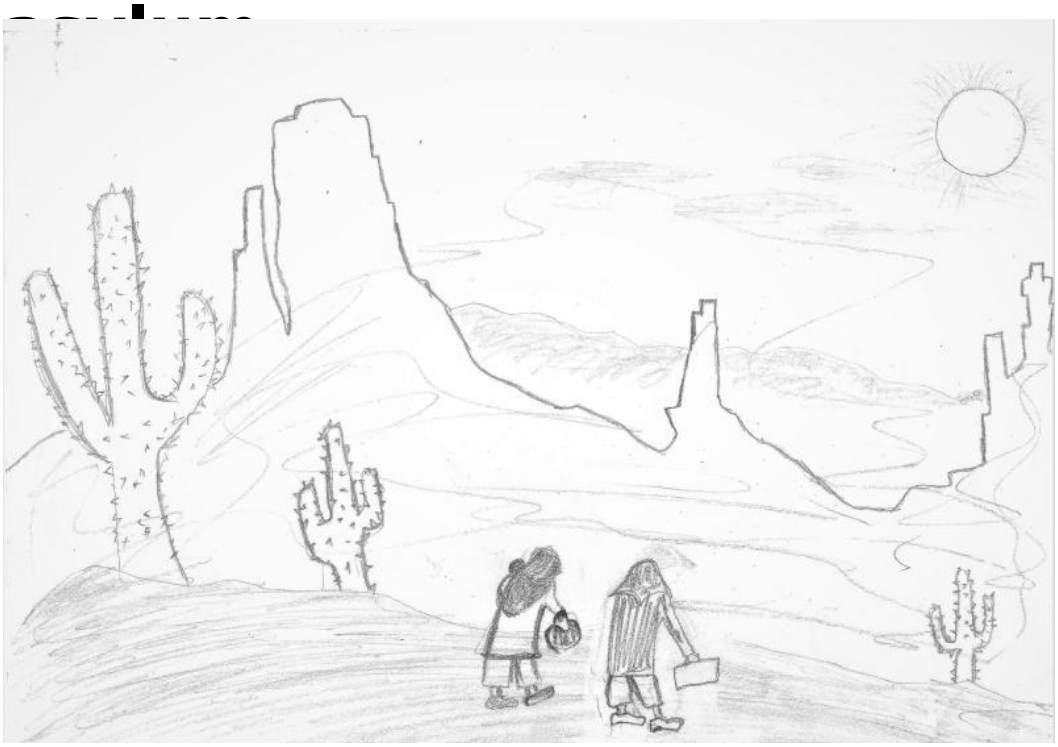
Someone who smiles, that's all you need: life in Yorkshire and Humber for a young person seeking asylum



A key question for our researchers was: how can we do better at helping young refugees settle in and adapt to life in the UK?

This report outlines priorities from the young people’s perspective, and has great illustrations by one of the young people who participated in the research.

Summary

This research project focused on young people who arrived in the UK unaccompanied in order to seek asylum here. The main objective of the research was to listen and hear what it is like for them to live in Yorkshire and Humber, and what could potentially improve their experience. Many of the young people we met felt that their experiences and opinions are often overlooked. This is why it was crucial to bring their voices to the centre.

We worked in three geographical areas in Yorkshire and Humber. We used arts-based research approach which meant that while we did not work with many individuals, the time we spent with those who did participate in the project exposed us to their inner worlds, their views and practices. Some of our findings are presented here.

Internet access

Many young people that live in independent lodgings do not have internet access outside college where they spend only a

few hours over three to four days per week. The internet is essential for access to services, for keeping in touch with those they care about, for keeping informed and for pursuing interests. This chimes with the UN resolution which emphasises the importance of internet access for the adequate fulfilment of many.

> 'I need internet for everything, but it is a problem that it is so expensive.'

Boredom

A number of young people that live in small towns told us they have too much free time: other than attending college, they feel there are not that many activities for them. They see this as a problem because having too much free time heightened their sense of boredom, and this triggered negative thoughts which stemmed from traumatic past experiences, and uncertainty regarding the future [partially caused by the lengthy asylum process].

> 'I spend a lot of time on my mobile because there is nothing else for me to do.'

English language

Many young people feel that their English is not improving quickly enough, and that they do not have enough opportunities

to interact meaningfully with people who speak good English. Various studies have illuminated the link between communicative skills and the ability to feel at home in a new country. For example, those who engage in English language activities that go beyond formal learning settings, such as ESOL classes, have more opportunities to feel that they belong.

> 'My English is not improving, but my Amharic [spoken by a friend] is getting really good. Now, I can speak it really fast.'

Family roles

The expectations young people and families they live with [supported lodging providers or foster families] have of each other do not always match. This can pose various challenges for both sides. Our findings suggest that a good relationship with a family was of utmost importance. When the relationship works well it helps tackle some of the challenges around boredom, language learning and internet. Furthermore, strong relationships accentuate a sense for the young people that ‘someone cares’, which is crucial considering the extreme difficulties they have been through.

> 'Living with someone who smiles at you means you are not alone.'

Key priorities and how to address them

The young people involved in this research identified four key priorities to improve their early experiences of life in the UK:

1. Access to the internet.
2. Alleviate boredom.
3. Accelerated English language learning.
4. Strong relationships with carers and professionals.

Ways in which these issues can be addressed:

- Free, reliable access to the internet for young people who live independently

- Opportunities to socialise with peers who speak English fluently through youth organisations and offering a choice of activities and learning opportunities

- Volunteering opportunities tailored to young people's interests, enabling them to meet new people, learn English and fulfil their potential

- Young people most likely won’t understand the roles and responsibilities of foster carers and other professionals. It is important to explain these as clearly as possible

- Training can help carers and professionals understand the asylum process, young people’s experiences and how to handle cultural difference.

Produced by: Welcoming Young Refugees project [Migration Yorkshire]

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