

Annual Report

LASSN
Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

2023/2024





What We Stand For

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 the asylum claim.

LASSN believes that people from Leeds have a crucial role in ensuring refugees get the support they want, and can be empowered to integrate into the life of their new city.

Our Vision

For Asylum Seekers, refugees and any and all migrants to 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.



How we work...

- We work respectfully with asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants, acknowledging the significant contribution they make to LASSN, Leeds and the UK
- We are informed by the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants to ensure we meet their needs
- Our work empowers asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants and engage the local Leeds community to become involved in this support
- We work in partnership and collaboration with other organisations and service providers so that asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants access the most appropriate services
- We work with Volunteers whose time and enthusiasm are vital to our work with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants

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.



From my first day volunteering with LASSN I have been made to feel welcome, and have never felt hesitant when asking for help or an explanation. I will continue to cherish the memories made with my learner and the relationship which has come out of mutual support! Volunteering is not a one way system. I have learnt so much during this time.



Empowered

149 people volunteered with LASSN

Approximately **14%** of volunteers describe themselves as refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, and supported our work in various ways; assisting with recruitment and selection; training other 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.

217 people we support 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.



Supported

281 asylum seekers and refugees received one to one support from LASSN. If we count children and other dependents, LASSN supported a total of **574** people.

4435 nights of accommodation were provided to the **30** Guests who stayed at Grace House, Eva's House and with Grace Hosts.

£7115 was distributed in hardship grants to **94** households.

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, historical sites, galleries, theatre performances, engaging in gardening, swimming, walking, cycling and contributing to local sports and arts activities.

127 people were supported to improve their confidence in speaking and writing English through our English at Home and Welcome and Connect Projects.

17,000 people used the newly updated newtoleeds.org website, a resource for all new migrants living in Leeds that helps them get settled in the city.

Additionally, **3800** people visited our online directory of groups and services for refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds, called helpinleeds.com.

300 posts on migrationpartnership.org.uk helped keep **18,000** people up to date on the changing face of asylum services in Leeds and nationally – especially crucial in an emotionally charged and politically turbulent election year.

The lassn.org.uk website had more than **11,000** visitors, LASSN's Facebook page has over **3000** followers and a growing Instagram presence, with **279** followers on the platform.



This past year marked the first full year of the Welcome and Connect project, with the project going from strength to strength.



Welcome and Connect supports asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds in connecting to their new home in ways that make sense to most people – through education, work, or arts and cultural activities – all with the help of a LASSN volunteer who knows the city well.

These volunteers commit to meeting up with their match once a week, which aims to reduce the isolation and loneliness which some new refugees experience. As part of this project, LASSN also organises social events and workshops at places of cultural and historical interest, places of learning, and local businesses to boost confidence and encourage integration.

These activities included picnics, yoga, a visit to Leeds United football ground at Elland Road Stadium, an excursion in the Yorkshire Dales, arts & crafts sessions, a tour of the University, wood-working

workshops and an opportunity to help renovate Calverley Old Hall.

All of these activities were chosen to enable participants to explore aspects of Leeds they may never have experienced, while also helping them to boost their confidence and to widen their social circle.

In total 29 asylum seekers and refugees were matched with a total of 19 volunteers, outcomes of the project have included improved English language skills to enrolling in college courses – driving tests being passed to some finding employment, all of which have helped to integrate these beneficiaries into their new surroundings.

“When I was 8 years old, I always thought about swimming and asked if I could swim one day. Finally, I achieved my dream with my friend Liz; it was the first time when I went to the swimming pool, and I was very excited and happy.”

“Mel is a good friend to me, she helps me a lot with learning English. We have had a lot of good times together in the playhouse, library, holybush park. She put in a lot of effort and introduced me to good places to learn English.”

“I consider myself lucky to have met and be with Emily during this time. Since the beginning she asked and tried to understand my problems and challenges to help me. She helped me in several occasions that I won't forget. When my lawyer didn't reply to my calls and emails she helped me to reach out to her and I was able to get real answers to my questions regarding my situation.”

“My English teacher gives me more confidence and helps me to speak outside the home in English. They help me to make appointments with the GP and I don't need to have a translator. I can now make my own appointment for my eyes, with my opticians. Before I had a lot of problems with my English. But now I can speak English quite well, because my teacher helped me!”

“Before, in my country, I could not learn anything. Now with my teacher, I have learned so much. I did not forget any of it! I know ‘ing’, ‘was’, how to say things in the past. I can speak how I want to speak and talk to other people. There are so many things I will never forget!”

“When my mum first came to the UK she hadn't been to school so was unable to read and write in Dari (her home language). She was really quiet and nervous. Since meeting with her teacher from LASSN though she can now read and write simple words, she goes shopping by herself and has even joined the gym! She is so much happier!”

Volunteer tutors match with refugees and asylum seekers who want to learn English but who cannot get to mainstream ESOL classes. Tutors support learners as they build their confidence in English and to achieve goals that they set for themselves – like finding work, accessing education, or participating in social activities.

This year, **93** tutors spent **1750** hours teaching English to **98** people.

The 1:1 sessions helped learners achieve a variety of things, such as passing **B1 Citizenship** and driving tests, speaking with their children's teachers at parents' evenings, making GP appointments, and sharing life skills like sewing and baking with others.

As a direct result of these sessions, 45 people felt confident enough to take up a college course or attend a mainstream ESOL course. After these sessions, 95% of learners said they felt more confident speaking English.

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LASSN offered 14 training sessions throughout the year to help tutors enhance and share their skills, to learn from each other, and to reflect on how they can better support their learners.



“I was delighted when I gave Maryam, one of our English at Home learners, a reading book with pictures of different parts of Leeds. She looked through it and almost jumped in amazement as she showed me a picture in the book of her husband's stall in Leeds market! She went on to tell me all about the work he does, the people she has met at the stall and what life is like working there. She beamed from ear to ear to have seen the picture, proud of the share part of their lives.”

The Hosting and Housing Project (formerly known as Grace Hosting) provides accommodation to homeless Asylum Seekers in Leeds who are not entitled to any other accommodation.

“Everything about staying with this host was perfect, she was like a biological mother to me. Sometimes we would sit and chat in the sitting room. I was a history student and she teaches about Life in the UK... I was so interested and impressed and I heard about her own Irish personal history and I related my personal history to her.”



“I felt very comfortable in her house and free, I had privacy in my bedroom and could use the bathroom at any time. I could call my family in the Gambia at anytime from my room...”

“Staying at the houses is the first time I sleep good in England. I have always slept on sofas or on floors, the bed here is good.”



“Making a difference and helping goes two ways. Making a difference and giving help where needed may be the reason I started to volunteer with LASSN, but the result has gone far beyond that. Recently, after eating a meal with my guest, I suggested we go cycling together. He smiled and said “I would like that. I enjoy your company””

Coping with homelessness without an income, while also being prevented from working or accessing benefits, puts a huge mental and physical strain on individuals. It's both stressful and dangerous. Yet, this is the reality for refused asylum seekers, who are expected to build their case to remain in the UK under these challenging circumstances, requiring incredible emotional resilience.

LASSN helps to relieve some of this pressure in two ways. The first is through Volunteer Hosts who offer a spare room in their home to Guests, as well as day to day support.

The second way is through a stay at Grace or Eva's House. These properties are owned by private landlords and donated to LASSN. They each provide respite accommodation to 4 guests at a time, and help them reconnect with support around their asylum claim. Both of these housing projects provide respite from destitution and help guests to reconnect with support around their asylum claim.

This year, 30 Guests were accommodated for a total of 4435 nights, the equivalent of over 12 years. 12 people stayed with 9 hosts and 18 people stayed at Grace or Eva house.

This year, we increased the weekly financial support offered to both Hosts and Guests to help cover the increased living costs and utility bills during this year's challenging winter months

Additionally, guests are supplied with mobile phones (with SIM cards), bus passes and bicycles, to make getting around the city, communicating and socialising easier.

Guests are supported to access external group activities, such as gardening, theatre trips, going to gigs and Leeds Rhinos matches, as well as gym memberships, which have helped to ease isolation and stress.



When we reached Settle on a recent trip, the host team welcomed us at the train station and on arrival to the community centre there was an amazing group of volunteers who entertained us very honourably, with a variety of sweets, fruits, cold and hot drinks.

We visited two waterfalls, which were abundant with natural beauty and the whole team was very excited and enjoyed it.

Then we visited the old historical Museum, saw the smallest gallery of the world, the charity shop and afterwards we were served with a delicious dinner. It was really a memorable tour.

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

[Lassn.org.uk](https://lassn.org.uk)

11,000 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](https://helpinleeds.com)

3,800 people used helpinleeds.com – LASSN's directory of groups and services offering help to asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds.

[Migrationpartnership.org.uk](https://migrationpartnership.org.uk)

18,800 people looked at migrationpartnership.org.uk – a multi-author blog focused on local asylum, refuge, and migration.

[Newtoleeds.org](https://newtoleeds.org)

The newtoleeds.org website is a resource that helps new migrants settle in Leeds. This year, we completely revised and updated it, and included more refugee-specific resources on accessing housing and benefits. It reaches more than 17,000 people a year.

Social Media

LASSN's social media presence continued to grow. Although we decided to leave twitter/X, our [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/lassn) page has reached over **25,000** people and has **3160** followers, and the [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/lassn) page has been gaining traction, with nearly **300** followers.



Questions:

- What is your native language?
- What are your hobbies or interests?
- Do you use the internet to help you learn English? Why/why not?
What do you use the internet for?

Partnership and collaboration are at the heart of all of LASSN's work.

Here are some of the organisations we work with most closely.



Positive Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers

We work closely with Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (PAFRAS) and British Red Cross who provide support and advice for clients in Hosting & Housing.

pafras.org.uk



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.



Our ability to provide digital devices to clients would not be possible without the help of solidaritech.com and the people who donate their old devices to them. Find out how to donate your old tech [here](#).



Healthy Communities Together

We work in partnership with Leeds GATE, BASIS Yorkshire, and Yorkshire MESMAC, as well as 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 how each participant can act to change things for the better.



We are proud members of NACCOM – the No Accommodation Network, which promotes good practice in asylum accommodation, and who influence regional and national policy on homelessness, asylum seekers and refugees.

naccomm.org.uk



We are active members of Leeds Migration Partnership and contribute to the Strategy, Operations, and Information strands.

We started and still maintain migrationpartnership.org.uk which acts as a weekly bulletin for individuals and organisations who support asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants in and around Leeds.



LASSN works in partnership with PAFRAS, British Red Cross, Meeting Point, Solace and RETAS to raise and distribute funds to refugees experiencing homelessness and destitution in Leeds. This year, LASSN contributed £7,115 to the fund.

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

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

While LASSN's resources have become more stretched due to greater competition for a limited number of grants and rising costs, we have managed to maintain our various projects

and continue building our unrestricted reserves. All of this has only been possible due to the ongoing generosity of our individual donors and supporters.

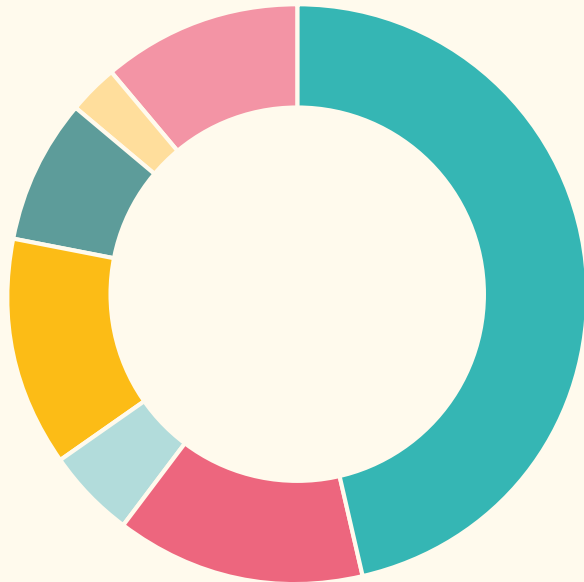
LASSN has received two major legacies this year: one is restricted for purchasing and

retrofitting a property for Refugee and Asylum Seekers and supporting the Hosting & Housing project, and the other was unrestricted.

For more detailed financial information, please see lassn.org.uk/accounts

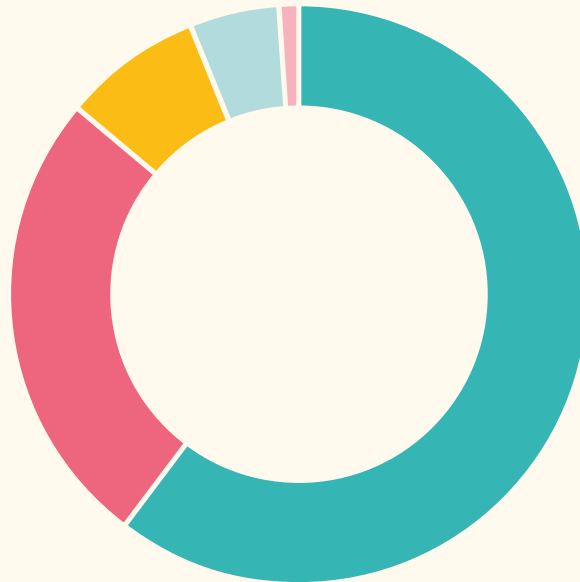
Expenses

- Project Staff Costs 47%
- Client & Volunteer Costs 14%
- Housing operating costs 5%
- Management/Admin 13%
- Office/Overheads 8%
- Governance/Professional 3%
- Donated Services 11%



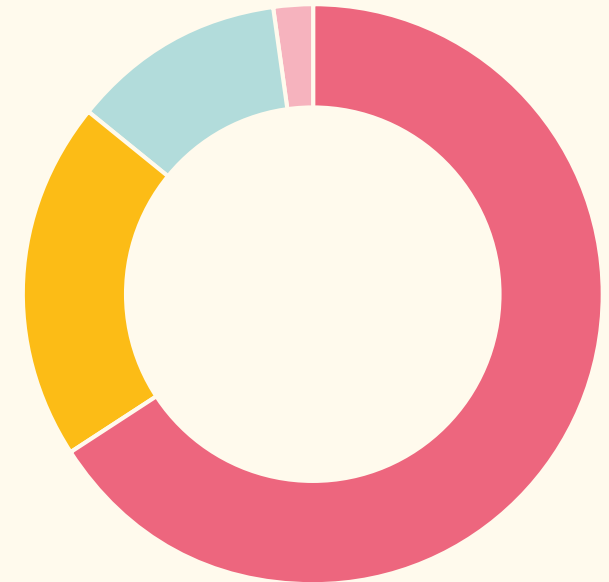
Income

- Legacies 61%
- Grants 26%
- Donations 8%
- Donated Services 5%
- Other/3rd Party 1%



Income excl. Legacies

- Grants 66%
- Donations 20%
- Donated Services 12%
- Other/3rd Party 2%



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 or those who have held or attended fundraising events 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 2023-2024.

Major Donors

Leeds Building Society Foundation

Leeds Building Society

Leeds Community Foundation

Holy Family of Bordeaux

Leeds City Council

Newby Trust

Leeds Christian Community Trust

PSI Volition

The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF)

People's Voice Media

King's Fund



5 Ways You Can Help!

1. Become A Volunteer

In these tough times, with refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants facing greater threats from the far-right, it's more important than ever to show solidarity.

If you can, please consider volunteering with organisations like LASSN. In exchange for your time and enthusiasm, we offer high-quality training and support and the change to make a real difference in someone's life.

If you have a passion for what LASSN does, and you'd like to help shape its future, please consider becoming a Trustee. Find out more at lassn.org.uk/volunteer

2. Become a LASSN Member

Show your support for our aims and objectives by becoming a member of LASSN. Sign up to receive a bi-annual newsletter, full of information on how you can actively help LASSN, refugees and Asylum Seekers. You'll also be able to vote or stand for election at our AGM's. Become a member at lassn.org.uk/members

3. Become A Regular Donor

By donating on a monthly, quarterly, or even annual basis, you would be helping to provide sustained support that keeps our projects running. Find out more at lassn.org.uk/donate

4. Organise A Fundraising Event

You can help out and show solidarity for LASSN is by organising fundraisers on LASSN's behalf. LASSN relies on donations of all sizes to help us during tough times. Sponsored events are a great way to communicate our vision and values, as well as helping to secure our future. Find out more at 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. Do you know anyone with skills they would like to share with us? Pass on our details!

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



THANK YOU

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📘 facebook.com/lassnleeds

📷 [lassnleeds](https://instagram.com/lassnleeds)

lassn.org.uk

helpinleeds.com

migrationpartnership.org.uk

newtoleeds.org

LASSN

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

Charity number: 1092647

