

VSO

18 youth volunteers, made up of 9 young people from the UK and 9 from Pakistan, took part in a 6 month Manchester-Pakistan Global Xchange. Volunteers completed 3month placements in community organisations in both Pakistan and Manchester, developing skills in leadership, cross-cultural dialogue, community participation and social action.

The experience of learning from each other, linking the two communities, and making connections between global issues and local action had a profound effect on the volunteers as active global citizens. After the exchange had finished, the Pakistani volunteers, with support from VSO and British Council, went on to develop two youth-led volunteering groups in a poor community of South Punjab and became the hub for a global youth network, setting up their own learning and peer mentoring organisation. With a focus on women and girls it has influenced policy on youth engagement and participation, and volunteering practice. Youth volunteers have also been involved in public health campaigns led by the Ministry of Health, and spoke at the climate change summit in Copenhagen, on the impact of climate change on the environment and people of Pakistan. They have gone on to initiate a partnership for peace link between India and Pakistan, to promote dialogue, friendship and peace, with over 200 members already signed up.

GX volunteers also helped mobilise young leaders of Sulatn Pur Hammar village in Multan to set up the Sahara Foundation, with more than 50 members. The foundation has paved a road in the village to ease mobility and raised money to install dustbins, increasing awareness of hygiene and cleanliness, and inspiring responsibility in young people to keep their village clean. The team also tackled a long-running issue of teacher absenteeism in the local girls primary schools. After an investigation with the District Education Officer and teachers, they found that a major barrier for teachers was lack of transport, forcing them to walk long distances to reach school. The young volunteers collected donations from all community members and arranged transport for teachers, until their advocacy with the DEO was successful. Teachers now regularly attend school and student enrolment has increased.

These powerful stories prove that as a result of global linking and exchange, these committed youth volunteers truly are inspiring community leaders and ambassadors in their own right, taking action for their community to tackle poverty and disadvantage head on.