£1 million to research care of child migrants

A researcher who travelled to ‘the Jungle’ refugee camp in Calais to see how unaccompanied child migrants lived has secured £1 million of funding from the Economic and Social Research Council to study the care of lone child refugees. The new research project led by The Open University will investigate the care of separated child migrants who arrive in the UK. The project team will work with young researchers within refugee communities to gather data on how migrants and those involved in their care make sense of, and value, care relationships and practices.

Lead researcher Dr Sarah Crafter, a Senior Lecturer in Psychology, and the lead Co-Investigator Dr Rachel Rose, an Associate Professor in Sociology (UCL) had their interest sparked after watching a news report about unaccompanied child migrants in Calais camps, and how in the absence of family they cared for each other. Dr Crafter says: “We went to ‘The Jungle’ refugee camp in Calais to investigate how child migrants coped, and to build links with charities working in the area. It was incredibly moving and hard to put into words how horrible the situation was. But understanding life in the camp wasn’t possible without a view of the children’s’ migrant journeys and the appeal of the UK as a destination. It was this that led us to researching the care they received once they reached the UK.”

Dr Crafter says that when unaccompanied children arrive in the UK they face conflicting treatment: “On the one hand we have a duty of care because of their child status so we must protect them, but on the other hand their immigration status means they are sometimes treated with suspicion or hostility. Care in that situation becomes an ambiguous concept.”
The project will work with local organisations such as the MEENA centre in Birmingham and Refugee Youth, alongside Barnardo's and the Refugee Council, to recruit and train young adults from migrant communities to gather research data. These young people will connect to children who arrived as separated child migrants in the UK to find out how they care for each other and discuss their experiences of the welfare and immigration system. The research team will gather data from around 60 children aged 11-18 years old; most of these will be refugees from Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan and Albania.

Professor Alison Park, Director of Research at ESRC said: “UNICEF estimate that, by the end of 2017, there were 13 million child refugees and over 900,000 asylum-seeking children worldwide. ESRC is pleased to be funding this UK-based research that will help us better understand how child migrants separated from their parents provide care and support for one another while navigating complex immigration and welfare systems. It will help create and develop best practice in the care and support of this vulnerable group and will provide valuable insights for policy makers and charities.”

The research results will be used to help children understand their own treatment and care as they go through welfare and asylum system and build connections to other young migrants. The project will support practitioners who work with child migrants through online resources, and study the wider cultural, political, economic backdrop of care influences institutions and individuals who work within them.

The project is a collaboration with University College London, University of Liverpool, the University of Northampton, the University of Oxford, the University of Bedfordshire and Coram’s Children’s Legal Centre. It begins in May 2019 and will run until July 2022.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

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