
WYDAN
NEWSLETTER 2024



An update and Engaging stories from those connected to WYDAN

The plight of homeless destitute asylum seekers is an issue in many areas across the UK. With the backlog of unprocessed claims and appeals many asylum seekers are left in a limbo of poverty and homelessness which puts an added strain on local homeless services.

In November 2022 the West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Seeker Network (WYDAN) opened an emergency night shelter in a disused church in east Leeds for destitute male asylum seekers.

The running of the Shelter is volunteer led, with a rota of volunteers, supporting the guests, including the cooking of an evening meal. These volunteers are supervised by the project manager and a small group of lead volunteers.

The Shelter only takes guests referred by agencies, mainly the Red Cross and Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers who are providing them with case worker support and who are able to vouch for their suitability for the Shelter.

Our shelter closed for this last season at the end of April, and we provided 1,378 nights of accommodation to a total of 24 men.

WYDAN also has 3 properties where we house 8 male and 2 female asylum seekers. Running the houses is taken on by our Lead Volunteers, who visit the houses on a regular basis making sure the residents are safe and well. Each week the house residents come to the shelter to gather food and cleaning products for their house and get the chance to talk with the project manager about their cases and how they are progressing. The residents can stay in the house until their section 4 comes through from the home office.

In May we held our AGM followed by a 'thank you party' for our volunteers. This was a wonderful celebration of all the hard work of our volunteers, of which there was over a hundred last season with over forty attending the thank you party along with some of the guests from the shelter and the residents from the houses.

An insight to the life at WYDAN.

Lead Volunteer role at the Night Shelter

“We share the role of Lead Volunteer on a rota basis but always look forward to our week as LV at the shelter, ready to listen to feedback from the week before which is shared by the previous lead volunteer: things to make note of and things to smile about.

The handover of the LV phone has been something to come to terms with, nervously checking that it's charged up with the volume on high so a request, from our hardworking agencies referring a new guest, can be dealt with straight away.

We are aware of the importance of this shelter community, having had a full house of 10 guests for most of the months that we've been open. We greet anxious strangers who arrive with heads held low, not really knowing what to expect from the shelter, not realizing that they are going to be part of a community, a family once again.

Other guests will give a handshake and warm welcome and before long they are strangers no more, their heads rise and hoodies are lowered, they engage in conversation, smile and even joke.

So, many thanks to the talented cooks for your hours of chopping to provide nutritious meals and thank you to our wide band of friendly volunteers. The care that surrounds these guys makes a difference. It is lovely to hear the guests address us as mother, father, auntie, uncle and to one another, brother.

We get to know each and every one very well and are sometimes given a hint into their dangerous but amazing journeys and the hopes and regrets they have experienced on the way. Then when they have the opportunity to move on it's like losing a friend.”

Volunteering at the Night Shelter

“Once you start volunteering at WYDAN, your thoughts are never far away from the amazing guys that you have met on their journey. I help every other Sunday from 5pm until 9.00am Monday morning. Every shift is unique, my partner & I try to make the guests feel at home, we listen and talk with them. Play games, prep food, clean, eat together, laugh and away from them cry about their situation. When I'm away from them, I spread the news of their plight to anyone who will listen, thankfully I have met some wonderful people who have given me clothes, food, shoes, games, painting accessories etc., for the guys to use.

WYDAN gets into your blood. Come and join the journey – you will never forget!”

Cooking for the guest at the Night Shelter.

“To say that I received more than I gave in cooking for the guests at the shelter is true for me. It is a lot of work to buy the ingredients and cook for on average ten people. I decided that I wanted to eat with as well as cook for the guests. Seeing many of them on a regular basis and knowing I have given something meaningful has been a source of joy. “

A Guest's feelings on the Night Shelter

'A' has been at the shelter for 8 weeks and is due to move into one of the WYDAN houses when the shelter closes in April. He said that he felt very welcome at the Shelter.

“When I return to the Shelter in the evening, I feel it is like coming home to family and am greeted by a volunteer with a warm friendly smile and being asked how I am. I want to support the other guests if I can and to help bring them together. And I really enjoy the 'Gardening Club'. The shelter has been so helpful to me, and I enjoy giving back by helping clean and clearing up in the kitchen. When I leave, I would like to come back to help by cleaning and cooking. I am a good cook. “

When the shelter closed in April were able to offer 'A' a place in one of our properties until he receives his section 4.

A Resident's feeling on the Houses.

'V' has been in a WYDAN house for 3 years. Prior to that he had been sleeping rough in parks. He was referred from PAFRAS. He says,

"I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for WYDAN. I was very depressed at the time and being offered a place in a house really helped me. I no longer had to worry about where I was going to be sleeping or where I could get food. This enabled me to think about and chase up my asylum claim. It was very important for me to have my own space. I am happy now to be able to give back to WYDAN by volunteering at the shelter."

Financial donations are always welcome!

By post to WYDAN, c/o Andrew Rathbone, 256B Burley Road, Leeds LS4 2LA, cheques made payable to WYDAN.

Direct to the WYDAN.

Bank Account No. 20323123.

Sort code 60-83-01.

Online via the Charities Aid Foundation platform

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/15943>

Gift Aid: Please let us know if we can claim gift aid on any donation (provide first line of address and postcode).

A small number of supporters make regular donations by Standing Order. We would love more people to consider support in this way.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUING SUPPORT