

# West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network WINTER SHELTER REPORT

*“We have received, and we have given.”*

**MAY 2018**

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**West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network (C.I.O)**

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**Charity Number 1158052**

## Who are WYDAN?

We are a network of organisations and individuals, in West Yorkshire, committed to supporting destitute asylum seekers by:

1. Strengthening partnerships, networking and information sharing
2. Increasing public awareness of the facts surrounding asylum seeker destitution
3. Equipping concerned public to help more effectively, both personally and through existing organisations that support destitute asylum seekers

WYDAN is a network of organisations and individuals across West Yorkshire. Our aims are to increase bed spaces for destitute asylum seekers, and to raise awareness amongst the public on the issue of destitution amongst asylum seekers. We are a strong and proactive network with a membership including all the key agencies across Leeds who work with DAS including, Red Cross, Meeting Point, PAFRAS, LASSN/Grace Hosting, Abigail Housing and St Monica's. We have been meeting and working together for over seven years, working together on various initiatives; partnership working is at the heart of what we do.

## What is asylum-related destitution?

People seeking refugee protection in the UK are often at risk of homelessness and poverty. The UK's asylum system is complex, and there are a number of points in the process where, because people have no recourse to public funds and no right to work, there is a risk of destitution.

The majority of asylum-related destitution is experienced by those who have had their asylum claim refused, are appeal rights exhausted and have no recourse to public funds. However, there are a number of reasons why refused asylum seekers are unable, or unwilling to return to their countries of origin, including continuing fears of persecution, or simply not being practically able to return to their country of origin through no fault of their own due to issues around statelessness or difficulties obtaining travel documents from their governments. Many individuals who have been initially refused asylum, go on to receive refugee status following a fresh claim.

Those who are granted refugee status are also at risk of falling into destitution. After receiving a positive decision on their claim, newly granted refugees have only 28 days before their support and accommodation is withdrawn. In this time, they are expected to find accommodation, work, or access mainstream benefits. In this interim period, many refugees are forced into destitution.

With no permission to work and no access to public funds, people who have come here to seek protection from persecution are forced to rely on Charities, faith groups, family or friends for food, shelter and other basic necessities. If people do not have access to these safety nets, they face the indignity and fear of life on the streets.

## The story so far...

- In May 2015, WYDAN called an emergency meeting for organisations and individuals across Leeds to discuss destitution amongst asylum seekers and the reduction in services for those seeking protection in the city. All organisations represented at the meeting reported that they had faced unprecedented demand for their services over the winter of 2014/15 and that with the planned reduction - and in some cases potential closure - of some projects it was agreed that WYDAN should take the lead and respond to the crisis. Following the discussion of a number of different options, it was agreed that WYDAN should explore the possibility of setting up a winter shelter for destitute asylum seekers (DAS).
- In the first year there were 417 bed nights provided for 15 individual men and this year there were 398 bed nights provided for 23 individual men. The shelter ran for 15 weeks.
- Last year we opened the shelter for 17 weeks and provided 398 nights of accommodation to 23 individual men.

## Referral Agencies

When we initially set up the shelter we decided that we would have two referral agencies' these were PAFRAS and British Red Cross. This was because we already worked closely with them, they would be supporting our clients and we wanted to keep the referral process as robust as possible as we were running a pilot and wanted the most settled shelter for all our new volunteers. When we realised that we were receiving a lower number of referrals than expected, we opened up the referral agencies to include Meeting Point, Migrant Help, York Street Health Practice and Solace. In the end we did only receive referrals from PAFRAS and BRC with the exception of two referrals from Inn Churches Bradford. We are arranging a meeting with all referral agencies and organisations with an interest in the shelter to see how we can move forward into next winter and to gain more feedback. Below is the feedback we have received so far from our partners:

1. I did appreciate the working relationship between Red Cross and WYDAN or Inn Churches. I made couple of referrals to WYDAN for clients and they were offered a place at the shelter. The referral system is straightforward and the shelter manager Katrina was very supportive and collaborative. I really appreciated and enjoyed exchanging with them throughout their operation time. I was doing personal follow up with referred service users. All service users whom we referred were very happy with their service. I am of the view that we need to keep and strengthen our working relationship with the core aim of continuously assisting and supporting our service users during their time of crisis while at the same time hardly working and supporting them to return on system and be out of destitution.
2. The winter shelter in general was very helpful for us as an organisation and for our clients. Communication was not a problem as we would contact the main contact number or Katrina. The feedback we would receive from our clients was good. Most of

the clients liked it. Shower was a problem for some of our clients. Waiting outside during the day is a concern. Changing places was not convenient for most clients - was good if there is any possibility to have a fixed place in the future. It is good to have the details and availability of the churches in a website, if not to provide such information that includes the details, map contact number, contact person, availability etc. to the referral organisations.

3. The feedback that I would like to share about the Winter Shelter is how reassuring it has been to coordinators and myself, that if a Grace Host has not been found then the referrer has always been able to refer to the Winter Shelter (for men). This has meant a lot, knowing that someone has not had to sleep on the streets. I had a strong sense from referrers that guests / clients have been able to make choices about if they are referred to the Winter Shelter or Grace Hosting, which I think is really important. It would be really helpful to see the evaluation / feedback given by clients from the Winter Shelter as this would help us think about the types of hosting that Grace provides and explore if we are fully meeting people's needs. The Winter Shelter will be really missed and thank you to all of those that have made it work so successfully.

## Feedback from our guests

We wanted to ensure that we had a true reflection of our guests' experience of staying at the shelter. We asked Liz Lewis to 'interview' our guests and here is her report:

A discussion session was held with 5 guests on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2016 at WEC International in Rothwell. The 5 men had been staying in the shelter from between 3 months and 3 weeks at the time of this meeting. They had been in Britain as asylum seekers for varying amounts of time from newly arrived to several years. Their countries of origin were Afghanistan, Eritrea, Guinea, India and Libya.

Immediately prior to entering the shelter 4 had been sometimes sleeping rough and occasionally staying with friends or in hostel accommodation. One had just been made homeless after his NASS accommodation was withdrawn.

### General feedback

The overwhelming message was that the guests were grateful and appreciated the project wholeheartedly. One opening comment was "the hospitality has been awesome." Another "everyone has been so friendly at every place we have stayed." "We are treated as if we are sons. Everything was done for us that a father would do for his son."

When asked to talk about problems in the shelter the guests explained that for the homeless being given shelter is so important that small difficulties do not matter. The guests wanted to talk of the friendly and interesting people that they had met, the warm welcome, good food and clean beds they had enjoyed.

To summarise the words of one guest "this project has been the best thing since I came here 3 years ago. I now have friends across the city of Leeds. I went to every church we stayed in and talked to the congregation in all the denominations.

I will take this experience with me. It has given me hope. Meeting people and having really interesting conversations I have learned so much. It has helped me psychologically, it has raised my psychological wellbeing and I feel so much better. "

### Feedback on practical aspects of the shelter:

#### 1. Weekly venues

Though some of the guests would welcome one venue for the whole winter, they also appreciated having a set place for a week. One man explained that moving daily is hard, and that is what homelessness is usually like. Here on Monday there is a good feeling knowing this is shelter for a week. Then Sunday is sad because it is time to pack in the morning.

Getting to the new shelter each Monday can be hard for some. Some guests had struggled to find venues. Others said it is fine as long as they have a post code and a phone that is working.

A system developed of meeting guests at the last venue on Monday evening and being driven to the new venue by the new hosts. This did work better.

## 2. Communication in the shelters

As well as praising the helpfulness of all hosts the guests reported that sometimes guests do not pass messages to each other. So for instance one man waited ages to find out how to get new shoes and others had trouble getting a bus ticket renewed. The guests suggested that It is helpful if hosts gathering the group together to give information about practical matters like bus tickets, laundry and new clothing.

## 3. Bus Tickets

Renewal of weekly bus tickets has been a problem several times. Guests were not always clear who to ask for the money at each venue. Sometimes a man was without a pass for a day or two.

Another problem is that First bus passes cannot be used on Metro buses. The coordinator and the hosts need to explain to all guests the need to but a Metro pass. This cannot be done on a First bus.

Metro tickets cost a few pence more but are worth it.

## 4. Meals

Meals at all venues were praised. The guests said food was plentiful, varied and tasty. All centres showed sensitivity to dietary needs. Some of the guests are vegetarian and several can only eat Halal meat. This was usually catered for. Once understood hosts always tried to meet needs.

Some guests missed chapattis and said rice was relied on more than they are used to. They came up with a practical solution for next year – could a chapatti pan and a bag of chapatti flour travel round with them? Then they could teach the host cooks to make them.

## 5. Sleeping arrangements

Were comfortable enough. Comfy beds and clean bedding was much appreciated and space was usually not a problem. Snoring could be a problem for some! Ear plugs may be a practical solution.

## 6. Washing, showers, towels etc.

The guests were very grateful for toiletries and efforts made to help them find a place to wash. They appreciated that many venues are not equipped with showers and

were able to make do with wash basins. They appreciated how some hosts took some guests home for showers. Such actions were beyond the expectations of the guests and an example of feeling like a son.

One suggestion was to try to provide information on the nearest swimming pool. Some guests would love to be able to use a sports centre for showers, swimming and perhaps gym. They appreciate providing free passes are costly and may be hard to organise.

## 7. Laundry

Clothes washing was usually organised by hosts. Many took washing home for guests and returned it. Whilst reflecting on the loss of independence represented by not being able to do your own washing, guests appreciated the help and generosity of hosts. The guests said they are willing to help by visiting laundrettes to wash sheets.

They reported no loss of belongings during the project, and only a little mix up when moving venues.

## 8. Privacy

When asked about privacy the men agreed that this is another thing that you lose when homeless. Shelter is the priority and this was provided. The men advised that they try not to dwell on what they have not got. They wished to explain to hosts that sometimes when a man retreats to his bed or to his phone, this is so he can experience some privacy. It is not a sign of being ungrateful or dissatisfied. It may be that they are tired, sad or simply wanting to be alone.

## 9. Feedback on receiving and giving back

The discussion about privacy led to the guests talking about how much they enjoy being able to give something back to their generous hosts. Being able to wash up, cook or help with grounds maintenance has been welcomed. The men spoke of being used to having to accept help and being grateful. But they also expressed their pain at their loss of independence, which is a consequence of their situation. Hence being able to contribute gives a sense of satisfaction and improves wellbeing.

Games of pool, dominoes and cards were enjoyed, as were weekend football and other activities.

## 10. Getting on with each other

Has been generally easy and some of the men will keep in touch. They thought there had been harmony 70 – 80 per cent of the time. They acknowledged a couple of difficult times but did not wish to dwell on these.

Some men could help with translation and were happy to do this. Others felt their English skills had improved in the hostel.

One suggestion was to have an English lesson one evening a week to improve English.

11. Respect for different faiths – eg prayer space, fasting, understanding of.

This was not a problem. People were helpful and genuinely interested and concerned to provide what was needed. Hosts always asked openly and then got it right.

12. Where will you sleep after the project ends?

This was a source of concern. The future is difficult for us said one man. We are in limbo and do not know the future. We do not know where we will go, which house, town or even country.

It was explained that efforts were being made to find accommodation for the men through other agencies and they would be meeting other agency workers next week.

### Conclusion

When asked what else they wished to say one spoke about the hostel being a two way process. He said, to paraphrase, we have received and we have given. We are the ambassadors of asylum seekers and refugees. We meet and talk to our hosts and congregations in the churches and synagogues. People learn from us and this is two way process. We help those we meet to practise their faith and to feel Gods love in us all.

## Report from the WYDAN Trustees on the Winter Shelter

We decided to set up the WYDAN Winter Shelter as a response to the difficult time that many destitute asylum seekers and asylum services had last winter (2014/15), where services struggled to find bed spaces for the people who needed them. Many asylum services have been severely stretched, especially in the last year or so, due to service closures and funding cuts. We didn't want to see a repeat of that difficult situation this winter, so we went ahead with starting the winter shelter, even though it was something new to us as and we didn't know quite what to expect.

Looking back, we are very glad we made that decision. We've been amazed by people's generosity – the time, effort, resources and money that have been given by the host churches and organisations, the hundreds of volunteers who have got involved and many people who have donated and fundraised for us. Another wonderful thing about the shelter has been people's willingness to work together to make it happen. It has been inspiring to see different faiths, church denominations and community groups from local areas all contributing what they could. I didn't get to visit every host, but the times I did visit I was struck by the wonderful atmosphere that had been created, with people of varying ages and backgrounds all sitting down to eat, relaxing, chatting and sharing an evening together. I'm sure the friendships built will be of lasting benefit to both the volunteers and guests.

There are many people to thank for their involvement in the project. Here are some of them:

- Inn Churches - as Trustees we really valued their guidance and support.
- Our volunteers – they have given so much of their time and energy to the project in many different ways.
- Katrina Burton – Katrina is the person who has been instrumental in getting the shelter started and seeing it through to the end. It has been a complex project to arrange, in a short space of time and she has done a brilliant job. We want to thank her for her tireless work and the sacrifices she's made to make the shelter all that it's been. She's recruited hosts, liaised with agencies, trained volunteers and has been on-call almost 24/7, as well as being a consistent presence and source of support for the guests.
- The agencies – we want to thank the many agencies and projects who do really valuable work with asylum seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire, for their input and support with the shelter.
- Our guests – finally, we're very grateful to the guests who stayed at the shelter, who have been so flexible in moving on each week and have been willing and open to keep building new relationships each time. We really hope that the experience has been a good one for them.
- The whole process of running the shelter hasn't been an easy one, and there are some things we would do differently if we ran it again; we have definitely learned a lot. However, our overall feeling is of being very pleased with how the project has gone and hopeful that we can build on what has been achieved so far.

I often feel ashamed when I see how asylum seekers can be treated in the UK, but this experience has made me feel privileged and proud to be part of such a wonderful community of people who have really given those seeking sanctuary the welcome they deserve.

Mary Halsey, on behalf of the Trustees of WYDAN.

## Report from Katrina Burton

I was tasked with setting up the winter shelter for WYDAN in the summer of last year. I spent a lot of time preparing for this. There was so much to think about, how would we fund this? What would it look like? Where would we get host organisations and volunteers? Was there definitely a need for it?

From the offset I was overwhelmed by the wave of goodwill and support towards the shelter. Everyone was nervous, we really didn't know what it would look like and how it would work we had lots of information and guidance from Inn Churches but it is sometimes difficult to imagine what a project will look and feel like if you can't see it!

From the first session of training we had six churches/organisations sign up for the shelter and a further 4 would go on to sign up at the second session. In the end we had 13 different organisations take part. However it is really important to note that every week there were many more organisations involved, it worked out that we had lead organisations but there were on average at least 5 churches involved most weeks. We recruited over 400 volunteers for the duration of the project. It was truly inspiring to see churches, different faiths, organisations individuals and local businesses supporting the shelter.

It was very disappointing to see the lack of guests particularly during the first few weeks of the shelter, I can only apologise to the first few hosts who put so much time effort and money into their week only to have to close some of the nights. I do believe that we opened the shelter at the wrong time and that if/when we open this year it will be open in November and that we arrange so that our hosts are aware that it may take time to build up. Ideally I would recruit hosts who are only able to offer a small area at first and build the shelter up over the first couple of weeks.

All our volunteers were amazing I can't thank you all enough! I particularly would like to thank the lead volunteers and the steering groups at every host organisation I know that every one of you was 'shattered' at the end of your weeks hosting.

Surprisingly the 'day to day' running of the shelter ran very smoothly. Ted Fairfax and his team of volunteers would pick up the 'shelter' beds, bedding, log book, handbook etc and move from one host to the next. All new hosts were nervous and of course they weren't quite sure what to expect. Mondays were always quiet and new relationships had to be established. A pattern soon emerged that by Wednesday/Thursday the shelter would have settled in and everyone was comfortable with each other. Sundays and Monday mornings were difficult as goodbyes are always hard, I spoke to one lead volunteer on a Monday to check in that everything had gone ok and I asked her how she felt 'bereft' was her answer. All hosts and volunteers found it difficult at the end, it really made people think about where their guest were going to next and even more so what would happen to the guests when the shelter ended. I felt it was really important to keep to our remit and maintain our boundaries and keep to the agreed aims of the pilot, also to realise that

we were making a huge difference to the lives of the guests that we had, as without the shelter they would surely be sleeping on the streets.

I will go on to talk about what was gained from piloting the shelter, but I guess we should cover what we lost from the shelter..... Bedding! I don't know how this is possible but frustratingly we lost a whole set of bedding from one shelter to another. Mobile phone chargers.... Though 3 were found on the last day! Guests!!!! Guests would sometimes get lost on a Monday when going to a new host, to solve this whenever possible we started picking up guests from the last location of the shelter and took the guest to the new hosts this seemed to work well.

So much was learned from the pilot and through our evaluation we know what works well and not so well. Where possible, suggestions made by guests and volunteers will be implemented if we are able to run the shelter again next year.

As I said earlier I was overwhelmed by the support offered and the generosity of the volunteers. In the beginning I would talk about the amazing volunteers and their dedication and commitment to the shelter, this never changed, however after the first few weeks my conversations about the shelter changed and it was all down to the guests.

I do not believe the shelter would have worked half as well as it did without the group of guests that we have hosted. They have been truly amazing! It has been a joy to work with the guests over the course of the shelter, we maintained the same group for the last few weeks and they had formed friendships and supported each other. The routine of moving week by week set in and without complaint our guests would move every Monday to a strange new place and have to meet lots of new people again. It has been a truly humbling experience working with these guys for the past three months.

I remember meeting a guest on his first night in the shelter at St Mathews. He was cold, tired and hungry. I took him to the side to talk to him and reassure him that he was safe, that he was very welcome and that the volunteers would look after him. He started weeping saying that he was afraid that his thoughts and feelings overwhelmed him sometimes in the middle of the night and he was scared he might have a crisis. I explained that our volunteers were available to talk to overnight and they would look after him. I didn't see him again till the following week, I could not believe the change in him, he was so calm and content I could see the physical and emotional changes in him since he had been at the shelter, if I didn't know before I did at that moment know what the shelter was all about! We were literally saving people who would otherwise be on the streets with no shelter, food, nothing! Our organisations and volunteers were opening their buildings and their hearts to share their lives and time, if only for a week, with the most marginalised in our society. I am hugely proud to have played a small part in this project it has been so rewarding and inspirational.

Katrina

## Acknowledgements and Thanks:

Julie and Jo Inn Churches – Supporting us and sharing all their great work in the beginning.

Mike Love – Facilitating our first meeting.

Helen Field and LCI – Hosting our meeting and training.

Faye and Lesley – Initial help with administration and for arranging Benefit concert by Gay Abandon

Gay Abandon – Concert

Ted Fairfax and his team of drivers – Moving the shelter every week

Amanda – Our 'floating' volunteer who filled in any gaps on the rotas.

All the business and shops who donated meals and food.

All Hallows Church – Hosting the Gay Abandon concert and 'thank you' party for volunteers.

Every one of our financial supporters, individuals, churches and organisations.

Liz Lewis – Evaluation

Yorkshire Aid – Storing the shelter.

**WE WOULD LIKE TO RAISE SOME FUNDS SO THAT WE CAN PLAN FOR NEXT WINTER SO THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO OPEN THE SHELTER EARLIER IN THE YEAR AND FOR A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME. IF YOU COULD HELP US IN ANY WAY WE WOULD BE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL WHETHER IT BE A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION OR IF YOU ARE ABLE TO HELP US FUNDRAISE IN OTHER WAYS.**

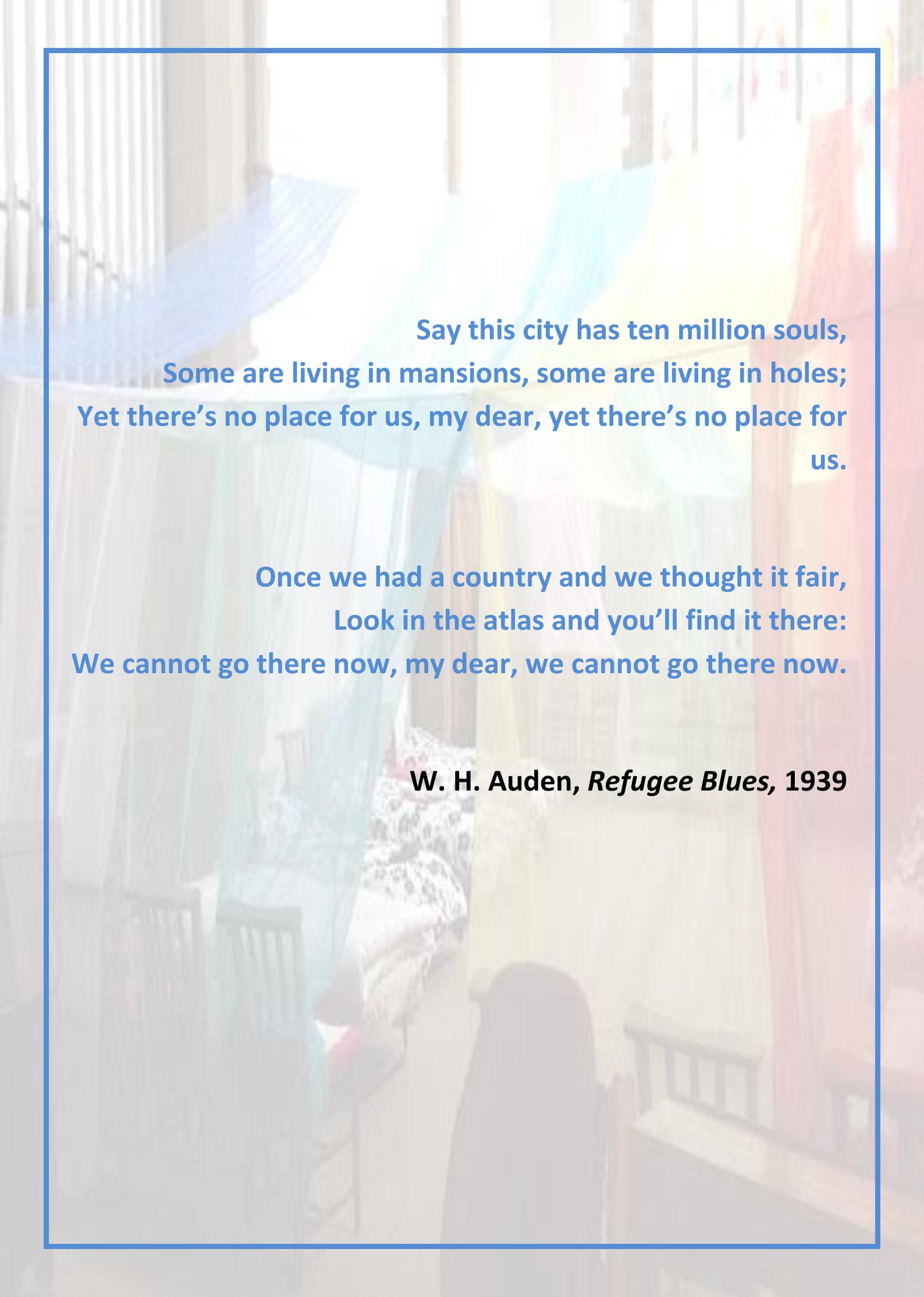
**THANK YOU**

**WYDAN**

Cheques payable to WYDAN Ebor Court Westgate LEEDS LS1 4ND

Unity Trust Bank

Sort Code 608301 Account Number 20323123



Say this city has ten million souls,  
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes;  
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for  
us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,  
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:  
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

**W. H. Auden, *Refugee Blues*, 1939**



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