



Case Study 70/100 Project - Kelly

Kelly, originally from England, discovered ICOS through Facebook. She initially engaged with the Organisation by attending workshops and trips, where she was introduced to ICOS's mission and values. She was particularly attracted to ICOS's efforts in promoting community well-being and health through activities that encourage engagement, socialising, and both emotional and physical enrichment. Kelly commented:

"ICOS harvest a feeling and sense of community, family and belonging; and they do this through arts and culture; volunteering opportunities; environmental activities; nature walks and talks; learning; wellbeing and self-improvement workshops; sports; day trips; cooking; public engagement; gardening and park maintenance; hands on experiences; community events; and above all - fun!"

Kelly also noted that the staff and fellow volunteers are incredibly welcoming and supportive. This positive environment inspired her to join the ICOS volunteering team:

"I just knew I wanted to be a part of this. And together, as a collective, we help to make our community a better place to live in - and we also help to give more opportunities to the people who live in it!"

When asked about her experience as a volunteer at Backhouse Park, Kelly shared:

"I think the main thing I most enjoy about volunteering at Backhouse Park is helping to put on the larger scale events that bring together all members of our community in a safe and welcoming space - regardless of age, race, language, ethnicity, gender, orientation, or social circumstances; everyone is welcome! ICOS events are all inclusive, no one gets left out, we work together for a common good - promoting social cohesion and encouraging people from all walks of life to get involved and enjoy the fun. Watching everyone interacting, engaging, chatting, laughing and forging friendships with one another is so uplifting, and as I like to put it 'good for the soul'. I find these positive interactions in Backhouse Park promote harmony, understanding, compassion and kindness. It's such a large, beautiful and serene, happy space, that we can both reach, and cater for, a larger volume of the public - changing perceptions and garnering a sense of togetherness and belonging.

Furthermore, it encourages people to get out, use, and enjoy, the stunning scenery and nature that we have on our very doorstep. It inspires people to take pride in our local area, to respect our environment, and it inspires members of the public to take better care of our surroundings. ICOS always promotes a greener, healthier, more sustainable lifestyle, and these events aid us in getting our message across and help make our community a better, stronger, and more positive place to live.



The stand out experiences and moments for me have again, taken place, on our larger events, such as our Family Fun Day; Refugee Day; Earth Day; and Children's Day. The turnout and volume of people attending have always been amazing - hundreds of people! As these events are always free to the public, those who are experiencing financial issues (which is the majority of Sunderland - we tend to have a higher than average population of poverty and social deprivation) and are economically challenged, can enjoy a full day of free, fun, action packed activities. Just knowing that ICOS, us volunteers, and indeed the generosity of funders, are contributing to alleviating these sorts of pressures on both individuals and families makes my heart feel full. Seeing the joy on people's faces (especially the children) at the amount of activities on offer at these events - arts and crafts (which people can create and take home free of charge) such as jewellery making, fairy forest terrariums, pebble painting, drawing, colouring, and kite making, to name but a few; games; circus skills; storytelling; bubble blowing; yoga; music; dancing; sports; characters (such as Spiderman); planting herbs, fruit, flowers and vegetables in pots to take home to nurture and grow; cultural food and picnics; and educational activities and stalls - is so unbelievably heartwarming. The things we can accomplish and achieve when we all work together never ceases to amaze me, and it makes me very proud to be an ICOS volunteer.

Moreover, these events help to educate the public on an array of different opportunities available to them - and through the many different stalls - they become aware of what is open to them, that they otherwise might not have known about. Likewise, being introduced to different organisations and opportunities gives people the confidence to get involved with them. So, yes, being a part of these experiences are most definitely the highlights of volunteering in Backhouse Park! However, saying that, the smaller events, such as gardening in the park; nature walks and talks; and bird identification workshops etc. are always fabulous too, as I get to know people on a more personal level; and I also get to take a breather, and reconnect with nature more strongly."

Volunteering at Backhouse Park significantly impacted Kelly's well-being. She observed improvements in her confidence, self-worth, and self-esteem. Kelly also highlighted the opportunity to learn about various cultures by engaging with volunteers from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Additionally, her organisational and communication skills improved through the volunteering experience. Kelly remarked:

"I worked independently using my initiative; and found just how invaluable teamwork is. I have learned to be more adaptable; I don't fear change as much as I used to; and I'm much more likely to embrace new experiences."

Kelly also emphasized how volunteering at Backhouse Park has profoundly influenced her views on environmental issues:



"I am more aware than ever of environmental and sustainability issues and I am now fully conscious of integrating eco-friendly choices and decisions into my lifestyle. I am also out a lot more in the fresh air and enjoying the beauty of nature."

Volunteering for the 70/100 project at Backhouse Park equipped Kelly with new skills, built her resilience, and motivated her to pursue more community work. Now that the project has ended, she shared her future plans with us:

"I feel more equipped to deal with life's major challenges and also the everyday trivialities. I'm looking forward to the future, and I'm excited about taking on new opportunities and experiences. Volunteering in Backhouse Park has been life changing for me, and the expansion in my wellbeing and personal growth has been a very welcome journey indeed!!"