

LASSN

Friends of LASSN Newsletter

Winter 2021

LASSN exists because people from Leeds want to be kind and helpful to people forced to leave their homes because of war and persecution.

As we watch the news, read the papers, or listen to the radio - we hear desperate stories that sometimes sound hopeless. We live on a planet where one person in every hundred has been displaced or forced to leave their home for their safety.

We hope these stories help tell the story of what can happen when a few hundred people don't leave it up to the Government to sort things out. People who are impatient for change and practically minded - and who want to continue to support, empower and integrate refugees into life in Leeds.

Thank you for being one of these people, and a friend of LASSN



The LASSN Team, November 2021: (From left to right) Andrew, Joanna, Jo, Anna, Tina, Hala, Emily, Jon and David

In December 2021, Leeds is accommodating more people seeking refuge than it has for some time. In our city of 760,000, we have almost 400 people living in hotels until the Home Office decide if they can live in the UK.

Some are people from Afghanistan who already have the right to remain in the UK. Others are also from Afghanistan but did not arrive on a plane chartered by UK Gov - and will have to make their case.

The sad reality is that those who made it to the UK without the help of the UK Government (i.e. those who couldn't get on a plane from Kabul) do not qualify for immediate resettlement. They will join the other people that the UK Government says have arrived in the UK unlawfully and will need to wait their turn as the Government decides if they can stay.

And, if the current Government gets its way, such people will be given less help and less protection as a way of discouraging others from coming to the UK. [You can read more about this and what you can do to help here.](#)



Growing Friendship

This Summer, LASSN worked with Season Well and Feed Leeds on a new 'Growing Friendship' project.

English at Home learners and Befriendeds were invited to participate and asked what they would like to grow at home. People expressed interest in growing vegetables, herbs and flowers.

In May 2021, twenty families were given the vegetable, herb and flower seedlings they asked for (grown and donated by gardeners in Leeds), compost, pots and garden tools so they could continue to grow their plants at home.

Throughout the Summer people excitedly shared pictures of their growing strawberries, salad leaves, runner beans, spring onions, tomatoes, flowers, chilli's etc in a very enthusiastic WhatsApp group.

It was not unusual to turn my phone on after the weekend and find 35+ messages and pictures! People shared knowledge about how to support, feed and look after the plants they grew and shared recipes that they used vegetables and herbs in - a wonderful exchange of knowledge and joy.

"The happiness and satisfaction of picking your own fruits and veggies is unexplainable" said a female asylum seeker taking part in the project.

We are thrilled that Season Well want to continue this project in 2022 and they have applied for funding to continue working with us. (Green) fingers crossed!

Tina, Volunteers Manager for Befriending and English at Home





Connecting Opportunities

We love hearing from our Connecting Opportunities Befrienders and Befriendees about all the fun things they get up to together.

Janet and her befriendeed, Afnan enjoyed a lovely afternoon recently, walking down the river to the Royal Armouries Museum, and taking one of the famous Leeds Water taxis back up it!

Thanks to Afnan for writing about her experiences and sharing them with us:

"Today I visited the Royal Armouries Museum with Janet. We walked to the Museum."

The Museum is about the long history of war in the world. It shows what the people wear and use in the war. The soldier wears a shield that protects him from the enemy. The shield shape is different in each country. A soldier used a sword and arrow to fight the enemy. In Japan and Europe the soldier he used horses in the war but in India and Africa used the elephants in the war. After we finished visiting the Museum we went back to the City Centre by Boat Taxi.

I really enjoyed myself and I will visit the Museum again with my kids."

Afnan



Rising to the challenge: destitution in Leeds

Covid has meant a lot of us have been re-evaluating what we do, and how we do it. .

In March 2020 when Covid restrictions came in, Emergency Accommodation via Grace Hosting and the WYDAN Winter Shelter (pictured here) closed.

WYDAN continued to support the former Shelter residents who moved into a council-run B&B.

At LASSN, only Grace House (the house for 4 asylum seeking men, which we opened in February 2020) and longer-stay Hosting arrangements continued.

Since March 2020, many new ways of working have been tried - from Quarantine Hosting to WYDAN taking over a B&B, and a new charity created - [LEDAS](#) - who opened 2 houses for destitute asylum-seeking men.

This means by December 2021, the 14 spaces the city "lost" to Covid have been replaced by

- two four-bedroomed houses for destitute men, and a flat for two women run by WYDAN and
- two four-bedroomed houses for destitute men run by LEDAS

In addition to all this, LASSN Hosts have continued to welcome 14 Guests into their homes - whilst still sticking to Covid restrictions - and 9 people have stayed at Grace House.

It is vital that LASSN and others continue to listen hard to the voices of the people we want to help. Below are a couple of examples of letters from people who have stayed with us.

Covid has given everyone working in destitution a chance to reflect on what we did and how we did it.

Covid has also allowed Guests to find their voices. We have shared a couple of letters from people who have experienced different arrangements - so you can hear things from their perspective.



More than a roof...

We were bowled over to receive this letter of thanks, from one of our former Guests.

Please [click on the picture above](#), to read what it said



...a place to rely on

And here's another describing the difference Grace Hosting has made.

Please [click on the picture above](#), to read the letter in full.

LASSN remains tremendously proud of Grace Hosting, and the life-changing welcome Hosts offer. We've just finished recruiting some new Hosts and stay committed to arranging long-term Hosting. But we also know Hosting is not ideal for everyone.

We are pleased to have listened and learned, and - with the help of generous landlords and people like you - we continue to provide accommodation and support that makes the most sense to the people being supported.

LASSN also hopes to open a second house (modelled on Grace House) as soon as we can find a second property, and as soon as we have raised enough money to cover the costs (about £1700 a month or £20,000 a year.)

Grace House costs has been funded entirely because of donors large and small - who set up a regular direct debit to LASSN. [Please help us to do this again by clicking here.](#)

Jon, Director



Years later, people still remember LASSN

David, the English at Home Volunteers manager, writes:

"Recently I was travelling in a taxi, and the driver asked me what my job was. I explained my role at LASSN, and he smiled broadly and told me he knew all about us! He said that he was from Afghanistan and that he and his family came to Leeds in 1996. At the time, his wife was pregnant with their second child and had no English, so she was very isolated. She managed to get a teacher from LASSN and eventually went to college and is now a teaching assistant. The teacher still visits the family for special occasions as a friend, as well as helping the children with their homework! "

This story has highlighted and reinforced the lasting impact that having an English Teacher can make, not just on the present but also on the future. This last topsy-turvy, challenging year has definitely underlined how vital people's support is from their English at Home teacher. Connection with LASSN has helped people keep up to date with ever-changing COVID guidelines, enabled many learners/volunteers to continue English teaching and learning and provided emotional support in a hugely isolating time.

The pandemic has also left a legacy of learning to us at LASSN – we now have a wealth of accessible online resources and increased knowledge of how to deliver remote support well. We are certainly more aware of the technological and online barriers that exist than we were before COVID; this knowledge is already helping us to be more thoughtful and responsive.

Going forward, English at Home will retain all the elements that the taxi driver's family benefitted from. We are also now able to offer a hybrid of face-to-face and online support. This hopefully means that more people can learn English - and means LASSN can be more responsive to individual needs.



LASSN's Annual Review, 2021

Those of you who attended [our Annual General Meeting](#) may have already seen our most recent Annual Review.

If you haven't, it's full of stories and info that you **won't** have read elsewhere in Friends of LASSN.

The Annual Review, and our most recent Annual Accounts can be found with all the other papers and presentation here: <http://lassn.org.uk/agm21>

Tina's time in Greece



During October 2021 I was lucky enough to be allowed to take a month's un/paid leave from LASSN to go and volunteer in Greece.

After some intensive research I connected with an organisation '[Offene Arme](#)' based on the island of Chios.

The organisation was initially set up to respond to boat landings; taking dry clothes and hot drinks to help people as they arrived from Turkey across the Mediterranean- often at night, cold and scared.

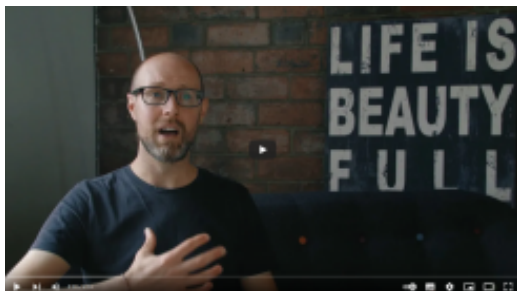
As COVID gathered steam, the organisation was prevented from attending landings and had to diversify their support to reach people. A 'free shop' was consequently established for people from the nearby refugee camp. New arrivals/people in the camp can visit the shop to choose clothes, shoes, toiletries, hygiene items and children's toys.



The beauty of it is it is just like any other shop - clothes displayed neatly on rails, changing rooms, a calm warm, welcoming space where people can browse for what they need. It was a real joy to help in the shop and to be involved in the behind the scenes warehouse organization of stock and resources.

What is heartbreaking is the number of people prevented from arriving on Greek islands – the numbers of (illegal) pushbacks affected by the border police, Hellenic coastguard and FRONTEX amount to over 20,000 people just this year. For those that arrive on Chios, 'Offene Arme' extend a warm welcome and it was a privilege to be part of that response for just a short time".

Tina, Volunteers Manager for Befriending and English at Home



Film Star

Earlier this year, David was filmed by a group called [TRS](#) because he studied Theology and they want to encourage people to do that degree.

As well as many shots of David walking past religious buildings, he manages to squeeze in a few words about LASSN too.

Please [click on the photo](#) to watch the film

Grace House & Grace Hosting

Over recent months we have had several guests moving out and new guests moving into Grace House.

When any new guest moves into the house it creates change which can be very unsettling for other guests. A new group has to be established which requires lots of effort from everybody.

The systems in place may be questioned, conversations need to happen to explain the thinking that sits behind established routines and new ways of doing things may come into play. Everyone has to dig deep, accept that arguments can happen and also recognise that this is normal when you live with other people.

A lot of effort is put into helping to create a community where people can live alongside each other respectfully. From regular house meetings to support sessions with guests, we encourage guests to see Grace House as their community.

Recently, a current guest took time to induct a new guest into the house, showing how the cooker, washing machine and everything else worked. Another guest decided to prepare an empty bedroom so that it was clean and welcoming for a new guest.

Never ever ever would we have asked this of a guest - but he said that it gave him pleasure to do it. The room was spotless, he even took down the curtain pole and cleaned it, changed the curtains, re-arranged the furniture and it looks fantastic.

What is lovely is that when the new guest arrives we will let him know that this was part of his welcome that another guest chose to do.

Jo, Volunteers Manager for Grace Hosting and Grace House



Life under lockdown

When a guest first begins their stay they have to complete a period of quarantine. For some guests this is quite daunting and for others once they adjust to the slower pace they benefit from the rest and distanced support from their host.

At the end of quarantine it was lovely to hear how Loice enjoyed moving around her new home.

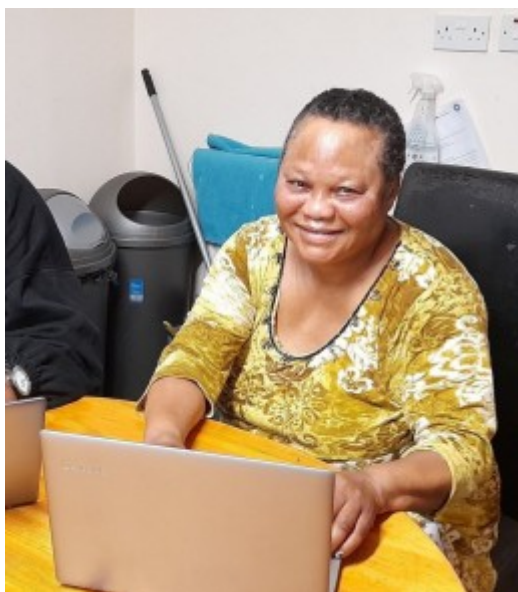
She made numerous outfits and accessories on the sewing machine, cooked with her host and enjoyed a trip to York Cathedral and became a valued member of the household.

Green shoots

The guests living in the house all expressed a desire to make their garden look tidy but needed help and guidance around how to do this.

A volunteer began a regular gardening group where everyone helped to tidy the garden, grow herbs and flowers and also talk and laugh with each other.

What felt really special was the fact that guests considered the garden part of their home and wanted to make this space a nice place to be in.



Keeping connected

LASSN continue to supply electronic devices and credit to people who households that need them - in collaboration with our partners Solidaritech.com.

Many thanks to everyone who has donated an old phone, tablet or laptop - because thanks to you we've been able to supply equipment to British Red Cross, Refugee Council, WYDAN, PAFRAS, LEDAS, Women's Health Matters, MicroRainbow...

[Click here for more details of what we've been up to](#) - including these laptops provided to St Monica's Housing project for destitute asylum-seeking women.



re:cycle

We hugely support the work of folks like [Leeds Bike Mill](#) - but when folks have bikes that are in decent nick (like these two nearly-new beauties) that they want to get rid of, we can give them a quick once over, and out to folks who need them.

Like Abuba said after just 3 weeks - *"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"*.

When we can, we also supply bicycles to children, so they can cycle along with their parents. And as you'd expect, we ensure all bikes are individually fitted to their riders, and supplied with locks, a helmet, and basic road safety instructions.

Bikes in need of some serious TLC should really go to the experts like the Leeds Bike Mill, but we'd love to hear about any others you might know about.

Thank you to Anna, to Simon her husband, Brian at everyone at Garforth Refugee Group who have helped us find and distribute 27 bikes in the last 12 months.

Local Updates

We delighted to share that Leeds City Council have committed to becoming [a Council of Sanctuary](#). Click on the link to find out what this means.

As well as their [Quarterly policy updates](#) Migration Yorkshire have started to publish [weekly news roundups](#) on Asylum Policy and resources.

[Migration Yorkshire's Policy Briefing October 2021 \[6 pages\]](#) "An overview of the latest statistics, policy and research on migration issues affecting partner organisations in Yorkshire and Humber"

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.

migrationpartnership.org.uk

Sign up for weekly updates from [Leeds Migration Partnership Blog](https://leeds.migrationpartnership.org.uk) with news and updates about around refugees and asylum seekers, and other migrant groups in Leeds

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

