



True Volunteer Foundation

Mentoring – real life - do a lot of things I could not normally

My name is Hekmat Momtaz but most people know me as Kim. I study international business in Loughborough University. I transferred from my University in Egypt seeking a better education. Doing a placement is a compulsory part of my course. When I started looking for a placement I thought it would be easy to find but as the months went by I started realising how hard it is to find a placement. I am not sure if it is because of the recession but it seems this is an area companies are not focusing on; even if you ask for a minimal salary.

My ambitions about my placement year were to get UK work experience and also to expand on my skills and get a feel of all the areas I might want to work in, in the future. There were many tools helping me to look for a placement and one of those was a website called Gumtree, and that is where I found True Volunteer Foundation (TVF).

Personally I love charity work and I have done a lot in my life time. When I looked on their websites and I started reading about them I was very intrigued to know more, especially when I read about their 'Pay to Work' principle. Also, knowing that they have a different approach than most charities do. TVF link three parties together: corporate sector, charity partners and true volunteer, and basically what they do is try to satisfy the needs of all three sectors.

Therefore I thought that I would give it a shot and send them an email and see if they reply. A couple of days later I get an email from Michael Padmanathan the trustee saying that he wanted to meet me to discuss me joining TVF. Everyone around me did not think it was a good idea because it was not a paid job. When I met Michael and he talked to me about TVF and everything they do, I was extremely impressed and I saw myself being part of this unique Foundation. I had made up my mind then about joining TVF but I said that I want to meet the team first before making any decisions. Therefore I went to their Open Day and I met the team, at this point the decision was made. The team were amazing, you could clearly see that they believed in empowerment, they had a very enthusiastic, passionate aura to them. There were people from all walks of life, students, people who owned businesses and a lot more. You could feel the positive energy and I wanted to be a part of that.

I worked sometimes from home and others from our offices in Oxford Circus but I have to admit without my BlackBerry, Skype and all new technology it would have been a lot harder to work at TVF. Volunteering for TVF has been amazing, an experience I am glad I had. I am getting everything I expected out of my placement year and more. I have worked and explored so many areas and it helped in knowing what I love to do and what I am not so keen on working on. Working with TVF has helped me put myself out of my comfort zone in order to grow and enhance my skills. For example one of the projects I worked on was the Forum3 exhibition, where charities go and try to recruit volunteers. It took a large amount of hard work and numerous hours by all volunteers to achieve what we achieved. Our stand cost around 10,200 pounds not including working hours and we did not pay a penny, due to our pay to work principle. We were able to do it and win the people's choice award by the help and support of all of



our sponsors and with the hard work of all the true volunteers. During the exhibition I remember one of our Sponsors saying he wished he could get his staff to work with as much passion and commitment. Also, having on-the-job training was a big challenge that I was glad to take on. In every open day Michael (trustee) does a main presentation to introduce TVF to our new volunteers. Part of the on the job training Michael asked me to present the main presentation and it was a challenge but I did it. Every day is a new adventure and a new experience.

I am now in the final few days of my placement, I have been taught and exposed to so many different things this year that I would have never as a student experienced anywhere else. When I reflect on my work in recent months I have to pinch myself. I have been opening up the New Offices in Soho and managing 10 people, organized a Victorian Dinner which Princess Alexandra attended, organizing a celebrity event. Moreover, I have met councilors, civil servants and politicians as part of a Government initiative to work with TVF. I have seen TVF go exponentially in the last 12 months. Only yesterday I was sent a report which Barness Newlove is sending to the Prime Minister and to amazement a photo of me volunteering was on the front cover.

Paul Warwick, TVF's Head of H.R. explained; "The value Kim will get back from True Volunteering will be tremendous. The experience alone will put her streets ahead when completing the final leg of her degree and entering the job market. The close mentoring Kim has received coupled with her desire to learn and take on more responsibility has made this another successful True Volunteering placement for all parties".

It is ironic that when the recession hit I was worried whether I would find a placement. Now I find I am at one of the few organizations which seems to be thriving in the current climate. The Comprehensive Spending Review has not affected the charity and it is continuing to recruit more True Volunteers as more unemployed, more migrant workers and more students are trying to gain some relevant and practical training. I am doing something which is worthwhile and the fact is gaining such experience makes me feel quite privileged especially as that I have learnt so much already!

Back to my books and Loughborough University in September!