On your side, by your side.

10 Years of the Scottish Guardianship Service

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Scottish Guardianship Service SINCE 2010

scottish refugee council

aberlour scotland's children's charity

Introduction

Over the last ten years nearly 700 asylum-seeking and trafficked children and young people have been supported by the Scottish Guardianship Service.

The service provides one-to-one support to help young people navigate the asylum and welfare processes and come to terms with their experiences.

Guardians provide a professional, friendly pillar of support, helping young people to be actively involved in the decisions that affect their life. Guardians make sure young people get the help they need, listen to their experiences, speak up for them when needed and help them plan their future and fulfil their potential.

The Scottish Guardianship Service was born from research commissioned by Scottish Refugee Council in 2006. The need for independent advocacy and support was clear. The Scottish Government developed a pilot scheme, delivered by Scottish Refugee Council in partnership with children's charity Aberlour.

The service launched in 2010. Early results of the pilot were so promising that three years later, guardianship was at the centre of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill. Our team of guardians continues to grow to meet demand and new initiatives such as the Allies mental health project and the Befriending project are proving to be effective ways of supporting young asylum seekers suffering from trauma and isolation.

Thanks to everyone who has supported the vital Scottish Guardianship Service over the last ten years and continues to do so.

Most of all, thanks to all the young people we've worked with. They're not just victims of war, oppression and trafficking. As their stories here show, they're real assets to Scotland.

"I want to say thank you for all the support I've been receiving because I'm sure that if I was alone, I wouldn't have got this far."

Fartun

"It was the 16th of September, 2010. I remember the exact time. Six o'clock. That's when I first met my guardian, Jillian. I really liked her. We just clicked. As soon as we met, we had a connection."

Ten years on, when her guardian teases her about her love for cappuccinos, 25-year old Fartun from Somalia admits she's still not a morning person.

But Jillian knew that seemingly endless meetings with lawyers and Home Office officials were mentally and emotionally challenging for the teenager seeking asylum, and a little caffeine boost would help. Every step of the way, Jillian was there for her.

"One time the interpreter, she was from a different part of Somalia, and Jillian realised I didn't understand what she was saying. So, she stopped the interview and asked if we needed to get another interpreter."

While Fartun's life could be measured in legal appointments, the chance to meet other young asylum seekers at the Scottish Guardianship Service provided some much-needed fun.

"The dancing was my favourite bit cos we used to come every Tuesday to practise our Azonto dancing. We performed for Refugee Week. I was nervous. I was like, I'm just gonna fall, embarrass myself. But it turned out perfect. I still remember the moves."

The year after she was granted refugee status, Fartun put on her snazziest outfit to join the guardians on stage at the Scottish Charity Awards, as the Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour scooped the Partnership Award. Now as a Fashion Technology student, Fartun has her sights on designing outfits for special occasions.

"Hopefully one day I'll open my own clothes shop. There aren't many Muslim shops in Glasgow so I'd like to sell Islamic gowns."

Fartun loves Glasgow, its people and especially her guardians.

"To be honest if it wasn't for them, especially Jillian, I wouldn't be who I am today."

Yusra

"Do you know Tony Macaroni? We went there for our first date. It was awkward," laughs 24-year old Yusra, who fled the civil war in Somalia nine years ago. "Even though Sayid had been my friend for three years I was so nervous I asked my foster brother to come and sit at another table!"

The Hospitality and Tourism Management student at Strathclyde University first met Sayid when they were both teenagers at the participation group run by the Scottish Guardianship Service. Now they're married and have their hands full with a lively two-year old son.

"His first word was dada. Now he can count up to ten. He knows colours, shapes. He loves outside, he loves cars. He gets that from his dad. Sayid's a mechanic."

The first thing her guardian, Alexis, did was support Yusra and her social worker to change her foster placement - a move that allowed the fifteen-year old to flourish. Alexis took her to lawyers' appointments and, when her asylum claim was refused twice, encouraged her not to give up. The third time, Yusra got her status.

In 2012 Alexis accompanied Yusra to the Red Cross family tracing service in a bid to find her family back in Somalia. Six years later, Yusra received a letter from the Red Cross to say they'd found two of her three siblings in a refugee camp in Kenya. She'd last seen her brother when he was four; he's now nearly 14.

"I was very emotional. I cried lots. I thought this can't be true after so many years. They're quite young so for me if I'll be able to get them here it'll mean a lot. They need family; they need someone to look after them. My other sister, I don't know if she's still alive or dead, I just don't know."

Shireen

"I like Irn Bru. It's the best drink in Scotland. It tastes like medicine. When I have a cough, I buy a big bottle."

Shireen was just 13 years old when he fled Afghanistan in 2008. When he arrived in the UK two years later, Shireen's age was disputed by the Home Office. Despite being only 15, he was treated as an adult, dispersed to Glasgow and the Home Office refused his asylum claim.

"That time was very difficult for me because I couldn't speak English, I didn't know where I could go or what I could do. I had nothing. And nobody believed my case."

It was only after the Afghan Embassy accepted his handwritten ID documents as genuine that he was referred to the Scottish Guardianship Service as a 16-year old. His guardian Hannah supported Shireen through the immigration and appeals process that eventually led to him being granted refugee status in 2014.

"Hannah's helped me in lots of ways, with my flat, with solicitors, she read my case and explained what was happening. Guardianship in Scotland is like my family. They support me for education, for interviews, for work, even when I have Council Tax problems."

Shireen has grown in confidence through many activities run by the service; he's taken part in a photography project, Christmas parties and a trip to the Scottish Parliament. He's now working on a business plan to open a grocery store, and he plays in a volleyball team at Scotstoun gym. But one of the things he enjoys most is Refugee Week, celebrating the country's cultural diversity.

"I wore Afghan clothing for a fashion show in the Gorbals. In Refugee Week we learn more about other peoples' culture. Here in Scotland there are mixed communities now. You can see a lot of culture. Different people from everywhere in the world."

Lyne

"I've just been accepted to do a PhD in Ultrasonic Engineering at Glasgow University," says 23-year old Lyne, who has just completed her Master's at Glasgow Caledonian University. She attributes her academic success to the help she's received over the last seven years from her guardians Alexis and Stephanie.

"I'm proud of myself, and I want to say thank you for all the support I've been receiving because I'm sure that if I was alone, I wouldn't have got this far."

Lyne remembers meeting Alexis for the first time two months after arriving in Scotland from Cameroon.

"She brought me to Primark and helped me buy some clothes. Some underwear and pyjamas. That was my first clothes since I arrived in the UK."

Together with the support she received from social work, her guardians' help with basic necessities proved a lifeline. But it is her guardians' support through dark times Lyne values most.

When a court decision went against Lyne, Alexis remained by her side. A year later, a flight ticket was booked to return Lyne to Cameroon.

"I thought that was the end, I thought I was going to lose everything. I was really down. I felt life wasn't worth living. But again, my guardian was there to say everything's going to be fine. I mean the whole time, she was there. She helped me to get the legal advice I needed."

Even though she's still waiting for a positive decision on her asylum application, Lyne hopes her success at her studies will inspire others to achieve their dreams.

"I wanted to do something meaningful with my life. Education is the thing that's given me the strength to continue. It made me get up every morning. What I went through, with all the difficulties I overcame, I think everything's possible. To be patient is not to wait but to act whilst waiting."

WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Tati

"They used to call me Tattie Scone at school. I didn't even know that was potato!"

When Tati started high school, he had to learn Scotland's language and culture quickly. Now 22 and with a strong Glaswegian accent, the refugee from Angola laughs about his nickname as he reflects on how much his guardians helped him through the early days.

"The only time I would smile was when Catriona or Alexis came to see me and took me out for a drive or a walk. They told me, 'Don't be afraid. You're not on your own. We're here to support you.' That made me feel stronger."

The other thing that helped Tati feel less alone was activities and trips with other teenage asylum seekers; memories of climbing, rowing, and discos stand out as highlights, along with his first ever Halloween party.

"It was good vibes. Everyone had to dress up, so I ended up putting on a dress and a wig. It was so funny. Everyone was laughing so it was the perfect chance for me to make friends."

The reasons why he fled Angola though were never far from the surface, especially when faced with repeated interviews with Home Office officials.

"The day my asylum claim was rejected I was crying my heart out. I didn't know what to do. Then Catriona and Alexis said, 'Listen. That's not the end. You need to be strong. You can appeal.' All I did was listen to their advice until the day I got accepted."

Tati's now in his final year studying Business and IT at the University of the West of Scotland, has a job at Nandos and does occasional work as a fashion model. But he still keeps in touch with his guardians.

"I wouldn't be me without them. I wouldn't be where I am right now without them. That's how much they mean to me."

Hai

"Learning to drive. That was my foster mum's dream for me. I was a bit scared. But it was fine. I passed first time."

Twenty-year old Hai has a flat of his own now but remains very close to his foster mum. His guardian Hannah knew a good foster placement was the safest option for him, after the terrified fifteen-year old arrived here on his own from Vietnam.

"When the police found me, I couldn't speak any English and I didn't understand anything. I didn't know who I could trust. My guardian always brought an interpreter. She explained things to me and helped me with the asylum process and legal appointments. The first person I could trust was Hannah. Without her, I don't think I would have refugee status."

Studying English at college and immersing himself in Scottish culture with his foster family helped Hai feel more confident about his new life. Through the Scottish Guardianship Service he enjoyed opportunities to meet other Vietnamese teenagers and they explored their new country together.

"Talking with people in the same situation as me made a big difference. We didn't feel scared anymore. We just felt safe. We were like little boys and little girls. We played outside and we weren't scared of anything."

Hai expanded his social circle and gained valuable work experience by volunteering at a British Heart Foundation charity shop.

"It was a new experience for me, and I made some Scottish friends. I volunteered for two years and learned to try new things."

With the support of both his foster family and his guardian, the future's looking bright.

"My dream job? I want to do an apprenticeship to be a carpenter or a mechanic. I'm going to try to save up so I can get a mortgage and buy a house."

LUMIX

Zayn

"My favourite Scottish word is *daftie*. I use it a lot."

19-year old Zayn loves living in Glasgow.

"I feel like I'm home. Glasgow is just making me so happy every day. I think the memories that I've made with friends here, and just the people that I've had experience with, it's a good feeling that I have in this city."

The Kurdish teenager didn't feel quite so at home at first.

"You have always that fear in you like, am I going to stay here? Am I going to get deported? I did not know anything when I came here. Am I going to be able to live in a safe place, in a safe country? I was worried about it all the time, all the time."

During the years of uncertainty, worry and fear, Zayn's guardians Megan and Graeme were by his side. They supported him through appointments with lawyers and Home Office officials, helped him apply for college, and introduced him to other young asylum seekers.

2019 was a good year for Zayn. Three years after arriving in Scotland from Kurdistan, he was granted refugee status.

"Guardians are like a miracle, an angel. They held my hand and moved me forward. I think having their help was a big deal for me. It's like the difference between day and night."

Now a student at City of Glasgow College, Zayn hopes to get a job in the media when he completes his HND in TV Production.

"A journalist, cameraman, sound and lighting. That would be really good. One day I'd like to work for the BBC.

Mahad

"We've won a couple of times. But unfortunately, we didn't win any cups. No trophies yet. But in the future yeah I hope so."

Every Saturday morning and Thursdays too, Mahad plays midfield for his football team in Maryhill. Sometimes he has a treat of chips and cheese on the way home. Hard to believe that when he arrived from Somalia at the age of 16, Mahad knew nothing about the beautiful game and nothing about Scotland.

"I came to this country on 6 January 2017. I was alone. I couldn't speak English at all. I only knew "yes". I didn't even know "no". That was hard. I was scared as well, and I remember I used to feel lonely."

When he was referred to the Scottish Guardianship Service, Mahad started attending weekly activities with other young asylum seekers.

"When I went there, I felt different because there were people my age. They're feeling happy, enjoying playing games, dancing, music. It made me feel quite different."

Mahad's guardian Megan accompanied him to immigration interviews, encouraged him to learn English at Langside College, and took him to the Red Cross who eventually traced his family to a refugee camp in Uganda.

"It was the best news I ever had. They said call this number. My mum answered the phone. I couldn't stop crying. They're all crying as well. The Red Cross workers and Megan too."

Last December Mahad travelled to Uganda to be reunited with family. He hopes to study IT and plans to work hard to bring his family to Scotland one day. In the meantime, he's been listening to his favourite rap music and decorating his flat.

"I put up wallpaper and hung up some pictures. It's beautiful the way I designed it. It's Scottish."

DRI-FIT

Pshtewan

"It was so good, it was like a film. I said to them I cannot hold that Iraqi flag because I am Kurdish. So they surprised me with my own Kurdish flag which felt great."

The flag ceremony at a residential holiday in Dumfriesshire with other young asylum seekers was a proud moment for Pshtewan. It was also the first time he realised he was not alone.

"You feel like no one else can feel the same as you but when I saw the other guys in the same situation, I felt strong."

Having travelled for eight months to reach Scotland at the age of 15, Pshtewan was terrified of being sent back to Iraq.

"It was so scary. I did a lot of hard things to get here. We didn't have food, we didn't have shelter. If they take me back there, they may kill me. There is not any safe place there for me."

While it is his guardian's job to help the young asylum seeker with lawyers, the Home Office, education and accommodation, Pshtewan doesn't see his guardian as a worker. He thinks of Graeme as a friend.

"When I have Graeme with me, I feel safe. You feel good when you have someone with you."

After two years in shared accommodation, the 18-year-old is moving into his own flat. He now has humanitarian protection, he enjoys worshipping at Glasgow's Central Mosque, and hopes to study psychology.

His dream for the future is to be reunited with his family.

"My personal hopes are to find my family. Meet them again. If we can live together again, that's all I want . After that I can go through with any situation."

Dlovan

"I've never experienced anything like that before and I enjoyed it more than anything I've done before."

16-year old Dlovan from Iraq laughs with his guardian Sarah as he remembers the day he went go-karting with other young asylum seekers, speeding round the track and overtaking their guardians.

While such days out with his peers have brought joy, the Allies Group run by the Scottish Guardianship Service is also helping the Kurdish teenager deal with the impact of trauma.

"The breathing exercise, even if you feel angry or frightened, that was good to calm me down. We were also given a very nice smell, the oil, that we were using to bring ourselves to the present. Because when my mind was going away and thinking about the past and the things I'd seen in Iraq, I had to bring myself back to the present. And that smell relates me to Scotland."

The recently launched Befriending Service has helped Dlovan to get to know Glasgow as his new home. Discovering the Forth and Clyde Canal was an experience he couldn't wait to share.

"I've been to so many nice lovely places in this city that I had never seen before. Just a wee while ago, my befriender took me to the canal on a bike. It was a very nice place. I've been back to it once again and the second time I went there I took a few friends with me."

Dlovan loves Scotland and has big plans for the future to help those who have nothing and nowhere to live.

"I am hoping to become a very big businessman to help the Scottish people or anybody staying on the streets with nowhere to live. I want to have a very big company and employ all these people and encourage them to leave drugs and alcohol behind."

HOODRICH

Meyman

"This is the team I support. Celtic. I just came to know them here. Some of my other friends support Rangers, but I love Celtic."

Meyman fled from Somalia after being captured and attacked by al-Shabaab at the age of just 15.

Two years later he arrived in Scotland just as the country entered lockdown to fight the spread of Covid-19. He was placed in supported accommodation for homeless 16 to 25-year olds where he started learning English and developed his new passion for football.

"I was very happy living there. They didn't discriminate against me although I couldn't speak English. They said come on, with time you will start speaking just like us."

Because of the lockdown, Meyman has yet to meet his guardian face-to-face. Instead they've had to build their relationship online.

"It was really difficult because I've never had a computer before. I didn't even know what asylum was. But I've had a lot of that explained to me by Megan. I'm very happy with everything."

Throughout the pandemic, the Scottish Guardianship Service has helped keep young asylum seekers connected with one another online.

"We support each other because it's a process we're all going through. And we talk about our dreams of the future, what we want to do, our education."

Now in student accommodation, Meyman is excited to start studying English at college.

"I want to be an engineer, for construction, for buildings, roads. And since I've never attended school I know that I need to do a lot of work, so I will really, really work hard."

Having my guardian by my side – it's like the difference between night and day.

They're amazing. I feel like I'm not alone. I feel like I have everything.

I knew I had somebody there I could trust. I knew I had someone there that I could open up and tell how I felt inside.

The guardians support you and are always behind you like a mum or brother or father.

Guardianship has guided me and given me the way to go in the future.

The Guardianship Service is my family to be honest. We have so much love and support.

The support I received from my guardians was indescribable. Actually they donate their life to us. They've been amazing. They have been there for us.

The guardians tell you you can be strong and we are here for you. There is hope. They always care about you.

I feel like she's my mum. She looks out for me. I tell her everything that's going on. I'm really, really thankful.

A guardian means everything to me. All the things I have learned and I have seen, has been because of the guardians. They make us very welcomed and happy.

Scottish Refugee Council

Scottish Refugee Council is an independent charity dedicated to providing support to people seeking sanctuary in Scotland. We have been campaigning for refugee rights since 1985.

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Scottish Charity No. SC008639

Aberlour

Aberlour is the largest solely Scottish children's charity, helping to improve the lives of Scotland's vulnerable children and young people. Not all children are born with an equal chance. Aberlour is there for Scotland's hidden children, when others let them down, because every child deserves a chance to flourish.

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