

# Strengthening responses to child trafficking and modern slavery:

A Pilot Project to support  
foster carers looking after  
Albanian and Vietnamese  
unaccompanied children

CHILD TRAFFICKING PROTECTION FUND  
PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

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## TERMINOLOGY

**Child** – A child is anyone under the age of 18, as per international<sup>1</sup> and national law.<sup>2</sup>

**Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child** – In the United Kingdom this refers to children who are outside their country of origin to seek asylum in the United Kingdom, are separated from parents and relatives, and are not in the care of someone who is responsible for doing so.<sup>3</sup>

**Trafficked child** – Trafficking of children is a form of human trafficking defined as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and/or receipt" of a child for the purpose of exploitation.<sup>4</sup>

*In general, unaccompanied children placed in foster care in the United Kingdom have applied for asylum, so in this report unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are referred to simply as “children”. Reference to children who have been potentially or actually trafficked will, for the purposes of this report, be referred to as “trafficked children”.*

**Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)** – An independent agency that is registered with the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)<sup>5</sup> to approve and support foster carers. Foster carers registered with such an agency are often referred to as IFA carers.

**In-house foster carer** – Foster carers who are approved and supported by a Local Authority.

**Pan-London rota** – A voluntary agreement by Directors of Children Services in which London Local Authorities take turns in supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children claiming to be 16 or 17 years of age. This is to ensure the fair distribution of children across Local Authorities in London.

**The National Transfer Scheme** – A voluntary agreement between Local Authorities to support the safe transfer and even distribution of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children across the United Kingdom, with a view to improving access to services and support they need.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) - (Article 1): A 'child' is a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger, [www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC\\_united\\_nations\\_convention\\_on\\_the\\_rights\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Children Act 1989, [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41)

<sup>3</sup> Home Office, *Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery Statutory guidance for local authorities*, (2017), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/656429/UASC\\_Statutory\\_Guidance\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656429/UASC_Statutory_Guidance_2017.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children* (2000), [www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about)

## ABOUT IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Migration Agency, is the leading organization in the field of migration. Established in 1951, IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. IOM has been working in the area of human trafficking and modern slavery for over 20 years. In the United Kingdom, IOM works to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and other organisations to detect and respond to issues of trafficking and modern slavery. It also seeks to improve the support conditions for those who have been affected by these crimes by implementing projects that directly support survivors, as well as conducting research to better understand vulnerabilities to trafficking. IOM has been working with Croydon since 2012, training close to 2,000 frontline professionals on trafficking and modern slavery.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The project team thanks all the foster carers who voluntarily engaged with the project or were involved in consultations. Your input helped us develop tools to the best possible standard.

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Finally thank you to all those who attended the opening forum in 2017 and who gave feedback in the initial consultation to build the project parameters.



Home Office



# INTRODUCTION

## Rationale

The Child Trafficking Protection Fund was designed to provide opportunities to pilot new ways to address vulnerabilities of children to trafficking and modern slavery in the United Kingdom and beyond. With its international footprint and local capacity-building experience, IOM proposed to reduce this vulnerability by raising awareness and knowledge about trafficking and risks for particular nationalities amongst foster carers, while increasing unaccompanied children's understanding of foster care. The need for training was one of the key recommendations of the ECPAT UK and Missing People report, *Heading Back to Harm*<sup>6</sup> which revealed an alarmingly high number of both unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children who may have been trafficked going missing from care, and at risk of further exploitation.

The London Borough of Croydon<sup>7</sup> also noticed that unaccompanied children can find it challenging to settle into foster care placements. Alongside cultural and linguistic differences, the children may feel pressure from traffickers and/or family members to repay a debt incurred in order to reach the United Kingdom, and thus feel the need to swiftly find work. These and other issues, such as their ability to build trust with unknown adults, mean that these children are at risk of going missing and being exploited or (re)trafficked. This is an issue that affects Croydon, other London Boroughs and Councils across the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) data for 2015, 2016 and 2017, shows Albanian and Vietnamese children as the top two nationalities of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children found to be potential victims of trafficking. A large proportion of Croydon Council's looked after children are unaccompanied, and a number of these children are affected by issues related to trafficking and modern slavery. To concentrate the pilot in a location and for nationalities most likely to be at risk, Croydon Council was involved, and Albanian and Vietnamese children became the focus.<sup>8</sup>

## Project description

The project's approach was to pilot wraparound support for foster carers who look after Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are in the care of and placed by the Croydon Council, particularly to reduce the risk of trafficking and modern slavery. It was supported by Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service<sup>9</sup> which provided the Child Trafficking Expert, as well as the IOM offices in Albania and Viet Nam.

The project reached out to foster carers for children placed in Croydon Council's care, being both in-house carers and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers, who voluntarily engaged in capacity-building activities. The project initially envisaged providing parallel support to social workers and supervising social workers supporting these foster carers, however, due to the funding eligibility requirements<sup>10</sup> those activities were excluded.

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<sup>6</sup> Missing People, ECPAT, *Heading back to Harm*, 2016, Follow up report in 2018: Missing People, ECPAT, *Still in Harm's Way*, 2018, [www.ecpat.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=96016be0-cc60-48e0-ab9c-635b742f5b7f](http://www.ecpat.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=96016be0-cc60-48e0-ab9c-635b742f5b7f)

<sup>7</sup> Herein after referred to as Croydon Council.

<sup>8</sup> While British children are the most numerous in terms of referrals into the NRM, funding for the project is restricted only to Overseas Development Aid (ODA) eligible participants and their foster carers. A general definition of ODA can be found here: [www.oecd.org/dac/stats/What-is-ODA.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/What-is-ODA.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> As one of the United Kingdom's leading children's charities, Barnardo's worked directly with 301,100 children, young people, parents and carers in 2017–18, running over 1000 vital services across the United Kingdom: [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 8.

## The following activities were carried out to support the pilot:

- An initial stakeholder forum and consultations, to raise awareness and support content development for training and information materials.
- The development of an online resource hub containing introductory briefings for foster carers and a handbook including cultural information.
- The development and delivery of training for foster carers, to increase their confidence in supporting young people who may be trafficked or at risk, in particular from Albania or Viet Nam.
- A series of forums for foster carers to provide them with regular opportunities for targeted expert and peer support on issues related to the project.
- An information leaflet for Albanian and Vietnamese young people placed in foster care by Croydon, guided by consultations with current or former Albanian and Vietnamese looked after children.
- A project evaluation report to be presented at a final stakeholder forum.

## Project achievements<sup>11</sup>

- **84** foster carers attended one of **7** face-to-face trainings on looking after unaccompanied children who may be trafficked or at risk, in particular from Albania and Viet Nam;
- **108** foster carers attended one or more of **7** forums focusing on:
  - **Forum 1:** Consultation and information sharing with foster carers (undertaken on two separate days)
  - **Forum 2:** Children missing from care
  - **Forum 3:** Safeguarding and protecting trafficked children; The National Transfer Scheme
  - **Forum 4:** Mental health support for young people from Albania and Viet Nam; Accessing health services
  - **Forum 5:** Looking after children from Albania
  - **Forum 6:** Looking after children from Viet Nam
  - **Forum 7:** Review and evaluation
- **356** foster carers were invited to access the online platform (Huddle);
- The main resources produced and available on the online platform include:
  - **Briefings** to prepare foster carers to look after Albanian and Vietnamese children;
  - **Foster Carer Handbook** with information about administrative processes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, trafficking and modern slavery as well as Albanian and Vietnamese culture, tailored to foster carer needs and based on the training content;
  - **Welcome Leaflets** in seven languages to support newly identified children to settle into foster care, produced in consultation with **29 Albanian and Vietnamese children and young people**;<sup>12</sup>
- **183** children received the Welcome Leaflet.

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<sup>11</sup> As of 30 November 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Children and young people from Albania and Viet Nam were consulted via focus groups and individual interviews to support in the development not only of the Children's Welcome Leaflet, but also the Foster Carer Handbook and the training materials. Ethical considerations were reflected in the methodology adopted to undertake this consultation.

The aim of this report is to (i) present findings of the pilot as a whole; (ii) present findings of specific piloted components to assess whether they were effective; and (iii) to make recommendations around what can best support foster carers to look after children who have been trafficked or are at risk, to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking and going missing. Since certain project activities will continue until the end of the project on 31 March 2019, their evaluation is ongoing. Any additional findings will be provided as updates on the webpage where this report will be made available.<sup>13</sup>

The main aim of the pilot was to understand if foster carer's capacity would increase (defined as confidence and knowledge combined), through participation in forums and training, as well as access to tools through an online platform. It also seeks to support children by way of a Welcome Leaflet describing foster care in a culturally appropriate way, which is also a useful tool for foster carers to help children settle better into their placement.

## Methodology

The project was evaluated using mixed methods to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Mid-way through the project, additional qualitative methods were employed to support in developing a deeper understanding of the project activities and impact, as part of a mid-term review underpinned by a theory of change. The review came about in response to external factors impacting on project objectives and delivery including challenging policy changes (National Transfer Scheme) and unexpected events, such as an Ofsted inspection of Croydon. While the National Transfer Scheme appeared to impact on numbers of children, the inspection proved positive for the increasingly strong focus on improving wider systems to reduce children going missing from care, which could not be measured by the project alone. The project therefore saw an opportunity to focus more on the foster carer experience, drawing on qualitative information to underpin effective evaluation of the project impact.

Tools were developed to support in the gathering of some of the quantitative data. These include the Foster Carer Interactions Database, Huddle Activity Tracker and the Welcome Leaflet Distribution Tracker. In respect of this evaluation report, data from each of these tools has been analysed up to the end of November 2018.

The main aim of the evaluation was to understand if foster carers' capacity (defined as confidence and knowledge combined) increased as a result of the wraparound support they were receiving under the project. Confidence and knowledge were deemed by the programme team as two separate levels of measurement; definitions suggest that knowledge is something that can be acquired, but confidence is something less tangible. Generally, knowledge acquisition has high attribution; the process is linear and increased understanding can, generally, be clearly linked to a training. This however, does not hold true for confidence, which is more personal and dependent on the individual's experience. Therefore splitting these areas made for a more robust approach to the evaluation. An approach was taken to understand foster carer confidence through their feedback at the specialist forums and to measure their knowledge before and after participation in training, as a self-assessment.

To add an extra layer of analysis to the evaluation of the Welcome Leaflet beyond its distribution, qualitative information regarding children being supported to settle better into placement is being gathered. Analysis at this time is ongoing, however positive reception from Croydon Council and the Home Office led to translation of the leaflet into 5 more languages than initially envisaged in the original

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://unitedkingdom.iom.int>

project design, in recognition of the desire to give more children information that will assist them to better understand foster care prior to their placement.

Through analysis of the quantitative data we have been able to measure the self-certified changes in foster carer confidence and knowledge, as well as foster carer interactions in various project activities, including their usage of the online platform, Huddle.<sup>14</sup> We have also been able to identify the numbers of Welcome Leaflets that have been distributed and to whom. In respect of the qualitative data, our analysis focused on identifying patterns within groups of respondents and themes across these groups. We searched for connections between the two in order to interpret the data and provide explanation for the findings.

## Sampling

Due to the voluntary nature of participation in project activities a cohort approach was taken, meaning that increases were measured in relation to a group rather than on an individual level. All foster carers that engaged across the programme and participated in at least one evaluation activity were included in the measurement.

**Table 1: Summary of methods used in evaluating the project**

Method	Output
Foster Carer Forum Evaluation Forms	54 forms completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>31 evaluations provided data to develop the confidence baseline</li> <li>23 evaluations provided data on self-evaluated changes in confidence</li> </ul>
Foster Carer Training Evaluation Forms	64 forms completed
Additional methods	Output
Interviews with Foster Carers	5 interviews completed
Interview with Fostering Team Manager	1 interview completed
Interviews with Strategic Managers	5 interviews completed
Focus Group with Social Workers	1 focus group completed: 5 participants
Focus Group with Supervising Social Workers	1 focus group completed: 2 participants
Focus Group with Children in Care (UASC) Team Managers	1 focus group completed: 3 participants
Foster Carer Forum Group Exercise	2 group exercises completed at final 2 Foster Carer Forums: 43 participants
Children's Welcome Leaflet Survey	Email survey completed: 27 surveys sent: 9 responses received

<sup>14</sup> It is important to acknowledge that foster carers who participated in project activities may have also had the opportunity to access other projects and support mechanisms throughout the life of the project, which, depending on engagement, will have also impacted on their levels of confidence and knowledge in caring for unaccompanied and trafficked children from Albania and Viet Nam. These include: support from the child's social worker and their supervising social worker; attendance at Foster Carer Support Groups, engaging with the Young Minds Project, regularly scheduled training for in-house carers focusing on supporting unaccompanied children, the in-house Foster Carer Mentoring Scheme, support via the Refugee Council and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, personal research and peer support and learning.

## FINDINGS

**Objective:** Vulnerability to exploitation for Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery supported by the London Borough of Croydon is reduced through capacity-building for foster carers and improved support for children

As outlined in the methodology, the project established an overall objective to demonstrate an increased capacity of foster carers to care for Albanian and Vietnamese children, as well as provide improved support, with an aim of reducing vulnerability to exploitation for these groups.

The project established a target of 30 per cent of foster carers demonstrating increased capacity to look after Albanian and Vietnamese children and 20 per cent identifying improved support for these groups.

In total, against a target of 80 foster carers attending a forum and 80 attending a training, 108 foster carers engaged with the forums (62 in-house carers, 45 IFA carers and 1 unconfirmed), and 84 attended a training (45 in-house carers and 39 IFA carers).

Across the foster carers who attended a project activity, at point of registering to take part, 23 Albanian children were being cared for and 11 Vietnamese. There were an additional 37 unaccompanied and trafficked children from 11 other countries being looked after. These numbers would have changed over time as new children moved into foster carers' homes and children who were already placed moved on. The foster carers came with a range of knowledge and skills, some newly approved and others who were longstanding in their role.

The following two sections focus on the evaluation of the trainings and forums and will support in demonstrating how far the above objective has been met.

**Outcome 1:** Foster carers demonstrate increased confidence in looking after Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery

The project set a target of reaching 80 foster carers across a set of seven foster carer forums: one consultative (doubled to increase input) and six thematic, as outlined in Annex A, supported by experts, the project team and Croydon Council staff. A further target was established aiming for 70 per cent of foster carers to report an increase in confidence in looking after Albanian and Vietnamese children from the first to the last forum.

Delivery of the first Foster Carer Forum provided an effective launching pad for future project implementation, enhancing understanding of the needs of foster carers and increasing their engagement. The first forum was repeated at a later date to mitigate issues around foster carer availability during the school holidays, with one taking place in July 2017 and the other in September of the same year. This was advantageous for two reasons: first, having a forum earlier allowed for early consultation with foster carers to inform the development of the project resources, and secondly, having a second consultative forum closer to the training dates allowed for greater promotion to encourage registrations, and facilitated understanding around how best to communicate with foster carers about upcoming activities.

Furthermore, the first two forums enabled foster carers to evaluate their confidence at that point, which supported in determining the confidence baseline. The last forum provided an opportunity for foster carers to share any perceived changes in confidence after attending the forums.

A total of 108 foster carers attended at least 1 forum, with around a quarter attending more than once. The total cumulative attendance across all 7 forums was 177 foster carers. Table 2 outlines the number of foster carers who attended each of the forums.

**Table 2: Foster carer attendance at forums**

Forum	Forum date	Attendance
1.1	July 2017	17
1.2	September 2017	32
2	November 2017	23
3	January 2018	23
4	March 2018	23
5	June 2018	16
6	September 2018	7
7	November 2018	36
Total number of foster carers		177

As table 2 shows, 49 foster carers attended the first two forums, with 31 evaluation forms completed sufficiently to provide data for the development of the confidence baseline.

Foster carers were asked to rate their confidence in relation to the following four areas: 1) confidence in looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; 2) confidence in looking after potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery; 3) confidence in looking after Albanian children; and 4) confidence in looking after Vietnamese children. They were given the following four confidence ratings to choose from: 1) Excellent; 2) Quite good; 3) Not so good; and 4) Low. Table 3 below shows a full overview of responses from foster carers.

Overall, foster carers rated their confidence higher than expected for **looking after unaccompanied children** and **looking after Albanian children**. In fact, 74 per cent (23 out of 31 foster carers) rated their confidence to be in the top two denominators, “quite good” and “excellent” for both these groups.

Confidence ratings were slightly lower in respect of **caring for trafficked children**, 52 per cent (16) rated their confidence as “quite good” or “excellent”, and **for Vietnamese children**, 39.5 per cent (12) “quite good” and “excellent”.

In summary, foster carers reported higher levels of confidence across all areas, in comparison to the lower ratings of “not so good” and “low”. The only exception to this was in respect of looking after Vietnamese children where foster carers rated on the lower side, 32 per cent (10) as “not so good” and 25 per cent (8) as “low”.

The project in fact targeted foster carers who were already looking after unaccompanied children or were likely to do so in future. Given Croydon Council’s proximity to the Home Office Asylum Screening Unit, and the fact that Albanian children were the largest number of unaccompanied looked after children in Croydon, many foster carers working with the Council had substantial experience. Some had been looking after unaccompanied children for more than 20 years. A number of carers acknowledged in evaluation forms that they wanted to improve their understanding and confidence on the subject of child trafficking as they had not knowingly cared for trafficked children during their fostering careers.

The last foster carer forum provided an opportunity for foster carers to rate their confidence across the same questions and ratings to provide information as to whether their confidence levels had changed by the time of the final forum. Of the 36 foster carers who attended, 23 evaluation forms were sufficiently completed to use in the evaluation. Table 3 outlines the self-evaluated changes in foster carers' confidence. The before and after totals vary owing to the different number of foster carers who attended the first and last forums.

**Table 3: Changes in foster carer confidence**

	Forums: July and September 2017	Forum: November 2018
<b>Confidence in looking after unaccompanied children</b>		
Excellent	5	12
Quite good	18	11
Not so good	4	0
Low	1	0
No answer	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Confidence in looking after trafficked children</b>		
Excellent	4	6
Quite good	12	14
Not so good	11	2
Low	2	0
No answer	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Confidence in looking after children from Albania</b>		
Excellent	5	8
Quite good	18	11
Not so good	5	3
Low	2	0
No answer	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Confidence in looking after children from Viet Nam</b>		
Excellent	1	6
Quite good	11	13
Not so good	10	2
Low	8	0
No answer	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>

As table 3 demonstrates, after attending the forums, 100 per cent of foster carers (23 out of 23) rated their confidence in **looking after unaccompanied children** as either “excellent” or “quite good”, with those rating themselves as “excellent” increasing by 225 per cent (12) from the baseline figure and “quite good” decreasing by 17 per cent (11).

Foster carers also rated their confidence in **caring for trafficked children** to have increased, with 87 per cent (20) giving a rating of “excellent” or “quite good”; a 100 per cent (6) increase of the “excellent” rating and a 56 per cent (14) increase for “quite good”. Two foster carers rated their confidence as “not so good”, however, overall, there was a decrease of 74 per cent (2) for this rating.



It is relevant to note that these two carers had not attended any forums before the final one and therefore had not benefitted from a wider range of forums, as other carers who gave higher confidence ratings had. No carers rated their confidence as low, a 100 per cent decrease on the baseline figures.

In respect of confidence in **caring for Albanian children**, 83 per cent (19) gave a rating of “excellent” or “quite good”, with excellent ratings increasing by 119 per cent (8) and “quite good” decreasing by 17 per cent (11). Three foster carers gave a rating of ‘not so good’ and these were also carers who were attending a forum for the first time. Once again, no carers rated their confidence as low, which is a 100 per cent decrease on the baseline figures.

Finally, ratings in respect of **caring for Vietnamese children** showed the most significant increases across all four areas, with 82 per cent (19) rating their confidence as either “excellent” or “quite good”, the former increasing by 643 per cent (6) and 55 per cent (13) for the latter. As with previous areas, two foster carers gave a rating of ‘not so good’ and these are represented by those who attended a forum for the first time. Again, no carers rated their confidence as low, a 100 per cent decrease on the baseline figures.

In summary, when looking at overall confidence as “quite good” and “excellent” ratings, the increase in confidence looking after Albanian children was lowest (8%), followed by unaccompanied children (18%), then trafficked children (35%) and Vietnamese children (44%). However when looking at the increase in those reporting a confidence level of “excellent” we can see superlative results, ranging from 82 per cent increase in looking after Vietnamese children to 225 per cent increase in confidence looking after for unaccompanied children. The project therefore saw a reported increase in confidence overall on all levels, with an increase by over 70 per cent of foster carers reporting “excellent” confidence.

## Qualitative analysis

### Impact on confidence

Through the evaluation forms and evaluation group exercises the foster carers shared a range of views about the forums and the impact these have had on their confidence. Professionals, including social workers, supervising social workers, managers and strategic managers, were also asked to comment on the impact of the forums. Knowledge of the forums was variable amongst the professionals interviewed, with most having limited knowledge of them, which impacted the range of answers provided. However, overall, the feedback received was positive, with foster carers rating each of the forums as either excellent or good. Foster carers shared that the forums had been invaluable to their learning and professionals viewed them as an important addition to carers’ learning. One foster carer stated:

“These are very informative and build my confidence in fostering young people from Albania and Viet Nam in the future.” (Foster Carer)



The following forum themes were most prevalently reported as having had the greatest impact on foster carers' confidence and wider learning:

- ✓ **Understanding child trafficking – impacts, risks, needs and safety**
- ✓ **Missing children and police procedures**
- ✓ **Culture and cultural values of Vietnamese and Albanian children**
- ✓ **Voice of the child – hearing from a young adult from Albania**
- ✓ **The National Transfer Scheme**

In supporting this learning, carers and professionals recognized the project teams' efforts to create an environment in which foster carers felt safe to share experiences and ask questions openly. The following comments highlight these points:

"I thought it was a really friendly atmosphere. None of the people, the experts were patronising, because sometimes some of these experts can be really patronising. What came across was a real, genuine, sincere attempt to share information to make the state of migrants or refugees or children who've been trafficked, to make it better. That's what came across." (Foster Carer)

"They [foster carers] have been able to network through this, learn together, feel safe to ask questions.....foster carers can be honest and not feel that they will be judged for not knowing something or being ignorant of something." (Strategic Manager)

### Putting learning into practice

Managers shared some positive impacts of the forums, particularly around a perceived improvement of foster carers' practice when children are missing. They stated an observed progress in the way foster carers are reporting children as missing; the approach being much more consistent. Foster carers' recording of missing episodes and general day to day recording was also reported to have improved. Managers fed back that recordings have become more detailed and carers are evidencing an increased curiosity and are beginning to appropriately question the circumstances around children when they go missing. This was reported as being supportive to the police and social care as well as individual children. One strategic manager shared her view that the project has supported in reducing missing episodes for some children:

"I think it's had quite a big impact from what I hear, and I think it's reduced missing episodes for some children, so I think it's had a big impact. Because I think foster carers feel better informed, they feel like they understand, they're thinking culturally differently about children who are placed with them and I think that's had a big impact on those children." (Strategic Manager)

## Building relationships

This is also reflected in the foster carers' feedback, with many sharing increased empathy and understanding toward the children in their care owing to learning about their backgrounds and cultures, leading to more positive relationships being built. One carer shared how the project has changed her outlook on fostering unaccompanied and trafficked children:

“The project has changed me. It has made me much more understanding and empathic. I am much more patient now with the young person in my care. Our relationship is much better because of this.” (Foster Carer)

A number of carers who had not looked after unaccompanied or trafficked children previously and had not considered caring for children from these groups before, shared how the forums had supported them to understand more and to feel greater confidence in their abilities to undertake this type of fostering in the future.

## Peer learning

Many carers and professionals commented on the added value that forums bring in supporting foster carers to build networks, to learn from one another and access practical advice which can be added to their knowledge and skills tool box.

## Developing knowledge of support services

Foster carers particularly enjoyed hearing and learning about additional support services and how they can enable children to access them. What was clear throughout the forums was the foster carers' feeling of a lack of empowerment when supporting children with complex histories and needs, and not knowing where to seek much needed specialist support. The forums provided an opportunity for foster carers to find out about such support services and their feedback evidences the value this brought for them.

## Additional feedback

Foster carers and professionals shared that they would have liked to hear even more real-life stories of children and their journeys to support in developing their understanding further. They also commented that having experienced foster carers as guest speakers would have been an additional benefit in enabling them to think practically about issues and challenges and to develop solutions together.

## Foster Carer Forums - Summary

Participation in forums has been shown to increase foster carers' confidence, and has helped to:

- » Increase foster carers' understanding of risks to children and how to keep them safe
- » Improve foster carers' response to missing children
- » Improve foster carers' recording practice
- » Increase foster carers' empathy and understanding leading to better relationships with children
- » Enable foster carers who have not previously looked after unaccompanied and trafficked children to increase their capacity to do so
- » Develop foster carers' networks of support
- » Increase foster carers' knowledge of, and access to, support services for children



Foster carer forum at Croydon Town Hall, June 2018. © IOM 2018/Abby DWOMMOH

### Output 1.1: Foster carers have the skills and knowledge to look after Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery

The project set a target of developing and delivering 7 sets of 2 half-day trainings to a total of 80 foster carers, some of whom also attended forums.<sup>15</sup> The training involved an interactive approach, and used group work activities, case studies and videos, centred around looking after unaccompanied children who may be trafficked or at risk, in particular from Albania and Viet Nam. A full list of training topics are outlined in Annex B. As with the foster carer forums, a further target was established aiming for 70 per cent of foster carers to report an increase of knowledge in looking after Albanian and Vietnamese children, potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery, after attending the training.

The training evaluations were self-certified, with foster carers providing a before and after knowledge rating at the end of the second training day. The before ratings have been used to provide the knowledge baseline, the after ratings show the changes in how foster carers rate their knowledge post training attendance.

A total of 84 foster carers attended one set of 2 half-day trainings each. Foster carers completed a total of 64 evaluation forms in a sufficient manner to provide relevant data for the evaluation report. Table 4 outlines the number of foster carers who attended each of the trainings.

Table 4: Foster carer attendance at trainings

Training	Training Date	Attendance
1	October 2017	13
2	October 2017	8
3	November 2017	13
4	November 2017	16
5	March 2018	14
6	June 2018	11
7	September 2018	9
Total number of foster carers		84

Foster carers were asked to rate their knowledge in relation to the following four areas: 1) knowledge around unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; 2) knowledge around trafficking and risks to children; 3) knowledge around Albanian children; and 4) knowledge around Vietnamese children. They were given the following four knowledge ratings to choose from: 1) Excellent; 2) Quite Good; 3) Not so Good; and 4) Low.

Overall, foster carers rated their knowledge around **unaccompanied children** as highest, with 67 per cent (43 out of 64 foster carers) rating their knowledge in the top two denominators, “quite good” (64%) and “excellent” (3%). The next highest knowledge rating was around **Albanian children**, with 45 per cent (29) reporting it as “excellent” (8%) or “quite good” (38%).

For **trafficking and risks to children**, 34 per cent (22) of foster carers rated their knowledge as “quite good” and none as excellent, while around Vietnamese children 25 per cent (16) rated their knowledge as “quite good” (22%) or “excellent” (3%).

<sup>15</sup> Half days were chosen to respect foster carer time to fulfil childcare obligations.

Similarly to the forum picture, many of the carers who attended the trainings had been caring for unaccompanied children for a number of years and a higher proportion of carers had looked after Albanian children, over **Vietnamese children**, which could partly explain the different levels of knowledge ratings in caring for children of these nationalities, as outlined above. Table 5 outlines the self-evaluated changes in foster carers' knowledge.

**Table 5: Changes in foster carer rating of knowledge**

Question one: My knowledge of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children		
	Before training	After training
Excellent	2	46
Quite good	41	16
Not so good	12	0
Low	7	0
Question two: My knowledge of trafficking and risks to children		
	Before training	After training
Excellent	0	28
Quite good	22	35
Not so good	28	0
Low	13	0
Question three: My knowledge of Vietnamese children		
	Before training	After training
Excellent	2	22
Quite good	14	40
Not so good	22	2
Low	26	0
Question four: My knowledge of Albanian children		
	Before training	After training
Excellent	5	28
Quite good	24	34
Not so good	20	0
Low	13	0

As table 5 shows, foster carers' knowledge increased across each of the four areas, and in all but one, every foster carer rated their knowledge as either "excellent" or "quite good".

After the training, all foster carers rated their knowledge of unaccompanied children as either "excellent" or "quite good", with "excellent" ratings increasing by 2,300 per cent (46), the largest increase across all four areas and ratings. There were reductions in the other three categories, "quite good" by 61 per cent (16) and "not so good" and "low" by 100 per cent (0).



Knowledge ratings of trafficking and risks to children showed a similar increase, with 28 carers giving an “excellent” rating, when no carers had given this rating on the before scores.<sup>16</sup> There was an increase of 62 per cent (35) on “quite good” ratings and no foster carer reporting “not so good” or “low” knowledge levels (a 100% decrease on “not so good” or “low” ratings to zero).

Foster carers reported a 1,033 per cent (22) and 450 per cent (28) increase in “excellent” ratings for their knowledge of Vietnamese children and Albanian children respectively and ‘quite good’ at 186 per cent (40) and 39 per cent (34). Two foster carers felt their knowledge of Vietnamese children was “not so good”, making up a total of 3 per cent of respondents, with none rating as low. For Albanian children, after the training no foster carer reported “not so good” or “low” knowledge levels.

The figures show a significant increase in foster carers’ understanding of their knowledge after attending the training. Overall, when looking across all areas and ratings, foster carers reported an average of 57 per cent increase in knowledge on looking after Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied and trafficked children. Even long-standing carers who specialize in looking after unaccompanied children rated increases in their knowledge, however, these were less marked than for foster carers who had less experience caring for this group of children.

## Qualitative analysis

The qualitative feedback evidences that the training was viewed by all foster carers as either excellent or good. The majority shared that it was informative and useful, with carers benefitting greatly from the knowledge of the trainers.

Foster carers, social workers, supervising social workers, managers and strategic managers were asked to comment on the training and its impact.

Foster carers commented that although the training focused on developing their knowledge of children from Albania and Viet Nam, much of the content was relevant to caring for all unaccompanied and trafficked children. They acknowledged that what they learnt would be transferable to caring for children of any nationality and this was something they enjoyed about the training as highlighted by the following carer:

“The training was very informative and beneficial for all foster carers who look after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.” (Foster Carer)

Inexperienced carers who had not looked after unaccompanied or trafficked children previously commented that they would feel confident to do so after attending the training, as this carer states:

“I have never looked after unaccompanied children, but feel confident to do so now.”  
(Foster Carer)

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<sup>16</sup> It is technically impossible to calculate an increase from a baseline of 0, but could be considered a 2,800 per cent increase.

The foster carers shared which topics had been most useful to them in their knowledge development, with the following emerging as the most relevant and prevalent:

- ✓ **Understanding child trafficking – impacts, risks, needs and safety**
- ✓ **Caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children**
- ✓ **Culture and cultural values of Vietnamese and Albanian children**
- ✓ **Language and communication skills**
- ✓ **Legal information, processes – asylum process, age assessment, legal rights and entitlements**
- ✓ **The National Transfer Scheme**
- ✓ **The National Referral Mechanism**
- ✓ **Where to access further support and information**

There was also evidence of continued knowledge development for some of the more experienced carers as shared by this foster carer:

“I have always fostered Albanian children, but during the course I still learnt things I wasn't aware of.” (Foster Carer)

### Putting learning into practice

Foster carers acknowledged an increase in their understanding of child trafficking and more awareness of the indicators and signs, as well as the safeguarding measures they can adopt in their homes to keep children safe.

Case study 1: During the evaluation, one foster carer illustrated how she had put her learning into practice. The trainers had supported her understanding of the National Transfer Scheme and best interests assessments, as well as the age assessment process. The advice given by the trainers enabled the carer to access a children's advocate, who supported the looked after child through the age assessment process and ensured that the child's best interests were considered before decisions were made about transferring her to another local authority under the National Transfer Scheme. The outcome was that the child was recognized as a child and enabled to remain with the foster carer, with whom she had expressed the wish to reside.

Social workers, supervising social workers, managers and strategic managers who were able to comment on the benefits of the training confirmed that since attending, some carers' practice had improved, in particular, their levels of understanding and empathy toward the children in their care.

Case study 2: A social worker shared how the project activities supported a foster carer to raise concerns about a young person in her care who was potentially being trafficked. Through attendance at the training and forums, the foster carer's knowledge about child trafficking and identifying trafficking indicators increased, which led to her being more curious about some of the behaviours the child was exhibiting. This understanding supported the foster carer to better manage behaviours she had once found challenging, and with increased empathy enabled channels of communication to open up between her and the child. The foster carer shared her concerns with the child's social worker, who acknowledged the risks and submitted a referral to the National Referral Mechanism. The social worker reported that the level of trust between the foster carer and child has improved and they remain safe and well.

The training also created opportunities for recognition of foster carer expertise, which was appreciated by social workers and foster carers alike. A social worker shared how attending the training provided added value in supporting foster carers to complete their Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS),<sup>17</sup> with the training covering many of the standards they have to evidence. A strategic manager acknowledged that attendance at the training could be one of the criteria used to support placement choice when matching Albanian and Vietnamese children with foster carers.

## Building relationships

Similarly to the feedback shared from the foster carer forums, participants commented on the training enabling them to increase their empathy and understanding toward children from Albania and Viet Nam. They acknowledged a deeper understanding of the experiences that children may have had, including their journeys to the United Kingdom and the impact these could have on mental health and emotional well-being.

Foster carers also shared a greater understanding of what they can practically do to support children to settle into their home, as this foster carer commented:

“When the young people come to your home and English is not their first language, how must they feel, not knowing how to communicate? Try to use flashcards for young people to try and have better communication, to settle the young person into your home.”  
(Foster Carer)

## Peer learning

Being with other carers was also regularly reported as an additional benefit, with carers having the space and time to share experiences and gather solutions to often immediate and pressing issues relating to children in their care from each other and the trainers. They shared how much they enjoyed working through the group activities, which provided another opportunity for them to interact and share with one another. They acknowledged that meeting foster carers from different agencies also supported them to learn new things and some exchanged their contact details, so they could provide informal peer support to one another after the training.

## Additional feedback

In respect of additions to the training, foster carers shared how they would have liked even more real-life stories and visual learning aids; as well as hand-outs to be given at the beginning of the trainings. Foster

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<sup>17</sup> Department for Education, *Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*, 2012, <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/f/foster%20care%20tsd%20standards%20and%20guidance.pdf>





## Overall findings

At the beginning of the chapter we outlined an overall objective to demonstrate an increased capacity of foster carers to care for Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied and trafficked children as well as improved support for unaccompanied children, with an aim of reducing their vulnerability to exploitation.

The evaluation of foster carer forums and trainings demonstrate an increase in both knowledge and confidence in caring for these children. As a composite of these two indicators, carers' capacity has also increased by more than the 30 per cent target established by the project: from 47 per cent reported capacity in the baseline, to 95 per cent reported capacity at the end of the project. This represents an overall increase of 48 per cent.

In addition, from the qualitative analysis, at least 20 per cent of the responses from foster carers and professionals indicate that support to children has improved, through an increase in knowledge and confidence; an increase in safeguarding practice; development of cultural awareness, understanding and empathy; and knowledge of support services for children.

**Foster carers and professionals report an increase in foster carers' capacity to look after Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied and trafficked children and provide them improved support.**

## Output 1.2: Professional and peer-to-peer learning tools are accessible to Foster Carers

The online platform Huddle<sup>18</sup> was launched in January 2018 to provide access to resources electronically and a supportive environment to foster carers in addition to face-to-face project activities. Foster carers were invited by their email addresses to register to access the platform.

Foster carers who access and use the platform can benefit from a range of resources and materials to support their continued learning and development, including the Foster Carer Handbook; Foster Carer Briefings about Albania and Viet Nam; Children's Welcome Leaflets in English, Albanian and Vietnamese, and later also in Amharic, Arabic, Dari, Pashto and Tigrinya; project information documents, including schedules for trainings and forums; handouts from foster carer forums; and forum and training presentation slides. Content is regularly updated with new resources and materials, as well as latest versions of previously uploaded documents.

The choice to use Huddle as the online method for sharing project documents with foster carers was made due to its established use within Croydon Council, including by Croydon's Safeguarding Children's Board.

To encourage foster carers' participation in the platform, Huddle was presented at each foster carer forum, and a basic user guide was compiled and distributed at forums and more widely via email. The project team reminded foster carers about the online platform with regular emails, as well as engaging with IFA managers to share information about the platform to pass on to their foster carers. The forums and trainings presented a good opportunity for the project team to support new foster carers to gain access to the online platform and to learn more about how the resources and materials could benefit them in the work they do. Foster carers were also encouraged to promote the space to other foster carers connected to Croydon Council within their networks.

At the time of writing, 298 in-house foster carers and 58 IFA foster carers have been given access to the online platform.<sup>19</sup> This exceeds the original target of 250 for in-house foster carers but has not yet reached the target for IFA carers, which is 100. The project team continue to invite both in-house and IFA foster carers to access the online platform, and are continuing their engagement with IFA managers with the aim of reaching as many foster carers as possible. IFA foster carers' email addresses are not available directly to the project for data protection reasons, hence the need to engage primarily with IFA managers to promote access to the platform for those carers.

Those actually taking advantage of the opportunity to access resources on the online platform which was drawn from records of who had logged in and used the platform at least once, were 31 in-house and 13 IFA foster carers. Looking at this low level of activity, it became imperative to consider a qualitative evaluation of the platform's usefulness for foster carers.

Foster carers and professionals shared their views as to why use of the online platform was low and highlighted the following factors as having the main impact on engagement: 1) limited experience and understanding of technology; 2) pressures on time, and 3) challenges around awareness.

### Limited experience and understanding of technology

There was a commonly held view amongst foster carers and professionals, that many foster carers have limited experience with technology and how to use a platform such as Huddle, which negatively impacts on their wish to seek out how to access it. One carer shared her view:

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<sup>18</sup> Huddle - an online document collaboration platform.

<sup>19</sup> Data available from the Huddle Activity Tracker up to the end of November 2018.

“If you give me a book and a pen, I'll write you a note about what we did, I haven't got a problem with that. Stick passwords and this and that in front of me and it all starts to blur over.” (Foster Carer)

It was also felt by some that the use of the terminology ‘online platform’ could put some less technologically aware foster carers off finding out more about it. One strategic manager suggested that foster carers may feel a greater level of confidence engaging with something more akin to Facebook, as this is a form of social media that is readily used by many. This was explored at project design phase but disregarded as such platforms are not permitted by Croydon Council because they do not offer the same level of safeguards as Huddle.

## Pressures on time

Other carers identified a lack of time as one of the main reasons for them not going to the online platform to look up resources and materials. Fitting additional learning into their often-busy schedules, in which they are managing a myriad of competing demands, including completing mandatory learning and recording, was not or could not be a priority for them, as highlighted here:

“I think sometimes, it's just about having the quality time just to sit and read. There is a wealth of materials on there, I need that quality time to read and look through all of the materials.” (Foster Carer)

Of those carers who have accessed the online platform, about half shared how easy, quick and user-friendly it is to log in and navigate, with the other half commenting on how difficult it was. Carers who shared a more positive view of its usability, also commented on how helpful the resources are and how beneficial it is to have “everything at your fingertips”. In addition, foster carers agreed that accessing the platform provides a good refresher of what was presented at the training and via the forums.

Social workers, supervising social workers, team and strategic managers also agreed that it could be a useful tool to support in reminding foster carers of what they have learnt, as well as acting as a support in instances when other professionals are not available. Although relevant materials were shared with social workers through their own internal Sharepoint<sup>20</sup> system, some said they would also benefit from having access to the online platform and would welcome it being offered out more widely.

## Challenges around awareness

Despite regular emails and newsletters, face-to-face communications and offers of one to one support in enabling carers to register and gain access, the platform had least take up of the piloted activities.

The majority of foster carers reported that they learnt of Huddle when attending a project activity at which time they shared their email address with the team so they could gain access. However, they often had not noticed invitations provided by email, hence reports of low levels of awareness.

In response to these challenges, the project provided more printed materials to foster carers, particularly of the foster carer handbook which was originally envisaged to be provided only to those who attended face-to-face training.

The project team continues to explore the most useful and user-friendly way of supporting foster carers to access the project resources and materials and how these might be sustained into the future.

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<sup>20</sup> Sharepoint – a web-based collaborative platform that integrates with Microsoft Office.

## Outcome 2: Improved settling of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into placement

### Output 2.1: Culturally tailored information material is accessible to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

The project established a target of producing 250 Welcome Leaflets for children from Albania and Viet Nam. The leaflets were developed with the support of children from these two countries to enable newly arrived children to begin to understand what foster care is and what other professionals they would have contact with would do to support them, as well as who to contact if they felt in danger. The leaflets are being provided to Albanian and Vietnamese children (and now, children of other nationalities) by the Duty Social Worker in the child's own language when they claim asylum at the Home Office. It is to be explained to them prior to being placed in foster care and at the placement planning meeting. The foster carer is also provided with an English version of the leaflet, as a support to understand the information that has been provided to the child. They can also access all of the leaflets on the online platform. A guide for distributing and recording the leaflets has been shared with the Duty Social Workers to support in tracking distribution and gathering impact data.

#### Developing the leaflet

*"Foster carers can help me by seeing how I feel and knowing how to treat me."*  
Albanian young person

Barnardo's facilitated a children's forum with an aim to consult with children and young people about the Welcome Leaflet.

A mixed methodology was developed to enable meaningful consultation with both Albanian and Vietnamese children from the Shpresa Programme and Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service. A total of 29 children and young people were consulted, some in groups and others individually.

The majority response to the leaflet was positive, with young people sharing that they liked it and agreeing that it would benefit newly identified children. They advised on practical things that could be changed to make the leaflet clearer such as, wording and terminology, which were taken into account when developing the final leaflet.

*"Foster carers can help by understanding religion and giving children the space to practice the religion they follow."*  
Vietnamese young person

At the time of writing, a reported 183 leaflets had been distributed by Duty Social Workers at the Home Office, 111 to Albanian children and 72 to Vietnamese children. Table 6 outlines who the leaflets have been distributed to.

Table 6: Number of leaflets distributed to Albanian and Vietnamese children<sup>21</sup>

Nationality	Number of leaflets distributed	Male	Female
Albanian	111	102	3
Vietnamese	72	42	27

While it has been possible to keep consistent records of how many leaflets have been distributed, the movement of children such as through the pan-London rota and National Transfer Scheme, whether or not with an IFA carer or an in-house carer, has made it more difficult to follow up after a time to assess impact.

<sup>21</sup> These numbers reflect the children for whom full information was recorded.



An additional activity made possible by budget savings in the first project year was the translation of the leaflets into Amharic, Arabic, Dari, Pashto and Tigrinya to meet the need expressed by Croydon Council to include children from Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea in particular as part of the support provided at the point of children claiming asylum. These are now being distributed as part of the project and can be accessed on social workers' Sharepoint and the online platform.<sup>22</sup> The leaflets will continue to be shared with children up to the end of March 2019 and the project is therefore confident in reaching its established target of distributing 250 leaflets.

## Foster carers reporting better settling of children into placement

Through the production of the Welcome Leaflet, the project established an outcome to support children from Albania and Viet Nam to feel safe and welcome, and to support them settling better into their foster placement.

As mentioned above, children receiving the leaflet would have been newly placed in foster care and could have been moved via the pan-London rota or National Transfer Scheme. These two factors, plus the experiences children may have faced prior to being placed in care meant it would have been inappropriate to engage with them in the evaluation process. The project therefore chose to measure the impact of the leaflet by asking foster carers who are caring for children who had received a leaflet whether they felt it enabled them to settle better, and to ask the same of professionals working with the children. The project established a target of 40 per cent of foster carers and 40 per cent of professionals reporting that children settled better.

The views of foster carers and professionals were sought via the foster carer forums, a Welcome Leaflet Survey, interviews with foster carers, and interviews and focus groups with professionals.

The Welcome Leaflet Survey was sent to twenty-seven of the foster carers who were known to have cared for a child who had received a leaflet. The majority were in-house foster carers as direct contact via email is not possible with IFA foster carers who have not participated in other project activities. The response was quite limited, again due to the voluntary nature of participation in this project activity, however potentially also as many foster carers were not yet aware of the availability of the leaflet. This has led to increased attention paid to making this known at the placement planning meeting. Responses at forums, interviews and focus groups corroborated a lack of awareness. Only one foster carer shared their view of the leaflet, stating that it did not seem helpful because children get too many leaflets at the Home Office. Overall, this information could suggest that foster carers are not always aware of the information that is shared with children at the Home Office and that the project leaflet is one of a number of different communications given to children at this time.

In respect of the social workers, supervising social workers, managers and strategic managers spoken with, the majority had seen the leaflet and shared an understanding of the leaflet distribution instructions for social workers and believed that overall the leaflet is working well. That said, one Team Manager highlighted a possible problem that could be impacting on leaflet distribution: social workers might not always prioritize sharing the leaflet with children or foster carers owing to constraints on their time:

“I think with that leaflet, I mean, there is so much going on at the Home Office with the Duty Social Worker when young people are arriving. Obviously sometimes it's not seen as a priority.” (Manager)

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<sup>22</sup> At time of writing only a small number of leaflets have been distributed to children of other nationalities, so they have not been included as part of this evaluation report.

## Benefits of the leaflet

Once aware of the leaflet, the majority of respondents agreed that it is colourful, user-friendly and concise and that the language has clearly been considered to make it accessible to children of Albanian and Vietnamese nationality. They agreed that the leaflet could foster a sense of belonging and support children to feel safe. Having the leaflet translated was seen as positive and overall, respondents felt that it could support children to feel less anxious about moving into a fostering family. One Strategic Manager shared the following:

“I just think the leaflet is really good at explaining what will be happening and I think it probably does impact on whether young people stay in placements or what happens to young people, due to their anxieties or worries, being in a strange environment, not knowing what’s happening and being moved....and I just think the leaflet is reassuring for them.” (Strategic Manager)

## Good practice

It was agreed by the majority of respondents that giving the leaflet should not be a one-off event and that reinforcing the messages contained within it would further support children to feel safe. The most commonly shared view was the need for children to be supported to understand the content of the leaflet with an interpreter both at the Home Office and once in placement with a foster carer, highlighting the importance of foster carers receiving an English version of the leaflet to aid this process.

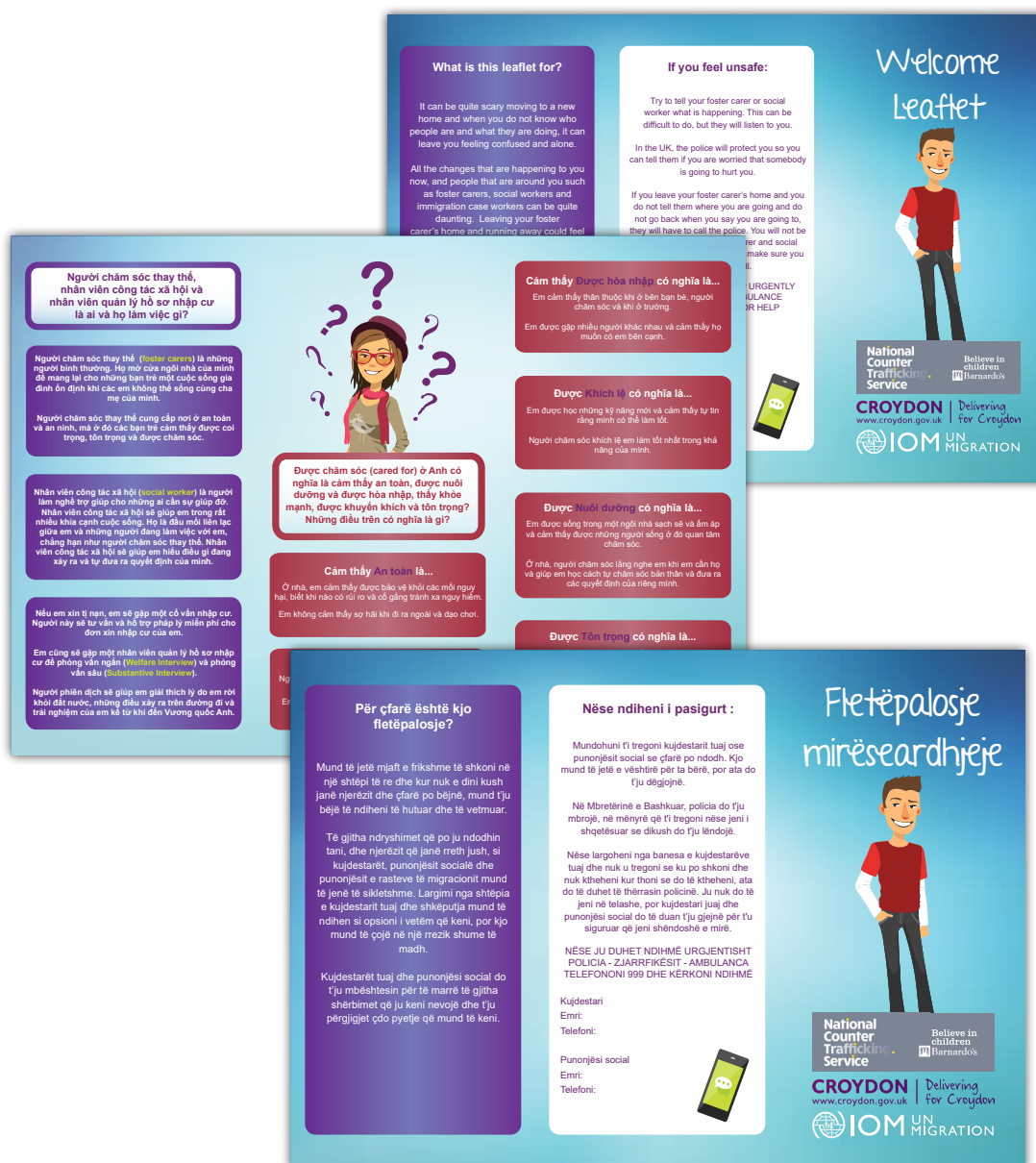
Although there have been challenges in measuring the impact the leaflet has had on children settling better, it is widely agreed by the foster carers, social workers, supervising social workers, managers and strategic managers, that providing such a resource to children at point of claiming asylum is good practice, as this strategic manager shares:

“I think it's really good practice. I think it's good. I think it looks good. I think it gives children something to hold onto and to understand that it's written so they know what their rights are as well as other people's. And it's something concrete for them in a time that is very traumatic, something that is culturally friendly. So I think it's good practice and I think it's sustainable. I think it's something that we can probably use later.”  
(Strategic Manager)

## Impact measurement challenges

Tracking and measuring the impact of the Welcome Leaflet has been an important feature of the project as this is not a task readily undertaken. It is acknowledged that there are a number of methodological challenges from developing baselines to interpretations of 'settling better' for individual children with specific and complex needs.

Despite these challenges, it is the project's observation from working with young people in the development of the leaflet of the importance of children having supportive information in their own language at point of claim. The project team will re-visit the leaflet distribution instructions to ensure foster carers are made aware of the English version and will continue to seek the views of foster carers and professionals about its effectiveness.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

The project has raised some key learning points for both supporting foster carers looking after unaccompanied children and more broadly around the protection of children who have been trafficked or are at risk. The underlying theme emerging was that more informed foster carers are able to support the identification of children at risk, and enhance the system of protection for them.

Key recommendations can be summarized as follows:

### Capacity-building and access to information

- Training on trafficking should be **mandatory for all foster carers** and include components on caring cross-culturally and recognizing signs of children at risk, with an aim of increasing empathy and deeper understanding of unaccompanied children's lived experiences;
- This training should include targeted content on the main nationalities of unaccompanied children, including cultural information and specific trafficking risks;
- Training should also be **mandatory for social workers and supervising social workers**, and be of the same or greater depth than that provided to foster carers, to ensure supportive environments are consistently created for both children and carers alike;
- In addition to training, supportive **face-to-face learning spaces** for in-house foster carers from Local Authorities and IFA carers together should be a feature of capacity-building, with opportunities to meet local service providers, and draw on their peer network to share ideas and build solutions together;
- Learning tools, resources and contacts should be made available to foster carers at **regular intervals and in different formats** (hard copy and electronic) to support different levels of technology use and access;
- Foster carers should be given opportunities to **feed into policy change and consequent procedures that impact on their care** for unaccompanied children, and/or be given the opportunity to hear about such changes face-to-face in a two-way exchange not only with relevant local authorities but also important stakeholders such as the Home Office.

### Access to information for unaccompanied children entering foster care

- While continuing to seek input on the impact of the project's Welcome Leaflet on children settling better in their foster care placement, the project preliminarily recommends that **information for unaccompanied children which is aimed at reducing their risk of going missing and/or being (re)trafficked, should be provided in a timely manner, be reiterative and always be explained face-to-face in a language they understand**, and not just on paper;
- **All adults working with unaccompanied children** in care, from foster carers to social workers, **should be aware and have a full picture of the information provided** to children, such as the above, also to support children's understanding of what social care and protection means in the United Kingdom and help them to settle better;
- Future efforts should be made to analyse the **amount of the information provided to children, the content and accessibility**, particularly at the moment when a child is claiming asylum, to ensure key information is properly delivered in line with a child's age and maturity.

## Continuous learning and enhancing protection for unaccompanied trafficked children or those at risk

To continue improving and building on the project learning, it is recommended that:

- Robust recording of missing episodes and children trafficked continue with the support of an intelligence analyst;
- Return home interviews<sup>23</sup> continue consistently and information is analysed for indicators of trafficking and modern slavery during strategic missing panel discussions;
- Foster carers and social workers continue to be kept abreast of any developments in the methods of exploitation employed by traffickers, and trends around missing children which can be useful for identification of those at risk;
- Children who have been identified as potentially trafficked receive specialist support and assistance, with strong collaboration between foster carers, social workers and Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs), where they exist (the scheme is due to commence in Croydon in April 2019);<sup>24</sup>
- Training materials and other resources are updated and actively disseminated to foster carers and social workers beyond the life of the project.

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<sup>23</sup> Statutory guidance states that when a child is found after a period of missing, an independent return home interview must be offered to them. This provides an opportunity for the child to share information that could help protect them from the risk of going missing again, from risks they have been exposed to whilst missing or from risk factors in their home.

<sup>24</sup> ICTAs are to be provided for potentially trafficked children under section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

## CONCLUSIONS

To provide innovative wraparound support to foster carers looking after unaccompanied trafficked children or those at risk, the project developed and facilitated a training programme over two half-days, set up a range of thematic foster carer forums, as well as an online platform with electronic resources. It also provided specific information for unaccompanied children to bridge a gap in cultural awareness around foster care in a Welcome Leaflet.

The project reached 108 foster carers via the forums, and **more than 70 per cent reported an increase in their confidence** in looking after Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied and trafficked children. Trainings were delivered to 84 foster carers, and **almost 60 per cent reported an increase in their knowledge** about Albanian and Vietnamese unaccompanied and trafficked children.

The project exceeded its targets to increase foster carers' capacity to care for unaccompanied and trafficked children and to improve support to them. It enabled over 30 per cent of foster carers to increase their overall capacity to care for unaccompanied and trafficked children and more than 20 per cent reported an overall improvement in support to children.

The evaluation suggests that some activities were more effective than others in supporting foster carers' capacity to care for unaccompanied and trafficked children particularly from Albania and Viet Nam and in reducing vulnerabilities to trafficking. **The foster carer forums and trainings provided the greatest benefit to carers**, with the online platform acting as an additional support for some. Further evaluation of the benefits of the Welcome Leaflet for children and online platform will continue up to March 2019.

With referrals of children into the NRM increasing year on year, it is hoped this project's learning can contribute to better training planning and continuing professional development of foster carers and local authorities looking after unaccompanied and trafficked children.

## Annex A: Foster Carer Forum Themes

Missing from care

The National Transfer Scheme

Protection for children who have been trafficked

Accessing health services, in particular local mental health services

Mental health and emotional well-being of children who have been trafficked

Children in Care Council

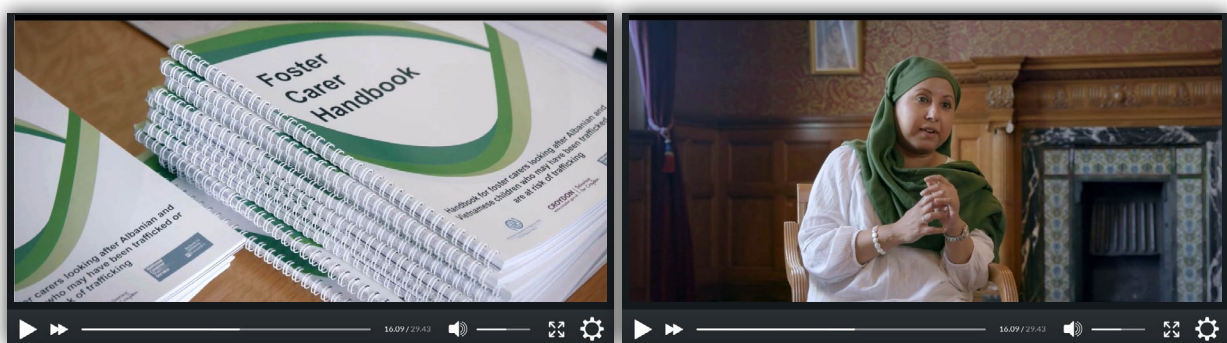
Caring for children from Albania

Working with interpreters

Caring for children from Viet Nam

Online Platform: Huddle

*Each of the above topics was presented by one or more experts or Croydon Council staff mentioned in our acknowledgments, or by the project team itself. Foster carers then had time to interact with experts through a Q&A, and share their experiences on these topics during discussion, as well as providing structured feedback in an evaluation form provided at the end. Some topics, like the Online Platform, were more practical, with demonstrations of how to access the platform and on the spot technical assistance.*



Screenshots of video tool created for foster carer training to include the voice of foster carers, created by Connected Pictures and IOM, June 2018. © IOM 2018

## Annex B: Foster Carer Training Topics

### Day 1

Terminology and Facts

Legislation and Guidance

The Asylum Process

Age Assessment

The National Transfer Scheme

### Day 2

Child Trafficking – signs of trafficking

Preparing to care for a child from Albania or Viet Nam

Overcoming language barriers

The National Referral Mechanism

Keeping children safe

Taking care of yourself

*These topics were covered over two half days of face-to-face training using an interactive approach, with group work activities, case studies and videos centred around looking after unaccompanied children who may be trafficked or at risk, in particular from Albania and Viet Nam. Tea, coffee and lunch was provided. All participants received copies of the powerpoint presentation, relevant handouts and a foster carer handbook at the end.*



Training activities, Croydon Town Hall, September 2018. © IOM 2018/Catherine CULLEN







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