The background of the slide is a photograph showing the silhouettes of several people standing on a beach at night. They are holding up their mobile phones, and the screens are lit up, creating a series of small bright points against the dark sky. A large, bright light source, possibly the moon or a low sun, is visible in the upper right quadrant, casting a glow over the scene. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

Working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children: some thoughts from the field

Professor Ravi KS Kohli
University of Bedfordshire
June 2017



'We' live in liquid times

- Migration as a form of 'human global warming'.
- It becomes important to identify the borders of the word 'we' and 'them' in such liquid times.
- 'We' are re-defining ourselves in liquid times, and therefore are re-defining 'them'. How we talk about 'them' tells us something about 'us'.

David Cameron, 15th May 2016

*“These are not someone else's children; they are all of ours, so every part of society should be stepping up to help **care leavers** get a shot at building a decent life”*

*unaccompanied
children*

*‘they are children, but they are not **our** children’*

Liquid children who have not grown up in our soil. They are strange seeds

They bring the death of the past and a threat for the future

Messages that guide us in our work with unaccompanied children

- We step *towards* someone who needs help
- We step *into* complexity, and move away from binary positions of good and bad
- We try to rebuild lives within borders that breathe, where diversity has a happy life
- We use frameworks that offer life, and a chance to live an ordinary life

Protection and care

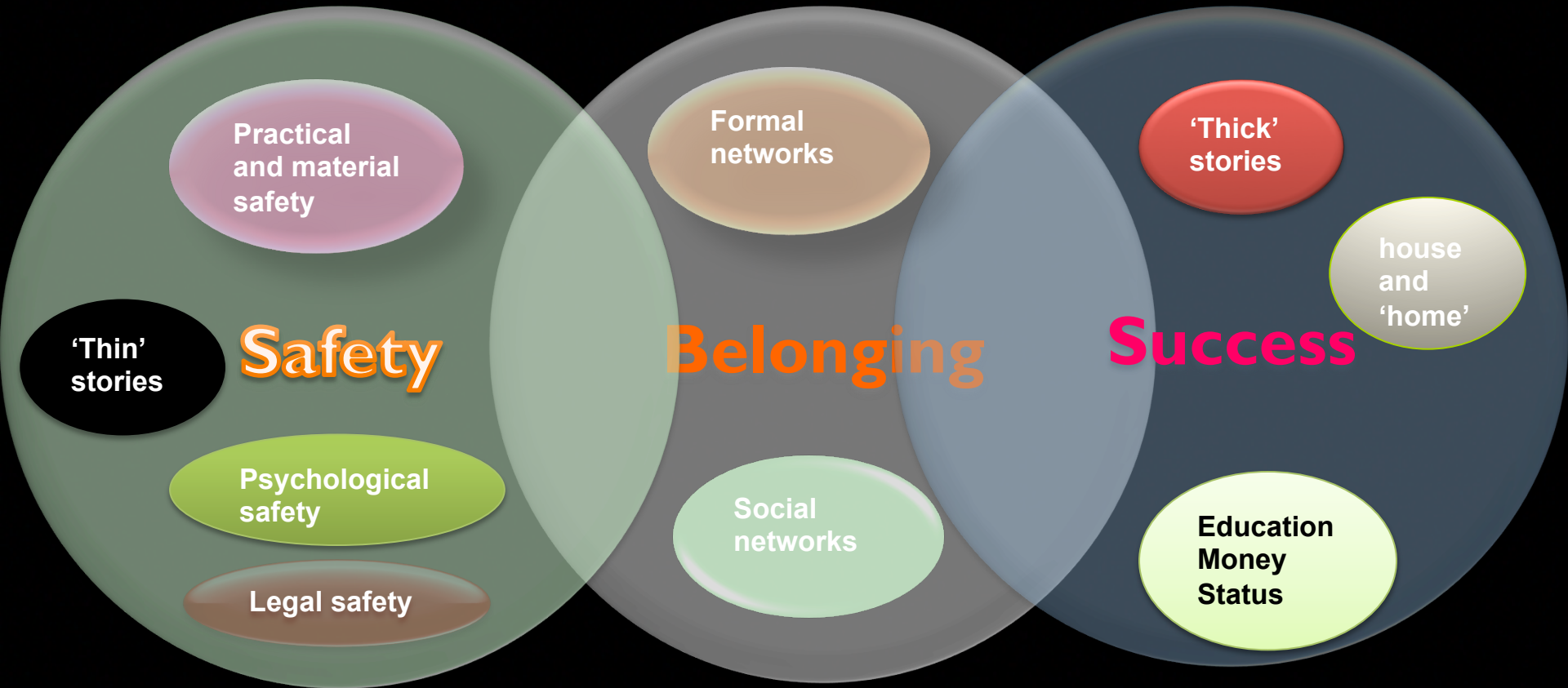
1951 Refugee Convention

- An instant shield: protection from persecution
- Used to judge and control a movement up and down the line of a refugee determination process

1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

- A durable embrace: protection as the revival of everyday life
- Used to protect and assist children grow up in sustainable ways

The move towards the *social texture* of an ordinary life



acclimatise adapt participate absorb reciprocate

Movement and stories

- Stories - that are gathered, stored, ignored, told and retold, edited, segmented, subverted, sentimentalised, believed and disbelieved
- Integrating and disintegrating: fitting in, being a good citizen, being grateful, keeping tidy, being obedient
- Practising happiness, metabolising sadness
- *Well, I have made up my story, and now I live within it...*

Practice

- As cross-pollination within professions and across different professional borders
- As work over time, with little parcels of time
- As work that means working in several dimensions at the same time: practical, legal, psychological; past, present, future
- As a way of making a sense of a safe and enduring home for someone

What unaccompanied children want from practice

- **Time**
- **Companionship**
- **Reliability**
- **Endurance**
- **Trust** – People who are honest, clear, authoritative, precise, kind, warm, and committed to making a relationship
- **Order & safety**: the humanitarian advocate/fixer, guard(ian), elder, mentor
- **Peace & belonging**: witness, therapist, a history & memory holder, network generator
- **Rhythm & success**: protective adult, friend or missing family member, an advocate, an optimist, able to and allowed to see a complex world

Success is complex, and hardly ever accidental

From staying alive to living on takes time, but life is stubborn, and won't give up on itself easily

Living can be lonely and requires reliable companions

Generosity lives alongside fear, and both need our attention

Peace is made, not found