

BENGGALI VOLUNTEERS WIN QUEEN'S AWARD

Mitalee Youth Association plans to expand all over the UK

By Ali Ismail

A Luton-based Bangladeshi organisation working for the upliftment of youth has won the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

The Mitalee Youth Association started in 1984 to provide a healthy outlet for Bangladeshi children during the school holidays with a football team. From the very beginning it has been run by young people for young people. It aims to redress the disadvantages faced by young people from all backgrounds.

The charity runs a radio station called Diverse FM, football and theatre projects as well as a summer school and an international youth exchange programme.

Mitalee's senior administrator Mehbul Koyes said: "We are planning to expand all over the UK. At present we are renting offices but hope to have premises of our own."

He added that Mitalee's established International Youth Exchange Programmes plan visits to Bangladesh, Pakistan and India to tackle family problems, poverty and AIDS.



The Mitalee football team

He also pointed out that the charity is making every effort to reduce the number of forced marriages in the community and has used theatre to impart the message.

Mehbul will meet the Queen in July at Buckingham Palace to receive the Award on behalf of Mitalee. He said he hopes to shake Her Majesty's hand.

The Bangladeshi organisation is one of 110 from all over the UK to win the coveted award. A spokesperson for the Queen said she was pleased to see such a wide range of winners for this year's awards, which recognise volunteers throughout

the country who give so generously of their time and energy to help others.

Other awardees include the Colchester Rape Crisis Line, the Guernsey Society for the Physically Disabled, the Surrey Witness Service and the Indian Muslim Welfare Society.

The Queen created the Award on April 30, 2002 to mark her Golden Jubilee. Nominees for the Award are decided on the basis of the time devoted to helping others in the community, improving the quality of life and opportunities for them and providing an outstanding service.

Refugee Week to Kick off in Leeds

A multinational celebration of music, dance and street festivities will mark the fourth Leeds annual Refugee Week this June.

The week of activities opens on June 13 with a colourful street festival in the city centre and continue with events including Asian henna body decoration, Somali women's fashion, Zimbabwean dance and theatre, Kurdish artwork, Sudanese children's drama and exotic foods from around the world prepared by refugees.

The event is expected to mark the cultural and economic contribution by refugees to the city.

All events, including an international football tournament, will be free.

The celebrations are organised by the Leeds Refugee Week steering committee made up of the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network, Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium Asylum Team and the Swarthmore Education Centre in Leeds.

Co-ordinator Mette Wiggen, said: "This is an extremely important week. It is the one chance asylum seekers and refugees get to show local people how much they have to offer."

"It's also a celebration of those past generations who fled persecution and who sought sanctuary in Yorkshire and have since enriched our lives."

"We're looking forward to seeing the many refugee cultures and local communities coming together to share and contribute to the week."

For more information, visit www.refugee-week.org.uk