

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

Annual Review

2014-15



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.

2014-15

a year in numbers

WE SUPPORTED

280

asylum seekers and refugees received one to one support from LASSN (and further 382 people if you count family and dependents)

268

people volunteered with LASSN

3800

nights of accommodation were provided by Grace Hosts

WE EMPOWERED

10

English at Home students successfully enrolled on a college ESOL course and 19 now attend weekly free classes outside their homes

1500

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

64

people reported significant increases in their emotional wellbeing after using our befriending service and 45 people said their social networks were stronger

WE INTEGRATED

65

posts on leedsmultiagency.wordpress.com helped keep people abreast of the changing face of asylum services in Leeds and beyond

161

people developed a sense of belonging and being cared for through befriending

8

exiled journalists involved in Press Gang wrote articles, interviewed writers, produced radio programmes and wrote for onewordleeds.org

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

In 2014/15 our 62 volunteers supported 98 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 support agencies who recognise the significant impact that loneliness can have on both physical and mental health.

Fiona's Story

Five years ago, Fiona came to the UK from Nigeria, fleeing domestic violence. The man who helped her to escape to the UK also began to sexually exploit her. She managed to flee this situation with her son and claimed asylum. She was housed in Leeds whilst the Home Office investigated her claim, and referred to LASSN befriending by her Health Visitor.

LASSN matched Fiona with a volunteer called Sandra and the two met up weekly for a cup of tea – sometimes at Fiona's, sometimes at a local café.

Sandra suggested Fiona get in touch with the local Children's Centre and they went together the first couple of times, as Fiona was nervous of going on her own. Sandra also helped Fiona to find baby clothes for her son, by introducing her to a local clothes-swap club.

After a 9 month wait, Fiona was granted leave to remain, and was told she must leave her accommodation within 28 days. Sandra helped her sign up for council housing and to apply for benefits and find furniture.

At their last review, Fiona remarked how much she has grown in confidence, and when she finds herself unsure thinking, "what would Sandra do now?" Fiona says this gives her confidence to tackle most things, and she is now much more aware of how things work. Fiona and Sandra rarely talk about the utilities and bills as they used to; their relationship now focuses on getting out, parenting and Fiona's plans for the future.

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

In 2014/15 we offered tailored English lessons to 86 people who would otherwise be excluded from learning English because of caring responsibilities and/or health problems.

Our 79 volunteer tutors delivered over 1,500 hours of teaching – an increase of more than 25% over the previous year.

We have supported 10 people to successfully take up college courses and 9 to move on to weekly classes outside the home.

We have been an active member of the Migrant English Support Hub steering group which supported the development of the comprehensive list of places to learn English in Leeds at <http://lel.help>

Li's Story

I started teaching Li Min almost two years ago. In the beginning, she didn't speak to me, as she was nervous and felt she lacked the skills she needed. Over time her confidence grew and her language skills improved vastly. We have since become friends. Li Min, and her husband make me amazing meals each time I come to their house in return for English lessons. They often joke to me that as a student I never get to taste proper Chinese food, only terrible counterfeit takeout Chinese! We also joke about typical Leeds situations, something that was near impossible to do in the beginning. Li Min is so vibrant and welcoming - it's great that her level of English now allows her to express her fantastic personality more. You can just tell she gets a sense of fulfilment every time she learns a new word or phrase. She previously had trouble filling out basic forms but now she can converse on many subjects from health to school to the weather (how British, am I right?)

Grace Hosting (formerly known as Short Stop) 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 2014/15, 84 guests spent a total of 426 nights staying in short term accommodation. This was a 35% increase in the number of individuals referred, with people staying on average 5 days - a day longer than people did in the previous year.

The 12 guests in our long stop accommodation stayed a total of 3380 nights, with the average length of stay rising from 29 weeks to 40 (a 35% increase). This reflects the fact that many of the people who enter long stop are at the end of the asylum process and cannot return to their home country.

Overall, in 2014/15 Grace Hosts provided more than 3800 nights of accommodation: more than 540 weeks, or 10 years.

Ed's Story

“My wife and I live in Beeston and we have spare rooms in our house. Over the last few years, we’ve hosted dozens of refugees in our house from Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Iran and Iraq. They’ve often been fleeing persecution or imprisoned and tortured in their own countries, and they’ve come here seeking a safer life.

“People often say “that must have been really hard, or challenging” but for the most part it’s been really enjoyable. Many of the people who’ve stayed with us have become our friends. I’ve got really fond memories of just having a laugh with people.

“I think it’s one of the best voluntary schemes in the city. It’s very efficient and very cost effective and delivering great outcomes and I’ve got a lot of time for it.”

Listen to the full interview at <http://lassn.org.uk/grace>

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

Our Press Gang project networks exiled journalists, media students and organisations supporting asylum seekers to report positive stories about refugees in the UK. www.oneworldleeds.org gets over 1000 different visitors a month, and our Twitter and Facebook campaigns have reached more than 10,000 people.

In December, we launched the new www.lassn.org.uk website, featuring many resources for people supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

We have given talks to people in churches, schools, universities, on the radio and in the street, and trained refugees and asylum seekers in how to make videos and radio broadcasts, and helped design and deliver a small grants scheme to build capacity in small refugee community organisations and other groups run by migrants.

We curate and maintain www.leedsmultiagency.wordpress.com a website for Leeds Multi-Agency Meeting – where information about Refugee and Asylum Seekers in Leeds is shared with more than 190 regular subscribers.

Margaret & Elsa

Our talks can take us in some surprising directions: in March we were invited to give a Lent Talk to Churches Together in Seacroft, Swarcliffe and Whinmoor. During the discussions that followed, Margaret - an 80 year old lady - shared her own bitter-sweet memories of being evacuated to Canada and being taken in by strangers. Afterwards, she showed us the newly renovated chapel next door, which also houses East Leeds FM - and we struck up a conversation with some of the broadcasters there. The following month, East Leeds FM broadcast Margaret in conversation with Elsa - an Ethiopian refugee – and they compared and contrasted their memories of being displaced on air, and what it means to be offered welcome and safety by strangers, a long way from home.

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 £5,125 was distributed in 2014/15 to 60 households (or 70 people, including children and other dependents). £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 2014/15 include:

AB Charitable Trust
Big Lottery (Reaching Communities)
Comic Relief
Esme Fairbairn Foundation
European Integration Fund
Henry Smith Charity
Jill Franklin Trust
Leeds City Council
Leeds Christian Community Trust
Leeds Community Foundation
Yorkshire and Clydesdale Bank Foundation

Finances

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

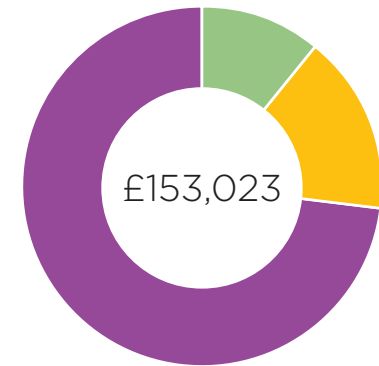
In 2014/15 our income level held steady at £153,023, reflecting our continuing grants from existing major funders and some successful grant applications to funders like Comic Relief and Yorkshire and Clydesdale Bank Foundation.

The financial climate remains very difficult with many organisations competing for a decreasing number of grants. We have faced difficulties in finding grant income to replace ones which are coming to an end. LASSN has maintained services by using the unrestricted reserves we have built up in better years and due to the ongoing generosity of our individual donors and supporters.

This year, LASSN trustees took the difficult decision reduce the amount of administration and finance support from 46 hours a week to 16, and renegotiated terms and conditions with existing members of staff.

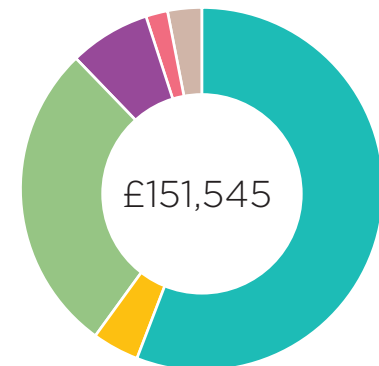
Download a full set of our accounts from www.lassn.org.uk

Income 2014/15



- Grants 73%
- Donations 16%
- Other/3rd Party 11%

Expenditure 2014/15



- Project Staff Costs 56%
- Volunteer Costs 4%
- Management/Admin Salaries 28%
- Office/Overhead costs 7%
- Governance/Professional Fees 2%
- 3rd Party payments 3%

Listening to the voices of experience

We will 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 also ensure refugees and asylum seekers help us to evaluate our services.

Proving our Quality

Our volunteers and staff work very hard to help people in very difficult circumstances. We are going to set ourselves standards that we want to live up to, 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.

Keeping track

We will implement a new database, so we can keep track of all aspects of our work. This will make it easier to show the difference we make, and will help us to develop ways of working that reflect what the people we work with want.

Finances

We will try and build up our reserves, in order to keep doing the things that are most important at LASSN (Grace Hosting, Befriending, English at Home, and Information and Awareness).

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.

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 2014/15 LASSN had 24 members. Membership allows you to...

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

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

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

Make a donation

Last year, generous donations, paid for 16% 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 just 89p a day to support one of our clients. So a donation of just £13 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

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.

**Leeds Asylum Seekers'
Support Network**

Ebor Court
Westgate
Leeds
LS1 4ND

Ph 0113 373 1759

admin@lassn.org.uk

Websites

lassn.org.uk
oneworldleeds.org
leedsmultiagency.wordpress.com

 facebook.com/lassnleeds

 twitter.com/lassnleeds

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