

Hussein, a 17 year old Afghan separated minor living in Romania

Hussein has learnt a precious lesson: when you help others who are in trouble, you are helping yourself. When he first arrived at the beginning of 2002, another young Afghan helped Hussein to adjust to his new life in the Accommodation Centre for asylum-seekers and refugees. Hussein now helps other newly arrived separated minors to do the same.

He divides his time between playing with the youngest children in the Children's Room in the Centre and accompanying other refugee children to the National Refugee Centre or to the Save the Children office, or when necessary, to court. If the children are Farsi speakers, he translates for them. "I help people, I am respected and helped when I have problems."

Shy and withdrawn, Hussein finds it hard to talk with new people about his past. His tired-looking eyes are a reminder of many months of hardship in Afghanistan, and of a yearning to be with his family. He remembers the lively discussions around the meal table with his parents and younger siblings. He is lonely and he misses their love.

In happier days, Hussein's father was a shopkeeper and Hussein would sometimes work as his assistant after school. His father began to have problems with the authorities which meant that Hussein and his siblings could no longer attend school. Then the war started and matters got worse. They had to flee their home town. For many months, the family travelled from town to town, often hiding from local authorities. Hussein could not cope with the instability and insecurity. His lodestone of normalcy was gone. Together with his parents, Hussein made the decision to leave Afghanistan. They stayed in Iran, while Hussein reached Romania, ending up in the Accommodation Centre.

Hussein is still traumatised by the separation from his parents, but he likes to help people. He has the feeling that he can be useful and this makes him more self-confident. Hussein thinks it is impossible for him to return home because his family is no longer in Afghanistan. His home for the moment is the Centre where he shares a communal life with other separated minors.

Hussein dreams of becoming a motor mechanic after finishing school. He has only recently been integrated into the local secondary school system and is happy at school but he will have to begin looking for a job, because in January 2003 he will turn 18 and will have to leave the refugee accommodation centre. Hussein has also applied for family reunification. He hopes to be able to solve all his problems and to live a successful life in Romania, together with his family. He doesn't want to think of a future without his family. He doesn't care where he lives, provided he can be with his family.