

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network



Annual Review

2016-17

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network (LASSN)

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

Our Vision

Asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants will be safe, respected, supported and empowered to rebuild their lives free of persecution

Our Objectives

LASSN wants asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to be:

SUPPORTED and relieved from hardship and distress. We want local people to be central to this support

EMPOWERED We want asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to be empowered to rebuild their lives and fulfil their potential. We want individuals and communities to have a voice and to influence the communities they live in

INTEGRATED We want asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to feel settled and safe in their new environment in Leeds. We want Leeds to be a place of welcome and understanding, and for the general public, organisations, politicians and policy makers to understand how to collaborate with asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to make this happen

Our Mission

LASSN will meet needs of refugees and asylum seekers and other migrants in Leeds and will raise awareness of issues they face

How we work

RESPECTFUL: We respect asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants, and the huge contribution they make to LASSN, Leeds and to the UK

INFORMED: We listen to asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to make sure we are meeting their current needs

EMPOWERING: We work in ways that empower asylum seekers refugees, and other migrants, and in ways that empower local people to become involved in this support

PARTNERSHIP: We seek good relationships with other organisations so that asylum seekers refugees, and other migrants get the most appropriate services

VOLUNTEERS: We think volunteers are vital to effective working with asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants, and know that volunteers benefit greatly from their interaction with the people they help.

2016-17

a year in numbers

WE SUPPORTED

306

306 asylum seekers and refugees received one to one support from LASSN (and a further 684 people if you count family and dependents)

275

people volunteered with LASSN

4278

nights of accommodation were provided by Grace Hosts

WE EMPOWERED

56

people were able to improve their social connections and their overall health and well-being through our Befriending service

8

English at Home students successfully enrolled on a college ESOL course, and 15 now attend weekly free classes outside their homes

15

refugees and asylum seekers volunteered with LASSN - assisting with recruitment and selection, training volunteers, public speaking, translating, organising trips and socials and making films, and developing a photo-library

WE INTEGRATED

More than
200

people were supported to improve their confidence in speaking and writing English, through our befriending and English at Home projects



Everyone we work alongside has been encouraged to find out more about life in the UK, and to understand more about where they live, and how Leeds works

384

posts on leedsmultiagency.org.uk helped keep 8,500 people abreast of the changing face of migrant and refugee services in Leeds and beyond

Befriending

Matching someone with a befriending volunteer can reduce isolation, improve well-being, and encourages integration and greater self-reliance among asylum seekers and refugees.

Volunteers also provide practical support to the people they are matched with: helping people to access health and social care services, to make stronger connections with community organisations and to make friends.

In 2016/17 our 51 volunteers supported 56 different people. Volunteers provide support for about 9 months, although some matches can continue for several years.

Miranda's Story

This is a story from a befriender and her impressions of her befriender. They have been matched for nine months.



When I first met Miranda she was depressed and had recently visited a doctor having had suicidal thoughts – it was the doctor who suggested she make contact with LASSN.

Miranda had recently arrived in the UK and was very isolated. She had limited English and found everyday life challenging and as a result barely left the house.

I initially helped with practical issues – getting a bus pass for her son to get to school, free school lunches, clothing, bedding, etc. and items to make the house more comfortable.

I took Miranda to food banks initially but then explored how to shop for fresh, cheap food.

When many of the practicalities were sorted and more trust had developed I started taking Miranda and her sons on days out to improve their well-being. I also spent time helping Miranda understand and feel less anxious about her asylum process.

Nine months on Miranda is now a different person – she speaks good English and although she remains fearful about what the future holds, she is starting to enjoy life in the UK.

English at Home

matches volunteer tutors with refugee and asylum seeker learners who are unable to attend mainstream English classes. Tutors deliver classes based on what's important to learners and tailor their lessons to their everyday needs.

Over the last year, one-to-one English lessons were delivered to 161 people from who would otherwise be excluded from learning English because of caring responsibilities and/or health problems by 104 tutors.

We have supported 8 people to successfully take up college courses.

Arwa's Story

When Arwa started learning English with us, she was very shy and nervous. It took a long time before she felt confident speaking up in lessons with her tutor. English at Home was her first experience of education since leaving primary school in her home country at 11 years old.

After a while, her tutor suggested that she start attending a free ESOL class in a nearby community centre. Arwa gave it a try, but soon stopped going. She often had difficulties with childcare, and she found the mixed level class quite intimidating. She also said that she felt guilty going out to classes, leaving the housework undone.

Fast forward to a year later, during an English at Home review: completely by coincidence, Arwa receives a text message from Leeds City College offering her a place on an ESOL course. We ask Arwa whether she will take up the offer. Arwa replies "Laundry? Pah! Cleaning? Pah! My husband will pick up the kids. I'm going to college!"



Grace Hosting

links households with a spare room (Hosts) with destitute asylum seekers (Guests).

Hosts welcome Guests into their homes with a hot meal, a bed for the night, breakfast in the morning – as well as providing emotional and practical support.

In total, Grace Hosts provided 4278 nights of accommodation to 89 different people in 2016/17. Hosts also provided emergency accommodation (less than a week) for 71 people, who spent a total of 1,476 nights staying with 51 different households.

The number of longer stay Guests rose from 5 in 2015/16 to 18 in 2016/17. Longer stay Guests stayed a total of 2,802 nights, with the average length of stay falling from 45 weeks to 22 weeks.

Grace Hosts house people with literally no other housing options. Asylum seekers cannot stay in hostels or access mainstream homeless accommodation. Without our support, some people have no option but to sleep rough.

Ahmed's Story

Ahmed came to the UK from Eritrea, as an unaccompanied minor. His original claim was unsuccessful, and he is now 24 and destitute, waiting to submit a fresh claim.

When Ahmed was first referred to Grace Hosting, he was new to Leeds and knew nobody. At first he moved around a lot, with hosts accommodating him on a night to night basis. Ahmed found this hard, as he put it “constantly living in survival mode, not knowing if [he] had a safe place to sleep”. There were times when no Hosts were available and Ahmed had to sleep in the bus station. He felt very low and isolated. Since January 2016 Ahmed has been in a longer stay placement with a Host. He's shared how happy and safe he feels in this placement, and has become part of the Host's family. His mental health has improved greatly.

Having some stability has helped in making friends and establishing networks. He plays in a football team, volunteers for 3 local charities and the gym. He has gained qualifications as a life guard and gym instructor and is studying maths and English at college.

The impact of hosting is much more than providing a roof over someone's head.

Information and Awareness Raising

Information and awareness raising remains central to our mission, tackling prejudice, encouraging understanding, and fostering interaction and integration with the local community.

The number of people looking at our website lassn.org.uk increased 20% over the last year to over 14,700 unique users. Specific pages and resources have been developed for young people, and all of LASSN's policies, procedures and training materials are now available online, free of charge, for anyone to use or adapt.

LASSN's social media presence has increased, with over 1100 Facebook likes, 1200 Twitter followers.

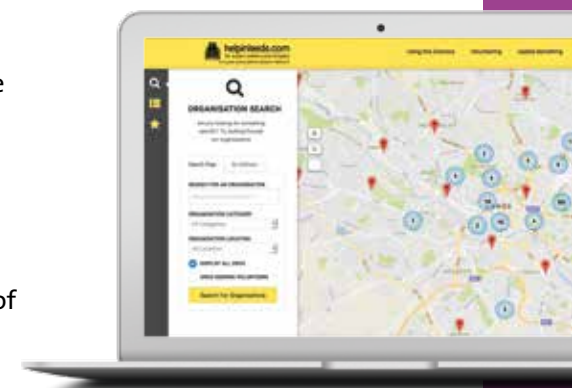
The audience of leedsmultiagency.org.uk – a website dedicated to local news on asylum, refuge and other migration issues – has grown, with 384 posts reaching 8,500 unique users.

LASSN staff have given talks to people in churches, schools, universities, on the radio, in national and regional newspaper articles and in the street.

This year, a Grace Guest completed a short film, describing the experience of Hosting, which is now used as part of our volunteer training programme.

helpinleeds.com

In June we launched helpinleeds.com, an online directory of over 180 services for asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds, and a resource for people wanting to find volunteer opportunities within the sector. In its first nine months of operation 2,800 visitors used helpinleeds.com more than 14,600 times.



The Hardship Fund

is an essential service to ease the situation of people experiencing homelessness and destitution.

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

- **PAFRAS** (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers)
- **British Red Cross**
- **York Street Health Practice**
- **Meeting Point**
- **Solace**
- **RETAS** (Refugee Education and Training Advice Service)

In 2016/17 a total of £6,415 was distributed to 85 households in 254 separate payments.

For more information visit lassn.org.uk/hardshipfund

Our major benefactors in 2016/17 include:

Big Lottery (Reaching Communities)

Brelms Trust

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Evan Cornish Foundation

Henry Smith Charity

Hilden Charitable Trust

Leeds City Council

Leeds Community Foundation

Seedbed Christian Communities Trust

Tudor Trust

As well as thanking our major benefactors, we would also like to thank everyone who has helped LASSN financially over the last year – all those who have made one off donations, set up standing orders, as well as those who have held or attended a fundraising event for LASSN.

Without your help and support we could not have helped so many people in our city.

Thank you.

Finances

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

In 2016/17 our income increased to £162,144, following another successful Big Lottery Reaching Communities grant to secure and expand our English at Home project.

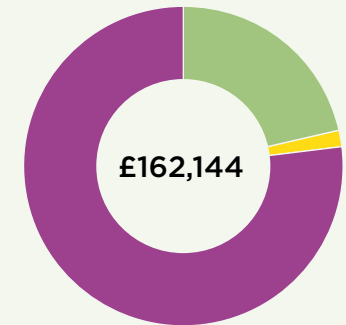
We continue to make good progress towards achieving full cost recovery for our projects, but have found the shortfall even harder to directly fund with increased competition for major grant funding.

LASSN has maintained services and rebuilt our unrestricted reserves due to the ongoing generosity of our individual donors and supporters.

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

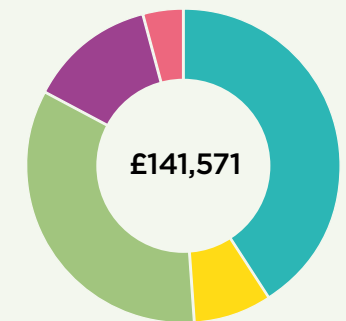
2016-17

Income



- Grants **79%**
- Donations **19%**
- Other/3rd party **3%**

Expenditure



- Project Staff Costs **41%**
- Volunteer Costs **8%**
- Management/Admin Salaries **34%**
- Office/Overhead costs **13%**
- Governance/Professional Fees **4%**

Listening to the voices of experience

We will create opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers and other migrants to give feedback on the things we do, and to find ways of including them in the planning and evaluation of our work so that their influence is felt in all aspects of our decision-making.

Volunteers

We will ensure volunteering with LASSN is fun, safe, and worthwhile. We will encourage a wider range of people to volunteer with LASSN, especially people with experience of seeking asylum. We will continue to ensure volunteers receive regular support and training, and that we learn from what they tell us.

Staying Safe

We will ensure everyone associated with LASSN is aware of how they can keep themselves and others safe, by developing awareness and skills through training and support for all clients, volunteers and staff.

Finances

We will continue to build up our reserves – with the aim of reaching 6 months running costs - in order to keep doing the things that are most important at LASSN (Grace Hosting, Befriending, English at Home, and Information and Awareness) even when existing funding streams end. We will make it easier for people to fundraise for us, by providing them with help and support to run events.

Demonstrating our Quality

We will ensure all aspects of our work are planned and evaluated, to make sure they are effective in helping us to fulfil our mission and aims. We'll develop an equalities strategy to ensure everything we do helps make LASSN a supportive and welcoming place for everyone.

Collaborating with others

We will continue to work closely with other agencies through the Leeds Migration Partnership, the Leeds Multiagency Meetings, as well as regionally and nationally through West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network (WYDAN) and the No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) and consolidate our reputation as an organisation that is helpful, reliable, and thoughtful.

Widening our influence

We will use our partnerships to share our experiences, knowledge, and ways of working, so that we can influence the development of policy and good practice and inform the development of new projects across the region and the country.

Communications

We will make it easier to see the difference LASSN makes to the lives of asylum seekers and other migrants, by improving the focus and quality of all our communications. We will review of all our websites and other materials to make sure they are clear, accessible, and that information is easy to find.

1 Become a volunteer

we desperately need volunteers, and in exchange for your time and enthusiasm, we offer high quality training and support, and the chance to make a real difference to someone's life. Find out more here:

lassn.org.uk/volunteers

2 Become a friend of LASSN

sign up to our newsletter, and get updates on the work we do and the difference we make

lassn.org.uk/news

3 Become a member of LASSN

you may not have the time to volunteer but you can support us by becoming a member of LASSN. Membership allows you to:

- show your support for our aims and objectives
- get regular updates on our work
- vote at LASSN's Annual General Meeting

Membership is £5 a month (free for unwaged people, asylum seekers and LASSN volunteers)

lassn.org.uk/members

4 Make a donation

donations, no matter how small, can make a big difference to our work. You can donate here:

lassn.org.uk/donate

5 Organise a fundraising event

we'd love you to hold a fundraising or sponsored event for LASSN.

Here's how you can help:

lassn.org.uk/fundraising

If you need any help or more information please contact our office:

0113 373 1759 / admin@lassn.org.uk

**Leeds Asylum Seekers'
Support Network**

4th Floor, Oak House
Park Lane
Leeds
LS3 1EL

Ph 0113 373 1759

admin@lassn.org.uk

Websites

lassn.org.uk
helpinleeds.com
leedsmultiagency.org.uk

 facebook.com/lassnleeds

 twitter.com/lassnleeds

Charity No. 1092647

Company No. 04228876