

LASSN

Friends of LASSN

Easter 2021

The last time we said hello, it was coming up to Christmas, and we were just about getting used to being online after nine months or so.

Now, as we mark the first Anniversary of Covid-19 in late March 2021, it feels like a good time to take stock, take note, and share some stories of life at LASSN, and how some folks have been thriving as well as surviving.

There's so much to pack in to this edition, it's hard to know where to start - but you're guaranteed to find stories from people attached to each of the projects, artistic endeavours, policy and campaigning news, as well as support from some unlikely sources.

Thank you for being a part of LASSN's story as we continue to support, empower and integrate folks from far away, into life in Leeds.



Befriending

Tina, Volunteers Manager for Befriending writes

LASSN's Befrienders have been working really hard to support Befriendees during this time of enforced confinement and disconnection. This has not been easy - going from face-to-face to purely remote support has many challenges and the support we would like to give has been severely limited by lockdown restrictions.

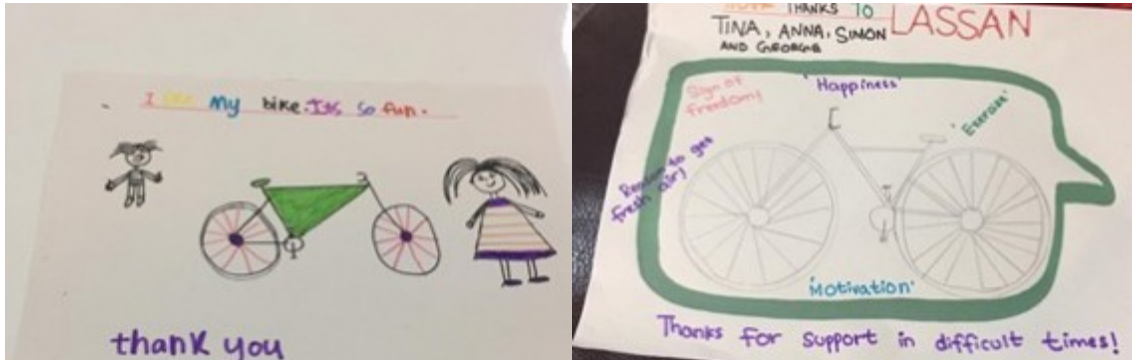
As well as enormous challenge though there has also been possibility and opportunity. One of the LASSN Befrienders George, contacted me to say that Ahmed, his Befriendeed, really wanted a bicycle – his huge struggles with his mental-health were amplified during lockdown and his anxiety about COVID meant he found it increasingly hard to leave the house at all. However, he dreamed of being able to cycle outside with his children and happened to mention this to his George - who then contacted me on the off chance; *"I don't expect you can help but do you know where I can get a bike?"* Fortunately, I did!

The wonderful Anna (who co-manages Meet and Connect for LASSN) and her equally wonderful husband Simon have been running a small but ever-growing project providing free bicycles to refugees and asylum-seekers in Leeds for almost a year. A few conversations

established that not only did they have a bike for Ahmed- but they also had bikes for his wife and children too and plans were made for the bikes to be delivered to the family.

"Having a bike has changed my life in many positive ways. I can reach quicker, its (a) very good mode of transport. My bike has given me chance to explore my surroundings even more which is leaving great impact on my mental health issues. Thanks to everyone in helping through these unprecedented times".

The biggest thank you to George, Anna and Simon for making this all possible.



Keeping Volunteers Safe

Massive thank you to everyone at Elland Road (and Thackray Hospital) who have been working to vaccinate our front line staff and volunteers since January 2021.

Thanks to your efforts, our Grace Hosts - the people who take strangers into their homes - and the people who help out at Grace House can all feel slightly safer.



Meet and Connect

We're sending these beautiful crochet kits out to members of our Meet and Connect groups.

The Meet and Connect groups started as a way of people meeting up in their local neighbourhood cafes, finding out about the area they live in and making new friends and connections.

And just because we cannot meet up face to face right now - it won't stop us from supporting one another.

Hala, who helps facilitate Meet and Connect online explains ***"There are two members of the group who are really excellent at crocheting. So they are teaching the rest of us over Zoom, and LASSN supplies the materials and costs of internet access. And as we learn, we practise our English with each other and produce something beautiful. Each of us crochets a square at a time. Eventually, the individual squares will be***

joined into a single blanket and we will share our work with someone who needs to stay warm

Hala and Anna both co-host Meet and Connect groups twice a week.

Thank you to Leeds Community Foundation whose generosity was the spark that set this little fire burning



Lighting Up Lockdown

Last November several organisations came together to launch "[Lighting up Lockdown](#)" - a project to encourage people to get out and about, celebrate nature and connect through sharing positive and joyful photos.

We had a theme each week - Colours, Light, Sunrise and Sunset etc. This joyful film is a compilation of photos, poems and music, a 6 minute gem and feast for the eyes and soul.

Make a cuppa, click on the photo to the left sit back and relax.

English at Home: The Gift of Language/ Present Tense

When Zara was first referred to LASSN she had just arrived in the UK and felt extremely isolated. She was terrified to leave the house to go to the shops in case she couldn't find her way back, and was pregnant with no idea how to access services. Zara couldn't speak a single word of English and as a result of no schooling as a child, was illiterate in Arabic, her home language.

We were able to introduce Zara to an English at Home teacher just weeks before the first lockdown in March. Due to her lack of language, I was very worried that she would find it really difficult to access lessons, but over this last year she has thrived! She is now much happier being out and about and also has a beautiful baby boy!

She has worked so hard to develop her reading and writing each week and can now read her own name and those of her 5 children. Over Christmas her teacher was able to deliver a gift for each of the children and Zara could read their names and distribute to the right child with a smile on her face.

English at Home Summary

Each year, we write a summary of what we've been up to at English at Home, for our funders at The National Lottery. This year, we thought we'd share it a bit more widely.

Please have a look: [it's full of stories and inspiration.](#)

Thank you and congratulations to all the learners, tutors, volunteers and supporters who make English at Home what it is.

We are proud to know you all, and celebrate your immense achievements.

Tina and David



Grace Hosting: More than a roof, and a chance to give back

We always say that hosting is so much more than providing a roof over somebody's head and a special and unique relationship can form between some hosts and their guests. It was lovely to hear this story from a host...

"At the beginning of the national lockdown I was finding it really difficult not being able to see my children or grandchildren and I felt quite sad. I was talking on the telephone to Ahmed a former guest who lived with my husband and I for some time and who was granted Refugee status and he must have sensed my sadness. Every day after that call he sent me a photo of himself to cheer me up. Once he was walking in the park with his cap on back to front, silly photos to make me laugh. What was so nice was that I felt he was thinking about me and looking out for me".*

Lebanese Bites

It's nice to be nice.

In recent months [Lebanese Bites](#) have been providing meals for some of the house meetings at Grace House.

When Lebanese Bites found out about Grace House, and who was staying there, they started to offer free food, discounts and all sorts to the guys staying at the house.

Lebanese Bites have not asked for anything in return, and have not made a fuss of their support.

So we thought we'd give them a free advert and encourage you all to support a community-minded business in the Woodhouse Lane area of the City.



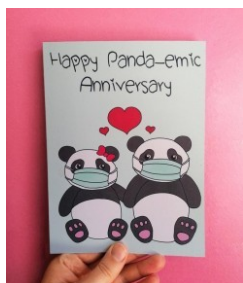
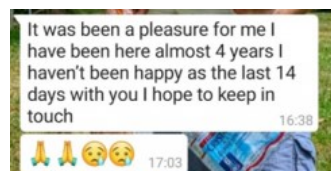
Grace Hosting - growing friendship

Since the pandemic every new guest in Grace hosting has to quarantine with a host for 14 nights.

We were apprehensive about doing this as many people have had traumatic experiences of being detained or imprisoned and we were concerned about memories or feelings being triggered.

One host spent time in their garden with their quarantine guest. They kept busy with masks on, lots of distance between them stripping back the garden ready for winter and chatting and laughing whilst they did.

After the guest completed his quarantine and moved into a new host's home he sent this lovely text (see picture).



Connecting Opportunities: Tea & Talk Online Groups

For many of the people we support on the Connecting Opportunities Befriending project, our weekly online conversation groups (known as 'Tea & Talk') have helped in lifting spirits, and adding variety to a monotonous lockdown routine.

We have explored a number of activities (such as creative activities and ESOL games and quizzes) and the topics we have covered have been utterly fascinating (examples include 'My first day in Leeds', 'Challenges and Changes'...and even 'Space Exploration'!!). We have been blown away by the enthusiasm from both our LASSN volunteers and Connecting Opportunities participants who are committed to making these online spaces a fun and

welcoming space for all.

As one of our volunteers, Margaret, says: *“Personally the thing I enjoy most is the cohesion of the group; sharing experiences, culture and talents (of which there are so many!). This atmosphere is created not just by volunteers but by all participants, all of whom want the project to be successful.”*

In particular, over the past year we have benefited hugely from volunteers who are previous Connecting Opportunities participants, with lived experience of taking part in conversation groups. Their valuable insight has helped us to continuously improve the groups over the past year.

As one of our volunteers (and previous CO participant) Sara says: *“I always feel we are doing a great job and that makes me happy. I think this group is doing very well because all of us work as a team”.*



A Year in the life of LASSN

A short retrospective of 2020, for those of you who weren't able to make it to our Annual General Meeting 2020

Digital support for everyone

All of our volunteers have had to adapt to the huge change brought about by volunteering remotely. For those that felt able to continue their volunteering, LASSN staff provided support in a number of formats – from additional ‘Telephone Befriending’ and ‘Teaching Online’ training delivered on Zoom; to numerous digital resources for ‘Befriending/Teaching in a Pandemic’; and finally, tailored 1:1 technical support to volunteers as needed.

Befriending and Connecting Opportunities volunteer Margaret shares how this support has helped her over the past year:

“As an older person for whom technology is daunting, I have been helped enormously by LASSN with my volunteering online.

I have been on the receiving end of not only practical advice but also patience and encouragement. It is difficult for younger people (my children and grandchildren included) to understand how older people feel when faced with a technological problem they think they should be able to fix but don't know where to start.

I just feel that with LASSN there has always been someone to renew confidence and help out.”





Congratulations Hala

In December 2020. The Revd Kate Bottley named Hala as Community Volunteer 2020 at Yorkshire Women Volunteer Awards

Hala has been volunteering with LASSN for several years in a variety of roles: She's helped us as a translator, a trainer, she's taught various members of our team Arabic and taught students at a local University about the pressures Migrant Families face - and that does not begin to cover the enormous impact she's made by volunteering with Give a Gift Leeds Retas Leeds Manuel Bravo Project PAFRAS and Touchstone

[You can read more about Hala \(and the other brilliant winners\) here](#)

Well done Hala and thankyou for everything you have done for the people LASSN (and others) support



Bus Passes

Even during lockdown, we've continued to supply bus passes to asylum seekers and refugees without transport.

The value of the bus passes we supplied to Anita was less than £30. Why do we do this? Anita explains...

"For the instance, I received the message from my solicitor that we were granted leave to remain, I became speechless and emotional. Do you know how I felt? It was like I just completed a long marathon and passed the end line. I overwhelmed by exhausting. It was a mixed feeling. But suddenly, I realised that I do not have much time to waste and now we must approach our own lives with a new start. Yes! now we can take decisions on our lives, after a long period of suffering and felt like a football in a live ground which is thrown from one end to another end with lots of pain. The real race was started. I can't stay in a neutral position and now I have another marathon with a few mileposts.

One of the most important tasks I must do is, to find a house to move as I knew we will get a notice in a few days asking us to vacate our current accommodation within a month. No! it is not a pleasant place to live at all. I am not complaining but this is the truth. We were here because we did not have any other option. Now I have a choice. I always love to settle in a peaceful area. I felt I can't wait to find such a nice place. So excited. Next Tuesday one of a lovely ladies from Retas, came forward to help me with finding a house and I was booked for viewing houses almost every day. It was not an easy task and there are plenty of things to consider with our circumstances. As a result, I engaged in more and more journeys.

At this point, I needed assistance to manage my travelling cost. Just like during my most needy times in past, LASSN helped me it with bus passes. Jo sent me day bus passes enough for me to achieve those visits. I do not know how I would thank her and other beautiful people work with LASSN..."



Musical support for LASSN

Lockdown has allowed people to show their support of our work in in lots of unusual ways.

Here's a selection of the prodigious talents who've leant us their support over these last few months. Click on each of them for more details

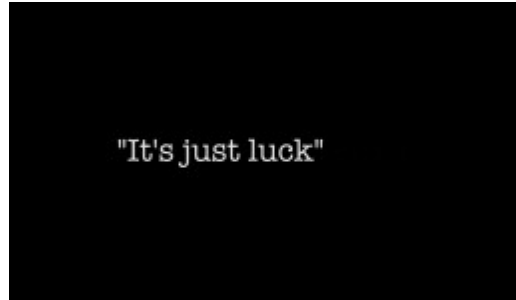


See What I Can See

(press the picture to play on Youtube)

"We wrote the song together. It's about making a home in Yorkshire, whether you come from here or not, and then being welcoming to others who are trying to do the same."

It is available for download at musicfromattic.bandcamp.com/album/see-what-i-can-see



It's Just Luck

(press the picture to play on Youtube)

"The tune in question is about as non-cynical as I have done..." inspired "by an an angry response to a friend putting [the video by Hassan Akkad](#) on his Facebook page".

It is also available for download at <https://optimismo.bandcamp.com/track/its-just-luck>



Frank Turner

Frank Turner is a folk singer with a particular reputation for t-shirts. Recently, one of his online gigs was invaded by some far right agitators who started calling him names.

Next day, he was selling t shirts with these names on, and donating the profits to LASSN.

So far, he's raised £6k in both the UK and US

They're sadly sold out of the ones he dedicated to LASSN, but [you can see his other t shirts and merch here](#)



We Shall Overcome

Lewis Burner, stalwart of the Leeds Country/Blues/Rock/Folk scene held a gig for us last year.

Lewis supports a wide variety of causes across Leeds and has a distinguished reputation as both artist and activist. Thanks Lewis.

[Watch more Lewis here.](#)

Policy Updates

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

Asylum Matters publish [fortnightly updates of policy, advocacy and campaigning](#) which anyone can subscribe to.

Migration Yorkshire's Leeds Briefing January 2021 provides "An overview of the latest statistics, policy and research on migration issues affecting partner organisations in Yorkshire and Humber"

[The Fair Immigration Reform Movement](#) launched recently with a wide ranging Charter of Ideas to create "a humane immigration and integration policy" in stark contrast to [those being proposed by UK.GOV](#)

Add your voice to [Liberty's I Support Protecting Everyone campaign](#) which draws connections between the rights of migrants, homeless people, and Gypsies and Travellers, alongside wider issues of civil liberties and social justice.

LASSN online

transitionguide.org.uk

Our [Transition Guide](#) is a step by step guide to setting up life in leeds as a new refugee. It used to be an offline guide to where to go, what to bring, what to say - and now it's online.

helpinleeds.com

[helpinleeds.com](#) now has more than 190 entries of organisations offering free support to asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds. It's free, and up to date, and run by LASSN.

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network,
116 Dewsbury Road, Leeds LS11 6XD

Keep up to date

Sign up for weekly updates from [Leeds Migration Partnership Blog](#) with news and updates about around refugees and asylum seekers, and other migrant groups in Leeds

Facebook and Twitter

[@lassnleeds](#) gives day-to-day updates on what we're doing and [LASSN's Facebook page](#) continues to reach out to people who may not usually show an interest in our work. Good news stories and photos.

