

FREE  
04

# Laissez Faire

**F**ashion

**A**rts

**C**ulture

**E**ntertainment

## FEATURING:

David Carter

- *world's best beautiful small hotel*

Jay Pinxie Turnbull

- *smokey eye*

Imi Seed

- *photography*

Yianni Constantine

- *the art of business*

Sasha Helim

- *illustration*

... and more

Make That Change

## TRUE VOLUNTEERING //

My name is Paolo Brand; I am 32 years old. I have spent many hours, days and nights enjoying Soho's infamous fare; its bohemian cafés, quirky pubs, funky bars and trans-continental restaurants. Soho would not be Soho without its architectural 'walk through the ages'; the colorful media; theatrical innovation; its pioneering stance for 'wacky culturalism' ... and, of course, the red lights!

I thought Soho had everything; however, now I realise something was missing.

Soho has the geographic area of approximately one square mile. Ironically, the 'Square Mile' in the City, where many of my friends ply their trade, has an altogether different vibe. Pin-striped suits and the relentless pursuit of money and self-centralism are a far cry from my artistic DNA, which thrives on a healthy work/life balance.

Our Soho 'Square Mile' has evolved to become a unique balance of industry, commerce, culture and entertainment... and now, its own innovative brand of charity, which fits squarely into the Soho story.

True Volunteer Foundation moved into Poland Street last year. This educational charity gives me a chance to volunteer on my own terms. On some days after work I meander down to their offices and work in the Marketing and PR team for a few hours.

I don't get paid and cannot claim back expenses. The same goes for everyone at the charity -- all 108 of us! This principle is termed Pay to Work.

It's pretty liberating really; I get the chance to unleash my creativity, knowing what I put in benefits only the people who really need to be helped: that is the 110,000 underprivileged people in the UK and 27 other countries worldwide who need an empowering hand. The office is full of people of all shapes, sizes and backgrounds. It has a real buzz, a real vibe. They even have full-time staff; some are retired; there are numerous European gap-year students; some unemployed; a few travellers; and, I have even met the odd frustrated actor. The arty types like video editors, graphic designers and the Events team sit in one corner; you have IT playing with their gadgets in another; fundraisers beavering away with their corporate counterparts, while project managers are yelling away on Skype to different corners of the world striving to keep their projects on time and within budget. There seems to be a role for everyone to get involved and contribute; numerous positions can be done from home leveraging an internet based Extranet which connects various TVF stakeholders.

The office has broadband, desks, computers, printers and telephones. It is by chance that everything matches as nothing was bought; everything came as a result of a donation. When the team first moved in, 8 True Volunteers (as we are known) had to carry everything up four flights of stairs. The same 8 people chipped in to buy paint and spent their weekend glossing the office. One member of this team was James, from Reddin-Clancy, the property consultancy that organised the property rent-free from Henderson Global Investors.

James told me how this was different to anything he had seen before: "The charity just has this positive energy where everyone gives up their time to help others. While I was representing them I realised the sacrifices people were making to do their bit; people taking days off to attend meetings and so on. I just felt like making a simple contribution and that was painting a few walls".



True Volunteer Foundation



On entering the building you are greeted by the famous quote by Margaret Mead, the American anthropologist that reads: "A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".

The TVF history is testament to that. The Charity was founded in 2004 by a guy called Michael Padmanathan. For the first 5 years it was run virtually from peoples' homes. True Volunteers

were undertaking a 'Social Career' alongside their day jobs to make the model work.... and into their seventh year they still are! It gained so much traction that it was time to put down roots, and luckily Soho mirrored its ambition.

Last year I met a True Volunteer who said she gave up watching soaps so she could fit True Volunteering

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into her hectic London schedule. Others cut down on the Soho nightlife. I am not sure I could go that far!

Ironically, TVF goes to the City's Square Mile for most of its project funding. The multinationals need to have structured philanthropy programmes and TVF ensures every penny of each pound donated makes its way to the end beneficiary. These companies get the maximum impact from their charitable grants and can outsource the whole charitable-giving process to a professional partner. TVF do not charge for this service. Unsurprisingly, this charity has won awards and media acclaim for its approach.

Soho should be proud to house such creativity. To celebrate, a number of organisations are coming together to hold a summer party in June, so watch this space. As for me, as you can see I have just finished my volunteering assignment and my good deed for the day!

To get involved please visit [www.truevolunteer.org](http://www.truevolunteer.org) or [www.paytowork.org](http://www.paytowork.org) or call 0203 468 7671.



Paolo Brand