**UASC Working Group minutes 06.02.2025**

**New Citizens Gateway**  
Talk about New Citizen Gateways work today, particularly the project we just did in Barnet and Southgate College.  
New Citizens Gateway is based in Barnet. We work with asylum seekers and refugees, not just young people below the age of 18.

We have some online services that anyone in England and Wales can access.  
  
Everything we do is, according to our holistic model which is essentially just meeting the needs of people where they're at, and if they come to us for one service and we see that they're in need of another one that we already have, then we can signpost them to that or potentially build new programmes that that meet their particular needs.

We also work in hotels where we get some of our referrals. What we work in three of the five hotels that have asylum seekers in Barnet.  
  
Most recently we did our Barnet and Southgate Psychoeducational project, which went really, really well. We had about 15 young people over the course of six weeks come and join us.  
There were weekly 2 hour sessions in which we discussed a different topic each week. It was myself, my manager, Mariam, and then we had some translators and some sessional workers with us.

This was the first three weeks. So the first one was talking about self-care. What is stress? We did a pre course survey so that we could reference it later.  
The second session was about culture shock and London itself less practical stuff, because we figured that could come from the college itself.  
And then the young people's own challenges and achievements in their journeys to the UK and since they arrived here, which was really interesting, we touched on nutrition and physical exercise.

And then the final three sessions were stress response and coping strategies, talking about fight or flight, that sort of thing.

Emotional support and counselling. We have one of our own counsellors come in and talk about what counselling is because many of them are unfamiliar with that concept and then finally they suggested talking about sleep hygiene.

We asked them at the start, is there any part of this course that you feel is missing? Is there anything you'd like to know about and sleep was something that they suggested so we incorporated that in and then we had a celebration. We gave certificates out as you saw in the first image.

We’re now running it in a different campus of Barnet and Southgate College and are hoping to continue with it. It works really well in small groups. Also at the end of each session we'd order food from one of their nationalities at the end. So we had Turkish food, Afghan, we got fish and chips. It was a lovely moment to kind of have more informal moments at the end and get to know them and allow them to experience each other's culture a bit more.

I thought I'd talk a little bit more about what we do at New Citizens Gateway. So we have lots of different activities for young people. We go on outings during school holidays. These are probably the most photogenic of our activities. We went to Brighton last summer. We watched a match at Arsenal in the stadium. We've contributed to some local gardening projects.  
And these are some of the slightly rogue ones. We had a stone masonry workshop which they really enjoyed and horse riding with Ebony Horse club Brixton.   
We have a weekly youth club which varies on what we do. So this was a photography session here. We were celebrating Nauru's Persian New year here at the bottom.  
We often have external organisations coming in. We've had, Brooke, talking about sexual health and consent. We've had lots of different theatre companies coming in and doing their own kind of thing. We've got round house coming in later to talk about a film project we'll be starting soon, so the variety is really lovely.  
We also we also have weekly football. I can't believe I forgot to mention that that is by far most popular activity.  
So on Friday evenings in Brent Cross, we play football. They will really enjoy that.

We have bilingual counselling online. We have lots of different languages.  
Various waiting lists for each but 12 free sessions. For these kids to do counselling in their own language and also counsellors that have experienced and know and are from the cultures that a lot of these kids are from, so understand that the nuances of what they've experienced in some way or another.  
We also have two online ESOL classes on Mondays and Wednesdays for different language levels which are so a great way to support people, particularly we find young people who have just arrived and haven't got into college or school, yet still waiting to be inducted. So this is a good kind of stop gap in some ways for that.

We also get some of our older young people to do volunteering. This was a year ago or so. We had a winter gifts distribution at one of the hotels we worked in. So we've got our young people, we have them sorting presents that we'd received from the local community, distributing them kind of keeping.

**Rigby, Debby**   
So it's it doesn't matter which local authority the young person is connected to, they can access some of your services?

**Joseph Shotton**   
Yeah, that's right. So the online ones can be accessed from anywhere and we're based in Barnet in North London. So we have people from various north London boroughs joining us. We can reimburse travel costs up to £10 for both ways so if they want to come from further afield that they're able to.

**Stroud, Frazier (BELS)**   
And in terms of the question I was going to ask in terms of the byline bilingual counselling, what's the referral process for that and can young people across the UK access it?

**Joseph Shotton**   
Anyone in England and Wales there's a specific age range which I think is 13 to 18, which covers most of our activities. Most of them are 11 to 18 and it's the same referral form as the rest of our youth activities.

Links and Contacts:

[Joseph@ncgateway.org.uk](mailto:Joseph@ncgateway.org.uk)

[Support For Refugees | New Citizens Gateway](https://www.ncgateway.org.uk/)

<https://www.instagram.com/newcitizensgateway/?hl=en>

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**REUK – Bilal Safi**

**Bilal**   
Hi everyone. My name is Bilal. I'm a mentoring coordinator for Refugee Education UK  
Our story's equipping young refugees to build a positive future by travelling and education.  
Just to elaborate more on the mentoring programme itself. The age criteria is between 14 to 25 and they have to be refugees or asylum seekers and be in education or want to be in education. Our hubs are mainly based in London. I look after north London Hub, we look after north London, West and East. We have a hub in Oxford and in the West Midlands - In Birmingham.  
  
It doesn't end after the six months. Six months is just a commitment that we want from both the mentor and the mentee and they are after six months we come back and then do a review with each one of them and if they're happy to continue then we let them continue. We have examples of mentees and mentors working together for 5 years  
 **Stroud, Frazier (BELS)**   
Which was, are there any plans to expand the mentoring outside of the areas you've mentioned? So obviously you've got Oxford, Birmingham and London are there any plans to expand it?

**Bilal**

Of course. In the future we will want to expand it.

**BERMINGHAM, Robert**   
Thanks for that. That was really good and I have someone in mind who we I'm from Gloucester, but he's moved to Birmingham and he's really struggling. He's struggling to access education and he's moved house a lot of times and his social worker by chance has changed. I really feel he could benefit from mentoring. Is there a waiting list? And yeah, I guess also I'd love to get the details of how to.

**Bilal**   
The waiting list. It really depends if you have a mentor in their local areas. What we do is that we match the young person based on the area. Its because we don't want them to commute far away from the mentee. So we mainly do that you know. It can be up to weeks or a month.

Contact details and links:

[bilal.safi@reuk.org](mailto:bilal.safi@reuk.org)

[Refugee Education UK | Educational Mentoring | Volunteer](https://www.reuk.org/mentoring)

<https://www.instagram.com/refugeeeduk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVhtsU5QX-0>

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**Simone Cassidy – Refugee Minor Program – Victoria, Australia**

**Simone Cassidy (DFFH)**  
So my name is Simone Cassidy. My role is education advisor and I work in state government in Victoria in Australia.

I think there are lots of parallels with the work that you all do in the work that I'm involved in here in Australia. So I work in a programme in state government that support unaccompanied humanitarian minors, so children who arrive in Australia with any kind of humanitarian visa and who are without a biological parent.  
They are provided with a case manager who is a social worker. They receive minimum of fortnightly home visits from that social worker from the time of their arrival in Australia until they are 18 and are no longer considered a minor. Although we do have.  
An additional programme if you like, that's a bit less intensive.  
For those between 18 and 21, to continue that support, we acknowledge that 18 year old young people still need a lot of support, a lot of the work that we're doing is to ensure that the young people are in a safe care arrangement that meets their needs. Most of the young people in our programme are not truly unaccompanied. They are unaccompanied in the legal sense of the word, but they are many. They're often with extended family members. They might be with an older sibling, an older grandparent, that family extended family may need a lot of support to settle well in Australia. And we also work with the Red Cross to trace family members. So in some cases children have become separated but parents can be located and then we work with Red Cross and with legal services here in Australia to bring those parents and to try to reunite children, which is the absolute joy of the work that we do. I sit alongside the case management team. I'm formerly an EAL secondary school teacher, and I provide education, support and advocacy. Some of the work that I was hearing about before that education, mentoring is a big part of my role. So helping young people to understand their options and navigate services, especially when they are getting a little bit older and need help finding work experience and understanding how they might get into university and do tertiary study for example. So my role is pretty flexible but it has that education focus.

In our system, we have all kinds of challenges with equities. I'm sure that these are challenges you're familiar with and people are not always well serviced if they've arrived in Australia without English, and if they haven't had a chance to have education prior to arrival.   
The most common countries of origin for young people that I'm working with are South Sudan, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan and Eritrea, and so many of these young people have been born in refugee camps. They haven't had the opportunity for formal education, and they may arrive 12/13/14, even 17 years of age. So our system, I'd love to say we do a stellar job of supporting them, but they're a huge gaps.  
As you can imagine, and perhaps you, you share those challenges as well.

One of the particular gaps that I have been very frustrated with over the years is that we find it very difficult to identify a learning difficulty in a in a young person.  
Our ways of understanding neurodivergence are all very based around being born in Australia. Having English as your first language. That's the model. That's the expectation. And if the young person has a different history, we tend to really struggle with understanding what's going on.   
And young people of refugee background do not get identified as having learning difficulties. That led me to want to understand more about that intersection between possible neurodivergence a learning difficulty and having a refugee background or being an EAL learner, and I applied for a Churchill fellowship  
I'll be coming to the United Kingdom in May and I'll be there from all of May and the first half of June.  
I'm very keen to learn about how teachers, educators, those who work with children and young people in schools, how the UK identifies learning difficulties.  
I'm not sure how well known it is, but you have some fantastic national guidelines put out by the Bell Foundation. I can send a link to those as well, but I'm sure you're very familiar with them that help educators to understand that intersection between I believe in the UK you call it SEND and that possible overlap with EAL. We have no such guidelines in Australia, so my main aim is to understand how those guidelines are being used.

Are they actually helping? Are they friendly for schools to use? I'm keen to understand the strengths and the challenges so that with the hope that perhaps one day in Australia we could have our own guidelines and work towards something similar.  
I've reached out to the Bell Foundation and a whole lot of different organisations who share that interest in that intersection of EAL and send, but I'm I'll be travelling, starting actually in Edinburgh and travelling South and ending up in London.  
I'll be going through Birmingham and Oxford and lots of places.  
If you're working with schools that you think might be open to a visit. I'm certainly not an expert in this space, but I'm really keen to learn and I guess to learn from your own experiences. So yeah, please do reach out. I'll also put my direct e-mail in the chat as well. And of course, you're welcome to reach out and ask any questions about our resources that we use in our system, if that's of any interest to anyone.

**Rigby, Debby**   
Refreshing to have somebody Simone that is talking about the same thing as the challenge that you're actually working on yourself. I mean, we I'm working in the City of London as the virtual school head there and over 90% of our young people are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.  
And when they first come to us, sometimes they stay, and sometimes they then get transferred on the national transfer scheme to other local authorities across the country. So we don't have a lot of time to try to work those things out.  
And what we do tend to find though, with the young people who stay is that the special educational needs, unless they're very specific and sometimes physical, we miss them a lot at the beginning because they tend to go on to a pre entry level courses and our colleges say, oh, you know, they had a lot going on. There was a lot happening for this young person. And that's true. You know, maybe they haven't had a lot of formal learning in the past. So we'll just put them back on pre entry level. Then they go back. And I tend to find that we're not even looking at some kind of neurodiversity until the end of the second year of pre entry levels that they fail.  
And I want to do something much much earlier than that, but it's really tricky as to how we how we do the assessments in a way that really supports that young person and we get a really true picture of what they can do. So I'm really, I'm really quite passionate about this, Simone. So you're very welcome to come and see me.

**Simone Cassidy (DFFH)**   
I'd love to connect with you. I think, yeah, we have the same, the same challenges and I think some of the concerns are very real in that of course we understand that trauma impacts learning. We understand it takes a lot of time to learn English and we don't want to pathologize the typical ways in which it might take the length of time it might take to learn English. We don't want to pathologize that and fail to give young people the time and support, and that trauma informed learnings that they need.  
But I think sometimes certainly in Australia everything becomes, you know, this is the impact of trauma. In reality, I wish I had my slides to share with you, but for our programme, we didn't have any education support prior to 2018. So my role started in 2018. Once we threw a lot of education support, the vast majority of our young people finish high school. We have a better completion rate of high school in our programme than the state average for all young people, just young Australian people. And last year, all but one of our U-12's went on to Taf or university study and that one that didn't, he's still studying. So what we've seen is these young people are incredibly resilient, they're intelligent, they're creative. Most of them do really well despite really challenging start. So the very, very few that struggle they're the ones that I that I do worry about and I think we failed to properly investigate what's going on because it is possible to do well with the right support.

**Jill Hollin**   
Simone, I also have a have a background originally in SEM, so it's an interest for me. We we successfully got an EHCP about a year or so ago for one of our unaccompanied young people. And I think the key for him was getting the speech and language assessment. I think I've mentioned this before in a previous group, we had an interpreter present for the speech and language assessment so that he was being assessed in his first language.

**Andrew Phillipson**   
Yeah. So in the last six months we've got two asylum seeking kids EHCPs.  
In terms of what we've done.

And so we've set a soft target within my team of trying to get an EHC needs assessment submitted once a month for our kids. It would still in terms of percentages and raw numbers, leave a huge disparity between the number of British born kids or non-asylum seeking kids who've got EHCPs within our looked after children's service versus the asylum seeking cohort.

We've got processes that we're developing we're working on. We have an EP that we Commission who we've worked with to understand the asylum process, to understand the ESOL process.  
I really took a lead on the 1st EHCP to learn about the SEND process and how to make that work, and we're now looking at demystifying that process with members of our team, but I would expect by the end of this year, by the end of 2025, I would hope that we're in double figures in terms of the asylum seeking kids that we've got that are receiving EHCP funding and support. And it really has been a case about winning hearts and minds and minds at all levels.  
  
And you know that two year cycle of repeating pre entry.  
We certainly would expect that that certainly was the case previously here, but we'd certainly expect within six months, if a kids on pre entry, I still don't think that's quick enough. But within six months, if we're not happy with it, you know that's a term and a half of college. If they're really falling behind within the next year, I'd want to have been putting on like I want it to be our practise to get an EP in there to do an assessment and then put that through for a needs assessment. And if there's one piece of advice would do it, I will give you if you've got funding get the EP assessment as part as part of the submit that as part of the needs assessment, rather than waiting for the SEND service to do it. It makes it far more challenging for them to argue the case against special needs if you've already gone out and got a professional opinion from somebody who is an expert in in figuring out special needs.

**Rebecca McCallum**   
  
One of the one of the sort of topics in there is obviously special educational needs and ESOL and one of the things that that our two big colleges, that's Peterborough College in Cambridge, have been doing is actually working on the assumption that about 20% of the learners will have some kind of learning needs given that that's what they see in their general post 16 population.  
  
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[**Simone Cassidy - Churchill Trust**](https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/simone-cassidy-vic-2024/)

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***AOB:***

**Interim College provision:**

Ed Frewin**:**   
I just wondered if anyone was having the same issues as we have because Bucks (college) group are basically full and we've got we had an influx of young people that arrived just before Christmas and we've got about 10 youngsters that have actually that have actually got no provision whatsoever with our local offer at the college.  
Riley, Sarah **:**   
Absolutely, Ed. We have had this problem over a number of years in that we have colleges in what we call the South Hampshire College Group. We have issues with placement and that they are placed where we don't have any post 16 provision. Last year, we had to provide transport for students to go from one side of Hampshire.  
To the other side of Hampshire, where provision was.  
We are desperately working with our placement commissioning teams and our refugee team who are a team of social workers. Myself and Steve work together and we're trying to make sure that not only can PO16 settings be more flexible, but also that when they are placing children, they are considering the education provision that's available in that area.

Rigby, Debby**:**   
Across London, because we don't have the housing, we place our young people right across Greater London and we're having real issues about getting them in particularly mid term we it wasn't so bad when we had a group arrived in September. We seem to be able to find places then, but it's almost like the places are now full and that's it. And you've got to wait till September. So I'm getting new arrivals all the time and I can't just can't get them in anywhere.  
We've done a deal with TLC Live, where we we've got a reduced rate and I'm sure they would give it to anybody. They're quite happy to give it to us where they put them online for four days a week. So Monday to Thursday, they at least get an ESOL lesson online. And then because it's in a group, I don't have to pay that much for it.

Andrew Phillipson:  
We use Tute similar to TLC Live Functional ESOL pre entry entry one and then entry two entry three classes. Our classes are mixed so they're in with learners from different places, although like TLC Live, I think what we'll do as we get more learners coming in, we haven't had such a significant number arrive in Hertfordshire the last couple of months, but as we do, there's also the facility to open up our own class there as well.  
And they did a four days of ESOL Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday.  
And then on Wednesday, I've worked with them to develop a pastoral programme for asylum seeking kids so.  
It's all the sort of pastoral things that you do with teenagers, but there's also sessions in there on specific things of being new to the UK, the laws that might, that they might struggle with.  
With specific issues that they might struggle with in terms of healthy relationships, some stuff on the asylum process, some CLA specific stuff as well.

Lisa Scrivens:  
I was just. I was just going to say we use TUTE as well. I'm really reasonable. I think at last look it was around £100 for about 12 young people in a session.  
So that's we use that as part of our orientation programme anyway to cover that interim period until they get into college, even if it's just for a few weeks. But it's really handy to have if you know if you're waiting an amount of time, something we have managed to do. One of our biggest providers in Surrey is get them to put on a one stroke two day course.  
It's not accredited, but it's something.  
And it gets them used to being in college, college life, and generally they're going alongside travelling alongside other young people who are going there full time. So it, you know, it gives them something. So that might be something worth thinking about with your, with your colleges, as to whether they could do something just because a lot of them they can't, you know, they can't do another full time course necessarily, but they could do a day and it's better than nothing.

Riley, Sarah**:**  
Yeah. Just very quickly, 'cause, I know you've got other things on AOB.  
Essex Virtual School has shared the their arrangement with TLC. There is a bulk opportunity or an opportunity to bulk purchase.  
So I know that it was shared recently in the virtual school heads meetings and therefore it's something that we're seriously looking into geographically where we're a large local authority with two unitary authorities.  
And it makes it very difficult for us to have one centralised hub, which is such a shame. We're working on it.

Jessica McGinley**:**  
Yeah, I'm just thinking outside the box whilst everyone is talking and hearing what you're saying, Debbie, about money funding, you can't know, can't fund 1 to one tuition, but there must be other young people who are not necessarily from your local authority in these other local authority places. So for example, Ed, what you're talking about, you've got a Wokingham young person living in your bucks area that can't. And I know you've been liaising with cat about that.  
But if they're not for mechanism where you know we can kind of combine our combine some funding together and kind of put on small groups or just throwing it out there about thinking a bit more creatively amongst our virtual schools. And I know that's difficult because you don't necessarily know what other looked after children from other local authorities are living in your local area. But you know we all work very collaboratively. I just wonder if that's another way to solve.  
A few of these problems whilst you're dealing with not having enough college places really, so just throwing it out there.

Links:

[Online ESOL tutoring | ESOL lessons from qualified UK teachers | TLC Live Online Tutoring](https://www.tlclive.com/subjects/english/esol)

[Tute ESOL - Tute](https://www.tute.com/curriculums/tute-esol/)

**Easy Readers:**

Sarah-Jo Jefford**:**  
In the summer I emailed around the group to ask if people had used easy readers that they would recommend. And this came out of one of our colleges stopped having a physical library, and that was a shame because people, you know, my experience is that people have enjoyed taking easy readers home.  
When they go to mainstream libraries, you know you can either find something at the right English level, but that's very much too young in age or some of the books for reluctant readers are a bit too sort of idiomatic, so people kindly gave lots of suggestions and I've just put them on the on the Word document. So thank you to everybody.

**City of London Enrichment**

Rigby, Debby **:**  
Yeah, I'll just, I'll pop it all in the chat for people just to let you know that there's a couple of things on.

We run these forest school days and open spaces in the City of London actually fund these and they're really good people arrive about 10:30. We do all sorts of different activities.  
Walking art, nature well-being activities, team games, lunches. All provided.  
It's a fabulous opportunity for young people to come along quite often. The feedback we get is just being out in nature just makes people feel so much better and it's great for young people to meet up with other young people who are in similar situations, so anyone's welcome to come to that. You just need to contact me so that I get enough lunch in to make sure that we're coming. But there's a few local authorities come now and it's great because we're beginning to sort of like, get friends where they only meet and we do like.  
We do four sessions a year and it's working really well.

We've also got a summer term enrichment programme for any young people who are on ESOL courses because quite often we find some of our young people when they're at college, they don't get much enrichment opportunity. It tends to be an awful lot of English, a bit of numeracy.  
PSHE. But you know we they put on at the City of London Boys School. They run these every so often where they do these fantastic science lessons and design technology.  
Drama, art, music and it's two full afternoons, followed by pizza, where they can come along and have a go at chemistry, have a have a go at something a bit different. You know, a lot of our young people have never been given these opportunities and that and City of London Boys School, they put a huge effort into it. So they tend to do that, those real fun, open evening type activities. Real wow things with them. So you've got volcanoes going off and you've got all sorts of chemical reactions happening.  
And then and they really make a big effort. So if anybody's interested in bringing the group along to that, you're very welcome to just get in touch. They all, we always finish it off as well with a Lords cricket, ground trip. Lords cricket ground are really keen to engage young people. They do all sorts of different activities to try to engage people in cricket and they always give us loads of tickets. So please, you know, get in touch.

Contact:

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