

## The Project

*Refugee Action was founded in 1981 to provide an effective approach to the successful reception, resettlement and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Our advice services deliver guidance and advocacy for newly arrived asylum seekers and our work with refugees helps them to build new lives through long-term community development and local projects. Our vision is for a society in which refugees are welcome, respected and safe, and in which they can achieve their full potential.*

*All our work is guided by the aspirations and needs of refugees. In Liverpool, this has resulted in the development of dedicated youth services following the introduction of the national dispersal system in 2000. Liverpool received one of the highest proportions of displaced young asylum seekers in the UK and over the years we have empowered many young people to gain access to a wide variety of services and take an active role in their new community. Since 2004, we have run 'Get Connected' which provides unaccompanied young asylum seekers across Liverpool with advocacy and community engagement. The success of this project has confirmed the benefits of delivering a dedicated service to meet young people's specific and complex needs. We now wish to pilot a new model of working which we believe will provide an effective way of delivering holistic support to young people at key transitional ages and empower them in making informed decisions.*

*This will be based on a key-worker model whereby individual young people with irregular status will be identified or referred onto the project and allocated a key worker who will support them from the very beginning of their asylum journey. The principle behind this approach is to build trust and confidence between the young person and the key worker to ensure that the client's needs are identified and met effectively. This in turn will lead to avoidance or minimisation of crisis-driven responses during transitions of age, legal status and access to support. The key-worker role will encompass advocacy support to deal with Social Services, solicitors and the UK Border Agency (UKBA) - particularly around age disputes, access to Social Services support and failed asylum claims. They will also provide information and guidance on asylum support and the asylum determination process and options where asylum claims are refused. Each young person will receive various informative briefings and meet regularly with their key-worker at key transition milestones around age, legal status and support to ensure that they understand each stage of the asylum process and the options open to them. It is hoped that these interventions will help young people avoid situations of crisis, reduce emotional and physical stress and enable them to plan for their futures - whether that involves better long-term integration, or eventual return. The key-worker will strive to develop more efficient joint-working between Social Services, legal providers and UKBA to ensure that young people with irregular immigration status receive an appropriate level of support to meet their complex needs.*

*This key-worker pilot, based at our Liverpool office would work with approximately 25-30 young people each year. The key-worker will also manage wraparound elements such as wellbeing and group activities to enable clients to learn key life skills and develop their understanding of their rights and responsibilities. We would also like to appoint an evaluator to work alongside staff throughout the life of the project and assess the impact of the key-worker model. This will help us to inform long-term best practice and policy, both locally and nationally.*

## **Why is there a need for this service?**

*Home Office figures indicate that last year alone 1,717 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in the UK, accounting for 10% of all asylum applications made in 2010. Our experience of delivering youth work in Liverpool over the last decade informs us of the on-going need for dedicated services and the need for a more effective model of working in partnership with other agencies to meet young*

*people's support needs. This project will reveal the impact of: individualised casework support for young people; improved understanding of available options during the asylum process; and timely intervention at key transitional milestones around age, legal status and access to support.*

*Our consultations with young people participating in our current 'Get Connected' youth engagement project tell us that social inclusion, independent support, access to services and personal development opportunities are almost universal needs of young people. A lack of ability and confidence in communicating in English and a lack of knowledge regarding rights, entitlements and sources of support is common. Our case records show a range of complex needs encompassing accommodation, education, health, disability, mental health, poverty, hate crime, prejudice, sexual health, sexuality, loss of family, culture, friendships and community. Many have witnessed or experienced traumatic events. Despite the difficulties they face, our experience indicates that young refugees are extremely resilient and highly motivated to achieve both educationally and socially. Additionally, many young people become the subject of age and 'duty of care' disputes between statutory agencies and departments, resulting in difficulties in accessing basic rights, support, accommodation and protection.*

*Research confirms that unaccompanied young refugees need support around mental and physical health, integration, access to services and personal development opportunities. The Children's Commissioner highlighted the needs of this group in the 11 Million Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). This was the first report of the commission, highlighting the needs of UASC as a priority. Save the Children have produced a wide range of reports, resources and guidelines for working with UASC as some of the most vulnerable young people in the UK. Refugee Action's 'Young Lives in Liverpool' report (2003) explored the needs and aspirations of young people seeking asylum in Liverpool, and the ways service providers have (or have not) responded to their needs. Key barriers reported included that young asylum seekers feel incredibly isolated; they would like to make British friends but fear prejudice; they don't understand what their rights or options are regarding education and employment; women in particular were reluctant to access support services including ESOL classes. Publications such as the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's 'Research into Young Undocumented Migrants – Scoping Study' (2007) and 'No Right to Dream' (2009) only further highlight the need for specialised services and new methods of working.*

*Refugee Action has recently been exploring the impact of a key-worker approach in providing asylum advocacy and support. We tested a Key Worker Pilot for singles in Liverpool and are running a Family Key Worker Pilot and Key Volunteer Pilot, due to finish in March 2012, after which they will then be fully evaluated. Offering a holistic service from the beginning of an asylum claim not only ensures improved access to practical guidance and an understanding of the asylum process, but it also results in greater trust in application decisions and a willingness to consider available options. For example, where applications were ultimately refused, it was expected that asylum claimants would make a more considered decision on voluntary return as an option rather than a life of destitution. These pilots had their foundations in the Australian 'Hotham Mission' model, which between March 2001 and March 2006 achieved a 79% voluntary return rate for clients who had exhausted their appeal rights (the UK had an 18% voluntary return rate from 2004 to 2006).*

*Although we are already testing a key-worker approach for adults and families, a similar model has never been piloted targeting young people. Given their complex needs and high risk of destitution, such a model of working may well prove significantly more effective at empowering them with an understanding of the asylum process and the one-to-one advocacy to support them in shaping their futures through choices not chance. A greater understanding of the asylum process will also lead to fewer points of crisis for clients by, for example, informing each young person of what the implications on accommodation, financial or legal support are depending on changes to their asylum status.*

### Who would benefit?

Since the national dispersal system was implemented in April 2000, Liverpool has received one of the highest numbers of asylum seekers in the country, many of whom are aged 30 years or under. These young people have fled unimaginable violence or persecution and have had their whole lives turned upside down. They have lost their home, their security and any sense of certainty and many have lost family and friends in traumatic circumstances. Alongside struggling to come to terms with the trauma they have lived through, young people face the challenge of trying to rebuild their lives.

We anticipate that the key-worker project in Liverpool will intensively support approximately 25-30 young people each year, over a two year period. The service will support individual young people for 18 month period, from 17 to 18.5 years of age. Three significant transitional milestones we expect cases to involve are:

- 17 years of age – At this point, young people will be identified and referred to our service, where the key-worker will begin preparing them for the upcoming transitions around their age, legal status and access to support. This will involve reviewing the client's current status and level of understanding about the asylum process. An honest discussion of possible outcomes will also be a central part of the meeting. The key-worker will ensure that the young person has a solicitor and explore any further evidence they have gathered since arrival or are able to get from their home country.
- 17.5 years of age - Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are normally granted discretionary leave up to the age of 17.5, in the run up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday at which point they become classed as an adult. UKBA reviews their case to decide whether to grant or refuse leave to remain once the individual reaches 18. If refused, UKBA will wish to remove the individual as soon after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday as is possible. If the decision is negative then the key-worker will help explore whether there is any new evidence which could be gathered to make a fresh claim. Otherwise the client is reminded of the implications of a refusal and more time is spent assessing the young person's situation, including an assessment of voluntary return. The client is informed that the service will continue to be offered for the next three months to support their planning process and look at the fact that support will soon be stopped and if there are any grounds for Section 4 support.
- 18 years of age – most individuals have not considered what to do if they are refused asylum. As a result a number of young people go missing just before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday because they panic about being forcibly removed. Or Social Services, who are often nervous of discussing assisted voluntary return, don't know how to prepare young people for what might happen post-18, and just refer people on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to One Stop Services<sup>1</sup> in the hope that they can access UKBA Section 4 support. In practice this sort of support has very restricting criteria and a lot of people are not eligible for it, so young people often end up destitute.

### Partnership Approach

Thanks to our on-going youth work in Liverpool, we already have established relationships in place with the two local accommodation providers who will be able to refer any young people towards this key-worker pilot.

At the heart of the project, we wish to formalise working relationships with UKBA, legal providers and Social Services to create more efficient provision of support for marginalised young people with irregular immigration status. Our Liverpool Area Manager is in contact with Social Service's Leaving

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<sup>1</sup> Our One Stop advice service has recently experienced a 62% cut in government funding and its sustainability is uncertain beyond the next financial year.

Care Team Manager and the UKBA's Children's Champion and is working towards creating a steering group represented by UKBA, Social Services and legal providers which will guide the project throughout the two years. The key-worker will play a pivotal role in facilitating greater joint-working to ensure that the needs of young people are always put first.

Through our commitment to regional and nation joint-working with other Refugee Community Organisations we will be able to disseminate information to a wide range of agencies and organisations in the private, voluntary and statutory sectors. In Liverpool alone, we work in partnership with: Liverpool Council for Voluntary Services 0-25 Network; the Children's Fund Advocacy Steering Network; Merseyside Refugee Support Network Children and Young Persons subgroup; Liverpool City Councils Youth Engagement team; National Mentoring Network; Liverpool Youth Service; Liverpool City Council Strategic Coordination Group; Sefton City Council Strategic Group; the North West Consortium; the Black and Racial Minorities Network and Liverpool Social Service's key strategic group: 'Safeguarding Young People from Abroad' (ceased earlier this year).

### Budget

The project will run over two years at a total cost of £63,632 in Year 1 and £63,218 in Year 2.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Key-worker salary	£27,588	£27,864	£55,452
National insurance contribution	£2,792	£2,820	£5,611
Other contributions (pension)	£2,807	£2,829	£5,636
Staff training	£590	£250	£840
Staff travel and subsistence	£800	£400	£1,200
Activities	£6,000	£6,000	£12,000
Client travel	£3,000	£3,000	£6,000
Interpreters	£2,500	£2,500	£5,000
Evaluator	£7,500	£7,500	£15,000
Office costs	£2,200	£2,200	£4,400
Apportioned organisational costs	£7,855	£7,855	£15,710
<b>Total</b>	<b>£63,632</b>	<b>£ 63,218</b>	<b>£126,850</b>

### New ways of working

Within the key-worker approach clients are allocated a named caseworker to support them throughout the asylum process and facilitate greater joint-working between UKBA, Social Services and legal providers to meet the client's needs. Trust will be established as clients gain confidence in the skill and expertise of their key-worker and their ability to identify, unpick and resolve complex issues. As a result clients may come to see their key-worker as someone who is separate to the rest of the asylum system, which is important in order for the key-worker to be seen as being

*independent. They are possibly the only person involved with the client who understands the whole context of their situation and as such can act as the link between the client and other services or agencies. Having an understanding of the client's wider situation as well as an in-depth understanding of the asylum system, the key-worker is well placed to pick up on any issues as they arise and therefore avoid and prevent crisis situations. Another benefit of a sustained one-to-one relationship is that clients may feel more comfortable disclosing information to their key-worker than to a legal representative or UKBA, which might be important in terms of their claim. This is one instance where the key worker can act as link, in this case between client and solicitor, in order to support the client to share information which may lead to a different, more positive outcome. This model ensures that clients receive advice at the post-screening/pre-substantive stage in order to help to prepare them for the interview and steps beyond that. In addition there would be interventions at each key point of the asylum journey depending on individual client need. A key part of the work is around preparing clients for a negative decision. This is not just around the practical implications but also an attempt to support clients through the emotional impact of receiving a refusal and to plan ahead. In this sense it is truly an end-to-end support model. Given young people's incredibly complex needs and difficulties in engaging with services, we expect such a model to prove invaluable in empowering young people with irregular immigration status to access support and make informed decisions about their futures.*

*Having embedded evaluation to measure and demonstrate this impact would undoubtedly help to inform Social Services, UKBA and legal providers of the benefits of working more closely together to meet client's needs. Ultimately, we hope that therefore this project will lead to, at the least local, change in policy and best practice relating to supporting young people with irregular immigration status during transitions in the asylum process.*

### **Refugee Action**

*Refugee Action has thirty years of experience in working with refugees and is the leading refugee advice, development and support agency across Merseyside. We work nationally, providing high quality, impartial reception and advice services that enable refugees and asylum seekers to make informed choices. In 2010-2011 our One Stop Service was contacted almost 50,000 times and we provided over 20,000 face to face advice sessions. Although we deliver an asylum advice service, this is not enough to meet the complex needs of young refugees, who require more intense and longer term support. The Liverpool office has been delivering direct youth work services and advocacy support to young refugees and asylum seekers since 2001 and work with over 150 young people annually including unaccompanied children. Our youth work has organically grown over the past 10 years, responding to the needs of young refugees and identifying the need for a young-person-friendly approach to casework and advocacy.*

*We believe it is crucial that young people have access to an independent advocacy service, to address their needs, enable to take part in other activities to build their confidence and to reach their full potential in life. We have an excellent track record of delivering youth work with young refugees and have developed and delivered a number of youth projects, namely Peer Mentoring - for young refugees funded by the Big Lottery and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Get Connected - advocacy support, personal and community development funded by BBC Children in Need, Peers Pride and Prejudice - a project that explored prejudice with young people funded by the Camelot Foundation and the John Moores Foundation.*

*Through our key-worker pilot for young people, we will uphold the rights of some of the most vulnerable young people in the UK, as they go through a difficult process where their immigration status sometimes comes before the fact that they are children. One such problem that we often find*

*is accessing legal help, as there are a limited number of options for those in Liverpool, however we do are best to find them good representation and if there are any issues we can liaise with the solicitor directly. Through advocacy we have also helped the young people ensure that they are correctly supported by Social Services. We helped a number of young people challenge Social Services over which section of the Children's Act they are being supported under. This had an impact on the level of support that they receive on turning 18, so through this advocacy the young people got the correct leaving care support that they are entitled to. Throughout our youth work we have also helped young people to access the health care that they are entitled to and need. In one situation a young person was not being registered with a GP because there was a dispute over which local authority was responsible for him, so he was being sent to the walk in clinic which was not really adequate. The project helped the young person to register with his local GP and so he received the proper medical treatment that he needed. As part of our youth advocacy we can inform young people what they are entitled to and how they should be treated so that they are confident enough to advocate for themselves in the future. Similarly, every young person is entitled to an education, and we have helped young people access this, supporting them to register with the college on courses that interest them or find ESOL classes to improve their English up to a level so that they can take the courses that they want to. As part of personal development we listen to what the young person is interested and try and fine them what they need in order to fulfil these interests and ambitions.*

*We are perfectly placed to build on existing relationships with young asylum seekers and relevant agencies to test out and evaluate this new model of key-worker support and if proven successful push for it to be adopted long-term.*

### **Sustainability**

*By ensuring evaluation is a core element of the project throughout its two-year delivery, we can ensure not only that best practice and effective joint-working are embedded in Liverpool between key agencies, we will work towards realising long-term aims too. Evidencing the model as a proven successful approach to working with young people with irregular immigration status will give us the opportunity to influence policy and best practice on a national scale. Ultimately, we would work towards adoption of the model nationwide and discuss with UKBA the potential for such scaling up to model as a tendered advice service which we would apply to deliver. If unsuccessful, we would also explore other funding avenues such as charitable trusts and foundation to roll out the project.*