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

**Training 4: UASC’s perspectives on care**

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

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# **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 (see sessions 1-3).

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
* Have been introduced to young people’s perspectives on care within the asylum system
* Critically reflected how perspectives from professionals and young people may be similar or different.

# **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 4 – UASC’s perspectives on care

In this section you are going to focus on the perspectives of the young people who took part in the Children Caring on the Move (CCoM) project. Some of your attendees may find the discussions in this training are difficult. It might be worth reminding your attendees that this course is designed to enable 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.

Using one of the introductory warm-up sessions as your first activity may also be helpful.

## 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 – UASC’s perspectives on care: ‘See Me’ [30 mins]

We know from the research that the events that prompt young people’s migration to a new country are often traumatic and destabilise their sense of self. As they move through their migratory journey and continue to claim asylum, they each experience a ‘trail of events’ that transform their world, shake their identities and in the case of the study by Chase (2013), ‘set them on trajectories over which they had no control’ (pp. 862). However, the CCoM study had a specific focus, which was to explore their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of ‘care’. One way in which the team of young researchers (who were unaccompanied migrants themselves) and the research team undertook this exploration of care, was through the collaborative development of a short digital film. The film is called ‘Stories too big for a case file’ and showcases the testimonies unaccompanied young people shared with us as they navigate the complex immigration-welfare system in the UK.

First, we explain how the film was created. Then, we have broken the film down into three parts (Activity 2, 3 and 4). We will ask your attendees to listen to each part, and reflect on the content. If your attendees have been experiencing some extremely challenging situations as part of their social care work with UASC, hearing their perspectives might evoke some strong emotions. As they listen to each part, ask your attendees to put themselves in their shoes and think about how their views might be similar or different from their own. Where are the departures and why do you think there are differences?

## Background

**Making the film**

The process of making the film started with young researchers and University researchers meeting online (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) to reflect on the stories they were hearing during the interviews with other young unaccompanied people. The research team discussed the main themes that were taking centre stage in these stories, and they felt they wanted to share these with a wider audience such as professionals, academics and other unaccompanied young people in the UK. We have made a decision to present these stories through a film, because it fits with our participatory approach of doing co-collaborative research with the young people and because we hoped that through this medium, the stories will reach more young people and communities.

Following these discussions, the University-based researchers searched for quotes in the interview transcripts that were illustrating the themes. These quotes were then re-voiced by members of the team, mainly the young researchers, and images and videos of places the young people have referred to during their interviews were taken, as well as images reflecting the stories they have shared with them.

## The Activity

You are now going to watch the first segment of the video put together by the young people. We have titled this segment *Seeing ‘Me’* because some of the key issues raised by the young people speak to the notion of identity and being understood.

As your attended watch, ask them to make a note of some of the key themes or issues discussed and think how they might relate to the young person’s identity. Make a note of some key quotes or words used by the young people.

You can click on the link to see the first segment of film.

<https://youtu.be/LUfZu2l1GGg>

**Possible discussion and reflections points**

Quite a bit of what the young people discussed can be thought about as understanding the self in a difficult and complex situation. You may have noted down the following quotes by a young person when they say ‘I will prove that this is me,’ and this perhaps gets to the heart of this segment of the film.

Not surprisingly, contestations about ‘age’ feature as a part of who makes up ‘me’ for one of the young people in this film. You might have also picked up on the theme of language translation. Language is an important part of a person’s identity and speaks to the heart of who they are.

Another theme is the idea of time: you will know that ‘waiting’ is a significant part of the asylum process. But, one of the young people also noted that some events, like the Home Office interview, happen in a short burst of time but have an enormous impact – as one young person said, in relation to the Home Office evidence ‘that is your life in there’. During that process of waiting, you might also have noted that a young person talked about developing ‘another life.’ Equally, the waiting has a deeply psychological component because it is the space where difficult thoughts fill the space.

One young person alluded to the ways one part of their life (claiming asylum) deeply impacts on all other parts of their life (attempting to concentrate at school).

**Additional questions or discussion points**

After listening to these young people’s descriptions of their identity and how the challenges of being as UASC impacts their sense of self, you may want your attendees to discuss the following questions:

* What practices do you engage in to support young people through difficult processes?
* In your experience, have there been any particular activities that have worked well when supporting young people?

## Activity 3 – UASC’s perspectives on care: ‘Seeing you’ [30 mins]

The Children Caring on the Move research suggested that ‘care’ means lots of different things to different unaccompanied young people. The second part of the film focuses on the relationships discussed by their young people and their importance in their lives.

## Background

Young people talked to us about their relationships with other young people, and how they care for each other. Sometimes, young people take a ‘family-like’ role, and other times they become mentors/advisors to other young people. Clearly, there are also important relationships with social care professionals and other key adults. Let’s watch the second segment of film.

## The Activity

Ask your attendees to watch the second part of the film

<https://youtu.be/g55CtSxObjc>

After watching the second part of the video, ask your attendees to draw a mind map on a piece of paper, depicting the relationships with significant others these young people talk about and reflect on the following:

* What made them important?
* What do you think young people value as caring in these relationships?

**Possible discussion and reflections points**

Your attendees may have noted that the clip can be split into three broad areas:

1. Disruption to relationships.
2. Developing care relationships with other young people.
3. Developing relationships with adults.

It is clear from this clip that establishing relationships with other young people is an incredibly important part of their experience. However, a disruption to the continuity of these relationships can have a negative impact.

You may have got a sense of how significant their care relationship with other young people can be. For example, one young person felt very alone when they arrived in the UK, but in establishing relationships realised there was a lot of potential in the development of a new self in a new context – being someone new and ‘doing more’ with the support of other young people.

Not surprisingly, adult relationships when positive, were extremely impactful. Hopefully, you noted that a positive adult relationship was framed in terms of kindness or being ‘lovely’ and being present or helpful – someone who ‘checks-in’ and are part of the key processes such as Home Office interviews. Someone to turn to, to manage challenging situations. Arguably, these are small but important acts of care.

But, when relationships were negative you may have noted a link with racist attitudes and in difficult relationships, nowhere to turn. The young people also recognised that social workers were overburdened with cases, making care challenging.

## Activity 4 – UASC’s perspectives on care: Dreaming of change [30 mins]

This is the final segment of the film. Like the previous segments, this piece of the film is approximately 5 minutes long.

## Background

In the final segment of the film, the young people speak of the ways they are trying to change the system, or the changes they want to see. CCoM was a participatory study and as such, producing knowledge that was change-oriented was at the core of our collaborative practices. Being provided with an opportunity to talk about was highly valued by the young people in our study.

NB. This film was made prior to the approval of the Illegal Immigration Bill (2023)

## The Activity

As before, listen to the young people talking about their desire for change.

<https://youtu.be/4ZgGe3XU3AU>

Think about the following questions and make notes:

* If you could change three things in the system for young people what would these be?
* What kind of changes in the system could you make to support the professional-young person relationship?

Part 2

After listening to these young people’s needs and desires for change, imagine and briefly describe a future session with a young person.

* What would you keep doing?
* What would you consider changing?

**Pause for thought: reflection on multiple stories**

As you reflect on these discussions, what care practices do you engage in? What are the limitations or boundaries that you set and why? Have these stories may have affected the way you see and work with UASC?

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