



THE LIBERAL JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

Drop-in for Asylum Seeker Families

2018 Annual Report

This Year at the Drop-in

We are very glad to report that our Drop-in continues to grow in both number and strength. By January 2019 we had registered approximately 488 adults from over 30 countries, including Albania, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sudan.

During 2018, we welcomed, on average, 72 adult guests and their children each month. Many of them have endured tremendous hardships before reaching the UK and a number of our guests are victims of human trafficking. Unfortunately, once in the UK, they face the difficulty of navigating a complex and lengthy asylum process, whilst subsisting on a minimal level of financial support.

We have a dedicated team of volunteers who span all ages, religions, and ethnic backgrounds, and work collaboratively to make the Drop-in possible. Amongst our volunteers are previous guests who have received leave to remain in the UK. Their commitment to the Drop-in is a testament to the strength of the community space that guests and volunteers have co-created.

With the exception of the recruitment of a Project Administrator who has been appointed to ensure the continued growth and long-term sustainability of the Drop-in, the Drop-in is entirely run by volunteers. We remain committed to volunteer care and, in addition to specific training, we provide a regular space for volunteers to reflect on the experience of volunteering at the Drop-in.

We continue to offer families with children under sixteen who are seeking asylum a warm and welcoming space. As well as providing a hot meal, good quality clothing, toiletries, and nappies, we signpost our guests to baby banks and food banks in their local area for extra support.

Our system of having two groups who attend the Drop-in on alternate months continues to run smoothly and has allowed us to accommodate our growing number of guests. We distribute double allocations each month to ensure that our guests receive the same overall level of support. We have been working hard to streamline our system and make the process as comfortable for our guests as possible. We have implemented a new queuing system for when our guests arrive which has significantly cut down the waiting time for our guests.

We continue to meet with other Synagogue Drop-ins to share knowledge and best practice. We have also directly assisted the United Synagogue in establishing their Hendon and Woodford Drop-ins and have been able to refer a number of guests to the Woodford drop-in, which has allowed us to open up space for more guests at the LJS. We also continue to collaborate with other charities such as Bloody Good Period, Mercy Ships and Little Village.

What We Offer



Welcoming Atmosphere:

We open one Sunday a month from 2.00-4.00 pm and welcome on average 72 adults and their children each month.

This year we crafted a statement of values which reflect the principles at the heart of the Drop-in – this statement can be found on the last two pages of this report. These values emphasise the importance of creating a warm, welcoming, and respectful atmosphere for our guests, and of shaping this atmosphere with a focus on community. With this in mind, in December, we held a communal Channukah candle-lighting at the drop-in.

Hot Food:

We offer our guests a delicious, nutritionally well-balanced, home-cooked meal prepared on the day by our dedicated team of cooks and served to our guests by volunteers.

Tea, coffee and biscuits are distributed throughout the afternoon, as are tasty snacks of fresh fruit and homemade cakes.



Good Quality Second-Hand Clothes:

We provide our guests with good quality second hand clothing, including school uniform for the children. We also provide second-hand shoes and buy in items such as new underwear for our guests. Every month we put out requests for certain clothing according to our guests' needs.

Our volunteers sort through the clothes the week of the drop-in, and are always on hand to help guests with their selections.

Baby Crèche and Supervised Play Area for Children:

We have a crèche for our guests' babies, and we also provide a hugely popular play area, which is supervised by a dedicated team of volunteers of all ages. These volunteers organize a range of exciting craft activities for the children; as soon as the drop-in opens each month there are children happily pulling on different costumes, playing table football, or having their faces painted by volunteers.

The play area provides children with a fun, creative, and educational space to spend the afternoon, and gives parents the time and opportunity to access the help they need or simply socialize with other guests.



Toiletries:

We provide a wide range of basic toiletries (including toothpaste, soap, shampoo and shower gel), all of which are generously donated. We also collaborate with the charity, Bloody Good Period, who provide us with a regular supply of sanitary towels for our guests.

Nappies:

We give out packs of 20 high quality nappies, each month, to every child who needs them.

Sourcing of Essential Items:

We often hear that our guests are in need of specific items (such as buggies, heaters, baby bottle sterilisers etc.) but that they cannot afford to buy them.

We have established connections with baby banks, and we refer our guests to services in their local area when they are in need of particular items. We are able to source other items such as suitcases by appealing to the wider LJS Community, via our monthly 'Wish-List' or Facebook page.

Shopping Money and Travel Reimbursement:

We provide each adult with £30 shopping money and £5 travel reimbursement every other month. We choose to give this money in cash so that our guests are able to spend the money in whichever shops are convenient for them.

Professional Help:

We have a specialist solicitor, counsellor, social worker, and doctor present at each Drop-in to assist our guests. This will sometimes involve some follow-up casework after a Drop-in, such as accompanying guests to tribunal hearings, finding solicitors to represent guests, making calls on behalf of guests or liaising with professional advisors.

Assisting with Forms and Letter Writing:

We always have volunteers available to help fill in forms or write letters. We stock certain forms which are commonly required by Asylum Seekers.



Our Guests: Who Are We Helping?

Our guests are families with children under 16 who are fleeing persecution for reasons of race; religion; nationality; membership of a particular social group; or political opinion.

Last year, Britain received 27,044 applications for asylum. Asylum seekers receive just over £5 per person per day. This financial support is intended to cover food, toiletries, clothing and transport costs and it equates to just 50% of what many people in the UK receive in income support.

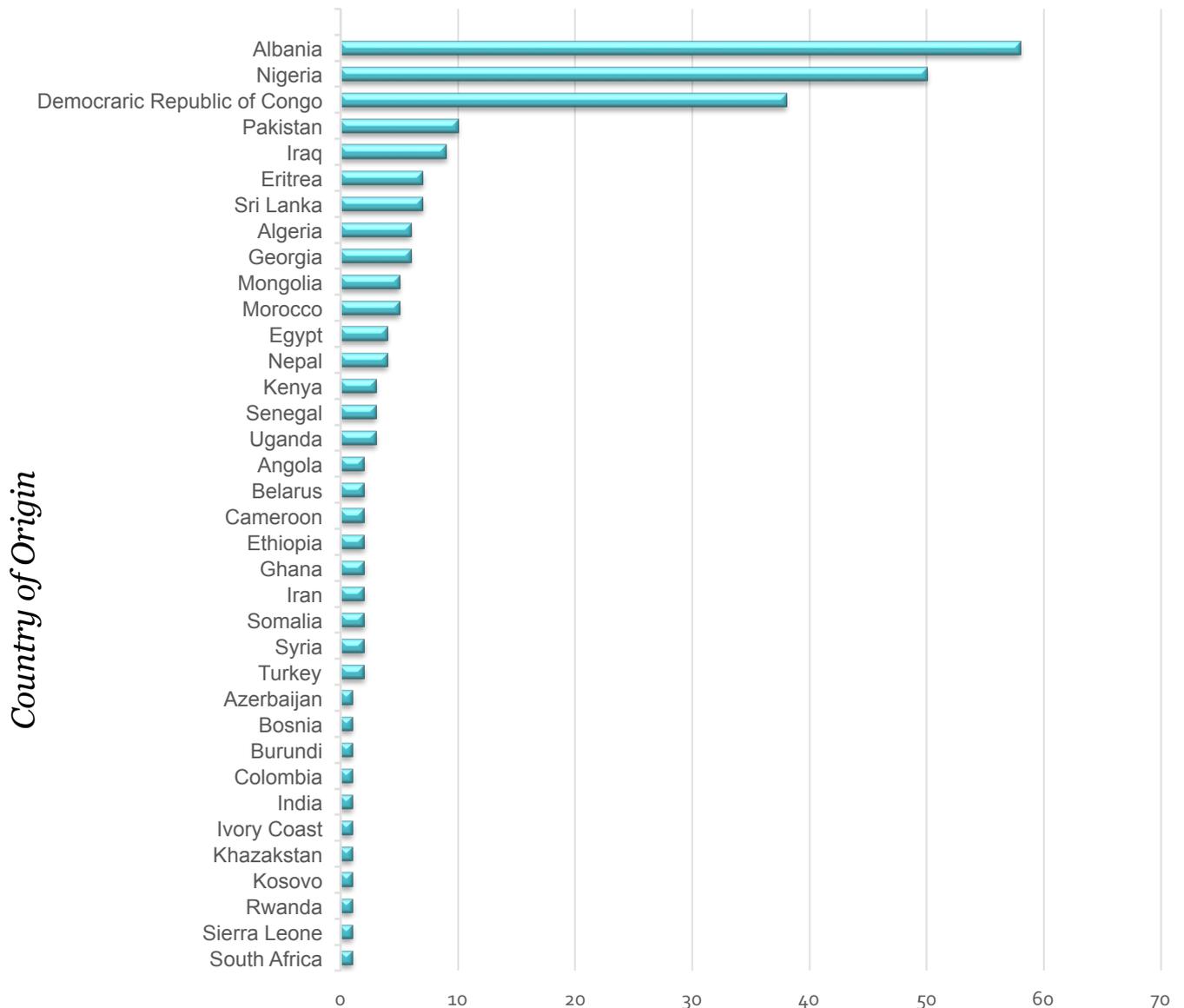
Most Asylum Seekers receive accommodation which is sub-contracted to the private sector – they often live in dilapidated bedsits that other people don't want and are hard to let. Asylum seekers do not receive council housing and they cannot choose where they live.

Asylum seekers in the UK are effectively prohibited from working until their applications for asylum are accepted. This often takes years and many of our guests have been waiting for over 6 years for a decision on their claim for asylum. Many asylum seekers are also faced with the prospect of indefinite detention.

Understandably, we see many guests with mental health issues caused not only by the primary trauma but also by the uncertainty and hardship of the asylum process.

The chart on the following page provides an overview of the countries of origin of our guests in 2018.

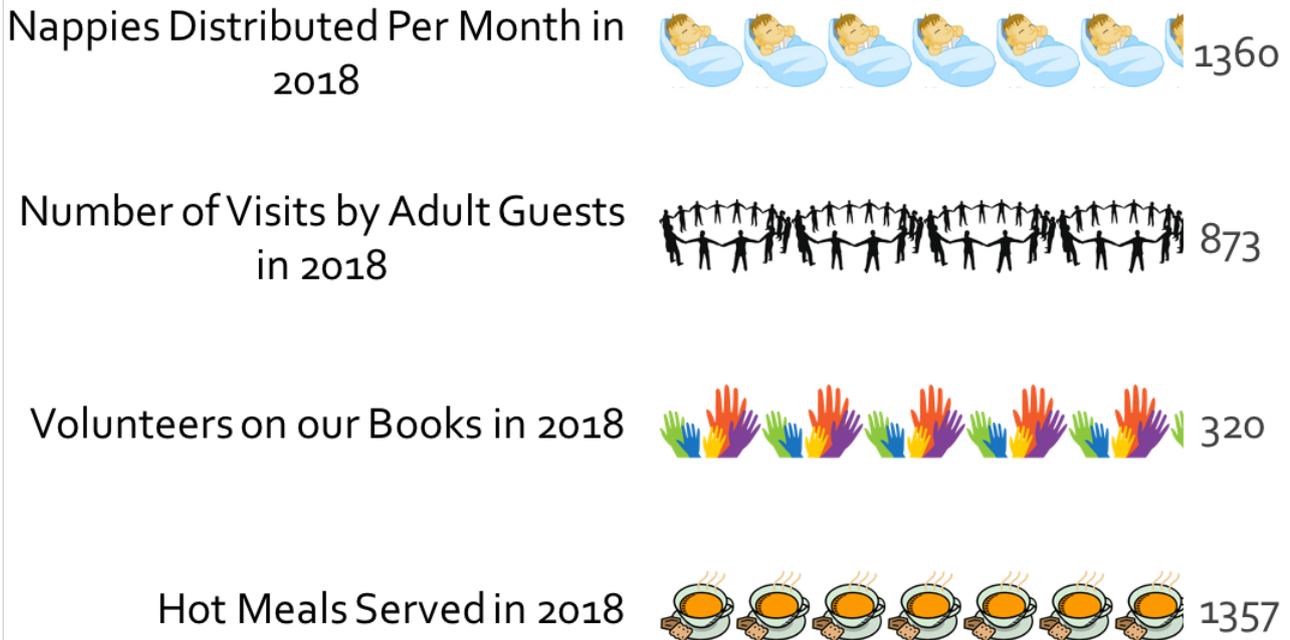
Country of Origin of Guests in 2018



Number of Guests

In 2018, our 288 guests came from a wide range of countries. This year, the top three countries of origin for our guests were Albania, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. 41 of our guests chose not to declare their country of origin.

Key Facts and Figures



This year we received **873** visits from adult guests. We served over **1357** delicious hot meals. Each month some **100** of our **320** volunteers turned up to help, and we gave out **20** nappies each to an average of **65** children each month.

What Do Our Guests Say About Us?

In feedback collected from 2018-2019, our guests commented as follows:

“Friendly and helpful...it’s very good for me. Love them all”

“I thank you very much for the help and support we receive from you. There have been bad circumstances that we have been through and you helped us.”

“The people here are very helpful and willing to help all the time.”

“I’ve been coming from the beginning; the warmth that we receive from you is everything. We can come in a grumpy mood, but we always feel better after being here. You guys make us feel better. It’s the warmth above all.”

“I have been coming here from the beginning because it’s inclusive and generous spirited”.

“I love what you offer us, especially for the kids – the play. It’s very organized. I have a friend here on clothes – she keeps nice things for me. Everyone has kind words for me.”

“Very family-friendly. My son is always eager to come – he loved it here – I wouldn’t be able to survive without the help from here. I’d like to give back to the society that has given so much to me.”

“Everything is perfect here. They all show respect say hello (not like other places) with a smile; they give more of everything; better food which is very good I like it a lot.”

“The love that I feel here is everything. I’d like to offer that too.”

Statement of Values

Underpinning the ethos of the LJS Drop-in is the belief in *Tikkun Olum* – the injunction to **Repair** the World, *Gemilut Chasadim*, deeds of **Loving kindness**, and *Kehillah*, creating and nurturing **community**.

To that end, within the limited framework of the monthly Drop-in, we offer our guests **respite** from the struggles in their rest of their lives, in a **welcoming**, safe, confidential, **warm, supportive** atmosphere.

To volunteer at the Drop-in is a special opportunity to take part in something very **meaningful** for each of us, and for our guests, and together, to be part of a special **community**.

Fundamental to all our activities is an atmosphere of **trust**. Our guests are **entrusting** us with their needs, with their children, with their stories, and sometimes their futures. **Trust** exists amongst the volunteers as well. We trust that each of us is operating from a place of **care** and **concern** for our guests' welfare, and bringing all their capacity for **kindness**, as well as their skills and competencies. We are all volunteers together, wanting to make a **useful contribution**.

At all times we want to engage, and speak **respectfully, politely, and gently** with guests and our fellow volunteers. As volunteers, we are offering **kindness** to our guests, and that kindness needs to extend to fellow volunteers as well, particularly at stressful moments.

We have to have **realistic aspirations** for the potential of the Drop-in. We need to remind ourselves of the **limits** of what is possible, within the two hours. At the same time, we need to carry out our tasks in a **timely** manner, bearing in mind the short time we have with our guests.

We also need to have **realistic expectations** of ourselves. It is important that we know our own limits and offer ourselves **self care**. Participating in the Drop-in is distinct from other forms of volunteering. While taking part in the Drop-in and helping others, can take us out of the pressures of our own lives, there may be times when we're not in the space to offer the compassion, care and patience that are necessary. If so, its right to absent ourselves on those days.

Similarly, we need to have realistic expectations of our guests, and we need to manage their expectations of what we can offer. We want to offer something that we deem to be **equitable** and **fair**, but we need to be mindful that our guests are survivors of trauma, and live in circumstances we cannot imagine. We need to offer **understanding** and **patience**, and **empathy**.

Each of us should ask ourselves regularly: “How can we help make it work?”



On behalf of all of the asylum seeking families
we support, our dedicated volunteers,
steering group, Council and Rabbis of
The Liberal Jewish Synagogue:

***Thank you to all of our volunteers,
donors and supporters who so kindly
give of their time and resources
including***

**Pears
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Contact details:

Principal Contact: Rabbi Alexandra Wright

Contact Address: The Liberal Jewish Synagogue
Drop-in for Asylum Seeker Families
28 St. Johns Wood Road
London NW8 7HA

Email: asylumproject@ljs.org

Telephone: 020 7286 5181

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue is a company limited by guarantee (Company No. 9113305) and a registered charity in England and Wales (Charity No. 1159292). Registered office: 28 St John's Wood Road, London NW8 7HA