

Welcome to LEEDS



Happy

Welcomed



Safe



Connected

Empowered



The problem

Asylum seekers have often experienced fear, trauma and huge upheaval in the situations they are escaping from. On arrival in UK, they are unfortunately in danger of further upheaval as they attempt to adapt to the harsh conditions surrounding the asylum process while adjusting to life in an unknown city, country and culture. The services available to help them to settle into their new environment have been cut severely. We have seen that new arrivals into our cities and towns can become isolated and at worse destitute, having no idea about basic things like catching buses and connecting with the services or groups which can help them settle.

The solution

It was agreed that in partnership with City of Sanctuary, RETAS and Refugee Council, a volunteer-led project to support new asylum seekers to Leeds would begin. The **Welcome to Leeds** project was born.

How does it work?

When someone comes to the UK to claim asylum they are sent to an initial accommodation centre where they will stay for 21 days before they are moved to the town or city where they will live during their asylum process. At this centre, the Refugee Council will ask people who are coming to Leeds if they would like someone to welcome them. If agreed, then their information is sent to the Welcome to Leeds coordinator. A friendly, trained volunteer, who speaks the same language, will meet the new person 3 or 4 times to show them around the city. Most importantly, they will connect them with specialist services, groups and places of worship; reducing isolation and aiding integration. New asylum seekers feel safer and happier. They are more confident, better informed, and empowered to help themselves and others.



About Welcome to Leeds

From January 2012 to March 2013 we have successfully matched 85 new asylum seekers from 28 different countries.

Sri Lanka,	Tibet,
Iran,	Gambia,
Pakistan,	Guinea,
Nigeria,	Somalia,
Democratic Republic of Congo,	Lebanon,
Russia,	Uganda,
Cameroon,	Syria,
Libya,	Zimbabwe,
Burundi,	Rwanda,
India,	Bangladesh,
Senegal,	Palestine,
Eritrea,	Albania,
	Afghanistan,
	Algeria.



55% of new arrivals struggle to speak any English and need someone who can speak their language to help them find their way.

36% are female who are mostly single mothers.

Did you know?

- The top 10 nationalities for Asylum Seekers in the UK include: Afghanistan, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia, Sri Lanka, China, Pakistan, and Nigeria.
- All these countries are well known for wars, human rights abuse, or oppressive regimes and explain some of the reasons why people from those countries seek asylum.
- By law Asylum Seekers are not allowed to work.
- Most Asylum Seekers are highly qualified professionals back in their home countries (including as Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Nurses, and Teachers).
- According to United Nations figures, the UK is home to less than 2% of the world's Asylum Seekers and Refugees.
- The majority of Asylum Seekers and Refugees are supported by countries that are much poorer than the UK.

My story...

I came to Leeds as an asylum seeker in August 2012. I had been a primary school teacher with a diploma in Montessori, and was doing a degree in English Language and Literature. But I had lived a closed life, and had never travelled anywhere without a male guardian.

When I arrived here with my 11 year old son Ahmed, although I wanted to go out by myself, I didn't actually know how to, and I found Leeds very overwhelming and felt depressed. I was supposed to move to Bradford from the initial accommodation centre, so I researched all I could about the city. I even arranged for someone to meet me when I got there. However at the last minute, they moved me to Leeds.

Within a few days, a volunteer from 'Welcome to Leeds' came to my house. She was really nice and understood exactly what I needed. She took me into the city centre, got me a map and showed me around. She gave me contacts with other organisations and I registered as a client with RETAS and PAFRAS. Following that I was referred to Solace which has really helped me to deal with the trauma I had faced in my country and still do today.

I started coming to RETAS every Monday and Tuesday for their Steps to Settlement course. I made lots of new friends. I'm not used to being with men, but I always feel comfortable here now. In fact RETAS created the family I don't have - yesterday I was depressed, missing my home and friends, today is my birthday and they bought me a birthday cake.

I think this Welcome to Leeds is highly important especially for women who come by themselves with a child to be rooted when they come here. The whole system here is new to them. Welcome to Leeds helps to guide you in the right direction and gives you some friendship and helps you get a network of people around you. It made me feel welcome in a new country and I already feel part of it because of the friends I have made and the different organisations that help keep us standing. It gives us a solid foundation. It keeps us sane. If I wasn't put in touch with all these places I would have gone crazy.

Without Welcome to Leeds I would have been lost in Leeds. I found out where to start my life from.



Lost and Found

I fled my country in fear of my family situation and claimed asylum in the UK. Here is my experience of not being welcomed and feeling lost but being found in the end.

On the first day I arrived in Leeds I was so confused, it was so hard for me because I did not know the city. I had no friends, no family, I didn't know which way is right for me. I was lost. I was here for about 6 months without any help because I did not know anyone and I did not know where to go for help. The only time I came out was to sign in and then came straight home. After 6 months they moved me from that area to Harehills where I met a friendly person in the street. And she told me about RETAS and PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and Refugee Council. I told her that I didn't know anything about these places or how to find them. She told me that at RETAS they help people who are refugees or asylum seekers and that it was near my house. I couldn't believe her. I said "it's near my house?" She said yes. So one day I decided to look but I couldn't find it anywhere. Eventually I found RETAS by accident. There I met people who helped me a lot and showed me many places in Leeds. It was there that I learned about Welcome to Leeds. Although I was not new anymore and had been to a few other places they still found a volunteer who showed me places I didn't know about yet and she showed me how to catch the bus, before that I would walk everywhere I needed to go. My volunteer also called me to check how I am doing. I also met people from my country who can speak my language. When you are desperate and stressed and you meet someone from your country and speaks your own language you feel better.

Soon after that I decided to become a volunteer for Welcome to Leeds because I didn't want other people to be like me when I arrived in Leeds when I was so desperate. When you arrive in a new city and you don't know anyone, it is very important to have someone to show you the places you need to go to and where you can get help. That is why I want to give my time for people who need help because when I look back at my situation I needed help but I didn't have anyone to help me. I don't want anyone to experience this. This project is very good because you find friends you can have forever.

I want to say thank you very much to Welcome to Leeds because it helped me to make new friends and made me open to people again. It made me want to welcome people. You have a new confidence and gain experience which helps you to do many things. Because when you keep meeting new people you have more experience and when you have more experience you have more ideas, when you have more ideas you have more things coming in the future.



A Volunteer's perspective

I first got involved with Asylum Seekers as a volunteer in 2001 - helping to run a summer school and various ongoing activities including a weekly drop-in. In more recent years I have had less involvement but it was nice to be more personally involved again to support



Welcome to Leeds. Meeting a new asylum seeker usually has an impact on me reminding me of how vulnerable they are to be strangers in a foreign land where there isn't a great deal of support for them. I find it is a heart opening experience, to express welcome and support through words and action.

The training I received through Welcome to Leeds helped me understand the things that were and were not expected of me which cleared up some confusion and uncertainty. Also, practically, it introduced me to some of the other agencies that are relevant and what services they provide.

Having someone to personally welcome a new arrival and show them around, in my opinion, breaks down some barriers that may be there and hopefully makes the person feel a bit more confident and empowered.

By giving some of your time and energy to somebody who needs it you will be enriched and you may also learn something new about what it is to be human!

Sabahat

My name is Sabahat. I have an English master's degree. I came from a very strict family who forced me into an abusive marriage when I was 17. I came here to escape for my life and my son's life. I claimed asylum in 2012.

Initially I was refused asylum. I didn't have a solicitor. The Home Office legal adviser who assessed my case didn't believe me, and actually made me cry. It was my first experience in this country, coming from a small town in Pakistan and having no friends or family to help me.

When I arrived in Leeds I was alone with my 7 year old son, and unsure what to do. I knew no one, knew nothing - even how to get on a bus - and had no support. My son would sit all day looking out of the window, he just wanted to go to school, but I didn't know how to go about it. I was desperate for help with all the issues I was facing, about my house, my son's school, my representation in court - even though I didn't know what kind of help they could offer.



I managed to find the Refugee Council and joined the women's group, who were discussing what life is like in the UK on that day. I was so full of anger and stress, I just blurted out that there was no one to help you when you come from a place that is so different. I said there should be someone to show you - even the basic essentials to survive. A woman called Candy, who was leading the discussion, explained that she was from RETAS and ran a project called 'Welcome to Leeds'. The very next day she arranged for a volunteer to come and see me at home. This volunteer helped me to get my son into school and took me to the GP to register. I felt so much happier, after struggling for 2 months without knowing anyone or anything. I was also referred to an organisation (Manuel Bravo) that helped with my asylum appeal.

During that time I became so depressed that I was taking medication and had to get counselling. Welcome to Leeds linked me up with RETAS who helped me so much - they offered me voluntary work as a receptionist in their office; they arranged a trip for me to the Lake District with my son; they advised me on courses I could do. They helped me see that some of my depression could be lifted by being involved in activity, and most importantly, they trusted and believed in me. This was a turning point for me.

When I got just 3 days notice of my asylum hearing, even Manuel Bravo couldn't help as it was such short notice, so I prepared my own case. I was surrounded by friends, people who had been through the system and could give me tips, and who offered to go to court with me for moral support. I represented myself in court, and my asylum claim was successful.

I can now look forward to living and supporting myself in Leeds with my son, who is happily settled at school. I have a house, decorated with help from friends. I have applied to do a masters degree in law because others saw potential in me to be capable of practising law.

I also feel particularly safe here as a woman, which I haven't felt everywhere else. And I am now also supporting others, by visiting newly arrived asylum seekers as a volunteer with the 'Welcome to Leeds' project.

I am a different person today because of Welcome to Leeds and RETAS. This is not a small thing. They are angels for me.

5 Simple ways to get involved

1. Join us on Facebook. Search for **Welcome to Leeds**. Share your thoughts and experiences.
2. Become a **Welcome to Leeds** volunteer. Training provided!
3. Host a newly arrived asylum seeker in your home for a welcome meal. We give you our top tips...
4. Start a fun welcome group for new asylum seekers in your local community. We can help you with that!
5. Donate to **Welcome to Leeds**. You can make a real difference to someone's life.

Next step.....

Contact Candy at candyferreirapowell@gmail.com or pop in and visit us at:

RETAS

Roundhay Road Resource Centre

233-237 Roundhay Road

LS8 4HS

Tel: 0113 380 5630

Thank you for reading this booklet,
now **share** what you've learned and
help spread the message of **sanctuary**

