

Metro Eireann* Ireland's multicultural weekly

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41 deportation visits- now he can stay

By Catherine Reilly

A YOUNG Sierra Leonean man has been granted leave to remain in Ireland after reporting for possible deportation 41 times in just over three years.

His life is now ahead of him, and he's very happy, he still can't believe it, commented Mary King of the Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project.

She said the 22-year-old, who we do not have permission to name, officially received documentation relating to his status last week, following a complicated legal case. She said his situation will give hope to other young people in similar positions.

Metro Eireann understands that the young man came to Ireland in 2001 as an unaccompanied minor (under-eighteen and without family members) from Sierra Leone, which was still emerging from a state of civil war at the time. He said he lost family members in attacks by the Revolutionary United Front rebel group. He was not accorded refugee status.

He attained a Leaving Certificate and also attracted interest from top Irish soccer clubs because of his footballing abilities. Metro Eireann understands that he was given leave to remain in a settlement to a judicial review case versus the Department of Justice.

King told Metro Eireann she is aware of a number of people who came as unaccompanied minors, who've since had their status regularised, and all of them are working - give them a chance and they are going to contribute back to the State. She disputed the notion that giving leave to remain to young asylum seekers arriving alone in Ireland might only encourage the phenomenon. She said that numbers have dropped rapidly and that asylum applications are being processed more quickly.

The Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project is focusing on a particular grouping of unaccompanied minors - now aged out (over-eighteen) - who came to Ireland when the asylum system was backlogged and who have spent most of their formative years here. King said this situation applies to about 200 young people.

A spokesperson for the Department of Justice said she could comment on individual cases.