

Welcome to Hampshire

An information guide for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people

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Welcome

Hampshire has been a welcoming place for people from all over the world for centuries. You've come to Hampshire because you've had to leave your family and friends in the country that you've grown up in.

We hope that everyone here in Hampshire will help you to make a new life and that you in turn can contribute to the future prosperity of our county. This booklet is part of the help and support available for you. Please tell me, your social worker and teachers at school or college if you find it useful and make some suggestions of your own for other young people who will read it after you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Coughlan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'C'.

John Coughlan
Chief Executive
Hampshire County Council

Introduction

If you are under 18 years old, have come to the United Kingdom (UK) without an adult and are seeking asylum, you will be known as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) or unaccompanied minor. This guide contains information that will help you to settle into your new life in the UK. It includes information on:

- the asylum process
- your rights
- housing
- education
- health
- work
- contacting friends and family in your home country, including those that you have become separated from
- the experiences of one UASC from Ethiopia
- details of organisations that can help you

Claiming asylum

As an unaccompanied minor you need to apply for asylum in the same way as an adult. You may already have done this when you first arrived in

the UK – if you spoke to an immigration officer at an airport, port, or at Waterloo railway station. If you claimed asylum at one of these places you will be known as a ‘port applicant’. If you did not speak to an immigration officer when you first arrived, perhaps because you arrived in the country illegally, you can still claim asylum later at one of the Home Office’s Screening Units. The closest one to Hampshire is:

Lunar House,
40, Wellesley Road,
Croydon.
CR9 2BY.

Email: <mailto:cromenquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk>
Open: Monday to Friday, 10.00am to 3.00pm

If you claim asylum here you will be known as an ‘in country applicant’.

It is important to get legal advice quickly when claiming asylum. You may already have been allocated a solicitor through your social worker. If not, you can get one through the Children’s Panel Advice Project of the Refugee Council:

Refugee Council,
Children’s Advice Project,
115 High Street,

Croydon.
CR0 1QG
Telephone: 020 7346 1134 (9.00am – 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday).

children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

They will help you to contact a solicitor who will be able to help you with all aspects of your asylum claim throughout the whole asylum process. You will not have to pay for this legal advice.

The Refugee Council provide drop in surgeries where you and/or your carer can get advice and information about the asylum process. The closest one is in Portsmouth and is open on alternate Wednesdays (phone for details):

Highbury College
Tudor Cres, Cosham
Portsmouth
PO6 2SA
Telephone: 02073461134 (duty officer)

At the moment, due to Covid-19 the drop ins are giving remote support only.

Southampton has an organisation called CLEAR (City Life Education and Action for Refugees) that is not connected with the government and gives

advice to asylum seekers and refugees. They run an advice service at:

James Street Centre (main office)
2 James Street
Southampton
SO14 1PJ

Telephone: 02380 221111

reception@clearproject.org.uk

<http://www.clearproject.org.uk/>

Due to Covid-19 advisors at CLEAR are working only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you need advice ring them on 02380 221111, leave a message with your name and contact number and someone will ring you back.

The Red Cross also offer support for young refugees in Portsmouth:

To find out about what is available and opening times contact the Portsmouth Red Cross:

Email: PortsmouthReferrals@redcross.org.uk
Call: 02392 894215

The asylum process

All new claims for asylum should be decided within 35 days and appeals by 115 days. However, at present decisions are taking much longer than this. So, your application may take longer than the times described below. You will always have an adult with you, an interpreter if you need one and your solicitor if it is considered necessary. There are 4 main stages to claiming asylum:

Stage 1: The Welfare Interview

This is a short interview which usually takes place at the asylum screening unit in Croydon.

However, some asylum seekers are asked to go to other places for their interview. Your letter from the Home Office will tell you where your interview will be and your carer will make sure that you get there at the right time. Your interview will include:

- Asking you some basic information about your application including how you entered the UK, your name and age. If you do not have documents proving your age you will be assessed by an on-site social worker. If the social worker is unsure whether you are under 18 you will be treated as an 'age-disputed' child. This means that you have

claimed to be under 18 but have no documents to prove it and the social worker feels that you could be over 18. Within 25 days of your welfare interview Social Care should make a decision regarding your age. You have the right to appeal the age decision if you do not agree with it but will need sufficient grounds for an appeal. You will be told how to do this if it applies to you.

- Fingerprinting and photographing you. This will be done in the presence of a responsible adult who does not work for the immigration department. This could be your social worker or solicitor.
- You will be given a questionnaire called 'The Statement of Evidence Form (SEF)'. Your solicitor will fill this in and return it for you. This has to be done within 20 days.
- UK Visa and Immigration will give you an Application Registration Card (ARC) which confirms that your application has been made. It will look like this:

Shortly after your welfare interview (within a few days) you will be given a Case Owner. This person works for the Home Office. They will be responsible for your application all the way through the process. You have the right to ask for a male or female Case Owner.

Stage 2: First reporting event

This is the first time that you meet your Case Owner. It should be a few days after your welfare interview. At this meeting your Case Owner will:

- Explain the asylum process to you.
- Give you a date for your substantive interview (see stage 3).
- Be given help in finding a solicitor if you haven't already got one.

Stage 3: Substantive interview

This should be about a week after your first meeting. At the interview you will be asked to explain your reasons for applying for asylum in the UK. You will be given a copy of the interview notes and asked to sign to say that you have received them.

Stage 4: Decision

You should get your decision on whether you have been successful in claiming asylum within 35

days of first making your application, but it can take much longer than this. Usually your Case Owner will tell you the decision in person.

There are four decisions that your Case Owner can make about your claim for asylum:

1. They may grant you refugee status. This means that you can stay in the UK for up to 5 years, at least until you are 17½. The Home Office can review your case during the 5 years to check that you still qualify. If your circumstances have not changed by the end of the 5 years you can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). This is the right to live in the UK for as long as you want. You must do this **before** the 5 years have finished.
2. They may refuse your claim for asylum but give you Humanitarian Protection (HP). This could be because you do not meet the criteria for refugees but could be at risk of persecution if you returned to your country of origin. If you are granted HP you can stay in the UK for up to 5 years, at least until you are 17½. The Home Office can review your case during the 5 years to check that you still qualify. If your circumstances have not changed by the end of the 5 years you can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

This is the right to live in the UK for as long as you want. You must do this **before** the 5 years have finished.

3. They may refuse your claim for asylum but grant you UASC Leave. This could be because you do not meet the criteria for refugees but the Home Office is worried about your safety and arrangements for your care in your home country if you were to return. This is granted for 30 months or until you reach 17½, whichever is shorter. When your UASC Leave is about to expire it may be possible to apply for further leave to remain.
4. They may refuse your claim for asylum and not grant UASC Leave because they are satisfied that you will be safe and looked after when you return home.

If you are not happy with the decision that your Case Owner has made you have the right to appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber). Your Case Owner will explain how you can do this and how quickly you need to make your appeal. Your solicitor will be able to advise you whether you have sufficient grounds for an appeal and what your chances of success are likely to be. He or she will also do the

necessary paperwork for you and ensure that it reaches the First-tier Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) in time. You will be allowed to stay in the UK until the appeal is over. It should take approximately 6 weeks but may take considerably longer. Appeal tribunals are usually held in Newport but can be held in other places. Your letter from the Home Office about your appeal will tell you where to go and when. Your carer will make sure that you get there at the right time.

If you lose your appeal you will have to leave the UK. You might be able to get help from the Home Office to return home voluntarily:

Voluntary returns service

Telephone: 0300 004 0202

Open: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

<https://www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily/apply>

If you do not leave voluntarily you can be sent back to your home country by the Home Office.

If you win your appeal you will be granted refugee status. You may stay in the UK for up to 5 years and then can apply for ILR. You will be given travel documents and may travel to any country except the one you have claimed asylum from. Later, you will be able to apply for British

citizenship. Further details on how to do this are available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/becoming-a-british-citizen>

Your rights

You have rights. Whilst your claim for asylum is being processed and afterwards if you are granted asylum you will be entitled to the following free of charge:

- A safe place to live and a responsible adult to look after you.
- Food, clothing and other items needed for general living, e.g. school/college equipment.
- Medical care if you need it. This includes access to National Health Services (NHS) such as doctors, hospitals, dentists and opticians.
- An education at a local school or college.
- A university education if you have been granted refugee status or ILR and meet the entry requirements on the same basis as British students (some fees may apply).
- The right to work in the UK.

You also have the right to make a complaint if you are not happy with any of the services that you are receiving. For example, if there is a serious problem with your accommodation that cannot be put right after speaking about it with your foster carer you can ask to move somewhere else.

Your responsibilities

You also have responsibilities. Whilst living in the UK you will be expected to respect our laws and culture. There will be differences between what you are used to in your home country and our laws and culture in the UK.

Some important differences are related to the ages at which you are allowed to do certain things in the UK. Some that may affect you are listed here:

- Driving a moped (under 50cc): 16 years (licence needed)
- Driving a motorbike or car: 17 years (licence needed)
- Buying alcohol in a pub or shop: 18 years (ID may be asked for)
- Going into a pub without an adult up till 9.00pm: 14 years (not allowed to buy or

drink alcohol, but can buy soft drinks and food)

- Drinking alcohol in a pub as part of a meal if accompanied by an adult: 16 years (restricted to one drink of beer, wine or cider only)
- Having sex: 16 years (it is classed as rape if a person has sex with someone who is under 13 years old even if they have consented)
- Buying cigarettes: 18 years
- Getting married: 16 years with parent's consent, 18 years otherwise
- Travelling at reduced rates as a child on buses/trains: up to 16 years (16 years and older need to buy an adult ticket or hold a railcard for 16-17 year olds which will allow you to travel at reduced rates on trains)
- Live independently: minimum age 16 years and finished Year 11 or equivalent in school (in discussion with you, your key worker will decide whether living independently is appropriate for you and if so at what age)
- Taking non-prescription drugs: this is illegal at all ages
- Using or threatening to use weapons or violence against anybody: this is illegal at all ages

The role of women in society may also be different in the UK compared to your home country. In the UK men and women are equal. You need to make sure that you always treat women in the UK with respect and politeness. This is especially important at home where it is likely that you will have a female foster carer (see next section for more details about what this means). Women are commonly in sole charge of a household in the UK and should be treated no differently to a woman living with a man or a man on his own. Where there are a man and a woman sharing a household it is customary for both to carry out domestic chores at home. You should expect to take an active part in these. It is good manners to offer to help with such chores at home. If you do not treat your foster carer and their family with the respect that they expect and your attitude does not improve despite discussions about the difficulties that it is causing your foster carer has the right to tell Children's Services that he/she no longer wishes to be your foster carer. If this happens you will be given advance warning and will then have to move to different accommodation. Sometimes this may involve moving to a different part of Hampshire or even moving to another part of the UK.

Housing: a safe place to live

When you make your claim for asylum the Home Office will pass information about you to the local Children's Services department. This is the part of government responsible for looking after children who do not have an adult to look after them. Children's Services will find you a safe place to live and will organise access to the other things that you need to live in the UK. They will allocate you a social worker who will be the person that you can talk to about anything to do with your everyday care. This is sometimes referred to as being 'looked after' or being 'in care'.

You will probably be placed with a foster carer. This is a person who receives an allowance (a fixed sum of money) paid by Children's Services to look after children who have no one to look after them. You will live as part of their family. The allowance the foster carer receives will pay for all of your basic needs such as food, essential clothing, toiletries, transport, pens/pencils etc needed for school. It will also cover some treats such as visits to the cinema. The types and numbers of treats will be decided by your foster carer and may vary between different households. So, another young person living with a different

foster carer may have different treats to you. You will have the opportunity to ask for particular items or treats that you would like to receive but it will be up to your foster carer to decide as what you want may not always be possible. It is important to remember that the allowance that the foster carer receives is designed to cover the things that you really need rather than luxuries that you might want but do not really need. It is not meant to cover very expensive trainers for example or the latest mobile phone. Some foster carers may give you a weekly allowance which is a sum of money for you to spend as you wish. However, some foster carers may not do this if they are already spending all of the allowance that they receive directly on things that you need. You should not be afraid to ask your foster carer if there is something that you need that they have not offered you but you must make sure that you are only asking for things that are essential. Foster carers do not have to provide you with luxury items.

Your foster carer will have been told some background information about you such as which country you have come from, which languages you speak and your religion. This is so that they can make sure that you are given access to anything that you need that may be related to your cultural background. For example, you may not

be able to eat certain foods, may need a certain style of clothing or wish to attend certain places of worship. If there is anything special that you need connected to your religion that has not been provided you should ask. Children's Services departments do, where possible, try to place children with families of a similar background but this is not always possible in Hampshire due to a lack of foster carers from different cultural backgrounds.

If you are unhappy with where you are living you should first speak to your foster carer. If there is still a problem, ask to speak to your social worker. He or she may not be available to speak to you straight away especially if it is in the evening or at the weekend so you may need to be patient. You have the right to ask to move to another foster carer's family if you are really unhappy and you have genuinely tried to resolve matters with your foster carer.

If you are aged between 16 and 18 years old you may be offered supported lodgings/accommodation instead of a foster home. This is where you are able to live more independently without an adult looking after you all of the time but where there will still be support from adults available when you need help. Your social worker will discuss this option with you if

he/she feels that this type of accommodation could be suitable for you.

Leaving Care

Children's Services will continue to support you until you reach at least 21 years old. If you are in education or training you will be supported until this finishes. One big change is that at 18 you can, depending on your immigration status, claim money for housing and to live from the Benefits Agency. As you get close to your 18th birthday your social worker will explain to you any changes that will take place and help you fill out any necessary forms.

Medical care

You are entitled to any medical care that you may need through the NHS (National Health Service). You will not have to pay for this. The NHS provides public health care in the UK. You have the same right to use the services it provides as any British citizen. Through the NHS you will have access to the following:

- A doctor (known as your GP) who you can consult about any medical problem. All conversations between you and your GP are confidential.
- Prescriptions for medicines that you need – your doctor will give you a ‘prescription’ (special piece of paper) which you take to a pharmacy to get the medicine you need. You will not have to pay for the medicine.
- A practice nurse for minor medical conditions/advice, including contraception and sexual health.
- Counselling/mental health services – a trained person to talk to if you have been through a traumatic experience in your home country, or to talk to about any other issues.
- A dentist.
- An optician – for free eye tests and glasses.
- Hospitals, including accident and emergency.

Your social worker or foster carer will be able to help you access these services. If you require an interpreter to go with you to a medical appointment, your social worker will be able to tell the services concerned to arrange this for you.

Education

You are entitled to attend school or college (depending on your age) free of charge until you are 19 years old. If you are granted refugee status this may be extended to age 21 or possibly beyond and cover a university education (some fees may apply).

You will attend a school or college local to where you live. You are entitled to the same education as other children of your age. There will be some differences between the education system in the UK and your home country. Some of these differences are explained here:

Schools

- School is compulsory for everyone aged between 5 and 16 years old in the UK.
- After the age of 16 years you can choose to continue your education in a sixth form or college. Everyone has to take part in either education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 18.
- Schools for children aged 5 to 11 years are called primary schools. Sometimes there are separate schools for children aged 5 – 7

years called infant schools and for children aged 7-11 years called junior schools.

- Schools for students aged between 11 and 16 are called secondary schools. Some secondary schools have a 'sixth form' which means that they also have students aged between 16 and 18 years old.
- Most schools are funded and run by the Local Authority (government). These are called maintained schools. But some are funded by the government but are run independently from it. These are called Academies or Free Schools. Maintained schools, Academies and Free Schools are all free for pupils to attend.
- There are also some other schools in the UK that charge fees to attend. These are called private schools.
- Most schools are for boys and girls but some take only girls or only boys (mostly secondary schools).
- Some schools are linked to a particular faith such as Catholic schools, Church of England schools.
- Most schools have a uniform.
- You will be placed in a year group according to your age not according to your past educational experience, how good you are

at certain subjects or how well you speak English.

- Each year you will progress to the next year group, regardless of how well you have done academically. You cannot 'fail the year' in the UK. There is no 'repeating the year' in the UK.
- There are GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams in Year 11 when most students are 16 years old. Most students take about 10 subjects. These qualifications are important as they will enable you to go on to college or will help you to get a job in the UK when you leave school.
- There are also some alternative qualifications to GCSEs, eg BTECs. Your school will discuss with you which qualifications will be the best ones for you to study for and how many you should take.

Unfortunately bullying and racism do sometimes happen in schools in Hampshire. However, it is not acceptable behaviour and is taken very seriously. Bullying and racism can cause a lot of unhappiness. If it happens to you, you should report it to a teacher immediately. If the problem does not stop make sure that you let teachers know that there is still a problem. There are also

organisations that you can talk to about bullying or racism:

- Childline: a free to call telephone helpline which is open 24 hours a day, every day. You can talk to a trained counsellor at any time about anything you want.
Telephone: 0800 1111
Website: www.childline.org.uk
- Kidscape: An organisation that gives advice about bullying.
Website: www.kidscape.org.uk

Schools in the UK are required to hold a daily act of worship, sometimes known as 'collective worship'. This has to be 'broadly Christian' in nature. The act of worship can be part of 'assembly' time where either the whole school or part of the school, such as a year group meets together. It can also be held in the classroom by the classteacher (primary school) or form tutor (secondary school). If you prefer not to take part in this daily act of worship, perhaps because you follow a different religion, you have the right not to attend it. You should tell your classteacher or form tutor if you do not want to attend collective worship.

If you would like a quiet place to pray during school time either on your own or with a group of other students who share your religion, your school can provide you with a suitable room. This could be available throughout the year or just for a special period of time, eg Ramadan.

Your social worker or personal advisor can tell you where to find places of worship near where you live if you would like to attend one outside of school hours.

You are also entitled to take time off school to celebrate a significant religious festival, eg Eid (usually up to one day off school per festival). This will allow you to attend a place of worship for that festival if you wish.

Further Education Colleges

Further Education Colleges run a wide variety of courses. Some are academic, leading to qualifications such as GCSE or A Levels, leading to future university places. Others are vocational (to do with skills needed to do a particular job such as car mechanics or hairdressing) such as NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) and GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications). Some vocational courses can also

lead to university places. There are also courses to help you improve your English called ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses. You can choose to apply for whichever courses you are interested in but there may be entry requirements for some courses that you will need to meet.

Courses can be full time or part time. It is possible to work part time and study at the same time.

Courses in most sixth forms and Further Education colleges are free if you have been granted refugee status or have HP/UASC Leave status. If you are an asylum seeker waiting to hear the Home Office's decision courses are free if you are between 16 and 18 years old. If you are older you may have to pay fees to study.

There are specialist organisations that can give you advice on further education:

Coram Children's Legal Centre
Wellington House
4th Floor
90-92 Butt Road
Colchester
CO3 3DA

London Office:
Coram Children's Legal Centre
Coram Community Campus
41 Brunswick Square
London
WC1N 1AZ

Coram provides free email legal advice on the rights of young refugees and migrants including access to further and higher education. They also have downloadable factsheets on access to further and higher education including information on fees.

Email: mcpadvice@coramclc.org.uk

<https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/resources/higher-education-refugees-migrants/>

Refugee Council,
Children's Advice Project,
Christopher Wren Yard,
115 High Street,
Croydon,
CR0 1QG

children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Telephone Advice line: 020 7346 1134 (9.00am – 5.00pm, Monday to Friday).

Universities

When you reach the age of 18 years old you can apply for university or Higher Education. There is no upper age limit. You will need to meet the entry requirements. These will vary depending on the university and the type of course that you wish to do. Your sixth form or Further Education College will be able to tell you how to apply and what qualifications you will need. They will also be able to help you get information about the different universities that offer the course that you are interested in so that you can decide which ones to apply to.

If you have settled status you will be treated the same as British students in terms of fees. If you have UASC Leave/Humanitarian Protection (HP) a decision about financially supporting you will be made depending on your individual situation. If you are Appeal Rights Exhausted you will not get funding to attend university.

Working in the UK

If you are an asylum seeker waiting for a decision on your claim you can work 6 months after making your claim as long as you are at least 13 years

old, but you need a work permit. This must be applied for in person at the Home Office.

If you have been granted refugee status or HP/UASC Leave and are at least 13 years old, you have the right to work in the UK. You do not need a work permit.

There are rules about how many hours you are allowed to work and when. These will apply to you if you are 16 years old or younger and still at school. The rules are to protect you and to ensure that your education does not suffer because of the number of hours or the times that you are working.

13-14 year olds

- You may work up to 12 hours a week during term time and up to 25 hours a week in school holidays.
- You may not work before 7.00am or after 7.00pm.
- You may only work for up to 2 hours on a school day. Only 1 hour of this can be before school.
- You may work for up to 5 hours on Saturdays.
- You may work for up to 2 hours on Sundays.

- You may work up to 5 hours a day during the school holidays, but must not exceed a weekly total of 25 hours.

15-16 year olds

- You may work up to 12 hours a week during term time and up to 35 hours a week in school holidays.
- You may not work before 7.00am or after 7.00pm.
- You may only work for up to 2 hours on a school day. Only 1 hour of this can be before school.
- You may work for up to 8 hours on Saturdays.
- You may work for up to 2 hours on Sundays.
- You may work up to 8 hours a day during the school holidays, but must not exceed a weekly total of 35 hours.

In the UK there is a minimum wage for workers aged 16 and over who have reached school leaving age. (You reach school leaving age on the last Friday in June when you will be 16 by the end of the summer holidays). Employers must not pay you less than the minimum wage. This is currently £4.55 per hour for 16 and 17 year olds

and £6.45 per hour for 18 to 20 year olds. The rates may change every year.

If you are 16 years and over you need a National Insurance Number. This shows that you are entitled to work in the UK and is also needed to claim benefits.

Your social worker will be able to help you apply for a National Insurance Number if you are over 16 years old and are eligible for one. Your eligibility will depend on your asylum claim – if you have been granted asylum or Humanitarian Protection (HP) or UASC Leave then you are entitled to a National Insurance Number. If you are still waiting for a decision you will be entitled to one 6 months after making your claim but will also need a work permit. If your decision comes through before the 6 months are up then you will be entitled to the number straight away without needing a work permit as long as you get one of the decisions above.

Your National Insurance Number will be a mixture of numbers and letters, for example, QQ 12 34 56 A. It will be sent to you in a letter which you must keep safe.

Sport and Recreation facilities

There are many places in Hampshire where you can take part in sports activities or other recreational activities. Most larger towns and cities have recreation centres where you can go in your spare time. They are open at weekends and in the evenings as well as in the daytime. They offer activities such as swimming, football, tennis, badminton, squash, judo, yoga and many others. Many also have fully equipped gyms. You can find out where your nearest one is by asking your foster carer or social worker. Alternatively, you could use Google to find out where your local ones are. Search for 'sports and recreation centres' or 'leisure centres' and the name of the town/city where you live. There will be a charge for taking part in these activities.

Many areas of Hampshire also have youth clubs which you may like to attend in your spare time. They usually open during the evenings on certain days every week. They are run by youth workers who will organise some leisure activities as well as giving young people a place to socialise. Your foster carer or social worker will be able to help you find out where your nearest youth club is.

Contacting family and friends in your home country

Public telephones take coins or pre-paid phone cards. It is very expensive to phone abroad using coins in a pay phone. If you want to phone your home country it is cheaper to buy an international pre-paid phone card. You can buy these from many shops – look out for signs in the window.

You can send e-mails from some public phones, from internet cafes or free at public libraries. (But you will have to join the library first. Your social worker or foster carer will be able to help you do this.)

You may be provided with a mobile phone which you could use instead of public phones. Speak to your social worker to see if this may be an option for you. Sometimes a mobile phone is not permitted due to safety concerns. Your social worker will be able to tell you whether this applies to you.

Finding family members from whom you have become separated

If you have lost contact with your family and would like to try and contact them, an organisation called

The Red Cross can help. The Red Cross look for missing people. They can also get messages to people that are hard to reach because they are in refugee camps or in prison. You can contact them at the closest Red Cross office to where you live. If you live in Hampshire, the closest office is:

Portsmouth Red Cross,
338 Commercial Road,
Portsmouth
PO1 4BT

(Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays
9.00-5.00pm)

Telephone: 02392 894214

At the moment, this is a telephone only service so there is no need to travel to the office.

The experiences of one UASC from Ethiopia

I come from Ethiopia. I am 16 years old. My mum is Eritrean and my dad is Ethiopian. I am an only child. When I was 5 years old my mum was sent back to Eritrea because of a war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. I never saw her again. I lived with my dad and grandmother.

When I was 8 years old my dad disappeared. I think he was killed by the government because of his involvement in politics. I never found out what happened to him.

When I was 14 years old my grandmother died. I had no-one to look after me. The police questioned me about my father's political activities, threatened me and kept me in the police station for 5 days.

I decided that it was too dangerous to stay in Ethiopia especially as I had no one to look after me. My uncle said that if I sold my grandmother's house and gave him the money that he would arrange for me to go to England. I was really scared but felt that I didn't have any choice. I agreed.

I travelled to France on a false passport. Then I went in the back of a lorry with lots of other asylum seekers through the Channel Tunnel and into England. The lorry stopped in Winchester and we all got out. The lorry driver opened the back of the lorry, saw us all and called the police. I was taken to a police station. I was scared and didn't understand everything that was going on. The police were really nice to me, gave me food and drink, blankets and let me sleep in the police station the first night. They even checked what sort of food I ate – I told them I was Muslim and they made sure that they didn't give me anything I wasn't allowed to eat.

The next morning the police asked me some questions with the help of an interpreter who spoke to me on the phone. Later, the police arranged for an emergency social worker and interpreter to speak to me in person. I was too scared to ask questions and didn't know that I had any rights. The interpreter told me that I had rights but didn't really explain what they were. She reassured me.

The social worker arranged an emergency foster placement for me. I went to live with an English family. I had a check up at the doctor, dentist and optician. My foster carer bought me clothes and other things that I needed. I was too scared to

ask for much as I thought that she was paying for the things herself but I later found out that she had been given the money by the government. I started at a local school and was shocked by the racism that I experienced.

My social worker found me a solicitor who dealt with my asylum claim for me. He explained what would happen. I was interviewed by an immigration officer with an interpreter. He filled out some forms and told me that it would be a long wait for a decision.

I wasn't very happy living with my foster carer and her family. She didn't understand my cultural background and wouldn't let me contact another UASC that I had met on the lorry and who had gone on to live in London. Later I was visited by a Human Rights worker for looked after children. He told me more about my rights, in particular that I had the right to ask to move foster carers and the right to contact my friend in London. He arranged for me to move foster carer. This meant moving to a new town and a new school too, but I was much happier even though there was also racism in my new school.

After about a year I received a letter refusing my claim for asylum. I decided to appeal. I saw two new solicitors including one from Ethiopia that my

friend in London had used. I decided to use the Ethiopian solicitor. I won my appeal and now have the right to stay in the UK for as long as I want. I hope one day to be able to return to Ethiopia.

Useful contacts

Home Office asylum claims related

Lunar House,
40, Wellesley Road,
Croydon.
CR9 2BY.

<mailto:cromenquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk>

Open: Monday to Friday, 10.00am to 3.00pm

Information on becoming a British citizen

<https://www.gov.uk/british-citizenship>

Free legal advice/general advice on asylum related issues

CLEAR,
James Street Centre (main office)
2 James Street
Southampton
SO14 1PJ

Telephone: 02380 221111
reception@clearproject.org.uk
<http://www.clearproject.org.uk/>

Open on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Children's Panel Advice Project,
Refugee Council,
115 High Street,
Croydon.
CR0 1QG

Telephone: 020 7346 1134 (9.00am – 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday).
children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Portsmouth Red Cross
Email: PortsmouthReferrals@redcross.org.uk
Call: 02392 894215

For help if you decide to return to your home country

Voluntary returns service
Telephone: 0300 004 0202
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
<https://www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily/apply>

Telephone helplines – someone to talk to

Childline: Telephone: 0800 1111 (free)

Website: www.childline.org.uk

Help with school related issues

Hampshire Ethnic Minority Achievement Service,
Dame Mary Fagan House,
Chineham Court,
Lutyens Close,
Basingstoke,
Hampshire.
RG24 8AG

Tel: 0370 7794 222

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/emas>

Advice on accessing further/higher education

Coram Children's Legal Centre:
Wellington House
4th Floor
90-92 Butt Road
Colchester
CO3 3DA

London Office:
Coram Children's Legal Centre
Coram Community Campus
41 Brunswick Square
London
WC1N 1AZ

Email: mcpadvice@coramclc.org.uk

Children's Advice Project
Refugee Council,
Christopher Wren Yard,
115 High Street,
Croydon,
CR0 1QG

Telephone: 020 7346 1134 (9.00am – 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday).

children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

If you have questions about your day to day care or any aspects of being an unaccompanied asylum seeking child/young person

Speak to your social worker in the first instance. If they do not know the answer to a question they will go away and find out the answer for you.

If you would like to contact local people/groups that share your cultural background

Eastleigh area: Contact Rajni Bali, Community Development Officer:
rajni.bali@eastleigh.gov.uk

<https://www.eastleigh.gov.uk/our-community/supporting-our-residents/ethnic-minority-communities/associations-and-groups>

Basingstoke area: Contact Islam Jalaita, Community Development Officer, at Basingstoke Diversity Forum:

islam.jalaita@basingstoke.gov.uk

<https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/ethnic-minorities>

For help in finding family members

Portsmouth Red Cross,
338 Commercial Road,
Portsmouth.
PO1 4BT
02392 894214

(Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays
9.00-5.00pm)

For support if you have been trafficked to the UK

Barnardos' child trafficking service

Kate.Norman@barnardos.org.uk

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-children/trafficked-children>

Lynne Chitty
UK Care Director,
Love146,
P.O. Box 51700,
London.
SE8 9BX.

Telephone: 08456 802 146
info@love146.org.uk

Love146 is an international human rights organisation working to end child trafficking and exploitation through survivor care and prevention.

Request for feedback

We hope that you have found the information in this booklet useful. It would be very helpful if you could let us know which parts of the booklet were the most useful and tell us if you have any suggestions about how we could make it more useful for other unaccompanied asylum seeking children that arrive in the UK after you.

Please write your comments in the spaces on the next page (use the back if you need more space) and send them to:

Hampshire Ethnic Minority Achievement Service,
Dame Mary Fagan House,
Chineham Court,
Lutyens Close,
Basingstoke,
Hampshire.
RG24 8AG

You can write in any language you like. Thank you.

Things I found useful about the Welcome to Hampshire booklet:

Suggestions for making it more useful:

Any other comments you would like to make:

Your age:

Your home country: