# boaztrust

A year unlike any other: serving destitute sanctuary seekers and refugees

Report 2020/2021

Clients in several shared Boaz houses have enjoyed growing vegetables and plants this year.

#### A welcome letter from our Chief Executive

It has been a year unlike any other. The Covid pandemic is far from over, yet while aspects of our lives continue to be different and disrupted, for many people around the world the suffering already endured before the pandemic never stopped.

As well as ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen, and the truly dreadful situation in Afghanistan, fighting in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has also forced more than one million people from their homes. By the end of 2020, there were more than eighty million people around the world forcibly displaced.

As people are compelled to make desperate decisions in search of safety, we have witnessed a hardening of hearts in the UK. With the proposed Nationality and Borders Bill, the Government is vowing to make the process of applying for sanctuary much harder, undermining the very principle of asylum.

It is against this backdrop that the Boaz Trust has worked during the last year, providing accommodation, as well as practical and emotional support, for people who are destitute. We have also worked locally, regionally and nationally to influence decision makers, and to advocate for a fairer and more compassionate asylum system.

It has been a hard and exhausting year for us, but we are proud of our achievements. We have strengthened our client support work and have found hidden riches in being able to connect with our clients in their homes. We have strengthened existing partnerships and forged new ones, and we have invested in our advocacy work to hold the Government to account.

We have stayed committed to our desire to become an antiracist organisation, looking inwardly at our practices and policies, and speaking out when we have witnessed the racism deeply embedded in our society. We make no apology for our suggestion that the rhetoric of the Government emboldens those who hold racist ideologies, and that as a country with a colonial history and institutional racism towards people of colour, we must do more to understand the connections between racism and asylum policy.

The world is changing and becoming ever more fractious and fractured. Meanwhile we keep on keeping on, buoyed by each other and by the people we seek to serve. Thank you for standing alongside us.

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Ros Holland Chief Executive

## A client's story: Nori\*

We met Nori at the beginning of this year when he was accommodated in a hotel as part of the Everyone In scheme. Now housed with Boaz, he describes his experience during the Covid pandemic.



At the start of the pandemic I was living on the streets of Manchester.

I used to go to places to get support, but gradually they started locking down and there was nowhere to go. For the first lockdown I was homeless on the streets. I had lived on the streets for five years and when I heard people saying we had to 'stay at home' I didn't know how I could do that because I didn't have a home.

During the first lockdown I was attacked on the street. I was taken to hospital because I was bleeding badly. I had blood coming out of my ear. When I left hospital I went back to sleeping on the streets. Sometimes I could not sleep because the pain would wake me up and because people passing by kicked me when I was sleeping. It was cold and raining, and I used to think that only God knows what would happen to me.

Eventually I went back to Cornerstone to ask for help. At night it felt too difficult for me and I knew that I needed a place to rest.



In January this year I was moved into a hotel. At that time I was still suffering and bleeding from the attack. At the hotel I met other people in a situation like mine and it was there that I found out about the Boaz Trust. Later that month I was able to move into the Boaz house. After that situation – being on the streets – to have a house and support was like 'wow.' I didn't know that Boaz existed. I had been homeless for so long and had never received anything like this before.

I have a lot of friends and I have met a lot of people. When I came to the UK I didn't speak any English at all. I started meeting people and learning English and now I understand a lot. I need support, but I can also help people just like people helped me.

Sometimes I wonder why I did not find Boaz sooner. When I moved to the hotel and met Boaz I suddenly saw a lot of good people around me.

Only God knows what will happen. Maybe everything will be okay, but we cannot know the future.

Our support team have accompanied clients on wellbeing walks, as restrictions allowed, throughout the pandemic.

### Our services

A core focus of our work at the Boaz Trust is to provide safe and stable accommodation for people who have become homeless following the refusal of their asylum claim.

Following a refusal, people lose their entitlement to asylum support and have no recourse to public funds. Many of the individuals we work with are terrified of being returned to their home countries and wish to re-engage with the asylum process to help them resolve their cases.

#### Shared houses

During 2020-2021 we provided accommodation for 51 people whose asylum applications had been refused. Of those we accommodated, 41% were women and 59% were men. Two fifths of individuals living in Boaz houses were under the age of 30.

During the first several months of the pandemic, our clients experienced long delays in being able to access paperwork from the Home Office. There were reports that individuals eligible for Home Office asylum support and accommodation were

being placed in hotels and, at worst, in former army barracks. We became increasingly concerned about the impact that such a move would have on our clients' mental health and so we did not insist that clients apply for Home Office accommodation, if they became eligible. As a result of this decision, the number of people who we were able to accommodate during the 2020-2021 financial year decreased by a quarter as fewer people moved on positively. We very much felt that our decision was the right one to make ethically.



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Last year everything was tough. I was homeless, I was attacked, but I will never forget the people

who helped me in the hospital. Even though there was Covid they looked after me so well. Now I have a second life and good things [have] happened. I got support from so many good people and I am thankful. And now the Boaz Trust. They check up on me to see if I am okay.

#### The winter night shelter

As we reported last year, we were forced to close our men's winter night shelter early as the severity of the pandemic became apparent. The 11 men who were staying in the night shelter at the time of its closure were offered accommodation in local guest houses and hostels, funded by a scheme known as Everyone In, overseen by Manchester City Council.

Between April and June 2020, we continued to support the men in various practical ways. A team of our night shelter volunteers provided almost 700 hot meals, and delivered regular food and hygiene products. One of our support workers made regular wellbeing phone calls and socially distanced visits.

In time, some of the men were able to move into shared Boaz houses as rooms became available. Others were able to once again access Home Office accommodation, having made fresh asylum applications.

In October 2020, the Government guidance confirmed that we would be unable to re-open our night shelter for the 2020-2021 season. We took the lessons we learnt from early on in the pandemic and integrated them into our new floating support model, which you can read about on page seven.

#### Hosting

At the start of the 2020-2021 financial year, two clients were staying with Boaz hosts. As the situation with the pandemic worsened, it became apparent to us that hosting was going to be unfeasible for the foreseeable future. Thankfully we were able to offer our two clients spaces in our shared Boaz houses.

At various points throughout the year we explored re-opening our hosting programme, but owing to local lockdowns and fluctuations in local rates of Covid transmission, we felt we were unable to do so. We look forward to a time when we can relaunch our hosting programme.

## Refugee support

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our housing and support for people who have been granted refugee status have continued to go from strength to strength.

During 2020-2021 we accommodated 42 individuals with refugee status, or some other form of leave to remain. Nine people were supported to move on from Boaz during the year into other long-term accommodation, including social housing and private rentals. Just one Boaz client was reunited with her family during the 2020-2021 period as specialist support services for Family Reunion were paused, and travel and border restrictions ensued.

At the start of the pandemic we were extremely concerned about how it might impact our clients with refugee status. Some were initially furloughed and, with several of our clients on zero-hour contracts, we were worried that clients may struggle to maintain rent payments. Our refugee support workers continued to work closely with clients and we were relieved that most people were able to maintain employment and keep up-to-date with rent payments.

During the year, 16 clients were able to find and maintain employment and 22 clients were able to access education opportunities, many made possible by the provision of internet across all our houses.

Despite the challenges faced by our clients, we've been heartened to learn of the ways in which individuals have been able to support themselves and one another through this time.



#### A new model of support

With the closure of our night shelter, we started providing support to men who had been moved into emergency hotel accommodation, owing to the pandemic. As time went on, we began formalising a new model of support that we could offer to people within our client group, not yet living in Boaz accommodation.

We called this floating support and, during the first six months, we were able to work with 28 individuals.

In partnership with the local council and Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, we started working within specific hotels and hostels in Manchester to support individuals made destitute by the asylum system. Owing to the pandemic, individuals who would have ordinarily been homeless were accommodated through the Everyone In scheme.

The floating support model is an opportunity for hotel accommodated sanctuary seeking individuals with no recourse to public funds to meet with a Boaz support worker for an initial assessment of their situation. It is a chance for people to have their asylum claim looked at by a solicitor at GMIAU and, where considered viable, to receive support needed to obtain relevant paperwork and evidence to work towards



making a fresh asylum claim. It is also a way for individuals to access GP and dental services, as well as other forms of emotional and practical support.

Support worker, Vron, explains why this model of support is so important: "At Boaz we often get calls from agencies referring homeless individuals to us for accommodation. Because our waiting list is so long, we are mostly unable to offer support. When previously homeless people were moved into hotel accommodation at the start of the pandemic, we began to notice that there wasn't always a lot of specialist support available for them. People were wasting a lot of time not being able to move their asylum case forward

and understandably this was having a negative impact on their mental health.

Through the model of support we now offer, we are able to help clients access their paperwork and meet with a solicitor. We're finding that we're reaching people who we wouldn't have been able to support previously. Often there's nobody else advocating for the people we see. It also means that as rooms become available in Boaz houses, we can offer them to the people we are working with and, when they move in, their cases can progress more quickly because things are already in motion. It's a really important model of support because it means we're reaching more people than before."

### Moti's\* story: a case study of Boaz support through lockdown

With the closure of our night shelter in March 2020, we worked tirelessly with Manchester City Council and others to find accommodation for the men who we had previously supported. But we didn't stop there, as Moti's story demonstrates.

Moti was referred to our night shelter in January 2020. He had become destitute after his asylum claim was refused and he became ineligible for benefits and accommodation (otherwise known as no recourse to public funds). When our night shelter closed in March 2020 owing to the worsening Covid situation, Moti moved to temporary accommodation.

We continued to support Moti with financial assistance and food, as well as wider wellbeing support. We assisted him to register with a GP and helped him to access emergency dental services. Crucially, we referred Moti to Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU), with whom we partner, and they reviewed his asylum case. The solicitor advised Moti of the evidence he needed in order to demonstrate to the Home Office that he faced



risk of persecution due to his political activity in his home country and his continued political activity since arriving in the UK. We supported Moti to collect evidence and liaised with the solicitor, providing an interpreter when needed.

In June 2020 we were able to offer Moti a room in one of our shared houses, which meant that he was finally able to move out of the emergency hotel accommodation that he had been staying in. As with all our clients, we supported him financially each week and continued to provide support with his asylum case.

Moti's immigration case progressed quickly. His solicitor submitted a fresh claim to the Home Office, re-opening his case for consideration. We supported him to apply for Home Office asylum support and accommodation, which he was once again eligible for. He moved out of the Boaz house in September 2020 and is awaiting a decision on his fresh claim from the Home Office.

Home Office asylum accommodation is provided on a no-choice basis and unfortunately Moti was housed outside Manchester. However, through regular wellbeing phone calls his support worker helped him to feel more settled in his new environment, providing remote support in the weeks and months after he left Boaz.

At Boaz the support we provide is holistic, recognising that as well as accommodation, clients often need legal and social support.

We have been able to provide a number of initiatives to support clients this last year, including cookery classes, online yoga, gardening and wellbeing walks.

### Holistic and personcentred support

Despite everything that we have faced this year, we are really proud of the way that our support work has developed and thrived. During the first lockdown, our support team adapted quickly to be able to provide both remote and socially distanced in-person support.

Before Covid our clients would primarily come to the Boaz office to access support. The nature of the pandemic meant that this was no longer possible and so our support workers started spending more time in the neighbourhoods where our Boaz houses are. We soon started to see the positives to this way of working, enabling us to get to know our clients better.

With the impact of Covid taking hold and resulting in long delays for clients trying to access paperwork, as well as the broader effects of lockdown, it wasn't long before we started to notice the impact this was having on clients' mental health. We placed a greater emphasis on our wellbeing support, providing individual and collective support as and how the restrictions allowed for. We accompanied clients on socially distanced walks, initiated a series of gardening projects across several Boaz houses, delivered online yoga classes, partnered with Heart and Parcel to offer online cookery classes, purchased exercise equipment and, where requested, referred clients for mental health support offered by the Caribbean and African Health Network and others.

Recognising the impact of isolation on our clients, we successfully crowdfunded £10,000 in the summer of 2020, enabling us to install Wi-Fi across all of our Boaz houses. Furthermore, we ensured that each of our clients had access to a device from which they could use the internet. Our clients still talk about the difference that internet access has made to their lives, helping them to stay connected to family and friends, work with solicitors on their

asylum claims, and access learning and volunteering opportunities.

In the summer of 2020 we also moved from providing our sanctuary seeking clients with a small weekly cash allowance to a pre-paid Visa card topped up weekly. This change was met with positive feedback from our clients and support staff alike as a more dignified means of providing support. We furthermore increased our weekly food allowance for clients in recognition of the growing cost of food.

Combining face-to-face and online activities, as well as individual and house wellbeing initiatives, 69% of our sanctuary seeking clients and 45% of clients with refugee status engaged with the activities we offered.



One of our support workers, Rich, talks to a client.

## Speaking truth to power

Since our founding, we have always combined the practical support we offer to sanctuary seekers and refugees experiencing destitution, with sustained campaigning efforts to positively change the asylum system.

In the early years of Boaz this often meant attending marches and rallies to campaign for change, as well as engaging in conversations with local and regional political decision makers, advocating for a compassionate and fair asylum system.

Political leaders across the spectrum have been responsible for initiating and implementing harmful policies against people seeking safety for some years now. We will continue to speak truth to power to elected leaders from any political party where we determine there are unjust policies and practices.

In the last year, it has been difficult to ignore the growing hostility towards people seeking sanctuary, notable in the Government's Nationality and Borders Bill. Dystopian in its scope, it represents the biggest shift in UK asylum policy that we have witnessed in the lifetime of Boaz. Not only does the Bill seek to undermine the very principle of asylum, but it will pave the way for inhumane practices such as sending people to offshore processing centres and furthering the use of out-of-town asylum

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accommodation. People who arrive in the UK through any means other than official UK Government resettlement routes will be criminalised and punished.

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There are a multitude of complex and complicated reasons why people are forced to leave their homes and homelands.

We will be intensifying our advocacy and campaigns work in the months ahead. As well as opposing the Nationality and Borders Bill through our engagement with political representatives, we will be asking you, our supporters, to help us to build a more compassionate society for people seeking sanctuary. Be it in our church groups, our neighbourhoods or our places of work, we want to help shift the narrative and build public understanding and compassion.

#### Please join us

To take action with us, visit www.boaztrust.org.uk/ advocacy.

We've recently enjoyed being able to meet outside with our clients and reconnect.

"Before I was thinking that I could never do yoga. But then my friend said that we can do anything if we believe in ourselves. When I started yoga I liked it so much. It relaxes my body and I sleep so deeply the night I do it. When I am tired or sad I do yoga and I feel better for it."

## Trauma-informed yoga

During the pandemic, some of our female clients practiced yoga with us. Amy Merone shares why yoga can be helpful and the vital importance of teaching from a trauma-informed perspective.

Several weeks before the severity of the Covid pandemic became apparent, we applied to the This Girl Can Community Fund to finance a series of in-person yoga classes for our female clients. I had recently joined the Boaz Trust and, as a yoga teacher, I was looking forward to introducing the practice to our clients. In the weeks that followed we were awarded the funding, but it became apparent that we wouldn't be able to offer anything in-person for a long time to come.

As the world moved online, we too started to imagine an online yoga offering for interested clients. It was a challenging experience as we navigated connectivity issues and multiple lanauages, and I wrestled with how to demonstrate postures remotely. Still, for all the challenges, it was an opportunity for those who wanted to, to inhabit a space each week where they could notice the body and breath, and move in a way that felt good.

As the restrictions allowed for in the summer of 2020, we met together in the park to practice in-person. So much of the way that yoga is marketed in the West today implies that the practice is about the attainment of a particular posture or a particular look. For me, the practice of yoga is simply an opportunity to become curious about the way we breathe and move, noticing what arises for us as we do so. I wanted our practice and time together in the park to be free of expectation, and instead to invite playfulness and laughter. The memories of those sessions are of the iov that we found in the movement of our bodies.

Teaching from a traumainformed perspective, there is the invitation, and encouragement, to practice in a way that feels safe and intuitive for the individual body that each of us inhabits. I am interested in understanding how our lived experiences shape how we feel in, and about, our bodies, and how the practice of yoga can be used to support our physical and mental wellbeing.

Many of the clients we work with have experienced trauma and some are livina with post-traumatic stress. This means that individuals may experience dysregulation within their nervous systems, which can manifest as symptoms such as anxiety, a heightened sense of danger, difficulty concentrating, and difficulty falling and staying asleep. Furthermore, post-traumatic stress can make it difficult for a person to be in the present as memories from the past (and any ongoing trauma) can resurface.



Trauma-informed yoga is a way for our clients to use movement and breath to help calm the body's nervous system over time. Our clients have shared that the practice of yoga has supported them to feel calmer, to sleep better and to feel stronger.

Since June this year, a small group of us have been able to practice together in-person again. There is a different quality to being inside a shared space, greeting and meeting one another where we are in that moment. In our sessions together now, I respond to what the women tell me they need and want: opportunities to breathe and balance, to be elevated off the ground, and also to be grounded.

Towards the end of each session, as our bodies tire, we come back to the ground and rest. Sometimes a person tells me that they will go home and sleep now, relaxed by the practice of yoga. That, I come to realise, is enough.

## Finance



We wish to thank our many donors, individuals, churches, faith and community groups, businesses and other local organisations who have supported our work through fundraising, donations and giving, as well as those who have generously allowed us to continue to use their houses this last year.

Throughout the pandemic we have provided both in-person and remote support to our refugee and sanctuary seeking clients.

#### Thank you for reading.



#### Please say hello:

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