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As we enter the winter season and closing months of 2023 we are thrilled to bring you this edition of Friends of LASSN, brimming with updates and stories that will brighten the colder days.

Project updates

English at Home

The past year has been busy and positive at [English at Home](#)!

Our fantastic volunteers have been hard at work, supporting learners and boosting their confidence in English. According to recent reviews, a whopping 99% of our learners are feeling more confident, while another 99% find their teachers incredibly useful. Plus, 88% have reduced their isolation by joining local community groups or making friends in the area.

On the behind-the-scenes front, we've been busy too. Our volunteers received a boost with six training sessions led by field experts. We also hosted a learner focus group to fine-tune our match and review process.



The one-to-one nature of the volunteer-learner relationship means that a special bond can be built. Gannah* needed an English at Home teacher as she had difficulties with memory and recall due to PTSD. Since being matched with Christy, her confidence has increased exponentially: she now volunteers at a local charity shop and has started using her background in fashion to teach other women how to sew. Both refer to each other as sisters, with Gannah* explaining that Christy understands how she needs to learn and is always patient with her, especially when she struggles with her mental health.

Grace Hosting

At [Grace Hosting's](#) houses, every guest is navigating through profound challenges, having fled traumatic situations and now grappling with the adversities of an immigration system

with an openly hostile approach. The toll on their mental health, motivation, and hope is substantial, requiring immense inner strength to persevere.

Our House Volunteers are instrumental in providing emotional and practical support. From offering a listening ear to assisting with doctor's appointments and ensuring access to free food, their efforts go beyond immediate needs. Activities and shared meals create a sense of companionship, allowing individuals to temporarily escape their worries. The impact of this support resonates even after guests move out. Just last week we received this message...



Our houses offer guests a stable place to recoup, focus on their asylum claims, and engage with essential services, positively impacting their overall well-being. Due to a generous donation, we were also able to provide guests with gym memberships for a number of months.

Many guests went to the gym at least 5 times each week at all hours of the day. Guests shared how it improved their mental health, created better sleep patterns, improved their physical health and having a routine and a place to go that was outside of their home improved their wellbeing. Everyone also shared how positive it felt to meet 'every day' normal people who live in Leeds, talk and have banter and not feel like an 'asylum seeker' but just another person that goes to the gym.

Since the money ran out guests have been raising with volunteers, in house meetings and in review sessions the loss that they are feeling from no longer going and the impact it is having on their wellbeing.

Amazingly, a friend of LASSN did a sponsored run and the money raised will now be used to pay for two months of membership for Grace Hosting guests.

If you would also like to organise a fundraiser for LASSN, please [contact our new Community Fundraising and Communications Coordinator, Orla.](#)

Welcome & Connect



You'll remember that W&C is LASSN's newest project, which launched in April 2023. Welcome and Connect offers two kinds of support - a one-to-one connection with a volunteer, alongside social groups for people to learn more about their new city, and to meet other people.

One-to-one matches have provided participants with a supportive volunteer. This has been a great help for individuals to share their worries, talk through barriers and explore activities and services available to them in Leeds.

The impact of each hour spent together has been moving to see. From participants never having set foot in the city centre to regularly attending the gym, art galleries and going for walks, the Welcome & Connect project has been able to support individuals with lifestyle changes that help maintain good wellbeing through extremely trying times.

Meanwhile, our Tea & Talk group has been growing each week as participants continue to join and make new friends while learning about Leeds, culture and each other. Our partnership work with various organisations and projects like New Roots, The Prince's Trust and The Landmark Trust have been so fruitful in keeping us busy with a range of activities and crafts for the group.

Goodbye Ukraine Hosting Project



LASSN's Ukrainian Hosts Support project ended on October 31. Over the past year, Anna, our former Ukrainian Host Development Worker, connected 40 hosts and established multiple support groups across Leeds.

Through face-to-face and online meetings, workshops, and individual sessions, hosts delved into various topics: housing options, the host's role, holiday arrangements, understanding trauma, setting boundaries, managing conversations, employment opportunities, ESOL classes, and social events.

Although the project has finished, we have left [the comprehensive resources for hosts](#) on our website, so that people can still benefit from them.

Thank you to hosts who participated, shared experiences, and continue to provide safety and show compassion to displaced Ukrainians.

LASSN news

You're invited to our AGM

We would love you to come to our Annual General Meeting 2024.

At our AGM, we'll elect and confirm re-appointment of our trustees, share what we've been up to as well as our plans for the year ahead, and enjoy some food and music.

- 20th January 2024
- 11:30-14:30
- All Hallows Church, 24 Regent Terrace, Burley, Leeds LS6 1NP.

RSVP or find out more





This year marked 25 years since the first Refugee Week in the UK. LASSN proudly organised four events in collaboration with local organisations.

Participants from our Tea & Talk group showcased their weaving skills in an exhibition at the University Gallery, hosted at University of Leeds Galleries. You can check out a video of this collaboration [here](#).

Additionally, our partnership with People's Voice Media led to a [knowledge exchange event](#) analysing a decade of migration coverage in Leeds newspapers. We anticipate the premiere of a short animation based on these accounts in January 2024; let us know if you'd like more information about this admin@lassn.org.uk.

Alongside Leeds Refugee Forum, we hosted the Refugee World Cup, engaging 24 teams representing diverse Leeds communities.

We also partnered with Leeds Church Institute for the '[Seeing Asylum](#)' [photography exhibition](#) at Leeds Minster.

We commissioned a video to showcase these events and others during Leeds Refugee Week, and celebrate the contributions refugees and asylum seekers bring to life in Leeds. Check it out below!

Refugee Week Video

Asylum in Leeds

In Summer, the UK Government passed laws enabling the detention and removal of asylum seekers who arrive to the UK without invitation. The new laws will require the UK Government to expand current detention facilities from just over 2500 places, to accommodate the estimated 65,000 individuals per year facing removal from the UK.

As hotels in the South of England close, asylum hotel residents in Leeds have doubled from 1000 to 2100 in less than three weeks. Cost-cutting measures, like requiring people to share rooms, have led to hunger strikes and self-harm. Despite a 37% profit increase for Home Office contractors in 2022, the government complains about the cost of hotel accommodation for asylum seekers.

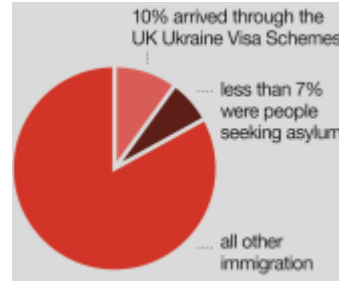
New arrivals lack basic resources, with the government relying on charities like British Red Cross and local shops for free clothing. Those in hotels receive only £9 per week for essentials.

The surge in hotel residents complicates support efforts, limiting access to English classes and activities. Legal aid for asylum claims is nearly non-existent in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

LASSN are not a party political organisation, but when an increasingly hostile environment is repeatedly described by politicians as “the will of the people” – we encourage all those who share our values to make their voices known.

There’s lots of ways of doing this – asking questions, writing letters, signing petitions, and even voting. Or lending your support to campaigns to enable asylum seekers the right to work. Please: if you are concerned by what you read here - speak up, and speak out!

To keep informed and tapped on to ongoing campaigns and advocacy opportunities, you might consider exploring the following.



Asylum Matters

If you haven't already, sign up to Asylum Matters updates, where they share news, and advocacy and campaign updates.

[Sign up](#)

Migration Yorkshire

Check out Migration Yorkshire news for stories about migration-related policy, research and statistics.

[Read more](#)

Facts Not Fiction

To help separate fact from fiction, British Red Cross have made a new data visualisation tool on asylum and modern slavery systems

[Check it out](#)

Although the Government's actions and rhetoric are making it even harder for charities like LASSN to provide humanitarian help, we're doing our best to provide an alternative to the fear and division which the Hostile Environment creates. We're continuing to do what we do best: encouraging people from Leeds to support asylum seekers and refugees, providing accommodation options for asylum seekers, facilitating skill development, and creating integration opportunities to make Leeds a truly welcoming place.

The sustainability of our projects and our ability to continue meeting the ongoing needs of asylum seekers in Leeds hinge significantly on your support.

In this spirit, we invite you to contemplate becoming a regular donor. Regular contributions provide essential, unrestricted funding, playing a pivotal role in the longevity and success of our projects.



£5 per month

Could pay for a bus pass, enabling an asylum seeker to meet their volunteer match and receive support.

£10 per month

Could pay for one week of a volunteer host's expenses.

Become a Regular Donor

Despite the challenges that we face - it's not all doom and gloom. We were delighted to hear about Leeds City Council's recent commitment to becoming a [Council of Sanctuary](#) - you can see footage of this historic vote [here](#). This brings the council in line with [local health](#) and [cultural partners](#), who have also committed to making their institutions more welcoming and friendly places for people seeking sanctuary.

Follow [this](#) link to learn more about what is being done to make Leeds a compassionate city.



Thank you for reading, for supporting, and for considering the value of consistent donations.

Speak soon (and hopefully see you at our AGM!),

Team LASSN