

# Resettlement of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in foster care: a UK perspective

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# This presentation will focus on

- The contexts of protection and care that can result in resettlement of unaccompanied young asylum seekers
- Our study on the lives and circumstances of unaccompanied young people in foster care in the UK - *Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People: Creating a family life across 'a world of difference'* London: BAAF

# Geographical changes

Country of origin

Transit countries

Country of asylum

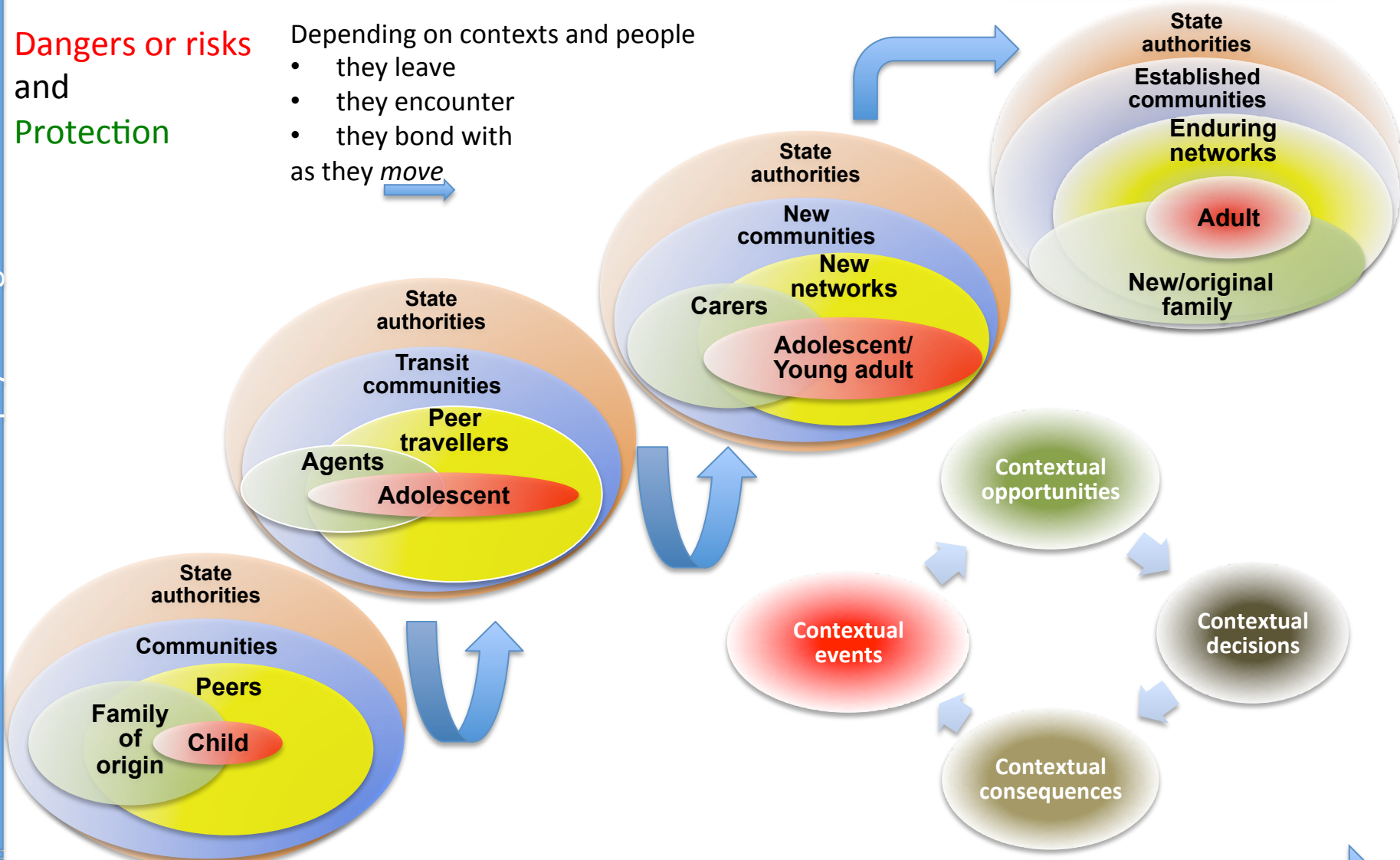
Country of life long settlement

Dangers or risks  
and  
Protection

Depending on contexts and people

- they leave
- they encounter
- they bond with as they *move*

Maturational and psychological transition



The passage of time

# Protection and support

## 1951 Refugee Convention

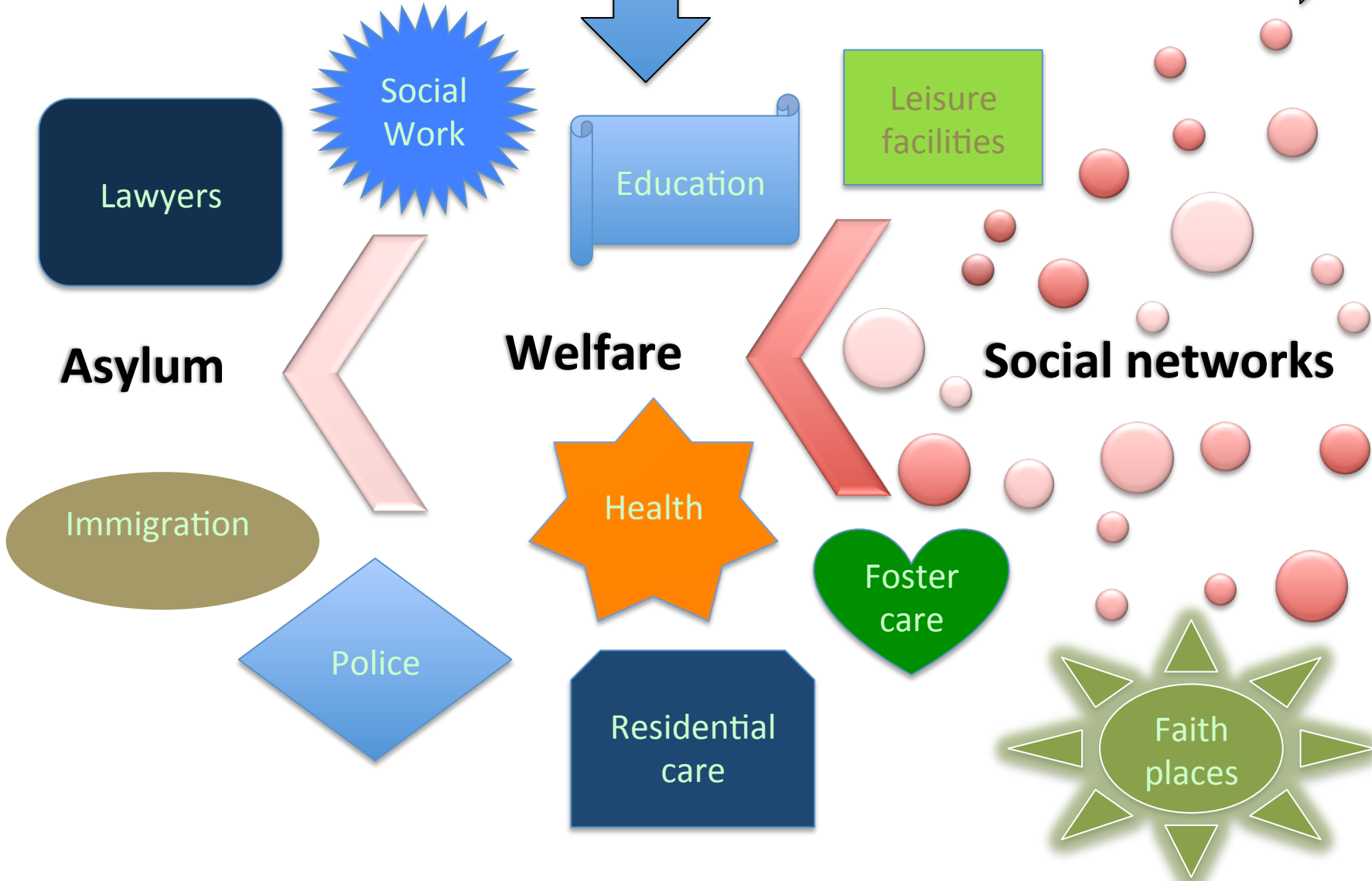
- An instant shield: protection from persecution
- Used to judge and control a movement up and down the line of a refugee determination process

## 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

- A durable embrace: protection as the revival of everyday life
- Used to protect and support children to grow in different directions

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Decision Makers



# Protection and support as



# **Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Young People**

# Research questions

- What is the pattern of arrival, stay and departure for UYP in foster care?
- What is it foster families **do** to create a sense of 'home' and 'family' for UYP?
- What progress do young people make? How do foster carers help them to be successful and plan for the future?
- What do young people make of their experiences in foster care, how do these vary, and what do foster carers make of the young people?



# Study design

Our project was carried out between 2009-2012.

Methods included:

- a **postal survey** of 133 foster carers who were caring for an unaccompanied child on 31 December 2009
- semi-structured **interviews** with 21 young people and 23 foster carers
- A **policy and practice study**, including focus groups with UYP formerly in foster care, with social workers from children's asylum teams and interviews with team managers

# Preparation for foster care

- Most UYP needed immediate placement – fast decisions, limited choice
- No knowledge of foster care before entering UK - not always associated with safe care; basic explanations:  
*They just said you will live here with them and they will take care of you. They are like your family from today. (focus group)*
- Little information about the young person known at this stage or passed to foster carers – working in the dark;
- Little information given to young people about *this* particular foster family – not knowing what to expect.

# Arrival – offering hospitality

- Time is compressed – often late at night, tired and hungry;
- Making welcome and feeling safe – providing a refuge
- Feelings of relief at reaching a destination – anxiety about the unknown

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*There was this boy, his face covered in mud, his shoes, everything, with this plastic bag with all his dirty things, belongings and whatever. He said: 'Hello'.*

*They're in survival mode...because they've had to live like this for so long...and been through so much when they come here, they're in a real state...They almost have to be de-briefed.*

# Settling in – finding a place

Markers of welcome and belonging:

- Saying/writing something in young person's language (welcome pack)
- Reinforcing the familiar, introducing the new
- Discovering likes and interests (cuisines, culture, religion and geography) – using libraries and the internet
- Not asking 'big' questions too soon
- Sharing activities in place of language

# Overcoming language barriers; building relationships

## Steve – Nadir's foster carer

*We have got a lot of things in common. If I'm working in the back garden he knows exactly what I'm doing... when he came here, the first week I was building a shed at the back, when he didn't know a word in English. But every tool I wanted, he knew what I wanted and would pass it to me. Which, if it was my son I would have to say: "Can you pass me the saw? Can you pass me the hammer?" He knew exactly what I wanted and he'd pick it up and would join in and cut a bit of wood for me and things like that. ..I think he enjoyed that. I think that's really where the bond started.*

# Reinforcing the familiar – introducing the new

## Mark – Abraham's foster carer

*We took snippets out the Tigrinya phrase book, pinned up on the fridge. That's how we communicated to start with, which was extremely hard work.*

## Social worker

*It's that balance, isn't it, of getting what they're used to and what they're familiar with and actually then branching out to the things that they're less familiar with.*

## Eleanor – Arian's foster carer

*So you want a tangible, early win...So things like, you know, we would try and find out what kind of food that they liked and make it.*

# Family integration (viewpoint of foster carers)

	PER CENT	Not at all	To some degree	Very much so
Is easy to care for (n=131)		4	31	65
Feels part of the family (n=131)		5	33	62
Trusts you (n=131)		2	24	73
Feels you care for him or her (n=131)		2	18	80
Talks to you about personal things (n=131)		6	40	54
Feels encouraged (n=131)		5	18	77
Fits in better than when first came (n=131)		2	19	79
Feels the odd one out (n=117)		67	24	12
Feels picked on (n=122)		83	14	3
Wants to leave (n=121)		64	24	12

## Proximity and distance: 3 'types' of relationships

- *'Family-like' relationships* – here young people and foster carers established new 'family-like' connections, bonds and status. There was usually an expectation that this bond would endure beyond the end of placement.
- *'Temporary home bases'* – here good relationships existed between foster carers and young people, but without a tight bond. This relationship was seen as time limited until the end of the placement.
- *'Lodgings'* – here the foster carer delivered the service they thought they were contracted to do. The young person did not feel at home, but instead more of a 'lodger' in someone else's house



# Developing 'family-like' relationships

## Developing trust and bonds

*He can see that people do care and I think that goes a long way. I think if you see that you're not just an item, you're somebody, I think people should grasp it and Samuel's grasping it (Samuel's foster carer)*

## Listening and communicating

*The food, I think, was quite a good thing. And then he'd remember...He'd talk about his family, the people that looked after him through his journey and stuff. That was really interesting. (Stephanie, foster carer)*

## Motivations – going the extra mile

*She (my foster carer) really pushed hard and...that's not just at school, that's on a lot of things, with social workers and...(if) there's been a problem, she's been helping me. (Arian)*

## Feelings of inclusion – family membership

*We were taking some photos and we said: 'Oh yeah, let's get the family' (together)'and they (our foster children) stood apart and everyone else said: 'Oh no, no, no, (get) in, in.' It was just one of those moments when you think: Oh yeah, that's it, you are (family).*

# Challenges

## Tensions were not uncommon

- Adjusting to family lifestyles, rules and rhythms of the household
- Testing the boundaries in adolescence
- Coping with silences and emotional distance
- Overcoming cultural and gender preconceptions
- Disharmony with social workers – feeling unsupported

# 'Lodging'

## **Greater feelings of separation and exclusion**

*The family gave us a room there especially for us. I am allowed to live there but I am not allowed every day to come into the sitting room to watch TV. (YP focus group)*

*She cooked separately for herself and her husband and we had separate food...She cooked once every month...and put them in the freezer...Ours was frozen and hers was cooked fresh. (YP focus group)*

## **Being mindful of the implications of 'lodgings'**

*We've had a lot of placements where it's been a fairly miserable experience...Essentially (where) it's separate from the rest of the family...those kinds of things. And we've drawn those to a fairly rapid conclusion when it's become clear what's going on. (Team manager)*

## **But 1:3 young people expressed some desire to leave**

# Planning for the future

- Intersection of immigration and welfare policies – time of greatest anxiety
- Accelerated and compressed transitions – added threat of forced removal
- Just 11% of our survey sample had refugee status; majority still waiting for a final decision
- Preparation for enforced return now an uncomfortable reality
- Most did not want to return to their countries of origin - a foreshortened future?

# A foreshortened future?

*Can you plan? If you say to him: 'Oh, we're thinking of going to such-and-such a place for a holiday next year, would you like to come with us?' You get this shrug...It takes a certain kind of mental toughness to deal with it. (Eleanor, foster carer)*

# Doing well? Mostly yes

- Not doing things by numbers: being flexible, attuned, and organically growing into relationships of reliability and trust
- Seeing the young person, not the category
- Seeing the familiar in a stranger
- Bonding, bridging and linking life beyond the placement
- Interpreting silences benignly – not allowing suspicions to infect relationships
- Waiting, listening and companionably comforting in the face of an uncertain future