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# Families New to the UK

Confident families in cohesive communities

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4Children

Supported by:



CALOUSTE  
GULBENKIAN  
FOUNDATION





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## Foreword

The shape of British society and British families has changed dramatically in recent decades. We live longer, have fewer children and are more mobile than ever before. Our communities and families are more diverse too. According to the Office of National Statistics, in 2008 more than 700,000 children were born in England and Wales. Of those, almost a quarter (24%) were born to mothers who were themselves born outside the UK – in London this figure rises to over half (55%).

In addition, thousands of parents bring their children to the UK each year in search of a better life, whether as asylum seekers or economic migrants. With our interest in understanding the impact of these demographic shifts on individuals, families and communities – and drawing on the particular insights gained by our Founder, Calouste Gulbenkian, who as a migrant experienced some of these issues himself – we were keen to explore these questions further.

There are some experiences that are common to all families, whatever their heritage. We know for example that the last couple of years have been a challenge for many families, with the recession bringing financial hardship and uncertainty to many households across the country. However, for particular types of family the barriers to getting on and fulfilling their aspirations are higher and more plentiful.

That is why we were pleased to work with 4Children to look at how families that are new to the UK are grappling with the challenges of modern family life in Britain. And to look at what might be done to ensure that these families and their children are able to flourish; giving their children the best possible start in life and contributing to the community as a whole.

**Andrew Barnett**

Director

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK)

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## Preface

4Children embarked on the Family Commission journey in the spring of 2009 because we recognised that much of the highly politicised debate at the time about family was missing the voice of families themselves. Even before the full weight of the recession hit, it was clear to us that family life could be hard, with parents juggling work, caring for older relatives and children, balancing the family finances and ensuring their children got the best start in life.

In October 2010 we published the Family Commission final report which drew on the views and voices of 10,000 families across Britain. The themes were clear – families want practical and non-judgmental support which builds from their strengths, to know where to go for help when parenting gets tough, and have recognition of the importance of the extended family.

During our work we met many families who faced, and had overcome, additional challenges as a result of being new to the UK. These families faced cultural and language barriers as well as poverty and feelings of isolation. As with many of the families we spoke to, families new to the UK told us of the joy and challenges of being parents and asked us to understand just how much more difficult it is in a new country without the support and comfort of your extended family or community.

Families also told us of the frustration of being misunderstood and of the need for professionals and wider society to have a better understanding of their needs and what they have to offer our society. So I am pleased that 4Children, with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, has been able to build on the Family Commission findings and look more closely at these issues. The prize is great – more cohesive communities and more children growing up in happy and thriving families – and achievable. We hope the recommendations in this report can help contribute to this ambition.

**Pip O’Byrne**

Chair of 4Children and Family Commissioner

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## The Family Commission

In April 2009 children and families charity 4Children launched the Family Commission, an 18 month inquiry into family life in Britain. The Commission, chaired by Esther Rantzen CBE, embarked on the task of trying to get beneath the headlines and learn more about the reality of family life today.

The Commission asked some big questions:

- What is daily life like for families in the UK?
- What support do families need now and in the future to fulfil their potential?
- How can we build positive family involvement and interactions across communities and generations?
- How should we respond to families who struggle to cope with hardship, health, relationships, employment and finances?
- What should the role of Government, communities and employers be in supporting families?

The Commissioners and 4Children researchers travelled the country meeting families and visiting the services that provide them with advice and support. The Commission undertook two national surveys and held focus groups across England.

During the course of the Family Commission's work the particular challenges and opportunities for families who were new to the UK became a recurring theme which 4Children believes deserved a closer look. This publication aims to provide that insight. We are very grateful to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for supporting this work, which builds on the work of the Family Commission.

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## Introduction

Immigration, and in this case specifically families new to the UK, is a sensitive subject which provokes strong views. This report is not intended to be a debate about the pros and cons of immigration to the UK, but a look at the needs and ambitions of those who are living here as economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. While some may have higher support needs and face more persistent challenges, what all have in common are high hopes and aspirations for their families' future.

People move to the UK for a variety of reasons. Some are escaping atrocities and persecution while others move to take advantage of economic opportunities, intending to return to their country of origin within a few years. What is clear is that 'families new to the UK' are not a homogenous group. Some adults come to the UK, then partner up and start a family. Others already have children when they move to the UK. Sometimes migration is 'phased', with family members moving to the UK in stages.

Asylum seekers and refugees invariably face a different set of challenges than economic migrants, particularly stemming from the economic hardship experienced by many awaiting immigration decisions. Despite this, what has been highlighted in our research is that the vast majority of people moving to the UK have big ambitions for the future, for themselves and their families, and are looking to make a contribution to the society they are joining.

Families moving to the UK have the same basic needs as the settled population – for good quality, affordable housing; a job which pays enough for a minimum standard of income; accessible schools and hospitals and other public services; and a feeling of safety in their local community. Research carried out by the Refugee Council shows that many people moving to the UK want to adopt 'the British way of life' and list football and TV programmes as important ways of integrating.<sup>1</sup> A female refugee whom 4Children met at a centre for asylum seekers in Southwark stressed, "I just want to go to work and pay tax. I want to help people."<sup>2</sup>

Many of the needs of families who are new to the UK are identical to those the Family Commission heard from families of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds across Britain. In particular, the need for services that provide them with the practical help they require to give their children a good start in life, and that are there with some specialist support when things go wrong. This reiterates the need for strong universal services with targeted intervention for those who need it. Making sure that services are family friendly and go with the grain of family life – with more help for families to find or return to work, along with parenting support – will support families of all shapes and sizes and from all backgrounds.

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As well as sharing the same basic needs, some new families face particular challenges. Whether this is the need for access to English language classes, help with navigating unfamiliar public services, struggling to get access to mainstream credit or the challenge of parenting children in a different culture, these specific issues need to be addressed if families are to flourish in their new community. In an era when every penny spent on public services is scrutinised, investment in supporting new families to settle into their local communities and quickly become productive, economically active members of society makes good financial sense.

In these austere times it is worth noting that it has been calculated that immigration brings a net income of £6 billion a year to the UK and it will play a significant role in easing the challenges associated with our ageing population.<sup>4</sup> This pamphlet sets out recommendations to help strengthen that reciprocal relationship between newcomer and host, support incoming families with complex needs and help in working towards integrated, multicultural communities where all families can achieve their aspirations. The potential rewards of this for everyone are limitless.



## Rachel<sup>3</sup>

Rachel came to London from The Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 2000s seeking asylum. In 2008 with a toddler and another baby on the way she was referred to social services by her midwife who was concerned for the welfare of the children. She was living in a single room in a hostel and suffering incidents of domestic violence from her partner.

Rachel was facing uncertainty about her immigration status. Having had her claim for asylum turned down she was in 'limbo', fearing that she would be deported. "I could not cope. I was under so much pressure."

Because of her immigration status Rachel was not allowed to work and was living in extreme poverty. She could not even afford to use a clothes drier, so their one cramped room always had washing drying on every surface.

Rachel welcomed the involvement of social services with her family. She was aware that she was not coping and she wanted help. Indeed, she had previously sought help but her immigration status and her poor English meant that she was not able to access relevant services.

When a social worker made the initial visit to Rachel's home she told Rachel that the room was dirty and messy and that she should not dry her washing in the room. Rachel asked for support to make home improvements but the social worker was not forthcoming. Rachel felt the social worker "gave orders" and "asked lots of questions" but failed to understand the challenge of living in a single room in impoverished circumstances. Rachel complained about the social worker's attitude and she was replaced.

Over the next two years Rachel had a further five social workers allocated to her case but despite this turnover her experience was very positive. Her social workers linked her with her local Children's Centre, including a full time, free nursery place for her daughter.

Social workers also helped Rachel to be re-housed and provided her with financial assistance to purchase essential items for her new baby. They supported her in applying for indefinite leave to remain in the UK. They helped her develop strategies to cope with her violent partner until the relationship finally ended. Most importantly, they worked in partnership with Rachel, asking her what she wanted, treating her with respect, listening to her and then giving her professional and practical advice.

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Rachel felt that she had all the information she needed and understood what was happening throughout.

In 2010 when Rachel was interviewed by the Family Commission her children were happy and healthy and had been removed from the child protection register, and her case has been closed. Rachel has been granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and is now looking to the future for herself and her family. She feels more confident and aims to go to college once her youngest child starts nursery. Rachel says that if she ever felt that she was struggling to cope again she would go back to her social worker, with whom she is still in touch.

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## Chapter 1

# Myth busting: The facts about migration

## Definitions

Each individual and family has a unique story behind their decision to leave their country of origin with the aim of starting a new life in the UK. They could be fleeing persecution; seeking to set up a business; taking up a job; or move as a result of marriage. Some may be moving with families and children, while others may establish families once they settle. However, people coming to the UK fall into three broad types. Using the United Nations Refugee Agency definitions<sup>5</sup> these are:

- An **asylum seeker** is a person who has left their country of origin, has applied for recognition as a refugee in another country, and is awaiting a decision on their application.
- A **refugee** is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...'
- **Economic migrants** make a *conscious* choice to leave their country of origin in order to benefit from economic opportunities and can return there without a problem. If things do not work out as they had hoped, or if they get homesick, it is safe for them to return home.

## Statistics

Over the last decade there has been an increase in people moving to the UK, with net annual immigration figures ranging from 118,000 to 244,000 between 2000 and 2009.<sup>6</sup> The latest figures, for the year to December 2009, show that net migration rose to 196,000, an increase of 33,000 people or 20%, from the previous year's figure of 163,000.<sup>7</sup>

The latest figures from the Home Office<sup>8</sup> show that the number of applications, excluding dependants, for asylum was 6% lower in 2009 (24,250) compared to 2008 (25,930), with the number of applications for asylum, excluding dependents, down 29% in the second quarter of 2010 (4,365), compared to the same quarter of 2009 (6,110). In 2009, 64,750 persons were removed or departed voluntarily from the UK, 5% lower than in 2008 (67,980). There were 138,820 grants of leave to remain (excluding dependants) in 2009 relating to in-country applications under the new, 'Australian-style' points based immigration system.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to one of the myths about immigration, people moving to the UK are often highly educated, young and able to work. Sixty per cent of asylum seekers are under 30, and 90% are aged between 15 and 44.<sup>10</sup> Whilst many are working in minimum wage jobs such as agriculture or the service industries, others are in skilled roles as doctors, nurses and in financial services. From Home Office research on refugees it was found that 33% had a degree, post graduate or professional qualification, 66% had a job in their previous country of residence and 65% could speak an additional two languages. These figures compare favourably to the UK population as a whole.

According to Refugee Week figures, 17 Nobel Laureates, 71 Fellows or Foreign Members of the Royal Society and 50 Fellows or corresponding Fellows of the British Academy are refugees. There are 1,500 refugee teachers across Britain, including some of the most renowned educators – Professor Wole Soyinka and the late Sir Karl Popper – and the British Medical Association has 1,073 refugee and asylum seeking doctors on its database.<sup>11</sup>

### **Net contribution of immigration**

‘Migrant workers contribute more in taxes than they receive in services, and migration probably leads to slightly higher levels of employment and ages for native workers.’ This is the conclusion of an in-depth report by the Trade Union Congress.<sup>12</sup> It shows that immigrants do not drive down wages and in fact help to fill gaps in the job market. The report used figures from a Home Office study in 2000 that found migrants paid £31.2 billion in taxes and received £28.8 billion in public services. This amounts to a net contribution of around £2.5 billion, or the equivalent of 1% of income tax. Liam Byrne, the then Immigration Minister at the Home Office, said in 2008 that migration adds £6 billion to the economy.<sup>13</sup>

Research carried out by Experian shows the contribution that skilled migrants make to the economy, with significant over-representation in particular entrepreneurial fields. Data analysis was done on nearly half a million entrepreneurs; cross-referenced with a database relating to a billion individuals around the world and allowing for their cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, a figure was calculated for each field. With a base figure of 100 for the UK average, a figure of 120 indicates a significant over-representation of ethnic groups in a particular field. The research found that in medical practices the figure was 235, in dental practices 215, in civil engineering 189, in banking 167 and in higher education 165.<sup>14</sup> These figures show the massive contribution that families and individuals who have moved to the UK have made to the country. This also challenges the stereotype that all new families moving to the UK are vulnerable and in need.

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## Chapter 2

# Starting a family revolution:

## What families want

### Sam<sup>15</sup>

Sam's parents moved to the UK in the 1970s as refugees from Hong Kong. They were originally part of the 'boat people', Chinese people who were removed from Vietnam and had to move to Hong Kong.

Her parents were both 18 when they came over, and hadn't previously met. For the first few years life was tough. They lived in a run down house and had to find furniture where they could, often from skips. They lived on benefits and then by doing sewing to earn a bit of money. Sam's mother has still only a limited grasp of English. Her father attended English language night classes and after a few years was fluent. After building a life here they were able to go into business and set up a restaurant with other family members. However they still don't feel British, and some day they want to move back to China.

Sam is the first generation of the family to be born in the UK and has lived here all of her life. She attended a local school and has used the health and transport services frequently. She says that her identity changes depending on where she is, and that "in the UK I am seen as Chinese, but in China I am seen as British". Her story is one of great positive integration. Sam was able to get a good education, to attend university and find a professional graduate job.

The Family Commission has talked to families of all shapes and sizes and from all backgrounds across Britain, and the messages have come back loud and clear. Families say that:

- Families, including extended families, are a huge resource which can help prevent and solve problems
- Services need to be provided in a way that goes with the grain of family life, rather than working against it
- Universal services like GPs, schools and Children's Centres need to work together to ensure that all families know where to go for help
- Services must recognise that all families have strengths which can be built on

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- Their views should be listened to when decisions are being made that will affect their lives
- They want more help earlier on before any problems they experience become crises
- They draw great strength from their informal social networks of other parents and members of the community;
- Professionals must work **with** them, not **for** them, even when things get really tough

Of the respondents to the Family Commission's surveys:

- 69% say financial hardship is the biggest strain on family relationships
- 75% say unconditional love is their favourite thing about their family
- 47% say families need more advice and information when things go wrong
- 24% say their children's future is a concern that keeps them awake at night
- 55% say more flexibility from employers would help them balance work and family life
- 61% say that families with older relatives do not get enough help from Government

During the research for this report we met with asylum seekers in London, a group of Chinese mothers in Yorkshire, parents of African origin whose children had been placed on the Child Protection Register in two different London boroughs, and women originally from South Asia now living in Wales. What was most striking about many of these conversations was that many of these same themes emerged consistently, wherever we went.

That is not to say that newly arrived families do not face particular challenges or barriers – they do, and that is what the rest of this report seeks to address, but it would be wrong to overemphasise the difference. Families struggling in poverty, or trying to balance work and family responsibilities, or lacking confidence in their parenting skills, are families first and foremost wherever they are from.

Much of the media reporting of immigration seems predicated on the notion that immigrants are 'helpless', 'different' and 'non-contributing'. This pamphlet seeks to turn this perception on its head by arguing that we need to capture the energy and aspiration of families moving to the UK and support their successful integration into communities. Families and individuals arrive with high aspirations – whether for education and career opportunities or simply living in a safer environment where

they can flourish. Our support for migrants should be geared towards helping people achieve that dream to the benefit of wider society.

An IPSOS Mori Poll commissioned for Refugee Week<sup>16</sup>, which surveyed 327 asylum seekers and refugees, painted a positive picture of attitudes. Overall, 60% said the average Briton is welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers, with only 18% disagreeing. The most enjoyable thing about living in Britain, stated 44% of respondents, was ‘the British people’; and 42% said it was the multicultural society. When asked which characteristics best represented British people, 52% said ‘friendly’ and 35% said ‘polite’.

While the IPSOS Mori poll is positive, immigration has continued to be a controversial issue. During the 2010 General Election, in opinion polls it was second only to the economy as being of concern to voters.<sup>17</sup>

### Integration – what does it mean?

The desire to integrate into their new community is what shapes the additional needs that newly arrived families have.

There are many definitions of integration. In 2007 the then Government’s Commission on Integration and Cohesion described it in the following way: “...integration is principally the process that ensures new residents and existing residents adapt to one another.”<sup>18</sup>

There are also a variety of models and frameworks for describing the process and stages of integration. The Refugee Council and the University of Birmingham<sup>19</sup>, describing how refugees perceived integration, split it into three stages: *functional*; *belonging and acceptance*; and *equality and empowerment*. They argue that developing through all three stages can lead to a positive sense of settlement by new families.

Included in the *functional* stage is having a job, speaking English, accommodation, money and health care. The *belonging and acceptance* stage includes mixing with British people, knowing how to do things and feeling safe. The final stage, *equality and empowerment*, includes having the same rights as British people, having the same opportunities as British people and living a ‘normal’ life.<sup>20</sup>

## Key aspects of integration

### 1. Functional

- Having a job
- Speaking English
- Going to school or university
- Having accommodation
- Having money
- Having a national insurance number
- Health care
- Obeying laws
- Paying bills
- Knowing where things are

### 2. Belonging and acceptance

- Immigration status and having a passport
- Mixing with British people
- Speaking English
- Feeling accepted
- Feeling safe
- Making friends
- Getting married
- Staying in the same place
- Knowing how to do things

### 3. Equality and empowerment

- Having the same legal rights as British people
- Having the same opportunities as British people
- Having the same status as British people
- Being the same as British people
- Living a 'normal' life
- Being listened to
- Capacity development



## **Families New to the UK**

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The evidence shows, and families have told 4Children, that there are a series of barriers to integration. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion<sup>21</sup> highlighted these as:

- Lack of practical information about how to live in the UK
- Lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, and the advice available
- Non-recognition of qualifications
- Lack of language or employment skills
- Difficulties accessing English classes that meet their needs
- Lack of opportunities to meet local people and socialise with them
- Some public hostility and ignorance
- Restrictions attached to their immigration status

In addition, families who are new to the UK have identified to 4Children a number of issues and challenges with which they tussle on a daily basis. These include:

- Feelings of isolation and a lack of an extended family network
- Poverty and low paid work
- Parenting
- Poor housing

Our findings show that these barriers limit too many families that are new to the UK to the functional stage of integration for too long.

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## Chapter 3

# First steps and building aspirations

## Access to services and moving towards integration

All families living in the UK benefit from access to good quality public services, whether they are the indigenous families or new arrivals. Families need access to health support, Sure Start Children's Centres, schools and the opportunity to access education and develop their skills to further their potential. This underlines the importance of strong, accessible universal services, with targeted help for those whose need is greatest.

For those families and individuals that are new to the UK there is a need for practical help and information to enable them to access these crucial services – for example, how to register with a local GP, how to apply for their child's place at the local school and how refuse collections and other local authority services operate. The Family Commission heard from people who said that if they moved areas or were new to the UK they would not know how to find and access services.<sup>22</sup> Many had only found the services, from which they eventually drew great benefit, by word of mouth.

Clear information therefore needs to be available, listing what the public services are for, who can access them and where they are located in the local area. But even routine tasks like catching a bus to the town centre can be daunting when you do not know how or where to buy a ticket; the bus routes; or the social 'mores' when on the bus.

The Commission on Integration and Inclusion<sup>23</sup> commended the use of 'welcome packs' which provided simple, practical information about local services and recommended that the Department for Communities and Local Government develop a sample pack as best practice guidance. Whilst some councils continue to provide this kind of information, it is still not widespread practice and there is concern that it could fall victim to local authority budget cuts. Where packs are produced they are likely to have most effect if made available at all local public facilities such as libraries, GP surgeries and Sure Start Children's Centres and backed up with online promotion.

## Schooling

For those moving to the UK with their families, as well as for those that start families here, ensuring children are able to make the most of educational opportunities is very important. For children of school age looking to continue with their education in the UK it is essential that they are able to speedily access a place at their local school and are given the support they need to successfully make the transition. Some

parents told the Family Commission that because they did not arrive in the UK at the start of the school year, there was a delay in allocating their child a place. This was a cause of additional anxiety.

Young people who have experienced the transition to the British education system told our focus group that schools needed to take full account of a whole host of issues – not just language support, but potential mental health problems, bullying and the wider family circumstances. However, young people do not want these challenges to define their time at school. They said it is important not to underestimate the abilities of a child (because they face additional challenges) and thereby limit their aspirations.

There is a clear case for schools to have enhanced contact and meetings with parents who are new to the UK. Many parents will not have a clear understanding or expectation of the school system and therefore will be reluctant to challenge or approach the school when problems arise. Language problems compound these factors.

### **Challenging life events**

It is also important to recognise the impact of challenging life events on families that are new to the UK. All families go through tough times such as bereavements, relationship breakdowns, redundancy and illness. When such events occur as isolated incidents, long term consequences can normally be avoided, but persistent difficulties and challenges – sometimes over years or even generations – can become entrenched, grinding down resilience and a family's ability to 'bounce back'.

For disadvantaged families, including some of those adapting to a new life in a different country, whose emotional and financial resources may already be stretched to the limit, a 'normal' life crisis can be a trigger to set them into a downward spiral that is very difficult to climb out of without support. This is especially true for families who are struggling to identify or access services that might support them.

### **Learning English**

There has been a greater focus in the last ten years on the importance that being able to speak English plays in both the ability of new arrivals to be able to integrate into their new communities and for the existing community to adapt to inward migration and therefore to the maintenance of cohesion. Research from the West Midlands has indicated that well over 50% of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the region cannot speak English, and even fewer can read or write in the language.<sup>24</sup>

While funding has increased in the past decade for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, take up of classes has gone up even faster, resulting

in what the previous Government saw as unsustainable budget demands. The influential Commission on Integration and Cohesion report<sup>25</sup> stressed the importance of English language training as part of wider integration, calling on the then Department for Education and Skills to ensure there is adequate provision. The Government's response to this was to ensure funding was more specifically targeted to foster community cohesion.<sup>26</sup>

ESOL classes are a recognised way of learning the language and opening the door to training and employment. However since August 2007 there have been greater instances of charging for these classes, in England. For those that are able to access free classes, it is usually a limited number of sessions, and only up to ESOL Skills for Life Level Two, the equivalent of a GCSE A\*-C or NVQ level 2.<sup>27</sup> We have been told that because individuals learn at different speeds, a short course is not sufficient for all learners.

For the economically inactive, particularly asylum seekers and mothers with young children, there are likely to be fewer interactions outside the family or immediate social group and for many this means not picking up a good grasp of English straight away. Mothers with young children told the Family Commission that accessing childcare to allow them to attend classes is key to whether or not they can take part. Mothers say it can be hard to access childcare facilities near to classes, with costs of travel an additional barrier.

### **Parenting and the parent-child relationship**

For parents we have heard that not having a confident grasp of English can pose additional challenges to family life. In families where children develop English language skills more quickly at school than their parents, the Family Commission was told that two further issues can result. First, children are expected to become informal interpreters for their parents; and second, over time this can contribute to a cultural gap opening up between the generations.

As the Family Commission learnt from the young people at Refugee Youth<sup>28</sup>, young people are regularly being asked to translate and interpret for their parents – particularly during interactions with government agencies and public services. There is considerable research and best practice guidance<sup>29</sup> highlighting the negative effect this can have on family dynamics, including that it can have the effect of ‘infantilising’ the adult and reversing traditional family roles. This is described by Refugee Youth members as “losing our childhood” and they can often feel “lonely and depressed without support”.<sup>30</sup>

Professionals working with families, whether in doctors' surgeries, in the family home as social workers or in other roles, should as a default always use professional

translators when interacting with people unable to speak English. This places less pressure on the parent–child relationship, with boundaries firmly established and the child not growing up too quickly.

However children do grow up, and as they do, parents who were themselves brought up in another country face the same challenges as parents born in the UK. Families have told us that few parents are prepared for the onslaught that the advent of the teenage years can bring. From friends and relationships to schooling and behaviour, the time when children are branching out into independence can be one of great anxiety for parents. For many families the transformation of their relatively contented 10 year old into an uncertain and possibly aggressive or unruly teenager is a shock. We know that periods of transition, from primary to secondary school and then into puberty, are times of increased risk for families. Yet we have been told that parents feel they have nowhere to go for help. Some lone parents told us of the particular problems they experienced at this time.

For parents who have no experience themselves of growing up in Britain and who may feel their children are changing culturally at the same time as growing up, this can be particularly challenging. Some families, particularly of African origin, told the Family Commission that issues around discipline, respect and chastisement of older children were problematic and had been the cause of considerable conflict in their family.

### **Sarah**

Sarah, her teenage daughter Nicola and two younger children live in London. From the time that Nicola began attending secondary school their relationship had become troubled. They argued regularly and Nicola (now 13) was refusing to attend school. Sarah is originally from a west African country where traditional culture requires children to respect and defer to their elders. Physical chastisement of children is acceptable. Sarah felt that having settled in the UK, Nicola was growing up without these values and did not respect her.

“She is a bright child but with challenging behaviour. She got in with a bad crowd. There was probably a clash of culture. Back home a child is raised by the whole village. It is different here. Children are disrespectful,” Sarah said.

As a result of Nicola’s non-attendance at school the family was referred to Children’s Services and a social worker visited the family home to do an assessment. During that meeting the social worker discussed the mother–daughter relationship including English laws and norms for child discipline with Sarah, alone.

After the meeting it became clear that Nicola, who was in the next room, had overheard the discussion and she told Sarah that she would phone the police if her mother physically chastised her again. From this point on Sarah believes that her daughter's behaviour deteriorated. "There was argument after argument."

On the social worker's second visit a further conversation about discipline took place but this time Nicola was in the room. Sarah felt that the social worker had inappropriately "told her off" in front of her daughter. Given the problems that there were between mother and daughter, Sarah felt it would have been better for this to be a private conversation. She was particularly unhappy because the social worker talked to Nicola in English, which Sarah did not understand. The meeting became extremely heated and ended with Sarah asking the social worker not to visit again. A new social worker was appointed to take on the case. "If she had taken me to one side and given me practical help and advice, I would have listened," Sarah told the Family Commission.

Over the next four years, Sarah had a further six social workers and at any one time eleven professionals were involved in working with her family, including Youth Offending Team workers, Education Welfare Officers and Family Therapists. Interventions and support were provided by this group for three years, including two parenting courses. Despite this, Sarah felt that no progress was made.

At age 17 Nicola agreed to enter a voluntary and temporary care arrangement. Initially the plan was for Nicola to be in care for two weeks, but at the time Sarah met the Family Commission the placement had been ongoing for two months.

"It was the right move. Because of the arguments and my poor health. In the end it was for the best. The parenting courses helped me with parenting my younger children. They are well behaved and go to church. I have no problem with them," said Sarah.

The Family Commission's researchers asked Sarah what her advice would be about how Children's Services can best work with families. She said:

1. Give power back to the family. Don't tell children they can't be chastised. Tell the parents that. Parents need help setting boundaries for children.
2. Improved communication between professionals and parents.
3. Children are more advanced in terms of their education and activities outside the family. Parents are not given the same access to education, and this should be recognised and addressed.

Parents from all backgrounds who have undertaken parenting classes are largely positive about them – particularly when they were delivered in the community in a non-stigmatising way. But many others wanted access to advice and support about parenting and did not know how to access it or it was not available. The Family Commission found that this was particularly the case for families who struggled to access services generally, including those who are new to the UK.

Parents also said they felt distanced from their children's school and education, which gave them little sense that they could be positively engaged with it – something evidence shows is really important.<sup>31</sup> As Sarah and Nicola's case shows, where parents have not had access to education themselves, this can put a real additional strain on relationships.

### **Housing and community**

Having a safe and welcoming place to call home is key to the aspirations of all families. But for families who were not able to afford to buy a home of their own, or access social housing, the private rented sector was too often not delivering this. Families who were new to the UK told us that good quality housing with space for a family is hard to come by.

For asylum seekers this is a huge problem. Many live in extremely confined, poor quality accommodation. At one focus group held by the Family Commission we spoke to two women who lived in a tiny cramped bedsit, only just big enough for a bed.<sup>32</sup> One of the women was pregnant and the other had a 2 year old child. For one of the women this was actually an improvement in her situation. Her previous landlord would not let her use the toilet in the house, would not give her any kitchen access and would not let her use any other rooms in the house. She had to use a bucket in the room instead of the toilet and had no way of preparing food at home. Other attendees at the focus group had experience of inappropriate sexual advances from landlords and squalid living conditions.

Housing for migrants can be a controversial issue for local authorities, with accusations of housing new families before local families. Senior Labour politician Jon Cruddas MP recently commented: 'The issue of immigration has been so significant ... because it is seen to have ruptured a tacit covenant between the traditional working class and Labour – a covenant about housing, work, employment, a sense of neighbourliness and community.'<sup>33</sup> Given that the high and increasing demand for social housing will always mean that it is not available to all families who might benefit from it, a key priority for the future must be the improvement of private rented accommodation and greater regulation of landlords to ensure high standards, better affordability and greater security.

## Supporting aspirations

Once the initial support needs have been met, and basic requirements like language classes and public services have been provided, the long term aspirations of families become important. A longer term aim must be to give families new to the UK a sense of empowerment over their lives and futures and a sense of civic engagement. These families need to achieve the second and third stages of integration: *belonging and acceptance* and *equality and empowerment*.<sup>34</sup>

A vital part of this is feeling part of a community and building up networks of friends and people who can offer support and guidance. This allows families to put down roots and feel at home in their new community. It is also important to feel involved in and part of local decision making by voting or getting involved with local issues. This way not only do the new families feel a part of their community, but they can help shape them and make them more receptive to other new families.



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## Chapter 4

# Families united

### Isolation and the absence of an extended family network

Families up and down the country told the Family Commission that their families provide an unparalleled source of love, support, advice and inspiration. ‘Unconditional love’, ‘support’, ‘friendship’ and ‘fun’ topped the list of survey respondents’ favourite things about their families.

The nature and structure of families has changed – with more lone parents and step-families, fewer cousins, aunts and uncles, yet more grandparents and great grandparents. Half of the population see their extended family members twice a year or less<sup>35</sup> but for the other half we have heard that the extended family are a great source of support – from childcare to financial help.

Many recent migrants told the Family Commission the absence of a wider family network of support was keenly felt. Whilst many families are able to rely on extended family members for day to day support, families whose extended network of friends and relatives are overseas cannot draw on this resource.

***“Family is powerful. Close friends are good but not the same.”***

Rachel, London

For new migrants, building up a network of support is an important factor in both the *functional* and *belonging and acceptance* stages of integration. Such social networks are often described as creating ‘social capital’ – ‘connections between individuals’<sup>36</sup> – which are either ‘bonded’ or ‘bridging’. ‘Bonded’ social capital arises within families or ethnic or religious communities. ‘Bridging’ social capital links people from more disparate groups. Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, suggested that bonded social capital helps people ‘get by’ and bridging social capital helps people ‘get on’.

For newly arrived families without extended families living close at hand, this can lead to isolation and can create a real disadvantage when seeking to understand and navigate British culture, norms and services. Opportunities to form ‘bonded’ relationships with other families and individuals in a similar position can be extremely reassuring and beneficial to well-being. There are many examples of community groups across the country who have been described to the Family Commission as ‘life saving’.

### **Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers<sup>37</sup>**

This centre has been a lifeline for many new asylum seeker and refugee families in London. It offers a place to build up a network of friends and support and is a good place to get information on local services and shops.

The organisation runs three day centres a week (12.30–5pm) at different locations across Southwark, London. The organisation is supported by volunteers and one part time staff member and offers a wide range of services to refugees and asylum seekers.

The centre offers a one stop shop for advice and support: English lessons, play groups, childcare workshops, social events and even yoga classes. Everyone coming to the centre also has the option of a hot meal at lunchtime, the only one of the day for many members. Before coming to the centre it is common that attendees have struggled to get high quality legal advice; the volunteers advise asylum seekers on their individual cases and refer them to qualified solicitors.

We heard in particular how valuable women's groups were in this regard. For the mother of the family we were told that a women's group can be the only contact she has outside the house. Attending such a group helped mothers to develop self esteem, networks within the community and enabled families to learn about services that they can access.

However, to move beyond *functional* integration, refugees themselves told the Refugee Council that 'bridging' social capital was needed, in the form of "mixing with British people".<sup>38</sup>

Families told the Family Commission that public services, particularly universal services, were one of the ways that they built relationships and links with the wider community. For families with young children, using services like Sure Start Children's Centres helped them to mix and make friends. However, many said that finding these services in the first place was often a considerable challenge. For asylum seekers and refugees in particular, issues about entitlement to access services were an additional barrier.

## Families together

Where extended family members are close at hand, families from different cultural backgrounds say that they are a vital source of childcare, advice and emotional support, particularly during tough times.

Thirty per cent of people surveyed for the Family Commission had turned to family for some sort of help or support as a result of the recession (e.g. borrowing money, childcare or providing somewhere to live). Furthermore, almost one in three said that they would be most likely to turn to a family member or extended family member if they had a serious problem.<sup>39</sup> It has become increasingly clear that the extended family is a vital resource which policy makers and public services must recognise and utilise.

One mechanism for harnessing the resource of the extended family that has particularly impressed our Family Commissioners is Family Group Conferencing (FGC).

### **Family Group Conferencing**

Family Group Conferencing in England is usually triggered by welfare concerns for a child. Where appropriate, a social worker can offer a family a chance to have an FGC in order to find ways of providing necessary reassurance to Children's Services and the Family Court that a child can safely remain in the family.

Once the decision is made to have an FGC, a professional and independent Coordinator is appointed. It is this person's role to identify and engage with all the members of the extended family and appropriate friends of the family in question. They bring this potential network of support together, culminating in a meeting where everyone is able to discuss openly and honestly the issues that the family face and how these can be overcome by working together.

At the meeting an action plan will be agreed by the extended family and friends which is then presented to the statutory agencies as a way forward. If the agencies are content that the plan represents a credible and safe way forward then the family are asked to implement the plan, monitored by the agencies.

The key to the success of Family Group Conferencing is that the family is involved in the decision making. This creates a more challenging but equal relationship with the professionals, drawing on the extended family and friends as a resource. FGC can be used in the early stages of a family struggling to cope but is most frequently used

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alongside the statutory child protection process or care proceedings. Unlike 'classic' social work practice, at an FGC it is the family and friends who are in the driving seat, identifying issues and proposing solutions, supported by a professional facilitator.

The Family Commission met some families, including families new to the UK from Somalia, who have been through the process of having an FGC. They were great ambassadors and advocates for the approach.

FGCs already have a successful history in some local authorities in England, including the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham which had its work on FGCs evaluated in 2005/6.<sup>40</sup> The evaluation report highlights the achievements of the project including calculating that 51 of the 119 children for whom conferences were held were prevented from entering the 'formal' care system – either remaining with their parent/s or living with kinship carers. The report also notes extremely high satisfaction levels with the process from children, parents, extended family members and the professionals working with them.

### **Barnardo's Neville Street Project, Cardiff<sup>41</sup>**

Barnardo's Neville Street project in Cardiff was launched in August 2001 and has since supported children and families from black and minority ethnic communities through the provision of a range of services.

The children and families using these services are often experiencing difficulties in parenting and in accessing other services due to cultural issues, language barriers or discrimination. The aim is to build self esteem and confidence in parenting capacity. Language support is provided to help families fully participate in decision making processes. Children are supported through a variety of high quality play and learning opportunities, activities, educational trips and after school clubs.

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## Chapter 5

### Families that work

'Having a job' was the top of the list for refugees when considering what they felt were the key aspects of integration into Britain.<sup>42</sup> For economic migrants work is the prime motivating factor. But for many, the reality of working life in Britain, or the struggle to find work, or the enforced inactivity of asylum seekers, means that secure employment is an unrealised dream.

#### Low paid insecure work

For many migrants who move to the UK, the sort of employment they find is characterised by low pay and low security. Migrants take jobs such as working in the catering and hospitality industry, factory packing, cleaning, and fruit and vegetable picking which have hours that can be irregular and seasonal, meaning it can be hard to plan for the future.

These jobs also come with little employment protection and workers can be subject to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. The *Fair Work* coalition, led by the TUC, highlights problems such as no holiday or sick pay, being paid less than the minimum wage and working longer hours than initially specified experienced by those on the bottom rung of the employment ladder. There is also little hope of escaping these jobs as people are unable to build up financial capacity and receive little or no training or career development.<sup>43</sup>

#### Qualifications

One additional problem raised with 4Children is in transferring qualifications to the UK from an individual's previous country of residence. Qualifications in one country may not have an equivalent in the UK, nor be valued equally.

The system of comparison is complicated and expensive, with no simple free comparisons table of international qualifications available to the general public. The UK Border Agency directs people to the NARIC (The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom) website<sup>44</sup>, which is the only recognised qualifications checker. An individual has to pay between £46 and £210 to apply for a check, depending on how quickly they want it processed. Even £46 for the basic service is still unaffordable for many on low incomes or without work. There is no option of self-assessment.

In many cases the NARIC service does not recognise qualifications as like for like. The Commonwealth Secretariat has published a report which sets out some of the problems teachers coming from other Commonwealth countries have when moving to the UK.<sup>45</sup> It gives the example of one – Dr Paul Miller – who was a Head of Department at a school in Jamaica, but upon coming to the UK to teach was told he did not have the required qualifications to work as a professional teacher and was given ‘unqualified teacher status’. He had to find a school willing to sponsor him to get the qualifications he needed, this despite having already been an experienced teacher in Jamaica.

### **Access to work**

While economic migrants from within the EU, refugees and those with necessary permits are entitled to work, asylum seekers are forbidden to work and must live on benefits. A single asylum seeker is entitled to £35.12 per week, which is just £5 per day, while a couple will get £69.57 per week. A single parent asylum seeker will receive £42.16 per week and his/her children will receive £50 each.<sup>46</sup> They are not allowed to supplement their income. This compares to the UK’s jobseekers allowance of £65.45 for a single person and £102.75 for a couple.<sup>47</sup>

The state is forcing asylum seekers and their families to live below the poverty line and not have the financial ability to be part of society, regardless of how long they may be staying in the UK. One important step would be changing the regulation that asylum seekers are not allowed to work. If they were allowed to work and earn their own money, household incomes would increase dramatically and individuals would also benefit from the advantages of work to self esteem and mental health.

### **Financial capability and access to credit**

Financial insecurity is further exacerbated by debt, which can result in loan sharks and exploitation, and the lack of access to mainstream banking products.

Many families moving to the UK will have built up debts along the way, for example from paying for visas or in some cases even paying traffickers to bring them into the country. The result of this is that many families will start their new life in the UK with large amounts of debt. This then prevents families being able to access good sources of credit and start to build up their financial resources.

Another problem is the lack of access to mainstream banking facilities and credit. The cost of being without a bank account can lead to greater insecurity due to credit and penalty charges. Those families without an account lose out on savings available, for example on utility bills through paying by direct debit. This has been dubbed the ‘poverty premium’.<sup>48</sup> Some of the reasons for new families not being able to set up

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an account include lack of the necessary identity documents, a lack of credit history, language barriers, lack of support and information, and literacy problems.

Families without bank accounts are then unable to access mainstream credit. People who are unable to borrow from high street sources are often forced to get credit from high interest lenders – some of which operate on the edge of the law. Doorstep lenders and loan sharks can charge between 300% and 1,000% APR. There is currently no statutory ceiling on interest rates.<sup>49</sup>

For some families unable to gain access to mainstream credit, this form of lending is the only way of getting money they may need urgently to pay the rent, pay for a school trip or be able to finance the repairs on the car that is needed for work. Families new to the UK are especially vulnerable as they often have little knowledge of the law and may not be able to understand the ‘small print’ of a loan agreement.

A good access to credit for new families who are unable to borrow through conventional means such as banks is through a local credit union. Credit unions are community led and owned and offer users a better rate of interest. At the same time credit unions can provide households with a way of saving up money and creating a cash reserve, instead of living day to day. This allows families over time to build up personal assets and a sense of having a stake in society.

Credit unions can also link in with teaching good money management skills and through partnerships with local Citizens Advice Bureau can help manage debts and financial problems. The Community Banking Partnership report published by the New Economics Foundation sets out how credit unions and the community finance sector can come together with banks and money advice agencies to co-deliver ‘one stop’ services to the financially excluded, including families new to the UK.<sup>50</sup>

### **South West Migrant Workers Action Plan<sup>51</sup>**

The Action Plan for 2010–2012 was put together by the South West Forum for Migrant Workers, made up of organisations such as the TUC, NHS South West, South West RDA and the South West Chamber of Commerce. According to Government estimates, migrants contributed between 8.1% and 10% of regional Gross Value Added in the South West in 2008.

The Action Plan seeks to tackle issues relevant to economic migrants – making sure they get the support and services they need. It is a two-way process, with another of the forum's aim being to ensure that the region fully utilises migrants' skills, especially those of high skilled migrants. The plan is split into four sections: Regional and Local Structures; Economy, Skills and Employer Engagement; Support for Migrant Workers; and Responsive Public Services.



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## Conclusion

Families who are new to the UK have highlighted to 4Children the major challenges and barriers to integration that they face – obstacles that limit their opportunities and the opportunities and life chances of their family for generations to come.

To enable families to reach their aspirations and potential we are recommending a number of key changes in both policy and practice.

### Recommendations to national Government

→ **The importance of funded ESOL classes and the childcare necessary for parents to access them**

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes are vital for new families to learn English and fully integrate into the local community. While funding was cut for free classes in 2007 to only the most in need, with the current economic uncertainty it is essential that no further cuts are made. At the same time providers of courses must do more to ensure they reach out to vulnerable new families, such as mothers with young children, by providing childcare facilities or partnering with a local provider.

→ **Better regulation of private housing to ensure families are not living in substandard accommodation**

The Family Commission has heard from families who are living in cramped, one bedroom accommodation with no access to a toilet or cooking facilities. It is imperative that vulnerable families are not exploited and that the housing quality is of an acceptable standard with access to the facilities that are essential to families with children. Government should review whether local authorities have all the powers they need to crack down on exploitative landlords.

→ **A review of immigration laws to allow asylum seekers to work while seeking asylum**

Asylum seekers are entitled to benefits far below what is needed for a basic level family income, and which are a third lower than what indigenous families are entitled to. Asylum seekers have to live off the state and are not allowed to supplement this by doing any work. This situation should be changed – policy should allow families to work and provide for themselves and their families.

→ **Preventing exploitation at work**

Migrants are often employed in temporary and insecure jobs. To prevent exploitation, Government needs to modernise employment law to close the employment status loopholes for temporary and agencies workers as

expeditiously as possible. There should be a statutory presumption that employment rights apply to all workers, as proposed by the TUC in their Fair Work Coalition campaign.<sup>52</sup> This will also benefit British born workers at the lower end of the labour market and will prevent unscrupulous employers deliberately undermining terms and conditions and exploiting the vulnerable.

→ **Open, and free, access to qualification comparison tables so people moving to the UK can work out what their qualifications are worth**

Being able to use qualifications from another country to gain employment in the UK is vital for new families. Part of this is being able to access an open, straightforward qualification comparison table to allow employers and employees to find out themselves what comparable qualifications are worth. It is unacceptable that people have to pay up to £210 to the NARIC to get this information.

### Recommendations to local authorities

→ **Protection of local funding for welcome packs and support for groups which build 'bonding' social capital**

Local authorities must provide both welcome packs and support groups for new families arriving in the UK. Both are vital in providing information about local services, with support groups in particular helping to build confidence and helping families to settle in. Welcome packs and support groups should be available or run in local community facilities such as Sure Start Children's Centres and libraries.

→ **Children and Family Centres to provide support to families throughout childhood**

An important source of support and integration is the use of local Children and Family Centres to access services and information. Whilst the primary focus on Sure Start Children's Centres has been providing services to families during the first five years of a child's life, some centres including Carousel Children's Centre in Braintree, Essex have brought together services for families with children up to age 19 under one roof. Such centres are then able to provide the kind of holistic, integrated and 'one stop shop' support that families with older children also find valuable, whether they are new to the UK or not.

→ **Parenting support for families as their children grow, which includes support to bridge the cultural gap**

As children grow, become more integrated into their local community and push their home boundaries, parents need support in learning good parenting skills. This should be provided in informal settings, such as Sure Start Children's Centres, to make parents feel more comfortable. A particular problem that needs

addressing is the cultural gap, often between parents and children over rules and boundaries. Professionals who come into contact with families, such as teachers and social workers, need to be trained to recognise this gap and work to support families to overcome these challenges.

→ **Encourage new families to get involved with their local communities and to help shape them by becoming community leaders and decision makers**

A longer term aim for people moving to the UK is becoming fully involved with their local communities, helping to give families a sense of empowerment. This allows them to shape their communities and services to help meet their needs, and also provide a source of support and advice for future new families.

### **Recommendation to the policy and research community**

→ **Further research about the needs of families new to the UK**

Whilst this report provides an important starting point to understanding and addressing the needs of families new to the UK, this is an area with little robust data.

### **Recommendation to professional bodies**

→ **Stopping the use of children as interpreters by professionals working with the families**

Families new to the UK should be treated with dignity and respect by the professionals interacting with them. People respond best when they are listened to and feel in control of their own lives. In particular, the use of children as interpreters between professionals and parents should be only used as a last resort, allowing children to be children and not 'infantilising' adults.

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## About 4Children

National children's charity 4Children has been shaping and influencing national policy for more than 25 years. We strive to place every child's and parent's needs at the heart of the community in developing and delivering innovative, integrated 0–19 support.

Our expanding programmes of universal and preventative services are finding new solutions to offer children, young people and families the support they need to flourish.

4Children believes that:

- Support needs to be joined up and universal, with targeted support where required
- Prevention is better than cure
- Support is needed throughout childhood: from 0–19

Find out about 4Children's wide range of support programmes, children's centres, services, products and events:

**[www.4Children.org.uk](http://www.4Children.org.uk)**

Information Helpline: **020 7512 2100**

## About Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is a charitable foundation established in Portugal in 1956 with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. The Foundation's Headquarters are in Lisbon with offices in London and Paris.

Its founder, Calouste Gulbenkian, was an Armenian born in Turkey who worked in Britain and became a British citizen, lived in France and settled in Portugal. He was multicultural and multilingual and spent his career bringing people from different cultures and nationalities together.

The purpose of the UK branch is to help enrich and connect the experiences of people in the UK and Ireland and secure lasting and beneficial change in their lives. The Foundation has a special interest in supporting those who are most disadvantaged.

# **Families New to the UK**

## **Confident families in cohesive communities**

Immigration is a sensitive subject which provokes strong views. It also brings a net income of £6 billion a year to the UK. This pamphlet argues that we need to capture the energy and aspiration of families moving to the UK.

Our recommendations aim to strengthen the reciprocal relationship between newcomer and host, prevent the exploitation of the vulnerable, support incoming families with complex needs, and help in developing integrated communities where all families can achieve their aspirations. The potential rewards of this for everyone are limitless.