

MEAF, HOME OF ALBANIANS IN BIRMINGHAM

Albanian associations in England have served as catalysts of Albanian development and persistence for integration into British Society.

Precisely the achievements in this aspect are merits of the work of organisers and leaders of these associations, that have managed to organise and develop projects in support of Albanian migrants. One of the most successful Albanian associations in England is also Midlands Ethnic Albanian Foundation (MEAF).

During a conversation with the Chairman of MEAF, Mr. Dritan Dema after expressing his "great pleasure and privilege to write about the Midlands Ethnic Albanian Foundation" thanked the newspaper Albania for the opportunity and for the commitment to show as fully as possible the life and integration of all Albanians in Britain.

"Albania"- How was this association established?

MEAF is a charitable organisation registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales. During 1995-1996 in the city of Birmingham there lived only a few Albanians whom were very difficult to find.

On the 24th December 1997, on Christmas Eve, around 24 Albanians from Albania and Kosovo, after having travelled for many days with lots of suffering, having changed several lorries, arrived in Coventry, in the Midlands. They felt very isolated as they didn't have any relatives and they couldn't speak English. One year later, looking at the great need of the community to organise and after several preparatory meetings the idea came up of establishing an association to help and support all the new-comers to the Midlands.

On 8th March 1998 in the city of Birmingham, with delegates from Coventry, Birmingham, Leicester as well as invited guests of honour from the Albanian Community in London, we formed Ethnic Albanian Association. Dozens of Albanians have helped this association by giving their time, their efforts and worked hard in order to have a dignified community as active as possible in order to help our compatriots.

"Albania" - How did you manage to achieve this success?



During the first months of 1999, The Archdeacon of Aston, Venerable John Barton made contacts with our Association and expressed his great desire to do everything possible to assist Albanian community in Birmingham and further. We informed Ven. Barton with the difficulties that our Association was facing and expressed our need to have a place where we could gather to assist each-other. After a few days Ven. Barton contacted me and said that he had thought of establishing a wider cooperative group with professionals as well as honourable local people of Christian and Muslim religions. This would support the Albanian community living in Midlands and those waiting to be evacuated from the refugee camps in Macedonia and Albania to Birmingham. The local host community was extraordinarily willing to help in any way. During an appeal broadcasted live on a local radio station, Ven. Barton pledged his authority that this help was necessary and pleaded to everyone to financially support our cause and form MEAF.

Within a month we reached our fundraising targets which enabled us to open the first Albanian office in support of the community. In 2000 Midlands Ethnic Albanian Foundation became officially recognised as a Registered Charity.

One year later the Ethnic Albanian Association created by Albanians and MEAF by the majority of host local people merged together in one. On behalf of MEAF and Albanian community in the Midlands I would like to thank all those Albanian compatriots and British benevolent from all around the United Kingdom for the irreplaceable support they have given in taking MEAF forward in serving all the Albanians.

After a joint-venture, and proper coordination, the MEAF Board Of Trustees, in January 2001 successfully managed to employ Mr. Xhemal Dragoshi as Project Worker for a period of 15-months. The Board Of Trustees, after full analyses based on community needs, managed to successfully plan a three-year development project. Since September 2003 MEAF has employed (full-time) Mr. Ermal Deliu as Community Development Worker. This three-year project is funded by Comic Relief. MEAF is very grateful to the funders who gave us this development opportunity. During these two years, the Community Development Worker together with volunteers have worked for all

compatriots who have approached the MEAF office for advice and information as well as helping them with integration into the local life.

The actual Board Of Trustees consists of:

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|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1) Anila Edge | Treasurer |
| 2) Antonio Bajraktari | Trustee |
| 3) Arlinda Ballçaj | Trustee |
| 4) Diana Syziu | Secretary |
| 5) Dritan Dema | Chairman |
| 6) Gjergji Shyti | Trustee |
| 7) Gjon Gjellaj | Trustee |
| 8) Romeo Bertini | Manager |

"Albania"- What are some of MEAF's future plans?

LEARNING ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

On a voluntarily basis the Albanian teachers Deshire Mara and Albana Daupaj did a great job during a pilot project in teaching Albanian in Birmingham. During this year MEAF want and have on its plans to develop in Birmingham and further the learning of Albanian language. At the same time we want this year to be more engaged in participation and facilitation of Albanian women and girls with

MEAF's activities not only as participants but by being in the centre of activity organising. Mr Ermal Deliu, The Community Development

Worker and the Board Of Trustees welcome any initiative and suggestions that comes to help with the development as well as taking forward the Albanian community in Midlands and further afield.

28 NOVEMBER, FLAG'S DAY

It has now become a tradition that in Birmingham, the UK, Albanian and British community come together and celebrate this very significant day for all of us. This year, MEAF is working towards organising a social event for celebrating together this significant day. This year we would like to invite a local Birmingham MP of as well as other dignitaries from the Birmingham City Council who have helped us towards our integration.

RADIO STATION AND WEBSITE IN ALBANIAN

By working together with other organisations over the next year, we hope to open a radio station, which would broadcast in Albanian during certain times and days. At the same time we will work towards creation and opening of a website from where we would inform everybody of our activities and achievements of the Albanian community in the Midlands.

PROJEKTS FOR ELDERLY



MEAF want to work more in support of the needs and desires of the elderly who may feel lonely and find it is more difficult to integrate into the community they live. We would like to hear from you, to do as much as we can to assist you with fulfilling your needs.

SPORTS ACTIVITIES

The Friends of Birmingham team participated in the Unity Cup Football Tournament, organised by Kick It Out from 15th-17th July 2005 in Leeds. 20 teams from all the United Kingdom participated in this tournament and our team achieved the runners-up, bringing the game to penalties which finished in another team's favour.

MEAF is working towards organising an educational activity during the National Action Week Against Racism In Football, from 13th - 25th October 2005. We would like to invite a Birmingham City football player to take part in this very important event. For more information please contact us in mid September on MEAF's office number.

We call on all the sympathisers to contact us with suggestions and support so we all together can build a secure future. We would like the Albanian community in Midlands to continue being a perfect example of integration and achievements of Albanians in Britain in all scopes of life, education, employment, business and integration.

In his message to Albanians in the United Kingdom, the MEAF Chairman, Mr. Dritan Dema invites all readers and all Albanians to support and to unite with each other, presenting themselves with dignity as honoured citizens of this country, where we are working and contributing with sweat and knowledge to the development and successful progress of Great Britain. As such, we will continue and always be proud being British Albanians.

"ALBANIA"; wishing SUCCESS

Interviewer P.Kuçana

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