

Sam, volunteer

Sam is a henna artist from Balochistan. In her late thirties, she has two children of school age, and has been living in Calderdale for 2 years.

Sam has always loved art, beyond her own practice of mehndi. She first encountered Hebden Bridge Arts when she was living in Cornholme in 2023, in temporary accommodation, and being supported by Calder Community Cares, one of Hebden Bridge Arts' community partners through the Engaging Neighbourhoods project. She was awarded a free place on a weekend-long bird lantern making workshop in Hebden Bridge, being facilitated by withy artist Sue Walpole for Hebden Bridge Arts Open Space 70 project. The lantern she made was exhibited in July 2023 as part of the Arts Trail, which she visited with her family members.

Sam says that arriving at that first workshop was a bit scary, because everyone was unknown to her, and it was a different art medium for her, but she enjoyed the weekend, and had fun as well as learning new skills. She enjoyed Sue's teaching style, and the sessions were fun.

Since her arrival in Calderdale in August 2022 Sam, who is multi-lingual, has volunteered once or twice a week on reception at St Augustine's Centre in Halifax. St Augustine's supports refugees and asylum seekers, and the centre supported Sam and her family in various ways when they were seeking sanctuary. Now with refugee status and leave to remain, Sam gives back through her regular volunteering, being responsible for meeting and greeting people of all nationalities and answering the reception phone.

From her encounters with Hebden Bridge Arts in 2023 Sam knew the charity needed volunteers for our 2024 project 'The Man Who Planted Trees', and with encouragement from a friend she applied to be a creative workshop volunteer. She met with Lisa, the Volunteer Coordinator, to find out more and heard about an opportunity which was a great fit for her: volunteering with an art course run by Hebden Bridge Arts at St Augustine's Centre, where Sue Walpole was to be the creative-facilitator for the sessions. Sam decided to give it a go.

As a volunteer Sam helped participants, by registering them, translating in various languages, helping people complete evaluation forms (again using her language skills) and by organising and serving the refreshments each week. She also helped Hebden Bridge Arts by making a visual record of the sessions through photos, ensuring end of course forms were completed and reporting weekly attendance numbers. Sam also assisted artist Sue to load and unload her car of the bulky project materials, and to clear up the room after the sessions.

Sam was able to join in the creativity of the sessions, writing words and phrases out to go on the 3D tree artwork, in various languages to reflect what group members wanted to contribute to the collaborative piece. Of the workshop sessions making up the course Sam says, "I loved it – I didn't realise the time was going so fast in the group. The tree we all made was so beautiful." The group sessions were open to younger members of St Augustine's and Sam supported an Iranian girl of 11 and her 16 year old brother to make something alongside their mother.

Attending the play with the workshop participants and Sue made Sam very emotional. She says, "The play was very eye-opening, and made us realise what we are doing to the planet. It made me cry. The actors and singers were amazing and the kids I was with loved it. We also saw our fabulous tree in the foyer." Sam says as a result of volunteering with Hebden Bridge Arts she would volunteer with an arts organisation (including this one) again.