

20 Years of Volunteerism and Still Going Strong

Since its inception, Iraqi Association has been working with volunteers, we put volunteering and community activism at the heart of the charity's work. Our volunteerism has created a strong link between voluntary activity and overall life satisfaction of many of our service users, and those who offers their time to become volunteers. Beside that, volunteering has a positive influence irrespective of a community's social class or wealth. At Iraqi Association, volunteers are those who would like to make a difference to the lives of others. On average, the charity is engaged with 10 regular volunteers every week. We provide induction, training, briefing and supervision, and they participate in meetings and discussion panels. They offer various contributions such as Suham, she is a carer, "When I hear of someone locally in need, disabled, semi-bedridden, I go and cook and try to help out. It is truly gratifying work and I hope that if I need help someday, that someone might come to help me".

Meanwhile others are engaged to help out in different fields, Thar is a volunteer helper at our reception, she is a lawyer by profession. "I enjoy dealing with people, particularly traumatised and vulnerable, I want to contribute towards helping others and make a difference to their lives"



Thar

Volunteering at Iraqi Association has achieved many benefits, both to volunteers and the community. Since the establishment of this service many new refugees gained language skills, self-esteem and a stake in the community. In another case, Ali, with PhD in mathematics, is one of our volunteers. His time at Iraqi Association as volunteer has given him experience of office protocol in the UK. "Now, I know about Quality Mark, Case Studies and UK style CV preparation and job interviews."



Ali

As a client-led charity, Iraqi Association is continuing to serve all age groups, despite its prudent budget. The VOIA project (Voice of Iraqi Association) is run by youth volunteers to cover the west London area. It's on air every Monday from 11am-2pm on Westside Radio 89.6FM, the new sound of west London. Mazin is one of the volunteers, who has completed his studies in Sound Engineering, he assists other volunteers every week to prepare and organise youth-led programmes.



Mazin

Mazin said, "I am thrilled to have this opportunity, this will give me work experience and necessary training to join the competitive market of sound engineering". VOIA is also lucky to have DJ Ahmad, a young Iraqi volunteer who offers his skills and experience and collection of vibrant and unique mixed style music to listeners of VOIA every week. His programme attracts many emails and messages of feedback.

DJ Ahmad said, "I am pleased to air my collections, I hope this will attract many young people in the area to join the existing listeners." While Susan is helping the VOIA team, she is also a full-time worker, but committed to offer her time with the VOIA project. Other recent volunteer includes, Labwa, she is actively seeking to link with other young people to join VOIA team.

As a non-sectarian group, Iraqi organisation services everyone who needs the help of the charity. Our community volunteers can give their time to do something they are passionate about and can lead to tangible results. Samantha was one of our volunteers who has helped with our fundraising work. She sent us a note saying that "I am extremely grateful for the opportunity which you have given me, I have learnt excellent skills and met very interesting people, I am also pleased that I contributed towards the work of your charity".

As a grass root community organisation, we are very proud of our volunteers and the contributions which they make. Many volunteers have gained confidence, skills and experience to improve their employability, and to make positive contribution to this society. Ekram is a librarian by profession, she lives in Richmond and offers few hours every week to welcome our clients and meet them at the reception area.

Ekram deals with different people from different social backgrounds. "Engaging with people who are anxious about their settlement needs is a challenge for me, but at the same time, it gives me confidence and motivation".



Ekram

Every year Iraqi Association involves hundreds of part time volunteers in a diverse array of services, from office work to practical help and outreach work. Such as telephone communication method with disabled clients and building contacts and networking. Or to make arrangements to see vulnerable clients at GP surgery. While others assists the charity to organise events, such as seminars or group sessions with community members. We also offer choices, such as the development of creative writing, print and design of publication, so that they can gain new skills and realise their potentials. Or engage young local people with sport activities. The recent growing local demand from young people has encouraged us to develop a soccer team with the help of a qualified professional volunteer coach, Sadiq Alwohali, (who appeared in the Times newspaper on 14.01.2008) is committed to help and develop the skills of our youngsters locally.

Our volunteerism is easily accessible to everyone at every level, regardless of their age, race, faith, gender, disability, class, sexual orientation, employment status or any other factor. Volunteering at Iraqi Association is a positive aspiration that meets real needs and is intrinsically worthwhile. Our volunteers are at the centre of our vision. If we look back since the development of this work at Iraqi Association 20 years ago, volunteering brought as people together, giving them a purpose and potential to develop themselves as well as their communities. As a Quality Mark registered organisation, we have a volunteer policy and accordingly, we recruit, brief, retain, train and supervise them.

The fact is that many grass root community groups offers fantastic Services, including volunteerism, their role must be recognised and supported. It's not only because of the cost effectiveness, but because grass root groups can directly engage potential users while mainstream agencies cannot reach. Beside that, Iraqi Association has been working in this field for many years, our experience tells us that often fear and lack of trust deters the hard to reach people. However, with resources and recognition, community groups can develop many innovative ideas and projects to involve and evolve today's disfranchised young and excluded families and children.



Susan

Our 20 years of volunteerism confirms that volunteering needs direct support from an effective infrastructure, If we want to flourish it.

The chance to gain experience to develop personally and professionally - is high on our list of our young community members, according to the Director of Iraqi Association, Jabbar Hasan. "A large numbers of our local young excluded people are eager to gain confidence and break the terrible isolation and the poverty trap, majority of them are British born with native Iraqi parents. They face enormous social and economic difficulties, lack of opportunities to help these youngsters will alienate them further."

In essence, volunteering assists refugees and asylum seekers to settle and integrate, and gain necessary experience to develop their skills and confidence. They have for so long been ostracised and made to feel as if they are a burden on this society. But our experience with Iraqi refugees shows that they are more than willing to work and put something back into the community. Our volunteers' diverse backgrounds can bring in new ideas and fresh approaches. It is therefore imperative that refugees are given every opportunity to take part in volunteering.