



Woodford Forest launches asylum seeker drop-in centre

Woodford Forest United Synagogue has become the first Jewish community in East London and Essex to offer a drop-in for asylum seeker families.

Iain Duncan Smith MP and Redbridge Deputy Mayor Councillor Taifur Rashid MBE attended the launch event, which was held as part of Mitzvah Day – the UK’s biggest faith-based day of social action.

Volunteers came to help from all over the region, including members of Chigwell & Hainault, Redbridge and Ilford Synagogues. They sorted clothes, shoes, toiletries and children’s toys that had been donated by the local Jewish community, as well as the charity Goods For Good. They also served a hot lunch, distributed food vouchers and spent time befriending the 30 asylum seeker families in attendance.

The drop-in is part of the United Synagogue Chesed scheme in which acts of loving kindness – inspired by Jewish values – are undertaken to help both members of local Jewish communities and the wider society in which they live. The drop-in will now run on the first Sunday of every month at Woodford Forest.

Former Government Minister Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative MP for Chingford and Woodford Green, said: “Events like this show how brilliant the Jewish community are at reaching out to all other members of society - supporting them and helping them. I was enormously proud to come here and see the marvellous work that is happening for asylum seekers, both at this event for Mitzvah Day and then every month going forward.”

Councillor Taifur Rashid MBE, who represents the Ward of Loxford in Ilford for the Labour Party, added: “It was wonderful taking part in Mitzvah Day and seeing some of the good deeds that happen. I enjoyed getting to know the volunteers as well as the people they are supporting.”

There are 28,000 asylum seekers in the UK waiting for the Home Office to grant them refugee status. During this period, they get minimal financial support from the Government and are not allowed to work.

The United Synagogue runs a similar successful drop-in for asylum seeker families at Hendon United Synagogue. People wishing to volunteer or donate items should contact Yael Peleg on yapeleg@theus.org.uk [1].

Robin Jacobs, chair of Woodford Forest United Synagogue, said: “We are delighted to be able to host this drop-in for asylum seekers and launch it as part Mitzvah Day. It is very important that our synagogues are not just for the Jewish community, but are a key part of the British community too.”

Mitzvah Day continues throughout the month culminating in more than 40,000 volunteers taking part in projects around the world on Sunday 18 November. For more details, visit www.mitzvahday.org.uk [2].

For some gorgeous photos, [click here](#) [3].

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Woodfood Forest launches asylum seeker drop-in centre

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