# Practising with care in mind: Learning from professionals and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

**Training 3: Professionals’ and practitioners’ perspectives of UASC’s care of each other**

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=9170>

**Authors**

Sarah Crafter (The Open University)

Evangelia Prokopiou (University of Northampton)

Table of Contents

[Practising with care in mind: Learning from professionals and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children 1](#_Toc132190100)

[About this course 3](#_Toc132190101)

[What is the broader aim of this course? 3](#_Toc132190102)

[The aim of this exemplar session 3](#_Toc132190103)

[Who is this training for? 3](#_Toc132190104)

[How long will the course take to deliver? 3](#_Toc132190105)

[Learning outcomes 4](#_Toc132190106)

[Using evidence-based training 5](#_Toc132190107)

[The Children Caring on the Move project 5](#_Toc132190108)

[Who took part in our study? 5](#_Toc132190109)

[Training 3 – Professionals’ and practitioners’ perspectives of UASC’s care of each other 7](#_Toc132190110)

[Activity 1 – warm-up discussion: the unique challenges of working with UASC [approx. 10 minutes] 7](#_Toc132190111)

[Background 7](#_Toc132190112)

[The Activity 7](#_Toc132190113)

[Activity 2 – the relationship between adults and young people [30 mins] 8](#_Toc132190114)

[Background 8](#_Toc132190115)

[The Activity 9](#_Toc132190116)

[Activity 3 – Adults’ views young people’s care of each other [20-30 mins] 10](#_Toc132190117)

[Background 10](#_Toc132190118)

[The Activity 10](#_Toc132190119)

[Activity 4 - Adults’ views young people’s care of each other [20-30 mins] 12](#_Toc132190120)

[Background 12](#_Toc132190121)

# **About this course**

The materials in this downloadable resource are designed to be used by trainers of social work and/or other social care professionals and practitioners. You can either follow the activities directly or lift particular exercises and adapt them for your own purposes. The materials contained here are part of an 8-hour online course which has been broken down into manageable parts.

## What is the broader aim of this course?

The purpose of this course is to help qualified and differently qualified practitioners and professionals to think about their reflexive practice in relation to care with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and separated/lone migrant young people. The capacity to reflect is a core part of professional competence and helps social care professionals think about their own practice, their approach to their work and to learn from the process.

The course recognises that working in any kind of social care capacity with vulnerable young people is extremely tough, dynamic, and an often emotionally draining job, so it is useful to think about what shapes practice and why. The attendees of this course will be introduced to the thoughts and opinions of practitioners and professionals who work with UASC and young people who are themselves, unaccompanied migrant young people.

This training will enable social care professionals to better understand their own and others’ perspectives on young people’s care relationships – including, their care of each other.

## The aim of this exemplar session

The activities in this session explore what it means to ‘care’. The activities can be used as a standalone or may be useful to ‘warm-up’ or ‘introductory’ activities to further sessions.

As the trainer, you may also find it useful to mix and match the activities in this exemplar session with activities from other available training sessions (sessions 1, 2 and 4).

PowerPoint slides associated with these activities have been made available to you to adapt and re-use.

## Who is this training for?

This course is aimed at social workers, senior practitioners, personal advisors and other social care professionals and practitioners working with UASC.

If your attendees are qualified social workers you can remind them to add this course to their CPD record to meet the requirements for registration. By the end of this course they will be able to answer the two key requirements: describe what they have learnt; then state how the CPD has had a positive impact in their practice on the people they work with. If you are delivering this course to differently qualified professionals, this course will enhance their reflexive practice skills.

## How long will the course take to deliver?

Between 1 and 2 hours

Notes to Trainers: You can pick and choose which activities to deliver as part of this course. Some activities are very short and others are designed to stimulate discussion and reflection, and therefore, may require more time.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of this course you will:

* Been introduced to evidenced-based training and the Children Caring on the Move project
* Been introduced to two different models for professionals’ ways of working with young people
* Have reflected on professionals’ and social care practitioners’ views on care.

# **Using evidence-based training**

A core feature of this course is that it is evidence-informed – in other words, the core content is based on research findings as opposed to anecdotes or opinion.

In this training you will be drawing on both academic literature and data evidence from a research project called [Children Caring on the Move](https://www.ccomstudy.com/).

The data provided comes from what young people, professionals and social care practitioners have told us about their lives, their working practices and a key element of our study: young people’s care of each other. We have provided you with both young people’s and adults’ data so that you can explore some of the synergies and differences in their perspectives.

**At times your attendances may agree or disagree with what the young people and adults say in our study. That is ok! A key component of the course is to encourage your participants to reflect on where your own views relate or diverge and why that might be the case.**

## The Children Caring on the Move project

**You may find it useful to ‘set-the-scene’ of this evidenced-based training by introducing your attendances to some key bits of information about the Children Caring on the Move project.**

The Children Caring on the Move project set out to examine Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children’s (UASC) experiences of care, and caring for others, as they navigated asylum and welfare systems in England.

* We started with the premise that care is not necessarily limited to what adults (or the state) provide for young people.
* Our work has shown that young people provide a lot of care for each other, but we wanted to understand what that care looks like. We also wanted to explore how professionals and practitioners who work with UASC and other separated child migrants thought about young people’s care of each other.
* On the one hand, the duty to care is a central tenet of any practice when working with vulnerable children such as UASC and other separated child migrants. On the other hand, stringent immigration practices, policies, bureaucracy and structural challenges undoubtedly present personal tensions and professional constraints for those whose role is meant to foreground ‘care.’

## Who took part in our study?

*Collecting data from young people:*

The way in which we wanted to gather data from our young people was quite unique compared to many research projects. First, we recruited a group of enthusiastic unaccompanied young people to work with us collaboratively as Young Researchers. We trained them in social research skills that students might learn at school or University when conducting their own research projects, such as interviewing skills. The Young Researchers then conducted interviews with other UASC with the support of the University researchers.

We carried out a total of 75 interviews with 38 unaccompanied young people in two major cities. Each young person was invited to 2-3 interviews over a 6-12 month period. These included (i) object-based interviews where participants were asked to bring an object that represents care; (ii) photo elicitation focused on a ‘day in the life’ of the participant; and (iii) walking interviews to see places of (un)caring.

*Collecting data from adults:*

We conducted 64 semi-structured interviews with adult participants about their understandings and perspectives on care.

For ethical reasons we have developed a broad set of descriptions for the range of adult stakeholders that we interviewed. They include:

* Project Coordinators (in Education/Charity) who oversee multiple projects in their settings.
* Project Managers (in Education/Charity, State Social Work, Arts in Charity, NGO sectors) who tend to line mange those who work directly with young people.
* ‘Direct workers’ (e.g., Charity advocates, state and independent social workers, foster carers, educators, paediatricians and educators), who are those who have direct and regular contact with young people.
* Other stakeholders covered areas such as mental health/therapy (working in NGO settings), interpreters, immigration lawyers and border force.

Our interview questions focused on examining the interviewee’s background, their broad experience of caring for separated child migrants and their role in their lives; the interviewee’s own understandings of care, care relationships and caring practices; how care changes over time; their views on the wider economic, social and political priorities and challenges that influences their ‘care’ and support practices.

# Training 3 – Professionals’ and practitioners’ perspectives of UASC’s care of each other

## Activity 1 – warm-up discussion: the unique challenges of working with UASC [approx. 10 minutes]

The activities in this training session provide an opportunity to discuss 1) professionals’ own perspectives and care and 2) their understandings of children’s care of each other. You may find it useful to introduce one or two ideas about ‘childhood’ and ‘care’ from Training 2 as a precursor to these activities. This activity is designed to encourage your attendees to begin a safe dialogue.

## Background

The challenges of working on a daily basis with very vulnerable unaccompanied migrant children are well known – complex caseloads, challenging client situations including emotional trauma and high volumes of work all point to high emotional demands (Griffiths et al., 2019). Providing care for UASC young people often competes with other systemic, legal and professional demands.

## The Activity

Working in pairs or as a whole group reflect on the following questions:

* What challenges do you think are unique in working with UASC compared to ‘citizen’ look-after children? What are the similarities?

## Activity 2 – the relationship between adults and young people [30 mins]

This activity draws on evidence in the academic literature to examine the relationships between adults (usually social workers) and unaccompanied migrant young people. The discussions will be based around two pieces of evidence 1) a framework called ‘domains of practice and 2) the notion of ‘co-navigation’.

## Background

A key line of enquiry within the academic literature has been on the relationship between social care professionals and young people and the different forms of practice or ways of working.

Kohli (2006) collected data with social workers and through an analysis of their descriptions of how they relate to UASC created three ‘Domains of practice’. They are:

* **Domain of cohesion (the humanitarians):** this is where assistance meant meeting practical needs and supporting day-to-day needs such as shelter, food, money, schooling, medical support and welfare advice. This was a pragmatic approach. They were aware that the young people perceived them as being in a position of authority who could both help and hinder their progress.
* **Domain of connection (the witness):** this is where professionals sought to understand the emotional worlds of the young people, often bearing witness to trauma and engaging with the emotional elements. This was also recognised as an emotional challenge and in order to cope, moved towards the other positions of ‘cohesion’ or ‘coherence’.
* **Domain of coherence (the confederates):** this is where the young person and social worker co-construct a new start in the UK, enabling a flexible and enduring relationship. The experiences of UASC were framed within similar frames as other children experiencing adverse situations. The relationship straddled a line between professional help and friendship. They viewed young people’s stories as wide-ranging and complex, and felt comfortable being ‘ethically subversive’ by protecting parts of stories to immigration authorities.

Devenney (2019), a qualified social worker, has characterised the relationship between social care professionals and UASC as a *co-navigators*. In other words, Devenney saw professionals as a valuable resource to help young people steer a course through ‘complex, unpredictable and adverse terrain of institutional bureaucracies and systems’ (p. 940). By framing professionals and young people as co-navigators Devenney proposes:

* Through co-navigation professionals are not considered either as controlling or enabling; rather, power dynamics are considered fluid. Professionals can either reproduce existing relations of power created through oppressive immigration systems, or transform them by understanding their own relative positions of (albeit limited) power as enabling agency for the young person
* Emotional attachments to young people could be imbued with intricate power relations that shift over time. The volatile terrain of immigration controls and local policies sometimes caused changes in the relationships of professionals and young people; putting their hopes and aspirations at odds with each other
* Professionals are also plotting their way through difficult and uncertain social landscapes – seeking their own agency whilst working under constraining forces. As co-navigators, professionals and young people are operating in the social

Devenney also found a blurring of the relationship between friendship and professional relationship, as well as ‘emotional witnessing’ as described by Kohli. The young people in her study also valued professionals’ abilities to solve problems in order to access crucial resources. Her study addresses the challenges of co-navigating through ‘oppressive state immigration practices’ (pp. 935) and the inherent difficulties in building trust in a ’culture of disbelief’.

## The Activity

This activity can be split into multiple parts or treated as one part. Ask your attendees to read through Kohli’s ‘Domains of Practice’. In pairs ask them to discuss where they see themselves within the three domains.

* Do you see yourself within any of the three domains? Perhaps you span one or more domain. Do you see any issues or problems with the domains when reflecting on your own practice?

Introduce Devenney’s notion of ‘co-navigation’. After looking at the description of co-navigation, in pairs ask them to reflect on this model in relation to their own practice and care relationships with young people.

* What are your thoughts on the idea of ‘co-navigation’? Does this approach contradict or reflect your own relationships with young people? Are there any elements of the model you agree or disagree with?

## Activity 3 – Adults’ views young people’s care of each other [20-30 mins]

One of the reasons the Children Caring on the Move project began was because there was a gap in the evidence about our understanding of young people’s care of each other.

**Ideally, it is better to use both Activity 3 & 4 as a package as the data presents contrasting views. Together both activities can be completed in 45-60 minutes depending on the level of discussion.**

## Background

We knew from our pilot work that social care practitioners understood the value of young people’s friendships and to a lesser extent, saw care relationships as important, but had not really brought that to the foreground in their own practice (Rosen et al., 2021). Consequently, we sought to understand how UASC or ‘separated’ child migrants, and those involved in the care of separated children, make sense of and value care relationships and caring practices.

## The Activity

In this next activity you will introduce your attendees to Brandon. For ethical reasons we have been deliberately vague around the details of his role, but we can tell you that Brandon is a qualified social worker for a Local Authority in England. At the time of the interview, he was working in a managerial role, overseeing other social workers who had direct connection to UASC. Brandon is not his real name.

Provide your attendees with this quote from ‘Brandon’ (the dots reflect short pauses in his speech). Your attendees will find it useful to know that during his interview Brandon was asked the following questions:

* ‘Would you recount a situation (if you know of one) in which separated child migrants take care of each other?’
* ‘What are your views on children’s care of each other?’

Brandon initially described formal care processes such as placing UASC with foster carers or older siblings. When asked about more informal care relationships, he replied:

‘Informally, I mean, not really, because they’ll be looked after by us, so we wouldn’t approve young people to look after…it’s more indirectly through mentoring and… you more often find that once they start going to school, and going to the [name of charity], they just end up associating with other young people from their country, and they develop kind of informal support networks that way. So yeah, I wouldn’t say caring, it’s more informally supporting each other, just through peer mentoring really. …I wouldn’t say caring for… well, caring for each other in the sense that they’re looking out for each other, but not taking on a caring role, you know, doing the caring in a sense that we associate with a social work perspective.’

Ask you attendees to read through the quote (see accompanying PowerPoint slides). Ask them to reflect on the following questions:

* How does Brandon frame young people’s care of each other? What words does he use to try and make sense young people’s relationships?
* Do you agree or disagree with his perspective, in what ways?
* How does Brandon’s approach to children’s care of each other reflect or contradict the concepts of ‘care’ and ‘childhood’ you read about above? (**this question links to materials in Training 2. If you have not delivered any of this training, this question may need to be removed**)

**Possible discussion or responses**

One thing your attendees may have noted is the way Brandon wrestles with the notion of ‘care’ when associating this with young people’s relationships to each other. He brings in other terminology such as ‘mentoring’, ‘associating’, ‘supporting’ and ‘networks’. For Brandon, ‘care’ is associated with the formal process of social work practice where care is provided by a parental figure or an adult, such as a foster carer.

Brandon’s quote is also interesting when we return to thinking about what we mean by care. As you read in Section 2, ‘care’ in its broadest definition can encompass caring *for* others and being cared for *by* others. Understandably, Brandon also focused on the formal aspects of care because these are highly linked to the procedures and processes in his everyday social work practice. His reflections on informal care relationships are a little more complex. Informal care is perhaps similar to ‘domains of connection’ or ‘co-navigation’ discussed in the earlier activity. Informal care is linked with the idea, for example, that care is an ethical activity. It may be part of our obligation to others – or be an act of reciprocity. We might also have strong ideas about what is ‘normal’ or ‘appropriate’ forms of informal care. Some care relationships are seen as desirable whilst others are not. Informal care may have an unequal power relationship.

## Activity 4 - Adults’ views young people’s care of each other [20-30 mins]

This next activity stays with the theme of exploring professionals’ perspectives on unaccompanied young people’s care of each other but will present your attendees with a slightly different perspective to Brandon’s.

## Background

Your attendees are now going to read a quote from Lauren. Lauren spent a number of years as a key worker in semi-independent accommodation. She later moved to work in the charity sector. Her talk interweaves both her reflections from her past and her work in the present.

‘[I think that]…the structures of care from the state, so social services, and all of those places that unaccompanied minors receive care from, I think often cloud and make less visible the practices of care that happen between friendships and peer groups. And I think that some of those practices of care are some of the most meaningful and sustaining forms of care in these young people’s lives.

So when I talk with my refugee colleagues who are now kind of early 20s….things like doing translation or interpreting, or spending an hour on the phone with the Jobcentre for a friend, interpreting for them, or filling out someone’s driving licence application and taking it to the Post Office, and doing all of that labour was not identified and recognised as care…I mean, something that happened, again, from my housing memories, is people having friends to stay, and kind of hosting people. That, for me, culturally, I understand that within a framework of care, and providing. And things like those advocacy examples around driving licences and stuff, I understand that as offering care to a friend or a family member. I think, instead, sometimes those behaviours and those actions are not allowed, so they’re seen as bad things, or they’re seen as stuff to hide, where naturally, what’s happening is this kind of inter-relational mutual caring relationship being developed. But often we just don’t know how to talk about them, but they’re really, really meaningful…

Ask you attendees to read through the quote (see accompanying PowerPoint slides). Ask them to reflect on the following questions:

* How does Lauren frame young people’s care of each other?
* Do you agree or disagree with Lauren’s perspective, in what ways?
* How does Brandon’s and Lauren’s approach to UASC’s care of each other differ?

**Possible discussion or responses**

One thing your attendees may have noted is how Lauren suggests that both the State and young people themselves, understate features of care. From Lauren’s perspective, care is less about formal procedures or relationships but about the everyday activities and practices. It is the very ‘everydayness’ of those activities that leads both adults and the young people to frame them as ‘normal’ or ‘of course’, the thing that they do.

**Acknowledgements**

This free training program and the associated research was made possible from funding provided by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC – ES/S001980/1). We would also like to thank all those who gave their time to participate in our study. We also extend our thanks to Dr. Deborah Hadwin for providing her social work expertise and providing feedback.

This content is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 licence. You are free to use, adapt and re-use this material as long as you credit The Open University, CCoM Project, appropriately and license the material under the same terms. For more information visit **http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/**