with practical assistance in finding accommodation, employment and education, increased their awareness of Canadian society and values, improved their language and communication skills, expanded their social networks and improved access to community resources and services.

61. Emotionally, refugees identified that their confidence had increased in carrying out daily tasks, feelings of isolation and emotional distress reduced, and, importantly, befrienders had helped them deal with their fears including the police and navigating large urban areas or cities. The evaluation reported that compared with other refugees, refugees supported by a befriender had more success in gaining work, developed language skills more quickly, received less state financial assistance, had more friends, and were more optimistic about their future.

62. In another study (McVittie, Goodall and Barr, 2009), befrienders identified themes or benefits important to them. The first was the reciprocal nature of the befriending relationship. Befriendees often developed language and cultural understanding, but befrienders described their increased knowledge of different cultures and understandings of diversity. A second benefit was gaining acceptance into the wider social and family networks of the befriendee and both developing wider social links. Finally, befrienders talked about negotiating cultural factors. Cultural differences were viewed as positive, but differences were sometime apparent in the activities conducted within the relationships and required some discussion or negotiation, for example swimming or going for lunch. For some, this developed into enduring and long-lasting friendships.

63. Benefits identified by participants in the current scoping study included helping young people to meet other people; develop confidence in getting around and using services in their local community; build familiarity with day-to-day activities such as shopping or going to a café; identify opportunities such as volunteering or groups they can join and increase their English language skills and understanding of cultural norms and expectations. Through gradual building up over a period of time, these activities were perceived as contributing to longer-term benefits for young people in reducing social isolation and developing resilience.

Challenges

64. The literature on befriending in other contexts, and the interviews and focus groups for this scoping study, identified a number of potential challenges to setting up a successful, sustainable Befriending service for unaccompanied young people in Scotland. However, previous evaluations also identify a number of ways to mitigate against such challenges and ensure that services are developed to support both young people and Befrienders appropriately.

65. **Clarity in the nature of the relationships:** first, is clarity in the nature of the relationship and the expectations of both the befriender and befriendee. If the relationship is considered a friendship, then some

may have the expectation that the relationship will evolve into a natural friendship and that the enforced ending of those relationships may lead to disappointment, disillusionment and possibly to a failure of the intervention (Thompson et al. 2016). Refugees' distrustful behaviour can also be perceived by some befrienders as a sign of rejection and therefore create difficulties in developing or sustaining a Befriending relationship.

66. Second, the support given and received will vary across the befriending relationship. For some, the befriender's primary role may be to act as a friend, to talk with and listen to them, and to encourage them. They gain a new social contact, a new source of interest and entertainment, and someone who will listen to their concerns and celebrate their successes (McVittie, Goodall and Barr, 2009). Due to past life experiences some refugees have very complex and demanding needs and it is possible that befriendees may come to develop an over dependence on the befriending relationship emotionally, where more specialist therapeutic and mental health support, is required. Befrienders could unintentionally cause greater harm to the befriendee either through providing support which is not helpful or not recognising the needs of the young person and may feel responsible for a therapeutic relationship or feel the demands on them are too great. The result may be that they do not continue as a befriender resulting in potentially a significant loss for the young person. This was identified by both Guardians and other professionals as a key challenge.

67. With regard to the relationships between befrienders and befriendees, attention needs to be given to gender, age and personal interests. The timing of the introduction of the befriender was also important and was not thought helpful at a time when the befriendee was in crisis either psychologically, financially or socially (Behnia 2007). From the outset, the befriender and befriendee need to be carefully matched with clear discussions on the boundaries, nature and expectations of the befriending relationship. Once this was established, organisations found that allowing befrienders and befriendees to regulate their own relationships, such as how often to meet and where, was important to its success.

68. **Recruitment of befrienders**: several issues were identified. First, an organisation's lack of financial resources was reported as an important factor hampering success in recruitment. Insufficient funds prevented them from employing volunteer coordinators and staff as well as covering administrative and advertisement costs. Second, research within voluntary organisations identified that over half struggled to recruit volunteers (McVittie, Goodall and Barr (2009), but that they often target certain groups of people, particularly those whom they consider hold the required resources and attributes.

69. The recruitment of volunteers is a two-way process: the result of organisations seeking volunteers; and individuals being motivated to act as befrienders and seek out the organisation. Recruitment was influenced by factors such as an organisation's view of clients' needs, what resources might be necessary to meet those needs, and what the potential befrienders might bring in terms of emotional and practical resources; thus the selection of volunteers could be influenced by organisations' biases. Individuals may also choose organisations as they share an interest in the aims of the organisation, have an ideological affinity to the organisation or respect the organisation's positive reputation.

70. To create interest and awareness about refugees and befriending programs, organisations used visual, printed and social media, and direct communication to raise public awareness through, for example, schools, universities, professional associations, service agencies, local volunteer centres, religious congregations, and hospitals. Misconceptions and concerns that could prevent potential volunteers from joining the befriending scheme were addressed as well as highlighting the impact of traumatic experiences on the lives of refugee or trafficked populations, and the challenges and rewards of volunteering.

71. **Retention of befrienders**: once recruited, the key challenge going forward is how to retain a volunteer workforce. Organisations need to keep them motivated and interested in their work. A major source reported by volunteers is the discrepancy between expectation and experience of volunteer work which could be in terms of the time required, the nature of the role, the amount of support available to them from the organisation and the people they are supporting or befriending; sometimes befrienders can feel rejected if the relationship does not develop.

72. Another challenge was insufficient sustained financial resources preventing organisations from hiring volunteer coordinators and staff, covering administrative and advertisement costs, and covering expenses incurred by volunteers such as liability insurance and transportation. Changes in the lives of volunteers such as internal migration, marriage, illness, and family or employment crisis often compromised their ability to continue working with refugees. Finally, the relationship between staff and befrienders can also play an important role in the successful retention of befrienders; tensions resulted in a loss of volunteers (Behnia 2007).

73. Research also identified what helped to maintain the motivation of a volunteer workforce: where befrienders feel needed, helpful and appreciated (Behnia 2007), and where they are allowed to take part in decision-making, have a voice in designing procedures and setting organisational policy, attend professional workshops, and get recognition for their achievements and contributions (Thompson et al. 2016).

74. For those working with a refugee or trafficked population, the complexities of cultural differences between refugees and volunteers as well as language barriers were sometimes challenging. Conflicting political, ideological and cultural perspectives also negatively affected befrienders' relationships with refugees and organisations. Befrienders could feel over-whelmed or helpless as accounts of refugees' past traumatic life experiences are shared. The current scoping study highlighted the considerable levels of expertise that have developed within the Scottish Guardianship Service and other services in recent years, which offer a valuable resource in developing appropriate training for befrienders.

75. To retain volunteers or befrienders, organisations provided on-going training, support, and follow-up. Training and workshops on issues such as refugees' traumatic experiences, world events, confidentiality, boundary setting, how to work with refugees who have little or no English skills, and how to deal with cultural and language differences and difficult situations were offered to befrienders. Programme coordinators maintained regular contact with befrienders through one-on-one meetings, telephone calls, e-mails, and correspondence. Support was also offered in providing space to discuss how the relationship was developing, any emerging issues and activities undertaken, and also the befrienders personal circumstances if necessary.

76. Matching was considered an important factor and time was taken to ensure that befrienders were involved in tasks they felt comfortable performing and were provided with a range of opportunities to choose from. Key to retention was treating befrienders as part of the workforce by inviting them to the relevant meetings, in-service training and social activities. The contributions of befrienders was recognised through newsletters, certificates of attendance, and taking opportunities to personally thank them for their efforts.

77. **Resourcing the service**: this was identified by the Guardians and other professionals as a potential challenge and to ensure that the Service reached all geographical locations within Scotland.

78. **Boundaries between roles**: this was identified particularly in relation to the role of the Guardians and Befrienders; broadly speaking some saw the work of the Guardians and other professionals discharging the 'formal' responsibilities through the legal, asylum and looked after systems whereas the Befrienders role was more 'informal' focused on social activities to help them feel comfortable in new environments and to develop confidence. For some the distinction was more nuanced, and a delicate balance would be needed to ensure the development of a new Service did not disrupt what was already working well:

> '*If the befrienders can help with the social support that would be good, but with the caveat that the social support and the social interaction that the Guardians have is the bedrock of their relationships with the young people, and you don't want the Guardians to be reduced to … someone who is just in their life to do one job. The thing that builds trust with the Guardians is the roundedness of their role.*'

> [Interviewee]

79. For young people, the difference between roles needs to be clear, as several commented in the focus groups on the 'many' adults around them. They suggested that the relationship with befrienders should not be problem-focused and should allow them to develop trust and confidence over time.

How should a Befriending Service be coordinated and managed?

80. This small-scale review of literature together with interviews and focus groups identified key elements core to a possible Befriending model for this group of young people:

Resources
- From the outset the service should be properly resourced. Guardians may identify young people who might benefit from linking with a Befriender, but the service should be appropriately and separately resourced in terms of setting up, coordinating and managing the service, and developing plans for continued sustainability. Starting and withdrawing a service may cause more damage than no provision;
- Befrienders need to be resourced to travel to the young people and to take part in or introduce the young person to appropriate local activities. It may also be helpful for young people to know that Befrienders are not spending their own money on activities, to avoid a sense of guilt or indebtedness; and
- Many of the risks identified in the literature evaluating previous befriending schemes were mitigated against when resources were in place that enabled services to be developed and managed appropriately by paid staff supporting volunteers.

Scope of service
- Provision should be targeted based on the individual needs of the young person and resources available locally to the young person;
- Face to face provision was preferred, augmented with further group activities with some telephone support in recognition of Scotland's geography and rural locations;
- Most viewed the befriending relationship as long-term and for at least 12-18 months and possibly up to three years.

Management of service
- Befrienders overseen and supported by local Coordinator(s). The Coordinator would recruit, manage and oversee the work of Befrienders, and address any issues emerging;
- It was important to the Guardians and other interviewees that this provided a support to their work and the management of individual Befrienders did not become additional tasks for each Guardian;
- Coordinator(s) overseen by a central organisation.

Breadth and role of Befrienders
- Careful consideration should be given to the range of Befrienders recruited including a range of ages, experiences and gender. For some young people, someone from a similar background and age is important, but for others it is about someone who will be there for them emotionally and to help get involved in local activities, develop their own interests and capacity to pursue these, and to focus on their lives as young people in the present rather then their past experiences or often uncertain futures.

Preparing and training Befrienders
- Befrienders need to have some understanding of child protection issues and procedures, and when additional supports may need to be put in place. This should include clear information about how Befrienders should handle any disclosures from young people about past or potential risks to their safety
- Befrienders also need to be prepared in terms of some knowledge of trafficking and asylum processes to understand what stage the young person and why the young person might be finding some periods more difficult than others. However, training should also ensure that the Befriender role is clearly defined as focused on social networks and *not* on casework.
- Befrienders also have to be prepared for the young people to sometimes express views they might disagree with – for example, about gender roles or cultural differences.

Conclusion

81. The unequivocal support from unaccompanied young people, the Guardians and other professionals about the potential benefits of a Befriending Service was abundantly clear.

82. Supporting the social wellbeing of unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children and young people was not in the original remit for Guardians, but it could be argued that it is through genuine co-production of the Guardians working with, and listening and responding to the needs of young people that the importance of this third domain of social networks emerged. The need for Befrienders to focus on this may become more apparent in the next 18 months if, as anticipated the establishment of independent child trafficking guardians (S.11 Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015), which is currently under consultation, is more restricted than the current role of SGS Guardians.

83. There are challenges in setting up and delivering a Befriending Service, including clarity about the scope and nature of the befriending relationship, recruitment and retention of befrienders and long-term sustainability of a service. There were, however, also clear suggestions and strategies identified in the literature and from evaluations about how such challenges could be managed. These include long-term benefits to a young person's health and wellbeing, and to society as they become active participants in their local communities. These benefits were also identified through the original evaluation of the Scottish Guardianship Service (2013), which also recognised that Guardians ability to continue to support

young people in their social integration would be compromised if referrals to the Service increased; which has been the case since 2015.

84. The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (Scottish Government 2018) defines integration as a *'long-term, two-way process, involving positive changes in both individuals and host communities, which leads to cohesive, diverse communities'.* The proposed befriending model would support the integration of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people through increased interaction with others in their local communities. Scotland continues to gain a better understanding of the impact of traumatic experiences and loss of family and friends on young people who have faced such experiences, and it is in this context of a better knowledge and understanding of the needs of young people, and potential gaps in the services we can offer that these ideas were identified were tested; all recognised the need for and value of a Befriending Service for Scotland's unaccompanied and asylum-seeking young people.

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