PL84U Al-Suffa Food Bank Report

At PL84U Al-Suffa we have been striving to increase community cohesion through a variety of initiatives since 2013. We have held three events celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week in recent years.

Since our first World Interfaith Harmony Week event, we have strived to establish PL84U Al-Suffa as a space to promote mutual understanding. We achieve these aims by co-ordinating the efforts of a wide range of community activists from all faiths and none to provide a safe space to support marginalised communities.

Our volunteers come from a cross-section of society and engage in dialogue with one another whilst in the service of others. This is through volunteering at the foodbank for the homeless, elderly and those in need during food bank hours or delivering parcels to the most vulnerable.

Support and donations to the foodbank come from a wide range of sources, and our space has become a melting pot where all sections of society meet to work towards the common good, regardless of social, ethnic or religious background.

At PL84U Al-Suffa we endeavour to reimagine the identity of food banks, by providing aisles from which beneficiaries select the items they prefer, in order to restore dignity to all that access our service. This innovative approach eliminates wastage and is inspired by Islamic teachings regarding mindfulness of resources. Our methods have gained recognition, whereby we have now shared best practice and trained volunteers at four other local foodbanks.

Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to build these bridges through the foodbank, emphasising the values of, “love thy neighbour,” and, “love for your brother what you love for yourself.” Over the past year we have been able to acknowledge and provide the appropriate food for various religious and cultural festivals and celebrations: Chinese New Year, Mitzvah Day, Diwali, Eid, Ramadhan, Christmas, Easter and Shrove Tuesday. We also aim to accommodate those with specific dietary requirements as well as those who suffer from underlying health conditions.

Whilst accessing the food bank, people have been able to share experiences of the pandemics and lockdowns and express their individual needs and fears. This is a crucial element of our work, and forms an integral part of working towards a culture of peace in challenging times.

The pandemic has highlighted, that although faith leaders send the message of peace and harmony to congregants, we are still largely reliant on communities to build bridges through grassroots movements. This year has been an exceptional example of how there is a need for us to continue to work together. Our organisation acts as a lifeline that propagates and embodies essential values of social justice and cohesion.

We pride ourselves on not just acting as a foodbank, but also co-ordinate efforts to provide furniture, clothes, maternity support and baby necessities. We have further become a hub for public health safety, due to the conditions under the pandemic and have provided service users and volunteers with appropriate PPE, to reduce risk and ensure everyone’s safety.

Harmony in society is achieved when we each individually contribute a separate note that forms the melody as a whole, creating something together which could not be achieved alone. At PL84U Al-Suffa, the message of World Interfaith Harmony Week is put into action everyday, through the contributions of each individual, donors, distributors and volunteers alike.

During these difficult times, most of us have experienced the loss of loved ones and our lives have fundamentally changed. In the face of this, volunteers have given up not only their time but also have put their own safety at risk, as front-line staff. We enthusiastically return week after week to support our fellow human being’s needs and provide a life-saving service. Essentially, most of us are strengthened and inspired by our faiths to continue striving against the tide and support one another, regardless of our differences.

The interlinking threads to the fabric of our local community are brought together at PL84U Al-Suffa every week and woven into a safety blanket that protects the most vulnerable in society. This cooperation amongst such a vast array of people enhances mutual understanding and each week we take one step closer towards strengthening community cohesion.

PL84U AL-SUFFA continues to capture an audience of all faiths and beliefs who collectively want to contribute to the hardships our communities are facing. Together we are stronger and achieve more, and we as a charity embody the values of World Interfaith Harmony Week as our consistent efforts have demonstrated.

Saira Mir

CEO

PL84U AL-SUFFA