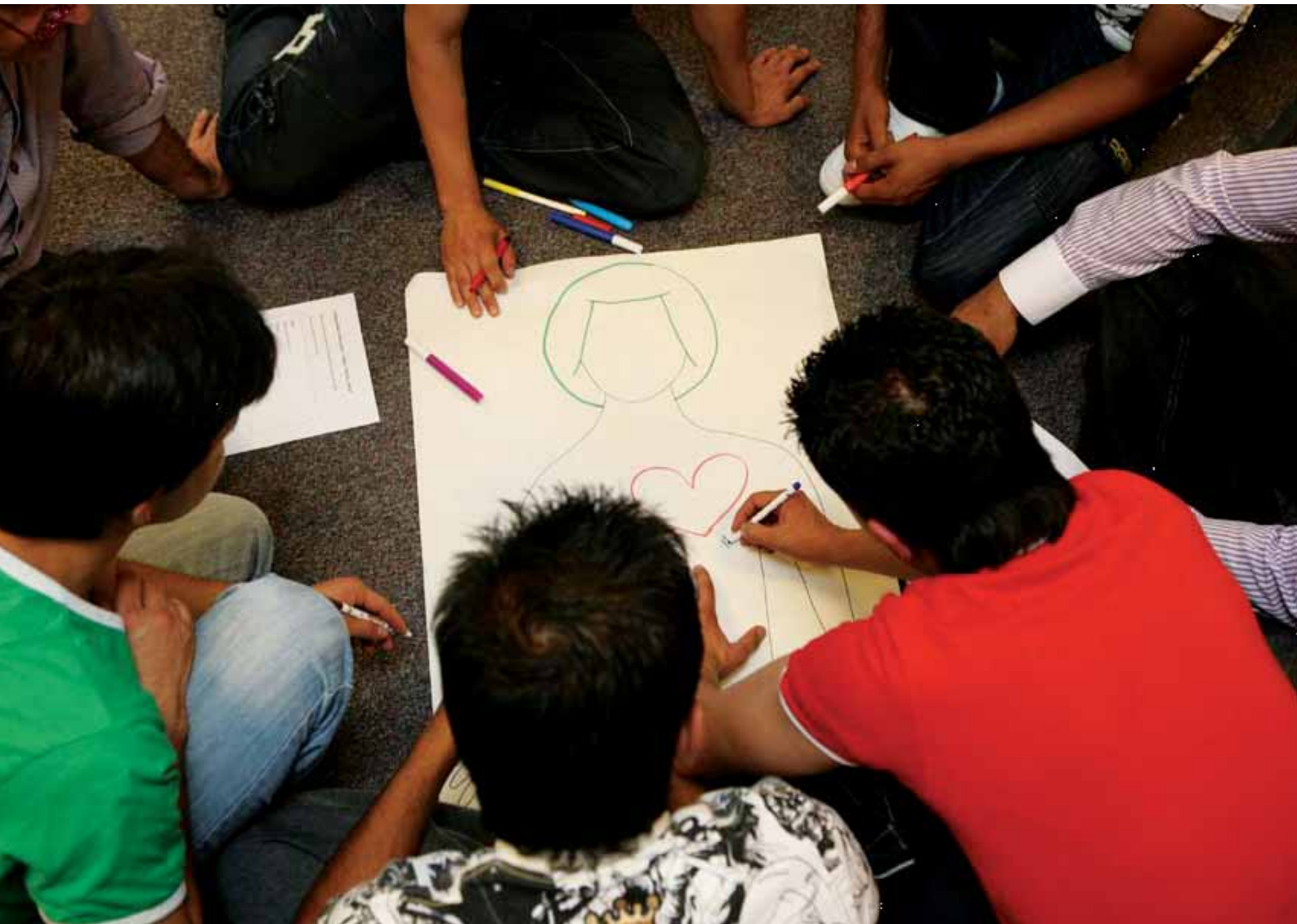
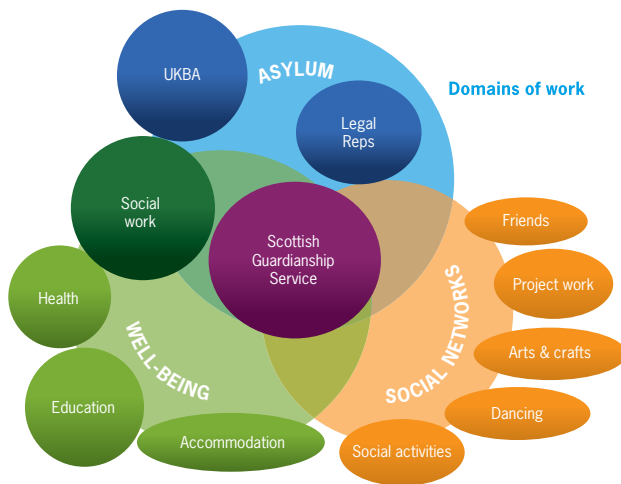


‘SHE ENDURES WITH ME’

An evaluation of the Scottish Guardianship Service Pilot



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Executive summary



Context

Forced migration is a fact of life for many of the world's children. In 2011, there were 35.4 million people 'of concern' to UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), nearly half of whom were under 18 years of age. A small proportion of these children make it to Europe and the North Americas. In the UK, 1,300 children claimed asylum in 2011 (UNHCR, 2012).

There is evidence that separated children and young people seeking asylum have difficulties in understanding and navigating asylum and welfare systems. In such circumstances, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on States that have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child to establish systems of Guardianship to support separated children and young people. To date however there is considerable variation between European countries in the development of comprehensive and sustainable systems of Guardianship. In the UK there is no system at all.

The Scottish Guardianship Service ran as a 30-month Pilot from September 2010, managed by the Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour Child Care Trust, and jointly funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Scottish Government and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The Pilot was established in response to concerns about the experiences of separated young people seeking asylum in Scotland. The Service was independent and non-statutory, placed within the Scottish Government's commitment to Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) that requires professionals to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Scotland.

The Pilot provided an opportunity to undertake an independent evaluation of the value of establishing an independent Guardianship system, the role of Guardians in protecting the rights and interests of separated asylum seeking children young people and about how they could best operate in the context of interagency working. The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund funded the evaluation.

The evaluation

The report is the product of a formative evaluation process which began shortly before the Scottish Guardianship Service was established. The evaluation utilised a reflexive research methodology and a mixed methods approach based on a series of evaluation events and activities including 20 evaluation visits. The report is based on data and information relating to the experiences and outcomes of 81 young people who were allocated a Guardian during a two-year period between 1st September 2010 and 31st August 2012.

In order to capture the complex and inter-connected nature of the work of Guardians, the evaluation explored three domains of practice –

- **the asylum domain**, within which separated young people are assisted in their claims for protection as refugees;
- **the well-being domain**, within which access to and quality of social work, accommodation, education and health provisions are bridged and connected by the Guardians; and
- **the social networks domain**, within which the everyday lives of separated young people are supported.

Young people live in each of these domains simultaneously: what takes place in one domain impacts on their ability to function effectively, and develop, in the others. Equally, the work undertaken by the Guardian in one domain has an impact on the capacity of young people to deal with issues in other areas of their lives. In other words, **the capacity of a young person to deal with issues in relation to his or her asylum claim is often contingent on their general sense of well-being and on feeling socially embedded and connected.**

The work of the Guardians in relation to social networks was not anticipated before the Pilot began but has provided an important opportunity for the lives of young people to become 'normalised' - in other words for them to live and rebuild their lives away from the stresses of the asylum process and the complex negotiations and difficulties associated with securing their day-to-day welfare in terms of housing, education and health. This process of normalisation has helped young people to re-establish their social contacts and skills and build their resilience to deal with the events taking place in their lives. **This, in turn, enables them to deal with issues in the domains of asylum and well-being more effectively.**



Photo by Peter Ian Campbell

The work of the Scottish Guardianship Service

The Service is based in Glasgow but expanded geographically over the lifetime of the Pilot, working with Local Authorities in areas of Scotland where there is less experience of working with separated young people. The value of Guardianship in these areas is particularly clear. The Service also works with age disputed young people provided that they are referred prior to the dispute over age.

The young people allocated a Guardian during the period of the evaluation came from a total of 17 different countries. The main countries of origin were Afghanistan (23.5%), Vietnam (16%), Nigeria (13.6%), Iran (12.3%), Somalia (8.6%), Gambia (6.2%) and Eritrea (5%). Together young people from these seven countries constituted nearly three quarters (71.6%) of young people in the Service. Around three quarters (73%) of those receiving a Service were male and the remainder (27%) female. The majority (85%) were between 15 and 17 years but more than half were age disputed. Around a third of young people had trafficking indicators associated with domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and cannabis cultivation.

The **role of the Guardian** and how it relates to other professionals involved in a young person's life was not originally specified sufficiently clearly. This impeded the way in which the Service was experienced by others, and hindered its work during Year 1. Clarity around the role of the Guardian increased significantly in Year 2 as a result of a Joint Protocol drafted with Social Workers and UKBA and improved day-to-day communication and working. **There is now a clear definition of a Guardian, operationalized across services in line with the needs, wishes, feelings and rights of children seeking asylum.** This is reflected in the Protocol and increased understanding among stakeholders, 82% of who are probably or definitely clear about what a Guardian is and does.

A considerable amount of effort and planning was made to ensuring that there is **effective interagency working**. This has been particularly important because the Service did not have a statutory footing, and Guardians were involved by consensual agreement, where all stakeholders could see the 'added value' of a Guardian's presence in each domain.

During Year 2 there has been improved collaboration and joint working between stakeholders and the Guardianship Service. The work of the Service is generally well regarded by stakeholders.

Findings of the 2012 stakeholder survey

- 74% agree or strongly agree that the Guardian appears sufficiently knowledgeable in relation to immigration and asylum issues (compared with 44% in 2011)
- 74% agree or strongly agree that the Guardian helped to communicate an understanding of the young person's experiences (compared with 59% in 2011)
- 60% agree or strongly agree that the Guardian helped them to understand the young person's fears, worries and concerns (compared with 44% in 2011)
- 60% agree or strongly agree that the Guardian understood and respected their work with the young person (compared with 30% in 2011)
- 60% agree that the Guardian helped to establish and facilitate informal networks of care and support (compared with 44% in 2011)
- 74% agree or strongly agree that the Guardian helped the young person to participate as fully as possible in the asylum process (compared with 48% in 2011)
- 62% strongly agree that the Guardian acts in the young person's 'best interests' (compared with 28% in 2011)
- 68% were either totally or very satisfied with the work of the Service (compared with 56% in 2011)



Photo by Peter Ian Campbell

Young people's experiences of the Service

The views of young people who have been allocated a Guardian were almost uniformly positive, sometimes glowing. The Guardians were regularly described by young people as being **like friends, family members, trouble-shooters, connectors, diary organisers and guides**. They helped reduce bewilderment and loneliness, particularly just after arrival, when they told young people about Scotland, other agencies and services, and the rules of asylum and welfare.

According to the young people, the Guardians **kept their promises**. They were **prompt about keeping to appointments**, and were **prepared to wait**, un-disappointed in young people who were sometimes late. They **understood privacy**, and the need to be left alone sometimes, and would **'check in' by text**, to make sure that the young person was aware of a Guardian's continued attention to their well-being at times of withdrawal or silence.

Evidence has accrued of **Guardians as 'sense-makers'** for the young people, and as translators of their new environments, explaining systems, processes, laws, obligations and rights in systematic ways. Young people believe that the Service puts them – rather than the processes to which they are subjected – at the centre and that the Guardians provide them with a level of acceptance and support which, for complex reasons, they are unable to secure from other adults in their lives.

"Even if I don't say anything she understands me. Even sometimes I've tried to upset her on purpose just to test how far I can go, but she doesn't let go and that is good. She helps me to know myself better. She endures with me."

Outcomes for young people

During the course of the evaluation we identified evidence of the 'added value' of Guardianship across the three domains of asylum, well-being, and social networks.

The domain of asylum

For young people the asylum process was often experienced

as stressful and bewildering: as one young person explained, 'It's like you are carrying a big rock'. Some of the young people had not been formally educated, did not read or speak English and were unfamiliar with formal processes and procedures. Others had received some formal education and were very articulate but nonetheless struggled to express themselves.

There is evidence that Guardians played an important role in **explaining the asylum process** to young people. This was particularly clear where a Social Worker had not yet been allocated or where the relationship with the Social Worker had broken down. **Guardians used simple, clear language and a range of methods and techniques to ensure that young people understood roles, rules and contexts**. Explanations were often repeated, and repetition was valued by young people.

Because Guardians had **time to build up a relationship of trust with the young people**, and because they were perceived as being on the young person's side, they were able to encourage young people to disclose information which they were not willing or able to discuss with other professionals.

"The project has made a real difference to the lives and experiences of the young people it has worked with... There is a vast difference in the level of understanding of the asylum process and the ability to engage in it in a positive way to ensure that the information that UKBA need to make the most appropriate decision is communicated"
(Legal Representative)

The majority of stakeholders consider that the work of the Guardians 'added value' to the work undertaken in relation to the asylum claim and, in particular, that it helped young people to articulate their experiences.

74% of stakeholders agree or strongly agree that the Guardian helps to communicate an understanding of the young person's experiences.

74% of stakeholders agree or strongly agree that the Guardian helps the young person to participate as fully as possible in the asylum process.



It is difficult to draw clear conclusions from the evidence about the impact of Guardianship on asylum outcomes, but better engagement in the asylum process together with improved information-gathering was seen to increase the possibility that a young person receives Refugee Status. Sometimes Guardians assisted a young person to **exercise his or her right of appeal against the initial decision**. The Service explicitly engaged young people in the issue of return where necessary and timely to do so and where a young person was willing to engage with this issue.

The domain of well-being

The role of the Guardian in this domain was primarily one of **linking young people to resources and keeping them going there, ensuring good standards of service delivery and professional behaviour, and filling gaps in resources and services in a timely way**. Examples included identifying and securing appropriate accommodation particularly at points of transition, most notably the transition into adult services when a young person turns 18. Other examples were of Guardians helping young people to maintain educational links, and monitoring distress and symptoms of withdrawal, discussing these with other professionals and the young people themselves in relation to organising treatment that was necessary, bespoke and timely.

There is evidence that these interventions were viewed as being helpful not only by young people but also by Social Workers, Residential Workers, and education and health providers, among others. This had not always been the case: during Year 1 in particular there were tensions and disagreements regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Guardians relative to other service providers, particularly Social Workers. Over time however these tensions largely dissipated as roles became more clearly defined and better understood. The development of a Joint Protocol between the Scottish Guardianship Service, Social Workers and UKBA contributed significantly to this process.

Moreover **there is identifiable pattern of practice and strategies used by Guardians and others that generate the best outcomes for young people**. Improvements in service delivery and in outcomes for separated young people in Scotland was the result of a significant effort on the part of all of those working with the Service to collaborate and work together to improve their own practice and that of others. Guardianship lifted the overall quality of service provision by encouraging

professionals to work together more closely and demonstrating the advantages for young people when they did so.

The domain of social networks

Research evidence related to separated young people emphasises the importance of generating and sustaining safe informal networks of care and protection in order for them to feel 'at ease' in new environments. In generating opportunities for young people to participate in social activities, the Guardians' work in this domain appeared to offer **a sense of happy punctuation** in their lives, not driven by deadlines, correctness, and neatness. It was manifest in two forms, one diffused and the other made of systematic and purposeful activities.

The diffusion was shown by creating a culture of warmth in the spaces and practices used by the Guardians. This was based on what appeared to be **spontaneous acts of kindness and companionship** – being taken shopping, going to prize-giving events and cheering loudly when the young person succeeded, the Service remembering your birthday, having someone ring up and ask you if the stomach-ache was going away, being affectionate, having social activities where 'not serious talking' happened, dancing, playing, singing and chances for young people to be good and do good in ways that made 'everyone happy'. The Service generated a culture of welcome to young people, and created a sense of 'home' at the Guardianship office. This Office/Home was a poignant contrast to their Home Office experiences.

"They know where the crisps are, and they help themselves"
(Guardian)

The precision focussed on the young people participating in **activities that developed skills, contacts, confidence, and understandings of Scotland as a place to be in**. Regular group work, art and craft projects, photography lessons, trips to the zoo, the sea and countryside or other cities and safe landscapes, and participation in celebrations - allowed young people to spend time together, and generate new network opportunities.

"The Guardians make us feel that we are human"
(Young Person)



A model for others

We conclude with a discussion of the extent to which the Scottish Guardianship Service meets the core standards of Guardianship practice developed by Goeman et al (2011). Our evaluation identifies evidence that:

- The Guardian advocates for all decisions to be taken in the best interests of the child (Standard 1);
- The Guardian ensures the young person's participation in decisions which affect them (Standard 2);
- The Guardian works in partnership with others, most notably Social Workers and Residential Workers, to protect the safety of the young person (Standard 3);
- The Guardian acts as an advocate for the rights of the child or young person (Standard 4);
- The Guardian acts as a bridge between, and focal point for, the young person and other actors involved (Standard 5);
- The Guardian works to ensure the timely and implementation of a durable solution for young people (Standard 6) appropriate to prepare the young person for all possible outcomes, including return;

- The Guardians treat the children and young people with whom they work with respect and dignity (Standard 7), that they form relationships built on mutual trust, openness and confidentiality (Standard 8) and that they are accessible (Standard 9); and
- The Guardians are equipped with relevant professional knowledge and competences (Standard 10) and that the Guardians themselves are proactive in identifying their learning and development needs.

The Service acted as a mechanism for ensuring that service providers worked together and that the overall level of provision was improved. In so doing Guardianship supported organisations and institutions to meet their statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people, in terms of both process and outcomes, as intended under GIRFEC and the Scottish Government's commitment towards harmonising domestic legislation, policies, services, strategies, and practices with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Much of the learning from the Pilot could be usefully shared with policy makers and practitioners in other parts of the UK and Europe.

Downloadable PDFs of both the executive summary and full report are available on the following websites:

www.aberlour.org.uk

www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk



The Scottish Guardianship Service has secured future funding in Scotland. As our report was being finalised the Scottish Government announced that it would fund the core Service for a further three years, subject to review after one year. Efforts are being made to secure additional resources to enable the work in relation to social networks to continue and for other areas of work, including in relation to returns, to be further developed