Briefing Note: Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children: The Role of Social Workers in England

**Introduction:**

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England face unique challenges and vulnerabilities as they navigate the asylum process and adjust to a new country. Social workers play a crucial role in supporting these separated young people and ensuring their well-being. In this briefing note, we will explore effective interventions and strategies that social workers can implement to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, including principles of robust age assessments and available resources for social workers to enhance their practice.

**Challenges Faced by Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children:**

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children often experience trauma, isolation, language barriers, and uncertainty about their future. Recent data and research highlight the mental health concerns, educational barriers, and social integration challenges faced by these vulnerable children. It is essential for social workers to provide comprehensive support and advocacy to address their complex needs.

**Effective Interventions to Support Separated Young People:**

1. **Trauma-Informed Care:** Social workers should adopt a trauma-informed approach when working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This involves understanding the impact of trauma on the child's development, behaviour, and well-being, and providing appropriate support and interventions to promote healing and resilience.

2. **Culturally Sensitive Support:** Social workers should be culturally competent and sensitive to the unique cultural backgrounds and experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. By respecting their cultural identities and traditions, social workers can build trust and establish meaningful relationships with these young people.

3. **Advocacy and Legal Support:** Social workers play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and best interests of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This includes providing legal information, guidance on the asylum process, and ensuring that children have access to legal representation and support throughout their immigration proceedings.

**Robust Age Assessment Principles and Merton Compliance:**

A robust age assessment is essential to determine the age of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children accurately and ensure that they receive appropriate support and protection. Social workers must follow the principles of Merton compliance, which include transparency, fairness, and respect for the child's dignity and rights. The assessment should be conducted by trained professionals using a multidisciplinary approach and consider the child's physical, psychological, and social development.

**Resources for Social Workers:**

1. The Refugee Council: The Refugee Council offers resources, training, and support for social workers working with asylum-seeking children and families.

2. British Association of Social Workers (BASW): BASW provides guidance, tools, and professional development opportunities for social workers involved in refugee and asylum-seeking support services.

3. Local Authority Safeguarding Teams: Social workers can collaborate with local authority safeguarding teams to access additional support, expertise, and resources for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Social workers in England play a critical role in supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and ensuring their well-being and protection. By implementing effective interventions, conducting robust age assessments, and accessing relevant resources and information, social workers can enhance their practice and provide comprehensive support to these vulnerable young people. It is essential to prioritize the rights, safety, and best interests of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and work towards creating a supportive and inclusive environment where they can thrive and rebuild their lives.