

A YEAR OF SERVICE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

A Year of Service 2012 was the joint initiative of nine faith communities, facilitated by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) with the Mitzvah Day Charitable Trust (MDCT). It aimed to celebrate volunteering among people of faith, support integration through cross faith social action connected to faith festivals, and showcase the ongoing volunteering in faith communities. Its inspiration was the dedicated service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in her Jubilee year, along with the imperative to serve found in the writings and beliefs of each faith community.

How the project was established

Planning began in the summer of 2011. Twelve religious festivals or dedicated volunteering days were chosen from nine faith traditions. Each of these provided an opportunity for cross faith volunteering in social action.

Representatives were invited to form a reference group drawn from the nine faith communities, and an advisory group comprising key stakeholders. MDCT was contracted to: create the programme brand, identity and website, employ a member of staff to run the programme;

advise the reference group on publicity and promotion. DCLG provided a reference point for publicity and communications and facilitated all meetings. This was a new style of partnership working for DCLG.

Two key factors ensured success: clarity of purpose, and excellent relationships between departmental staff and members of the reference and advisory groups.

The programme formally opened in January 2012, with the first volunteering day in February. Learning about the process and organisation of the volunteering projects went hand in hand with providing information about festivals and the social action events designed to illustrate them. This was a steep multiple learning curve for everyone.

Service themes

The reference group were keen to ensure a balance of activities to illustrate the different faith festivals or foci chosen for the programme. Each faith group chose a social action theme that resonated with its festival. Projects held on volunteering days were funded and organised by local faith communities. 144 separate events were recorded on the A Year of Service website. 75 were held in London. 25 organisations or workplaces ran events, the rest held by local faith communities. The national event celebrated examples of faith based social action from across the country.

Together in Service

Following A Year of Service DCLG has announced that it will continue to celebrate and facilitate faith based social action projects, and to help link them up across faith boundaries, through a further three year programme to comprise:

- An ongoing calendar-based structure'
- A Together in Service Fellowship to link up and resource volunteers;
- A Together in Service small grants fund

KEY LEARNING FROM A YEAR OF SERVICE

In this programme local faith communities built on existing relationships and work, or set up new projects. Eight key lessons learned can be applied to other social action settings.

- 1 Planning and preparation:
 - a) Identify a lead person, support them and establish a small team
 - b) Allow plenty of time to create a plan, ensure it is agreed, clear and understood by all involved
 - c) Plan visits to centres with the staff or chaplain in order to be well briefed
- 2 Communication and publicity:
 - a) Give plenty of time to advertising the event so it reaches a wide audience
 - b) Locate the event in a public place, and at a busy time to help publicise it
 - c) Take lots of photos and ensure you have permission to use them
- 3 Provide good hospitality:
 - a) Good hospitality happens when people are valued for who they are
 - b) Respect dietary and faith requirements when providing food
 - c) Get advice from local centres about suitable donated materials
- 4 Build links with faith communities:
 - a) Take time to encourage people of different faiths to share events
 - b) Acts of shared kindness help people to see they have common values
- 5 Know who your beneficiaries are:
 - a) Recipients of care often offer as much back to the volunteers
 - b) Provide a variety of activities so all generations can participate
 - c) The environment benefits as much as individuals

- 6 Make sure there is a strong link between a faith festival and social action:
 - a) Ensure festivals have an inherent element of social action
 - b) Social action demonstrates the practical and spiritual aspects of faith
 - c) Acts of kindness help people break down barriers
- 7 Develop partnerships to create sustainability:
 - a) Establish good relationship with local businesses, and agencies
 - b) Respect the boundaries set by partners
 - c) Environmental projects make a very visual difference to the local community and create a strong sense of corporate ownership
- 8 Provide adequate resources:
 - a) Give due consideration to funding support.
 - b) Organising requires time and commitment of local resources
 - c) Be realistic and focus energy on what is achievable

The full report 'A Year of Service' is available to download from the Faith Based Regeneration Network website: www.fbrn.org.uk