

Independent guardians impact young survivors of child trafficking

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Independent guardians who support young survivors of child trafficking are crucial to their protection, safety and recovery in an increasingly difficult environment, analysis shows.

Led by academics at Cardiff University and funded by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Center (Modern Slavery PEC), [the research assesses the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship \(ICTG\) service.](#)

The state-commissioned support intervention in England and Wales, which is currently contracted to children's charity Barnardo's, is only available in two-thirds of local authorities, nearly 10 years after the Modern Slavery Act established its provision.

Researchers assessed the effectiveness of the service based on what is important to child survivors. They found that young people consider the service to be vital in helping them navigate a complex system, linking up the different services and professionals involved in their lives.

The Home Office [has indicated](#) the service will be covering all local authorities in England and Wales from 2025/26.

A young modern slavery survivor and [research](#) participant said about their ICTG practitioner, "You were the only one, from the beginning, who really talked to me."

Another young survivor said, "When I first came to this house, I was so lonely, and you [the ICTG practitioner] came, and you befriended me, and you were so kind and caring. And you were always there for me. You made me feel not lonely anymore."

A foster caregiver quoted in the research said, "You [the ICTG worker] are the only one that I think [the young person] has really trusted and has helped him."

Dr. Anna Skeels of Cardiff University, who led the research, said, "Children who experience trauma connected to modern slavery often

find it hard to trust anyone and they're having to navigate a complex and often hostile environment.

"Thanks to the guardianship service, children are able to build this trust and rebuild their lives again. It's crucial that every child who experiences exploitation can access this support they so need."

The report highlights the importance of the service in ensuring the safety of young people. Crucial interventions cited include keeping Children's Services cases open when other agencies had been trying to close them; ensuring the safety of modern slavery survivors testifying in court against traffickers; and charges being dropped against young people in cases of exploitation where they were linked to criminal activities such as the county lines practice.

Building trusting relationships over time was highlighted by children and their families as key to the success of the service. Young research participants reported that this relationship helped them to trust others, enabling them to socialize, access education, connect with professionals and wider services.

But despite the success of the service, some challenges remained; according to the cases reviewed in the study, 67% of young people seeking asylum were still waiting for a decision on their futures. This threat of removal was cited as the main obstacle to their long-term recovery.

Liz Williams, Policy Impact Manager at the Modern Slavery PEC, said, "It's positive to see the guardianship service being so valued by young people affected by modern slavery.

"We hope this evidence can help further inform the full roll out of the service across England and Wales, nearly ten years after trials of the

service began."

Lynn Perry MBE, the Chief Executive of Barnardo's, said, "This research emphasizes just how crucial support is for children who are survivors of horrific crimes like trafficking and modern slavery.

"We welcome the government's decision to finally ensure this service is rolled out across England and Wales, as has been promised for a number of years. It is clear from this research that thousands more children will benefit from this expansion."

Hannah Stott of Safe to Grow, who was a collaborator on the research team, said, "This research further solidifies the value that guardians bring to the lives of children and young people who have been trafficked and the wider professional network working alongside them.

"I fully welcome the government's recent announcement to make ICTGs available across the whole of England and Wales. This will ensure all children and young people identified as potentially trafficked have access to the specialist support they need."

This research was designed to place the participation of children and [young people](#) with lived experience of [modern slavery](#) at its center and involved ten young advisers who fed into the project design and findings.

More information: Research summary:
[modernslaverypec.org/assets/do ... analysis-summary.pdf](https://modernslaverypec.org/assets/do...analysis-summary.pdf)

Provided by Cardiff University

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