

# DESIGNING A NEW PATH

How Volunteering Transformed Abel's\* Mental Health and Professional Outlook

[www.migrationpolicy.org.uk](http://www.migrationpolicy.org.uk)



## BACKGROUND

Abel, a 24-year-old software engineer and graphic designer from Ethiopia, is currently living in temporary accommodation provided by the Home Office in a hotel. Upon his arrival, Abel found himself in an environment where most residents spent their time idly, which he found deeply unsettling. The lack of engaging activities and a creative outlet led him to feel isolated and uncomfortable, affecting his mental health.

Having previously worked in a creative and stimulating environment, Abel struggled with the transition to life in a hotel. He felt alienated and disconnected, and the monotony of his surroundings began to take a toll on his well-being. He recognised that he needed to engage in productive activities to avoid falling into depression and to maintain his mental health.

Abel's primary concern was the lack of meaningful activities in the hotel, which left him feeling unproductive and anxious. He feared that prolonged inactivity would negatively impact his mental health and professional skills. Abel was eager to find a way to stay engaged in creative work and avoid the mental health challenges that many asylum seekers face in temporary accommodations.

## SOLUTION

As part of the outreach and engagement efforts, Abel was signposted to Birmingham Settlement, a charity organisation that supports disadvantaged communities. Birmingham Settlement accepted Abel's volunteer application, providing him with an opportunity to contribute his skills and stay mentally active.

At Birmingham Settlement, Abel began working with the team on their social media page and assisting with content writing. This volunteer role allowed him to apply his graphic design and software engineering skills in a meaningful way. It also gave him the chance to learn more about the UK work environment and office culture.

Through volunteering, Abel found a creative outlet and a sense of purpose. The opportunity to engage in professional tasks helped him regain confidence in his abilities and provided a structured routine, which was essential for his mental well-being.

## IMPACT

Abel's story demonstrates the transformative power of volunteering for asylum seekers living in temporary accommodations. His proactive approach to seeking volunteer opportunities allowed him to maintain his mental health, develop new skills, and integrate into his new community.

## AT A GLANCE

**ENGAGING IN VOLUNTEER WORK** can provide asylum seekers with a sense of purpose and help improve mental health.

**CHARITY ORGANISATIONS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE** in supporting asylum seekers in their integration journey.

**STRUCTURED ROUTINES** and professional engagement can prevent feelings of isolation and depression.

**LEARNING ABOUT UK WORKPLACE CULTURE** through volunteering can help asylum seekers prepare for future employment opportunities.

### AUTHOR: ASMA MALIK

Outreach and Community Engagement  
Coordinator

\*For privacy and data protection purposes, the name "Abel" is a pseudonym used to protect the individual's identity. All personal details have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality.