

BASPCAN Report

This paper reports on a study of private fostering by Karen Wells, Birkbeck, University of London and Angela Wilson, Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB). The aim of the research was to explore the 'The experiences of children from overseas living in a private fostering arrangement in England and Wales'¹. The intention was to bring into focus the voices of young migrants themselves, their understanding of why they came to the UK, their experiences, particularly their family life in the UK, and feelings about the future.

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- Presentation at BASPCAN conference (presented April 2015 at Annual Congress, Edinburgh in a paper entitled 'Globalising Child Circulation: The Care of Children Who Are Privately Fostered across International Borders'),
- Submit a paper for consideration to Child Abuse Review (this will be submitted by December 31st),
- Report on outcomes by December 1st 2015 - this is addressed in the following report.

Method

The research was conducted over 18 months from October 2013. A pilot project was undertaken in 2010. That project provided a case audit of private fostering in a London borough (LBA) which showed that (a) child protection issues in reported private fostering cases were low and (b) that children who were fostered into the UK through a private arrangement between the parent and one or more caregivers came from a range of countries and sometimes moved across multiple homes in the UK. In the follow up to the pilot study we interviewed four social workers from three local authorities, facilitated a focus group with 5 social workers from another London Borough (hereafter, LBB), and conducted in-depth life narrative interviews with 8 children from two boroughs (5 South Asian, 3 Ghanian). We also had access to logs of calls made to CFAB's advice line, and to the case files of an additional 20 cases that CFAB had been involved with. In addition, CFAB organised two meetings on private fostering at which social workers spoke about their experiences of private fostering. Following coding of the transcripts, the following themes emerged as the key issues in our research: Motivation for migration; adaptation to living in the UK; independent futures; safeguarding and immigration.

Motivations for migration

Although the focus of this research is on the accounts of privately fostered children, the viewpoints of social workers are important, not least because they have access to a wider range of experiences than children themselves do. However, the social workers we interviewed were often uncertain about the reasons given for migration and sometimes assumed that children were lying in order to lessen the likelihood of being removed from the UK. Our data can be grouped into three sets: children who experience a family crisis, particularly the death of a parent or abandonment by a parent; children who have a legal right to be in the UK and have come to access education; and children whose parents believe that the UK will give them a better future for a range of complex reasons. In fact, the motivation for many of the arrangements was a mixture of multiple factors.

¹ In fact all of the children in the study were living in England but the points made in the recommendations would apply to children in England and Wales.

Family Crisis

Family crisis, usually involving the death of a parent, parental separation, or parental abandonment was a feature of all of the children's accounts and also came through strongly in the cases and advice line calls to CFAB. Interestingly, none of the social workers identified family crises specifically as a cause of child migration. Similarly, this has not been highlighted in the wider literature on independent child migration. We think this is an important finding, and one that is specifically related to *child* migration, in contrast to e.g. young asylum seekers and other young forced migrants which share many similarities with adult migration. In a review of the literature on HIV/AIDS, migration and family care, Haour-Knipe (2009) found that parents' illnesses and dying were often a cause of child migration and that, for example, '...demographic analysis in KwaZulu Natal has shown that parental mortality doubled the risk of a child moving. Younger children, girls, children with weak kinship ties to the household, and those in households with fewer assets were especially likely to be sent elsewhere' (Haour-Knipe 2009: 45 citing Ford & Hosegood 2005). Ansell & Blerk (2004) also found that parental sickness and death were a cause of child migration, with significant numbers of child respondents in Malawi and Lesotho having migrated following their parent's death or sickness and as many as 20 per cent in Lesotho and 35 per cent in Malawi now living with children who had come into their households following parental death or sickness. In her research on the street-ward migration of young Ugandans, Lorriane Young, (2004) found that parent's death was cited by one in five children's as a reason for leaving home. However, she also notes the importance of '[t]he spatial integration of structural conditions at the national level with family crisis at the local level' to avoid over-simplifying the impact of family crisis on child migration. Although most of the (still scant) literature on child migration and family crisis is based on research into the impact of HIV/AIDS on families/households in sub-Saharan Africa, the cause of parental sickness and dying in itself does not change the underlying logic of a coping strategy based on migration.

In this, as we noted, small body of literature, the focus is on sub-Saharan Africa. However, in our research parental abandonment, divorce and parental death were important events in children's narratives and in advice line and case referrals to CFAB. One boy, Abbas (all names are pseudonyms) told one of us (Karen Wells) in a life history narrative interview that he came to the UK because his mother had died when he was two or three years old. His father remarried after two years and when Abbas was seven he was sent to the UK. His father now lives in Kuwait with Abbas' his stepmother and her children, who Abbas calls his 'stepbrothers and sisters' who were 'little kids' when he left suggesting that they are his brothers and sisters by his father. It is unusual for South Asian children to make these kinds of distinctions; most of the other respondents, for example, refer to their cousins as 'brothers' and 'sisters' or 'cousin-brother' and 'cousin-sister', the distinction therefore may imply an emotional distance between himself and the children his father had with his stepmother. When he came to the UK he was initially left with a family but those people contacted a single woman who had no children and she took him in, but that is for later. Another boy from South Asia who is now living with a family in London says that his mum left him when he was little and 'my dad never came back'. He says he was cared for by strangers (the domestic workers who had lived in the house before his parents left) until they brought him the UK when he was 11.

Although this boy's story had elements that may seem fictitious or unbelievable, the general gist that he was an only child, whose parents left him, seemed nonetheless believable. The only girl in our interview sample, a 15 year old who had been sent to London with an agent paid for by her grandfather, described how her mother had left her and her brother when her brother was a little boy. She then lived with her grandparents and her brother until her grandmother passed in 2009. She explained,

‘And so, and then after that, I lived with my grandfather and my little brother, because my father passed away in 2000, when I was three and a half years old [when her mother was pregnant], and my mother, after a few years, my mother left us and my younger brother and me used to live with my grandparents and my grandfather, maternal grandfather. And my grandfather remarried because he quite old enough and he need, someone need[ed] to look after us. Yes, so, I mean, yes, I was to live with my step-nani and grandfather and my little brother there’

Her ‘step-nanny’ was not as loving as her grandmother had been:

‘So, and my grandfather remarried my step-grandmother. We were thinking, okay, she, another grandmother is coming; she will take care of us. But she did, but now she’s step-grandmother, so it’s a bit different. She didn’t like us that much, like, she told me do that and that. If I do a little mistake, maybe she gets angry. That’s why, yes, and then this little, little mistakes and she’d just scold me and my grandfather as well’.

In addition to the crisis in care precipitated first by her father’s death, then her mother’s abandonment and then her grandmother’s death, Dukah was then subjected to sexual harassment and assault by a neighbour. This man was charged and imprisoned for some time but on his release, the grandfather

‘...was, like, annoyed with me: look, your mum ran away, now because of you, you are bringing shame. Some other people came to my house, trying to do something nasty. And so, he was like, both of you are, like, pissing me off. It was something like that and he said, he planned to get rid of me, then he found out some way to send me, because here, one of my aunt lives...So, he says, okay, if I just send you another country, then I will be, like, I will be in peace without you’.

Dukah’s interview was lengthy and detailed and attests to the importance of networks in seeking a solution to a familial crisis, in this case a series of losses and abandonments, compounded by shame and the step-grandmother’s harshness. Yet, it is also clear that the stories of death and abandonment that figure in young migrant’s accounts are not always true. In an interview with a social worker in a large English city, the social worker described a case in which the child’s private foster family said that his parents had died in the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. CFAB were asked by the local authority to complete an assessment in Pakistan and found that the father was alive: ‘He was a food vendor. He did send his son with his sister to come to the UK for a better life’. Of course, that the father was not dead does not mean that family crisis was not a motivation for the father to send his children to the UK. Notably, the mother is not mentioned in the assessment.

Although social workers seemed rather uncertain if family crisis was a trigger for migration, they also described several cases where this evidently was the case. In one case, the mother was arrested for drug-smuggling on entry to the UK. In another case, the mother was very young and sent her child to the UK from Jamaica to be looked after by her grandmother’s sister. In two cases, children were in private fostering after one or both parents died in a war. A social worker we interviewed in LBB explained,

‘This girl is now 13 and when she was about two, the mother escaped and her father died in the war, and so she was raised by her paternal family - so by her paternal grandmother and by her paternal uncle, and *somehow* the uncle came to this country as a refugee about three or four years ago and

then he got leave to remain and then he brought over his family, so his wife and his child *and this 13 year old girl (emphasis added)*'.

However, in our reading the child's loss of her birth mother and father can be seen as a family crisis that precipitated the movement of the child to the care of her uncle.

Another girl came to the UK with her maternal aunt: 'the mother's got some kind of mental health issue and so the maternal aunt [whose relationship has not yet been proven, which is why this is still being treated as PF] thought, well instead of them [incomplete sentence] and they're British citizens anyway, so instead of them growing up [there] why not here so that they can at least go to school here and they can depend on themselves' (SW M LBB). In the case referrals to CFAB, a quarter (5/20) involved some kind of family crisis including, parental abandonment, maternal death, and conflict with step-parents. In the audit of advice line calls, while motivation was not recorded for the majority of inquiries, at least 6/55 involved family crisis including parental abandonment, parents in prison, or parental death. There is some evidence of a pattern of family crisis which involves father's death followed by maternal abandonment.

To conclude this section, in a number of cases and responses family crises was a key theme in explaining child migration to the UK. Yet, this is largely absent in the wider literature on lone child migration which tends to assume (e.g. in relation to young asylum seekers and refugees) that migration is essentially structural and either strategic or forced. This finding is confirmed by research by Sarkar et al (2003) into informal fostering in the slums of Dhaka. They noted both that informal fostering was widely practised by the poor and that maternal death accounted for nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of the reasons for fostering. In our view, this is a very important finding of this research. Of course, as Young noted in her 2004 research family crises are related to structural conditions. The crises of people living in poverty are always more visible than the crises of other classes.

Leaving for education

Independent migration of children to attend school in another country is a long-standing reason for child migration. In general, if a child attends boarding school, even if they live in private arrangements outside of the school term-time, this has escaped the attention of social services, with families being protected or insulated from the gaze of social services by their affluence. In the USA, the experiences of children who are sent to the USA to live with distant relatives or strangers and attend day or boarding school have been well-documented. The perhaps pejorative label social scientists have deployed to describe these children, 'parachute-kids', hints at the idea that education migration is a starting point for family migration. In general, the children in our study were not sent to the UK specifically for education although, as with young asylum seekers, social workers and children commented on the commitment of these children to doing well at school. However, one Local Authority in central England focused specifically on this form of migration, with children sent to the UK specifically to access English education, and the child protection concerns it raised.

The literature on parachute children in the USA suggests that most young education migrants in the USA are migrating from Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong. In the 1990s, as many as 40,000 Taiwanese unaccompanied young migrants were studying in the USA, living in a variety of care arrangements and attending public (that is, state) school. The scale of current unaccompanied migration to the USA is difficult to determine, given the difficulty of tracking students and the wide range of visa arrangements that students enter under. A more recent phenomenon, dubbed 'Astronaut Families', in which one parent accompanies a child to the USA while another parent stays in the country of origin has emerged in the 21st century and latter part of the 20th century, perhaps partly in response to the improved opportunities for social capital and social network building in South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan following several decades of economic growth.

In our study, the primary source for this section is one local authority and their presentations to the CFAB conference on private fostering and an in-depth interview with one social worker who has been at the centre of trying to manage these cases. Social workers in at least one other local authority have also mentioned their awareness of lone child migration from East Asia (personal communication to Angela Wilson). Interestingly, few concerns were raised concerning migration of children from Western Europe to the UK for education in similar arrangements, which also accounts for a large number of the known private fostering arrangements, as reported in the Department for Education statistics.

In the Local Authority from which this data is drawn, two carers have been looking after several children and young people at any one time. The children are all from Macau, a former Portuguese colony. Macau's colonial past has given its citizens right to apply for Portuguese citizenship which then would give them right of abode in the European Union. The parents in these cases have organised the migration of their children to the UK to attend state school. The children do well at school, by the social workers' account. What seems to concern the social workers is the numbers of children who are in the care of two or three carers but, principally, what they view as the immorality, and borderline illegality, of adults (the carers) profiting from the care of children. While some of the children are said to be relatives of the carers, the difficulty in establishing family connections means that children's services have duty to assess and monitor the arrangement under private fostering legislation. On these visits, concerns were raised about basic care, housing, and supervision. The carers addressed these concerns, however the social workers felt that the carers were being evasive and the social workers' concerns were not satisfied. In the end, the carers have been told that they cannot accommodate any privately fostered children and, in response, they have started to take over 16s, who are not covered in the private fostering legislation, who are accessing education.

The children come to the UK, either with their parents (who then return) or with the carers (who, according to the social worker visit Macau in the school holidays to recruit students for the next academic year). The parents pay between £500 and £700 per month for the carers to 'provide a room, take them to school, attend parents' evenings, take them to activities and, you know, provide transportation' (SW interview). The older children, particularly the boys live independently from 16, although the carers continue to provide food for them – delivering it daily from a take-away. The parents are hostile to the attempts of children's services to end this arrangement and, according to the social worker have said 'you need to basically keep out of our lives, keep away from our children' (SW interview).

Strategic child migration

Although the social workers were generally of the view that private fostering is essentially strategic, meaning 'for a better life', even in these cases the back story is more complicated than this suggests. For example, we interviewed a family of three sisters who came to the UK from Ghana. They were aged 14, 12 and 10. When we interviewed them, they were living in local authority foster care. Their mother had arranged for them to come to London with a family friend 18 months previously. In Ghana, they had quite a send-off with a celebration and lots of well-wishes. They say their mother has sold her land and house to finance their trip. They knew the man who brought them to the UK and they entered with UK passports (their father is British). On arriving in London the man brought them to a house that he shared with a woman, her teenage daughter and son. They were not made to feel welcome or comfortable. The youngest child said it was 'like a prison', although they also agreed that it was boring (they were not allowed to go out or to watch TV) and uncomfortable rather than frightening or dangerous. They 'had each other', which made it bearable. They called their mother on the mobile phone she had given them but they did not want her to know how difficult things were because of the financial costs she had borne to get them to the UK. Eventually

their phone broke and they could not contact their mother. At this point, their mother contacted a member of her Church in London (that is to say, a London 'branch' of her own church in Ghana) and this woman came to the house to find out what was happening with the children. She then took the children to live with her. This woman had two small children and she worked as a nursery worker. She enrolled the youngest of the sisters in school and applied for a place for the other two. In the meantime they had to stay indoors and look after her two young children whilst she was at work. They did not like this, finding the children to be rude and finding it unfair that the children were never chastised for bad behaviour or made to do any housework. The woman then applied for a 5 bedroom house from the local authority on the grounds that she was over-crowded and, apparently, this was offered to her. Once the offer was made she contacted children's services to say that the children were not hers and she could not look after them. The accommodation offer was rescinded and the children were visited by a social worker. They liked him and found him sympathetic. He arranged for their current placement with a local authority foster carer. At the time of the interview, the children were living with the foster carer. They seemed relaxed and happy and called the foster carer 'auntie'. The foster carer, despite having been with them only a few weeks, seemed genuinely attached to and interested in them.

In the short period of the interview (about an hour), it is of course difficult to tell very much about a child but they seemed remarkably resilient and honest; straight-forward and matter-of-fact about their experiences. The foster carer suggested that as they get older they might realise more the potential risks that they had faced. This is an astute comment and one that points to other problems with the lack of research into private-fostering, specifically that we know very little about the long-term impacts on children of parental separation and migration because we have no longitudinal studies. This is a gap which future research should attempt to meet.

In any case, reflecting here on the intersection between family crisis and strategic migration, even in this case, which seems a fairly straight-forward instance of strategic migration – the sale of family land to finance a trip which, it is assumed, will make a better life for these children and possibly for their mother – the spectre of family crisis haunts it.

These children are British citizens through their father. Their parents divorced some years earlier and the promise that their father would bring them to the UK then receded into the distance. This was really the only point in the interview when the girls seemed distressed. They have not seen their father since the divorce. He is living, so far as they know in Britain but they have had no contact with him. They say their father is old and refuses to take care of them because he is too old and it would not be any use to him. What he means by this, according to the girls, is that by the time they are adults and able to look after him, he will probably be dead. The sense I had is that this was why their mother had sent them to the UK, to claim, as it were, their birth-right through their father and to force his hand. Unfortunately, it seems that he has not responded to this.

Most of our evidence for migration for what we are calling strategic reasons comes from the interviews and focus group with social workers. 'She came here for education, so her parents, her carers from [names country] sent her over for a better life, better education' (SW FG). 'I do think it's for educational opportunities, but also, maybe ... their family are not so well off and so maybe that's why they think that life will be better in the UK' (SW CM, LBB). Another social worker explained that although children rarely explain it in these terms, the carers themselves may offer as a possible explanation of why their parents sent them that 'they want a better life, so they want a better education, they want a better standard of living' (SW M LBB). This same social worker who, is clearly very experienced and also interested in and concerned about the children she works with, in discussing Dukah's life said 'I think her case is quite an exception. In my experience most of the reasons why children come over, are sent over, is because of financial reasons or for a better education, a better life.' (SW M LBB). Despite this assertion she discussed in some detail 8 of her 14

cases and in these eight cases (including Dukah) the motivation for migration seemed to be far from straight forwardly strategic. The mother of three of the children, a sibling group, had mental health problems, two other siblings were deaf and also could not speak. Although this in itself may not be considered a family crisis, it does suggest that they may have complex educational needs that might not have been met in their home country. Another child had stopped speaking (what is often called Selective Mutism); given that most children manage migration and new family life without developing anxiety disorders, this also suggests that this may also not have been a straightforward strategic migration decision. Despite this, the social worker inferred that the parents had made such a decision, commenting that: 'To an eight year old it really doesn't make sense, you know, going to a better school or having a better life, because actually that child is settled with the parents and they've got a life, and they had a life and they were quite happy however way they were living'.

Adaptation to living in the UK

In this section we discuss how the children in our sample have adapted to life in the UK particularly in relation to their feelings about their new families.

Family Life in the UK

We should remind readers that the children in this study were all known to children's services. Most had been referred to children's services through the Home Office when their carers tried to regularise the child's immigration status. The children involved in our research were remarkably resilient and adaptable and spoke of their intimacy with their "cousins" and affection for and attachment to their carers. In this section we describe their accounts of new family life focusing on three cases in which the children elaborated most on their family life. Although we focus on these three respondents, the other respondents were also positive about their new families, 'They always respect me, they always play with me, they're always talking to me' said Bakri. Explaining how he had come to adapt to living in London with his new family Bakri said, simply 'Come back, come back, but they didn't come back, then I find my little brother and I play with them, and I stay with them. They stay with me and I was with them'. The social workers also said that 'some of the carers are fantastic. Some of the private foster carers are really fantastic carers'.

Having said that, the social workers also identified cases where family life in London was not so positive. One child is now looked after in foster care having been physically abused by his carers. Two children in another family were working as child domestic servants, while the foster carers own children of a similar age went to school. Another boy had been sexually abused when his initial private fostering arrangement broke down and the 'carers' found someone at the market for the boy to live with. The boy disclosed sexual abuse to his school a couple of days later and was taken into care. Less extreme but still difficult was another case of a child living with a single woman who was finding it difficult to look after the boy and wanted him to be taken into care although the boy wanted to carry on living with his carer. Another child was taken into care because the carer contacted children's services and said he would no longer provide financially for the child and children's services should come and pick him up.

'I live with the carer and she's really caring; because she hasn't got no kid's she's like, she look after me like [as if he were one of] her own kids' (Abbas).

Abbas came to the UK six or seven years ago and is now 16 years old. He lives with his carer in a one-bedroom flat. She does not have any children and Abbas said that although she is married she does not live with her husband. Abbas was one of two children in our sample who lived with a single woman. In a sense these children made these women mothers. Research in Bangladesh in 1998 on informal fostering with 46 foster mothers caring for foster children under 24 months found that more than half of the foster mothers were childless (Sarkah et al 2003). Abbas says he is also the

only boy in an extended family of girls as his foster mum (as he calls her) has a sister-in-law and a brother-in-law and nieces but no nephews. He implied that this was a significant explanation of why they were so pleased to have him in the family: 'I first came he [the brother-in-law of his foster mum] brought me, that time was birthday, he bought me games, went shopping and bought me everything because their whole family they haven't got no sons, all daughters, like, no sons'.

The other boy who lived with a single woman, Najid, also shares a one-bedroom flat with his carer who he calls auntie. She has applied for a two bedroom accommodation for her and the boy but has been refused. He is perhaps less attached to his auntie than Abbas is to his 'mum' and in response to my question 'Do you think she loves you?' he replied 'Yes, I think so, something, yes'. Yet he does seem very attached to her. He has lived with her now for six years (since he was eight), they share a bedroom which, as he says is, 'a bit difficult for us, but still'. It is because of her, he says, that he 'got more into religion' and his religious belief and practice gives him a lot of comfort.

Dukah has also settled well with her family in London. The start of living in London was difficult. Her grandfather had not told her that he was moving her to London but rather he had suggested that she should 'go away, have a little visit different country, then maybe everything will cool down, you will feel better'. So, when she arrived in London she thought it would be for a holiday. When her aunt, who her grandfather had sent her to, realised his intention she travelled overseas to persuade him to take the girl back but he refused. The aunt had left Dukah in the care of an uncle while she went to visit the grandfather. Dukah explained,

'she told my uncle to keep me while she went to [home country] and she tried to find anything there she can send me there and she couldn't and she came back and tell my uncle, look, what shall I do now? My family is not going to accept her. They are saying no, we've got our own privacy in our house; we're not going to let her. She can come, yes, she is my cousin, as a visit, she can visit, fine, but not permanently. She, they didn't allow, so, and she was like, oh my days, now, I'm in a great trouble; what I'm going to do with this girl? Then my uncle says, okay, I'm going to take care of her'.

Dukah now lives with her uncle and aunt and her three cousins. Her youngest cousin is five and the other three are older than her. She shares a bedroom with her girl cousin, who is 20 and who she calls cousin-sister. She is very close to her cousin-sister. She says 'our relation is, like, so close, we, I don't feel she's older than me or something. I mean, we are so close and she is really friendly and she helps me with everything if I need any help with my school work or in home; if I need anything, I ask her, I ask my aunt. Yes, everything's going on fine.' She has only been living with this family for 18 months. Although she knew them when they lived in her home country, she had not seen her uncle for many years. He had moved to London when his children were still young and then brought them to live with him seven or eight years ago. This was presumably around the time that they would have started secondary school. Unlike the other children in our sample she has a sibling, a younger brother, who she keeps in touch with. He still lives with her grandfather and step-grandmother and she is concerned for his welfare.

Like the other children in the sample, her uncle was not recognised as such in UK law (which is to say the sibling or brother or sister in law of a child's mother or father). Of course this was the case for all the children in private fostering, this being the basic difference between private fostering (which is regulated by law) and close kinship care (which is not). Dukah expressed very well the distinction between a legal relationship and the caring relationship that she had with her uncle: 'he's my dad's cousin. But he is a far relative. It's not that far, but still is far, but [in practice] the relation is, like, more closer than close people, than your own brother; there's more closer. Because my dad's own blood, my uncle, they don't even care about us. But he is looking after me; he's doing everything for me. He's such a nice guy, yes'.

Precarious futures? Legal status and futures

Young migrants who are privately fostered face an uncertain future. This is partly because they do not have anyone 'behind them', as one respondent said, and it is also because of their often precarious or even unknown legal status. All of the respondents, and of course the Macau children who only came to the UK to further their education, are very focused on school learning and see good exam grades as opening up possibilities for the future. The social workers concur on this point. Even for the Macau children, and notwithstanding the social workers' concerns about exploitation and safety in those cases, the social worker interviewed commented on the academic success of these children.

Uncertain futures

Children responded to questions about the future in broadly two ways: a positive scenario in which they do well at school, get good jobs and then are able to 'get my life sorted out' or a very uncertain future in which they do not know 'how am I going to feature in my life?', as one boy put it. Most children held both positions simultaneously. All of the respondents drew on their religious belief (whether Muslim or Christian) in positing that 'God knows', that is to say that their future is in God's hands but also that God has a plan and will protect them.

Legal Status

We did not raise the issue of legal status directly with young respondents. It is noteworthy though, that neither did they raise it with us, for example when talking either about how they came to the UK or how they think about the future. We did raise this issue with social workers. The social workers in our sample did not see it as their direct responsibility to get involved in immigration issues with privately fostered children. In LBB social workers asked about the immigration status of children at their first assessment and then at each annual review. Those social workers who held cases where children were involved in immigration disputes felt that it was the responsibility of the private foster carer, rather than of children's services, to support a child in regularising their immigration status. This is a common approach taken by local authorities, who will advise families to seek legal advice on their child's immigration status.

Once a child turns 16 they are no longer the responsibility of the local authority under section 66 of the Children's Act 1989 (Private Fostering), and this is at about the same time in the child's life when immigration issues will start to impact on them. There is evidence from other studies, for example, that many children do not find out until they start applying for university or for employment that they are not British citizens. This contrasts to "Looked After Children" who are eligible for leaving care support until 21 or even 25 in some cases. However, there is evidence here too (Rushton, 2015), that social workers do not see immigration support as part of the role of children's services, even when it impacts on the lives of Looked After Children as they transition to adulthood. The obvious risk is that a privately fostered child could face an enforced return to their country of origin after having lived in the UK for a number of years. If the child's immigration status is not addressed, these children who have formed families in the UK could be returned to a country that has now become strange to them.

Conclusion

This report has presented our findings on this qualitative study of 'The experiences of children from overseas living in a private fostering arrangement in England and Wales'. Our key findings are that the widespread presumption that child migration of this type is essentially strategic is not justified and that family crisis is a key factor in precipitating children's mobility. Family crisis has not been identified in previous studies as a significant factor in private fostering and we consider this to be an important finding. We also found that migration with boarding-out so that children could attend

state school in the UK is a significant element in private fostering in some local authorities. To the best of our knowledge, this issue has not been addressed in previous studies. In terms of adaptation to living in the UK all respondents, children and professionals, found that children are resilient in their adaptation to living in new families. Even, those children who were now in local authority foster care following the breakdown of their private fostering arrangement seemed to have settled remarkably quickly into their new home and to have formed a close attachment to their foster carer. However, one of the limitations of this study is that the sample was recruited through children's services and therefore we cannot know how children who are not known to social services experience living with a new (or sometimes a series of new) families. In relation to the future, the immigration status of many privately fostered children is uncertain and this may lead to very precarious transitions to adulthood.

The key issue is around permanency planning for children with an irregular immigration status and ensuring that this uncertainty does not negatively impact on the child's wellbeing and ability to achieve. This has an important effect on the child's welfare and should therefore be taken into account by social workers as part of their ongoing support for the child. Related to this issue is the cut-off point for children's services oversight of private fostering. At the moment this remains at 16. This means that a critical period in the lives of adolescents, a time when the future is uncertain for most people and particularly so for children privately fostered across international borders, is the point when formal support is removed. This is not in line with other legislation and maybe a point for future campaigning.

Karen Wells, Birkbeck University of London and Angela Wilson, Children and Families Across Borders, December 2015