

Nicu

Nicu was born in a village in Romania. He lived with his younger brother and his parents. When he was nine, his family was approached by a gang who said that they could get Nicu work around Europe. The family knew the gang; they were intimidating, but they had seen other members of community make money from working abroad. They wanted money for their future and there was not much work locally. They paid the gang 200 euros to smuggle Nicu into Europe. The gang told his parents that after Nicu had worked off the rest of the debt for his travel and accommodation, they would receive lots of money.

Nicu was driven to Spain, where he was placed in a house with lots of other children. He met another boy, Andre, whom he was told he had to work alongside and learn from. The following day, Andre took him onto the streets and they had to beg for money. At the end of the day, they took the money back to the house. One of the men they were living with started to hit Andre, saying he was lazy and hadn't earned enough. They were not allowed any food that night.

In the following weeks, Andre showed Nicu how to steal from people's pockets and to take money from cash machines while people were using them - Nicu would distract them, and then Andre would steal the money from the machine. Every day they would take the money back to the men at the house, and they would get beaten if they did not think they had made enough.

After a few months, Nicu was flown into the UK. He was taken to a house in east London, where he was living with fourteen other adults and children. Nicu had to sleep downstairs on the floor. Again he went out on the streets all day, stealing from people. He would often get chased by men, and sometimes they would catch him and take their money back. Nicu was very scared. It was cold and he was often very hungry and weak. But he knew he had to carry on, otherwise he would get into trouble.

One day, in the morning, Nicu heard some loud noises. Police broke into the house; they told Nicu to stay where he was. He couldn't speak much English so didn't understand everything they were saying. They tried to ask him lots of questions, but the men in the gang were looking at him, so he didn't say anything.

Nicu was taken to the local authority and was placed with a foster family. He went to school, but found it very difficult. He had never been in formal education before, and this life was very different to the one he knew. The other children at school started to bully him, so Nicu refused to go.

He was interviewed by the police - they wanted to know about what had happened to him. He was very scared to talk because he was scared of the men in the gang. He said he wanted to go back to his parents. The local authority contacted them and they said they wanted him to come back to Romania. The authority contacted ECPAT UK, who advised that Nicu was at high risk of being re-trafficked. They said that time should be spent with Nicu to understand what his wishes were, as he was

likely to be fearful of authority figures and still under the influence of the gang's control.

The local authority made the decision to return Nicu to Romania, saying that he didn't want to stay in the UK and wanted to go back to his parents, who were asking for him to be returned.

Later, ECPAT UK inquired into where Nicu was and discovered that he again no longer lived with his parents. We suspect he has been re-trafficked. ECPAT UK has notified the police.

Campaign message

Children trafficked in to the UK experience horrendous abuse and exploitation. If they are lucky enough to escape, they find themselves alone and afraid. These children desperately need someone who can support and protect them. ECPAT UK is campaigning for all child victims of trafficking to be provided with a guardian. Please support us. @ECPATUK www.ecpat.org.uk.

Trafficking statistics

In 2011, 2,077 victims of human trafficking were identified from 75 countries. Of these, 489 were children. These are only the official figures. ECPAT UK are aware of many more who have not been identified by authorities.

Stats from UKHTC baseline assessment, August 2012

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