

# Hosting strangers: hospitality and family practices in fostering unaccompanied refugee young people

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## ABSTRACT

Refugee young people entering foster care face transitions as they settle into life in a new country and household. Drawing on findings from a study on foster care for refugee young people in England, this paper examines encounters and negotiations with the public worlds of the asylum system and foster care delivery within the intimate setting of the household and everyday domestic practices in foster care. The paper considers Derrida's neologism 'hostipitality' to explore challenges in hospitality in this context. The framework of 'family practices' is then applied to explore how foster carers and young people 'did' family in foster care. It was found that family practices were inhibited by tensions and challenges in the notion of 'hospitality', but family practices also offered opportunities to respond and promote young people's sense of belonging in the family in this environment. It concludes that hospitality at the threshold is necessary, but that the most successful foster care relationships were able to move through and beyond hospitality to relationships of family-like intimacy.

## INTRODUCTION

Unaccompanied refugee young people are under the age of 18, claiming asylum in their own right and with no parent/regular caregiver in the UK (Wade *et al.* 2005). They are supported by Children's Services in the local authorities in which they present in a range of accommodation including residential care, but more commonly shared housing with floating support or foster care. They are likely to be placed in foster care if they are under the age of 16 when they arrive or are deemed particularly vulnerable. In policy terms, an 'asylum seeker' is someone who has applied for asylum and is waiting for a decision on their claim. A 'refugee' has been granted asylum and given leave to remain in the UK, initially for 5 years. In this paper, the term 'refugee' is used in its broad sense to refer to young people at all stages of the asylum process.

Research in the UK on placements for unaccompanied minors has usually focused on young people in semi-independent housing, or mentioned foster care briefly alongside other placements (Wade *et al.* 2005;

Brownlees & Finch 2010). There is growing research evidence that explores fostering practice in general (Sinclair 2005), but limited evidence focusing on the specific fostering experiences of unaccompanied minors. This paper discusses findings from case studies and focus groups in a study on foster care for unaccompanied minors in four local authorities in England (Wade *et al.* 2012). The aims of this study were to

- Describe the fostering experiences of young people and foster carers
- Identify specific features of the fostering task in the broad resettlement needs of young people
- Assess the support provided to young people and preparation, training and support of foster carers
- Identify factors that facilitated or constrained the making of placements.

International literature highlights some advantages and disadvantages of foster care for unaccompanied minors (Tolfree 2004; Hek 2007). Advantages identified include faster adjustment to a new language and culture, stability, and individual care and emotional

support. Disadvantages include young people feeling excluded from foster families, foster carers lacking specialist knowledge which other support workers provide, and lack of ethnic or linguistic matching. Fostering may be a confusing concept and young people may not know what to expect (Hek 2007). Mann & Tolfree (2003) found some young people feared discrimination, being treated less favourably than foster carers' birth children, not being allowed to attend school and being made to work. In the UK, foster care has been described positively by some young people when it was somewhere they felt valued and cared for (Hek 2007; Chase *et al.* 2008). However, other young people have felt that they were treated differently, were uncared for and isolated (Chase *et al.* 2008).

In contrast to UK born young people entering foster care, refugee young people's experiences of transition and settlement into new households were entwined with a wider process of arrival and settlement into life in a new country. They brought with them the legacy of not only life in another family and household but also life in another country, often one in the midst of conflict, violence and disorder. Many young people entered their first foster placement within days/hours of their arrival in the UK. Their experiences of transitions into foster care were considered within a wider experience of transition, which encapsulated, but also extended beyond, domains of household and family. As foster children and as refugees, these young people were subject to the gaze and interventions of the asylum system and social work practice. This paper examines their encounters and negotiations with the public worlds of the asylum system and foster care delivery, within the intimate setting of the household and everyday domestic practices in foster care. Through the framework of 'family practices' (Morgan 1996) and Derrida's (2000a) neologism 'hostipitality', it explores how foster carers and young people 'did' family in foster care, how family practices intersected with tensions and challenges in the notion of 'hospitality', and how these affected young people's sense of belonging in families. The paper identifies three broad modes of hospitality and inclusion of young people in foster families, categorized here as 'lodger', 'guest' and 'like-family'. Focusing on 'like-family' relationships, it explores how these came about through (i) examining the time span of hospitality in the development of relationships and negotiations of power, and (ii) family practices in the creation or constraint of intimacy in relationships.

### 'Hostipitality'

The term 'host society' refers to established populations residing in countries, towns and neighbourhoods where refugees arrive. Foster carers and their families can also be conceived as 'host families' offering hospitality to young people who cross the threshold into their households. In delivering foster care to unaccompanied young people, foster carers are at the forefront of the nation's threshold.

'Hosting' implies an offer of hospitality from those who own or control a territory that is entered to the newcomers who cross the threshold. Yet as Derrida (2000a,b) argued, the notion of hospitality holds an inherent tension. His neologism '*hostipitality*' [my italics] drew attention to the shared etymological route of the words 'hospitality' and 'hostility' (Derrida 2000a). In offering hospitality, hosts claim control of the household. Guests cannot, in practice, 'make themselves at home' because the agency required to do so also potentially disrupts the host's order and control of the household (Sirriyeh 2013). This positioning of host and guest makes it difficult to extend absolute (unconditional) hospitality.

'Absolute hospitality' depends on a context of *visitation*, the unanticipated arrival of the stranger, rather than *invitation* (Derrida 2000b). It requires hosts to open up their home not just to a known invited person, but to 'the absolute, unknown, anonymous other' (Derrida 2000b, p. 25). Nothing is asked for in return, not even the stranger's identification. Absolute hospitality is a gift not a duty and there is no expectation of a commitment to the host's terms and conditions. The neologism 'hostiplitality' can be applied to describe displays of hospitality, caution and challenging negotiations of power and reciprocity which the study found within foster placements.

### Family practices

Rees & Pithouse (2008, p. 339) described foster care as 'the coming together of strangers' where 'key participants in fostering have to co-construct and learn new understandings about intimacy within a relatively short and limited span of time'. In the context of family separation, the asylum process and uncertainty about what the future holds, this short time span can also be a time of uncertainty and emotional distress for young refugees. In examining how relationships developed between young people and foster carers during placements, this paper explores how family practices were 'made', 'displayed' and used in

establishing close family-like attachments, or tensions in more challenging relationships.

It has been argued that contemporary families are defined more by 'doing' family than 'being' family (Morgan 1996). In kinship research, there has been a shift from a primary focus on biological connectedness to examining the social construction of families and ways people 'do' family in regular routines and interactions that become embedded into everyday lives. Finch's (2007) concept of 'display' examines how family practices are established and recognized as family practices by those in and beyond the family. Sometimes, acts need to be displayed so they are conveyed to, and understood by, others and become established as acts of family. Actions may be interpreted differently by people. In foster care, new family members must learn to recognize and become included in existing family practices, but also co-create new practices. In order to become effective as family practices, they have 'to be understood by others as carrying meaning associated with "family"' (Finch 2007, p. 67). Research exploring family practices often focuses on 'new' or 'non-normative' family structures, although so far with more limited attention to adoption and fostering (Jones & Hackett 2011).

## METHODS

Fieldwork took place in 2009–2010. The study incorporated a census drawing on local authority information systems to provide a profile of all 2113 unaccompanied minors looked after by the four local authorities; a postal survey of 133 foster carers, case studies with 23 foster carers and 21 young people in their care (two young people did not agree to be interviewed); three young people's focus groups; four social worker focus groups; four interviews with children's asylum team managers; and the production of practice guidance.

This paper explores findings from case study interviews and young people's focus groups. The sample for the case studies was drawn from the foster carer survey sample. The young people interviewed were 13–18 years old and had been in the UK for between 10 months and 5 years. Eighty-eight per cent of unaccompanied minors in the local authorities at that time were male (Wade *et al.* 2012). The case study sample was all male. Unfortunately, no females agreed to participate so we cannot compare experiences of males and females or explore in-depth gendered experiences of young women. Young people originated from seven countries (14 from Afghanistan). With a small non-

random sample encompassing several countries, it was not possible to determine clear differences aligned specifically to nationality. Four young people had refugee status and the others had 'Discretionary Leave to Remain' (temporary leave to remain usually until the age of 18). Seven foster carer interviews were conducted with fostering couples. The rest were one-to-one interviews with female foster carers. Most placements were cross-cultural, although two young people were with foster carers of the same ethnic origin. Young people and foster carers were interviewed separately. All young people were offered the opportunity to be interviewed in their first language, although only one took this option. It is possible there was bias towards young people with positive experience of placements, as both young people and foster carers agreeing to be interviewed were more likely to have had positive experiences. However, in interviewing foster carers and young people, we gained two-sided in-depth case studies. As our aim was to identify good practice and understand the development of relationships, we opted for case studies.

Young people living in foster placements may be wary of expressing criticism. Where this was their only placement, they lack alternatives to compare it with. In order to balance these effects, three focus groups were held with 19 young people (two male groups and one female group aged 15–20) who had previously lived in foster placements. Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed using the software package MAXQDA (VERBI GmbH, Berlin, Germany).

The foster carer survey was conducted anonymously. Information packs and questionnaires were routed to carers by Children's Services. Questionnaires contained a sheet foster carers could complete to agree to an interview with them and the young person in their care. If so, they provided the research team with their contact details. Consent was rechecked and negotiated with research participants by telephone and again in person prior to interview. At interview, this information was reiterated and it was made clear that interviewees could withdraw consent at any stage and that, if any questions caused discomfort, they were at perfect liberty not to answer or to take a break. Young people were not asked about the circumstances in which they left their country of origin or details of their asylum claims. It was explained that confidentiality would only be breached if information was disclosed, which indicated a child was at significant risk of harm. Team leaders in each social work team agreed to be the key contact who

researchers would inform in such an event. Data were held securely in line with data protection requirements. To ensure anonymity, participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

### Three models of relationships in foster care

Drawing on concepts of hospitality and family, participants' accounts of integration in family relationships fell broadly into three 'models' categorized here as 'like-family', 'guest' and 'lodger'.

#### 'Like-family'

Some young people and foster carers established new 'like-family' (Mason & Tipper 2008) connections, bonds and status. Kinship status in relationships was displayed, particularly through the use of naming to mark proximity (Mason & Tipper 2008). Titles like 'mum', 'auntie' and 'son' were used, or descriptions of foster carers and foster siblings as 'like a mum', 'like a sister' or 'a special family' were used rather than terms like 'my foster carer' or 'her husband' used by young people in other foster placements. Like-family status was sometimes displayed through the production and display of photographs of young people with foster families.

We were taking some photos and we said: 'Oh yeah, let's get the family', and they [foster children] stood away and everyone else went: 'Oh no, no, no, in, in!' It was just one of those moments where you think, OK, yeah, that's it, you are. (Eleanor, foster carer)

Researchers were shown photographs of foster children with foster carers' families displayed prominently in the house on mantelpieces and display cabinets, these photographs acting as 'tools of display' (Finch 2007; Jones & Hackett 2011). There was an expectation from foster carers and young people that these relationships would endure beyond the end of the placement because of the close bonds.

#### 'Guests'

In other foster placements, foster carers and young people respected and valued each other, but without a tight bond. There was often a lack of common interests and divergent lifestyles. Often they did not spend much time together or develop a close knowledge of each other. Relationships were seen as time limited until the end of the placement.

Young people also sought different degrees of membership within families and sometimes did not expect

high levels of intimacy, simply wanting respectful relationships. As Nouri (Iran), a focus group participant, explained, 'you're not, you know, their child anyway, but at least show you just some respect'.

#### 'Lodgers'

Finally, in some relationships described to us (usually referring to past placements), there was distance and degrees of tension. Here, foster carers' approaches had been to deliver the service they were contracted to provide and young people had not felt a sense of belonging in households.

In order to examine key questions addressed in this paper, the following sections focus on the development of the first model of 'like-family' relationships and challenges in establishing this, drawing on some contrasting examples from 'lodger' relationships.

### Developing relationships

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the context of who agreed to be interviewed, most descriptions of current foster care relationships were categorized as 'like-family' or 'guests', although two were in the 'lodger' category. However, past placements were also mentioned and here there was greater variation across the three categories. There was a more even split across the three relationship models in young people's focus groups. Overall, there was usually a gradual development in relationships, but changes also occurred at key moments when certain events and responses were catalysts in the development of relationships. The following sections identify key acts of hospitality and family practices that helped produce these developments.

#### Threshold moments

Beginning with a look at arrival into foster placements, it is suggested that hospitality can be conceived as a moment in time. Dikec *et al.* (2009, p. 6) discussed Levinas' attention to 'the originary impulse that precipitates any association with others' – how receptive people are to each other and inspired by the needs of others. Dikec *et al.* (2009, p. 6) observed that hospitality 'proceeds from that *vertigenous moment* when one feels *bound to the other* – the moment that makes possible the ever risky tipping together of unfamiliar lives'.

While for both foster carers and young people, memories of some events and chronology were hazy,

memories of first meetings and impressions of each other were often clear and centred on the emotional response to the circumstances and to each other. They often had only a few hours notice of who was arriving or where they were going and little information about each other. While some young people had been in the UK for some time or were moving between placements, other arrivals into foster care were often late at night and at the end of long journeys.

There was this boy, his face covered in mud, his shoes, everything, with this plastic bag with all his dirty things, belongings . . . he said, 'Hello' [laughs] and he was so tired. (Eva, foster carer)

In 'like-family' placements, a key action by foster carers at the threshold was to welcome young people and provide rest and refuge. Carers and young people spoke of immediate practical responses made by foster carers to help young people feel physically comfortable and recover from their journey, such as making them food, showing them around the house and how to use appliances, and allowing them to rest:

She said to me, 'Do you want any food?' I said, 'Yeah'. I was starving. And then, she said to me, 'Do you want to go to sleep?' I said, 'Yeah, I want to go to sleep', because I was really tired. And then I went to sleep and it was like a dream, like, I was feeling so nice. (Abbas, Afghanistan)

Returning to the definition of 'absolute hospitality', the provision of a contracted and arranged foster care service meant that these interactions were characterized by 'invitation' rather than 'visitation'. However, given the limited time for preparation, the sudden circumstances of arrival and emotions displayed towards each other, there was often a 'tipping together' (Dikec *et al.* 2009) at this point and a recapturing of the surprise and unforeseeable circumstances of 'visitation'. At this moment, pathways of hospitality were chosen and doubts, or at least questions, were suspended.

In contrast, in some 'lodger' placements, significant doubts arose and were expressed, constraining the levels of hospitality foster carers were able to offer. A foster carer described a short-term emergency placement where she had been unable to suspend the question of age. Faced with a young person she believed to be an adult, this carer was anxious at being alone in the house with a stranger she regarded as an adult male. While she accepted the young person into her house, that night she barricaded her bedroom door with a piece of furniture. A few young people faced immediate clarifications of foster carers' 'house rules' and the terms of their acceptance into the household.

In a focus group, Alice (Ghana) said: 'She [foster carer] told me her rules. What she likes and what she doesn't like; the house; bathroom; everything'.

Hospitality understood as a gift to an unknown stranger must be time limited. Dikec *et al.* (2009, p. 5) referred to time limits of hospitality within different cultures, illustrating this with reference to the Swahili saying, 'treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe'. An extended period of hospitality may become a source of tension, but also a barrier to intimacy and the development of relationships. Without reciprocation and opportunities for young people to exert agency and contribute to the framework of home and family, there are potential limitations to the formation of relationships and creation of a sense of belonging. Hospitality is an important first step, but a movement through and beyond hospitality to intimacy and like-family interactions helped produce positive relationships and outcomes for young people.

#### *Mastery of the house*

A previous study found a key element in young refugees' definitions of home was their ability to exert control and choice in their lives (Sirriyeh 2010). The current study found examples of young people who wished to contribute to household activities, to not simply be recipients of gifts of hospitality, but rather active members of the household. Nadir (Afghanistan) and his foster carer discovered a common interest and used this as a basis to develop their relationship.

When he came here, the first week I was building a shed at the back, when he didn't know a word in English. But every tool I wanted, he knew what I wanted and would pass it to me . . . He knew exactly what I wanted and he'd pick it up and would join in and cut a bit of wood for me . . . I think he enjoyed that. I think that's really where the bond started. (Steve, foster carer)

Reciprocation and active roles in household activities were also evident in other aspects of life in placements. Many foster carers reflected on the importance of foster carers adopting some degree of flexibility in the organization and control of household life and activities. Suggestions included incorporating young people's food practices within existing family food practices, celebrating events in young people's cultural traditions as well as those already celebrated by foster families, and finding out about young people's interests to organize some family social activities around these. There was criticism of carers who expected

young people to assimilate into the existing household, as opposed to both young people and foster families taking action and making adjustments.

Young people's access to food, freedom to regulate their own consumption of food and their role in structuring the household's food culture were frequently used as illustrations of the extent to which they felt a sense of belonging in the household and the degree to which foster carers sought to help them feel at home. Recognition of the social role of food has been incorporated into research on migration and settlement, families and foster care (Kohli *et al.* 2010; Rees *et al.* 2010). Food and family food practices hold symbolic significance and can be tools and measurements of settlement, power, agency and inclusion and feelings of belonging and home (Kohli *et al.* 2010).

There were many successful food experiences in like-family foster placements where young people were encouraged to become involved in food choices and preparation. While familiarity was important to many young people, choice and control was also significant, whether in choosing food from countries of origin or new kinds of 'comfort' food. Young people contributed to the creation and establishment of new family food practices. Through their incorporation in decision-making here, foster carers displayed to young people their desire to see and recognize them as active and included members of the household.

In contrast, some young people reported monitoring and limitations on access to food. Nouri (Iran), a focus group participant, described food being locked away and being reproached for inviting friends over and offering them snacks. Similar examples of regulation and control were also given in relation to use of space in the household. In a focus group, Ali (Afghanistan) said, 'The family gave us room especially for us there. I am allowed to live there but I am not allowed every day to come into the sitting room watching TV'. In patterns of interactions and reciprocations, mastery of the house became shared to an extent in some households, while it remained more exclusively in the control of foster carers in others.

The control of household activities was determined not only by foster carers and young people but also by the negotiation of social work and foster care professional guidelines. A key site of conflict was in the negotiation of 'house rules' and boundaries, and tensions between fulfilling social work regulations and facilitating 'normal' life routines and practices. Some young people wished to share bedrooms as they were unused to sleeping alone, but were unable to do so because of safeguarding rules. There were also

instances of conflict over what was seen as challenging 'teenage' behaviour. Children in foster care can feel they are under greater regulation and scrutiny than their peers (Geenen & Powers 2007). While teenagers may seek to test boundaries, those in foster care can lack the security of doing so within the structure of solid and longstanding relationships with their carers (Sinclair *et al.* 2005). Sometimes, there was a clash of expectations arising from young people's earlier life experiences. Some young people had lived apart from parents/caregivers before arriving in the UK and had difficulties in adapting to UK social work regulations about appropriate boundaries and safeguarding of children. In such cases, safeguarding actions were viewed by young people as attempts to control and curtail their wishes, particularly as guidelines were set out in fostering guidance, rather than emanating solely from intimate family expressions of love and care. While recognizing the importance of safeguarding, some carers contrasted the rigidity of the application of externally set rules with the negotiated and individualized approach used with their birth children.

In addition to control and choice, young people judged their sense of belonging by the closeness of the bond between themselves, the foster carer and the foster carer's family. The level of trust and care displayed was crucial to these bonds.

#### *Trust, duty and care*

Trust was important for establishing early relationships of hospitality and determining whether strangers were characterized as a risk or friendly presence to be welcomed. Trust was also crucial in establishing a secure base, intimacy and positive relationships later on as young people settled into placements (Schofield & Beek 2006). Both carers and young people acknowledged the importance of developing trust in order to build successful relationships. They discussed the degree to which they trusted each other, the ways in which trust became embedded in family practices and ways in which family practices helped establish trust.

These relationships were built in the aftermath of conflict and forced migration where young people may have been subject to 'cultures of mistrust' (Fink 2001) and had to be cautious about who to trust in order to ensure survival and safety. Four other key issues raised challenges in the development of trust in the context of the negotiation of asylum and social work structures within the intimate setting of a family home. These were age disputes, asylum claims, and

young people's status as young people in care, and perceptions of foster carers' motivations. Foster carers and young people emphasized different concerns: foster carers focusing on the first two themes and young people focusing on the latter two.

Most carers and young people developed some level of trust in each other. However, there were also examples of degrees of mistrust or, more commonly, acknowledgements of doubts or questions carers had about aspects of young people's accounts. Foster carers usually referred to previous placements, but some spoke about current ones. Some thought young people had claimed to be younger than they were because they expected to be treated more favourably in the asylum system. Concerns centred on (i) lack of documentation evidence of age; (ii) older physical appearances; and (iii) behaviour which foster carers associated with older ages or early adulthood. There has been extensive debate in relation to the procedure and accuracy of age assessments (Watters 2008). Age is normally assessed on a holistic basis by social workers. In some instances, it was evident that despite social workers having accepted the young person as a minor, foster carers expressed limited confidence in the accuracy of these official age assessment processes. Once young people's 'official' age had been settled, continuing processes of surveillance and assessment by foster carers had negative implications for relationships of trust, and for young people's integration into families. Links between age and behaviour were made by foster carers in some 'lodger' placements, and non-compliant behaviour became linked to suspicions that the young person was older than their claimed age, rather than being regarded as ordinary teenage behaviour.

In contrast, other foster carers were sceptical about age, but aware of the complexity of this issue. Their approach was to work with the young person's official age and not become involved in the age assessment process. These carers often built good relationships with the young people and were in the 'like-family' or 'guest' categories. Some foster carers were aware of age disputes from social workers or schools, but remained neutral on this topic. This professional area of intervention was not seen as compatible with the development of foster family relations and the issue was not allowed to cross the threshold into the intimacy of the household.

While a few carers expressed some scepticism about young people's asylum claims, this was generally without the degree of mistrust attached to comments on age. Reflections on asylum claims were often made

by foster carers who had close relationships with young people and successful placements, while foster carers who disputed young people's ages often did not refer explicitly to suspicions about asylum claims. Reasons for this are unclear. Foster carers who were uncertain about young people's asylum claims worried about young people's prospects of receiving refugee status and how to support them through the asylum process. While concerned about outcomes for young people, these foster carers often chose not to focus on troubling specifics and found points of empathy with the wider overall story, continuing to support and advocate for the young person. As with Kohli's (2007) 'confederate' social workers, these foster carers accepted and worked with the complexity in young people's narratives, took the young person's side and became trusted companions.

It's . . . trying to understand the loss, whether the stories that they tell are true or not, you still have to appreciate the fact that they've made such a big journey by themselves, and they are still only young. (Stephanie, foster carer)

To illustrate young people's trust in their foster carers, carers and young people in like-family relationships often referred to examples where young people had confided in carers. Links were made between displays of trust here and the status of their 'like-family' relationships. Mahmud (Afghanistan) said: 'She is like my mum. I tell Leena [foster carer] many things'. Many young people in 'like-family' relationships had spoken to foster carers about their lives in their countries of origin and journeys to the UK. These stories emerged gradually as foster carers and young people came to know one another. However, there were also key moments in developing relationships of trust. Some foster carers were actively involved in supporting young people in their asylum claims and many had worked with the young person to tell and record their account for interviews and court hearings. This activity required high levels of trust and openness from young people and trust and empathy from foster carers. This contributed to, and resulted from, the building of close bonds. Key moments were also noted in other situations when foster carers proved to young people that they were on their side and would support them.

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

In contrast to foster carers' focus on asylum and age, young people often explained mistrust as

emanating from foster carers' response to them as young people in care. They were concerned that as a result of being in care, they were regarded with mistrust as unknown strangers in the house. While young people in like-family relationships were given keys to the house and invited to treat it as their own, some in other placements were denied a key. Speaking about his former placement, David (Sierra Leone) said: 'rooms are locked and the only rooms that are open without no lock is ours'. Alice (Ghana) was also made to leave the house whenever her foster carer went out; 'She said she would not keep me in her home because she don't know me. She just knew me through fostering so she will not leave me in her house'. In contrast, in 'like-family' placements, young people and foster carers illustrated the levels of trust placed in young people, as displayed through the higher levels of responsibility young people were given, the greater extent to which they were entrusted with material valuables or younger foster siblings, their access to space in the home and whether they were given a key to the house.

Finally, young people and foster carers discussed perceptions of carers' motivations in providing foster care. Michael (foster carer) said, 'He can see that people do care, and I think that goes a long way. I think if you see that you're not just an item, you're somebody'. As stated previously, absolute hospitality is rendered as a gift rather than a duty. In a context where foster care is a contracted service with a set of duties attached to the task and where foster carers receive financial allowances, how do carers display that the care and support they provide to young people is not just about duty? This is not a theme exclusive to fostering unaccompanied minors. As Sinclair *et al.* (2005) found, children in foster care sometimes express concern that their foster carers might be just 'doing it for the money', or that they are not valued as much as other children in the household.

Young people used a range of measures to assess whether foster carers felt a bond to them beyond duty. First, foster carers' generosity and small gifts were a means through which young people measured and confirmed levels of care and affection provided to them. Mohammed (Afghanistan) said, 'When she [foster carer] went off for the holiday to Africa, she bring some present for me'. Extra small gifts that were *not from the official financial allowance* had particular symbolic status. In contrast, Gul (Afghanistan) had felt hurt after his foster carer's partner referred to fostering as 'a business' following a disagreement about a clothes purchase.

A second measure used by young people, and foster carers, was to look for examples where foster carers went *beyond* duty to do something they would do for their birth children or other family members, thus displaying the foster child's status as 'like-family' and fixing their position within the family network of care. Advocacy was a key area in which care beyond duty was displayed. Young people spoke positively about foster carers who were seen to go beyond a narrow or limited definition of their role. This was also recognized by foster carers. One example was the extensive work and emotional support some carers gave to young people with their asylum cases. Another key area of advocacy was around access to education. Some 'like-family' foster carers had not simply found a school that was 'good enough', but instead searched for the 'best' school and made concerted efforts to get young people into that school, as they would for birth children. Speaking about her rejection of one school place offer, Eleanor said: 'I wouldn't send my own children there, why would I send my foster children there?'

Care was also displayed and recognized by inclusion in family activities. This involved inclusion into existing family activities, but also flexibility about the nature of these activities. As mentioned earlier, food featured in a number of ways throughout accounts of foster care placements. Food was a means of establishing an 'early win' and communicating care and affection across language divides, before trust had been built. Inclusion and exclusion at the dinner table was a strong symbol of inclusion and exclusion in the family. Young people were happy when foster carers went to extra effort to cook them separate food that they particularly liked, regarding this as a sign of care and commitment. However, some described hurtful forms of separation. Describing his experience in foster care, David said,

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

## CONCLUSION

Foster care aims to provide young people with care in a family setting. The study found that in successful placements young people became integrated into family networks of care and carers and young people assumed 'like-family' status to one another. They did

not seek to replace bonds with birth families, but rather used family practices to enact new creative kinship.

A key challenge in extending offers of hospitality was in welcoming unknown strangers associated with risks linked to negative discourses on asylum and young people in care (indicating the importance of training and support for foster carers on asylum matters). In 'like-family' placements, these challenges were not allowed to take hold. These relationships often began with 'tipping together' moments at the threshold when early emotional responses to one another were catalysts for early hospitable interactions. However, these relationships were dynamic and these carers and young people were able to move beyond hospitality to the intimacy of like-family interactions. The examples discussed in this paper have indicated how the attitudes and actions of foster carers did and did not enable the developments of these kinds of relationships. There were positive outcomes in foster placements where young people were included in structuring the activities and culture of the household, such as contributing to food choices. There were also positive outcomes where young people had developed relationships of trust, intimacy and reciprocity with foster carers and foster carers' families which (particularly in early days) were supported through visible symbolic displays of trust and care.

Relationships of hospitality and family practices took place in the intimate setting of the household, but within the view and reach of the public worlds of the asylum system and social work practice, which brought a specific set of challenges in negotiating new relationships. It was evident that young people sometimes feared exclusion and being cast as 'outsiders' not only in relation to their position as refugees, but also with regard to their status as young people in care. While some anxieties about trust were specific to experiences of refugee young people in the asylum system, there were other circumstances that potentially apply to the wider population of young people in care. In the context of the professionalization of foster care where foster carers have clear guidance on duties, responsibilities, financial allowances and safeguarding, there were challenges in displaying and recognizing family practices enacted out of care and affection rather than duty alone. Professionalization is vital to ensuring young people are cared for in safe and secure settings and that the important role of foster carers is recognized and valued. Yet, to retain the core strengths of foster care as a placement option, it is necessary that ordinary, but vital, practices and

display of family care and affection in the everyday intimacy of the domestic setting are not inhibited and undermined, and that 'like-family' relationships are allowed to develop.

This study did not compare foster care placements with other placement options for unaccompanied minors. However, existing literature on other placement options identifies concerns about isolation, difficulties in accessing services and some poor standards of accommodation and care. Our study found that these challenges were less evident in successful foster placements. In these placements, there were significant benefits for refugee young people in access to family care and support, trusted confidantes and advocacy in negotiating key services.

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