



The plight of Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and refugees has continually hit the UK headlines throughout the last couple of years; whether it's been through the death of Aylan Kurdi, the clearance of the camps in Calais, or the suicide of a young Eritrean seeking sanctuary in London. Children arriving in the UK have not only often witnessed violence, torture and separation in their own countries, but have undergone perilous journeys to get here, often being further separated from family and friends along the way. Most arrive in the UK with little to nothing, trying to navigate complex processes and administration, as well as just being teenagers! Reading the headlines can make you feel powerless about what you can do to help, but there are many things that can be done to support those arriving and trying to re build their lives in the UK.

If someone arrives in the UK and they are under 18years old, they will receive support from social services as a looked after child. The Local Authority will provide them with accommodation and subsistence support, and then this where we come in!

Pathways to Independence provides specialist support, accommodation, information and training services for 60 young people, seeking asylum and refugees, aged 16 to 25, in Brighton, Redhill and Croydon. We are a small, person-centred organisation that cares about the young people we work with. We have a 15 year service history working with Local Authorities providing a range of specialist accommodation from single to shared units, across a wide range of needs, from low to medium to enhanced support. We also provide outreach only options for young people living in the community. The young people we work with have complex and safeguarding needs, including further risk of trafficking, grooming, extremism, integration and experience ongoing trauma . This informs and underpins our approaches to supporting our young people. Pathways to Independence provides homelessness prevention and long-term independence by focusing on young people's progression to leading independent lives. We currently have a 90% rate in maintaining accommodation and 90% of our young people are in education with 73% engaged in a programme of Independent Living Skills.

We have a proven track record in this field having supported over 500 young people since 2004 within our projects.

Francine's Story

Francine left Burundi as a child fleeing war conflict to the Republic of Congo, but met further conflict there and was forced to flee again, to the UK. Her journey was tough and after arriving in the UK she was taken into a foster family. At 16, after leaving foster care Francine was alone and in need of emotional support, direction and guidance. PTIUK (Pathways) started working with Francine and her pathway began. Francine explains, "Pathways were the first people to really understand and recognise the real me and my ambitions and hopes. They saw me for who I really was. They gave me the basic support of accommodation, access to education, healthcare and legal advice but what they really provided was true emotional support. The best way I can describe Pathways is as a family, a mother – caring and kind, a father – offering direction and guidance, a brother and sister who I can chat to and share my fears and hopes with."

Pathways worked with Francine to identify the elements of support she needed as an individual. Using Pathway's own Independent Living Skills Programme Francine was able to create clear vision as to where she wanted to get to and how she would get there. Francine comments, "My real journey started with Pathways. This is when I felt I could really be the person I wanted to become. Pathways helped me see the bright light, see the pathway clearly. I felt like I was going from zero to something, from dark to light and from emptiness to fulfilment."

Seeing the potential within Francine, Pathways worked hard to understand the her motivations, hopes and fears. Through this person centred approach we can help young people to realise their potential and fully integrate into their UK community. Pathways are fully committed to multi-agency working and believe this to be a critical component in the services they deliver.

Working with guidance and support, and with her own significant drive and resources, Francine went on to successfully complete her 'AS' and 'A' Levels and completed a degree in humanities at Brighton University. Throughout this time Francine has worked to support herself and also volunteered to provide support back into her community. "Pathways are still there for me even though I finished my pathway with them some time ago. They have helped me find my house, find the right courses for university and so much more. From the bottom of my heart, thank you". If you want to hear more of Francine's story you can go to our website where she talks of her background and journey to the UK; "In An Exiled World".

For our young people to succeed, we rely upon our partners within the community to help support those we work with. Although the young people we work with do receive some financial support from social services, we find that the levels of support vary from Local Authority to Local Authority with some UASC receiving less than others and most receiving only basic amounts and starter packs. Most of our young people have to budget on £47 per week, which is less than current benefit rates for under 25 year olds. We welcome gifts in kind to help improve the lives of those we work with to support them individually, build relations with others and community with each other.

We would welcome;

- Bed Covers / Fleece Blankets

- Night Lights (some people are afraid of the dark)
- House Plants
- Suitable Pictures for walls
- Mirrors
- Keyrings
- Shoe Racks
- Prayer Mats
- Wall Chalk Boards to put in communal areas
- Adult colouring books and Pens
- Games (board games, old PS3's etc)
- DVD Players (must be pact tested/new)
- Rice Cookers (have to be pact tested/new)
- Hats, Scarf, Gloves
- Socks
- Storage Bags
- Calendars / Diaries
- Garden Furniture
- Luxury Personal Care Items

We also welcome financial donations for extra activities that would enable people to learn more about the area they live in or activities that would promote their physical and emotional well being. For example;

- £12 would pay for Gym membership for one month
- £8.75 for a cinema ticket (£35 - £52.50 for a house to go together - £525 for everyone to go at Christmas)
- £6.49 for a game of bowling (£25.96 - £38.94 for one house to have one game)
- £5.00 for football team membership per person
- £5.00 Bus Day Saver
- Travel to London for those who live in Brighton to visit museums etc
- Travel to Brighton from Redhill and Croydon to visit the sea and countryside
- £11 student ticket for Ice Skating at the Pavillion ant Christmas
- £15 gift voucher for items of their own choice

Property

We would welcome landlords who have property in the Brighton and Croydon areas who would rent property to our young people when they are ready to move into independent living. Unfortunately many of those we work with face extreme prejudice when they try to find somewhere to live.

Volunteer

We regularly recruit volunteers who are able to support with accompaniment, ESOL support, life skills and administration. We are particularly interested in those who are in Redhill, Croydon and Brighton.

If you would like any further information about anything relating to this article please contact maryjane@ptiuk.org.uk Thank You!

