

## Abida Iqbal – MBE and Queens special award.



My name is Abida Iqbal, MBE and I am the founder and chairperson of Redbridge Disabled Women's Welfare Association based in London.

I must first introduce my group to you so as to give you a background of the work I have been doing.

I founded this group in 1993, from my house. I used to pick up a handful of housebound ladies, mostly disabled and elderly, and bring them to my house.

In the next few years, we moved the group, as it grew too big for my home to a center and named it the Muslim Disabled Association. Despite the name, we welcomed everyone from different faiths.

Ten years later, two members of our group in their 50's and 60's committed suicide just 2 months apart by jumping in front of a train, one at Seven Kings Station and the other at Ilford Train Station .

They had been suffering from depression and it made me realize that I had to focus on mental health within the group.

The group has since been growing to the point that we register a new member almost weekly. And we try our best to raise money for international disasters be it earthquakes , floods, or tsunami as well as supporting our local Night Shelter( for the homeless) for the last 17 years as well as delivering food for the Muslim homeless during Ramadan, Newbridge School for special needs children for 7 years.

After the death of my husband in a hospice where he spent the last days of his life, I decided to offer my support to Havering Hospice too for providing such good care to my dear husband.

## Abida Iqbal – MBE and Queens special award.

We also have been hosting a multi-faith event every year in December so that it coincides with Christmas, Eid, Guru Nanak birthday, Hanukkah and Diwali for 15 years .It is to promote integration and tolerance to all faiths.

I then received a MBE from the Queen's awards for voluntary service in 2010.



All this while I was working for the NHS for 28 years.

Our group caters for all kind of ladies, with mental health issues, depression, Alzheimer, dementia and young girls with learning disabilities. We offer them services like arts and crafts, outings, talks of awareness about healthy eating, mental problems, domestic violence, police safety, etc.

We also have a police community officer coming regularly to check on our ladies and answer any questions they might have.

After the London bombings of 7/7, I decided to get involved to spread the message of love, peace and by arranging a peace rally and taking a bus load of councilor, the Mayor of the London Borough of Redbridge and members of my group across different London boroughs and distributed 5000 leaflets. We made history that day and the event was broadcasted on BBC1 during the day.

A few months later I organized tree planting in the boroughs of Redbridge, Barking, Havering, Plaistow and Waltham Forest with plaques reading “love, peace, unity” to get the younger generation involved in this too so

I also wanted to spread the same message to the different worship places and took the group to visit our local Mandir, Synagogue, Mosque, Church and Gurdwara.

## Abida Iqbal – MBE and Queens special award.

As part of my commitment to the group and individuals within it I regularly visit them whether it is at home, in hospital or residential homes as I think it is important that all of the members and committee members know that I am here for them whenever they need me. I feel proud of myself, my family says that they couldn't have achieved as much I did with my background. I came to this country at a very young age, without any education and everything I've done has been a blessing.

And now our group has also been recognized for its work in the community by the Queen and is one of only 20 groups being awarded this special award.

