



COMMITMENT TO SANCTUARY SEEKERS

#ThinkBIG

Waltham Forest College 

Waltham Forest College: Commitment to Sanctuary Seekers

Waltham Forest College is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive, and accessible environment for all students, including asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. Recognising the unique challenges these groups face, the college has established a range of support services that address both immediate and long-term needs, from financial assistance to welfare and academic support. This report provides an overview of the support structures in place for asylum-seeking and unaccompanied students, focusing on financial aid, welfare support, academic assistance, and community integration.

1. Financial Assistance for Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Minors

One of the most significant barriers for asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors is financial insecurity. Waltham Forest College has implemented various initiatives to alleviate these challenges and make education more accessible.

- **Bursaries and Hardship Funds:**
 - The college offers bursaries specifically targeted at low-income and vulnerable students, including asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. These bursaries help cover essential educational expenses, such as textbooks, stationery, and other learning materials.
 - The *College Hardship Fund* provides emergency financial support for students who face unexpected expenses, ensuring they have access to necessities like food, housing, and other essentials.
- **16-19 Bursary Fund:**
 - For students between the ages of 16 and 19, the college participates in the government-funded 16-19 Bursary Scheme. Eligible students receive financial support to cover transport, meals, and other essential costs associated with attending college.
 - Asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors often qualify for discretionary bursaries, provided they meet residency criteria or have exceptional circumstances that require additional financial support.
- **Travel Assistance:**
 - The cost of transportation can be a significant obstacle for asylum-seeking students who live far from the college. Waltham Forest College provides travel bursaries for eligible students, covering part or all of their transportation expenses, which helps reduce the financial burden and encourages consistent attendance.

2. Welfare and Emotional Support Services

Welfare and emotional support are vital for asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors, many of whom have experienced trauma, family separation, and uncertainty. Waltham Forest College offers comprehensive welfare services to ensure these students feel safe, supported, and empowered to succeed.

- **Designated Safeguarding and Welfare Officers:** BeSafe Team
 - The college has trained safeguarding officers specifically tasked with supporting vulnerable students, including asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. These officers provide guidance on personal and emotional challenges and assist with issues related to legal status, healthcare, and housing.

- Safeguarding officers collaborate with external organizations and social services to ensure students receive holistic support, including mental health care, medical treatment, and legal advice as needed.
- Specifically one member of the team has been designated as College of Sanctuary Lead.
- **Mental Health and Counselling Services:**
 - Recognizing the mental health challenges that asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors often face, the college offers free access to mental health services and counselling. These services are delivered by licensed professionals who have experience working with trauma, anxiety, and other challenges commonly faced by displaced individuals.
 - Counselling sessions provide a safe space for students to process their experiences, improve coping skills, and build emotional resilience. Regular mental health workshops on topics like stress management and mindfulness are also available.
- **Peer Support and Mentoring Programs:**
 - Peer support programs connect asylum-seeking students with local students who can provide guidance, friendship, and practical advice about life at Waltham Forest College. This social support network helps asylum seekers build connections and reduces feelings of isolation. Two student support groups: one for 16-19 and one for Adults are run at the college.
 - The college's mentoring program pairs unaccompanied minors with trained staff or older students who can serve as role models, offering emotional support and encouraging positive educational and social engagement.

3. Academic Support and Integration

Academic success is a key goal for asylum-seeking students, but many face challenges with language, previous education disruptions, and adapting to a new curriculum. Waltham Forest College provides targeted academic support to help these students thrive.

- **English as a Second Language (ESOL) Support:**
 - To address language barriers, Waltham Forest College offers ESOL courses specifically designed for non-native speakers. These courses cover English language skills essential for academic success and integration into the broader community.
 - Conversations clubs are also run to further support students and develop skills and confidence.
- **Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs):**
 - The college creates Individualized Learning Plans that take into account each student's previous schooling, learning preferences, and academic goals. For students with disrupted educational backgrounds these plans help students understand specific areas to work on, strategies to use and support available.
 - Regular assessments and progress meetings ensure that the students are receiving appropriate support and adapting well to the curriculum. This tailored approach helps all students including unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers to achieve academic success and build confidence.
- **Access to Study Resources:**
 - Waltham Forest College provides access to resources such as textbooks, digital tools, and online learning platforms. For students without personal devices, the college has a device loan scheme that includes laptops, enabling them to access educational content both on-campus and remotely.

4. Community Integration and Cultural Awareness

Supporting asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors in adjusting to a new cultural and educational environment is crucial for their overall well-being. Waltham Forest College actively promotes community integration through cultural awareness and social inclusion initiatives.

- **Extracurricular and Social Activities:**
 - The college organizes extracurricular activities, clubs, and sports teams that encourage students to interact, build friendships, and develop a sense of belonging. These activities are especially beneficial for unaccompanied minors who lack a family support network.
 - Community service programs enable students to engage with the local community, which fosters a sense of purpose, belonging, and empowerment. Asylum seekers can participate in volunteering opportunities, which helps them build skills and connections within the community.
 - Workshops and events celebrating diverse cultures, such as World Culture Day, provide opportunities for asylum-seeking students to share aspects of their own cultures, enhancing mutual understanding among students.

5. Partnerships with Local Organizations and Charities

To provide comprehensive support, Waltham Forest College collaborates with various local organizations and charities that specialize in supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

- **Collaboration with Refugee and Asylum Support Charities:**
 - Partnerships with organizations like the Refugee Council, Migrant Help, and local charities provide students with additional resources and expertise, from legal aid to psychological counselling.
 - These organizations often provide legal and immigration advice, helping students navigate complex processes and access services outside the college.
- **Workshops and Information Sessions:**
 - The college frequently invites representatives from local charities and organizations to conduct informational workshops on topics such as asylum rights, healthcare access, and employment opportunities.
 - These sessions are especially valuable for students who may have limited knowledge of their rights and resources available to them in the UK.

Conclusion

Waltham Forest College demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors through a variety of targeted services that address their financial, emotional, academic, and social needs. By offering comprehensive financial assistance, welfare support, academic guidance, and fostering community integration, the college helps these students overcome barriers, build resilience, and pursue their educational goals in a nurturing environment. The college's partnerships with external organizations further enhance its support network, ensuring that these vulnerable students have access to the full range of resources they need to succeed.

Recommendations for Continued Improvement:

- **Expand Financial Support:** Increasing the allocation for hardship funds and bursaries, where available, to meet the growing needs of asylum-seeking students.
- **Continue to enhance Mental Health Services:** Continue to develop more on-campus mental health resources tailored specifically to address the trauma and stress experienced by asylum seekers.
- **Broaden Community Engagement:** Increasing opportunities for asylum-seeking students to participate in community service and volunteering, enhancing their sense of belonging and social integration.

Waltham Forest College's commitment to providing a supportive and inclusive environment not only benefits the students but also strengthens the college community as a whole, fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and resilience