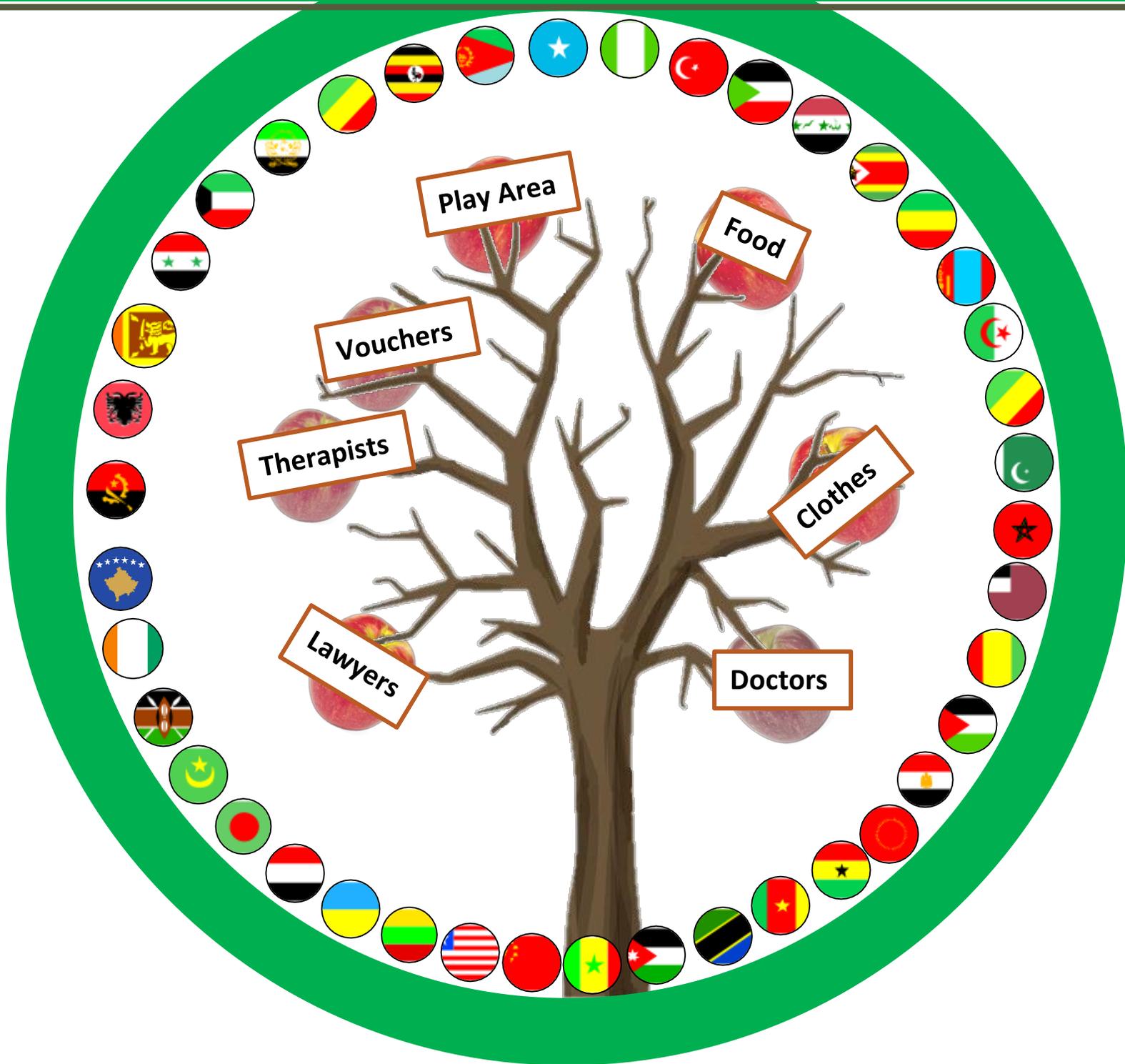


NNLS DESTITUTE ASYLUM SEEKERS DROP IN

Annual Report

2016/17



Enormous thanks to **Jimmy Thoronka** for the design and layout of this annual report and to **Sam Pearce**/www.square-image.co.uk for taking the lovely photographs. Thanks too to all the volunteers who contributed to this report.

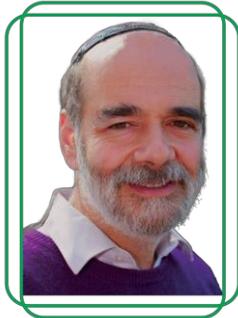
The NNLS Destitute Asylum Seekers Drop in is a project of New North London Synagogue, registered charity N° **1094668**.

For more information about the NNLS Destitute Asylum Seekers Drop in **contact:** dropin@nnls-masorti.org.uk



Foreword

Message from Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, rabbi of the New North London Synagogue



In the last two years especially, the life-threatening trials facing those seeking asylums have frequently been in the public eye - the hunger, homelessness, emotional and spiritual suffering, loneliness and misery, which is the daily portion of hundreds of thousands of refugees across Europe and millions more throughout the world.

This is one of the great political and moral concerns of our day. It is a universal issue for everyone, from all faiths and backgrounds. It has resonance for Jews whose recent history involves so much persecution as well as for those from other religious and ethnic groups who have endured persecution and discrimination. Jews are commanded by the Torah to be especially compassionate towards the stranger and the refugee.

I am grateful to the Drop in for the constant devotion, knowledge and skill of those who lead it, and for the huge amount work put in by so many to bring food, sort clothes, store equipment, set everything up, welcome and look after clients and keep the project working month after month.

I appreciate how the Drop in brings so many people together, including volunteers of different faiths, communities and ages, from 12+ all the way to over 90.

I am moved that the Drop in leads many members of the Jewish community and other communities to go far beyond their regular first-Sunday-of-the-month commitment, to write reports, raise consciousness, seek funds, offer hospitality in our homes and many other matters.

I am moved, too, by the gratitude with which the support given is so often appreciated by the clients. May the coming year be a year of greater compassion towards all asylum seekers and refugees.

Thank you

Jonathan Wittenberg

INTRODUCTION

At a time when we are facing the biggest refugee crisis since World War Two the work of the Drop in is more important than ever. Asylum seekers attending the project come from more than 60 countries. They arrive in East Finchley on the first Sunday afternoon of every month from all four corners of London and beyond. We see enormous desperation and suffering amongst the client group but also resilience and hope.

Now in its twelfth year, the project continues to go from strength to strength, offering an increasing range of services, placing more clients than ever who have no legal representation when they first come to the Drop in, with reputable lawyers. These lawyers can literally make the difference between life and death for our clients, helping them secure sanctuary in the UK, so that they are not sent back to countries where they have already been persecuted and where their lives will be at risk if they return.



Asylum seekers live in extreme poverty – Home Office support is pegged at approximately 50 per cent of income support, the official poverty line - and many of our clients don't even receive that support and have to survive on literally nothing. The wonderful home-cooked food, clothes, £15 supermarket voucher and £5 travel expenses that they receive at the Drop in help to soften the harsh edges of the poverty and destitution they experience. The warm welcome they receive from all of the volunteers makes them feel valued in a way they often don't outside of the Drop in.

Enormous thanks to all our wonderful volunteers who work so hard and give so much to improve the Drop in. We are proud that, like our client group, our volunteers are a very diverse bunch – from varied religions and from none, from a range of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and from three generations.

Huge thanks too to our generous funders who provide money to purchase the supermarket vouchers and travel expenses which are a lifeline for our clients. Last year 95.6% of our expenditure went directly into the hands of the clients with just 4.3% used for other items, mainly the rental of Martin School. There are very few charities that give such a large percentage of their funds directly to their clients.



We are also delighted that we now have a sister Drop in across the road at the Archer Academy – the New London Synagogue Destitute Asylum Seekers Drop in. It operates at the same time as ours. Our longstanding clients have moved to this Drop in, where they receive similar services to our Drop in, and if they need to see a lawyer or doctor can come back to our service to consult one.

Last year we introduced a new structure at the Drop in with a Coordinating committee leading the project along with two sub-committees – an Operations committee and a Clients casework committee. At the moment the Drop in is part of New North London Synagogue, a registered charity. But we are moving towards independent charitable status although the

close links with the synagogue will be maintained. It is an exciting time in the project's development. We are always trying to think of new ideas that will benefit clients and are hoping to start a singing group.

Deborah Koder, co-founder of the Drop in, and Antony Lishak have resigned from the Drop in after 11 years of wonderful and dedicated service. Emma Ackerman, who has provided many hours of fun for younger visitors in the children's area, is also stepping down. We would like to express our appreciation to them all.

Last December we gathered a group of asylum seekers and refugees to record a fundraising version of the classic song ***We Shall Overcome Some Day*** at the Phoenix Cinema in East Finchley. If you didn't see it when we first circulated the link, take a look at the 2-minute trailer on YouTube. It was a very emotional song for the asylum seekers and many shed tears during the recording, especially when they sang the line 'We shall all be free ... some day.'

The singers were very proud of the recording. One said when she watched the final version: "Thank you for sharing and it is powerful. I was in tears watching it. It's a true story of what I am going through."

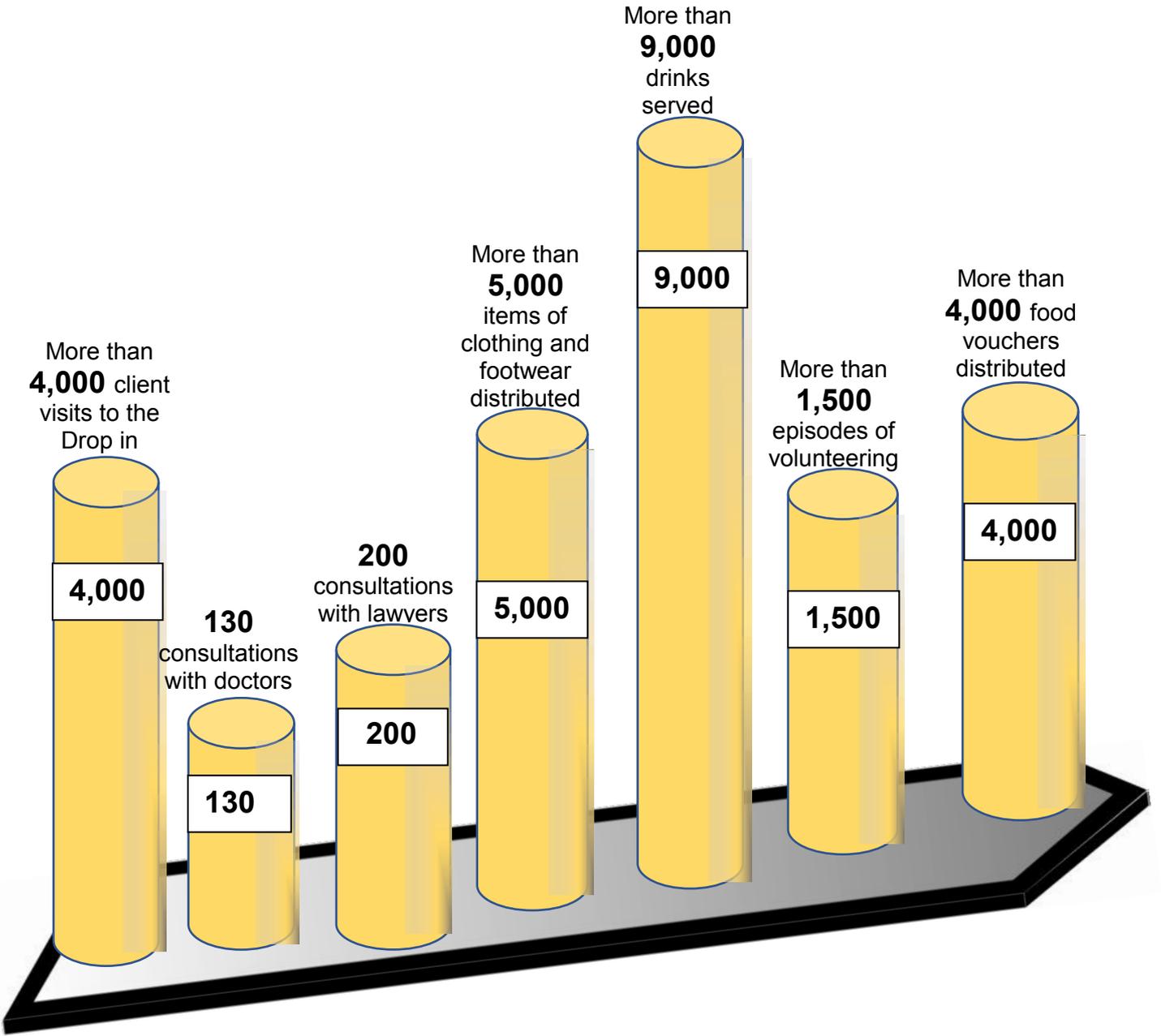
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCbACC-lskU>

We stand in solidarity with the asylum seekers who attend the Drop in and hope that the day when they will be safe and free is not too far off.

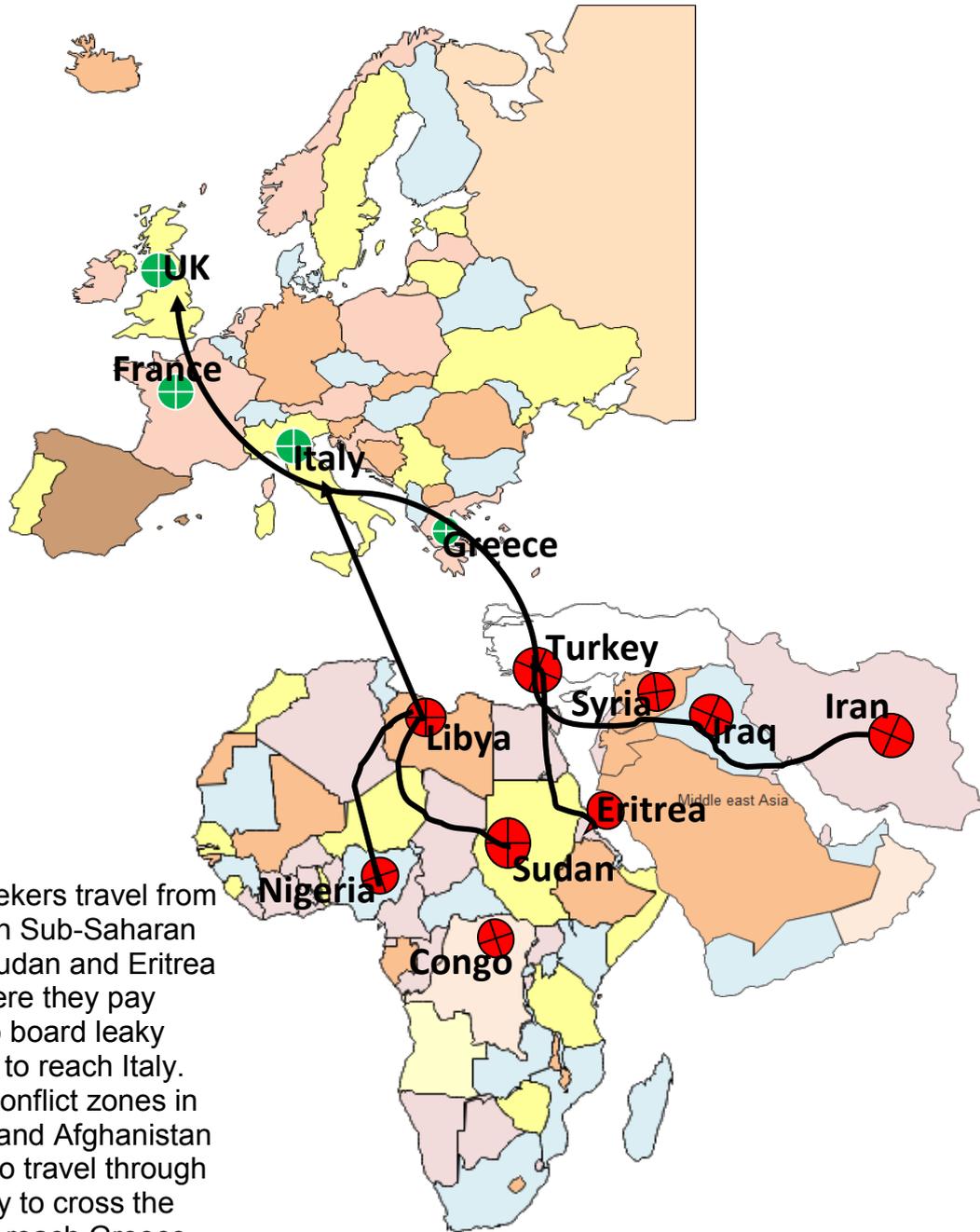
The Drop in Team



NUMBER CRUNCHING 2016



MAP OF POPULAR MIGRATION ROUTES



Many asylum seekers travel from conflict zones in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Sudan and Eritrea to Libya where they pay smugglers to board leaky dinghies to try to reach Italy. Those fleeing conflict zones in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan are more likely to travel through Turkey and try to cross the Aegean Sea to reach Greece. From there they hope to continue their journeys through central Europe to reach countries like Germany, Sweden and UK. Last year Germany took in the most asylum seekers of any European country. The UK was ninth taking in just 40,000.



VOLUNTEERS

Around 120 volunteers help out at each Drop in session along with 30 or more who attend the pre-Drop in clothes sorting. Some volunteers attend both sessions while several serve on our Co-ordinating, Operations and Client committees, participating in meetings, preparing minutes, providing continuity and planning Drop in sessions. As the Drop in evolves we are continually identifying new volunteer roles.



Every volunteer enquiry receives a response. We have introduced a registration form to collect some basic information about applicants and match them to vacancies. We are planning to circulate a volunteer 'wish list' for existing volunteers to pass on to friends and family to match skills and experience needed.

Many volunteers are unable to attend every month so no two Drop in's have exactly the same volunteer team. We ask that young volunteers (12-16) are accompanied by an adult. Many help out with food, drinks and clothing. The range of jobs at the Drop in is huge - from washing up, emptying bins, setting up and clearing up to organising the children's corner, interviewing traumatised clients, interpreting for them and showing them round, to our highly skilled doctors, lawyers and therapists, there really is something for everyone.

Volunteers are great at identifying gaps and coming up with ideas for new initiatives. Two volunteers have recently been analysing which languages we most often require interpreters for and have now set up an interpreters' database so that every new client can tell their story in their own language.

We are drawing up a series of policies for volunteers. We have also offered some training for volunteers and will be offering more in the coming months.

We work with Mitzvah Day, King Alfred School and the North London Ismaili Centre. Archer Academy and Martin School organise collections of clothing and other essentials for us, while youngsters celebrating bar and bat mitzvahs have organised clothing collections and baked biscuits for the asylum seekers.

Thanks to all our volunteers for your help, suggestions, kindness and cooking.

“Big thank you for everything you do for us. Warm welcome every month, delicious food, toiletries and clothes, warm smiles from all the volunteers. Your support means a lot to us.”

client

OUTDOOR DROP IN

Over the years life on the outside of the Drop in has changed hugely. It used to just be one long queue of asylum seekers waiting to get out of the cold, now it has turned into a micro-culture of its own. For starters, it's not one queue, there are three – those waiting to go inside, those in Express who get vouchers and travel money and then leave, and first timers. There is an outdoor food 'marquee' serving sandwiches, drinks, cakes and other snacks for those in the Express queue. There are volunteers serving hot drinks etc. to those waiting to go inside.



There are volunteers checking who needs to see lawyers and doctors and to find out if

anyone is in crisis and needs urgent support. Client surveys and information about possible legal challenges underway that might benefit some clients' cases also happen in the outside queues. There's also the Big Yellow team who collect kitchen equipment, toys and items needed by the doctors from the storage venue round the corner and then unload (and at the end of the session reload) things outside. What happens outside has become almost another parallel Drop in complementing what happens inside.

Queue management sets the tone for the Drop in. Outdoor queue managers are often the first people to greet clients as they arrive. If the queues are chaotic or bad-tempered it can set a negative tone for the rest of the time clients are at the Drop in. The most important thing is to create a mood of friendliness and fairness. When we apply rules we have to do so as consistently as possible – i.e. not letting people from Express inside, accompanying people waiting in the queue to use the toilet if the other outside toilet is busy, not allowing barging in. And while it's important to be consistent it's also important to use discretion – so, for example, if a woman is 9 months pregnant, and it's obvious she needs to be inside we should let her go inside.

Much of our job involves trotting up and down chatting to people, 'invisibly' making sure the line is monitored and people are not pushing. Invariably, clients will point out other clients they feel are not behaving well. It's important to deal with these concerns as quietly and undramatically as possible. Basically we are there to pre-empt problems and spread the love.

The most important qualities needed for queue management are lack of ego (you can't

OUTDOOR REFRESHMENTS



The numbers keep on growing: more and more cold and hungry and people arrive at the Drop in each month. But thankfully there are also more and more volunteers wanting to help by bringing and serving hot drinks, nourishing sandwiches and treats of all kinds. Like the asylum seekers we are supporting those who bring food and come to help are a mixed bunch: members of NNLS, the Ismaili community, St Mary's Catholic Church, grandparents and grandchildren. Mothers whose children have baked fairy cakes or spent bar/batmit zvah gift money on food for those who have none, Duke of Edinburgh's Awards candidates, a cancer sufferer focusing her energy on other people's problems rather than on her own. We all value the opportunity to offer help and support.

pretend there's anything clever in what we do), an ability to use a pen in extreme cold, calmness and a degree of focus. It's a bit like goal-keeping – you can have nothing to do for a while, but if you take your eye off the metaphorical ball for a second, you can very quickly lose control.

It's a rewarding job because you get the chance to chat to our clients and find out what special people they are.



“We love everything about the Drop in. The only thing we don’t like is the queuing.”
client



RECEPTION



A warm welcome awaits clients at all three receptions – indoor, Express and first timers. Each month our team moves between the three areas to get to know clients better and learn about how the different areas function. Regular clients visit indoor and express reception on alternate months.

Our bespoke database enables the reception teams to work quickly

and to minimize queuing. It is updated throughout the month and confirms clients' eligibility for the Drop in following checks made with their solicitors. It also notes information needed for clients on the day such as collection of a specific pre-ordered item of clothing or a reminder that they need to make an appointment to see a doctor or a lawyer.

Clients also give solicitor details and sign an authority which we post to their solicitor giving the solicitor permission to confirm their immigration status to us.

After clients have passed through indoor reception they can get a cooked meal, good quality clothing, see doctors, lawyers and therapists, have a relaxing massage and sit and chat with friends and volunteers. At express reception in the Portakabin on the school field, clients receive their £5 travel expenses and £15 supermarket voucher along with hot drinks, food and sometimes a delicious meal cooked by the Ismaili community. Clients go to the first timers' reception after they have completed an initial interview. The first timers' reception team welcome them to the Drop in and explain about all the different services they can access and where they're located.

There's always a buzz at reception as clients excitedly share good news – a new baby, a positive decision from the Home Office or a reunion with a long-lost family member. If there is bad news reception team members are there with the tissues and a comforting hug as well as signposting clients to a part of the Drop in that can help them.

“This is a lovely place, more places like it should exist.”

client



FOOD

At 2.00pm on the first Sunday of the month the kitchen in Martin School is a hive of activity. One volunteer is making hundreds of sandwiches using mountains of donated loaves of bread and cheese then goes on to fill enough take-away boxes for up to 400 people.



Meanwhile another volunteer is organising the serving tables with dozens of hot and cold dishes that have been donated, while a third is preparing masses of plates and napkins for all the meals that will be served.

At the same time ovens need to be set, hot plates and urns turned on, the washing of salad ingredients overseen

along with decanting containers of food and persuading young people into doing the washing up.

It's physically exhausting work and we need to ensure that the kitchen work force are hydrated and maintain their energy levels.

As the doors open at 2pm there is an expectant hush. By 2.15pm the lunch queue has established itself, the kitchen staff are poised and begin filling plates to order, almost without pause, for the next 2 1/2 hours.

Everyone who passes the lunch counter expresses amazement at the quantity of food, the aroma of herbs and spices, the variety on offer and the remarkable production line that ensures clients get a meal of their choice. Conversations are exchanged over the bean stew, news is updated over the coleslaw, babies are admired, children engaged in chit chat - and all the while the food keeps coming thanks to the generosity of volunteers preparing and serving the food.



In the main hall hundreds of cups of tea and coffee are made along with lot of cold drinks. A fantastic selection of biscuits and cakes are also served.

It is an honour and a pleasure to be able to make a small difference to a group of people who have suffered the fallout of war, displacement, torture, penury and dislocation.

I wish there we could do more to alleviate the suffering, but at least we can do something.

CLOTHING

Our clothing teams are now well established - some volunteers having been with us on most of the project's 11-year journey. Our two teams continue to meet twice a month, sorting and packing donations delivered to NNLS, prior to the Drop in day and then assembling our pop up distribution centre at the school, on the Sunday of the Drop in.

As the public profile of the struggles that asylum seekers endure has increased, we have benefitted from an increase in clothing donations, peaking in December, after Mitzvah day, when 35 volunteers responded to our pleas for help and sorted and packed 100 laundry bags of donations.

We stress the need for high quality seasonal clothing. Alongside the many wonderful donations given to our clients we receive some unsuitable ones. We have an arrangement with the All Aboard charity who collect items that are not appropriate to distribute to our asylum seekers.

We are regularly able to distribute new underwear and socks, and during the winter months new hats, gloves and scarves. These are all highly prized by our clients and often the only new items of clothing they possess.

We also identify specialist needs and one of our clothing coordinators assembles 'baby bags' for 0 to 3 month old babies, selecting new/nearly new vests, Babygros and blankets to set up new mums or those about to give birth.

This year we have been delighted to welcome more family groups volunteering at both the sorting and the Drop In, including one family which has managed to entice seven members to join the Sunday Drop in team. Our experienced volunteers provide role models for newer members, demonstrating the sensitivity, warmth and patience needed to support the clients, a tall order when they have just seven minutes to try to prioritise needs, as clients enter in groups of 10 to 15 at a time. With such high numbers now attending, we are regularly trying to provide clothing for up to 150 people in the space of two hours. We strive to maintain a calm atmosphere, in the queues, the halls and the corridors, as people wait their turn.



We are grateful for all the support we have received this year– clothing donations, time and energy committed by volunteers. The best thing of all is the delighted smiles of clients when we find them just the thing they need.

“Outside of the Drop in we are not always treated well. But here everyone is polite to us.”



CHILDREN'S AREA

The children's area remains as busy and active as ever. This year we have seen more children than ever before coming into the area with a vast range of ages, country of origin and needs. Mothers unstrap young babies from their backs and deliver them into the arms of volunteers who then sensitively play with and hold them. For volunteers this is a joy and for parents it is a chance to have some time for themselves to get their needs attended to at the Drop in. Alongside the youngest of children, we also welcome primary aged children who take great pleasure in playing with superhero characters or games of cards.

It is always touching to see children of all backgrounds come together and playing on an equal footing, putting their worries aside and just having fun. Of course, working with so many children with differing experiences and needs can be tiring and challenging, but always rewarding.



DOCTORS, LAWYERS AND THERAPISTS

We have a consultation area usually staffed by two doctors and several lawyers each month. The therapists liaise with the doctors and lawyers but are usually based in the main hall chatting to clients. About one in ten of our guests are seen each month by these professionals. A team of four volunteers work here, updating appointments on the database,



ensuring the medical and legal notes are filed correctly, managing the queues and ensuring that the environment is calm and quiet so that both lawyers and doctors have the best possible conditions to work in. We also try to create the best possible atmosphere for clients to open up about their cases.

A group of volunteers is now working to develop our interpreters' service in a way that can serve our guests the most, with proactive planning of the languages needed and keeping a list of interpreters on rota. Two people from our team help asylum seekers to fill in HC1 Forms. These NHS forms entitle asylum seekers to receive free prescriptions, NHS dental treatment, sight tests, glasses as well as essential travel costs to hospital appointments. We fill in and post off between ten and 20 forms each month. It takes about two weeks for clients' HC2 certificates to arrive. These certificates entitle them to access the above services for free. We also signpost people who do not have a GP to the Doctors of the World clinic in Bethnal Green.

We are fortunate to have a public health doctor and a specialist sexual health nurse distributing condoms and providing advice. In partnership with University College Hospital we have offered screening for latent TB.

"I never forget your help. Thank you for referring me to the Helen Bamber Foundation, you have helped me in many ways and have introduced me to lots of good people. Whenever I am worried or upset you have always reassured me and cheered me up. You are the reason why I got my visa. These words all come from my heart."

client



DOCTORS

In the medical room, we find there is often a large gap between the complex needs of the Drop in clients and the limits of a 10-minute GP consultation. The gap is even larger for some clients who have been unable to register with GPs due to practical barriers or red tape. The team of volunteer doctors assisted by other volunteers working with the doctors and lawyers help bridge the gaps by signposting clients to GPs, dentists, opticians or specialist clinical services for asylum seekers.

We cannot provide clinical care at the Drop in, but can often help by having time to listen or by using our knowledge of asylum seekers' needs and the barriers they face. For example, in the medical room we can help people fill in HC1 applications, inform them about free emergency dental clinics or help them communicate with their GP, as well as spotting signs of past torture needing further assessment. The client can then be advised how to access appropriate services. Clients who are particularly vulnerable or unwell may need help from other teams at the Drop in regarding housing or other issues impacting on their health. so, it's important to work in a joined-up way with others in the Drop in team involved with client casework.

In March, we held a training session for doctors and others. The aim was to highlight the specific needs of our client group and help the different teams work together. Feedback was good and we plan to run further training in future.

This year we've had some doctors retiring and various new medical volunteers joining. We've been able to keep the rota running smoothly, thanks to all. New volunteer clinicians are welcome - if you are a health professional able to deal with a variety of clients and have a few Sundays free each year then do get in touch.



LAWYERS

The landscape continues to be a challenging one for asylum seekers looking for good lawyers to represent them in their cases, as the number of solicitor firms and law centres with immigration franchises diminishes. At the Drop in, we are extremely fortunate to have the continued commitment of a rota of volunteer asylum lawyers from some of the best firms of immigration solicitors and barristers' chambers.

To respond to the increasing numbers attending the Drop in, we have been able to increase the number of clients we are able to see by having five or six lawyers on the rota each month, each seeing an average of 5 clients. We do our best to place clients with arguable cases with reputable firms of solicitors who still have an immigration franchise.

We continue to build links with other voluntary organisations, and aim to identify those clients who may be eligible for some form of government support whilst they wait for decisions on their cases.

The expertise of our pro bono legal panel remains the envy of many other voluntary organisations in the sector.



THERAPISTS

We help people tell their stories in ways that make them stronger and “witness” stories told while affirming and containing experiences. We also provide a debrief service for volunteers who may have been touched or disturbed by their encounters with clients. We provide support when volunteers encounter new clients with complex mental health problems. We need to be sensitive to the “coping mechanisms” of the clients and not bring up traumatic memories such as rapes or having witnessed parents or children shot in front of them. Clients we chat to include those who are depressed, bereaved or trafficked. They are often glad to share their stories.

In some cases where clients are traumatised and frightened by the physical symptoms of trauma we can explain why they might be experiencing these things in a very simple way and offer some relaxation and mindfulness exercises. Sometimes clients disclose things to us that they haven't previously talked to lawyers about or mentioned in their asylum claims. With their permission, we can discuss these new disclosures with Drop in lawyers. Sometimes we contact clients' GPs to ask if the GPs can refer the clients for counselling. The Drop in gives asylum seekers the rare opportunity to be heard in a calm and trustworthy environment.





NEW CLIENTS

Most new clients turn up alone, hopeful but anxious after a long bus journey across London. Our job is to greet them cheerfully, make them feel welcome and reassure them. Often, they may have quite a long wait outside on the pavement before being admitted because each person is seen individually, so we must wait for an interviewer to be free. It is fun to introduce them to each other and chat generally about where they come from and how long they have been in the UK. Established clients help to create a friendly atmosphere as they greet us when they arrive. It is touching to find how caring old-timers can be when they introduce new, traumatised people to us.



For a long time, we had been averaging about 30 new clients per month but in September numbers almost doubled, putting pressure on all Drop in services. The increase was accounted for mainly by newly arrived young men from Eritrea and Sudan who were housed in London, rather than being dispersed to other areas which is usual Home Office practice with new arrivals. In the last couple of months' numbers of new clients have returned to the previous 'normal' of around 30. But because the project is a Drop in and we never know from one month to the next precisely how many new clients will turn up.

NEW CLIENTS' INTERVIEW TEAM

We now have a team of around 15 interviewers who regularly attend Drop in sessions. Their role is to gain an understanding of the circumstances that have caused them to leave their home country and identify any urgent problems. Do they have a lawyer and a doctor and do they have anywhere to live? Would they like to speak to one of the Drop in's therapists, or do they need help in completing an HC1 application, which will entitle them to free prescriptions, free dental treatment and free eye checks?

Our growing band of volunteer interpreters provide invaluable assistance with the interviews. Our team of interpreters now include Arabic speakers, as well as Farsi, French and other languages. We are trying to recruit more Amharic, Tigrinya and Albanian interpreters and to build up our interpreter database.

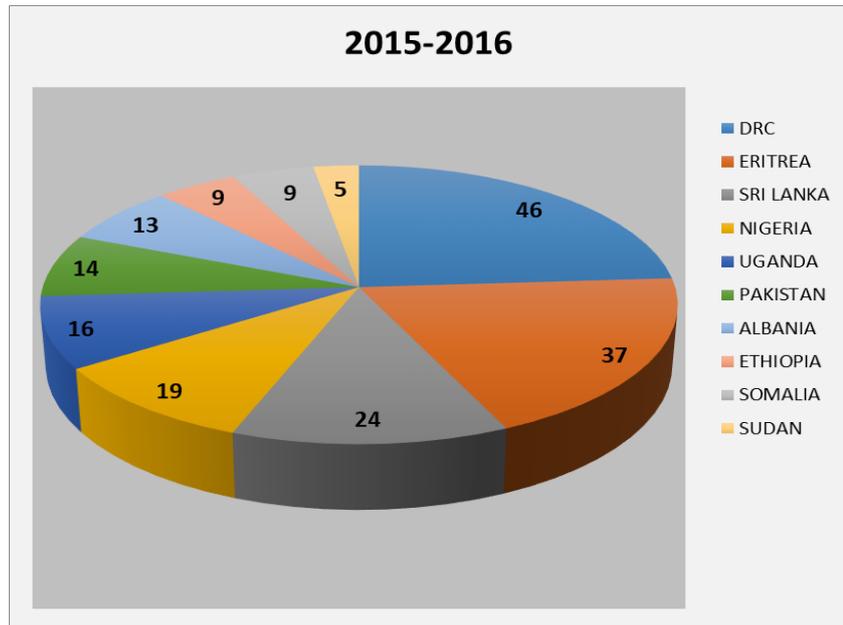
NEW CLIENTS' INDUCTION TEAM

Following their interview new clients are warmly welcomed by the induction team. Communication with other sections of the Drop in continues to improve: appointments with doctors and lawyers are now made directly on the computer database, walkie-talkies are used to communicate with the first timers team outside so we can streamline the flow of clients and can be prepared if interpreters are needed.

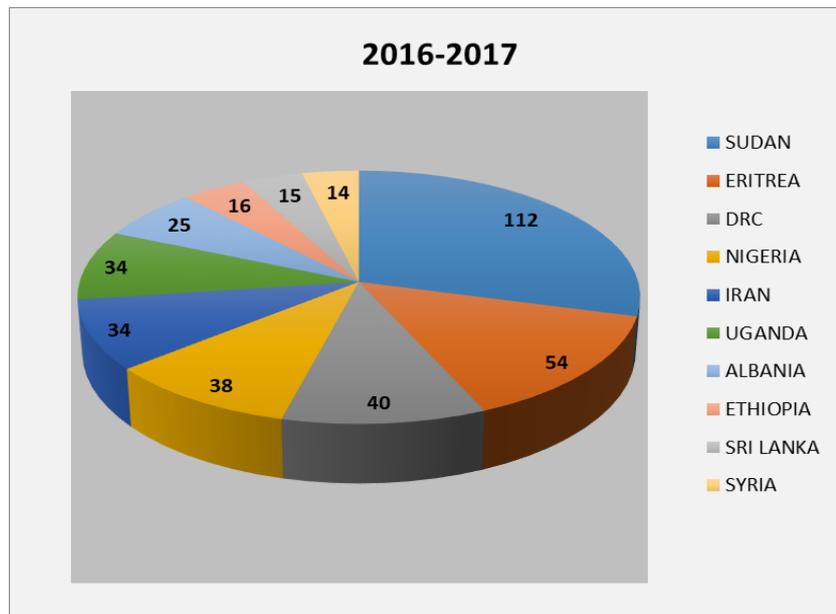
The induction team explains Drop in services to new clients after their interviews and show them around. When interviewers hand over a client, volunteers sensitively respond to their individual needs, often staying with a vulnerable client until they have accessed the services they need that day. Induction team volunteers liaise with lawyers and doctors to ensure that new clients are seen when their cases are urgent, speak to the clothing team to find baby clothes or a desperately-needed coat and take clients who need this service to volunteers who help clients to fill in HC1 forms giving them access to certain NHS services.

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF FIRST TIME CLIENTS 2015/16 AND 2016/17

COUNTRY	NUMBER
DRC	46
ERITREA	37
SRI LANKA	24
NIGERIA	19
UGANDA	16
PAKISTAN	14
ALBANIA	13
ETHIOPIA	9
SOMALIA	9
SUDAN	5



Country	Number
SUDAN	112
ERITREA	54
DRC	40
NIGERIA	38
IRAN	34
UGANDA	34
ALBANIA	25
ETHIOPIA	16
SRI LANKA	15
SYRIA	14



We have clients from more than 60 countries attending the Drop in - almost a third of the world's countries. The two graphs above show the top ten countries of origin of new clients in the last two years. In 2015/16 we had new clients coming from 42 different countries. In 2016/17 we had new clients coming from 51 different countries. Some of the countries not shown on the charts where new clients came from include Jamaica, Ivory Coast, Serbia and Pakistan. One of the biggest changes in the last two years has been the increase in the numbers of Sudanese asylum seekers coming to the Drop in in the last 12 months. The drop in is well known in many different asylum seeker and refugee communities and is seen as a place of safety and support for hundreds of asylum seekers each month.



FOLLOW UP CASEWORK

Follow up work is varied and sometimes complex. We ask all clients to sign an authority giving their solicitor permission to discuss their case with us and confirm their immigration status to us. We conduct these extensive checks because we have such a large number of clients and offer them such a comprehensive package of support. We want to protect the integrity of the project and demonstrate to our funders that we are targeting the most vulnerable.

We also try to find reputable legal aid lawyers for clients who are unrepresented and as our networks broaden and the reputation of the Drop in builds we are becoming more successful at doing that.



Filthy asylum seeker accommodation in Hounslow

We also accompany clients to court hearings at the immigration tribunal, which is often a terrifying experience for them, and sometimes go with them to medical appointments to advocate for them. In the course of the month there are many phone calls to sub-standard Home Office accommodation providers, lawyers and doctors to try to secure a better deal for clients. Clients often call with specific problems in between Drop ins. Recently we picked up a message from a client who called at 2.27a.m. sobbing into the answerphone because she had been told the previous day that she was going to be evicted from her Home Office accommodation.

“I just need to talk to someone,” she cried.

Recent cases we have been involved in include exposing poor conditions in Home Office accommodation in Hounslow, helping a client who was badly injured in a road accident set up a personal injury trust to look after his compensation money and contacting a local council to help secure a nursery place for the two-year-old child of a client. The council had refused to give the child a place even though she was entitled to it.

Outside of the Drop in we work collaboratively with other NGOs in the asylum sector, especially when we have clients in common. We attend forums such as the Londonwide Destitution Forum to discuss common problems and challenges and to share good practice. We have researched and developed a series of information sheets to assist clients outside of the Drop in. These include sheets on where to obtain free legal advice, how to navigate the system when making the transition from asylum seeker to refugee and sources of support for LGBT asylum seekers.

Our focus is always on trying to offer the most practical form of assistance possible. Working with clients outside of the Drop in helps to cement relationships of trust and provides an often disturbing insight into clients’ lives.



ACCOMMODATION TEAM

As with many areas in our clients' lives, accessing accommodation is an uphill struggle. Asylum seekers whose cases are still being considered are entitled to accommodation. We help clients apply for this housing, which is generally of a very poor standard and usually outside London. Last month a client was distressed at the thought of leaving London to access accommodation because here she has her church, friends and, despite all of the daily struggles, managed has to make a life for herself.

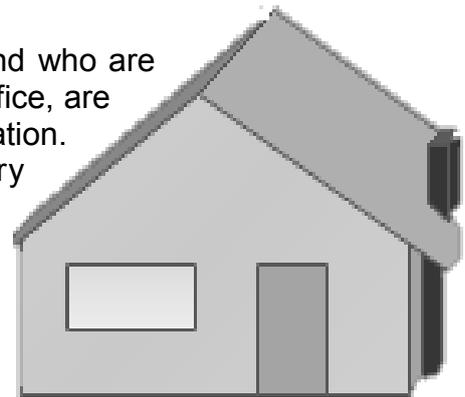
It is not unusual for a client who is eligible for Home Office accommodation to instead decide to sofa surf if they have the opportunity to do so, so that they can stay in London, where they have their friends and support network.

All clients desperately hope to be granted leave to remain and it is always wonderful to hear when this happens.

However, these clients often come to see us clutching eviction letters from their Home Office accommodation. Clients who may have limited English and no working knowledge of the benefits and job seeking system are expected, within a few weeks of gaining leave to remain to get an National Insurance number, register as a job seeker, and find a place to rent that will accept them with no deposit. We have successfully placed many of these clients with hosting schemes. Organisations such as Refugees at Home offer a buffer during a period where clients are particularly vulnerable and at real risk of homelessness.

Some clients, whose asylum claims have been refused and who are gathering evidence to submit a fresh claim to the Home Office, are not entitled to any Home Office support or accommodation.

Many rely on the generosity of friends and constantly worry that friends will tire of them. Hosting schemes are not usually appropriate for them, as they are designed for short-term stays. There are only a handful of shelters who accept refused asylum seekers and many of them are full and have long waiting lists. Every month we hope we don't have to see clients who have all their worldly belongings packed into a slender suitcase, who will have to leave the Drop in and sleep on the streets because we are unable to find accommodation for them. But sadly, we do see a handful of such cases.





FINANCES

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT 12 MONTHS TO 31 OCTOBER

	2016		2015
INCOME			
DONATIONS			
Monthly receipts	40,292		25,978
Other	79,874		96,271
TOTAL DONATIONS	120,166		122,249
Gift Aid	<u>7,544</u>		<u>7,412</u>
TOTAL INCOME	127,710		129,661
EXPENDITURE			
Direct Costs			
Food Vouchers & Travel	86,632		92,637
Other costs			
Room Hire	3,600		2,700
Sundry	<u>351</u>		<u>1,819</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	90,583		97,156
NET INCOME	<u>37,127</u>		<u>32,505</u>
FUNDS AVAILABLE			
Opening Reserves at 1.11.2015	85,259	At 1.11.2014	52,754
NET INCOME	<u>37,127</u>		<u>32,505</u>
	<u>122,386</u>		<u>85,259</u>
Less: Advances for Next Drop in	<u>(9,375)</u>		-
CLOSING RESERVES at 31.10.2016	113,011	At 31.10.2015	85,259



THANKS TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS

We would like to thank everybody who support the Drop in

INCLUDING:

London Churches Refugee Network

Pears Foundation

Monument Trust

Martin Primary School

Milton Damerel Trust

NNLS Pesach Appeal

Anonymous donors

Lapid Trust

Costco

Big Yellow Storage Company

**All those who have set up standing orders,
those who made donations to mark special oc
casions and held fundraising events for the
Drop in**