



# Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

A Research Study with Dost Centre for  
Young Migrants and Refugees  
A Relationship-based, 360° Service

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## **Introduction**

*“Unaccompanied migrant children in the asylum and immigration processes are some of the most vulnerable young people in the United Kingdom. They have often fled conflict situations abroad or have been the victims of abuse and exploitation, including those who arrive as victims of trafficking. It is crucial that they are supported effectively.”*

*Dr Hywel Francis MP,*

*Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, June 2013*

### **Dost Centre for Young Migrants and Refugees – a summary**

Dost Centre for Young Migrants and Refugees is a charity founded in 2000, and based at Trinity Community Centre in East Ham, London. Its overall aim is to improve the quality of life for young migrants and refugees aged 11 – 25 years living in Newham and the surrounding boroughs. It aims to:

- enable young migrants and refugees to achieve their potential by promoting their resilience and improving their well-being
- support young migrants and refugees in accessing their rights and entitlements, particularly as they are going through the asylum process
- raise public awareness and understanding of the needs of young migrants and refugees, and improve policy and practice related to young migrants and refugees

The Centre seeks to achieve its aims by providing young migrants and refugees with youth work and educational support, one to one advice & casework, and one to one therapeutic casework.

It also works more widely to raise awareness by sharing knowledge through presentations, training and consultancy, participating in relevant policy and practitioner forums and offering placements to students in relevant fields.

### **The UEL Pilot Research Project – a summary**

*“Psychosocial Studies research considers relationships between professional practice and the lived experience of marginalised or denigrated populations. It also interrogates the gap between mainstream policy processes and analysis and the experience of these populations and those working with them.”*

*Psychosocial Studies Research Group, February 2013*

The aim of the study discussed in this report was to report on Dost's services from the vantage point of a sample of former and current service users. The voices of young refugees and migrants often remain hidden and there are a limited number of studies reporting their views (but see the discussion below). Dost is a service that typically engages and works with its users long term (sometimes over many years) and this was an opportunity to record the views of both recent entrants to the UK and those whose asylum journey had taken many years, or indeed could be said to be over. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the summer of 2012 with 20 service users aged 12 to 26 years. Interview questions were designed to elicit answers in four key areas:

- the nature of the lived experience of young migrants and refugees using Dost's services
- Dost's response to this experience and the positive characteristics of Dost's culture as an organisation
- evidence of a transformative impact upon young people as a result of engaging with Dost's services
- gaps or deficits in provision in Dost's services

The interview data obtained was subjected to thematic analysis and considered in two ways. Firstly, following detailed coding of data, a quantitative analysis collated the most frequently reported benefits and drawbacks of Dost's services. Secondly, consideration was given to the lived experience of the young people during their time using Dost's services. Three overarching themes addressed 'lived experience':

- trajectories through the asylum and migration process
- trajectories through the developmental process of adolescence
- achievement of a sense of emotional well-being

Overall, the research project found that from the point of view of service users, Dost had had a valuable transformative impact on their lives. The interview material is considered substantively in what follows, but the quotations below were typical responses when interviewees were asked to sum up the nature of Dost's services:

*"I have no family. They are my family. They 150% for sure tell you the right thing to do."*

*"There are no false promises and they will not let you down. This is a home away from home. They embrace anybody."*

*"If it wasn't for M, I wouldn't be sitting here right now. I think of her as a mum – like a second mum."*

*"Dost is a safety net if all else fails. They are a backbone with their support. Dost is the thing you can fall back on."*

## **Background context to the work of Dost**

### **Dost's work with young migrants and refugees**

Dost supports young migrants and refugees in accessing their rights and entitlements, particularly as they are going through the asylum process; it also seeks to enable young migrants and refugees to achieve their potential, by promoting their resilience and improving their well-being. Children and young people may self-refer (usually via the Youth Sessions), or be referred by statutory or voluntary services (eg. CAMHS, social services, other youth projects) and elect to use one or all elements of the service. In 2010-11, 178 children and young people took part in their youth programmes, 40 attended educational programmes and 60 were seen by the Advice, Advocacy and Therapeutic Support Service. In 2010 Dost hosted 'Brighter Futures', a self-advocacy group for young refugees and asylum seekers.

In the past, Dost has worked exclusively with unaccompanied or separated child asylum-seekers and it is expected that many if not most of the children referred or self-referred to its service will continue to fall into this category. The majority of the 20 interviewees were unaccompanied asylum seekers.

As of 2012, though, Dost broadened its service to support children of migrant families, in recognition of the fact that such children share many of the disadvantages and difficulties of separated asylum seekers. This is particularly the case where children are living with extended family or more distant relatives or family friends. 6 of the interviewees fell into this category. In addition, 1 interviewee was the British-born child of migrants, and had been taken into foster care. Dost will also work with children who are undocumented, and some of the interviewees fell into this category.

### **Hidden lives**

The lived experience of young migrants and asylum seekers can be hidden from public and professional view for a variety of reasons. Young people arriving in this country, particularly those who are alone, lack material, linguistic and cultural resources in claiming their entitlements and making their needs known (Bhabha and Finch, 2006). They are frequently psychologically vulnerable because of their experiences in their countries of origin and during their journeys to the UK (Bronstein and Montgomery, 2011; Mougne, 2010). In addition, they may face a 'culture of disbelief' (Pinter, 2012: 16) about their histories, particularly within the immigration service, and are therefore wary of disclosing their experiences (Kohli, 2008). Lack of awareness about their distinctiveness as a group compared to other disadvantaged child populations (eg. looked after children) may also mean that their comparative resourcefulness and resilience is overlooked (Kohli, 2003).

Dost aims to raise public awareness and understanding of the needs of young migrants and refugees, and improve policy and practice related to them. One way it does this is through its website, [www.dostcentre.org](http://www.dostcentre.org). Other recent research has also aimed to make the voices of refugee and asylum-seeking children more visible. Kohli and Crawley (2011) interviewed 11 of the Scottish-based asylum-seeking young people using the pilot Guardianship Service in 2011, employing focus groups and one-to-one interviews. The Children's Society has recently interviewed a small sample of children using its services, as part of a policy report demanding further adaptation of the immigration service to ensure it prioritises the best interests of refugee and asylum-seeking children subject to its control (Pinter, 2012). It is hoped that the research presented here will contribute to making more visible the voices and broader lived experiences of young migrants and unaccompanied asylum seekers, lives that too often remain hidden and unrecognised.

### **Living on the borderline**

The uncertain or borderline status of refugee children and young people (as almost-adults and not-yet-approved asylum claimants) contributes to the provision of patchy or delayed or inadequate services (JCHR Report, June 2013). Child claimants have difficulty accessing and funding good quality legal advice, they are often placed in unsuitable accommodation, and safeguarding concerns are frequently inadequately addressed, particularly in relation to the detection of trafficking (JCHR Report, June 2013). Children experience delays in accessing health and educational services, and routine disputation of their age. There are bars to them applying for higher education (JCHR Report, June 2013).

In addition, whilst the immigration service is required to place the 'best interests of the child' centrally in its determinations (Article 3, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), it is also required to "...uphold the integrity of the immigration control system" (UKBA Code of Practice for Keeping Children Safe from Harm, 2008: 8). This tension has recently been resolved in practice by granting many asylum-seeking children 'discretionary leave to remain', a category which 'runs out' as they reach near-adulthood, although there is a right of appeal. This means that children and young people are granted asylum at a lower rate than the adult population of asylum-seeking applicants, as discretionary leave to remain is granted only on humanitarian grounds<sup>1</sup>. The category creates a great deal of uncertainty, meaning that many children are planning their futures in the hope of remaining in this country, whilst also having to consider eventual return to their countries of origin. Unsurprisingly, many children find this prospect difficult to face. Preparing young people for possible return to their countries of origin is one of the most demanding dimensions of Dost's work.

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<sup>1</sup> On average only 13% of unaccompanied minors were granted asylum over the past five years, while around 51% were given discretionary leave on the basis that there were no adequate reception facilities in their country of origin...unaccompanied children continue to be granted refugee status at a noticeably lower rate than overall applicants. In 2011, 25% of asylum applications were granted refugee status compared to only 18% of unaccompanied children." (Ilona Pinter, The Children's Society, 2012: 3)

## **Guardians for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children**

In many European countries special guardians are appointed to oversee the best interests of unaccompanied refugees who are minors (Alikhan and Floor, 2007). As indicated above, in Scotland there has been a recent pilot of a Guardianship Service for refugee and asylum seeking children. Guardians accompany children and young people when they claim asylum and are cared for by health, education and welfare services. Guardians have a brief to be 'on the child's side', and the first annual evaluation report of the Scottish Guardianship Service Pilot concluded that "...Guardians appointed to the Service appear to us to be clearly committed to the well-being of young people...Young people wholeheartedly value the Service in relation to asylum assistance, welfare, co-ordination, and social provisions." (Kohli and Crawley, 2011: 38). It is worth noting that in the first (pilot) year of the service, the new Guardians found it hard to help children plan effectively for a future in their countries of origin (Kohli and Crawley, 2011: 23).

Dost's advice and advocacy work with migrant and refugee children has many parallels with the work of the Scottish Guardians. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has recently called for a trial of the system of guardianship in England and Wales (Press Notice, JCHR June 2013) and this may well be something Dost could seek involvement in.



## **Research design and methodology**

This research was funded with a grant of £3000 from the Social Sciences Small Grant Fund in the School of Law and Social Sciences at the University of East London. In June 2012 the project leader met initially with staff at Dost to discuss the conduct of research that aimed to be 'practice-near' (Froggett and Briggs, 2012) and designed to gain a purchase on the subjective experiences of migrant and refugee young people – as noted, a highly vulnerable but dynamic group. A preliminary literature review of the field was conducted.

### **Interview questions**

A semi-structured interview schedule was devised and adapted in discussion with Dost staff. This consisted of open-ended, neutral questions, framed in a friendly way, about eight key areas for service users of Dost:

- initial experiences in this country
- first encounters with Dost
- experiences generally at Dost
- encounters with the Home Office and Dost's advocacy role
- experience of youth sessions
- Dost's support in relation to education
- experience of the key worker relationship
- a discussion led by the question, 'Should Dost change?'
- a closing question about the young person's ambitions for the future

The design of the schedule was also informed by the National Children's Bureau's Guidelines for Research with Children and Young People (2011). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of East London. Two research assistants were recruited to participate in the conduct of interviews. They both had relevant clearance and experience of the service user group and of conducting interviews with vulnerable young people.

### **Sample**

A sample of up to 20 potential interviewees was discussed, with selection based on the following criteria:

- young people who would not find the interviewing process distressing
- a range of ages from youngest (12 yrs) to oldest (25+ yrs), and males and females
- fluency of English
- users from all of the services
- users at different stages of use of the service
- any member of the youth sessions who wanted to participate (11 – 19 yrs)

## Key characteristics of the sample<sup>2</sup>

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Country of birth</b>	<b>Age on entry to UK</b>	<b>Age at time of interview<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Duration of interview (mins)<sup>4</sup></b>
Faith	England	n/a	12	16
Abdul	Pakistan	9	14	14
Ashraf	Pakistan	10	15	12
Sohail	Afghanistan	14	15	37
Shamsur	Bangladesh	11	16	16
Ibrahim	Pakistan	13	16	17
Rajiv	Sri Lanka	11	17	10
Solomon	Sierra Leone	13	18	16
Benjamin	England	n/a	18	19
Abraham	Somalia	16	20	35
Mohammed	Iraq	16	21	20
Phuc	Vietnam	14	22	39
Rahim	Afghanistan	15	22	28
Reben	Iraq	16	22	33
Kehinde	Uganda	17	22	107
Petras	Lithuania	13	23	43
Christelle	DRC	14	23	39
Hassan	Iran	17	23	58
Bernardo	Sudan	16	24	77
Alexander	Rwanda	15	26	56

This was a relatively small sample and partly unrepresentative. Older research participants were drawn from those who continued to be formally or informally connected to Dost. It was the researchers' impression that continued involvement was in fact fairly typical for the organisation, given the longstanding nature of the work with the young people; but it is possible that those who had no current links with the organisation might have had different views. Time constraints unfortunately did not permit a more widespread, random sampling of ex-users.

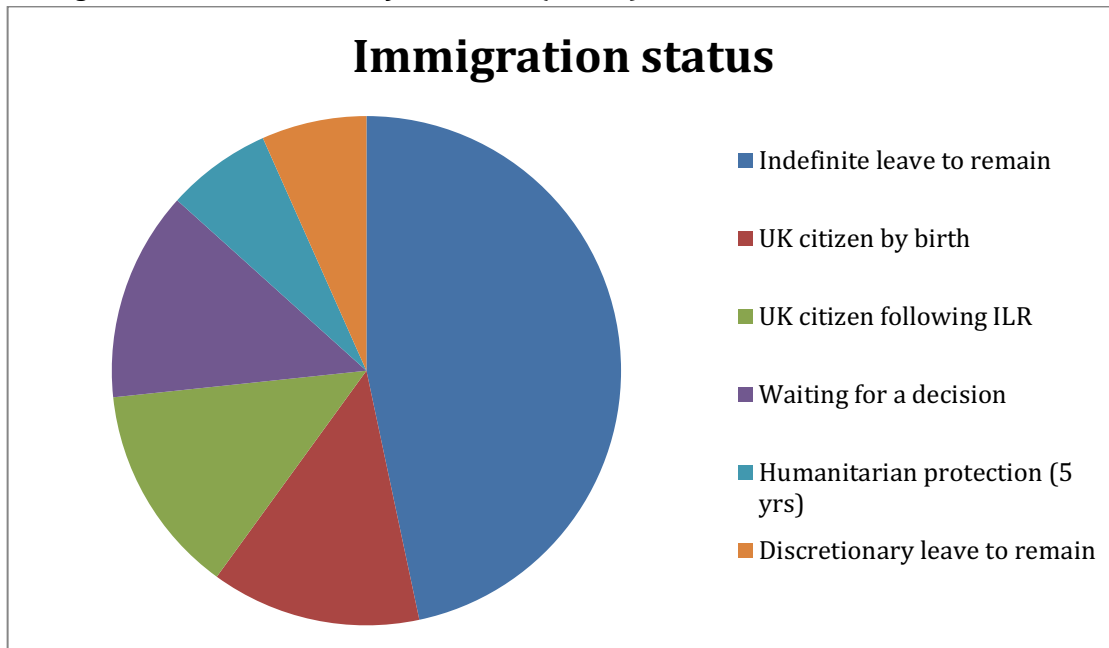
<sup>2</sup> All names and countries of birth have been anonymised.

<sup>3</sup> Care was taken to ensure that young people were able to give informed consent prior to being interviewed.

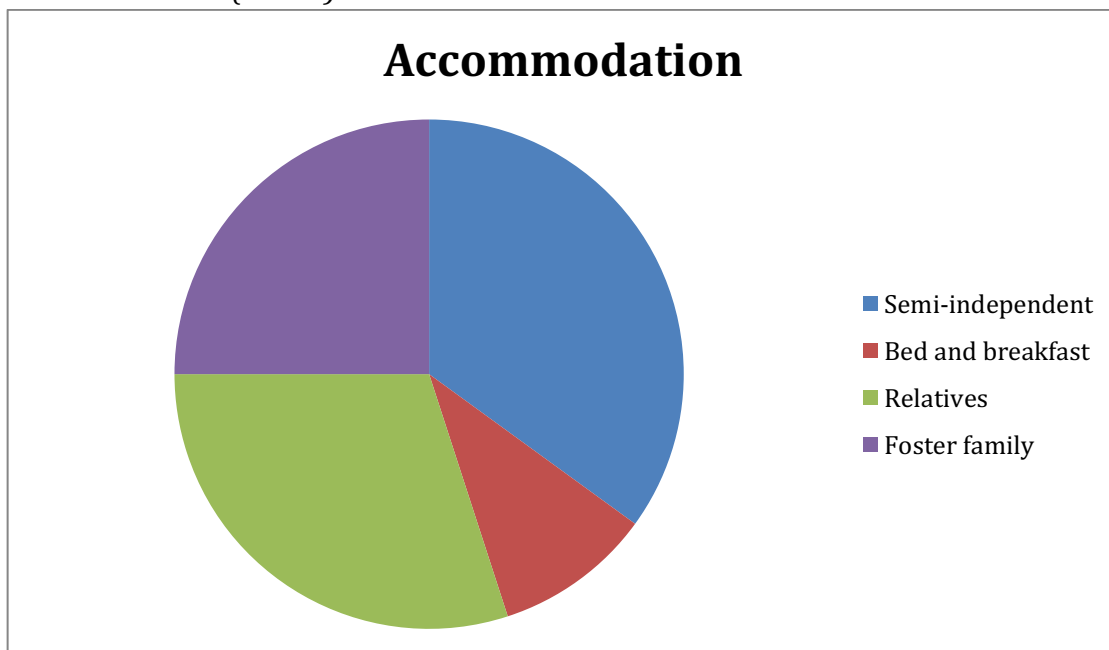
<sup>4</sup> It is possible to see a clear correlation between age and duration of interview.

## Other relevant psychosocial factors

*Immigration status at time of interview (n = 20)*



*Accommodation (n = 20)*



## *Education*

All but one of the interviewees over 16 years had attended college, 5 were at university or held degrees and 11 were in employment. The interviewees ages 16 years or below were all in mainstream schooling. Only 3 of the interviewees had any English on entry to the UK.

## Analysis of the data

Interview material was transcribed and extracts coded thematically. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that thematic analysis can usefully summarise the key features of a data set as well as providing opportunities to present 'thick' descriptions of lived experience. It also lends itself well to qualitative analyses aimed at informing policy and practice (p. 97). In this study, qualitative analysis took two forms. Firstly, the prevalence of particular themes was noted quantitatively in relation to the most frequently reported benefits and drawbacks of Dost's services. Frequency was noted in terms of how many interviewees spoke to a given theme.

One of the strengths of this study was the depth and detail of the material interviewees provided. A further qualitative analysis considered dimensions of the lived experience of the young people who were interviewed in more depth. These were conceptualised using four overarching themes:

- trajectories through the asylum and migration process
- trajectories through the developmental process of adolescence
- achievement of a sense of emotional well-being
- the work of building an identity as a particular kind of UK citizen and resident.

These themes are addressed by presenting particularly telling or vivid extracts from individual interviews that could also be considered as representative of interviewees' views expressed overall (unless specifically noted as divergent).

Finally, it is worth noting the epistemological framework within which this research report is grounded. The approach taken here is essentialist or realist - it is presumed that interviewees had access to and were recounting their lived experience relatively unproblematically and truthfully. However, it is important not to be naive and to consider a number of factors influencing the particular accounts given:

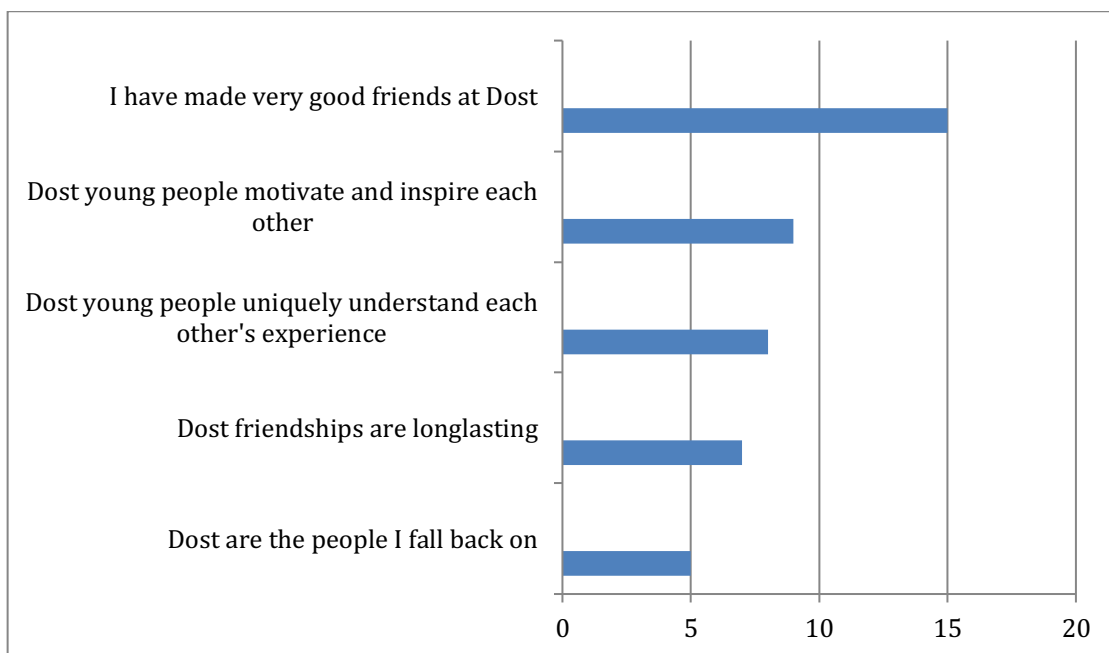
- interviewees introduced as 'university researchers' may be positioned as professionals with whom an interviewee may wish to be circumspect in detailing all elements of their story accurately (see Kohli 2005), or with whom an interviewee might wish to present a particular persona
- interviewees knew Dost was at risk of losing core funding; a positive research report might influence things positively
- linguistic and cultural factors and the significance of individuals' 'assumptive life worlds' (Yelloly and Henkel, 1995) may mean that meanings assumed were not what was intended to be conveyed

Within the limits of these parameters, though, interviewees were impressively fluent and spoke with considerable passion and force about Dost and their experiences.

## Findings from the research interviews - prevalence of particular themes

### 'Dost means 'friend' in several languages'- the importance of friends made at Dost: 15/20 interviewees

This statement occurs on the Dost website and in its literature; it was mentioned by many interviewees and captures the way friendship at Dost transcended barriers of language, ethnicity and culture. Three quarters of interviewees emphasised the importance of friendships at Dost.



#### *I have made very good friends at Dost (15/20 interviewees)*

<p>"...is nice because everybody is very friendly here and after you spent a bit of time here you get close to each other"  <i>(Ibrahim, from Pakistan at 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"Dost means friendly, er, like in different languages. Like, in my language it means friends, like...Dost...friends. People didn't know that I couldn't speak any English. They tried to help me out, and then we became friends, and I, cos couldn't speak English, they helped me"  <i>(Abdul, from Pakistan at 9 yrs)</i></p>
<p>"Um, so yeah, so just sort of made friends, and um, just, the cool stuff started happening, you know, started hanging out with one group of friends that was just the first point of contact. You study together, you have fun together, you have weekends together and stuff."  <i>(Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"Now I have got many friends here at Dost. Dost is a good place for young people. I have made many friends."  <i>(Ashraf, from Pakistan at 10 yrs)</i></p>

*Dost young people motivate and inspire each other (9/20 interviewees)*

<p>“...he’s saying, like, where he is now, he comes to Youth Club, it’s like completely different for him, like the friends he’s got over here, whereas the friends he’s got at school, they hang around on the streets and they don’t really pay that much attention in, you know, studies whereas if you come here, Dost look after them, so these friends, they’re just, like, behaviour-wise, different.” <i>(Sohail, from Afghanistan at 14 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“If you are with friends that are actually positive and they are going through stuff...but they’ve got some source of, uh...motivation...and...they have a strong belief, so, you might go, you might fell down and stand up and you will keep going.” <i>(Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</i></p>
<p>“They say environment educates, environment changes, for me the friends I have made in Dost has made me change the way I see things, the way I approach things. And the way I can stay positive. Most of those friends I have now they have their status, but they will call me and they will say, listen, you will have it one day. You’ve struggled, hard, we know, you will have it. For me, it was that encouragement, you know?” <i>(Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</i></p>	<p>They were cool, like. I have friends who were from Afghanistan, India...They, like, do BMX with me. So it was like good to mix, with them, to know their culture, and like talk about that, yeah, to know their culture. It’s good.” <i>(Benjamin, UK, 18 yrs)</i></p>

*Dost young people uniquely understand each other’s experience (8/20 interviewees)*

<p>“You are able to talk to them because you know that they will be able to understand the way you’re feeling, you know. They’re really different from other friends outside, because other friends outside, you can’t meet them and say, oh, do you know, that this happened to me, you can’t say things to them like that. Whereas friends at Dost, because you know they’ve been through a similar, or the same, situation as you, you can actually speak your mind to them.” <i>(Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“At the time I didn’t have other friends outside. The only friends I had were the ones I met here. By that time we were sort of, because we were kind of unique, because of our experiences, it was not that we hadn’t associated with other people, but this was kind of our, this was our kind of environment. I struggled to make friends in college. There was nothing...I don’t know what I could have talked to them about that they would have understood.” <i>(Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</i></p>
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*Dost friendships are long lasting (7/20 interviewees)*

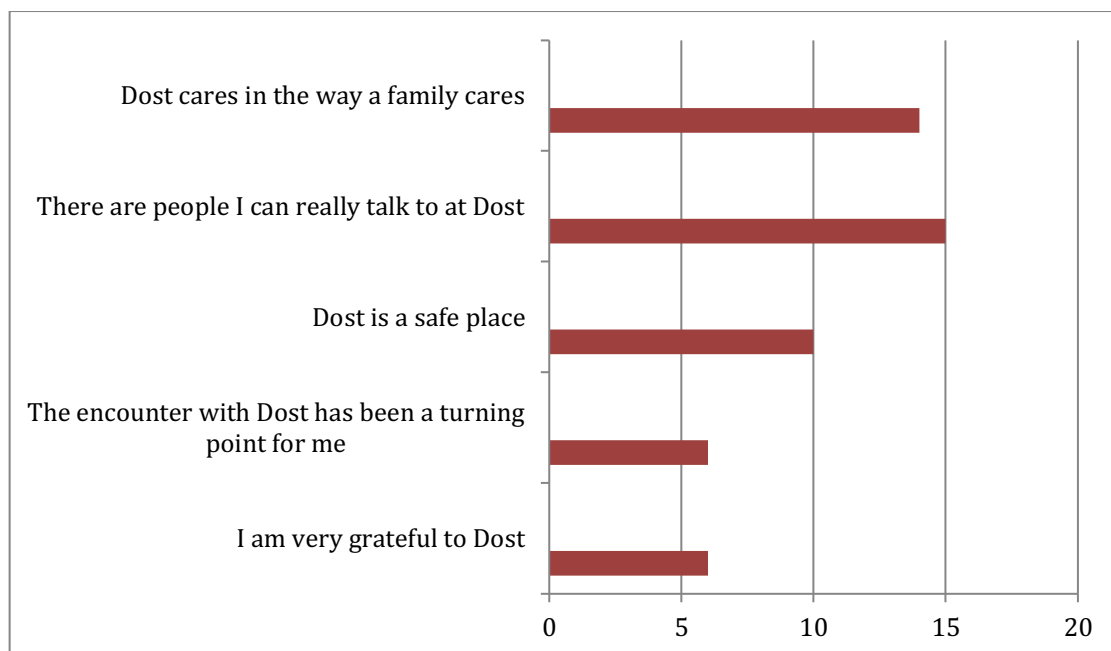
<p>“The friends I’ve made at Dost, it’s like we’ve had a good time there and they were very nice friend, like one or two of them are still like my best friend.” <i>(Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“Well, I think the friends I’ve made at Dost are a friend of life, you know? They are kind of medicine of life, you know, a friend is a medicine of life.” <i>(Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</i></p>
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*Dost are the people I fall back on (5/20 interviewees)*

<p>“You don’t feel like being as open with others, you don’t feel that they are being as supportive with you. But Dost is the sort of thing that you can fall back on.” <i>(Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“I had friends that were here at Dost already before me. They told me, ‘We are really confident about these people...These friends are real friends.’” <i>(Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</i></p>
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## Dost as an ‘as if’ family: 14/20 interviewees

Nearly three quarters of the interviewees used metaphors or analogies to do with ‘family’ when speaking about Dost’s support and care.



### *Dost cares in the way a family cares*

<p>She was like my counsellor, she’s like my mum, she’s my dad, you know...She’s my brother, she’s my sister, she’s my friend, oh she’s my best friend. I tell her everything, you know. She was everything to me. (Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)</p>	<p>“If it wasn’t for M, I wouldn’t be sitting here right now. I think of her as a mum – like a second mum.” (Shamsur, from Bangladesh at 11 yrs)</p>
<p>“Dost is like a family. We all get on with each other. I’m not saying this because you are from the outside – this is what I’m feeling about Dost.” (Solomon, from Sierra Leone at 13 yrs)</p>	<p>There’s a family atmosphere. About family. And their teaching. It’s about the family. That warm-up...is...is here. Like, that kind of a feeling of being a family. As in, taking care. It’s here. (Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</p>

### *There are people I can really talk to at Dost*

<p>“Those kinds of friends are the friends that I need when I really need, you know? They are the friends that I can have for fun, friends that I can really talk to, friends that I see as brothers and sisters, friends that I think you know, if I am sick today they will come and knock my door, you know? Those are the people I am talking about. (Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</p>	<p>“For me, it was an issue of trust. I wasn’t sure who to trust, who I could really talk to. But Y was kind of open. They were very kind of open people, you know? They were not...it’s not like an institution where someone has ten minutes to talk to you and that’s how long they can see you. You could kind of talk more and more, and they wanted to find out why am I here.” (Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</p>
<p>“You have this heart to heart conversation that otherwise you wouldn’t have been able to have. You would feel free, to be open, um...to be more honest and to be yourself. Which is kind</p>	<p>“What I wanted was someone I could just talk to, to listen to me, I didn’t want someone to tell me it was OK and stuff, I just wanted to say everything that was on my mind.”</p>

of, the basis of it all. (Petras, from Lithuania at 14 yrs)	(Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)
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*Dost is a safe place*

“There are no false promises, and they will not let you down. This is a home away from home. They embrace anybody.” (Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)	“If you got problem, like with foster family, or maybe if you got problem with friends, or maybe someone, you know, outside, you tell them for you to be safe, you know? I don’t have family, no one, so...uncle, I call them uncle.” (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)
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*The encounter with Dost has been a turning point for me*

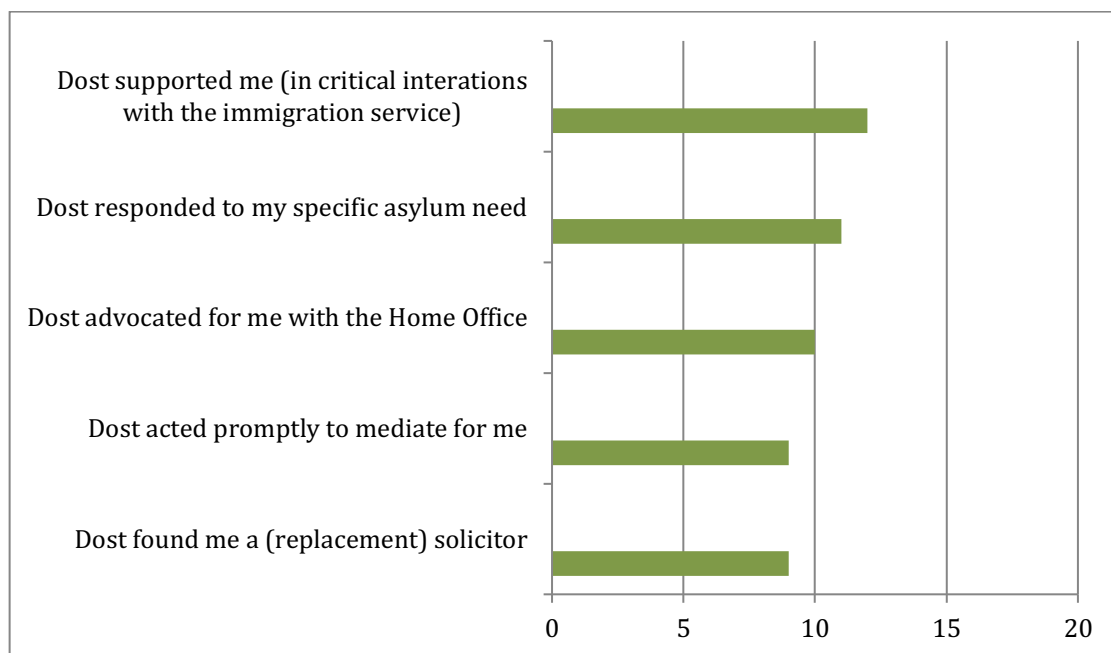
“Oh my god, this is like...they inspired me. You know, for it to be...somewhere in your life you need to be looking at someone to see that, OK, I’m gonna be that person, or I’m gonna do that thing, you know...” (Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)	“If I didn’t come here I am sure 100% that I would end up in jail or prison or I was going to die in the road, you know? It sounds like making a lot of difference, a lot of difference in people’s life, you know? Especially in young people’s life.” (Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)
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*I am very grateful to Dost*

“I have to say thank you very much, that’s ...cos if I don’t know these people, imagine.” (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)	“Thank you to everyone at Dost who helped me and I do appreciate what they did. I have a good life now thanks to them.” (Rahim from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)
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**‘This is not a game: this is the Home Office’ (Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs) – Dost’s help with the asylum process: 12/20 interviewees**



*Dost supported me (in critical interactions with the immigration service)*

<p>“And C , is not that officially I asked for it but he took his own time to come with me to the Home Office to attend the interview...And was really helpful, because at the time I remember there was one Home Office officer and another trainee officer and one interpreter, and the trainee actually did a lot of disturbing things, and C just reported to the officer. I found this very helpful.” (Phuc, from Vietnam at 14 yrs)</p>	<p>“Basically, basically, they were coaching me and its...um...directing me, giving me guidance. Cos really, there was no one about apart from them. And finding, solicitors, interacting with the solicitors, barristers, taking me there, all the appointments, finding the, actually what’s going on, with my case.” (Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</p>
<p>“I was signing in the Home Office every two weeks. I was taking one day off from college, I was going in to sign at the Home Office, and my caseworker said that’s not right. She found a solicitor for me, and she said, oh this is... they made a mistake. You shouldn’t do this. Two years I was doing that, I was in that situation. And they stopped the signing.” (Reben, from Iraq at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>“They do a lot for people, they write references, and we’ve got case workers here. If you have any problem, young people can go and speak to them and I think they do a lot.” (Ibrahim, from Pakistan at 13 yrs)</p>

*Dost found me a (replacement) solicitor*

<p>“She said, ‘Oh, I’m your case worker, we will help you to find a solicitor to find, to help you with everything. And it was, like...she gave me energy. I remember that she took me to the solicitor’s.” (Reben, from Iraq at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>“Where they really helped me was after the solicitor’s interview, because the story they had compiled on my case...the solicitors weren’t good. Um, and then, I came here and Y found me a different solicitor.” (Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</p>
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*Dost responded to my specific asylum need*

<p>“Dost helped with my case, and told me how to apply. And they asked for me in the Home Office how long I have to wait and so on, and how can it be done quickly.” <i>(Ashraf, from Pakistan at 10 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“Cos there was a problem with Home Office. The first um...application I made, they rejected it... and I’ve got...in a state before, whereby I worried. But then when I was going there, the staff at Dost have come with me as well. We needed moral support, you know!” <i>(Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)</i></p>
<p>“I was refused last year, January, and C is the one who um, supported me. Um...I was very distressed, I didn’t know what to do. He said, many young people are having this refusal. So, this is what we should do. We shouldn’t be distressed. We should try, we are going to appeal...My solicitor was a bastard, sorry for my language, he was incredible, somebody I wouldn’t want to see again in my life. But C said, that’s not what you want to do. What you want to do is go there, say what your needs are, and forget about the way he treated you.” <i>(Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“I was thinking, Oh God, I am a good person, I did nothing wrong, and why this is happening to me? Like they asked me and kept me waiting which I think not only for me but for every one, waiting is a terrible thing. I have been waiting six years. I have got nothing now, I am telling you. I have got no papers. I have been going through and I am still waiting. If I don’t come here I would go mad you know? They support you with your mental health problems, depression, they are the right people to know when you are going through bad times.” <i>(Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)</i></p>

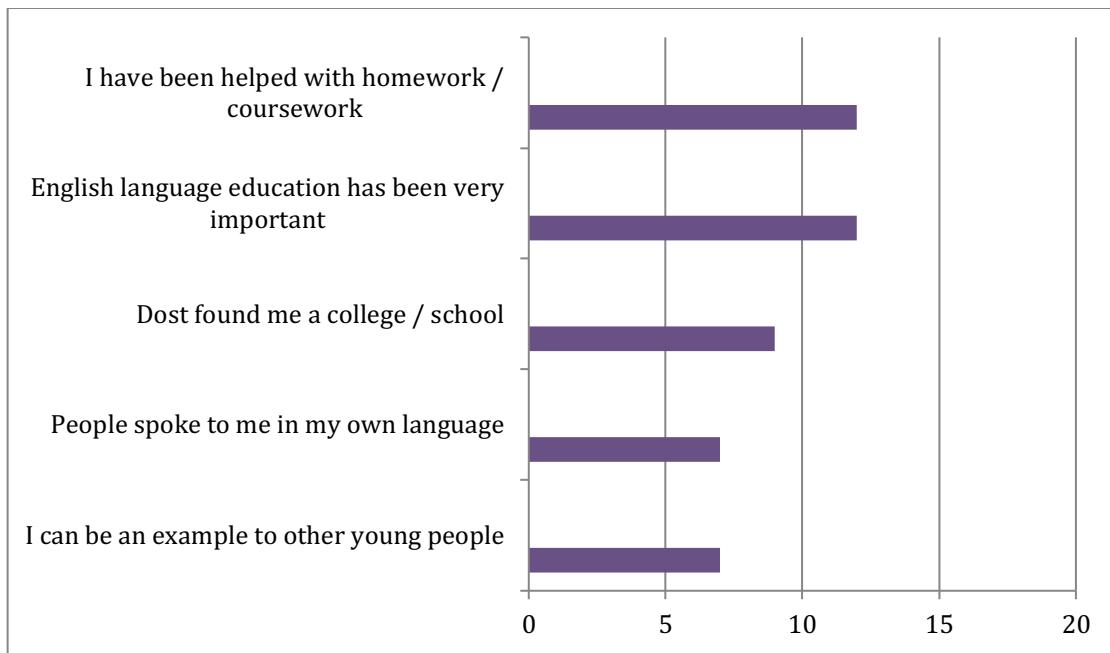
*Dost advocated for me with the Home Office*

<p>“When I got refused, they helped me again to go, you know, write an application, appeal against their decision and apply for an extension, and put up a statement altogether with him, and took me to the solicitor again and sent a...make sure if it again ready on time and...yeah!” <i>(Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“He say he had an interview with Scot, and then Scot was talking to the Home Office about it, like his interview, like what he said, like what he wants to do, like how he wants to change things, and Scot was basically like you know taking his point of views...And giving it to the Home Office.” <i>(Sohail, from Afghanistan at 14 yrs)</i></p>
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*Dost acted promptly to mediate for me*

<p>“If I don’t send in the application next week Monday to apply for another visa or ILR I am in the country illegally and therefore my case becomes jeopardised...Once I get in contact with my solicitors, they tell me we’re sorry, we don’t know who you are, we have not got your file, nothing...And again going back to the safety place, I quickly come here...by Friday the application was filled in and everything has been done so quickly it’s just incredible...for emergency things, this is absolutely beautiful!” <i>(Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“...court is tomorrow, the solicitor told me in that day...I go, ‘What the hell...?’ So I come straight away here...S, he sent an email, finding me that other solicitor, she went in judge, she told her she wanted more extension. I trust Dost like my family, you know? Thank God I got even visa. <i>(Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</i></p>
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**Dost's help and encouragement with educational and personal advancement: 12/20**



*I have been helped with homework / coursework*

<p>"I came with my work, and Y was guiding us. We got some books and everything, and afterwards, including the experience which I got from here, the work I had I was doing weekends here, it all kind of added up to my portfolio which I took to university and they gave me a place in the university." (Alexander, from Rwanda aged 15 yrs)</p>	<p>"Mr C , he's very close to me and always help me a lot with my education. Every time I apply for an application, ah, every time I go to college and interview he always support me and everything. And every time my homework I call him and ask him for help." (Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs)</p>
<p>"When I first started at Dost they were helping me with me with my home work, M and some others. So that was good." (Faith, UK, 12 yrs)</p>	<p>"He teaching me how to write, reading before going to school, college, so he teaching me at the Trinity Centre, into writing, little bits." (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</p>

*People spoke to me in my own language*

<p>"She was speaking my language. I was happy, because, you know, first time I find people who speak my language. It felt great. You know. I was like, nearly crying, so she told me, there two people in class, come, yes, they was speaking me my language, I was you know like, too move...And oh! You making me like trust, so thanks for that, you find me these people." (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>"A few people were speaking my language, speaking to me in Arabic, and there were one of their officers for the Dost who speak it, and she was talking to me like and actually telling me, uh, there is this and this is that, and I was like oh, so, we was speaking! And I was already like, smiling." (Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</p>
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### *English Language education has been very important*

<p>“I mean I learned English from Dost...When I first came here I saw Dost like school, like college but after that I learned that in fact it is for the community, to be used for different things, is quite amazing because I even didn't know how to speak to the teacher and to ask for help. The amazing thing is, my English teacher, he find a dictionary, got Vietnamese and English in it, and I tried to start from there.” (Phuc, from Vietnam at 14 yrs)</p>	<p>“I don't speak the language even, when you say to them, how are you, I can't say, I can't say something, cos I don't understand. So either, I don't know how to write. So you teaching me. No one, you know, he don't laugh you. It was he want to know your language, he treat you good, so he teaching me how to write.” (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</p>
<p>“I was a bit scared, I didn't spoke any English and yeah...I saw many young people playing and talking. I couldn't talk much because I didn't know English. But as I started to learn English I got to talk to them and now I have got many friends here at Dost.” (Ashraf, from Pakistan at 10 yrs)</p>	<p>“I came here and started learning on the English...Couldn't speak English. That was the most difficult...difficult thing to me. Now I can speak English so I have no difficulty. A bit, I can speak English...My friend who was same, same country as me, he told me about Dost and he told me that you learn a lot there...I didn't know anyone so I was like shy and couldn't speak to anyone. And after, M, like, told me to, don't be shy and speak to people, and you will improve your English. And now I speak good. (Abdul, from Pakistan at 9 yrs)</p>

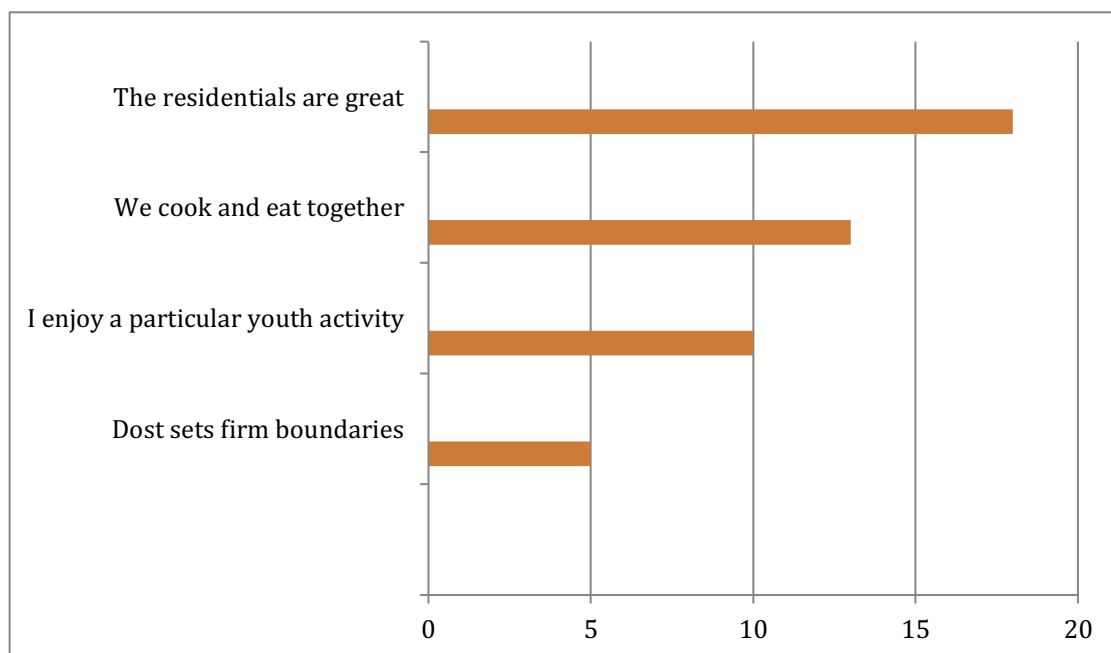
### *Dost found me a college / school*

<p>“They helped me go into college, and that...so that was good.” (Benjamin, UK, 18 yrs)</p>	<p>“Mr C took me to Redbridge College. I was doing ESOL for...about two years, and he, he enrolled me and registered, yeah, straight away. Was very very important. Was like...for me...was something like a gift. And then they were calling him to say, 'oh, he's good,' or, 'he's doing well', and, um, that was big difference. And after two years, I was asking for letter to go for example to other college, I was doing another course. Mr C was giving me, and I went.” (Reben, from Iraq at 16 yrs)</p>
<p>“Mr C organised an interview. When I went to the first interview the teacher said, no, you can't do GCSE, you have to do bridging course. And when I came home after this, Mr C said, NO! He wrote to the Head of Science! I can't believe this, I have the email, in my computer, I wish I had my computer, I would show you...He wrote to the, the Head of Science. The Head of Science called me back. I went for an interview and they allowed me to do GCSEs. (Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</p>	<p>“They helped me to go to college.” (Ashraf, from Pakistan at 10 yrs)</p>

### *I can be an example to other young people*

<p>“Dost is teaching me this thing – you know, you pass on this thing...even if you don't speak his language, you understand how he feel...so you have to help him” (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>“It worked because I'm right here. I'm at the University, and I've got status. It took time. It took, like, years. If you're a fighter, others come for advice. Let them know, and tell them how to do, how to go about it.” (Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</p>
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## Dost's Youth Sessions and residentials as most enjoyed: 18/20 interviewees



### *The residentials are great*

<p>"...you will still sit down and have a much deeper heart-to-heart conversation with a member of staff than you would have during youth club...[At residentials] you might have from six o'clock in the evening until twelve o'clock in the night, you know, and you're just chilling, playing cards and whatever you know, and you sit down and you have this heart to heart conversation that otherwise you wouldn't have been able to have." <i>(Petras, from Lithuania aged 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"...it's one of the most exciting things in Dost and yeah, is good, because is like a new starting. We go away and we come back, it's like a dream...you get to each other better, yeah? We do like team work, cooking, cleaning, everything." <i>(Ibrahim, from Pakistan at 13 yrs)</i></p>
<p>"...you didn't ask me if we have been going like on trips! We went to Woodlands, we did fireworks, we could sing whatever we wanted to sing, it was a lovely summer. We went to Wales and climbed a mountain and raised some money for Dost." <i>(Ashraf, from Pakistan at 10 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"...we had to walk I don't know how many miles at night...you had to use some clues that had been left on the ground, and if you find the keys you come back in the van, and if you don't find the keys, you have to walk back home...Back home I've had some experiences of going out in the dark in the night and walking away and stuff but to do it in a way which is more safer, you know, it was sort of therapy. And I had my senses kind of tingling again, being able to walk in the dark." <i>(Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</i></p>

### *We cook and eat together*

<p>“...they teaching me how to cook...I don’t like a take-away. I cook myself, I like fresh food...I eat all day now you know, fresh food. I never eat you know on the outside no chicken chips. No chicken chips! I go Tesco, I buy home, I eat fresh.” (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>“...it helped me a lot, me and many other young people from the same background, they made our lives easier, I learned how to cook and other stuff that I needed to know.” (Solomon, from Sierra Leone at 13 yrs)</p>
<p>“We have meals as well, like on every last Friday of every month we have a meal where anybody who wants to cook can just go in the kitchen and then like they try to cook something for everybody, oh, yeah, we cook for each other. Some time it goes wrong but yeah, it’s alright. (Rajiv, from Sri Lanka at 11 yrs)</p>	<p>“Just come here and have food. Cos sometimes we didn’t have money, to kind of go and have a meal. So – kind of come here for lunch, or something...and then go.” (Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</p>

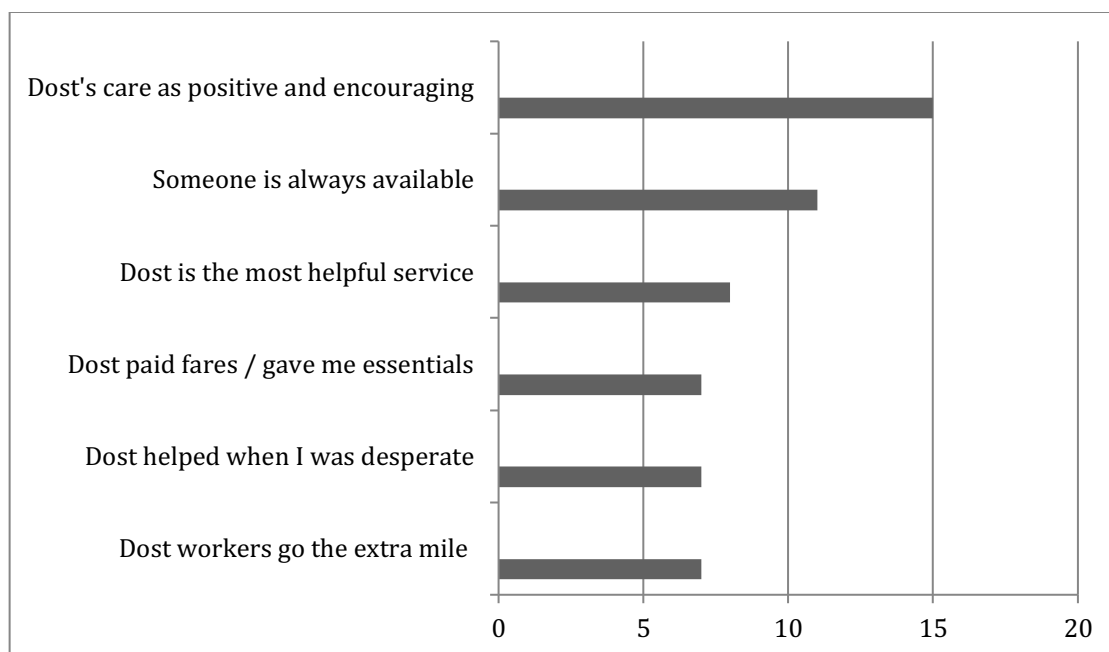
### *I enjoy a particular youth club activity*

<p>“...with Photoworlds, they, like, they came to Dost and we did photography courses with them and we published a book called New Londoners. Also through Dost I met a director called Bruce Anandi. We made three short films called ‘Three by Three’, at Dost. And from there Bruce linked up with Roundhouse Theatre, and then three...two years ago we did summer school, and he recommend me, asked to me to be like one of the creative motivators, to be like a bridge between young people.” (Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs)</p>	<p>“I come here every Friday night for like table tennis or play cards and meet up with Dost friends.” (Phuc, from Vietnam at 14 yrs)</p>
<p>“...I started playing pool and stuff like that. And I’m good at it and stuff like that. [Interviewer: Playing what?] “Pool. Pool. Snooker...I want to be a snooker player.” (Abdul, from Pakistan at 9 yrs)</p>	<p>“...they had BMX here, as well. Um...that I’d never done. That was cool. That was something I never done. I still carry on doing that cos M said I’m good. And there was this other guy who came in, like, from, Waltham Forest, and he was like a coach, BMX coach, and he said I was really good. He came here to like have a session on the track, so it was kind of good. It was good, yeah. Fun.” (Benjamin, UK, 18 yrs)</p>

### *Dost sets firm boundaries*

<p>“If he, if he don’t like, he tell you straight away. Araham, don’t do this. That’s it. And you would like to think you keep it.” (Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>“Let’s say somebody is smoking outside in the garden and Trinity people, Mr Paul who is the Head, can go and tell them: please don’t smoke here. And this is good for us, because people may think this is a bad place otherwise.” (Rajiv, from Sri Lanka at 11 yrs)</p>
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## The key worker relationship at Dost: 15/20 interviewees



### *Dost's care as positive and encouraging*

<p>"...they always talked to me. She always talked to me about her experience, the ways she came through, and she said, 'You know, you can! Look at me, I'm, you know, I'm studying and I'm working and...so don't, don't let other things affect you.'" (Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)</p>	<p>"...when someone upsets me, she is always there for me, like she always have got new ideas about it. There was a time when there were lots of problems at home, between my parents, and coming here was like going away from them, and it made me happier. Sometimes I would just talk about it to J." (Faith, England, 12 yrs)</p>
<p>"I was being bullied. And you feel like, no, I don't want to go to school the next day. But when I spoke to the staff in Dost, they were able to tell me that you know, this is what I really want, my education. That it's gonna get better, you know? They were able to listen and then they lead me to people like Connexions." (Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)</p>	<p>"They loved me as a human being, these people are really nice. It's why it works here. The way they helped me they help everyone. They don't see your background, they see you as a human being and they try hard to help you in any way. In any way where you can live your life positively." (Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)</p>

### *Someone is always available*

<p>"The keyworker could change. Sometime it used to change, but only when this key worker was dealing with something else. But, even then there was someone else. It was consistent, continuously it was there for me." (Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</p>	<p>"You are not depressed and thinking there is no one to help you because in here there is always someone who you can talk to. Any time, If I am in trouble or if I am upset I always come here and talk about it and they just calm me down. They make me a cup of tea or take me out somewhere for food." (Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)</p>
<p>"Dost was always stable. You know? They were always there. So when you move, even though you are moving, it's like they are coming with you. Does that make sense?" (Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)</p>	<p>"It's a safety net, so, if everything else fails, you are sure to come to one place where you get the most support and stuff. And as I said, even though things change throughout the years, because you get different people and different things, you get different settings, it stays the same." (Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs)</p>

### *Dost is the most helpful service*

<p>“They work as a team and this is what I like about Dost. If you ask anybody for help they will help you. They won’t say no. If you go to other youth centres you don’t see this. I have been to almost all the youth centres of Newham and they are not like here. They go and talk to one person only if they have issues while in here you can talk to anybody and they will try to help.” <i>(Ibrahim, from Pakistan at 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“If I was to give an example, say I am having difficulties at school, and um, I might be having behavioural difficulties with my foster carers. I might be having difficulties with my social worker which happens very often. And once those three start interlinking, and you don’t get on with any of them, you can’t ...you don’t feel that they are being supportive with you. Um...Dost is the sort of thing that you can fall back on.” <i>(Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs)</i></p>
<p>“Dost is a good place for young people, more opportunities than other places.” <i>(Rajiv, from Sri Lanka at 11 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“At that time I was receiving support from social services and from other agencies and probably the most important one was Dost, because the really big thing was the solicitor.” <i>(Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</i></p>

### *Dost paid fares / gave me essentials*

<p>“He gave me money for travelling and sometimes he took me in the car.” <i>(Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“She gave me my first computer. She told me, I will give you a computer. It’s a stand-alone PC. She came and dropped it at home.” <i>(Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs)</i></p>
<p>“One of the caseworkers there gave me a biology book because I said to her, I am studying sciences. She called me, she said, Kehinde, I’ve got a book here, if you want you can get it. That’s important.” <i>(Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“They gave me a form to fill in so I could claim my fares.” <i>(Rajiv, from Sri Lanka at 11 yrs)</i></p>

### *Dost helped when I was desperate*

<p>“There was a day when I felt like, I’m just gonna kill myself. I called them, and they were able to say, look what you’ve come from...If I look back from where I’ve been? That I shouldn’t even think that. You know? They were able to listen to me.” <i>(Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“I’ve felt very distressed at one point. Even sent a text message saying I’m going to kill myself. They actually came to my house, knocked my door, you know...and three or four times, you know, before I opened the door. So, you know, “What’s happening...?” They actually are there if I need help.” <i>(Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs)</i></p>
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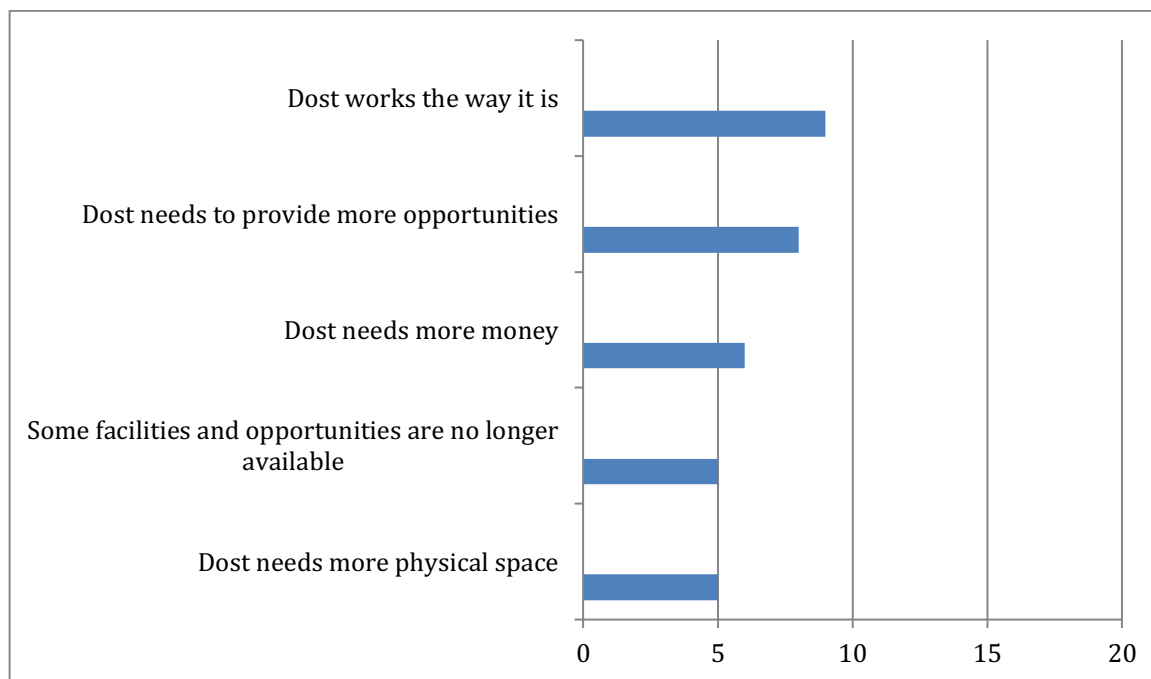
### *Dost workers go the extra mile*

<p>“They were able to build up relationships and get inside people’s lives to help...many Dost staff did spend outside office hours in order to help.” <i>(Phuc, from Vietnam at 14 yrs)</i></p>	<p>“It has been the selling point of Dost for a long time now, and it’s the relationship between young people and its staff. Where staff in a sense go beyond the call of duty, where they go where a young person needs to go, um, to help a young person, to develop a relationship with a young person.” <i>(Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs)</i></p>
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## Should Dost Change?

A number of interviewees answered this question by simply repeating their positive experiences at Dost or by praising Dost generally. Some suggested that they were not qualified to comment. Others answered in the negative, or had specific ideas as below. No one expressed overall dissatisfaction with the service.



### *Dost works the way it is*

<p>"I think they do more than what people expect from them. if you want to do gardening they will have or find someone to help you and show you how to do gardening, I am just giving you an example because they do a lot of things as I told you" (<i>Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs</i>)</p>	<p>"Oh my God...Change? I don't know. Oh God. Um. I don't know actually. No I don't. I don't think there is anything they should change." (<i>Shamsur, from Bangladesh at 11 yrs</i>)</p>
<p>"I can't, I'm really sorry, I can't find anything to change about Dost. Absolutely nothing. And I would recommend it to all my young friends, you know. That come from different countries or that is in trouble, you know." (<i>Christelle, from DRC at 14 yrs</i>)</p>	<p>"I don't think there is anything to change. It works fine." (<i>Ashraf, from Pakistan at 10 yrs</i>)</p>

### *Dost needs to provide more opportunities*

<p>"But I'm just...a bit disappointed with them because these days they're doing activities but these activities are not good enough to help young people to think ahead in the future...table tennis competition or pool competition for example, it's nice but you know, you're not professional and you don't have the skills to go to the higher levels, you know what I mean?" (<i>Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs</i>)</p>	<p>"There's different activities but at the same time there's the same ones. That goes on every month. So they could improve the activities, have different activities every time" (<i>Shamsur, from Bangladesh at 11 yrs</i>)</p>
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*Dost needs more money*

<p>"I don't know, maybe they could change in terms of expansion to expand their services. The problem is that they did expand a few years ago but the problem is the finances that are a big problem. It's such a good organisation that has accepted a mixture of people and tried to help them. Not just the migrants but also the local people. They didn't exclude anybody. If they had a resource I think it will be good to expand if they can but the problem I think it will be the resources. They had a lot of struggle and they had to cut a lot of things." <i>(Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"The problem is that Dost have no funding, but if they could have funding they could expand their services... I mean I don't understand why government cut the funding? I mean I know this country now is getting poor but still a lot of people need help. I mean they spend too much money for Americans to fight Afghanistan instead of using this money for their own people." <i>(Phuc, from Vietnam at 14 yrs)</i></p>
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*Some facilities and opportunities are no longer available*

<p>"I don't know about that because they...they...personally I didn't get any problem, you know, because we...um but the one thing I didn't talk about that we had an English class here when I came here before." <i>(Reben, from Iraq at 16 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"I wanna see it change...no more making young people happy. Like, you, you want a religions camp in summer time, you wanna take, before you like take us in a lot, lot party, but now not, not, you understand? Now the budget it has gone low." <i>(Abraham from Somalia at 16 yrs)</i></p>
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*Dost needs more physical space*

<p>"Is not Dost's fault but the place is a bit small, because we are so many coming here, together with Trinity as well, however is working very well. I wish they had a bigger place." <i>(Solomon, from Sierra Leone at 13 yrs)</i></p>	<p>"We need more space. There's no outside space to play football." <i>(Rajiv, from Sri Lanka at 11 yrs)</i></p>
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## Summary of most prevalent themes

Perhaps surprisingly to an outside reader, the service reported with most enthusiasm, and most often spoken about, was the 'ressie' (residential holiday). 18 out of 20 interviewees spoke about residential, often with depth and passion. For many they had been a transformative experience, and interviewees looked forward to them immensely. It seemed that the opportunity to have a holiday, and an escape from the immediate environment and the pressures of daily life, was valued by this group perhaps even more than the average person values their annual holiday or up-coming city break. 'Ressies' seemed to be heightened and condensed versions of other experiences they valued at Dost, as a place of asylum, safety and personal and group exploration.

The next dimension of Dost's work to be consistently highly valued, and spoken about by three quarters of interviewees, was the friendship and unique understanding they found at Dost (15 out of 20), the family-type care (15 out of 20) and the opportunity to really talk to others (15 out of 20). These 'soft', harder-to-quantify elements of the service were considered life-saving by many, and essential by most. They were powerful remedies for the lonely, isolated, bereaved and traumatic situation so many of the young service users found themselves in.

In addition to speaking about the quality of the relationships at Dost, 13 out of 20 young people mentioned food, cooking and shared eating as an important dimension of their experience at Dost. Sharing meals is an important ritual part of family and communal life (particularly in non-Western countries) and the reinstatement of this ordinary familiar element of life was much valued.

The pressing need for advice and advocacy in relation to the immigration service, and the need for help with learning English and progressing educationally, were also frequently mentioned (12 out of 20). Interventions with solicitors and in relation to deadlines and procedures at the Home Office were considered life-saving and vital. The relief at being able to communicate and the sense of being able to progress normally with life through education (particularly when other elements of life were 'on hold' as a result of the UK Border Agency's processing times) were fundamental to these adolescents wanting to plan for and look forward to their adulthood.

Finally, young people were less forthcoming about whether or how Dost should change. This could be read straightforwardly, as an expression of the fact it did not need to change. But it also has to be seen in a context where a much-needed service was under threat of closure, and any criticism might have been read as contributing to its failure to survive. With hindsight, then, the question could have been posed differently – although interviewees were aware that the university was an independent body, unconnected to funding, we could have stressed more that more critical answers at this point would not impact negatively on the provision of a service.



## Findings from the research interviews – dimensions of lived experience

### Trajectories through the asylum and migration process

In addressing the refugee experience, Papadopoulos (1997b) speaks about the ‘mosaic substratum of identity’ (p. 14) that underpins our sense of belonging and of who we are. Our ontological security is founded in ‘givens’ that exist as our background to living, including:

“...the fact that we belong to a country, that our country exists, that we belong to a certain language group and we are used to certain sounds, that we belong to a certain geographical landscape and milieu, and that we are surrounded by particular types of architectural designs.” (Papadopoulos, 1997b: 14)

When this shifts or is lost, particularly in the context of violently losing family and friends, the experience is unsettling and frightening at a basic existential level:

“...my house is surrounded by a mountain. I am a mountain guy! I have been climbing mountains all my life...I had to see a doctor because I wasn’t socialising with people, it’s like, I am different. I am coming from another area and I am living in a city, that I never been in a city in my life.” (*Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs*)

“...it was a terrifying experience for me. I had travelled with someone and I was left on my own...actually I had nothing with me. I spent a night at the Home Office and it was very very cold...none of us had had any food for more than 30 hours, and by the time we were all seen we were actually shaking...” (*Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs*)

“...he sent me off on two lorries. I was thirteen....I didn’t even know where I was going...I lost my country, my homeland, my family, a way of life that was familiar to me, and, you know, it was mine by right.” (*Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs*)

The young people also spoke about seeing different coloured faces (when they were used to seeing only brown faces and the same ethnicity), and hearing different ambulance sirens, and seeing traffic and different, new cars. They spoke about the different (unpleasant) food, about their own basic confusions like how the shower in the hostel worked, how the cooker worked, and unpleasant sensory experiences like not having warm clothes. Some spoke of feelings of excitement. No one spoke about a sense of relief or safety on arrival. A number spoke about wanting to go back home during the first few days, weeks and months, despite the danger, and some even voiced this to their solicitor as their wish, because of their sense of homesickness and disorientation.

The Children’s Society (Pinter, 2012) has noted the experience of insecurity, powerlessness and disorientation that young migrant and refugee children experience on arrival in the UK and then in relation to the immigration service. There is now widespread recognition that we

are breaching these children's human rights in failing to provide asylum support that is in their best interests (Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Report, June 2013).

The interviewees in this study spoke eloquently of their isolation and disorientation, and their fear and anger at being – as they saw it – criminalised and disbelieved in relation to their claim for asylum in the UK. These experiences need to be understood in order to fully understand the '360°', wrap-around, child-oriented construction of Dost's services.

“And when I came here, my main target was to be in a safe place. I didn't thought they're gonna put me in, like, they took me to police station, and I stayed one night in custody, in prison. Uh, I thought they were gonna put me in a good place, and ...but they said, you have to stay here, that's it...I was crying that time. I was shouting, I was kicking the door. Um...one of the police officers say, 'Oh, do you want to go out?' I say yes. He gave me address, Croydon address on the paper. And he say go. When I went out, I didn't know because it was...night. When I went outside, I didn't know anywhere, anyone. I was just speak a little English. I asked someone for...They didn't talk to me. You know, they was looking at me because of my clothes and you know ...they was different. My clothes was dirty. After I went to the kebab shop, I recognised their face, I thought that they was Arab...They said, what do you want, you know, what do you like to eat? And I said, oh, I am here, and I need a little bit of help, this is my situation.”  
*(Reben, from Iraq at 16 yrs)*

Once engaged with the immigration system, young people reported very difficult experiences:

“...they is giving me like refuse, more than three times? So, last they is refusing me, say, you're gonna send me back home. The solicitor, she hold my case, but she didn't do anything.” *(Abraham, from Somalia at 16 yrs)*

“..I was thinking, oh God, I am a good person, I did nothing wrong. Why is this happening to me? I have been waiting six years. I have got nothing now, no papers...I am still waiting.” *(Rahim, from Afghanistan at 15 yrs)*

“...this is not a game. This is the Home Office and if you make one mistake you will end up kicking out from this country, or you might ruin, ruin your life, you might stay in like a criminal.” *(Karim, from Iran at 17 yrs)*

One theme that came across in the interviews was a particular sense of time – having to find strategies for managing the sense of limitless time passing, limbo; then sudden deadlines rearing without warning; confusion and a sense of being wrong-footed or unfairly treated; fear; helplessness in the face of a system not understood and an awareness they needed 'insider' know-how, and were not insiders. The dimension of Dost's services that is engaged with sourcing reputable and specialised legal advice, in linking children to solicitors, and then in supporting them with appointments, preparatory paperwork and UKBA and court appearances, is vital work that could inform the new Guardianship pilot.

## **The achievement of a sense of emotional well-being**

Deveci (2012) draws on Melzak's (1999) psychotherapeutic work with refugee and asylum-seeking children to argue that the sense that children and adolescents are able to make of violence and concomitant extreme experiences is dependent on the sense that adults close to them are able to make of these events. Deveci is the former Director of Dost. In her article, 'Trying to Understand', she speaks about the healing dimension of relationships that are built and sustained over time, and are aimed at getting to know a young person on their own terms. Many asylum-seeking young people are wary of 'therapy' or 'counselling'. But they seek friendship, companionship and familial care. Taking a quiet, empathic, but positive and potentially practical helping role is the best way of reaching them emotionally:

"...they were not actually staying just on the kind of support that the social worker give, they were more like family, there was more concern. It was the kind of support that come to the point of sharing your emotions, your feeling." (*Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs*)

"Sort of, if you've known those people for years on end, you build such strong relationships...I think closeness is at the heart of it all." (*Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs*)

"...we had a LOT of talk..." (*Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs*)

"...they could actually understand because they see your face every day...they could sort of read your mind, read your face. The expression, and then – go to that. And say, 'Yeah, OK...that's it'. It was more in-depth." (*Bernardo, from Sudan at 16 yrs*)

Thus the sustained work of supporting young refugees and migrants is about allowing for grieving but giving the young person a replacement, 'as if' family, and friends. Central to this work is a process of claiming the young person, and committing to them. It is interesting that the young people are 'asylum claimants' but that their claim is rarely met in an emotional sense. The process of claiming and commitment is in part what makes the work of preparing young people to go back so difficult. The work is about mending broken attachments and re-instantiating good attachment figures inside. This is compassionate and humanitarian, but it is also the practical way to build resilience and a capacity to achieve a new, secure, positive identity:

"When [secure people] face setbacks, their resilience, particularly their ability to appraise and mentalise, keeps them positively oriented for longer...Very often, rather than deal solely with the negative emotions that have been aroused, secure people also try and do something about the thing, person or situation that has brought about the unsettled state...secure people adopt a problem-solving stance in an attempt to regulate emotional upset." (Howe, 2011: 83)

## Trajectories through the developmental process of adolescence

Dost children are young people on a trajectory through adolescence to their future adult lives, and this coincides with their asylum trajectory. A fuller quotation from Petras (from Lithuania) points to this:

“I didn’t even know where I was going...Everything about it was fresh and new. So in a sense it was exciting...But I lost my country, my homeland, my family; a way of life that was familiar to me and it was, you know, mine by right.” (*Petras, from Lithuania at 12 yrs*)

Contemporary attachment theory suggests that adolescents increasingly use close friends as their primary attachment figures, with adults as ‘attachment figures in reserve’:

“In adolescence, friends begin to be used as reciprocal attachment figures, providing the relationships in which emotions can be explored and regulated” (Howe, 2011: 80)

The peer group becomes the place from which to explore a new, widening horizon, and to build a new identity which is separate from the more intimate world of the family. It is in this context, perhaps that the excitement about ‘ressies’ can be understood. The residentials prefigured a ‘leaving home’, and newness, in an exciting, non-threatening, appropriate way.

“I haven’t even spoken about activities, have I? It’s the one-to-one human contact that develops and grows and deepens and changes and fluctuates, you know? It was about not reminiscing with friends about the times that you had, but making and having those times right here, right now, which is kind of the most important thing that can happen for a kid.” (*Petras, from Lithuania at 13 yrs*)

But young refugees, migrants and asylum seekers are dealing with profound processes of loss and may need to move backwards and forwards developmentally, seeking closeness to parental figures to help them make sense of their experiences. It is also the case that in adolescence generally, parents remain of key importance and the popular representation of the adult-teen relationship as characterised by ‘storm and strife’ is inaccurate. Adults are drawn upon, particularly at times of need and distress where protection issues come to the fore, even whilst friends appropriately become the main people with whom emotional states are explored and regulated reciprocally:

“...adolescents use [attachment figures] mainly for the regulation of their emotions...but even though friends increasingly provide relationships in which issues of care and attachment are managed, at times of need and stress, parents still feature high up in the adolescent’s attachment hierarchy (Howe, 2011: 80)

In the research, as we have seen, service users repeatedly spoke about Dost workers and other young people at Dost as like family, and Dost as a home; they spoke equally frequently



about the central importance of friendship and the particular nature of the friendships formed at Dost. I understand from conversations with Dost staff that 'Dost', which means friend, came to be named some years in, when it became clear that this was the right name for the 'community in mind' that had developed for everyone. This community was centred around what the young people had in common (they were asylum-seeking) as well as provided a site for exploring their many differences:

"It was hard for me to make friends at college. Everybody seemed to have a family, be coming from somewhere...[at Dost] I met a lot of young people who were focussed. That was the best thing. I found that very very interesting – despite what they were coming from, and everything. We were kind of unique, because of our experiences, and we supported each other." (*Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs*)

"When I first came in this country, I was very intolerant to other cultures. Very intolerant to other religions. But something now, I am actually I'm not – I am very tolerant to other cultures, I'm very tolerant to other religions, and these are because of the friends I've made. In Dost. These are because of...as I've said, you know, they say environment educates, environment changes, for me the friend I have made I Dost has made me change the way I see things, the way I approach things." (*Kehinde, from Uganda at 17 yrs*)

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This report is necessarily limited in confining itself to representing and analysing the views of a small and partially self-selected sample of Dost service users. Other elements of Dost as an organisation, such as its referral and auditing procedures, its funding strategies, staff recruitment, training, supervision and management, and its relationship with the Trinity Community Centre in which it is situated, would necessarily be the subject of a full research evaluation. However, it is possible to state with some confidence, from the detailed accounts presented by this sample of service users, that Dost has had a **transformative positive impact** on their lives. This is evidenced by the way the majority of service users spoke at length in glowing terms about key aspects of Dost's culture and provision:

- The **committed and caring relationships** that staff at Dost formed with service users over a long time frame, relationships that were felt to go beyond the call of duty to provide truly loving 'parental' support and dedication
- Dost as a unique service providing **essential, accurate and timely advice**, and advocacy and interventions with other services, in a process-driven climate where this user group is profoundly disadvantaged
- The opportunity to have fun **and to build long lasting and supportive friendships** with other service users, including on residential holidays

## Recommendations

- That Dost builds further on defining and articulating its unique **360° relationship-based model** for supporting young migrants and refugees, and that it seeks to disseminate this model, particularly if the pilot for a Guardianship Service proceeds in England and Wales
- That in a harsh funding climate, where it is necessary to consider potential rationalisation of services, consideration be given to what would be lost in scaling back **residential holidays** for the children and young people
- That consideration be given to the possibility of providing **English language support**
- That the process begun in 2012 of re-thinking provision so that it is oriented towards young migrants generally, as well as refugees and asylum-seekers, continues, with detailed reflection on and articulate the **different needs of these different population groups**
- That Dost considers renting or finding more **outside space**

Dost's service users are a valuable and articulate source of ideas and information in relation to the service. It is hoped that this report contributes to the wider representation of the voices of refugee and migrant children. The last word can be left with them:

"Members of Dost, they have this experience and they have this understanding and the reason they do is they have seen many young people come and go. They have had many heart-to-heart conversations with many young people, this is not something you can pull out of books, but only learn, from them, you see?" (*Alexander, from Rwanda at 15 yrs*)

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