

The value of volunteering: “One of the highlights of university”



*Bella Mosslemans' work with charities including Restless development and Street Child, and as President of **LSESU Amnesty International Society**, saw her shortlisted for the LSE's 2015 Volunteer of the Year award. Organised by the **LSE Volunteer Centre**, the 2015 LSE Volunteers Awards were held in the summer term to recognise the outstanding contribution of student volunteers. Several Department of Government students were nominated for their work supporting charitable and non-governmental organisations, and we've been catching up with some of our nominees. Bella (BSc in Government) tells us about the benefits of volunteering and the opportunities and inspiration it provided at the LSE and beyond.*

What have been the benefits of being involved in the LSE volunteering community?

Volunteering at LSE has been a really amazing experience and without a doubt one of the highlights of university. It's not only been a really enjoyable past-time but has given me a sense of purpose outside my studies. Above all, it has allowed me to meet some really inspirational and amazing students who have never failed to make me smile – even when standing for hours in the pouring rain on Houghton Street.

What have you learnt from volunteering during your time at the LSE?

The volunteering that I've done both at LSE and outside it, has taught me that you should never stop trying and that hard work pays off. It's also made me realise that there are thousands of like-minded people out there trying to make the world a better place.

As campaigns officer, and then President of LSESU Amnesty International Society, I learnt how to organize and run a vast variety of campaigns, fundraisers and panel events with high-profile speakers. As Campaigns Officer I ran a campaign on Child Rights: this involved hosting a panel event, raising money for **War Child** and **Amnesty International** and running a petition to urge the Central African Republic to stop the use of Child Soldiers. This year, with the help of my amazing committee, we ran campaigns on Refugee and Asylum Seekers' rights, Women's rights, Activists' rights and also drew attention to the HK democracy movement.



Through these events and my experiences outside LSE, I have learnt that in a team, it is possible to make students, and indeed the general public, care about important human rights violations and development issues that they were not previously aware of.

What has been the impact of your voluntary work outside of the School?

In my first summer at LSE, I volunteered in Makeni, Sierra Leone for 3 months with **Restless Development**, an international youth-led NGO, and the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR). I worked on a variety of livelihood projects with a team of national and international volunteers. I can say with no doubt, that they were the best three months of my life and I hope to return to work there one day. Volunteering in Sierra Leone also inspired my academic studies. While there, I became very interested in the mining sector’s impact on development. This led me to write my Government GV390 dissertation on natural resource governance in Sierra Leone.



Bella with her team of international and national volunteers in Makeni, Sierra Leone

Since returning from Sierra Leone, I received funding from Restless Development’s campaigns fund (sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation) to run a campaign to stop British Mining companies’ exploitation of Sierra Leone – which I hope to continue after graduating.

While in Sierra Leone, I also helped out a charity called **Street Child**. When Ebola broke out, our Amnesty International society ran an Ebola crisis appeal in which we managed to raise over £750 in 3 days. This went towards Street Child’s work helping the thousands of children orphaned by the outbreak in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Last summer, I worked as a fundraising intern for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster-Munition Coalition (**ICBL-CMC**) – an international NGO working towards a world free of anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, where survivors can lead fulfilling lives. I also was involved in **Action Aid**’s Tax Justice campaign and worked with **Christian Aid**’s Climate justice campaign team. All these campaigns have had an impact on global and/or UK national policy. Tax evasion, for example, became an important topic of the general election campaign. We are continuing to put pressure on the Conservative party to sign a Tax Dodging Bill – something which would help David Cameron fulfil his pledge to raise £5 billion from tackling tax avoidance and evasion.

I was also a mentor at **IntoUniversity**, worked on the **Student Stop Aids Campaign** and am currently part of Restless Development’s Youth Strategy Team – helping them develop their global policy for the next 5 years.

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

Volunteering has confirmed my ambition to work in the development sector. After graduating from LSE this summer I hope to spend my life making as much of a positive difference as I can.

LSESU Amnesty International Society is part of a network of over one hundred **Amnesty** student groups standing up for human rights in universities across the UK.

Follow LSESU Amnesty on Twitter – **@LSEAmnesty**

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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