

Funded by



Surviving to Thriving impact report 2019



In partnership with



Introduction

This report summarises the impact that a £1 million Dream Fund grant from players of People's Postcode Lottery has made on the lives of children and young people in the UK through the Surviving to Thriving project.

Since April 2017, the **British Red Cross, Refugee Council and UpRising** have come together in partnership to directly support unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees aged 11-25 in Birmingham, Leeds and the East of England.

The project directly supported 612 young refugees and asylum seekers with life and leadership skills, advice and mental health support to rebuild their lives and thrive in the UK. Alongside the direct services, Surviving to Thriving delivered free training to 610 professionals working with unaccompanied young people to equip them with specialist skills and insight to provide long-term, appropriate support.

This report provides an overview of the different aspects of the holistic service model and shares learning from the project, including around effective partnership. It also includes information about 16 films produced by the young people supported. We encourage wide use of these by professionals and the public to raise awareness and prompt positive change.



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Impact in numbers

2

years

3

regions

3

partner organisations

5

different service offers

14

core staff

44

volunteers

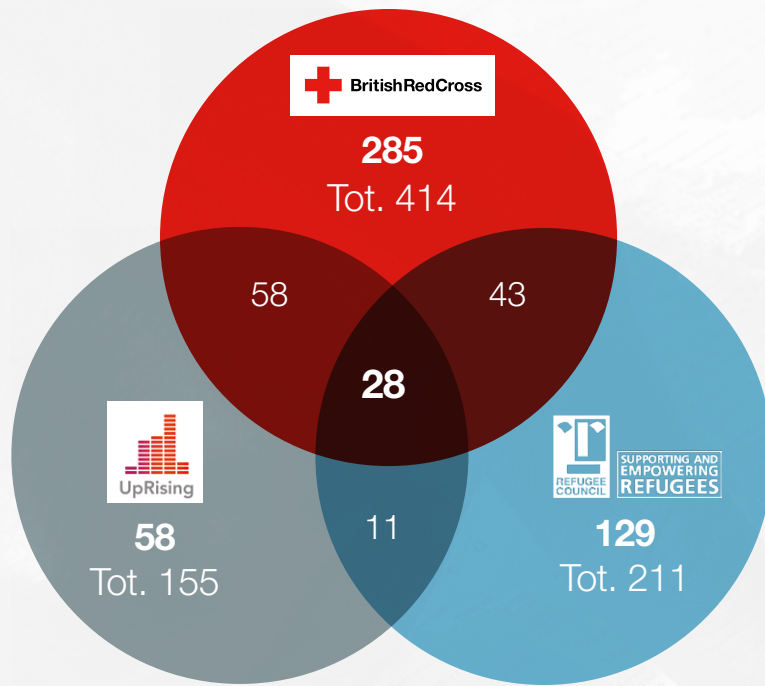
610

professionals

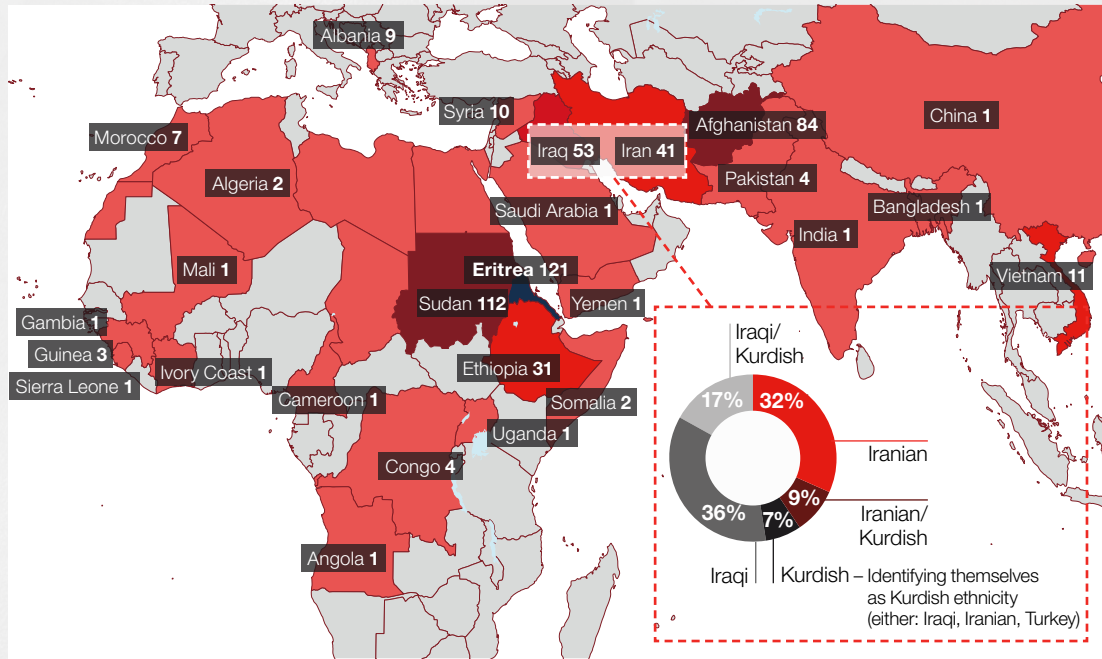
612

young people

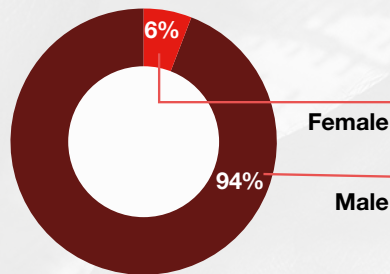
Number of young people accessing the different elements of the project



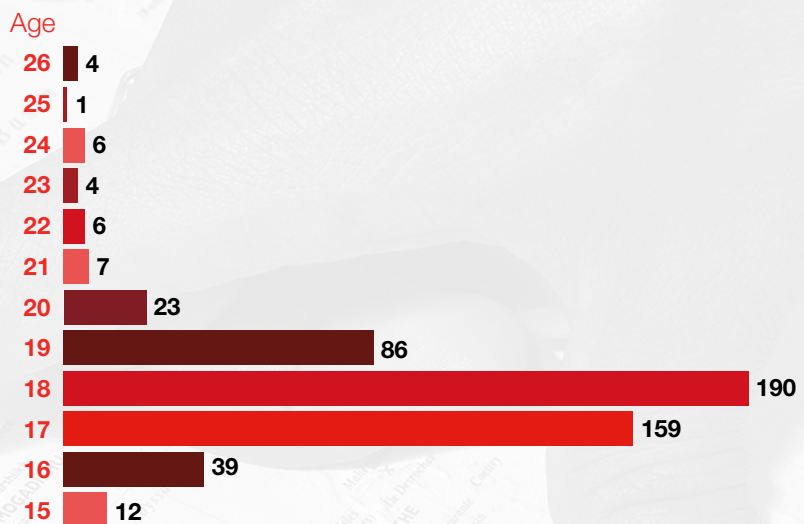
Country of origin of young people



Gender of young people



Age of young people at the end of the project



The context

In 2015, around one million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe. Over half of the world's refugees were children and that same year asylum applications from unaccompanied minors in the UK jumped from 1,945 to 3,043.

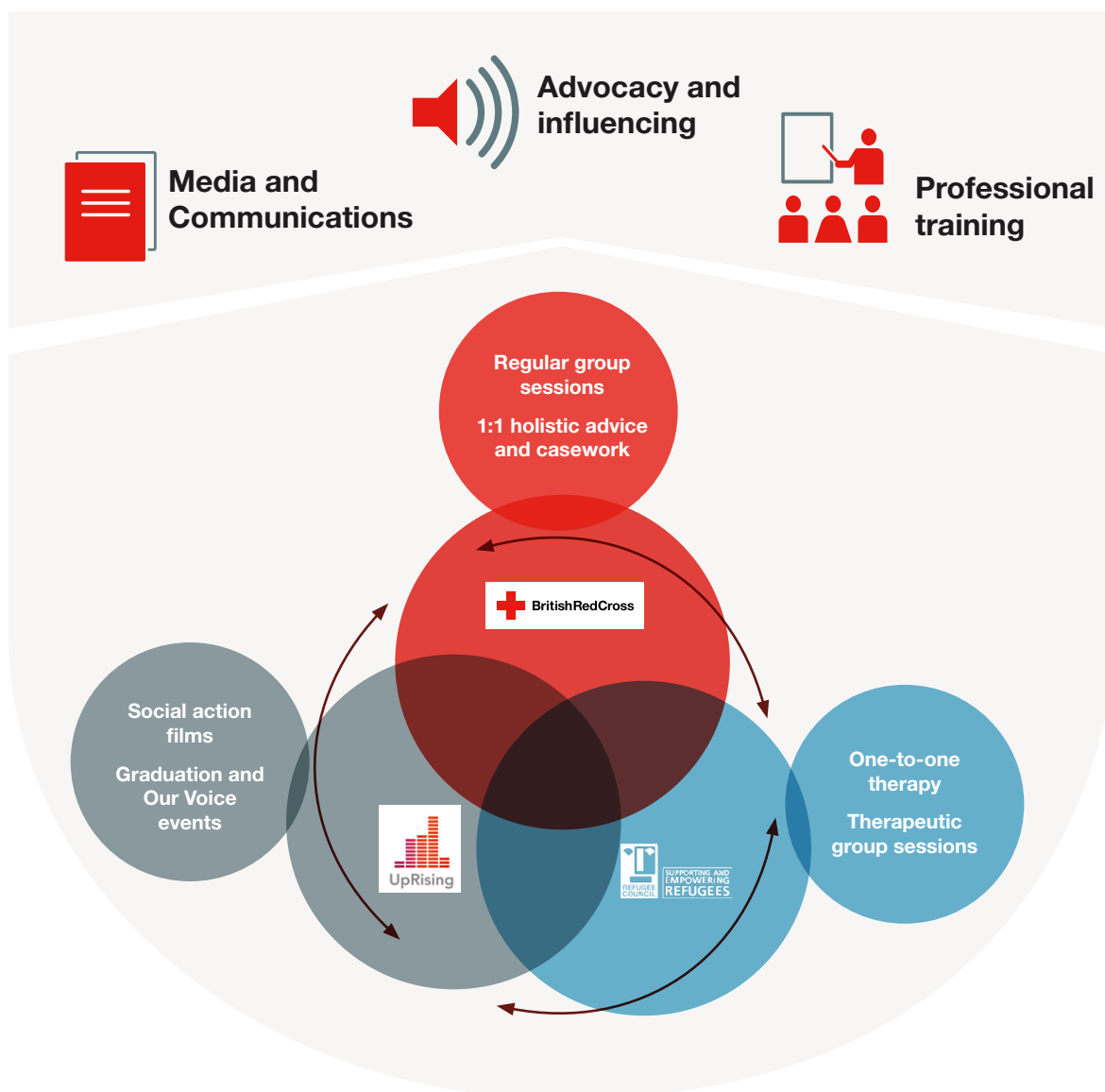
These young refugees and asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable people to reach UK shores. Most of them arrive alone after being separated from family and braving exploitation, trafficking and hunger to get here. When they finally make it to safety, they still face the challenges of having their age called into question and navigating the complex asylum system in a foreign language, all while dealing with the emotional turmoil and mental health issues that their experiences have created. With a fragile sense of identity and uncertain immigration status, their capacity to focus on their future is severely compromised.

Meanwhile, the introduction in 2016 of the national transfer scheme (NTS), a voluntary transfer arrangement between local authorities to care for unaccompanied children, meant that these young people were being relocated to regions in the UK that didn't necessarily have the infrastructure or services to provide the specialist advice and support they desperately needed.

“Coming to this country for the first time, you don't know anything, you don't know anyone and you [...] need to know how to get support”

Max, 18, Birmingham

A unique model of collaboration



Given the range of challenges young refugees arriving in the UK face, we knew we needed an innovative, two-pronged approach to provide direct support to young refugees and people seeking asylum, while upskilling professionals to give them long-term, appropriate support through their specific experiences and issues.

What makes Surviving to Thriving unique is that the British Red Cross teamed up with Refugee Council and UpRising to test a new model of collaboration that could meet each aspect of the young people's needs.

Partnership

Working together in a genuine partnership required clarity, transparency and appropriate communication.

Monitoring and evaluation

Producing a clear monitoring and evaluation framework at the start was essential to success, stating which indicators and outcomes each organisation was responsible for. We also developed and agreed a shared project referral email address and a secure SharePoint site with a service user database to monitor activities and report progress to People's Postcode Lottery.

Data protection and agreements

Underlying the data sharing and referral pathways was a clear partnership agreement, information sharing agreement alongside bespoke referral and data protection consent forms.

Co-location

We recognised the value of sharing an office space between partners in each location to facilitate quick day-to-day referrals, enable rapid communication and local project developments. Logistical challenges included the use of different IT equipment and systems, but the benefits were enormous and enabled a truly collaborative partnership to develop. For example, we found that being able to introduce young people to a Refugee Council psychotherapist during Red Cross or UpRising sessions put the young people at ease and made them much more likely to access mental health support.

Communication

Keeping all partners and project staff informed was at times challenging. So we implemented solutions such as a shared database of key documents, a monthly project newsletter, regular communication planning meetings, project team and steering committee meetings. We also produced shared marketing and project publicity materials to clearly communicate the service externally.



The impact Surviving to Thriving made



Life skills and advice

The Red Cross provided one-to-one casework around young people's rights and entitlements, as well as regular group sessions and outings to build their social networks, knowledge, skills and confidence. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, often suggested by the young people, including the asylum process, education, cooking, sexual health and first aid. We invited local organisations to help the young people understand how they could get involved in their communities, from photography to opera performances. Outings included visiting a botanical garden and donkey sanctuary, and residential in Wales and the Peak District.

Measuring success



reported increased access to life skills learning



reported increased community engagement



of young people reported increased knowledge and understanding of their rights, entitlements and available services



Max 18 Birmingham

“When I arrived in the UK I didn't speak English and I was so frustrated that I couldn't talk to anyone, but now I feel good. I pushed myself and Surviving to Thriving helped a lot with that. I go to the Red Cross to enjoy myself and talk to people in English and I've met friends there — it helps to meet people in the same situations.

“Now I'm a volunteer and I talk to other people and give them advice, and I'm there to help them if they have a problem in their heart. My future looks good now. I know what way I can go and I feel there's something in my future. My mum always said to me the more you work, the more you get — if you work hard you go high.

“I feel I have something more to give in life.”



**SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES**

Mental health support

Refugee Council offered support through its My View programme – tailored therapeutic services in both one-to-one and small group settings. Sessions were based on a combination of creative approaches including art therapy and dramatherapy to help address trauma and restore well-being and self-esteem.





Young person accessing therapy in Luton.

“For me, the greatest highs are witnessing the children I work with find their inner strength and resources – and flourish. I work with children who come to us suicidal, with a lost sense of self-worth, and then manage to find hope and become involved in their community and actively and positively contribute to it, drawing on their experience, and thereby helping others. Seeing isolated children make first steps towards reaching out to others is incredible. So was having had a young boy tell me ‘my brain is not broken anymore’ after 12 sessions of therapy.”

Sasha Nemeckova, Senior Psychotherapist

“The fact that I had the experience to share with you everything inside of me made me so happy to talk, to keep your feelings inside, it hurts. Asking for help is good for your health. When you tell the doctor your pain, they help with the problem. It is like that with the pain inside. When you say what is happening, it helps. Very excellent.” Young person receiving therapy in Leeds.

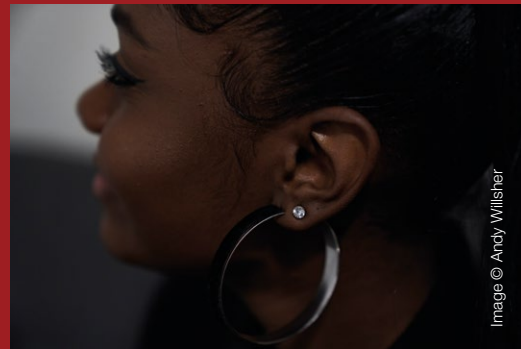
“When I came here, it was very hard for me to deal with the emotions I was having, and I was very upset about my past. Coming here has helped me deal with all the emotions, and taught me that life comes with ups and downs. I thank you for helping me become strong. I may not be strong in everything, but I am stronger, because I know I can trust again.

“I thank you for helping me become strong.”



Empowerment and Influencing

UpRising delivered a total of nine Find Your Power programmes in Birmingham and the East of England. Young people got the opportunity to use film to explore their experiences, challenges, fears and dreams. The young people took up the roles of actor, script-writer, director, and film-maker to represent the perceptions and challenges they face as unaccompanied refugee and asylum-seeking children in the UK. The programmes empowered the young people to unlock their leadership potential and understand how they can affect real change through social action. Many of the participants returned to volunteer on multiple Find Your Power programmes, increasing their skills development even further. The 16 films produced are detailed at the end of this report and are all publicly available on YouTube. Please do watch and share these as far and widely as you can!



Nawal, 18, Birmingham

“Before, I was hopeless to be honest. I wasn’t confident and I wasn’t ready to mix with other people. In the first [UpRising] session I could feel my voice shaking.

“This time, they asked a question and I asked to have the mic. It was a standout moment because I never thought I could stand in front of people on stage and say even my name. I felt like my spirit came out of my body when I spoke.

“Surviving to Thriving supports young people, it gives them the opportunity and motivation to think that it doesn’t matter how you look or what your refugee status is – you can do anything in your life.

**“ I wasn’t
always confident –
I am now. ”**

ING TO THR

g young refugees
people seeking a
ical life skills
d opportunity



Communications, advocacy and co-production

Through the direct service delivery and the Find Your Power programmes, Surviving to Thriving gained unique and valuable insights into the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced children and young people.

We have worked hard to put this insight in front of individuals who have the power to influence change, big or small, to impact the lives of young refugees for the better.

The young people have always remained at the heart of shaping and developing the project. Through a Youth Leader programme, some have become volunteer leaders within the group sessions.

Over 100 young people engaged in 34 unique co-production, advocacy and influencing opportunities.

Some highlights include:

- presenting two of their films to MPs at an event called Sanctuary in Parliament
- four Our Voice events where the young people presented their films to members of the public at cinemas in London and Birmingham
- meeting with MPs at Parliament, including Labour MP Catherine West, to discuss a Ten-Minute Rule Bill on the right to work for asylum seekers
- participating in a research project with the Cabinet Office, to inform a review of Home Office policies for unaccompanied children
- participating in staff and volunteer interview panels. Upskilling and capacity building



Upskilling and capacity building

These films have formed an integral element of the specialist training provided to professionals. We set out to train 300-400 professionals and surpassed the target by delivering free training across England to 610 professionals including social workers, foster carers, teachers and the police. This training provided specialist information about how to effectively support young people, as well as to raise awareness of their experiences and garner empathy and understanding. The project included two separate training offers. The British Red Cross provided training on the rights and entitlements of young refugees, while the Refugee Council focused on the mental health needs of young refugees and the trauma they may have experienced.

“The films gave me real insight into the challenges facing young refugees. I am able to contextualise their plight. Their voices were heard. I was very worried we were talking about them. They were talking to us. Lots of very pertinent information but also hearing the voices [from] the child refugees themselves. It made me more interested in working with such children. [The training was] Most useful, best attended by everyone working with separated children.”



92% of professionals trained reported an **increased awareness and sensitivity** towards the issues and challenges faced by young refugees and asylum seekers.



91% of professionals trained reported **feeling better equipped** to address the issues and challenges faced by young refugees and asylum seekers.

Collectively, the 610 professionals who have attended training since the beginning of the project expect to work with approximately 2,326 young people per year, establishing a significant legacy from the project.

People's Postcode Lottery funding for the project is culminating in an end-of-project conference in London for 150 social work professionals, the content of which has been shaped entirely around the films produced by the young people on the project.

“The films gave me real insight into the challenges facing young refugees. I am able to contextualise their plight. Their voices were heard. I was very worried we were talking about them. They were talking to us. Lots of very pertinent information but also hearing the voices [from] the child refugees themselves.”

Professional who attended the training



Media coverage achieved

We drew on a wide range of communications channels to increase more sensitive and balanced media stories. Our aim was that stories raised awareness of the issues and experiences of young people and encouraged more sympathetic attitudes towards asylum seekers. Young people were given opportunities to share their experiences if they wanted to. In total we achieved 34 pieces of coverage: 2 in the national media, including a feature in the Guardian, 19 regional media pieces, 4 regional radio interviews, 1 trade press article, in Children and Young People now, 1 podcast, 2 social media videos and 6 blogs, including in the Huffington Post.

Kalyani McCarthy, Surviving to Thriving Project manager, says: “I feel the really transformational aspect of the project is the long-term relationship the project has made with so many young people. Whether it’s creating art with a therapist, having an informal chat with a volunteer or the opportunity to create a film about their experience and show it in parliament, we’re showing young people that we value them and their views, and that we want the best for their futures.

“I want to thank players of People’s Postcode Lottery for making this dream project a reality, and allowing us to provide a safe and welcoming space where young people can begin to realise their potential. It has truly changed lives.”

The Surviving to Thriving films

All of the films below are publicly available on a YouTube playlist (search #SurvivingtoThriving UpRising Films) please do watch and share these as widely as you can within your own training and events.

Saving the Children

Birmingham - November 2017

'We are the next generation to develop our world. Who other than us can do that?'

Key themes: destitution

This was the first film produced by young people on the project. They wanted to focus on the difficulties children and young people face when they first arrive in the UK and the help and support they need.

Education

Birmingham – November 2017

'If I didn't go to college I would feel sad; I would be lonely; I would be poor – horrible!'

Key theme: education

Young people who made this film wanted to share how important education was to them and their futures.

Waiting for Refugee Status

Cambridge – February 2018

'I wish had had somebody to talk to and tell me what is happening'

Key themes: asylum process, insecurity

The seven young producers, aged 14-18, originate from Sudan, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

Many of the young people who created this film had been waiting for over six months to hear back from the Home Office about their asylum claim. They wanted to explain how it felt to go through the process, waiting for months or years to hear whether they would be granted safety and permission to remain in the UK.

Post 18 Education

Cambridge – February 2018

'I want to get a good education so I can have a career, something I am passionate about and makes me happy. Everyone deserves a second chance.'

Key themes: education and age

The seven young producers, aged 14-18, originate from Sudan, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

Participants felt education was the most important topic to focus on. They were all studying English in college but felt very uncertain about how entitlement and access to education can change after an asylum seeker turns 18. They wanted to share their concerns about what would happen when they finished ESOL (English as a second language) and hoped to improve education provision for over-18s.

Prejudice

Birmingham – March 2018

**‘But they told me they did not believe me.’
“Go home,” they say.’ ‘My foster carer
keeps me away from their young children.’**

Key themes: racism, prejudice, mental health

One of the male participants started a conversation by sharing that he had been ignored by someone when asking them for directions to the bus station. He felt this happened because he was a refugee. The young people then shared other experiences of how they had been mistreated by members of the public and professionals, and how they had felt prejudice from people who don't know a lot about refugees and asylum seekers. They also explored the negative influence of the media on people's beliefs and behaviours about refugees. These young people made the film as they want to be perceived as the same as other people.

Loneliness

Birmingham – March 2018

**‘If you are a professional working
with us, be aware of the signs. We might
not know how to tell you that we are lonely.’**

Key theme: loneliness, mental health

The 11 young producers, aged 17-20 originated from Sudan, Eritrea and Egypt

The young people spoke about when they first arrived in the UK how everything was different. One participant shared about being the only girl in a house full of boys and hiding in her room, too scared to make breakfast. They also compared eating at home together with family and now eating alone in the UK. They also wanted professionals to know that sometimes they might feel very alone but don't always know how to express this.

Family Reunion

Bedford – May 2018

**‘Being reunited with my family would be
really amazing, it would be, I cannot even
explain, it would make me really happy’.
‘I want to be successful to make my
family proud’**

Key theme: refugee family reunion

One young producer, aged 17, from Sudan.

During discussions in this group, family reunion came out as the highest priority issue they face. But as the programme progressed, the young people found it too hard to discuss this personal and painful topic. By the time of filming, only one young person wanted to be involved. Despite finding it extremely hard, he wanted the public to know about refugee family reunion and how incredibly hard it was to be a child alone in the UK, separated from their family.

The Asylum Process

Birmingham May 2018

**‘We are tired. We are tired of waiting, tired
of not understanding, tired of feeling alone.
Nothing is certain, we can't plan our futures.
Not university, not a job, not a family.
We feel sadness, hopeless and powerless.
We can't eat, we can't sleep and we are
finding it hard to focus.’**

Key themes: the asylum process, legal support

The seven young producers, aged 17-18, originate from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sudan and Cameroon.

Several of the young people had been waiting for over 2 years for a decision from the Home Office and spoke about the impact this has on their mental health and how they can't plan for their futures.

Eighteen

Birmingham – May 2018

**‘I feel good, I feel safe, I feel comfortable.’
‘It is hard to be an adult when you haven’t had the chance to be a child.’**

Key themes: education, age

The six young producers originate from Sudan, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

During the planning of this film, participants discussed problems they had faced in school or college. There was a clear disparity in the experiences of those under and over 18 – the younger people generally had a more positive experience. One of the participants said over-18s are expected to be ‘adults’. The group wanted to show in this film how access to education changes after an asylum seeker turns 18, with a hope that the education provision for over-18s can improve.

Dear United Kingdom

Central Bedfordshire – June 2018

**‘In Calais, seeing the police was a bad thing.’ ‘I often sit inside alone.’ ‘I know some politicians do not like people like me.’
‘I don’t want money or anything like that, I would like to feel safe and free.’**

Key themes: life in the UK, journeys

The three young producers, aged 16-17, originate from Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The young people were particularly interested in discussing their personal journeys to the UK, and hoped the films would help people understand more about their experiences fleeing war and persecution. They wanted to explain how it feels to be welcomed to the UK and conversely how it feels when people are hostile. Participants were so passionate they worked on the scripts at home, merging them together in sessions ahead of filming.

No Right to Work

Birmingham – August 2018

‘If only the rules could change to let us work. We could be independent, happy and feel like humans. We will learn new skills, practice our English, work hard, mix in society and give back to the country that has protected and respected us. We will not just survive. We will thrive.’

Key theme: asylum-seekers’ rights

The 11 young producers, aged 16-21, originate from Eritrea, Guinea, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Participants expressed their concerns about not being able to work, shared their worries and fears of the consequences and of being held back. They explained how not being able to work made them feel less than human. They wanted to confront the injustice of discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers.

Age Assessment

Birmingham – August 2018

‘Leaving my foster family felt like leaving my own family all over again.’

Key themes: age, legal process

The nine young producers, aged 17- 18, originate from Iran, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Most of the young people in the programme were living in semi-independent accommodation and spoke at length about the hostility and suspicion they’d experienced in encounters with the Home Office, social workers and other professionals. One young person spoke about being asked, “how old were you in 2017?” They didn’t know enough English at the time to even understand the question, so they were disbelieved and discredited, and put through an age assessment process. Participants compared their experiences of living in semi-independent accommodation and foster care and how treatment like this effectively re-traumatises them and leaves them vulnerable, frightened and lonely. They wanted to raise awareness about the suspicion and disbelief they experience and the impact this has on their accommodation and asylum.

Overlooked

Peterborough – September 2018

'I do not like thinking the worst about people but it is very hard not to sometimes.'
'It can feel like my social worker is just waiting for me to be older.'

Key themes: asylum process and social workers

The six young producers, aged 16-19, originate from Ethiopia and Sudan.

Participants felt asylum and education were important and particularly wanted to discuss the relationships they had with their social workers and shared that they often felt avoided or ignored. The young people recognised the busy role social workers have, but wanted to create a video showing how it feels when they don't hear from their social worker, particularly when they contact them and get no reply.

Life at College

Peterborough – September 2018

'Education is important and I want to make the most of it.'

Key themes: education, limitations

The six young producers, aged 16-19, originate from Sudan and Ethiopia.

Education came out as one of the two most important topics to these participants, who were keen to talk about what an English language class is like and how they find learning. Participants shared how they love learning but sometimes find the college environment difficult to learn in, for example due classes being too big, or lessons being disturbed by students who don't want to be there.

Respect

Birmingham – November 2018

'We've already lived without peace. We've seen how disrespect can sow the seeds of hatred between us.'

Key theme: mutual respect

The 11 young producers originate from Sudan, Iran, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

These participants wanted to create a positive film exploring the idea of respect. They decided it was important to pass on advice to other young people who have come to the UK or will arrive in future. They felt respect was a central value and that you always need to treat others with respect to receive it and vice versa. They wanted to let other young people know what would be expected of them in Britain in terms of being respectful..

Dreams

Birmingham – November 2018

'Besides, we've already achieved the impossible. We are going to reach for the sky!'

Key theme: young people's dreams for the future

The 11 young producers originate from Iraq, Sudan and Eritrea.

Participants wanted to talk about their hopes and dreams. They explained how they had to put their ambitions on hold to reach safety in the UK, but they always remember their dreams and are constantly trying to achieve them. They felt strongly that they are not defined by their experiences or identity as young refugees or asylum



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Providing young re
young people seek
with practical life sk
and opportunit

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is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland
(SC037738) and Isle of Man (0752). Published 2019 BRC19-112