



West End Refugee Service

strength through support



Issue 74: July 2018

WERS Volunteer Project

Support, Empowerment, Community

'Very many thanks to the wonderful ladies who helped so willingly in the café and the kitchen – it was great to have them!'

(Libby, Haltwhistle Plant Festival organiser and WERS volunteer)



For the second year running, WERS' volunteers worked alongside local volunteers at the Haltwhistle Plant Festival held in May. It was a great occasion and WERS' hardship fund benefitted to the tune of £1000. Fantastic!

WERS' volunteers, currently numbering 50 and representing 13 different nationalities, come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences – local people, refugees, asylum seekers and students. All of them share a desire to give something back to the community and this they continue to do – in spades! Volunteering provides an opportunity to make a significant difference to the lives of those seeking sanctuary and enjoy the hugely fulfilling opportunities for personal development and

learning. At WERS, local people volunteer as befrienders, support workers and help out in the clothing store.

For our clients, many of whom are not allowed to undertake paid work, volunteering provides welcome opportunities to use their skills and gain valuable experience of team-working in a variety of different settings.

A skills and interests audit carried out at WERS in 2017 revealed an extraordinary wealth of untapped skills amongst its clients. Asylum seekers are frustrated not to be allowed to provide for self and family and this can have a devastating impact on their mental health. Clients have repeatedly told WERS that volunteering has a most beneficial effect on their overall health and also improves their English language skills.

How we do volunteering at WERS

In response to the very differing needs of its clients, WERS has a two-stage volunteering structure for asylum seekers and refugees:

Stage 1. Some clients new to volunteering or who are unable to undertake a regular volunteering commitment find participating in supported group volunteering at local events (the Haltwhistle Plant Festival, for example) a good way to start building their confidence. Also in Stage 1 is the opportunity to be trained to volunteer in WERS' clothing store, where local people and client volunteers work alongside one another.

Stage 2 volunteering then gives them the chance to be more independent and take up external

volunteering opportunities . Some clients are ready to dive into external volunteering from the outset; as with all our services, there is built-in flexibility to allow clients to move at their own pace.

Central to the project is WERS' digital platform **skillsmatch**, the website where asylum seekers' and refugees' skills are matched with volunteering opportunities in public, private and community sector organisations.

We're recruiting - Befrienders needed!



We are currently looking for male and female volunteers to support our clients through friendship.

WERS' Befrienders help asylum seekers and refugees feel more welcome, supported and integrated into the local community. As the name suggests, the role of the volunteer Befriender is to be a friend to the family or individual with whom they are put into contact, spending a few hours weekly or fortnightly, sharing activities and building a relationship. This could involve inviting the person or family to social outings or events to help familiarise them with their local community, assisting them in making phone calls to help them access services or make appointments and improve their English through general conversation.

We ask you to give a minimum time commitment of six months and we offer full training and induction. The role is supported through regular contact with our volunteer coordinators.



Currently we have volunteer Befrienders aged between 23 to 73 years old, from all walks of life! If you are interested in becoming a befriender with us, please visit the website to find out more, and/or contact us for an application form or an informal chat.

"I have someone I can chat with, we talk about life generally. She gives practical help. I can show how I feel, it has strengthened my positive outlook and confidence".

"I'm new in country, I'm feeling alone, so when they call me to meet I feel good".

WERS could only do a fraction of its work were it not for its amazing group of volunteers who give their skills, time and wisdom so generously. WERS owes them a great deal! Thank you all very much!

Lindsay Cross

Save the date....

This year's Annual General Meeting will be on Thursday 8th November at 6pm at Westgate Baptist Church.

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