

October 2023

Homes for Ukraine Newsletter for Schools



Dear Colleague,

This newsletter is the first step in our journey to encourage cross-working between the Homes for Ukraine team at Kent County Council and schools. In the upcoming months, we will provide you with invaluable information, resources, and guidance on identifying and addressing safeguarding issues that may affect Ukrainian children in our community. Our combined efforts will not only raise awareness of the unique challenges faced by Ukrainian children but also lead to practical solutions that enhance their educational experiences and overall well-being. By working together, we can offer a strong support system to these young individuals.

The ongoing global events have brought to our attention the need for heightened vigilance and support for Ukrainian children who have experienced displacement, trauma, or other adversities. As educational institutions play a pivotal role in the lives of these children, we believe that together, we can create a network of care, understanding, and resources that will ensure their safety, well-being, and academic success.

If you have any student safeguarding concerns and a referral is being made, we ask that you alert us at the earliest opportunity, we have interpreters available on our team to assist you should you need additional support with translating.

We are contactable from 9.00am – 5.00pm via our Homes for Ukraine team central telephone number on **03000 419820**, alternatively you can email us at ukrainesafeguarding@kent.gov.uk.

About the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Between March and May 2022, the UK Government introduced 3 new temporary visa routes to allow persons affected by the war in Ukraine to come to the UK.

4 March 2022 - Ukraine Family Scheme - allows applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK.

18 March 2022 - The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine)- allows Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor (host) under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Parents should travel and stay with their children.

3 May 2022 - Ukraine Extension Scheme allows Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to apply for permission to stay in the UK if they held permission to be in the UK on or between 18 March 2022 and 16 May 2023 eg: Ukrainians here on seasonal worker VISA's.

IMPORTANT: The Family Scheme and Extension Scheme are not overseen by local authorities as the Homes for Ukraine scheme is – we support those that have initially arrived to stay with a host on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This means that there are many other Ukrainian families in Kent that are not directly supported by the local authority, and we would not necessarily know anything about. Although this newsletter provides information in relation to our work on the Homes for Ukraine

scheme, inevitably, much will also be relevant to children and families that have arrived on other schemes too.

Ukrainian Culture Relevant to Students and Schooling in Ukraine

The Schooling System

All children aged 6 to 15 years old attend a nine-year compulsory schooling period. Schooling begins at the age of 6, unless a child's birthday is after 1st of September. Children under 6 attend nursery school where it is the norm for them to take a nap during their lunch period which would be from approximately 1.00pm – 3.00pm.

Quite often primary school children in Ukraine would walk to and from school unattended without parents or adults.

This Academic School Year

This academic year in Ukraine will run from September 1, 2023, to June 28, 2024. The last month is used for compensatory classes to fill educational gaps, certification/exams, and other activities according to the Ukrainian educational program. In general, local authorities can determine the date of completion of training in their own regions.

The holiday and half term schedule for the current school year in Ukraine looks like this:

Autumn half term – 23 October - 29 October 2023 Xmas half term - 25 December - 8 January 2024
Spring half term – 25 March - 31 March 2024 Summer holiday – 27 May -31 August 2024

Learning Styles

With the ongoing situation in Ukraine there are three learning formats for schoolchildren, face-to-face learning, distance based learning and blended learning which local authorities choose based on the security situation in the region. Remote learning is provided for institutions on the territory of hostilities or occupied territories.

Today, 75% of Ukrainian schools are equipped with shelters. A condition of face-to-face education is that the shelter must accommodate all participants in the educational process. If the shelter is not adequate, schools can introduce a variable of the learning styles above.

Absence and Attendance

School attendance in Ukraine is more relaxed, there are no sanctions for taking children out of school for holidays or breaks and not all schools in Ukraine have an absence reporting procedure or policy.

We understand that there have been a number of issues engaging some parents with regards to education (particularly around sporadic school attendance, frequent trips away during school term time, refusal to attend a particular school based on Ofsted ratings or reputation, waiting lists for preferred schools etc.) and we continue to try and support with this by ensuring key messages are shared around parental responsibility and the law in relation to education. Please see the last section of this newsletter for the communications shared with parents. The Department for Education have been clear that we should not be treating Ukrainian children any differently to other children in respect of education and therefore the same rules apply in terms of making CME referrals for example.

Uniform

Children do not wear school uniform in Ukraine, school uniforms are only required in private schools and it quite common for children to wear gold earrings and crucifix necklaces.

SEN

In Ukraine, there are reports that there is often stigma attached to a child who has SEN and so parents do not always feel that they want to pursue any investigation or diagnosis for their child due to the worry of how the child will be treated by others – including school staff and other children.

Child Independence

Children in Ukraine are deemed to be more independent, and it is not unusual to see children as young as 7 years old waking up and getting themselves ready for school in the morning and then walking to and from school alone. Children are frequently left home alone from a similar age for lengthy periods of time – overnight and sometimes for multiple days. Please see the communications with parents' section for our communications that have been sent on this matter. Unfortunately, we are seeing an increasing number of referrals into children's services due to inadequate parental supervision.

Children left unaccompanied – parents returning to Ukraine

The Homes for Ukraine service and Childrens Services are being made aware of an increasing number of cases where parents are leaving their child/ren in the care of a host, family member or other adult and they are returning to Ukraine or travelling elsewhere, sometimes with no anticipated return date at all. We understand that there is a cultural element to this in that children are very often left in the care of friends/family for extended periods of time, without any intervention from services and this is acceptable in Ukraine.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme do have an Official Unaccompanied Minor route, whereby all necessary safeguarding checks are complete, and a host and child Private Fostering Arrangement is agreed prior to the child travelling to the UK. Unfortunately, parents and children are arriving on the

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main Homes for Ukraine scheme (where the intention and purpose is for families to be sponsored together and parents retain legal parental responsibility), but we have a number of cases where the parent is subsequently leaving.

In the vast majority of cases, we are not aware of this until the parent has already left the country, which has huge implications for the safeguarding of the child/ren. Again, this has resulted in an increase of referrals into Childrens Services. If you suspect that a parent has left a child, please do alert us and we will follow this up, as the Homes for Ukraine scheme VISA's were intended for parents to travel with and stay with their child/ren.

Upon investigation, a large proportion of parents that have left their child/ren have done so as they wish to return to Ukraine (to be with other family/friends or to return to work), and for their child to remain in the UK for their education. This is an issue which we are in direct contact with the Home Office, DLUCH and the Department of Education about. Please see the final section of this newsletter for the communications we have made to parents and hosts including the relevant Home Office guidance.

[Training Opportunities/School Support](#)

Migrant Help have shared some information with us on their Schools Programme which may be of interest: [Schools Programme | Migrant Help \(migranthehelpuk.org\)](#)

The Schools Programme will deliver assembly presentations and workshops that challenge the mindset of young people in the UK by promoting positive discussion around displaced people. They can be contacted via email - schools@migranthehelpuk.org

From Trauma Informed to Healing Centred – a free online conference on Friday 17 November 9.30am-1.00pm

You are invited to join us at our second annual multi-agency conference to hear about the work that has taken place to make Kent and Medway trauma informed and the importance of becoming 'healing centred'. This conference aims to enhance your understanding of trauma and why trauma informed and healing centred practice is so important for both the children's and adult's multi-agency workforce.

You will hear about:

- Trauma informed developments across Kent and Medway
- Brighter Futures – an innovative new local initiative that provide trauma informed support to primary school children, particularly those living with domestic abuse

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- New self-harm and alumina training
- The Youth Endowment Fund's trauma informed pilot in secondary schools in Kent
- The meaning of 'healing centred approach'
- How Districts are working to become trauma informed
- The work of our Trauma Informed Ambassadors

And we are delighted that our keynote speaker will be [Sophie Brigden](#), an accredited Trauma Informed Coach, who will share details of a new and unique multi-agency trauma informed supervision model which has been developed specifically for Kent and Medway.

Places can be booked [here](#).

Trauma Informed Resources

[Trauma informed resources - Kent County Council](#)

If you are supporting people with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), on this page you'll find information, training opportunities (including how to Train as an ACE Ambassador), and updates from our own [SPACE Matters campaign](#).

[Childrens Wellbeing and Mental Health Support](#)

Isolation Rooms

We have received reports of children being fearful and stressed by the phrase 'isolation rooms.' Many children have negative and traumatic memories associated with this term due to sheltering in shelters from attacks in Ukraine. We believe that by being aware of this and taking students on tours of isolation blocks and rooms and explaining when, why and how they are used, will reduce the level of stress.

Temporary Return to Ukraine

Parents are often taking their children back to Ukraine in the holiday breaks to visit other family members/friends etc. Some are also returning to Ukraine so that they can take exams that the child is studying for online virtually.

We have received an increase in reports of children displaying some difficult behaviours and reports of impacts on emotional wellbeing after return from a temporary trip back to Ukraine. We have

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communicated this to parents as we are not sure that parents understand or are seeing the impact on children's wellbeing following these temporary trips.

Mental Health/Emotional Wellbeing Support

[ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА ДОПОМОГА ВІД НПА | Офіційний сайт НПА \(npa-ua.org\)](#)

Mental support provided by **National Psychological Association in Ukraine** (Ukraine based) Free support line: +448081642432. On the line they are providing free 40 minutes psychology support

[Help for Ukrainian Refugees in the UK | British Red Cross](#)

Emotional support: You can call the British Red Cross support line, which provides help in more than 200 languages. 0808 196 3651 open daily 10am - 6pm and you can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

[Barnardo's](#)

Having come to the United Kingdom because of the conflict in Ukraine, you may be experiencing difficult feelings such as anger, guilt, sadness, trauma, grief, and loneliness. By speaking with a therapist, you will be able to explore your feelings and experiences in a safe space, without fear of judgement. It is a chance to discuss any difficulty or distress you may be experiencing or have experienced in the past. Counselling can help you to accept the things that you cannot change and help you to bring about the changes that are possible.

Barnardo's are offering:

- 8 sessions lasting 45 minutes by telephone or video with a qualified, approved Therapist.
- There is no cost to you for the therapy.
- Sessions can be arranged to fit around your schedule.
- Additional sessions will be considered if needed.
- Free access to an interpreter if needed.

[UA Mental Health](#)

This charity organisation provides 12 free consultations from volunteer psychologists. These consultations are intended to help those who suffer from depression, despair, apathy, trauma and or anxiety, giving these people somewhere to turn to.

The website is in Ukrainian, the parent will need to fill out the form online, and the volunteers will select a specialist to best suits the request and need.

[Childline](#)

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Childline is a safe space for anyone under 19 who is seeking help and support. They have the option to speak to a counsellor [over the phone](#), by [online chat](#), or by [email](#).

When you call them on **0800 1111**, you will get through to a counsellor, they are there to listen and support you with anything you would like to talk about. Or you can have a [1-2-1 counsellor chat](#) online.

Childline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So, you can talk to them at any time. But they might not be able to talk for as long when it is after midnight.

Resources in Ukrainian

- www.childbereavementuk.org/resources-in-ukrainian
- [Mental Health Support \(opora.uk\)](http://opora.uk) / [Опора - головна сторінка](#)
- [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Resources for the Ukraine Crisis - Child Mind Institute](#)

KCC Communication to Parents

Below is a range of guidance specific to parenting, safeguarding and UK legalities regarding children that we have sent to our guests and hosts whilst Ukrainian families are residing in the UK over the past year.

We aim to keep guests fully up to speed and aware, if there is anything you can think of that we have not covered, and that you believe would be beneficial in communicating with our guests relating to schooling, parenting or the like, please do contact us. We are more than happy to include this in our monthly newsletters to hosts and guests.

Leaving Children in the UK without their parent

Please contact us to discuss the care of your child/ren before making any arrangements to leave your child/ren in the UK without their parent or legal guardian. There are both legal and safeguarding implications for any arrangements and you must inform us before leaving your child/ren.

Relevant guidance explaining the responsibilities of parents and councils can be found here:

Guidance is very clear to parents: [Homes for Ukraine: Guidance for sponsors \(children and minors applying without parents or legal guardians\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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“When you are in the UK, you should not leave your child in the care of a sponsor (or an accompanying adult relative) for 28 days or more. You also should not leave your child in the care of a sponsor (or an accompanying relative) for shorter periods on a regular basis”.

[Homes for Ukraine: Guidance for councils \(children and minors applying without parents or legal guardians\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils)

“The wider Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme was not designed for unaccompanied children.

Separate guidance for sponsors and parents makes clear that we strongly advise that where parents/legal guardians have applied through the main scheme they should travel and stay with their children in the UK. If exceptional circumstances mean that the parent(s)/legal guardian are unable to travel with their child or must leave their child in the care of a sponsor, guidance is clear that they should agree this with the sponsor and inform the council in advance so they can complete additional sponsor suitability checks”.

Child Student VISA's

Following our previous advice and information about guests leaving children unaccompanied, it has come to our attention that many parents would like their children to remain in the country, without their parent or legal guardian, for their education. If this is something that guests are considering, we would urge guests to enquire about a Child Student VISA.

The Homes for Ukraine team are unable to directly help with Student VISA's, but we have provided some information below for guests to make their own enquiries. You can apply for a Child Student visa if you are between 4 and 17 years old and you want to study at an independent school in the UK (this is sometimes called a boarding School, or a private school and places will need to be found and funded by the guests). They **cannot** study further at an academy or a local authority-funded school or a higher education institution. All the information regarding this can be found [here](#).

Parental Supervision

As a parent it is your duty to know where your children are, what they are doing and who they are with, this is an important part of parental care, love, and protection.

You need to consider what the risks are to your child in different situations, and make sure your child is supervised more closely where there are risks. You need to consider the risks in the local neighbourhood, the young person's age and gender, their personality, vulnerability and understanding of risks, when you are deciding how to monitor and supervise your child.

Most parents monitor their child's physical whereabouts, but also check their child's emotional well-being and adjustment. This emotional monitoring is needed during key life events or changes.

- The NSPCC state that infants and young children aged 0-3 years old should never be left alone – even for 15 minutes. This applies not just to leaving them home alone but also in your car while you run into the shops. For more detail, please see our advice on [Baby parenting tips | NSPCC](#).
- The NSPCC state that “while every child is different, we would not recommend leaving a child under 12 years old home alone, particularly for longer periods of time. Children in primary school aged 6-12 are usually too young to walk home from school alone, babysit or cook for themselves without adult supervision”. [Leaving Your Child Home Alone - Advice | NSPCC](#)
- All children under 16 should not be left alone overnight.

If your children are young you need to have a parent or responsible adult that you know well and trust to watch over the child.

It is not recommended to leave a child under 12 on their own. If you leave another child to look after a younger child, you need to be sure the child is mature enough to be responsible. If anything happens to the younger child, the parent will be held responsible by authorities. You can find more information on leaving a child alone on the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children’s website: [Leaving Your Child Home Alone - Advice | NSPCC](#)

Technology is useful, but also a potential threat. You and your child may both have phones to contact each other when necessary. However, you also need to monitor your child’s use of the Internet as this is an area of particular risk and child exploitation.

Remember: Parents can be prosecuted if they leave a child unsupervised ‘in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health.’ [The law on leaving your child on their own - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Children and Education

In England, the statutory school age is from age 5 to 16 years and individuals aged 16 to 18 years must be in either full-time education or work. As a parent you are responsible for ensuring that your children of compulsory school age receive a full-time education.

Your child’s education is a priority and local authorities have powers to enforce school attendance, including the power to prosecute parents who fail to ensure their child’s regular attendance at school which could mean the parent receiving a fine.

Although parents may prefer their child/ren to attend a particular school, this is not always immediately possible as schools very often have waiting lists. Your child must attend another suitable school, even if they are on a waiting list for a space at your preferred school. Being on a waiting list does not exclude the requirement for a child to attend another school that does have current spaces available.

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Some children may be eligible for free school transport if attending their nearest suitable school. There are very strict criteria for this – please refer to the guidance here: [Free school transport - Kent County Council](#).

In most circumstances, families are expected to fund their own children's school transport. Please use the following link to check if your child may be eligible for fee reductions on the Travel Saver Card (for school years 7 to 11) [Cost of KCC Travel Saver - Kent County Council](#). For over 16's, please check the following link for more information about travel cards: [KCC 16+ Travel Saver - Kent County Council](#).

Education is considered one of the most important aspects of a child's development and parents are expected to take a prominent and supportive role in their children's education. Unless direct permission has been given by the school, **parents must not take their children out of school during term time**. This includes for purposes of taking your children on holiday or for other trips abroad, such as a temporary return to Ukraine. If there are significant concerns for your child, a referral may be required to Childrens Services in Kent.

This page will provide more information on School attendance and absence: [School attendance and absence: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

While in UK education, parents are also expected to meet with teachers regularly for a progress report, and to help their children with their homework. It is a parent's duty to ensure their children arrive at school appropriately clothed, fed, and ready to learn.

If at any time you feel unable to get your children to and from school, it is your responsibility to inform the school. You must call the school and explain your situation and the reason your child cannot be at school.