

VOLUME

Loud & Proud About Volunteering

May 2015

#4

SECOND CHANCES

HOLLOWAY
DIAMOND CUT LOOSE
AT CENTRA

//

WORDS DON'T COME EASY

HOW SUPPORT WITH
HER DOODLES HELPED
ANITA FEEL DANDY



“ I BELIEVE IN YOUNG PEOPLE „

– DAVIDSON UTSAGHAN (Brokerage Volunteer)

EDITOR'S LETTER

I AM PROUD TO PRESENT the brand new issue of Volume featuring a new look, a new team and a new Editor, yours truly. Volume 4 is all about positivity, strength and survival. In "It's Good To Write" a Service User, Anita, gives us her perspective on a painful bereavement and the interesting way in which a volunteer helped her to cope. Diamond, an inmate at Holloway Prison, describes how volunteering with Centra is helping to start her reintegration process back to the community. On a lighter note, as spring is in full bloom, we interviewed Jo, our food growing volunteer about her work and plans.

We have tried our best to keep Volume inspiring and motivating and I hope we have accomplished that. Before you turn the page and start reading, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Volume team: Virginie for her innovative ideas and great designs; Barbara for her outstanding pictures; and Andrew, Anisha and Isha for their fantastic writing and editing. I'd also like to thank Neil Willington for making Volume possible and for asking me to take over the reins as Chief Editor of Volume Magazine. Personally this feels like a privilege and a great opportunity. THANK YOU!

HAFIDA AABBAD
Editor



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THE FRUITS OF JO'S LABOUR

A food-growing volunteer for Centra has recently secured £1500 worth of funding from Circle 33 for the development of gardens in Cutbush House, Islington. Over the last year, Jo researched the seven different community gardening projects at Centra, identifying Cutbush House as the best focus for development. Her indomitable spirit inspired the residents and volunteers to nurture and grow an array of fruits and vegetables, ranging from onions and chives to rhubarbs and raspberries. With the investment, Jo is determined to create storage for saplings, tools and produce for the Cutbush House community gardens. Her aim is to motivate the residents to maintain the communal garden sustainably, with or without her presence. The funding will also support work at Duval House, Minerva Lodge and Hawberry Lodge, also in Islington, and Jo plans to hold community events between these schemes when the sun shines on the blooming gardens this summer. • Isha Arora



Garden at Hawberry Lodge



FOOD FIGHT

Centra is organising 'Food Fight' in their Islington sheltered housing schemes for older people this May and June. Food Fight is a celebration of how food brings people together and keeps us healthy; exploring food history, culture and nostalgia. As well as healthy eating, 'Food Fight' will promote food safety and food sustainability, test people's food knowledge (quiz competition) and share experiences of the food they used to eat (reminiscence). We will also be looking to

identify some of our finest older cooks and to challenge them to a Food Fight! They will be asked to produce a meal that is both tasty and nutritious, using simple and affordable ingredients; the winning cooks will secure an exciting prize for their scheme. So fortunately, or should I say unfortunately, nobody will be throwing foods at each other in this 'Food Fight.'

For more information please go to www.centragroup.org.uk/volunteering.

THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

Trevor Gumbs is a volunteer-turned-employee, gaining full-time employment at Circle Housing earlier this year.

Starting as a Recruitment and Administration volunteer for Centra Care & Support, it was his polite persistence and an urge to find a job that landed him the role of Hub Administrator at Circle Housing. His story is going to be featured in a video as a case study for Circle Housing's opportunities website.

Citing his volunteering journey, Trevor points out that voluntary work may not pay you but it gives you all the requisite tools for getting your CV shortlisted for a job interview.

You can't put a price on the experience that one gains by devoting only a few hours a week to voluntary work. Trevor encourages young people to make the best use of their time and gain practical experience through volunteering. It took him less than a year to find his first job after volunteering at Centra.

See Trevor's story at: <http://circleopportunities.org.uk/case-studies/trevor/>.

• Isha Arora

I FOUND MYSELF

SOMETIMES IT TAKES JUST ONE INCIDENT OF POOR JUDGMENT TO COMPLETELY TURN ONE'S LIFE UPSIDE DOWN IN A BAD WAY. TO COME BACK FROM THAT CAN BE AN UNIMAGINABLY DIFFICULT ACCOMPLISHMENT.

Volume spoke to Diamond, a young woman who lost almost everything, but mostly her freedom, after one unfortunate decision. She shares her story with us, her fears, insecurities and struggles, and how she's trying to find her way back to a life she once had. Diamond (a name she picked herself, as her real identity will remain anonymous at her request), was sentenced to prison in 2012. For privacy reasons, we will not go into detail about the allegations or her conviction.

PRIVILEGE

After two years of good behaviour, doing numerous courses and a high security clearance job at the prison's canteen, Diamond worked her way towards two privileges. Working ROTL (Release on Temporary License), a scheme at HM Prison Holloway, that allows prisoners to do volunteer work outside The Establishment and Home Leave, which means that she can spend a few days with her family every twenty-eight days. "I was so excited to start working and to be outside that when I was approached with three different volunteer roles at Centra, I couldn't pick one so I asked if I could take all three, which obviously was not possible."

INSECURE

Diamond has been volunteering since September last year. "Being able to do this makes the transition back to normal life much smoother. The first day I started working I was very insecure and nervous,

because I didn't know if I would fit in and how people would treat me. After about one week I felt very comfortable. My people skills came back and it was as if I had never been away. It gave me confidence. I found myself."

OUTSIDE THE GATES

HM Prison Holloway has several partnerships with organisations like Centra, who make it possible for prisoners to gain valuable experience outside Holloway towards the end of their sentence. "I am very grateful to be able to do this. It feels like things are starting to get normal again. When you are outside the gates for the first time in years, it's a very scary thing. You're very out of touch with the world outside. Being inside can do two things to you, it can make you or break you."

SECOND CHANCES

Thanks to her strong character, hard work and the opportunities she made for herself, it is absolutely the former for Diamond. "Everybody wants a second chance in life, but unfortunately not everybody is always willing to give another person a second chance. Just because I have been in prison, doesn't mean that I can't achieve the same as anyone else."

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Diamond can't wait to start applying for a paid job. As her sentence comes to an end in August next year, she can start looking for a paid job in April, which is part of the ROTL Scheme. "I think doing volunteer work will benefit me when I start looking for a paid job. I'm learning a lot about myself, about my strengths and skills. It's also really good to be part of society again." An important goal in Diamond's life now is to leave prison and to never go back. She just wants to have her life back and be successful. Her positive attitude and self-confidence are admirable. "The only person that can hold me back is me." • *Hafida Aabbad*



© Virginie Bourgery

"I'M LEARNING A LOT ABOUT MYSELF, ABOUT MY STRENGTHS AND SKILLS" - Diamond



Artwork made
by young people at
Brentwood foyer

POSITIVE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE

HELPING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS THEY SET OUT ON THE ROAD OF LIFE'S JOURNEY CAN BE CHALLENGING AND DEMANDING. IT CAN ALSO BE INCREDIBLY REWARDING, ACCORDING TO DAVIDSON UTSAGHAN AND MEL WEEDY AT BRENTWOOD FOYER.

WHAT DOES THE FOYER DO?

Brentwood Foyer provides accommodation and support for up to 40 young, single homeless people aged between 16 and 23, with priority given to those from the Brentwood area and Essex. As well as paid staff, volunteers support the Foyer's work.

George Boateng has been the Centre Manager at Foyer for three years. "Young people come to the centre for a reason - often due to something going 'wrong' in their lives, family breakdown or gang involvement. There are many different reasons. Volunteers are important to our work. They bring a range of different skills and help young people to move on."

The Foyer aims to be part of a process of improving life chances. Many of the young people are classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), so training and learning opportunities are one of the priorities. Volunteers support the classes (literacy and numeracy) held at the Foyer by being a familiar face and providing that all important extra individual help. Establishing and rebuilding relationships and trust goes hand in hand with this work. Many of the young people need help to feel empowered and begin

to make choices about their lives. Volunteers can play a big part in this work.

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE VOLUNTEER?

Davidson and Mel spoke about their desire to help young people and their motivation for volunteering. Mel had worked with 'Crisis' a national charity for single homeless people and this spurred her on to get involved with the Foyer. "If you help people early on in their lives it can make a difference in the long term." Davidson was involved with other youth work in the area. "You learn a lot. In the past I've worked with individuals here, but I am also learning about working with groups of young people." He added, "I believe in young people, often they get 'bad press', but I'm keen to help empower and motivate them." Both spoke about being positive in their volunteering. Davidson summed it up - you need to "talk them (young people) up."

HOW ARE VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTED?

Initially, new volunteers are paired with a member of staff who inducts them into the workings of the centre as well as introducing them to the young people.



Mel Weedy

"SMALL THINGS MAKE A DIFFERENCE, SOMETIMES THEY ARE ONLY TINY LITTLE THINGS,,

-Mel



Davidson Utsaghan

George, Davidson and Mel commented on how useful the induction was in allowing new people to 'find their feet'. Mel: "I feel supported and I find it easy to ask for help. I know staff are often busy but they are really helpful. Relationships are important, it doesn't feel like them and us and I like this."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THAT VOLUNTEERS FACE?

Mel: "Time. Trying to fit things in around the time you are in the centre. You also have to be flexible and prepared to do things that maybe you hadn't planned. Sometimes I come in and ask if there's anything that needs doing - but it's good and that's how I learn new skills." Davidson: "Working with young people who then had to leave and wondering what the outcome was. Sometimes you're not able to see things through - that can be difficult."

Just as a journey is made from many small steps, so is the work of supporting people who are made from many different interactions and experiences. As Mel put it, "small things make a difference, sometimes they are only tiny little things." • Andrew Christiansen

“IT’S GOOD TO TALK (...) BUT SOMETIMES YOU JUST CAN’T - THEN I THINK IT’S GOOD TO WRITE,,

DEALING WITH GRIEF CAN BE VERY PAINFUL, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT’S SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU. ONE WAY OF MAKING SENSE OF THE GRIEVING PROCESS IS THROUGH WRITING.

I visited Anita O’Leary from Brightwell Court Islington who had been writing memories of her late sister and found out how she had been supported in this by Centra volunteer Ken Payne.

DOODLING

Following the death of her sister, Anita had been referred to a counsellor by her GP. “It was the counsellor who originally suggested I write about my sister - she gave me the confidence to start it.” Anita began to write in a notebook. “I called it ‘doodling’, just putting my thoughts down on paper. I wasn’t worried about the spelling or how it read, I just wanted to put it down. Later on, my son got me a laptop and I started to use that - I loved it.”

REMINISCING

Anita then met Sue Wardell, Involvement Manager for Centra Care & Support, and through her she was put in contact with Ken. “Sue asked me what I liked doing and I told her I was writing and she suggested I meet Ken - it was really good. Ken is a brilliant fellow.” Anita and Ken met regularly for just over a year. “When I started writing I went right back and started writing about our parents and childhood. I wanted to write for my own children and for my sister’s children.” Anita described how having these regular meetings with Ken helped her to continue with her writing. “I knew he (Ken) was coming each week so this spurred me on to do a certain amount, it kept me going. Sometimes he’d put the ‘p’s’ and ‘q’s’ into what I’d been writing - to tidy it up a bit.” Anita looked forward to Ken’s visits. “Mostly we would talk about the stories and laugh. We laughed a lot. I’ve had a good life and have a lovely family. I’ve been very happy. It’s good to remember those times and I realise how wonderful the times with my sister were. The writing really helped me, but it doesn’t stop the grief. I still miss my sister, we were very close, but I’m glad I did the writing. I think more people should give it a go.”

CHEERS AND TEARS

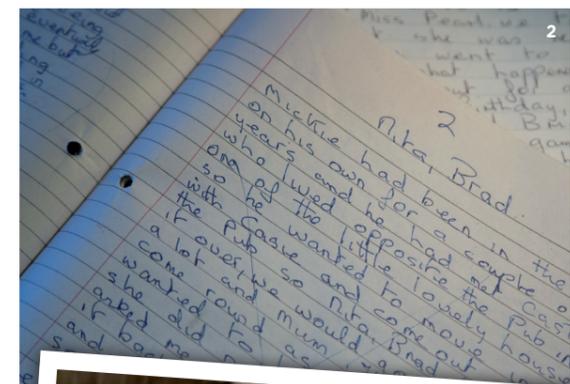
We asked Ken about his time with Anita. “Working with Anita has been a really pleasurable experience. I found her stories very entertaining, with a lovely blend of cheers and tears. In that time, I have become very good friends with both Anita and her husband. I’d like to encourage her to try her hand at fiction since she now has developed more of a taste for writing. Hopefully this could serve as a catalyst for other service users to discover their own creative abilities.”

What next for Anita’s writing? Anita plans to put her writing into a book for her family. She has a friend who is a graphic designer and is hoping to include pictures and photographs.

SHARE YOUR WRITING

And finally, what advice would Anita give to people dealing with loss? “Start writing, begin anywhere in your story, the story will come as you write. Don’t worry about spelling or punctuation; just get it down on paper. It’s helpful to have someone to share your writing with, to encourage you and to share the funny stories.” •

Andrew Christiansen.



1. Anita working on her memoirs.
2. Anita's handwritten notes.
3. Family holiday 60s, Anita front left, sister Jean front right.

THIS IS HOW SANDRA ROLES



"I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING WORTHWILE,,
-Sandra

VOLUME CELEBRATES SANDRA, A SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR AT ALONE IN LONDON. SANDRA WANTED TO SHARE HER SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN A PASSION DRIVEN ENVIRONMENT.

CAN YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF?

> My volunteering role for Alone in London was a very lucky coincidence. I am a recent graduate in International Communications and Development and have been striving for communications experience with a non-profit organisation. When I joined Alone in London I was still writing my MA thesis on Social Media in Disaster Response. I was looking for a project in social media so I could motivate myself, bring new things into practice and better understand what non-profits and charities are looking to get from social media. It appealed to me that Alone in London has never had a track record of using social media and starting things from scratch was just what I was looking for.

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR ALONE IN LONDON?

> I am responsible for our Twitter and Facebook accounts and website improvements. I create social media content that encourages young people to engage with our services and to attract funders. It's important to collaborate with my team to ensure this content reflects Alone in London's mission and values.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON AT THE MOMENT?

> We are discussing potential campaign opportunities. It's time for the charity to receive a lot more attention for the amazing work they do.

WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER?

> I would say two things were the biggest motivators. I wanted to do something worthwhile and I was looking to 'test' myself in the field of social media.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF VOLUNTEERING?

> I wanted to do something that I was passionate about, that wasn't for my studies or for money. To tests my strenghts and weaknesses and to bring different skills and a fresh perspective to the organisation.

ARE YOU ACCOMPLISHING THAT?

> Definitely. The positivity and open-mindedness of the team is the strongest force behind this becoming a reality.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

> The next step is to turn this fantastic volunteering experince into something I will continue to do for a living. •
Hafida Aabbad

WHERE IS ADRIANA NOW?

EACH ISSUE WE TRY TO TRACK DOWN A FORMER CENTRA VOLUNTEER TO SEE WHAT THEY ARE UP TO NOW. MEET ADRIANA, PREVIOUSLY A RESEARCH VOLUNTEER, WHO NOW WORKS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT.

WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER?

> I was changing direction in my professional career. I had just started an MSc in Geographic Information System and Services and was looking for an opportunity to start building some experience -but I also wanted to feel that my work was benefiting someone. I went to Voluntary Action Islington and they put me in contact with Centra. I was very pleased because it was everything I was looking for.

WHAT DID YOU DO AT CENTRA?

> I carried out research and analysis of 18 local authorities, including demographic profiling, and health and social care statistics. This aimed to help the organisation achieve a greater understanding of the ageing population and their changing requirements. I also put into practice what I was doing in my MSc and represented data using GIS mapping.

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

> I work for the Commonwealth Secretariat as a research officer in the Health and Education Unit. My role is to carry out health policy review and development so that country members can have policies that guarantee or facilitate access to health services for the whole population, especially for marginalised groups. Volunteering gave me the opportunity to learn something new and to somehow start my career again. When I went for the interview for my new job I was able to talk about what I did for Centra and prove that I had experience in this industry. It showed that I had initiative and looked for opportunities to learn and put my skills into practice.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WISHING TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER?

> Grab opportunities that volunteering presents to improve as a person and as a professional. I faced challenges, but in a way that pushed me to learn more. If you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve, volunteering can put you in the right path and open doors for you. •

Anisha Desai

TEAM VOLUME



ANISHA DESAI
Writer/Editor
Medical Editor from London, loves a good science fact, and crazy about travel and music.



ISHA ARORA
Writer
Former writer for Deccan Herald in New Dehli. Has a keen interest in documentary filmmaking.



ANDREW CHRISTIANSEN
Writer
Lived in London for 25 years. Interested in poetry, writing and green issues



BARBARA LUCKHURST
Photographer
Student of life, education, photography and Swahili.



VIRGINIE BOURGERIE
Art Director
From Paris, newbie in London. Crazy about literature, cinema, photography and knitting.



Centra delivers a range of services to support people who require a safe, comfortable place to live or who require assistance to find a secure and sustainable home. We provide care, support and assistive technology to more than 130,000 people across the UK.

CENTRA VOLUNTEERING

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