

# A day in the life of Short Stop

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## It gives me great satisfaction

By Volunteer Coordinator

IT'S MY DAY for co-coordinating short stop referrals and I try to be clear and ready as the calls can come in anytime from around 9a.m. This means downloading Katrina's new weekly host list, a quick check to see whether there are any major differences or new messages, and having my referral and hosts sheets to hand.

The calls come in predominantly from the Refugee Council, although I have on occasion had calls from Social Service offices - and it has varied from 5 coming in within the space of an hour, to none during the whole day. I ask them to call back in around an hour and a half. Then I go through the host list and start calling them. I feel guilty about ringing the same people each week so I try to vary the sequence. I am occasionally lucky – first call, they are in and can host! Jackpot! More often, I need to go through quite a number on the list before I get through to someone – and then quite naturally, they are unable to host that evening.

Almost without exception, those who are unavailable are very apologetic and make a point of telling me to try them on another day. I get a real feeling of satisfaction when I find a host, as if I've played a part in joining two important links in a chain. I can only imagine what it must feel like to the refugee to hear that

they will have warmth, a bed and food for the night.

There can also be a slight sense of concern when I have almost exhausted the list without success

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and it's still only 11.30. The more worrying calls are those that come in the late afternoon, with the Refugee Council offices closing imminently. Thank goodness for those whose notes say 'no calls till after 4 as I work shifts . . .' So far I have always found a host for the referrals and I think that's a big tribute to those who host and LASSN's project.

Co-ordinating means that I have to stay in and have no excuse for not getting on with the homework for my evening class or doing those more tedious household jobs! It was also great fun fitting faces to names at the LASSN Christmas party.

It's a role that suits me and my situation whilst giving me the satisfaction of knowing that I'm playing a part in the wider support for the most desperate of our refugees.

## It was the lowest point in my life

By Short Stop Guest

I WENT into short stop at the lowest point in my life, I was fleeing domestic violence and because I was an asylum seeker most shelters were not accessible to me.

The police were very helpful but being an asylum seeker there was only so much they could. I made a decision to leave my partner

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**They were surprised that I talk so much and laugh that much!**

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while applying for state support. The only place I could get support was LASSN.

The first time I went into someone's house was very difficult for me as I was feeling very emotional and I didn't

know what was expected of me. They were very nice and showed me to my room, I just stayed there all night so they wouldn't even notice I was there. I am sure they found it difficult as well and didn't know what to do to help me but I am glad they respected that I needed time to myself.

I have been back to see them when things got better and they were actually surprised that I talk so much and laugh that much.

I thank everyone at LASSN for being so understanding and the hosts for letting strangers in their home, especially when most of the times these people are much stressed and also with a lot of baggage.

# Deeply appreciative

By manager, Refugee Council, referrer

ALI\* IS a new arrival from the south of Somalia finds his way to our office in Leeds. He has been dropped off by an agent nearly and told to come inside our building. He speaks a type of Swahili. He doesn't know which country he is in, or a single word of English. He is freezing cold and disorientated. Snow is falling. Ali has never seen snow before. He is confused and unsteady trying to walk across the icy ground.

Ali needs to make an asylum claim in Croydon, but he's arrived in Leeds on Friday. Refugee Council staff speak to him and see he is distressed and confused. He cannot claim asylum until Monday anyway because the Home Office is closed for the weekend, so we need to help him find somewhere to stay for the weekend.

We call Short Stop. Normally, we would ask the host to direct Ali to the bus station on Sunday night so he can claim asylum on Monday, but as

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he is distressed, exhausted and vulnerable, we ask if the host can have him all weekend and we'll get him on the Monday night bus to claim asylum on Tuesday.

Short Stop is able to find a host. We know this host well and know that Ali will be met in a safe, warm welcoming environment. We know that this weekend will give him a little time to recover from his journey and prepare himself for the 'final leg' – getting the night bus to London and the train to Croydon and then finding the Home Office building where he can lodge his claim.

The staff of Refugee Council benefit hugely from being able to refer to Short Stop. Without them, we might be sending Ali and others like him to spend the weekend on the freezing cold streets. Ali is deeply appreciative of this help. We soon all learn the word 'Assanti' – Swahili for thank you.

**The hardest thing about it was having to say goodbye to him and not knowing where he was going to end up that night.**

# We never looked back

By Volunteer Short Stop Host

WE HAVE been hosting for about two years now. We had moved house and had a spare room, we wanted to do some volunteer work but we was both so busy with work and life we couldn't make time to make a fixed commitment to voluntary work. We were talking to some friends in church one day and they told us about the voluntary work they did for LASSN. It seemed ideal for us we could volunteer at home and wouldn't have to leave the house!

We couldn't start till we completed the training and then we were away so eventually we started hosting in the June. We had been given a mentor and had contact info for Katrina and LASSN but we were still nervous when we were waiting for that first knock on the door, I remember talking about how nervous we were and then thinking about how much more nervous our guest was going to be and that kind of calmed us down.

Pierre\* arrived an hour late! We had nearly given up on him, he was so apologetic he had got lost on the bus here from the refugee council. We welcomed Pierre into our home and showed him around including his room and the bathroom, we offered and he accepted a shower straight away and we prepared a meal while he settled in. We shared the meal with him and chatted for a while, after clearing up Pierre asked if it was ok if he could go to his room, of course, we said. We didn't see Pierre again that night, in the morning Pierre had breakfast with us he apologized for not saying good night but he had gone to his room and was so tired he had just fallen asleep! We then found out that Pierre had spent the last four nights sleeping in a park. As we had agreed the previous day with the Refugee Council Pierre left our home at 8.30am. We were so surprised at how smoothly it had gone Pierre was a pleasure to have in our home it was just like having any guest to stay over.

We both felt the hardest thing about it was having to say goodbye to him and not knowing where he was going to end up that night, I supposed that at least we had given him one night off the street.

Really we have never looked back since then, we usually host about once a week the scheme means you can do as much or as little as you like and adapts to your needs as well as the guests.