

Supported lodging hosts for unaccompanied asylum seeking children

John*

John and his wife, Sarah, are experienced supported lodgings hosts who have accommodated a number of young men over the years. In that time, they have hosted one unaccompanied asylum seeking child, a Sudanese young man aged 15, who has lived with them for the past two years.

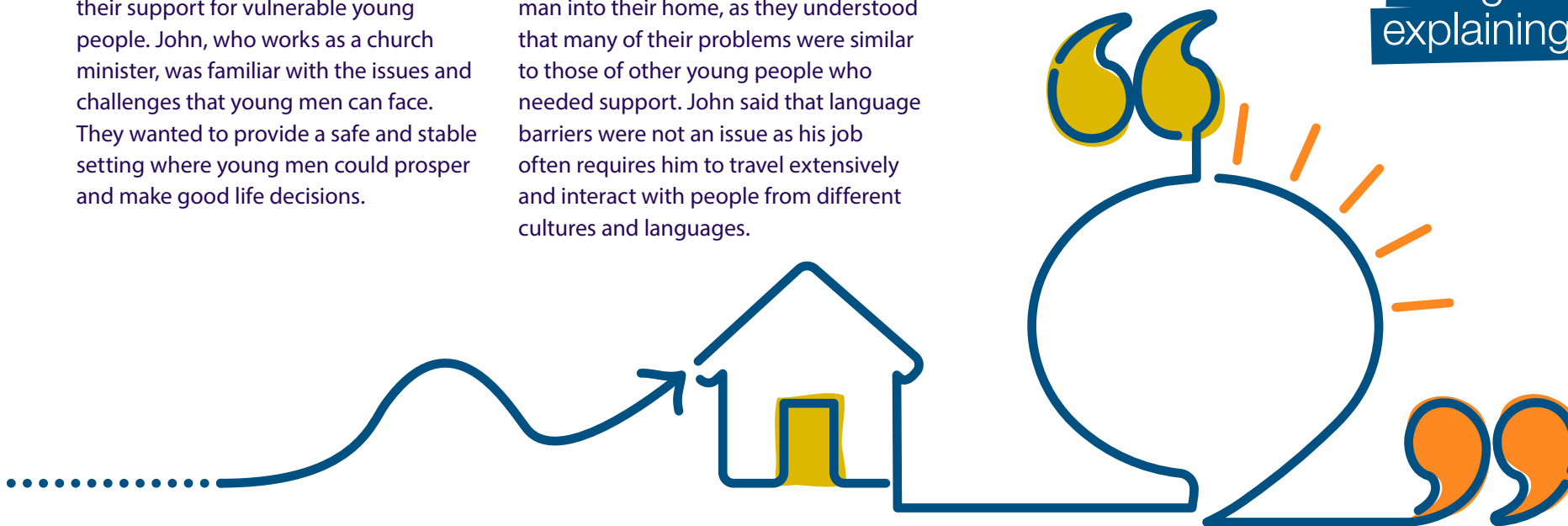
Why did John become a supported lodgings host?

John understands the importance of providing a stable home environment, and he and Sarah were eager to offer their support for vulnerable young people. John, who works as a church minister, was familiar with the issues and challenges that young men can face. They wanted to provide a safe and stable setting where young men could prosper and make good life decisions.

How did John and Sarah feel about living with unaccompanied asylum seeking children?

John and Sarah welcomed the young man into their home, as they understood that many of their problems were similar to those of other young people who needed support. John said that language barriers were not an issue as his job often requires him to travel extensively and interact with people from different cultures and languages.

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Were there any particular challenges?

One of the main challenges for John and Sarah was building up trust. The unaccompanied child in their care had been trafficked into the UK and he could be mistrustful of other people, as he assumed they had ulterior motives. It took time to build a relationship, although they overcame it by being kind and clearly explaining the situation. Another challenge was changing the boy's attitude towards women which was different in his culture. John had to be firm and explain that women had to be treated with respect and that they were equal to men. The asylum process can be stressful for some unaccompanied children and their hosts, but in John's case, their young man was keen to

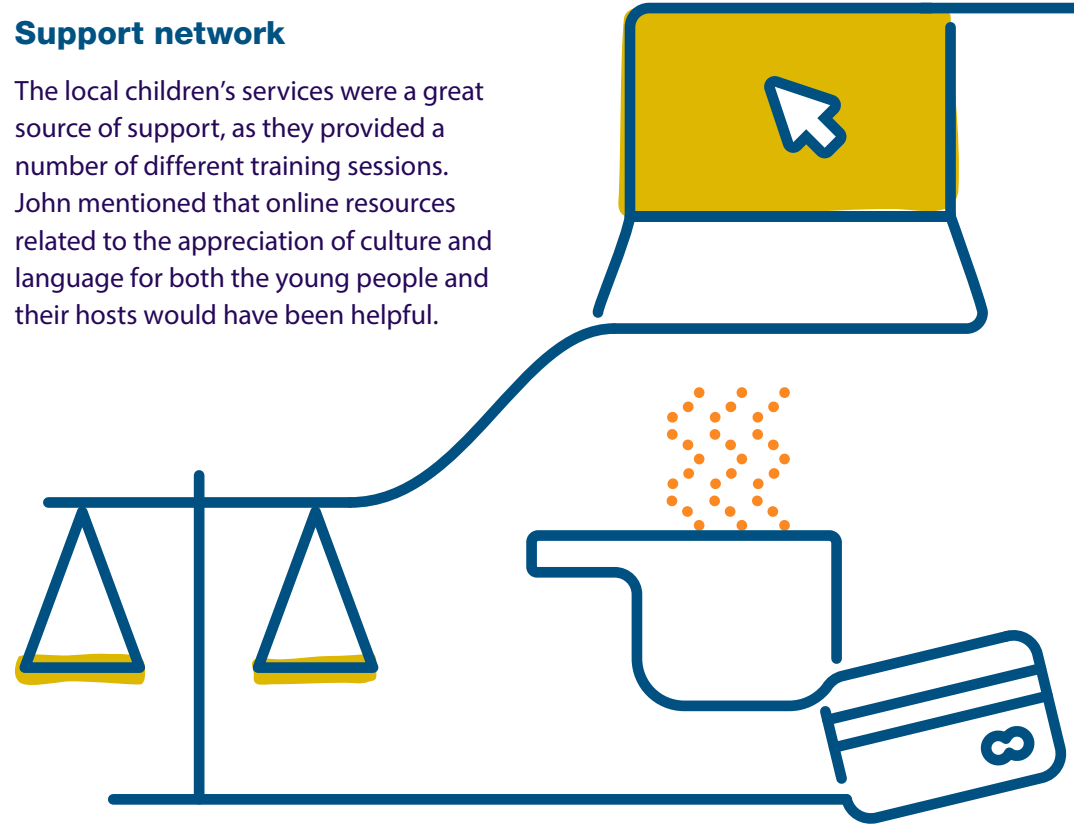
keep his home life and asylum case separate unless he needed help with legal terminology. John believes that he wanted to create this distinction to avoid talking about, and reliving, the traumatic experiences that he had undergone when he was trafficked into the UK. John and Sarah were respectful of his wishes but were always sure to support him in whatever way they could.

As with any young person, living with an unaccompanied child poses its own challenges, but John said the positives far outweighed the negatives and that it is a very enriching experience. Teaching the young man to cook and how to manage money brought a great sense of satisfaction, as these are life skills that could set him up in life.

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Support network

The local children's services were a great source of support, as they provided a number of different training sessions. John mentioned that online resources related to the appreciation of culture and language for both the young people and their hosts would have been helpful.



Advice to potential supported lodgings hosts

Being a supported lodgings host has been a very positive experience, but there are obviously challenges as you are dealing with vulnerable people. Be sure to do it for the right reasons, check your motivations and be committed for the long term. Some young men still ask us for advice and stay close to the family well after they have left home. These young people are not passing projects, they are real people.