

Information on Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC) for Brighton and Hove foster carers.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) have been through difficult and sometimes horrific experiences in their home countries and in their journeys to the UK. Through no fault of their own they are now alone and in need of care and protection. It is VITAL that you research as much as you can about the child's country of origin including religion and food to enable them to settle into your home more quickly. Coram/BAAF have produced some helpful leaflets on caring for UASC from specific countries. Click on the link below for further details:

[Caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people: FULL SERIES | CoramBAAF](#)

Your supervising social worker (SSW) and the child's social worker will also be able to support you with this. There is also a support group for carers of UASC's that meets every couple of months (ask your SSW for details) where you will be able to meet other carers and get ideas and suggestions.

Why do UASC seek asylum?

Most UASC's who come to the UK to seek asylum are 15 or over. Most are boys. Below are some of the reasons why they seek asylum in the UK:

- War or other armed conflict or serious civil unrest, and the breakdown of normal society.
- Forced recruitment into military service, perhaps being forced to engage in violence
- Persecution of them and their families, perhaps because of their political or religious beliefs or ethnicity.
- Being taken from their families and trafficked for the sex industry or to be a domestic servant.
- Being beaten up or sometimes raped or tortured because of ethnic or tribal conflict or political repression.
- Some UASC's come to the UK in the hope of escaping extreme poverty and deprivation in their own country, where they have no opportunities to survive.

Although they are called 'unaccompanied' this does not necessarily mean that the child or young person travelled alone. Someone will have helped the child to travel to the UK, perhaps an agent or someone posing as a member of their family. In most cases the children and young people have not been involved in the decision to leave their country of origin. Sometimes they travel with a brother or sister but in many cases, it means leaving behind everyone they have ever known – parents, relatives, siblings, friends. They have often had to ensure long, arduous journeys hiding in lorries or containers.

What are the rules about Asylum?

The asylum process is long, stressful, and emotional. Young people will need to revisit memories of significant trauma and separation, whilst at the same time remaining hopeful. They also need to think about what happens if their application is refused. The child's social worker should triple plan for the young person (this should include input from the foster carer) This involves a transitional plan supporting a young person whilst they await a decision from the Home Office. A longer-term plan supporting a young person if they are granted refugee status and preparing a young person to return

to their country of origin if their application is unsuccessful. They will have multiple interviews, some of which can last a whole day and will need to have a responsible adult of their choice with them during their interviews (this is often the foster carer). Further information on the role of the responsible adult at Home Office meetings is on the UASC page of the Foster Carers Handbook. They will also have access to a solicitor which their social worker will help them to find. They have a right to change solicitors if they do not feel they are being well represented. The asylum process includes a complex set of timescales to comply with. It is important that you support them to keep hold of their ID and all correspondence from their solicitor and the Home Office and that you get them to all required appointments. The consequences for not attending a meeting or not responding to a phone call or letter can at worst be deportation. The young person or their social worker must inform their solicitor and the Home Office if they move address or get a new phone number.

Welfare Interview (previously known as a Screening Interview) - at this interview the young person will be fingerprinted and photographed. The Home Office will then check these against the European immigration database. If the young person is found to have claimed asylum in another European country the Home Office will return the young person to that country. The young person will remain in foster carer until they are removed from the UK. If nothing is found the young person is issued with an Asylum Registration Card (ARC). This does not mean that the young person can remain in the UK. It only acts as a form of I.D; and signifies that the young person has made a claim for asylum in the UK. Following the issuing of the ARC, the Home Office will also issue paperwork that needs to be completed by the young person's legal advisor and sent back to the Home Office by a set date so that a 'Substantive Interview' can take place.

Substantive Interview - The young person is then taken back to the Home Office by their carer and legal advisor for their 'Substantive Interview'. This normally takes place 4-6 weeks after the 'Screening Interview'. This interview is extremely important for the young person because a decision about their asylum claim will be made by the Home Office following this interview. The young person is not told the outcome on the day. The decision can take between 2 and 24 months to be received.

The Child's asylum claim can result in one of the following outcomes:

Refugee Status: valid for 5 years. Following which the child can apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR).

Humanitarian Protection: this is granted if the Home Office do not accept that the child meet the criteria of the Refugee Convention. It is granted if their individual circumstances means that it is too dangerous to return them back and is valid for five years following which they can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

UASC Leave: this is granted for 30 months or until they are 17.5 years old, whichever is shorter. It is important to note that UASC leave is a refusal of asylum and is a weaker form of protection. Children can only receive it until they are 17.5 years old.

Discretionary Leave – granted where there are exceptional circumstances or compelling reasons, such as if the child is a victim of trafficking.

Appealing the Home Office decision

Young people are able to appeal the Home Office decision and it is important that they are linked in with solicitors who can help them do this.

Appeal Rights Exhausted: once a young person has gone through the appeal process and the refusal still stands, they become 'Appeal Rights Exhausted' and will be expected to leave the UK when they reach 18 years old. Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARX) means that they have No Access to Public Funds (NAPF) post 18. In practice this means that the young people are not entitled to education, housing, or financial benefits. They are also not allowed to work. However, as care leavers, young people will continue to be supported by Brighton and Hove with housing and living expenses in the same way as any other care leaver or until they are removed from the UK.

You may find the following useful:

Migrant Children's Project – free advice line – 0207 636 8505. Email – mcp@coramclc.org.uk

Age Assessments

Guidance issued by the Home Office is that when a young person first arrives in the UK, if there is any doubt about their age, they should be treated as a child until they are assessed. Age assessments should only be completed if there is doubt about a young person's age as they are very intrusive. The age assessment is completed by two qualified social workers and usually takes place one or two weeks after arrival. This is NOT to determine whether they can remain in the UK (that is the role of the Home Office). The reason for the age assessment is to see whether they are under 18 in which case they will be viewed as a child and will be able to access the support provided by the local authority. Please see fact sheet on the UASC section of the Brighton and Hove foster carers handbook for further information on age assessments.

Legal Status

The young people are not in the care of Brighton and Hove Council (they are not on Care Orders). They are accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Therefore, Brighton and Hove do not have Parental Responsibility for the young person. In practice this means that the young person (dependent upon their age) can give their own consent to medical treatment and education trips. The foster carer can give (with fostering or out-of-hours service) consent to emergency treatment for a young person if the young person is too ill to give their own consent.

Where will the UASC live?

When an UASC comes to the attention of the local authority, a social worker will find them a safe place to live. Where they live will depend upon their age. If they are over 16, they will either be placed in supported lodgings or be referred to semi-independent accommodation. In semi-independence they will live with other unaccompanied young people. Workers there will support them intensively whilst they adjust to life in the UK for about 3 months. It will then be reviewed to see if they would be better suited to a lower support unit. If they are 16 or under, considered vulnerable or are female they will be placed in foster care.

Education

Most UASC are extremely motivated with regards education and to learn English as they are aware it will make a big difference to their future. For some the chance of an education may even have been a factor in their family's decision to send them to the UK. Education levels between UASC vary greatly. Some will have studied a wide range of subjects and may have gained qualifications at the end of secondary school. Others may have received little or no formal education and may be non literate in the own language. Many will fall between the two categories. However, some children may not have

been at school before. Even those who have been attending regularly will have big adjustments to make to resume their education in the UK. As well as a new language to contend with, the whole school culture may be very different and there will be new subjects to study. Specialist language support for children who do not speak English is vital. In schools UASC can often be shocked by the lack of respect shown by pupils towards their teachers. As a foster carer you will be expected to liaise with the school/college and to act as an advocate for their child/young person. The child's social worker will support you in getting them into a school, college, or language school.

For those UASC's aged 16 and over this is normally an ESOL course at one of the local colleges/language schools. For those who are under the age of 16 they will be enrolled at a local school. The school and social worker will access language support. It is important to give the UASC as much opportunity as possible to practice their English. However, in the longer term, along with all the other losses the UASC has suffered, they may be acutely aware of the loss of their native language if there is not an opportunity to speak it. You might be able to address that this by making links with other people from the child's country of origin.

Some Tips

- Aim to use plain English rather than jargon. English has a larger vocabulary than any other language. We have several words which mean almost the same thing. People new to English usually learn the simpler words first i.e., before not prior to and the law says not statutory requirement and avoid slang, idioms, and euphuisms such as cut it fine, spend a penny.
- Make instructions clear and direct.
- It is not always easy to know if someone has understood us. Often, we assume that the other person has understood. We may think we can tell if they have understood, unfortunately we are often wrong. Rather than simply asking them if they understand ask them to say what they have understood – What do you need to do when you get there?
- Ask what they understand a word to mean? This may be more difficult for people who can understand more than they speak. So, another way to check understanding is to get them to demonstrate their understanding – we talked about proof of identity. What proof of identity are you going to take?
- It may be difficult to understand someone who is still learning English, especially if they have basic level English and/or a strong accent. It is important that you check what you have understood. • Repeat or paraphrase what you have heard.
- Make information visual. Remember even if the UASC cannot understand it they may want to take it away and show it to friends who can read English.

When we meet people, we often notice the way they communicate. We all have preferred ways of communicating and using language. Someone who communicates in a way that is unfamiliar – or different to how we communicate – may appear rude or aggressive for example. Politeness – norms about how and when you show politeness vary from culture to culture. In the UK people tend to use please thank you and sorry more than people in some other countries. Saying 'please' 'thank you' and 'sorry' in the UK may seem odd to people from those countries. They may be used to asking for things in a direct way in their own language and they do it in English too. What sounds blunt or rude to us sounds straightforward and normal to them. Talking over each other's/interrupting - in some cultures, it is acceptable to do this in others it is considered rude. Be aware that some people may not have enough English to be able to express things in a polite way.

Working with Interpreters

Often interpreters have English as an additional language themselves. They may have a high level of English but equally they may not. Either way be aware of the language you use. Always make sure you look directly at the young person, rather than the interpreter – this can be tricky at first but remember you are talking with the young person. It is also worth mentioning that the translator will only translate what you say, they will not chat with the young person, so if you don't want to sit in silence, please keep up communication. Try to be as clear as possible – if you need to use technical words, check that the translator understands what they mean. Google translate can be useful, especially for single words and short sentences. It has an audio function. Be aware that there are many words for example, safeguarding, which may not have an exact equivalent in some other languages. The better a person can use the language of the country they live in, the better they can integrate, find work, access services, and contribute to society. Learning English takes time and practice. A lot of the practice takes place through day-to-day contact with English speakers.

Health

Young people seeking asylum in the UK have access to free NHS services. They may be in a poor physical state when they first arrive due to inadequate health care and nutrition. The immunisation status of many UASC will not be known. The CIC nurse team will arrange for immunisations to be given according to the recommended schedule for 'Individuals with Uncertain Immunisation Status.

Public Health

The CIC nurse team will also refer the young person for routine TB screening. They will also routinely recommend screening for Hepatitis B, C, HIV and Syphilis as many of the countries of origin have a higher prevalence than in the UK and the uncertain route and experiences of travel also places individuals at a greater risk of exposure. Please also see general advice in the foster carer's handbook about HIV, Hep B and C and how to protect yourself against the risk of contracting Hep B. Please speak to the CIC Nurses if you have any queries about this.

More information on TB and Hepatitis B is available at www.nhs.uk/conditions

Health Resources and Guidance can be found on www.uascheath.org.

Please also see the health information section for carers on the UASC page of the foster carers handbook.

Mental Health

Children and young people seeking asylum are likely to have suffered trauma. Some have witnessed acts of war, torture and killing. They may have been raped or tortured themselves. They may have lost people they loved and any sense of security. It goes without saying that they are experiencing grief, shock, fear, anxiety, and isolation. Some may be suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Some will be pre-occupied with their harrowing experiences whilst others will try and avoid thinking about it. A few will need urgent psychiatric intervention; however, counselling, and other psychological support may not be appropriate for every young person. Furthermore, there is often a lack of culturally appropriate counsellors and other counsellors are often reluctant to offer counselling when a young person needs so questions and/or responses may not be put across properly. Therefore, a young person's English needs to be developed to a fairly high level before they can access counselling. This lack of counselling and the fact that the young person is going through the stressful immigration process means that the young person will probably need a lot of emotional

support from their foster carer for the first few months. When we listen to their stories it is natural to want to make some immediate response such as suggesting counselling. However, this may have more to do with making us the listener feel we have done something and have less to do with the young people's actual emotional and practical concerns. Counselling or even talking about feelings may be an unknown concept in their home culture, where people have different ways of coping with psychological distress. Many UASC do not feel ready or want to take advantage of such services straight away. Their most pressing concerns are often the practicalities such as the outcome of their asylum application and whether they are going to be allowed to remain in the UK. It is only later that the young person can begin to focus on the longer term or address what has happened in the past. Remember the most important thing that you as a foster carer can offer at first in a supportive environment in which the UASC has time to collect their thoughts and feelings. Although you may want the UASC to talk to you, you may need to be patient – don't push them into talking about things they are not ready to do so. It is important that you talk to your SSW/support worker and the child's social worker about any concerns you may have about their emotional health. There is information in the UASC section of the Foster Carers Handbook on supporting young people with their emotional wellbeing. The UASC team have a psychologist who works with them who can provide consultations and advice to the network.

Sexual Health

This can be a challenging area to discuss especially considering language and cultural differences together with difficulties with interpreting services. The majority of UASC will not have had access to sex education. Consideration needs to be given to the experiences of travel to the UK, sexual crimes, evidence of trafficking, risk of STI's and pregnancy. Consider the country of origin and the risk of female genital mutilation. The CIC nurse team run specific sexual health training for UASC's which includes input on sexual health, healthy relationships, and the law in the UK. The young person's social worker can refer them to this.

Tracing Family

In some situations, in certain countries it is dangerous for UASC to give information about their parent's activities and whereabouts – they may have been told not to say anything for fear of putting their parent's lives at risk. They may feel that information about their parents may jeopardise their own asylum claim. So, they will understandably be wary and possibly reluctant to answer questions about their parents and relatives. However, for some young people they may be keen to trace their relatives if they don't know where they are. You can discuss with the child's social worker and your SSW/support worker how to go about tracing a child's family. It is usually done via the International Tracing and Message Service of the British Red Cross. The use of mobile phones and social media has meant that that some young people are still able to keep in touch with people that are close to them.

Contact with family.

It may be that the young person in your care has links to family members in the UK. These family members will need to be assessed before they can have unsupervised contact, as is the case for all children in care.

How will I meet the child's cultural and religious needs?

As a foster carer you will need to ensure that you meet the child's needs in terms of pride and ownership of their identity, language, culture, and religion. However, there are challenges in achieving this with children who have had a difficult experience in their home countries and will take

some effort on your part. The child is likely to know little or nothing about UK society. Everything around him or her – the people, the streets, the houses, the school – is likely to be very different from their country of origin. Some children may never have seen white people or those from other ethnic backgrounds before. For some the climate is very different and it will be their first encounter with very cold weather. Remember integration is a two-way process and it is not simply about the young person 'fitting in.' The young person's social worker alongside yourselves will be able to support the young person to adapt to living in the UK.

Religion

Good practice suggests that each child should be placed in a foster family of the same religious and cultural background. However, due to the shortage of carers from different ethnic groups in Brighton and Hove you are likely to be caring for a child who comes from a very different background to your own. It is important to establish how important religion is in the child's life and how keen they are to worship and observe religious practices as this will vary. Many of the young people that are placed are Muslim and we have developed links with a local Imam and other people in the local Muslim community who are very supportive of foster carers – ask your SSW for further details. Prayer Mats can be purchased on eBay and Amazon. Copies of the Quran can be purchased on Amazon.

Food

The food the child is offered in the UK is likely to be quite different from the diet in their country of origin. Remember like any other traumatised child, he or she may lose their appetite or overeat for comfort. Newly arrived young people are likely to be malnourished when they are first placed so it is important not to give them too much food at first as this is likely to upset their stomachs – little and often is best. Food is an important aspect of life in many of the countries that UASC's originate from and is an opportunity for families to sit together. Often girls help their mothers and learn to cook but boys are unlikely to know how to make meals in many cultures.

Food shopping and eating out.

Food has a strong link to identity and belonging. It is important to try and offer an UASC food that is familiar to them, this may mean traveling to specific shops and learning from them how to cook favourite dishes. Halal food - Halal is Arabic for permissible, it is food that adheres to Islamic law, as defined in the Koran. The Islamic form of slaughtering animals, dhabihah, involves a cut through the jugular vein, carotid artery, and windpipe. Many supermarkets now sell Halal meat. Many restaurants also cater for a Halal diet although you may need to check their website as this is not always stated on the menus.

Cultural Attitudes

UASC responses to situations may be unfamiliar to you. For example, a child may come from a country where people's attitudes to authority figures – parents, teachers, police etc are very different from those that are usual in the UK. Young people may not be used to making eye contact with authority figures because to do so would be disrespectful. Young people may be used to a more distant relationship with their parents and may find it difficult to trust adults enough to tell them the true story of what has happened to them and their families. A young person placed may have come from a cultural background where females outside their immediate family are not spoken too. So, they may appear intolerant when told what to do by a female. It is important that you speak to the child's social worker about this as they will address this with them.

Finances

UASC are entitled to a bank account. The young person's social worker will be able to advise you on which banks are more welcoming. In addition to ID typically accepted by all banks some banks will also accept either: 1) A biometric residence permits or 2) An immigration status document from the UK Border Agency alongside 3) A letter from the Home Office with proof of their address on. As with any young person, support with budgeting is very important, in addition you will also need to ensure they understand the value of British coins and notes. You may need to be careful that the young person is not sending all their money home. Some young people will not accept money from a female carer. Any allowance should be discussed at the placement planning meeting to ensure the young person is aware of the process. Please discuss any difficulties with your supervising social worker.

Please see the financial information for foster carers in the finance section of the UASC page of the foster carer's handbook and on CHARMS.

College Bursary

UASC like any other child in care, will be entitled to a bursary when they go to college to help pay for clothes, books, and other equipment for their course. The bursary is to encourage good attendance and behaviour. The money is paid direct to the young person by the college. The exception to this is the ISE language school, where the money is paid direct to the Local Authority, and the UASC POD will give this to the young person. It is best to discuss who is going to pay for what before the young person starts college together with their social worker and your SSW and/or at the Placement Planning Meeting. In the meantime, it is a good idea to discuss with your SSW and the young person's SW who pays for what at the Placement Planning Meeting. Regarding lunches, young people may prepare a lunch to bring with them to college or return home after lessons to eat lunch. If they choose to purchase their own lunch from a shop, café, or restaurant the young person will need to pay for this out of their bursary.

Building Resilience

A child or young person's resilience to adversity depends on the individual risk factors and protective factors in their lives. But in the case of UASC you are unlikely to know much about the quality of the parenting they received in their early childhood. You will need to try and recognise risk factors and help them feel safe enough to talk about their problems if they want to. Like any other child or young person who has had a traumatic experience and is being cared for outside their own family, they need a stable and safe family life or 'base' where they can start to mourn and then recover. Helping them deal with the impact of all this is demanding and you cannot do it on your own. You will need to draw on other resources and get the support you need from social and health services. It is also important that you look after yourself. UASC need the opportunity to develop friendships. They need encouragement to develop their talents and skills in sports and other leisure activities and hobbies. They may wish to attend a place of worship or join community support groups to maintain a strong cultural identity. You will need to help them with all of this. Again, there are various organisations in the city that can help you with this. Further information on this is available on the UASC page of the foster carer's handbook. It's a good idea to find out what sports or leisure activities the young person may enjoy and try to link them in with these. The young person social worker will be able to help you with this. They may be unsure and if, so you could explore different options and try some together. Sports, creative activities, outdoor activities and socialising with peers are all shown to be protective factors against mental health problems and help build resilience.

Culture

UASC's may feel very isolated and so it is important to try and arrange for them to meet up with others from their country of origin where possible, or at least with people who share a language or a faith. In building a relationship with them you will need to show an interest and be non-judgemental when exploring differences between their culture and ours. This may include for example different views on arranged marriages, caste systems, differences in age of sexual consent and understanding of the concept of consent which may be different to that set out in UK law. In addition, the child or young person may be used to relating very differently with older and younger people, or with males and females. It's good to do some research into the cultural norms of their country of origin, but also to remember that the young person is an individual and may not ascribe to the norms of his/her country.

Children who have been trafficked

Some children come to the UK to seek refuge and then become vulnerable to exploitation. Others are deliberately trafficked into the country. Many of the young people who have been trafficked never come to the attention of the authorities because they are kept hidden. However, if a child is placed with you, you will need to be particularly vigilant in case the traffickers should attempt to trace them or harass or threaten them. The social workers will discuss this with you and the risks. Trafficked children are at risk of returning to or being found by their traffickers and further exploited for sex, forced labour, domestic servitude, or criminal activities. They are likely to be uncertain about who to trust and of their rights, and they may not disclose immediately the full facts. They may not initially recognise that they are victims of a crime and may have been told that children's services are not good people. Therefore, it may take time for your relationship to grow. Many trafficked children go missing from care, sometimes within the first 48 hours. This may be due their fear that their family are being threatened. The location of the young person should not be divulged to anyone until their identity and relationship to the young person has been established. If your young person is at high risk of going missing, then their social worker will agree a specialist plan with you to minimise this risk (safety plan). The young person will need repeated reassurance that they are safe. They may need to be supported in keeping themselves safe so ask them what would help them feel safe. Involving the young person and empowering them whenever possible can help them regain a sense of control over if anyone suspects the risk of trafficking or exploitation, we will need to monitor the movements and relationships of the young person. This should be done transparently through honest and respectful communications about rights and risks where possible. Relationships Establishing a strong, positive, and trusting relationship can play an important role against young people going missing. Wherever possible rules and boundaries should be discussed and agreed mutually, this is to avoid the young person feeling like they are being controlled, as they may have experienced this with traffickers.

Racism and Hostility towards UASC

Unfortunately, many UASC's will experience prejudice and racially/culturally motivated bullying. Reassure and explain to them that this is unacceptable, help them understand their rights. Encourage them to tell you if they are experiencing bullying in any way. If you have other young people living with you it may be a good idea to get them to watch one of many short films showing the asylum process from the point of view of the young person. These can be found on YouTube or via Google. The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Q Rauf offers a child's perspective of the refugee crisis. You may also need to prepare your existing children and young people to report any bullying that they

may experience by association, this is due to a negative public perception of asylum seekers by some people.

Please see the emotional health section on the UASC page of the Brighton and Hove Foster Carers Handbook for further information on how to support a young person.

Drugs and Relationships

Although many UASC may seem capable and mature for their age because of their experiences and the responsibilities they have had to bare, they may be surprisingly vulnerable in the UK. For instance, they may not have had the education in drugs, sexual health, and contraception that UK students of their age have had. Attitudes to sex and contraception may be different in their home countries and mixing with UK teenagers may be quite a culture shock for them. Their insecurity, inexperience of living in the UK enduing public transport, their lack of knowledge about the culture and the fact that English is not their first language will all affect their ability to judge people and situations. On top of that they may be feeling isolated and lonely factors that could make young people particularly vulnerable if someone tried to form an inappropriate sexual relationship with them or exploit them in some way. Make sure any unaccompanied asylum seekers have the information they need about drugs and alcohol abuse and sexual health like you would with any other teenager placed with you. Their social worker will help you with this and there are specific courses that they will link them into. Try to keep track of where they are going, who they are associating with and any risky situations that are developing.

Care for the Carers

It is important that you look after your own well-being when caring for an UASC, particularly where they may have experienced significant trauma. You are not alone – talk to your SSW about how you are feeling.

Thank you and updates.

We hope you have found this guidance helpful. It is by no means exhaustive and as we live in a changing environment this guide will be evolving over time. If you have any additions/amendments/recommendations, please do get in touch via Sally. Puham@brighton-hve.gov.uk We really appreciate all the hard work you do in supporting Brighton and Hove's young people and we know that you are making a huge difference to the lives of those you care for.

Thank you.