



Oasis Living Rooms

Top Tips

Welcome

Whether it is a staff member or a volunteer who a Living Room guest meets first, that first encounter is really important. Their experience right there and then. Whoever walks into a Living Room needs to feel welcomed and accepted.

The space itself

Consider what you can add to your space to make it feel welcoming for people to come in to. First impressions are important. Small touches such as fairy lights, art, and cushions can make all the difference. You don't need to spend loads of money – but aim to make the space feel genuinely like a 'living room'.

Some people may want to come and simply be, others will enjoy chatting. Make sure you have some things for people to do, to provide an opportunity to connect. Books and magazines, toys (if you have children attending), cards, simple art/craft, and board games are all easy start points for engaging in something together with others.

Activities and services

Planning a range of activities can be a great way to encourage people into your space: quizzes, bingo, film screenings (check on licensing requirements) or activities like knitting / other crafts. If you are able to provide things such as IT and Wifi access, homework clubs, device charging, a washing machine etc., these can really add to the usefulness of the space.

Don't underestimate the power of relationships

Offering a warm space, with hot drinks, a chance for a chat etc., may at times not feel like much. But we really believe that lasting change is built on relationships! One of the things Covid has reminded us is that we were made to be in community with one another, and Living Rooms are one way we can provide that opportunity for people to connect.

Ownership

Let's create spaces where those who come feel a sense of ownership. One way of doing this is to encourage people to do things for themselves. E.g., everyone being able to put the kettle on creates a sense of mutual support rather than charity. As you get to know people and listen to them, are there any suggestions they have for the space? Are there activities they would like to see happening, perhaps some that they could run or help set up?

Spreading the Word

We have chosen the language of 'Oasis Living Room' intentionally. It's vital to recognise the significant stigma that many may still feel when coming into your space. The language we use to describe our spaces, and the way in which we present the services we host, are vital to reducing these feelings. Terms to avoid would be warm banks, heated rooms, free meals, benefits advice, etc. By all means, send out flyers or post on social media about your Living Room, but it is likely that the most effective way of letting people know about your space will be through word of mouth. Once some people come along and enjoy themselves, they will tell others, or invite their friends.

A lot of local authorities are also running their own 'Warm space' schemes and are creating their own directories. It is worth adding your Living Room project to these as a way of spreading the word, as well as to the Warm Welcome site. (<https://warmwelcome.uk>)

Accessibility

How accessible is your space? Make sure you consider:

- Approach to the building (e.g., dropped curbs, signage, etc.)
- Entrance accessibility (e.g., ramps, steps and handrails)
- Doors (exterior and interior) with dignified access for all and accessible routes
- Lifts and stairlifts that are easily accessible
- Keeping aisles, corridors, doorways, and spaces free of obstruction and with space to accommodate wheelchair and buggy users
- Means for people with disabilities to leave the building quickly in the event of an emergency.
- Alarm systems suitable for alerting the hearing impaired
- Clear signage to the correct entrance to use (especially if it's not the main building entrance people might be used to using)

Inclusion

It is important we make sure that everyone who comes to a Living Room feels included. Things to consider (and this is by no means an exhaustive list) are:

- Can everyone easily access the space (see the above points on accessibility)?
- The type of food provided
- The languages spoken in the local area
- Seating – is it flexible/suitable for everyone?
- Is there a separate space for parents and babies if they need it?
- Any key festivals or events which may impact on people's emotions or may impact on what they can do at a particular time e.g., they may be fasting
- Have you got access to a prayer space?
- Have you got All Gender Toilets available?
- Ways of indicating your space is LGBTQ+ inclusive including rainbow lanyards, posters that celebrate LGBTQ+ history, and icons or posters and leaflets advertising LGBTQ+ groups and services
- Visuals and resources that reflect your local community in its diversity (e.g., choice of books available, ethnicities and culture represented in literature and other visuals in the space, choice of background music)

These are suggestions to consider – but you will need to make things work for the space you have available. For example, if you're unable to provide a separate space for parents with babies that shouldn't prevent you from opening your living room, just think through how you'll accommodate everyone's needs.

Safety

It is important everyone who comes to a Living Room feels safe. Please make sure you follow your safeguarding policy and procedures, complete risk assessments for the space and for activities, consider hygiene / infection risks and public health measures (Covid hasn't gone away), and that where necessary food hygiene and allergen rules are followed too (especially if you are preparing food onsite). None of this needs to be complex – but make sure you've written down your procedures clearly for everyone, briefed volunteers, and have a clear chain of responsibility should any problems arise. Food hygiene is available for a small fee online, allergen training is available for free at <https://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/>

Temperature

The basic level of warmth for a healthy person wearing warm clothing is 18°C. This standard is recognised by the World Health Organisation and is the minimum standard in the government's latest UK cold weather plan. Warm spaces should therefore aim for 18 - 20°C as a rough guide. Providing coat racks is a good idea but people should be able to keep their coats on if they wish. It may also be appropriate to offer blankets to those sitting still for any length of time, or near entrances.

Additional support

Local Authorities are providing information on local services and household support available. Most are providing leaflets or other literature that you could make available in your space. If you already provide debt/benefits or other advice services or referrals, you may want to run 'pop-up' sessions in your Living Room or invite partners organisations to come and share their expertise. Think about how this is presented, so that your Living Room remains a venue for all – offering community, friendship, and participation. Are there other local organisations who offer wellbeing or mental health support who might want to come and run some activities with you? Above all, make sure that what you offer is based on lived experience, and knowledge of your community.