

hope housing

emergency accommodation
for asylum-seekers





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Why Hope?

There are increasing numbers of asylum-seekers in and around Birmingham whose support and accommodation from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) have been cut off.

People in this position who have no other entitlements to “public funds” are completely destitute and often homeless. Many are also highly vulnerable because of their physical and/or mental condition. Some are pregnant, with children, disabled or elderly.

On top of this, because of the bar on “recourse to public funds”, homeless asylum-seekers generally have no access to mainstream provision for the homeless, e.g. hostels, women’s refuges and night shelters.

Up until recently, local voluntary organisations working with such destitute and homeless asylum-seekers have been able only to offer them limited financial support, through Birmingham Law Centre’s Asylum-Seekers’ Destitution Fund and other smaller local funds. Grants from these funds were never sufficient to cover the cost of accommodation.

Birmingham Law Centre (BLC) and its partners have launched Hope Housing to help fill the current gap in provision for asylum-seekers by providing emergency accommodation for homeless, destitute and vulnerable asylum-seekers in the West Midlands

Hope So Far

Having formed the Hope Housing partnership, Birmingham Law Centre and its partner-organisations have successfully approached some local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and other accommodation-providers for properties to be leased at a peppercorn rent by Birmingham Law Centre and used as emergency accommodation. Our first clients were accommodated in May 2007.

Hope Housing currently has capacity for eight women and four men to be accommodated in three houses leased at peppercorn rents from two RSLs and the Catholic Diocese of Birmingham.

Up until recently the development of the project and furnishing, decoration and management of the properties has been carried out by workers and volunteers from the Hope Housing partner-projects with no extra staffing, and no other resources beyond a fund of £20,000 made available from BLC’s general charitable funds.

However, with funding from the Lloyds TSB Foundation we are now able to employ two part-time Hope Housing project workers. We now hope that the accommodation-providers we are already working with and others whom we have not yet approached will make more accommodation available to Hope Housing on a “peppercorn-rent” basis.





Hope Now - the Need

We now want to expand Hope Housing's provision to meet the need for emergency accommodation in the West Midlands. To do this we need to build on the relationships we have already built with those who are willing to make accommodation available to the project, and to have more come on board to help us expand our provision.

Getting Involved in Hope

We are looking for RSLs and other organisations and individuals to provide us with properties that we can use to accommodate asylum-seekers with no other way of getting housing.

Ideally we are looking for arrangements that run for at least one year but hopefully more.

Clearly the main beneficiaries are homeless asylum-seekers but we believe there are benefits in this to those who provide properties:

1. Supporting Hope helps fulfill the social mission of RSLs and other organisations.
2. If you release property to Hope we will prepare it as accommodation for asylum-seekers which will preserve and often improve its condition (perhaps particularly relevant for hard-to-let properties).
3. Hope will manage the letting, so that your resources are not needed for the duration of its assignment to Hope.
4. Supporting Hope can contribute to community cohesion.

How Hope Works

All properties that Hope Housing manages will be subject to a signed agreement with those providing the properties which will include the agreed period that Hope can use the property.

Hope will issue licenses to asylum-seekers and manage the accommodation professionally and effectively.

Where necessary Hope will undertake to prepare the property for letting.

Hope will take referrals for suitable candidates for the accommodation from its partner-agencies, and manage the accommodation in partnership with those agencies (see 'Roles and Responsibilities' below).

The accommodation is intended for emergency use so the emphasis will be on working with the referring agency towards a more permanent solution of the client's homelessness, e.g. through rehousing by the Home Office or by local authorities - Hope helps only those asylum-seekers that it considers should qualify for help elsewhere. This model has already been piloted by Birmingham Law Centre's successful Asylum-Seekers' Destitution Fund.

Helping Hope

We are keen to talk to any organisation that can help Hope Housing provide more emergency accommodation to asylum-seekers. So please get in touch with Geoff Wilkins (contact details on back page) to arrange a meeting.

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The Hope Partnership

The project is a partnership between:
Birmingham Law Centre;
ASIRT (Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team);
Restore (Birmingham Churches Together for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees);
Karis Neighbour Scheme, Birmingham.

The project's associates include accommodation-providers making available properties for use as emergency accommodation and local agencies working with destitute asylum-seekers which refer clients to the project for accommodation.

Roles and Responsibilities

Birmingham Law Centre, the lead-organisation, has full legal responsibility for the project, the full title of which is 'Birmingham Law Centre Hope Housing'.

The partnership works together:
To develop the project's aims, policies and working practices;
To select residents to be accommodated in the project's accommodation;
To rehabilitate, furnish and fit out the project's accommodation;
To manage the day-to-day running of the project's accommodation;
To provide support, in cash or kind, advice and casework assistance to residents of the project's accommodation;
To assist in fund-raising for the project.

The partners meet at least monthly to plan and develop the work of Hope Housing. Meetings may also be attended by representatives of the project's associates.

Hope Partners

Below is a summary of each of the partner organisations. A Memorandum of Co-operation is available on request which details the relationship between the partners. All the partners in the project are already working with destitute asylum-seekers in the Birmingham area:-

Birmingham Law Centre (BLC)

BLC is a solicitor-led legal advice/casework agency which aspires to the highest standards of casework expertise. BLC currently provides a wide range of social-work and legal-advice/casework services to individuals and communities in need in Birmingham and the West Midlands, including free in-depth debt-counselling and representation and welfare-benefits and community-care advice and representation. BLC is also developing and delivering anti-poverty strategies in partnership with local agencies and communities.



the partnership



ASIRT (Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team)

ASIRT aims to provide relief for asylum-seekers, refugees and their dependants in Birmingham who are in condition of need, hardship and distress. It also provides general legal advice and assistance to persons subject to UK immigration control and their dependants, who by reason of their inadequate financial resources are otherwise unable to obtain such advice and assistance. In addition it aims to advance the education of local people and the education and training of asylum-seekers and refugees and their dependants in order to assist with their inclusion into the wider community. ASIRT aims to engage and co-ordinate the efforts of voluntary agencies on strategic and practical levels to alleviate the suffering of people made destitute by the asylum system and with no recourse to public funds.

Restore (Birmingham Churches Together for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees)

Restore is a project of Birmingham Churches Together seeking to welcome and support refugees and asylum-seekers. Restore's mission is to encourage friendship and build resources, primarily through the church and to enable refugees and asylum-seekers to make a valued contribution to society. Restore works to raise awareness, change attitudes and challenge prejudice in the host community. Its key areas of activity are befriending by local volunteers on a one-to-one basis; hosting social activities for families and adults; raising awareness within the

host community, especially through the church network; working together with other refugee agencies and advocating on behalf of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Karis Neighbour Scheme

Karis Neighbour Scheme seeks to offer practical support, friendship and advocacy in the local community through volunteers. It aims to promote community links and address needs unmet by other organisations. Karis's work includes helping people access services; speaking on their behalf to organisations and companies and assisting with bills, benefit queries and accommodation issues. It offers family support and home visits; a "Welcome to Ladywood" group for women and children; English classes with alternative activities for the students' children; parties and trips in the holidays; a community allotment; and visits to the isolated elderly. In addition volunteers provide tidying and clearing gardens; decorating; moving furniture; and DIY chores.

Associates

Also associated with the project are:
British Refugee Council, West Midlands
British Red Cross, West Midlands
Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham
Catholic Diocese of Birmingham
Bournville Village Trust
Friendship and Care Housing
Yardley Great Trust

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Hope Housing

The Hope Housing Project Development Worker is Geoff Wilkins, Geoff@birminghamlawcentre.org.uk

The Hope Housing Project is based at Birmingham Law Centre - address and telephone numbers as below.

Partners

Birmingham Law Centre

1st floor, Dolphin House
54 Coventry Road
Birmingham
B10 0RX

tel. 0121-766-7466
fax 0121-766-8860
email admin@birminghamlawcentre.org.uk
Web site <http://www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk>

Birmingham Law Centre is a registered charity, no. 1087514, & company limited by guarantee, no. 4173542.

ASIRT

All Saints House
172 Herbert Road
Small Heath
Birmingham
B10 0PR

0121-772-6700
fax 0121-772-3900
email admin@asirt.org.uk
Web site <http://www.asirt.org.uk>

ASIRT is a registered charity, no.1098544.

Restore

All Saints House
172 Herbert Road
Small Heath
Birmingham
B10 0PR

0121-766-8764
email info@restore-uk.org
Web site <http://www.restore-uk.org/>

Restore is a registered charity, no. 243931.

Karis Neighbour Scheme

Community Room
Balfour House
Cawdor Crescent
Ladywood
Birmingham
B16 8XH

0121-689-6081
fax 0121-455-7524

email info@karisneighbourscheme.org
Web site <http://www.karisneighbourscheme.org/>

Karis Neighbour Scheme is a registered charity, no. 1077200.

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