# **Introducing Bristol Hospitality** **Network (BHN)**

### BHN is a registered charity which began in 2010. We are not part of any religion, and we welcome people of any faith, or of no faith. All our services are free, and information people tell us about themselves is confidential. We have 9 part time members of staff, and over 100 volunteers. **Why do we need a ‘Hospitality Network’?**

The UK asylum process is complex and punitive, making it very challenging for people seeking asylum to provide the evidence required to be granted protection.   
When we should be taking care of valuable and traumatised humans, our system instead treats them as if they were guilty of crimes.  
Many asylum seekers are made destitute as a result, without the right to work, claim any benefits or apply for housing. They may be extremely marginalised, often sofa-surfing/sleeping rough and with little knowledge of their rights or how to change their situation.   
Many experience the effects of living with the consequences of trauma, loss of family, exclusion and long term homelessness.  
Our hosting gives people the safety, time, support and stability to act to make a safer future.

The number of urgent referrals, and of people using our drop-in centre, is rising because of the deliberate hostile environment created by the current government.

We work alongside people seeking asylum, through   
- our Monday drop-in centre, which is open to all asylum seekers or people in need of   
 protection, and   
- providing accommodation for people whose claims have been refused, and who are   
 being forced into destitution.  
 **BHN services available on Mondays:**  
 **Breakfast café**

The main hall table is available from 10.30 until about 12.30 (when it’s cleared for lunch) with bread, toast, spreads, tea and coffee, biscuits, fruit.  
  
**Free hot lunch**

Our lunch is prepared by volunteers who are themselves service users, overseen by our kitchen manager.   
Anyone seeking asylum, and all volunteers, are very welcome to eat with us.   
It’s served between 1pm and 1.30pm, and usually includes rice, dal, and meat, vegetarian, and vegan dishes from different cultures.  
  
**English lessons (English as a Second or Other Language, known as ESOL)**Our volunteer ESOL teachers offer group classes from 11am until 12, and from 12 until 1pm.

**Games**

We have a ping pong table, table football, scrabble and other games. Some people find that concentrating on a game is great for their mental health, and volunteers will help people improve their English with scrabble. Anyone can join a game.  **Sewing**

Volunteers co-ordinate our sewing table, where people can learn and use their sewing machine and hand sewing skills, mend clothes, and make things.   
 **Barber**

We have a member volunteer who’s a great barber!  
 **Advice**

We can help you   
- understand letters and send replies  
- find out or understand what’s happening with your asylum claim  
- understand the asylum process, what might happen next, and what you need to do  
- apply for Home Office accommodation if you’re eligible  
- understand your rights  
- apply for free prescriptions  
and with other problems.

**Volunteering opportunities**

All our services are run or supported by volunteers.

Some roles require specific knowledge or skills, and others don’t.   
Member volunteers, who are all people seeking asylum, cook and serve our food, wash up, set up the hall and put everything away again, staff the reception desk, interpret for us, and offer particular skills which might be useful for other people.

**Culture**

**Hospitality**

We want to make a welcoming space which lets everyone express their individuality, in a culture of acceptance, openness, curiosity, discussion and learning.   
**Anti-Oppression** and **Equity**

People do not all have the same power, privilege or opportunity, and our members are often very disempowered and experience entrenched structural and social oppression.   
Whilst ‘Equality’ usually means treating everyone the same, ‘Equity’ aims to treat people according to need, and to do all we can to support people to have more power. We do this through listening, supporting people to have a voice in BHN and in the city, sharing information and knowledge, volunteering and learning opportunities.

**Integrity**   
We try to be open about our decisions and actions, and to create a culture which everyone who uses BHN feels like they ‘own’. We try to recognise our limitations and to learn from our mistakes.  
**Solidarity and** **Mutual Empowerment**   
We don’t want to just work ‘for’ our members, but to support them to have the power to make decisions and take control of their lives. We work to be member-led, to ensure that member voices inform our strategy, and to support members to take leadership roles in the organisation.