Glasgow Night Shelter, an independent non-faith based charity

Glasgow is one of the main UK cities to which the Home Office disperses asylum seekers, so there are large numbers of asylum seekers here, both those who are currently in the official support system and those who are, at least temporarily, no longer being supported. We are a group of over 50 committed volunteers, male and female, from all walks of life and a wide age range, who find it completely unacceptable to deliberately make people street destitute, all the more so when these people are often the victims of persecution and even torture. We thus run Glasgow Night Shelter.

Every night for almost 5 years now we have been using a church hall to shelter destitute asylum seekers and also non-EU migrants who are unable to access homeless services. The men turn up for the first time at our door cold, hungry, tired, frightened, totally demoralised - and become our welcome guests. We have the overnight use of a tv/dining room, a kitchen, washing facilities and a large hall where the men sleep on good quality mattresses with plenty of bedding. We would very much like to offer the same provision for destitute women but we have had enormous difficulty finding premises which will accept women. We will not give up in our search.

We open the door at 8 pm and close again at 8 am. We give our guests a warm welcome and a hot and nourishing evening meal. The guests can then watch tv or sit around chatting with each other or with the volunteers. Four volunteers sleep over every night and others come in to offer friendship, advice and, sometimes, chiropody. We make a serious effort to encourage our guests to be focused in the collection of evidence required for a fresh asylum claim, and thus a route back into the official immigration support system. This year we organised quite an intensive training scheme for some of our volunteers so that the ability to help our guests in this effort is now increasingly widespread in our community. We also collect warm clothing and shoes and distribute these as needed. Some of our guests require much more support for various reasons - mental or physical health problems, extreme youth or age, shattered nerves because of a dreadful journey or a history of persecution. We do what we can to help, escorting them to doctors and lawyers and connecting them with other charities which can offer specialist intervention. Our guests can stay with us as long as they need, basically until they can move on to a better situation.

Margaret Sweeney Feb 2017

Chair of Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers