

LASSN Annual Review 2013-14



Leeds Asylum Seekers'
Support Network

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network was set up in 1999 to respond to the pressing unmet needs of refugees & asylum seekers living in Leeds. Most of the people we work with have experienced acute isolation, mental health issues, language difficulties & immense uncertainty over their asylum claim.

Our Vision

Asylum seekers & refugees will be safe, respected, supported & empowered to rebuild their lives free of persecution.

Our Mission

LASSN will meet the needs of refugees & asylum seekers in Leeds & will raise awareness of issues facing refugees & asylum seekers.

Our Objectives

LASSN wants asylum seekers & refugees to be

- **Supported** & relieved from hardship & distress by local people
- **Empowered** to rebuild their lives, to fulfil their potential & to take control of their lives
- **Integrated** settled & safe. LASSN wants Leeds to be a place of welcome & understanding & for the general public, organisations, politicians & policy makers to understand the needs of asylum seekers

How we work

LASSN works in ways which

- are **Respectful** of the contribution asylum seekers & refugees make to both LASSN & the UK
- are **Informed** & based on what asylum seekers & refugees say they want & value
- are **Empowering** of both refugees & asylum seekers, & local people to help & support them
- are based on **Partnership** - we seek good relationships with other organisations so that asylum seekers & refugees can access the kind of help & support they want & need
- sees **Volunteers** as vital to effective work with asylum seekers & refugees & recognises how much they benefit from their interaction with refugees & asylum seekers

Please note, all stories and case studies used in this document have been anonymised.

We supported:

483 asylum seekers & refugees supported by LASSN

4,282 nights of accommodation provided to 81 people

£2,230 Hardship payments made to 49 households

231 local people volunteered, to make all this happen

We empowered:

1193 hours of English Lessons in people's own homes

76 referrals were made by befrienders to other agencies

10 exiled journalists & 12 student journalists worked together to produce www.oneplanetleeds.org.uk

We integrated

86 people felt a sense of belonging & being cared for

We trained more than 70 people to learn new skills

660 different people visited our website each month

We networked with more than 121 organisations to produce our 2013 Directory of Services

Befriending reduces isolation, improves well-being, & encourages integration & greater self-reliance among asylum seekers & refugees. We recruit, train & match volunteer befrienders with clients on a one to one basis.

In 2013/14 63 volunteers supported 86 different people. Volunteers provide support for about 9 months, although some matches can continue for several years.

Most referrals to befriending come from mainstream health providers who recognise the significant impact that loneliness can have on both physical & mental health difficulties.

Our volunteers have also assisted in the well-being of children, helped with asylum applications, & made 76 referrals to other services such as language support, children & young people services, advice & legal support as well as health services.

Some excerpts from one of our befriender's notes...

"Noah's family all arrived on Xmas Eve by coach. I took them put up beds, bedclothes & towels & anything else I thought they might need. His wife & four children all speak French. Another first: I found myself playing football with the boys"

"The family are coping with the cramped conditions & looking forward to being re-housed, but we know it will take time. So far I have not been able to get any of the children into school - but have visited most schools in the area with Noah. I am very pleased that Anna can be put on the list for "English at Home" (& so is she)."

"I went with Noah to view a house that has been offered to him by a housing association. It ticks almost all the boxes & the rent is right as well! It may well involve change of school for the children but I am sure they will cope; the family couldn't struggle on much longer with six in a one-bedroom flat."

"I can now confirm that Noah has a new address. He moved in yesterday with a little help from me, & an enormous amount of help from Abraham, my other befriendeer; this is what "supporting each other" is all about. He is so relieved. All we have to do now is re-consider the schooling for the children...!"

Aissatou's story

In the 18 months that we have known Aissatou, the improvement in English language skills, confidence & the ability to run her own life have been immense.

Through carefully planned home lessons & doggedly using English at every opportunity, she is now able to do everything by herself. This includes medical appointments & arranging nursery places for her children, but also those everyday transactions which we take for granted; understanding & paying bills, dealing with her housing provider, chatting to neighbours.

In September, she will start ESOL classes at college at quite a high level, & we're confident that she will settle into college very easily thanks to her home lessons. Within a few years Aissatou should be well on her way to achieving her ambition of completing her Pharmacist training so that she can practice her profession in the UK. Without the help of English at Home, this goal would have been a very long way off indeed.

English at Home matches volunteer tutors with refugee & asylum seeker learners who are unable to attend mainstream English classes because of caring responsibilities &/or health problems.

In 2013/14 we offered tailored English lessons to 70 people from 15 different countries, who would otherwise be excluded from learning English. We increased the number of volunteer tutors to 74, who in turn provided almost 1,200 hours of teaching. Our 6 month reviews with learners found that in all cases there had been an

increase in the level of confidence, with nearly all clients reporting that they now used English much more outside the home. By building people's confidence, we have supported 8 people to successfully take up college courses & 12 to move on to weekly classes outside the home.

We have recently entered into a partnership with the Northern Refugee Centre & Refugee Education Training Advice Service to support the delivery of English lessons in people's own homes, as part of the EU Funded Active Integration programme.

Grace Hosting (formerly known as Short Stop) volunteers provide homeless, destitute asylum seekers an emergency hot meal, bed & breakfast in our volunteers' own homes.

The last year has seen a continued increase in the number of guests who need medium to long term accommodation.

In 2013/14 short stay referrals dropped by 70% from 207 people to 62. However, their average length of stay increased from 2 nights to 6 (a total of 385 nights in total.)

During the same period, referrals for long stay have more than trebled (16 people to 49) as we see more people at the end of the asylum process, & who are unable to return to their home country.

The average length of a Long Stay placement went up from 24 weeks to 29 weeks. Although we have only been able to accommodate 19 of these people, they stayed more than 3897 nights, which is an increase of 40% on the previous year.

Overall, during 2013/14, LASSN's volunteers provided more than 4280 nights – 661 weeks, or nearly 12 years' worth of accommodation.

Abdullah's Story

"I arrived in the UK in 2006. I was trafficked here & I spent the next five years trapped & being forced to work. I was tortured mentally & physically. I was eventually abandoned when they had used me up, & they took everything that I had: my money, my documents, my dignity, my identity. I was not familiar with the UK, I have physical disabilities from being beaten back home, & I am uneducated. I tried to find help & was told to seek asylum.

When I moved to Leeds in August 2012, I didn't know anybody. After nearly a year, my asylum claim was rejected & I became homeless. Without the support of Grace Hosting & my hosts I don't think I would be here today - if this service did not exist, I don't think I would exist.

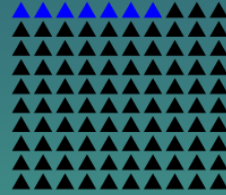
I was very lucky to get such nice hosts. I feel they are now like my family, as they helped me a lot & still offer friendship & advice. They have provided me with so much emotional & mental support & have helped me to stand up on my feet."

Is the UK number 1 in Europe?

Asylum applications in 2013



Only 7% of asylum seekers arriving in the EU 28 countries come to the UK



An infographic taken from our website www.oneworldleeds.org

Our information & awareness raising work tackles prejudice, encourages understanding, & fosters interaction & integration with the local community.

Our Press Gang project continues to bring together exiled journalists, media students & organisations supporting asylum seekers in order to tell positive stories about refugees in the UK, through the One World Leeds newsletter and elsewhere.

In late January 2014 we launched OneWorldLeeds.org website with the intention of reaching a wider, more general audience. With almost 900 visitors in the first 2 months of operation, we have seen some of our myth-busting

infographics going viral on Twitter & Facebook - reaching many thousands of people in just a few hours.

We gave talks to people in churches, mosques, charities & other organisations. We maintain a website for Leeds Multi-Agency Meeting, where information about Refugee & Asylum Seekers in Leeds is disseminated to more than 196 regular subscribers.

Our Directory of Leeds Services for asylum seekers & refugees was updated in June 2013 & remains an important resource for volunteers, staff & other people looking to find support in Leeds.

The Hardship Fund is an essential service to ease the situation of people experiencing homelessness & destitution.

LASSN works in partnership with six other refugee support organisations to support destitute asylum seekers in Leeds over the winter months.

A total of £2,230 was distributed in 2013/14 to 49 households (or 69 people, including children & other dependents). £25 is paid for up to 4 weeks, & provides a lifeline for those in desperate situations & can mean the difference between a hot meal & nothing to eat.

Our major benefactors in 2013/14 include

- AB Charitable Trust
- Alan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust
- Anonymous
- Big Lottery
- Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
- Henry Smith Charity
- Hilden Charitable Fund Trust
- Holbeck Charitable Trust
- Jill Franklin Trust
- Lankellychase Foundation
- Leeds City Council
- Leeds Christian Community Trust
- Leeds Community Foundation
- Lloyds TSB Foundation
- Porticus
- Sovereign Healthcare Charitable Trust
- The Brelms Trust
- The Scurrah Wainwright Charity

Thank you to all of the people & organisations who have given their time, money support & goodwill to LASSN.

With your help, we continue to make Leeds a place of safety & welcome for asylum seekers & refugees .

LASSN relies on charitable grants & donations: we receive no regular Government funding.

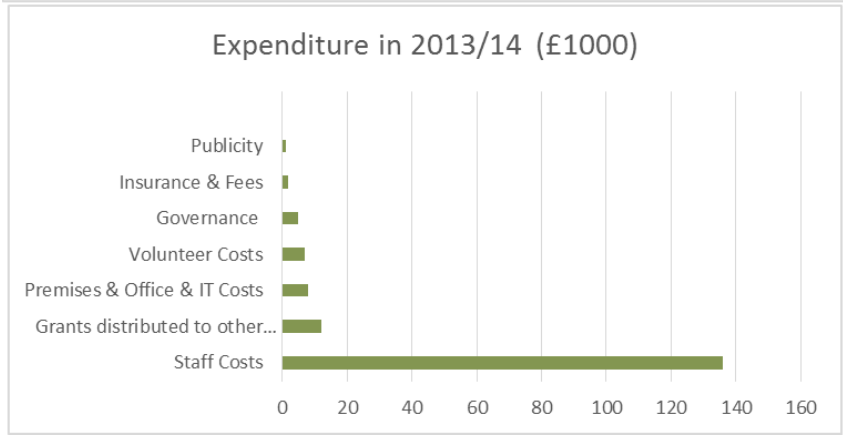
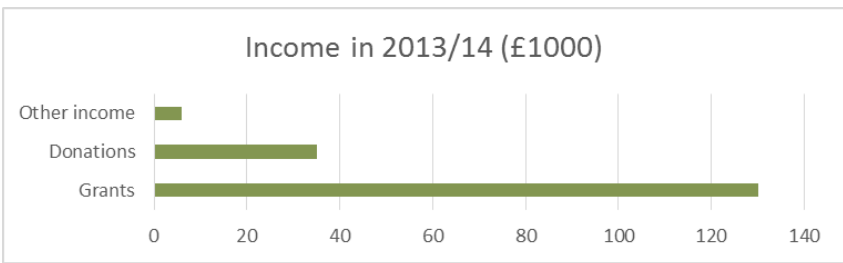
In 2013/14 our income increased from £130,040 to £155,821, reflecting some successful grant applications to major funders like the National Lottery (English at Home).

The financial climate has continued to be difficult with increasing competition for a decreasing number of grants. LASSN has maintained all the services we provide by using the unrestricted reserves we have built up, due to the ongoing generosity of our individual donors & supporters.

Funding from Leeds Community Foundation's Transition Fund has enabled us to embark on a series of strategic conversations with Staff & Trustees, that will enable us to work out how LASSN can survive & thrive during this prolonged period of financial difficulty.

LASSN is currently looking at the way we deliver our services, & how we resource aspects of our work, so we can make sure we continue to provide excellent services, as well as achieving excellent value for money in pursuit of our objects & mission.

Download a full set of our accounts from www.lassn.org.uk



Vision & Values: we want to make sure LASSN stays on track, so we're going to talk to everyone involved with LASSN—volunteers, members, friends, partners, staff & trustees—to ensure we have a shared understanding of our mission & values, & make sure these guide every aspect of our work.

Finances: we will continue to manage our money well, to make sure we keep doing the things that are most important at LASSN (Grace Hosting, Befriending, English at Home & Information & Awareness), & to ensure we have sufficient reserves.

Service Delivery & Development: we will strengthen the links between all our services, to make best use of our resources, & offer the best support we can. We're going to focus on helping people to know & understand their rights, as well as to find ways of supporting them to speak up for themselves.

Partnerships & external collaborations: we will build on our existing partnerships with Positive Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Leeds Refugee Forum & continue to lobby to improve the way asylum seekers are supported & helped in Leeds & beyond, via the MultiAgency Meetings.

Communications: we're going to put more of what we do online (e.g. our Directory of Services), make our website & publicity materials easier to read, & make sure our clients, referrers, volunteers, & supporters find the information they want quickly. We will try & make sure all voices of LASSN are heard in our publicity & communications.

Volunteers: we want to widen the volunteering opportunities at LASSN, to get more people with lived experience of seeking asylum involved in our work & how we make decisions. We also want our volunteers to meet one another more & increase the amount & range of training we offer.

Become a volunteer

We're always looking for people to help us out. In exchange for your time & enthusiasm, we offer high quality training & support, & the chance to make a real difference to someone's life.

Become a friend of LASSN

Everyone who supports with time or money becomes a friend of LASSN. All our friends get regular updates on our work, by post or by email.

Become a member of LASSN

In 2013/14 LASSN had 35 members. Membership allows you to

- show your support for our aims & objectives
- Vote at LASSN's Annual General Meeting, to elect our Trustees & vote on other business
- Get involved with campaigning & influencing others

Membership is free for unwaged people, asylum seekers & volunteers, & we ask that everyone else pays £10.

Make a donation

Last year, generous donations, paid for a quarter of the work of LASSN.

Although we employ 5 part time staff, it's our network of volunteers & supporters who enable us to offer hope & encouragement to so many people.

We're good at making a little bit of money go a long way: it costs just 96p a day to support one of our clients. So a donation of just £14 could support one asylum seeker for a fortnight.

A standing order gives us the security to plan our future work.

You can download a form from our website www.lassn.org.uk for standing orders or one-off donations.

You can also donate online at www.localgiving.com/lassn where occasional promotions allow your donation to be matched pound for pound, or through www.cafonline.org

Remember: if you pay tax in the UK, ask us about Gift Aid: so we can reclaim 25% tax on everything you give to us.

If you want to support LASSN through fundraising or a sponsored event, contact Jon on 0113 373 1759 or email jon@lassn.org.uk.



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Support Network**

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Cover photo by Rachael Loftus