

**Creating Stable Futures:
Human Trafficking, Participation and Outcomes for Children
Shared Learning Event resources**

Case Studies: Part 1

Contents

Ezra, Part 1	2
Abina, Part 1	3
Mesfin, Part 1	4
Yu Chan, Part 1	5
Tabea, Part 1	6
Altin, Part 1	7
Dat, Part 1	8
Thomas, Part 1	9

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Ezra, Part 1

Ezra, 16, grew up in Guinea with his parents. However, when his father died, his paternal uncle came to his mother and took Ezra from her. He lived with his uncle for some time where he had to do work around the house and on the farm. He sometimes went to school but often felt very tired and struggled to concentrate.

At some point he was told by his uncle that his mother had a debt and Ezra needed to help pay it off. He said a friend had a good job for him in the UK, which would help Ezra pay off the debt.

Before travelling, Ezra met his uncle's friend. He seemed kind and friendly. He took Ezra to have his photograph taken, bought him new clothes and gave him a smart hairstyle, which made Ezra feel good and excited about what was to come.

On the way to the airport the man gave Ezra a passport with his photo but a fake date of birth and name. He was told to remember these details and if anyone asked him he must provide these and say the man is his uncle. He said Ezra could be arrested by the British authorities if he didn't do as he was told. This person accompanied Ezra on the flight, and he was taken to a house in Cardiff.

From the first night there were many men who came to the house, were drinking and using drugs. One of the men took Ezra to another room and started sexually abusing him. After a few nights of this happening Ezra managed to run away and presented at a police station where police referred him to children's services.

Abina, Part 1

Fifteen years ago, Abina was brought into the UK by her “aunt” from an African country that was in the throes of a civil war in which domestic human rights abuses occurred with impunity. Historically rich with natural resources, the civil war had left the country beset by devastating socio-economic circumstances, creating further conflict and resulting in several thousand people fleeing persecution and seeking asylum in countries such as the UK.

Prior to her arrival, Abina had witnessed first-hand the death of her mother, her maternal grandmother who had subsequently looked after her, and other members of her family. Later in her life she came to blame herself for these bereavements.

On her arrival in the UK, she was two years old and was initially looked after by her maternal aunt, who was her designated private foster carer. Her aunt became ill and Abina was then moved around from one extended family member to another. She was not encouraged to attend school regularly and experienced a protracted period of instability. Her experiences during this time are not known, although it later became clear that she was working within the extended family, providing cleaning and childcare during school hours. At the age of 10, she became looked after by children’s services in a London borough, and after a series of foster care placements broke down, was ultimately transferred to a children’s home.

During the years between her arrival and today, she has gained a history of being sexually exploited, and concerns about her mental health and history of self-harming have been ongoing throughout. She has disclosed accounts of rape on two occasions; and on neither occasion have these rapes led to any prosecutions. By the age of 15 she had miscarried, been excluded from school for truancy, gone missing for days at a time, self-harmed and was associating with older men. She once engaged briefly with CAMHS but refused to continue. She was also referred to a behavioural programme led by CAMHS but was moved areas before she reached the top of the waitlist. Children’s Services sought a place for her in a specialist unit, but a shortage of beds made this impossible, and she has been moved from one semi-independent unit to another ever since.

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Mesfin, Part 1

Mesfin, 17, had to flee his home in Ethiopia with his family when he was 15, due to the targeted persecution based on ethnic and political differences. Whilst seeking safety in refugee camp in a neighbouring country, an 'agent' offered Mesfin an opportunity to get to Europe and work to support his family. He travelled alone through Libya and Europe, and he had to work to 'pay his way'. When he arrived in the UK he was told to go to children's services to get accommodation but also that he would still need to work to pay off his debt.

Whilst in care there were clear indicators that he was working in various places such as construction sites and restaurant kitchens to pay off his debts. When his asylum application was refused, he was afraid of being removed and professionals worried that he was working even more, despite telling him this was not allowed, and that he could appeal the asylum decision.

Mesfin attended college for some time and whilst there, it had become apparent that he had some learning difficulties that had initially been attributed to the language barrier and his lack of formal education. However, Mesfin had very poor college attendance and lost his place.

Despite working more, Mesfin found that over time he had even more debt for food and transport to and from work and he was only given a few pounds a week. He began looking further afield to see if he could make more money.

Mesfin's leaving care worker only manages to see him for statutory visits and has recently referred him to a mentoring and social support programme.

Yu Chan, Part 1

Prior to coming to the UK, Yu Chan was, at the age of 14, trafficked from China to Europe where she was sexually exploited for commercial purposes. She had left an impoverished community in China, having been brought up within an orphanage as her mother had died in childbirth and there was no knowledge of the whereabouts of her father.

In the UK, she presented to children's services aged 15 after escaping from a brothel. She was five months pregnant. Yu Chan was placed in local authority care but went missing several times and placements broke down. Three days after giving birth, Yu Chan went missing with her baby. She telephoned her health visitor and informed her that she had sent her baby back to China.

Following the disappearance of her baby, Yu Chan has voluntarily returned to care where she has been placed in a foster placement in a different geographical area due to her ongoing vulnerability. A restrictive safety plan has been implemented.

It has emerged that the baby might have been sent to the same orphanage in which Yu Chan had lived. Professionals also think that Yu Chan doesn't understand the benefits and support to which she is entitled to help her to keep her baby in the UK. There has been a lack of appropriate interpreting and Yu Chan's history of trauma has not been addressed. Some reports speculate that she might have undiagnosed learning difficulties and also define her as naïve and not very present.

Practitioners feel that she has been subjected to pressures by unknown people, particularly from within her own community. They believe she has been threatened by her traffickers who said that she owed them money and that the baby could repay the debt. She was threatened with her own and her baby's death if the debt was not repaid.

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Tabea, Part 1

Tabea was aged 13 when she arrived in the UK and was used as an unpaid domestic worker within the home of a couple who knew her family. For two years she looked after a baby, washed all the clothing and cleaned the house. Bottles of bleach under the sink were labelled with her name. This was later used as an indicator of her exploitation in domestic servitude, as she was given specific work tools named for her to use in her housework. During this time, she was assaulted on numerous occasions by the couple and told by them that she had brought a “darkness” and “bad spirits” into their home. They changed her name and provided her with clothing that was old and too big for her.

A member of the public noticed that her clothing and her behaviour was unusual but did not know what to do or who to contact to report it. This same person spoke to her, and Tabea told her that she was living with people who were not her parents and that she had to look after the child by herself. The member of public did not believe the story and thought that Tabea must be making it up.

Continuously called names and criticised, Tabea eventually found out that if she went to the offices of the nearest social services, they could help her.

It took three repeat presentations at the social services office and a number of home visits before a full assessment was organised. The adults were both professionals who claimed Tabea was their niece and was 18 years old, showing a passport and work visa as proof. They said they were employing her to help in the house. Tabea found it impossible to explain the details of what had happened to her but was taken into local authority care pending further assessments and investigation.

She has been referred to a specialist trafficking service.

Altin, Part 1

Altin, 15, grew up with his nuclear family in Albania. His father worked and his mother stayed at home to look after the family. The family was considered by their local community to be financially comfortable. Altin attended school and hoped one day to become a mechanic.

Altin is one of four children, with two younger sisters and one older brother. His father is an alcoholic, and throughout his childhood Altin witnessed domestic abuse of his mother and physical abuse of his siblings, something which he also regularly faced. Close relations came and went without ever intervening or any discussion around bruising or other clear indicators of this abuse.

The precipitating event which led to Altin leaving Albania was when his father put Altin's life at risk due to complex blood feuds in the area. Altin's mother helped him escape and borrowed money to get him to the UK.

Altin has been in the UK for six months. When he left Albania he was told he would be working on construction sites to pay off his mother's debt, but instead found himself forced into criminal activity. At first he'd refused to do as he was told but he was violently assaulted. Altin was exploited in a cannabis farm, and experienced violence and sexual assault. He escaped from the cannabis farm and sought help from an older adult cousin without knowing his cousin worked for a rival criminal group. He is now under their control.

Altin has been arrested after being found carrying several wraps of cocaine. However, when interviewed by the police Altin gave no comment and has not disclosed anything that has happened to him. Concerns for trafficking have been raised, but without disclosure or other evidence of modern slavery, no NRM referral has been made, charges remain and Altin is bailed to the care of the local authority.

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Dat, Part 1

Dat, 17, doesn't remember his parents and for most of his childhood he lived on the streets of Hanoi with other children begging, stealing or selling lottery tickets. There was an older boy who he had to give all the money to who was very violent, so Dat ran away to a different city further north.

When looking for work he was approached by someone who offered him work in a warehouse in China, where he worked for a couple of years- during this time he didn't earn any money as they said it was needed for his accommodation and food. When he was a bit older he was told it was time for him to work in Europe. His journey through Europe took several years working in various countries until he arrived in the UK and told to look after cannabis plants growing in a house.

After a few months the police raided the property and arrested Dat for cannabis cultivation.

Thomas, Part 1

Thomas, a 16-year-old British boy, has a history of neglect and was abused by his uncle and cousin from a young age. His mother was unable to care for him. He moved between different extended family placements, foster placements and several children's homes.

At the age of 12, Thomas was suspected to have been groomed online and sexually exploited by older males. He was known to be using alcohol and cannabis. Child protection and safeguarding processes were followed and for a period, risks to Thomas decreased, but as time went on there were missing episodes and, on several occasions, he was found to have large amounts of cash, several mobile phones and expensive items in his possession. When questioned, he did not want to talk about what was happening or where he was going.

Age 14, overseas travel was arranged for Thomas, and he went missing overseas for periods of between two and six weeks. Alongside concerns over sexual exploitation, there were also suspicions that he might be involved with drug traffickers. Thomas' journeys were often staggered. For example, on one occasion he was sent to a country where he was refused entry. He then received instructions to move to another country where he was given further tickets for travel.

The sexual exploitation unit has worked closely with the Home Office and children's services and has taken hold of Thomas' passport and put Border Force on high alert in case there are attempts to get Thomas out of the UK on false passports.