



Fostering Hope:

**A blueprint for providing
children seeking sanctuary in
the UK with a warm welcome
through a safe and loving home**

June 2024

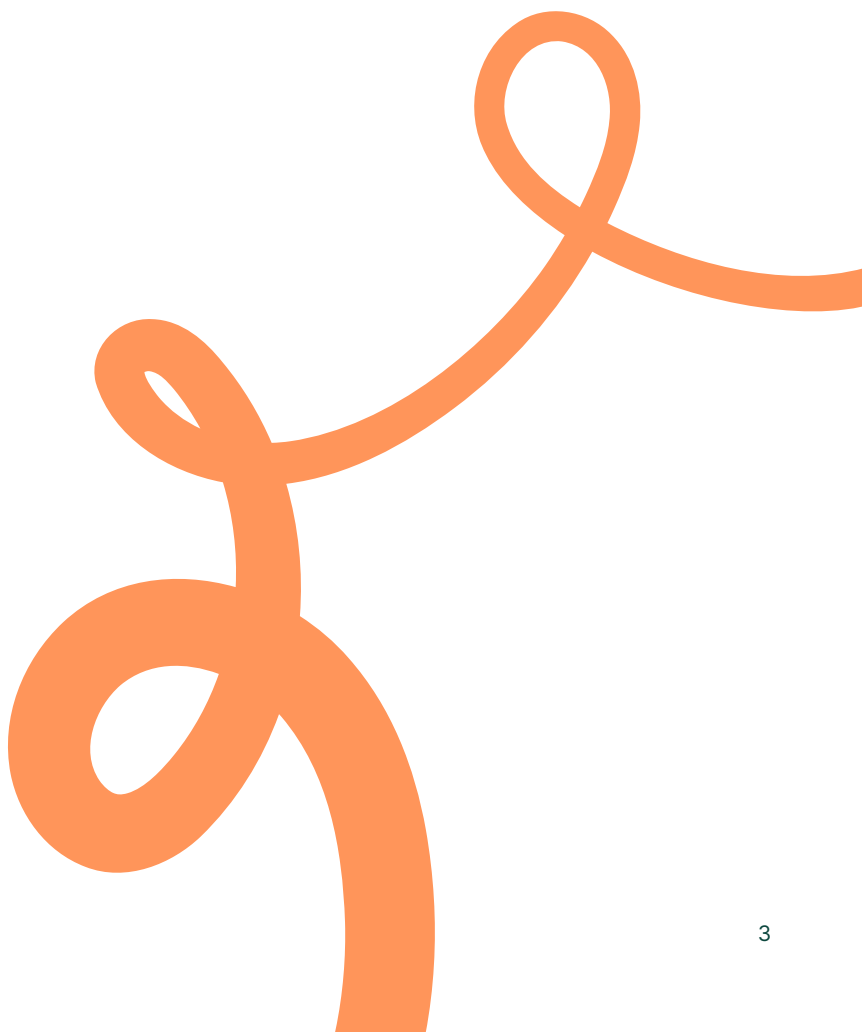


Changing childhoods. Changing lives.



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Introduction

All children need a safe and loving home; somewhere to thrive and enjoy their childhood.

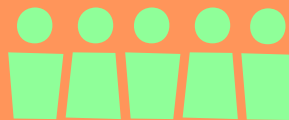
Sadly, for too many children arriving in the UK without a parent or carer, this basic need is not being met.

In the year to March 2024

There were 69,298 asylum applications made in the UK.



Of these, 5% (3,285) came from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under the age of 18.¹



The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking Children in care in England increased by 42% from 5,100 in 2019 to 7,200 in 2023.²

Many of these children will have experienced substantial trauma and adversity in their home countries and during their journey to the UK. These children have often travelled alone and have no friends or family to reach out to when they arrive.

Like all children who cannot live with their parents, these children are in the care of a local authority, and there is a legal and a moral obligation to provide the care and support they need. On 27 July 2023, a High Court judgment confirmed the duty on local authorities under the Children Act 1989 to care for all children in their area regardless of immigration status. That judgment also confirmed that the systemic and routine use of hotels by the Home Office to accommodate unaccompanied children was unlawful.³

However, despite this ruling, evidence shows that the response to children arriving unaccompanied often remains inadequate. While children are no longer being placed in hotels, there is often a shortage of suitable places (whether in foster care, residential care or supported accommodation) where these children can receive the support they need to thrive. This means many children are facing significant uncertainty, with some spending a long time in processing facilities while appropriate provision is found.

Children arriving in the UK without an adult to care for them are at risk of further harm. A recent report by the Children's Commissioner for England found that around 1,000 of the 6,000 children aged 16 and 17 who presented as homeless in 2022-2023 were unaccompanied children.⁴

All unaccompanied children must be taken into care when they arrive in the UK. As with all children in care, they must have their needs assessed, and provided with somewhere to live that will meet those requirements.

1. Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2023 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2022>
3. Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children through the National Transfer Scheme | [Local Government Association](#).

4. Homeless 16- and 17-year olds in need of care | Children's Commissioner for England (childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Our research report 'A Warm Welcome'⁵ published in 2023 and supported by Action for Children, British Future, Coram Legal Centre, ECPAT UK, NSPCC, Refugee Council, Save the Children, The Children's Society, and others, outlines the need for a **strategic plan** for welcoming all refugee children and children seeking asylum, to enable them to be offered the best possible start to life. This should include investment in sufficient care placements to meet the needs of the specific needs of this unique group of children. In particular the next Government must commit to developing a network of specialist provision across the country. This should include investment in both specialist foster care and high quality supported accommodation.

Barnardo's is one of the largest voluntary foster care providers in the UK and also provides a range of supported accommodation for children in care and care leavers. This report draws on our decades of experience working directly with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Through the voices of those children and the adults who care for them, the report outlines a "blueprint" for what high quality specialist care looks like. We also highlight the steps that are needed to ensure children move smoothly through the National Transfer System* and into a loving home as quickly as possible following their arrival in the UK.



5. A warm welcome: A blueprint for supporting displaced children | Barnardo's ([barnardos.org.uk](https://www.barnardos.org.uk))

Recommendations for the next UK Government

1. Develop a strategic plan that protects and welcomes children who have fled their homes to seek sanctuary in the UK. This should include an adequately funded system for both specialist fostering and supported accommodation.



3. Assign all unaccompanied children seeking asylum with a Guardian when they arrive to the UK. This would provide children with much needed extra support as they move through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and integrate into their new community.



5. Welcome packs should be provided as standard in all supported accommodation settings to ensure that unaccompanied children have the resources they need at the start of their placement to enable them to settle and thrive.

Deodorant	Body lotion	Shower gel, conditioner, shampoo	Sanitary products	Razor (Disposable)	Toothbrush/ toothpaste
Towels - bath towels/ hand towels	Wash cloth	Hairbrush/ comb	Toilet paper	Duvet	Pillows (x2)
Bedding (x2 bed sheets x2 duvet covers)	Desk & chair for students (For order)	Bin	Storage box	Clothes drier	Pots and pans
Cups (x2)	Plates (x2)	Bowl (x2)	Glasses (x2)	Cutlery	Lock for cupboards
Cooking utensils	Either £20 supermarket voucher or delivery voucher	Clothing including underwear and socks	Phone and sim (reasonable) - under £100	Shoes (approx. £30)	Oyster/ travel card

2. The National Fostering Recruitment Campaign should contain a specific target for recruiting foster carers who specialise in the care of displaced children. This should include targeted, bespoke campaigns as well as the establishment of a national register of foster carers who are trained in caring for unaccompanied children to help quickly identify where provision is available.



4. All children must have their needs assessed to ensure the type of accommodation they are placed in is appropriate and in their best interests. Specifically, where a child is 16 or 17 years old, their needs must be established in a local authority care setting (specialist foster care or residential children's home) before determining whether they would benefit from living in supported accommodation.



6. When moving children through the NTS, information passed between local authorities must be as detailed as possible, to ensure that children's needs can be fully assessed. Similarly, children need to be provided with clear and comprehensive information about where they are being moved to.



A strategic plan for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in the UK

Currently, there is no UK-wide strategic plan for children arriving in the UK – either with their families or unaccompanied. This means the UK is unable to guarantee suitable accommodation, access to services or support to overcome traumatic experiences and settle in their new homes. This is having a detrimental impact on local government and communities' ability to plan and deliver services for these children, which affects their long-term health, wellbeing, education, and prospects.

Development of a national strategic plan would allow for local government and other agencies to plan and prepare services effectively. It would require cross-government and multi-agency working to ensure that everyone working to support unaccompanied children are agreed on shared priorities and can effectively collaborate to meet their needs.

A clear strategic plan underpinned by sufficient funding would help deliver the warm welcome children so desperately need.

Nations-specific approaches to supporting unaccompanied children

Whilst there is no UK wide plan, there are relevant nation specific plans that speak to some (though not all) of the challenges unaccompanied children face.

Wales

Wales issued the Nation of Sanctuary Plan in 2019, as well as an anti-racist action plan which highlights the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.⁶ The sanctuary plan included a number of actions to 'support local authorities to ensure unaccompanied refugee and asylum-seeking children can be adequately looked after'. These include committing to continuing to provide funding to train foster carers and social workers to improve their capacity to deliver for refugee and asylum-seeking children. It also includes a commitment to working with the All-Wales Heads of Children's Services and the National Fostering Framework Strategic Steering Group to explore ways in which a pool of foster carers can be developed from refugee backgrounds.⁷

6. An introduction to an Anti-racist Wales (gov.wales)

Scotland

In Scotland, The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022 sets out a vision for a welcoming Scotland where refugees and people seeking asylum can rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.⁸ The strategy priorities equality and diversity to improve outcomes for unaccompanied children. For example, the development of an Additional Support for Learning Framework entitles children and young people, who do not speak English, to support that helps them overcome barriers to learning in school.⁹

England

The UK Government published a safeguarding strategy for England for unaccompanied children seeking asylum and unaccompanied child refugees in 2017.¹⁰ The strategy is a step in the right direction and including provision for national and local systems with information and support to safeguard children.¹¹ However, to date, very little has been done to implement this strategy.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, a draft Refugee Integration Strategy was consulted on by The Executive Office in 2022. It is worth noting that when the draft Refugee Integration Strategy was published for consultation two years ago, Barnardo's NI welcomed the intentions of the Department to develop a strategy that is welcoming and inclusive, however it is not clear how the strategy would be practically implemented and realised. We recommend a redrafting of the strategy to reflect tangible actions with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the relevant departments, agencies and organisations.

7. https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/nation-of-sanctuary-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-plan_0.pdf

8. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/>

9. New Scots: refugee integration strategy 2018 to 2022 – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

10. Safeguarding unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

11. i.e. We are committed to ensuring children and young people have the information, support and help they need to be safe and to keep themselves safe, and for effective local and national systems to be in place to ensure that children are properly safeguarded. (pg. 17), [Safeguarding unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618811/Safeguarding_unaccompanied_asylum_seeking_and_refugee_children_-_GOV.UK.pdf) – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Unaccompanied children and the care system

Any child who does not have a birth family that can look after them should be cared for by their local authority. This duty, which is set out in the Children Act 1989,¹² applies equally to children who arrive in the UK without a parent or other family member and makes an application for asylum. Local authorities can receive unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) either because they arrive directly in the area or because children are transferred under the National Transfer Scheme. In this situation, the receiving local authority has a duty both to assess the children's needs and to provide them with accommodation. Such accommodation can be in foster care or a residential care home, or for children aged 16 or 17, it can include supported accommodation including options such as supported lodgings.

As of 31 March 2023, there were **7,290 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in local authority care in England**.¹³ These children account for around 9% of all children looked after by local authorities, and the number has been steadily growing in recent years – increasing by around 40% since 2019. The majority of these children are over the age of 16 (84%) and are male (around 96%). Currently most live in supported accommodation settings (45%), although, according to the latest available data, some (16%) were living independently in 2023. Only 38% of these children are currently in foster care – down from 50% in 2019.¹⁴

These children often arrive in the UK after fleeing traumatic experiences such as war and famine, and it is important that once in the UK they receive the specialist care that they need to recover from past trauma and thrive. However current pressure on the social care system, including a lack of funding and a shortage of foster carers – especially those with specialist training – can make this difficult.

7,290
unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
in local authority care in England

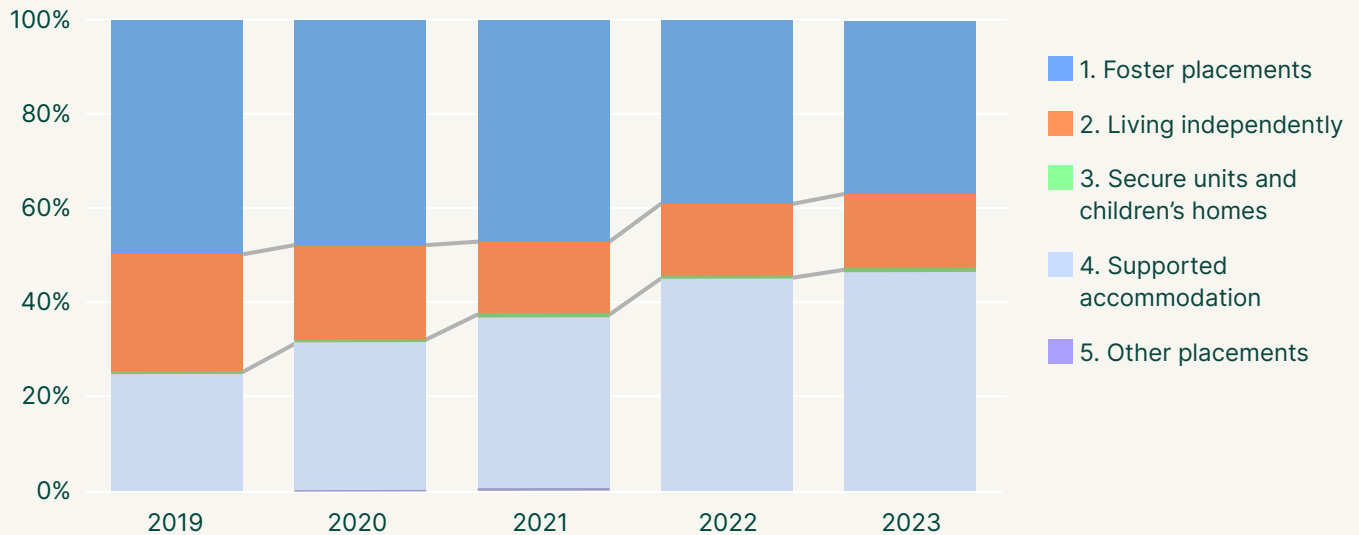


12. [Children Act 1989 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

13. [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2022 to 2023 – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

14. [Children looked after in England including adoptions. Reporting year 2023 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

Percentage of unaccompanied children by placement type 2019-2023



Barnardo's is calling on the next Government to oversee the development of a range of specialist care across the country, along with sufficient funding to make this possible. This would include investment in specialist foster care and in high quality supported provision for 16 and 17 year olds, where this is the most suitable option. This will require action from the Westminster Government working in partnership with local authorities and with the devolved administrations.

How much funding is needed will depend on how many children would be placed in specialist foster care and how many would be better suited to high quality supported accommodation (based on an assessment of their needs by the local authority). However, based on the number of unaccompanied children in the care system in England as of March 2023 we estimate that the funding necessary to provide specialist provision to all unaccompanied children in England ranges from £296m per year if all children were placed in foster care to £243m per year if 50% were in specialist foster care and 50% in supported accommodation.¹⁵

15. Annual figures have been calculated assuming that the number of unaccompanied children in the system remains constant and the investment required would increase or decrease should the number of unaccompanied children coming into the country change substantially.

Towards a blue print for a 'warm welcome' for every unaccompanied asylum-seeking child seeking a home in the UK

What is foster care and what is specialist foster care?

Foster care provides a safe, secure and stable environment for children and young people who cannot live with their birth family. Foster carers provide a caring home for these children, working with them, their families and the local authority, or independent fostering agencies like Barnardo's.

A survey of Barnardo's foster carers found that making a difference to the lives of children in care and offering children the opportunity to be part of their family were the biggest reasons for choosing to foster.¹⁶

Many children who need foster care will have suffered trauma and abuse and all foster carers need training in understanding how to provide high quality trauma informed care. However, some children who enter the care system have specific needs which benefit from more specialist care. For example, they may have significant health needs or face ongoing safeguarding risks. Specialist foster carers with specific training are therefore sometimes needed to provide extra support.

Many unaccompanied children will have emotional, practical, language and cultural needs that will require this type of specialist care.¹⁷

Fostering an unaccompanied child undoubtedly brings challenges but foster carers tell us it can be very rewarding. Specialist foster carers can support children to address their emotional needs, attend school, learn new languages and about new¹⁸ cultures.

Chloe and Dan's Story*

Chloe is a foster carer supported by Barnardo's; she has been fostering older children for around two and a half years. She is currently supporting Dan, who is from Eritrea, and came into her care when he was 17 years old.

Chloe told us how Dan has "added vitality to my life and also has given me experiences because of cultural differences so I am learning new languages and learning new cultures."

She also told us: "Barnardo's are excellent, and they provide a really good training programme, I was supported a lot and I had my own personal social worker and given another foster carer as a buddy".

"This is going to be my fourth week with Don; he came to me very timid and nervous and because of the support I have been able to give him through Barnardo's, just last week he was in the kitchen with his earphones, singing and dancing and washing up, I could see he was really relaxed and feeling at home."

"If you are there to support the young people with their self-worth and self-esteem, they are just the most wonderful human beings".

*Names have been changed

16. Barnardo's Foster Care Survey, Phase 1, December 2023. Survey of 101 Foster Carers.

17. Different Types Of Foster Care Placements | [Fostering UK](#)

18. How UASC Fostering Changes Lives | [TACT Fostering \(tactcare.org.uk\)](#)

Barnardo's service provision

Barnardo's provides care for over 700 children and young people across 20 fostering, adoption¹⁹ and short break services across the UK, including providing foster care to unaccompanied children.

We have extensive experience of working with children from diverse backgrounds and with differing cultural needs. We currently support foster carers supporting unaccompanied children in:

- **Birmingham**
- **Cardiff**
- **Cheshire**
- **Darlington**
- **Derbyshire**
- **Durham**
- **Kent**
- **Lancashire**
- **Liverpool**
- **Manchester**
- **Nottingham**
- **St Helens**
- **Warwickshire**
- **Wolverhampton**

Barnardo's provides foster carers with the tools and specialist support needed to ensure children in their care thrive. Our expert workers provide carers with comprehensive preparation and ongoing training, as well as offering support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Funding for placements is provided by local authorities in line with their Framework Contracts.

Foster carers receive financial support, including an allowance to help make a positive difference to a child's life and a professional fee. In April 2023 Barnardo's provided a 5% uplift to all our foster carers' professional fees to support with the impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

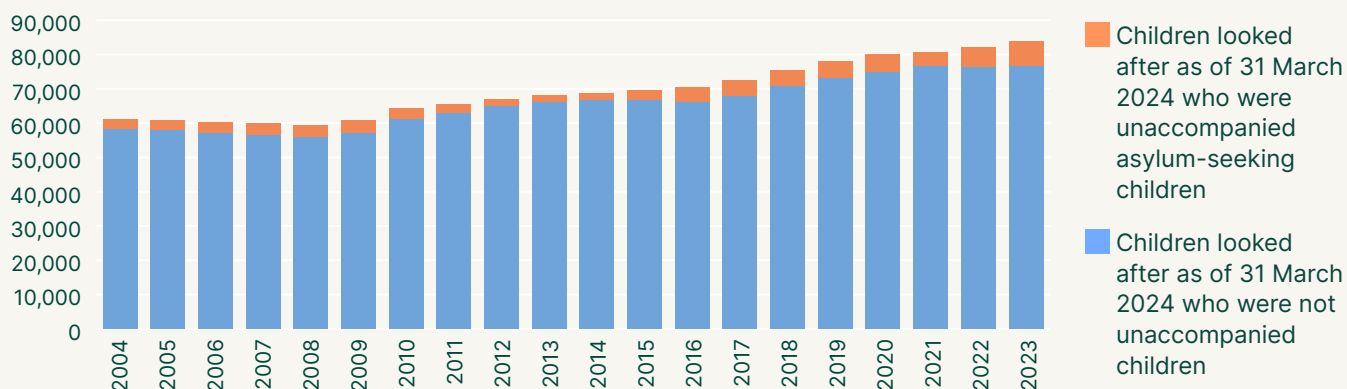
What does an adequately funded placement system for unaccompanied children look like?

Any plan to increase funding for specialist fostering carers and supported accommodation for unaccompanied children, must consider the challenges facing the wider children's care system.

The care system

The number of children in care in England has been rising steadily over the past ten years.²⁰ Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children make up a relatively small proportion of the total number of children in the care system, but this percentage has grown significantly in recent years. As of March 31, 2023 9% of children in care were unaccompanied children.

Population of looked after children in England as of 31 March 2024



19. Barnardo's do provide adopters for unaccompanied children where their legal status has been clarified but this is extremely rare.

20. Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2023 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)



Rising numbers of children in the care system are placing enormous pressure on local councils particularly as, for many years, funding has not kept pace with this increase in demand. For example, between 2010-11 and 2016-17 councils reduced spending on children's services by almost £1 billion, a fall of 9% in real terms.²¹ While overall spending on children's services has now increased – spending in 2021-22 rose by more than £800 million – this is primarily being driven by increased spending on high-cost residential care placements.²² This means much of the rest of the system is stretched and with nearly one in five local authorities reporting a risk of bankruptcy in the next two years,²³ there is a risk that the ability of the system to provide the level of care that children need will worsen in the coming years.

The Government commissioned an independent review of the children's social care system in England which was published in 2022. This recommended a wide range of reforms²⁴ including that central Government invest £2.6bn in the care system to rebalance and move away from cost-intensive late intervention services and towards earlier support for families and children. However, to date, there has been limited implementation of the recommendations, with little funding allocated.²⁵

The need for adequately funded specialist foster carers for unaccompanied children should therefore be placed within the context of the need for wider reform of the children's social care system. This includes the need for significant central Government investment to rebalance the system. This would ensure that local authorities are better able to support more children to remain safely living with their birth families while increasing the quality of care available for those children who do need to come into the care of the state (including those who are unaccompanied children).

Recruitment

While the number of children in care rises, the number of foster carers is falling. Since 2021, more foster carers have left than joined across the UK and there is an estimated shortage of 6,500 foster care homes.²⁶ Research by YouGov on behalf of Barnardo's suggests there is public concern around the situation – nearly three quarters of adults in the UK are worried there aren't enough foster carers to give children safe and loving homes (73%). However, only 7% would consider fostering a child within the next 10 years.

There are several reasons behind this the recruitment crisis, including pressures such as the cost-of-living crisis and difficulties in accessing suitable accommodation. In the YouGov survey conducted for Barnardo's 15% of respondents said their reason for not fostering was that they couldn't afford it, while 23% said that they didn't have enough space in their current accommodation for a foster child.

The Government has committed to a national recruitment and retention programme in England to help tackle this issue. This includes a pledge of £3m to deliver a pilot programme in the Northeast, with a further £24m to develop further regional programmes, plus a further £8m pledged in December as a further extension.²⁷

This makes it the largest national investment in fostering in recent times. However, Barnardo's is concerned that the campaign only focuses on recruiting foster carers to work directly with the local authority. There is a further need to **harness the expertise of the independent fostering sector – particularly because this sector holds the expertise for recruiting and training foster carers to look after children with more complex needs – including unaccompanied children.**

21. [Children's services spending 22_final report.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

22. [Children's services spending 22_final report.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

23. [Post-Autumn Statement Temperature Check \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

24. [ARCHIVED CONTENT] [Final Report – The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

25. [Long-term strategy launched to fix children's social care – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

26. [More children to end up in unsuitable homes if more foster carers aren't urgently recruited | The Fostering Network](#)

27. [Recruitment and retention in mainstream fostering – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Recruitment and retention of foster carers, and support to train specialist foster carers is crucial to ensuring unaccompanied children receive the right placement and the right support and must be an integral part of the UK Government's strategy for foster care recruitment.²⁸ Within the foster care recruitment campaign the Government should establish a coordinated and well-resourced approach to recruit and mobilise foster carers with specialist skills to support unaccompanied refugee and children seeking asylum.

The National Transfer Scheme allows children to be moved to and placed in a different local authority but does not take into account placement sufficiency. Specifically targeted recruitment drives in those areas of the country that children are moving to under the NTS would ensure that there are specialist placements available in the country in the areas where these are most needed.



What makes high quality specialist placements?

“Caring for a displaced child is just like caring for any other child. People think you need a list of extra skills such as language and legal knowledge. Whilst important to be mindful of these things, they are still just children and providing them with a safe home is the most important thing.”

Barnardo's carer

All children in the care system will have suffered some form of trauma. However, the specific needs of children who have fled their home countries are likely to be very different. These children have left their homes due to persecution, war, or famine, which are often not commonplace to us within British society. They will have experienced traumatic events and losses including exposure to violence and separation from family members. Many will have encountered further trauma on their journeys to the UK.

In addition, unaccompanied children may need support to contact their families at home, reach family members in the UK or the group they have travelled with. Foster carers will need support to navigate this safely and to manage the emotional distress associated with separation.

We believe that the next Government's plan for caring for unaccompanied children must equip foster carers to meet these specific needs. It should do this by:

- Meeting the child's practical and emotional needs
- Providing training to understand legal processes
- Helping carers to become culturally competent
- Supporting carers to access other relevant support services

The sections below use evidence from our carers and the children that they support to establish a blueprint for what high quality specialist foster carer looks like for these children.

28. More children to end up in unsuitable homes if more foster carers aren't urgently recruited | [The Fostering Network](#)

Meeting children's practical and emotional needs

In December 2023, Barnardo's surveyed 101 foster carers. 44% said the cost-of-living crisis had impacted on their ability to foster, and 71% cited improved financial support as one of the main aspects that would improve foster care.²⁹

When unaccompanied children arrive at a foster care placement, they often have very few belongings with them. Specialist foster carers spend a great deal of time supporting and providing for children's practical needs. This involves buying clothing, providing culturally appropriate food, and taking them to numerous appointments and meetings e.g. GP, solicitors, school.

One Barnardo's foster carer described how she had recently bought the child she cares for a suit so he could attend his school prom. This was paid for out of her own pocket. Whilst foster carers want to do the very best for the children in their care, the high cost of living inevitably limits many carers' spending power.

To retain current foster carers and ensure recruitment of much needed new carers, it is essential that there is comprehensive and ongoing financial support for carers.

These children will also have many emotional needs that may not be immediately apparent. They may seem happy to be safe, but many will have long term emotional needs as they process what has happened to them and what they left behind. Carers need to be equipped to help children through this process, including through adequate mental health support when necessary. This means that it is essential that foster carers are able to access appropriate services to support children's mental health and emotional well-being, we explore challenges to accessing these services later in this report.

Training to understand legal processes (including asylum and legal)

81%
of Barnardo's foster carers felt that training has helped them with their fostering role.³⁰

Many carers described the importance of training being informative, relevant and regular. 77% highlighted the importance of ongoing training in helping them to learn and refresh their knowledge. In addition, training provides an opportunity to meet and learn from other carers.

However, at present there is too much variation in training provision and quality. Local authorities receive varying numbers of unaccompanied children, and therefore some have developed best practise and specialist training resources which others lack access to. Raising awareness and sharing training resources is important to address this variation in the level of support available to specialist foster carers caring for unaccompanied children.³¹

Ongoing training should be available to all specialist carers, and this should be tailored to the needs of the children they support. Specialist foster carers supporting unaccompanied children need training to support their cultural, emotional and practical needs.

Specialist foster carers may also need to support a child navigating the asylum process. Therefore, an understanding of a child's legal status and the immigration system can help to increase confidence in understanding a child's needs, and to support their wellbeing. Unaccompanied children often face an array of complex legal challenges as they navigate the asylum system, which can have profound effects on their mental health and overall adjustment.

29. Barnardo's Foster Care Survey, Phase 1, December 2023. Survey of 101 Foster Carers.

30. Ibid.

31. A warm welcome: A blueprint for supporting displaced children | [Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk)

Ali's Story*

Barnardo's NI placed 'Ali', a 15-year-old boy from Iran with a foster family. He had presented to social services after travelling to Northern Ireland from Iran, fearing for his life. His foster family initially focussed on providing him with day-to-day care but alongside his social worker increasingly supported him with his asylum application. 'Ali' attended school, integrated well with his peer group and continued to have contact with his birth parents via videocalls. His family always thanked his foster carers for looking after him. 'Ali' wanted to remain in the UK long term and after a long legal case, he was granted refugee status. During his asylum process, 'Ali' had his initial claim rejected, and experienced long waits for a final decision. During this time, his wellbeing suffered, and his foster carers worried that he would be left with long-term mental health problems.

Understanding 'Ali's' legal status and the steps involved in his asylum applications helped to provide a sense of security and stability during an uncertain time. When foster carers possess this essential knowledge, they can better support the children in their care, helping them to cope with the stress and anxiety that often accompanies the legal process, and promoting long term wellbeing.

Investing in the training of foster carers to navigate the legal complexities associated with immigration issues is an indispensable component of ensuring the holistic well-being and successful transition of unaccompanied within the foster care system.

*Name have been changed



What we do

Barnardo's has many years of experience in recruiting, training, assessing the needs of, and supporting specialist foster carers who provide a safe and supportive refuge for unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

Where a new or approved foster carer expresses a wish to care for a displaced child, they will receive specialist training and are buddied with an experienced foster carer in advance. Training is then provided on an ongoing basis to support the child in their placement. The initial and ongoing training is crucial to ensure placement stability for the child.

Specialist training includes:

Working with interpreters

Legal status & age assessments

Understanding trauma & post-traumatic stress syndrome

Dealing with loss

Access to health & therapeutic services

Culture, religion & identity

Education & community

Integration

Our work training specialist foster carers suggests that when foster carers decline or are unable to take up the offer of training, placements are more likely to break down. This highlights the importance of training, and the opportunity it gives potential specialist foster carers to understand whether the role is right for them.³²



32. <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/evaluation-barnardos-safe-accommodation-project-sexually-exploited-and-trafficked-young-people>

Understanding different cultures

Yìchén's story

Barnardo's supported a 12-year-old Chinese boy, Yìchén, who had limited English language. Yìchén was placed with a foster family in Northern Ireland from a white background who were experienced foster carers, but who had no prior experience of caring for displaced children. Yìchén's foster father attended a class for several months on learning conversational Mandarin to better connect with him.

Barnardo's was able to link Yìchén with a youth club attended by a large population of Chinese families. He built friendships there and began to integrate well into his foster family, school and community.

Despite positive stories like Yìchén's carers often lack the training and skills to meet children's cultural needs. Our recent report on the experiences of Black children in care "Double discrimination"³³ highlighted how Black children can feel isolated due to a lack of consideration of their cultural identity from social workers, foster carers and/ or residential workers. Young people described how not having access to appropriate skin and hair products or cultural foods made it difficult for them to feel like they belonged.

"So maybe even like the food that we're eating it's not really.. how we really eat... even the products ...like skincare products that they give you because obviously they buy all these things, so you have to basically tell them, 'I need cream, I need xxx'."

Black care leaver interviewed for Barnardo's Double Discrimination report

33. [Double Discrimination – Black care-experienced young adults navigating the criminal justice system report.pdf](#) (barnardos.org.uk)

It is particularly important that foster carers supporting unaccompanied children can develop an understanding of their cultural needs. Many unaccompanied children are completely cut off from family, friends and their communities. Specialist foster carers should be supported to help children remain connected to their cultural heritage through researching and understanding their cultural background, giving them opportunities to eat familiar foods, and ensuring they can speak in their own language through interpreters. Valuing children's cultural and ethnic identity is a form of child-centred practice.³⁴ Alongside acknowledging cultural needs, specialist foster carers should also be supported to help children to adapt to British culture, through explaining various aspects of the new environment they found themselves in and supporting them to try new things.

Help the child access key services

All fostered children will need help to identify and access services to support their needs and support their development. This includes accessing education, financial services, hobbies and activities, and legal support. Foster carers need guidance to navigate these systems effectively and ensure the child's rights and needs are met.

Education

In the UK, all children have the right to access education. Current policy and statutory documents point to a clear expectation around access to education for all newly arrived migrants. However, even when dedicated support is in place, children are still missing out on a school place.³⁵

In 2022, one in five (21%) unaccompanied children were not in school.³⁶

Barnardo's foster carers describe how access to education must be established quickly to help children integrate effectively.

34. [barnardo27s-sa-project-evaluation-full-report__3_.pdf](#) (barnardos.org.uk)

35. [InvisibleorIgnored_ExecutiveSummary_WONDER.pdf](#) (wonderfoundation.org.uk)

36. Children's Commissioners, 'Looked after Children Who Are Not in School', 2023. Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum (UCSA) were overrepresented among the population of looked after children who were not in school. This statistic concerns only unaccompanied young people of compulsory school age, i.e., until 16 years old.

“School leads to everything, it is the hub of everything. Once you get schooling right, the other support will fall into place.”

Barnardo's foster carer

Foster carers play an important role in children's education including advocating for places in schools, supporting with homework, liaising with the school about issues relating to safety, and escorting their child to and from different elements of their alternative education provision.³⁷

We also know that education is important for placement stability. Barnardo's was commissioned by the DfE to provide a pilot “Safe Accommodation Project” in England. The programme placed children at risk of trafficking or who had experienced sexual exploitation with specialist foster carers. The programme's evaluation found that placements were less successful when children were not engaged with education. Lack of school placement or irregular attendance was associated with placement breakdown within weeks or months.³⁸

Barnardo's foster carers describe mixed support for children attending school. One described how the boy she cares for was not given the time and support he needed in class. He was unable to speak English and was given a laptop and told to sit at the back of the classroom. The foster carer was concerned that he was left to figure everything out on his own.

“These children need to be properly educated to give them the best chance, they can't be left at the back”-

Barnardo's foster carer



Children need comprehensive wrap-around support in schools, including help with their English language and extra-curricular activities to allow them to settle more easily and realise their potential.

Early personalised support is crucial to ensure that unaccompanied children are ready for school. This includes offering mental health and wellbeing support, language support and working with schools to ensure that they are prepared to meet children's needs.

Schools can support unaccompanied children through providing information and support to teachers, and through a curriculum that is culturally sensitive as well as accessible. This can help children feel safe and looked after at school, promoting attendance and engagement. In England the role of Virtual School Heads (VSH) can be pivotal in facilitating this. VSHs are part of the statutory framework for all children in care. They are responsible for promoting the educational achievement of all the children looked after by their local authority. Evidence shows that VSHs can act as advocates for children in care and can exert pressure on headteachers including on admissions and use of exclusions.³⁹

Virtual school heads also work to help support the well-being of children in care when they are at school through offering training and linking schools with mental health support and wider services. The important role that VSHs can play for refugee children and children seeking asylum is not however recognised in guidance provided for the role and evidence suggests that the support provided is variable across different local authorities .

37. [barnardo27s-sa-project-evaluation-full-report_3_.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

38. [A warm welcome: A blueprint for supporting displaced children | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

39. [1 \(bris.ac.uk\)](#)

What we do

Barnardo's Sanctuary service provides a tailored trauma informed, activity-based support service for 11–16-year-old asylum seekers residing in Hertfordshire asylum hotels. Support includes both preventative interventions as well as immediate wellbeing support through one to one and group activities. Packages of support have been developed to enable young people to improve their mental health, reduce isolation, meet others with similar experiences, learn from peers and rebuild confidence.

Early intervention is key to the service. Linking with and working in asylum hotels as soon as families arrive provides immediate support and a safe space to assess children's needs and help prepare them for school. Evidence shows the children supported have been enabled to build a safe support network, talk about their feelings, make friendships, build confidence, raise their self-esteem, feel valued and improve their mental wellbeing.



Mental health support

43% of Barnardo's foster carers described how better access to support and counselling for the child they care for would help to improve foster care.⁴⁰

Almost half of all looked after children have a diagnosable mental health disorder,⁴¹ compared to some one in five children in the wider population. Barnardo's research also shows there is a problem in relation to care leavers accessing mental health support. Our Neglected Minds⁴² report found that almost half (46%) of young people who had been in the care system were considered by their personal adviser to have mental health needs and one in four young people had experienced a mental health crisis since leaving care.

It is important that all children in care have services available to meet their needs. This is especially important as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are under significant pressure and there is significant variation in average wait times across the country. The average waiting time for treatment varies from just four days in some areas to almost 147 days in others⁴³

Both carers and unaccompanied children themselves have told us of the problems that they face accessing appropriate mental health support.

40. Barnardo's Foster Care Survey, Phase 1, December 2023. Survey of 101 Foster Carers.

41. [A Healthy State of Mind: Improving young people's mental fitness – Localis](#)

42. [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 – wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey – NHS England Digital](#)

43. Over a quarter of a million children still waiting for mental health support | [Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

Effective local leadership is key to improving access to mental health support for all children in the care system including unaccompanied children. The introduction of virtual school heads (VSHs) has helped to improve access to education for children in care, through better co-ordinated leadership. Introducing a virtual mental health lead could achieve similar results in the field of mental health. In particular they could play a key role in co-ordinating action from different stakeholders, including CAMHS, mental health support teams in schools and community health services. Barnardo's also believes that virtual mental health leads could be given a remit to consider how to ensure that local services can meet the needs of specific cohorts of children in care including unaccompanied children.

The provision of virtual mental health leads for looked after children would therefore help ensure that all unaccompanied children can access the therapeutic support they need. **This would support foster carer families to provide the best support and promote placement stability.**

What we do

Barnardo's LINK service, commissioned by the Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities provides trauma-informed, person-centred therapeutic support to children, parents and wider family. Our pool of experienced therapists offer virtually delivered talking therapy in several different languages. They also have the necessary skills to work alongside experienced interpreters to enable access to therapy for all.

In addition to individual talking therapy, the service offers Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET.) NET is a form of psychotherapy that aims to help individuals who have experienced traumatic events, particularly refugees, asylum seekers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to process and cope with their experiences. Displaced children are often exposed to traumatic events before, during, and after their migration journey. NET has been shown to effectively reduce PTSD symptoms in this population by helping them process and integrate their traumatic experiences into a coherent narrative.

In 2022/23 LINK supported: 125 individuals via our Hong Kong Helpline, 232 individuals via our Ukrainian Support Helpline and 228 individuals via our Asylum Support Helpline.

Bank accounts

Barnardo's frontline workers have described difficulties for displaced children and families in opening bank accounts, given their lack of permanent address. Banks' processes vary significantly, with banks requiring different forms of identification⁴⁴. Our foster carers have described these processes as confusing and time consuming.

The importance of helping all children in care and care leavers to access bank accounts was identified in Barnardo's recent report on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on care-experienced young people: **"No Bank of Mum and Dad"**.⁴⁵ The report found that lack of access to financial services can make it difficult for young people who have recently left care to manage their money effectively. However, the report also found a range of appropriate banking products that could support young people growing up in care to access an account. For example, Metro Bank⁴⁶ has developed a process for opening bank accounts that verifies a young person's identity through communication with a local authority, rather than requiring photo ID and proof of address.

Simple changes to processes can help to ensure that financial products and services are accessible to children in care and those who have left the care system. **To help prevent financial exclusion of all children in the care system, including unaccompanied children, Barnardo's recommends that all banks put in place clear policies which outline how they will support this cohort.**

Hobbies

All children can benefit from taking part in hobbies, sports⁴⁷ or learning new skills.⁴⁸ Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may gain additional benefits. Barnardo's pilot Safe Accommodation Project found attending exercise classes, going to a gym or playing sport helped children integrate into their community, and was linked to longer and more stable foster care placements. The pilot also found those who did not get involved in such activities tended to be placements that then broke down quickly.⁴⁹

One Barnardo's foster carer said she saw a change in the child she cares for after he began attending the local gym, where he was able to make friends and spend some time away from the home.

However, being in care can make it difficult for some children to participate in activities that other take for granted. This includes going on school trips or visiting friends' houses. Current regulation and guidance for foster carers can create barriers to participation such as asking a friend's parents to undergo a police check before they can stay over. Children supported by Barnardo's have expressed frustration at these regulations⁵⁰, frustration which is often shared by foster carers themselves.⁵¹ The final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social care in England⁵² also highlighted this concern and recommended that **"Foster carers should be given delegated authority by default, to take decisions which affect the day to day lives of children in their care"**. It is important that local authorities consider this recommendation in relation to all children in foster care, but it may be particularly important in relation to unaccompanied children given the importance of social activities in helping these children integrate into their new communities.

44. [Banking for Ukrainian Refugees --Ukrainian Refugee Help](#)

45. <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/report-cost-living-crisis-care-experienced-young-people-bank-mum-dad-.pdf>

46. [Metro Bank Helps Care Leavers Become Financially Independent \(metrobankonline.co.uk\)](#)

47. [Physical activity helps children to deal with life's challenges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

48. [The benefits of after school activities | Explore Learning](#)

49. Ibid

50. [BARNARDOS YP checklist.pdf](#)

51. [The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

52. [The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

Solicitors

Access to quality legal advice is essential to anyone who is presenting their asylum claim. The UK system is very complex and many people don't speak English well enough to advocate for themselves. The onus is on the claimant to prove their case. Many people are forced to flee with only the clothes on their backs and often lose documents as they travel to safety. An experienced legal advocate can help people put their cases in chronological and logical order, making it easier for the Home Office to decide on a person's case.⁵³ However, Barnardo's foster carers have described how accessing good quality legal advice is becoming increasingly difficult. It is essential that all children seeking asylum have access to immediate and quality free legal advice.

Language support

Language needs underpin every area of support a child can have access to. Lack of interpreters and translation issues can create barriers for children in communicating their needs and understanding the support that is offered to them, whether this be in school, a doctor's surgery or accessing legal advice.⁵⁴

Barnardo's recommends a strategic plan for unaccompanied children including ring-fencing of local authority budgets for commissioning translation services and providing training for translators working with this cohort. This should both support children to access resources translated into their own language and support them to learn English in the longer term.

Supporting young people post-18

"The hardest part for him was between the age of 18-19½ when he was not permitted to access education or employment. He was young, fit and wanted to contribute /better himself through education and work opportunities."

Barnardo's worker about Adam, an unaccompanied young person in our foster care

For all children in care, reaching the age of 18 can mean they face significant additional challenges. The current systems of support mean that many face a "cliff edge" at the age of 18, with many being expected leave their foster carer or residential placement and live relatively independently. For young people who arrived in the UK seeking asylum and who have an outstanding claim on reaching 18 things can be particularly difficult. While the local authority does have responsibility to support them as part of their status as a "care leaver" (providing they spent 13 weeks in care prior to their 18th birthday), support available from other services, are more limited.

Given the difficulties that leaving care with uncertain immigration status can bring Barnardo's believes that the emphasis should be on encouraging the Home Office to work with local authorities to overcome barriers to ensure that immigration status is settled before young people leave care. In addition, a plan should also consider how local authorities leaving care services' should work to support young people who do leave care with uncertain immigration status until these issues are resolved.

The role of personal advisors:

In England a personal advisor (PA) is someone who offers advice, support and information to make sure a child or young person is ready to leave care and live independently. They'll also contribute to a pathway plan and make sure it's carried out correctly.

53. [A warm welcome: A blueprint for supporting displaced children | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

54. [A warm welcome: A blueprint for supporting displaced children | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)



Once a child turns 18, they will:

- Take over responsibility for supporting the young person.
- Support the young person to set and reach personal goals through use of a pathway plan.
- Keep in touch with the young person and make sure they can get any additional support that they need⁵⁵

A pathway plan is a document that prepares the young person leaving care. It helps a young person identify any support they need to feel confident living independently. This might include identifying suitable accommodation, mental health counselling or support to achieve career goals.⁵⁶ When a child turns 16, their local council should work alongside them to start writing a pathway plan.

Effective pathway planning by a personal adviser is paramount for all children, but of particular importance for unaccompanied children; this planning should start well before they leave care. Early planning addresses unique needs, including education, employment, housing, and emotional well-being. Early planning can help to ensure a smoother transition into independent living and enhance long-term prospects for success. Proactive and early pathway planning is crucial in ensuring positive outcomes for unaccompanied young people navigating the transition from care to independent adulthood.

Foster carers must be supported within this transition and provided with advice on providing practical help and emotional support to children or young people preparing for transition working in conjunction with the child's social worker, their personal advisor, and other professionals.⁵⁷

The role of a Guardian

In England and Wales, only trafficked unaccompanied children can access support from a Guardian, whereas in Scotland and Northern Ireland, Guardians support all unaccompanied children.

Our recent report 'A Warm Welcome'⁵⁸ supported by Action for Children, British Future, Coram Legal Centre, ECPAT UK, NSPCC, Refugee Council, Save the Children, The Children's Society, has several recommendations for the development of a welcoming movement for children, one of which is assigning all unaccompanied children arriving in the UK a Guardian. Young people with lived experience of the asylum process believe the role of a Guardian is critical and have organised a youth-led campaign, the Youth-led Commission on Separated Children⁵⁹, seeking this change in England and Wales.

A Guardian for every unaccompanied child would provide a consistent adult, trained to help them navigate the asylum system, and who can act as an advocate. Barnardo's foster carers have described how high turnover of social workers is a key barrier to children accessing consistent support and advice.⁶⁰ A Guardian would help to resolve these challenges, would significantly reduce pressure on current foster carers, social workers and personal advisers, and help to attract new foster carers.

55. [What is a pathway plan and personal advisor? | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/warm-welcome-blueprint-supporting-displaced-children)

56. Ibid

57. [Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People \(fostertalk.org\)](https://www.fostertalk.org/)

58. <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/warm-welcome-blueprint-supporting-displaced-children>

59. See [Guardians for unaccompanied children | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk)

60. [Barnardo's Foster Care Survey, Phase 1, December 2023. Survey of 101 Foster Carers](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/warm-welcome-blueprint-supporting-displaced-children)

Supported accommodation

While ensuring there are enough specialist foster placements for unaccompanied children is a priority, it is also important to consider that most unaccompanied children who enter the UK are 16 or 17 (only 13% are under 16) and therefore it will remain common for these children to be placed in supported accommodation. The use of this type of accommodation for children in the care system in England has grown significantly in recent years, rising by 76% between the end of March 2010 and the end of March 2022.⁶¹

Like all children in care, unaccompanied children must have their needs assessed and be matched with the placement that best meets their needs. A strategic plan that protects and welcomes displaced children who have fled their homes to seek sanctuary in the UK, must include an adequately funded system for the range of placements these children are likely to need – which includes supported accommodation where this is appropriate.

These forms of accommodation are **only** for older children, who do not require full time care, but who still benefit from having good quality support to enable them to integrate into the country and make the transition to living as independent adults. Where there has been an assessment of need of a child and the best match to their needs is in “other arrangements” the placement could be either be supported lodgings (in a family home) or supported accommodation – which is either a single occupancy or shared accommodation with provision of either on site or floating support.⁶²

Providing support

As with the quality principles outlined above, we believe the next government’s plan for caring for unaccompanied children must also equip those supporting children in other accommodation settings to be able to provide them with practical and emotional support.

Welcome Packs

As well as ensuring a basic standard of accommodation it is important that accompanied children are provided with the resources they need to enable them to live independently. This is particularly important for these children who will often have arrived in the UK with few or none of their own possessions.

Barnardo’s has been working with supported accommodation providers in Brent to consider how they can better support older children entering supported accommodation as their first placement in care – including those who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. Barnardo’s worked with a group of young people with experience of the care system to develop a welcome pack including a range of resources from toiletries (including shampoos, and shower gel), towels, bed linen and kitchen equipment (including pots, pans and plates). The welcome pack has been piloted with a number of supported accommodation providers in the Brent area and received positive feedback from children and young people who report that it helps those who have arrived with nothing feel more welcome and at home. Following a successful pilot, the packs have been implemented and are a contractual requirement for all Supported Living Accommodation providers in Brent. The packs also help facilitate an early conversation between children and workers to help them understand the support that is available within the accommodation which is essential in helping them to settle in.

“I was happy. I mean you know they made my room perfect...and when they gave me the pack and then they said to me, anything you need, you can just come to reception or call us anytime, you know for any help.”

Young person who received a welcome pack

The welcome packs cost just £200 each and professionals supporting children and young people report that they feel they provide a huge benefit in being able to provide a warm welcome to young people as they access their new accommodation.

“Having the pack will save us time so we can spend more time with the young person.”

Worker in supported accommodation

61. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7560/CBP-7560.pdf>

62. [Suitable placements for UASC updated \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

Regulations

As of October 2023, regulation in England requires that all supported accommodation providers are registered with Ofsted and confirm to a minimum standard, for both the standard of accommodation and the levels of support they provide to the children in their care.⁶³ From April 2024 supported accommodation providers are also subject to regular Ofsted inspection.

The regulations are widely welcomed as a means of driving up quality in the supported accommodation sector however the extra requirements that they place on providers means some are considering exiting the market or shifting their service offer so that they only house care leavers over the age of 18. This has led to reports that one in five supported accommodation beds are projected to be lost.⁶⁴ The Government must provide a package of support for supported accommodation providers to ensure that there are sufficient available placements for all unaccompanied children who need them.



One in five
supported accommodation
beds are projected to be lost

What Barnardo's currently provides

Barnardo's provides supported accommodation services across the UK: These contain a variety of models of delivery ranging from supported housing to floating support. Services that are based in England are currently in the process of registering with OFSTED in line with the new regulatory framework.

Our supported accommodation across England supports over 70 young people, with most of our provision based in the North West. In South London we also provide floating and accommodation support for more than 25 young people.

In Leeds, Barnardo's provides a service hosting up to 16 displaced children in four flats of four, with support included. Our workers in these settings have the training and skills to support this cohort of children and young people.

Outside of England, we also run supported accommodation across Belfast, Glasgow and Swansea, and many of the services include support with transition to independence up to 25 years old. In Belfast, we run 10 beds at any one time across two premises, for young people aged 16-21 years with medium to high care dependency as identified by Trust workers, of which eight beds are classed as medium to high support and two classed as low to medium support.



63. [Government bans unregulated accommodation for young people in care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-bans-unregulated-accommodation-for-young-people-in-care)

64. ['Catastrophic' loss of one in five supported accommodation beds projected, as regulation looms - Community Car](#)

Supported lodgings

In some circumstances, supported lodgings may be the most appropriate arrangement for the young person.

Supported lodgings are a service that allows an individual to live in a family home, experiencing domestic life in a shared and supportive environment, which provides support to the young person, but not the same level of care provided by a foster placement. The child or young person has their own room and shares the kitchen and bathroom facilities with the family or householder, or 'host'.⁶⁵

For many children wishing to gain independent living skills while receiving ongoing support, supported lodgings can be an appropriate option. However, supported lodgings do not suit all children and young people, specifically those who have few boundaries to their behaviour, or who want the freedom and anonymity of other settings. It is essential that there is local provision of a range of accommodation options, to meet the differing needs, wishes, and aspirations of individual children and young people.⁶⁶

Kidisti's story*

'Kidisti' was referred to a Barnardo's service in January 2023 at 16 years old. 'Kidisti' is Eritrean, she spoke limited English and needed a Tigrinya Translator.

'Kidisti's' needs were assessed, and it was established she needed long term and stable accommodation, support with her wellbeing and accessing health care, faith and cultural support, employment, education and training advice and help with financing and budgeting. 'Kidisti' would also need to gain independent living skills, access information on her rights and support applying for leave to remain.

'Kidisti' was considered a good candidate for and placed in supported lodgings. To best support her, her hosts received training and ongoing support to best care for an unaccompanied child and on the role of a supported lodgings providers.

Her hosts were able to support 'Kidisti's' contact with the local church and community, as well as supporting her to attend college. CAHMS support was also offered. Kidisti is now happy and settled in her placement, her English is improving, and

she has formed friendships. Kidisti has a good relationship with her host family; they recently took her to an Eritrean restaurant, and she has now received her refugee leave to remain.

*Name have been changed



65. [Suitable placements for UASC updated \(local.gov.uk\)](https://www.local.gov.uk)

66. [Evaluation-of-barnardos-supported-lodgings.pdf](#)



Needs must be established

When a child arrives in a local authority area, it is crucial to prioritise the establishment of their specific needs before considering their placement in supported accommodation. Where a young person has complex needs and/or requires a greater level of ongoing care and supervision, supported accommodation is not appropriate.⁶⁷ Therefore, **it is imperative that robust needs assessment and placement planning is in place prior to any supported accommodation placement** and is shared with providers prior to any placement commencing.

Barnardo's has carried out an evaluation of supported lodgings for all children, which has findings that can be applied to children seeking protection in the UK.⁶⁸ The study demonstrates the importance of accurate and complete information about potential risks, challenging behaviours, triggers for behavioural issues, and young people's life experiences being collected at referral stage. Incomplete referral information can present serious risks to young people and providers and was cited as a reason for placement breakdown.⁶⁹

An initial and detailed assessment is therefore fundamental to ensuring a child's safety, well-being, and overall development. By comprehensively evaluating their emotional, psychological, educational, and social needs, authorities can tailor accommodation and support services to best serve the child's interests. Understanding their unique circumstances, including any past traumas or challenges, is vital for making an informed decision regarding their placement. This approach not only helps to provide the child with an environment that aligns with their requirements but also sets the foundation for a more successful transition and integration into the new community, ultimately offering them a better chance at a stable and fulfilling future.

67. [Guide to the supported accommodation regulations including quality standards \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67111/guide-to-the-supported-accommodation-regulations-including-quality-standards.pdf)

68. <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Evaluation-of-barnardos-supported-lodgings.pdf>

69. [Ibid](#)

How unaccompanied children access care placements: The National Transfer Scheme

All local authorities with children's services in the UK are directed to take part in the National Transfer Scheme.⁷⁰ The scheme allows unaccompanied children seeking asylum to move local authorities to begin a care placement. Councils for whom unaccompanied children in care account for at least 0.1% of their child population, can request children be transferred to an authority with a lower proportional of unaccompanied children.⁷¹ This spreads the cost of supporting unaccompanied children to more local authorities.

The nine English regions, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland take it turns to be responsible for receiving referrals, on a rota system, with regional leaders allocating each case to an eligible authority within their area. The deadline for transfers between councils is ten days.⁷²

It is imperative that the NTS runs effectively and with children's best interests at the heart so that placements succeed when children are moved.

Placement capacity is one of the biggest issues affecting the effectiveness of the National Transfer scheme. In 2023, The Association of Directors of Children's Services said the NTS no longer effectively functions, in the light of pressures including a lack of adequate funding and a national shortage of placements.⁷³

Creation of a strategic plan for an adequately funded system for placements for unaccompanied children would allow for local authorities to properly plan and prepare services.

70. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-interim-national-transfer-scheme>

71. [National Transfer Scheme to become mandatory for all local authorities – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-transfer-scheme-to-become-mandatory-for-all-local-authorities)

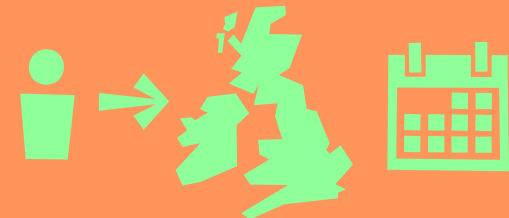
72. [Government urges councils to take in unaccompanied children after court rules hotel placements unlawful – Community Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-urges-councils-to-take-in-unaccompanied-children-after-court-rules-hotel-placements-unlawful)

73. [Government urges councils to take in unaccompanied children after court rules hotel placements unlawful – Community Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-urges-councils-to-take-in-unaccompanied-children-after-court-rules-hotel-placements-unlawful)



How journey of displaced child should look when arriving:

1. Child arrives in UK and is referred to the nearest local authority children's services at the earliest possible opportunity.



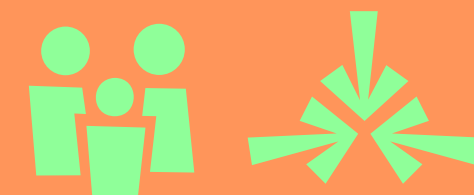
2. Child should have completed an asylum screening interview and be issued with a Home Office reference number.



3. Child will have welfare checks and all relevant checks completed (with as much detail taken as possible), to establish their needs and welfare concerns e.g. trafficking concerns, referral to the Independent Child Trafficking Service.



4. If appropriate, child placed in National Transfer Scheme.



5. Child's needs and best interests are considered i.e. information is provided to the child about new area, a preference for urban or rural, and for location of friends or siblings considered.



6. Child met by social worker or Guardian from local authority to make child feel safe and welcome and informed of where they are going.



7. Child travels to new local authority area.

8. Child placed in care of local authority.



9. Child placed into specialist foster care (If child is over 16 and needs are assessed, may be moved into supported accommodation).



Ensuring accurate information exchange

When moving children under the NTS, the exchange of information between local authorities is critical. It must be as detailed as possible to ensure that children's unique needs can be comprehensively assessed and that they are placed in an appropriate setting.

Welfare interviews at the point of entry to the UK serve as a pivotal moment for understanding children's backgrounds, experiences, vulnerabilities, and aspirations. A detailed welfare interview delves into not only a child's physical and educational requirements but also their emotional and psychological well-being. By capturing the full breadth of their circumstances, past traumas, and individual needs, these interviews enable local authorities to develop tailored support plans that address every facet of a child's life. This approach is essential for safeguarding the best interests of these children, ensuring that they receive the necessary care, protection, and opportunities for a brighter future.

To ensure seamless transfer through the NTS, welfare interviews and subsequent evaluations of children's needs must consider each child's individual circumstances. This should then be applied to evaluating the location a child will be moved to.

This evaluation should encompass the presence of necessary infrastructure, including access to religious facilities like mosques and availability of halal food, as well as support for English language learning (ESOL), and educational facilities that can cater to children with communication needs.

The information passed between local authorities needs to be as detailed as possible, to ensure that children's needs can be fully assessed. Similarly, children need to be provided with clear and comprehensive information about where they are going. Without the provision of this information, children are less likely to integrate into their new surroundings, and placements may breakdown. These children are also more at risk of going missing or of exploitation.

Barnardo's recommends that children should be provided with a welcome pack of information to help them make an informed decision about where they are being moved to. Welcome packs have previously been developed to support British Nationals Overseas arriving to the UK from Hong Kong. Packs contain information about legal rights, access to health care, education and financial support.⁷⁴ Creation of an accessible welcome pack for children using the National Transfer Scheme would help them to feel welcome, understand more about where they are being moved, and support them to settle on arrival.



74. [Welcome Pack for arrivals from Hong Kong on the British Nationals \(Overseas\) visa \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Kazem's story

An Iranian boy, 'Kazem', arrived at Nottingham from the National Transfer Scheme. When he arrived at our service, 'Kazem' didn't understand what was happening, he told workers he thought he was only in placement for a couple days and that he had not been informed that he was moving to Nottingham permanently. 'Kazem' reported that he had moved from Home Office accommodation into supported accommodation and had been for several months and felt settled there.

'Kazem' was placed in specialist foster care however he couldn't settle and became very distressed. The carer tried to help him integrate, by taking him out on day trips and visiting local areas where he could speak the language, but this proved difficult and didn't help the situation. The placement ended after two weeks as 'Kazem' struggled to settle, which was affecting his relationship with the carer which eventually broke down.

If 'Kazem' had been provided with clear details of where he was going and how long for, he would have been able to make an informed decision. To ensure the smooth transition of children, the information provided to them at their original local authority is therefore of paramount importance. It must be as detailed as possible about their destination, encompassing not only practical logistics like location and housing arrangements but also emotional support networks, schooling, and any potential cultural or language adjustments. This comprehensive information ensures that the children are well-prepared for their transfer and can adapt more readily to their new surroundings.

Barnardo's commissioned a research report to understand how community-based support (such as mentoring and befriending schemes) can support care-experienced young people through life transitions and help them to develop positive relationships. Community-based support can help unaccompanied children to learn about their local area, build their skills in spoken and written English, culturally acclimatise and also find existing communities in their local area that may speak their language or be familiar with their culture. The same principles can be applied to children moving through the National Transfer Scheme and into new surroundings.⁷⁵



75. [Building our world – how to use mentoring to create community-based support for care-experienced young people.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

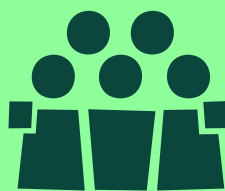


A Guardian for all unaccompanied children

Barnardo's Independent Child Trafficking Service supports children to cope with the practical and emotional trauma of being trafficked and helps them to understand and navigate social care services, criminal justice and immigration.

The service, which is funded by the Home Office, delivers the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) Service, which is underpinned by the Modern Slavery Act 2015, Section 48. Between 2021 and 2022 Barnardo's supported:

Over 1,400 children, many of whom are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, from more than 40 countries, including Vietnam, Albania, Sudan, Afghanistan and Eritrea.



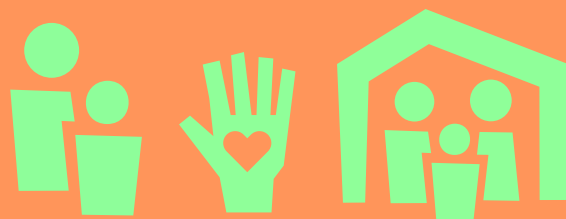
Barnardo's Independent Child Trafficking service (ICTG) has anecdotal evidence of increasing numbers of children refusing to move under the NTS. Children are reporting that they want to stay in familiar cities where their friends are rather than move to an unfamiliar area.

The role of a Guardian could play a pivotal role in looking out for the children's best interests and helping the child to integrate into their new surroundings if the child does want to move through the NTS.



The role of a Guardian should include:

- **Meeting the child as soon as possible when they are due to move or have moved between local authorities.**
- **Meeting with the child face to face to help facilitate their move, and to be available to the young person online.**
- **Preventing children from running away by reminding them that they have someone on their side and providing a consistent adult in their lives.**
- **Showing the child that moving and starting foster care placement may be in their best interest.**
- **Gathering information from the child to help local authorities establish their needs and make sure those needs are met.**
- **Helping the child understand the asylum processes.**
- **Helping the child access relevant services, get into education, and integrate into their new home and community successfully.**
- **Supporting foster carers and social workers to provide care that meets the child's unique needs.**



By focusing on individual needs and the appropriateness of placement, better information sharing between local authorities, and assigning all children a Guardian to help guide them through the process, the NTS can better ensure the well-being and successful integration of children into their new communities.

Conclusion

All children need a safe and loving home. Somewhere to thrive and to be able to be children.

Currently, too many children arriving in the UK having experienced terrible trauma, are missing out on the care, love and support they need.

That's why we're calling on the next Government to develop a fully-funded national strategic plan that would help local authorities to plan and deliver the right services, including by recruiting and training specialist foster carers and providing appropriate, high quality supported accommodation.

About Barnardo's

At Barnardo's, our purpose is clear – changing childhoods and changing lives, so that children, young people, and families are safe, happy, healthy, and hopeful. Last year, we provided essential support to over 370,000 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 800 services and partnerships across the UK. For over 150 years, we've been here for the children and young people who need us most – bringing love, care and hope into their lives and giving them a place where they feel they belong.

We offer a range of services that support all children, no matter their nationality or how they arrived in the UK. This includes our National Counter Trafficking Service in England and Wales which delivers the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service⁷⁶ (ICTG) on behalf of the Home Office; a number of helplines including our Asylum Seeker Support Helpline and Ukrainian Support Helpline⁷⁷; a Scotland-wide welcome service to help families from Ukraine⁷⁸ and the Barnardo's NI Refugee Support Service⁷⁹ which supports families from Syria. We also support displaced children through our family support services, our fostering and adoption services and our supported accommodation.

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76. [Independent Guardian Service | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

77. [helpline.barnardos.org.uk](#)

78. [Barnardo's Scotland Welcome Service | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

79. [NI Refugee Support Service | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)



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