

Chapter 9: BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES

Becoming a British Citizen or becoming settle in the UK brings opportunities but also responsibilities. This section looks at some of the responsibilities and gives information about some of the many ways in which people can help to make their communities a better place to live and work.

Cohesive communities

Although Britain is one of the world's most diverse societies, most people believe that there should be a set of shared values with which everyone can agree. Many of those values are mentioned in other parts of this book. There is a general principle that all people should respect the law and the rights of others. But in addition to obeying the law, people want to get on well with their neighbours and contribute to the well-being of all. The purpose of this book is to help new migrants who want to become settled in the UK or to become British Citizens to become more aware of the laws, customs and traditions here. Knowing about these things will make it easier to become a full and active citizen, but reading a book is no substitute for being part of society. By getting to know and understand your community, life will be better for everyone.

Surveys have given us some very interesting information about what makes people feel good or bad about the area they live in. Everyone should try to be a good neighbour. You can start to do this by introducing yourself to the people who live next to you. It is good to avoid making too much noise and to respect the privacy of your neighbours. One of the most common causes of complaint about neighbours is about leaving rubbish outside the house. So make sure you know what days you can put out your rubbish for it to be collected and that you know what arrangements there are in your area for recycling.

Good citizens

A special survey – the UK Citizenship Survey in 2005 – tells us a great deal about what people think about the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen. The things that people strongly felt should be the responsibilities of all people living in the UK were:

- To obey and respect the law
- To raise children properly
- To treat others with fairness and respect
- To behave responsibly
- To help and protect your family
- To respect and preserve the environment
- To behave morally and ethically
- To treat all races equally

- To work to provide for yourself
- To help others
- To vote.

Supporting the community

There are a number of positive ways in which you can be a good citizen. These include:

Jury service

Apart from getting the right to vote, people on the electoral register might be asked to serve on a jury (see page 90). Jurors are chosen at random from the electoral register. Anyone who is on the electoral register and is aged 18-70 can be asked to serve. The task of jurors is to decide the outcome of a criminal trial in the Crown Court. They will be among many people chosen each year for jury service and they will have an opportunity to be involved in the legal system. Jurors hear the more serious criminal cases such as theft, burglary, and drugs offences. Jurors also hear cases involving murder and rape, although these types of cases are less common.

Their task is to consider the evidence presented throughout the trial and then reach a verdict of 'guilty' or 'not guilty' based on that evidence.

Because jurors are randomly selected they represent all sections of society. They will be asked to take an unbiased approach to the case to ensure that a fair trial takes place. Being a juror is a very important role and is a chance to do something positive for the community. Some people are not qualified for jury service and others might be excused from doing it. More details can be found on the Department for Constitutional Affairs website, www.dca.gov.uk

Helping at schools

If you have children, there are many ways in which you can help at their schools. Often, parents can help in classrooms or during mealtimes by helping to supervise activities or helping children with their reading. Often you will find out about these opportunities by notices in the school or from notes your children bring home.

Many schools organise events to raise money for extra equipment or out of school activities. Activities might include book sales, toy sales, or bringing food to sell. You might have good ideas of your own for raising money. Sometimes events are organised by parent and staff associations (PSAs). These are also known as parent teacher associations (PTAs) and volunteering to help with events or joining the association is a way of doing something good for the school and also making new friends in your local community.

School governors

School governors are people from the school community who wish to make a positive contribution to children's education. They must be aged 18 or over at the date of their election or appointment. There is no upper age limit.

Governors are a large volunteer force and have an important part to play in raising school standards. They have three key roles of setting strategic direction, ensuring accountability and monitoring and evaluation school performance.

You can contact your local school to ask if they need a new governor. Your local education authority (LEA) will be able to help you find a school or advise on opportunities to become an LEA governor.

Political parties

Political parties always welcome new members, and joining a political party is an important way of demonstrating support for the views you hold and for the democratic process. Political parties are especially busy at election times, when their members work hard to persuade people to vote for their candidates. For instance by handing out leaflets in the street or by knocking on people's doors and asking for their support. Becoming a British Citizen allows you to stand for office as a local Councillor or as a Member of Parliament and so provides an opportunity for becoming even more involved in the political life of the UK.

Local Services

Many local service providers want to involve local people in decisions about the way in which they work. There are opportunities to serve as a Board member in Primary Care Trusts or Regional Development Agencies. Universities, local Learning and Skills Councils, housing associations and arts councils also advertise for people to serve as volunteers in their governing bodies. It is also possible to become a lay (non-police) representative on a police authority or even to apply to become a magistrate. You will often find advertisements for vacancies in your local newspaper or on local radio.

Volunteering

Volunteering is working for good causes without payment. There are many benefits from volunteering. It gives you a chance to meet new people and can help if you are bored at home. Some volunteer activities might help you by giving you a chance to practice your English or to give you work skills that will help you find a job or improve your CV. But many people volunteer simply because they want to do something to help other people.

Activities you can do as a volunteer include:

- helping the elderly
- youth work
- helping improve the environment
- working with the homeless

- mentoring
- work in health and hospitals
- working with animals.

Many charities want volunteers to help with their activities and to help them raise money. They often advertise in local newspapers and most charities have websites that will give you more information. If you want to volunteer you can get more information from www.do-it.org.uk which is a database of thousands of volunteering opportunities.

In recognition of the important role volunteers and the not-for-profit sector play in both society and the economy, the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) was set up in May 2006 to drive forward the Government's role in supporting a thriving voluntary sector. The third sector includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises and faith groups.

The OTS brings together the work of the former Active Communities Directorate (ACD), originally in the Home Office and the Social Enterprise Unit (SEnU), formerly in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) within the Cabinet Office. It will work closely with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the role of third sector organisations in communities and decision-making at a local and regional level. For more information, visit the Office of the Third Sector website at: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thirdsector

For younger people, Millenium Volunteers (MV) is a national programme aimed at people aged 16-24. As an MV you get a chance to help others by doing something you enjoy and develop your skills at the same time. There are schemes in most cities and towns. If you do 200 hours of volunteering, you get an Award of Excellence. For more information go to www.milleniumvolunteers.gov.uk

TimeBank is a national charity that seeks to inspire and connect people to share and give their time. TimeBank appeals to people who know that their time and skills are in demand – but just don't know what to do about it or where to start. TimeBank has worked in partnership with Government departments in finding volunteers to help with disadvantaged people. For example, TimeBank has worked with the Home Office to find volunteers to work with refugees as their mentors – to help them find jobs and to get more involved in society. For more information go to www.timebank.org.uk

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) is one of the largest organisations in the UK that promotes volunteering. It prides itself on pioneering new solutions and innovative ways to tackle society's needs and has over 40 years' experience in supporting partners and volunteers in activities that really make a difference to people's lives.

CSB's campaign to promote volunteering, CSV Make a Difference Day, is the UK's biggest day of direct volunteering in the community. CSV has over 10,000 senior volunteers who run activities and projects for CSV and recruit other senior volunteers. For more information go to www.csv.org.uk

The Prince's Trust was founded in 1976 by The Prince of Wales. Having completed his duty in the Royal Navy, he became dedicated to improving the lives of disadvantaged young people in the UK, and began the Trust to deliver on that commitment.

The Trust has become the UK's leading youth charity, offering a range of opportunities including training, personal development, support in starting up a business, mentoring and advice for young people aged 14-30.

The Trust has four key target groups:

- Unemployed young people
- Young people underachieving
- Young people leaving care
- Young offenders and ex-offenders.

All of these activities need volunteers. Many new or aspiring managers find that volunteering with a Prince's Trust group helps them with their own career as they have to tackle real management issues in a challenging environment. If you want to volunteer to help disadvantaged young people you can contact the Trust at www.princes-trust.org.uk

Charities

Britain has many thousands of active charities, working to improve the lives of people – and animals – in a wide variety of ways. Some of the organisations already mentioned in this chapter are charities, but you will hear about the work of many others. A few of the most important charities working in Britain are described below.

Comic Relief

Red Nose Day is a fundraising event that takes place every two years. Comic Relief, the organisation behind it, was set up by comedians and uses comedy and laughter to get serious messages across, while making sure that everyone who gets involved can have fun at the same time. Its objective is to raise money for deserving causes. Everything raised is distributed to well-known charities and is used for good work both in the UK and abroad.

Red Nose Day culminates in a night of comedy and moving documentary films on television. Everyone in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is encouraged to cast inhibitions aside, put on a Red Nose and do something a bit silly to raise money. It is an event that unites people in

trying to make a difference to the lives of thousands of individuals facing terrible injustice or living in extreme poverty. The website for more information is www.comicrelief.com

British Red Cross

The British Red Cross is a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, the world's largest humanitarian organisation. The movement champions individual and community values which encourage respect for other human beings and a willingness to work together to find solutions to community problems. The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement is committed to, and bound by, its Fundamental Principles. These are:

- Humanity
- Impartiality
- Neutrality
- Independence
- Voluntary service
- Unity
- Universality.

It has no religious affiliation and in the UK offers volunteering opportunities in many fields, including first aid, emergency response, a message and tracing service to try to reunite people who have been separated by conflict, and helping refugees.

Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Earth is one of the leading environmental charities in the UK and was founded in 1971. Further information can be obtained from its website at www.foe.org.uk Its interests are:

- Getting a grip on climate change.
- Bringing in laws to bring recycling to our doorstep.
- Warmer, more energy efficient homes.
- Protecting our countryside.
- Keeping genetically modified food off the menu.
- Persuading big companies to behave better in respect of the environment.

Greenpeace

Greenpeace (www.greenpeace.org.uk) is an international environmental organisation founded in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in 1971. It is known for its campaigns to stop atmospheric and underground nuclear testing as well as to bring an end to high seas whaling. In later years, the focus of the organisation turned to other environmental issues, including bottom trawling, global warming, ancient forest destruction, nuclear power and genetic engineering. Greenpeace has

national and regional offices in 41 countries worldwide, including the UK. It receives its income through the individual contributions of an estimated 2.8 million financial supporters, as well as from grants from charitable foundations, but does not accept funding from governments or corporations.

Greenpeace's official mission statement describes the organisation and its aims thus:

Greenpeace is an independent, campaigning organisation which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to force solutions for a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace's goal is to ensure the ability of the earth to nurture life in all its diversity.

Worldwide Fund for Nature

This charity used to be known as the World Wildlife Fund and was founded in 1961. WWF-UK works on both global and local environmental issues. Much of its work is in areas where the most critically endangered wildlife and the least protected habitats are found. It believes however that the origins of many environmental problems lie in developed countries, including for example, our consumption of natural resources.

WWF-UK not only directs some 70 per cent of its conservation expenditure towards its global programmes but also seeks to influence global environmental issues through responsible actions in the UK. Its website is at www.wwf.org.uk

Oxfam

This well-known charity has its origins during the Second World War, when Greece was occupied by the Nazis and suffered a serious famine. The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief was set up in 1942 in order to raise money and persuade the British government to intervene to help the victims of famine. After the war the Oxford Committee saw a continuing need and enlarged its objectives to include 'the relief of suffering in consequence of the war'. Activity then centred on the provision of food parcels and clothing to Europe. Today, Oxfam responds in emergencies to save lives; works with people to improve their lives and prospects through longer term development programmes; and campaigns on issues that they believe will achieve lasting change and an end to poverty. Its website is at www.oxfam.org.uk

There are many other charities and voluntary organisations that would appreciate you giving up some of your time or your skills. They all have different aims but they all have something in common – the wish to help others and to make our lives and our communities better.