

Appendix 1 - Speech by Brent LAC (UASC) at Celebration Event 2017

Hello, guys. My name's H. I come from Afghanistan and I'm a student at Newman Catholic College. I'm very honoured to be speaking to you this afternoon as a refugee and young person in care of Brent Council.

Life is not easy for anybody. None of us here has had what could be described as an easy life. That's why we're here. Our lives have been disrupted in various ways, and now some of the good people of Brent have invited us into their homes to try to help us live as normal a life as possible.

Let me tell you a little bit about me. When I was younger, I lived in a small village in Afghanistan. You probably know something about what can happen in Afghanistan. I'm sure you've heard of ISIS. I'm sure you've heard of the Taliban. Well, in my village both ISIS and the Taliban were making our lives a misery. And I became a target. Life got dangerous so my family decided that I needed to be sent away to a place of safety. So here I am, and here are you, safely looked after by the good people of Brent.

It didn't always feel safe, though. When I first arrived here, I didn't know anything about the UK and I didn't know what to expect. I was taken by the police to stay with a foster carer. Now, you may have experienced something similar as you were probably taken in by a foster carer with a different background from your own. What I got was a big culture shock, particularly in relation to food. My foster carer was from Ghana in West Africa, which is as far away from Afghanistan as London is. Her cooking was very different from what I ate back home, so you can imagine how difficult I found it just to get used to the food. Besides, I couldn't communicate what I wanted to because I couldn't speak English. I felt a long way from home.

Soon, I went to Queen's Park Community School and started to learn English. I made good progress, so I soon moved on to Newman Catholic College to broaden my studies. I had always been keen to learn and, although I often used to get into trouble, I was supported all the way, and I am now both pleased and proud to be in the 6th form studying GCSEs and looking forward to a successful life. I don't know quite what that success looks like, although I'd like to be involved in international relations and politics.

What I do know is this. My success depends on my hard work and my willingness to communicate what I feel the need to, and to listen to what others have to tell me. This is true for you too. It is especially important in relation to our foster parents, as they want the best for us even if it doesn't always seem like that. They will never replace your parents, but then it wasn't always easy with your parents, was it? They didn't always give you everything you wanted, did they? Of course not. As you may guess, mine didn't either. So don't expect from your foster parents more than your parents gave you. Just remember, they're doing their best, and if something is not working for you, let them know.

One last thing. The key to your success, and mine, is education. Life is all about learning. I have had a huge amount of support along the way, not just from my foster carer but from my teachers and social worker too. I have learnt from, and been supported by others, too, along the way, all organised by my school. From the Afghan Peace Exchange who came into school to teach us Afghan students about the meaning of respect and taking the opportunities we're given. From my Paiwand mentor, Maty, who gave me a head start with my Maths. From Lord Alfred Dubs, a Second World War refugee from Nazi Germany, who encouraged and inspired us to support his stand on bringing young refugees to the UK from Calais. Through to Gulwali Passarlay who had a similar life journey to mine, and taught us never to lose hope and to fight for what we want.

Without all of these influences, my life would be much harder than it is today, and I almost certainly wouldn't be studying for GCSEs and aiming for the career that I know I'm capable of.

But I also know that hard work and self-belief are important qualities. In the end things may happen in your life but it is the choices you make that make the difference. You are the one in control, so do what you need to in order to create a happy and successful life.

Thank you.