



THE
ASYLUM SEEKER
ASSISTANCE PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT 2019





LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are living in an era of unprecedented attacks on asylum seekers. Seemingly overnight, long standing legal norms were replaced by new policies designed to detain, criminalize, and delegitimize asylum seekers. The consequences of these actions range from arbitrary to inhumane. And yet despite the political chaos, our clients remain resilient, and so do we.

With your support, 2019 was also the year ASAP transformed from a fledgling nonprofit to an effective, efficient, and established organization. This year, ASAP served nearly 300 asylum-seeking men, women, and children from 35 different countries.

Our dedicated staff worked in partnership with clients to address basic needs, obtain living wage employment, and connect with their new community. As our clients learned to stand on their own two feet, individual well-being significantly increased as did our clients ability to secure and work with legal representation.

The results of our unique service model speak for themselves: **In 2019, 100% of ASAP clients with legal cases that reached a final conclusion were granted asylum, compared to the national average of 40%.**

I am so proud of what we have accomplished this year but there is so much more to do. Now more than ever, asylum seekers need ASAP to maneuver through the political chaos that has engulfed our country.

2019 may have tested our resolve but it has also strengthened our determination. By emphasizing courage and connection, we have built a solid organization that will stand with our clients for many years to come.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joan Hodges-Wu'.

Joan Hodges-Wu
Founder & Executive Director

OVERVIEW

The Asylum Seeker Assistance Project (ASAP) is the first and only nonprofit exclusively dedicated to serving the estimated 50,000 asylum seekers living in the Washington, D.C. region. An asylum seeker is a person who applies for refugee status from the safety of the United States.

Having survived persecution, violence, and war in their home countries, asylum seekers arrive in the U.S. with many needs but few resources. These needs often persist throughout and even after what is typically a protracted legal process.

While there are some nonprofits working in the asylum space, their focus is on the provision of immigration legal services. These organizations provide a good and important service, but legal support alone does not guarantee a successful legal outcome, especially when asylum seekers are unable to meet their basic needs.

Founded in July 2016, ASAP's wraparound, holistic service model is designed to support the safety, stability, and economic security of our clients and their families. ASAP's focus on services outside the legal realm means our work is complementary, not competitive. Our organization has quickly been embraced by many legal service nonprofits, law firms, and pro bono attorneys looking to connect their clients to a continuum of care. Data suggests it is the combination of legal and non-legal services that dramatically increase the likelihood of an asylum seeker winning their legal case.

THROUGH DIRECT SERVICES, EDUCATION, AND SUPPORT, ASAP STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES BY EMPOWERING ASYLUM SEEKERS TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES WITH DIGNITY AND PURPOSE.





WHAT WE DO

ASAP's unique service model combines social, employment, and community engagement programs to address a range of unmet client needs.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Ineligible for mainstream services and unable to work for an extended length of time, many asylum seekers struggle to meet their basic needs. ASAP's social service program is tasked with strengthening client safety and well-being via information, referrals, and emotional support.

EMPLOYMENT

For most asylum seekers, economic survival is key to maintaining hope and personal dignity. Our employment program is designed to equip clients with the knowledge, skills, and resources to find safe, legal, and meaningful employment in the US.

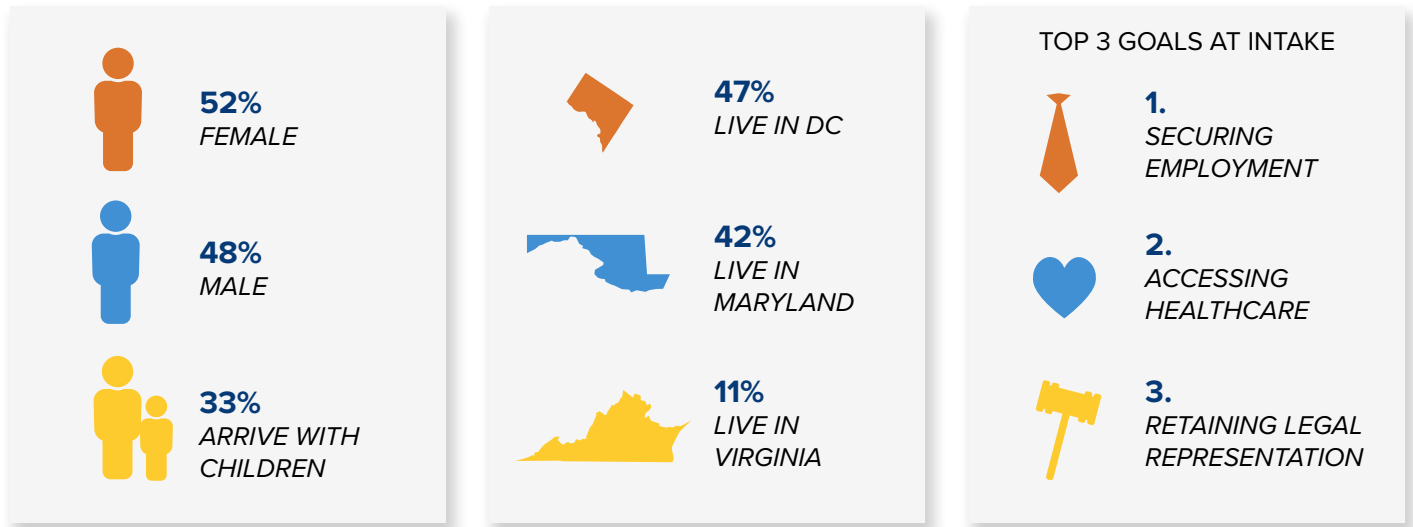
COMMUNITY

Social connection is essential to one's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. ASAP's community engagement program facilitates a variety of opportunities throughout the year for clients and volunteers to connect, engage and build meaningful relationships.

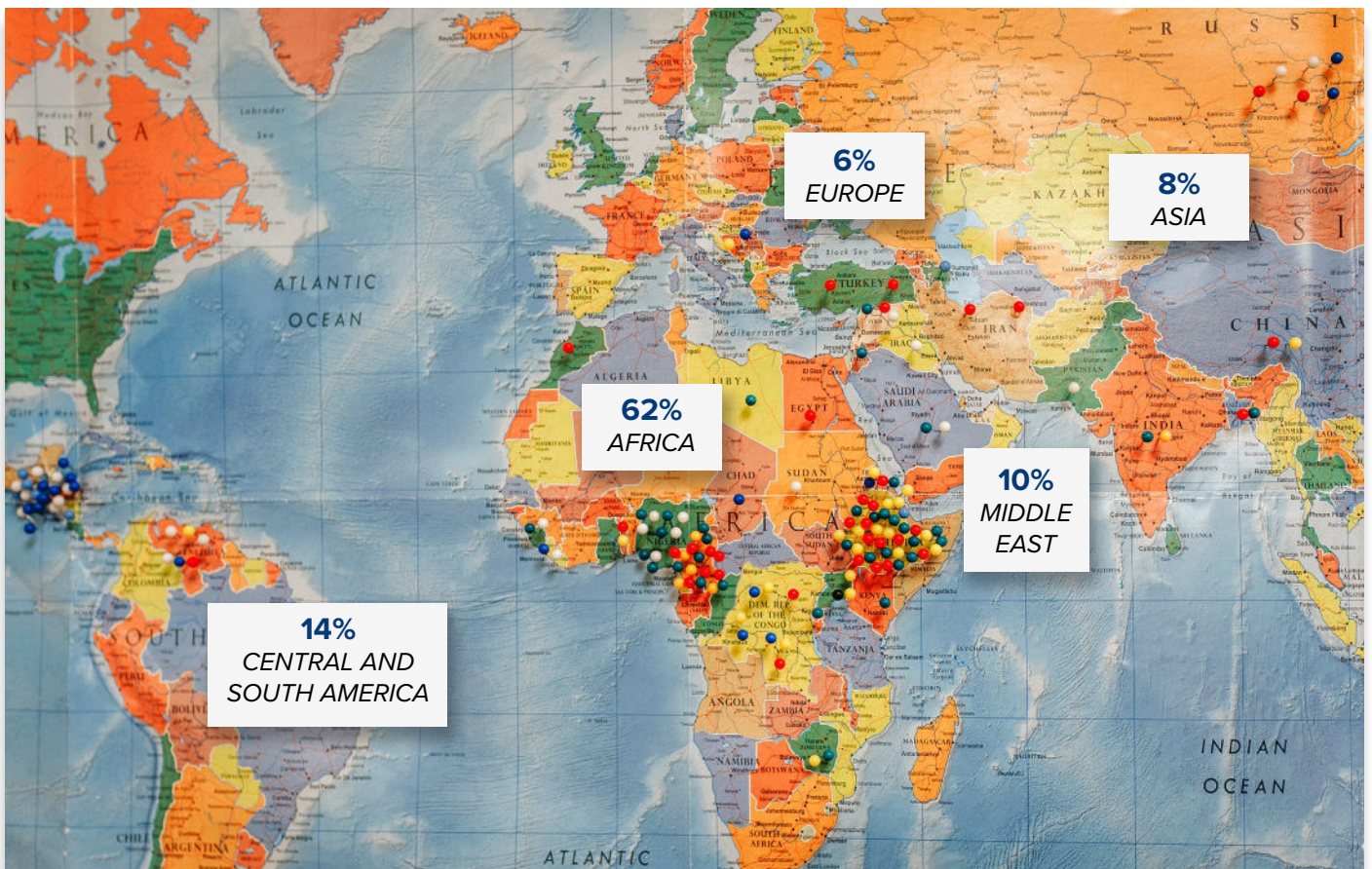
2019 BY THE NUMBERS

ASAP provided direct services to **272** asylum seekers including **120** new clients. Clients identified a total of **467** goals, and were connected to a range of critical services and supports to address unmet needs spanning from healthcare to housing to legal representation. **68** asylum seekers enrolled in our employment program. ASAP hosted **12** community events attended by over **750** clients and volunteers. **20** asylum seekers were trained as ASAP client ambassadors. After **6** months of direct services, overall client well-being significantly increased.

WHO ARE ASAP'S CLIENTS?



WHERE DO CLIENTS COME FROM?





CLIENT STORY: BERHANU*

“First when I came to the US, I was happy because I knew me and my son were safe. But after that, it got difficult. One day, I met a friend who was an ASAP client. He told me: ‘Go there. You will get good help.’”

Berhanu* is a 38 year-old Ethiopian woman who was born into a family of high-profile politicians. Although Berhanu was not politically active, her family’s legacy made her a target. For many years, Berhanu was arbitrarily arrested, interrogated, and beaten. When Berhanu was seven months pregnant, she was beaten so violently that her baby was diagnosed with a severe medical condition as a result of the in-utero trauma. Berhanu could not imagine raising her child in a country where he would never be safe. After many difficult conversations with her husband, Berhanu and her son fled Ethiopia to live with her sister in Silver Spring, MD. Her husband stayed behind so he could send money to his wife in the US.

From the beginning, Berhanu struggled. The money her husband sent was barely enough to cover her expenses. Her son was bullied in school. Berhanu and her sister’s relationship soured. Berhanu found a survival job but the work was difficult and dangerous. Desperate for help, Berhanu confided in a friend she met at church. Her friend told her about ASAP.

Berhanu cried tears of relief the first time she came to ASAP’s office. For the first time since her arrival, she felt like someone understood what she was going through. Working together, staff connected Berhanu with a doctor to treat her son, helped her enroll in a medication assistance program, and brought her into ASAP’s employment program. Berhanu and her son began attending ASAP social events, which helped them meet new friends. One of these new friends helped Berhanu find new housing. Staff also connected Berhanu to a private immigration firm that agreed to give her a generous ASAP client discount, and worked with her to create a payment plan to cover the remaining fees. Berhanu and her son were granted asylum in 2019. She immediately applied for her husband to join her. The family hopes to be reunited by 2022.

**Not client’s real name*

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Asylum may be one of the most talked-about topics of the year, but the voices of asylum seekers are noticeably absent from these conversations. In response, ASAP piloted a new program focused on identifying, recruiting, and training client ambassadors. By creating opportunities to elevate the voices of asylum seekers, we hope to broaden community awareness of asylum seekers and to build public support for humane and responsible asylum policy.



PHILLIPS COLLECTION EVENT

As part of their summer exhibition, The Warmth of Other Suns, the prestigious Phillips Collection partnered with ASAP to host a night of storytelling. Five ASAP clients hailing from Syria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Venezuela shared stories of heartache and hope before a packed auditorium.



HUMANS OF ASAP

ASAP's online photo and interview series continues to spotlight clients' stories and voices. This client said: "I just want to highlight that people don't understand how vulnerable we are here—legally, psychologically, financially, emotionally. ... I want Americans to know my story so they can be more understanding."



WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL

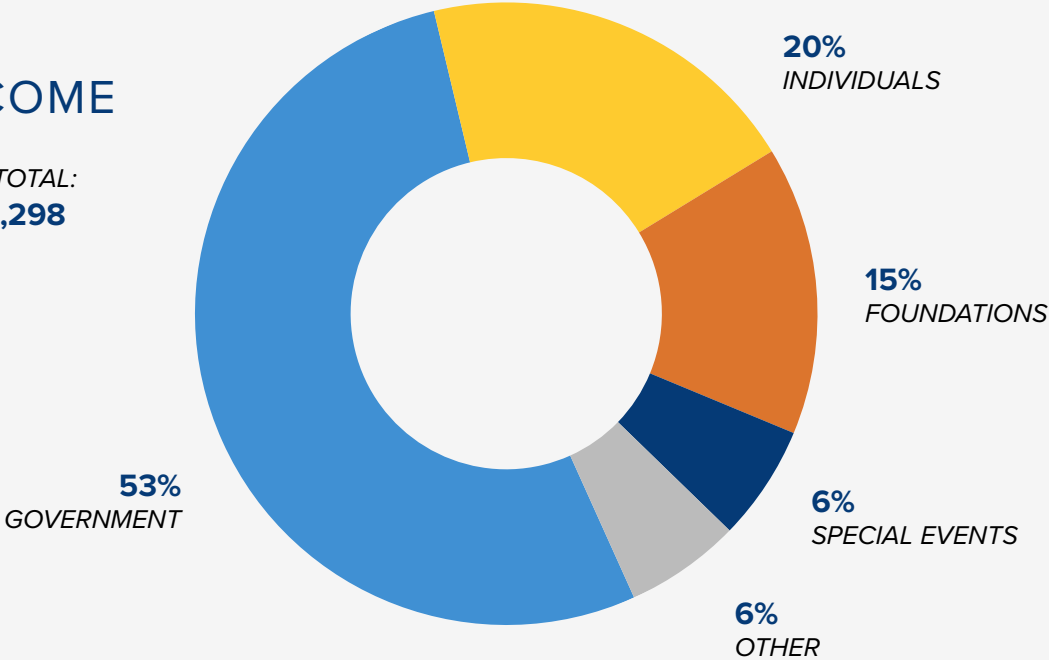
Lindsay Muir Harris, Immigration Law professor and ASAP Vice Chair, co-authored an op-ed with ASAP's Executive Director denouncing a proposed \$50 asylum application fee. They argued the ability to seek safety from persecution is a human right and should always be free.

OUR FINANCIALS

ASAP's budget grew by 129% in the past year. In 2020, we will serve an even greater number of asylum seekers, expand the breadth and depth of our services, and continue to build on new and existing partnerships to amplify the impact of our work.

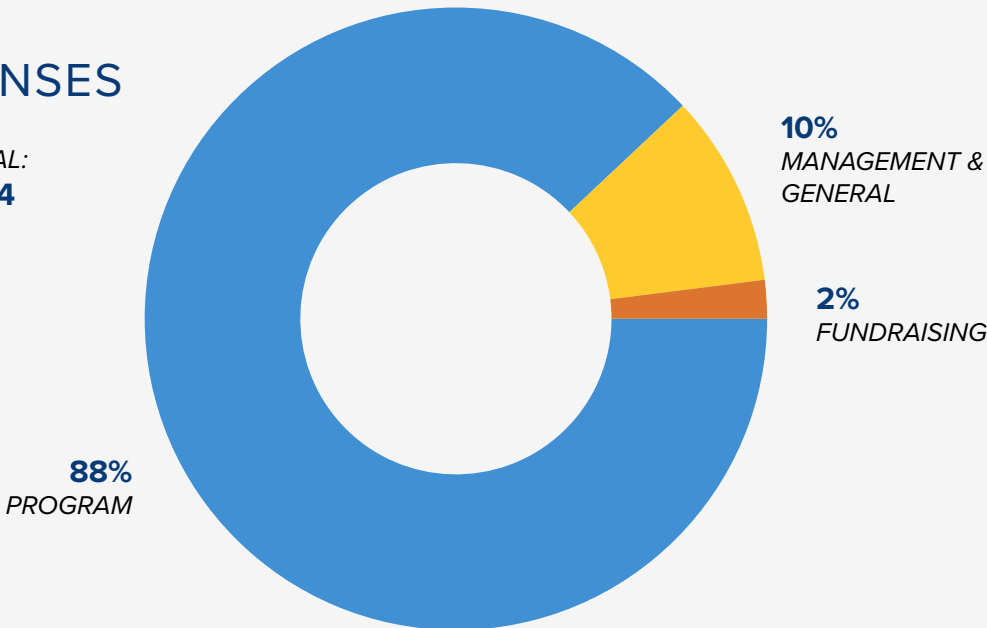
INCOME

2019 TOTAL:
\$518,298



EXPENSES

2019 TOTAL:
\$377,824



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"One day, I will contribute to ASAP because they helped me during my tough times. ASAP makes this world a better place to live in."

*Mr. B.
ASAP client from Cameroon*

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