

2018/19 Annual Impact Form–Sheffield City Council Tackling Inequality Grant

ASSIST Sheffield

ASSIST Sheffield is a volunteer-focused charity supporting destitute refused asylum seekers through accommodation, advocacy and welfare provision, bringing about positive change in the lives of highly vulnerable and marginalised people. We also challenge destitution through education and awareness-raising. Established 16 years ago, ASSIST is widely recognised as a leading organisation working with destitute asylum seekers in the UK and is unique in the Sheffield area. Destitute asylum seekers have no recourse to public funds or accommodation.

ASSIST received a £12,600 grant in 18/19 as a contribution towards core running costs to help achieve two main outcomes

1. Destitute asylum seekers in Sheffield experience improved quality of life.
2. Increased sense of resilience, confidence and understanding (of their situation) amongst destitute asylum seekers.

2018-19 is the 2nd year of funding from a 3-year Tackling Inequality Grant from Sheffield City Council. This report provides an overview of our work in 2018-19 and our progress to achieve these two outcomes

Key achievements from last year:-

- ◆ Our Help-desk responded to **640** individuals, issuing **772** Food bank referrals and made **99** referrals to the Archer Homeless Project.
- ◆ Our Support and Advocacy Team supported **147** clients from **35** countries holding **1,445** Advocacy appointments.
- ◆ **14** clients moved on to statutory support (whilst appealing their asylum claim or making new claim).
- ◆ **59** clients accompanied to **300** appointments
- ◆ We accommodated **110** people,
 - ◆ **68** in long term housing
 - ◆ **36** who only used emergency Night Shelter
 - ◆ **28** used both Night Shelter & long term accommodation.
- ◆ Taking the total number of bednights' accommodation provided, we have calculated that this potentially saves Sheffield Council and associated local services over **£840,767** per year.
- ◆ Volunteer Dividend - **322** volunteers providing an average of **3049** volunteer hours per month is equivalent to paying staff at real living wage **£329,292** per year.

"Best thing about ASSIST was friendship. It made me feel at home. ASSIST is my second family."

ASSIST Sheffield
c/o Victoria Hall
Norfolk Street
Sheffield
S1 2JB

0114 275 4960
admin@assistsheffield.org.uk
www.assistsheffield.org.uk

"I was at the night shelter for three months. Then I got the ASSIST house - it's state of the art. It has everything I need. I have my own room, I am no longer destitute"

Our clients experience an **improved quality of life** as we provide accommodation, welfare payments and access to advocacy and support. This is in response to clients who consistently inform us that their biggest worries and causes of anxiety are their lack of stable accommodation, their legal status and their lack of income.

ASSIST **reduces street homelessness** among destitute asylum seekers in Sheffield by providing an emergency Night Shelter, long term accommodation in ASSIST houses and Hosting services.

24% increase in bednights provided in ASSIST houses



12% increase in bednights provided in ASSIST Night Shelter

In a recent Client Voices survey of our clients 58% stated that accommodation was the best thing about ASSIST. Accommodation is an ongoing priority for ASSIST and this year the number of ASSIST houses has increased to 8 with the temporary use of a 2 bedroom flat in addition. Below are some photographs from our most recent house.

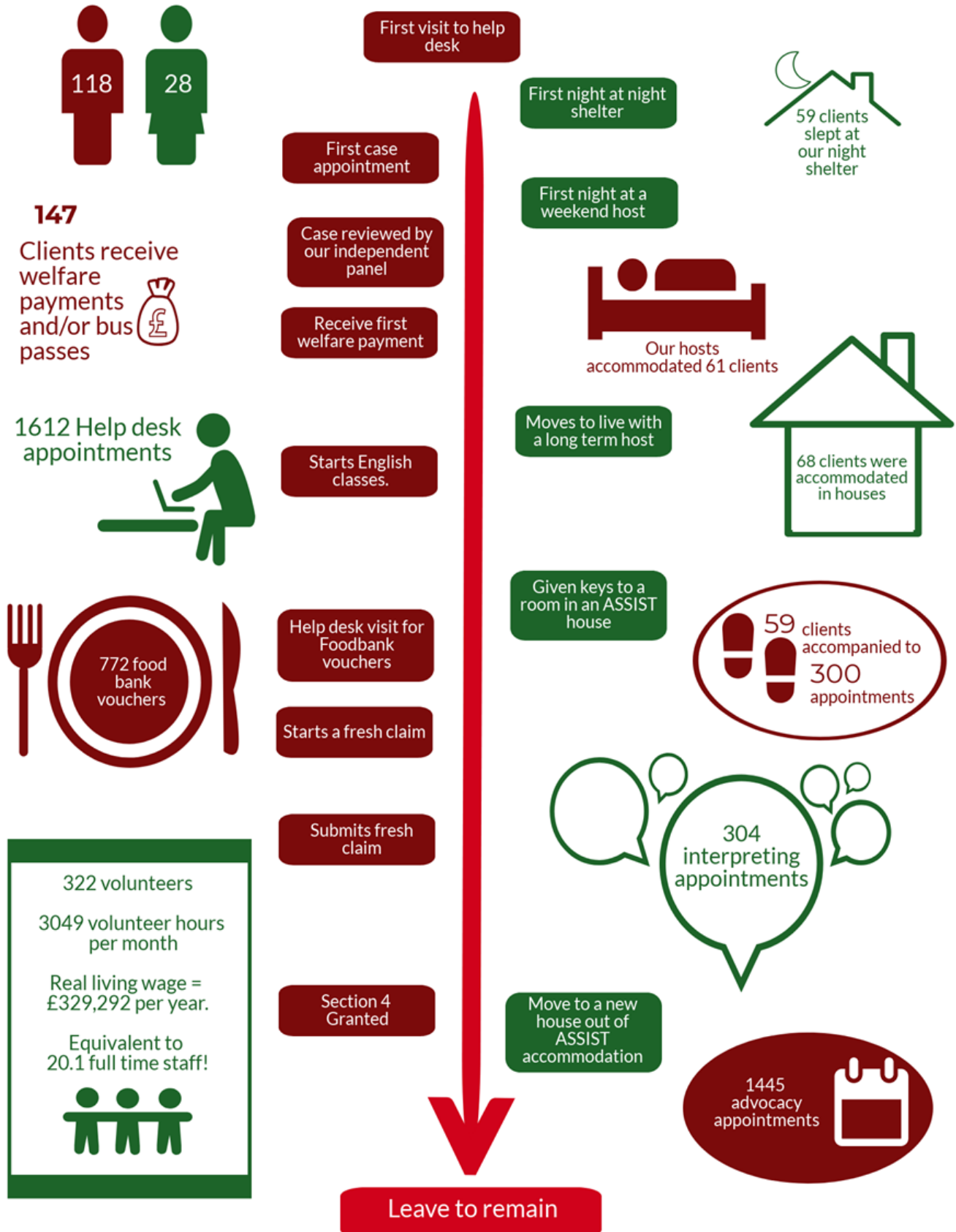


"My friend told me about the night shelter. I started going to the night shelter and I felt at home there. I made good friends and met lovely people"

In 2018/19 ASSIST saved Sheffield City Council and associated local services **£840,767** per year (Based on At What Cost, Crisis, 2015 and 15344 ASSIST bed nights)

"Getting ASSIST accommodation means that you can have some self respect and privacy"

Example Client Journey 2018/19



A client / volunteer's story

"I arrived in 2008 from South Sudan. When I first applied for asylum, it took 2 years to get a response and I got an initial refusal. I went to court. The judge said I had a fair claim, but the Home Office somehow didn't uphold the judge's decision afterwards and I was destitute. In 2011, I then had an interview at ASSIST and they offered me temporary accommodation. I got involved with so many people there; I started volunteering and playing football. In 2017, I eventually went to court again and received a positive decision. 10 years later, but I finally was given leave to remain!

10 years have passed. I know I'm never going to get the time back, but I had to keep positive, looking at the bright side and believing there was light at the end of tunnel. It helped to receive good feedback from people. It also helped to volunteer in ASSIST, and see people in such desperate situations and think that there are people in worst situation. I used to think a lot 'why did this happen to me?', but it happened for a reason. I need to move forward as much as I can. I need to see beyond the horrible things going on my country.

There has been war for over 40 years. The country is going backwards. Entire villages are tortured and burnt down, and those alive are left to die through starvation or illness. Everyone can read information online, you can form your own opinion, but with United Nation's and so many other people's reports. I can't help but wonder, why isn't the international community not putting more pressure on the country with this horrible situation?"

One of our volunteers says:-

"I went to the Heeley Festival and found the ASSIST stall, where I talked to a volunteer. I was impressed with the organisation within ASSIST and the support I was given as I started: the induction training session was particularly effective and gave me a very good idea of the journeys and difficult legal processes the people who came to ASSIST had experienced. I am as impressed now as I was then with the support, organisation and ethos within ASSIST: I feel that all I have to do is to turn up twice a month and sleep at the Night Shelter - the rotas are sorted, there is food in the kitchen cupboard, the bedding is regularly washed and any problems that have arisen are taken on board and properly addressed. I continue volunteering because of the many impressive people I meet: the other dedicated volunteers who have a strong sense of what is right and just and who have a wide range of skills to enable them to get things done; the guests who show an incredible strength of character in the face of the hostile environment deliberately created to discourage them from making the difficult journey here and the threats they face if they are deported; the immense generosity of ASSIST's supporters."

ASSIST helps to **reduce poverty** amongst destitute asylum seekers by providing welfare payments of £20 a week, or £10 plus a bus pass per week.

During 3 months of the winter period these welfare payments were temporarily increased by £5. The bus passes in particular are very important for some clients. (Total cost of welfare payments and bus passes was £112,413).

For high risk asylum seekers ASSIST provides emergency payments (138 payments totalling £1,906) and/or referral to Foodbanks (772 referrals) or Archer Project (99 referrals).

"With the bus pass, you can go wherever you need, wherever you want, you can go. You can do what you want. For example, I can get to the GP on time"

"Bus pass is everything. Before I had to walk 11 miles in one day. It helps you to get to legal appointments. I have a health condition. Walking can make things worse"

"With the bus pass, you can stay on the bus all day. You can relax for a few hours on the bus and keep warm. This is important. Buses have chargers, the new buses with chargers are very good"

ASSIST provides our clients with access to life **enriching opportunities** to help reduce their social isolation.

We know from conversations with both clients and volunteers that being involved with ASSIST has resulted in reduced stress and anxiety and **increased resilience, confidence and understanding of their situations**. For example we have a volunteer accompanying team who, upon request, will accompany clients to their Home Office appointments. Clients who have utilised this service have reported that this has reduced their anxiety and they feel more secure in having someone there who can advise and support should something

ASSIST recognises that part of our work not only includes providing accommodation advocacy and financial support, but that we should be encouraging clients to enrich their lives in a meaningful way and feel like they are part of the community in which they live. As an organisation, we ensure that we make clients aware of activities that may be beneficial to them. We provide information on our notice boards about groups and activities that clients can participate in the local area.

ASSIST has partnerships with both universities and theatres where we have an arrangement to offer free tickets to events to our clients. We also signpost clients to English conversation classes, colleges, and music groups. For two of our houses ASSIST has a partnership with SAVTE who go to the houses who go to the houses to run English classes.

We have close relationships with the Mulberry GP practice where our clients are able to access medical support if required. Should any of our clients not have a GP, we are able to refer directly to the practice. We have worked closely with the practice where we have had clients with acute mental health and physical health problems and who require urgent interventions. Mulberry was set up 20 years ago to provide primary care for homeless people and hard-to-reach clients, and is funded by NHS Commissioners in Sheffield to provide excellent primary care for clients who may not otherwise receive any healthcare. All clients registering at Mulberry have a 20 minute initial screening assessment with an Advanced Nurse Practitioner, and have access to a dedicated and specifically trained Mental Health Counsellor.

Appointments with the Mulberry GP are for 20 minutes, not 10 minutes as in other GP practices, enabling time for a comprehensive assessment, particularly if an interpreter is required.

ASSIST encourages clients to proactively engage and take practical action to address their situations. Whilst ASSIST cannot provide legal advice ourselves, we work in close partnership with South Yorkshire Refugee Law & Justice (SYRLJ) as well as numerous solicitor firms. We support clients to gather their evidence which will allow them, via their solicitors, to submit fresh claims for refugee status. We now have a formal partnership with SYRLJ whereby they will have an initial appointment with all new ASSIST clients who do not have any existing legal support.

48 clients were supported by SYRLJ, 6 of whom moved on to be supported by solicitors. In all 67 clients had legal support from solicitors.

10 clients moved on to Section 4
5 clients moved on to Section 95
2 clients obtained Leave to Remain
1 client moved on to other Statutory Support
1 client had a Voluntary Return

ASSIST volunteers and staff signpost clients but recognise that clients may be reticent to go alone the first time so they also arrange for first visits to be accompanied, either by other clients or ASSIST accompaniers. 59 individual clients were accompanied to around 300 appointments

"I don't think you can choose just one thing ASSIST does and says that it's the most important. You can't live without accommodation, you can't live without money. These things work together so I won't just choose between them, that's not a good way of doing things. They are part of a big thing, you know? I can't decide between the things that ASSIST does. ASSIST helps with all of the things that people need. ASSIST meets all of people's needs so I can't choose what's best."

About Our Clients

147 Clients from around the world



Our Volunteers

We couldn't help and support our clients without the tremendous contribution of our volunteers. During last year we have worked with 322 volunteers from a wide range of different backgrounds, ages and cultures. Over the year, we have recruited and trained a total of 98 new volunteers. Our volunteers include 8 current clients, 6 other refused asylum seekers, 14 asylum seekers and 8 refugees (with Leave to Remain).

Breakdown of our Volunteers by Team

Accommodation:

Hosts - **73**
Night shelter - 79
House visitors - **20**
Accommodation support - 6

Client Support:

Accompaniers - **21**
Interpreters - **53** (19 languages)
Support & Advocacy - **55**
Help Desk - **22**
Panel - 6

Resources:

Events, Fundraising & Awareness - **23**
Finance - **5**
Grants - 4
IT - 6
Office - 4
Recruitment & Training - 9

(Note some volunteers are in more than one team)

Training and Support for Volunteers

Recognising the challenging nature of our volunteers' work, we have expanded our training and support services. Although all new volunteers were offered induction training this mainly was to familiarise volunteers with the asylum system and ASSIST's role in supporting our clients, and didn't cover in sufficient detail essential key areas such as Safeguarding, Boundaries, Confidentiality and Selfcare. New Safeguarding, Confidentiality & Boundaries training was designed to incorporate these areas - so far 120 volunteers have attended this training. We also now run a monthly programme of training on a range of issues requested by our volunteers delivered by a combination of in-house experts and colleagues from other organisations. These workshops included: Listening Skills, Managing Risk, Human Trafficking, Asylum System, Post Traumatic Stress, Avoiding Burnout, Working with Conflict, Mental Health First Aid.

We have also been developing our volunteer interpreters' team with team-building and training events. We now have 53 interpreters, covering 19 languages. 15 of our regular interpreters have completed the WEA qualification in community interpreting at level 1 or above.

58 volunteers responded to our survey about support needs. Based on this, we have developed a new programme of 'shared learning' workshops for volunteers from different teams to share their experiences, and to support and learn from each other. An experienced volunteer who is a professional counsellor is offering a free one-to-one confidential listening service to all ASSIST volunteers, to provide extra support with challenging situations.

Volunteer Dividend -

322 volunteers providing an average of **3049** volunteer hours per month is equivalent to paying staff at real living wage **£329,292** per year.