**Josh E:** [00:00:00]

**Anna:** Welcome to Point Made, the Centrepoint podcast by young people for all people. I'm Anna, the campaigns officer here at Centrepoint, and I'm joined by my co host.

**Josh E:** I'm Josh, and I am an ex resident and current apprentice within Centrepoint.

**Anna:** in today's episode we'll be discussing the experiences of being a young person seeking asylum and some of those challenges that young people may be facing and we will be talking about how those experiences can be made easier, but before we get into it, I'd love to introduce the panel.

**Josh Service Manager:** Hello, my name is Josh. I am a Deputy Service Manager in Camden. I've been with Centrepoint for about 8 9 months and before that I was a support worker. I work for a single homeless project and I've been working with asylum seekers now for about 4 years.

**Adam:** Hello, everybody. My name is Adam. I'm from Abricos. I'm here today to share my experience like a refugee in the UK.

**Anna:** Amazing. Thank you so [00:01:00] much for being here.

**Josh E:** Thank you both as well for introducing yourselves. Josh, if you don't mind me asking you the first question, Could you give us an overview of the experience of some of the asylum seekers and the support that the young people need?

**Josh Service Manager:** Yeah, no problem. I suppose from my experience anyway, there's a kind of lineage or trajectory to the kind of support the, asylum seekers receive, at least in respect to the sort of local authority care. And so my experience comes from working with, Camden, Islington, and Hackney. and generally, things start out with a, dispute in the age of a young person.

The home office will, find the young person that's arrived in the UK, and they will dispute the age that young person's given. And then the local authority will conduct their own sort of like age assessment, and determine if they are going to take that young person under their care.

[00:02:00] Once they've decided that that young person is their stated age, which is usually, well, under the age of 18, we begin working, generally with 16 and 17 year olds, and then it progresses through into sort of early 20s generally. And so in those early days, It's an interesting time I suppose for us anyway, it involves quite a lot of work that moves quite quickly.

So the young person will have their own sort of age assessment with, social services. They'll be placed in a supported accommodation, so one of our services. They'll begin to receive, financial support. we'll begin, sort of, dentist and, opticians registrations and registration with the GP.

There'll be some, initial health care appointments, a health assessment with, social services as well. and also, we begin to look at, that young person's, journey with the home office, [00:03:00] which involves that young person being linked with a solicitor to begin building their case to submit.

evidence and to submit a statement. And so early on, it can be quite a testing time for a young person from my experience, particularly if their understanding of English is quite limited.

And over time, that young person builds, their understanding of the English language. They get used to the area that they're living in. they know the places of worship. They build communities of friendship groups. If that young person is enrolled in college, they'll begin to Developed their understanding of the English language as well, which is probably one of the biggest things but I suppose that is Contained really within that young person's journey with the home office and so one of our biggest challenges in terms of like building and maintaining those relationships is that we can offer support in a wide range of [00:04:00] areas, but at the end of the day, we don't make that decision. If it was our decision, It would be different, but we're starting to see growing numbers of, refusals from the Home Office, which has quite a big impact on the well being of our young people.

there is certainly a kind of retraumatization that can happen, When young people sort of arrive in, in the UK with some, expectations about what might happen in terms of, access to opportunities and, safety, and thenthat image can be changed when there are a lot of delays,and barriers, that then mean that a young person is.

perhaps stuck, and doesn't have a clear idea of what the future looks like. and that can compound, a lot of the work that we're trying to do to address that young person's physical and [00:05:00] emotional well being. many young people have had a very traumatic and difficult journey to come to the UK.

The stories vary, but generally it's a complete kind of uprooting and, in terms of contact with family members and, the, the difficulties in terms of what happened on that journey and how difficult it was to, to get here, to then be, I suppose, in some ways, faced with, it's, it's not the same, it is a,a safe place, but there are a number of challenges, and now anyway, a kind of fear that there isn't a permanence there, and that a young person could, return in some ways to a situation that they thought that they had left and,

that young people that are seeking asylum are not cared for or looked after or that this isn't, that they're not welcome here, [00:06:00] which when you do work with asylum seekers on a daily basis, you know that young people, seeking asylum, bring so much wealth of, knowledge and experience and maturity and understanding and have a real desire to learn and contribute and, and support themselves and the people that they care about.

**Anna:** Thanks so much for sharing that, Josh, and I think that shed so much light on how complicated it is and how, you know, people have experienced trauma. So it's like, what is, what are their experiences then with like facing advocacy and trying to get that support that they need?

Adam, I'd love to just come to you and hear a bit more about your story. Are you able to share some experiences of what it was like to come to the UK? Sure.

**Adam:** Yeah, I can try because, my story is so long. I don't know where to start.but I left my country when I was 12, for family problems.

my dad take off me to Ghana. there I spend, a few [00:07:00] month where I was crying every day. I just want to go back, see my mom. But, they show me and told me it was impossible because, the things was happening there. It wasn't good for me to go back, even for my dad. I was took to Libya, near to my brother who was living there.

When I, went to the Libya, people got, it would get sell like, object or nothing.

Like, if you arrive in Libya, like, the first thing they ask you is like, They will told you, you are lucky because the driver, avoid you the death. You need to pay for that. Like, it's a, debt, it's a credit you need to pay for. I tell them I don't have money.

And they put me in, uh, to the prison where they, they put people to torture them to get money from them. every day, they can put, Knife on the fire, [00:08:00] put on on your skin, uh, that, that pain will make you, cry or shoved in the same moment. They're doing this, like they're the phone.

They call your family, they would hear your pain or your shing that will make them pay for you. But in my case, I, I told them I don't have a family anymore because I was going to, meet my brother. every night they put, my leg down in the water, put a, a, I don't know, current, to electrocute your body.

just to, you know, make you pay. one night, we got a chance and we escaped.

When I leave from there, I was just running. I saw someone, in his car. I told him to, to stop and he stopped here asking me where I from. I told him, I'm just, uh, [00:09:00] trying to go to my brother and he asking me if I know where he live.

I say I don't know where he live.He searched my, my brother and took me to him. after this, two,or three days. I noticed there was fighting in Libya, there was a war. Like, we was sleeping on one night this, before a bomb in our house where we was sleeping, and that explode.

And to protect me, my brother said it wasn't safe to be with him in that situation. in that place. And he paid to send me in Italy. And when I arrived to Italy, I was happy thinking everything was fine now, and I knew I learned a new things of award calling [00:10:00] racist that I wasn't

there, every night, the people came with, uh, a stone, throw in our, our place, and told us to leave because they don't want migrants in the city And one day, they hurt one of, my friendin that place that make me very, very scared, because the things, was going very far.

It doesn't matter where I'm going, but I need to. just leave. And when I leave, Italy I met some people and he just told me they was going in England. Ask them if they know, somebody said,

It doesn't matter. England is better than, in a racist way, I say, ah, if it's like this, even me, I'm running from racism. we can just go together. Ah, we went [00:11:00] to Cali. For a few months.

the place was calling jungle. I don't think now they have that place anymore. people live in the, forest. every two days, the police come and catch you. if they catch you, they bring you to the prison. We can spend,one week or two weeks,if you are not lucky, they can send you back.

some people has been sent back, we don't know where. You know, like that.

we try every night just to, get car to come in the UK. sometimes it can be very difficult.

Uh, in the, COVID time, yeah, people, people was running about COVID and they didn't leave more. And in that moment, there was, uh, many, boats outside,

**Speaker:** yeah.

**Adam:** many people take that boat and hide in the, you know, they, they [00:12:00] dig and put clothes there. One night they can take and, you know, just go to the, the UK.

we spend one, one day on the sea. No eat, no food, uh, no drink, nothing. We was, we were tired. We couldn't move anymore.

And we got lucky. we met, police or police border, something like that, and they help us, um,took us to the UK.

Honestly, thank you for sharing. I don't have words for it. Um, but it's a humbling experience just to listen to you speak. I don't really get caught, um, speechless. But today, in this moment, I just want to say thank you for sharing.

**Josh E:** You're

**Adam:** welcome.

**Josh E:** Um, Thank you for having the courage to be here today [00:13:00] and well done for surviving. I don't actually know what else to say beyond that.

**Anna:** Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing that. And yeah. I'm sorry about so many of those experiences as well. Now that you are in the uk, what, what does that look like?

Are you applying for asylum or where are you at now?

**Adam:** Yeah, I applied for asylum, but

the problem I got now with a solicitor problem because after, my interview, I got, refused and, right to appeal and After that, I got, some news from a single authority who told me I was, a victim of modern slavery and, human trafficking. But, before to get that letter, in that moment, my solicitor was just, you know, he told in the case, if [00:14:00] I got refused, I need to appeal, he can't help anymore.

He stopped his contract with me and after that I got, that letter, but I can't do anything anymore because I don't have a solicitor to tell me what to do and what he's made. And Joshua Sierra is the only one who is helping for that problem.

**Josh Service Manager:** Yeah. I suppose I can speak. to the work that's been happening with Adam in the last few months, really.

Adam received his, refusal from the Home Office in November of last year and subsequently because of the dwindling availability of legal aid to pay for solicitors, particularly in relation to appeals. It leaves many, a growing number of young people in a very kind of precarious and difficult situation.

Generally, a young person that's newly taken [00:15:00] under the care of the local authority, there is far fewer issues, having a solicitor, to build the case and submit it. so we see many, many young people. go for interviews, with the home office. Subsequently, we're seeing a growing number of young people that have refused and at that point, solicitor support stops or at least it's, it becomes much more difficult to, find a solicitor that's willing to take on the case.

And so that's really when we talk about limbo and waiting is that, not only does it take a long time, for a young person to submit their case and then receive an outcome from the home office. A positive decision still takes months, but a negative decision can then lead to months, if not years, of waiting and not knowing what will happen.

And so that's particularly why a policy like Rwanda, I suppose, is so [00:16:00] visceral and,damaging is that it presents a very clear image to those people that are waiting that this is something that might happen to them. And that is, of course, incredibly traumatic and difficult and makes it very difficult for services and support workers and social workers to reassure young people that, there's a process to follow and things will be all right.

so it creates a situation where Adam and I don't necessarily know what's going to happen next. We just have to do the thing that's in front of us, seek some advice.

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**Josh Service Manager:** Um, Adam had an exam this morning, a GCSE exam, which meant that he was unable to attend, one of the advice clinics that the CP legal team do a really good job of facilitating. But It's sort of we're looking at June now for Adam to speak to an [00:17:00] advisor that he spoke to in sort of November in December, but to really Clarify his position and offer some Reassurance it's It's a sorely needed kind of service.

but really what's needed is, is to address the sort of backlog of, asylum claims and ensure that there's solicitors available to pick up those cases and, support young people with, their cases, particularly because as Adam mentioned, after being refused by the home office, he received a positive national referral mechanism outcome.

Which I think is, as someone who's not, a lawyer, but has looked at these sorts of cases and, paperwork and worked with asylum seekers, it's obviously a horrendous recognition that something has happened in that young person's life. [00:18:00] But in the same way, it helps his case in terms of, hopefully in the not too distant future, being recognised as someone that is, entitled to live here and claim asylum and, build a life heRe.

**Anna:** Josh, you mentioned about Adam having a positive outcome for a national referral mechanism, but then also a refusal of his asylum seeking process. Could you just explain the difference between those two things?

**Josh Service Manager:** Yeah, so not all young people that make an asylum claim will necessarily have a national referral mechanism.

the NRM is to determine if a young person has been a victim trafficking and modern slavery. The extent to which a positive or negative NRM decision impacts on a Home Office claim is not something that I have a lot of experience with. It's more,solicitors that would be able to tell you the extent to which, [00:19:00] if you're determined to be a victim of, of modern slavery, the impact that that would have on an asylum case.

But generally, I would think it's a positive thing if the Home Office are scrutinizing a young person's case or their reasons for coming to the UK. If that mechanism is used to prove that that young person has been a victim of modern slavery That has a positive impact But in some cases at least in Adam's case, he received that decision after his Refusal by the Home Office and so now without a solicitor What you're really looking for is you know?

is a professional to take on that case and see that there's been changes in his circumstances. And to be able to recognize the reasoning that was given by the home office that there's a fault there and that a mistake has [00:20:00] been made. And so that's really where the challenge comes from is that for us, we can see that there is.

ample evidence, and reasoning, uh, behind Adam's case and, and claim to be in the UK. And yet he is stuck in a system that is not moving forward and he doesn't have a professional to represent his case. And so that's probably the,most difficult and challenging aspect of it is that you can recognize quite clearly, the, the fallacy there or the injustice.

**Anna:** Yeah. Thank you for explaining that.

**Josh E:** I just wanted to get an understanding from your perspective as a key worker, as someone that supports people in refuge, and from your perspective as someone that's going through it, to just hopefully give the audience a clear understanding from both sides, how it feels and how it affects you as well.

**Josh Service Manager:** Well, I would say that it is, from my [00:21:00] perspective anyway, hugely frustrating in terms of, building relationships with young people, the foundation of the work that we do really is those relationships when there are aspects to that relationship or that young person's reality that are completely out of your control and that you have no input over and that your teams don't have any input over and your your service doesn't have an impact over and the organization that you work for doesn't have an impact over and the local authority.

And so We have a remit of Support and it goes so far. I think it's important to recognize There is a tremendous amount of resilience and hope among teams and young people that are undergoing this process Because you have to there's no [00:22:00] real other option You have to be able to focus on the next step.

what can we do while so much is out of our control? There has to be a way to claw back a sense of dignity and justice that, recognizes and is true to what that young person's been through and the support that you Say that you provide, you know and so early on In that young person's journey.

There's generally more hope initially, And I think over time particularly if there's a refusal We do a lot of work around About kind of managing expectations and not making any promises about The future, but being able to say that while we can't do this, we can still do this. And so the whole idea, I suppose, of that limbo period is [00:23:00] that you'll begin to see, over time, growing sort of mental health needs, access to,

Therapeutic support is quite limited. Access to, interpreter services and sort of the logistics of maintaining that young person's physical and mental well being. You're looking at, issues with college perhaps. That young person needs to be able to do something and, engage in meaningful activity.

But. over time without a positive decision from the home office, you can often see young people moving into sort of precarious or unpaid work. it might heighten issues around trauma or substance misuse. And so the, the relationship becomes under strain when there hasn't been that, that decision or that relief, that says you are allowed to be here and you can build [00:24:00] your life here.

You can get a job. You can study and do what you want. and so for me, I think that's, that's one of the biggest things is, being really patient, but also recognizing or not downplaying the reality.

And at the same time being able to, uh, to think about what you do within that.

**Josh E:** Honestly, thank you for sharing that, from that perspective. Adam, would you be alright with sharing from yours?

for example, right now you're in limbo with, you're waiting for results,

How does that make you feel? Um, and what does it make you want to be able to do?

**Adam:** It's not easy, you know. Sometimes you don't want to just leave your bed, you want to stay asleep and do nothing.

You never know, maybe it will be positive in the future, and saying I left everything for that, [00:25:00] I will lost.

If I think that way, I can get up and go into the college, doing what, what I like to do more. But, any time I think about the frustration from, Home office, you can just stay and never know, they can say maybe tomorrow we will, deport you, you know, never know. It's, it's just a, your head, you, you talk with yourself, you create your own self talk with that, you know,

You need to stop everything, say, not doing anything, just stay and wait, wait, wait for the, for the decision.

in French we say, Yeah. It means like, No choice, no choice, you know. It is what it is, in a polite way to say it. Yeah, yeah, [00:26:00] no choice.

**Josh E:** In a polite way to say it. Yeah, it's

**Adam:** something, it's not, easy to say, what do you think properly, because it's a traumatic thing, you know, it's very traumatic.

Sometimes you don't want to do anything, You don't know why you are angry.

your heart is burning and your body is burning like they put fire on. you don't know why. It's something very, very difficult

**Josh E:** to carry. I understand that. Yeah. Um, different people have different terms for it.

Yeah. I guess a Caribbean term would be, hot school. when you just boil it up inside and you can't always put your finger on why. Yeah, yeah. You don't have the words to describe it, but. You know you can feel something more than what you should. And, yeah.

**Adam:** sometimes I can just go to the college. Not talk to anybody, I'm not there, like, Presently, you can see me, but I'm not physically, you know, [00:27:00] mentally, I'm not there.

It's a trauma, you understand? It's a trauma. Something came like that, you don't know where it came from, but you are safe, but you have that thing in your mind to say, you know, you are not, you are not really, really safe.

You know, if you don't know your final decision, you are not really safe.

**Josh E:** You feel more safe when you have your own power, when you can control your own feet. You're waiting on others to make a decision in your life. Yeah,

**Adam:** uh, strange thing is that, that control your, your mood, it can make you, very nervous.

**Josh E:** Like, having that mindset and knowing that just words and a paper can alter your life. And not only your life, but your mindset as well, to your determination to survive, your determination to do better, your determination to even value people. And I think that is something where You [00:28:00] may not get commended for it, but you are a strong person.

**Josh Service Manager:** Adam, what would you say were ways or things that did help you during your journey?

**Adam:** To be honest me, I don't have Much problem in the UK. The problem is a decision the only things, uh, would disturb me for in the UK, I can say is the only one, because here, I can say I got a lot of support.

in the beginning, when I came here, my English was bad. they give me a lawyer, he explain me about, very few things, I don't know. I signed something, I don't know what it was saying, you know. Normally, if, I, I got someone in that time to say, Look, if you get refused, that mean you will not get someone to help you later.

you will be alone in that case. you know, if for someone came and [00:29:00] asked me for advice, like what I experienced.

I will tell him, the bad thing is a lawyer thing. If he know you have a opportunity to get a good lawyer, who will accept your case, even they give you refuse, that is good, that is very good because, when I came here, I was going, uh, Red Cross,

And that time they told me if I want a lawyer, that that mean I could change a lawyer if I wanted. They could do that things for me. Like they could change my lawyer. But, you know,I don't know anything. I say, no, I have a lawyer. I have everything. They say, do you have everything? I say, yeah, but.

And this happen. I, I understand now, many lawyer doesn't like doing appeal case, they don't like it. Like take a, the case of someone, in the middle, they don't like that, you [00:30:00] know.

I can say if being in UK is a happy thing for us, , But if you have a lawyer problem, ah, that is another problem, even the lawyer will tell you it's not easy.

**Josh Service Manager:** yeah. I think there's something certainly there about the continuity of support for someone's journey over a period of years and having that consistent kind of voice and for things to be explained at every stage in a way that is clear and makes sense.

We lack that quite a lot, you know, having consistency. People pick up their story at different points and there's a lot of disconnect a lot of the time. If a young person moves or a support worker leaves, change in management.

Clawing together a kind of picture of support And that's so difficult when Things are moving at such a pace and that's you're [00:31:00] supporting You multiple services or several young people that are also dealing with similar things to be able to dip in and dip out.

Having that sort of voice or that guide throughout that process, I think, is so important.

**Josh E:** Well, as someone that, normally doesn't get caught off guard this one has kept me, um, in suspense of what to hear next and has been a very intense one for me to listen to, but it's been an honor to be able to listen to it at the same time.

And I just want to know what is the happiest thing that can bring you the biggest smile in your role?

**Josh Service Manager:** Oh, that's a difficult question.

There's so much about this job that brings you joy and happiness and hope for the future, I think. Because in many ways, there's an absence of it. It forces you to be very attentive and sensitive to [00:32:00] the positive things that happen, those small gestures. working with young people is such an enlightening experience.

You learn so much from different cultures and perspectives. And then it goes down to small things like, gestures of goodwill and good intent. You could sit in a corner and have a good cry for a long time about a lot of these things but in the day to day there's just moments of joy and happiness in that

And it goes down to sharing experiences, going to appointments together, college, enrolments, uh, travelling a long way to see a solicitor in some cases, or, having shared meals, celebrating like religious events. When I was a support worker, I remember so well, like distinctly, On a weekend late shift on a Saturday, young people will be cooking a meal together, and I remember having like boiled chicken and rice that is like [00:33:00] so beautifully fragrant and soft and has been created with so much love and care that it moves you so much.

A simple thing like that, like a young person that doesn't have a lot of money, week to week. Coming to you and saying here's a can of coke and a plate of food, you know, thank you for what you've done for me. And then that being shared and being together in that is something that is hard to let go of and keeps you going for sure.

But I think that's perhaps easy for me to say because It's not my Daily life in that way And so I am so immensely Privileged to be like a part of it

**Josh E:** but it's people like you that need to be here and Um I needed by residents by asylum seekers by those in need [00:34:00] you fulfill that duty

**Anna:** Yeah, that was really beautiful.

**Adam:** Thank you. Um, for you, Adam, what are you looking forward to in the future? What is making you feel hopeful? The future, first of all,I can't say much because I'm waiting for something I didn't get yet. But if I get it, I would like first to study, so I have two, things I would like to be. First of all is study medicine if I get the chance, maybe be GP. I don't know. second one is, um, if I see I'm not too good in medicine I will, try in, engineering.

That is what I'm thinking in the future. What I'm thinking for the future.

**Anna:** my dad is actually a GP, um, so I'd be interested what inspired you to want to do that role.

**Adam:** When I was coming in the UK, most of us, we were sick and, there was people they called them in the French name, Médecins Sans Frontières.they was came, they came many times to help us, give us, [00:35:00] medicine, bring food, you know.

Those kind of people, you can never forget them, because, in that time, in my case, I was, I wasn't looking myself like a human because he couldn't look at me with two eyes, trust me, because most of the time, I was dirty, very, very dirty. I was. Always give the same dress because we don't have a match in the sand.

Same, same shoes. same dress. if you see the hairyou couldn't approach us. But those people, there was many times they were there with us, they brought food, you know, medicine It was so much helpful for us. it gave me that, feeling to be like them.

Help people, help someone who need one day.

**Anna:** Yeah. I think that's so incredible as well, when it's like someone that's made such a big [00:36:00] impact for you, and then you want to give back as well after everything you've been through.

You know, it really does show, how important, your story is, but also, that ambition to also help others despite, you know, you could very much just be like, I want to start out my own life and make sure I've got a good life, but you still want to give back, which I just think shows your character so much.

So thank you so much for everything that you've shared. it was a really powerful and very honest story. as Josh said, just so privileged to be able to hear it. And I really hope that this can be the start of more change of, Realizing, you know, when the government's making decisions about refugees and asylum seeking, actually, it's like your story and other people's stories, there needs to be at the forefront.

Um, and kind of really respecting and honoring and caring

**Josh E:** Thank you. No, honestly, and I agree, thank you both for being here today. Thank you for sharing. it's been a privilege and an honor to have met you both, genuinely speaking.

**Josh Service Manager:** Thank you. It's nice to be able to share and we don't get a lot of opportunities I suppose to advocate and speak about our day to day in that way. So I hope [00:37:00] that it it's a conversation that provides some reassurance to other people that are experiencing similar or helps to enlighten other people that may not know what it's like

**Anna:** Yeah,

**Josh Service Manager:** so yeah, thank you

**Josh E:** well, in terms of anyone listening, watching you've been enlightened to the reality of people's lives and what it really takes to be a strong survival and what.

It really means to be an asylum seeker and a refugee and those who want to help and the struggle that they're going through. So, if you have enjoyed or found this podcast very informative, please do like, subscribe and share and make sure the message keeps going forward. But until the next time, thank you.