

A Review of Short Stop



I was tired and cold and hungry you let me stay and made me feel so welcome I could deal with the next long day after resting I couldn't of coped without Short Stop

IBRAHIMSHORT STOP GUEST

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Introduction

Short Stop was established in April 2003 in response to the growing need for emergency accommodation for destitute asylum seekers and refugees. The project was initially managed by a volunteer co-ordinator until September 2005 when a grant from Lankelly Chase Foundation enabled us to employ a part-time co-ordinator. Funding was also received from Leeds Christian Community Trust and Sir Halley Stuart Trust.

Short Stop provides emergency accommodation to destitute asylum seekers and refugees. Guests are referred to us and are placed with our volunteers in their own homes where they provide a bed, evening meal and breakfast, and facilities to bathe or shower. Volunteers open their hearts and homes to people who would otherwise be sleeping rough.

Aims of the project

Short stop aims to provide emergency accommodation and respite for destitute asylum seekers and refugees, this results in improvement to a guest's mental health, provides better access to services and reduces isolation. We also aim to promote the issues surrounding destitution and asylum and our hosts tell us that they learn so much from the experience of hosting and have a better understanding of the issues and also become more culturally aware. This has wider positive effects as most of our new volunteers are recruited by word of mouth from existing volunteers who have had such a positive experience.

Volunteer Co-ordinators

We currently have 6 volunteer co-ordinators who volunteer for one day per week (sometimes more if covering for other coordinators). They take referrals and manage the rota on a day to day basis, calling hosts to see who is available for hosting that night then liaise back with the referral agency to ensure a guest is placed for the night. The volunteer coordinator role is essential to the running of the project and is somewhat a stressful role. Coordinators have to find available hosts within a limited amount of time. We hold coordinator review meetings to talk about how we can run the service more efficiently and have reviewed how we communicate and share information. This appears to be making the job easier. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer coordinators for their time, commitment and dedication to Short Stop.

Volunteer Hosts

We have 64 volunteer hosts. This includes multi occupancy homes i.e. co-ops and squats this gives a much greater availability for hosting. We continually look for new volunteers and have had 26 new people join us over the year.

All new volunteers have to attend our two day training. Volunteers find the training extremely useful. Every volunteer who attended that last training gave it a five out of five on their evaluation forms.

We really didn't know what to expect when we started hosting we were incredibly nervous for a stranger coming to our house we need not of worried, Ali came and he was so nervous we immediately realised it was worse for him coming to a strange house and essentially receiving charity, he settled well and ate with us then went to bed, it wasn't any trouble having him to stay in what would have been an empty wasted bed, hosting is such a rewarding humbling experience and I would recommend anyone to do it, it just feels right for us.

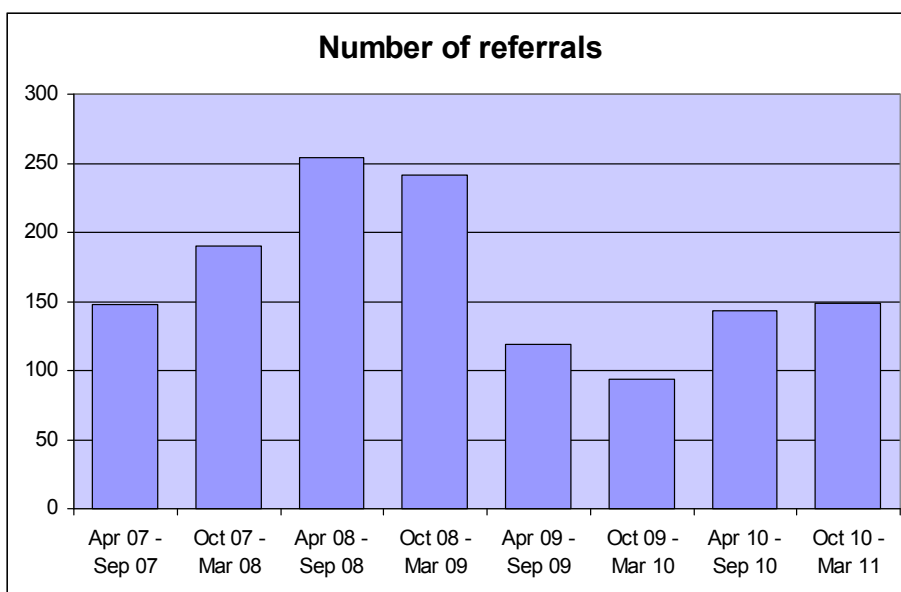
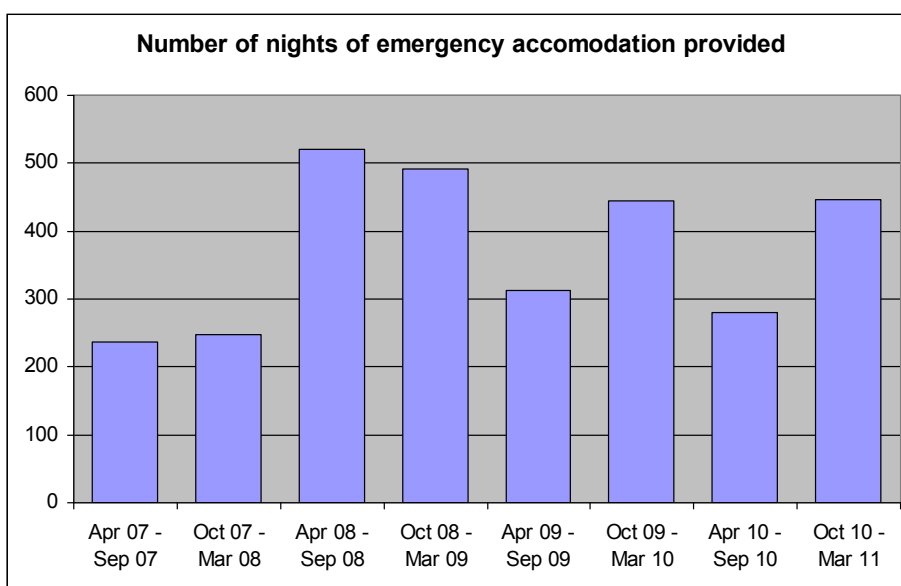
SHORT STOP HOST

We continue to offer volunteer support evenings where volunteers get the chance to share good practice and listen to guest speakers. New hosts are given the opportunity to have a mentor for the first few times of hosting.

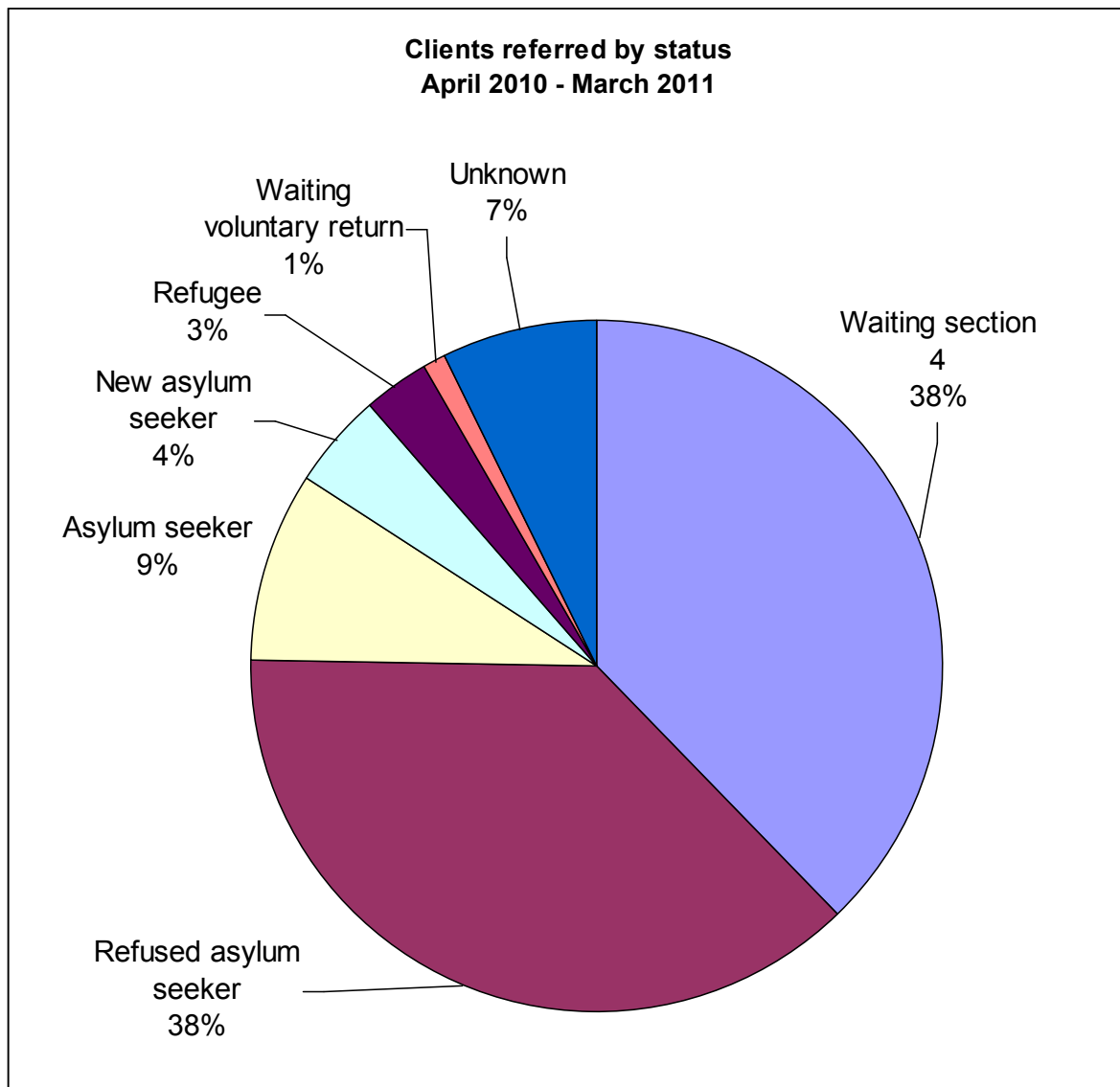
We are still recruiting for hosts through advertising and by word of mouth. We are always looking to recruit new volunteers please feel free to contact us to discuss this further if you think you maybe able to help either as a host or coordinator, or you can find all the information you need and an application form on our website www.lassn.org.uk.

Clients and referrals

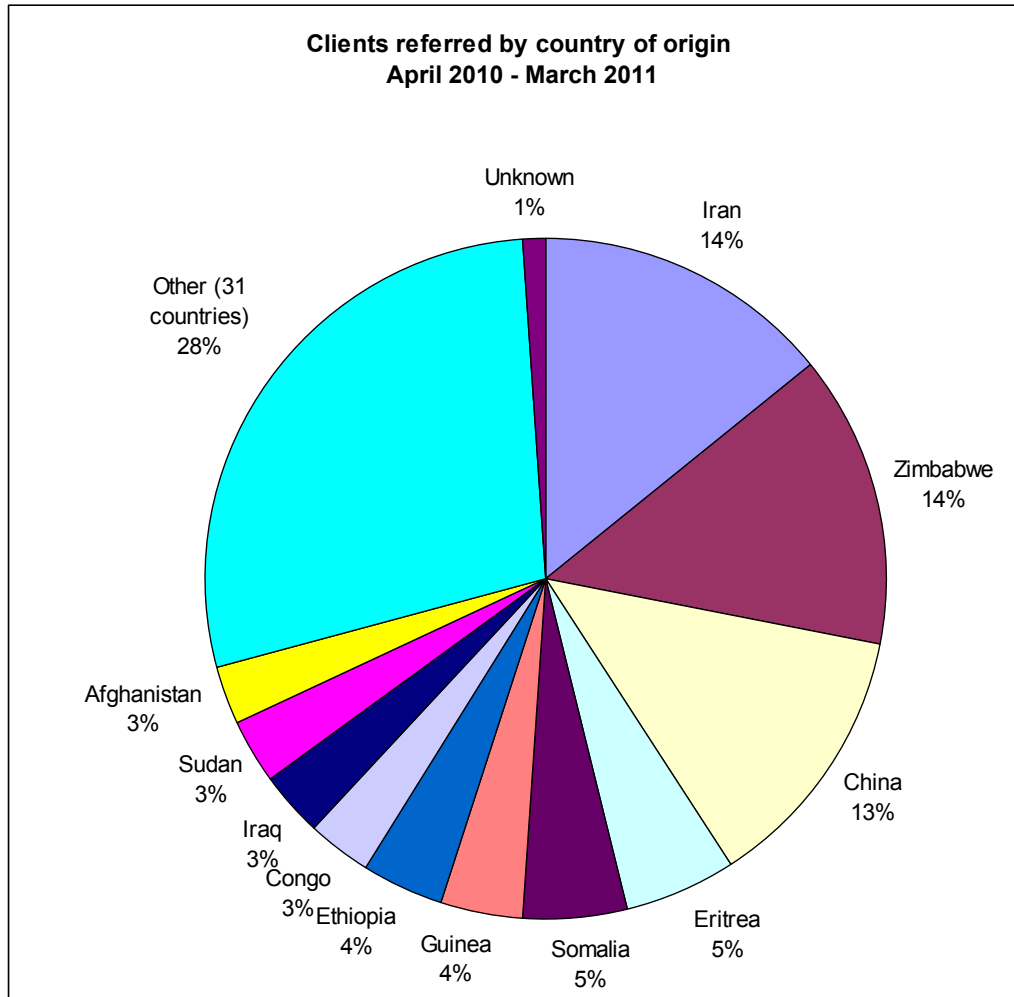
In the past year we have provided 735 nights of accommodation to 297 adults and 6 children and we have a 97% success rate in placing destitute asylum seekers and refugees. The refugee council continues to be our main referral agency followed by PAFRAS, Health Access Team, and other voluntary agencies.



Once again this year a large proportion (39%) of referrals are people waiting for section 4, which is limited support of accommodation and £35 per week in the form of a payment card. The most common reason for section 4 support is for refused asylum seekers who sign up for voluntary return. It is also available for those unable to leave the UK for reasons beyond their control and for those who have no safe route of return. Applicants can be waiting weeks for section 4 accommodation and till the point of being accommodated will be destitute. We are planning to talk to UKBA about this as it is a very high proportion of our referrals and most of these clients should have access to accommodation.



We have also again seen an increase of referrals from China, in 99% of these referrals they are heavily pregnant women. We had great concerns about this and in response we arranged a meeting with 11 different key agencies from across the city to talk about this issue. The meeting was very productive and we talked about the issue and agreed to monitor the situation and respond if need be, however referrals for Chinese women have dropped again.



Long Stop

When hosts sign up for short stop they agree to provide accommodation for 1 – 3 nights. Over the past two years we have seen a marked increase in hosts offering much longer term accommodation to guests. This means that some hosts have made the choice to keep guests for up to six months in some cases. This has resulted in many positive experiences for hosts and guests alike however it has impacted greatly on the day to day management of short stop. Therefore it is apparent that we have to formalise the longer term hosting that is already taking place and to ensure we are adequately training and supporting our volunteers.

Our statistics show that we have provided much longer term hosting to many more people however this is hard to quantify as many times we do not know that hosts keep guests for longer as at the moment it is not officially long stop but an informal agreement between the host and guest.

We have consulted with hosts who have done longer term hosting and they inform us that there is a need to formalise this project with support, guidelines and policy to work with.

Referral agencies tell us they are in desperate need of mid to longer term accommodation for clients that they know will for example get section 4 support but there may be a dispute with their claim so may not receive support for weeks or sometimes months.

We were unable to secure funding to pilot long stop therefore we took on a student from Bradford University. We have learnt a lot about how we think long stop will work and what we need to put this project in place. The placement ends on the 16th May 2011 and a final report will be published then when we will have a clearer understanding about how and if we can run this valuable service. Can we take this opportunity to thank Dale Woodhouse (Student) for his hard work and dedication to this project.

Our strategy for 2011 – 2012

- To continue supporting our existing volunteers and recruit train and support new volunteers
- To secure longer term funding to enable us to continue providing this vital service.
- To evaluate the Long Stop pilot and respond to the final report and recommendations.
- Continue to campaign on the issues for destitute asylum seekers and refugees
- To respond to the bigger picture, we understand that cuts to other organisations and referral agencies will impact on short stop, we need to monitor the situation and respond accordingly.

Conclusion

Short Stop continues to be a valuable resource to asylum seekers and refugee communities in Leeds. It feels like an exciting time with the development of Long Stop and we are looking forward to both the challenges of this and also the opportunity to provide longer term support and accommodation. It feels very positive that the service we are providing is so much appreciated by guests and referring agencies. In these challenging times we need to monitor and respond to the many changes happening around us there is a definite impact on local services and we need to check that we respond accordingly and support our volunteers and guests through these difficult times.

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to all our volunteers, coordinators for their time and commitment sometimes taking referrals last thing in the day and knowing if they don't place that person in all likelihood they will not have anywhere to go that night. We continue to be amazed at the willingness and kindness of our hosts who open their homes and hearts to strangers who at times are greatly distressed and lonely.

We are also thankful for the good working relationships with our referrers, including the Refugee Council, St Georges Crypt, Pafra and the Health Access Team. May we also take this opportunity to thank our funders for providing funds which allow us to continue providing this vital service.

While giving a talk a few weeks ago I realised that I never thank our guests, Short Stop works because of the strong relationships with our volunteers and our referral agencies, however we do need to thank our guests who are always grateful and really appreciate our service the feedback that we get back from hosts and guests themselves is testimony to this.