

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Lady Katy Blair
info@islingtonchinese.com
Phone: +44 20 7263 5986

Hongkongers are settling well in the UK

A new pilot study commissioned by Islington Chinese Association has shown that families that have left Hong Kong to start a new life in the UK have, on the whole, adapted well to their new home.

Since the British government announced a new immigration route for British National (Overseas) (BN)) visa holders of Hong Kong in July 2020 and the Scheme opened on 31 January 2021, there has been a total of 123,400 applications by the end of March 2022.

Founder of Islington Chinese Association Lady Katy Blair said, "In the last 2 years, we received an increasing number of people from Hong Kong coming to our Centre looking for information and services. Many are families with young children. This new wave of migrants are not the same as the past generations of new settlers from Hong Kong. We wish to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs so that appropriate services can be planned and provided."

She continued, "We are pleased to find that those interviewed for this pilot study have adjusted well to life in the UK. Over 70% of them or their spouse got a job in the UK. Their children were doing well at school and showing interest in learning. Those who adapted best, reported that having good digital and information skills, being proactive, and building good social networks had served them in good stead."

The study has adopted a qualitative approach and interviewed 11 parents in March and April 2022. Most of them are mothers. They arrived in the UK between September 2020 and December 2021. At the time of interview, they were living in London, Kingston, Sutton, Guildford, Woking and Cambridge. Their children were aged from 1.5 to 22, with the majority between 6 and 12 years old. The parents come from middle class backgrounds, and are mainly well-educated and have savings.

3 necessities of new arrivals: a school place, a home and a job

Most of the interviewees spent less than a year making preparations to leave Hong Kong. Their main concerns were schooling for their children, finding a place to live and getting a job. They heavily relied on social media such as facebook and whatsapp groups as the chief source of information.

Most reported that their children had fitted into their new schools well, both academically and socially. In Hong Kong, parents had provided a very packed schedule of learning activities for their children. The new environment was very different to what they and their children were used to, so some parents felt more relaxed and started to explore alternative ways of parenting.

Lai, a veteran social worker specialises in working with families and children, has been leading this project since February 2022. She said, “The parents we interviewed are working hard to help their children adapt to the new environment and reduce their sense of loss at leaving their family members and friends in Hong Kong. They learn to make food and drinks their children had enjoyed in Hong Kong, and encourage them to build new hobbies and join interest classes,”

She continued, “While making new friends at school has been important to their children’s integration into the local community, the kids have also been able to stay in touch online with their old friends and family members in HK. This has been found to be beneficial to their mental health.”

One thing in common: Preserving the identity as Hongkongers

One thing close to the hearts of all interviewees is the importance of maintaining their unique identity as Hongkongers. They felt they differed from other Chinese groups because Hong Kong has its unique political history and distinctive cultural traits and customs.

Parents would like their children to continue learning Traditional Chinese and practising speaking Cantonese but they find it difficult as most local schools in the UK teach the Chinese language used in Mainland China. There is a need for local libraries to stock books and other teaching media in Traditional Chinese. One parent suggested that Teaching Traditional Chinese and Cantonese as a second language should be explored. Apart from languages, some parents expressed the need to preserve traditional values of Hongkongers towards sex, marriage, and respecting elders in the family.”

Easily overlooked issues: Job opportunities and talents match in different cities

The study has revealed some challenges faced by some families in the first few months after arrival which some parents may overlook. One of them is the time gap between finding a place to live and being offered a school place. Many parents who landed in June or July found that local schools were unable to handle applications during summer break.

Some interviewees already had a job lined up before they arrived. Others were job hunting, and optimistic about their chances of gaining employment, and believed that London would provide more employment opportunities than other cities. Some pointed out that many parents were too cautious about the cost of living in different cities and failed to notice the differences in job opportunities. Some advised that parents should gather more information about the job opportunities in different cities and consider carefully if their talents are matching the openings in the local job market.

Challenges facing by parents who come alone

There are some parents whose spouse is not coming to the UK. They shoulder all responsibilities alone, from setting up a new home, taking care of their children to looking for a job. They face more challenges and pressures adapting to the new environment.

Lai would like to remind parents of the importance of their own wellbeing. She said, “Children are these families’ top priority. Their sense of security is built upon family security, especially the mental health of their parents. New adaptation needs will emerge after the initial period of adjustment. Support services could be planned to help parents cope with stress and build up protective factors for their families.”

The study was led by a research of three members with professional backgrounds in social work and psychology and supported by voluntary transcribers. Most of them are also Hongkongers recently moved to the UK.

Lai said, “Our common goal is to study the adjustment needs of families who have already settled in the UK, learn from their experience, share it with service providers, voluntary groups and others so that they will be better able to offer effective, targeted assistance to future incomers from Hong Kong, both before they leave Hong Kong and after they arrive in the UK,”

“It’s hoped that future research will focus on those who have had more difficulties with settling in the UK; single people; other family members (fathers, children, grandparents); residents outside London; and people with fewer resources/contacts before they came to the UK.”

Celebrating its 35th anniversary this year, Islington Chinese Association (ICA) is an inclusive community organisation and has a long history of supporting people of Chinese heritage, in particular those originated from Hong Kong, and initiating much-needed services to help newcomers acquire the skills and resources for effective settlement and building strong community cohesion. ICA was one of the 47 organisations being allocated government funding by The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to help BN(O) Hong Kongers settle into life in the UK. Its Welcome Hongkongers Programme commenced in February 2022 and delivered a wide variety of social gathering events, interest classes, wellbeing and educational courses. ICA was awarded an extended grant to continue its work plan along the same themes of support for Hong Kongers in health/wellbeing, employability, social integration, community safety, cultural exchange and improving language skills.

Latest news of welcome Hongkongers programme is available at:

<https://islingtonchinese.com/>

<https://www.welcomehongkongers.com/>

The full study report can be downloaded [here](#)