



True Volunteer Foundation

A Work Placement Opportunity with a Difference!

My name is Hekmat Momtaz but most people know me as Kim. I study international business at 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 to realise 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 for my placement year were to get UK work experience and also to expand on my skills and get a feel of all the areas in which I might want to work in the future. There were many tools helping me to look for a placement; 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 lifetime so far. When I looked on TVF's websites and I started reading about the charity I was very intrigued to know more, especially when I read about TVF's 'Pay to Work' principle; also knowing that it has a different approach than most charities. TVF links three parties together: the corporate sector, charity partners and True Volunteers, and basically what it does 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 would reply. A couple of days later I got an email from TVF's Human Resources team. Everyone around me did not think it was a good idea because it was not a paid job. When I met them they talked to me about TVF and everything it does, 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 wanted to meet the team first before making any decisions. So I went to their Open Day and I met the team; at this point the decision was made. The team was 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 many others. You could feel the positive energy and I wanted to be a part of that.

I worked sometimes from home and other times from TVF's 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 in 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 take 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 'advertise' 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, not including working hours, and we did not pay a penny out, due to our 'Pay to Work' principle. We were able to do it and win the People's Choice award due to the



help and support of all 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 as TVF. Also, having on-the-job training was a big challenge that I was glad to take on. At every Open Day a member of the TVF Management Team delivered a main presentation to introduce TVF to our new volunteers. Part of the on-the-job training H.R. asked me to do was to give a main presentation. 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 experienced anywhere else as a student. When I reflect on my work over recent months I have to pinch myself. I have been opening up TVF's new offices in Soho and managing ten people; organized a Victorian Dinner, which was attended by Princess Alexandra, and organizing a celebrity event. Moreover, I have met civil servants and politicians as part of a Government initiative working with TVF. I have seen TVF go forward exponentially in the last 12 months. Only yesterday I was sent a report which Baroness Newlove is sending to the Prime Minister, and to my 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 that seem to be thriving in the current climate. The Comprehensive Spending Review has not affected the charity and it is continuing to recruit greater numbers of True Volunteers as more unemployed, migrant workers and students are trying to gain some relevant and practical training. I am doing something which is worthwhile and the fact is that gaining such experience makes me feel quite privileged, especially as I have learnt so much already!

Back to my books and Loughborough University in September!