Supporting care leavers with insecure immigration status: Learning on effective support, collaboration and influence

An evaluation delivered by the National Children's Bureau, commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation

**Final Report
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In Autumn 2018, NCB was commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation to evaluate, over a three-year period, four projects that had been funded to work with young people leaving care with insecure immigration status. Each project was led by a charity or group of charities working in collaboration with the local authority (or local authorities) for their area.

This evaluation explored the approaches of the projects and their impact. Its findings are intended to inform the work of local authorities, charities and their funders in improving support for all care leavers with insecure immigration status.

The methodology comprised a series of in-depth interviews over six phases with young people, project staff and local authority staff. This was complemented by other activities such as a literature review and quantitative analyses.

The legal and policy context

It is estimated that at least 18,934, approximately 15 per cent, of all looked after children and care leavers in England have a potential unresolved immigration status (South London Refugee Association and Coram Children's Legal Centre 2021). Typically, care leavers with insecure immigration status fall into one of three broad groups:

- **Unaccompanied young people seeking protection:** This group includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and victims of human trafficking.
- **Young people with a non-asylum immigration issue who are not EU citizens:** This group includes young people raised in the UK by their families but who were subsequently taken into care.
- **Young EU citizens in/leaving care:** Similar to the above, these young people may have been taken into care due to concerns about their welfare and have citizenship of an EU country.

Unlike the entitlements of looked after children, those of care leavers are dependent on their immigration status. Entitlements, both to welfare benefits claimed by other care leavers and the legal aid which could help young people resolve their status, are also affected once they turn 18. This means it is particularly important that timely and early support is provided to resolve and regularise immigration status, allowing young people to transition smoothly into adulthood without their welfare being jeopardised.

Findings

Understanding the challenges at hand

Young people supported by the projects, particularly those seeking asylum, faced a wide range of challenges prior to coming to the UK which continued to impact on them when they arrived in the UK. Whilst many of these young people expressed positive aspirations to contribute to society, experiences of traumatic events in their home country or on their way to the UK impacted on their coping mechanisms and their ability to engage in a timely manner with key immigration processes to resolve their status. These challenges were further compounded with a range of others including:

- A lack of trust in authorities;

- Inconsistent quality of legal representation where solicitors did not spend enough time considering young people's language needs or their understanding of the process; and

- An inability to work and/or the limited availability of opportunities to engage in educational or social activities often resulting in young people suffering from poor emotional health and wellbeing.

Local authorities faced a number of challenges in providing support to young people. These included:

- Identifying young people who needed support, including recognising the need for support for unaccompanied young people who had only been granted leave until the age of 18 (known as UASC leave) and, in particular, identifying those who, despite being taken into care from their families in the UK, still had unresolved immigration issues. This emphasised the need to intervene at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent their rights to work and/or receive benefits (as detailed above) from being negatively impacted; and

- A lack of detailed knowledge amongst social workers and personal advisors of how to interpret asylum and immigration law provisions alongside a lack of confidence amongst these professionals in providing support.

In response to these challenges, project and local authority staff identified two key areas to focus the collective efforts of the projects, namely:

- Provide specialist casework and immigration advice (or making appropriate referrals) to fill any gaps in existing provision; and
- Deliver holistic support to young people to help them adjust to their new environment and develop resilience and coping mechanisms.

In delivering the above, the projects sought to collaborate more closely to improve capacity in local authorities and promote early intervention. They also aimed to provide opportunities for young people with experience of insecure immigration status to inform the policies and practices that affect them.

How the projects supported young people

Projects provided a range of support to young people and worked in a number of ways to help meet their identified needs:

- **Expert guidance to navigate the immigration and asylum systems:** All project staff teams collectively had a high level of knowledge and expertise on the legal requirements and processes required at each stage. The projects employed Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) accredited advisors, either at levels 2 or 3, to ensure they could do this effectively. This was particularly useful for non-asylum-seeking young people with insecure immigration status, as the appropriate routes to settlement were generally less commonly understood and relevant processes even less familiar for social workers. Projects also supported young people to get the most out of their legal representation by aiding communication with existing solicitors or referring young people to new high-quality solicitors. Such referrals to new solicitors were made if the young person's existing representation was poor quality or their advice needs required a higher level of accreditation than the projects could provide.

- **Building trust with young people:** Significant effort was invested by project staff in maintaining regular email, phone and face-to-face contact with the young people they were supporting. Project staff made young people aware of their project's independence from statutory bodies which helped to address power imbalances between staff and young people and further build trusting relationships.

- **Accommodating communication needs:** Projects provided translation services to translate written materials into the young person's first language wherever possible and provided interpreters for specific meetings. Group and peer-to-peer work was also utilised to aid information sharing.

- **Supporting young people's mental health:** Project staff took a number of steps to address the impact of trauma on young people including: showing understanding, flexibility and patience around time keeping (which was particularly important given the lack of structure in many young people's lives); providing a safe space for young people to share their experiences when ready; providing information and advice to promote good mental health self-care and; identifying when further mental health support may be needed.

- **Provision of holistic support:** Projects provided advice to young people on a range of practical issues such as cooking, travel and managing relationships with housemates. They supported young people to access social and educational opportunities and health services. This also included helping to secure better support from the local authority, by informally advocating on the young person's behalf or making formal challenges in public law. This is discussed further below. Service provision, particularly in terms of the community and voluntary sector, varied considerably between local authority areas. This impacted on what projects themselves needed to provide to young people. Abdel's story, below, gives an example of holistic support.

How the projects worked with local authorities

Projects worked with local authorities in a number of ways to meet the needs of young people including through:

- **Training for professionals and carers.** Over the course of the evaluation, projects collectively provided training to several hundred professionals. Strengths identified by local authority staff included: tailoring of content to the existing levels of knowledge of particular teams; contextualising information in relation to local services and communities and referring to relevant local authority policies; and signposting to ongoing advice provided by the projects. Local authority structures (such as whether they had a dedicated team for these young people) and the pressures they faced (such as high staff turnover/increasing numbers of vulnerable children) affected the extent to which local authority staff took up projects' initial offers of training and advice.

- **Advising social workers and Personal Advisors (PAs) on individual cases.** Whilst this 'second tier support' was not a feature of all projects initially, its significance grew as more young people with insecure immigration status were identified by local authorities, not all of whom could be directly supported by the projects. Local authorities welcomed the accessible and responsive guidance offered, which played a particularly key role in supporting many young people through the EU Settlement Scheme.

- **Coordinating support for individual young people,** particularly in terms of ensuring the holistic support offered by projects complemented the day to day corporate parenting responsibilities of local authorities. Project staff were vigilant to the potentially blurred boundaries between their roles and that of young people's social workers and aimed to maintain clear lines of accountability. This was important for particular tasks such as age assessments as these were often challenged by projects. This was also important in terms of ensuring that demands on projects' time were manageable. In this sense it was only partly effective, as project staff were better placed to provide some aspects of support particularly for young people who had absconded from care in another area and were not yet on the caseload of the local authority.

- **Making formal challenges to decisions.** Project staff supported (or in the case of one project, directly represented) young people in challenges to local authorities in public law, primarily in relation to the conduct of age assessments. This potential source of conflict was managed well by project and local authority staff who recognised such challenges as a legitimate and separate activity to their day to day work together, which could bring about improvements in local policy and practice.

- **Advocating informally on behalf of the young person,** using interactions with young people's social workers and personal advisors to highlight needs and suggest how the local authority may be better able to meet them. David's story, below, sets out an example of how a local authority was persuaded to take a more active role in supporting a care leaver with their immigration status. Whilst such informal advocacy contributed to young people's outcomes, and was often welcomed by local authorities, in some cases it disrupted the projects' and young people's working relationships with local authority staff.

- **Advising on local policies and processes.** Local authority staff welcomed input from the project staff on the design of local policies and processes, in particular those in relation to identifying non-asylum-seeking young people who may need support around their immigration status. The extent and effectiveness of this collaboration evolved over the course of the evaluation as relationships strengthened.

- **Acting as partners in a community of practice.** Working relationships between project and local authority staff developed to such an extent that they were able to engage in regular meetings and information sharing exercises to support the development of each other's practice. This way of working was particularly critical in collaborative efforts to identify and support young people through the EU settlement scheme.

How the projects involved young people in making change

Projects organised a range of activities to give young people a voice. These activities adhered to good practice in meaningfully engaging young people. Key elements of good practice observed included:

- **Audience, influence and agenda setting.** Project staff reported that, in general, their participation

activity had a clear purpose and pathway to impact. In practice, this included setting up sessions in partnership with local authority colleagues to inform specific local policies, for example, and co-producing documents about young people's experiences that were then used by project staff in their influencing work.

- **Allowing time and space to identify the right approaches.** The projects establishing new activities were cautious and patient in their approach. Whilst this was partly a case of allowing young people to gradually build confidence and trust, we also heard of steps taken to listen to young people's feedback on this journey to understand what works for them.

- **Flexibility to account for diverse and changing needs.** The onset of the pandemic and associated restrictions had significant ramifications on this aspect of the programme. Examples of how this was addressed included adapting group activities so that they could be delivered online or in outdoor spaces, and increasing the time allocated to ice-breaking activities to mitigate the lack of opportunities for socialising under lockdown.

- **Providing opportunities for young people's longer-term benefit.** Projects offered activities that could provide young people with transferable skills such as mental health self-care, English language skills and experience of exercising agency.

- **Consideration of young people's best interests and wellbeing.** This was done through a combination of reducing the potential risk the participation activity may pose to a young person's welfare, and accepting the fact that some young people were not in a position to take part. That some young people struggle to engage, appeared to be partly due to the nature of the activities that were arranged. For example, group activity may be more challenging for those who are struggling with their emotional wellbeing, and some young people struggled to think beyond their immediate support needs whilst their project support worker (rather than a separate person) was coordinating participation activities.

Impact on young people directly supported

Young people benefitted from the support provided by projects helping them to understand their rights whilst supporting them to engage in informal support networks and access education and training opportunities. Combined with the range of holistic support described above, all of this contributed to improving young people's mental health and wellbeing. Young people themselves saw the role of the projects as transformational, and local authority staff working with them saw noticeable improvements in young people's wellbeing.

Based on an analysis of the cases of young people referred in the first half of the evaluation period[1]:

- Overall, 58% of young people had made substantial progress towards resolving their immigration status. This included 48% who were granted refugee status or humanitarian protection within the evaluation period.

- Based on analysis of data from NRPF Connect[2] we were able to confirm that, on average, those young people who were granted these statuses, did so more quickly than young people in other local areas.

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1   These are a limited cohort of young people who consented to share information with the evaluation team.
2   NRPF Connect is a voluntary database that local authorities can upload data to regarding the support they are providing to people with no recourse to public funds. During the evaluation period, 32 local authorities submitted data to the database on care leavers who fall into this category.

Later in the evaluation period, projects worked with local authorities to identify and support many non-asylum-seeking care leavers with their immigration status, including supporting many successful applications to the EU Settlement Scheme.

Impact on policy and practice

Evaluation evidence found that collaboration with local authorities had led to improvements in their policy and practice, including:

- **Changes to local authority policies and procedures.** These included,

    ▷ the establishment of dedicated local authority teams for working with care leavers with insecure immigration status
    ▷ formal policies on supporting these young people and on supporting those who were also victims of trafficking
    ▷ public commitments to supporting young people who wish to apply for British citizenship
    ▷ changes to local authority routine data collection on children in care to include nationality, helping identification of those who may need support in relation to their immigration status

- **Improved knowledge and confidence** of the many children's social care staff the projects worked alongside, advised and provided training to in relation to **immigration and asylum issues**

- **Improved understanding** amongst these staff of how the experiences of this group of young people may impact on **their day to day needs and behaviours**, reflected in better initial assessment of needs without the need for further advice or intervention from the projects.

Impact on costs to local authorities

This evaluation highlighted the ways in which the projects helped to avoid significant support costs for care leavers which would normally have been borne by local authorities. Based on a selection of eight scenarios that unfolded for young people supported by the projects, we estimated these potential cost savings. These range from:

£7,191 – for one young person who was an EU citizen but not identified as such promptly, incurring legal and Home Office fees as well as needing support with accommodation and subsistence for a short time whilst his case was resolved;

£101,111 – for one young person who came to the UK with her birth family aged 6 but needed support with accommodation and subsistence for five years, as she had been advised to take an unnecessarily lengthy route to settlement in the UK.

If these figures are multiplied by the number of young people with insecure immigration status supported by local authorities, the potential cost savings are significant. Local authorities, with the support of charities, can avoid the vast majority of these costs by acting early to address young people's immigration status before they turn 18.

We heard from project and local authority staff that there were also wider potential cost savings for

local authorities. These included more efficient management of young people's cases informed by training and advice from project staff and reduced support needs of young people as a result of action to improve their wellbeing.

Based on the policy, practice and cost impacts described above, most project and local authority staff saw potential for the commissioning of the projects by local authorities in the future. They suggested that this would need to be a bespoke offer of support based on the responsibilities and priorities of the local authorities as well as key elements of the current projects.

Implications of the findings

The evaluation identified a number of overarching learning points for local authorities, charities and funders looking to further develop support for care leavers with insecure immigration status:

- **Recognising, accepting and responding to the evolving nature of individual young people's needs:** Given the time it takes to develop trusting relationships and effective participation work, charities and their funders should plan for impact to be measured over a longer period. Local authorities should ensure continuity in social worker support for these young people.

- **Flexibility in response to local context:** Charities developing future work in this area should consider how the structure of local authority teams and pressures faced locally may affect the training needs and take up, and how the availability of other voluntary and community services available locally may inform the design of a holistic support offer.

- **Clearly defining roles within a multi-purpose, multi-agency team:** Charities and local authorities should work to clearly define the roles of their staff so that young people see a clear separation of their day-to-day advice and support, both from decision-making about their entitlements (such as age assessments), and from group-based activities to influence change.

- **Challenging policy and practice professionally and through agreed channels:** Charities and local authorities should maintain dedicated fora at strategic and practitioner levels to share insights and solutions. The evaluation found that this was more constructive than advocating informally for young people on an individual basis, which sometimes disrupted relationships. The time needed to develop relationships through these fora should also be considered by charities and their funders in terms of the timescales across which it may be reasonable to see impact on policy and practice.

- **Potential for commissioning by local authorities:** There is a case for most or all of the projects' existing activities to be commissioned by local authorities across England as a key part of meeting their corporate parenting responsibilities. The reception and impact of training and advice for local authority staff suggests that these activities should be considered a valuable part of charities' offer, in addition to their one-to-one advice and casework with young people. Charities may want to consider developing a specific offer that responds to local authorities' interest in early intervention to ensure care leavers immigration issues are addressed before they turn 18. Funders may support this by having designated funds for early intervention initiatives. This would support collaboration whilst not interfering with charities' role in supporting older or absconded care leavers for whom local authorities may not have recognised responsibilities.

- **Addressing barriers at a national level:** This evaluation identified the impact that systemic issues in children's social care, such as staff turnover, constrained resources, and fragmentation of responsibility between the local authorities of England, are having on support for care leavers with insecure immigration status. To address this, the Department for Education should work with local authorities and charities to secure:

- ▷ more collaboration and coordination between local authorities in supporting young people with insecure immigration status, so that a more consistent offer of support can be delivered. This includes areas such as Kent where more unaccompanied young people arrive in the country;
- ▷ adequate funding and workforce development, so local authority staff have the capacity and skills to support these young people to access the expert guidance they need, when they need it; and
- ▷ collaboration between local authorities and specialist charities, so that the social capital and distinct expertise of the voluntary and community sector can be used to complement and improve local authority support for these young people.

- **Building the evidence base:** There are two main areas of inquiry that could further contribute to evidence-based practice in this field. Funders should consider supporting research to explore these in order to inform good practice, as well as their own and local authorities' investments, in the sector.

  - ▷ engaging with a larger number of local authorities to understand the impact of local context, on the best approaches to effective collaboration to support young people.
  - ▷ building on this evaluation's approach to developing cost examples by applying this methodology to a larger, representative, sample of young people and creating a robust cost-benefit analysis.

Conclusion

Overall, this evaluation has demonstrated a range of innovative approaches that projects have adopted in working with local authorities and other stakeholders to intervene early to help resolve young people's immigration status. It has shown how projects have worked hard from the start to secure young people's trust. As well as showing high levels of flexibility and understanding, projects provided a range of practical support to help manage and mitigate the impact of any trauma that young people might have experienced prior to, or when, they reached the UK.

Projects worked closely with colleagues in local authorities, supporting and advising them on individual cases, as well as enhancing knowledge and building relationships leading to improved policy and practice, and cost savings for local authorities.

There is much that other charities, local authorities and other key stakeholders can learn from this evaluation. Most importantly of all is the lesson that early intervention and enhanced collaboration between projects and local authority staff can help to maximise the chances of young people's immigration status being resolved on a timely basis. This means that the life chances of many more young people will be greatly enhanced through better access to education, housing and other services so vital for mental health and wellbeing.

1. Introduction

In Autumn 2018, NCB was commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation to carry out a programme of evaluation with four projects that had been funded to work with young people leaving care with insecure immigration status. The evaluation ran from October 2018 to June 2021. The global pandemic inevitably had some impact on the projects and this evaluation, which is discussed in more detail below, but did not change the overall scope and value of this work.

Each project was led by a charity or group of charities and worked in collaboration with local authorities and other local organisations. Whilst each project had a different focus and delivery model, they all aimed to improve young people's wellbeing and outcomes and to involve young people in influencing positive changes to policy and practice.

The evaluation had two main aims:

1. to understand the projects' approaches to working with young people and local authorities;

2. to explore the impact of the projects on outcomes for young people, on local policy and practice and on the costs involved in supporting young people.

About this report

This report is the main output from the evaluation and draws together all the data gathered throughout the evaluation period. It is aimed at readers in the statutory, voluntary and academic sectors who have a role to play in supporting this particular group of young people, including those who do not consider themselves experts in children's social care and immigration.

The report is structured as follows:

- The remainder of this introduction sets out key aspects of the policy context in relation to supporting children and young people with insecure immigration status and provides a more detailed description of the projects.

- Chapter 1 sets out the evaluation aims, questions explored and the methodology employed, including the range of qualitative and quantitative approaches used in data collection and analysis.

- Chapters 2 - 4 set out the **findings** in relation to the evaluation's first aim - **understanding the projects' approaches** - with chapters dedicated to each of the following areas:

    ▷ **Support work with young people;**
    ▷ **Collaboration with local authorities; and**
    ▷ **Involving young people in making change.**

- Chapters 5 – 7 present the **findings** in relation to the second aim of the evaluation - **exploring the impact of the projects** – with chapters focusing on the following:

    ▷ **Impact on outcomes for young people;**
    ▷ **Impact on policy and practice; and**
    ▷ **Impact on costs of supporting young people.**

- Chapter 8, **conclusions and implications,** extracts the key learning from the findings to inform the ongoing work of the organisations delivering the projects, as well as the policies and practices of local authorities and other organisations working to support this group of young people.

The legal and policy context

About care leavers with insecure immigration status

In this evaluation, we consider care leavers to mean young people who report being between the ages of 16 and 25 and have spent some time being looked after by a local authority. This includes young people who are still in care. Whilst in exceptional circumstances some young people may leave care as early as age 16, they will typically do so when they turn 18.

The immigration status of a young person in care, or leaving care, may be deemed insecure for a number of possible reasons. The young people supported by the projects fell into three broad groups. Technical information in this section has been summarised from Coram Children's Legal Centre (2017a) and London Funders (2021).

Unaccompanied young people seeking protection

This group includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and victims of human trafficking. Asylum claims are usually commenced shortly after the young person arrives in the country. If successful, they result in the young person being granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, normally for a period of 5 years, after which time they may apply for indefinite leave to remain and citizenship. The status of young people in this group may remain unresolved for an extended period because:

- there may be delays in the processing of the initial application

- the young person may be appealing a negative decision, or may be preparing a fresh claim with new evidence about their situation

- they may have had their application for asylum turned down and just been granted unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-child (UASC) leave until they turn 18, but have neither appealed this decision nor made other plans

- the young person may have been trafficked into the UK and, after presenting to authorities, will need to go through a process of assessing their vulnerability, the risk posed to them by traffickers and any subsequent entitlement to protection.

Young people with close family present in the UK

These include:

- young people who were being raised in the UK by their birth families but were subsequently taken into care due to concerns about their welfare and their parents were either in the UK on a work or study visa or themselves had insecure immigration status (or theirs was otherwise challenged by the Home Office due to lack of documentation)

- young people who have reunited with a close family member with leave to remain in the UK, who themselves may have been granted or claiming asylum

- Such young people will normally pursue a right to remain in the UK based on length of residency or (under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights) a right to respect for private and family life. This can involve multiple successive (normally annual) applications to renew limited right to remain until length of residency criteria are passed.

Young EU citizens in/leaving care

These young people, like many young people in the group above, will at some point have been living with their families in the UK and been taken into care due to concern about their welfare. Their birth families will have settled in the UK using the EU's provisions for freedom of movement. Like other EU citizens seeking to remain in the country, these young people would need to apply for settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). This is a distinct process from that which is applicable to people of non-EU nationalities.

There is no official published data on total numbers (or estimates of) care leavers with insecure immigration status in the UK. Based on the results of a Freedom of Information Request with responses from 116 of 152 local authorities, it has been estimated that there are at least 18,934 looked after children and care leavers who are not British citizens, meaning they have a potential immigration or citizenship issue to be resolved (South London Refugee Association and Coram Children's Legal Centre 2021). The Department for Education (2020) publishes data on the number of UASC looked after by local authorities in England, with the figure as of March 2020 being 5,000. The Home Office (2021a) estimated that, in April 2021, there were 3,600 children in care and care leavers eligible to apply to the EUSS. Local authorities participating in the NRPF Connect database reported supporting 856 looked after children and care leavers with no recourse to public funds (see page 72) during the financial year 2020/2021 (NRPF Network 2021).

Young people's entitlements to support

As a key aspect of this evaluation considers how the projects have worked with local authorities to help meet their duties to young people, it is important to set out what these duties and the associated entitlements of young people are. These are different depending on whether a young person is still in care and whether they are aged under 18, with this group having significantly more generous entitlements than those who have left care and are aged 18 or over. Here we summarise these entitlements as they apply in England[3].

Children in care

If a child arrives in the UK unaccompanied they will normally be accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. As indicated above, children with insecure immigration status can also include those who have been removed from their birth parents in the UK, in which case they will be the subject of a Care Order under Section 31 of the Act. Care Orders may also be used to protect children who have been trafficked or are unaccompanied and very young. (Coram CLC 2017a). Regardless of whether a Care Order is in place, a young person will become officially looked after if they have been accommodated by the local authority for 24 hours (DfE 2017, 9).

For many young people arriving in the UK unaccompanied, their age may not be clear. Where the young person claims to be aged 17 or below but the local authority disputes this, the local authority may carry out an age assessment. The result of this determines the young person's entitlements. Statutory guidance stresses that age assessments should not be a routine part of the assessment of unaccompanied and trafficked children and should only be carried out when there is a reason to doubt the young person's age (DfE 2017, 13).

Local authorities have a range of duties towards looked after children up to their 18th birthday. Fundamentally, these are the same regardless of immigration status (DfE 2017, 9). They include provision of:

- A suitable care placement, usually with a foster carer
- A care plan that addresses health, education, behavioural and emotional development, identity, family and social relationships
- Involving the young person in the development and review of this plan, including through support from an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)
- Measures to promote health and educational attainment, including priority in school admissions
- Support in the transition to adulthood (see below).

These entitlements stem from a general duty in the Children Act 1989 (Section 22) and are further detailed in various policy regulations and guidance. They are often collectively referred to as a local authority's corporate parenting responsibilities and are mainly delivered by the children's social workers and carers.

From the age of 16 (before they leave care), children should receive a needs assessment around support with health, education and development, a pathway plan setting out how these will be addressed and a personal advisor[4] to provide and coordinate support.

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3   Children's Social Care is a devolved policy area. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have distinct legislation relating to this area, although similarities exist as a legacy of legislation made by the UK Parliament before devolution.
4   Unlike social workers, personal advisors are not regulated professionals and do not have the clearly defined responsibilities and training requirements that this entails. They are, however, normally supervised by a registered social worker.

For those with insecure immigration status, local authorities are required to help them to plan for different potential outcomes of their immigration application, including:

- Being granted leave to remain (such as through refugee status or humanitarian protection)
- Not being granted status and being able to return to their country of origin
- Not being granted status and not being able to return to their country of origin.

Accommodating these three options in the young person's pathway plan is known as 'triple planning' (Coram CLC 2018).

Regulations and guidance (DfE 2017, 10-28) set out additional detail on duties placed on local authorities in relation to unaccompanied children and those who may have been trafficked. Key points include:

- Making a specific assessment of a child's needs (including the effects of trauma) which may arise from this experience and taking account of this in care planning

- Ensuring that those working with the child understand the immigration system and the particular issues that the child may face. Social workers in particular are expected to have knowledge of key aspects of immigration application and trafficking referrals processes. Personal Advisors (PAs), Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), carers and interpreters are all also expected to have some knowledge

- Ensuring children have access to a legal representative to support their asylum claim and to support an appeal if this is refused

- Providing an interpreter, making reasonable endeavours to ensure this interpreter speaks both the correct language and dialect of the child

- Approaching possible reunification (with the child's birth family) with particular sensitivity – avoiding this if this poses a risk or distress to the child and ensuring the child is signposted to family tracing services (such as that run by the Red Cross).

All immigration cases involving children in care are covered by legal aid. This means that legal advice and representation can be provided free of charge, regardless of whether the child in question is unaccompanied or if they are claiming asylum. This area of policy was subject to change during the evaluation period. Prior to October 2019, non-asylum cases of separated children were not covered by legal aid. The reintroduction of this entitlement followed campaigning by charities working with such young people and the reversal of the Government's policy, established in 2012, to deny legal aid to immigration cases (Ministry of Justice 2019; Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium 2019). Whether any young person receives free legal representation depends on the availability of a solicitor with the capacity to take the child's case on at that particular time.

Care leavers

The duties placed on local authorities and the entitlements of young people reduce when they leave care. However, young people who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks prior to their 18th birthday are entitled to a range of support as care leavers up to the age of 25.

The local authority is required to continue to provide the support set out in the pathway plan (see

above), primarily via a Personal Advisor who is allocated to the young person up to the age of 25. This support is expected to reduce as the young person approaches the age of 25 and only has to be provided beyond the age of 21 if the young person requests it or if they are undertaking education or training (DfE 2018, 5-7). Once the young person turns 18 and the local authority does not have an absolute duty to accommodate the young person, the young person will have priority access to social housing and will be entitled to financial support to undertake education and training. Young people typically live in some form of supported accommodation or a staying put arrangement with a foster carer up to the age of 21.

Unlike the entitlements of looked after children, the entitlements of care leavers are dependent on their immigration status. If a young person has not been granted any valid form of leave (including where UASC leave has expired at age 18), and is appeal rights exhausted (ARE), the young person's entitlements are affected. Such young people can only receive support if it is deemed necessary to avoid a breach of their human rights. The local authority is required to carry out a human rights assessment to determine this (DfE 2017, 26). In addition, if young people have not had their status resolved they will not be entitled to key benefits, such as housing benefits and universal credit. This is known as having 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). (Coram CLC 2017b). Even when a young person is granted leave to remain, such as when granted in respect of a right to private and family life, this may be on the condition that they have no recourse to public funds. Any young person who does not have regularised status will generally not be able to work.

Whilst legal advice for asylum applications for people of all ages is covered by legal aid, other types of immigration cases are not covered for individuals aged over 18, which means that young people in this situation must find a way to pay for this advice (some local authorities provide the funding for such advice under their duties to care leavers). Legal aid funding for solicitors working on adult asylum cases is also less generous than for those working with children.

As can be seen from the summary above, both children's social care and immigration are complex areas of law and policy. In practice, these policies can be open to interpretation by those tasked with implementing them. This openness to interpretation and the levels of complexity involved can often lead to disputes and differences in practice which can affect a young person's entitlements and their outcomes.

About the projects

The four projects considered in this evaluation aimed to create positive outcomes for young people with insecure immigration status by enabling them to access their entitlements and lead fulfilling lives. A particular focus of the projects was coordinating and improving access to immigration advice in order to resolve the children and young people's immigration status. The projects supported young people with a wide range of immigration statuses and following many different paths to settlement, including children of EU citizens and the children of adults with insecure immigration status as well as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The services provided by the projects also sought to support local authorities to best meet the needs of these children and young people in their care, including those relating to education, housing, employment, mental health etc. These aspects of the projects were designed to build capacity in local authorities where social workers and carers may not have been meeting the unique needs of this group.

Figure 1 summarises the key aspects of the delivery model taken forward by each of the four projects.

Figure 1: Delivery Models of the Four Projects

Project A:
An enhanced relationship with two local authorities to ensure provision of timely specialist advice and support to young people as soon as possible after their arrival in the UK. This included:

- An enhanced casework service to young people to agreed referral criteria.
- Second-tier support and advice for social workers working with the young people.
- Training for local authority staff.
- Collaboration with managers to identify needs and target support.
- Participatory activity, with a new young people's steering group to inform the development and delivery of the project, and local authority policy and practice.

Project B:
Partnership working with a local authority to improve services for young people leaving care with insecure immigration status. It sought to do this through:

- Early access to legal support for young people, including representation in public law (beyond immigration).
- A training programme for local authority staff.
- Establishing a framework of practice standards for delivery by the local authority.
- Peer-led awareness-raising, policy and advocacy work through an established participation group.

Project C:
Crisis intervention for young migrants aged 16-25 subject to immigration control, prioritising support for young people at high risk of destitution, exploitation and trafficking. This included:

- Emergency practical support, including securing access to emergency provision and accommodation.
- Individual and group well-being/mental health activities and responding to other immediate needs.
- Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) Level 2 accredited immigration casework, providing intensive support to resolve immigration issues.
- Training for Personal Advisors (PAs) and other local authority staff.
- Convening a new group of young people with lived experience of insecure immigration status to co-design and co-deliver research and awareness raising activities.

Project D:
Holistic support to young people, promoting good practice locally, and advocating for better identification of non-asylum-seeking children who may need immigration support. Activity delivered included:

- One-to-one mentoring support to identify wellbeing issues and support access to other services and positive activities.
- Deployment of an OISC (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner) Level 2 accredited immigration advisor to triage cases held by the local authority and work with local authority staff to develop plans to meet their needs.
- Facilitation of a forum for service providers working with young migrants to aid joint working with the local authority and promote greater understanding of the needs of this cohort of young people.
- Co-design of a new wellbeing and advocacy group with young people leaving care.

2. Evaluation aims and methodology

Evaluation aims and research questions

The overarching aims of the evaluation were two-fold: firstly, to understand how projects worked with young people and with local authorities, and identify aspects of their models that could be considered good practice; and secondly, to explore the impact of the projects on outcomes for young people, on local policy and practice (at the local authority and wider voluntary sector) and on the costs involved in supporting young people. Evidence was collected from a range of sources to address the following evaluation questions:

Aim 1: Understanding the projects' approaches to working with young people and local authorities

- What do the service users, projects and the local authorities see as their ideal outcomes from these projects?
- What are the key components of a best practice approach to supporting these young people?
- What modes of joint working between voluntary sector organisations and local authorities have been developed to take this forward?
- What methods of involving young people in advocating for change have been developed?
- What local contextual factors may affect the feasibility and effectiveness of the above?

Aim 2: exploring the impact of the projects on outcomes for young people, on local policy and practice and on the costs involved in supporting young people

- What are the outcomes for children and young people who receive a service from the projects?
- What impact have the projects had on local policy and practice?
- In what ways may the projects contribute to cost savings to local authorities, and what is the scale of potential costs to be saved?
- What opportunities are there for sustaining impact after the projects end?

Detailed methodology

Literature review

A literature review was undertaken at the beginning of the project to help inform the evaluation as it was being delivered. Comprising c. 25 documents, it examined some of the key challenges faced by children and young people with insecure immigration status in or leaving care and their support needs (e.g. access to suitable housing, GPs, school and college places). It also examined the political and legislative environment within which support providers work and the challenges they experience. This analysis informed the development tools used in the primary research that followed.

In-depth Interviews

A series of interviews were held over six phases spanning the evaluation period, with project and local authority staff and young people.

A set of topic guides were developed for undertaking these interviews. The topic guides consisted of open-ended questions for the most part to allow for in-depth discussions and these were used across all phases of the evaluation. The topic guides were tailored to be of relevance to a range of interview

participants at each stage of the evaluation including project managers, project support workers, local authority staff and young people. The core topic guides, used for the initial phase of the evaluation and as basis for more tailored topic guides as the evaluation progressed, are included in Appendix 2.

Tables 1 and 2, below, provide an overview of the numbers and key characteristics of the range of interviewees who participated in the evaluation including young people, local authority staff and project staff. In summary:

- 13 interviews were undertaken with *young people.* The characteristics of these young people were as follows:
  ▷ *Age:* over half of this group were under 17 years old and under half were 17 years old and over.
  ▷ *Gender:* twelve were male and one was female (nationally, 88 per cent of asylum applications of those aged under 18 during the evaluation period were from males (Home Office 2021b))
  ▷ *Geography:* Five had arrived from Africa, seven from Asia and one from Europe.
  ▷ *Immigration status:* five were awaiting or appealing an initial asylum application, two were appeal rights exhausted, five had recently been granted refugee status, and one had arrived unaccompanied and was seeking leave to remain on grounds of a right to family life.

These interviews were only undertaken in the first three phases of the evaluation. As a result, they do not represent the full range of young people that projects were working with by the end of the programme, which included more of those with non-asylum immigration issues and EU citizens.

- 45 interviews were undertaken with **project staff.** The majority of these were with project managers and support workers/youth caseworkers. Support workers and youth caseworker roles were similar in that both involve working directly with the young people. Interviews were also undertaken with project solicitors and immigration advisors who worked specifically on young people's asylum and immigration cases. A number of these interviews were group interviews and involved interviewing support workers and project managers together.

- 12 interviews were undertaken with **local authority staff** with the majority of these being with social workers in managerial or team leader roles. Social workers were in one of the following teams: migrant children's teams, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) teams, Through Care Teams, 14+ teams and the Leaving Care Team. One participant was a peer mentor for young migrants. At least two different staff were interviewed for each project.

Table 1: Number of interviewees per evaluation phase

Phase	Young People	Project staff	Local Authority	Totals
One: March 2019	2	8	0	10
Two: July 2019	4	7	4	15
Three: December 2019	7	12	0	19
Four: September 2020	0	4	4	8

Five: January 2021	0	4	0	4
Six: May 2021	0	10	4	14
Totals	13	45	12	70
Total unique interviewees	13	17	10	40

Table 2: Number of interviewees per project

Project	Young People	Project Staff	Local Authority	Totals
A	3	11	3	17
B	1	11	3	15
C	5	12	3	20
D	4	11	3	18
Totals	13	45	12	70
Total unique interviewees	13	17	10	40

For the first three phases of evaluation, which were undertaken prior to the pandemic, interviews were conducted on-site at the project's offices or at local authority offices. For phases four to six of the evaluation, during which there were a number of national lockdowns due to Covid-19, interviews were undertaken via video conferencing software.

Throughout the evaluation, interviews with project staff were undertaken in a group format with up to four project staff (from the same project) interviewed at the same time, whilst interviews with local authority staff continued to be held individually. Interviews were held with young people individually, face-to-face and on the projects' premises. Some of these interviews required an interpreter, who were either present in person or provided by telephone. No interviews were held with young people during the latter phases (i.e. 4-6). This decision was taken in response to the views of project staff who indicated that it would be difficult for young people to participate in this format in a meaningful way given that they were facing significant challenges during the pandemic.

Qualitative analysis

An initial thematic analysis of data from interviews was undertaken after each pair of evaluation phases (i.e. after phase two, after phase four and after phase six). A thematic framework was developed during the initial analysis and revised during later stages of the evaluation. Additional themes were explored specifically at phase four (see impact of the pandemic, below). Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used to support identification and analysis of themes across the range of projects, interviewees and evaluation phases.

Vignettes, setting out examples of how young people have been supported by the projects, were developed based on interview data and further information collected from projects. Each of these vignettes relates to a young person interviewed during the first three phases of the evaluation. This data was complemented by interviews held with project support workers to gather more information about that young person's needs and outcomes. This is with the exception of two vignettes which were developed specifically to provide examples of young people with non-asylum immigration issues, typically supported by the projects during the later phases of the evaluation. These vignettes were based on further written and verbal submissions from project staff. All vignettes relate to real, individual, young people, but names have been changed and details removed to protect identities.

Quantitative data capture and analysis

A data capture template was developed to collect data from projects on the evolving immigration status of the individual young people they were supporting. Data collection fields included: age of the young person; their nationality; application stage and immigration status at up to five time points across the evaluation period. NCB created a coding scale to categorise young people on their journey towards achieving full citizenship status which was aligned to the data captured in the above template. These data collection tools were informed by interviews in the initial phases of the evaluation and through direct consultation with project staff and advisory board members. This ensured a focus on quantifying outcomes seen as most relevant to participants in a way that created as little burden as possible on projects in terms of data collection. In total, immigration status data was collated for 64 young people (16 from Project A, 21 from Project B, 18 from Project C and 9 from Project D) for up to five time periods.

Examples of 'costs on the path to settlement' were also developed to illustrate the potential costs to local authorities of late intervention versus early intervention to support young people with a range of immigration and asylum issues. The scenarios developed are based on case notes relating to real young people supported by the projects. Some examples are based on the experience of more than one young person. Two examples (Henry and Sanjiya) are fictitious but based on expert advice from projects about different legal routes to settlement and their implications. The names of young people and other details have been changed or redacted to maintain the anonymity of the young people supported. Unit costs used in this analysis were developed based on review of official sources and grey literature, which are cited alongside the cost examples in Chapter 7 of this report.

Advisory Board and Learning events

A project advisory group was formed to guide the delivery of the evaluation. This comprised PHF and NCB staff members and a representative of the NRPF Network and Coram Children's Legal Centre. Members of the advisory group, along with project staff, were invited to attend a series of four learning events.

Learning events were undertaken in April and November 2019, October 2020 and July 2021. The purposes of these events were two-fold: firstly, to enable individual projects to share updates with attendees; and secondly, to enable NCB to share emerging findings and provide information on future activities and how projects were to be involved.

The learning events helped to shape the evaluation as it was being delivered, test emerging research findings and support planning for the drafting of this final evaluation report.

Ethics

Staff and young people's versions of an information and consent form were developed. These included information on the purpose of the evaluation, methodology, how the data would be collected, used and stored, and how individuals could exercise a right to withdraw. For young people, particular assurances were given to the effect that the evaluators were independent of any immigration authorities and that the interviews would not focus on their experiences prior to arrival in the UK. Each item of the consent form was individually explained to young people with the support of an interpreter where necessary. In recognition of their expertise in the communication and wellbeing needs of the young people, project staff were consulted on the development of the information and consent forms, core topic guides and the overall methodology. These were also reviewed and assessed by NCB's Research Ethics Advisory Group before being finalised.

Impact of the pandemic

Before detailing the specific research activities undertaken, it is important to note that this evaluation was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic occurred approximately halfway through the evaluation and had a significant impact on the projects, the scale of the evaluation activities that could be undertaken and how they could be undertaken as well as on the projects themselves.

Prior to the pandemic, we had planned to interview a larger number of young people over the course of the evaluation to gain a deeper insight into the personal impact of the projects and also to ensure that young people's voices were given due weight in our analysis of this. Beyond the third phase of the evaluation, we were unable to interview young people. This limited the amount of qualitative data collected. Furthermore, the delivery of the projects changed in response to the pandemic which limited the amount of data that could be collected in relation to project delivery models and the ability to make comparisons in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. A summary report setting out findings on how the projects responded to the pandemic was published online in January 2021 (NCB 2021). Its main findings included:

- Many young people experienced further practical, social and mental health needs, and their immigration and asylum cases had been further delayed by the Home Office.

- The projects have adapted well and quickly to adjust their support offer, including providing more support to address destitution and to facilitate access to guidance and opportunities virtually. In the cases of some young people, project staff felt that they were missing important opportunities to build relationships and keep in touch with the service and other parts of their support network.

- Periods of lockdown also saw some unexpected benefits, such as homeless young people benefiting from the 'everyone in' scheme, some young people being able to stay in their foster placements for longer, and project staff being better able to share their insight and expertise with sector colleagues via online (rather than face-to-face) meetings.

Limitations

This evaluation aimed to share learning from a small group of individually unique but related projects. Given that the evaluation collected data from four such projects, each with their own specific focus and local contexts, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions on the impact of individual aspects of the project models and how the models compare in their effectiveness.

Data gathered directly from young people was also limited in scale and scope due to the pandemic disrupting planned face-to-face interviews. Whilst our analysis aimed to give requisite weight to insight from young people, less data was collected from them than from project and local authority staff. Those young people that were interviewed represented the cohort supported by projects in the first half of the evaluation, which included more asylum-seeking young people and fewer of those who were seeking other routes to settlement.

The analysis of potential cost savings from early intervention presented in Chapter 7 is not intended to serve as a full economic analysis. In addition to the young people described not constituting a representative sample of those supported, the analysis undertaken did not assess opportunity costs (including funding for the current projects). Economic analysis is a resource-intensive process and is often made difficult by the lack of availability of key data (Smith et al 2018). Indicative cost modelling exercises such as that contained in this report help to inform decision making but should not be given undue weight vis-à-vis other available evidence.

In spite of the limitations highlighted above, the insights set out in this report should be considered as an important contribution to the development of evidence-based policy and practice. This is particularly the case given the paucity of studies looking at this particular area of work with young people.

3. Support work with young people

All of the projects carried out some form of direct work with individual young people in order to support them towards achieving positive outcomes. This work delivered holistic support to young people through specialist casework and immigration advice.

Before exploring the range of activities and direct work undertaken by projects, it is important to first of all understand the context within which this work began with young people and the challenges that they faced. This chapter starts by exploring these challenges and then goes on to explore how projects worked with young people and whether their initial aspirations for working with young people were met.

Understanding the challenges faced by the young people

In the initial phases of the evaluation, interviews with project and local authority staff and with young people themselves identified a range of challenges that young people had faced, and were continuing to face, in their lives once in the UK. These included:

- **Trauma:** young people, particularly those seeking asylum, very often experienced traumatic events in their country of origin or on their way to the UK. This trauma affected their mental health and their ability to cope and function, adversely impacting on their ability to engage with the processes involved in resolving their immigration status. Project staff reported having witnessed behaviours indicative of PTSD and depression during support sessions with them. One young person explained:

> " *I was really, really stressed because I've been waiting a really long time. I was wondering about my hair, it starting falling [out] from the stress.* "
>
> Young Person

- **Lack of trust in authorities:** some young people had experienced anxieties and were sometimes re-traumatised by events since arriving in the country. These largely related to interactions with UK authorities and some of the people involved in processing their status and/or caring for them. Interviews identified where young people were repeatedly challenged and questioned by local authority staff and carers and not being believed or trusted.

> " *[There] seems to be this culture of disbelief... just the assumption that young people are working illegally or they're doing something they're not supposed to be.* "
>
> Project staff member

- **Variability of legal representation on asylum and immigration cases:** Young people and project staff explained that some solicitors did not take enough time to consider specific needs in relation to language, comprehension of the process and emotional wellbeing. This was reported to have negatively impacted the quality of immigration applications made and subsequent outcomes. The risk of poor-quality legal representation was reported to be higher in cases where young people were referred to solicitors by the local authority or by family or friends.

- **Acclimatisation to life in the UK:** arriving in the UK had been particularly daunting for the young people. Young people explained how difficult it was not knowing English and how to undertake basic tasks or access support in the country.

- **Inability to work or engage in educational and social activities:** young people were rarely able to undertake paid employment and had limited opportunities to develop their skills and undertake positive activities to improve their wellbeing. In some cases, this was due to the inevitable anxiety of not knowing what the future held, whilst they waited long periods for their immigration application to be processed. In others, there were initial delays in identifying and accessing educational opportunities at college, with young people normally having to wait until the start of the next academic term.

> " *I've been so busy to focus on my own case... I hope that after this I'll go back to* "
> *do some football, sports, anything to do with that... I missed a few weeks from*
> *college, not going there, because I really felt so off when I heard I couldn't do the*
> *apprenticeship. I felt useless.*
>
> Young person

- **Lack of awareness of own status and need for support:** project staff highlighted that some of the young people they were seeking to support would not be aware that they had insecure immigration status. This would be the case if the young person had been taken into care from birth parents who themselves had insecure immigrations status, had a work or study visa or were EU citizens. Such young people may not have faced the challenges described above to the same extent as those seeking asylum, but would need support to understand, come to terms with and address their immigration status.

Social and cultural opportunities were at times limited and depended on the young person's nationality and language and if there was an existing migrant community in the local area where they could be accommodated.

On a more positive note, in these initial interviews young people shared their aspirations for the future. They explained how they wanted to develop their skills and contribute to society in a myriad of ways such as by studying ICT at university, developing a career as a plumber, supporting other young people as a football coach, or by writing an autobiography to raise awareness of the experiences of refugees.

> " *I want to be something in the future. I want to enjoy my life here and then, yes,* "
> *help with other people as well, with the communities and everything else, as*
> *much as I can.*
>
> Young person

Given the range of challenges faced by these young people and the complex picture in terms of their legal entitlements, it is not hard to imagine the difficulties faced by the projects in designing and delivering programmes to overcome these challenges and best support the young people.

The initial interviews with project and local authority staff identified shared aspirations for projects to improve the support provided to young people. These were focused on two key areas:

- **Providing specialist casework and immigration advice:** interviewees spoke of the need for projects' direct work with young people to fill gaps in social worker and solicitor capacity in terms of providing specialist immigration casework to young people. Project staff aspired to build on their existing casework and advice services and, in some instances, this included employing specialist qualified immigration advisors to undertake casework.

- **Delivering holistic support:** local authority and project staff alike were keen that the projects focused on supporting young people to settle into their new local area and on improving their

mental health and well-being. The projects were thought to be well placed to do this given their experience of working with such young people and their connections with other voluntary sector services.

The ways in which the projects developed their work with young people to address these challenges and aspirations is described and appraised below.

Building trust with young people

The young people interviewed spoke very positively about the project staff, highlighting their friendly and open approach which enabled them to feel comfortable and secure so that they felt they could place their trust in them. Local authority and project staff suggested that this, in turn, enabled young people to articulate their needs and concerns more clearly thus opening up a route to support from both local authority and project workers. Projects used a number of practices to build this trust with young people including:

- **Taking opportunities to reach out through other services and group settings:** Project staff who delivered direct support to young people made a point of being present at other group activities and sessions run by the project organisation or other charities. For two projects this involved offering a formal drop-in surgery at these settings where they triaged young people who needed further one-to-one support. In the case of the other projects, staff were able to informally chat to, and observe, young people to gauge how they were getting on.

- **Utilising time spent together around provision of direct support:** Young people often got further opportunities to get to know project staff by virtue of some of the support provided. This was particularly the case where staff were travelling to interviews and Home Office appointments with the young people.

- **Keeping in regular contact:** Project staff highlighted how they regularly checked in with young people by phone or text to see how they were and to remind them of support opportunities available to them. This contact took place regularly and not just when there might have be an update on the young person's immigration status. Where there were particular issues, or initially after referral, project staff reported visiting young people in their accommodation or a public place nearby. One project staff member explained:

> " *It's much easier to get people to engage if you're able to build up a relationship with them, which involves seeing them, or speaking with them as regularly as possible and not just where there's an update. Just to check, to be able to check in and to be able to keep encouraging them to engage with mental health support.* "
>
> Project staff member

- **Stressing and exploiting independence from statutory bodies:** interview findings from young people and project staff suggested that the projects' independent position from statutory services contributed to the trusting relationships that were able to flourish and develop. Being entirely independent of the Home Office removed some of the power imbalances between staff and young people, which made it easier for trust to be established. This was especially the case for those young people who already had negative experiences with the Home Office and/or their local authority. Local authority and project staff suggested there were key differences between their roles that made this possible. For example, social workers, in particular, are involved in decision making that affects the young people and have a duty to be professional and apolitical

in explaining these decisions. Project staff had more freedom to explain why things may be happening to a young person and to listen to their concerns, regardless of whether they related to the local authorities' duties. Vignette One, below, sets out an example of how a project worker was able to use their independence to build trust with one young person, as part of a pathway to securing them better support.

Vignette One: Saleh – Exploiting independence to build trust

Saleh was referred to the project in 2017 by the local authority. He initially came for legal advice with his asylum case. Along with supporting Saleh with his asylum claim the project identified that he had additional support needs, including wanting to be in education. His access to education had been delayed due to the local authority wanting to carry out an age assessment on him.

The local authority had placed him with a foster carer that he was very unhappy with due to the way he was being treated. His project support worker put in a formal complaint against the foster carer and it was agreed he could be moved on to another placement.

Due to his experiences with the local authority, Saleh did not feel like he could trust his social workers and he would always refer to the project as his source of support. In an interview with NCB he expressed how the project team felt like family to him now.

He's now very happy and settled in his new semi-independent accommodation. He is also now at college after being granted Refugee Status in 2018 and he has a good network of friends. He was also supported by the project to help his family join him in the UK under the refugee family reunion rules.

The project supported him above and beyond what the local authority was able to offer him and actively advocated for his needs.

Overall, these aspects of practice appeared to be consistent features across all of the projects. However, some contextual factors may have affected the specific approach to initially engaging with young people and the extent to which this was successful. Being able to reach out to young people in different settings relied upon projects running the relevant groups themselves or there being a vibrant local charity sector working with refugees and migrants. This was not present across all of the projects. Where projects had agreed formal processes with the local authority for young people to be referred to them, this also meant projects were more reliant on getting to know young people during the provision of support provided, rather than before. One member of project staff suggested that some young people referred to the services in this way were more suspicious of the project staff initially:

> *"For the historic ones that have been referred to us by social services, they're just a bit more suspicious, because they've been referred to us by social services. It takes them some time to understand that we don't work with social services, that we are there to support, that the young person is the boss for us, that that's where the instructions come from. Trying to build this image of, like, we are a team, everyone works for your best interests, that they can talk to us about things that they might not want to talk with social services, and that's okay because we're not going to share it, unless they give us consent to do that."*
>
> Project staff member

The structure of individual local authorities also had implications for the importance of the project's independence in building trust with young people. Some partner local authorities had age and human rights assessments conducted by the same teams as those organising their day to day care, potentially affecting levels of trust between young people and social workers. For young people in these areas, the fact the projects were independent of the local authority was particularly important.

The wide range of approaches used by the projects to build trust with young people put them in good stead to continue to do this throughout the pandemic. Some opportunities to meet in person were not available due to the lockdowns so projects were more reliant on checking in with young people by phone or text and increasingly depended on the rapport and trust they had developed with young people before the imposition of lockdowns.

Accommodating language and communication needs

Many of the young people the projects worked with spoke very little, if any, English and organisations were proactive in ensuring that their communication with young people was as effective as possible. Steps taken included:

- **Using interpreters and translation services:** Projects used interpreters to translate written materials into the young person's first language wherever possible. Young people interviewed were particularly appreciative of this, especially those who reported a negative experience of interacting with statutory services where they did not have access to interpreters.

- **Using group and peer-to-peer work to aid information sharing:** One project delivered parts of their immigration service to young people through groups of peers from similar backgrounds, enabling them to support each other to understand some of the issues and processes they were navigating. Projects also sometimes paired young people who shared a language to interpret for one another.

Accommodating mental health needs

Many of the young people that the projects worked with may have experienced significant trauma in their country of origin or on their journey to the UK. Project staff also highlighted that, where young people had negative experiences in their interaction with statutory organisations in the UK, this can negatively impact on young people's ability to communicate their needs effectively. Project staff took a number of common steps to address the impact of language and trauma on young people's ability to communicate as follows:

- **Showing understanding and patience around keeping appointments:** Project staff highlighted how some young people often struggled to have healthy sleep patterns and/or effective time management skills which may have resulted from trauma they experienced. In addition, where young people were not engaging with education, they also lacked structure in their lives. In response to this, project staff kept in touch with the young person and showed them flexibility if they did not attend an appointment at the agreed time. As one project staff member explained:

> " *I've got a young person at the moment, he's sofa surfing with friends, but he's sleeping in the day because he is scared to sleep at night because of the flashbacks and the dreams he's getting. That's why he can't come to an appointment at 10am because that's when he's going to bed… It's important to have that understanding around how mental health symptoms can translate into practical things of why they're finding it difficult to attend appointments at [the scheduled] time, to remember what appointments they have and getting confused and things like that.* "
>
> Project staff member

- **Providing space to share experiences when young people are ready:** When young people attended appointments, project staff used the time to build relationships and address any wider issues, such as trauma, that the young person might have experienced which may be pertinent to their immigration application.

- **Promoting good mental health self-care:** Young people were provided with informal advice and information around sleep hygiene and other aspects of coping with trauma through one-to-one and groups session. Two of the projects collaborated with a named mental health specialist to support such activity and facilitate referrals to treatment.

- **Identifying when further mental health support may be needed:** Project staff were aware that some young people needed specialist mental health support in order to engage with the immigration system and other services. Where this was required, they worked with social workers to support referral to NHS and voluntary sector mental health treatment.

Whilst all projects took similar steps to address young people's mental health needs to enable them to engage with the wider support on offer, this could present challenges if a young person's mental health needs were acute. This was a particular issue for older young people who generally had more complex needs and who may be receiving crisis intervention. Project staff also stressed that uncertainty over immigration status often contributed to young people's mental health needs and resultant challenges in communication. They suggested that in some instances this could affect young people's willingness to engage with mental health treatment where they felt it would not deal with the root cause of their anxiety.

Supporting navigation of immigration processes

Projects used their relationships with young people and their expert knowledge to support and help navigate young people through the immigration system. As one young person described:

> *[The project staff member] was explaining to me what's going to happen. He was telling me if you get a negative decision what's the next steps [are]: 'I'll email your solicitor, and tell her what's the next step after that. What do you do after that? What's the next step?' She said, 'I'm going to phone them, and make an appointment. We'll go together.*

Young person

Generally, support was provided in three main ways:

- **Expert guidance:** All project staff teams collectively had a high level of knowledge and expertise on the legal requirements and processes required at each stage. Project staff were able to explain the best course of action for young people involved in varying, and sometimes complex, cases. The projects employed Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) accredited advisors to ensure they could do this effectively. Young people and local authority practitioners were very grateful to have this level of expertise available, and they identified a clear gap in such expertise among social care staff already working with the young people. This was particularly the case where non-asylum-seeking young people had insecure immigration status, as the appropriate route to settlement was generally less obvious and relevant processes even less familiar for social workers.

- **Supporting communication with solicitors:** Support included liaising with solicitors to inform them of what they need to be doing or advising the young person on the meaning and importance of particular correspondence from the solicitor, where the solicitor had not done this themselves. They also made referral where there were no project staff with the requisite OISC accreditation level to advice on a particular process.

- **Securing access to suitable legal representation:** Where the representation provided by young people's existing solicitor fell well below the standard expected, projects worked with the young person and their social worker to arrange to appoint a new solicitor. Projects also worked with local authorities to ensure young people accessed better quality solicitors from the start of their case. Projects did this by advising and training local authority staff on the characteristics of good representation for young people. Other projects were involved directly with the young person at an early stage themselves either referring them to a solicitor via their casework service or delivering legally aided advice themselves.

Vignette Two, below, sets out an example of how a project supported one young person with expert guidance on their immigration case and secured them access to suitable legal representation.

Vignette Two: Nouman – Supporting navigation of immigration processes

Nouman arrived in the UK as an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC). When he was referred to the project his asylum claim had been rejected. He had previously been granted UASC leave, but he was now 18 and without any leave. He was in the care of his father so he was not entitled to any care leaver support from the local authority. He was experiencing the lasting effects of the trauma he had been through, and during the course of the project working with him he found out he had suffered a bereavement when a family member was killed in his home country.

Nouman already had a solicitor working on his case when he was referred, and the project support workers realised they were not providing the best advice for his case. They were also not communicating effectively with him. They were advising him to borrow a significant amount of money he did not have to pay for an application for limited leave to remain. It was then that the project stepped in to explain there was another option for him, and that it was free to go through the asylum process with legal aid. They helped Nouman to find a new solicitor who was known to the project and they supported him with creating a strong claim. This included writing a detailed letter and testifying in his case about his evident trauma. His new solicitor also commissioned an expert witness report on his mental health that his support worker provided evidence for.

Nouman was granted Refugee Status following the case and was able to continue living with his father and brother. Once granted status the project discharged his case but they were aware that he was very happy about his future, continuing his studies and looking to find work in the city.

Provision of expert advice and supporting communication with solicitors was well embedded within projects and delivered consistently. The extent to which projects were able to secure young people's access to suitable legal representation was, however, dependent on them being in contact with the young person soon after their arrival into the country. By the end of the evaluation period all projects had established some form of agreement with local authorities on prompt referral. Some local authority staff, however, expressed reservations regarding establishing such a process, citing the fact the project was not a formally commissioned service. Project staff stressed in interviews that when a young person had already instructed a solicitor that was not known to be specialist in supporting young people, this would involve more work for the project in supporting two-way communication between them or in going through a formal process to change the solicitors.

Holistic support

Young people stated that they really valued the project teams' responsive approach and that they could depend on the project workers to support them to meet their holistic range of needs. As one young person said:

> *If I have any kind of problem I go in to them; like I was telling her my body's aching, I have a medical problem and they're helping me with that. I live close to here so I can just come in.*
>
> Young person

The three projects that aimed to offer some form of holistic support or mentoring delivered three main categories of activity as part of this:

- **Practical advice and support:** Project staff provided advice with a range of practical issues such as cooking, travel, managing relationships with housemates etc. Project staff explained how young people's needs in this regard depended on what aspects of education they had missed during their childhood, what type of placement they were in and their access to informal support networks. Following the onset of the pandemic and as opportunities to meet face-to-face reduced, the young people supported by the projects were faced with a range of new challenges. Projects used COVID-19 emergency funding to help ensure young people had access to technology and connectivity they needed in order to stay in touch with friends, project staff and other services. They also provided support with booking GP and other appointments and giving them reminders of when these were to take place.

- **Facilitating young people's interaction with peers and positive activities:** Projects supported young people's access to social interaction and peer support by organising groups and activities such as day trips out of the cities, youth clubs for young migrants and photography skills sessions. They also signposted to other community activities such as football and boxing clubs. As indicated above, such connections with opportunities for positive activities were a key part of the process in developing trusting relationships between project staff and young people.

- **Facilitating access to education:** All of the projects supported young people to access education which, for many, was in further education settings. This primarily included English language courses and vocational education. Project staff supported young people to identify courses, complete applications and negotiate enrolment processes (some of which were restrictive in terms of when young people could join courses, with exceptions secured in some cases to avoid the young person waiting).

Vignette Three, below, sets out an example of how a project provided practical advice and support to one young person, as well as facilitating their interaction with peers and positive activities.

The extent to which each of these featured in the support provided to young people, and how they were delivered, appeared to be dependent on the specific project and local authority context. Whilst one project had a range of other groups and activities to refer young people on to, another had to provide more of these opportunities themselves as they were not available from other organisations. The relationship with the local authority was also a factor with some projects able to dovetail their support with that provided by social workers and personal advisers more than others (see 'colleagues in a team around the young person', below).

Vignette Three: Idriss – Practical Support and Accessing Positive Activities

Idriss came to the project's drop-in service because he had received a letter saying he was over 25 years old, but he was 16 years old. He had travelled to the UK on false documents which showed the wrong date of birth making him 26 years old. Idriss was very confused when he arrived at the drop in. The Home Office had placed him in the city in asylum accommodation with three older adults. During his journey to the UK he had contracted Malaria and spent time being street homeless in another country.

The local authority refused to accept Idriss into care because they thought his documents were not genuine. His project support worker advocated for him to have an age assessment, which they agreed to, however it was more stringent than usual and took considerably longer than average.

While they were waiting for the outcome of his age assessment his project support worker spent time supporting him practically. They took him on the bus from his accommodation to the library and helped him get a library card and showed him how to take books out. They introduced him to another young person who spoke his language and lived locally and signposted him to a community football club and a youth group which he attended regularly.

After six weeks, Idriss was assessed as 16 years old and able to be taken into the care of the local authority. His support worker continued to be there throughout the asylum process, referring him to a good solicitor, attending his substantive interview and subsequent appeal hearing. She was there to support him every step of the way and to explain things to him so that he understood everything that was happening to him and about his case.

Idriss was granted Refugee Status after his appeal and continues to have a positive relationship with his support worker who he speaks of very highly. He is very ambitious and when we met him he expressed hopes to write a book about his experiences one day.

Whilst the flexibility and responsiveness discussed above were clearly appreciated by young people and local authorities as a way of securing holistic support, projects also noted that this could be time intensive. The number of referrals taken from local authorities, particularly those which involved working with younger clients who had not reached crises, had to be restricted to fit the funding provided and ensure organisations could still support those in need. We note in Chapter 3, below, how some young people would expect support with personal or asylum issues from project staff at a group session (where it could not be delivered). This highlights another potential issue, that providing ever greater levels of flexibility may make it harder to manage young people's expectations and place unhelpful pressure on project staff. This also highlights the importance of managing demand. One project introduced a system of 'second tier' support where a young person would have an allocated caseworker at the project but would be supported indirectly through advice provided through their social worker. Indeed, it is important to remember that local authorities have a range of responsibilities to deliver aspects of this holistic support themselves. In developing relationships with local authorities,

projects sought to use some of their influence to improve the way in which this is delivered, potentially helping to control demands on the projects and their staff.

Summary

This chapter of the report started by setting out the main challenges faced by the young people prior to becoming involved with their respective project. These challenges included: exposure to traumatic events prior to coming to this country; a lack of trust in authorities; variability of legal representation; not knowing or understanding English and; an inability to work or engage in educational and social activities.

The initial interviews with project and local authority staff identified shared aspirations for projects to improve the support provided to young people in two key areas: providing specialist casework and immigration advice (e.g. by filling gaps in social worker and solicitor capacity in terms of providing specialist immigration advice to young people) and delivering holistic support to young people to help them settle into their new local area and to improve their mental health and well-being.

Findings from the research show that projects were successful in meeting these aspirations. Projects invested significant staff time in building strong relationships with the young people they were supporting. They used their independence from the local authority and other statutory agencies, along with capacity to deliver positive activities, to get to know these young people in the round and to build trust with them. This meant that project staff could get to understand what was important to the young person and help them move forward with their lives.

As well as using their expertise to support young people with their immigration cases, project staff offered flexible and holistic support that responded to their diverse and immediate practical needs. As part of this they supported young people to access social and educational opportunities and health services. They also helped young people to get the most out of their legal representation.

The effectiveness of these aspects of support were impacted by several factors. The range of other charity services and activities available to the young people determined the number of opportunities projects had to reach out to young people initially, to build their trust. This also affected delivery of holistic support and the extent to which they had to deliver positive activities for young people themselves rather than referring on to another organisation. Similarly, the range of support offered by local authorities was a factor, with some local authorities describing more provision than others for positive activities to help young people acclimatise to life in the UK.

Provision of holistic support required significant resources and impacted on the number of young people projects could support at any time. This highlights the importance of collaboration with other charities and with local authorities to manage demand and ensure support is well targeted and communicated.

Figure 2 below, provides a visual summary of how approaches and activities described in this chapter interact with each other, with external factors and implementation challenges identified. The arrows linking aspects of support show how these reinforced each other – for example, building trust enabled communication and mental health needs to be better understood and communicated, which in turn meant that support to navigate the immigration process and holistic support could be delivered more effectively. Other activities offered by the organisation or local charities supported both the delivery of holistic support and the process of building trust. Where this was less present and the scope of the local authority support offered to young people was more limited, the delivery of holistic support could require disproportionate project staff resource, a significant implementation challenge.

Figure 2: Aspects of Support Work with Young People
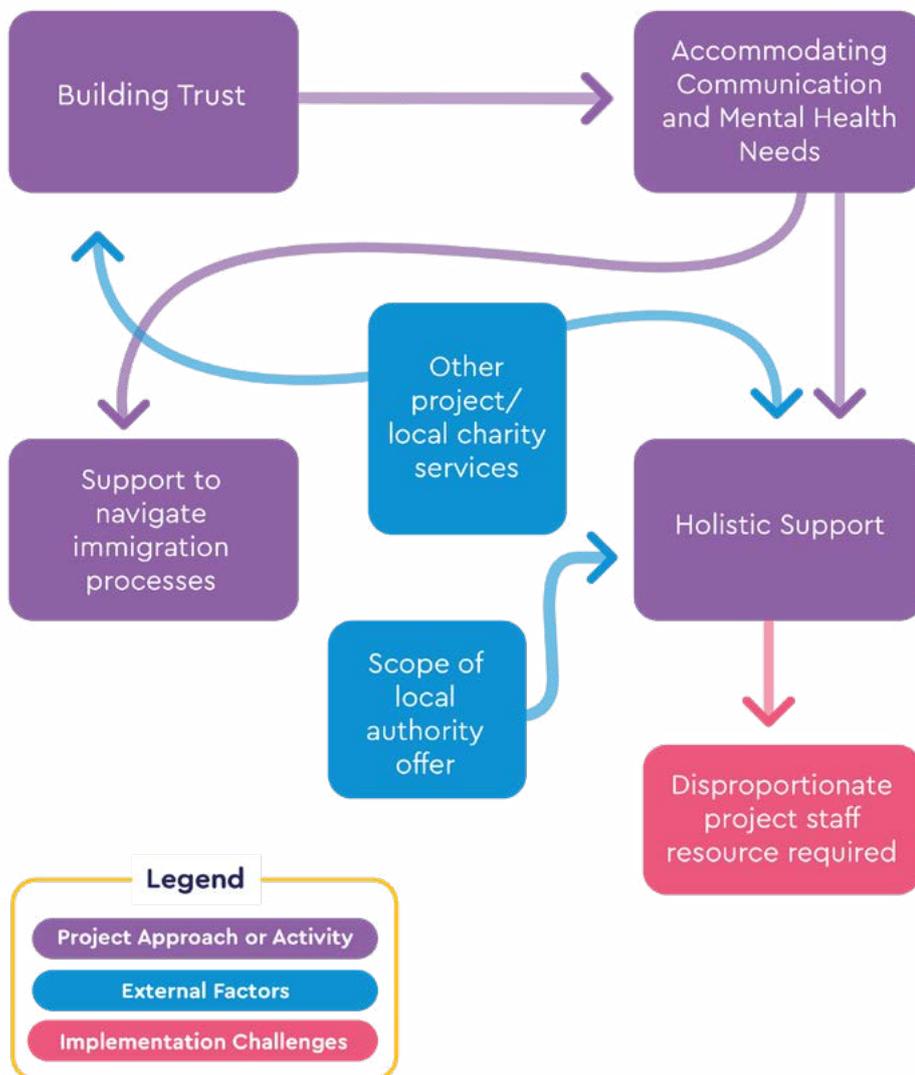
4. Collaboration with local authorities

A key focus of the evaluation was to understand how the funded voluntary sector-led projects collaborated with their respective local authorities. This chapter begins by presenting findings from the initial stages of the evaluation in terms of the aspirations towards joint working and the anticipated challenges that this would bring. It then moves on to describe the collaboration that took place across the projects and highlights the enablers and barriers to supporting young people, as well as project achievements.

Anticipated challenges in joint working

Projects and their local authority partners identified a range of potential challenges that projects might face in coordinating support for the young people and giving them certainty for the future. These included:

- **Capacity constraints in children's social care:** project and local authority staff acknowledge that children's social care services faced pressures which meant it could often be difficult to provide the best support to all of the children and young people they worked with. They saw this as a result of reduced funding and increased demand across the full range of their responsibilities (not just those towards care leavers with insecure immigration status). We also heard of (and observed across the course of the evaluation) turnover of children's social care staff. In addition, project staff reported that in recent years there had been fluctuating numbers of migrant young people locally, which presented challenges for both themselves and the local authority. These capacity and turnover issues served to amplify the challenges set out below.

- **Interpreting young people's entitlements:** both project and local authority staff anticipated inconsistencies in how young people's support entitlements might be interpreted. Project staff, in particular, described a reluctance on the part of local authorities in some instances to provide some forms of support for young people which projects believed young people were entitled to.

- **Social worker knowledge on the immigration process:** project and local authority staff reflected on the knowledge that was required on the part of social workers and personal advisors to ensure that care leavers with insecure immigration status get the support they need to regularise their status. Whilst key aspects of knowledge regarding when, and how, young people should be supported in their immigration applications are required by statutory guidance, interviewees recognised that most social workers struggle in practical terms to keep their knowledge up-to-date. This was particularly the case for staff who were not part of a dedicated migration team due to the limited need for it across their caseloads.

> *The asylum side of things is so complicated, that if you're only dealing with perhaps one asylum seeker in a caseload of 18, you might struggle to have the time to know what you need to know in order to be able to support them, and... it's such a life-changing thing, isn't it?*
>
> Local authority staff member

- **Confidence in decision-making:** project staff expressed concerns about confidence levels among social workers in making the right decisions for young people. They noted that the complexities of immigration law, combined with the perceived pressure on public agencies to restrict support

for migrants (as a result of the 'hostile environment policy')[5], left social workers conflicted in terms of fulfilling their duties towards these young people. These concerns were echoed by some of the local authority staff who referred to supporting migrant young people as a daunting area of practice and one where social workers, PAs and carers can struggle to understand how their responsibilities to the Home Office interact with those they have towards the young people in their care.

- **Identification of non-asylum-seeking young people who need support and impact of the EUSS:** A key challenge anticipated across projects was the impact of the recent European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS). At the start of the evaluation period, the timeline and detail of the scheme's implementation, and what this meant for local authorities supporting care leavers who were citizens of EU countries, was unclear. This increased the numbers of young people who were not asylum-seekers but still needed support with their immigration status. Local authorities appeared to struggle to identify such young people promptly, as nationality and immigration status data is not routinely recorded when children enter care.

Despite the challenges above, both project and local authority staff expressed strong hopes at the outset for their future collaborative efforts in supporting young people. They stressed in particular the hope that projects would contribute to:

- **Building capacity in local authorities:** Projects were keen to work with local authority staff to improve young people's experience of the care and support they provide as well as their responsiveness to their particular needs. Projects set out to address this in a number of ways including through provision of training and advice and engaging in collaborative discussions with a range of local authority staff to meet young people's support needs. Local authorities, for their part, expressed particular interest in using the experience of being involved with the projects to increase consistency of knowledge across the social work profession to best meet the needs of these young people.

- **Improving policies and processes:** Projects also expressed their desire to use their influence to change policies and processes so that young people with a range of immigration issues could be more promptly identified and receive more consistent and timely support.

- **Promoting early intervention:** all of the project and local authority staff interviewed highlighted the importance of early intervention through projects to ensure that young people's immigration status could be resolved in a timely manner, particularly given that their entitlements reduce once they turn 18 years old. This was deemed to be critical for those young people only granted UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child) leave initially, as once they reach 18 they no longer have leave to remain in the country and are at risk of losing their entitlement to support. The projects aimed to address this by raising awareness amongst social workers of this issue, developing arrangements with local authorities to refer relevant young people to the project, and targeting casework support to younger arrivals.

Over the course of the evaluation, interviews identified a range of ways in which projects worked with local authorities to improve the levels of support provided to young people. The paragraphs below summarise the key activities that took place.

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5   A series of policy interventions intended to make it progressively harder for irregular migrants to live, work and access services in the UK, and to emphasise individuals' responsibility to prove that they are in the UK legally. Now known as the "compliant environment". See Williams (2020, 37–38, 170)

Provision of training for professionals and carers

Provision of training sessions for professionals and carers was the key method used by all projects to build capacity in local authorities. Over the course of the evaluation, projects collectively provided training to several hundred professionals. This typically covered key aspects and stages of the immigration application processes, the experiences and needs of young people, and what professionals can do to support them. In the second half of the evaluation period, a briefing on the EU Settlement Scheme and actions needed from local authority staff was also provided. In addition, two of the projects established agreements with the local authority to provide mandatory training to newly qualified social workers. Training was also delivered to other social workers, PAs, foster carers, Independent reviewing officers and police officers.

Local authority staff identified the strengths of the training as follows:

- Training content was tailored to the prior levels of knowledge of particular teams.

> " *We were trying to really focus on the social worker's role in supporting an unaccompanied minor. It was the first time that we'd done it in that format. The team said it was really helpful... We've had other providers come in and do immigration training, and I think sometimes people have gone away and just gone, 'That - what happened there?!' It's just gone over their head, because there's a lot of legal stuff, and actually a social worker needs to have some idea, to get a sense of if the solicitor [is] doing the right thing, but they don't have to know what the legislation is. They just have to know the right questions to ask.* "

<div align="center">Local authority staff member</div>

- In addition, it took account of the local authority context and thus allowed for information to be contextualised in relation to local services and communities and to refer to relevant local authority policies.

- It provided an opportunity for projects to explain how they could access ongoing advice from them so that professionals could check their understanding before putting their knowledge into practice. Given the projects' independence from the statutory sector, it also provided opportunities to initiate discussions on contentious national policies such as those relating to the 'hostile environment'.

- Training was usually delivered at team meetings which facilitated attendance on a mandatory rather than elective basis.

- In some training, young people were involved and were able to make clear the practical impact of poor practice on the wellbeing and outcomes of this group

Project staff highlighted some additional enablers and barriers to the effectiveness of training. By reaching out to foster carers, PAs and police officers, some of whom had limited awareness of the experiences of migrant young people, project staff had the opportunity to challenge negative attitudes and inappropriate language that they felt could adversely affect young people's care and support. They could also use tailored sessions with individual local authorities to explain particular local challenges, such as the variable levels of support offered by different solicitors in the area.

Some training delivered by several of the projects, however, was attended on an elective basis and had limited uptake. Project staff expressed doubts that it would have sufficient impact on improving

practice with young people. With sessions delivered at team meetings, some project staff felt that this did not provide them with enough time to cover the necessary content potentially limiting its impact. Given the gaps in knowledge and awareness highlighted, it is important to consider the potential implications of staff not fully benefiting from the training on offer. Those many front-line staff, for instance, may be continuing to miss opportunities to support care leavers with insecure immigration status and may be harming their wellbeing through negative attitudes and language.

Advising social workers and PAs on individual cases

Most local authority staff were appreciative of the ad-hoc advice they could access from the projects. This advice supported their decision-making on immigration case work for a range of young people with insecure immigration status, including those not directly supported by the projects. Such advice would typically have been sought and provided via email. Local authority staff reported that the projects were very responsive in this regard.

> *They've been really helpful in dropping whatever they have and supporting me with some of the queries that I've had, and some of them are quite complicated... [They would say] that I can look into this, give me 24 hours, I'll get back to you, it's something that we can look at supporting.*

<div align="right">Local authority staff member</div>

One project developed a formalised offer of second tier support for young people. Under this arrangement it was agreed with the local authority that some young people referred by them would be indirectly supported by way of advice provided to their social worker. This arrangement enabled individual project staff to understand the wider context of the young person that they were advising. Project staff thought that this would enhance the quality of their advice, whilst allowing them to retain capacity to work directly with a smaller group of young people.

Another project delivered advice to social workers via regular drop-in sessions facilitated by its OISC accredited advisor at the local authority offices. This was well received by the local authority and was reported to enable more constructive advice.

> *I know that feedback from the PAs and social workers is that it's just having that opportunity to troubleshoot, it's worth its weight in gold [because if] you can go online, it's a minefield sometimes to try and pinpoint what you need to do a bit with a certain case.*

<div align="right">Local authority staff member</div>

These sessions stopped being delivered in the latter stages of the evaluation as a result of the pandemic. Project staff noted, however, that after these sessions had stopped being delivered, they had started to get more information and advice queries via email. Whilst this did not enable troubleshooting to be as efficient as at the drop-in sessions, project staff were heartened that social workers were still accessing and acting on their advice.

Whilst all projects sought to offer some form of advice for local authority colleagues, take up of this varied. One project arranged drop-in sessions for social workers to advise on supporting young people to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) but saw less take up of these than they had initially hoped. Project staff suggested that this may have been because staff did not have the initial awareness and insight needed to understand that young people on their caseload might need support

with this. It also perhaps serves to illustrate the importance placed by local authority staff on being able to access advice via email at any time. With fixed drop-in sessions, such flexibility could not be offered. The project staff did find themselves providing more advice by email, nearer the deadline for the scheme, as did staff from the other projects.

One local authority staff member drew a comparison between the email and phone advice provided by project staff and the access they had to colleagues from CAMHS and the virtual school head. These colleagues were co-located with them and gave ad-hoc advice in person. They suggested that the advice service provided by projects could be further strengthened though co-locating project staff within the LA. This reference to the projects in the context of other statutory services underlines how critical some local authority staff saw the role of the projects in supporting the young people they worked with. Full-time co-location of relevant project staff with social workers could, in theory, provide the benefits of a drop-in session with the flexibility of ad-hoc email advice. This could, however, negatively impact levels of trust between project support workers and young people by limiting opportunities for social workers and project staff to have confidential conversations with their own teams.

Take up also appeared to be potentially impacted by the structure of the local authority services for young people with insecure immigration status and levels of staff expertise. Local authority staff that did not report making use of the projects' advice reported that they already had a strong background and expertise in immigration. They also held responsibility for the initial assessment of, and support for, young people on arrival in the country, including delivery and quality assurance of age assessments. The local authority team whose staff appeared to avail of the advice from the project the most was responsible for all care leavers and they only worked with care leavers with insecure immigration status once they had been assessed by the asylum team. This may have been because that staff who are not officially employed as specialists, or responsible for relevant, potentially legally contentious decisions (such as age/human rights assessments), may be more willing to admit to having gaps in their knowledge.

Coordinating support for individual young people

The projects' aspirations to provide young people with holistic support often meant that division of labour between social workers and PAs on the one hand, and the project's support worker on the other, was not immediately clear. Notwithstanding this, project staff were able, to varying degrees, to coordinate their support for individual young people with local authority colleagues.

There were instances where the support provided by the project and local authority were complementary to each other. For example, project support workers signposted young people to social and leisure activities which some local authority staff saw as being beyond the scope of their own responsibilities. In a number of cases some of these activities were provided by the projects themselves. They also provided advice and guidance to support young people who, whilst recognised by local authority staff to be vulnerable, were not deemed by the local authority to be legally entitled to leaving care support. Local authority staff were particularly appreciative of the fact that the projects were able to provide this extra layer of support and felt confident in referring young people on their caseload to them. In these instances, whilst the existence of the projects may have made their jobs easier, local authority staff did not see it as directly supporting the fulfilment of their legal duties to young people.

Project and local authority staff also reflected on the close relationship that projects had with young people and the benefits this could have in terms of informing and coordinating support across both services. This was particularly the case where projects were supporting young people who were still

looked after. In the case of at least two local authorities and their respective projects, project support workers were able to keep in regular contact with the young person's social worker and/or PA to coordinate support. In such cases the opportunity of this regular interaction was also used to share, with the young person's permission, information about emerging needs. This included disclosures by young people to project support workers about mental ill health, or issues with accommodation. On some occasions these disclosures were accompanied with a request to act on the information. This was seen by both parties as making best use of the stronger relationship the young person had with the support worker from the project. It helped to ensure that the social worker was aware of a young person's experiences and needs which they otherwise would not have known about. In one instance, for example, it was agreed that the project officer was best placed to refer a young person to mental health services, on behalf of the social worker.

Local authority staff acknowledged that the projects were supplementing statutory provision and, in some instances, providing support that would normally be the responsibility of a social worker, foster carer or PA. Project staff, for example, supported young people to change solicitors or to access college as well as taking the place of local authority staff in attending solicitor and Home Office appointments with the young people. As highlighted in the previous chapter, some of these activities afforded project staff more opportunities to build trust with the young person. Local authority staff also valued the fact that the project could step in and share tasks to ensure the young people had reliable support regardless of social worker and PA capacity. One local authority staff member said:

> " *I think the challenge is that social workers, even if you want to do the best practice yourself and go to every single appointment, you've got to face the reality, because writing a statement sometimes takes five or six appointments. If they're two hours each, and you've got 18 young people, there really just isn't the time in the day to do it!... I just think having [the project] on board will mean that... if anything gets missed or whatever, there's another pair of eyes to pick up on something.* "

Local authority staff member

The interaction between local authority and project workers illustrated above can best be described as colleagues in a team around the young person. However, this was not as clearly evident in practice in some of the local authorities and their respective projects. In the case of two local authorities, whilst the project's support workers were undertaking some similar activities, this was not explicitly coordinated with local authority staff as communication was reported to be limited and one directional. Project staff suggested that these local authorities may have been facing more challenges than others in terms of demand and staff turnover, with staff perhaps not having the time or confidence to collaborate with the projects. From our interviews with the local authority staff members, we also observed that they undertook a wider range of work with care leavers who had insecure immigration status. They may therefore have seen less to gain than others in working closely with the projects.

Another challenge was being able to strike the right balance in terms of the amount of capacity projects dedicated to supplementing local authority capacity. Project staff, whilst willing to be flexible in the interest of individual young people, were cautious about taking on too much. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the provision of holistic support was resource-intensive and it limited the number of young people that they could directly support. A member of project staff gave the example of having to attend too many solicitor meetings with a young person, when their foster carer should have been able to do this. Local authority staff acknowledged that this was an issue they wanted to address.

Project staff also stressed the importance of maintaining their independence from the local authority as a means of building and maintaining trust with the young person. This meant that, whilst they recognised the benefits of communication and coordination with local authority staff, they were reluctant to identify as being colleagues with equal or equivalent responsibility for the young person. They highlighted the differences between their roles and that of social workers, in particular that the social worker was tasked with making decisions about the young person's support on behalf of the local authority.

It is, of course, important to reflect on what these insights may tell us about the quality and adequacy of support typically provided by local authorities to care leavers with insecure immigration status. It may be seen as concerning, for example, that social workers were reliant on the projects for fully understanding individual young peoples needs and to support them (e.g. by accompanying them to solicitors' appointments) through legal processes so critical for their future wellbeing and safety. This reliance could arguably call into question local authorities' ability, capacity or willingness to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities to these young people.

Advocating informally on behalf of the young person

Project and local authority staff reported that advice and coordinating support was often accompanied by the project suggesting or requesting improvements to support for the young person in question. In this way they may be seen as advocating for the young person informally (as opposed to fulfilling the role of advocacy services or legally challenging the local authority). Local authority staff generally accepted that it was part of the role of the project support workers to share their views on the young person's needs and what would be in their best interests. Examples of this working well included a project highlighting a young person's difficulties with their current placement and being moved to one where they were happier, and a project successfully making the case for a young person's Home Office fees to be paid by the local authority. These examples illustrate how the projects used their skills and expertise to advocate for better decision making for individual young people. Vignette Four, below, sets out an example of how a project advocated for a young person to get better support from the local authority. Whilst this example relates to the local authority being persuaded to undertake a very small and specific activity, it underlines the importance of the role of the project in facilitating support. It is probably the most concerning example we heard during the evaluation of suboptimal support from a local authority in relation to an immigration case.

Both project and local authority staff acknowledged that such informal advocacy did not always work well and that caution should be exercised. Some local authority staff members suggested that it was unhelpful for individual PAs and social workers to be challenged on a decision that was taken in line with local authority policy. In one of these cases project staff reportedly had a different interpretation of the law in relation to support for care leavers and they questioned the judgement of the social worker or PA. A local authority staff member said:

> *Our internal policy and procedure may be slightly different and I think sometimes frustrations can happen between the PA and the [project] worker if they're not in agreement of what [the young person's] entitlement is. It's not anything that affects positive working together, it's just we know we have to acknowledge the boundaries in the roles.*

<div align="right">Local authority staff member</div>

A project service manager from another area also recognised that this kind of informal advocacy needed careful consideration. They provided an example of a relationship breakdown between a young person and their PA with the young person blaming them for the poor quality of their accommodation.

Together these examples underline the importance of managing young people's expectations and informing them what may or may not be within the control of professionals. They do not mean, of course, that there is no merit in projects challenging local authorities when they do not feel that young people's entitlements are being honoured. It is notable that when defending their decision making to evaluators, local authority staff made reference to the consistency of support between young people and internal local authority policies, rather than directly quoting legislation or statutory guidance. The possibility that weaknesses observed by projects amount to local authorities failing in their duties cannot be ruled out. It is important, however, that any challenges are made in a way that is more likely to lead to positive change than they are to disrupt the relationships at the heart of supporting individual young people.

Vignette Four: David – Informally Advocating on Behalf of the Young Person

David was referred to the project by his PA whilst he was in prison. His birth family, who originated from a commonwealth country in the Caribbean, had tried to regularise his immigration status but their numerous applications had failed. The local authority did not clarify his status whilst he was in care and so they missed an opportunity for him to register as a British National. After he turned 18 this was no longer an option.

David had served a prison term but was not being released because of his immigration status. The project support worker contacted him and supported him to engage with BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees) who eventually succeeded in getting him released on bail.

The project support worker discovered that the Home Office were planning to deport David and advised him and his PA that he would need to appeal against this. The project staff made an Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) application which was successful. They also referred him to a solicitor and supported him and his PA to engage with the process and produce relevant evidence of his family life.

The project advocated for David's PA to organise a social worker to visit the family home and write a statement from the perspective of the local authority. Concerns were raised by social services that this was not within their role and there was no clear policy within the LA on providing supporting evidence. The project escalated their concerns and the relevant manager provided a letter. It included their observations and professional opinion on his character, how he has reformed after prison, his living arrangements, and the best interests of the child. Project staff suggested that this will be a strong piece of evidence for his appeal against deportation.

Making formal challenges to decisions

Three out of the four projects continued with their organisation's practice of working with solicitors to challenge potentially unlawful decisions made by local authorities. This normally did not affect day-to-day collaboration between staff from the project and local authority and was sometimes welcomed by those local authority staff.

For care leavers with insecure immigration status, the process that is most open to challenge is age assessments, carried out by social workers. Where a young person did not accept the age determined by the social worker, and where it appeared to project staff that the proper process had not been followed, this was challenged. A challenge would be made through a solicitor and involved sending a pre-action letter to the local authority's legal department. Typically, a project support worker would communicate informally to a social worker that the decision was being challenged. One of the projects directly employed a solicitor to advise and represent their clients on matters of public law, most of which related to age disputes. Another project described how they were using strategic litigation to try to clarify the law on support for care leavers.

Local authority and project staff generally reported that formal challenges did not adversely affect day-to-day relationships between them. This was attributed to a number of factors including, for example, that the challenge was normally dealt with by different people. The degree of mutual respect and professionalism for each other's distinct role in supporting the young people was also noted. One project fulfilled a responsible adult role, with this person accompanying the young person at age assessments carried out by the social worker. Feedback from the local authority staff identified this as good practice, commenting on how much quicker and less disruptive it made the process for the young person. Another local authority staff member suggested that legal challenge in the form of a Judicial Review (JR) could help them improve their practice.

> " *We don't always agree. Sometimes they've JR'd us on age assessments and things. But I've said to [the project manager], I welcome the challenge, because actually with challenge, with scrutiny, we get better at what we do.* "
>
> Local authority staff member

Staff from another project, however, highlighted how their relationship with one part of the local authority had not been as warm and collaborative as their relationship with another part. They suggested that this may have been because they had regularly facilitated legal challenges on the age assessments which that team had carried out. One project initially proposed that, to avoid potential conflict with the local authority, it would not accept referrals of age-disputed young people. This decision was reversed after many such young people presented at the project's services with no other sources of support. The project and local authority were still able to collaborate in many of the ways described in this chapter.

One project reported that they were planning to work with a solicitor to undertake strategic litigation to clarify legislation that had been the subject of disagreements with local authority staff. Given that such challenges can have an impact on working relationships, and take up resource that could be used supporting young people, it is perhaps unfortunate that such an intervention was needed. It could be argued that this may have been avoided, either by local authorities being willing to interpret the law more generously, or by the Department for Education issuing clearer guidance. That such challenges are seen as necessary by the projects perhaps underlines some the systemic issues in children's social care highlighted at the beginning of this chapter.

Advising on local policies and processes

In the case of three out of the four projects, local authority staff welcomed input from the project staff on the design of local policies and processes. The extent and effectiveness of this collaboration evolved over the course of the evaluation as the relationship between projects and the local authorities developed and strengthened. Examples of this collaboration included project staff in one area advising on practical ways in which the local authority's data collection could be improved to help identify young people on their caseload who, although were not asylum seekers, had insecure immigration status because of the status of their birth parents. Whilst this suggestion was identified relatively early on, project staff expressed frustration at how long it took the local authority to act upon it, with progress only being evident by the end of the evaluation period. In another project, a local authority representative reported having sought advice on young people's entitlements and the best way to communicate these. By the end of the evaluation period, project staff were holding regular meetings with a senior manager in children's services to advise on delivering on various commitments made to young people with insecure immigration status.

In one area, whilst local authority staff said that they welcomed input from the project, they gave a notably more modest account than project staff of how much influence this had had on their policies. This may have been because the local authority staff were reluctant to admit to a reliance on outside advice in their decision-making. Indeed, one of the local authority staff members stressed the importance of the local authority's need to maintain clear responsibility for local policies and processes and for the project not to be seen to have undue influence. One member of project staff underlined how having more developed and trusting relationships could lead local authorities to be more open in how they seek advice and input from a project.

> *All these different bits of work have increased our profile and made the people at the council say, oh yes, actually, if we go and ask them for information or advice, it doesn't mean that we're saying, we don't know what we're doing, it's okay to do that.*
>
> Project staff member

Partners in a community of practice

As well as seeking to coordinate support for individual young people, the projects also developed mechanisms for working alongside local authority staff to coordinate support across their shared caseloads. These mechanisms were mainly set up during the second half of the evaluation period, building on training provided to local authority staff. The relationship seen in this form of collaboration was deeper than that of trainer and trainee, and perhaps better described as 'partners in a community of practice'.

In the case of two of the projects, regular meetings were set up for local authority staff and project staff to share information about emerging issues facing young people, check in on cases and seek each other's advice. In one project this took the form of regular briefing sessions with PAs. For this project and their local authority this was an important channel for collaboration, as they had been less successful in coordinating support in relation to individual children or advising on local policies and processes.

Another project established a wellbeing group for professionals and carers, facilitated by a project staff member and also attended by a specialist mental health professional. This group provided opportunities to discuss the best ways of supporting young people with their mental health and well-

being as well as looking after their own. They also set up a forum of voluntary sector organisations supporting migrant young people, to which local authority colleagues were also invited. At this meeting, representatives of charities exchanged information on emerging issues affecting young people and discussed their respective contributions to supporting this cohort. The local authority valued being introduced to other voluntary sector organisations at this forum as this meant they were then able to better signpost young people.

> *There's an opportunity for all organisations who are working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to come together and provide updates on their service and thrash out ideas for how we can create better partnerships. I really value that forum; I think it's excellent.*
>
> Local authority staff member

Foster carers appeared to be more consistent participants in this group than social workers and PAs were. Project staff suspected that this was due to social workers and PAs not feeling comfortable reflecting on their professional experience and wellbeing in this shared space. A local authority staff member who took part in one of the other groups referenced above suggested that they had found it unhelpful to be challenged on local authority policy during the meeting.

One project formed a working group with local authority staff to coordinate support for young people to navigate the EU Settlement Scheme. This took the partnership working a step further, with work being coordinated as well as advice and experiences being shared. This form of collaboration appeared to work better where participating staff were more junior and therefore would feel less obliged to act as representative for the local authority and more open to sharing experiences of challenges.

Another project's work to supporting young care leavers through the EU Settlement Scheme drew on a number of the approaches outlined throughout this chapter, from formally challenging the local authority's initial inaction, to advising staff on young people's cases and working as a community of practice, ensuring applications were made before the deadline. This is outlined in more detail in the box below.

Supporting applications to the EU Settlement Scheme: Example of one project's work

Project staff were aware of the June 2021 deadline to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme and were concerned the local authority did not have a process in place to identify and support eligible young people. In March 2020 they offered to support the local authority by accepting and supporting referrals of young people, including providing legal advice.

Despite their offer of support the project staff did not receive any referrals for EUSS applications throughout the rest of 2020, despite continuing to raise the issue with local authority managers. In November they made a formal complaint setting out the urgency of the situation and explaining that the local authority was not meeting its legal duties.

In February 2021 the local authority, closely supported by the project staff, started to identify eligible young people. The project started receiving referrals in March 2021, and between then and June 2021 they triaged and advised on over 40 young people's cases. They secured representation, and submitted applications themselves for those who were referred too close to the deadline. The project ensured all the young people had their applications submitted in time.

Summary

Projects employed a range of approaches and mechanisms for building capacity in, and collaborating with, local authorities.

All projects delivered training to local authority staff. This training was valued highly and staff pointed to a number of benefits of this training including, for example, that it was tailored to the needs and context of the local authority. Those accessing training were also encouraged to avail of the projects' offers of advice to social workers and PAs on individual cases.

All projects sought to coordinate their support for individual young people with the local authority staff also working with the young person in question. This led to varying degrees of collaboration, with some projects' staff effectively acting as colleagues in a team around the young person. This happened where local authority staff had time to develop a relationship with the project and felt they could benefit from project staff's deeper knowledge of immigration processes. In several instances project staff appeared to be carrying out activities that should have been done by authority staff. The fact that this happened highlights potential weaknesses in the support that young people receive by default from local authorities. Indeed, project staff felt that local authorities should not be relying on independent charities (who are not commissioned by them) to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Project staff were also wary of their roles being confused or conflated with that of social workers as this may affect independence in the eyes of young people, and therefore their ability to gain their trust.

Projects exploited this independence from local authorities to provide challenge where they thought young people's entitlements had not been fully met. Whilst this was expected and sometimes welcomed by the local authorities, findings suggested that it could also have a negative effect on

working relationships. Where such challenges were made, project and local authority staff emphasised the need for these challenges to be made in a respectful way and with young person's expectations carefully managed so as not to damage relationships with the professionals involved. Formal legal challenge remained a key tool for the projects, particularly in challenging age assessments. This had a limited negative impact on day to day collaboration, as project and local authority staff saw this as a separate and legitimate process.
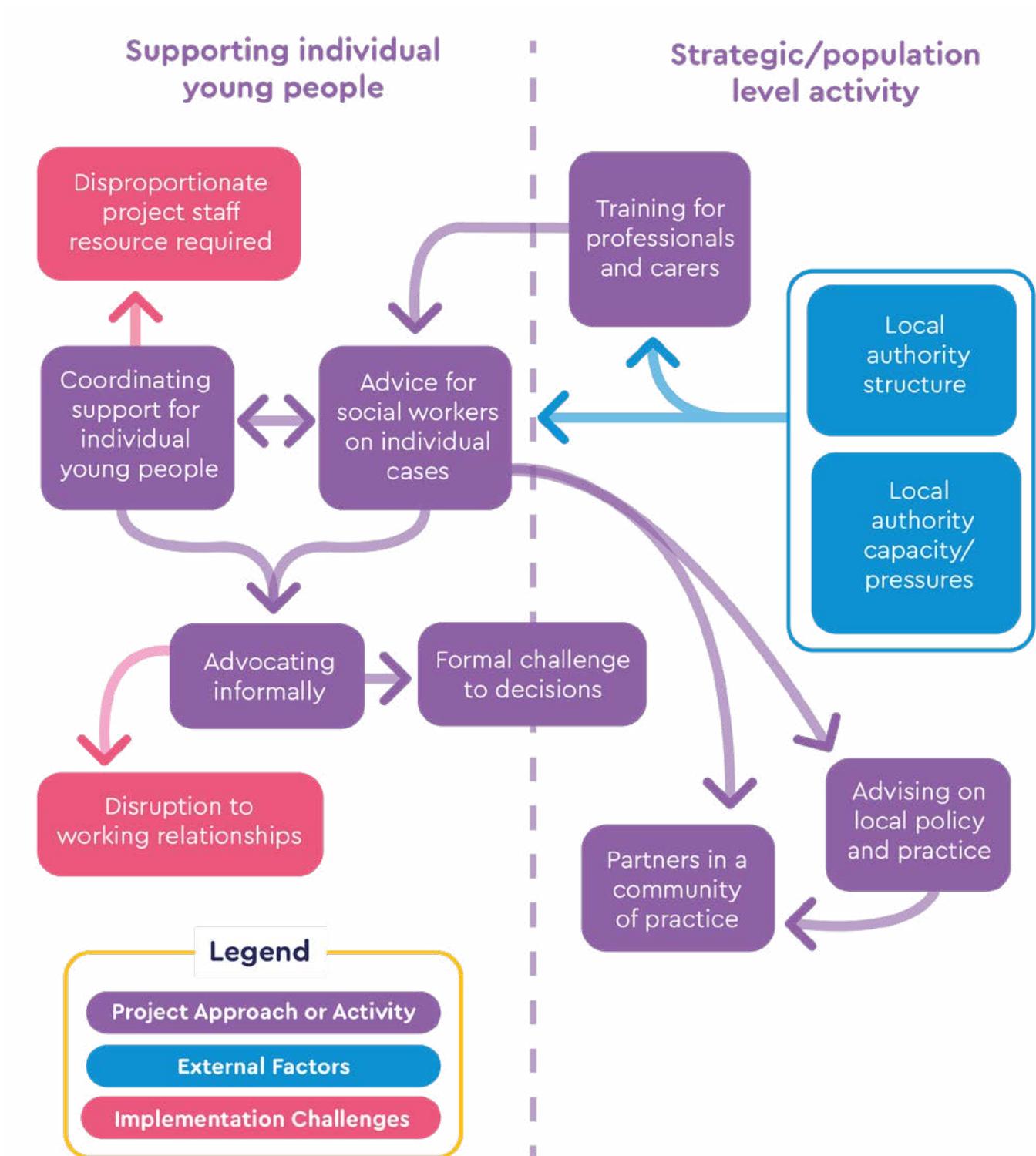
As well as collaborating and advocating on behalf of individual young people, projects worked alongside local authorities at caseload, population and strategic levels. This included convening groups of professionals across the statutory and voluntary sector to share advice and knowledge. It also included advising local authority staff on immigration policies and process. Whilst not all projects achieved the same level of collaboration, or made the same use of all these approaches, they all positively developed their relationships over the course of the evaluation period. This included building on their offers of training and advice towards more interactive and integrated ways of working with local authorities. The ability of project and local authority staff to form these 'communities of practice' was critical in collaborative efforts to identify and support children and young people through the EU Settlement Scheme.

Communication, respectful approaches to challenge and clarity of respective roles of project and local authority staff were key enablers on this journey. The structure of local authorities, as well as the specific challenges they were facing, also appeared to have a bearing on how these relationships evolved. Specialist teams had less to gain from collaboration and local authority staff struggling with high caseloads had less time to build relationships with the project staff.

Figure 3 below provides a visual summary of how approaches to collaboration described in this chapter interact with each other, with external factors and potential implementation challenges identified. This includes activities and approaches to supporting individual young people (on the left) and those aimed at impacting policy and practice at strategic or population level (on the right). Several of these activities and approaches supported the effectiveness of others, for example training for professionals aided the acceptance of advice in relation to individual cases, which in turn enabled staff to develop the relationships necessary to work as partners in a community of practice. Local authority structures and the pressures they faced affected their capacity to engage with the projects' initial offers of training and advice. Where project staff collaborated with local authority staff or coordinated individual support this could require disproportionate resource (connected to the delivery of holistic support, described in the previous chapter). Some informal advocacy for young people by project staff disrupted their and young people's working relationships with local authority staff.

Figure 3: Approaches to collaboration

Figure 3: Approaches to collaboration

Supporting individual young people

Strategic/population level activity

Disproportionate project staff resource required

Coordinating support for individual young people

Advice for social workers on individual cases

Training for professionals and carers

Local authority structure

Local authority capacity/ pressures

Advocating informally

Formal challenge to decisions

Disruption to working relationships

Partners in a community of practice

Advising on local policy and practice

Legend

Project Approach or Activity

External Factors

Implementation Challenges

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5. Involving young people in making change

Another key focus of the programme was to work with young people with lived experience of insecure immigration status to advocate for change. Project staff aspired to take more account of the insight and experiences that their clients had faced to improve support. The participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them, and supporting them to inform policy and practice change, is not new. Indeed, a duty on public bodies to do this is enshrined in international law[6], and a body of evidence and good practice has been generated by many organisations working in this field.

The projects were at different starting points in terms of developing their work in this area. Some had been facilitating group work with young people to support their influence on policy and practice for several years, whilst others were attempting this for the first time as part of this programme. Furthermore, the projects' plans for this activity, and the cohort of young people that got involved, generally reflected their focus and caseload as it was at the beginning of the evaluation period. This meant that it was primarily young people seeking (or granted) asylum, rather than young people with other immigration support needs, that took part in these activities.

The paragraphs that follow outline the projects approaches to involving young people and these are appraised in the context of the key principles highlighted in existing literature.

Audience, influence and agenda setting

Lundy's (2007, 933) model includes four key elements for effective participation. Two of these – 'audience' and 'influence' - highlight that the views expressed by young people must be listened to and, as appropriate, acted on. The first two 'P's in Cahill and Dadvand's (2018) P7 model, meanwhile, are 'positioning', that is, how young people will be facilitated to participate, and 'purpose', that is, what is the aim of their engagement. Literature also suggests benefits to retaining an open mind on what young people will be supported to express views on, therefore providing space for them to influence the agenda. Indeed, Wyness (2009) argues that adults defining the advocacy model and activities does not necessarily create the space for young people to discuss what matters to them. The UNCRC (Article 12 and General Comment 5) stresses that the primary aim of such activity must be to facilitate young people's voices to actively influence the decisions that affect their lives. By extension the primary aim is not to improve life for future generations, or indeed to improve the effectiveness of an intervention or project. A common theme across the literature is that young people are given some form of meaningful agency either to influence policies and practices that affect them or to choose the issues on which they are able to collectively express their views.

Whilst each at different stages in their participation work, staff across projects were generally very aware of the importance of making this activity meaningful. One project staff member began to decline requests they had received from the media for interviews with young people in order to protect them, as they felt the interviews were tokenistic, had no clear purpose and that young people's views would not be listened to or acted upon. They said:

> " *everyone is asking for interviews. We're like, no, because you're just going to lose interest, and nothing is going to come of this.* "
>
> Project staff member

Project staff reported that, in general, their participation activity had a clear purpose and pathway to

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6   Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. See United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009)

impact and gave examples of this. One project, through an established participation group funded separately to this programme, had developed a list of key messages that the young people wanted to share with adults working with them. These were then developed into a guide for local authority staff and launched at an event. The event was co-led by young people, attended by policy makers and promoted through many channels by the project's host organisation.

Another project developed the role of its youth steering group to include informing the local authority's policy and practice in addition to informing the organisation's own day-to-day running. Relevant sessions were organised to provide an opportunity for young people to influence a specific policy or procedure that was under review at the time. This project purposively arranged these opportunities at times when the benefits for both young people and the local authority would be greatest e.g. at the point when the organisation had gained the trust and respect of the local authority as a strategic advisor and where listening to, and acting on, young people's views was therefore more likely.

> " *I think both local authorities very much understand the value of the service... I think that's got to a good place now, and I think as a result, they're more likely to support the youth participation work and the policy work. More energy could go into that now.* "
>
> Project staff member

One of the projects established a new young people's group with a broad focus on influencing policy and practice. However, the project staff member did not report any predetermined priorities or positioning opportunities for influence. Instead, time was taken in the first half of the evaluation period to identify the area of most interest to the group, including supporting the young people to undertake their own peer research to inform this. This gives a good example of the approach espoused by Wyness (2009) of giving young people control of the participation activity and supporting them to set their own agenda.

In addition to group-based participation activity with young people, the projects involved young people in the delivery of training for professionals. Whilst this potentially provided individual young people with an opportunity to directly influence practice, this tightly defined role would not have provided the same opportunities in terms of agenda-setting as participating in the group work described above.

Allowing time and space to identify the right approaches

The existing literature suggests that engaging with underrepresented or vulnerable groups can present significant challenges in terms of the design of recruitment processes and the activities themselves. These include language and comprehension, fear of stigmatisation, and a tendency for those from a more privileged background to participate at the expense of others (Lenette et al 2019; Wyness 2009, James 2007). It also suggests, however, that such work can be successful where time is taken to build trust and identify the most accessible approaches for individuals (Winter 2010; Sandhu 2016; James 2007).

The projects establishing new activities were cautious and patient in their approach. Whilst this was partly a case of allowing young people to gradually build confidence and trust, we also heard of steps taken to listen to young people's feedback on this journey to understand what works for them.

Two projects sought to gradually introduce young people to group activity and participation work. When seeking to recruit new members to an already well-established participation group, they considered how young people's wellbeing could be improved by engaging with positive group

activities they were running through another part of their organisation. Young people who had taken part in these activities were encouraged to attend a conversation group, focused on practicing English and informal peer support, as a stepping stone to joining the participation group. Another project established a wellbeing group, with the aim of introducing young people to group discussion whilst remaining routed in some of the tangible challenges that they were themselves facing, and keeping support from their project staff member and mental health specialist on hand. In both these examples, project staff reported disappointing levels of take up. Staff from one of these projects suggested that this may have been due to young people's difficulty in keeping to the fixed times required by group work (as opposed to the flexibility offered by staff delivering one to one support). This project eventually commissioned an external organisation to help design a new set of participation activities. This work was ongoing at the end of the evaluation.

As highlighted above, for one of the projects which set up a new young people's group, there was little pre-conception of what their programme of activity would look like. This enabled the group to be supported to build a programme of activities that fitted around their interests and the topics that mattered to them.

> *" I am trying to not have too clear an idea of where I want to take it because I want the young people to have a bit more time to explore more options and feel like when they do choose something, they're happy with what they've chosen. "*
>
> Project staff member

It should be stressed however, that this group did not initially include young people who were receiving or had recently received one-to-one support from the project. Project staff observed the young people taking part were generally in a more settled position, having regularised their immigration status and were facing fewer challenges in relation to their mental health and emotional wellbeing. The participation activity was working with young people who did not have the same challenges to their wellbeing and confidence as other service users, and therefore some key voices may have been excluded. This was partly addressed, as the project progressed, by the facilitator of the group reaching out via a youth club that was popular with some of the young people receiving direct support from the project.

Building trust was seen as a key part of supporting young people to participate in group activity. This was addressed in staffing decisions including, for example, the facilitators of two of the groups getting involved and introducing themselves to young people at other group activities and the two other groups being co-facilitated by a support worker. In one case, the project was looking to expand its participation work, building on what they saw as success during evaluation period, and had successfully recruited a dedicated participation officer with lived experience of insecure immigration status to lead this. In the other case, this decision was more informed by difficulties with the previous approach.

The importance of taking time to build trust with young people may have additional implications for which types of young people may be able to get involved in this work. Where projects have less direct contact with young people – for instance if they are indirectly benefiting through the projects' advice to local authority staff or referral on to a specialist solicitor – rather than being directly supported, there may not be the opportunity to build this trust. EU national care leavers and those with complex non-asylum cases are more likely to be in this group. Projects may need to consider different ways of giving a voice to such young people with whom they have less direct contact.

Flexibility to account for diverse and changing needs

The literature stresses that those coordinating participation activities should remain flexible in their approach and responsive to young people's diverse and changing needs. (Mencap 2010; Young Minds 2020). Projects demonstrated adherence to these principles to some extent in the way they recognised and responded to how young people's needs and capacity changed over time.

The onset of the pandemic and associated restrictions had significant ramifications on this aspect of the programme. It meant that both the needs of young people and the options available to projects for taking them into account changed in a manner that could not have been planned for in advance. Two of the projects reported successfully engaging with existing members of their groups to adapt the format and focus of activities. One of these groups made the successful transition to an online format. This group was able to continue some similar interactive and creative activities from their previous face-to-face work by emailing and posting activities and resources to young people in advance. The other group started to meet in the organisation's outdoor space. In both cases, project staff identified that some young people had lost some of the confidence that they had shown in previous meetings, perhaps due to unfamiliarity of the format. Other young people were keen to catch up with each other, having had limited opportunities for social interaction under lockdown. As a result, increased time was allocated by projects for ice-breaker and fun activities that members could take part in as a group. For the online group this included an opportunity to celebrate Eid together.

Staff from another project revealed that they had been pleasantly surprised with how well some young people were able to engage with the development of a local authority policy document. Whilst they had hesitated in setting up the relevant session, they felt that their initial caution had been misplaced due to how the young people's confidence had developed since joining the group.

In a less positive example, project staff running a wellbeing group for young people acknowledged that they had made a mistake in holding one of the sessions during Ramadan, which appeared to have had an effect on attendance.

Providing opportunities for young people's longer-term benefit

Whilst participation activity should be beneficial for young people 'in the moment', it is also important that young people do not become dependent on continued participation to realise ongoing benefit (Sandhu 2017). It is important that young people are supported to develop transferrable skills to move on from their current situation, particularly where mental illness and trauma are concerned (James 2007).

Considering the content and format of the activities, and the common needs of the young people (discussed elsewhere in this report) it appears that projects sought to provide opportunities for young people's long-term benefit. They sought, for example the following transferrable skills:

- Mental health self-care, through discussing wellbeing and sleep hygiene, for example

- English language skills

- Experience of exercising agency, which has been seen to have a number of long-term benefits (NICCY and Northern Ireland Youth Forum 2015)

> *Probably one of the main [outcomes] is just how it feels to be in control of the process at a time in your life when you're not in control of much. I'm sure for some of them, they've experienced that at some point in their life, but aren't experiencing it now, so this feeling in control, I think has a really positive wellbeing effect and improved confidence.*
>
> Project staff member

Whilst this suggests that the projects have followed good practice in this area, we were unable, through this evaluation, to judge the extent to which transferrable skills were actually developed and exploited by the young people.

Consideration of young people's best interests and wellbeing

Children and young people have a right to say no to participation activity (UNCRC GC 12, para. 16). Adults also have a responsibility to recognise the power dynamic between themselves and young people. By extension, they must be aware that taking part in such activities may not always be in a young person's best interest and could, in some cases, be exploitative (Franks 2011). All projects addressed this to some extent, by a combination of reducing the potential risk the participation activity may pose to a young person's welfare, and accepting the fact that some young people were not in a position to take part.

Project staff reported feeling very aware of the immediate needs of the young people that they were working with on an individual basis. They stressed that young person's insecure status meant that they were facing a range of immediate and difficult challenges such as anxiety, destitution and homelessness. As a result, projects felt that any capacity the young person had was best focused on their immigration application as opposed to participating in group activity. They were aware that, whilst hearing and understanding young people's experiences may be helpful for developing solutions and motivating policy makers to enact them, asking young people to recount these experiences could re-traumatise them. Where young people were invited to join group and participation activities, projects took a number of steps to consider immediate needs, including:

- Facilitating discussion of wellbeing issues, which could help young people cope with their current situation, and potentially be in a better place to engage with their immigration application process.

- Where wellbeing was discussed, making clear that young people were not expected to discuss their own individual traumatic experiences.

- Including interactive and social activities that could enhance wellbeing and address some of the deficits brought about by social isolation (made worse by, but not unique to, the context of the pandemic).

> *We do have a rule, actually, that no-one talks about their own personal trauma so it's more generic and general about generally how the body reacts and generally if you're struggling to sleep. There is a safety mechanism there, so no-one is sharing anything particularly traumatic to them but we're talking more about symptoms that they're experiencing and how to manage them.*
>
> Project staff member

However, because of the issues highlighted above, project staff felt that many young people receiving support from them were too vulnerable to safely take part in the activities. As one project staff

member said:

> *Their lives were really critical: they were destitute and homeless, and their mental health was shocking. They had no income and they were just ripe for any exploitation at all. Engaging them in anything like that was always really unlikely.*

<div align="center">Project staff member</div>

Additionally, one of the projects that facilitated discussion of wellbeing issues, found this was not as successful as they had hoped. They reported that several young people would want to discuss their cases with the support worker who was present. It became apparent that the young people in attendance were struggling to think beyond their immediate practical challenges and uncertainty regarding their immigration status. Projects' staff thought that this was likely due to the presence of the support worker and general lack of clear separation from the one-to-one support offer. As a project staff member said:

> *Another real barrier we had was that we hadn't separated out the project staff's roles... it was very difficult for [the project support workers] to be, at one point, trying to help you to get to a solicitor's appointment - that's if it was going on - and saying, 'Let's give you a voice around this,' when all you're saying is, 'I need somewhere to live. I just need somewhere to live.' What we've done now is separate out those roles.*

<div align="center">Project staff member</div>

Although some young people may not be in a position to take part in (or indeed co-design) group-based participation activities, this may not mean that nothing can be done to ensure their voices are heard. It could be argued that the projects should consider other options for such young people, such as integrating consultation activities into the delivery of one to one support. Such activity may be less ambitious in terms of the control that young people have (see Audience, Influence and Agenda Setting, above) but could be a way of making the projects approach to participation more inclusive.

Summary

Project staff aspired to undertake meaningful work with young people to give them a voice on the issues that affect them. We saw evidence of the projects taking steps to follow good practice in this activity, addressing the principles set out in existing literature. Of those young people that were able to participate, some had the opportunity to influence local authority policy and practice, whilst others were able to steer the direction of their own participation work, including undertaking and presenting peer research.

Projects followed evidence-based practice in supporting young people to participate and personally benefit from the activity. This included allowing time to develop relationships with young people and develop the format of the activities and considering how young people could develop transferrable skills.

Projects were also very aware of the need to consider young people's immediate interest when considering who would participate and how. They aimed to address this by incorporating activities that address young people's need for social interaction, making sure young people were not asked to do things that may be distressing or a distraction from addressing their pressing practical needs.

Projects learned the importance of supporting young people to get used to group activity and build their trust. They also concluded that the difference between participation activity and support work merits dedicated staffing.

Unfortunately, immediate, pressing needs were a barrier to many of the young people taking part in group activity. Other young people, who had less direct contact with the projects, also did not have the opportunity to build the requisite trust in project staff to engage in this work. This means that projects should consider a range of ways of empowering young people to speak up, beyond co-designed group work, to accommodate young people's diverse situations. Whilst these steps may help to make this activity more successful, ensuring the voices and experiences of those in most need may continue to be a challenging area of practice.

6. Impact on outcomes for young people

A significant component of the evaluation is to examine the outcomes secured for young people through the support provided by the projects. This chapter sets out relevant findings from interviews, particularly those with young people themselves and includes a series of vignettes to illustrate the impact that the projects' support has had on young people. Findings of our analysis of data on their progression through the immigration system is also set out.

Progress towards a positive immigration outcome

As described earlier in this report, immigration status has a critical impact on young people's entitlements across many aspects of life. Project staff were clear in their view that young people's wellbeing and future prospects depended on getting a positive and timely decision. Interviews with local authority and project staff revealed how young people had felt better in themselves since resolving their status. One local authority staff member said of a young person they had been working with,

> *He just is noticeably less stressed since he got his decision. He's always actually been - compared to other young people, the stress doesn't have seemed to have impacted his ability to engage in education as much as it does for some of the young people. I think he was always doing fairly well in education. Whereas, other young people just find it impossible to focus their energies on that.*

Local authority staff member

Indeed, around a third of the young people interviewed had already received a positive decision in the form of refugee status and it's likely that this influenced both their capacity and inclination to speak as positively as they did of the projects. See Vignette Six below for an example of how achieving a positive decision on their case enables young people to progress in all areas of their lives.

Project staff highlighted throughout all phases of the evaluation how hard it was to predict when the Home Office would progress a young person's application to the next stage or decide on the application. The impact of the pandemic on the capacity of the Home Office and its processes amplified the delays and uncertainty that young people faced. This inherent uncertainty in the process was both hard for local projects to influence and hard to measure their influence upon.

With consent from young people, projects shared information with the evaluation team on young people's progress through the asylum and immigration system. This included data on the progress of a select group of young people who were referred early in the evaluation period and were in a position to take part in the evaluation. This does not account for all of the young people directly supported by the projects.

To analyse and aid interpretation of this information, a 13-point coding scale was developed indicating the steps and outlook on a young person's journey to achieving secure immigration status. A summary description of this scale, which incorporates both asylum and non-asylum cases, is set out in figure 4, below.

Figure 4: Coding scale for young people's immigration outlook

Step	Outlook	Result
1	Most positive outlook	British Citizenship
2		Settled status or Indefinite Leave to Remain
3		Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection, Stateless status, Pre-settled status or re-settlement from Europe under 'Dubs' scheme
4		Awaiting an initial decision on an application made before reaching the age of 18
5		No application made, but child aged under 15
6		Appealing decision on application made pre -18
7		Awaiting an initial decision on application made post 18
8		Awaiting an initial decision on application made post 18 and age is disputed
9		Appealing application made post 18
10		Appealing application made post 18, and age is disputed
11		Fresh application submitted
12		Appeal rights exhausted (ARE), fresh application being prepared
13	Most negative outlook	Appeal rights exhausted (ARE), no plans for fresh application

The scale takes account of a number of factors that are known to impact on the likelihood of a positive decision, or, based on interviews with project staff, were reported to do so. Home Office statistics, for example, show that applications made by young people aged under 18 are more likely to receive a positive initial decision than those aged over 18 (Home Office 2021b). Project staff also reported how the passing of time made it harder for the young person to remember their situation in their country of origin and therefore more difficult to put a good application together. Young people are therefore placed differently on the scale according to their age – with those aged over 18 seen as having a more negative outlook than those at the same stage of their application but younger. Table 3, below sets out results of an analysis, using this scale, comparing the young person's outlook when first referred to the service to the last time they were assessed by the project within the evaluation period.

Table 3: Change in young people's immigration position over the evaluation period

Outcome	Number of young people	Percentage
Improved position	38	58%
Of which reached step 3 or above (i.e. refugee status or humanitarian protection)	31	48% (of total)
Position stayed the same	21	32%
Worsened position	6	9%
Total	**65**	**100%**

Out of the 65 young people for which data was received, the immigration position of more than half of them (58%) had improved during the evaluation period, 21 (32%) had stayed the same and 6 (9%) had worsened. The number of young people whose improvement amounted to being granted refugee status or humanitarian protection (at step 3 or above in the scale) was 31 (48%).

Further analysis revealed that, for those that were granted status, this took an average of 342 days (just under a year) from their first referral to the project. Whilst there was no control group to compare to within the project local authorities, comparison with other young people in similar situations is possible using NRPF Connect Data. This data is based on information uploaded by 32 local authorities on people who need additional support as a result of having no recourse to public funds. Care leavers represented in this database took an average of 500 days from presenting to a local authority to receiving a positive decision on their asylum or immigration case. Out of 65 care leavers supported by the projects which have data, 10 at some point had no recourse to public funds but were eventually granted status. It took an average of 428 days from these young people being referred to one of the projects to having their status granted. Based on this data, our analysis would suggest that projects were able to help resolve young people's immigration status more quickly.

The above analysis provides a snapshot of what was achieved with a group of young people who were referred to the projects early in the evaluation period. Qualitative evidence gathered through interviews in later stages of the evaluation suggests the projects continued this successful work to progress and secure young people's status. This included a wider range of young people with non-asylum immigration issues and those who needed support to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.

Improving wellbeing

Young people were unanimous in their positive feedback on the support that they received from their respective project. This started with how welcomed and safe they felt in the company of project staff. This support was often reported to be transformational in the eyes of the young person, particularly when they compared it to their experiences of other services. One young person said:

> *When I'm coming here... I don't feel alone, I feel like they're stood with me, next to me, they're helping me with every single part of the - they changed my life.*
>
> Young Person

The young people appreciated the range of support and saw the service as being truly on their side. During interviews, the young people expressed that the service felt like a "family". Support such as this fostered enduring relationships which young people saw as reducing their stress and loneliness, leading to an improvement in their mental health. They saw it as a safe place where their struggles would be listened to, believed and supported.

> **"** *I don't have a friend, I don't have a family, I don't have anything, but when I* **"**
> *got introduced to them I found a family. They accepted me [and] who I am and*
> *they were very supportive… they understood what I was going through was hell*
> *because I was reliving everything I went through and luckily, they supported. They*
> *didn't take away the problem, but helped me to [get] through it.*

<div align="center">Young Person</div>

Addressing young people's practical needs and living conditions was seen by project staff as key to young people's wellbeing. In some cases, they were able to help secure more suitable and supportive placements. One local authority staff member, describing a new placement accessed by a young person, said:

> **"** *His placement was very supportive. He was with a foster carer who's [from the* **"**
> *same country as him] and who's really nice and we really saw a lot of benefit*
> *from that to be honest. I think his engagement in education and his development*
> *and confidence were really helped by how supportive that placement was.*

<div align="center">Local authority staff member</div>

Age assessments had a profound effect on the living arrangements of the young people because if they were assessed to be an adult they were placed in adult accommodation. Interview findings suggested that projects attempted to work around this by visiting young people and providing practical advice and support. In some cases decisions on the young person's age were successfully challenged, allowing them to be placed in foster care.

Some young people faced challenges in terms of unsuitable accommodation and destitution and projects could only mitigate against this. We heard that the quality of accommodation provided by the Home Office is often poor, but young people would be placed there due to their insecure status and assessed age, which take time to address or challenge.

Isolation was a major issue facing some of the young people. Interviewees spoke of how the projects created informal social spaces for young people with similar experiences to get to know each other.

> **"** *Before I was alone and was having lots of bad thoughts in my mind and was* **"**
> *getting depressed; now I've made some friends and I'm spending some time with*
> *them.*

<div align="center">Young person</div>

Young people reported that having access to this allowed them to support one another going through similar processes, fostering that 'family feeling' and improving wellbeing (see Vignette Five below).

Building resilience and foundations for the future

Young people and local authorities explained that the projects were able to support access to opportunities and knowledge that prepared young people to become more independent in the future. Principal among these was access to education and training.

Most of the young people interviewed were passionately pursuing a specialist course or had plans to go onto one after studying English. They had also made new friends at college, further contributing to reduced isolation and positive wellbeing. One young person described their education experience which the project had helped them realise:

> *I'm in college and I started studying health and social care. I really wanted to be a support worker, and work with anyone who's from abroad. ...[like most] refugees from [my country of birth], my first language is Arabic. Yes, I would understand them, and I would be able to help them translate, maybe, because my English is a bit better, and tell them how it's working.*

Young person

As well as education and opportunities to build informal support networks, young people reported having benefited from improved knowledge which their project workers imparted to them. This focused on knowledge of their rights, both in the immigration system and in relation to support and protection from other statutory services. One young person said:

> *They are helping us; they're telling us our rights, what rights you have as a youngster, what rights you will have as adults and grown-up adults, what rights you will have in this country. They're telling us all the things.*

Young person

It is important to note that interviews found that not all young people were benefitting from access to positive opportunities. Some also continued to need support to understand their rights and the steps required in their immigration application, particularly when they had extremely complex cases. Projects showed how they were able to respond to such young people.

Vignette Six, below, sets out an example of how a project supported a young person to build his foundations for the future through accessing education and developing a support network.

Vignette Six: Abdel – Building Resilience and Foundations for the Future

Abdel was appeal rights exhausted when he was referred to the project by the local authority. He arrived in the UK as a UASC when he was 17 and was now about to turn 21. He was in the care of the local authority because he was studying at college, however he could not do the placement part of his course because he did not have a National Insurance number. He was also struggling to engage with his course because of his mental health and he was facing destitution.

The support worker at the project initially tried to resolve the issues with his college course, but his mental health problems got significantly worse to the extent he was experiencing hallucinations. They took Abdel to his GP to help him get his medication. He had been referred for trauma therapy but had missed some of his appointments, meaning he had been taken off the list. His support worker managed to get him back on the list and to get to an appointment. They got a public law solicitor involved who was able to help get the local authority to agree to extend his leaving care support, which continues to this day.

Abdel wanted to continue his studies by doing an NVQ , however you need a National Insurance number. His support worker spoke directly with the college and they agreed for him to do it without one if he signed up to do the course as a volunteer and with the condition the local authority paid the course fees. The Home Office has a policy around unpaid work so she also had to have a public law solicitor check everything. It took months of writing letters, having meetings and communicating with the college, and then he was able to study the course in 2021.

Abdel is now 25 and has been granted stateless status by the Home Office, which means he has no citizenship in any country. He feels settled in the UK and has a network of friends, and continues to access support for his mental health. He remains engaged with the project, going on social activities, and has an ongoing positive relationship with his support worker. They are continuing to support Abdel with his immigration status, gathering evidence from his trauma therapist and GP, which they submit to the Home Office every few months.

Improving capacity to engage with the immigration system

Having developed trusting relationships with project staff and being supported to improve their wellbeing, young people were then better able to engage with some of the more challenging aspects of their immigration application. Project staff and several local authority staff described examples of how positive and trusting relationships enabled young people to engage (see Vignette Seven below for an example of how project staff advocated for a young person to enable them to participate in their case).

Vignette Seven: Hashim – Addressing Trauma as a Barrier to Engagement

Hashim arrived in the UK aged 16 and engaged with the project around six months later. He first became known to the project by attending the youth club. He then started sharing with the project team that he was unhappy with his solicitor. The support workers also found the solicitor to be inadequate, and they helped him to secure a new one and started doing casework for him.

Once the project started working with Hashim they found out he was very traumatised about specific incidents that happened on his way to the UK from his home country. His support worker spent a lot of time encouraging him to access mental health support and to report to The National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[1].

There was one aspect of his case that Hashim was unable to discuss because of how traumatic it was. His support worker played the crucial role of advocating on his behalf ahead of his substantive interview. This meant it was agreed in advance that he would not have to discuss the most traumatic incidents that had happened to him. His support worker secured this through raising it with his solicitors and agreeing a plan with the Home Office.

He had his interview in January 2020 and was granted Refugee Status. His support worker also helped him to access mental health support and referred him to an organisation that helps newly granted refugees find employment.

1   The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery, including those who have been trafficked, and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. More information is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms/guidance-on-the-national-referral-mechanism-for-potential-adult-victims-of-modern-slavery-england-and-wales

A local authority staff member, describing another case, said:

> *He wasn't going to his interviews, because he couldn't manage it…. I know that since they've been involved, …he's now been able to attend some interviews. Still we don't know what the difference is going to be on the outcome, but at least he's not in a situation now where he's not even going to get the chance to try because they're going to say, 'Well, he just didn't come.'*

Local authority staff member

Good legal representation is a key element of young people's successful navigation of the immigration system and projects were keen to ensure this was in place. Interviews with local authority staff in one area reported that young people generally had better representation by the end of the evaluation period and attributed this to having been referred to the project promptly, and having been supported to access this. Vignette Seven above describes how a project was able to support a young person to change their solicitor to one they were more satisfied with and, in an interview with another

young person, they spoke of their gratitude for having been helped to change their solicitor.

> *" I had another, old solicitor, who didn't even tell me when I received a decision from the Home Office. I told [the project support worker] about that and I said, 'I want to change my solicitor, I'm not happy with this.' [my project support worker] helped me change my solicitor. They found me a really good solicitor, and I'm happy with that. "*
>
> Young person

However, supporting young people to access a good solicitor was not always possible because of the barriers discussed in chapter 3. In many of these the cases the projects did as much as they could by prompting solicitors and offering additional support and information to the young person.

Summary

All of the young people interviewed in the evaluation spoke in positive terms about the support they received from the projects. This was often described as being transformational in nature.

In terms of progress towards resolving their immigration status, just over half of the young people's situations improved, and 40% achieved refugee status or humanitarian protection. These young people's cases were resolved, on average, more quickly than those of other young people whose cases were recorded on NRPF Connect.

Not all young people were successfully supported to the same degree. Some factors affecting their wellbeing and progress towards regularising their immigration status were harder than others for the projects to influence, such as the suitability of their placement or accommodation, and delays to Home Office decisions once an application had been submitted.

Young people and local authority staff recognised how the projects supported young people's wellbeing by welcoming them and addressing issues with living conditions, social isolation and mental health. Examples were given where young people's resilience and future prospects were strengthened from being supported to access education and to understand their rights.

7. Impact on policy and practice

The projects aspired to build capacity in local authorities, work with them to deliver holistic support and early intervention, and to influence local policy and systems. Local authority and project staff shared a number of examples of changes that they had seen and reflected on the extent to which the projects helped bring this about. These examples and reflections are described under the broad headings below, giving insight into the positive impacts that are achievable through the kinds of collaboration discussed in this report.

Improved knowledge and practice of social care staff

Examples were received from all projects, corroborated in interviews with local authority staff, of positive impacts on the practice of social workers in supporting young people with insecure immigration status. These related to social workers using the knowledge gained through training and joint working with the projects, to better assess, plan and respond to young people's immigration and wellbeing needs. In three of the projects, this included reports from local authority and project staff that social workers were able to provide more informative and timely advice to young people on the progress of their immigration application. One member of local authority staff described how they had seen a general increase in confidence amongst their team members in supporting these young people.

> *We know where they're at and we know when we should be taking certain action, or at least advising the young person to take certain action. The knock-on effect from that is I think that it's built confidence in social workers and personal advisers in dealing with this aspect of the young person's care.*
>
> Local authority staff member

Interviews also shone a light on more specific aspects of practice that were reported to have improved as a result of interaction with projects. One local authority staff member highlighted that social workers were more commonly writing letters on behalf of young people to challenge Home Office delays. Project staff in another area suggested that their formal challenges to the local authority had resulted in a reduction in the number of poor-quality age assessments undertaken. The same project reported that they had secured more flexibility on the part of the local authority in terms of the length of time they financially support young people making a fresh asylum claim. Staff from another project reported having witnessed better consideration by a local authority of the needs of young adults who had absconded from care – looking past the young person's status to see their vulnerability and need for support – resulting in such young people being more likely to be placed in supported accommodation.

An aspect of improved practice that was observed in at least two of the project areas was both increased and earlier referrals of young people to the projects. Similarly, it was observed by local authority and project staff that a wider range of social workers and PAs had begun to contact the projects for advice. Local authority staff noted that whilst social workers and PAs had become more confident in some aspects of immigration-related support, there was still an ongoing need for advice from specialists in relation to more complex cases.

Improved local authority processes and structures

Projects were reported to have contributed to a number of positive changes to local authorities' operational processes and structures. These included, in three areas, the **co-design by projects and their local authority partners, of changes to monitoring and data collection systems**. These changes

will allow for young people with potential insecure immigration status to be more easily identified by their social workers. Projects were hopeful that in the future, this earlier identification would lead to earlier intervention and resolution of cases. In one area the project successfully advocated that local authority staff would be required to enter the nationality of each young person before being able to enter any other data about the young person into their case management system. This would result in local authorities being able to identify any potential issues around immigration as early as possible and reduce costs, for example, where a young person may be identified as having an immigration issue before turning 18. This is particularly important for young people who may not know that they have an immigration issue because they, for instance, came to the UK as a small child and subsequently went into the care of the local authority or do not have regular immigration status because their parents did or did not have documentation for them. One project staff member explained how the new data system would ensure that social workers are more reliably prompted to act:

> " *When it's up and running - this new database - it's going to be a compulsory field. If they choose the option that's, basically, they don't know, or that there's some uncertainty... That will create a work record in that social worker's workflow, and that leads into their performance review and the decisions that the managers are also looking at. So, it will immediately be something that will be picked up because it's going to be there, through their own internal systems of how they manage their work.* "
>
> Project staff member

Two projects **established new procedures for the local authority to refer identified young people for support** from the project organisation, enabling young people to be referred by default to the project. The aim of this was to support early intervention in the young person's asylum or immigration case, so that they got expert help from the project before poor legal representation or unaddressed wellbeing needs negatively affected their outlook. One local authority staff member, however, expressed reservations about establishing such an arrangement in their area. They suggested that such processes should only be put in place where a service had been commissioned by the local authority, commenting on the potential for it to cause confusion in the relationship between the local authority and the project organisation. All projects had worked with local authority colleagues to draw up a memorandum of understanding to avoid such issues. Not all local authority staff, however, recognised or were aware of these.

Three local authorities **restructured their teams working with young people** with insecure immigration status. In one area this took the form of the **establishment of a new virtual team** where all members of local authority staff interacting with these young people would regularly meet and collaborate. By the end of the evaluation period this team had started allocating young people to dedicated PAs who had expressed an interest in supporting this group of young people. Two other local authority areas restructured their social care service, to **create dedicated and expanded teams** for working with these young people. In one case this supported both young people seeking asylum and those with other immigration needs. The manager of this team also convened a new multi-agency operational group in which the project organisation was represented. In all of these cases the local authority and project staff expected these new structures to facilitate sharing of expertise and more consistent support for young people. Whilst local authority staff stressed that a number of factors were considered when making these decisions about structure, they readily acknowledged the contribution of the advice from the projects to informing the shape of the new teams. As one local authority staff member said:

> *[The project organisation] were part of our multi-agency working task group to look at how we responded to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. That quickly became a whole operational group to look at how we can best improve our services for all migrant children. So [their] views, opinions and roles have also impacted on the decision-making within the local authority in terms of responding to the needs of these children.*

Local authority staff member

Local authority and project staff hoped that these new arrangements would enable better consistency of support for young people.

The new team established in the other local authority area worked exclusively with young people seeking asylum. Whilst these young people may benefit from more consistent support, it could be argued that this limited scope presents a missed opportunity to more effectively identify and support young people with other immigration needs.

Building on the perceived success of training delivered during the evaluation period, two projects now deliver part of their local authorities' mandatory training for newly qualified social workers.

Extended scope of local authority support for young people

During the course of the evaluation period, **local authorities made changes in their policies** in relation to support for young people with insecure immigration status. Two local authorities made **public commitments to support young people in their care** to gain British Citizenship. Whilst it's not possible to attribute these changes solely to the projects, project staff explained the efforts they had gone to in securing it, including working with other campaigning organisations to garner support. By the end of the evaluation period, one project had become part of a formal group supporting the local authority to implement its commitment, and the other was advising on the final wording of the public statement. Staff from the first of these projects also reported that the local authority had agreed to work towards implementing a set of core principles, developed by young people themselves, through the same operation group.

One project reported securing several commitments from the local authorities it worked with in terms of changes to formal polices that will enable better support for young people. These included:

- When young people are placed in foster care, formally requesting that the foster carer (as part of their agreement with the local authority) accompanies the young person to solicitor and Home Office appointments out of area

- A revised trafficking policy that requires safeguarding inquiries to be made for all young people who are suspected to be victims of trafficking and for them to be placed in 24-hour-supported accommodation

- The development of a young person-accessible and up to date policy on support for young people with insecure immigration status, informed by input from the project's participation group.

One local authority staff member explained how they worked with the project to develop improved support for trafficked young people,

> *They supported me with the argument for ensuring that young people have - those who are trafficked have appropriate and safe accommodation. Meeting with me and my head of service to say... At least I had backing from [the project] to say that, what is safe and appropriate accommodation? It can't be a shared accommodation, it can't be a B&B for young people trafficked, and outlining what best practice would look like in a local authority.*

Local authority staff member

Creating legacy and sustainability

A key consideration in evaluating the programme is the extent to which impact can be sustained and the new areas of activity continued through other sources of funding.

Staff from all projects and local authorities were unanimous in their assessment that the relationships between the project organisations and their relevant local authorities had improved over the course of the evaluation period. They were generally of the view that these relationships would be the linchpin of ongoing collaboration in the future.

> *I think our relationship with the local authority - at the moment is much more established, obviously, than it was at the start. That will mean that we will get more positive changes delivered together in the next few years because we have that relationship with them now.*

Project staff member

However, some interviewees highlighted that progress could be lost if key staff in local authorities changed jobs. As one local authority staff member explained:

> *we worked to build those relationships. So [the project staff member] can call me at six o'clock on a Friday going, 'What are you doing?'... I suppose going forward from both sides, we always need to think about what is the contingency if there's changes in leadership in relation to that and how we do that in terms of working together.*

Project staff member

Having said this, the projects all appeared to have successfully navigated turnover amongst the local authority staff that they were working most closely with. Only one of the local authority staff members interviewed during phase two of the evaluation was still in post at phase six, and even their role had changed in terms of its day-to-day focus.

Project staff suggested that the legacy of the projects would be more secure where the local authority had made public commitments to improvements in support for care and had a written policy on how they would deliver this. In these cases, projects could continue to work with others to hold local authorities to account, and support them in their delivery. The changes to formal policies and new commitments described above, therefore, have strong potential for long term impact.

Any sustained impact in terms of improved knowledge, confidence and practice of social care staff is potentially more vulnerable in the long term. Local authority staff acknowledged that staff turnover was a significant factor and that continued training and access to advice would be needed from the projects.

> *"I do feel you need to continue to have that, because the danger is in social work is that there's such a high turnover of staff, that information could be lost"*
>
> Local authority staff member

The fact that two local authorities have included aspects of the projects' training as mandatory for newly qualified social workers, will play an important role in sustaining knowledge and confidence in practice. The establishment of dedicated teams, which happened within three of the local authority areas, could also help to sustain knowledge amongst local authority staff. Members of such teams, having more young people with insecure immigration status on their caseloads than their peers, would have more opportunity to use and maintain their knowledge and experience of working with these young people.

Potential for future commissioned provision

Interviews in the final phases of the evaluation explored which aspects of the projects had been of most value to the local authorities and might be commissioned in the future. Whilst the local authority staff interviewed do not have the authority to commission themselves, they were generally confident that they could put a good case forward for this to happen. They suggested that this would be more likely to be successful if the case:

- Focused on an accessible and bespoke offer to the local authority, such as dedicated advice drop-ins or priority access to support for children and young people referred.

- Addressed the needs of young people towards which local authorities have clearer and more substantial duties – such as those who are still officially looked after by them.

- Was accompanied by evidence and monitoring data on how many young people had been, and could be, supported going forward.

The projects have already, to some extent, developed their delivery models in response to the needs and preferences of local authority colleagues. Examples of this are set out in Chapter 3. Staff from some projects also expressed confidence that the relationships built and evidence developed as a result of this programme put them in a strong position to secure funding from local authorities.

> *"We haven't had funding for any advice-related work for many years. I think our relationship with [the local authority], through this project... has really improved that immensely. I think we've got a lot more evidence now, through this, about just how much benefit we bring.*
>
> Project staff member

The projects were generally keen to explore opportunities for their support to be commissioned. One project staff member, however, pointed out that their organisation did not currently accept statutory funding and were afraid the trusting relationships they had with young people could be damaged if they did so in the future. It could also be argued that the project organisations, as charities, should focus on meeting the needs of those who are not entitled to support from statutory agencies. The interaction of commissioned work with their independence and other work will likely be a key consideration for the project organisations going forward.

Summary

The projects were successful in securing a range of positive impacts in terms of:

- Changes to local authority policies and procedures.

- Improved knowledge and confidence of the many children's social care staff they have been working alongside, advising and training.

- Improvements in some specific areas of local authority practice with young people with insecure immigration status, particularly in relation to assessing young people's needs.

These changes have been delivered through a combination of collaborative approaches (as detailed in chapter 4, above) including training which was, in some cases, co-delivered with young people themselves.

The projects have worked with and advised local authorities in developing changes to local policies and processes. These aimed variously to improve the identification, assessment and support of young people with insecure immigration status. The relationships built over the course of the evaluation period were key in securing these changes. Indeed, in the second half of the evaluation, local authorities particularly welcomed advice on how to identify and support young people with non-asylum immigration issues. The approaching deadline for applications to the EU Settlement Scheme may have provided increased impetus for this. Young people themselves, through the project's participation groups, also played a role in informing and securing some of these changes.

Interviewees acknowledged that the knowledge and good practice developed in local authorities may decline over time, but that improved processes and policies would be an important legacy for the programme. Project and local authority staff believe that the relationships developed will help them to continue to collaborate in the future.

Most project and local authority staff recognised potential for continued project work to be commissioned by local authorities. This may not cover all of what was delivered as part of this programme, with local authorities looking for a more bespoke offer aligned with their priorities. It should also be noted that no commissioning arrangements had been confirmed by the end of the evaluation period.

8. Impact on costs of supporting young people

This chapter sets out findings in relation to the potential costs to local authorities and the Exchequer that may have been avoided through the activities of the projects. Drawing on the insights of local authority and project staff, along with desk research, the sections below begin by exploring the different areas and ways in which costs may have been saved.

Reduced local authority capacity needed to address support needs

The holistic support provided by the projects was seen by interviewees as having the potential to reduce the workload of those working in children's social care. This was particularly the case where projects had a close working relationship with social care staff. The reduced workload was a result of projects sharing work that children's social care would otherwise have been doing themselves, such as attending appointments with the young person and supporting them to access education and mental health support.

Reduced demand on local authority staff time also came from the project improving the young person's ability to engage constructively with other professionals. This included social workers and PAs as well as the young person's solicitor and the Home Office. It was seen as reducing the time local authority staff would need to spend supporting the young person to communicate their needs and engage with the immigration system. The positive impact on wellbeing of young people realised by the resolution of immigration status was also noted. Where immigration status was resolved more promptly with the support of the projects, there would also be the potential for reduced demand on staff time to meet related needs of the young person. One local authority staff member said:

> *we've found that because that work has been happening earlier and earlier, and [the project] have been able to pick up work and work with young people well before they're getting to that stage...at the minute, actually, there is a lot less that needed chasing, a lot less that needed reviewing because obviously a lot of that work had happened earlier and processes were already in place for those young people.*
>
> Local authority staff member

All of the projects reported having shared their expertise with local authorities to support improvements in the care and support of young people with insecure immigration status. Through impacting positively on the knowledge and confidence of social care staff, project staff believed that local authority staff were required to invest less time understanding how best to support the young people therefore creating efficiencies in the system. Importantly, this belief was acknowledged by several local authority staff interviewed. The time freed up through this efficiency could lead to potential cost savings in terms of reducing the staffing required by the local authority or reallocating staff time to offer a higher level of support to children and young people where required. It could also contribute to reduced stress, lower sickness levels and turnover amongst the workforce. Measuring these potential gains would require detailed time monitoring and reporting requirements to be placed on local authority staff and was outside of the scope of this evaluation. It is therefore not possible to meaningfully quantify potential savings in staff time. The figures identified by such an exercise could, owing to areas of savings identified above, be significant for the local authorities in question.

Accommodation and subsistence for young people with no recourse to public funds

There is a specific group of young people whereby supporting them involves significant and yet avoidable cost for local authorities. These are young people who reach 18 without having resolved their immigration status and do not have any current application or appeal underway. These young people have no recourse to public funds (importantly, no access to welfare benefits and housing support that other care leavers can receive) and cannot usually work. Furthermore, funding from the Home Office to local authorities to pay for these young people's costs ceases. Local authority staff recognised this and were therefore particularly enthusiastic about early intervention aspects of the projects. One local authority staff member said:

> *the accommodation costs and the subsistence costs are astronomical, and so you'd probably only need three or four young people to have had a decision maybe a year earlier - a year of accommodation for each of those young people is more than the salary for that dedicated worker. So, it's a bit of a no-brainer, really, for local authorities, as far as I'm concerned.*

Local authority staff member

NRPF Connect is a voluntary database that local authorities can upload data to regarding the support they are providing to people with no recourse to public funds. During the evaluation period, 32 local authorities submitted data to the database on the additional costs they had incurred supporting care leavers who fall into this category. The average annual costs per young person reported was £18,897. For cases that ceased to incur such costs during the period, the average length of time these costs were incurred for was 868 days (2.38 years), giving a total average cost per young person of £44,931.

At the time of writing there is no readily available data to quantify the proportion of children in care with insecure immigration status who end up as care leavers and incur these support costs. It is fair to say, however, that it is not an uncommon occurrence. 492 such cases were logged on NRPF connect across the 32 local authorities, costing them collectively just under £2.5m during the evaluation period.

The amount of support that young people require will of course depend on the length of time that they have no recourse to public funds, which is in turn determined by their route to settlement and the timeliness and quality of their applications to the Home Office. The examples of Farooq, Henry, Tanya and Abi, described below, indicate the range of cases and costs that this condition can involve.

Legal representation

Project and local authority staff highlighted how supporting young people to submit the strongest possible initial immigration application helped to avoid the need for appeals and fresh applications later. One local authority staff member said

> *What we've found - is that because now we're able to access quality legal representation from the outset, solicitors are doing what they're supposed to do... that tends to mean that they're more likely to get a positive decision from the Home Office in the first place. So, it's a win-win situation, really, for the young person and for the local authority in terms of resolving that claim.*

Local authority staff member

Legal representation for asylum seekers is within the scope of legal aid, but for other immigration cases it is not unless they are a separated child under 18. Such costs would only fall to a local authority in relation to young people aged over 18 and taking a route to settlement outside the asylum system. Whilst the vast majority of young people on whom we gathered specific data (discussed in Chapter 6, above) were seeking asylum, the range of young people the projects worked with widened over the course of the evaluation. Unaccompanied young people seeking asylum only make up a minority of children in care with insecure immigration status (South London Refugee Association and Coram Children's Legal Centre 2021; Department for Education 2020). The potential costs of procuring the services of a private solicitor on a young person's behalf are therefore an important consideration for local authorities. Applications for exceptional case funding can me made for care leavers not normally eligible for legal aid. As in the case of some young people discussed elsewhere in this report, projects have been successful in securing legal aid in this way. This requires extra expert intervention, however, and cannot be guaranteed.

Tribunal and Home Office fees

Tribunal and Home Office fees are also waived for cases involving children and these fees do not apply in relation to asylum claims or applications to the EU Settlement Scheme. These fees can be significant however for young people seeking a route to settlement based on length of residency. If their initial applications are not made in a timely manner, several applications must be made to the Home Office after the young person is aged 18. These can attract not just the cost of the application fee but also the Migrant Health Surcharge for the period that the young person has limited leave to remain (see the cases of Abi and Tanya Below). Where immigration decisions are appealed on behalf of the young person there are tribunal fees to consider as well as the cost of representation by a barrister, if this goes to a hearing.

There is a fee for applying for citizenship as an adult or as a child. As of 26 May 2022 these fees are now, by default, waived for children in care (but not care leavers) (Home Office 2022). As this change happened after the evaluation period, this did not affect the examples described below. The impact of this change, however, is taken account of in the summary of costs set out in table 5 at the end of this chapter.

Examples of early and late intervention and their cost implications

To illustrate what some of these costs can amount to in relation to young people in different scenarios, we have developed a series of eight cost examples. They take account of accommodation and subsistence for young people who have no recourse to public funds, legal representation and Home Office and Tribunal Fees. They do not take account of local authority staff capacity required to support young people, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as it has not been possible to identify meaningful unit costs as part of this evaluation. The unit costs used to develop the examples, as well as other common costs, are set out in Table 4, below.

Table 4: Unit costs used in cost examples

Category (Source)	Item	Cost
Home Office fees (Home Office 2021c, 2021d)	Leave to remain application *'early' Indefinite leave to remain can also be sought through this application if applying under the 5 year concession (Home Office 2021e)	£1,033
	Indefinite leave to remain application	£2,389
	Registration (of a child as a British Citizen) application *Fee waived for children in care from 26 May 2022 (Home Office 2022)	£1,012
	Registration of an adult (as a British Citizen)	£1,126
	Naturalisation (of an adult as a British Citizen) application	£1,330
	Migrant Health Surcharge (amount levied via leave to remain application fees for every six months the charge is applicable)	£312
Tribunal fees (HM Courts and Tribunals Service 2021)	Appealing a decision on an immigration (non-Asylum) case – without a hearing	£80
Legal representation (solicitors fees) (South London Refugee Association and Coram Children's Legal Centre 2021)[7]	Support for leave to remain or naturalisation application	£1,500
	Support for an indefinite leave to remain application	£1,800
	Support for appealing a decision on an immigration (non-Asylum) case – without a hearing	£2,000
Accommodation and subsistence for young people with no recourse to public funds (Analysis of data from NRPF Connect, see page 71)	Weekly costs	£363

The examples are based on case notes relating to real young people supported by the projects. Some examples are based on the experience of more than one young person. Two examples (Henry and Sanjiya) are fictitious but based on expert advice from projects about different legal routes to

7   This source does not include cost figures for support for a naturalisation application or support for an EU Settlement Scheme Application. For the purposes of this analysis it is assumed that this will be the same cost as support for a leave to remain application.

settlement and their implications. Names and other details have been changed to protect the identity of the young people involved.

The eight examples presented below are made up of two examples of young people from four broad categories, representing the range of situations and immigration status of young people supported by the projects. These are: unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people affected by trauma; young people taken into care and whose birth parents are from an EU member state; young people taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status – where the young person is also seeking to gain British Citizenship, and; young people taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status where the young person is not seeking British Citizenship.

For each of these categories, we set out an example of **'early intervention'** where the young person's social worker or other local authority staff have taken prompt action, including through collaboration with one of the projects, to ensure the young person has the support they need. We then set out a corresponding example of **'late intervention'**, where support from one of the projects has only been sought once the young person has faced difficulties or delays.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people affected by trauma

Early Intervention cost example: Nadia

Nadia arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child in March 2019 and was taken into the care of the local authority. She was 15 years old and had fled from South Sudan. She was referred by the local authority to the project in April 2019 and the project staff referred her to a solicitor.

The solicitor started working on Nadia's case in May 2019. They worked with her to prepare a detailed statement and gathered evidence on her vulnerability. This included gathering evidence from the local authority.

The solicitor made a request to the Home Office for them to grant Nadia refugee status without the need to undergo a substantive interview. This was considered to be in her best interest due to her difficulties in talking about her past trauma and her current vulnerabilities. The request was successful, and she was granted refugee status in October 2020, without the need for a substantive interview. She was 17 years old when she obtained refugee status. When she is eligible, Nadia would like to apply for indefinite leave to remain and British citizenship.

Costs on the path to settlement: Nadia

Home Office fee for naturalisation application	£1,330
Solicitors fee to support naturalisation application	£1,500
Total	**£2,830**

Late intervention cost example: Farooq

Farooq arrived in the UK when he was 16 years old as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child from Libya. He was subsequently taken into the care of the local authority. Farooq regularly shared his concern with his foster carer and his social worker, including at annual reviews, about the uncertainty he faced. His social worker thought that there may be some unusual delay in his asylum claimed and referred him to one of the projects. By this time, over two years had passed since Farooq first claimed asylum and he had still not yet had his substantive interview with the Home Office. As his status had not been resolved by the time he had turned 18, he had no recourse to public funds and was unable to claim universal credit or housing benefit.

Upon reviewing the case, Farooq's project caseworker noticed that his solicitor had not prepared or submitted a 'Statement of Evidence Form'. This meant that no substantial work was held for him on his file for the previous two years. The solicitor had informed the Home Office that, due to the client's poor mental health, they were unable to take a statement. However, they had neither sent any evidence of his mental health issues to the Home Office, nor followed up with Farooq or his social worker to see if he could prepare a statement later.

The project staff supported Farooq to submit a complaint about his solicitor and find a new one to take over the matter. Once the new solicitor was secured, his asylum claim was progressed, and he had a substantive interview in July 2019. His asylum was unfortunately refused the following month.

Farooq's asylum claim refusal was appealed and he has since attended two court hearings. At the end of the evaluation period he was expecting a decision imminently. Should he be granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, Farooq would like to apply for indefinite leave to remain[1] and British Citizenship.

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1   There are no Home Office fees for those with refugee status or humanitarian protection wishing to apply for indefinite leave to remain.

Costs on path to settlement: Farooq

Home Office fee for naturalisation application	£1,330
Solicitors fees to support naturalisation application	£1,500
216 weeks (four years two months) accommodation and subsistence	£78,495
Total	**£81,325**

Young people taken into care from parents from EU member state

Early intervention cost example: Benas

Benas was a nine-month-old baby who was being looked after by the local authority. He was born in the UK and his mother had Lithuanian nationality and been living in the UK for three years. His social worker referred him to the project in the final weeks before the EUSS deadline of 30th June 2021.

Despite the imminence of the EUSS deadline the project decided to take on the case. The project staff were able to secure pro bono support from a barrister to enable Benas to make an application to the Lithuanian Embassy for proof of his nationality. They were subsequently able to support him to make an EUSS application prior to the deadline. They were able to secure pre-settled status for him.

An application for settled status will need to be made after five years. It is expected that would be the path Benas would take considering the young age he became looked after by the local authority. For the same reason, it is likely a British Citizenship application will be made on his behalf. This will not incur a Home Office fee, as the Home Office recently announced that fees would be waived for children in care. Early intervention in his case will have undoubtedly contributed to reduced costs over the long term.

Costs on path to settlement: Benas

-nil-

Late intervention cost example: Henry

Henry was born in the UK to parents with French citizenship, who themselves hailed from Benin. He was taken into care at age of 6. Henry's nationality was not recorded by the local authority upon him being taken into care. He had multiple social workers and placements in the years that followed.

After some difficulties in his early teens, Henry was settled in a foster placement from age 14 and established many local friends and a strong wider support network. His social worker was not aware that he did not have British Citizenship. The social worker realised something may be wrong when Henry was not sent his national insurance number before his sixteenth birthday. He was referred to a local solicitor who supported him, on the instructions of his social worker, to apply for limited leave to remain on private life grounds. This application was refused as the solicitor did not follow up with Henry and his social worker to ensure all relevant evidence was included on his application.

Henry's next social worker, who supported him as a care leaver, referred him to one of the projects, who advised that Henry should have applied to the EU Settlement Scheme. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the deadline for this scheme had passed. Rather than seeking further support from Henry's current solicitor for this, they gained advice from a local charity that had Home Office funding to support vulnerable people, including children in care, to make late applications to the EU Settlement Scheme. Although support for his application was free, because of his insecure immigration status, he was unable to access housing benefit or universal credit from his 18th birthday up until when his settled status was confirmed three months later. The shortfall had to be met by the local authority.

Henry has always felt that the UK is his home and identifies as British. With the support of his Personal Advisor he would like to apply for citizenship at the earliest opportunity. As Henry is seeking citizenship as an adult rather than a child, he will need to make an application for naturalisation with the support of a private solicitor.

Costs on path to settlement: Henry

Home Office fee for naturalisation application	£1,330
Solicitors fees to support naturalisation application	£1,500
12 weeks accommodation and subsistence	£4,361
Total	**£7,191**

Young people taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status (young person seeking citizenship)

Early intervention cost example: Kwesi

Kwesi arrived in the UK from Ghana aged 6 with his parents who were looking to settle in the UK. He was taken into care around 18 months later. His nationality and immigration status were recorded by the local authority as part of his initial care plan. Kwesi had limited leave to remain, which was due to expire in under a year's time. Within a few weeks of his care order being made, his social worker referred him to one of the projects to address this. The project advised Kwesi and his social worker on the likely steps required for him to resolve his status and supported referral to a suitable solicitor to progress this.

Three further applications for limited leave to remain were made whilst Kwesi was a child and before he was eligible to apply for settled status. At age 14, as part of his pathway planning, Kwesi confirmed that he wanted to apply for indefinite leave to remain and for British Citizenship. The local authority, project, and solicitor worked together to support the progression of his indefinite leave to remain application when he was 16 and submission of his citizenship application before he turned 18. Kwesi was granted citizenship aged 18 years and 5 months.

Costs on the path to settlement: Kwesi

Home Office fee for registration application	£1,012
Total	**£1,012**

Late intervention cost example: Tanya

Tanya was born in the UK and taken into care when she was 4. Her parents had travelled from Jamaica to live with her aunt shortly before she was born, but she was not sure what their immigration status was. When Tanya was 17, she saw coverage of the Windrush scandal and was concerned about how she may be treated in the future. She decided she should apply for British citizenship[1] and, with the consent of her social worker, instructed a solicitor based in her local high street to support her with the application. Her solicitor failed to collect enough evidence to demonstrate that she had been born in the UK and lived here continuously for the first 10 years of her life. The Home Office refused Tanya's application.

After Tanya heard that her application had been refused, she spoke to her social worker and her solicitor to review her evidence and refusal letter. It was agreed that she should make an application for limited leave to remain. By this time Tanya had turned 18 but her social worker arranged for the local authority to pay the relevant fees. This was granted but on a 10 year route to settlement, with a no recourse to public funds condition. Tanya was worried about the difficulties this would create for her. She discussed her situation with her PA who referred her to one of the projects. The project worked with Tanya and her PA to find a new solicitor and make sure they had the evidence they needed to make a new application for citizenship, ensuring that sufficient evidence was provided. This application was successful and Tanya was granted British citizenship aged 22.

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1   Tanya was not eligible to apply to the Home Office's dedicated Windrush scheme as her parents had arrived too recently.

Costs on the path to settlement: Tanya

Home Office fee for child registration application	£1,012
Home Office fee for leave to remain application	£1,033
Home Office fee for adult registration application	£1,126
Solicitors fee to support leave to remain application	£1,500
Solicitors fee to support adult registration application	£1,500
Health Surcharge – 30 months (2 ½ Years)	£1,560
208 weeks (4 years) accommodation and subsistence	£75,588
Total	**£83,319**

Young people taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status (young person not seeking citizenship)

Early intervention cost example: Sanjiya

Sanjiya arrived in the UK from Nepal aged six with her parents who had work visas. She was taken into care at the age of 10 following a breakdown of her parents' relationship and arrangements for her care. A year after Sanjiya was taken into care, her birth father was deported following a criminal conviction and her mother passed away shortly afterwards. At her next annual review meeting, the implications of these events for Sanjiya's longer term future in care and in the UK were considered. It was decided, with Sanjiya's input, that the local authority would apply directly for four years leave to remain under the Home Office's children in care policy. Sanjiya is now 13 and, now that her leave has been granted, is developing a clear plan with her social worker to apply for indefinite leave to remain at age 15, before her support from the local authority and legal aid reduce. She is not sure if she will apply for British citizenship as she may want to return to Nepal as an adult, and dual citizenship is not allowed.

Costs on the path to settlement: Sanjiya

-nil-

Late intervention cost example: Abi

Abi was born in Trinidad and came to the UK to live with her aunt at the age of six. Abi and her aunt's relationship broke down when she was 12 and she was taken into care. Abi raised her immigration status as an issue to be addressed when she was starting to develop her pathway plan with her social worker. With the support of her social worker, foster carer and local legal aid solicitor she made an application for leave to remain in the UK under the private life route. This application was finally submitted shortly before Abi's 18th birthday and she was granted 30 months leave to remain.

Abi's solicitor failed to advise her and her social worker about making an application for limited leave to remain under the child in care policy, which if granted could have made her entitled to apply for ILR after four years. As a result she was put on the 10 year route to settlement without recourse to public funds. Her application to extend this leave was subject to a Home Office fee, including the Health Surcharge, and she had to seek support of a private solicitor as she was now an adult.

Abi was referred to one of the projects for support to help her with her next application to extend her leave. At this point she was advised that she could request for early indefinite leave to remain under the new 5-year concession, as she had been lawfully in the UK for five years, starting whilst she was still a child. As a result she was granted ILR. Abi has decided not to apply for British Citizenship for the time being, as she feels having indefinite leave gives her the certainty she needs while she completes her higher education course and considers options for her future.

Cost examples: Summary

Table 5, below, summarises the costs on the path to settlement associated with the eight examples set out in this section. The difference between the costs of the late intervention examples and the early intervention examples are set out in the last column.

Table 5: Summary of costs associated with supporting eight young people on their path to settlement

	Late intervention		Early intervention		Difference in costs[8]
	Name	Costs	Name	Costs	
Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person affected by trauma	Farooq	£81,325	Nadia	£2,830	£78,495
Taken into care from parents from EU member state	Henry	£7,191	Benas	£0	£7,191

8   As explained in the main text of this report, the cost examples are based on individual young people whose circumstances may only be partially comparable.

Taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status (young person seeking citizenship)	Tanya	£83,319	Kwesi	£1,012	£82,307
Taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status (young person seeking citizenship) Taken into care from parents with insecure immigration status (young person not seeking citizenship)	Abi	£101,111	Sanjiya	£0	£101,111
Total					£269,104

The examples set out in this table show that, whilst young people may be in similar situations when they are taken into care, and seek the same outcomes in terms of their future in the UK, the costs associated with supporting them towards these outcomes can vary wildly. Whilst Farooq and Nadia both struggled to engage with the asylum process due to their mental health challenges, early action from Nadia's local authority and the project supporting her meant that these costs could be contained. The costs to the local authority in relation to legal representation, Home Office fees and accommodation and subsistence were £78,495 more for Farooq than for Nadia.

The most extreme contrast in costs was between Abi and Sanjiya. By taking the initiative and enabling Sanjiya to resolve her immigration status before she turned 18, her local authority avoided having to pay any fees to the Home Office and solicitors, and ensured she was able to claim benefits like any other care leaver. These opportunities were not taken up by the local authority supporting Abi, with the potential costs of supporting her to the same outcome coming to £101,111.

The examples of Henry and Benas show that even supporting young people through the EU Settlement Scheme can vary notably in the potential cost to the local authority. Overall, the costs associated with the four late intervention examples were £269,104 more than those for the early intervention examples. Whilst these are only illustrative examples they demonstrate the financial benefits to local authorities that can be gained through early intervention and collaboration with projects such as those evaluated.

Summary

During the evaluation, evidence of potential cost savings for local authorities, as a result of the projects' work with young people, was identified in four main areas.

1. **Reduced levels of local authority resource required and efficiencies created in the system** due to projects having improved young people's ability to engage with professionals; having contributed to more prompt resolution of young people's immigration status and having

improved the knowledge and confidence of local authority staff in supporting young people.

2. **Reduced demand on local authorities for accommodation and subsistence** for young people with no recourse to public funds, due to young people's immigration status being resolved in time for them to be able to claim benefits like other care leavers.

3. **Reduced need for private legal representation** and the associated solicitors' fees in relation to immigration applications, due to advice and guidance in accessing high quality representation whilst the young people are still entitled to legal aid.

4. **Reduced need to pay Home Office and tribunal fees** through supporting the young person to make as many of the relevant applications as possible to the Home Office whilst they are still eligible for fee waivers and the reduced price of applying for British Citizenship as a child as opposed to doing this as an adult.

A series of examples of the costs associated with supporting young people were developed based on the case notes of young people supported by the projects. They illustrate that whilst young people may be in similar situations when they are taken into care, and seek the same outcomes in terms of their future in the UK, the costs associated with supporting them towards these outcomes can vary wildly. Those examples that involved early intervention by the local authority, in collaboration with the projects, to address the young person's immigration status, involved notably less cost than those where such early intervention and collaboration were lacking.

9. Conclusions and implications

This evaluation considered the practice and impact of four voluntary sector-led projects collaborating with local authorities to support care leavers with insecure immigration status. The findings, developed over the two-and-a-half-year evaluation period are wide ranging. They underline some of the key challenges faced by these young people and identify common aspirations across projects and local authorities for addressing these. They illustrate the approaches that can be taken in this work with young people and some of the potential barriers and enablers to their effectiveness. They also provide encouraging evidence of positive impact of the projects and their collaboration with local authorities. In this final chapter, a recap on the main findings is provided before drawing out key implications for professionals and organisations working with these young people.

Shared challenges and aspirations

The young people historically supported by the project organisations exhibited a particular range of needs and experiences that hindered their access to support from local authorities and their chances of positive outcomes. They had often been exposed to traumatic events prior to coming to this country and had a lack of trust in authorities. They experienced variable quality legal representation as well as facing barriers in accessing educational, social and employment activities.

Projects and local authorities identified challenges in addressing these needs. These included: a lack of detailed knowledge amongst social workers and personal advisors of what the UK's Asylum and Immigration law means for their responsibilities to young people on their caseload; a lack of confidence amongst these professionals in providing support (partly attributed to this knowledge gap but also stigma and the 'hostile environment'); and difficulties identifying relevant young people and determining their entitlements. A potential challenge highlighted in our literature review, and further stressed in interviews, was the implication of turning 18 for young people's support and status. This was particularly an issue for young people who had only been granted status until their 18th birthday and had not been effectively supported to resolve their status beyond this point. Project staff were concerned that young people who were not seeking asylum but still had insecure immigration status for other reasons were not being identified and supported consistently by local authorities. They also anticipated, at the beginning of the evaluation period, that additional challenges would result from Brexit, with the need to identify and support care leavers born in EU countries to maintain their right to live in the UK.

The factors described above contributed to young people not getting the right support to address their immediate wellbeing and not providing a fair opportunity to regularise their immigration status before their entitlements are reduced when reaching adulthood. The project staff, and local authority staff they worked with, therefore wanted the projects to deliver direct support to young people in the form of specialist immigration casework and advice and holistic support. The projects sought to collaborate to improve capacity in local authorities and promote early intervention. They also aimed to give a voice to young people with experience of insecure immigration status in informing the policies and practices that affect them.

Key considerations for practice and collaboration

Projects employed a range of approaches to successfully realise their, and their local authority colleagues', aspirations. Projects invested significant staff time in building strong relationships with

the young people they were supporting. As well as using their expertise to support young people with their immigration cases, project staff offered flexible and holistic support that responded to their diverse and immediate practical needs. As part of this, they supported young people to access social and educational opportunities and health services. They also helped young people to get the most out of their legal representation.

All projects delivered training to local authority staff which was well received and lauded for its tailored approach. In coordinating support for individual young people, some project and local authority staff effectively acted as colleagues in a team around the young person. Some activities carried out by projects as part of this coordinated approach were, arguably, the responsibility of the local authority. This highlighted ongoing weaknesses in the support typically offered by social workers and personal advisors. Project staff revised their offer in some areas to manage demand on their time in filling these gaps. They also used their relationship with local authority staff to advocate informally for individual young people to get improved support. Collaboration also took place at a case load and population level through convening groups of professionals across the statutory and voluntary sector to share advice and knowledge and advising local authority service managers on immigration policies and process. These aspects of collaboration were key to developing and implementing solutions allowing young people with non-asylum immigration issues and EU citizen care leavers to be identified and supported.

There was evidence of the projects taking steps to follow good practice in giving young people a voice, adhering to the principles set out in existing literature. Of those young people that were able to participate, some influenced local authority policy and practice, whilst others were able to steer the format and focus of their own participation work, including undertaking and presenting peer research.

Evidence from the evaluation points to a number of factors that impacted on the applicability and success of these ways of working. This in turn points to the importance of the following:

- **Recognising, accepting and responding to the evolving nature of individual young people's needs**

  Projects provided highly personalised support to young people, with their signposting, methods of communication and level of support being dictated by young people's specific needs. Projects and local authorities also accepted that the division of labour between those supporting them differs depending on young people's current relationships with these different professionals. For example, due to the trust gained by project staff from young people, it was recognised that projects were often better placed to understand needs and pass this insight on to local authority colleagues to inform support plans. A critical point to stress is that a young person's needs and relationships evolve, particularly as they become more trusting of, and engaged with, the projects, and projects saw success when they evolved the support they provide to young people accordingly. **Charities and their funders should consider what this means in terms of the time period over which impact can be monitored,** for example allowing at least a two-year period to capture the impact on those young people who need more time to build trust in those supporting them. This also highlights the importance of continuity of relationships between young people and the adults that are working with them. **This may be a particular challenge for local authorities to consider as they seek to manage staff turnover and capacity issues.** Where some young people may have to be reallocated between social workers or PAs because of staff changes, for example, young people with insecure immigration status could be prioritised for continuity of support. This means, for example, allocating them to more experienced social workers who may be less likely to move on, or keeping them with any existing social workers who are reducing their overall caseload.

  Similarly, young people's capacity for engaging in participation activity to influence policy

and practice varied depending on where they were on their journey towards a settled future. Project staff were rightly wary of involving young people with the most acute needs so as not to overwhelm them and to stay focused on the immediate challenges to those young people's wellbeing. They were able, however, to meaningfully involve young people whose immediate needs had been addressed, in participation activity that was accessible and aimed to build confidence. Preserving the ability to be responsive and avoiding a static or 'one size fits all' offer for individual young people will be critical to the success of ongoing and future support. This means thinking creatively about how young people's insights can be gathered outside of formal group activity, and how young people with less direct contact with the projects can be included. This of course requires time and careful consideration, particularly for organisations where such approaches are less well developed. **Funders looking to support young people's involvement in influencing may wish to allow for a development and learning phase within their funded projects to allow for the right approach to be developed before delivery.** They may also wish to ensure that organisations are able to dedicate sufficient staff resource to this task.

- **Flexibility in response to local context**

The context in which the projects worked, and what was realistic in terms of collaboration with local authorities, varied and evolved over time. Some local authority staff were initially unable to engage in building relationships with the projects as they struggled to meet immediate demands in their area. This meant that forming a team around the young person was not initially achievable. Collaboration levels did improve, however, as the relationships developed. Social workers taking up advice from projects also depended on the structure of local authorities and the expertise of staff in individual teams. Existing, dedicated teams did not take advice up as much, particularly if they held responsibility for policies and decision making on immigration and asylum. The services already available to young people varied between local authority area (and over time due to the pandemic), with implications for the capacity projects needed to deliver holistic support. Where there was a vibrant charity sector providing services and positive activities, projects could signpost to these, but needed to provide more support directly where this was not the case. This all underlines the importance of understanding the local context and recognising that building holistic support for young people and effective collaboration with local authorities can take time. Below, we highlight how the evidence base on approaches to supporting these young people should be further developed. **Critically, charities, local authorities and funders looking to build on the learning in other local areas in England will need to continue to develop a bespoke, local approach in such projects, rather than looking to deploy like-for-like models developed elsewhere.**

- **Clearly defining roles within a multi-purpose, multi-agency team**

Projects and local authorities saw benefits of close collaboration to meet the needs of individual young people, including being able to be more responsive to the young person's needs as well as developing their own working relationships. Particularly in the early stages of the evaluation, project staff were, however, wary of lines of responsibility becoming blurred as they shared similar tasks with local authority staff. Independence from local authorities and the wider statutory sector was a key tool for projects in developing trust with young people. Distance from formal decision making, for example around age assessments, was a critical part of this. Projects learnt that within their own work, there can be challenges in prioritising between meeting young people's immediate needs and supporting them to get involved in making change. The evaluation findings suggest that **these roles – statutory decision making, day to day support, and facilitation of participation activities – would benefit from being more clearly defined** at the outset and reviewed regularly thereafter to both better inform the young person and to provide clarity for those working with them. In practice this means project staff providing direct support to young

people and referring them to participation activities, but those participation activities being led by another staff member. It also means keeping an open mind and maintaining high ambitions about the level of collaboration between local authority and project staff, but (as these projects generally did) ensuring this is governed by clear protocols on responsibilities and information sharing.

- **Challenging policy and practice professionally and through agreed channels**

    Projects played an important role in informing and advocating for improved support for young people from local authorities. This was often welcomed by the local authority staff they worked with and differences of opinion did not generally jeopardise ongoing collaboration. The findings suggest that this can be done in a way that builds rather than erodes trust, but doing so requires careful consideration. This means avoiding, for example, criticising individual professionals for following local authority policy, or challenging colleagues in public fora where there is an opportunity to discuss the issues in a more appropriate space. By the end of the evaluation period, projects had established working groups and communities of practice with the local authority staff, providing a suitable space to discuss concerns and coordinate support for young people in a mutually respectful manner. **Charities and local authorities should consider maintaining fora like those developed by the projects to share intelligence and solutions, and facilitate their staff collaborating as partners in a community of practice.** Similar to the time needed to develop relationships with some young people, other organisations looking to influence local practice will need time to develop good working relationships with local authorities. This should also be considered by charities and their funders in terms of the timescales across which it may be reasonable to see impact.

Impact of the projects and further use of learning

The projects demonstrated positive impact on young people's lives in many ways. This included improving their wellbeing through reducing stress and loneliness and helping secure access to more supportive placements. It included building young people's resilience by helping them understand their rights, engage with informal support networks, and access education and training. Over the course of the evaluation period, the projects also supported many young people towards positive immigration outcomes. Our analysis suggests that these young people gained their immigration status more quickly than young people in other local areas. Young people valued the responsive and holistic support provided and often saw it as transformational for them.

Evaluation evidence found that collaboration with local authorities had led to improvements in their policy and practice. This included improved procedures for identifying and assessing the needs of young people, the development of new dedicated teams for migrant or asylum-seeking young people and public commitments to support all young people to regularise their status. Collaboration also led to improved knowledge and confidence amongst their staff in supporting care leavers with insecure immigration status.

The projects delivered potential cost savings for local authorities in the form of reduced staff resource needed to support young people, decreased likelihood of young people requiring financial support from the local authority as a result of having no recourse to public funds, and the reduced need to pay Home Office, tribunal and solicitors' fees on the young person's behalf. Examples of young people supported by the projects illustrate that whilst young people may be in similar situations when they are taken into care, and seek the same outcomes in terms of their future in the UK, the costs associated with supporting them towards these outcomes can vary wildly. These examples also illustrated how early intervention and collaboration between local authorities and the projects can act to contain these costs.

As this evaluation has identified strong evidence of positive impact on outcomes for young people, as well as adding value to local authorities' practice, there is an imperative for other charities and local authorities to learn from what has been achieved. The findings have several key implications for how the good practice identified can be mirrored across the country:

- **Potential for commission by local authorities**

  Local authorities valued a wide range of activities that the projects delivered to improve support for young people. This raises the prospect of the projects' continued work being commissioned by local authorities. Training and advice for social workers and PAs were the aspects of support most amenable to this arrangement. Independence from the local authority was, however, a key enabler in building trust with young people and in being able to push for improved policy and practice. This means that charities considering such arrangements have to ensure that their relationship with the local authority is managed with clear governance arrangements that protect the projects' ability to hold an independent relationship with the young people. There is a case for most or all of the projects' existing activities to be commissioned by local authorities across England as a key part of meeting their corporate parenting responsibilities. **The reception and impact of training and advice for local authority staff suggests that these activities should be considered a valuable part of charities' offer, in addition to their one to one advice and casework with young people.**

- **Framing of an offer to support local authorities in their duties**

  Local authority staff particularly recognised value in the support projects provided that was aligned with fulfilling their own statutory duties. For example, there was particular collaboration to meet the needs of young people who were still looked after and to secure early access to immigration support. Understandably, the projects' work also prioritised those without entitlements to statutory support from local authorities, owing to their more substantial unmet needs. For those young people in a more challenging situation, the projects' role was more centred on providing direct support and navigating and challenging the wider immigration system. Balancing resources across early intervention and collaboration with local authorities on the one hand, and crisis support for those in most immediate need, on the other, poses a potential dilemma for charities supporting care leavers with insecure immigration status.

  By working with local authorities, however, projects were able to prevent some young people ending up in crisis and improve support offered by the local authority, potentially having a longer-term impact on outcomes. The fact that charities will have to take an independent, challenging approach to support young people in crisis should not, therefore, override the potential for collaboration with local authorities to meet the needs of other young people. **Charities may want to consider how allocating some resource to early intervention can help build positive relationships with local authorities and reduce the number of young people reaching the age of 18 without regularising their immigration status. Funders may want to consider how they can support this, for example, by having designated funds for early intervention initiatives which complement existing funds for meeting the immediate needs of these young people.**

- **Addressing barriers at a national level**

  This evaluation did not aim to appraise the UKs public discourse and national policy on immigration. As such, it does not draw general conclusions on policies such as the 'hostile environment' and wider priorities of the UK government in this regard. It did identify, however, the impact that some systemic issues are having on support for care leavers with insecure immigration status. The evaluation found, in its early stages, that the 'hostile environment' was adversely

affecting the attitudes and confidence of carers and local authority staff working with young people who were legally entitled to be in the country and have the same support as other children in care and care leavers. During the evaluation, we heard evidence of the pressures facing local authorities, primarily the size of the vulnerable child population and amount of staff turnover in social work teams, which affected the extent to which they were able to avail of projects' support. This was also seen in projects identifying and supporting young people who had absconded from care in other parts of the country. Local authorities struggled to identify young people and plan their support because of gaps in routinely collected data. This is in addition to our observations about the gaps in local authority support for young people which projects found themselves filling. A Government-commissioned Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England has recently concluded (MacAlister 2022). Our findings suggest there is a case for the following key improvements to be part of the implementation of the Review, which the **Department for Education should work with local authorities and charities to secure:**

▷ more collaboration and coordination between local authorities in supporting young people with insecure immigration status, so that a more consistent offer of support can be delivered, including in areas such as Kent where more migrants arrive in the country
▷ adequate funding and workforce development, so local authority staff have the capacity and skills to support these young people to access the expert guidance they need, when they need it
▷ collaboration between local authorities and specialist charities, so that the social capital and distinct expertise of the voluntary and community sector can be used to complement and improve local authority support for these young people.

These improvements have key synergies with themes in the Review and align with its recommendations around supporting the workforce, investment, national leadership and regional collaboration. It will be vital that the needs and experiences of care leavers with insecure immigration status, including those evidenced in this report, are taken into account in the implementation of the Review's recommendations.

Continuing to develop evidence-based policy and practice

This evaluation was limited in scope to considering four projects working with five local authorities in a specialist area of practice with relatively little previous research or evaluation. It considered a wide range of issues at a changeable time in this area of policy and practice. Whilst we have drawn conclusions about the implementation and impact of these particular projects, caution needs to be exercised in generalising the findings to other areas and organisations.

There are two main areas of inquiry that could further contribute to evidence-based practice in this field. Firstly, this evaluation identified areas where the local context, particularly the demands faced by individual local authorities and the way in which their services are structured, impacted on the best approaches to effective collaboration to support young people. This could be further explored by engaging with a larger, more representative sample of local authorities and staff working at different levels within them. Secondly, examples of cost savings delivered through early intervention and collaboration could be developed into a more thorough economic analysis, based on a representative sample of young people supported in this way and comparison with an appropriate control group. This could include modelling of staff costs and efficiencies within local authorities as well as the direct costs quantified in the examples in this report. This would help inform cost benefit analysis for local authorities or other statutory agencies considering funding this kind of support.

This evaluation has indicated the scope and impact of holistic support and joint working that can be

delivered in aid of this group of young people. It has demonstrated the range and potential scale of impact of pursuing a holistic and collaborative approach across the voluntary sector and local authorities. Those working with care leavers with insecure immigration status across the country should draw inspiration from this, as well as renewed optimism for securing them better outcomes.

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Appendix 1: Summary of recommendations for local authorities, charities and funders

Area of learning from evaluation	Recommendations for local authorities	Recommendations for charities	Recommendations for funders
Recognising, accepting and responding to the evolving nature of individual young people's needs	Ensure continuity in social worker support for care leavers with insecure immigration status		Take into account time needed to build relationships with young people and develop effective participation activity when setting time over which impact is measured
Flexibility in response to local context:		Consider how local authority structures and pressures may affect training needs and take up; How local community and voluntary services may inform holistic support offer to young people	
Clearly defining roles within a multi-purpose, multiagency team:	Clearly delineate decision making and day to day support roles, agree this with partner charities and communicate this to young people	Clearly delineate day to day support from group-based participation activity and communicate this to young people	
Challenging policy and practice professionally and through agreed channels:	Maintain fora at strategic and practitioner level to share insight and solutions with charities and their staff	Maintain fora at strategic and practitioner level to share insight and solutions with local authorities and their staff	Take into account time needed to build relationships with local authorities when setting time over which impact is measured
Potential for commission by local authorities	Consider commissioning training and advice for local authority staff as well as one to one case work and advice for young people	Develop an offer for local authorities focussed on early intervention to resolve immigration status before care leavers reach age 18	Consider dedicated early intervention funding to support charities to develop this offer, whilst protecting work with older care leavers.
Building the evidence base			Consider funding: Research across many local authorities to explore impact of local context on best approaches; Cost benefit analysis building on cost examples in this evaluation

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Appendix 2: Core topic guides

Support workers

> **Legend**
> [Instructions]
> Information to read
> - **Questions to ask all participants**
>   ▷ Probes to ask if relevant, and not already covered
>   ○ Prompts to explain/give examples if
>   respondent struggling

[Use this topic guide flexibly, it is not a script. Questions are written as a guide and researcher should use and probe as appropriate. Use probes and follow-up questions to help participants 'unpack' these as far as they are able and willing to.]

Introduction

I am [insert name] from the National Children's Bureau's research team and we are carrying out research about how voluntary sector services are helping young people with insecure immigration status. Our research is funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation who have asked us to talk to services supported by its Shared Ground Fund to find out what works in supporting this group of young people and what local and national changes might improve their outcomes.

We will use the information you provide through this interview, alongside other material, to produce a report for Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The information you share will be anonymised before publication. We will not share any personal information about you or your clients with the Home Office or any immigration authorities.

The key point to remember is there are no right or wrong answers. And if there are any questions you would rather not answer then just tell me and we can move on.

The interview will last approximately 40 minutes.

We have an information sheet which we would like you to read and I can talk through with you. Then we would like you to complete a short form which confirms that you would like to take part in the study. If you do not wish to take part or if you change your mind, that's absolutely fine and will not affect our findings about your work.

i. **We would like to record the interview if this is OK?**
   So we have an accurate record of what you said and do not have to ask you to repeat yourself. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside the National Children's Bureau research team except for the transcription service which will be typing up each interview into a written format.

ii. **Do you have any questions for me before we start?**

iii.   **Are you happy to take part in this interview?**

A. Who you help and how

- **Can you briefly describe your role as it relates to supporting young people with insecure immigration status?**

    ▷ What format does this take (face-to-face, email etc.)

    ▷ How many such young people have you worked with over the last year?

    ▷ Could you briefly describe the characteristics of the young people you work with in terms of gender, age, country of origin, etc.?

    ▷ How do young people reach your service?

B. YP Outcomes

- **What are the main challenges that the young people you work with face?**

[Prompt with outcome areas]:
    ○ Immigration status
    ○ Housing/homelessness
    ○ Money/financial literacy/access to banking
    ○ Life skills/Independent living
    ○ Community and Social life
    ○ Education
    ○ Physical health (inc access to primary and dental care)
    ○ Mental health and wellbeing
    ○ Support from social workers

- **How do you help the young people with these challenges?**

    ○ Do you advise or advocate?
    ○ Do you provide practical or emotional support?
    ○ Do you signpost to other services? If so, which ones? How do you work with them?

- **What impact do you think this support has on the young person?**

C. Barriers and enablers

- **Thinking about the people you work alongside (either inside or outside your organisation), what or who in particular has the most positive impact on your work?**

- ▷ Why do you think this is?

- ▷ How could others be more like this?

- **What or who (if anything) do you feel may get in the way of your work?** (This might be systems or processes, other organisations, or people...)

  - ▷ Why do you think this is?

  - ▷ What do you think might resolve this?

- **If there was one change you could make to improve these young people's outcomes, be that to local services, the law, or society as whole what would it be?**

  - ▷ Why?

  - ▷ Is there anything that would come a close second?

- **What is the most rewarding thing about the work you do?**

Service managers

[instructions, introduction and questions i-iii as above]

A. Who you help and how

- **Tell me about your service model for this group of Young People**

    ▷ What format does this take (face-to-face, email etc)

    ▷ How many such young people has it supported over the last year

    ▷ Could your briefly describe who makes up your group of service users in terms of gender, age, country of origin etc?

    ▷ How do young people reach your service? Are there any specific criteria for accessing your support

B. YP outcomes

- **What are the main challenges that the young people you work with face?**

[Prompt with outcome areas]:
- Immigration status
- Housing/homelessness
- Money/financial literacy/access to banking
- Life skills/Independent living
- Community and Social life
- Education
- Physical health (inc access to primary and dental care)
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Support from social workers

- **How (if at all) does the service contribute to addressing these challenges?**

    - Does your service provide support and or advice directly relating to this?
    - Do you signpost to other services? If so, which ones? Describe nature of interaction

- **What evidence do you have about the impact on the young person?**

- **How do young people influence your work and those of others? How do you support this?**

C. Demonstrating value

- **Which of the challenges we've discussed have the most potential to escalate if you did not step in? What are they?**

    ▷ What would be the implications for other services?

    ▷ How (if at all) have you gone about highlighting your value to these others services?

- **What opportunities may there be for demonstrating your value / impact as a service?**

D. Barriers and enablers

- **Tell me about your relationship with the Local Authority – how is it going/changing?**

- **Have you developed strong links with any particular agencies? How have you done this?**

    ○ [Hearing about relationships with statutory bodies is most useful but can also talk about charities]
    ○ This might include relationships you have successfully strengthened, or are better than you may have expected

    ▷ What is it that makes this relationship effective?

    ▷ Could this work for other agencies?

    ▷ Who should we talk to in the other agencies to get the other side of the story?

- **Are the any agencies with whom your relationship is particularly challenging?**

    ▷ Why do you think this is?

- **Are there any areas [i.e. from the outcomes star] you would like to help young people with but the barriers presented by the practices and policies of other agencies are too great?**

    ○ This may be relationships, local policy and practice, resources, national policy and practice (i.e. Home Office) etc

    ▷ What are these barriers?

    ▷ Are there any potential ways of overcoming that you could work on locally?

- **If there was one change you could make to improve these young people's outcomes, be that to local services, the law, or society as a whole what would it be?**

    ▷ Why?

    ▷ Is there anything that would come a close second?

- **What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

Local authority staff

[instructions, introduction and questions i-iii as above]

A. Who you help and how

- **Can you briefly describe your role and how this relates to support for young people with insecure immigration status?**

    ▷ What format does your support take? (Face-to-face contact, email etc. working with other professionals)

- **How are the local authority's teams structured in terms of the division between immigration specific issues and day to day support for children in care and care leavers?**

    ▷ Do you have specialist teams or particular staff that work with young people with insure immigration status?

    ▷ Have there been any changes to this whilst you have been working for the local authority?

    ▷ Could you talk us through the process for carrying out age assessments in your area?

B. Approach to pathway planning and care leaver entitlements

- **How do young people with insecure immigration status come to your attention?**

    ○ How is nationality and immigration status of children in need or in care recorded on your systems?

- **How if at all is the local authorities approach to pathway planning differentiated for young people with insecure immigration status?**

    ○ How are different results of immigration processes planned for?
    ○ What are the key differences if any for specific statuses
    ○ those in the asylum system
    ○ EU citizens.
    ○ third country nationals without lawful status
    ○ Humanitarian protection
    ○ Refugee status

- **Do you think there is any difference in emphasis in terms of how much attention each part of a pathway plan needs? How is this reflected in the process?**

[Prompt with outcome areas – in order of importance]:
    ○ **Immigration status**
    ○ **Mental health and wellbeing**
    ○ **Community and Social life**
    ○ Money/financial literacy/access to banking
    ○ Housing/homelessness
    ○ Life skills/Independent living

- Education
- Physical health (including access to primary and dental care)

- **How do you monitor young people's progress in these areas?**

  - How is this recorded?
  - Who holds the data?

- **If a young person reaches care leaving age before their immigration status is settled, what does that mean for support that they get from the local authority?**

  - How (if at all) does your offer differ to that for care leavers who do have secure immigration status? [Use care leaver local offer as prompt]
  - Does your support to help them settle their status continue?
  - Are local entitlements for this group published/written down anywhere?

C. Interaction with PHF funded service

- **Can you describe how you work with [insert service name] and how your role intersects with their service, e.g. who do you mainly liaise with**

  - And [if relevant], how do you refer young people to [insert service name]?
  - Can you tell me about any formal arrangements in terms of how you work with [insert service name], e.g. Memorandum of Understanding?
  - Are there any other initiatives in place to support joint-working?

- **What impact do you think [the PHF service] has on these young people you support?**

- **Are there any further benefits or challenges for the local authority that flow from working with the service?**

  - Has it changed the way you work with these young people?
  - Has it made particular aspects of the local authority's role easier (or more difficult)?

D. Barriers, enablers and role of other agencies

- **What are the main difficulties faced by the local authority in terms of securing good outcomes for young people with insecure immigration status?**

  - Are there any needs that the local authority particularly struggles to meet?
  - What are the implications in terms of the knowledge and skills required amongst you and your colleagues?

- **Which other agencies and services are important in meeting these needs?**
  - To what extent do you think they meet their responsibilities?

- **Do you seek advice and/or training in this area from third parties?**
  - Where does this come from e.g. other local authorities, other statutory agencies, charities etc.
  - What form does this take – e.g. ad hoc, access to written materials, standard training

package, tailored training etc.
  ○ To what extent does this meet your needs?

- **Does the local authority commission any services to support this group of young people?**

    ○ What are the key tests in terms of value for money?

- **If there was one change you could make to improve these young people's outcomes, be that to local services, the law, or society as whole what would it be?**

- **Is there anything else you would like to say about your work with young people with insecure immigration status and with [insert service name]?**

Young people

[Use this topic guide flexibly, it is not a script. Questions are written as a guide and researcher should use and probe as appropriate. Use probes and follow-up questions to help participants 'unpack' these as far as they are able and willing to.

[Have to hand and read before interview – overview of service (where the service is based, (inc building, street etc), who the service supports, staff structure, etc.)

Ice breaker/warm up

[Ask questions like – how their day has been so far, what weather has been like, what they are having for lunch, what they like, share what you like etc.]

Introduction

I am [insert name] from the National Children's Bureau's research team and we are carrying out research about how [insert service name] has helped young people like you.

The purpose of this interview is to help us understand what it is like using this service, how it helps you with different challenges in your life, and if there is anything more that services can do to support you.

We will use the information you provide to produce a report for Paul Hamlyn Foundation, these are the people that have paid for the service. The information you share will be anonymised. This means that some of what you share with us today may be used in a research report but nobody will know that it is you who said it. Also, we are not connected to the Government or immigration services and we will not share any personal data with the Home Office or any immigration authorities.

The only point where we may need to share your details is if you say something which makes me concerned about your safety or the safety of another young person. If you tell me that you or someone else is at risk of serious harm, then I will have to share this with my manager and the project leads at [insert service name] who would then contact the Local Authority. Does that make sense?

The key point to remember is that this is not a test - there are no right or wrong answers. And if there are any questions you would rather not answer then just tell me and we can move on.

The interview will last approximately 40 minutes.

We have an information sheet which we would like you to read and I can talk through with you. Then we would like you to complete a short form which confirms that you would like to take part in the study. If you do not wish to take part or if you change your mind, that's absolutely fine and will not affect any services you receive now or in the future.

i.   **We would like to record the interview if this is OK?**
     So we have an accurate record of what you said and do not have to ask you to repeat yourself. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside the National Children's Bureau research team except for the transcription service which will be typing up each interview into a written format.

i.   **Do have any questions for me before we start?**

ii. **Are you happy to take part in this interview?**

C. How the service helps you

- **How long have you been in contact with [insert service name] /using this service?**

- **Who / which agency connected you to [insert service name] in the first place?**

- **Have you been assigned a caseworker? What is their name?**

- **How often/ how many times have had contact with them?**

- **How has [insert service name] helped you so far? What things have they supported you with?**

    ▷ Has [insert service name/name of caseworker] helped you with anything else?

D. Accessing wider support – NEED TO MAKE CLEAR IN THIS SECTION IF BEFORE USING SERVICE OR DURING

***If we have access to their needs assessment – start by saying... you previously said in [insert date of needs assessment] that you felt [very good/good/ok/bad/very bad] about the support you got for [insert area of support]...
- How do you feel about support you get in this area now? Why do you feel this way?
- Do you think you'd like more support for this area? What else could be helpful?
- Work your way through each of the support areas in turn...

***if we don't have access to their needs assessment, ask the following questions...
- **How has the [insert service name/caseworker] helped you access other services and support that you may need?**
    ▷ What kind of support are you receiving with your immigration status? Do you have a solicitor or do you need one? Do you know what you need to do next? How has [insert service name/caseworker] helped with this?

    ▷ How do you feel about where you live and who you're living with? What are the local communities like? What does [insert service name/caseworker] say about this?

▷ Do you go to school or college or are you working at all? What is that like? How easy was it to get your place at school/college/find a job? How did [insert service name/ caseworker] help?

▷ Have you ever needed help from a doctor or dentist? Was that easy to get? How did [insert service name/caseworker] help?

▷ Have you ever needed to talk to someone about your mental health – this includes things like your feelings, emotions, stress levels, how you cope with difficulties, etc.? Was this support easy to access? How did [insert service name/caseworker] support with this?

▷ What support do you get from your social worker/PA? Is it useful? Do you talk to [insert service name/caseworker] about this?

▷ Do you have the money you need? Do you know how much you need and how to get it? Do you have a bank account and was that ok to get? How has [insert service name/ caseworker] helped with this?

***If not already covered ask for all:

▷ How about general life skills, like shopping, cooking, cleaning clothes and that kind of thing? Has anyone ever helped you with these skills? How has [insert service name/ caseworker] helped with this?

▷ Do you have friends or family or people from your local community to support you with anything? How do you feel about these relationships? How has [insert service name/ caseworker] helped you build relationships?

▷ What do you think about the participation groups with other young people which this service offers? Do you think this kind of work is useful?

E. Your relationship with the service
- **Who are the main people you talk to in the service? How helpful do you think they are?**

  ▷ How do you feel about the information you receive from the service?

  ▷ Do you understand everything the service talks to you about?

  ▷ Do you feel like they listen to you? Do you feel able to ask questions?

- **Do you have a good relationship with the people you talk to in the service?**

  ▷ How do they compare to other adults in your life?

  ▷ Do you feel that you can be as open as you would like?

- **How do you feel when you are using the service?**

  ▷ How do you feel when you arrive?

  ▷ How do you feel when you leave?

- **What is your favourite thing about the service?**

- **Overall, do you think you get the support you need [from service and wider agencies?]?**

  ▷ If not, what is lacking? Where would you like some more support [prompt with ideas from needs assessment]?

  ▷ Why do you think this happens?

F. Agency and feelings about the future

- **What do you feel positive about at this point in time? What's going well in your life [prompt with ideas from needs assessment]? Is there anything you're looking forward to?**

- **Do you feel able to make plans for the future? Does the [insert service name/caseworker] help you with this?**

  ▷ What are the main things which worry you about the future?

  ▷ What do they do to make it better?

G. Close [pickmeup and debrief]

[Continue the theme but strike a more positive note, avoid questions about the young person's own situation]

- **What would you say to friend who was thinking about going to see the service but wasn't sure?**

- **Who is your favourite adult in the UK or the person who has helped you the most?**

  ▷ Why do you like them?

  ▷ What could other adults do to be more like that person?

Thank you for talking to me today, it has been really interesting for me. I hope it was ok for you. Please remember that we will not share any of your personal details. We're very grateful to you for sharing your experiences. This information will help to make support better for young people with experiences like yours. If you have any more questions after this interview, you can ask us or the service.

The recording which we have taken today will be sent to a transcription service and will be typed up as a written record. Your name and other personal details will not be included on this. If there is anything you have said today which you would like removed from the record then please contact us using the information provided on your sheet. Is there anything now which you would like to have removed?

United for a better childhood

The National Children's Bureau brings people and organisations together to drive change in society and deliver a better childhood for the UK. We interrogate policy, uncover evidence and develop better ways of supporting children and families.

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