

Leeds Asylum Seekers'
Support Network

LASSN



2022
—
2023

Annual Review

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

was set up in 1999 to respond to the pressing unmet needs of refugees and asylum seekers living in Leeds.

Most of the people we work with have experienced acute isolation, mental health issues, language difficulties and immense uncertainty over their asylum claim.



Our Vision

Asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants will be safe, respected, supported and empowered to rebuild their lives free of persecution.

Our Mission

LASSN will meet the needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants in Leeds and raise awareness of the issues they face.

Our Objectives

LASSN wants asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to be:

- **SUPPORTED** by local people and relieved from hardship and distress;
- **EMPOWERED** to rebuild their lives, fulfil their potential, and have an influence;
- **INTEGRATED** and settled in their new environment in Leeds, and for Leeds to be a place where organisations, the public and policy makers collaborate with refugees to make Leeds a place of welcome and understanding.

How we work...

- **Respectfully** with asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants, acknowledging the significant contribution they make to LASSN, Leeds and the UK.
- **Informed** by the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to ensure we meet their needs.
- **To Empower** asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants and engage the local Leeds community to become involved in this support.
- **In Partnership** and collaboration with other organisations and service providers so that asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants access the most appropriate services.
- **With Volunteers** whose time and enthusiasm are vital to our work with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants.



"I thank God for LASSN
and my teacher because
without them I would not
be doing these things."

*~LASSN English at
#home learner*

2022
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2023

A YEAR ON A PAGE

Supported

373 asylum seekers and refugees received one to one support from LASSN. Including children and other dependents, LASSN supported a total of **672** people.

£5050

was distributed in hardship grants to...

5189 nights of accommodation were provided to the **37** Guests who stayed at Grace House, Eva's House and with Grace Hosts.

78
households

Empowered

231 people volunteered with LASSN.

14% of volunteers describe themselves as refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, and supported our work in various ways: assisting with recruitment and selection; training volunteers; representing LASSN at conferences and strategic meetings; public speaking; interpreting and translating; organising trips and socials; making films and taking photos; cooking; publicising our work; and serving as Trustees.

107 people were able to improve their social connections and their overall health and well-being through our work to connect asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants with mentors and befrienders.



All LASSN clients were offered phones, data, and credit to help them stay in touch and access support.

Integrated

All the people we work alongside were encouraged to find out more about life in the UK. Volunteers supported them to find their feet in Leeds and understand more about how Leeds works – visiting schools, universities, cultural activities, galleries, theatre performances, gardening, swimming, walking, cycling, visiting sporting fixtures, and contributing to arts projects.

218 people were supported to improve their confidence in speaking and writing English through our English at Home and Befriending projects.

201 posts on migrationpartnership.org.uk helped keep 22,000 people abreast of the changing face of asylum services in Leeds and beyond.

<http://>



The lassn.org.uk website had more than 17,000 visitors, LASSN's Facebook page has over 3,000 likes and LASSN has over 2,100 Twitter followers.

Connecting Opportunities

This project empowers new migrants to enhance their English language skills, integrate, and access support.

Volunteers are paired with migrants, meeting weekly to foster a relationship, explore the city, and develop skills.

Our Tea & Talk group meets bi-weekly in various cafes in Leeds, allowing refugees and migrants to develop friendship groups, English language skills and a network of support.

This year, **29** volunteers supported **61** people seeking employment or education, **14** of whom found jobs or entered education.

96 Tea & Talk sessions were held throughout the year. The group also ventured on social and cultural trips to places like Temple Newsam, Calverley Hall, and the Corn Exchange.

Taking part in activities and fulfilling hobbies as a group has enabled participants to build confidence and created a safe space for cultural exchange.

Our Voices

"I am just so proud to see the progress made by Farah*."

The first time I met Farah she was very quiet and scared to make phone calls, not knowing what to say.

Now it is amazing to see her confidence is back, and she is managing so well with her kids and exploring places I was able to show her with her family. I feel very lucky to know her."

– Connecting Opportunities volunteer

"I am happy that I met new people and got to know other cultures"

– Connecting Opportunities participant

"I have enjoyed knowing more about different shops, travel and visiting places"

– Connecting Opportunities participant



Befriending

Befriending reduces isolation, improves well-being, and encourages integration and greater self-reliance among asylum seekers and refugees. Volunteers provide practical support to the people they are matched with: supporting people to access health and social care services, make stronger connections with community organisations, and make friends.

In the last year, **46** asylum seekers and refugees were matched with **40** volunteers who provided one-to-one support. Befriending enabled refugees and befrienders to learn more about Leeds and make greater social connections. Activities like picnics, theatre trips, and visits to sporting fixtures helped people to discover new aspects of life in Leeds and to widen their social circle.

Welcome & Connect

Towards the end of this year, we merged our Connecting Opportunities and Befriending projects into a new goal-focused volunteering project Welcome & Connect, where volunteers help refugees and asylum seekers connect to support services, educational opportunities, and cultural /leisure activities in Leeds.

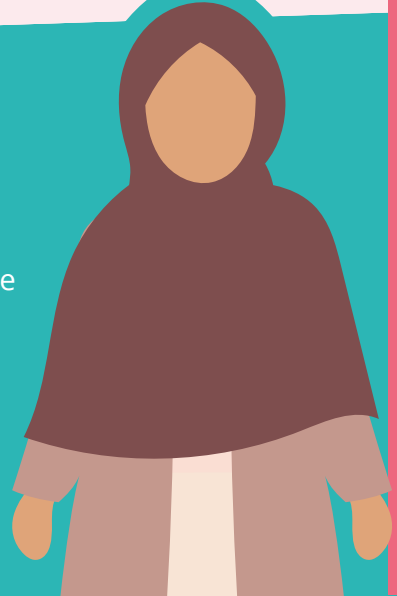
"I am happy that I met new people and got to know other cultures"

– Befriending volunteer

Our Voices

"I feel I'm alive again. 2 gorgeous friends I have from your support. They and you are amazing people in my life. I'm coming up little with your support".

– Befriending participant



English at Home

Volunteer tutors match with refugee and asylum seeker learners who cannot attend mainstream English classes. Volunteers support learners to build their confidence in English and achieve goals they set for themselves.

This year, **91** tutors spent **2013** hours teaching English to **111** people. Among them, 56 successfully joined college courses or mainstream ESOL classes. After sessions, **95%** of learners said they felt more confident speaking English.

1:1 sessions enabled learners to pass UK Citizenship and driving tests, speak with teachers at parents' evenings, make GP appointments, attend bakery courses, support other refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the area and much more!

Learners were also connected with volunteering opportunities to practice their English in community settings.

25 training and support volunteer sessions ensured volunteers had a place to share skills, learn from one another, and reflect on how they help people learn.



Our Voices

"When I first met Amara* she had no English language and was very new to the country. Amara's determination in weekly sessions has meant that, within just six months, Amara can now write her name, recognise much of the alphabet – and her vocabulary is increasing daily. It is especially admirable given she has more than five young children and a very busy household.

I am so proud of what Amara has learnt and hope to continue to see her flourish!"

~ English at Home volunteer



Shirley has volunteered with us for 20 years!

Grace Hosting

The Grace Hosting Project provides accommodation to asylum seekers in Leeds who are not entitled to any other accommodation. Coping with this stress, building an asylum case, and worrying about loved ones requires remarkable emotional resilience.

Volunteer Hosts offer their spare rooms to Guests and offer them support. Grace House and Eva House are shared houses where Guests can get respite from destitution and reconnect with support around their asylum claim.

This year, **37 Guests** were accommodated for a total of **5189 nights**, the equivalent of over **14 years**. 19 people stayed with 6 Hosts and 18 people stayed at Grace or Eva's House.

Increased financial support was given to Hosts and Guests through the winter months to help with an increase in cost of living and utility bills. Guests have been encouraged to participate in wider group activities to ease isolation and levels of stress - including a gardening group, trips to the theatre and rugby.

A generous donation enabled us to gift monthly gym passes to Guests which had multiple benefits from having a reason to leave the house, gain strength and improve sleeping patterns.

Our Voices

"Staying with Cara for 10 months gave peace to my mind, knowing I was going to sleep in the same place. I was making a 20-year application, I had so much paperwork, so much stress I needed this place to help me to focus. She was friendly, I could talk to her, she even trusted me with a key to her house...she never judged me".

– Grace Hosting guest

"Going to the gym help me with everything. I sleep good now. I lose weight. I go 6 days a week, 2 hours. I want to keep go because I make friends. It helps with pressure and stress. If I stay home, I do nothing but think."

– Grace Hosting guest



Ukrainian Hosting Support Project

With support from Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation, LASSN started its Ukraine Hosting Support Project in November 2022.

The project aims to make hosting an enjoyable and positive experience by helping Hosts meet, learn from one another, and find extra support for their Ukrainian Guests.

Regular groups were set up around the city, and a series of information sessions for Hosts were set up covering topics like supporting people with trauma or finding rented accommodation.

In response to an increase of new migrants in Leeds, our website newtoleeds.org was updated to ensure that Ukrainian people were welcomed with the right information in their own language. The website is a resource for all new migrants living in Leeds and reached over 16,000 people in the last year.



Our Voices

"The group has made a huge difference with our hosting experience. At the point of joining, we were in desperate need of being able to discuss our experiences with people that simply understood. I can honestly say that without the support of Anna and the group, our hosting experience would have broken down months ago".

– *Hosting couple who attended regular groups*





“Being able to explain to people why I host has changed several people’s views. I hope it’s a very small step to making our country more welcoming to people who need our support.”

*~Grace Hosting
volunteer*

Information & Awareness

Providing information and raising awareness of issues around asylum and refuge are central to LASSN's mission: tackling prejudice, encouraging understanding, and fostering interaction and integration within the local community.



lassn.org.uk

17,000 people looked at lassn.org.uk - where all LASSN's policies, procedures and training materials remain free of charge for anyone to use or adapt - including a library of more than 100 ESOL resources.

helpinleeds.com

4,300 people used helpinleeds.com - LASSN's directory of groups and services offering help to asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds.

migrationpartnership.org.uk

22,000 people looked at migrationpartnership.org.uk - a multi-author blog focused on local asylum, refuge, and migration.

Social Media

LASSN's social media presence continued to grow, with 3,000 Facebook likes, and 2,100 Twitter followers.

For LASSN, raising awareness also involves creating spaces where people can express themselves and be better understood. This is why, in the past year we supported the development of empowerment training for participants, promoted books written by volunteers and supporters, and coordinated the refugee world cup (check out the video [here](#)).

Check out our friend Jennie Cole's book series...



Our partners

Partnership and collaborations are at the heart of all LASSN's work. Here are some of the organisations we work with most closely.



We work closely with [Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers \(PAFRAS\)](#) and British Red Cross who provide support and advice for clients in Grace Hosting.

Our support to destitute people informs our membership of the

[No Accommodation Network](#) and [Asylum Matters](#) - who both influence regional and national policy on homelessness, asylum seekers and refugees. We also provide free Wi-Fi access to people staying in [WYDAN](#) and [LEDAS](#) accommodation.



We are members of [Forum Central/Volition](#) - who represent third sector organisations in Leeds with an interest in mental health, wellbeing, and [Voluntary Action Leeds](#).

We are active members of [Leeds Migration Partnership](#) and contribute to the Strategy, Operations, and Information strands. We started (and still maintain) the blog which acts as a weekly bulletin for individuals and organisations who support asylum seekers refugees and other migrants in Leeds.



Leeds Migration Partnership

We are a [Connecting Opportunities](#) partner. Connecting Opportunities works with new migrants to develop their skills and opportunities to work and be part of the local community.



SOLIDARITECH

Digital

Inclusion: As well as supplying devices and SIM cards for free – we continue to fund a digital inclusion project with [Leeds Refugee Forum \(LRF\)](#). This provides clients with devices and training on how to use them.

[Solidaritech.com](#) continue to provide portable technology free of charge. This year LRF was able to create a [lending library](#) to supply tablets to asylum seekers and other people living in temporary accommodation.



We are working in partnership with Leeds GATE, Basis Yorkshire, and Yorkshire MESMAC and with Asylum Seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, Sex Workers, and Trans+ people to tackle health inequalities. Adaptive Action workshops have been facilitated throughout the year, bringing together community voices and those in positions of power to gain shared understanding of what is happening and move towards action.



LASSN works in partnership we work in partnership with PAFRAS, British Red Cross, Meeting Point, Solace and RETAS to raise and distribute funds to refugees experiencing homelessness and destitution.

Read more about the [Hardship Fund here.](#)



LASSN Finances 2022-23

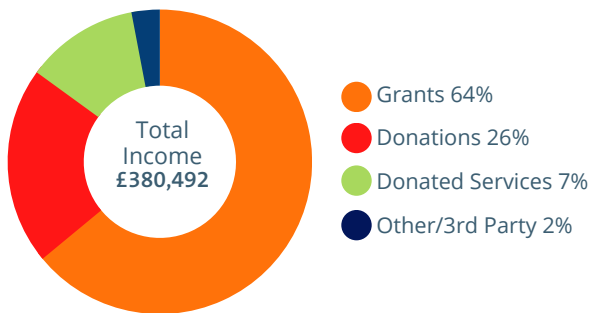
LASSN relies on charitable grants and donations: we receive no regular Government funding.

We continue to make good progress towards achieving full cost recovery for our projects, but increased competition for major grant funding makes things harder and harder.

LASSN has maintained services and rebuilt our unrestricted reserves due to the ongoing generosity of our individual donors and supporters.

Download a full set of our accounts from lassn.org.uk/accounts

Income



Expenses





As well as thanking our major donors and benefactors, we would also like to thank everyone who has helped LASSN financially over the last year – all those who have made one off donations, set up standing orders, as well as those who have held or attended a fundraising event for LASSN.

Without your help and the support of our major benefactors listed below, we could not have helped so many people in our city during 2022-23.



NEWBY
TRUST

Leeds
Community
Foundation



Holy Family of Bordeaux
in Britain and Ireland



1

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

In these particularly challenging times, showing solidarity through volunteering has never been more crucial. In exchange for your time and enthusiasm, we offer high-quality training and support and the chance to make a real difference in someone's life.

Find out more at lassn.org.uk/volunteer

2

BECOME A FRIEND OF LASSN

Show your support for our aims and objectives by becoming a Friend of LASSN. Sign up to our newsletter at lassn.org.uk/signup and receive quarterly updates about our work. If you are interested in voting at our next AGM or standing for election, become a member. **Become a member at lassn.org.uk/signup**

3

BECOME A REGULAR DONOR

By donating on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis, you can help provide sustained support to keep our projects running.

Find out more at www.lassn.org.uk/donate

4

ORGANISE A FUNDRAISING EVENT

We would love you to do some fundraising for LASSN. No matter the size of the donation, your help would mean a great deal to us.

Find out more at www.lassn.org.uk/fundraising

5

TELL OTHERS ABOUT WHAT WE DO

Follow us on social media, share our posts and let your friends know about our work. Know anyone with skills they would like to share with us? Pass on our details!

If you need any help or more information please contact our office: 0113 373 1759 / admin@lassn.org.uk

Thank you



Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

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Websites

lassn.org.uk

helpinleeds.com

migrationpartnership.org.uk

newtoleeds.org



facebook.com/lassnleeds



twitter.com/lassnleeds

Charity No. 1092647

Company No. 04228876