

# LASSN

## Friends of LASSN

### Autumn 2020

It's never been more important to remember who our friends are at LASSN - the many people who share their time, energy and resources to help folks from far away. We are so grateful for your continued support, and all the messages and donations the current situation has triggered. Thank you for being there for us

And this edition of Friends of LASSN is a rather strange mix - of looking back at what we've done (as we always do) but also looking forward to a future is deeply uncertain, but where we know things will be very very different.

One of the features of LASSN's work alongside refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants at risk of harm or exploitation, is the importance of sharing hope. As we know from our conversations with the people we help, when hope feels hard or lost, we sometimes have to borrow other people's, or lend a bit of our own.

We hope the stories below help to remind you of the amazing and inspirational work of our volunteers, or the people they walk alongside, and the staff that support them.



### Refugee Week during lockdown

During Refugee Week, we wrote about the impact of the Pandemic on the folks we help, and the volunteers that help them.

Each of the LASSN projects got its own article - and you can [read the whole series by clicking here](#)

### Teaching English on line

Since March, everything has changed. So we've written a new guide to surviving and thriving online. We're very proud of it.

Click on the image and see for yourself



## Befriending

Tina, Volunteers Manager for Befriending writes

*'Sarah\* has been in Leeds for almost 2 years. She is waiting for her asylum decision and has found the time waiting for life to re-start enormously difficult.*



*Before coming to the UK Sarah grabbed every opportunity to learn and develop herself and her skills. Soon after Sarah was referred to LASSN she looked at College applications but unfortunately they were unsuccessful. Refusing to be put off, Sarah set her sights even higher and began to research University opportunities. On August 20th this year she received the email she had been waiting for– confirming that her University application had been successful.*

*“Heartfelt thanks to LASSN for taking the time out on many occasions to not only share information with me, but also to actually come to the house and go through step by step to help me sign up for University.*

*It has been a constant struggle, and with the help and support I received and continue to receive from LASSN and my Befriender I was able to be successful in my applications. Thank you everyone and I am forever humble, grateful and thankful.*

*I received an Unconditional offer from Bradford University to study a BA Hons in Sociology. As an asylum seeker, I am financially handicapped and there was no way that I could have paid for the Degree. With the constant help of my Befriender her enormous support and reference, I was able to secure a Sanctuary Scholarship Award.*

*Thank you to LASSN and my Befriender for your Unconditional love, support and services”.*

*We are so proud of everything Sarah has achieved and of the amazing support her Befriender has given her and we wish Sarah every success!*

*(And thanks to Solidaritech, who have provided her with a laptop to help her with her studies.).*

## Sharing what we know

In the last few months the world has changed for everyone.

There has been a lot of confusion over changing rules around asylum applications, how and when to stay in touch with the Home Office, how and when interviews are taking place, what happens when the Home Office make a decision on your case, and your asylum support ends.



Refugee Action have been busy collecting the experiences and knowledge of small charities across the country in their [coronavirusasylumhandbook.com](https://coronavirusasylumhandbook.com) and we are pleased to see examples drawn from many Leeds organisations, including LASSN.

Migration Yorkshire's Migrant Information Hub [migrantinfohub.org.uk](https://migrantinfohub.org.uk) attempts to keep an eye on the ever changing policy picture, and describes how they are being implemented.

Finally, Right to Remain have made an excellent short film about [Recent Changes to the Asylum and Immigration System](#) [6 minutes] which should be an accessible round up of recent events



## Connecting Opportunities

Rasha - one of LASSN's volunteers - has made a remarkable film celebrating the kindness and connections that the mentors, befrienders and participants create through our #connectingopportunities programme

Please click on the image above to watch Ewelina and Sarah tell their story.

Their story echoes the findings of recent research into the [attitudes of Yorkshire people to migration](#) which concludes that

- there's a lot of potential to increase social connections within communities, and
- people want to live in successfully socially integrated communities.

Ewelina and Sara are a great example of a friendship that crosses social and cultural backgrounds, and how #connectingopportunities is helping to build the kind of communities we all want to be a part of.

## Life as an Asylum Seeker in Leeds during the Pandemic

Channel 4 news recently ran this piece on what life is like to be an asylum seeker in the UK, featuring some interviews from people staying at Hotels in Leeds



## Grace Hosting: A Quarantine host's experience

*Emergency Hosting stopped in March of this year, as it was no longer safe to people to invite someone to stay for just a few nights at a time.*

*Since then LASSN have been collaborating with volunteers to develop safer ways to allow hosting to continue.*

*This has led to the development of Quarantine Hosts - Hosts who help someone to self-isolate for 2 weeks at a time, to ensure they are virus free - and who can then be introduced to a Host. Here's a picture of the kit we provide to Quarantine Hosts to make this possible*

*So far there have been three guests who have experienced quarantine hosting and we are in the planning stages for the fourth.*

Here is Nancy's experience of this brand new role

"At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, my husband Bob and I decided that, as over 50's, and because Bob has asthma, we wanted to act very cautiously, and so we have. To this day we haven't been to a pub or restaurant or had anyone inside our home to socialise.

So I think people who knew us were quite surprised when we agreed to have a guest stay with us for two weeks so that he could quarantine prior to his operation in hospital. For us it made perfect sense, it was a controlled entry and exit from our home, and he would be staying in a bedroom all the time, apart from prearranged visits into the garden.

It turned out to be quite a steep learning curve. The first was always tell your guest your carefully laid plans! As soon as he arrived, he went straight to his room as per our instructions, wearing a mask, and, almost at once reappeared downstairs looking delighted to be here. We had forgotten to say, "And please stay there." The next day he was in the garden and it started to rain, so he very kindly brought all the washing in from the line. Such a thoughtful thing to do under normal circumstances.

We got all these things ironed out quite early and realised that clear communication is the key to success. This was the very first quarantine hosting situation and I don't think we made too many mistakes, and certainly no serious ones. We had support from Jo, who was getting proper guidance from Public Health Leeds, and really the only difficulty was our guest's very specific medical requirements around diet. I was anxious to get it right, he was anxious not to offend me, but a conversation with Jo helped us to get very precise information which was then easy to follow.

In fact it was such a positive experience that we went on to have him back again for two more weeks after his surgery so that he could quarantine again before going on to his next accommodation. He was so quiet that I often forgot that he was there. We had some lovely evenings outside in the garden, masked up, playing darts and listening to music. Our most recent guest left this morning, and we celebrated his leaving in much the same way last night, except with the fire pit roaring and warm coats on.

I think this is an invaluable service which offers potential longer terms host peace of mind about theirs and their guest's safety."

## #solidaritybadges

We've made these #solidaritybadges so that you can show your support for and solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers without saying a word. They're bright enough to be noticed, and small enough to be discreet.

There are a variety of messages, reflecting what LASSN stands for, and the messages we want to promote.

- No human is illegal
- Refugees welcome in Leeds
- You are safe here
- Migration is not a crime
- Be kind

If you haven't got yours yet, click here for more details <http://lassn.org.uk/solidarity>

## #solidaritybadges from around the world

Just before the start of lockdown, we were approached by a guy called Greg on Facebook, asking if we'd share some badges with him because

*"My activism in social and political movements inspired me to begin collecting badges as a way of preserving this aspect of our history. "*

*"Of course"* we said and popped some in the post. (He was kind enough to make a donation, too).

Turns out this guy has been collecting badges from refugee projects from all across the world over the last few years . Loads. Far too many to show you here.

We love that this collector found LASSN and our #solidaritybadges and are deeply chuffed to add our designs to his collection.



## Greg's

Australian, Greek and Spanish apparently.

## LASSN's

Three of our seven current designs.

## English at Home

David, Volunteer manager for English at Home writes

*"A referral was made to English at Home to request a tutor for a woman called Noura. She had very basic English, only being able to say her name and basic greetings."*



*"Noura had a 3 year old daughter and a son who was only a few months old so she was unable to attend any classes to improve her English. As a result Noura was becoming very isolated as she spent all of her time at home with the children and lacked the confidence to do tasks such as the shopping because she did not have the language skills."*

*When I first met Noura an interpreter came for the initial assessment. I asked Noura why she wanted a teacher. "At the moment I am stuck. I cannot go out because I do not have the words and I feel scared. I want to have the confidence to meet people and be able to go out," she told me through the interpreter.*

*We were able to bring a teacher to Noura's house to teach her English for 1 hour a week, focusing on the things which she wanted to learn. Her teacher also had small children so was able to be flexible when having two extra students in the lesson! Noura showed great enthusiasm and skill and progressed very quickly, developing language for shopping through role plays and other work.*

*In the final review, about 18 months after Noura started lessons it was a pleasure to hear how she had progressed. She had started classes so was no longer in need of an English at Home tutor. From having a few words in English she was now studying Entry Level 1 at College!*

*In this meeting there was no need for an interpreter and Noura was very happy to speak for herself. She told me that she was now at college and also attended a local Children's Centre where she had made a lot of friends. She had even had the courage to call the Home Office when it was necessary and had been speaking with the Council as they tried to arrange new housing.*

*Noura told me "I first wanted a teacher because I had no English and could not go out. Now I can do all these things for myself. I go shopping, to the Children's Centre, to nursery, to friends, to the Council. Now I am so busy being out and speaking I just need some time by myself at home!" "*

## Socially distanced bike lessons - on hold for now



Our recent Bike Ability sessions were a fantastic opportunity for Connecting Opportunity participants to get outdoors and socialise in a socially distance way.

There were 8 people that came to the training, all with wide ranging cycling abilities: from complete novices to one participant that was used to cycling around London from his time living there! With the support of Mark (our original 'Bike Buddy' volunteer), the Bike Ability trainers were able to split into smaller groups to provide support as needed....

Some more experienced participants practiced riding on the road, learning what to do at junctions in the UK, and how to understand road signs....and others learnt how to ride a bike for the very first time! We received great feedback about the sessions: "The session was very good and useful and I'd like to attend again" "I will try to come back because I loved it".

Sadly local restrictions were announced before we could go on any group bike rides - but when it's safe to do so, we have plans for a bike ride on the canal.



## The cost of staying safe

In early June, after sustained pressure from organisations like LASSN, the Government agreed to increase asylum support levels from £37.75 to £39.60 a week - £1.85 or 26p a day.

Even so, the cheapest face mask we can find on the high street is 70p, from Asda. They come in packs of 4 at £2.80

Here are Amy and Ian sending disposable face masks to all of our clients, two days before they became mandatory, to make sure everyone who needed one had one.

We much much prefer to use reusable face coverings where possible, so we've also instructions on how to make their own mask.

## Thank you for the PPE

Thank you so much to the three wonderful volunteers and also Otley Maker Space for responding. Now every guest in Grace hosting can have multiple re-usable masks and we have enough to last us a year.



## LASSN's Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 11th Nov 2020

**19:00 - 20:00**

Although the Pandemic restrictions mean we can't meet up in person, we'd still love to meet with you, to share even more about what we've been up to over the last year.

As usual, we hope it will be fun, entertaining, informative and a chance for us to share some of the challenges and triumphs of the last 12 months.

As well as meeting other our supporters, volunteers and well-wishers from across the city, we hope you will

- find out more about the last year at LASSN, and the progress we have made towards securing our aims,
- hear about our plans and priorities for 2020/2021
- ask questions
- vote for Trustees to join our Board
- cast your eyes over our finances and hear about how we've secured and spent money
- appoint our Accountants for the coming year

**Sadly due to the logistics of delivering food to everyone at home, it will be self-catering this year.**

### How to join us

Please click on the Meeting link: <http://bit.ly/lassnagm20>

If you are prompted, the Meeting ID is 816 6912 7820 and the Meeting code is: 12345

If you have not used Zoom before, or a bit uncertain about how things will work, we will be having a practice run at 18:00 that evening, to make sure your camera and microphones are working ok.

We'd love to see you, so if you can, please come and join us.



## Asylum and Digital Poverty

Click on the picture of Jon to hear him talk about the way Digital poverty - the lack of access to technology and broadband - has affected asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds and the ways LASSN have been addressing this.

## Policy updates

[The impact of Covid19 on people in the immigration system \[21 pages\]](#) During the pandemic, Refugee Action have been collecting info from orgs like LASSN to build a national picture of impacts on clients and organisations alike. There have been 5 of these so far, and a 6th one is due next month. Insights from these surveys have informed our C-19 applications for funds

[House of Commons Briefing Paper on Asylum statistics for UK and the EU \[28 pages\]](#)– September 2020. These statistics contain data on the number of people applying for asylum, the outcomes of asylum applications, and the number of people being resettled to the UK, as well as a new section on asylum applications and Channel crossings in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

[Migration Yorkshire's Policy Briefing October 2020 \[6 pages\]](#) “An overview of the latest statistics, policy and research on migration issues affecting partner organisations in Yorkshire and Humber”

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network,  
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