



West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network (C.I.O.)
Registered Charity Number 1158052
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NIGHT SHELTER NEWSLETTER - January 2021

Dear Supporters,

None of us could have predicted the strange year of 2020, with every area of life severely affected by the Covid pandemic and all of us trying to carry on positively doing the best we could.

The WYDAN Night Shelter began the year at full capacity with 10 guests and followed its established roving pattern in various churches supported by their enthusiastic army of volunteers until the Covid lockdown arrived in mid-March – night shelters across the country closed, including ours, and Local Authorities took in the homeless. All our guests moved into accommodation provided by Leeds City Council (LCC) and thanks to loyal volunteers WYDAN were able to work in partnership with the Council continuing to provide food and some support to our former guests and other asylum seekers accommodated at a hostel in Holbeck. The LCC manager expressed appreciation of this support in glowing terms:

“I would like to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who generously provided allowances and tirelessly provided a wide variety of excellent meals and shopping over the pandemic. I know the massive time, effort and cost that has gone into keeping them well fed. The majority of the happy moments at Garforth House came from bonding over the food you provided. As you know, a lot of these people are in a desperate situation often without any sense of hope. Food was pretty much all we had to break the days up, help mend disagreements and show them that people do care. The allowances provided them some sense of independence and took a crucial edge of their destitution. All of us at the council were amazed by your generosity and good cheer and one of the positives of this year has been seeing first-hand good people swing into action to help the more vulnerable. Without your contribution we couldn't have done it. From all of us at Leeds City Council, THANK YOU, it will not be forgotten”

It was always known that the Local Authority provision was temporary, so WYDAN (like many other night shelter providers) explored potential Covid-secure means of operating a Night Shelter. These efforts proved to be abortive, but we are grateful for all the work that was put into them, and much of what was learnt will prove useful in the future.

The Local Authority's funding for accommodating asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds came to an end in October and the hostel in Holbeck closed at the end of November, when (all credit to LCC) they managed to make further funding available to enable LEDAS to establish two houses to accommodate the hostel residents. At this point the need for WYDAN's support of that cohort of men ceased. At the same time we were aware of more asylum seekers becoming in need of emergency accommodation and we received the opportunity to work with LCC to make provision for these people, which brings us to our current position:

Following a rapid application process, and in response to the pandemic, Public Health, through Leeds City Council, awarded WYDAN a one off sum of funding. The funding was granted to support WYDAN to provide services that would assist in reducing the transmission and spread of COVID amongst our vulnerable cohort.

We are using this funding to provide emergency accommodation for non-EEA nationals with no recourse to public funds (male and female), firstly in hotel accommodation then, once properties can be secured, in suitable houses. This funding was confirmed on Wednesday 16th December, our first guest was accommodated on Friday 18th December followed by four more guests on Monday 21st December, all in a comfortable family run guest house in Leeds LS2. Further guest referrals are happening now that our referral agencies (PAFRAS and British Red Cross) have returned from their Xmas break. As an indication of what this means for our guests Katrina gave this update on 28th December:

“I have been over to see our guests today and they are all happy and settled. Just wanted to share a conversation – one of our guests was talking to his mum and he was telling her where he was staying and about his volunteers ... he and his mum were crying as he told her God had sent him angels.”

And the delight of our referral agencies at having a referral route for desperate people they are encountering is expressed in this quote from a representative of British Red Cross:

“I wanted to say how much of a difference it has made over the Christmas and New Year period for our service users who have been provided with food, shelter and emotional support. The Red Cross service users whom WYDAN have accommodated had been facing long term destitution and with the weather conditions worsening were also facing homelessness in icy conditions. Instead they have been accommodated in a warm safe environment and with no other emergency accommodation available in the city it is safe to say the guests have found sanctuary at a time they needed it most. Huge thanks and we very much look forward to working together on this project into the new year.”

These are busy and exciting times.

During January, WYDAN will be working with LCC to secure, furnish and equip properties in which guests can be accommodated, Covid-secure and longer term.

WYDAN remain committed to providing emergency accommodation to destitute asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds. The Public Health grant is funding the accommodation described above through to 31st March, but after that date we will be needing both our established sources and new sources of funding to maintain the provision.

At present we cannot foresee whether or when the need may arise to re-activate a roving night shelter, nor when it will be safe to do so. However, 2020 has taught us that whilst we cannot predict the future, we can maintain focus on our core purpose of supporting destitute asylum seekers in emergency accommodation, constantly adapting to prevailing circumstances. We will continue to rely on our volunteer support base to enable us to do this.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Donations are always welcome! By post to the WYDAN, c/o Andrew Rathbone, 256B Burley Road, Leeds LS4 2LA, cheques made payable to WYDAN.

Direct to the WYDAN's bank account no 20323123. Sort code 60-83-01.

Or online with Gift Aid via the Charities Aid Foundation platform www.cafonline.org/my-personal-giving/start-giving/donate-now by inserting our charity number **1158052** in the 'search' box and following the screen instructions from there on.