Our work with local families continues to provide much needed support through the ’Welcome to Ladywood’ drop-in, ESOL classes, befriending, Baby Bank Central as well as trips and activities during the school holidays. Ruth Fuller is our Children & Families Worker and has been working with the project for 11 years now.

It’s been another full year for the Children & Families project; We’ve had xxx contacts with xxx families, welcomed nine new volunteers, said goodbye to six & welcomed Liz Brown onto the staff

The growth and development of Baby Bank Central has remained a big part of the work this last year. We gave out 282 parcels to 245 clients, thanks to huge generosity from the general public. Our Facebook page, superbly managed by a volunteer, hit 3,000 likes in the summer, which is the reason why we’ve had enough resource to give out 21,270 nappies, 525 parcels of clothes and 55 cots! As well as equipment and clothes we’ve received financial donations that have really helped provide new mattresses, change mats as well as stairgates and cots when they’ve been needed urgently. After a visit to Jubilee Children’s Storehouse in December 2017 we made some procedural changes to our weekly shift. We were so impressed by the way the storehouse volunteers dignified clients by giving them choice we incorporated this into our format.

One to one befriending remains a special part of the work and this year we were able to carry out xxx sessions with xxx clients. Mostly we visit clients at home, sometimes we go out for coffee or a walk with clients, other times we help to celebrate special occasions when friends and families are few and far between. Other times it’s pure muscle that’s required, which was the case when a lady and her son needed to move house after a period of upheaval. Thankfully the steep flight of stairs and washing machine were no match for a cheerful group of volunteers from a local church! Coming at short notice they filled their cars and saw mum, son and washing machine installed within an evening. Here’s what she said *‘I am not lonely… I realised that there are still people in the world who help others without any expectation. People who have a kind heart, who are very supportive when you need them. Those who can be your family’*

The Drop-in is a precious welcoming space for local people, particularly women, in our 17th year we welcomed xxx. We enjoy a meal together, playing & singing for the children and this year started ‘competition weeks’ where the women brought dishes around a theme i.e. potatoes, pasta or bread – the winner of fruit week won a pineapple! Food & eating together is a major theme at the Drop-in, so it was only fitting to get together to make a recipe book to give to Heather, a faithful and much loved volunteer at the Drop-in when she left for pastures new. A personal highlight this year was when we dedicated a session to three volunteers who come weekly to serve, welcome and wash up. Ruth set the date and suggested that the ladies might like to express their appreciation. The influx of creativity and kindness was second to none; some ladies came early to set up, others washed up so the volunteers didn’t, others brought food and another brought a meal for each volunteer so she didn’t have to cook in the evening, one lady gave each volunteer a hand massage and the list of kindnesses went on, it was beautiful!

We said goodbye to another long term volunteer at ESOL in the summer, at 80 she decided to finally retire! We did consider closing the class down as were struggling for help particularly in the crèche but we’re thrilled to say than an influx of clients volunteering to help on a Friday has meant that we’re really well staffed. It’s been a wonderful turnaround and super to see ex-students giving back so wholeheartedly

Over the summer we trialled some joint ‘intergenerational trips’ with Karis Befriends, we started small just a few clients going to Cannon Hill park & Botanical Gardens to share picnics and cuddles with obliging babies but it was a glorious beginning and we hope we’ll be invited back, not least because the sun seems to shine on KBF trips! We finally took our now annual trip to Hatton Park (postponing it twice because of the rain) we enjoyed the animals and games and only once had to run for cover because of a downpour.

This year, in many respects has been quieter, with fewer client crises and new referrals but it’s been a year of depth; seeing clients give back and the fruit of long-term faithful relationships, perfectly encapsulated when at our Eid Drop-in, one lady exclaimed; ‘*this is my family’*.