

Volunteer Profile: Sammy Ismail



1. Hi Sammy, what subject do you study and what year are you in?

Hi! I'm studying Pharmacy and I am in my third year.

2. Where have you volunteered before?

I worked with a charity called Mencap.

3. Can you tell me a bit more about the charity?

Mencap is the UK's leading learning disability charity working to help people with learning disabilities and provide support for their families and carers. Mencap works collaboratively, fighting for equal rights, campaigning for greater opportunities, and challenging attitudes and prejudice. They offer a wide range of support worker roles.

4. How did you hear about Mencap?

I recently took a position with NCS this summer and they work with a wide range of charity partners, one of which was Mencap. It was at Harle house in Feltham.

5. How frequently did you volunteer and what were your main responsibilities?

I volunteered once a week for three weeks. My main role was in providing additional support to the service users by preparing equipment and helping to set up interactive group activities and games. My most important role however was just to spend time with the service users. On my last day I hosted afternoon tea for all the service users.

6. What were the requirements for this role?

Only that you must be enthusiastic, compassionate, caring, and always act in the service users' best interest.

7. What was the most challenging aspect of your experience?

The most challenging part of my volunteering experience was at the beginning when I was unsure of how I could make a good first impression on the service users. I was particularly nervous at this point because I had zero previous experience communicating to people with learning difficulties.

8. Describe one new skill you have developed from volunteering with Mencap.

I learnt how to communicate with people on varying ends of the spectrum of learning difficulties. With some of the service users you could just openly converse and with others you would communicate through art or visual cues, but the most simple thing I learnt was that it's not rude to politely ask a service user to repeat themselves if you don't understand something. I know it's an obvious statement but early in the volunteering experience it felt at times like I would be offending a service user if I didn't understand what they were trying to communicate to me.

9. What were your opinions about volunteering before this experience, and have these opinions changed?

Before entering this volunteering experience, I felt that it would be incredibly hard to work with the service users, but it was the complete opposite. Most of the time the service users just want you to listen and show interest.

If you've been inspired by Sammy's experience, you can find out more about volunteering with Mencap here: <http://studentsunionucl.org/whats-on/volunteering/summer-holidays-with-oxford-district-mencap>