

A Year of Service 2012



At the heart of the beliefs of faith communities are values such as compassion and justice. Through social programmes rooted in these values faith groups make an enormous contribution to our society – including through volunteering. Many thousands of men and women of faith regularly volunteer for projects that benefit those in need or improve our environment. For instance, during Advent (the season leading to Christmas) many Christians distribute gifts or volunteer in shelters for the homeless. Muslims raise money during Ramadan for those in poverty. Sikhs provide free meals for those in need. In workplaces, some staff faith networks lead volunteering efforts for good



A new initiative – A Year of Service – will help highlight and link up these projects during 2012. Every month, each of the nine major faith communities in turn will host a day, or days, of volunteering in communities and businesses across the country and will invite people of other faiths, and those without religious beliefs, to join in. Each community's day of service will be linked to one of its religious festivals, or to an existing volunteering day such as the Jewish-led 'Mitzvah Day' or the Hindu-led 'Sewa Day'. Each day will have a theme, such as visiting the elderly, feeding the hungry or planting trees



For example, a church might collect food to feed the hungry during Harvest Festival, and invite a local mosque or temple to join in. In a business, a Buddhist employee might arrange the clean-up of a local park. Projects will also give local faith groups an opportunity to mark the Diamond Jubilee together – service being a key theme of HM the Queen's long reign.

Service is not just a 'giving to'; it is a 'receiving from'. Every volunteer learns from and builds a relationship with those they serve, within and across communities. A Year of Service will help forge such friendships, increasing neighbourliness and strengthening bonds of community. Its aims are to increase volunteering, improve understanding and practical cooperation between people from different faiths and none, and promote good relationships between employees from different backgrounds.

The project reflects and involves, through a Reference Group, the major faith communities: Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian. The Inter Faith Network for the UK, Faith based Regeneration Network, Coexist Foundation, Church of England, Mitzvah Day and Business in the Community are offering advice through a Steering Group facilitated by the Government.

Everyone is invited to get involved! Email info@ayearofservice.org.uk or see www.ayearofservice.org.uk for project ideas, advice and much more.

