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Revd Grace and Revd Gareth Thomas had a spare house. As clergy, they live in a church-owned vicarage during their working lives. When they retire, though, they will need somewhere to live, so they bought a house and started paying off the mortgage.

Like Grace and Gareth, some people are fortunate enough to have a spare home. You've inherited one which you don't need but don't want to sell, or you bought a house for your children, but they don't need it yet. Deciding what to do with it can have big financial and ethical implications, and right now it's vital that no house sits empty. Boaz Trust in Manchester have an answer. They look after your house for free, can provide a small rent to offset any mortgage repayments, and do good at the same time.

'They do a better job than our estate agents did'

Revd Gareth Thomas

Boaz provide accommodation for refugees and destitute asylum seekers. They found that these groups were at particular risk of homelessness. Administrative errors can often lead to people's asylum claim being rejected. If refused, accommodation and support is terminated after 21 days, and many end up on the streets. Even if their claim is successful, and they are granted refugee status, they are given just 28 days to 'move on' from asylum support. This is a very short amount of time to secure housing, work and benefits – especially for refugees who may be new to the UK and may not have the necessary support networks and understanding of UK systems and processes to help them thrive.

The charity not only keeps people off the streets, but also supports asylum seekers who need to appeal their decisions and offers stability to refugees whose cases have been approved whilst they apply for jobs and rebuild their lives in the UK. Boaz 'ease' their residents into renting by teaching them life skills, like cooking and cleaning, as well as offering emotional, financial and legal support. While this looks different in lockdown, they've been providing people with vital virtual contact to help people feel supported in their homes.

'Jesus and His family sought asylum - what welcome would they have found in modern Britain?'

Dave Smith, Founder of Boaz Trust

Boaz Trust started with church members offering a sofa for a night, and they expanded from there. After fifteen years, people know that Boaz ‘really care’ and are responsible and diligent. This has also inspired non-Christian organisations to get involved. Arawak Walton, a BAME housing association, knew that they could not offer support to refugees in the way that they wanted to, but were keen to work with Boaz to meet this need. Arawak Walton now lease two houses to Boaz Trust for the amount that they would receive if they were to rent them to families. Boaz then rent these out to single refugees on a room by room basis. This generates surplus income, which contributes towards funding other parts of their work.



Partnering with others – whether individuals or Arawak Walton – has helped Boaz to expand rapidly. This is exactly the sort of collaboration that the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Housing, Church and Community wants to encourage. Now more than ever it’s vital that we provide more supported accommodation to keep people off the streets, in stable and secure homes. Working together, our resources and skills can be pooled to make a real difference to people’s lives. Can you get involved with a local homelessness charity at this crucial time?

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Notes:

1. Boaz Trust leases most of its houses either for free or for peppercorn rents.
2. Revd Grace and Revd Gareth Thomas pay for their mortgage, but Boaz look after the house for them and provide tailored 1:1 support for the

clients in the house.

3. Boaz currently manage 20 properties. 4 are owned by clergy, 2 by Arawak Walton, and 4 by Green Pastures, a Christian Community Benefit Society. The rest are owned by private individuals who support the work, vision and values of the organisation. 18 of these houses are shared by 3 or more single adults, while two properties are for couples or families who have recently been reunited as a family.
4. Boaz do not charge destitute asylum seekers for their accommodation, because following a refusal on their asylum claim, they have “no recourse to public funds” (i.e. certain mainstream benefits), they are not allowed to work and earn a living, and they do not have the right to rent housing.
5. Boaz hope to ‘ease’ recently granted refugees into the British rental market by providing simple tenancies which include all utilities. Boaz don’t charge any deposit and the accommodation is fully furnished.
6. Boaz do not provide permanent accommodation – they try to find a way forward for all their clients to move on positively. They know that not all their clients will be granted asylum, but they hope to treat each individual with humanity and dignity in the meantime.
7. Boaz also continue to offer hosting with local individuals and families and a winter night shelter, alongside their shared accommodation, for asylum seekers who require emergency accommodation.
8. The relationship with Arawak Walton began when the housing association took on a management contract for all of Boaz Trust’s properties, handling maintenance and rents. This started a conversation about ways to continue this relationship.
9. Arawak Walton lease two houses to Boaz Trust for the amount that they would receive if they were to rent it to a family. Boaz then rent these out to single refugees on a room by room basis. This generates surplus income, which contributes towards funding other parts of the work such as specialist support workers, as well as covering the housing costs for those who have had their claims refused and are not currently allowed to work, claim benefits, or pay rent.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/housing-church-and-community/church-blogs/turning-empty-house-home>