Case Study: Interfaith Challenges

Interfaith Challenges are one-off, high impact group volunteer events, for 10 or more people from different faith backgrounds to come together and contribute to the local community or environment.

Building on our experience of organising one-off group volunteer events and learning from others, Interfaith Action developed Interfaith Challenges, a unique approach to introducing young people (aged 16-25) to volunteering in a multi-faith environment.

During the summer of 2009 Interfaith Action have run 4 Interfaith Challenges and trained 6 team leader volunteers to run their future challenge events.

The project is supported with funding from City Bridge Trust, Camden Volunteer Centre and the Interfaith Youth Core.

The approach is simple: recruit young people (aged 16-25) from different faith and cultural backgrounds to volunteer together for four hours with an hour for ‘reflective dialogue’ on the activity/project they completed. Through the informal meeting of group volunteering or challenges volunteers interact and meet people they might not otherwise do so.

In addition to this we have trained 6 volunteer team leaders to run our future Interfaith Challenges in pairs, increasing the capacity of the organisation to organise 3 times as many events, for increasing numbers of volunteers.

Challenges included moving soil and flattening land to make way for extended sports facilities at the Calthorpe Project (in King’s Cross); clearing overgrowth in Highgate Cemetery; and painting the fence boundary at Jenny Wood Nature Reserve (in Kilburn).
Over 50 new volunteers registered with the organisation expressing an interest in attending at least one of the interfaith Challenges in the summer.

Unfortunately, only 22 young people actually attended the four Interfaith Challenges. But collectively they completed over 150 hours of volunteering.

33% of volunteers had not volunteered in the past 12 months, and 46% of the volunteers had never participated in an inter-faith project before.

67% of volunteers agreed that the Interfaith Challenges increased their understanding of other religions. Others said they felt there needed to be more volunteers at each event for this to happen.

Volunteers were from Muslim (27%), Christian (18%), Hindu (14%) , Jewish (9%), Buddhist (9%) and Jain (5%) backgrounds.

Challenges

The biggest challenge we faced was getting volunteers to actually turn up. For all our Interfaith Challenges organised we have had over subscription, unfortunately on the day an average of only 10 volunteers turn up.

We have encouraged people by providing lunch; reimbursing travel expenses; phoning volunteers teh day before as a reminder and also to check they know wehere to go & when. We also always make sure to over- register for each activity.

Outcomes

• Increased opportunities for young people from different faith backgkrounds to volunteer together

• Increased interactio between young people form all faith & cultural bacygrounds

• Increased awareness and understanding amongst young people about other faith traditions