

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru
Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales
Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Seicolegol Prydain
Response from: The British Psychological Society (BPS)



The
British
Psychological
Society

John Griffiths AM

Chair Equality, Local Government & Communities Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Pierhead Street

Cardiff

CF99 1NA

21 November 2016

Dear John Griffiths AM,

Wales and the World: Supporting refugees and asylum seekers

We welcome the decision by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee to look at the support available for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and how well Wales is responding to the large-scale displacement of Syrians because of the country's civil war.

We appreciate that this is largely in relation to the Welsh Government's 'Refugee and Asylum Delivery Plan' and how those services are provided through local authorities.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) would like to take this opportunity to share its views on the support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Earlier this month, the BPS's Presidential Taskforce on Refugees and Asylum seekers issued a statement on the need for the prompt, effective and human treatment of minors from Calais. We believe that the committee may want to consider the principles outlined in this statement as part of their inquiry along with how they apply to unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive in Wales.

Statement by the British Psychological Society's Presidential Taskforce on Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The British Psychological Society recognises work already undertaken to support and care for unaccompanied minors by the French and British Government. However, we would stress that there are important and additional considerations which need to be made.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) recognises the efforts of the British government to share responsibilities with France in protecting unaccompanied children and young people. In addition to those recently arriving, there are thousands of children and young persons in the UK as asylum seekers and refugees, with similar and urgent needs and large numbers still in Calais with an uncertain future.

Whilst efforts are being made by the Home Office in collaboration with the British Red Cross and others to provide support to recently arrived minors in the UK from the 'Calais Jungle' the BPS emphasises that there are important and additional considerations which need to be made in any measures taken with these minors. In particular prompt, effective and humane action is vital as many will have multiple and complex needs.

1. Prompt, holistic assessment of their overall wellbeing and medical, psychological, welfare and educational needs. This requires a coordinated response from a multidisciplinary team, which should include practitioner psychologists.
2. Psychological assessments of vulnerability (including to risk of further harm or exploitation) and of the impact of a range of experiences including loss (including of parents or other family members), violence, abuse or exploitation. Such assessments should be gender-appropriate, culturally-appropriate and in the relevant language of the individual using professional interpreters. Psychological assessments can take into account socioeconomic and other context factors which impact on the well-being, development and learning of a children and young persons. Such assessments can contribute to a prompt multidisciplinary response to ensure minors are able to access appropriate health and social care services, and that they are able to access education swiftly and that they can be adequately supported in the educational system; and placed in culturally-appropriate, safe foster care where necessary.

3. Multidisciplinary assessments in cases where the ages of minors is disputed in the legal asylum determination process. No single discipline has the expertise to provide a definitive or even a best approach to age determination and any such assessment requires more than a one-off assessment, which can provide an approximate age. Practitioner psychologists can contribute to multidisciplinary age-range assessments by assessing development and maturity, the range of psychological and social factors which may impact on such development. They can help by providing a psychological opinion on the implications of such an assessment for the individual's functioning and their protection, emotional, social and educational needs.
4. Effective support of any families who are supporting the minors, particularly in understanding the needs of the child or young person, providing a safe and supportive environment as best as possible to facilitate their development and adjustment to life in the UK and to the educational system. Psychological support should also foster any existing peer relationships, such as those formed in Calais, and existing relationships and communication with family members outside the UK.
5. Adequate training and ongoing support for foster carers and staff in residential settings hosting unaccompanied minors. This will ensure carers are prepared for the range and complexity of psychological, medical, educational and welfare needs as well as personal, emotional or other resources that unaccompanied minors may have to manage the challenges of adjusting to life in the UK.
6. Adequate and prompt training for health and social care staff and teachers receiving unaccompanied minors, to consider the psychological aspects of their needs and development to help ensure that every individual is supported in reaching their full potential.
7. Adequate training health service commissioners and local authorities to ensure adequate systems are in place to allow prompt access to social, health and educational systems to promote well-being and social inclusion of unaccompanied minors

The British Psychological Society urges the government, all psychologists and other health, social care and educational professionals to work together to uphold our legal obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and our humanitarian obligations to ensure the protection, safety and best interests of each and every unaccompanied minor arriving in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Hutchings', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Paul Hutchings

Chair Welsh Branch, British Psychological Society

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