



PAFRAS

Positive Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers

IMPACT REPORT **April 2022 – March 2023**

PAFRAS aims to end destitution, increase access to social justice and advocate for the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum in Leeds.

We resist the hostile environment, strive for systemic change and ensure that the voices of the people we support are at the heart of all we do.



TESTIMONIALS

“

RETAS has been a close partner of PAFRAS for many years. We have a positive working relationship and have collaborated on a number of pieces of work for eg Support with Family Reunion applications. RETAS has always found PAFRAS colleagues to be helpful, responsive and flexible in responding to requests, offering support and collaborating on partnership projects. They are excellent ambassadors for Leeds and the service the city offers to refugees and asylum seekers and set positive example for the partnership.

Roger Nyantou – RETAS Chief Executive

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“

PAFRAS are a brilliant organisation. Each year they help hundreds of refugees with no other form of support. The casework and mental health support they offer are essential to the welfare of people staying in accommodation projects like ours and those provided by LEDAS, WYDAN and St Monica's. Their staff represent Leeds' migrant 3rd sector at regional strategic meetings, and Karen ensures the Leeds Migration Partnership effectively plans and responds to emerging issues around migration in the city. Jon Beech, LASSN Director

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“

You don't tell us what to do, you support us and stand next to us. You will fight with us and when I'm with you I don't feel untouchable but I feel safe. Nobody else shines a light on our lives like PAFRAS, the way the Government talk about us is wrong and PAFRAS show people that.

”

“

PAFRAS helped with everything. When I was new in the UK I didn't know anything. I went to PAFRAS, every time they answer me and help me.

”

“

I have no words to express how happy I am and my deep appreciation for PAFRAS.

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“

PAFRAS makes me feel seen and heard. I know that when I have a problem, I've got someone to tell. But not just someone to tell, someone who will listen and try help me or explain to me because they care. I don't feel like just another person I feel like somebody who is cared about, there's a difference.

”

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“PAFRAS provide invaluable support to people who wouldn't otherwise have anywhere to turn. They are experts in their field, and deal calmly with the most horrendous and unfair situations people find themselves in. It's great that our organisations work closely together to support people and I greatly value their input not only to individual people but also how the team contribute to the wider context of the refugee sector in Leeds.” Kathryn Ashworth, Solace CEO

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WELCOME



My name is Karen Pearse and I am very proud to be the Director of PAFRAS. Welcome to our Impact Report for 2022/23, we hope you enjoy reading about our work.

PAFRAS is a small, grassroots charity that has been supporting people seeking asylum and living in Leeds since 2002. We are the key organisation in Leeds providing advice and support to people who are facing destitution and with complex advice needs. We support single people, couples and families with children – people with aspirations, hopes and fears. Our aim is to support people to find safe and sustainable routes out of destitution, as well as providing more general advice and support.

We deliver a weekly drop-in, have an adult advice service, a service specifically aimed at supporting young people aged 16-24, integrated mental health support, in-house domestic violence support and a family reunion service for refugees.

PAFRAS is delivered by and for people seeking asylum and refugees. We are committed to encouraging and facilitating opportunities for people with lived experience of migration and developing lived experience leadership; 6 people in our team of 13 have migrated to the UK. We are also lucky to be supported by an amazing team of 80 volunteers, 84% of whom are seeking asylum or are a refugee.

As well as offering support directly to people who have migrated, we also seek to influence policy, working collaboratively with activists and organisations to campaign for a more compassionate and humane immigration system.

2022/23 has been another busy, yet successful year, in spite of an increasingly hostile external environment towards refugees and people seeking asylum and a cost-of-living crisis which has seen operational costs soar.

We would like to extend our thanks to all volunteers, staff and trustees who work so hard to ensure we can continue to provide support and hope to some of the most marginalized members of our community in Leeds.

We would also like to thank our funders and our supporters who raise funds, donate goods and who offer solidarity.

PAFRAS VALUES

As a values-led organisation, in collaboration with people who access PAFRAS, volunteers, the staff team and trustee board, we recently reviewed our values to ensure they are relevant, meaningful, and courageous.

These core principles guide all aspects of our work. Our renewed values are:

We provide a welcoming environment where refugees and people seeking asylum are treated with dignity, respect and empathy.

We work in a collaborative and empowering way, respecting refugees' and asylum seekers' knowledge and skills, resilience, and right to make decisions about their own lives.

We work in partnership with others to uphold and promote the rights and voices of refugees and people seeking asylum.

We are bold and tenacious in our pursuit of social justice and systemic change.

TRUTH ABOUT PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

You may hear people being called a migrant, a refugee or an asylum seeker. The meaning of each term, and/or associated rights and entitlements, is different.

A migrant is someone who has moved to another country. It could be for work, or to study or to stay with friends or family.

A refugee is someone who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country. All humans have an internationally recognised right to seek safety in a different country. In the UK, as in most countries, there is a legal process which determines whether a person's experiences and situation meets the legal definition of refugee under the [1951 convention](#).

An asylum seeker has arrived in a country and asked for protection under the 1951 convention. This is a person's immigration status until their claim is resolved, when they may be granted refugee status or another form of protection.

In some cases, a person's asylum claim is refused, but this seldom leads to them leaving the UK. Much of PAFRAS's work is with people whose asylum claim has been refused, but who have unresolved protection needs.

A person's immigration status does not define the person. We all have hopes and plans for the future, want to be free from prejudice and safe from persecution and to be treated with dignity, humanity and respect. The people who access PAFRAS's service simply want a safe place to re-build their lives and re-kindle their hopes and dreams.



WHY DO PEOPLE COME TO THE UK??



The 1951 Convention recognises that people fleeing a country may have to use irregular means in order to escape and claim asylum in another country. There is no legal way to travel to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking asylum. There is also nothing in international law that says refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach; but the fact is, most do. At the end of 2022, there were 35.3 million refugees worldwide and 70% [1] of the world's refugees were living in a country neighbouring their country of origin, often in developing countries. Only around 1% of the world's 35.3 million refugees live in the UK.

There are many reasons why people choose to come to the UK to claim asylum. Often people come because they have family or other personal connections who they want to be close to. Some people come because they already speak English and feel that that will help them to eventually find a job and integrate. Old colonial ties might mean people have more knowledge and understanding of Britain and that combined with seeing exported British pop music and television, and supporting British football teams, might give a sense of familiarity with Britain.

And for many people, options are limited, and they must rely on smugglers to help them escape. People fleeing civil war, oppressive regimes or persecution will often have to leave in secret and will need to place their lives in the hands of smugglers to get them to a safe place, with no choice on the destination.



CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

There are significant problems and inefficiencies in the asylum system. Since 2018, the Home Office has significantly slowed down their decision making on asylum applications. As the asylum decision making backlog has increased, people have continued to claim asylum, which has meant there has not been a “flow” through the system. People are entering the system at a faster rate than they are exiting the system, and the number of people awaiting a decision on an initial asylum claim at the end of March 2023 was at a record high of 133,607^[2]; 98,739 people had been waiting over a year. The delays continue to rise, meaning that thousands of people are living in limbo, losing skills, unable to integrate, damaging employment prospects and creating and exacerbating mental health difficulties.

As the asylum backlog has grown, the pressure on the normal asylum accommodation estate has meant the Home Office is housing people seeking asylum in hotels. Hotels are designed for short stays, but many people seeking asylum are staying in hotels for many months and in some cases over a year, leading people to become depressed and deskilled, unable to move on in any meaningful way or to engage with new communities.

As employment is forbidden while an asylum claim is outstanding, we regularly meet experienced professional people, people with high level and much-needed skills who want to be able to work and support their families but are forced to live in poverty and access destitution support because the system is so inefficient.

There is currently a nationwide Legal Aid crisis which we are feeling the impact of locally. All Legal Aid providers in West Yorkshire are at capacity and are not taking on new clients. Legal representatives are over stretched and the whole Legal Aid system is underfunded and unsustainable. Many people making asylum and human rights claims are doing so without legal representation.

With the cost-of-living soaring, we have seen essential items gradually rise in price over the last few years and skyrocket recently. During that time Asylum Support rates have barely risen, going from £40.85 to £45 per week, pushing people seeking asylum further and further into poverty.

The passing of the Nationality and Borders Act in 2022 introduced the threat of removal to Rwanda for some people seeking asylum who have arrived by irregular means and further more hostile policies and laws are being developed as part of the Illegal Migration Act which was passed in July 2023.

At the end of March 2023 official Home Office statistics suggest there were 1,199^[3] people being supported in Leeds while awaiting a decision on an asylum claim. This doesn't include people who: are waiting a decision on a support application; are in “initial accommodation” including hotels; have had a claim refused and asylum support stopped; or are undocumented. In addition at the end of March 2023 there were 77 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in Leeds, being looked after by the local authority.

[1]Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

[2]Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2023/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to>

[3] <https://leedscs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/5cc339667ca94723a88506912bec2bf5>

PAFRAS impact

3,970

visits to the drop in

320

new clients access PAFRAS

308

people accessing PAFRAS were destitute

598

people received advice

We supported

83

out of destitution

Young Migrants Matter supported

101

young people

72

people accessed our internal regulated immigration advice

We supported

84

people to access a legal aid solicitor

YMM trained

15

people to act as appropriate adults in ages assessments and provided an appropriate adult in

20

Local Authority Age assessments

50

people attended the PAFRAS World Café

YMM Delivered

9

training sessions to

350

colleagues

PAFRAS impact

32

people who we worked were granted some form of refugee leave or protection.

243

successful onwards referrals were made to mental health services

3,555

food parcels and

780

hygiene packs were distributed

15

were LGBT

9

women

5

with children were supported by our DVA worker

7

people had a disability

113

people accessed Refugee Family Re-union Casework and

16

families made successful applications to be reunited.

The mental health team undertook

357

mental health assessment and offered

1252

support sessions

80

volunteers gave their time to support PAFRAS.

84%

of volunteers have lived experience of forced migration.

WHAT DOES PAFRAS DO – OUR SERVICES

Multi-agency drop-in

At the core of our work is a weekly drop-in at St. Aiden's Community Hall in Harehills. We provide food parcels, food vouchers and toiletry & hygiene packs as well as vital advice, advocacy and support. We have a small social area and we offer tea, coffee and snacks. We have a wonderful team of volunteer who support us to deliver the drop-in. Volunteer roles include interpreters, welcome desk, food distribution, kitchen and advice.

PAFRAS Advice Service

The Adult Advice Service is made up a Senior Caseworker, line managing 2 Destitution Caseworkers and an Advice Volunteer Coordinator. The Advice Volunteer Coordinator manages 4 Advice Volunteers. The team structure enables us to work proactively with service users by filtering advice needs across the 3 levels (regulated immigration legal advice, complex casework and non-complex advice). We are registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), the regulator for legal advice. We adopt an Early Action Approach, which means we try to prevent issues arising or help de-escalate them, as well as providing support if a crisis has occurred.

The key aim of the advice service is to support people to find sustainable routes out of destitution. We will also work preventatively with clients before receiving a decision from the Home Office. We focus on crisis prevention.

This is done by:

- De-escalating crisis situations
- Referring into emergency accommodation (3rd sector housing, hosting, night shelter)
- Assisting with asylum support applications
- Offering high quality regulated immigration advice
- When possible, making legal referrals to quality legal aid solicitors
- Supporting clients to raise issues and complaints with housing providers.



“When I was homeless I had to rely on others to survive. I had to stay with friends and acquaintances, sleeping for a few days here and there. I gave the food parcels I received from PAFRAS to the people I was staying with, so that I felt I was providing to the house and paying my way in the only way that I could at that time. Eventually PAFRAS helped me to find a shared house with another charity to stay in, where I could sleep in peace.”

OUR SERVICES

Immigration status is at the root of the majority of our service user's problems. As well as providing line management, the Senior Caseworker has a role providing regulated immigration advice. Some of this is provided as consultancy to team members, helping them to understand the situations in which their clients find themselves; supporting their efforts to identify potential evidence for fresh claims; and helping them to refer onward for legally aided immigration advice and representation. In addition to this, the senior caseworker provides advice and representation directly to clients. Given the very limited nature of the resource, the focus here is on representing those PAFRAS clients who can't get help elsewhere. Unfortunately, at present, this is an ever growing number of people!

Aram was brought by a friend to the PAFRAS Drop-In in need of support with accommodation. Aram is from Iraq, and claimed asylum when he first arrived in the UK in 2019.

Aram did not access the asylum support system when he first claimed asylum and instead went to stay with friends. Without access to advice, he did not know he was eligible for accommodation and support from the Home Office or how to apply for it. Instead, Aram had been sofa surfing amongst friends or sleeping rough for 3 years. He had relied on support from friends or found work when he could, in cash in hand jobs for below minimum wage. He also did not have access to a solicitor.

Without a consistent known address or any legal representative, the Home Office lost contact with him. He therefore did not attend a substantive interview and did not receive any decision on his asylum claim. During this time, Aram's mental health deteriorated.

Aram came to PAFRAS for advice. We were able to contact the Home Office on his behalf who confirmed that his asylum claim had been withdrawn. We referred him to a solicitor to make further submissions and arranged a first appointment. Aram experiences low mood and high levels of stress and anxiety which makes organising and attending appointments very difficult. Working with PAFRAS meant we could assist Aram to communicate with the solicitor, keep to appointments and allow extra time outside of solicitor appointments to help prepare his statement.

Aram is now ready to make his further submissions for his asylum claim, and can be assisted by PAFRAS to book an appointment at the Liverpool Further Submissions Unit and pay for travel. Once further submissions have been made PAFRAS will assist Aram to apply for section 4 asylum support with accommodation.



OUR SERVICES

Integrated mental health support

We are commissioned by the NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board to deliver mental health support. Our two-person team undertakes mental health assessments, makes onward referrals to appropriate statutory and non-statutory mental health services and offers one to one support and stabilization work, to prevent deterioration.

We know that when mental health support is integrated and offered alongside practical case work and legal advice to it can enable someone to reach a position where they can make informed decisions and positive changes.

Dorcus, a young woman from Camaroon arrived in the UK aged 14 to live with friends of her family who had promised a home and access to education. Dorcus however was kept in the household with little or no freedoms, working as a domestic help. Some 10 years after her arrival she sought help from a member of the local church and was rescued by them.

It was thought best for her safety that she move away and she came to Leeds.

During her time in Leeds, Dorcus was given respite in the homes of various church members and their families. She really appreciated the help she was given but for a young woman her life outside of the home has been very limited. She has had no opportunity to take up education, to meet other young people or to mix with others outside of the church.

When Dorcus first contacted PAFRAS, she was quietly spoken, shy and withdrawn, difficult to engage in conversation and uncertain about what help she wanted or needed. She admitted to feeling lonely and isolated and was often tearful.

A PAFRAS case worker helped Dorcus to move out of her accommodation with one of the families from church and to begin living more independently in a shared house provided by the third sector, while her immigration issues were dealt with.

Our Mental Health workers referred Dorcus to our student therapist, who she engaged well with. We also helped her to register with college and to find an allotment group to join.

Over recent months we have seen Dorcus blossoming. She has finished her therapy session, attends college and enjoys growing food in the allotment group, where she has made some friends. Her confidence continues to grow.

OUR SERVICES

Young Migrants Matter

We have two Young Persons Development Workers who support young people aged between 16 and 24 with an insecure immigration status. We offer early action casework to prevent young people who have migrated becoming destitute, and/or to support people quickly out of destitution, through holistic support and advice. Our approach is led by young people, and we aim to empower young people to make their own decisions. We aim for young people to feel highly supported but also challenged to do things for themselves and be better prepared for their futures. We do this by frontloading our support and working collaboratively with other relevant organisations.

Leeds has seen an increase in people being placed in adult accommodation, who have been given a date of birth, by a Home Office worker, of over 18, that they dispute. Young people are entitled to a legal age assessment to determine their age, which must be undertaken by a qualified Social Worker. An Appropriate Adult should be present, to support the young person through the assessment. YMM have trained a number of volunteers to be able to act as Appropriate Adults in Age Assessments undertaken by Leeds Children's Social Work Services.

YMM have developed our training offer over the last 12 months, and broadened the reach of our sessions. Our training pack has been co-produced with young people, who have also participated in delivering the training on several occasions. We have also been building strategic alliances, partnership working, collaborating, and building power at a local, regional and national level, to campaign for an immigration system based on human need, rights and justice and not on hostility.



OUR SERVICES



Refugee Reunion

We have continued to work with Sheffield Hallam University, offering family reunion legal advice and casework support to refugees, who want to be reunited with their families. Our Refugee Family Reunion Caseworker supports people to make applications to the Home Office, sources DNA test funding where necessary, assists with UNHCR registration for families and links applicants with other organisations abroad who can assist to make the family reunion process easier.



Sanctuary Support Scheme Domestic Violence and Abuse Support

Since June 2021 we have been working with a partnership of 7 organisations offering support to victim-survivors of domestic abuse from a number of marginalised groups including refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, those at risk of forced marriage and people from the LGBT community. Our Domestic Violence and Abuse Support Worker offers emotional, practical and advocacy support focussing on, but not limited to, client's experience of domestic violence and abuse.

"I just want to take this time out to thank you for all you've done for me with my son and nephews [family reunion] case. Thank you for having patience even when I was depressed and angry at times... I really appreciate all you've done. Thanks for the good work, it was worth the wait."

OUR SERVICES

World Café

World Cafe I is a welcoming, safe, and inclusive café session for young adults seeking asylum in Leeds. At the heart of the cafe is the social element of coming together with others who have experienced similar, and often challenging lives, and doing this in a lively and supportive public venue. Using an asset-based approach; staff encourage those attending to provide support and guidance to each other and to the wider community, nurturing the unique competencies that people seeking asylum bring to our communities and to Leeds as a whole.

Nala - "Coming to the World café is really good for me because I can interact with other cultures. I have learnt so much and met so many people from around the world and we can all communicate together in a very relaxed place"

Daniel - "I love coming to the World Café for the refreshments and for spending time with other people. I hate being alone at home with my own thoughts. I am a people person, I will go to wherever people are so I feel connected. The cafe makes me feel connected in this city"

Obi - "I come to the cafe every week because it improves my mood. I get to forget my problems by being with people. Even when I don't forget my problems, at the World cafe I know I can talk about things on my mind with kind people. Coming to the cafe really keeps me busy and at the same time it cleans my mind"



OUR SERVICES

Volunteers

We are extremely lucky to have an amazing team of volunteers who support PAFRAS to deliver our vital services. We are committed to working collaboratively with, and empowering the people we support; we prioritize offering people with lived experience of the asylum process volunteer roles, recognising that people seeking asylum have a vast range of skills, knowledge and experience.

At the drop-in, volunteers support the welcome desk, screening and advice, offer refreshments, interpreting, distributing food and toiletries and setting up and down. Outside of the drop-in volunteers help with interpreting, managing donations and food storage, acting as appropriate adults in age assessments, driving, collections and deliveries, comms and office-based support.

This year we have worked with 80 volunteers and 84% of our volunteer team have experience of forced migration.

Hamid is currently navigating the complex and convoluted asylum process and waiting for months on end for an asylum interview is a source of great anxiety for him. During this time, Hamid is not allowed to work and is currently unable to access college.

After speaking with the volunteer co-ordinator at the World Café about his ability to interpret Arabic, as well as his desire to assist people in a similar situation to himself, Hamid began volunteering at the weekly drop-in.

After several months of volunteering, Hamid now describes how he has something to look forward to every week, which has helped him partially negate some of the anxiety caused by the open-ended waiting time of the asylum system. At the drop-in, Hamid is able to utilise his wide-ranging skillset to welcome clients into the space and support with distributing food parcels.

Hamid said that "Since I have been with PAFRAS, I've had the chance to collaborate with an active and caring team to support people with advice and food. I am able to speak with people in my own language to support staff and volunteers- clients tell me that they are very satisfied with the drop-in and I am proud to be a part of the team"



PARTNERSHIPS



Local Partnerships

We have a number of other partnerships that, each day, have a positive impact on the lives of people who we support:

Physical Health: we work closely with Bevan Healthcare, and other primary healthcare providers, to help asylum seekers to register with a GP, access advice around health issues, receive immunisations and access blood borne virus screening.

Housing: we have excellent relationships and established referral pathways with local third sector destitution accommodation providers and can support people into accommodation, therefore stabilising crisis.

Mental Health: We are in a National Lottery Community Funded partnership with Solace and have excellent working relationships and clear referral pathways between our organisations.

Sexual Health: Yorkshire MESMAC Leeds offer 121 chats about sex & sexual health at the PAFRAS drop-in and give out free condoms & lube. They can sign post people to free sexual health testing service (HIV & STIs) based in the city centre.

GOVERNANCE

Board of trustees

PAFRAS is overseen by a committed, active, and well-functioning board of trustees. We have 8 trustees with expertise in health, fundraising, IT, finance, management and leadership and these skills are further enhanced by the lived experience of forced migration of 2 members of the board. Over the year, trustees have had the opportunity to attend training to develop their knowledge on a range of issues including governance, charity finances and lived experience leadership.

Policies and Procedures

We have a full suite of policies and procedures, in place to ensure we are legally compliant and to ensure everyone working at, volunteering with and/or accessing PAFRAS are safe.

UK General Data Protection Regulation

All PAFRAS staff attend GDPR training and work within our GDPR policies and procedures, maintaining confidentiality and handling, storing, and processing data appropriately.

Safeguarding

We have robust, up to date, safeguarding policies and procedures in place to protect from harm people who come into contact with PAFRAS, including the people who access PAFRAS, staff, volunteers and others. All staff attending safeguarding training and regular refreshers. Our Safeguarding Leads are the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Ella Keevash, and our Director, Karen Pearse.



INCOME AND FUNDRAISING

Income and fundraising

PAFRAS is a small, locally based independent charity with an annual turnover of over £600,000 in 2022/23 of which around £55,000 is an estimate of the donated goods we receive and distribute (food, toiletries, etc). Our independently examined accounts are available on the [Charities Commission website](#).

The majority of our funding comes from grant-making trusts and foundations and we are lucky to receive much needed financial support from generous individuals, groups, businesses and organisations.

How can you help?

There are so many ways you can get involved and support our vital work. Donate Items of food/toiletries: Tins (tomatoes, pulses, veg, fruit and fish), rice, cereal, snacks, tea and coffee, shower gel, toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, razors. Deliver to our Wednesday Drop In, 10-12, or to our office between 9am – 3pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Financial support – PAFRAS couldn't survive without the support and generosity of our donors and supporters and we are hugely grateful for every penny donated.

Please [visit our website to download](#) a standing order form if you are able to give regularly.

Or, to make a one-off donation online, go to our [Givey](#) account or donate via [PayPal](#).

- £5 buys a 1- day bus ticket which enables someone to access important appointments like doctors, hospitals or solicitors
- £10 buys a mobile phone top-up to stay in contact with loved ones near and far
- £15 buys weekly food parcel for a single person
- £20 buys a weekly food parcel for a couple
- £30 buys a weekly food parcel for a family

Alternatively, you could fundraise for us in a more challenging or creative way, like doing a sponsored run/walk/swim, making and selling stuff or even putting on an event.

Volunteer programme – We rely on the support of volunteers, primarily to help in the weekly drop-in, covering a wide range of roles including making up food parcels, providing a warm welcome to all our visitors and (with appropriate training) providing advice. We are always looking for volunteer interpreters on a Wednesday (and other times by appointment) in a range of community languages including Kurdish Sorani, Arabic, Tigrinya, Farsi and Pashto.

Other volunteer roles are available outside of the drop-in including comms, office administration and acting as appropriate adults in age assessments.



We would like to thank all our partners, including:

Refugee Action through the Early Action Partnership
Solace with whom we work on the Lifeline Leeds Project
Leeds Women's Aid who we work with on the Sanctuary Support Project
Sheffield Hallam University who we work with on the Refugee Family Reunion
Bevan Healthcare and Yorkshire MESMAC who support our weekly drop-in.

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