



Leeds City of Sanctuary

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 Leeds City of Sanctuary
 233-237 Roundhay Road
 Leeds, LS8 4HS



Warmest wishes of the Season

Welcome to our winter newsletter, which is not just updating you on the many events and activities that have already taken place this quarter - but hopes to give all of our supporters some ideas on how we can take practical action this winter and into 2012.

As we always say, City of Sanctuary is not just about those who are already involved, or who have signed a promise of support - it is about the whole of Leeds, and how Leeds can grow as a city that can be proud of the welcome it extends to people seeking sanctuary.

Leeds City of Sanctuary has had an action packed Autumn and taken part in many activities that are building month on month to gradually grow the culture of hospitality that will mean Leeds is truly a City of Sanctuary.

Looking forward to the New Year, the Leeds team is ambitious that we can achieve official "City of Sanctuary" status but more importantly, that Leeds can continue to find new ways to show a warm welcome to people who most need the sanctuary of our city.

As easy as A, B, C... Three great ways

On our Promise of Support forms everyone is asked to do something practical to help build the culture of safety and welcome in Leeds. The best way of doing this, of course, is to welcome and include people seeking sanctuary into existing activities, but there are also a number of ways that help and support can be extended directly to assist people who are claiming asylum in Leeds this winter.



GIVE TIME

From a few hours to a few days – there is a group or organisation promoting sanctuary that can do with your help! Here is a list of places we know would love to hear from you. If you don't see anything that matches with your time or skills, just let us know and we are sure we can find something in the New Year.

Be a friend...

Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network (LASSN) is looking for befrienders to visit isolated asylum seekers and refugees in their own homes each week for 6 to 12 months. Care is taken to match the right volunteer with the right client. The aim is to help people settle in Leeds, integrate into the local community, access services and overcome the emotional stress caused by past trauma and the asylum process. Training, expenses and support is given. Contact pauline@lassn.org.uk

Teaching English one to one...

Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network (LASSN) is looking for volunteers to teach English to refugees and asylum seekers who, for reasons of caring, disability or gender, are unable to attend classes. You do need to have empathy and be good at getting on with people but don't need to be a trained teacher. Training, expenses and support is given. For more details, contact gerard@lassn.org.uk.

Homework Club Volunteers...

The Refugee Council is looking for 2 volunteers for the Homework Club. The Homework Club is run by volunteers who provide academic assistance to young people aged 13 -18 years. The volunteers would be working with a small group of young people to co-run educational activities. This could include support around English language issues, exam revision, homework/assignments and building confidence. Contact Khami Miraf for the volunteer application khami.miraf@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Volunteer in your sleep...

If you have a spare bedroom, some free time in the evening and could occasionally offer someone a place to stay overnight then you could volunteer in your sleep! Many refugees and asylum seekers will experience homelessness at some point during their asylum claim. Short Stop volunteer hosts provide a hot meal and a bed for the night to people who have nowhere else to turn. Contact katrina@lassn.org.uk for more details.

Don't believe the type!

Can you write a good story? We aim to help asylum seekers and refugees get their voices heard. People who hear their stories are often changed by what they hear. Can you spare a few hours each month to gather stories by interviewing refugees and attending events, write press releases and feature articles, make links with the media locally and regionally. For more information contact pressgangleeds@hotmail.com

Speaking as a refugee...

City of Sanctuary meet lots of local Leeds people who would like to hear more about the refugee experience, but don't know who to ask. If you're a refugee or asylum seeker who would be willing to talk about what's happened to you, we can provide training to help you speak out. For more details, contact: abbe.sanctuary@gmail.com

Make friends with expectant mums...

Refugee Council is looking for volunteers to befriend pregnant asylum seekers and refugees. Following training, the volunteer would meet up with a woman on a one to one basis once a week and would support her to access appropriate health and social care and enable her to integrate into the local community. Contact rose.mccarthy@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Just wanna have fun?

We receive a lot of invitations for refugees and asylum seekers – for everything from knitting clubs to football clubs. If you are an asylum seeker or refugee and would like to be invited to a range of social events, just email abbe.sanctuary@gmail.com

of showing your support this winter

Co-ordinator for schools of sanctuary project

This would involve talking to schools and supporting them through the process of becoming a school of sanctuary, and being point of contact for the initiative. For more details, please contact abbe.sanctuary@gmail.com



This winter season, Leeds City of Sanctuary is supporting the Leeds Hardship Fund. Too many people in Leeds are living in limbo: banned from working yet unable to access benefits. Many of these are asylum seekers who do not know where they will be sleeping from one night to the next: in parks, public toilets or the floors of friends. For survival, they rely on food parcels and the charity of others.

Estimates range from 1,000 - 3,000 destitute asylum seekers in Leeds. These are people whose application has been refused but who cannot be returned home, because it is unsafe or because they cannot get the necessary travel documents. These are people who cannot claim state benefits and who are banned from working to support themselves. These are also people who are ostracised by many, who do not feel they are worthy of charity and support.

Since 2006 charities in Leeds have operated a Hardship Fund to provide limited financial support to those in greatest need who have no other income. Each winter small subsistence donations are made for up to four weeks to destitute asylum seekers. This provides a vital lifeline to people in desperate situations and can mean the difference between a hot meal and nothing to eat. **£25 can help one family for a week over the winter time.** All donations are very much appreciated and will directly benefit people in Leeds.

Visit the website to download a donation form:
http://lassn.pir2.info/leeds_hardship_fund.htm

You can also make a donation online through MyCharityPage. and can also use MyCharityPage to set up your own sponsored event on behalf of the hardship fund. Contact us if you would like to organise an event and we can help with forms and information.



PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) seeks to provide practical help and support to people who are destitute. They can ensure that donations of food, clothing, blankets and toiletries get to people who are most in need in Leeds this winter.

The causes of destitution are often misunderstood, but the impact of destitution is clear to see by the numbers of people who are coming to PAFRAS every week for help with food and essentials. If you would like to help them to help some of the most ostracised people in Leeds, there are a number of things you could add to your weekly shopping list and drop in to them, to show your support.

Donations of the following items can always be utilised:

Tins: Tomatoes, pulses, beans baked beans, spaghetti, chickpea, vegetables and fruit, fish and meat (except pork). Custard, rice pudding etc. are also good.

Dry food: Sugar, rice, pasta, couscous, pulses, cereals, (these are split down into portions, so catering size bags are useful), tea, small jars of instant coffee, cereals.

Sweets: Dried fruit, nuts, biscuits, chocolate bars and cakes.

Also needed : Long-life milk, fruit juices, and diluting juice/squash, cooking oil.

In addition people often need the following:

Toiletries such as soap, shower gel, shampoo, deodorant, tooth paste and brushes, safety razors and sanitary products. Things like **babies' nappies**, talcum powder, baby wipes, etc. are also always helpful.

Clothes, blankets and sleeping bags.

A number of people have also asked about donating toys and gifts to children and families who are in need. We have been delighted to act as "secret santa" on your behalf to these people, who have been excited by the gift but also very touched by the effort taken to include them in the "Leeds Christmas spirit". If you too would like to do this, please let us know. Contact abbe.sanctuary@gmail.com

City of Sanctuary: National News



Tiffy Allen is the national co-ordinator for City of Sanctuary, and has also been the local Leeds Co-ordinator for the last year. She talks here about some highlights from the growing movement for Sanctuary in the UK and beyond.

One of the many exciting things about City of Sanctuary is that it's a national movement – we're linked to thousands of people all over the country who share our passion to see our cities, nations and world become more welcoming and more inclusive – places of sanctuary especially for those who have had no choice about leaving their homes and families behind.

I'm really privileged as national co-ordinator to have a chance to look inside the 22 or so groups we have around the country and catch the unique flavour that characterises each city, town or borough.

So here are some highlights from the last few months:

- After months of preparation, we now have a national board of trustees representing a good mix of groups including Wales and Scotland. Alan Thomas from Swansea is the new chair and Roger Nyantou from Leeds one of the new trustees.

- We have seen new groups emerging in several places including Wolverhampton, Gloucester and Lincoln.

- New initiatives are happening in the three 'Celtic capitals' of the UK – Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.

- The London Borough of Hackney is holding up the 'sanctuary banner' for the big city, and attracting interest and support from several other boroughs.

- We are seeing 'streams and themes' of sanctuary emerging in several sectors including schools, universities, sanctuary in health and midwifery, 'sanctuary Sunday', ESOL initiatives as well as initiatives around supporting destitute asylum seekers, where our close links with other national networks are very helpful.

- My own personal highlights have included fascinating visits to Oxford, Belfast, Hackney, Wolverhampton, Nottingham, London and Manchester, with trips to Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea happening before the end of the year.

- We are enjoying a very productive connection with the Leonardo de Vinci Foundation in the province of Emilia Romagna, Italy, where Stefano had been invaluable in his services as an intern. With further links emerging in USA, Germany, France, Republic of Ireland and Greece, who knows where this exciting adventure will take us.

Passing on the baton...

Finally, let me just return home to Leeds as I finish this reflection. It has been my privilege to co-ordinate the Leeds group from its foundation to now, and I know that in handing over to wonderful Abbé, the movement here will just go from strength to strength. I am immensely proud of and grateful for my home group of Leeds, I talk about my city wherever I go, and I want to publicly thank the steering group and RETAS for the huge support they have been to me during my first year as national co-ordinator. I couldn't do it without you, and you really deserve that lovely award we received in November.

Sanctuary in Action: Short Stop



As well as the obvious benefits to the asylum seekers provided with emergency accommodation, Short Stop can be extremely rewarding to our volunteers. As one new Short Stop host wrote recently of her first experience of hosting:

“I had a great sense of satisfaction from being able to offer just a bed and a meal, and from knowing she was comfortable and safe for the night... I've been thinking about the fact that it's through no merit of my own that I find myself in a country where I can go about my life without fear or danger, and that it's the least I can do to offer a spare bed to help others who in all likelihood by no fault of their own, find themselves seeking asylum. I'm sure now that I will continue to offer hospitality through LASSN in this way.”

Katrina Burton works for LASSN - Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network - she manages the volunteer project Short Stop which provides emergency overnight accommodation for asylum seekers with no other options. She speaks here about the project:

Volunteering usually means getting out of your house, but not when you volunteer for Short Stop at Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network (LASSN).

Short Stop volunteers provide an evening meal, bed and breakfast for asylum seekers and refugees made destitute in this country and who would otherwise sleep on the streets. Short Stop is a practical solution and a way to support and welcome people seeking sanctuary.

Many people who have fled their own countries to escape persecution and torture, arrive in Britain only to face hostility and prejudice. Legally unable to work and support themselves, for many reasons outside of their control, asylum seekers and refugees can be left without accommodation.

LASSN has more vulnerable people asking for emergency accommodation than we have the capacity to help, and the number of referrals is always increasing.

Welcoming someone into your own home is a profound expression of sanctuary, and will not be suitable for everyone. LASSN provides training, support and expenses to people who are interested in become Short Stop hosts.

If you think you would like to find out more, contact Katrina by e-mail: katrina@lassn.org.uk or look at the website www.lassn.org.uk

A Little Kindness Makes All the Difference

In January, Senco a Ugandan man was destitute with nowhere to stay and no money. He had slept on the streets and had managed to secure a couple of night's accommodation at the Crypt homeless shelter. He saw a worker from the Health Access Team who referred him to Short Stop.

Senco first stayed with a family where he was made to feel so welcome it made him cry. He had not had this experience of kindness before. It was a relief to be out of the cold and have something to eat. He stayed with Short Stop for around two weeks with various hosts until he found a place with a social housing provider. Senco says that he is now very settled and can see an end to his desperate situation. Now that he is safe and secure he is able to see how depressed he was and says that without Short Stop he would have contemplated suicide.

60 years of protection

2011 marks the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention and of Refugee Council. The Refugee Council is Leeds marked the anniversary by hosting an event at its Leeds offices. The event was well attended by organisations from throughout the region.

The event showed a new film: "Protecting refugees: 60 years and beyond", narrated by British actress Zoe Wanamaker the film features the testimonies and thoughts of refugees who fled conflicts around the world and rebuilt their lives in the UK, in each decade since 1951.

Visit the Refugee Council's YouTube channel to see the film.

The evening also featured 'Refugee of the Year' awards. Awarded annually by Migration Yorkshire, this year's winner was Beatrice Botomani. Her award was presented by last year's winner Mariam Tola Williams and both gave very moving speeches. (Pictured, right).

A special award was presented for dedication and commitment to Beryl Tierney for 10 years volunteering with the Leeds office.



Award for our initiative



In November Leeds City of Sanctuary was awarded the Special Initiative Award at the Hamara Community Awards. The annual Hamara Community Awards are presented on six categories for people and organisations who have contributed to Leeds communities and who continue to put others before themselves.

The Leeds City of Sanctuary movement won the "Special Initiative Award – acknowledging an inspirational or exceptional initiative which has helped to make a major difference to the community or society at large."

The awards organisers cited the way the Leeds approach to build a city of sanctuary has been so inclusive of parts of the city: refugees and long term residents, local and city wide organisations and groups, people from all faith communities and none.

The City of Sanctuary steering group themselves acknowledged this in accepting the award, Tiffany Allen addressed the gathering by saying: "So many of you out there should be on the stage with us to accept this award." Leeds is delighted to receive the award in recognition of work so far, and feel proud to have the backing of Hamara for all the work ahead.



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