

LASSN

Friends of LASSN Newsletter



Winter 2022

Season's Greetings. We're delighted to update you on what's been happening at LASSN over the last few months.

We also hope this newsletter is the equivalent of a warm blanket and a hot drink during difficult times - to help keep your spirits up - and to remind you of the difference your support makes to the support, empowerment and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds.

The LASSN staff team recently spent an awayday at the [People Powered Press in Saltaire](#), thinking about how we talk about LASSN's values, where we produced a giant poster for the entrance to our building.

We wanted something big and bold, and to make it clear what people can expect from LASSN: we came up with "Everyone is equal, valued, welcome."

Thank you for your continued support for LASSN, and most importantly of all, the refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants at risk in Leeds.



From left to right: Mahshid (Project Support and Admin Officer), Anna (Hosting Development Worker), Aya (Tea and Talk Group Worker), Andrew (Office Manager), David (Volunteers Manager, English at Home), Jo (Volunteers Manager, Grace Hosting), Mehjabeen (Volunteers Manager, Connecting Opportunities), and Jon (Director).

City of Sanctuary

By Prisca [Chioma Okuechukwu](#) (1965, Nigeria – 2022, Leeds)

In a world full of people,
 There abound, the isolated, the lonely, the broken, the castaway,
 By the harsh circumstances of life,
 Tossed to and fro by the storms of Persecution,
 Torture, war, and violence.
 Like a Skyscraper uprooted, chopped in bits
 By tsunami, rocked helter-skelter by ferocious flood,
 Scattered beyond recognition,
 So is one, on the journey of asylum,
 But behold! Angels appeared on the scene

In the Mothering care of Solace,
 In the soothing balm of [Pafros](#),
 In the breath of life of [refugee Council](#),
 In the sewing hands of [Lassn](#),
 In the resuscitating hands of [Hillary Benn](#) and [Fabian Hamilton](#).

See! Angels with swift hands [remoulding](#)
 Leeds into a city of Sanctuary,
 A soothing home now for the hurting and the broken.

Solace, a Leeds based charity supporting survivors of exile and persecution
[Pafros](#), [Pafros](#) Action For Refugees and Asylum Seekers
 Lassn, Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network
[Refugee Education, Training, Advice Service](#)
[Hillary Benn](#), Labour Member of Parliament for Leeds Central
[Fabian Hamilton](#), Labour Member of Parliament for Leeds North East

City of Sanctuary

Prisca - who we know through our Befriending programme - recently shared a poem with us, entitled City of Sanctuary.

We're including it - not only because it's an excellent poem - but also shows the impact of LASSN's Befriending project, and how it is helping to make Leeds a City of Sanctuary.

Please click on the text of Prisca's poem to read it.

Goodbye and hello



Anna

Anna Terry rejoined the team in November as the Ukrainian Hosting Development Worker, as well as being a former Grace Host, Anna previously supported our Meet and Connect social groups.

You can read more about the work we're starting with hosts of Ukrainian families below .



Mehjabeen

Mehjabeen joined us in October, as the Volunteer Manager for Connecting Opportunities.

"I am passionate about volunteering to support the growth of diverse communities. Exploring various cultures, cuisines and languages is something I enjoy. I learn best through shared experiences and connecting with others through lived values."



Tina

After 5 years, we're sorry to say goodbye to Tina, who has managed volunteers for English at Home, Befriending and Connecting Opportunities.

In December, she's flying out to Oman, to work on her Arabic, and will then start work with refugees living in camps.

We'll miss her enormously.

Connecting Opportunities

Sadly, our work with Connecting Opportunities is coming to an end.

You'll remember our Mentoring and Befriending project has been operating for 5 years alongside employment support from PATH Yorkshire and Touchstone, mental health support from Solace and ESOL lessons from PATH.

The programme enjoys EU funding which ends in March 2023, and no new referrals have been taken since November 2022

Tina, Mehjabeen and Aya have been working hard to plan what comes next: to ensure participants know where to find further support once the project closes - as well as to shape LASSN's future plans for Befriending. You can read more about this from Mehjabeen, below.

So far participants tell us they have enjoyed the blended approach of group activities (like the recent trip to Calverley Hall pictured below and the Women's Empowerment sessions we ran over Summer) alongside a more goals-oriented approach to 1:1 befriending.



Mehjabeen, the Volunteers Manager for Connecting Opportunities writes:

Connecting opportunities has been a consistent source of support with a variety of regular weekly activities. From conversation groups and insightful day trips to wellbeing workshops and support with confidence building.

Attending these groups for the first time myself, I was truly moved by the warmth and welcoming nature of the group and realized how integral connecting with others is, especially as I am new to the city.

The richness in finding common ground and relating to a diverse range of individuals really develops Tea & Talk to being more than just a conversational group. So many goals and aspirations are shared, at the same time many barriers are broken and fears or inhibitions are overcome through the support and empathy of both the volunteers and participants.

We recently carried out a focus group with the participants and discussed how Tea & Talk has been useful and the wonderful feedback we received has been so encouraging. The discussions also highlighted that having such avenues of conversation, support and connection are essential and very much an ongoing need. Like all of us at LASSN, the Tea & Talk group were disheartened to learn that the CO funding will be coming to a close and really wish that this great initiative could continue.

This was also the reason we discussed what the groups current needs were so that we could provide a closing strategy that supported every individual in the best way possible and would equip participants to continue working towards their goals post Tea & Talk closure.

The focus group also brought to light the strong bond that has been created in the group as they have decided to continue meeting and supporting one another after the CO project closes

LASSN are seeking new funding to resource this work, and keen to retain the excellent volunteers and staff who have made CO such a success. We'll have more information on this in the New Year.

Here is some of the wonderful feedback we receive from the Tea & Talk participants:

- "It was a great chance to meet people and communicate which gave me self-confidence"
 - "The Tea & Talk program helped me a lot in developing speaking and listening skills"
 - "Tea & Talk meetings have given us the opportunity to meet different people, exchange ideas and discover the British culture".
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Musical connection

We sometimes get quite random calls to the office. Last month, a local Councillor got in touch to ask if we could help Mussa - an asylum seeker living in a Hotel in his ward. Mussa is a saxophonist, and had not had access to an instrument since arriving in the UK.

We emailed some folks we know, and within a couple of days we'd found a saxophone for Mussa - kindly loaned by the friend of a friend. And, in the process, Mussa connected with [ChapelFM](#) - and who have since had him playing live on air.

Seeking refuge often means people leave important things behind and musical instruments are often too big to carry.

If you have a spare instrument you could give away, or loan to someone who'd use it, [please let us know](#) - so we can try and help more folks like Mussa.

AGM 2022: What did you miss?

If you weren't able to make it to our Annual General Meeting - please have a look at [what you missed](#), including the spectacular review of the year, presented by the team. Click on the image to watch it



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

LASSN
Leeds Asylum Seekers'
Support Network

Support to hosts of Ukrainian families

In November, we launched our support to Hosts of Ukrainian Households. There are currently [695 Ukrainian refugees resettled in in Leeds](#).

Anna, the Hosting Development worker, is setting up Hosting Support Groups across the city where hosts can meet other hosts - and importantly - meet people from other agencies like Housing, Education, and Welfare rights, who can provide help and support to their guests.

Hosts of Ukrainian Guests can [register here for support](#):

As well as updating [newtoleeds.org](#), we've also gathered self-help resources in a new section of LASSN's website: [lassn.org.uk/ukraine](#).



newtoleeds.org and helpinleeds.com

Our websites helpinleeds.com and newtoleeds.org have been completely revised and updated. helpinleeds.com is a directory of all the places in Leeds that are good at helping refugees and asylum seekers. newtoleeds.org is a guide to life in Leeds for new migrants and refugees who are allowed to work and who have free access to public services.

Both of these websites are available in 22 different languages, and provide up to date information on life in Leeds.

Mahshid and Julia have both worked hard on these over the last couple of months, checking hundreds of telephone numbers, opening hours, addresses - as well as changes to access following the Pandemic.

We've also taken the difficult decision to mothball our other website transitionguide.org.uk. Since this guide was launched in 2017, our friends at RETAS have developed the [28 Days Transition Project](#), which provides support for refugees in transition, and newtoleeds.org covers most of the information that was previously in the Transition Guide.

English at Home

Choosing the right people to work at LASSN is one of our most important tasks, and all of LASSN's work is based on what we've heard and learned from the people we help.

Which is why we **always** involve refugees and asylum seekers in choosing new staff.

David (Volunteers Manager for English at Home) has supported 3 English at Home Learners to help select our new Volunteer Manager for English at Home, and Aya - the Tea & Talk Group Leader, and former English at Home learner - sat on the interview panel.

We'll let you know the outcome of our recruitment as soon as we can - but we're sure with such great help we'll find the right person.



New tech for Christmas? Can we help recycle your old stuff?

[Solidaritech](#) are a not for profit who supply the folks LASSN support with second hand laptops, computers and tablets and phones for free.

In the last year they've supplied almost 900 devices to refugees and asylum seekers - but they've recently run out of laptops and are very short of phones - so we said we'd lend a hand with their Christmas Appeal.

"we'd love to receive the tech you have replaced over the last 2 years, or even in the last few weeks. If you replaced devices with a Black Friday bargain, please donate your old tech rather than leave it on the shelf."

LASSN are a drop off point for Solidaritech, so if you have any spare equipment that's less than 3 or 4 years old, [please get in touch](#).



Grace Hosting, and the Cost of Living

Everyone is feeling the pinch right now, and the volunteers who invite asylum seekers to live with them are no exception. With rising costs of food and heating, it costs more than ever before to put someone up in a spare room.

Although the model of Grace Hosting has changed following the Pandemic, Hosts still provide a welcome, a bed, and support to 12 every night - Guests who would otherwise be street homeless.

Sadly, LASSN are not in a position to offer Grace Hosts [the £350 a month "Thank You" payments](#) offered by Government to Hosts of Ukrainian people. And our grant applications to enable us to increase the amount of financial help we offer to both Hosts and Guests have not been successful.

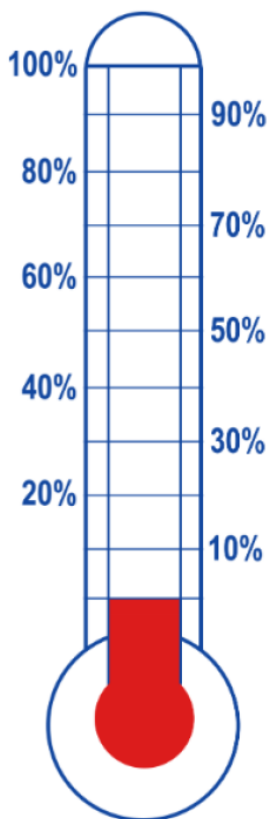
However, thanks to the ongoing generosity of LASSN donors, we've been able to offer Guests £20 a week living expenses over the Festive period. This is the same amount as we offer to guests staying at Grace or Eva's House - and helps people to get out of the house, to buy toiletries, food, and snacks. These payments improve the independence of Guests, but also to relieve pressure on their Hosts - who can only claim £39 out of pocket expenses a month.

We continue to apply for grant funds so that we can make these kinds of payments more regularly, as well as increasing the amount of expenses that can be claimed by Grace Hosts.

If this is something you'd like to support, please consider donating to LASSN.

We promise that every penny will go directly into the pockets of people with nothing, or their Hosts who continue to share what they have - even during the hard times.

Donate to Grace Hosting



and.digital and kidscan help LASSN's fundraising

Some of LASSN's projects are funded through the generosity of Trusts and Grant making giving bodies. But the rest of our work is resourced through the generosity of private donors and community groups.

In recent months, we've enjoyed help from [kidscan](#) and [and.digital](#) to help us improve

- the way we raise funds, and
- the support we provide to people and groups who raise funds for LASSN.

They've suggested we ask your advice, to help influence how we develop our fundraising strategies.

As part of our research, we'd like your help to better understand who reads these newsletters, and your connections to LASSN.

It's totally anonymous, and the findings will be used to inform our fundraising strategy for 2023 and beyond.

We know we ask a lot of you already - but if you have 2 minutes to complete this online survey, we'd be ever so grateful.

[Take me to the questionnaire!](#)

News and Policy Updates

Refugee Action continue to produce [excellent info on recent changes to asylum law](#), and how people who disagree with them can organise for change.

Migration Yorkshire continue to publish [weekly news roundups](#) on Asylum Policy and resources.

Asylum Matters also publish [fortnightly updates on policy and campaigns](#).

helpinleeds.com

helpinleeds.com now has more than 200 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](#) with news and updates about around refugees and asylum seekers, and other migrant groups in Leeds

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network,
22-23 Blayds Yard, Leeds LS1 4AD

