

ACTIVE CITIZENS TOGETHER PROJECT NETWORK NEWSLETTER ONE: MAY 2016

Hello to all members of the Active Citizens Together Project Network. This is our first newsletter to keep you in contact with the project.

So far:

- We have run 6 workshops on ways for European citizens to be more active citizens here in the UK
- 63 people from across Europe have taken part in these workshops so far
- They have come from 14 different EU countries – **guess 10 of these countries correctly to win a prize! Details at the end of the newsletter.**

What are people saying about the project?

“They were really interested in the workshop. I discussed it with them afterwards, and they registered to vote after they’d been to the workshop. They find it good to know about their rights” (Angela Bitca – Teaching Assistant, Learning Matters & Respect Project, Volunteering Matters, Ipswich)

“It was a great pleasure to join such a rich session and thanks for organising and creating these good opportunities. I hope to stay in touch with you all and maybe see you at The Green Back Yard” (Agnese Lazzari, Peterborough workshop participant, January 2016)

“During our ESOL session we shared with the other participants the experience of the ACT workshop and we discussed current worries and also what we could do to make a change. It was a very interesting discussion. In the beginning, most participants said that they had no power to make a change. After a debate, they started to see small steps they could take to make a change happen.” (Lígia Macedo, Adviser GYROS & Participant Great Yarmouth Workshop, March 2016)

Our featured 'Active Citizen' for this edition of the newsletter is Michal Siewniak.

“I hope my journey, as well as many others, who inspire to empower various groups and individuals, will continue and never stop!”



I am from Poland. I came to the UK in 2005 and started doing community work at the end of 2007. The freedom of my parents in communist Poland was very limited. I remember very well times when I had to queue to get basic products and cooking ingredients. I remember rationing, and being taught Russian instead of English. Despite many difficulties, I had a lovely childhood!

I watched the collapse of the Berlin Wall but I would have never dreamed that Europe and Poland would change so much in such a relatively short period of time. From early years, I was very interested in community work. My journey as a “community activist” started in the secondary school.

Before I came to Britain, I lived in Croatia (where I met my wife and did Masters in History) and then Italy. When I first came to the UK, I had to find work, but shortly after this I realised that as many more Eastern European people were coming to the district, it would be great to establish a local network for the Polish community. One day, I saw an advert in the Roman Catholic Church newsletter about the BME (Black & Minority Ethnic) Community Network called Welwyn Hatfield Ethnic Minority Group, and had a strong feeling that it was an organisation that could support me to set up a local network like this, which was in many ways my dream and aspiration.

Our first meeting took place in November 2007. It was very well-attended by local people and support agencies. I passionately believe in what I do and I would like to encourage people to take up different opportunities that come their way. I believe that you have to “chase your dreams”, get involved in local activities and always be at the service of others.

I became keen to stand for local election as I felt this could provide me with another opportunity to make a real difference. I was elected as a Liberal Democrat councillor for the borough of Welwyn Hatfield in Hertfordshire in 2014, and served in this role until 2016. It was challenging, but most of the time it was so rewarding! Being able to represent your residents, listen to their concerns and to drive local change is something extraordinary which keeps me going!

During my time in the community and voluntary work as well as a local councillor, I have been able to run so many amazing initiatives which included trips to the Houses of Parliament in London and the European Parliament in Brussels, Hatfield Polish Day, Football and Volleyball Tournaments, Health events, ESOL classes and so much more.

The MOST important thing is that NONE of this would have taken place if it hadn't been for many fantastic people I have met. Most of them were keen and eager to welcome new migrants and they were, and still are a huge inspiration to me.

Summer workshops:

We will be running more workshops over the summer:

- ARKA Skills, Thetford - Thursday 23rd June
- Irish Forum, Luton – Friday 1st July
- Hatfield Fire Station – Thursday 7th July
- Holywell Community Centre, Watford – Monday 18th July

Anyone who would like to attend a workshop can register their place at:

<http://smp.eelga.gov.uk/>



Join the ACT mentoring programme

If you came to one of our workshops, we hope you will remember that we also have a mentoring programme. This is an opportunity for you to come forward to have support and advice from another European citizen in doing some community or voluntary work.



Councillor Sophie Meudec, is looking forward to becoming a mentor for the ACT project and as an EU migrant herself has lots of experience of becoming an active citizen in Ipswich. Sophie is a local councillor and is very active in her community.

Councillor Sophie Meudec
Ipswich Borough Council

Finally, if you would like to talk to us about the Active Citizens Together Project, please contact us.



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More information about the ACT project can be found at:

<http://smp.eelga.gov.uk/migrant-workers/act-project.aspx>

Can you guess 10 of the 14 countries our active citizen workshop participants have come from so far? If you think you can, and want to win a prize, please email your answers to: sue.hay@eelga.gov.uk or Rachel.heathcock@eelga.gov.uk by **Friday 10th June 2016**

Look out for our next newsletter in September!