

WYDAN Winter Shelter Testimonial – Service Provider

The Red Cross has been working with destitute asylum seekers and refugees in Yorkshire for over 10 years. Last year across Yorkshire we saw 1044 destitute clients and 2232 clients across Yorkshire in total. In Leeds last year we saw a total of 293 clients 157 of whom were destitute.

If a client is street homeless the amount of work needed to try and find them accommodation for a night can take up a large part of the working day. The work is unsatisfyingly perpetual and a member of the team could be trying to find someone accommodation every day for a number of months. Finding accommodation every day means there is less time to concentrate on finding a longer term solution. If the client is moving from house to house each day without any money to feed themselves it is difficult for them to focus on their asylum claim.

LASSN provides a fantastic and invaluable service in Grace Hosting to destitute clients and supports a large number of the clients who access the Red Cross. What was highlighted by a number of organisations last year was that it would be good to have something alongside it to offer those who are unable to access Grace Hosting and are faced with a night on the streets. Last year, during October and November the Leeds coordinator would always be last in the office waiting for a call about whether a host had come forward for that evening for a client. More often than not something would be found last minute. However, there were several occasions when a sleeping bag would be given out, along with directions to the bus station, a sorry and a good luck.

Since the Winter Shelter opened in January the Leeds team have not had to ask someone to leave the Red Cross office with nothing but a sleeping bag and the clothes on their back and told to come back tomorrow. Unless you have had to deliver news like this to clients you can only imagine what it feels like and how hard it is to fight the temptation to take the client home with you. You go home and you think about them all night, whether they will be ok and whether you could have done anything else. Imagine that feeling at least twice a week and how that weighs on your conscience! And that is just the member of staff – what of the client who has nowhere to go and nobody to support them – a potentially terrifying experience. The Winter Shelter provided much needed respite for a very vulnerable group of individuals and offered the caseworkers an opportunity to focus on moving the clients' cases forward. In my opinion the impact on the Red Cross Leeds team's well-being has been notable during the Winter Shelter pilot's life. It was clear that the men who stayed in the Winter Shelter appreciated the welcome, support and



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consideration of all the volunteers who looked after them during the project.

Unfortunately, with destitution there are no quick solutions and street homelessness is a reality – one which affected one of the clients last week after the closure of the shelter. The affect that not having somewhere to go had on the client was profound and their mental health plummeted in one day. It really did highlight to me the need for the Shelter and the multiple positive effects resulting from its' existence. It also highlighted to me the fact that even if only one person is hosted the difference that can make on that individual is not to be negated.

I would like to thank Katrina for working non-stop on coordinating the shelter and each and every one of the volunteers who will have made a difference in some way to people's lives. I would like to see it continue to support those in need and if it can be an all season shelter then all the better.

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