

Post Placement Support Project

The project will provide tailored post-placement support to families reunited in the UK via Dublin III or other routes. Under Dublin III, children can be reunited with family members in the UK; however sometimes these families receive limited support once the young person has arrived. This project will provide advice, guidance and assistance for whole families in this situation, supporting them to stick together where this is beneficial, understand their rights, and achieve their full potential.

The Importance of Families

The right to family life is for all children, no matter where they come from or where they are going. Enshrined in the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 10 & 8 identify the right to ‘family reunification’ - for children to live or remain in contact with family members. This right is also reflected in the UK’s Children Act 1989, which states that wherever possible, children should be cared for within their own families.

This is of course also true for young people who have fled their country of origin, and have travelled to Europe to find safety. Under European law, the Dublin III Regulation states that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in EU member states can be placed in another member state where a family member lives - with their asylum claim heard in that state.

‘Kinship’ or family care can offer young people crossing borders in such circumstances, an opportunity to live within their families, if they are unable to live with their parents safely in their home country. Research suggests that kinship care offers children and young people stability, with links to their families of origin maintained and a sense of identity, history and their ‘life stories’ protected. We also know that children cared for by family members can achieve better outcomes than those looked after outside of their family (Wellard et al: 2017).

Unique Challenges

Kinship care benefits children and young people, but it is not without its challenges for carers. A study by *Grandparents Plus* identified that kinship carers can face “...loss of freedom and disruption of life plans; loss of employment; financial constraints; emotional strain; coping with challenging teenagers, and the considerable impact on wider family relationships, social life and friendships” (Wellard et al: 2017).

The needs of the young people being cared for can overwhelm carers, particularly when local authority support is limited:

“The Government has recognised that a portion of family placements through Dublin III have ended up breaking down. Difficulties can arise when young people with high needs are placed with family members with little support” (The Children’s Society: 2018).

Young people may have faced trauma and adversity in their countries of origin or through the crossing of borders; experienced the anxiety of immigration control and bureaucracy; and potential hostility, poverty, or isolation in host countries.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) without family support are usually allocated a local authority social worker to meet their needs. Professionals can sometimes have the information, knowledge and resources needed to achieve this and can draw on specialist support from within their organisation, although this is of course not without its own challenges and issues. Family carers do not share some of these advantages however, and can be left struggling if the threshold for local authority involvement is not met. Some of the difficulties for these families can be that:

- ✚ Young people may have unstable immigration status; a factor that can prevent them from setting positive goals and planning for their futures in the UK. Young people will need help to make informed choices about their asylum or other applications, and need access to their right to legal representation. Not all young people are entitled to means-tested legal aid and many family carers are left to manage this difficulty;
- ✚ Young people may have mental health needs relating to experiences they have had pre-flight, along their journeys, or on arrival to a host country. Family members can often be in a good position to support with these concerns, but sometimes it can be over whelming, confusing, or too close to their own experiences. Support, including knowledge of and access to services, may be vital for families to stick together through difficult times;
- ✚ Many young people arriving in the UK to seek asylum face language barriers. They need support and information to help them access educational opportunities to develop skills and prepare them for further education or for work opportunities;
- ✚ Young people reunited with their families can feel isolated from their peer group, and they may need support to identify and to access positive social activities that are locally available;
- ✚ Young people may be at risk of exploitation in the UK, a risk which can increase if they are isolated, experiencing language barriers, or are vulnerable for other reasons. It is important that young people and their families are informed about these risks and family members feel equipped to manage and ask for support around any emerging concerns.

Early action and tailored support to families can be a vital step towards keeping them together and thriving.

The Hostile Environment

The UK's immigration policy is characterised by a 'hostile environment' – a set of government policies aimed at people who are 'undocumented,' which make it incredibly difficult for people to access services. These include (but are not limited to) healthcare, education, housing, work, bank accounts, or benefits. Liberty's report on the hostile environment in the UK outlines how far reaching this issue is:

"The hostile environment is a sprawling web of immigration controls embedded in the heart of our public services and communities. The Government requires employers, landlords, private sector

workers, NHS staff and other public servants to check a person's immigration status before they can offer them a job, housing, healthcare or other support. Landlords and employers can face fines and even criminal sanctions if they fail to do so" (Liberty: 2018)

Prejudice against migrant or refugee families, as well as a lack of knowledge around entitlement to services, can mean that families are not seeking or getting statutory support when they may need it. The Children's Society found that in 2017 there was, *"inconsistent support offered by local authorities for young people arriving through the Dublin III regulation"*. They commented further that this outlines *"the importance of the young people's needs being framed in accordance with the Children Act 1989"* (The Children's Society: 2018).

It is key for families to understand their rights and feel empowered to exercise them, with professionals advocating, navigating, and challenging alongside them in order to promote social justice: those working with families should stand in solidarity with them against the hostile environment.






The Project

We want to address a gap in the provision of support for family members caring for children following reunification across international borders, where local authorities have decided not to be involved. We will provide tailored post-placement support for families reunited via Dublin III and other routes, and aim to address some of the inequality these family carers and the young people experience.

We will provide support to families throughout the UK, recognising that there are areas, particularly outside of London, where support is more greatly needed.

Once referred, we will undertake a telephone or face-to-face assessment of children and carers' need for early help, including any information that may need to be shared with relevant local authorities in regards to private fostering arrangements, safeguarding or child protection concerns.

We anticipate supporting families with:

-  Health
-  Education
-  Emotional and behavioural development
-  Family and social relationships
-  Parenting skills

We will develop and implement a tailored support plan by working in partnership with each family for up to twelve months. This will set out what the family needs and where they can access it. This could involve linking families to mediation services, peer group support, identifying local enrichment activities or liaising with targeted services in the family's area. We will regularly review support plans to ensure that outcomes are progressed and will seek children and relatives' views throughout.

At the end of any time spent with a family, we will develop a tailored action plan along with families, setting out their 'next steps' and resources which they can continue to access once CFAB's role has ended.

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References

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