

Pathways Through Care and After: Unaccompanied minors in England

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1 Introduction

For centuries, the population of forced migrants has always included within its ranks children and young people who have had to leave their homelands by themselves to seek sanctuary in countries distant or near to their own. Whilst in the early- to mid-twentieth century, UAM often travelled to the United Kingdom as part of organized resettlement programs, such as the Basque and *Kindertransport* [children transport] children in the 1930s, this is less often the case today (Ressler et al. 1988). The pathways young people take tend to be more individualized, may be more protracted and may carry greater uncertainty and risk. Exercise of choice in relation to final destination may also be limited, with control frequently resting in the hands of agents who organize their transit arrangements (Hopkins & Hill 2008; Crawley 2010).

Regardless of how and why young people come to the UK, they share some common experiences that are both complex and multi-layered. These experiences include being uprooted from the familiar and transposed to a foreign landscape, while often lacking the language skills to communicate with those they meet; from family rootedness (in most cases) to being alone while carrying worries about the fate of their families and/or the investment their families may have made in them as individuals selected to travel; transitioning from a status as citizens in their own countries to seeking rights of citizenship in a new host society; and, alongside all these changes, they are navigating a pathway from childhood to early adulthood in circumstances that appear neither certain nor promising. Given these circumstances, the degree to which they succeed in leading rich and purposeful lives is testament to their strength and resilience.

Once young people arrive in the UK they encounter a wide range of professionals charged with assessing their claims for asylum and providing them with initial care and protection. Young people's primary needs are for safety and shelter in a supportive environment, for access to education, to retain continuity with past relationships and customs while being given opportunities to make new ones; and to be enabled to find new purpose in the routines and activities that are part of everyday life (Wade et al. 2005; Kohli 2007). This paper considers what we currently know (and have yet to find out) from the growing body of UK research with a focus on how unaccompanied young people navigate a pathway through care and towards adulthood and on the systems that are intended to help them.

The United Kingdom comprises four countries (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Immigration law and policy applies across the UK as a whole, whereas child welfare legislation is devolved. Law and policy affecting children 'looked after' by local authorities in out-of-home care therefore differs from one country to another, although England and Wales share the same legislative framework. To simplify some of this complexity, evidence concerning social work practice with UAM in this paper is restricted to the English context.

2 Demographic data and asylum decisions

The United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) provides a clear administrative definition of an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. A young person will qualify if they are below the age of 18 (or appear to be so if documentation is lacking), if they are claiming asylum in their own right and if they have no adult relative or guardian to care for them in the UK (Home Office 2002). Each young person has to meet these criteria since, only then, will local authorities receive government funding to provide them with services as an UAM.

The numbers of UAM making applications for asylum in the UK vary each year. Official statistics provided by the Home Office show this pattern of variation, ranging from 3,333 applications in 2006 to 1,125 in 2012 before climbing again to 3,253 in 2015. Only a small minority of applications are made at ports of entry and most applications are made 'in-country', where young people have already entered the UK and present themselves to a local authority for assistance. For example, between 2008 and 2015 only around 8-10% of applications were made at ports of entry (Home Office 2016a).

The vast majority of UAM are male, rising from 75% of applicants in 2006 to 91% in 2015. A majority are also aged between 14 and 17 years at time of entry. In 2015, for example, just 8% were younger than 14 years of age, just over one quarter (26%) were aged 14-15 and 62% were assessed as being aged 16-17. The assessment of age has been a major source of controversy. Where a young person claims to be a minor but UKBA does not accept this claim, they are treated as an adult asylum seeker until there is evidence to support their claimed age. Age assessments are usually undertaken by social workers and age disputes are not uncommon. According to official figures there were 1,007 cases in 2014 and 2015 combined (Home Office 2016a) and the accuracy of procedures for assessing age have also been a long-standing matter of concern to local authority practitioners and non-governmental organizations (Crawley 2007).

Countries of origin also vary as conflicts escalate or diminish in different regions of the world. During year ending June 2016 official data for asylum applications of all ages (adults and children) identified the top five countries of origin as Iran*, Iraq, Pakistan, Eritrea* and Afghanistan*. Those marked with an asterisk also comprised the three most common countries of origin for unaccompanied children, accounting for 53% of all applications by minors. However, in the same year across all ages, there had also been a rise in applications from Syrian nationals (from 125 applications in 2011 to 2,563 in 2016), reflecting the deepening crisis in that region. Furthermore, again looking across all ages of applicant, there is evidence of an association between countries of origin and asylum determination. For example, during the same year, 87% of applications by Syrian nationals resulted in a grant of leave to remain, compared to Eritrea (48%), Iran (40%), Afghanistan (35%), Pakistan (16%) and just 12% for Iraqi nationals (Home Office 2016a). The reasons for these differences are not explained in the data, but are likely linked to the government's use of a country report system which determines which countries are considered 'safe' and which are not.

Relatively few UAM are granted a permanent right to remain in the UK. In 2015, official data suggest that just under one quarter of applicants were granted asylum (23%). This grant does not provide permanence, in itself, since it is awarded for five years and requires a further application at that stage before permanent citizenship rights are achieved. While a further minority of young people are given an outright refusal (22% in 2015), most are granted limited leave to remain which ends once a young person reaches seventeen and a half years of age (52% in 2015), allowing time (in theory at least) for final decisions to be made before

young people reach the age of majority (Home Office 2016a). This grant is made on the sole grounds that there are considered to be no suitable reception arrangements in the child's country of origin. As such, it defers removal. Before a period of limited leave runs out, a young person may apply to extend that leave and, if unsuccessful, appeal that decision. However, in many cases, decisions at appeal are only taken once the young person has reached 18 and, since they no longer meet the criteria for a grant of limited leave as an UAM, these applications are rarely successful.

Where the appeals process is unsuccessful, the young person is then designated as being 'appeal rights exhausted' (ARE) and is considered to be unlawfully present in the UK (Matthews 2014). The young person no longer has a right to study, work, to obtain social housing or, unless it would breach their human rights, to access welfare services. He or she is expected to take advantage of a voluntary assisted return package (designed to provide financial and practical assistance to aid their return) or be liable to enforced removal; the latter pathway involving regular reporting requirements and a risk of detention prior to removal. Many young people, however, cannot be returned immediately. There are frequently barriers to removal, such as an inability to secure the agreement of the country of origin to accept the young person back or lengthy time delays in obtaining the correct documentation. This can leave young people in a limbo state where they are unable to move forward purposefully with their lives and they remain reliant on local authorities to provide for their basic care (Matthews 2014).

Unsurprisingly many young people, who do not want to return, decide to disappear into a world of illegal work and rely on networks of informal support to sustain them (Matthews 2014; Wright 2014). The immigration system therefore offers most UAM a sense of 'built-in' impermanence that creates anxiety and further discontinuity and, as highlighted in recent literature, makes social work planning and effective leaving care support difficult to achieve (Devenney 2017; Wade et al. 2012; Wright 2014).

3 The legislative framework – the Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 (CA 1989) provides the legislative framework for children in England and Wales, including those in need of additional support and services. The Act recognizes that children are best brought up within their own families. The intention of the legislation is to ensure that children are protected from harm and that their developmental needs are met. Some of the key principles of the Act are consistent with those enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (effective from 1990) – for example, the paramountcy of the best interests of the child in all decisions affecting them (Article 3); respect for a child's race, religion and culture (Article 2); keeping children safe from harm (Article 6); and taking account of the wishes and feelings of children, commensurate with their age and understanding (Article 12). From a children's rights perspective, however, there has been criticism that the key principle of decision-making based on the best interests of the child, ultimately determined by adults or the courts, may serve to restrict children's ability to exercise their rights independently (see for example Fortin 2009).

With respect to UAM, once they are accepted as such they have the same rights and entitlements to welfare services as other citizen children. Without a parent or customary caregiver to look after them they should be treated by local authority children's services departments as children 'in need' under the provisions of the CA 1989, receive a full assessment and be provided with accommodation by the local authority. As a 'looked after' child not only do young people have the protection of statutory regulations while they are

'looked after', but also access to the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 to assist them through the transition from public care to independence as young adults. Local authorities have clear duties in regard to 'looked after' children, including requirements for child care planning and review, allocated social work support and contact and for promoting their health, education and training. Those formerly 'looked after' are entitled to receive leaving care support up to the age of 25 if they are in education or training. The CLCA 2000 includes duties to prepare young people for adult life, to provide pathway plans and ensure continuing support from personal advisers once they leave care, usually at or before the age of 18 (Department of Health 2001).

Personal advisers are commonly drawn from the ranks of professional social workers, teachers and youth workers. Pathway planning should identify young people's immediate needs and look forward to a longer-term future beyond care. Plans should be regularly monitored, reviewed and adjusted in the light of experience. The role of the personal adviser is pivotal in helping to construct the plan, providing continuity of support for the young person through transition and in identifying the resources and services that are required to meet their needs. The pathway plan will need to address all the core areas of young people's lives – for personal support, accommodation, education and training, employment, family and social relationships, life skills, financial assistance, health and contingency planning.

Where a young person's asylum application is undecided as they reach 18, these services may continue until all appeal rights have been exhausted and they are classified as being unlawfully present in the UK (Department for Education 2010). Even at this point local authorities must be mindful whether a withdrawal of services would breach a young person's human rights under the European Convention on Human Rights and under domestic human rights legislation (Dorling 2009).

4 Placement and care arrangements

Age has been identified in the literature as a key determinant of the placement pathways of UAM, with younger children predominantly entering foster care, or to a lesser extent residential care, and older young people, those aged 16-17 at referral, being predominantly placed in semi-independent, usually hostels, supported lodgings or shared flats, or independent accommodation, usually private sector shared housing projects. The provision of private sector shared housing has been found to be highly variable, both with respect to quality and to the levels of support provided to young people (Stanley 2001; Wade et al. 2005). These age-related patterns have been reinforced by placement supply shortages and by variations in the level of Home Office special grant paid to local authorities for those aged under or over 16; payments for the latter being a lower per capita amount (Audit Commission 2000; Stanley 2001). These age-related differences continue today and still tend to reinforce these patterns (Home Office 2016b).

Over the past two decades, guidance has been developed to assist local authorities when considering care arrangements for UAM. Official guidance was first introduced in 1995 (Department of Health 1995) and an updated guide, endorsed by government, was published in 2001 (Kidane 2001). Guidelines to support good practice have also been issued by the Separated Children in Europe Programme (2009), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1994) and the Council of the European Union (2003). Training resources for foster parents and social workers have also been made available in the UK (Kidane & Amarena 2004; 2005). Taken together this body of guidance emphasizes the importance of speedy but well informed responses to children's placement needs, reinforced by careful needs

assessments undertaken over time, of listening to children's views about placement, taking account of their past experiences and of their cultural, linguistic and religious needs. It also emphasizes the importance of ongoing support to provide continuity for young people, to respond to changing needs and to minimize the need for further movement.

Many UAM are referred or find their way to local authorities in pressing circumstances, often requiring a placement on the same day. One study of social work services for this group found that almost one half in that sample (47%) required a same-day placement (Wade et al. 2005). Initial assessment and decision-making is therefore often taken under pressure. Social workers tend to focus on gathering basic information on young people's backgrounds, placement needs, health screening and education. More difficult questions about young people's families, past experiences, reasons for exile and the emotional consequences of these tend to be delayed until young people are more settled in placement. Assessment should therefore be a continuing process that is revisited and reviewed over time as young people become more comfortable and confident (Wade et al. 2005). Initial encounters are often marked by suspicion and confusion. While some young people may be willing to tell their stories openly, others may be wary about the consequences of doing so and sometimes remain silent. There is evidence that social workers understand young people's need to withhold information about the past and recognize that it can have a protective function, to keep memories under control and allow a focus on the present (Kohli 2006). It has also been suggested that some degree of silence may represent one means by which young people can exercise control in circumstances where their lives are largely governed by the workings of the welfare and immigration system (Chase 2010). Providing young people with a supportive placement, with opportunities to build new sustaining relationships and to re-establish the ordinary routines of day-to-day life may allow, with time, the richer narratives about young people's lives to come through; the kinds of narrative social workers ultimately need for well-rounded care planning.

5 Experiences of care

Fostering is well established as being the preferred placement option for children who need to be 'looked after' away from home, with almost three-quarters of 'looked after' children placed in foster care at 31 March 2016 (74%). It is also the preferred placement option for younger unaccompanied children (Hek 2007; Wade 2009). In contrast, evidence suggests that residential care is a little used resource for UAM and, where it is, it is mainly used for relatively short periods of assessment and adjustment soon after arrival before young people move on again, often to semi-independent living (Stanley 2001; Wade et al. 2012).

Given the age profile of young people at arrival, however, stays in foster or residential care may be relatively brief before young people move to semi-independent accommodation. Strategies to delay young people's transitions from care, including initiatives to enable young people to stay on foster care beyond 18 where they are in education or training, have formed an important strand of government policies towards care leavers in recent years (Stein 2010). However, one recent study of fostering found little evidence that staying on was an option being considered for unaccompanied young people; almost all were expected to move on at or before reaching 18, mainly due to cost and limitations in the supply of placement resources (Wade et al. 2012).

Existing legislation gives local authorities a clear duty to prepare 'looked after' children and young people for adult life (Department of Health 2001). However, accumulated research findings have tended to highlight inconsistencies in the help young people in out-of-home care receive (Biehal et al. 1995; Courtney et al. 2005; Stein 2004; Stein 2010). Although

evidence on what makes for good preparation is limited, there is a consensus that the foundations lie within a stable and positive home environment (Jackson 2002), that preparation should take place gradually, over the life time of care, and that support should be provided holistically, paying equal attention to practical, financial, educational, emotional and interpersonal skills (Department of Health 2001; Stein 2004; Stein & Wade 2000). Providing young people with such environments has, however, proved to be challenging. Young people's care careers have been too often marked by movement and instability (Jackson 2002); the economic participation and educational attainment of care leavers has tended to be poor (Biehal et al. 1995; Broad 1998; Cheung & Heath 1994; Courtney et al. 2005) and, although leaving care services have been shown to be quite successful in helping young people adjust to life after care (see Stein 2010), problems faced by young people in accessing and managing their accommodation and gaining a foothold on the employment ladder have been continuously highlighted (Barnardos 2014; Wade & Dixon 2006).

Evidence about the forms of care and support that best help unaccompanied young people to refashion their lives has only started to emerge in recent years. Despite the adversities young people have experienced before and after migration, reports from social workers about the resilience and creativity many show in meeting the challenges of resettlement are quite common (Chase et al. 2008; Kohli 2007). Although evidence on UAM experiences of care is limited, some fragmentary evidence suggests they may do rather well once they are settled. For example, there is some evidence that they may experience greater placement stability than their British peers in the care system (Sinclair et al. 2007) and that they may manifest fewer troubling and troublesome behaviors (such as truancy and exclusion, substance misuse or offending) both during and after leaving care (Dixon et al. 2006; Sinclair et al. 2007). Studies have also pointed to higher rates of post-compulsory participation in further and higher education, where young people's immigration status permits continuing study, than is the case for other care leavers (Dixon et al. 2006; Brownlees & Finch 2010).

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that UAM tend to fare better when placed in more highly supported placements, such as foster care or small group homes, in comparison to those who have lived in more independent accommodation. One earlier study charting the care pathways of 212 UAM in England found that a settled placement in foster care, small group home or with family friends or relatives was associated with young people being more consistently engaged with education and with them developing more deeply rooted networks of support over time (Wade et al. 2005). This contrasted with young people who had been continuously living in semi-supported or independent settings. These young people were more likely to have experienced greater placement instability, spent more time disengaged from education and were at greater risk of experiencing social isolation. Environments that offer lower levels of support and encouragement therefore tend to present young people with greater difficulties in accessing and sustaining educational participation and in building the networks of relationships that are important to their overall development. More recently Brownlees and Finch (2010) have also reported that, from the perspective of education professionals, UAM living in foster care are better able to adapt to school or college life, in part due to the quality of relationship established between teachers and foster parents. The interest and encouragement of adults who are important to young people (teachers, foster parents, community actors and social workers) play a key role in supporting educational progress and, through the sense of social connectedness that participation provides, to young people's sense of wellbeing (Chase et al. 2008; Gilligan 2007). In this respect, some (but certainly not all) fostered young people have spoken about being surrounded by a network of

supporters, involving foster parents and their families, friends and school or college staff (Wade et al. 2012).

Similar findings have also been presented in relation to the mental health and wellbeing of unaccompanied young people. This area has received prominent attention in the international literature. Studies have assessed the effects of forced migration and resettlement, including levels of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression linked to pre- and post-migration experiences, and have attempted to identify risk and protective factors for mental wellbeing (Bean et al. 2007; Hodes et al. 2008; Bronstein & Montgomery 2011). Symptoms of stress and anxiety were found to be significantly higher amongst UAM than among refugee children living with their families and were much higher than for the wider population of young people (Bean et al. 2007; Hodes et al. 2008). Consistent with the findings above, however, evidence from these studies also suggests that placement in more highly supported settings may be protective of mental wellbeing. When controlling for age, reports of psychological distress were lower for refugee young people living with family members and for young people living in foster care or small group homes compared to those living independently.

The perspective of young people on factors associated with positive wellbeing has been much less explored. Chase et al. (2008), whose study explored young people's views, found that learning English, living in placements with high quality care and having opportunities to share their feelings and feel supported helped to strengthen young people's sense of wellbeing. In contrast, uncertainty about the future linked to asylum claims not surprisingly had a deleterious effect. While some young people, therefore, may experience high levels of emotional distress and may need professional help, most may be helped by the continuous care and support of those surrounding them. Such care may help young people to harness their own resilience and aspirations for the future and strengthen their capacity to cope with the challenges that lie ahead.

The potential of foster care to provide such environments has been under-explored. However, recent research in England has provided some encouraging findings (Sirriyeh 2013; Wade et al. 2012). Wade, Sirriyeh and their colleagues' research was based on a survey of 133 foster parents and interviews with foster parents and young people. Overall, most young people were reported to be doing very well in foster care and were considered to be well integrated into the everyday life and fabric of their families. What young people wanted from these placements bore similarity to the expectations of other 'looked after' children (Hek 2007; Selwyn et al. 2010; Sinclair 2005) – to feel normal, safe and protected; to be able to reconstruct their lives after the extraordinary events they had lived through; to be treated equally to others in the home; to be shown respect for their culture, language and religion and have opportunities to maintain a sense of continuity and connection, whilst being given opportunities to resume their education and build new social relationships. Whilst some young people wanted to maintain close relationships with their foster families, others wanted to maintain a respectful distance, while some others found family life more challenging.

Young people's place and relationships in foster families evolved over time. In many cases these relationships became enriching and sustaining, while some others were unable to flourish. Three models of family relationships were identified. First, some young people and foster parents were able to establish new 'family-like' connections, bonds and status in the family. These close relationships were expected to endure beyond the life of the placement and provide continuity to young people through transition to adulthood. Second, some placements were akin to 'temporary home bases'. In these placements, good relationships

existed between foster parents and young people in a culture of mutual respect, but these relationships were rather more formal and were not expected to endure. Finally, a small number of young people were more akin to ‘lodgers’ in the homes of strangers. In these placements relationships tended to be distant and often tense. Although foster parents understood themselves to be delivering a contracted service, young people were often marked out as different in these homes (to birth or adopted children) and felt no sense of belonging. Where social workers became aware of the limitations of these placements, they tended to act to close down these contracts, although constraints on the availability of placements meant that some lasted longer than should have been the case. For most young people, however, their experiences of foster care had been positive and foster parents (and their family network) welcomed young people into their homes, adapted their family practices to take account of young people’s needs and customs, and acted as confidantes and companions to young people as they established their lives in the UK.

6 Transition planning and support on leaving care

The CLCA 2000 provides the legislative framework for pathway planning and aftercare support in England. Its rationale lay in accumulated evidence about the early age young people were expected to leave care (often before 18), the poor outcomes achieved by young people, especially in relation to education, employment and risks of homelessness, and the inconsistent delivery of leaving care services (Biehal et al. 1995; Broad 1998; Stein 2004; Stein & Wade 2000). The legislation has sought to delay young people’s transitions from care (with distinctly mixed results) and to strengthen procedures for assessment, planning and services before and after leaving care. From age 16, local authorities are obliged to provide young people with pathway plans and personal advisers to assist them through transition to age 21, or 25 if continuing in education or training (Department of Health 2001). Subsequent research points to improvements in assessment, planning and support, although service inconsistencies between local authorities persists (see Stein 2006, for a summary of developments).

For UAM, transition represents the phase in which the tensions between child welfare and the immigration systems are at their most acute. As we have seen, only a minority of young people will have a continuing right to remain. The rhythms of transition therefore tend to be controlled (in time and space) by the imperatives of the asylum decision-making process and not by the steps young people need to take to meet their own aspirations for a successful life. Pathway planning is therefore necessarily made much more complicated (Wade 2011). Government guidance suggests that pathway planning should take account of the different possible outcomes of the asylum decision-making process, including: long-term planning to help young people prepare for life in the UK should they receive an indefinite right to remain; transitional planning to help young people achieve short- to medium-term goals where they are waiting for a final decision; and return planning to prepare young people for return to their country of origin in circumstances where they become appeal rights exhausted (ARE) and have no legal right to remain. The idea is that these potential transition pathways be prepared for in parallel (Department for Education 2010), taking account of different rights and entitlements to work, study, housing and financial assistance that are attached to different immigration statuses (Dorling 2009; Coram Children’s Legal Centre 2012).

There has been insufficient research on how pathway planning is undertaken for this group of young people or on how it is experienced by them. Research has found, not surprisingly, that planning is easier to undertake where young people have a settled immigration status. In these circumstances, young people have a greater sense of control over their destinies and can make

plans for a settled life in the UK. Plans made for social housing, education and employment and for financial assistance can be developed with greater certainty. Where their circumstances are less certain, young people's aspirations for the future are at risk of being undermined (Devenney 2017; Wade et al. 2005).

There is also evidence of variability in pathway planning for young people in different circumstances. Evidence suggests that planning tends to be more successful where young people are living in more highly supported accommodation, where past contact with support workers has been consistent and where young people's progress has been regularly reviewed in a manner consistent with the aspirations young people have for themselves (Wade et al. 2005). In contrast, studies have pointed to greater variability in planning for young people living in unsupported accommodation. The quality of this accommodation has been shown to be more highly variable (Wade et al. 2005; Brownlees & Finch 2010; Chase et al. 2008) and these young people have tended to be amongst those most likely to experience abrupt and unplanned transitions from care (Wade 2011).

The act of migration involves young people in making a heavy investment in the future and in the creation of positive visions of a future self (Griffiths et al. 2013). There is growing evidence that the wellbeing of young people subject to immigration control as they transition towards adulthood is wrapped up in this sense of a secure projected self and that young people are committed to taking the steps necessary to achieve their aspirations (Chase 2013). Positive feelings of security and wellbeing are associated with young people being able to maintain a coherent biographical narrative that connects the different phases of their lives – that links where they have come from, where they are in the present and what they hope to become (Chase 2013). New evidence also suggests that young people's plans for the future may be rooted in notions of symbolic or physical return in later life and in providing reciprocal support towards their birth families. The pathway to realizing these plans lies primarily in achieving educational success and establishing a productive career path (Devenney 2017).

However, as we have seen, for young people without a settled asylum status, control of destiny is fragile and easily disturbed. Uncertainty about the final outcome of asylum decisions, especially where the signs appear negative, can be associated with a weakening of resolve, an inability to think realistically into the future, a focus on immediate daily activities and a deterioration in mental wellbeing. Devenney (2017) found that, in these circumstances, young people's biographical narratives were at risk of becoming unraveled and that young people, faced with a prospect of enforced return, were often unable to imagine a constructive future for themselves at all. Their future thoughts were often consumed by fears for their own safety should the worst happen.

Studies have consistently pointed to young people's reluctance to contemplate the prospect of returning to their countries of origin (Chase et al. 2008; Coram Children's Legal Centre 2012; Kohli 2007; Wade et al. 2005). Most young people will have lived in the UK for a lengthy period of time and want to make their homes here. For many young people, their journeys to the UK will have been complex and may have involved time spent in refugee camps or moving across borders to avoid conflict or civic dislocation. For these young people defining a clear sense of belonging or a definite safe place of return may be difficult (Chase et al. 2008). Given their determination to remain, their reluctance to envisage the prospect of return is understandable and has led some commentators to question the practicality of state policies designed to prioritize return planning as a central part of the pathway planning process, especially since such policies rely on young people's acquiescence to the state's role in

determining their future (Allsopp et al. 2015; Matthews 2014). Certainly, social workers and foster parents have consistently reported on the challenges of engaging young people in discussions about return and have worried about how young people would cope should this event occur (Wade 2011; Wade et al. 2012). Many practitioners try to work proactively for this eventually, spending time with young people exploring their best options, helping them to acquire skills and qualifications that might be useful and identifying networks of support that may be helpful to them in their 'home' countries. Other workers and foster parents appear to be more reticent, tending to watch and wait for young people to take the initiative for fear of causing greater distress and anxiety. Obviously, from an official perspective, this strategy runs the risk of creating planning drift (Wade 2011).

New strands of research, drawing on the perspectives of young people, suggests that 'time' is perceived by them to be the overriding controlling feature of the immigration system and may also be applied to the services and support attached to the leaving care process (Allsopp et al. 2015). Service entitlements are bounded by markers of age and legal status, immigration statuses are limited in time and also place limits on the mobility of young people, determining where they should live and what they are able to do, and waiting is a defining feature of the asylum application and decision-making process. However, young people do not just wait passively. Allsopp et al. (2015) point to a number of strategies that young people may actively employ to speed up these waiting times and/or regain some measure of control over their life goals. These may include: using their networks of support to understand the system, their entitlements within it and to access the best possible professional support; rather than giving in, to maintain a sense of moving forward, gathering skills and knowledge and maintaining a daily routine; and by endeavoring to keep up with other young people in their cohort through study and social activities to reduce the feelings of built-in impermanence and immobility that the system generates.

Moving forward, in part, depends on young people gaining access to high quality legal representation. Pathway plans should arrange for representation and embrace young people's need for advice, support and companionship throughout the lengthy, stressful and confusing asylum application process. It is critical that claims are well-organized and presented, given the persistence of concerns about the quality of asylum decision-making by the UK Border Agency and the likelihood that a large proportion of young people will fail in their claims and be required to leave (Refugee Council 2010). Consistent concerns have been expressed about the availability and quality of legal advice and representation for migrant young people and, in the context of a declining legal aid budget, about their access to financial assistance in legal proceedings (Dorling 2013). Young people are frequently confused by these proceedings, they may struggle to understand the meaning that underlies what is said, especially when their knowledge of English is limited. They may also have difficulty in knowing whether their legal representatives are working effectively on their behalf (Chase et al. 2008; Wade et al. 2005). Delays, drift and confusion surrounding the progress of claims are not uncommon, whether due to the inefficiency of lawyers, government agencies or social workers. Claims monitoring, support and advocacy should therefore be important ingredients of the pathway planning process.

For most young people, therefore, leaving care is laced with uncertainty and anxiety. As we have seen, most young people will fail in their attempts to establish a permanent right to remain. Once they have exhausted all rights to appeal (ARE) they will be considered unlawfully present in the UK and be expected to report regularly to the authorities to ensure their availability for repatriation at a later date. Young people's legal entitlements to work,

study, claim welfare payments or receive leaving care services formally cease at that point. Nevertheless, before withdrawing services, local authorities should conduct assessments to ensure that withdrawal would not amount to inhumane and degrading treatment, therefore breaching a young person's human rights. How local authorities respond to ARE young people is likely to be highly variable. However, there is evidence of some local authorities continuing to provide leaving care support to ARE young people or of providing basic assistance after human rights assessments (Matthews 2014). Previous studies have also found a tendency for social workers to continue to operate at the margins in support of young people they have cared for, even though they may be ultimately powerless to change the overall course of events for them (Dunkerley et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2005).

As we have seen, very few UAM are willing to face the prospect of return. Becoming ARE may lead to a prolonged period of uncertainty, since the practical challenges involved in deporting young people are considerable (Sigona 2012). To date, insufficient is known about the decisions young people make at this stage and the implications of these for young people's life projects. It is suggested that many young people will embrace the risk of entering the world of illegal work alongside other undocumented migrants and place a reliance on their networks of friends and acquaintances (should they have them) to find sustenance and accommodation (Mathews 2014). There is also some likelihood that, where young people have been deported, they will undertake secondary migration journeys in an effort to once again rebuild their lives. However, from a research perspective, we need to understand much more about the strategies young people employ to navigate these precarious pathways in search of a secure and viable future.

7 Conclusion

Research on UAM in England is a relatively recent field of enquiry. Over the past two decades, studies have emerged that have described their experiences and explored the ways in which young people utilize formal and informal networks of support to chart more or less successful pathways towards adulthood. They have also explored the delivery of social work services and begun to delineate the forms of support that appear to be most helpful to young people as they endeavor to reorder and refashion their lives. Most of this work has taken the form of relatively small-scale qualitative studies focusing on discrete aspects of the resettlement process – for example, focusing on experiences of care, education, emotional wellbeing or, more formally, on the asylum process. Some larger-scale quantitative studies have focused on the mental health and wellbeing of young refugees and on aspects of wellness associated with the pre- and post-migration experience. Newer threads of research, building on older ones (see, for example, Kohli & Mather 2003), have also focused on the importance of young people being able to create and maintain a coherent biographical narrative of their lives, connecting past, present and future, in order for them to move forwards with their life plans. These studies also point to the ways in which being subject to immigration control can disrupt and jeopardize young people's progress towards realizing their ambitions.

Despite this progress, there is much more that needs to be done. Prospective longitudinal studies tracing the pathways of refugee young people over time have been scarce (see, for example, Gifford et al. 2007). It is evident that, in a UK context, we still know relatively little about the longer-term experiences and progress of young people sometime after leaving care (Pinter 2012) nor have studies systematically compared young people's experiences in different placement settings, for example, in foster care or small group homes. In particular, there is a need to examine the ingredients associated with young people making a success of

their lives and what success looks like for young adults. In stark contrast, very little is also yet known about the experiences of young people who either remain in the UK illegally or who return to their countries of origin to understand how they survive and what they make of their lives. In short, there remains a need for a sustained program of research that can elaborate the complexity of young people's lives, of their journeys into adulthood and which can provide the basis for more constructive policies and practices to assist them.

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