A study investigating the factors that facilitate and prevent young refugee settlement in Newham

The Children’s Society Refugee & Homelessness Team
## Contents

1 **Acknowledgements**  
   Foreword  
   2  

2 **Executive summary**  
   4  
   2.1 Research questions  
   4  
   2.2 Summary of findings  
   4  

3 **Introduction**  
   5  
   3.1 Definition of refugee  
   5  
   3.2 The Children’s Society, Refugee &  
   Homelessness Team  
   3.3 Why Newham?  
   5  
   3.4 The importance of ‘settlement’ over ‘integration’  
   6  
   3.5 Methodology  
   6  
   3.6 Dilemmas  
   7  
   3.7 Aims  
   7  

4 **Research questions and findings**  
   9  
   4.1 Research questions  
   9  
   4.2 What is the meaning of settlement?  
   9  
   4.3 What are the factors that facilitate settlement?  
   11  
   4.4 What are the barriers to settlement?  
   15  

5 **Recommendations**  
   21  

6 **Appendix**  
   24  
   (a) Interview questionnaire  
   24  
   (b) Participant data  
   26  
   (c) List of organisations  
   27  
   (d) The Children’s Society Goals and targets - young refugees  
   28  
   (e) Glossary of terms  
   29  
   (f) Bibliography/References  
   30
Acknowledgements

The best way of finding out what affects young people is to listen to the young people themselves and allow them full and equal participation; allowing them to identify the issues that affect their lives. The study reflects this participative approach. Four young refugees Sheku Dumbuya, Aminata Puhindei, Moses Uwizerwa, and Lawrence Dagunduro, together with members of The Children’s Society (TCS), Refugee & Homelessness Team (RHT), constituted a steering group that implemented this project. The time and energy put in by the research department at the Community Involvement Unit helped in shaping the structure of the research and provided very useful advice.

Myfanwy Franks of the TCS Research Unit in Leeds also provided useful help in analysing the findings and subjecting the draft report to scrutiny. Samantha Shaw, Rachel Blaine and Sophie Rena from TCS also played significant parts in editing and producing the report.

The programme managers Beth Green and Susan Clare painstakingly went through the drafts and made valuable contributions.

The Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMA) provided very clear and useful advice, as did the Unaccompanied Minors Team of the London Borough of Newham.

The Refugee & Homelessness Team of the Children’s Society would like to acknowledge the role of these people and organisations.

Bockari K Stevens
June 2006
Foreword
By Stephen Timms, Member of Parliament for East Ham
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The London Borough of Newham is unique in its ethnic diversity, its rich cultural history and its welcoming environment. It has a very young population and has, over a long period, provided sanctuary to people fleeing violence and oppression from all over the world.

They have included many children and young people. I pay tribute to The Children’s Society, which has been providing invaluable and imaginative help to them over the past ten years, as I have seen for myself on many occasions. This intriguing study puts their experiences into context. It underlines how hard it is for many young people to adapt to our society – often after deeply traumatic experiences – whilst at the same time wanting to maintain their identity and culture.

But it is an essentially optimistic study. It shows how – time after time – young refugees are overcoming adversity, settling in their new home, valuing the support of their school teachers, drawing strength from their faith and planning how they can make a contribution in the future.

The study highlights the barriers facing young refugees in Newham. If the barriers could be overcome, the transition could become much easier. The participation of young people themselves, and listening to their voices, is a distinctive feature of this study.

Young refugees in Newham are hugely talented. Their successful settlement in Newham will build social cohesion, and further build the borough’s extraordinary vibrancy, which is going to be key in our preparations for the 2012 Olympics. We can look forward to their future cultural, social and economic contribution. We need to make the most of it, not just for their sake but in the wider interests of us all.

I hope all those who work with young refugees will find this study inspires and informs their practice.

Stephen Timms MP
2 Executive summary

2.1 Research questions

The research project sets out to find answers to the following questions:

a) What is the meaning of settlement?
b) What are the factors that facilitate settlement?
c) What are the barriers to settlement?

2.2 Summary of findings

a) Young refugees perception of settlement

In defining the concept, young refugees equate settlement with survival. To them settlement involves acquiring the strategies and capabilities to sustain themselves in a new environment. It is a journey that starts from the day they arrive at their place of exile up to the time that they feel safe and happy at school, at home and in everyday life. Settlement begins when they enter the United Kingdom.

b) What are the factors that facilitate settlement?

- Learning the new language
- Schooling and education
- Secure, safe and accepting environment
- Religion and faith
- Organised group activities
- Peer interaction
- Supportive organisations and people
- Secured immigration status.

c) What are the barriers to settlement?

- Immigration (authorities and procedures)
- Inability to communicate
- Public perception and negative media
- Frequent changes of accommodation
- Difficulties in accessing services
- Lack of networks
3 Introduction

3.1 Definition of refugee

In this report the term young refugee is used to describe every young person-seeking asylum whether successful or not. This will be the case except where highlighting a particular status will be of relevance to the study.

3.2 The Children’s Society (TCS), Refugee & Homelessness Team (RHT)

The Children’s Society has focused its work in four main areas; work with young refugees being one of them. The refugee goal of The Children’s Society is to ensure that the laws and practices and its implementation recognise that children who are refugees are, first and foremost children. As such they should be protected by the laws and practices that safeguard and promote the welfare of children’. The RHT is one of The Children’s Society’s projects.

The RHT has been working with young refugees since 1996. The project helps young refugees to fulfil their individual potential and to challenge the systems that keep them marginalised. Since its beginning the project has seen an increase in the social and political marginalisation of young refugees.

One of the pieces of work of the RHT is the Young Refugees Project. This project supports and advocates for young refugees between the ages of 13 - 21 years drawn from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. A core area of the work of the team is to work with these young refugees in challenging the issues that affect them. This is achieved through advocacy, campaigning, lobbying and research. An example of previous research is A Case for Change, 2002. This piece of work highlighted the gaps between the needs of these young people and the services that are provided for them.

3.3 Why Newham?

In addition to the RHT being based in Newham, it is also of particular interest to refugee studies because:

- It has the second largest number of refugees of any London borough. (London Asylum Seekers Consortium report, November 2004).
- It hosts an extremely high number of young refugees compared to any other borough in London. At the end of 2004 there were 231 unaccompanied refugee children in Newham. Two thirds were aged between 16 – 17 years. (Focus on Newham, 2005).
- It has the highest youth population in London, with over 40% of a population of 254,000 aged under 25 years. (Focus on Newham, 2005).

The RHT have established links within the young refugee community as well as organisations that work with them.
3.4 The importance of ‘settlement’ over ‘integration’

In October 2000, the government launched a document for integrating refugees in the UK (*Full and Equal Citizens-* a strategy for the integration of refugees in the United Kingdom, 2000). A National Refugee Integration Forum was set up in order to develop and implement this strategy. Subsequently in March 2005, a National Strategy for Refugee Integration was launched (*Integration Matters, 2005*). The strategies emphasised the importance the government attached to the integration of refugees into mainstream life in the United Kingdom.

Although a ‘children and young people’s sub-group’ is part of the National Refugee Integration Forum, there seems to be a wide gap between the strategy and the perception of the young refugees themselves.

Within the wider discourse of this Home Office’s strategy the circumstances of young refugees seem to be over-shadowed, as the strategy will only benefit those with refugee status. The Home Office Integration Strategy is aimed at recognised refugees and not those with short-term leave or asylum seekers.

The idea of researching integration was discussed at length with young refugees at The RHT and from other sources. As a result of these discussions the young refugees decided to look at settlement instead of integration, since it became obvious that they felt uncomfortable with the terminology ‘integration’, and would prefer ‘settlement’.

The young people maintained that once settled, integration follows as a natural outcome. Settlement has been considered a two way process making it distinct from integration or assimilation. They regard settlement as adapting to a new way of life whilst retaining their culture. The young people decided to explore definitions of settlement as well as the barriers and facilitating factors which lead to its attainment.

3.5 Methodology

The initial stage of this study took the form of desk research, which included looking at casework notes from the RHT, annual reports from the young refugees project, and several journals, all of which highlighted young refugee issues in the borough.

Planning the study involved the setting up of a steering group comprising four young refugees who had been associated with the project, three RHT members of staff and The Children Society’s Policy Advisor for Refugees.

It was a participatory process and the young people were involved not only as interviewers but played a driving role in all aspects of the study.

The formulation of the proposal was thoroughly discussed and agreed upon by the steering group. The steering group also prepared questionnaires for
interviews and the researcher and the four young people carried out the interviews.

Twenty-five young people were interviewed. They were between the ages of 13 – 19 years, from diverse backgrounds and nationalities including Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Lithuania, and Albania. Gender balance was also taken into consideration. Only a few of the participants had been granted refugee status. (See appendix B for a breakdown).

Participants were sourced from various community groups and statuary organisations that work with young refugees. These included Shpresa (an Albanian group), The Trinity Community Centre, Eastlea Secondary School, Little Ilford Secondary School, Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMA), Newham Unaccompanied Minors Team, and the RHT. Snowball sampling through networks was used to locate and recruit other participants. (See appendix C for details).

Focus groups were arranged to discuss issues arising from the interviews already conducted as well as any new issues that may have surfaced. The RHT Young Refugee project worker facilitated these sessions.

3.6 Dilemmas

Researching vulnerable groups brings into sharp focus power relationship issues and how to deal with these. The participants were given the option to choose where, when, and how they wanted to be interviewed. For instance, when a female participant did not want to be interviewed by a male her wishes were respected and a female colleague conducted the interview. There was no obligation to answer questions that they did not want to answer and they were free to withdraw at any time in accordance with recommendations from The Children’s Society Research Unit.

Assurances were given that information gathered from participants’ notes and interviews would remain confidential in order to protect the privacy and identity of the young refugees. These assurances were given prior to interview.

The Children’s Society’s guidelines on research ethics were used to inform the steering group and participants. The guidelines are designed to ensure that acceptable standards are used when involving children and young people in the research. (These guidelines are available on request).

3.7 Aims

This study aims to:

- Inform the RHT and The Children’s Society in order to locate the future direction of the work carried out by the RHT.
- Inform national and local policies relating to young refugees.
- Improve practice at a local level ensuring young refugees are supported to settle successfully in Newham.
Contribute to the current debate on integration for young refugees.

4 Research questions and findings
4.1 Research questions

The project set out to answer the following questions:

a) What is the meaning of settlement?
   b) What are the factors that facilitate settlement?
   c) What are the barriers to settlement?

4.2 What is the meaning of settlement?

Settlement is the process of trying to establish in a new country through the acquisition of basic needs such as language, education, security and stable accommodation. It involves the building of networks and planning for the future.

The term settlement has a variety of meanings. The Collins Concise Dictionary defines settlement as 'to take up residence in a country, to establish or become established in a way of life, to migrate to and form a community'.

When the question was posed to young refugees they defined settlement in a number of ways and themes.

Many see settlement as being released from anxiety, fear and uncertainty:

‘Not been worried, less sad and been able to get on with life.’ (Fatima, 13)

‘Realisation of having total peace, not just the realisation that there is now peace in your war-torn country where people are not chasing you or running about for your life but inner-peace that you are a free man to do what you like.’ (Moussa, 15)

Another common theme used to define settlement is self-actualisation. It is the idea that you can achieve something in life with your own efforts:

‘Being able to achieve your potential and been pleased with yourself that you are achieving something in life.’ (Anna, 19)

‘Achieving goals that you have set, doing what you have dreamt about and have dreams for the future.’ (Balla, 15)

‘Settlement is a whole of life process. Achieving your dream takes time; settlement therefore is a life long process, it takes in all of life’s experience.’ (Mohamed, 17)

Generally young refugees see settlement as a gradual process and not something that can happen overnight:
‘It is a step by step process and the process starts before you get status.’
(Lai, 18)

‘Status is confirmation which helps you feel more settled, but you are already settling before that status.’ (Karim, 16)

Being empowered and able to participate in normal activities and decisions that affect them is another way that young people see settlement:

‘Settlement is a journey to empowerment through participation and influencing the decisions that affect your life.’ (Akim, 17)

‘To be able to regain your life and your childhood; being able to bring back life as it was before the circumstances that brought you to the United Kingdom.’ (Henry, 17)

They see settlement as a self-actualisation process in which the young person develops within the new community in order to realise their aims and dreams. This, they perceive, will result in happiness.

For some young refugees settlement is understood in the context of a welcoming environment. This theme stresses on the attitude of the host community in strengthening the settlement process:

‘Being welcomed in your newly found community and feeling part of that community.’ (Mei, 14)

On the whole, interviewees saw settlement as a state of being, a process of adapting to a new environment. They see it as a two way process of trying to adapt to a new environment and culture whilst retaining their own. Many are convinced that settlement is distinct from assimilation or integration:

‘I will like to make this clear – I will never forget my traditional background which makes me what I am. I will like to show people my culture and traditions and for it to be appreciated.’ (Makuta, 15)

What is important is that young people want to be treated as young people first with their potential to contribute to society recognised irrespective of them being integrated or not. What they look forward to is successful settlement, and being able to become established in their new communities.

A young refugee, Morlai (16), on receiving his status letter from the Home Office intimated that integration was not the issue for him. He wanted to put all his difficulties behind him, such as being put in detention on arrival, finding a solicitor and having to report regularly to the police. His immediate desire now that he has secured status was to settle; by this he meant finding a job, continuing his education, trying to find out the whereabouts of his parents and making friends.
4.3 What are the factors that facilitate settlement?

- Learning the new language

Learning the new language as soon as possible is a major factor in the process of settlement.

Learning the native language is an essential tool for participation and understanding new systems and cultures. Young refugees mentioned the need to have their voices heard and their views respected.

- Schooling and education

Young refugees acknowledged that school provides stability and a normalising environment. It provides support networks, prevents isolation and offers an opportunity to learn English, interact with peers and gain contact with adults.

On the whole young refugees interviewed spoke positively about schools providing a secure environment in which they can learn easily. Education was cited as a prime facilitator in the settlement process. Many described the building of trust and the immeasurable support they receive from teachers and colleagues as important influences in building confidence and providing direction. With appropriate support there is evidence that refugee children can achieve on equal terms if not better than their peers. In the 2004 Advanced Level examination two young refugees were among the highest merit scorers in the United Kingdom (*In exile*, 2004).

Apart from meeting their educational needs, schools play a vital role in helping young refugees establish themselves in their local communities:

‘I speak from experience by saying that mainstream school is the most important part of me growing up, this being because school is the best way of me escaping my problems, building my confidence and being able to know that there is something I am doing with my life even if it might be temporary.’

(*Lin*, 16)

Abraham, 16, arrived in Newham when he was 14. He waited seven months to get a school place. During that time he felt isolated and through some friends he got himself involved with gangs. He had a couple of problems with the police before he got in touch with an organisation that got him a school place. He was supported in his schoolwork and soon developed interest in school again. Once he was going to school regularly he was able to disengage from the gangs and concentrate on his studies. Abraham believed that it was idleness and a lack of direction that got him into trouble. Now he has re-started his education and made better friends he says he is happy and beginning to settle in Newham.
Secure, safe and accepting environment

Findings from this research re-enforce the importance of a safe, secure, positive and accepting environment as a means to successful settlement. Participants recognise Newham as being particularly welcoming to young refugees compared to other boroughs. No specific reasons were given for this; one can only conjecture that the high ethnic population in Newham with local community support could be a factor.

Asylum seekers and refugees tend to prefer to live in areas where there are others from the same background and where the presence of a strong community group can help to reduce adjustments problems.

In many discussions about settlement the idea about ‘home’ will keep surfacing:

‘Feeling at home is where you feel safe, and recognised for who you are. It is a very powerful concept in explaining settlement. I was born in Liberia but now that I live in Newham, in a house, have friends and I’m going to school, then this is my home.’ (Victoria, 17)

Many believe that the way they are treated when they arrive has a long-term impact on future settlement.

Anna, 13, arrived unaccompanied in the UK three years ago and took up residence in Croydon. People she observed would look at her in a negative way; kids would ask ‘why are you living here’? In school and college she felt she stood out because of her accent. She was been called names and felt unsafe.

As a result she and a friend then decided to move to Newham. In Newham she made friends and came across organisations that gave her opportunities to make more friends. She feels happier and more confident. She observes that it is only at this stage that she has started to settle.

Religion and faith

Places of worship offer a means of social interaction. Meeting and sharing common experiences builds bridges between the communities. Many young refugees regard positive support from churches or mosques as very useful. Religious institutions also help build strong relationships between young people of different nationalities, language and gender. This bond invariably provides a vehicle for successful settlement and social cohesion.

Religion and faith played a significant part in the pursuits of settlement for some of the young refugees interviewed. A little less than half of those interviewed relied on their faith to see them through the settlement process.
It is possible that some already had strong religious beliefs prior to flight; but many of those interviewed prioritised the place of religion as a result of their traumatic experiences:

‘Despite what has happened to me, my family and friends, God has given me a chance to live and therefore I can do something better with my life.’ (Susanna, 16)

Interviewees also described the role of religious institutions as providing a form of parental support especially for the unaccompanied young refugees. For those who had experienced severe loss and grief, the place of worship was described as a place of solace, which has given them a source of strength.

‘My family for the moment is the mosque. When I arrived in this country I had no friends, no family or relative to turn to for support. In the mosque especially on Fridays I met many people there who were always prepared to help me out, people that I can talk to, people that can show me around. Through the mosque I got involved in activities and the young peoples’ group. I love to go to the mosque as they have given me more confidence in myself and we find time to relax as well. It is the best thing to have happened to me as they make me forget my worries and think more positively about the future.’ (Mohamed 15)

Places of worship provide the opportunity to meet with community friends and religious groups. Experiences are shared and advice given about their new environment.

- Organised group activities

It became evident that participation in shared activities is vital to the process of settlement.

All the young people interviewed put a high premium on organised activities such as summer trips, residential and youth clubs as important settlement facilitators:

‘Activities help to make a sense of life and give us strength.’ (Emusu, 14)

In some organisations like The Trinity Community Centre, or The Children’s Society, RHT, such activities are often oversubscribed emphasising the need and importance attached to them by young refugees.

Social activities give young refugees the opportunity to ‘switch off’, make new friends and feel like other teenagers.

The young people also believed that visits arranged to parts of the United Kingdom promote an understanding of what life is about in the UK, for example visits to Parliament give a practical experience and some understanding of the workings of government and democracy.
Residentials also occupy key places in the lives of young people who need to forge friendships, especially for those facing isolation. The Trinity Community Centre has residentials every six weeks, which involve team building and adventure weekends. This organisation reports marked improvements in the lives of the young refugees they involve in such programmes as they build bridges and encourage self-confidence.

- Peer interaction

Meeting young people in similar situations or those who had been through similar circumstances develops hope for a positive outcome and the acquisition of useful advice and experiences.

Many of the young people who were interviewed mentioned that making friends and developing local networks evokes a feeling of being accepted in society:

‘When I had just arrived in Newham fresh from detention I felt lonely, abandoned, isolated and could not fit in. I was totally lost and felt like there was no future for me. My neighbour invited me to play football and in the team I soon made friends from all backgrounds. This changed my whole life and I started feeling confident to go out and meet with others in my age group. Today I am like a champion in East Ham as my friends respect me and I respect them. They call me captain.’ (Mommodu, 15)

Almost all the participants agree that peer relationships whether facilitated through organisations, churches or at school are of major significance in the process of settlement. It helps build their confidence, gives practical language support and self-respect. It also provides a way of building bridges with the host communities so relevant for settlement.

- Supportive organisations and people

Young refugees need compassionate people or organisations that they can turn to for advice, support, information and understanding. For young people, especially those who are unaccompanied, the influences of foster parents, carers, friends, and teachers offer invaluable support to their sustainable settlement and development.

Having someone to turn to for advice, information and genuine understanding is very important for settlement as it gives a sense of security. Young people observed the continuous building of trust as a prime factor in the pursuit of settlement. Once trust is established then they can then ‘open up’. Through these organisations young people are able to identify people they can trust and therefore discuss their issues. Useful organisations cited were RHT, The Trinity Community Centre, and Shpresa. (An Albanian community group).

Organisations also help these young refugees to locate and access other important services, including reputable solicitors.
Victor, who was 14 years old on arrival in the UK was living with a relative who was using him for ‘free labour’. He used to work in his aunt’s grocery shop and received no remuneration for this. In addition to working long and unsocial hours he was also abused. This greatly impacted on his studies, general outlook and confidence. His teacher at school observed that Victor was having difficulties at home, which was impacting on his achievement levels at school. He was eventually referred to the RHT for support. The RHT helped him to access social service support and a solicitor to regularise his immigration status. As a result he was moved to a more suitable accommodation and is now attending university and enjoying his studies. Victor has since been very active in youth activities in Newham and feels that he is settling well.

- Secured immigration status

Young refugees with guaranteed status tend to find the future more secure; they are better able to mix confidently with other young people and move on.

Secured immigration status however doesn’t necessarily equate with successful settlement:

‘It is helpful that I have been granted status, but my main problem is to get my education, work and be able to trace the whereabouts of my parents.’

(Roger, 16)

Although secured immigration status is a vital ingredient in the settlement process its attainment is also a point at which other concerns, previously obscured by anxiety about whether the young person will be allowed to stay, come into focus.

4.4 What are the barriers to settlement?

- Immigration

Without guaranteed status young refugees noted that they find the future uncertain and insecure. Difficulty finding legal representation also compounds this problem. Government policies, which restrict legal aid, have not been helpful.

Young refugees are often given temporary status until they are 18 years old, a few are given refugee status, and some are refused and deported.

The difficulties of short-term leave were-emphasised by participants. It is important to mention that for the majority of unaccompanied minors, permission to stay is given until their 18th birthday.
Research conducted into young refugees turning 18 years old suggests that this period is a traumatic time because of the uncertainty and fear of them being deported.

Young refugees also reported that the immigration system is bureaucratic, suspicious about their claims and at times hostile towards their claims for protection. The young people further complained that they do not consider many decisions to be fair (Turning 18, Save The Children. 2004).

The threat of removal and fear of return to the countries they have fled from test the resilience of young refugees at a very difficult time in their life:

‘Turning 18 is my major worry because I will be taken from my foster carer; but not only that, I don’t know if they will send me back.’ (Tai, 17)

‘Fear of deportation to country fled from sometimes makes you feel suicidal.’ (Roger, 16)

In the words of a young refugee deported to Afghanistan sometime in 2005 as he boarded the plane:

‘I am quite frightened of what waits for me in Kabul. I am aware of the past slaughter and continuing attacks on the Assari – I ask you all to move to the next campaign to change the law regarding lone children entering this country.’ (Young person quoted speaking to Community Action For Young Refugees newsletter, June 2005).

‘You sometimes think what is the point of settling? you come to the country for a reason, you are seeking protection, but with short status or no status you worry about what will happen to you when it runs out.’ (Cho, 17)

Evidence from case files suggest that young refugees are many a time not happy with their solicitors but feel defenceless in doing anything; in some instances solicitors have closed down without completing their cases. Mention is made here about finding competent solicitors because recent government cuts in legal aid for asylum claims have made many solicitors reluctant to take on asylum cases.

Mustafa, who was 18, had a letter from his solicitors informing him that they could no longer represent him in his immigration claim. In fact, his solicitors had not handled his case well, as much vital evidence needed for his claim was overlooked. He was at a loss as to what to do next when he was advised by a friend to contact the RHT. He visited the RHT and his file was recovered and another solicitor was acquired on his behalf. In 2005 he won his appeal and has now received refugee status.

- Inability to communicate
Language barriers present difficulties for young refugees to access services.

Language being the main tool of communication, many young refugees find it difficult to understand and pursue their rights. For young refugees, without support, lack of language can contribute to poor attainment levels at school and makes it difficult to interact with peers:

'Getting used to speaking English takes time and lack of it makes it difficult to understanding things and systems.' (Abdul, 15)

• Public perception, negative media and Immigration legislation

Many young refugees interviewed were concerned about public perception about refugees and the negative views that goes with it. Some have encountered racism and prejudice as a result.

Some participants regarded the media and the publics' perception of refugees as barriers to settlement. They pointed out that they were not comfortable with being identified as ‘refugees’ or ‘asylum seekers’, terms which they regard as bearing a stigma. Defining them by their immigration status inhibits their ability to relate with their peers on an equal footing. At school and in social gatherings many young people do not want their peers to know that they are refugees.

The terms refugee and asylum seeker have also become synonymous with various derogatory terms such as ‘economic migrant’ or ‘disease carrier’. The press plays a significant role in developing these perceptions and forging public attitudes. It is not uncommon therefore for young refugees to be treated unsympathetically when trying to access services.

Through the research, it became evident that many young refugees are going through a period of identity crisis. The label refugee which is officially attached to their status is much disliked as it exposes them to a perceived sense of subjugation in relation to their peers. The desire amongst these young people is for equal status and for them to be treated as children first and foremost.

The Home Office acknowledges, ‘the state of public debate is a massive barrier to refugee integration’ (Balancing national & local policies, 2004). For young refugees, media stories, many of them not true, that portray negative images of asylum seekers and refugees generate an environment of fear and loss of confidence:

‘You worry what will happen to you, you don’t want people to know that you are a refugee so that you just keep it to yourself. If people accepted me for whom I am, I wouldn’t mind them knowing that I am a refugee but people are judgmental.’ (Sohil, 16)
‘There is so much ignorance that goes on whilst individuals make decisions and comments about refugees; they seem to forget that refugees are human beings, individuals that have faced traumatic experiences and only want nothing but to be assured of their safety.’ (Loan, 18)

‘As long as you face discrimination in one form or another you are not settled and you don’t feel settled. You need a voice of your own to settle.’ (Mohamed, 16)

At a recent Refugee Week festival event organised in Newham, young people were involved in the planning and on the day itself played very important roles in sports, traditional music and acrobats. At the beginning of the event very attractive T-shirts purchased from The Refugee Council were given to volunteers and participants alike so that they could be clearly identified. All the young people returned the T-shirts and when enquiries were made as to the reasons it was revealed that it was because of the logo Refugee Week inscribed on the T-shirts. These young people did not want to be publicly identified as refugees.

- **Frequent changes of accommodation**

  Frequent changes of accommodation affect young refugees’ settlement abilities.

  Many of the young people interviewed spoke of the number of times they had had to move into temporary accommodation and how this had affected their lives at school, their ability to forge friendships and get access to services.

  A further effect given was the inability to access continuous healthcare as a result of moving around.

  Abi, 17, in less than a year has moved five times and felt very unhappy about her housing situation. On the day she was to sit to her examinations she received another notice to leave the house she was living in. Applying to the Homeless Persons Unit for emergency accommodation Abi was refused on the grounds that she had no identity papers, which were a pre-requisite for support. She therefore had to stay with friends for six weeks.

  This state of housing insecurity had serious effects on her school achievement levels that year which she later described as the worst period in her life. It took the intervention of solicitors for Abi to be offered suitable housing, which eventually saw a marked improvement in her school attainment. She is now at university.

  It is evident that repeated relocation is destructive to successful settlement.

- **Difficulties in accessing services**

  [---]
Administrative, language barriers and lack of knowledge present difficulties in allowing young refugees to get access to services, for example, in education, housing, health and social services support.

There is evidence that young refugees are affected by severe delays in registering at schools (Jones, C & Rutter, J 2001). By failing to access education they are denied meeting people and making friends, as well offering opportunities for their education and advancement, which are vital for settlement. Young refugees, by the nature of their flight, do not fall into the normal school patterns of enrolment. Some arrive in mid-term, others half-term and some at the end of term. ‘Pressure to achieve league table targets and new performance related pay has meant that a minority of schools has illegally refused to admit refugee children.’ (Rutter J, 2001)

Young refugees are further stigmatised by being put in alternative education projects instead of mainstream education.

Health services are also difficult for young refugees to access. In some cases registering at a GP requires passports and visas, which many young refugees do not have.

Social service decisions often seem to be resourced based rather than child-centred. For example, some unaccompanied minors who are supposed to be supported under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are often supported under section 17. This is because less support and financial resources are needed under section 17.

---

Mustafa is a 16 year-old Kurdish refugee who arrived in the UK in 2004. He has a physical disability after being involved in an explosion earlier in his life. He is a vulnerable young person who had a number of health and psychological worries. As a result, he has, on occasion, been attacked and even hospitalised. Mustafa was being supported under Section 17 of the Children Act. The vulnerable position of Mustafa clearly indicated that he needed more support than he was receiving and should be supported under Section 20. Social services has declined this support.

The RHT working on Mustafa’s behalf had not been able after almost a year of exchanges, meetings and core assessments with social services and liaising with solicitors to get Section 20 for him. The case is still ongoing at the time of writing of this report. Mustafa is still been supported under Section 17.

---

- Lack of networks

Arriving in a new place with no friends or family to lean on for support can lead to feelings of isolation. Young refugees who participated in the study expressed lack of confidence and fear upon their arrival. One of their most important concerns at this stage is how to gain networks in
order to combat this sense of isolation.

Trying to adapt to new cultures can also take time. Refugees who came from backgrounds of strong family and extended family ties found the absence of such support structures and adapting to a new culture very challenging.

Young refugees observed that they felt unsettled in the absence of family networks. It is important for young refugees to be with their families as they are growing up. It must be noted that young refugees, even with status, are denied family reunion.
5 Recommendations

Language, schooling and education

- Places in mainstream school need to be made available to young refugees as soon as possible after their arrival. This is to ensure that young refugees have access to the benefits of language support, the whole curriculum and social contact to facilitate their settlement into the host community.

Secure, safe and accepting environment

- Host communities should have an ongoing programme of education and awareness-raising about the positive contributions that refugees make to the community.

- Refugees should be placed in areas where they can access their community support.

- Community groups should be adequately resourced to support new arrivals.

Religion and faith

- Professionals supporting young refugees need to be aware of and able to respond to the religious needs of a young person.

Organised group activities

- Funding needs to be made available for social activities for young refugees e.g. summer trips, residential and cultural outings. These help to provide young refugees with opportunities for developing relationships and combating isolation; as well as initiating social contact and getting an understanding of different aspects of life in the UK.

Peer interaction

- More opportunities to be made available for young refugees to mix with their contemporaries.

- Schools and other voluntary organisations should facilitate peer mentoring.
**Supportive organisations and people**

- Organisations supporting young refugees should be adequately resourced through continued long-term funding and support.

- Organisations that work with young people should be trained on the needs of young refugees.

- Organisations working with young refugees should provide the space and time to listen to the problems and issues experienced by the young refugees. Listening to problems is as important as finding a solution.

- People working with refugees should discourage dependency by asking the young refugees themselves to take ownership of tasks.

- Local authorities should ensure that the needs of young refugees are included in local strategic plans.

- Local authorities, community groups and young refugees should be involved in the development and implementation of policies on settlement and integration.

**Secured immigration status**

- Young refugees should be given the support, advice and representation necessary for their claim to be judged fairly.

- Immigration decisions should be made with the long term best interests of the child in mind.

- Adequate training should be provided for Home Office staff to ensure that all decisions made in regard to young refugees are child-centred.

- Immigration decisions made by the Home Office need to be made without undue delays.

**Communication**

- Existing information regarding refugees’ rights and entitlements should be made available in a variety of languages and distributed by agencies.

- Agencies should make available professional interpreters regardless of cost.

- Platforms e.g. a young refugee forum, should be developed to empower young refugees to discuss and channel their grievances to the relevant authorities.
**Public perception and negative media**

- Organisations working with refugees should raise awareness of the positive contributions of young refugees.

- Organisations and the general public should take steps to counter negative and inaccurate articles in the media i.e. by writing to the Press Complaints Commission or by directly replying to inaccurate articles published.

**Frequent changes of accommodation**

- Young refugees need to be placed in stable accommodation and should not be moved unnecessarily.

- The local authority should ensure that young refugees are part of the mainstream housing strategy in Newham.

**Difficulties in accessing services**

- Young refugees need to have independent advocates to help them access services.

- GP surgeries need to ensure easier access for young people needing to register. Clear guidelines for registration should be always available.

- All unaccompanied refugee children should be assessed and supported in accordance with the Department of Health’s Local Authority Circular *LAC (2003) 13: Guidance on supporting children in need and their families*.

**Lack of family networks**

- Children with Refugee Status and Humanitarian Protection should have the right to family reunion when it is in the best interest of the young person.
Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire

I/D Number/Nickname

1  Gender  □ Male  □ Female

2  What is your age?  

3  What is your country of origin?  

4  Who did you arrive in the United Kingdom With?  

5  How long have you lived in the United Kingdom?  

6  How long have you lived in Newham?  

7  What is your immigration status?
   (a) Indefinite Leave To Remain  □  (b) Refugee Status  □
   (c) Exceptional Leave To Remain  □  (d) Discretionary Leave  □
   (e) Asylum Seeker  □  (f) Humanitarian Protection  □
   (g) Other  □
   If a, b, c, d, e, f or g, please state for how long 

8  Are you in:  school  □  college  □  waiting for school  □
   Waiting for a training place  □
   out of school /college  □  other  □

9  Who do you turn to for support?  

10 What has helped you boost your confidence since arriving in the United Kingdom?

11 What worries you most?

12 What plans or aspirations do you have for the next five years?
What do you understand by being “settled”?

How settled do you feel in Newham? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (note: 1 being unsettled and 9 being well settled please circle which one applies)

What do you think has helped you most to settle in Newham?

What mainly has prevented you from settling fully in Newham?

Would you like to live in the United Kingdom permanently? Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t know ☐

If ‘yes’, why? If ‘no’, why?

Notes: Before the forms were completed participants were made aware of the objectives of the study and further informed that their actual names were not going to be used as a way of protecting their identities.
Appendix B – Participant data

Age of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nationality of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelorussia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC Congo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steering Group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C - List of organisations

The Children’s Society, Refugee & Homelessness Team
The Hub
123 Star Lane
London, E16 4PZ

Press Complaints Commission
1 Salisbury Square
London, EC4Y 8SR
Help Line: 0845 600 2757
www.pcc.org.uk

Newham Social Services
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
Brian Didsbury centre
Didsbury Close
London E6 2SX

Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA)
The Credon Centre
Kirton Road
London, E13 9BT

Shpresa
The Froud centre
1 Toronto Avenue
London, E12 5JF

The Trinity Community Centre
East Avenue
London
E12 6SG
Appendix D

TCS Goals and targets - Young refugees

GOAL
By 2014, all laws and practices that protect and safeguard children will be applied to refugee children and young people.

Target 1 - All refugee children and young people will be assessed and supported in accordance with the Department of Health’s Local Authority Circular LAC(2003)13: *Guidance on supporting children in need and their families*, by April 2006.

Target 2 - All refugee children and young people will have places in mainstream schools and have the opportunity to participate in activities in and out of school by June 2007.

Target 3 - Barriers to unaccompanied refugee children and young people articulating their claims for protection will be identified and they will be given access to support structures to tackle these by December 2008.

Target 4 - No refugee child will be held in immigration detention by June 2009.
### Appendix E - Glossary of terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DLR</td>
<td>Discretionary Leave To Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELR</td>
<td>Exceptional Leave To Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Ethnic Minority Achievement Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HP</td>
<td>Humanitarian Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPU</td>
<td>Homeless Persons Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILR</td>
<td>Indefinite Leave To Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Local Authority Circular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBN</td>
<td>London Borough of Newham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHT</td>
<td>Refugee &amp; Homelessness Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shpresa</td>
<td>Albanian Community Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCS</td>
<td>The Children's Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UASC</td>
<td>Unaccompanied asylum seeking child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCS</td>
<td>The Children’s Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHT</td>
<td>Refugee &amp; Homelessness Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F - Bibliography/References

*Children Act*, HMSO, 1989

Newham Council, *Focus on Newham*, Newham NIMS, 2005


Refugee Council, *in exile*, issue 33, September 2004,


