

MEETING 19/06/2014

Ref: 12041

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Reducing Poverty

Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team (AMURT) UK

Adv: Joan Millbank

Base: Hackney

Benefit: Hackney

Amount requested: £79,237

Amount recommended: £60,000

Purpose of grant request: Give people suffering from food poverty the shopping, food/herb growing and cookery skills to eat a healthy diet that is good for people and the planet.

Background

AMURT UK is a small anti-poverty charity. It was set up in 1986 as an independent arm of the international relief charity AMURT. Its main activity is Made in Hackney, which involves food growing and running an educational eco-kitchen to deliver cookery courses to community-based organisations which support low-income, marginalised and /or vulnerable people. Over 700 people have benefited to date. It also runs community classes open to anyone interested in learning about food and eating healthily. Further, it provides structured volunteering and one day per week, 3 month apprenticeship opportunities, which add benefit to the community work and equip volunteers with employability skills and experience.

The charity runs a weekly Homeless Feeding Program using food collected from Spitalfields market, which is then cooked in the kitchen by volunteers and distributed in central London. Up to 400 free meals are distributed each week.

The charity is housed in the basement of Food For All, a not-for-profit health food store, which owns the building and provides the accommodation free-of-charge. The shop also pays the business rates, commercial refuse collection and the broadband connection for AMURT UK.

Funding History

None.

Current Application

AMURT UK is seeking your support to continue to provide its weekly Cooking for Life Classes. Initially funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the charity will continue to offer food growing and cooking classes to low-income, marginalised and /or vulnerable people of all ages. The charity currently works through 16 local organisations to identify and support participants to attend its rolling 6 session courses. Partners include Family Action which works with families in financial crisis; Asumjwe, a Black and Minority Ethnic women's mental health project; Alone in London, supporting young people moving from care into independent living and Lee House, which offers support to adults with learning disabilities. If funded, it will extend its outreach and build links to local food banks, job centres and Hackney Migrant Centre, which supports refugees and asylum seekers.

Each 6 week course introduces participants to simple food growing (cut and come again container-grown salads, herb pots), and the skills of eating well on a low budget including economical shopping tips, cooking with cheaper ingredients and

plant-based sources of protein. Participants prepare and share dishes in the kitchen and then take home recipe cards and weekly shopping budgets to help consolidate their learning. Some participants stay involved as volunteers helping to run courses for others and improving their own employability skills.

Hackney is one of the poorer boroughs in London with all but one ward in the top 10% most deprived wards nationally. On-going need and benefit is demonstrated through impressive feedback from past participants and partner organisations. The Big Lottery Fund monitoring officer has also provided strong feedback. Over the next three years 25 x 6 week courses will directly benefit 200 low income and vulnerable young people and adults each year (total 600). Current project monitoring and evaluation, using self-assessment and group discussion, demonstrates the potential to further reduce the number of Hackney residents experiencing food poverty.

Since the original application was submitted, the organisation has provided a revised breakdown of the funding required and this is provided at Appendix A. However, this does not alter the total amount requested.

Financial Observations

Independently examined accounts for the year ended 31st October 2013 show income of £86,714 and a surplus of £20,955 (24.2% of turnover), comprising £15,647 on unrestricted funds and £5,308 on restricted funds.

The charity's reserve policy aims to hold free unrestricted reserves of £5,000, which is equivalent to 3 weeks' worth of current year expenditure. However, this policy is currently under review. At 31st October 2013 free unrestricted reserves stood at £27,701 equating to 3.8 months' worth of current year expenditure.

The budget for the current year to 31st October 2014 shows a breakeven position on expected income of £86,914, of which £51,873 (59.7%) had been confirmed at 21st March 2014. The balance of £35,634 (40.2%) relates to this grant application for £25,634 and other grant applications amounting to £10,000 towards the Feeding Project.

Officer's Appraisal

Eating healthily and cheaply is a challenge for many living in poverty. This project provides a very practical way of building knowledge and skills, and a means of reducing the number of people experiencing food poverty. It also brings environmental benefits. The original request includes the cost of providing Sunday cookery classes, which are open to all and as such fall outside your grant criteria. Other project costs also do not directly address your Food Poverty programme outcomes e.g. apprenticeships. It is therefore proposed that a grant is made towards the cost of providing Cooking for Life Classes only. The applicant is aware of this recommendation.

Recommendation

£60,000 over three years (£20,000; £20,000; £20,000) towards the direct running costs of Cooking for Life Classes, including the cookery teacher.