



URSULINE LINKS NEWSLETTER 2024

Despite the stagnation and difficulties faced by Ursuline Links as a result of Covid, the charity proved its readiness and ability to embrace a new chapter of engagement, accomplishments and joy.



In January 2023, 33 young people committed to volunteer for one week at either a children's 'Day Camp', a week-long summer project for under-privileged primary school children in Newham, or in the 'London Social Justice Projects'; a range of opportunities for young people to serve the poor, marginalised and vulnerable in the local community.

February 2023 focused on service, leadership and engagement. The volunteers spent a Saturday reflecting and working together to determine their prospective roles in the programme and considering their engagement with the community.

In June, the young volunteers spent a second Saturday together in discussion / workshops where they were invited to reflect on the concept of service and encouraged to consider their own capacity for effecting change in the world. The day concluded with the young people being 'commissioned' to go forth and serve.

In July, the Training weekend at Desanzano House further developed leadership skills and provided practical training and preparation for volunteering in a range of venues. Topics included Safeguarding, Health & Safety and Risk Assessment and Management.

The programme culminated in volunteering opportunities during July and August. Volunteers for the children's Day Camp had the option of being 'residential' for the duration of the project at Desanzano House, (the then HQ of Ursuline Links) whilst the students volunteering for the London Social Justice projects travelled to venues from home each day.

The Day Camp, at the end of July, was a great success! 22 young people spent the week boarding at Desanzano and travelled, each day, to the Day Camp which was based in a local school. 4 young adults who had previously been participants in the Ursuline Links programme whilst at school, returned to Ursuline Links to support projects and made significant contributions due to their experience and understanding of the Ursuline ethos. The support received from adult volunteers was also much appreciated and the success of the camp was certainly a result of the collegiate approach and mutual co-operation and commitment of all involved. The venue worked extremely well with plenty of outside space and a Dance Studio for Fun and Fitness activities. The programme was varied and included games, sports, arts & crafts, dance, music a team quiz and drama sessions. On Wednesday a day trip to Call of the Wild Zoo in Essex proved popular with the

children and volunteers. Each evening, following dinner, the group met to reflect on the day's events and record those reflections in a journal. All students were fully engaged in these evening sessions and their responses were mature and receptive.



Week commencing 7th August we embarked upon our second week of volunteering in a range of venues across Redbridge, Newham and Tower Hamlets, supported by an adult volunteer chaperone. Each day, a group of 5/6 students were placed in one of 3/4 venues and this afforded the young volunteers a wealth of different experiences in Food Banks, a Care Home, a community centre, a community café, ASL workshops for young adults with SEND and a children's project run by a Refugee Support Centre. Staff at every venue each day gave extremely positive feedback. They were unanimous in their praise for the students saying that they were committed, selfless in their willingness to work hard and cheerful and compassionate towards those they met.



The emphasis for both projects was on developing life skills and emotional intelligence, enhancing confidence and promoting well-being. The end beneficiaries were not only the young volunteers but those served by them.

During the London Social Justice projects, strong partnerships were developed with hosting centres and there was an excellent range of volunteering opportunities for the young people. The students learnt to be adaptable and spontaneous in our responses to unforeseen challenges and both volunteering projects were a resounding success! The students said that as a result of the programme, they felt more resilient, discerning and compassionate to those who suffer poverty, loneliness and injustice.

Since the end of these projects, Ursuline Links has been under review and whilst there were no projects for this academic year, the Trustees are pleased to announce that a full Ursuline Links programme will be announced in Autumn 2024!