Cold comfort: young separated refugees in England

YHRMP ID
132
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Aims

The study aimed to give a voice to young people under the age 18 who have come to England, separated from their parents or usual carers, to seek asylum.

Methodology

The study was part of a three year project funded by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. Between July 2000 and February 2001 researchers talked to 125 young separated asylum seekers and refugees across England [including Yorkshire and Humberside]. Interviews were also conducted with 125 professionals and adults who work with young separated refugees.

Key issues

The report addresses the policy context, arrival and age determination, assessment, accommodation, support from social workers, financial support, transition at 18 years, education, social networks, immigration issues, and health. A significant number of interviewees had chaotic and disturbing experiences on arrival and received little or no support. Level of care and type of support depends more on which social services department they arrive at rather than on their individual needs. Contracting out to private companies leaves young people without adequate support. Access to education opportunities varies from area to area. Transition at 18 can lead to loss of friends and support. Many had mental health problems.

Conclusions

Despite their resilience and apparent maturity, young separated refugees deserve and require improvements in the standard of care and the protection they receive.

Recommendations

Recommendations are for central government – removing the reservation on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 to asylum seeking and other non citizen children, increasing grants to local authorities for support, improving asylum application procedures, not dispersing young people; and for local authorities – ensuring needs-led assessments,

appropriate accommodation, monitoring all placements, establish inter-agency groups, education and health providers to ensure services appropriate to needs.

Migrant Group
Asylum seekers
Topic
Children and young people
Social work
Unaccompanied children
Place
UK - inc. Yorkshire & Humber element
Year
2001
Resource Type
Report
Publisher
Save the Children
Published Location
London

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/cold-comfort-young-separated-refugees-england*