

# DA'ARO YOUTH PROJECT



ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 2019 + 2020





# FOREWARD

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Dear Friends,

In late 2017, in response to the deaths by suicide of a number of Eritrean teenage asylum-seekers, our community came together to mourn. We saw the impact these deaths were having on other young people as well as the wider community – and felt compelled to help in any way possible. We had ideas on how to build a strong community response to offer these young people a sense of purpose and hope.

I was part of a group of community volunteers who met to further brainstorm ideas on what we could do to maximise the support and impact we could offer these young people arriving here alone from Eritrea. These community meetings led to the election of a trustee board for our project and offers of support from volunteers.

The trustees, volunteers and I were working full time jobs, but we were passionate about getting our project up and running and this is what kept us going despite the very long days. We met Ben and together, he and I had countless meetings on a Saturday morning in McDonald's and after work in Costa to bring together a plan of action.

Just as we felt the momentum was finally picking up, we lost another young person to suicide which was very hard for us all, especially for all his friends. This fuelled us further to act fast and formalise a youth club – our community gathering – which would come to be known as 'Injera Club', and we invited as many of the young people we had access to.

Our first Injera Club with the young people was held in the back garden of the South London Refugee Association (SLRA) in Summer 2018. I have to especially thank Celia and the SLRA team for all the support and guidance they have provided us since that first day. Then we were invited to open the youth club doors again at Knights Youth Centre in October 2018.

Witnessing the progress that has been made from inception to today makes me extremely proud. We have come a long way from some of our early sessions where we had no young people attend – just Ben and I sat in the youth centre alone – to a peak of 48 young people attending in one week.

We have helped over 300 young asylum-seekers find a safe space to meet and interact, to offer them a sense of community and family, and to help them understand that they are not alone. During the lockdown it has been especially difficult for these young people, living in isolation, but we have tried to offer them support over the phone and have managed to deliver over 350 homemade food packages to them, as well as protective masks and hand sanitisers.

In April 2020, we finally registered Da'aro Youth Project as a charity. It is a testament to all the hard work and commitment from the whole community in making this charity a success. I have no doubt Da'aro Youth Project will continue to grow from strength to strength and I would like to thank every single person that has supported our mission.

Thank you all for your continued support.

## DEHAB WOLDU

Founder and Operational Manager



# OUR 2019 & 2020 RESULTS



300+

YOUNG PEOPLE  
REACHED

2,000+

ATTENDANCES OF  
INJERA CLUB

30

HELPED WITH  
CASEWORK

350

FOOD PARCELS  
DELIVERED

# DA'ARO YOUTH

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Da'aro Youth Project was established in 2018 by members of the Eritrean community in London in response to the deaths of a number of teenage Eritreans by suicide.

Eritreans and Ethiopians together were the largest nationality group of unaccompanied minors to arrive in the UK in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Asylum-seeking children and young adults arrive here after traumatic journeys through the Sahara Desert, Libya, the Mediterranean Sea and after crossing borders in Europe, such as in Calais. Once here, young people often struggle to adapt to new lives separated from their families, and find that navigating the complex asylum system can be stressful and traumatic. They face social isolation, discrimination and sometimes even hostility.

We aim to promote the wellbeing of these migrant young people living in the UK, through direct support, through building bridges in the Eritrean community and through advocating for changes to unfair and discriminatory systems which undermine their wellbeing. We believe that building sustainable relationships of trust and support within the Eritrean community is the best way to empower young people and enable them to overcome their marginalisation within society.



**FIGURE 1.**

*Above: Our first Injera Club.*

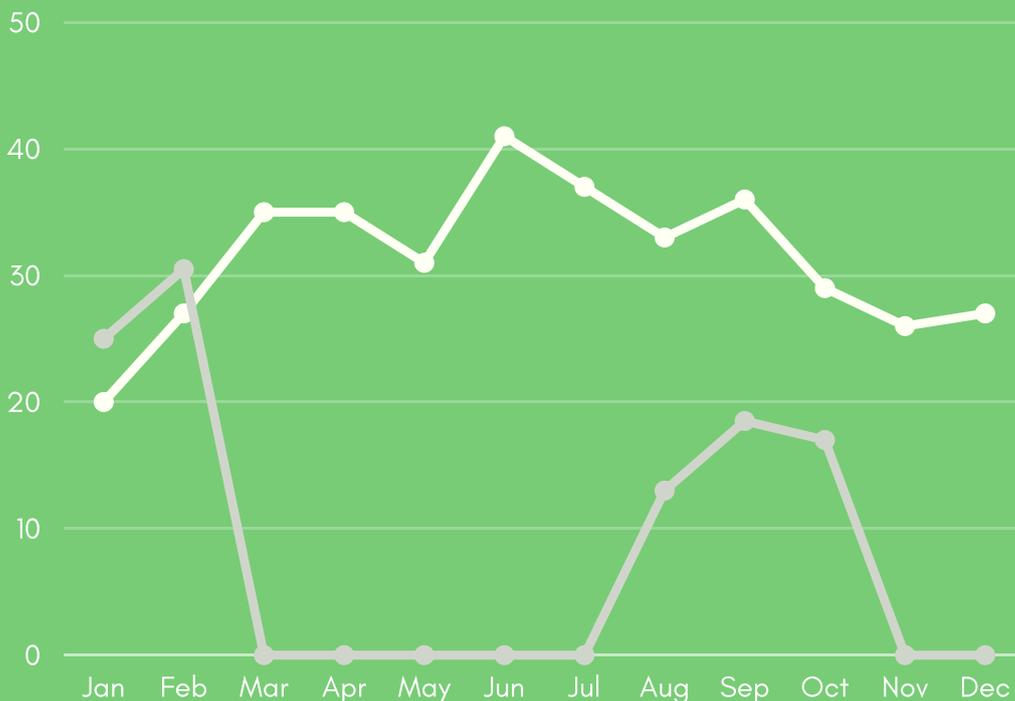
*Below: Table football at  
Knights Youth Centre*



# INJERA CLUB

We run a weekly youth club in south London for 14-to-21-year-old unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children and young people from the Horn of Africa: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia (and their friends). At Injera Club, young people are invited to socialise with others, play games, pool, table tennis, football and to enjoy a home-cooked traditional Eritrean meal. We mark special occasions, birthdays and holidays (such as Eritrean Christmas) at Injera Club by throwing extra special parties.

Injera Club is a social space - an environment where young people can interact with their **culture, food** and speak to others in their own language. Through the work we do at Injera Club we are looking to build **community**, improve wellbeing and strengthen the resilience of the young people who attend.



**FIGURE 2.**

*Our average weekly attendances to Injera Club throughout 2019 (white) and during the months we could open in 2020 (grey).*

We're thankful to Knights Youth Centre for allowing us use of their space in Streatham Hill - where we have access to kitchen facilities, recording booth and a sports hall.

A total of **328 individual young people** attended injera club over the course of 2019 and 2020. In two years we have had an incredible **2,155 attendances**.

We had an average of **31 young people attend injera club each week in 2019** and an average of **29 young people attend injera club each week in 2020** (during the months we could open).

A social worker told us about how important Injera Club was to the teenager she works with: *"He made a new friend, had fun, really connected with his community, and it gave him the boost he needs at the moment - his carer said he was like a different person the next day!"*

Young people have commented on how important socialising with their friends at injera club is and also mixing with older persons from their community. One said: *"When I get injera, it feels like I am having dinner with my mum."*



# COVID-19

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2020 has been a really tough year for everyone – but we feel especially that it has been difficult for newly arrived young asylum-seekers. Restrictions and lockdowns meant that throughout 2020 we were often unable to convene injera club, and had to find alternate means to reach young people and keep up support for them.

We gave out **clear information** about lockdown rules and health and safety in Tigrinya, Amharic, Arabic and in English to the young people we work with, via WhatsApp and phone.

We delivered approximately 350 **parcels of home-cooked food**, including injera and sauce, during periods of national lockdown, to help young people who are isolated to stay connected with their community and their culture. We also distributed hand sanitiser and face masks.

Our staff and volunteers made hundreds of **support calls** to the young people who regularly attend our project – we called everyone we had contact with at least once during each lockdown.

We undertook a **group trip** in the Summer 2020 to Guildford for a walk along the canal and bowling in the town centre – allowing everyone some time away from busy London. We're really looking forward to being able to do more trips when the pandemic is over.

We were also able to hold 12 **Covid-Safe Injera Club sessions, outside in the park** in South London during the Summer months.

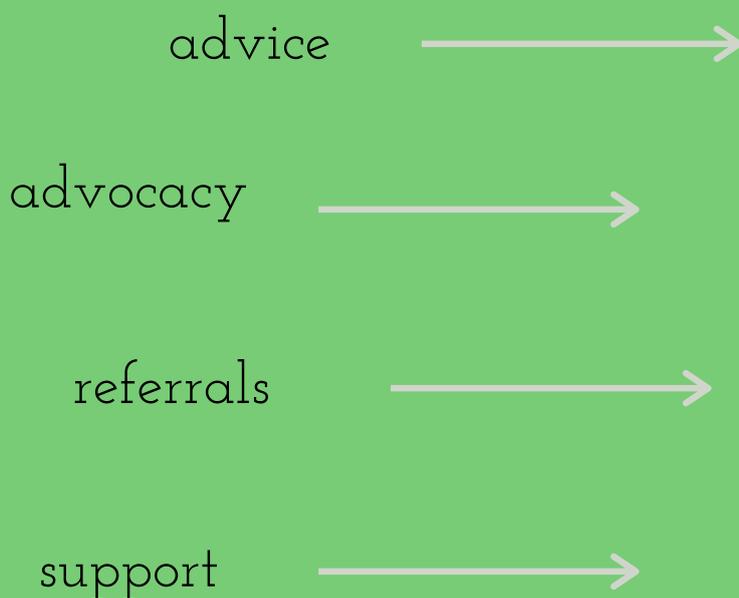


# CASEWORK

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Having built a community space that is trustworthy, we're thankful that young people who attend injera club feel like they can turn to us in a crisis. During 2019 and 2020, we opened a casework file for 30 young people, helping them to deal with a major difficulty by way of advocacy, referrals, support and guidance, helping young people to empower themselves as much as possible.

Young people experience numerous difficulties after they arrive in the UK - stress in the asylum system, worries about age assessments and disputes with social services. They deal with these problems while being away from their families, their culture and their home. In the last two years, we have done what we can to support young people through these challenges.



We supported a number of young people undergoing a **mental health crisis**, including one young man who had made himself intentionally homeless and intended to cross back to France (we supported him by raising a safeguarding concern and gently encouraging him to seek help from social services and at A&E). We referred a number of people to counselling and attended psychiatric assessments with them. A large part of our support work involves emotional support to young people on a daily basis – and even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We supported an increasing number of young people who had their given **ages disputed** by the Home Office or by a local authority Children’s Service. Where we believed them to be children, we wrote supporting statements for use in their legal appeals. We tried to provide additional emotional support and assistance to those young people who are age disputed and end up in the NASS system for adult asylum-seekers, some of them sharing rooms with other adults or staying in hotels with no social or financial support. We supported one child who became homeless after a local authority age assessment found him to be an adult – we helped him to find somewhere safe to stay by referring him to Refugees at Home and attending a hosting with him, supported him when he was in NASS accommodation, and attended court to advocate on his behalf – the age assessment was later overturned by a judge and he was then brought back into care. He continues to attend our project.

We advocated on behalf of young people when they had a **dispute with social services** or with their accommodation providers about the level of support they were receiving. Where we couldn’t find any easy resolution we helped refer young people to appropriate advocacy services and to community care solicitors.

**Poor housing and homelessness** continues to be an issue that affects the young people we work with. We supported a number of young people who had either become street homeless or destitute, or had fallen through the cracks of the system and were staying with friends. One young person we worked with was moved from a room with bed bugs (after months of pushing) only to then be housed in a room with water leaking from the ceiling. We made referrals to advocacy services and housing solicitors, and pushed social services and local authority housing departments to quickly resolve these housing issues.

There is currently no rule that allows for child refugees to apply for **reunification with their families**. The only option available is for young people to undertake a complex visa application. We supported seven young people with 'outside-of-the-rules' family reunification applications - four of which involved extensive casework, including referrals to solicitors, tens of visits to solicitors appointments, DNA appointments, psychiatric assessments, and writing detailed supporting statements. During these applications, young people are experiencing heightened stress and worry for the wellbeing of family members, including mums, dads, brothers and sisters in exile in France, Saudi Arabia, and in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan. We continue to support most of these clients, including one teenage boy whose younger brother has been trapped by the civil war in Tigray.

We visited three young people in **hospital** - two who suffered serious injuries in traffic accidents, and one who had been the victim of a random attack. On each occasion we brought them food, gave them positive encouragement, and helped them to feel less alone and afraid.

We supported four young people with **criminal justice issues**, referring them to good criminal solicitors, writing supporting statements, attending court with them (sometimes on multiple occasions), liaising with support services and their solicitors, and visiting them in prison. Without their families to support them, the criminal justice system can be utterly overwhelming, and so we try to help these young people to navigate this stressful process and to know that everyone gets a second chance.

We made numerous other **referrals** to partner organisations, including charities like Young Roots, South London Refugee Association, Off the Record Counselling, the Baobab Centre, May Gardens Project, Victim Support, Breaking Barriers and more. Thank you to all our partners for your hard work.





**FIGURE 3.**

*Above: An Injera Club trip out for dancing and dinner at Adulis restaurant.*

*Below: Eritrean Christmas time at Injera Club.*



# ADVOCACY

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Da'aro Youth Project was born out of tragic circumstances. Between 2017 and 2019 we were aware of the deaths by suicide of four teenage asylum-seekers from Eritrea in London. As well as working closely with those who have been bereaved by these losses, we have sought to advocate on the issue of mental health and young asylum-seekers.

In 2019 we initiated **meetings with Children's Services** departments in Croydon and in Kingston to talk about mental health and suicide amongst unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. We have also been present in meetings organised as part of the Croydon Refugee Youth Network and invited to attend meetings at Croydon college.

We supported the families of young refugees bereaved by suicide to **access legal support**.



# TEAM DA'ARO YOUTH

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In 2020 our team expanded from mostly volunteers and one paid staff to include three members of staff working part-time. We hired our founder **Dehab Woldu** as Operational Manager, leading on managing injera club, case work and community organising. Dehab joins Da'aro Youth Project with decades of experience working with asylum-seeking young people and with a very strong connection to her community. **Benny Hunter** moved on from leading on youth work and is focusing just on being Project Coordinator, managing finance, fundraising, admin and communication. We brought on board our volunteer **Raheal Amare** as a Sessional Youth Worker, to assist Dehab with casework and running injera club.

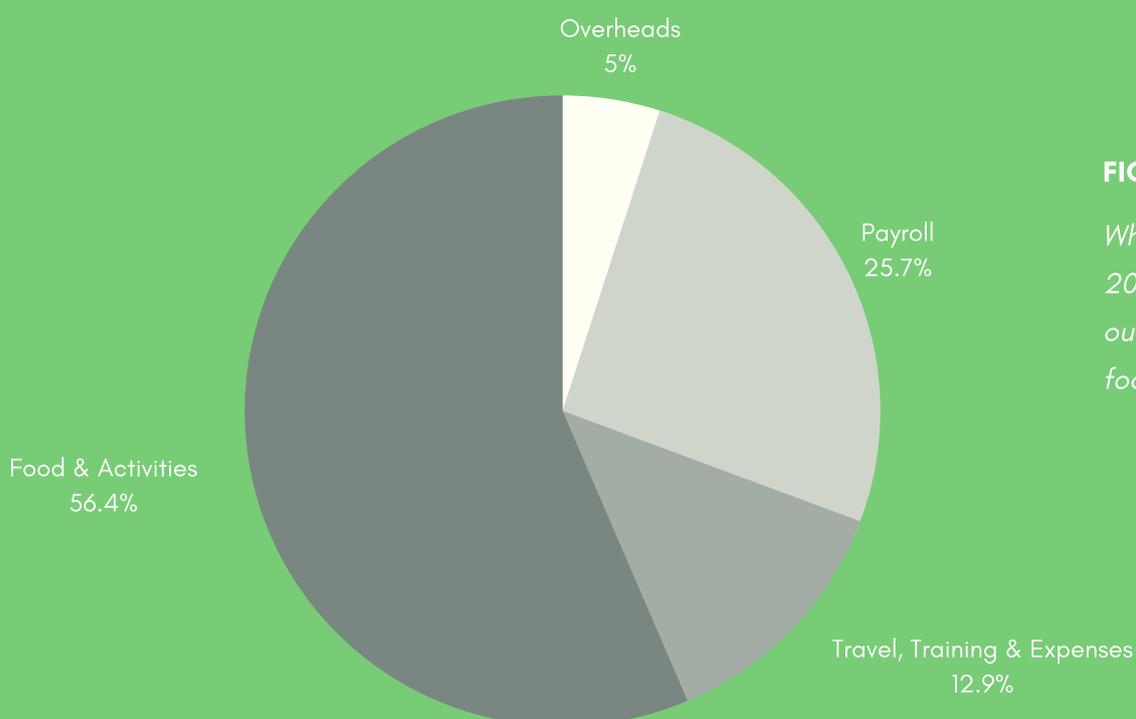
We continue to be thankful to our incredible volunteers for their patience and hard work. That includes our youth work volunteers from the last two years: Ruby, Grace, Aden, Sienna, Geordie, Nahel and Mikal – and our kitchen volunteers, helping prepare yummy food: Nebiyat and Gnet. We're so hugely thankful to the community members who have brought food or otherwise helped in whatever way to make Injera Club a success.

We said goodbye to our treasurer **Bella Solomon** and welcomed a number of community members to the trustee board, joining us from 2021 onwards. Thanks also for the ongoing hard work of trustees **Futsum Kahsa** and **Elaine Chase**.

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Thanks to our supporters and funders, who first put their faith in us as we embarked on this new project in 2018.

In the year ended 31st March 2020, our total income from donations and grants was **£22,225**.



**FIGURE 4.**

*What we spent money on in 2019-2020. More than half of our income was spent on food and activities.*

# THANKS

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Thank you to everyone who donated and fundraised for us in 2019 - 2020. Every one off contribution, donation to a fundraiser, and monthly contributor, has allowed us to grow month on month and continue to support the young people that we support.

We are very grateful to our funders, without which we couldn't do the work that we do: Choose Love, ILPA Ltd, Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, Donate4Refugees, and Knights Youth Centre.

An enormous thanks to SLRA and Celia Sands for everything you have done to support us.

The logo for 'Choose Love' features the words 'CHOOSE' and 'LOVE' stacked vertically in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font.The logo for 'Lesbians & Gays Support the Migrants' features the text 'LESBIANS & GAYS' in pink, 'SUPPORT THE' in light blue, and 'MIGRANTS' in a darker blue, all in a bold, sans-serif font.The logo for 'ILPA' consists of the letters 'ILPA' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid dark blue rectangular background.The text 'DONATE4' is in black with a large orange '4', and 'REFUGEES' is in black, all in a bold, sans-serif font.

# TRUSTEES

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John **Abraha**

Elaine **Chase**

Futsum **Kahsa**

Hadgu **Kiflai**

Berhane **Semere**

Petros **Tesfai**

Yacob **Woldehiwot**

Nardos **Yemane**



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