‘Someone who smiles, that’s all you need’: Life in Yorkshire and Humber for a young person seeking asylum

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Aims

The primary aim of the research was to understand the experiences and needs of young people who recently arrived in the UK unaccompanied to seek international protection. Additionally, the research also aimed to learn about expectations, challenges, practices of carers and social and support workers that came in direct contact with the young people on daily basis.

Methodology

The research was carried out in three geographical areas in Yorkshire and Humber; one town and two cities. The lead researcher spent

prolonged periods of time with approximately 30 young men and women (between the ages of 16-18), out of which she established more comprehensive relationships with about 17. We also interviewed a few support workers, social workers and a number of carers. The young people that took part in the research, majority of which were young men, came from or spent most of their lives in Afghanistan, Albania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq or Sudan. Three research methods were used: participant observation; interviews; and participatory digital storytelling.

Key issues

The report identified five key priorities as those that could potentially improve the experiences of life in the early stages of being in the UK for the young people that arrive here unaccompanied to seek asylum. These were:

1. **The importance of retaining a sense of individuality** – the report argues that most of the young people wanted to be seen as individuals with unique needs, interests and opinions, as opposed to be grouped under a shared umbrella of 'UASC'.
2. **The importance of living with carers who care** – the report suggests that strong relationship with carers and social/support workers were crucial as they highlighted a sense for the young people that 'someone cares' about them.
3. **Having free and accessible internet** – Having free internet access at all times was essential for accessing to services, for keeping in touch with those young people cared about, for learning and pursuing interests, and for accessing a myriad of information which affected their daily activities. The report found that many young people that lived in semi- independent accommodation did not have internet access outside college where they spend only a few hours over a few days per week.
4. **The challenge of having too much free time and how it related to young people's pasts and outlook towards the future** – the report reveals that a number of young people, especially those that live in small towns and rural areas, have too much unstructured

time. This was a problem for them as having too much free time heightens their sense of boredom, which triggers negative thoughts stemming from traumatic past experiences and uncertainty regarding the future (partially caused by the lengthy asylum process).

5. **Learning English and receiving fractured information** - many young people shared that their English is not improving quickly enough. Furthermore, the research identified some gaps in how information is communicated, or not communicated, to young people, which at times had dire impact on young people's lives.

Additionally, the report includes some challenges associated with fostering, and advice 'from carers to carers' of what could work when fostering young people.

Conclusion

The report concludes that young people who live independently are entirely dependent on formal services and networks. This means that they miss out on various opportunities - including employment, sports, education, friendships, internet access, etc - that their peers, who live in supportive family environment, have benefited from.

Recommendations

The report includes 6 recommendations:

1. Treat each young person as an individual at every opportunity and not through their immigration status.
2. Create opportunities for the young people to socialise with peers who speak English fluently.
3. Generate tailored volunteering opportunities for the young people that match their personal interests.

4. Ensure young people living independently have free, regular and reliable access to the internet.
5. Generate culturally sensitive training, as well as training on the asylum process, and encourage practitioners and carers to attend prior to beginning to look after young people
6. Ensure young people understand the role and responsibilities of carers and other professionals in their lives, as well as make sure that they understand the content of what is being discussed.

Web Link
https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research/someone-who-smiles-thats-all-you…
Migrant Group
Asylum seekers
Refugees
Refused asylum seekers
Trafficked
Topic
Children and young people
Unaccompanied children
Place
Yorkshire & Humber - region-wide
Year
2019
Resource Type
Report
Publisher
Migration Yorkshire

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/someone-who-smiles-thats-all-you-need-life-yorkshire-and-*

humber-young-person-seeking