

ACTIVE CITIZENS TOGETHER PROJECT NETWORK NEWSLETTER FOUR: MAY 2017



A HAPPY SPRINGTIME TO ALL OUR READERS.

Hello again to all members of the Active Citizens Together Project Network. We hope that you will feel inspired to get involved in the life of your local community this springtime and into the future.

Our featured 'Active Citizen' for this edition of the newsletter is Katerina Minalta



"I was born in Latvia in 1980. My mother moved there in 1970s from Russia, my father from Belarus. Many Russians after WWII migrated from the USSR to the Baltic republics that were part of the Soviet Union, to transform the largely agricultural economy to an industrial one. My Mum worked in construction and currently works for a plumbing company, my Father is a driver.

After school I completed my degree in Public Law and Economist Qualification in Entrepreneurship Management and served for Latvian public sector for 7 years with the State Revenue Service.

But life in Latvia didn't seem to me and my husband very promising, so we decided to move to the UK following friends who came one year earlier to Harlow, Essex.

I studied six months in Finnish university in 2003. Living in shared accommodation with other international students enhanced my cultural awareness and improved my English. This made it easier for me to move to the UK.

I, with my three years old son arrived to Harlow in March 2011 to join my husband who came in November 2010.

The next day we went to the children's centre and got lots of information about activities for kids, which was very beneficial and made it a smooth transition. Two days later we went to the Drop-In for international families provided by Integration Support Services (ISS). It was brilliant. I met other mums whose English was not the first language and got useful information how to settle in the UK about housing, employment and education. In October 2011 I started volunteering with ISS, helping

Latvian and Russian-speaking clients.

At that time ISS was involved in BBC 4 film production about Europeans' experiences in the UK. I, with other families and BBC4 visited many different places - Gulliver's Theme park, Colchester Zoo, Southend sea side and others. I was lucky to see many beautiful places and it helped me settle in the UK.

My second son was born in April 2012 and in 2014 we moved to Cambridge due to Cambridge Russian School, where my older son went every Saturday, and Cambridge Russian-Speaking Society that organises many events. I like to live in multicultural Cambridge where we have met so many different interesting people.

I met Eddie Stadnik, the Chief Executive of Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (CECF) at a volunteering fair in January 2015 and started to volunteer at the Forum in March 2015. I went to CECF because of their CHES Project (Cambridge Human Rights & Equality Support). And as I have experience working in integration support, Eddie asked me for assistance within Refugee Services, where I work as a volunteer.

Volunteering helps me to be more open-minded, to improve my English and interpersonal skills and provides me with additional trainings. I love to travel and see different cultures, and would like to become a British citizen one day."



What are people saying about the ACT Project?

Jose from Spain, now living in Cambridge, said (in his own words): "It was very helpfully to me and of course the good company, teachers and volunteer that we had. I think it was good how the workshop was, with the games, the role games, the activities and all the vocabulary. I learnt a few new phrasal verbs, vocabulary, how important is the voluntary work in England and how politics works there. After the workshop I started to look for any voluntary work around the town."

Wioleta from Luton said "I have shared what I learnt with the families I work with. I am sharing the correct information about voting especially when people can and can't vote. It is about working with all people in a community not just Polish."



Mentoring

We run a mentoring programme as part of the Active Citizens Together project, so that project participants can have some guidance and advice from a mentor (or buddy) in the community if they would like to. This diagram illustrates the mentoring process.

In January this year, we took three very inspiring women to court! But only for a mentoring visit – they did all arrive home safely later that day. The photo shows **Ela,**



Carla and Magda, talking on the magistrate’s ‘bench’ to Gladys Cummings, a Magistrate in the courts in St Albans, Hertfordshire. Gladys has been a Magistrate for 23 years. She told us that only around 9% of Magistrates are from minority ethnic groups, so she was pleased to meet with us, to encourage our three ‘mentees’ to apply. No formal qualifications are needed; childcare can be claimed for, as well as travel and subsistence, and training is provided. We certainly learned a lot about the justice system during our mentoring visit, and had the opportunity to sit in on three different trials.

Gladys said afterwards: “It was an absolute pleasure to meet you all and I am very happy that you all had such a good experience. It was wonderful to meet people who showed such an interest in, and wished perhaps to make their own contribution to the Magistracy, and to the community as a whole. I really enjoyed the morning myself and look forward to hearing from you in the future.”

Carla said “Thank you Gladys for the interesting day. I really enjoyed it and will think about becoming a magistrate in the near future”.



In April, **Tomasz** from Poland (on the right) took part in an ACT mentoring meeting with Erbie Murat (on the left) who runs the Volunteer Centre in Fenland. Tomasz wanted to find volunteering opportunities to fit around his work shift patterns and his family. He was particularly interested in I.T, having taught the subject in Poland.

Erbie showed Tomasz how to search for volunteering opportunities using the national 'Do-It.org' website where there are around 1.5 million volunteering opportunities. The photo shows Tomasz having a look at one of the advertisements he was particularly interested in, volunteering as a befriender, for people with learning disabilities with a local charity close to his home.

Erbie printed out the advertisement for the befriender role, signed and gave it to Tomasz as a form of referral to the charity as a way to introduce himself. Erbie also offered to have a follow-up meeting with Tomasz if required.

In April we also went with **Fatumata**, a Portuguese student who is learning English at City College, Peterborough (pictured right), to the Gladstone Park Community Centre in Peterborough to meet with Ferzana Kusair, Community Area Coordinator (pictured left).



Ferzana explained that there would be opportunities for both Fatumata and her friend, Miriene to take part in courses and volunteering at the centre. For example, the 'CommUNITY Meet & Eats' and other potential roles which are being prepared. She also talked about the availability of apprenticeships and training support.

Ferzana signed both Fatumata and Miriene up as volunteers at the mentoring meeting.

Volunteering can change your life – Paul Atkin talks to Sue Hay from the ACT Project



“I’m a Volunteering Adviser with Community Voluntary Service (CVS), Bedford.

My story begins at Kellingley Colliery in North Yorkshire, where I went to work straight from school. I had to get up at 4.00 in the morning, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. Everybody knew everybody and it was good pay, but difficult work.

In 1994 I was made redundant due to ill health, and had to have an operation on my spine. I couldn’t drive, I was in a lot of pain and had to claim benefits. My mental health suffered as a result of all this.

I eventually came to Bedford when I met my wife, and I now think of Bedford as home. When you go to Queen’s Park you can stand on a street corner and see the mosque; temple and church all at the same time – it’s great!

At about that time the NHS had a ‘Healthy Steps back to work’ programme, so I accessed that, and they suggested volunteering, so I made contact with CVS. But it took me about five attempts to make that phone call, I was so down, and had such low self-esteem with being out of work for eighteen years.

Anyway, I did start volunteering here seven years ago, doing two hours a week, setting up a database. Then one day, during one of the volunteer recruitment sessions, I started chatting to a young man who couldn’t even make eye contact with people. But I managed to find him a couple of things he could try. So that was a real boost for me.

Then I started volunteering with MIND and the Probation Service as well as with CVS, so my two hours volunteering a week turned into three days a week. I had a really good manager at CVS who told me that courses were available, and she sent me on one about how to be a better volunteer manager. Then a job became available and I applied. I had to do a powerpoint presentation, and I’d never done

one before, so that was very nerve-wracking, but I got the job and eventually became full-time.

It helped me interact with people. I picked up a lot of skills, and my first job was on the 'Healthy Steps' programme, so I'd come full circle!

Your language skills are really valuable to all sorts of local organisations, even if your English isn't 100% perfect. And I'm living proof that people can get employment through volunteering. Just contact your local volunteer centre, or search on the computer by typing in the search bar "Volunteering in", and then the name of your town.

You have so much right to be in this country and live freely, so do take every opportunity to make your mark. And if you're in Bedford, why not come in and speak to one of us on Thursdays from 10 - 1? We're at 43, Bromham Road, just along from Job Centre Plus.



Do you speak English? More than 200 European migrant citizens have now taken part in our ESOL sessions (English for Speakers of Other Languages) across the region, with tutors using materials prepared for them by the ACT Project team.

This group of students in Peterborough used the materials in many different ways, including interviewing each other in pairs, filling in UK voter registration forms and discussing a question posed by their Tutor "People believe that communities these days

are becoming less and less cohesive. Do you agree?" It was great preparation for their oral English exams.

Afterwards, the Tutor, Imogen Mason, said "It worked well – a fun, engaging lesson".



And after running a language class in Kings Lynn earlier this year, Tutor Julie Chaplin said: “We used the active citizenship project we did with you as a jumping off point for a volunteer project ... we will take around some migrants and British people to work on the projects as a team, building bridges and

friendships - and giving out time credits as a reward. So your project has had a measurable impact!”

COULD YOU BE AN INTERPRETER?



Elwira Down came to the UK from Poland twenty-five years ago, and has been volunteering for the Citizens Advice Bureau in Hatfield for the last 3 years. She has taken part in the ACT Project both as a workshop participant and mentor. Elwira is a qualified interpreter with a double diploma (Local Government Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) and English Law DPSI).

If you are happy to start small, a community interpreting qualification is fine. You can do it at certificate level 2, 3 or

4. It takes about 3-6 months part-time depending on the course provider, and costs about £600-750 if done face-to-face rather than online.

The Diploma in Public Service Interpreting course is difficult, and the pass rate is about 30% at first attempt. However, you’re unlikely to be accepted by any of the major interpreting providers and get a reasonable rate of pay if you don’t have DPSI and relevant experience.

More Information Updated information on various interpreting qualifications can be found here: <http://www.ciol.org.uk/qualifications>, <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/job-profiles/interpreter#career-path-and-progression>

Did your vote count?some thoughts from Michal Siewniak, an adviser to the 'Active Citizens Together' Project team



I voted in the local elections on 4th May. I must admit that I love doing it and I believe that far too often we take this 'privilege' for granted and we don't appreciate it enough. As a local activist and former councillor, now I wonder - Will I be able to vote again or stand in the local elections when the UK leaves the EU? Voting is the key element of a democratic process. It empowers people and allows them to have a say on local or national issues. I remember well, as a child growing up during communism, when my parents were not able to cast their vote. I hope that the new elected government will take into account the rights of EU citizens living in the UK. Being stripped of my 'voting rights' would be a MASSIVE blow to me. Many EU nationals in the UK, are keen not only to work in Britain, but also to shape the future of this country by being part of the political process.

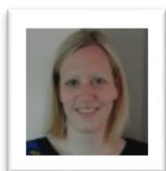


RUSHING FOR THE BREXIT?

You do not need to do anything as a result of Article 50 being triggered on 29th March this year. There will be no change to the rights and status of EU nationals living in the UK while the UK remains in the EU.

Under EU law you don't need a document to confirm your residence status in the UK. You will still need a document to prove your status if you want to [apply for British citizenship](#) or if you're an [extended family member](#) of an EU national.

If you're planning to apply for a document just to confirm your status, you can [sign up for email alerts](#) instead. More information about your [right to live in the UK](#) is available on GOV.UK.



Rachel and Sue hope you have enjoyed reading this newsletter. And look out for our final project newsletter in September.

