

AbuDhabiWorld

IN PERSON



أخر تغطية إعلامية
Latest Media Coverage

The city of Abu Dhabi is not short of people willing to go the extra mile to help others. But long before stories of altruism began to be regularly publicised here, one individual had already been selflessly devoting himself to the public for more than two decades.

His name is George Ity and he co-founded Nahtam Social Responsibility, a private organisation formed to take on various causes for the benefit of the community.

I came here in 1993, not for community work, but for better career opportunities after working as a creative director for an advertising agency in Bombay. I arrived with my wife and son – now I have two sons,” he laughs animatedly in recollection.

A Kerala native with a degree in advertising, George grew up in a family that embraces philanthropy as a personal mission.

“Community work has been in our blood since the time my grandfather served all the needy villagers (back home) with food and educational support for their children.

“Currently, my 83-year-old mother is the chairperson for SREDDHA charity

organisation, addressing the need of educating the elderly people on how to better deal with the new generation,” George says proudly.

“Even when I was working back home, I made sure to dabble in community work after office hours. I was the guy who started the campaign in Bombay calling for drug addiction to be seen as a sickness. My objective is to change the stigma, to treat addicts as patients in need of help and reintegrate [them] back into society.

“Community work gives me immense happiness and peace of mind,” George adds. “I like spending time with people and it gives me an opportunity to utilise my experience in advertising communications for the benefit of many.”

Given his clear desire to give back to others, it’s not surprising that George’s love for community work didn’t wane when he relocated to Abu Dhabi.

In the early 90s, the capital was still figuring out how to transition from a quiet, sleepy town to a bustling cosmopolitan city. Needless to say, there was a lot to be done to improve the budding community and help people adjust.

One of the early initiatives he launched was educating residents on the importance of conserving water: water metres didn’t exist, and this was years before the prospect of water scarcity in the country became the issue it is today.

“We published and distributed a small booklet teaching children how to save water,” George explains. “I did many

campaigns but you know when it’s community work, there’s no money, there’s no profit, so no commercial firms wanted to take part.

“Later, I realised that if I didn’t do something about it, all my ideas would die with me. So I started thinking of doing more to enable these programmes to service a large segment of the community,” George reveals.

“Doing more” meant quitting the corporate world and formally setting up non-profit organisation Nahtam, along with Emirati Ebrahim Al Haddar and Mauritian Isabelle Le Bon-Poonosamy, to help implement the campaigns systematically with assistance from volunteers and companies both in the private and public sectors.

Since its official founding in 2008, Nahtam, which means “we care” in Arabic, has spearheaded a number of noble initiatives including water and electricity conservation, cyber home safety, instilling saving habits in children, newspaper recycling programmes,

fundraising for children with special needs, diabetic awareness campaigns and the 67 *Inspiring Stories* book.

Despite its noble efforts, the group is not immune to the challenges that commonly confront non-profit organisations.

“We have ten staff and more than 4,000 volunteers. The staff have to be paid, the office has to be maintained and we don’t take any donations,” laments George.

Finding sponsors willing to participate in the campaigns is an essential factor in driving Nahtam forward, and that’s why the group is constantly reaching out to private and public entities for much needed support.

Understandably, the government’s call declaring 2017 as the Year of Giving was welcome news for George and his team. While charity activities in the city have increased over the years, George said the campaign gives the concept of giving more focus, with diverse industries coming forward and in turn helping more people.

IN PERSON



“SHARING DOESN'T COME WITH A TIME FRAME”

MIR
GOOD
DEEDS

How an expat paved the way for community service to flourish in the capital

WORDS Ferdinand Godínez

“Community work doesn’t at all mean donation of money,” George stresses. “One can show they care and share happiness in various ways. A sincere gesture or gratitude can be at times the biggest way to help people.”

“I believe you should be responsible to yourself first in order to be able to help others. We all live in a busy environment, and it is just a matter of taking a little time and a good heart for others. Community work is the easiest way of getting positive energy and happiness in life.

George also hopes that the Year of Giving campaign will inspire more residents, particularly the youth, to develop a lingering sense of empathy, not just towards fellow humans but animals and the environment as well. What’s more, the recent announcement that corporate social responsibility will be mandatory for all companies here creates an even bigger impact, which George says will strengthen the “sustainability level” of philanthropy in corporations, staff and families moving forward.

“Sharing doesn’t come with a time frame. Once an individual follows the acts of sharing it becomes a continuous process, which remains in the heart and mind forever.”

It’s certainly a motto George lives by. Lending a helping hand will always be a commitment and personal calling he’ll never get tired of no matter what the odds are.

“This is my life. Community work is something that is not part-time. You have to be dedicated and consistent. It’s like a plant: you put the seed and if you don’t take care of it, it will die. Community work is the same: you have to be consistent.”



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