



Extending solidarity to people seeking asylum and experiencing destitution through accommodation and creative community involvement

www.bhn.org.uk

Registered charity number: 1138498

Guidelines and Information for hosts

Bristol Hospitality Network is a registered charity that extends solidarity to people seeking asylum and experiencing destitution through accommodation and creative community involvement. Our vision is to see an end to the destitution of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and a greater awareness of the humanity and gift of such people, both in the UK media and the population as a whole. It is first and foremost a response of practical solidarity, our long-term aims are to push for changes in public awareness and unjust political systems, and to avoid creating cultures of dependency.

I The Hosting Network

Our Host network provides the following types of hosting:

- 10 bed men's welcome house
- host families offering a spare bedroom
- self contained flats or rooms within organisations including community houses, churches, colleges and hostels.

Host families/people with spare rooms offer anything from three month to three year stays for people seeking asylum who have become destitute. As a host you will receive an induction and ongoing support from BHN staff members and volunteers. You will join a community of hosts who meet every 3 months. These meetings are facilitated by BHN staff and are an opportunity to meet other hosts, get support and share experiences of hosting.

I Why do we need a hospitality network?

We estimate that there are over 100 people in the Bristol area who are seeking asylum and are destitute. Many of these manage by staying with friends from their home communities, or moving between different accommodations regularly. However, some people are regularly sleeping rough or in hostels where they don't feel safe. Seeking asylum in the UK is a complex process; around 40% of those seeking information and advice at the Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre currently have nowhere to live. People regularly experience destitution when their claim for asylum is refused. A refusal is often due to inadequate legal advice and representation and/or a lack of hard documentary evidence. If the refusal is not appealed, any financial support or accommodation from the Home Office stops, even though it may not be possible for the person to return to their home country. Generally, people seeking asylum in the UK do not have the right to work, this essentially narrows options for living in the UK to a reliance upon friends' support, charity or below-the-radar sources of income. It can take many months for them to get new evidence together and find a solicitor to make a fresh asylum claim. Many people can be destitute for some time before they are eligible for Home Office support again. Usually, someone seeking asylum in the UK will not be eligible for general government support or have the right to work until their claim for asylum is accepted and they are granted refugee status.

Frequently Asked Questions

BHN staff will be very happy to discuss any issues or questions you may have. Every host and asylum seeker who joins the network has a different experience and it is hard to make too many generalisations or rules.

Who will be coming to stay?

Most of the people we host are single men but there are a few women (quite rare and easy to host pretty much anywhere so it helps us if you are willing to host men). We cannot host children due to child protection issues and because the local authority has a duty of care for them. They come from all over the world, at the moment there are people from places as diverse as Iraq, Congo and Afghanistan hosted by the network. Some become very involved in the families where they stay, however most guests are very independent and spend time with a network of friends and may not be at home much.

How long will he or she stay for?

The hospitality network aims to provide support for people to move onto the next stage of their lives rather than somewhere to stay forever. Usually there is an initial two week review period, and then if everything goes well we informally agree an initial 3 month stay which can then be renewed. We have had all sorts of arrangements though, and we

can help facilitate an arrangement which works for you. It is rare a person needs a place to stay for less than 3 months as the system takes a long time to re-enter. During this time our members are known to the authorities and their address is known. You would be housing a refused asylum seeker not an 'illegal immigrant'.

Is it safe?

All BHN members (guests) come to us by referral only through Bristol Refugee Rights. The referral comes with good information about the members history, health and asylum claim progress. BHN also spends some weeks getting to know members at our weekly drop-in in order to get a feel for who they are and whether hosting would be suitable for them. We do not host people with significant health issues (including mental health) that we feel would have too big an impact on their hosts. We work in tandem with other agencies to get crisis support for people that we consider unsuitable for hosting.

How well will my guest fit in?

Since it is your home, you must set the parameters. You have every right to ask your guest to conform to the way you want things. Just remember – if it's a challenge for you, it will be for them too! It may be helpful to set some simple house rules about mealtimes, use of the bathroom/washing machine/kitchen, when you want quiet, definition of guest's space. It is also good to set the parameters regarding visits from friends, so there is no misunderstanding. It is also helpful to explain how things work like the washing machine/microwave as these can be confusing to all of us!

Some guests will like to contribute something in return for your hospitality, so don't be afraid to say 'yes' if they offer to help around the house or want to bring food to contribute to your household from local food banks etc (but also it's ok to say no to yet another box of tins of beans...!) We recommend you give your guests ownership of some household tasks once they have settled in. This could be watering plants, taking out the bins, cleaning the bathroom. Make sure to give clear guidance on how a task needs to be done.

You are very likely to be 'culturally challenged' by hosting someone. It is unlikely that your guest will be used to doing things the way you do, especially if they come from a different culture and climate, and even more if they have not been in the UK for long!

It is also important to recognise that BHN members are in a vulnerable position as refused asylum seekers, which means they might feel more obliged or pressured to fit into a host home and behave in a way that the host does. It's important that we are open and learn about the member's way of life and beliefs with an open mind and with respect. This of course works both ways and we ask the guest to do the same.

If you as a BHN host identifies as having a religious faith or strong political/cultural views, you do not have to censor this in your home. However, you should not under any

circumstances, evangelise about your beliefs and views with your hosted BHN member. There is a difference between expressing your faith/views/carrying out traditional practices (praying or eating vegan food) and pressuring someone to agree with these views, or even persuading them over time to think the way you do.

If you have children, talk through the implications of hosting with your family and BHN with particular care, and make sure your children are 'on board'. It is good to explain to them why your guests have nowhere else to go. Hosting in family homes with children is often a very positive experience for family and guest. However, BHN encourages people with children to host only if they can weigh up the risks personally (BHN cannot be held liable for any incidents involving children and hosted members). It's not possible to get DBS checks on our members as they usually don't hold passports or national insurance numbers.

Do I have to cook for my guest?

We recommend you try to share a meal once a week with your guest and encourage them to cook/contribute to the meal/washing up after. Our experience has been that most guests are self-sufficient with food, they visit charity welcome centres that provide cooked meals, local cafes and mosques/churches where they will socialise and eat with friends.

Your guest may or may not want to cook their own food in your kitchen, some eat out most of the time. Destitute asylum seekers can receive some food from Matthew Tree Project or Bristol Refugee Rights mini food store if they are cooking for themselves at your house. If you are sharing your kitchen you will want to clarify when you need space to cook and how soon after cooking you like to tidy away. For many cultures the concept of sharing another person's kitchen takes a lot of getting used to – as does the concept of "helping yourself" – don't be surprised if your guest simply doesn't! Most members have a community who they eat with regularly (Kurdish cafes for example in Easton).

Should I give my guest a key?

Again, you can decide this for yourself. It is reasonable to expect your guest to leave the house when you go out, at least for the first few days. If and when you give them a key is entirely up to you, but you do need to consider a couple of things: If you want them to leave early in the morning, do they have somewhere they can go? Also, if you are often out in the evenings, will it be easier to let them have a key or risk them coming back at 1 am and knocking on the door?!

Realistically, unless you are willing to trust your guest, the placement may not work too well! It's usually better to give keys.

Will hosting mean I have to pay additional costs?

Having a guest should not be expensive – but it may add to your living costs if you are a long term host. If you normally live alone, your council tax may go up, as you would no longer be eligible for the ‘single resident discount’. If you cannot afford to pay these additional costs, BHN may be able to help – please ask.

We have only ever had one small incident of theft in 10 years but you may want to check your insurance policy just in case. Our members are best described as guests as they do not pay any bills or rent. However, they may be considered ‘de facto’ lodgers by insurance companies so it is worth checking first that your policy covers people not in your ‘household’ i.e. family, staying with you.

BHN can also help by providing bedding and other essentials — just get in touch.

Should I give money to my guest?

BHN provides a solidarity fund of £10-£20 a week to people who are being hosted. Guests who are staying more than 2.5 miles from BHN are eligible for a monthly bus pass from BHN. Donations to BHN’s solidarity and travel fund are warmly welcomed. Think carefully before giving financial support directly to your guest – they have no way of repaying you, and it may set a precedent that is difficult to break. Buying a weekly bus pass or topping up a mobile phone are valuable alternatives that enable guests to stay in contact with friends, solicitors and Refugee agencies.

Will I need to help my guest with their asylum case?

BHN asks that hosts do not get involved with their guest’s case. If your guest needs advice they can talk to BHN HELP Team on Mondays at Easton Family centre, BS5 0SQ or BRR AID Team by phone appointment. We will be able to help them to gather fresh evidence to submit a new asylum claim. If you have questions about your guest’s asylum claim progress please contact BHN staff. We can share a limited amount of information with you as each case is confidential and complex. We always ask your guests permission before we do this.

Will my guest need a lot of emotional support?

Some guests may be very independent and fit in straight away. However, many asylum seekers who have just become destitute are often in a great deal of shock. Depression is also common due to traumatic past experiences and their experience of the asylum system. Most guests have trouble sleeping and will probably keep a different rhythm to you. Please try to be understanding; it may take your guest a while to learn to trust you and they may not want to talk about their story. Your guest will have support from BHN and from their friends, you are not responsible for their emotional support. Try to encourage your guest to keep active. They may want to get involved in BRR or BHN to keep busy or start English classes or volunteer. We accept that some may not want to engage in this way and have developed their own coping mechanisms. It’s best to leave them be and simply be friendly and offer a cup of tea when you see them. If you are

worried about your guest please get in touch with us or encourage them to see their GP.

Relationships

BHN asks that hosts do not enter into a relationship with their guest as there is a significant power difference between host and guest and the guest may not be able to give informed consent. If a relationship did develop beyond friendship then BHN would arrange for the guest to be hosted elsewhere in the network.

What if my guest needs to see a doctor?

Asylum seekers are entitled to Primary care in the NHS. This means access to a GP and to emergency treatment.

Most of our guests are registered with The Haven, a practice in Montpelier providing specialist healthcare to asylum seekers.

Your guest will also need a valid HC2 certificate entitling them to free medical treatment. Please direct them to BHN to fill in applications for these. They are complicated!

What if my guest has health issues?

Some of our guests are living with ongoing physical and/or mental health conditions including Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Those who have been diagnosed will usually be receiving treatment but some health issues will clearly have implications for their behaviour and specific needs. With the guest's consent we will share relevant information regarding health conditions with you. Please understand that guests may not want to disclose personal health information or may not have received a diagnosis. Please encourage your guest to go to the GP if they are ill. Please do contact us for further information if you are concerned about your guest.

What if I have problems with my guest?

We recommend that you discuss any simple issues with your guest and try to come to an agreement. If this is unsuccessful please get in touch and we will see how we can help. It's better to talk things through with BHN at an early stage rather than let things build up.

We suggest that the host and guest agree to an initial trial period of 2 weeks followed by 3 month blocks of time. You may well have formed a good relationship and be happy for your guests to stay longer, but this gives you and them the option for change.

What if I want my guest to leave before the arranged time?

You can end the hosting arrangement at any time, but please let us know in advance if possible so that we can make alternative arrangements. We understand that circumstances change, and that it can be draining to be a host long-term, so please don't feel guilty if you need to do this.

I **BHN board of trustees**

BHN is a registered charity and the board of trustees have a formal meeting every 2 months. As a host you are very welcome to shadow any of these meetings and also please do come to the AGM each year in October/November. If you are interested in joining the Board of Trustees, please get in touch.

I **Volunteering Opportunities for those hosted in BHN**

BHN is about solidarity and not charity. We encourage the people we host to volunteer, and also have social enterprise projects to provide funds for BHN to continue its charitable work. Please encourage your guest to GET INVOLVED!

Moveable Feast (catering social enterprise run by BHN) we have a fantastic team of volunteers catering for events as a fundraiser for BHN. We cater for weddings, festivals, conferences, parties, anything! Delicious menus are created by asylum seekers from countries including Iran, Sri Lanka, Somalia and cooked with volunteers from the network.

New Roots Garden (a community allotment project that welcomes refugees and asylum seekers)- this is in Speedwell and there is an opportunity for people hosted, their hosts and anyone else to work there. Contact: Rose 07928 652 959. You could get some delicious veg in exchange!

Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR) have many volunteering opportunities for members (asylum seekers and refugees). Please encourage your guests to get involved (see contact details below).

Bristol Bike Project - www.thebristolbikeproject.org

They collect donated bikes and restore them, providing bikes to several disadvantaged groups including asylum seekers. There is a choice of going on Thursday to 'earn a bike' by working on it (via a list held at BRR), or on Wednesday to learn more skills and volunteer more regularly.

British Red Cross- They need volunteers for their refugee project.

St Mark's Baptist church community café- this is on St Mark's Road in Easton
www.stmarkseaston.org.uk tel : 0117 9391866 (easy access and friendly)

Useful contacts

Lizzie Briggs 07734347817 director@bhn.org.uk Lizzie is the Director of BHN.

Laura Chester 07544 971885 laura@bhn.org.uk- Laura is the Hosting Network Manager

Elinor Harris 07970 388421 elinor@bhn.org.uk is the person to ask about your guest's asylum claim as she manages the Help team (casework and advocacy) at BHN

I Local Resources

The Haven Health Assessment Team

This is a gateway primary healthcare service to assess and address the initial health needs of asylum seekers not registered with a GP practice.

Address: Montpelier Health Centre, Bath Buildings, Bristol BS6 5PT

01179703887 email the.haven@nhs.net

<http://www.avon.nhs.uk/haven>

Bristol Refugee Rights

Provide a place of welcome in Bristol where asylum seekers and refugees can meet and be supported to play a full part in the life of the wider community, and also campaign for the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers. They provide English lessons, advocacy, a meal on Thursday and many other forms of support.

<http://www.bristolrefugeerights.org/>

info@bristolrefugeerights.org

Bristol British Red Cross Refugee Service

Red Cross provide a variety of services such as the destitution support fund, and orientation for newly arrived asylum seekers.

Tel 0117 301 2600 www.redcross.org.uk

Unit 41 Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Bristol, BS5 0HE

(they can be seen at BRR on Thursdays via the AID team)

City of Sanctuary

<http://www.cityofsanctuary.org/bristol> This is a group of organisations working to make Bristol a more welcoming place for asylum seekers.

bristol@cityofsanctuary.org

Office Tel: 0117 941 5960

I Information/ other links

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/> This is a good myth busting read! Essential for those involved in solidarity with asylum seekers.

<https://righttoremain.org.uk/asylum-navigation-board/>
An easy to read guide about the asylum system in the UK.

<http://stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com/>
This is a coalition of 40 organisations campaigning to end destitution amongst asylum seekers in Britain.

<http://reliefweb.int/> a good resource for understanding the political and economic climate in the countries which asylum seekers have come from.

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/> official home office asylum website, this has useful information on the process.

<http://www.freedomfromtorture.org/> works with survivors of torture.