

Afghan Association of London (Harrow)



Annual Report 2014/2015

Acknowledgement

It is through the sheer dedication and commitment of staff and the growing numbers of volunteers, backed by members, supporters, partners and our generous funders that we have been able to continue with our activities and services. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has made a contribution towards our work. Many of our projects would not be possible without this generous support from grant giving bodies. In particular we would like to thank our current funders, Trust for London, Awards for All, John Lyons Charity, Tudor Trust and the Clothworkers' Foundation for their generous support.



Message from the Chair for the year ended 31 March, 2015

In February 2015 we have celebrated the (20th Anniversary of the Afghan Association of London (AAL). AAL was established in 1995 to assist the Afghan refugees in the process of their integration into the UK society. As a centre point for Afghan community and relevant external agencies, the Association provides a wide range of practical support, help, advice and services to the community. Since its' inception, AAL has assisted thousands of Afghan refugees to successfully integrate and to make a positive contribution to the British society. The Association has initiated and successfully completed numerous projects and activities. To name a few; women's group activities and the publication of a specific journal for women, elderly group projects, social and cultural events and conferences, health initiatives (substance misuse workshops and immunisation project), building bridges project (introducing Afghan culture and food to mainstream communities), research projects, supplementary school, extra-curricular and sport activities for young people, mother tongue and extra-curricular activities, summer holiday scheme for refugee children, football tournaments, chess competition, Taekwondo classes and many more. However, in the last few years due to the economic crisis it is increasingly becoming difficult to secure funding for projects and services. For a small refugee community organisation such as AAL, this has been a very difficult year. In order to sustain the current services and activities, the Association relies heavily on volunteers' contributions. Despite some minor successes in securing funding, we have faced a real challenge to focus on developing long term strategies.

Due to increased competition for already shrinking resources even our substantial efforts in fundraising have proved insufficient. It goes without saying that AAL, with very limited resources, has to juggle the service delivery element with fundraising activities. We have provided 2000 face to face and telephone advice and information to our clients, the most vulnerable segment of the British society.

Without our dedicated staff and volunteers, it would have been extremely difficult to continue with our services and activities. We would like to thank all our funders, partners, our supporters, our dedicated volunteers and staff for their hard work. The coming year will be crucial for AAL. We look forward to developing our current services and activities whilst searching for new opportunities.

Ghafoor Nabi
Chair

Objectives, structure, governance and management

The main objectives of the charity are to:

1. To relieve poverty amongst the Afghan community in the London Boroughs of Harrow, Brent and Ealing particularly, by the provision of an advice and interpreting service.
2. To advance education amongst the Afghan community in the same areas, particularly by the provision of language classes and a library.
3. To provide facilities for the recreation and other leisure-time occupation of persons who have need of such facilities by reason of their poverty or social and economic circumstances with a view to improving their condition of life.
4. To relieve the aged, particularly those from the Afghan community; and
5. To protect and preserve public health by the provision of advice.

Achievements and performance

AAL is now running a number of projects and services this section describes progress over the last year.

General Advice and Information

AAL's staff and volunteers have dealt with an increasing numbers of queries, providing 2000 face to face or telephone advice to clients on a wide range of issue including welfare benefit, housing, health, employment and education. Complex issues, including domestic violence, harassment, immigration and hate crime will be referred to other specialist services and agencies.

Due to decades of continuous conflict, political upheaval, instability and persecution, thousands of Afghan refugees have sought sanctuary in the UK. The integration process for the Afghan community has been extremely slow. In most cases it has been a parallel existence rather than integration. There is strong evidence to suggest that the Afghan community experience social exclusion, isolation, inequalities, financial hardship, poor housing, a high level of unemployment and poor health. All major service providers and institutions are realising the importance of collaboration and partnership arrangement with local refugee, migrant and community organisations, as the first point of contact for MBE communities. Due to our understanding of the culture, languages, tribal affiliations, history and social-economic context of the Afghan community, we are in a unique position to deliver projects and to provide services. The Association services and provisions are designed to empower our community to achieve their full potential as active members of British society, to contribute to the community, and to become fully

able to exercise the rights and responsibilities. We would like to address the barriers our community face, whilst promoting British and universal values, instead of encouraging a parallel existence and separation from the mainstream community.

Volunteering

The Association benefits from the contribution of a pool of dedicated and committed volunteers, who assisted the Afghan Association with general advice and information, mother tongue classes, extra-curricular activities, admin support, IT, organising sport, social and cultural activities; as well as fundraising. Our volunteers will help clients in the process of their integration into the society, through participation in a wide range of educational, sport, social and cultural activities. We would like the Afghan community to overcome barriers, disadvantages and obstacles in the process of their integration into the UK society. The volunteers will assist our community to access essential mainstream services and provisions. The Afghan community is disadvantaged and vulnerable due to a number of factors, including; language barriers, lack of knowledge of the systems and institutions, rights and entitlement, poor access to essential services, compounded by poor health and mental health issues as a result of trauma connected to their past experiences and the current situation in Afghanistan, unemployment, poor housing and financial hardship. The above factors can seriously impede their integration into the UK society. Volunteering will assist them to feel less isolated and to integrate within wider societal and cultural activities. The project will enhance their understanding and knowledge of the system, services, provisions, rights and entitlements.

Isolation, post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety and distress are understandably not uncommon in refugees. Our volunteers provide one-to-one support to people seeking help, and signpost the most vulnerable to further specialist help. Volunteering will offer opportunities for our community members to take a vital step towards paid jobs, learn new skills, share expertise and experiences, build friendship, overcome isolation and develop a feeling of self-worth through their contribution to the community.

Volunteers have been an integral part of the Association, providing invaluable services and delivering different activities and projects. In addition to a drop in and appointment system, volunteers have provided telephone advice and have dealt with e-mail queries from clients and referral agencies seeking information and advice.



Congratulations to Husna Ahmed, one of our volunteers, who was nominated for a Harrow's Heroes Young Volunteer Awards in recognition of her invaluable contribution to Volunteering in Harrow. We very much appreciate all the help given by our volunteers through 2014-2015 which has made such a difference to the lives of our community members. **Thank you**

Photo: Susan, one of our dedicated volunteers, providing advice to a client of the Association

Youth and Sport Activity

The Afghan youth are extremely vulnerable and experience isolation and exclusion from different aspects of social life. They are affected by the lack of support, resources (sport and leisure facilities) and support networks. The families are seriously concerned about the influence of radical elements on disaffected youth which can lead to radicalisation. Many young people have difficulties settling into educational institutions and consequently fail to do well at their studies. They, therefore, have limited employment opportunities and as a result may adopt a pessimistic outlook to life. In addition, young people are dealing with a range of issues such as lack of UK qualifications, lack of work experience, low self-esteem and confidence, little motivation or aspirations and a lack of positive role models. As a result it's more likely that they will feel isolated which can lead to alcohol and substance misuse and other negative tendencies such as gang culture. The Afghan community is seriously concerned about the current uncertainties with regards to the future of Afghanistan. They follow the events and developments with anxiety.

Football Team



Our volunteers are encouraging young people to participate in sport activities, as a great way of keeping healthy and fit physically, while making new friends and having fun. Football is one of the most popular sports amongst the Afghan community.

We have successfully facilitated a football tournament between nine Afghan football teams in London. The top two teams participated in an Afghan European League in Cologne, Germany, finishing at the top of the table (first and second place). Many congratulations to the winners. Last year three of our footballers have obtained professional coaching qualifications.

Sport activities will assist our young people to build up their health and self-esteem, learn the ideals of teamwork and tolerance, and be drawn away from the dangers of drugs and crime. In order to facilitate cross-cultural understanding, the Association was keen to have an inclusive approach, and draw people together, across boundaries to enjoy football. In addition, sport and football in particular, have provided an attractive distraction from negative influences of extremism and radical elements. Interacting with young people from mainstream and other communities have create a perfect platform for cross-cultural communication and acceptance of differences and the importance of universal values of respect and tolerance. Involving people from different backgrounds in shared activities will break down barriers and will promote community cohesion.

Taekwondo Project

John Lyon's Charity's funding has enabled the Afghan Association to establish a Taekwondo Club in Harrow aimed at Afghan teenagers and young adults. The Taekwondo club is one of the most successful projects in Harrow, providing excellent opportunities for 50 young people to keep fit and healthy, overcome isolation by making new friends and having fun. Considering the progress made in a very short space of time, the Taekwondo Club is a story of success, exceeding all expectations. In order to showcase our participants' skills, we took part in a competition in 2014 in Kiev, Ukraine. The Kiev event has provided a perfect opportunity for our young athletes to shine. Our club members have demonstrated great sportsmanship, winning both medals and praises from the audience and participants. The Club continue with their training, hoping to participate in the next round of competitions in the UK or possibly Europe. As a quality assurance measure, the Taekwondo Club is affiliated to the British Taekwondo Association. We have been fortunate in attracting a pool of dedicated and hard-working volunteers including professional trainers and coaches, willing to assist our Club. In addition to the benefit of keeping fit physically, the Taekwondo classes have improved the learning performance of children and young people, and have encouraged school attendance and a desire to succeed academically. As outlined as part of the beneficiaries' feedback, the Taekwondo classes have played a major part in helping young people to build their confidence and self-esteem, overcome behavioural issues, and acquire life skills, in particular those who have been disenchanted with or disengaged from school. It has highlighted the importance of education and the danger of involvement in criminal activities.

Please read project participants and their families' testimonials at the end of the report.

Participants' feedback and Testimonials

“Taekwondo classes have given a massive boost to my confidence” Irfan

“I am able to channel my energy into such a positive outlet” Mohammad

“The taekwondo lessons reinforce a sense of discipline” Daniel

“Taekwondo helps my child to focus on his school studies” Basir

“My child’s confidence has increased drastically” Najib

“My child is very happy with the opportunity to socialise and interact with his peers” Wali

“We feel that the Taekwondo club has taught our son respect and self-discipline. It has definitely helped him to become more of a positive person”. Comment from one of the parents.

Parent Mentoring Project and the Afghan Association has started to work very closely together. I have found them very willing, flexible and attentive. Together, we have undertaken work with a vulnerable single Afghan mother of two, who speaks Pashtoo and no English. The Afghan Association has provided drop-in sessions for this client: to use their interpreting skills whilst assisting with constructing letters, making telephone calls, relaying messages and explaining choices & options to this client. This service has been invaluable; had it not been for this association, the parent mentoring project would have found it impossible to assist this lady due to the language barrier.

The mentoring project has started to work with another Afghan mother of three, whose husband died whilst she was in the last stages of her third pregnancy. We have started to work with this family in the last month. Aside from the obvious, this family have numerous difficulties. Primarily, we are concerned about the lack of day-to-day skills the mother has. Over the course of this bereavement, the family has become incredibly isolated; which our service hopes to address with the family. However, we will need the support of the Afghan Association to help bridge the language. Due to a recent service advertisement drive, we foresee more families from an Afghan background will present at our service. Therefore, I can anticipate our two agencies working in collaboration in the future and developing our best practice standards.

Sandy Newborn

Project Coordinator

Parent Mentoring Project, Action for Children



Figure 1 Women Group Activities, Figure 2 Mother Tongue Classes and extra-curricular activities



figure 3 Football Tournament



Figure 4 Women Group Activities



Figure 5 Taekwondo Classes

