Being young and out of place

public transportation systems, cooking and housekeeping, and personal safety.

Statistics are not kept in the US for outcomes for unaccompanied refugee youth exiting resettlement programmes but anecdotal information indicates the success of many children. Much of the practical experience of long-term integration programmes designed in the refugee resettlement framework can also be adapted to destination countries with unaccompanied youth seeking asylum. Long-term integration programmes originally designed for unaccompanied refugee children now serve international survivors of human trafficking, children seeking asylum and disaster victims too.

Nathalie Lummert nlummert@usccb.org is the Associate Director for Children’s Services with Migration and Refugee Services at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB/MRS). www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services

Supporting the social integration of trafficked young people

Claire Cody

By definition, trafficking requires movement. In many cases this leads to the disconnection of an individual from family, friends and, in some instances, language and culture. Young people who have been trafficked often find themselves in unfamiliar cities where they are unlikely to have friends, family or other meaningful connections. Traffickers are well versed in the methods for maintaining control; young people may be regularly moved, which adds to their disorientation, and victims of trafficking are often kept isolated from others. Through violence and experience, these young people may learn not to trust their peers.

But for those who were formerly trafficked, having the opportunity to speak with others who have common and shared experiences, especially those from similar backgrounds or communities, may help them to realise they are not alone. Many leading organisations working with trafficked young people bring survivors together to meet, share their own stories and access support and advice. However, some young people may fear interactions with others from their home country, believing that their stories will be divulged to the host community or their family back home. In other cases a young person may know or believe that those in the community know the trafficker or have links to others involved in trafficking back home.

Young people need to be shown their future is not dictated by their past. Positive role-models, including individuals who have faced similar adversity and are now living happy, positive lives, are also critical. This may come from peers who are further along the recovery process but also from the increasing numbers of survivor-led organisations across the world – organisations such as Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), Breaking Free and Courtney’s House (all in the US), the Somaly Mam Foundation in Cambodia and Shakti Samhua in Nepal.

With the participation of young people, such organisations can support survivors to re-define their identity and re-gain a sense of belonging.

Claire Cody claire.cody@perth.uhi.ac.uk is Oak Fellow at the Centre for Rural Childhood, Perth College University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland. Her work involves developing resources to support the recovery and reintegration of children affected by sexual exploitation and trafficking globally. www.childrecovery.info

The role of culture in mentoring

Bernadette Ludwig

Refugee and immigrant children actively try to embrace the American culture, often to escape taunts and feelings of not belonging. However, once they reach home, they are frequently reprimanded by their parents for being too American. Many newcomer families fear that their children will become part of the new society too quickly and forget or dismiss their cultural heritage. Not surprisingly, refugee and immigrant youth feel that nobody can really understand what they are going through as they navigate between different cultures while trying to define their own lives, identities and destinies.

The Go-Betweener Mentoring Program, run by Culture Connect, Inc., matches refugee and immigrant youth with mentors who are first- or second-generation refugees or immigrants from the same (or similar) cultural background, and who speak the same home language. These mentors have themselves faced many of the same obstacles that the young refugee and immigrant youth are encountering. Even more importantly, the adults are living examples to the younger generation that there are ways to successfully bridge two seemingly differing cultures. The Go-Betweener mentor also plays an important role in being able to communicate with the parents in their native language. This not only puts parents at ease but also offers an opportunity to help them become more at ease and better connected to resources in the larger community.

“I understand what it is like to have parents who do not speak English and do not feel comfortable with others who do not share their culture and language. As an adult I can now appreciate the social anxieties my parents faced living in a foreign country. Having been a child stuck between two cultures, I can understand the frustration and sadness of N, who is not allowed to do things that teenagers like her are allowed to do in the US... I can counsel her and help her understand where her mother is coming from.” (Latin American mentor)

Bernadette Ludwig bludwig@gc.cuny.edu is the co-founder and a board member of Culture Connect, Inc. www.cultureconnectinc.org and a PhD Candidate in Sociology at The Graduate Center, The City University of New York.