

Volunteering opened my eyes and enriched my university experience



Laura Price's work as Fundraiser and Student Liaison Co-ordinator for FoodCycle earned her a nomination for LSE's 2015 Volunteer of the Year award. FoodCycle LSE was also named LSE Voluntary Organisation of the Year at the 2015 LSE Volunteers Awards in the summer term. Organised by the LSE Volunteer Centre, the awards recognise the outstanding contribution of student volunteers. We've been catching up with some of the Department of Government students who were nominated for their work supporting charitable organisations. Laura (BSc in Government) tells us how volunteering enabled her to develop new skills and see how small grassroots projects can help tackle society's big problems.

What is Foodcycle UK?

In the UK, at least 400,000 tonnes of surplus food is thrown away at retail level each year, and much of this is perfectly edible. At the same time, around 4 million people are affected by food poverty and many in our communities are suffering from social isolation. That's where FoodCycle comes in. We collect surplus food from supermarkets and other retailers – mainly fresh fruit, vegetables, and bread – and turn these ingredients into tasty and nutritious meals which our guests can enjoy in a safe and welcoming environment. We also try and educate those around us about food waste and the resources that go into producing what's in their cupboards to encourage people to value their food. It's pretty eye-opening to think that if we stopped wasting food it would be the CO2 equivalent of taking 1 in 4 cars off the road!

What projects have you been involved in as volunteer?

Every year our hub has to raise enough funds to ensure the project is a success and is financially sustainable, so as Fundraising Coordinator I've been initiating and planning the team's fundraising through events, sponsored challenges and other community fundraising. In November, we promoted the Breadline Challenge (living off a food and drink budget of £2.10 a day for a week) to LSE students which was a huge success, raising over £600. We've also sung carols, sold Christmas Cards, catered for Oikos Society's Sustainability Conference, and FoodCycle Society held a fantastic Bake-Off in March. I have also been involved in promoting FoodCycle LSE on campus through assisting the society with events, awareness raising programmes, and by

maintaining our relationship with the Volunteer Centre and [Sustainable LSE](#), who have provided much support to our cause.

I am just one volunteer at one FoodCycle Hub, but nationally we all form a growing network of people intercepting as much food as we can and turning it into meals for those in need, all the while bringing people from all walks of life together. It's a fantastic model and our network is growing every day.

What have you learnt from volunteering and how have these skills contributed to your experiences at the LSE?

Volunteering as a hub leader has been a great learning curve and has really enriched my university experience. I have gained a variety of skills, from leadership to teamwork to time management, all of which have helped me to approach my studies and my other extra-curricular commitments much more effectively. I am definitely much better at organising things now – which is saying something for someone who is naturally very disorganised! I have also noticed my confidence has improved a great deal. When I started as a regular volunteer for FoodCycle I would never have seen myself being able to lead a team in a kitchen, yet now I really enjoy the responsibility and have found that I'm much more outgoing than I used to be. Being a hub leader has also made me realise the huge social benefits that come from being involved in group projects and has definitely encouraged me to get more involved with activities and societies on campus this year.

Has volunteering inspired any future plans after you finish your BSc?

Definitely – being a part of a community project has inspired me to look for work opportunities in this area as well as the NGO sector. It can be very frustrating studying about all these problems we see in the world and wondering what on earth we can do to tackle them. Volunteering has opened my eyes up to the sort of solutions that small-scale organisations can provide through on-the-ground, grassroots projects and being a part of one is immensely rewarding. Whatever happens, I will continue to fight against food waste where I can!

FoodCycle LSE combines volunteers, surplus food and spare kitchen space to create nutritious meals for people at risk from food poverty and social isolation.

Follow FoodCycle LSE on Twitter – [@FoodCycleLSE](#)

LSE Volunteer Centre is part of LSE Careers, [visit their website](#) to find out more about getting involved with volunteering at the LSE.

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