# Something to smile about: promoting and supporting the educational and recreational needs of refugee children

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## Aims

The aims of the research were to investigate the educational and social contributions that mentors and befrienders make to refugee and asylum seeking children as well as the impact of awareness raising activities in schools. This is the final report of the Supporting and Mentoring in Learning and Education [SMILE] project, a 3 year project set up by the Refugee Council in 2008 and funded by the Department for Education.

## Methodology

The project operated in 3 regions: Greater London, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber. Data was collected from the start of the project in 2008 until the end of October 2010.

Data was obtained from a number of sources:

- A total of 39 qualitative interviews were conducted with volunteers [befrienders and mentors], young people aged between 10 and 18 [befriendees and mentees] and the volunteer coordinators in each region. This represented a sample of just under 20% of the young people who took part in the project at the end of the data collection phase.
- Data was also obtained from pupils and teachers following the awareness raising school talks and training sessions. A total of 500 pupils from 10 different schools provided feedback, as did 16 teachers [although it is noted that researchers struggled to get feedback from teachers which could compromise the measurement of the longer term impact of the talks].
- Data was also collected through questionnaires completed by young people and volunteers, as well as organisers of the social activities set up for the young people.

## Key issues

The project found that volunteers had a significant positive impact on young people, both in terms of assisting them to

access an educational placement, and also in relation to improving their social skills. However, it also found that there were still considerable barriers to accessing education in the UK, and that negative perceptions of asylum seekers were common amongst school children in the UK.

The issue of age dispute arose spontaneously during the interviews and the report highlights the significant impact this can have on the young persons life and, in particular, how this can impact on education.

## Recommendations

The report sets out a number of recommendations for the Department for Education, Local Authorities, schools, the UK Border Agency and the Refugee Council. Practical examples include:

- development of mentoring and befriending services in the voluntary and community sector
- anti-bullying strategies to specifically mention refugee and asylum seeking children
- advice to new families on accessing education
- consistent access to mainstream provision for refugees and asylum seekers
- awareness raising training for teachers on asylum seekers and refugees

Migrant Group
Asylum seekers
Refugees
Students
Topic
Children and young people
Work and education
Children
Education
Place
UK - inc. Yorkshire & Humber element
Year
2011
Resource Type
Report

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