

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network



Annual Review

2015-16

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

Our Mission

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

Our Objectives

LASSN wants asylum seekers and refugees to be:

SUPPORTED and relieved from hardship and distress by local people.

EMPOWERED to rebuild their lives, to fulfil their potential and to take control of their lives.

INTEGRATED settled and safe. LASSN wants Leeds to be a place of welcome and understanding and for the general public, organisations, politicians and policy makers to understand the needs of asylum seekers.

How we work

LASSN works in ways which...

are **RESPECTFUL** of the contribution asylum seekers and refugees make to both LASSN and the UK.

are **INFORMED** and based on what asylum seekers and refugees say they want and value.

are **EMPOWERING** of both refugees and asylum seekers, and local people to help and support them.

are based on **PARTNERSHIP** - we seek good relationships with other organisations so that asylum seekers and refugees can access the kind of help and support they want and need.

sees **VOLUNTEERS** as vital to effective work with asylum seekers and refugees and recognises how much they benefit from their interaction with refugees and asylum seekers.

2015-16

a year in numbers

WE SUPPORTED

288 asylum seekers and refugees received one to one support from LASSN (and further 366 people if you count family and dependents)

303 people volunteered with LASSN

2876 nights of accommodation were provided by Grace Hosts

WE EMPOWERED

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

1655 hours of English lessons were delivered in people's own homes

20 Hosts produced electronic maps and directions to their houses, so that guests could find them more easily, using smartphone technology.

69 LASSN clients took part in evaluating our English at Home and Befriending services.

WE INTEGRATED

165 posts on leedsmultiagency.org.uk helped keep people abreast of the changing face of asylum services in Leeds and beyond

15 asylum seekers or refugees attended one of our volunteer training sessions.

232 asylum seekers and refugees reported a greater sense of belonging.

Befriending reduces isolation, improves well-being, and encourages integration and greater self-reliance among asylum seekers and refugees.

In 2015/16 our 51 volunteers supported 54 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 and children's services who recognise the significant impact that loneliness can have on both physical and mental health.

Selina's Story

"When ever I got to this bridge, that would be it, my body was there but my mind just escaped, I would be paralyzed with fear, I couldn't speak, I couldn't do anything. My befriender would help me by talking to me, reminding me of the things that made me smile. She would just talk to me about happy things to keep me distracted and calm. She would be by myside every time I had to travel and sign at the Home Office. I can't tell you how much this helped me. When it was over she would tell me, it's okay, it's done, you did it and you don't have to come back here again for another two weeks. She would say lets go and make some food and eat together. I can't tell you how much befriending has helped me, it saved my life."

The bridge on Kirkstall Road, on the way to Waterside Court: The Home Office building where asylum seekers are required to sign, to confirm their whereabouts.



English at Home matches volunteer tutors with refugee and asylum seeker learners who are unable to attend mainstream English classes.

In 2015/16 we offered one-to-one English lessons to 140 people who would otherwise be excluded from learning English because of caring responsibilities and/or health problems.

Our 113 volunteer tutors delivered 1,655 hours of teaching.

We have supported 11 people to successfully take up college courses (9 more were accepted but cuts meant they were unable to take up these places) and 15 to move on to weekly classes outside the home.

Uma's Story

In 2013 our Annual Review described our work with about Uma, a single mum with lots going on. Almost three years on and now with four children, her life is no less complicated, but she no longer needs the support of LASSN, having made impressive progress. Uma's spoken English is now so good that she no longer uses interpreters despite almost daily appointments. From a starting point three years ago of hardly any reading and writing, she can now understand all the letters she receives, writes beautifully and, more importantly, can read both for her own pleasure and to her children. Her youngest child in particular has developed a real love of books and gets very excited when Sandra, Uma's teacher, appears with a new one for him.

When we first met Uma her ambition was to work in childcare, she has now raised her sights to become a nurse. She is thrilled to have secured a place at College, and started last September. Her self-confidence and independence have grown enormously, and we're proud to have been alongside her as she's made such amazing progress.

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, and breakfast in the morning – as well as providing emotional and practical support.

In 2015/16, 84 guests spent a total of 1,289 nights staying in short term accommodation. The average length of stay increased from 5 nights to 15 - reflecting the difficulties an increasing number of people experience when trying to accessing Home Office support.

The number of people staying in Long Stop accommodation halved from 12 guests in 14/15 to 6 in 15/16. Longer stay guests stayed a total of 1587 nights, with the average length of stay rising from 40 to 45 weeks.

Overall, in 2015/16 Grace Hosts provided 2876 nights of accommodation: more than 410 weeks, or over 7 years.

In Autumn 2015 we received an unprecedented number of new hosts step forwards, doubling the number of hosting volunteers from 60 to 120 in less than 2 months.

Lisa & Mark's Story

"We started hosting in March 2015 and have hosted many people, mainly from North Africa and the Middle East.

Most people we see for just 2 or 3 nights.

We've been able to connect with people through cooking and eating together and have met some really nice people as well as learnt some lovely recipes from different parts of the world.

The hardest part of hosting is seeing our guests leave, not knowing whether they will have somewhere to stay the next night. Sometimes we see people more than once which has been nice because we've been able to get to know people more and have built up some good relationships.

We've really enjoyed the experience and what we have always tried to do is offer a warm welcome. Having heard from some people who've stayed with us that they've experienced prejudice and hostility during their time in the UK, this is all the more important to us."

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

Our main website lassn.org.uk increased its unique users over 140% to over 12,000 this year. [Oneworldleeds.org](http://oneworldleeds.org) – our multi-author blog - doubled its reach to 5,000 people and our Facebook likes have doubled to almost 800 – with some posts reaching tens of thousands.

We have given talks to people in churches, schools, universities, on the radio, and in the street, and trained refugees and asylum seekers in the effective use of social media.

Our posts on leedsmultiagency.org.uk – have reached more than 5000 users, and provided weekly updates on developments in Leeds relating to asylum, refugees and other migrants

A year online

LASSN's reach and influence increasingly relies on our use of the internet and social media. Over the last year, we have increased the amount of online support we offer to volunteers, publishing all of our volunteer induction and training materials on our website and sharing as many teaching resources as we are able. We've also put together information for groups who want to set up their own hosting schemes, and encourage others to use our training materials, if they find them helpful. LASSN has had a Facebook page since 2011 - although it has never featured very prominently in our work. However in 2015/16, our profile has grown enormously – reflecting an increase of interest by the general public in the work we do and about refugees and asylum issues more generally. Surprisingly few of our supporters or volunteers follow us on Facebook, but our daily posts regularly reach into the thousands and (and occasionally the tens of thousands), connecting people to our cause, and fostering better understanding of asylum and refugee issues.

The Hardship Fund is an essential service to ease the situation of people experiencing homelessness and 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 £5,600 was distributed in 2015/16 to 63 households in 218 separate payments. £25 is paid for up to 4 weeks, and can mean the difference between a hot meal and nothing to eat.

Our major benefactors in 2015/16 include:

AB Charitable Trust

Allen Lane

Bankside Primary School

Big Lottery (Reaching Communities)

Brelms Trust

Comic Relief

Esme Fairbairn Foundation

European Integration Fund

Henry Smith Charity

Indigo Trust

Leeds City Council

Leeds Community Foundation

Leigh Trust

Seedbed Christian Communities Trust

Tudor Trust

Finances

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

We continue to face difficulties in finding grant income to replace ones which are coming to an end, and gaps in funding have led to the redundancy of two valued members of staff. Fortunately, we were eventually successful in finding replacement funding meaning new staff could be employed to restart vital projects.

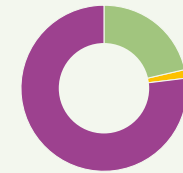
In 2015/16 our income level dipped slightly to £150,186 - including our continued grants from existing major funders and some successful new awards from funders like Big Lottery - Reaching Communities and Tudor Trust.

LASSN has maintained services by using the unrestricted reserves we have built up in better years and the ongoing generosity of our individual donors and supporters. The difficult steps taken in previous years to cut non-project related costs have shown through in this years accounts, strengthening our reserves.

In this difficult economic climate it is, perhaps, not surprising that some of our long-standing donors have had

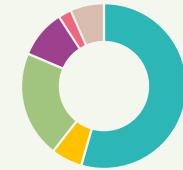
2015/16

Income £150,168



- Grants **77%**
- Donations **21%**
- Other/3rd party **2%**

Expenditure £133,533



- Project Staff Costs **55%**
- Volunteer Costs **6%**
- Management/Admin Salaries **21%**
- Office/Overhead costs **10%**
- Governance/Professional Fees **2%**
- 3rd Party payments **7%**

to review or cease their generous donations. That said, the enormous publicity around the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly in September 2015, has generated considerable interest in the charity and we have seen a pleasing rise in regular donations. We are very grateful to all our volunteers and donors for their support.

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

Listening to the voices of experience

We will continue to make it easier for refugees and asylum seekers to give feedback on the things we do, and make sure that all developments are based on what we have heard. We will continue to ensure refugees and asylum seekers help us to evaluate our services, and ensure their influence is felt at every level of decision making.

Staying Safe

We will review all of our safeguarding procedures, and ways of making sure our clients, volunteers and staff are safe and secure. We will improve the ways we recruit, select and train everyone who works with LASSN, and ensure the highest possible standards of safety are met.

Demonstrating our Quality

Our volunteers and staff work very hard to help people in very difficult circumstances. We have set ourselves quality standards that our Trustees will measure us against, to enable us to keep track of how well we're doing, and to make sure that all aspects of our work are the very best they can be.

Widening our influence

We will widen our area of work, so that as well as working with asylum seekers and refugees, we will also be able to work with other migrants at risk of harm, neglect or exploitation - such as people who have been trafficked or other migrants who do not have recourse to public funds.

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.

Collaborating with others

We will continue to work closely with other agencies through the Migration Partnership, and the Multiagency Meetings, and develop our reputation as an organisation that is helpful, reliable, and thoughtful.

Communications

We will continue to develop our websites, and use social media as a way of reaching out to a wider audience. We will share what we learn with others, and encourage greater numbers of refugees and asylum seekers to help us communicate.

Volunteers

We will continue to 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.

Become a volunteer

We're always looking for people to help us out. 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. Sign up at lassn.org.uk/volunteers

Become a member of LASSN

In 2015/16 LASSN had 26 members.

What it means:

- gives you the right to vote at our Annual General Meeting, or even to stand as a Trustee.
- tells us that you want to be more involved in the business of LASSN - so as well as sending you newsletters and updates, we might also ask your opinion about other things from time to time (once or twice a year, at most).
- gives you priority booking on our Volunteer training courses, to help you understand more about asylum seekers and refugees, and ways you can help out.
- means we'll prioritise any requests that come from you to speak at a meeting or group you attend.

Membership is free to volunteers, refugees, asylum seekers and people who are unwaged.

Everyone else is asked to make a donation of £5 a month or £60 per year.

Become a member by visiting lassn.org.uk/members

Make a donation

Last year, generous donations, paid for 2 1% of the work of LASSN.

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

We're good at making a little bit of money go a long way: it costs less than £1 a day to support one of our clients. So a donation of £14 could support an asylum seeking household for a fortnight.

A regular gift made by standing order gives us the security to plan our future work.

How to donate

You can download a form from our website for standing orders or one-off donations:

www.lassn.org.uk/donate

You can also donate online through www.cafonline.org or bit.ly/lassnmydonate

Remember: if you pay tax in the UK, please 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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