

Summer volunteer work at the Cardinal Hume Centre

Most people will probably know the Cardinal Hume Centre¹ as the homeless shelter which Notre Dame provides food and support to during the Christmas period. However, for 5 weeks throughout July and August the Family Services Programme at the centre plays host to a number of low income families, providing a safe and engaging place for them to come during the children's summer holidays. This year I was fortunate to have been able to volunteer with the programme throughout this 5 week period.

As stated the families are on a low income, so finding activities to keep the children busy during the long holiday becomes an overwhelming task, not only because they are on a low income but also because many of the families are not local to the London area. The mornings consisted of different arts and crafts activities with the children, all based around the theme fashion, however, it was clear the children had their own ideas about the theme and it soon it became everything and anything to do with Frozen and Tangled!

The afternoons were about getting the families to interact with one another and the mothers to engage in activities with their children. Similar to the mornings various arts and crafts and sports games were set up, but this time it was about team work and making sure everyone was involved. A key element to the programme is the lunch the centre provides for the all families who then sit together for the meal. This is to relieve the extra burden that could be caused to some families by having to buy food for lunch everyday when their children would normally get free school meals during the term time. In addition, this was a great opportunity for not only the families to get to know each other, but also for the volunteers to gain an insight into these families' lives. Alongside arts and crafts and family activities, outings were arranged which included a trip to Brighton, a Channel 4 screening of Pudsey, a Music Workshop by John Lewis and other more local outings to nearby parks in order to show the families what lies on their doorstep for them to do. To round it all off, the five weeks culminated in short performances of both Frozen and Tangled, where the girls and boys had made their own costumes and scenery. It was amazing to see the transformation of many of the families and their children from the beginning to the end. Many walked in on the first day very reserved and anxious about what lay ahead. However, they all left with confidence, strong friendships and the frozen songs definitely learnt! I thoroughly enjoyed my time whilst volunteering at the centre and made many new friends from around the world whilst there. It has truly made me appreciate all that I have and the inspirational work the centre carry out around the year. I would definitely recommend any girl at Notre Dame old enough to volunteer at the centre to do so, either in the summer like myself or on another holiday programme during Easter or Christmas.

Jenna Ridley
Notre Dame Cobham 6th Form

¹ The Cardinal Hume Centre in London is a registered charity, which enables people to gain the skills they need to overcome poverty and homelessness. The Centre gives homeless young people, families in need and local people the support they need to realise their full potential. Qualified personnel are available to advise on employment for jobseekers and money management skills, as well as housing, immigration advice and advocacy. It has hostel accommodation for homeless young people (16 – 21 year olds). It has learning services to help them improve their employment opportunities and inclusion in society. The Centre offers English language and literacy, IT training, work experience, early years learning and parenting classes. Every person who comes to the Centre has different needs and it offers a comprehensive response on one site, so that people can make informed choices about their future. The Centre welcomes people from all backgrounds in line with Cardinal Hume's founding ethos of offering sanctuary. *(Taken from the Cardinal Hume Centre website).*