

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
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To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 27 March 2019

Subject: **The role and work of UASC Champions**

Classification: Unrestricted

<p>Summary: This report provides members with an overview in respect of the newly established unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) peer champions programme, being supported by the Controlling Migration Fund Engagement Workers in the Central UASC Team. The report provides an overview of the role and expectations including specific projects and events promoting the contribution made by our UASC Champions across Kent.</p> <p>Recommendation: The members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to NOTE the new programme and its commitment to positively support migration and peer support helping new arrivals get established and settle in communities across Kent.</p>

1. Introduction.

1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the role of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) Peer Champions to Corporate Parents and share their programme, objectives and expectations. A number of our UASC Peer Champions will be attending panel to meet members and provide direct feedback and engagement regarding their role.

2. Background

2.1 The Controlling Migration Funding (CMF) is central government funding that was received in January 2018, to promote and support initiatives leading on migration promoting integration and improved outcomes for UASC and Care Leavers.

2.2 The purpose of the CMF, states that *'Migration, when it is controlled, can bring real benefits to Britain, our culture, our economy and to our way of life. The UK needs a fair and controlled immigration policy and that is exactly what this Government will deliver. Britain will remain an open and welcoming nation to those who arrive and stay here through legal routes. We are a compassionate country, as we have shown in our response to the recent Syrian refugee crisis where we have set the standard for the international community. We pride ourselves on welcoming people in need. Yet migration can place short-term pressures on some services and social pressures in areas where communities find it hard to integrate. In addition, illegal immigration exacerbates these problems and can lead to criminal behaviour and exploitation.'*

The CMF has enabled this project to initiate specific and targeted work to support the outcomes for UASC and asylum care leavers, where integration, community cohesion and migration can be problematic for young people without such targeted support. One of the programmes introduced to meet this need is the role of UASC Peer Champions, developing a small cohort of unaccompanied children/young people with training and support to fulfil this role. We have introduced UASC Peer Champions (called Champions) to directly influence and support community integration and cohesions, to act as a peer role model but also be involved with a number of key projects, targeting this expectation and providing valuable support to UASC in Kent.

2.3 The purpose of the Champions is to support children and young people who are either new arrivals or already living in Kent but isolated. Champions will provide peer support to UASC by providing advice and guidance regarding local services and resources available. They will support with learning about culture and appropriate behaviours, whilst managing day to day life in the community. It is important for the Champions to promote integration and community engagement, making use of individual experience and directly supporting new children and young people, helping them accelerate their transition and ability to settle, with the help and guidance from the Young People Engagement Workers. We have 2 UASC Young Person Community Engagement Workers who support the Champions. They undertake bi-monthly training sessions and oversee their commitment and involvement with the programme. The Champions are recognised for their role and provided with rewards, outings and vouchers to acknowledge the fact that they undertake the role in their personal time.

2.4 The UASC Young Person Community Engagement Workers also undertake direct work with new arrivals in the reception centre/emergency accommodation provision, to support their transition into shared accommodation in the community, where the Champions will then become involved. They will also manage referrals for Champions to undertake any specific activities, including projects and other initiatives.

3 UASC Champions

3.1 We have 14 Champions who have undertaken the training sessions and are located across Kent, to cover all areas of the community.

3.2 In addition to the Champions' roles and expectations, they can provide feedback to partners, stakeholder, social care staff, carers and managers in respect of their experiences and engagement activities. The Champions will also establish contact with the Young Adult Council, to help with improving wider services.

3.3 A potential Champion is identified by the allocated social worker and shift leader/care worker at the Reception Centre or in foster care, and will have been observed as standing out by making positive contributions, expressing views, supporting staff and usually having a basic grasp of English.

3.4 The Champions attending panel, have specific areas of interest:

- **Migration across Kent;** they are keen to raise awareness to ensure new arrivals are transferred across Kent to live in different towns and areas, in order to ensure a representation of different culture groups across Kent. Due to the variable cost of accommodation, certain towns can end up being used more frequently than others; for example, Gravesend has seen a lot of accommodation provision over the last few months, but this can then produce an over population of UASC in a specific community.
- **Relationship, sharing accommodation;** Champions are keen to support the opportunity to move into shared accommodation with friendship groups that they have established whilst in the Reception Centre, or even during their journey. They have developed rotas in the shared accommodation to complete chores; cooking, cleaning shopping and learning English. They are also keen to promote the integration of different cultures in the one accommodation, which can expand their own individual learning and development.
- **Standards and responsibilities of accommodation providers;** they are keen to ensure that the accommodation provided meets the agreed standards and that young people can raise issues quickly and easily and these are immediately responded to and the issues are logged. When they move into their new homes, they must sign a tenancy agreement and meet the providers who look after these properties, so they know what is expected of them and the house rules. This helps them to learn respect for each other, as they are using communal facilities; kitchen, bathrooms and living room.
- **Importance of education;** Champions have helped existing providers with classes at the Reception Centre and with setting up additional classes for those young people needing more help. They are often keen to move out of the Reception Centre into the community and start college, although this can sometimes take time due to the limited availability of college places. They recognise the importance of continuing their own learning of the English language so look at ways that they can do this themselves.

4 Existing projects:

- **Reception Centre;** the role includes shadowing care worker staff, supporting new arrivals at the reception centre, sharing experiences and reducing anxiety and frustration amongst some of the new arrivals who are often wanting to immediately live independently. The Champions can promote respect and support young people to listen and adhere to the rules and boundaries in the centre, and because they are speaking from their own experience, this can also help reduce absconding.
- **Managing Expectations;** this is a 6 weekly based modular programme, exploring expectations for young people when they move out of the Reception Centre into the community, to assist them to settle, adhere to laws, safeguarding, engage with professionals and attend college. The programme is delivered for two hours every Saturday afternoon, in the Reception Centre

and is led by a Young person Community Engagement Worker with Champions providing experience.

- **Locality Profiles;** each town has a locality profile that has been developed by the Champions and explains key information about the town, places of interest, library, leisure centre, etc These Profiles are used to help young people understand more about the town that they will move to and help them settle. They will be translated into several different languages.
- **Art Exhibition;** we are inviting UASC and asylum care leavers to participate in this Artwork programme to launch an exhibition in Refugee Week on 17th June 2019, where we will provide the exhibition at a School, before sharing the artwork in galleries and libraries across Kent. The purpose is to raise positive awareness of this client group and demonstrate the high level of skills and expertise of some young people as a maturing artist in Kent. To support young artists, we will hold a series of masterclass workshops to help young people with inspiration and equipment to develop their artwork and prepare for the Exhibition.
- **Football Team;** we are establishing an under 18 football team for UASC and children in care to participate in a local league and integrate in communities whilst help promote the football skills of young people. The team was initially proposed to demonstrate the quality and ability of UASC, who sometimes struggle to play football regularly and get trials at clubs. This will be our own team, being a foundation for future opportunities. We will initially introduce a male team and in future years we can develop girls and mixed teams, within the same club as these opportunities develop. The team is registered with the Football Association and UASC Peer Champions will help the coaching and management of the team. This exciting opportunity will be the first in the UK and bring high profile attention and interest to UASC, raising awareness and supporting integration.
- **Fire Safety;** we have established a partnership with Kent Fire & rescue Service and the Champions have been for a training session to learn more about safety, first aid and fire services. They will share this learning with UASC in their communities, to help raise awareness regarding these matters and ensure accommodation is maintained accordingly. This will also help to reduce tampering with fire alarms in shared accommodation.

5 Conclusions

The Champions will continue to develop their skills, abilities and raise awareness for UASC, enabling improved and accelerated community integration and exploring opportunities to support community cohesion. We must also recognise the personal benefit to the Champions to develop their own skills, interests and making a positive contribution, which we feel is invaluable to individual success and transition to adulthood. Champions will transition to the 18+ Care Leavers Service and continue with this role, looking to develop it further with targeted support and other initiatives. Our Champions have been established for 4 months and have already had a significant

impact with UASC, staff and service delivery. They have welcomed this opportunity to represent their client group and are proud to support Kent County Council.

Recommendations

KCC will prepare a comprehensive evaluation of this programme as part of the CMF and seek to continue this role, seeking the funding to agree the programme and the Young Person's Community Engagement Workers as part of future establishment when the funding ceases in 2020.

The members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **NOTE** the new programme and its commitment to positively support migration and integration in Kent.

6 Background documents

[Controlling Migration Fund prospectus 2018](#)

7 Contact details

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