



Home Office

# An assessment of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates

## Interim findings

Research Report 101

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# 1. Background

## 1.1. Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs)

Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 made provision for ICTAs in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> The role of ICTAs is to provide specialist independent support for trafficked children, in addition to existing statutory service provision, and to advocate on behalf of the child to ensure that their best interests are reflected in decisions made by public authorities.

## 1.2. Previous trial and early adopter sites

In January 2014, the Home Office commissioned an initial trial of ICTAs, delivered by Barnardo's, in 23 local authorities in England. The trial evaluation report, published in December 2015, found that the role of ICTAs was seen positively by most professionals involved and by the children themselves. ICTAs were perceived as adding value to existing service provision. However, the evaluation found that there was a need for further research into the ways ICTAs mediate the risk of children going missing. There was also limited evidence of benefits in relation to the immigration and criminal justice systems, due to the short timescale of the pilot.<sup>2</sup>

In June 2016, the Government announced that it would commence Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. To support the national roll-out of the ICTA service, it was introduced in three early adopter sites: Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and throughout Wales. This service has run from 30 January 2017 and is due to continue up to 31 January 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Modern Slavery Act (2015), available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/section/48/enacted>

<sup>2</sup> Kohli R., Hynes P., Connolly H., Thurnham A., Westlake D. and D'Arcy K. (University of Bedfordshire) (2015) 'Evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates trial: final report', Home Office.

## 2. Aims

The Home Office are assessing the ICTA service in the three early adopter sites over 2 years. An Independent Expert Advisory Panel has been established to oversee this assessment of the ICTA service.<sup>3</sup> The overall aim of the assessment is to answer the question:

*What is the 'added value' of the ICTA service, and is this different for different groups of children and in different early adopter sites?*

To address this question, the assessment will explore:

- How the ICTA service was implemented in the early adopter sites.
- How the ICTA service works alongside existing service provision for trafficked children in the early adopter areas, and how this is different for different groups of children.
- The outcomes for children who had an ICTA, including the outcomes for different groups of children.

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<sup>3</sup> The Independent Expert Advisory Panel includes academics and professionals from non-governmental organisations.

## 3. Methods

The overall assessment of the ICTA service comprises a quantitative and qualitative element.

The quantitative element of the research is being led by Home Office researchers in the Crime and Policing Analysis Unit and involves the collection of data from Barnardo's (the ICTAs' service provider) on the characteristics and status of children in the service and monthly data on the work carried out by ICTAs. It also involves collecting monthly data from local authorities about the work undertaken by social workers with children in the service. [Data tables](#) are available.

The qualitative research is being led by researchers at the University of Bedfordshire.<sup>4</sup> This research complements the quantitative data by gathering the views and perceptions of trafficked children working with ICTAs, the ICTAs themselves and a range of stakeholders interacting with the ICTAs in local areas. The qualitative research so far has involved 11 telephone interviews with operational and strategic stakeholders representing social care, immigration and criminal justice, and two face-to-face focus groups (one with ICTAs and another with ICTA service managers). A second phase of qualitative research will involve further interviews with operational stakeholders, ICTAs and a sample of children who have been receiving the service.

This report presents findings at an interim stage of the assessment, with quantitative data relating to the period from February 2017 to January 2018, after the service has been in operation for one year in the early adopter sites. On the recommendation of the Independent Expert Advisory Panel, due to the limited data collected at this interim stage, this report focuses on the quantitative data, with less emphasis on emerging findings from the qualitative research.

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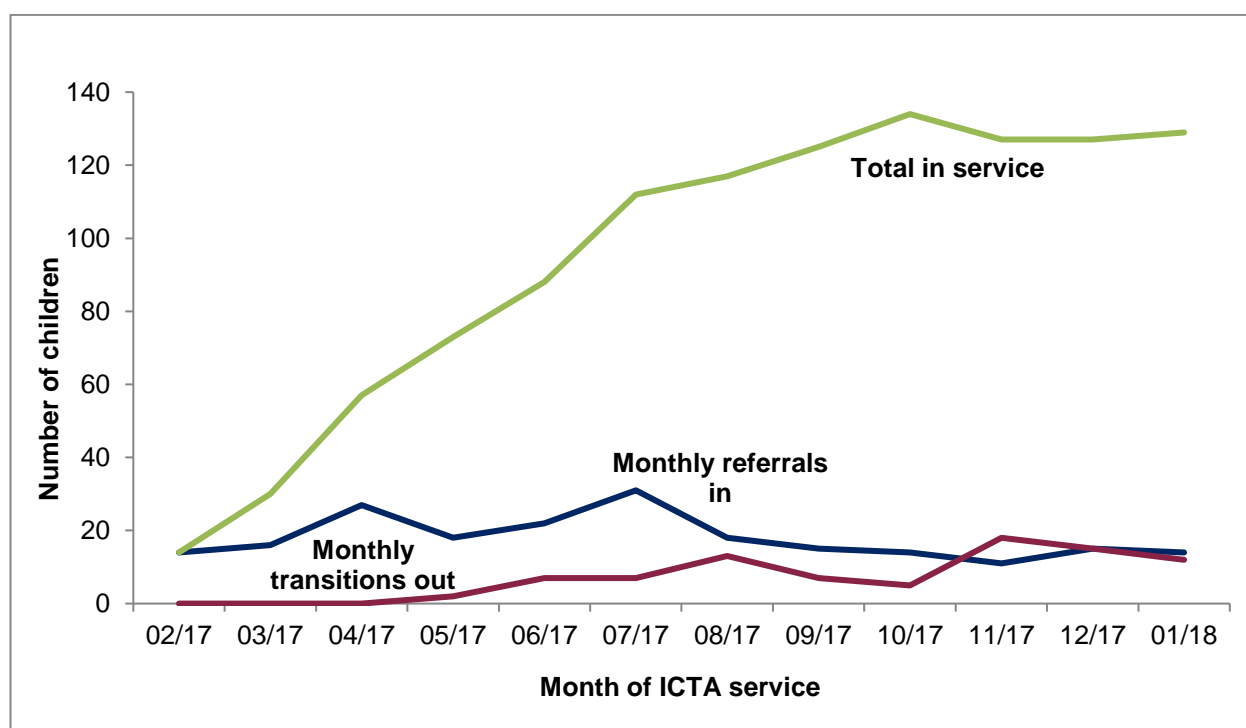
<sup>4</sup> The contractor, University of Bedfordshire, was selected through a process of fair and open competition.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Referrals

#### 4.1.1. Volume of referrals

A total of 215 referrals were made to the service within the first year, necessitating the recruitment of two additional ICTAs to support the existing six ICTAs in meeting demand, which required further Home Office funding. Children began to exit the service from May 2017, with increasing transitions out of the service resulting in a more stable caseload compared to the early months of service (Figure 1). Between May 2017 and January 2018 a total of 87 children exited the service.



**Figure 1: Total children in ICTA service, referrals in and transitions out per month, February 2017 to January 2018**

The high number of referrals could reflect:

- The general increase in potential victims of modern slavery identified in the UK, who were exploited as children.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the system by which the Government identifies and provides support to victims of modern slavery. There was a 66% increase in potential victims of modern slavery exploited as children referred to the NRM, from 1,278

in 2016 to 2,118 in 2017.<sup>5</sup> The National Crime Agency (NCA) has explained this recent increase due partly by the emergence of criminal exploitation, for example 'county lines', referrals among UK children, as well as unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) being referred into the NRM.<sup>6 7</sup>

- The proactive efforts by ICTAs to raise awareness of the service, as found in the qualitative research.

#### 4.1.2. Profile of children referred

Key findings in relation to the profile of children referred into the service between February 2017 and January 2018 are highlighted below:

- **Age and gender** – The ICTA service is for children under 18. Over half of children referred to the ICTA service were aged 16 or 17 on referral (121 of 215). A small number of children were much younger (7 children were 6 years old or under).<sup>8</sup> The majority of children referred were male (124 compared to 91 female).
- **Nationality** – The most common nationality of children referred into the service was British (80), followed by Vietnamese (39) and Sudanese (28). Overall, the majority of children referred were from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) (124 out of 215). A small number of EEA children were referred to the service (11).<sup>9</sup>

This is in contrast to the previous ICTA trial in 2014 to 2015, when the majority of children were from non-EU countries (110 of 158) and considerably fewer were from the UK (28).<sup>10</sup>

- **Exploitation type** – The most common primary types of exploitation for referrals into the service were criminal exploitation (65), sexual exploitation (72) and labour exploitation (43).<sup>11</sup> Primary exploitation type strongly varied by gender. Sexual exploitation was the primary form of exploitation for around three-quarters of females (66 out of 91), while criminal exploitation was the primary form of exploitation for half of males (62 out of 124).

#### 4.1.3. Status of children on referral

ICTAs assessed the status of children upon referral into the service.

- **Criminal justice system** – Overall, involvement in the criminal justice system on referral as either a witness, victim or the accused was uncommon (32 of 215 children). However, children were more likely to be involved as the accused (23 of 215), compared to as a victim or witness (8 of 215). Notably, most of the children who were involved as the accused were UK citizen children (18 of 23).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> National Crime Agency (2018), National Referral Mechanism Statistics – End of year summary 2017.

<sup>6</sup> County lines is defined by the NCA as an issue involving the use of mobile phone 'lines' by groups to extend their drug dealing business into new locations outside of their home areas by using children or vulnerable adults to carry and sell drugs outside of the area they live in.

<sup>7</sup> *op. cit* (National Crime Agency, 2018)

<sup>8</sup> A small number of those referred into the service (5) were assessed as being 18+ on or shortly after referral. These people technically remained in the service for a short time, while ICTAs worked with them to transition them to alternative support.

<sup>9</sup> EEA children have not been included in subsequent analysis by nationality because of the low number of this group.

<sup>10</sup> *op. cit.* (Kohli R. *et al*, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that primary exploitation type was sometimes unknown when children were too young to disclose their exploitation type and it needed to be decided by professionals over time. Some children also experienced multiple types of exploitation.

<sup>12</sup> The other 4 children who were involved as the accused were non-EEA.

- **Living situation** – Nearly all non-EEA nationals (111 of 124) were UASC who lived in local authority care on referral, while around half of UK national children (38 of 80) lived with family, with the other half under the care of a local authority (38).
- **Contact with trafficker** – 1 in 8 children (26 of 215) referred into the service had known contact with their traffickers, and a similar number had suspected contact (27).
- **Education and training** – There were similar numbers of children who were not attending education or training on referral (92 of 215) compared to those who were (98 of 215).<sup>13</sup>

## 4.2. Delivering the service

### 4.2.1. Timeliness of referral and first contact

- **Timeliness of referrals** – Of all children referred to the ICTA service, around 4 in 10 children were referred within one day (90 of 215) and half were referred within 2 days of identification (105 of 215). Three-quarters of children were referred within 15 days (158); however, it took 40 days or more for 1 in 7 children to be referred to the service (29).
- First responder organisations are responsible for making referrals into the ICTA service.<sup>14</sup> Agencies which most commonly referred children into the service were local authorities (which made 78 referrals) and the police (73).
- **Timeliness of first contact** – Once referred, ICTAs attempted to make contact with children as soon as possible. They almost always attempted to make first contact – with children directly or via a third party – within one day (178 of 215), and attempted contact was made for all children within 6 days.<sup>15</sup> However, it was not always possible for ICTAs to make direct contact with a child or in some cases (for example criminal exploitation cases) not in the child’s best interest. This was particularly the case if they were missing on referral. In these cases, ICTAs are expected to make contact with a third party (social worker, foster parent, parent, guardian, residential worker or support worker) to agree a safety plan for if the child returns.

### 4.2.2. ICTAs’ work with children

Almost three-quarters of children in the service (135 of 184) had some form of contact (including face-to-face, phone calls and any other form of communication) with their ICTA.<sup>16</sup> Over 4 in 10 children (79 of 184) had contact with their ICTA once a month or more on average.

Over a third of children had face-to-face meetings with their ICTA once a month or more on average (70 of 184). Just under a third of children met their ICTA less than once a month on average (58 of 184). Slightly under a third of children had not met their ICTA face-to-face (56 of

<sup>13</sup> There is missing data for 25 cases.

<sup>14</sup> First responder organisations are certain statutory agencies and non-governmental organisations that can make referrals into the NRM. A list of first responders can be found at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism>.

<sup>15</sup> There is missing data for the ‘first contact’ variable for 5 children.

<sup>16</sup> The base size for analysis of ICTA activity data (n=184) is less than the base sizes for child characteristics on referral (n=215) as those who did not have a complete month in service (n=7) and those who were missing on referral and never subsequently met an ICTA or engaged with the service (n=20), or where this was not known (n=4) have been excluded from the analysis.



184), but most of these children (34 of 56) had been in the service for 3 months or less. The most common topics covered in face-to-face meetings with ICTAs were 'safety' (for 74 children), followed by 'relationship building' (for 45 children) and 'social care' (for 38 children).<sup>17</sup>

Social workers had a similar frequency of overall contact with children as ICTAs; for example, over 4 in 10 children also had contact with their social worker once a month or more (71 of 158).<sup>18</sup> Social workers had more face-to-face contact with children than ICTAs.

Just over three-quarters of children met with a social worker face-to-face once a month or more on average (122 of 158), compared with slightly over a third for ICTAs (70 of 184).

### *ICTA contact with different groups of children*

ICTAs had more frequent face-to-face contact with non-EEA children compared to UK children. However, the reverse was true of social workers, who met UK children more regularly compared to non-EEA children.

- **ICTAs** – Just over half of non-EEA children met their ICTA once a month or more on average (52 of 99). Yet, under a fifth of UK children met their ICTA this regularly (12 of 74).
- **Social workers** – In contrast, over 8 in 10 UK children (49 of 58) met a social worker once a month or more, while this was only true of slightly over 7 in 10 non-EEA children (66 of 92).

Emerging qualitative findings may help explain the pattern of a higher level of ICTA contact with non-EEA children compared with UK nationals. ICTAs and stakeholders perceived UK children as being more likely to have existing support networks on referral, which comprised family, friends, community (including traffickers) and professionals. In contrast, the networks of non-EEA children were often comparatively 'empty', which meant ICTAs could have a more active role.

*“So I suppose the role of ICTA I see as more important representing a non-UK victim because they have less professionals working with them on the whole and they have less of a voice.”* (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

This was also evident in the previous ICTAs trial, which found that children who had been trafficked across borders (non-EEA, EEA children) appeared to be more isolated from protective networks compared to internally trafficked children (from the UK).<sup>19</sup>

In addition, ICTAs and stakeholders reported that UK children sometimes did not see themselves as being exploited in any way. This self-perception seemed to create a barrier to being influenced by ICTAs. In contrast, non-EEA children appeared to become closer to ICTAs more quickly, due to identifying as exploited, and having access to comparatively less alternative support. As an interview participant explained:

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<sup>17</sup> It was possible for ICTAs to select multiple 'common subjects'.

<sup>18</sup> There are different base sizes for social worker data (n=158) and ICTA data (n=184) due to missing social worker data. It is important for the reader to keep in mind that the missing data for 26 records means the picture from social worker data is not complete at this point.

<sup>19</sup> *op. cit.* (Kohli R. *et al*, 2015)

*“Because the children who we’ve had that [were] trafficked from abroad, in many cases... want some support. And they’ve recognised they’ve been exploited. I think the problem we have with young people who have been exploited criminally, internally [in the UK], predominantly...I think they’re still so close to home and they’re so close to the exploiters... That’s why I think it takes a long period of time to make them understand they’ve been exploited and therefore have a relationship with an ICTA.”* (Strategic stakeholder)

### 4.2.3. ICTAs’ work with third parties

It was very common for ICTAs to meet with third parties on behalf of children.

ICTAs met with third parties three times a month or more on average for around 8 in 10 children (145 of 184). It was rare for ICTAs to not meet with any third parties on behalf of children at all (this was only the case for 4 children).

For over two-thirds of children (116 of 184), the most common third party contacted by ICTAs was social workers. For other children, the most commonly contacted third parties were NRM case workers<sup>20</sup> (22 of 184) and foster carers (28 of 184).

The ICTAs’ advocacy work reflected that UK and non-EEA children had different needs from the service. As outlined below, there was more of a focus on work related to the criminal justice system for UK children, but more of a focus on immigration issues with non-EEA children.

- ICTAs gave advice to solicitors and other professionals providing legal representation on behalf of two-thirds of all non-EEA children while they were in service (65 of 99), almost always on immigration matters (55 of 65).
- In contrast, ICTAs gave advice to solicitors and other professionals providing legal representation on behalf of fewer UK children while in service (just less than a quarter, 17 of 74). Where this advice was given, ICTAs most commonly gave advice in relation to criminal justice issues (10 of 17).

## 4.3. Missing from service and transitions

### 4.3.1. Missing

Both UK and non-EEA children went missing, but the patterns differed between these groups. Non-EEA children were more likely to be missing on referral and the majority of these children remained missing and out of contact with the ICTA service. UK children were more likely to go missing while in service but then came back into contact with the ICTA service.

- A total of 26 of the 215 children referred to the ICTA service were missing when they were referred to the ICTA service.
  - Of these children, 21 were non-EEA nationals, of which 14 were Vietnamese.
  - The majority of these children (20) remained long-term missing (missing for 2 months

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<sup>20</sup> NRM case workers are trained to make decisions about whether someone is a victim of modern slavery.

or more) and out of contact with the ICTA service.<sup>21</sup>

- Children also went missing while in the ICTA service. The data collected from ICTAs shows that a quarter of children went missing at least once while in service (46 of 184); while data collected by social workers showed that a third of children went missing at least once while in service (56 of 158). The discrepancy between the two figures is likely due to short missing periods not always being reported to ICTAs.
- Both sets of data showed that UK children were more likely than non-EEA children to go missing episodically, while in service; however, the difference was more pronounced in the social worker data.
  - The data from ICTAs shows that just over a quarter of UK children went missing while in service (20 out of 74) compared to just under a quarter of non-EEA children (23 out of 99).
  - The data from social workers, shows that over half of UK children (34 out of 58) went missing at least once, compared to around a quarter of non-EEA children (22 out of 92).

When trafficked children went missing, social workers almost always reported the event to the police (55 of 56 children who went missing while in service), and requested 'missing from care' meetings (27 of 56). ICTAs had more of a coordinating role compared to social workers. Their most common activities were ensuring that they or the child's social worker requested or attended a meeting of the child's professional network in response to the missing event (22 of 45), as well as reporting the event to the police (22 of 45) and social care (24 of 45).<sup>22 23</sup>

### 4.3.2. Transitions

Children are expected to remain in the ICTA service for up to 18 months or up to the time a child reaches 18 years of age. However, a child will leave the service sooner if an ICTA has reached an end to the help they can provide. A total of 87 children referred into the ICTA service left within 12 months, well in advance of the maximum 18 months of service. Half of the children exiting the service (43 of 87) were transitioned into other services, mostly local authority child or adult services (18) or NGO services including Barnardo's (19).

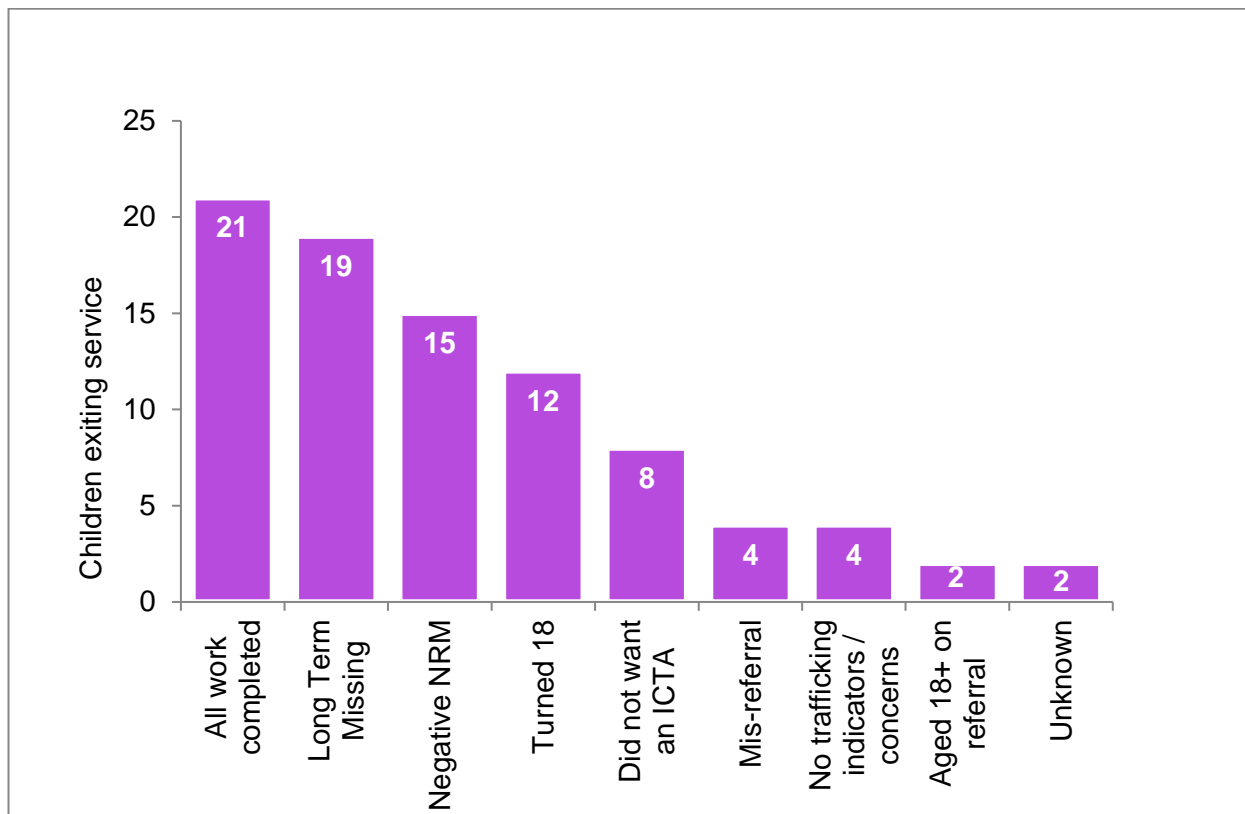
Figure 2 illustrates the reasons for children leaving the service. The most common reason was that 'all work had been completed' (for 21 of the 87 children who left the service), followed by 'long-term missing' (19), and receiving a negative NRM decision (15), which meant that a decision was made by the competent authorities that on the balance of probability the individual was not a victim of trafficking or modern slavery.

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<sup>21</sup> The latest status of a further 4 children who had been missing on referral was unknown.

<sup>22</sup> The base sizes of missing children in social worker data (n=56) and ICTA data (n=45) vary. This is likely due to discrepancies in reporting.

<sup>23</sup> Cases are closed when ICTAs are unable to provide further help to the child.



**Figure 2: Reason for children exiting the ICTA service**

Some specific patterns between different groups of children emerged:

- Two-thirds of the children leaving the service were non-EEA nationals (61 of 87). For a third of them this was because they were long-term missing (19 of 61, 15 of which were missing on referral), another fifth had received a negative NRM decision (13 of 61), and for a further fifth all ICTA work with them was completed (11 of 61).<sup>24</sup>
- A quarter of the children leaving were UK nationals (22 of 87). Their most common reasons for exiting were because they did not want an ICTA (7), all ICTA work was completed (6) or they had turned 18 (5).

#### 4.4. Added value

Interim findings from interviews with stakeholders suggest the service adds value to professionals and children in the following three main ways.

##### 4.4.1. Building trust

Stakeholders felt that children trusted ICTAs when they were able to establish and maintain the right sort of relationship – consistent, long term and with direct contact. Over time this meant that the child was not only more receptive to the ICTA, but that this trust extended to other adults from a range of services. As an interview participant explained:

*“So I think that having that sort of consistency, and probably quite a friendly amicable consistency for them, is good, it helps to build up trust, then through them builds up trust with other stakeholders, other departments.”* (Operational stakeholder, immigration)

<sup>24</sup> A further 2 EEA children received negative NRM decisions; no UK children had yet received a negative NRM decision.

#### 4.4.2. Advocacy

Related to this, acting as a single point of contact, the advocacy work ICTAs did led to them being seen by stakeholders as acting like ‘bridges’ between the child and other agencies, like social services and Home Office agencies such as UK Visas & Immigration, by establishing links between the child and other services, conveying information between the child and different parties, and also promoting the interests of the children.

#### 4.4.3. Specialist knowledge

Stakeholders perceived ICTAs’ specialist trafficking knowledge as being a helpful resource, which supplemented their own roles with the ICTA’s greater depth of understanding of trafficking:

*“I think it’s really useful to have a professional with that kind of specialist knowledge to advise on safety planning...”* (Strategic stakeholder)

#### 4.5. Conclusions

It is important to note that the findings presented in this report are interim and partial as the research is only at its halfway point. However, these interim findings provide early insights into the research questions by showing how the ICTA service worked differently with UK and non-EEA children. More specifically:

- ICTAs were more likely to have face-to-face contact with non-EEA children than UK children, while the reverse was true for social workers. Emerging qualitative findings suggest this might be because UK children had existing support networks on referral, while the networks of non-EEA children were often comparatively ‘empty’.
- These groups of children (UK and non-EEA) also had different needs and the ICTAs advocacy work reflected this, with more of a focus on work related to the criminal justice system for UK children and more of a focus on immigration issues with non-EEA children.
- Both of these groups of children (UK and non-EEA) went missing, although the patterns differed. Non-EEA children were more likely to be missing on referral and the majority of these remained missing and out of contact with the ICTA service. UK children were more likely than non-EEA children to go missing while in service but then come back into contact with the ICTA service.

This report does not focus on outcomes as many children had been in the service for only a limited amount of time as at the end of January 2018. For instance, two-thirds of children (142 of 215) had been in the service for 6 months or less. In addition, the qualitative research has only covered a limited number of stakeholders so far. These limitations will be addressed in the next phase of research. Once children have been in the service for longer, quantitative analysis will explore changes over time in their status, such as living situation, contact with trafficker, and engagement in education or training. The qualitative research will also gather views on ICTAs from a sample of trafficked children who have been receiving the service. The final report on the assessment will be published after the conclusion of early adopter sites in January 2019.

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