
Refugee Children’s Project (June 2010 – December 2012): Evaluation Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Refugee Children's Project

Designed by the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) in 2009, the Refugee Children's Project was implemented in the period June 2010 – December 2012.¹ Financially supported by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund the project aimed to contribute to:

*"changing immigration law (legislation, practice and procedure) to meet international standards on children's rights and ensure the priority of the best interests of the child and encouraging the fair and humane treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum."*²

The need for the project was identified in the proposal as the existence of a *"disadvantage that refugee children face because of lack of recognition of their substantive and procedural rights; [and the] failure of official policies and procedures to take account of their needs and of representatives to apply best practice in their work with children."* The project wanted to confront:

- the *"lack of appropriately qualified/experienced lawyers who combine both immigration and children expertise"*; and
- the need to *"maintain excellence under the current funding regime... [of] ... those who have the [relevant] qualifications and experience."*

Specifically the project wanted to achieve that:

"more immigration practitioners and practitioners in other areas of the law such as family law, criminal law and community care [acquiring] the skill, confidence and support to undertake work with refugee children and the desire to do so, [leading to] more and better representation for those children."

The project would do this by providing:

"training free at point of delivery; best practice and related publications, integrated with ILPA's influencing work and support for organisations working in the field."

The primary audiences to be engaged were:

- *"barristers, solicitors and OISC [Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner] representatives practising in immigration law"*; and
- *"legal practitioners practising in criminal, family and community care law where their clients are refugee children."*

In addition the project aimed to involve:

- *"others working with refugee children and their legal representatives [such as] community and support groups who play a role in referring children to legal representatives"*; and

¹ Although stated in the past tense, at the time of writing the project has not yet been totally completed.

² Unless otherwise indicated quotations in this paragraph are taken from the Project Proposal submitted to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

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- “those working on policy in this area or as experts.”

Continuing professional development courses (accredited by the Bar Council and the Law Society) were to be developed and targeted at:

- “Immigration law practitioners at ‘entry’ levels of expertise ...
- Advanced level practitioners working with refugee children, in the fields of immigration and family law ...
- Family law, criminal law and community care law practitioners without prior experience of immigration law”.

The range of training courses, on different themes and issues relevant to the legal representation of refugee children, would inform and contribute to ILPA’s publication and information programme, the content of annual conferences, and ILPA’s broader advocacy and lobbying work.

Organisation and implementation of the project and its various activities was led by a Project Coordinator. Three appointees have fulfilled this role: Natasha Tsangarides (June 2010 to February 2011), Lisa Woodall (March 2011 to February 2012) and Nirmala Rajasingam (since spring 2012).

An Advisory Group would provide guidance on the organisation of activities and on the content and production of materials. Consisting of approximately a dozen members it included members representing a range of interested parties and experiences, including from governmental and non-governmental agencies and organisations, from academia and law.

The project was budgeted at £330,003 over a 31 month period starting in June 2010.

1.2 Evaluation purpose and process

This report is focussed on:

- an assessment of the *effectiveness* of the project in terms of achievement of its objectives, including through
 - consideration of examples of *impact*, i.e. the wider effect of the project’s interventions,
 - and of *sustainability*, that is the (likely) continuation of achieved results after the project has finished.

More specifically for each of these aspects the evaluation aims to address the following:

- *Effectiveness*:
The extent to which the work done by the project has:
 - delivered intended benefits to participants, “leading to better representation for refugee children”³;
 - overcome blockages and made use of unforeseen opportunities;
 - led to acceptance within the sector of “ILPA’s characterisation of what is lawful and of what is best practice”.
- *Impact*:
The extent to which work done has led or contributed to:
 - changes in procedures, practice or legislation;

³ Monitoring and Evaluation Plan accompanying the project proposal submitted to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, p.4.

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- *Sustainability:*
The extent to which work done and strategies used by the project can be drawn on and applied to meet new or future challenges:
 - within ILPA;
 - within project audiences' organisations.

In developing this report the following information sources have been used:

Briefings by and interviews with ILPA staff:

- an initial briefing by the Project Coordinator, Nirmala Rajasingam;
- telephone interview with ILPA's General Secretary, Alison Harvey;
- a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the project staff (Project Coordinator and General Secretary)

Documents:

- ILPA project proposal to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund , 2009 (with later amendments 2010)
- ILPA year 1 report to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, 2011
- ILPA year 2 report to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, 2012
- ILPA June – August 2012 report to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, 2012
- Sample of Refugee Children's Project course materials accompanying professional development courses
- ILPA website [www.ilpa.org.uk/pages/refugee-childrens-project.html]

Survey questionnaires:

- circulated by ILPA to 130 randomly selected training course participants. The questionnaire involved open-ended and close-ended questions relating to participants' opinions and use of the course(s) in which they took part. 20 responses were received, eleven of these from participants who took part in more than one course.
- circulated by ILPA to 20_course tutors. The questionnaire involved open-ended and close-ended questions relating to tutors' opinions, experiences and suggestions relating to the organisation and content of 'their' course(s). Three responses were received.

Telephone interviews:

- nine course participants were contacted to obtain further information about how the course had affected their practice and to gather ideas about maintaining the project's gains.

In analysing the information the emphasis has been on data triangulation: using the different sources of information to compare opinions of different stakeholders. In addition, ideas and suggestions relevant to possible future professional development support in this field have been collected from respondents.

A draft of this report was circulated to project staff. This final version of the report takes comments and additional information provided by them into account.

2. Findings: project effectiveness

2.1 Training sessions, conferences and publications: quantities

The intention, indicated in the project proposal, was to organise 28 training sessions over the 31 month period and involve 980 participants, including some who were expected to take part in more than one session. At the start of project implementation, experienced trainers on the Advisory Group suggested that learning experiences were likely to be improved if the number of participants per course was reduced. To ensure that the total number of participants would be achieved this required the organisation of additional sessions.

Between June 2010 and August 2012 40 training sessions were held involving a total of 963 participants. A further 16 training sessions were held in September and October 2012, bringing the total number of participants up to nearly 1400.⁴ Many sessions were oversubscribed, and generally there was an increase in interest in participation over time. Information held by ILPA shows that the 31 sessions organised from November 2011 to November 2012 attracted 465 immigration lawyers and legal representatives, 132 non-immigration lawyers, and 87 non-legal practitioners. They represented more than 200 organisations.

The majority of the training sessions, each lasting three hours, took place in London, while others were held in Belfast, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Kent, Leeds, Manchester and Plymouth.

In addition to the training sessions, three conferences were planned to involve 300 attendees in total. Appealing to a broader range of stakeholders than those admitted to the training sessions, the two conferences that have been held to date have attracted law practitioners, UK Border Agency officials, immigration judges, social workers, NGO staff members, academics, and (former) child refugees.

The first conference attracted 88 delegates, the second 119. Their focus has been on informing delegates of significant legal and policy developments, promoting networking across different professions involved with child refugees, and stimulating discussions of best practice. A third conference is due to be held in December 2012 and is likely to attract 100 to 150 participants.

An intensive publication and information programme was planned to “*complement and reinforce the knowledge practitioners receive through [the] training courses.*” Each training session was accompanied by a course handbook. In addition, monthly information about child refugee cases was circulated to ILPA members and Children’s Sub-Committee mailing list recipients; 31 information sheets about refugee children and legal developments have been prepared and circulated; and a major publication has been produced annually.

The major publications which have been produced to date are a ‘Resources Guide for Legal Practitioners Working with Refugee Children’ (available via the internet and regularly updated), a totally re-written edition of an older ILPA publication ‘Working with children and young people subject to immigration control: Guidelines for Best Practice’, and ‘Working with Refugee Children: Current Issues in Best Practice’. The latter two have had print runs totalling 2000 and 1500 copies respectively. For the final months of the project an update of the Resources Guide is planned as well as the publication of a series of four booklets and brochures, drawing on different aspects covered by the training courses, and three monographs which explore different issues in current legal policy and practice.

⁴ Participants in these courses were not involved in the selection of informants for this evaluation, unless they had taken part in previous training sessions.

2.2 Project qualities: course organisation

Organising the range of courses, recruiting and briefing suitably qualified tutors, and supporting them in the production of course materials took up significant time of the Project Coordinators. Support given by the various Coordinators was greatly appreciated by tutors. As one tutor wrote, *“any support needed or requested was immediately forthcoming.”*

Briefings on expected course content and process were described as *“excellent.”* The way in which the different Coordinators developed a collaborative approach to the design of sessions also received positive comment: *“I was involved in the discussion stage of formulating a course and identifying potential areas to highlight within the notes,”* and *“we discussed at length what we hoped to achieve with the course and had various discussions to fine tune how it would be organised and presented.”*

Ensuring that training session ideas and, particularly, resources were delivered on time and to agreed quality standards appears to have required the Coordinator to make regular use of cajoling of tutors and writers, and occasionally required her to not only edit but also write materials.

Course application forms and feedback from sessions gave the project organisers an insight into current practice and needs. This helped to inform the focus and content of courses after the first year.

Many of the training sessions were repeated. According to project staff and tutors this helped to improve both the process and content of the course over time. Repeating particular sessions *“helped tutors to improve their presentation skills”* and made sessions more relevant to participants. That opinion is shared by participants whose feedback suggests that those who took part in later courses are even more complimentary about the quality of their course than those who took part in the first year.

2.3 Promotion and selection of course participants

Training sessions were advertised through ILPA’s communications with members, and through member and other networks, including CrimeLine and the Legal Services Commission. A significant attraction for course participants was that the courses did not charge attendance fees. In the opinion of project staff the project would not have engaged the number and range of course participants it did if fees had been charged. Finances in this area of legal work being as they are, many organisations cannot commit funds to what for, at least some, is a minority interest in their organisation’s or law firm’s practice. Where respondents remark on this aspect they agree with this assessment, stating for example that *“... people attended who might otherwise have not done so, if it had been a fee paying course.”*

Registration for a session was through application which asked about the applicant’s qualifications, experience of working with refugee children, and reasons for wishing to attend the training session. This not only helped tutors in planning the session – making their course relevant to attendees - but also assisted ILPA in identifying issues that might warrant specific attention in future courses.

Although attention was given to the distinction between entry level and advanced level practitioners (particularly during the first year), selection of course participants was primarily done on a ‘first come, first served’ basis. Staff reported some cases where applicants, who did not have involvement in refugee children’s cases, (unsuccessfully) wanted to take part in training sessions primarily because the free sessions were accredited (by the Law Society and Bar Council), earning professional development points.

Project staff report that interest in the courses was from a significantly wider field of professions than originally thought or planned, particularly from amongst non-legal organisations working with refugee children. Where possible, sessions have accommodated this interest, for example in entry level courses focussing on ‘Good Practice in Working with Refugee Children’. A number of respondents mentioned the

benefits of such ‘cross-over working’, not only in bringing together perspectives from different legal branches, e.g. criminal law as well as immigration law, but also from non-legal perspectives, such as social work. In this respect one respondent mentioned as one of the main benefits of attending *“the opportunity to meet and discuss issues with other practitioners involved in different areas which broadens and develops my own knowledge and skill base.”* Not all participants, however, were convinced of the value of bringing together different professions in the training sessions.

2.4 The quality of the training sessions, conferences and publications

The vast majority of participant respondents are (highly) complimentary about the organisation, content, and format of the usually three hour long sessions. Positive feedback received by the organisers immediately after each session is reiterated by respondents to the questionnaires. Across the range of questions asked there are no significant differences in opinions from those who part in one training session or from those who took part in two or more sessions.

Many respondents remark very positively on the sessions’ mix of information provision, skills development and networking opportunities. As in the feedback received immediately after each course, the great majority of respondents to the evaluation questionnaires and telephone interviews found the sessions they took part in *“excellent”*.

Typical comments regarding the content of the courses include: *“Provided carefully researched and thorough briefing on issues/law that we needed to understand”* and *“It has provided up to date information on the law but also on how cases are being dealt with by other practitioners, social care agencies, courts and tribunal.”* The use of case studies was mentioned by many respondents as especially valuable: providing real life examples that practitioners were able to relate to and use in their own work.

Many respondents found the sessions *“very useful for information sharing”*, particularly because they gave a chance *“to come together with fellow professionals and learn from one another about the law, and each other’s experiences.”* For some what was important too was that sessions stimulated a *“feeling of being part of a wider network”* - particularly important it seems where only one or two practitioners in a practice or organisation deal with child refugee cases.

That the training sessions offered something new was highlighted by one respondent who said: *“Previously most immigration courses did not cover children or issues in relation to refugee children in particular. New courses have been extremely useful in providing practical tips and guidance on working with refugee children.”* The approach of many of the sessions actively *“[got] us to look at the way in which we think about the case [illustrated through case studies]”*, which according to another respondent, *“gave me time to reflect on my practice”* and, according to yet another participant, *“allowed me to see information from different perspectives.”*

As a result of taking part the great majority of respondents would agree with one who said *“I now feel much better equipped to deal with issues relating to children and immigration law.”*

The division of courses into ‘entry’ and ‘advanced level’, used particularly during the first project year, was seen as less useful by project staff as time went by. According to the Project Coordinator a significant number of participants with advanced experience of immigration law used involvement in an ‘entry level’ course as a means to renew and update their familiarity with the principles of legal work with refugee children.

Varying levels of experience and knowledge, according to some respondents, helped to create beneficial participant interaction and learning. However, for tutors it could create problems, making *“it hard to*

pitch the teaching at a level which was neither too complex nor too basic for any given individual. [...] while the majority were well suited to the level of the course [...] there were always a few who found it too advanced or too basic." That latter aspect was confirmed by a minority of respondents, such as the one who felt that the course he attended *"was overly general."*

Suggestions on how the training sessions could have been improved are few, with most respondents indicating that they wouldn't change anything except perhaps, as one respondent suggested, *"add another half hour to enable more informal exchange"* about practice and issues. Another participant suggested that it would have been useful to receive the contact details of those who attended to enable further networking.

As with the training sessions, conferences too were viewed very positively. What is particularly appreciated by evaluation respondents are * opportunities to exchange and discuss experiences with a wide range of interested parties (*"discussions with others is what made the conferences worthwhile for me"*), * networking (*"it led to collaboration between my organisation and another"*), and * *"the range of interests and organisations at the conferences."* The presence and presentations of young people ((former) child refugees) at the conferences helped to *"make legal issues come alive."*

Comments such as *"the book is superb and the notes from the conference incredibly useful"* illustrate a typical opinion when respondents comment on the printed resources produced by the project. Both questionnaire and interview responses make clear that course notes in particular are regularly referred to, not only by course participants themselves, but also by other staff: *"they are on the shelf and everyone in my office uses them."* The course notes were also seen as useful because *"there's so much law and policy [in the area of refugees and child refugees], having a small pack that brings the main issues together is very helpful [and time saving]."*

2.5 Responding to unforeseen events

The project took place during a period of significant change in legal aid provision which has affected the capacity of practitioners to support immigration and refugee legal cases. However, these changes in capacity did not affect the ability of the project to deliver on its intentions.

What did have an effect, certainly initially, was the closure of the Refugee and Migrant Justice (RMJ) charity. In the design of the Refugee Children's Project close collaboration with RMJ had been foreseen. It was the intention that the project would feed into and build on strategic litigation and legal aid work carried out by RMJ, whilst various RMJ staff members would contribute to the project's training courses, either as tutors or as participants. However, in June 2010, at the start of the Refugee Children's Project, RMJ went into administration leading to a loss of reportedly 300 staff members.⁵ A year after the closure of RMJ, another major provider of legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, the Immigration Advisory Service, went into administration leading to further organisational capacity losses affecting support for refugee children. Both events were demoralising for project staff, and created an extra burden for ILPA by reducing capacity amongst the target groups of the project.

The dispersal of many former RMJ and IAS staff members to different practices across the country initially may have created problems for the project e.g. in keeping in touch with potential project participants. Project staff indicated that survival of RMJ in particular *"would have led to a bigger spread of take-up of the courses."* However, in the longer term, according to project staff, it may have enabled the project to get in touch with a 'new' range of organisations and law firms, many of them relatively new to (child) refugee cases.

⁵ Williams, Gavin (July 2011). "Don't go that way". Charity Finance (civilsociety.org.uk) quoted in: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugee_and_Migrant_Justice. Retrieved 30th October 2012

A number of seminars and meetings for lawyers interested in strategic litigation were organised by the project to help fill the gap left in this aspect of work as a result of the demise of RMJ.

3. Findings: project impact and sustainability

3.1 Impact: the long view

In ILPA's submission to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Trust the long term success of the project was described as follows:

"Success is recognisable when lack of respect for the rights of these children or denial of their entitlements under international and national laws, practices and procedures is recognised as unlawful and laws are enforced, and when failure to treat children in accordance with best practice is not acceptable to employers or to funders such as the Legal Services Commission and this is enforced."

The proposal argues that work towards respect for rights and best practice is not linear (given, for instance, changes in legislation, in enforcement procedures, in resource allocations, or in judgments). In this situation for the project to make a meaningful contribution towards long term success will *"depend on two things:*

- *the quality of the work done;*
- *the extent to which high quality work can be drawn on and used to meet future challenges."*

Findings in respect of the first of these two were discussed in the previous section. This section focuses on the second aspect.

3.2 Impact: affecting changes in practice

The great majority of respondents mention the positive effect of the project on their understanding and practice: *"[participation in the training sessions] has allowed me to gain greater knowledge as to how to challenge effectively negative decisions"; "... helped me to spot potential issues and the effect of my advice to clients on their other matters."*

Immediately practical benefits of the training are clear too, with one respondent stating that the course has led to *"More effective negotiation with social services in relation to at least 4 age assessments since course [...] More effective placement of UASC [unaccompanied asylum seeking children] with legal aid lawyers and obtaining better practice from lawyers under legal aid contracts for UASC. More effective negotiation on behalf of UASC [...] to maintain support from social services."*

For at least one participant information acquired during the training was *"very useful in [successfully] representing (my client's case) to the Home Office,"* a view echoed by others. Another participant mentions that *"at the time of the course I had an unattached minor asylum seeking client ... The course helped me to represent him better."* For another the benefits were that *"I have used the practical points about how to take effective witness statement for the case [I was dealing with]."*

Apart from the course itself many respondents have found the course notes of practical use: *“in a recent case I was able to quickly draw on information in the course book. Without it I would not have been able to draw on the right information when I needed it.”*

The wider impact of the courses on general legal practice of participants was noted by one of the project staff who from her observations noted that *“teaching new skills and honing [participants’] skills, broadening their knowledge and teaching the use of various legal tools.... all of this has made [participants] better advocates of children, but also equally importantly better legal reps in general.”*

Post-course support offered by project staff received complimentary statements from those respondents who referred to this. Such support, for instance in providing insights into ILPA correspondence with government officials, has assisted session participants in the legal cases they were dealing with.

These examples illustrate that for many course participants the project has led to immediate practically applied outcomes: making use of best practice examples and of opportunities for reflection and discussion which the training sessions facilitated. However, as project staff mentioned, longer term and lasting impact of the work done by the project may not be apparent for some time to come – if at all – since *“much of this work [i.e. legal cases] has a cumulative effect on changing legal practice.”*

In the experience of ILPA *“... legal challenges to unlawful decisions that contravene the human rights of child refugees is the most effective way to bring about change in policy.”*⁶ Although in many cases the direct influence of the project on legal judgements cannot be known let alone attributed, some examples are given by ILPA in its reports to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund where the project has had a tangible impact. To mention two:

From the first project report (2011): *“In July 2010, the Administrative Court gave judgment in R (Medical Justice Network) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2010] EWHC 1925 (Admin) ruling that the UK Border Agency policy and practice of failing to give a minimum 72 hours’ notice prior to removing someone from the UK was unlawful. [...] ILPA provided a witness statement for the Medical Justice case and supplied those bringing the case with copious materials from ILPA’s previous meetings and correspondence with the UK Border Agency on removal with limited or no notice, all of which was submitted. There are numerous references to these in the judgment.”*

From the second project report (2012): *“R (Medical Justice) v SSHD [2011] EWCA Civ 269. In this case removal without notice, a practice that has led to peremptory removals of both separated children and also young people who are the subject of age disputes, has been found to be unlawful. Seventy-two hours’ notice of removal must be given, so that challenges to removal can be brought in appropriate cases. ILPA, which has contested the failure to give 72 hours’ notice for a substantial period, provided witness statements and evidence in support of the case.”*

3.3 Impact: changes in procedures and legislation

Although the project did not have a *primary* purpose to affect changes in procedures or legislation, it was the intention that information and experiences gained from courses and publications would be used in ILPA’s wider advocacy work. On this basis the project contributed to a variety of advocacy and lobbying efforts. Cases, in which according to reports the project’s experience was particularly brought to bear, include the following two:

⁶ ‘End of Year Report: 1 June 2011 to 31 May 2012’, p. 6

- the UK Border Agency asylum guidance policy ‘Processing Asylum Claims from Children’ where staff reported that *“the influence [of ILPA’s work] is clear from a textual study comparing ILPA’s suggestions with changes made to the publication”*⁷
- lobbying and briefing of members in the Houses of Parliament during the discussions leading to the ‘Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012’. The advocacy work done led to *“some changes, for survivors of domestic violence, in trafficking cases and judicial reviews, which will provide some assistance to children ...”*⁸

3.4 Sustainability of created changes

As the previous paragraphs illustrate, according to respondents the basic strategies of the project have worked well, i.e. providing training courses free at the point of delivery, synthesising and disseminating information acquired from and through the courses, and using project experiences and information in ILPA’s advocacy work. The issue of sustainability focuses on the question if changes created by the project are likely to be kept going once the project is finished, and how this can be encouraged.

The most important obstacles to sustaining the achievements of the project, mentioned by respondents, are:

- the lack of resources (in particular time and funds) to
 - keep up to date with new developments;
 - devote to child refugee cases;
- legal developments, which may make acquired learning if not irrelevant at least less relevant and less based on potential best practice;
- politico-legal attention and social priority given to child refugees: within broader society but also within organisations and firms currently dealing with child refugee cases.

Project staff indicated that skilling up and informing individual practitioners sometimes led to changed ethos in law firms: embedding attitudes that gave increased attention to best practice in dealing with child refugee cases. The responses from participants, although not explicitly confirming this assessment, indicate that course learning and information was usually shared with – and often made use of by - other staff in organisations and law firms. However, responses also make clear that for various firms, child refugee cases are a ‘minority’ interest.

As the regular project information sheets testify, legal developments of concern to refugee children can come thick and fast. Ensuring best practice requires lawyers and others to keep up-to-date. Respondents are well aware that what they have gained, particularly in terms of understanding and knowledge, can quickly become out of date. To enable practitioners to stay informed of developments and best practice respondents suggest that there is a need to:

- continue the provision of face-to-face training sessions, *“perhaps every six months on recent developments”*; and
- continue the provision of information sheets which summarise legal policy and practice developments relevant to refugee children.

Where respondents made remarks about access to the courses, provision of them at zero cost to participants was universally mentioned by telephone respondents as highly important. With reductions in legal aid budgets *“we can only afford to go on free courses”* as one respondent said.

⁷ ‘End of Year Report: 1 June 2010 to 31 May 2011’, p. 11

⁸ ‘End of Year Report: 1 June 2011 to 31 May 2012’, p. 6

Although the area of work covered by the project was not new to ILPA, the project has given the association knowledge and expertise in matters relating to refugee children which otherwise, according to project staff, would not have been obtained. As a result of the project ILPA can draw on an increased number of contacts with lawyers and others interested and involved in refugee children's cases, including amongst family lawyers, community care lawyers and criminal lawyers. Together with the growth in membership of ILPA's Children's Sub-Committee, which has clearly been one result of the project, all this provides opportunities to build on the quality work done by the project – if resources allow.

Where those resources are available, in addition to providing training sessions on refugee children's cases, some further suggestions were made by respondents which aim to sustain (and expand) the knowledge and skills which participants have gained from attending the courses, such as:

- the organisation of 'call back' events: a facilitated workshop-meeting held some time after a course and open to course participants to present and exchange practical applications they have found for learning from the course, combined with the presentation of updates to do with the issue of the course;
- the organisation and facilitation of peer support groups focussed on particular (strategic) cases: enabling the exchange of experiences and the development of ideas in response to particular strategic legal issues relevant to refugee children;
- a refugee children blog on the ILPA website: enabling case workers to post queries and issues for peer comment and suggestions. (However, as some respondents mentioned, a related blog already exists, and there might be a danger of duplication of effort.⁹)

In addition, it might be worthwhile for ILPA to consider how work with law firm case worker supervisors and managers, can be organised in order to further develop best practice attitudes and approaches - 'embedding' them in organisational/law firm practice rather than leaving it to the interest and commitment of individual staff.

⁹ The 'Refugee Legal Group', see http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/pages/refugee_legal_group.html

4. Conclusions and suggestions

1. The Refugee Children’s Project set out to equip participants “with the skills, tools and evidence to recognise, assert and litigate the rights of refugee children and to apply best practice in their interactions with these children.”¹⁰

In relation to the three main aspects of this evaluation (the project’s effectiveness, its impact, and the sustainability of its achievements) the following conclusions can be drawn:

Effectiveness

2. From the available evidence it is clear that the project has exceeded its objectives, both in terms of quantities of work done and in qualities of work delivered.
3. Individual sessions have been well planned by tutors and Coordinators, and geared to needs and interests of participants. Support given by the Coordinators in planning and organising the training sessions and support materials is remarked on very positively by the tutors.
4. Participants report that their gains from the project have in effect led to “better representation for refugee children” because of the knowledge, understanding and skills they gained from participating in training sessions, and from the information and publications (in particular course notes) provided by the project.
5. The training courses, conferences and publications successfully supported the construction of shared understanding and meaning amongst project participants, creating a shared sense of best practice in legal cases concerning refugee children.
6. The effect of the demise of Refugee and Migrant Justice, an organisation that would have been a significant partner in the project, was successfully overcome by the project, with no adverse consequences on the achievement of project objectives.

Impact

7. Training courses challenged and questioned existing practices of project participants by enabling participants to reflect on their own and others’ approaches, and motivating and encouraging a momentum to try out new ideas. The use of case studies during the training sessions was particularly highly rated by respondents, in making legal cases come ‘alive’, in stimulating thought and discussion, and in motivating practical explorations of best practice.
8. Many respondents report an almost immediate impact of the project on their work, in particular in dealing with legal cases, and for some in developing better contacts with other agencies that provide complementary services to child refugees.
9. The project has supported – and on occasion enabled – ILPA to successfully carry out influencing work which it otherwise would not have been able to do.

¹⁰ Project proposal, p. 9

Sustainability

10. The great majority of respondents report an increased interest and motivation to sustain their level of skills and understanding to help them to deliver best quality practice in the case of child refugees.
11. However, there is wide-spread recognition that sustaining this interest and motivation significantly depends on:
 - a. the ability (in particular time) of practitioners to keep up-to-date with new developments;
 - b. ILPA's ability to continue to support participants and engage new practitioners through the provision of free courses;
 - c. practitioner organisations and firms maintaining or expanding their attention to refugee children's cases;
 - d. political-legal and social environments that encourage - through policies, practice and finance -, attention to the representation of child refugees, or at least do not disable such attention.

Summary

12. In summary, the project's results can be categorised under the following four headings:
 - a. *Reactions by participants*: the extent to which the participants are satisfied with the training sessions.
Course feedback and evaluation responses indicate that satisfaction with the organisation, content and process of the various courses has been very high.
 - b. *Learning*: the extent to which new skills and information have been acquired by project participants.
Both session feedback and participant questionnaire responses show that participants have gained a great deal of new information and skills as a result of the project.
 - c. *Behaviour*: the extent to which course participants apply new gained skills and information in their own work situation.
Questionnaire and telephone responses illustrate that the training sessions have led to changed and, as far as the participants are concerned, improved practice.
 - d. *Outcomes*:
 - i. The degree to which changed skills, knowledge and behaviour amongst participants have led to outcomes for end-beneficiaries (i.e. child refugees) which would otherwise, in the absence of the project, not have been achieved.
Independent assessment of this fell outside the scope of this evaluation but respondents report that the quality of their support for child refugees has improved.
 - ii. The degree to which the organisation/firm in which the course participants work has been positively affected by the learners' participation and by their application of newly acquired skills and knowledge.
The evidence from the acquired information shows that course learning, notes and project publications have been widely shared. In a number of cases respondents indicated wide use of this information in the organisation/firm. In a minority of cases, however, no reference is made to this or responses were received showing that learning and information was not shared more widely.
 - iii. The degree to which ILPA has been positively affected by the organisation of the project and by learners' acquisition and application of training knowledge and skills.
Project staff report that, for example, interest in the work of its Children's Sub-Committee has increased substantially, and that as a result of the project's research and contacts with training participants, ILPA's information provision and lobbying work has achieved greater reach and better results.

Suggestions for consideration by ILPA

Given the success of the project in meeting its objectives, and the effectiveness of its organisation, how can ILPA build on this success? The following suggestions are made for consideration by ILPA:

- A. Apart from continuing to provide child refugee relevant training sessions, free at the point of delivery, respondents suggested that there could be a great deal of value in providing opportunities for peer support, for example, by means of:
- i. the facilitation of peer support groups focussed on particular (strategic) cases: enabling the exchange of experiences and the development of ideas in response to particular issues relevant to refugee children;
 - ii. 'call back' sessions of participants who have taken part in a particular course: to exchange experiences of applying learning whilst also providing opportunities to improve and update that learning.

In addition some respondents suggest an ILPA website based blog focussed on child refugee cases: enabling peer support in dealing with particular issues and queries. However, some telephone respondents point out that this may duplicate already existing channels.

- B. To investigate how ILPA can build on its 'best practice approach' – as exemplified in the Refugee Children's project – to affect change at organisational/law firm level, for example through:
- i. Courses aimed at supervisors and managers in law firms;
 - ii. Organisational development projects that facilitate, through a process of 'unconditional support and unconditional critique': * the development of shared understanding and meaning of best practice in the organisation, * the introduction of different/new ideas that enable staff to compare and question existing practice, and * support for the trial of new approaches and ethos based on best practice provision.