

Rights in Practice: Advocacy and Integration Support for Afghan Refugees in London

Miki O'Connell - Laidlaw Leadership-in-Action Project



Introduction

The Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) is a charity based in Feltham, London, that provides support to refugees and asylum-seekers through education, integration, and advocacy. The organisation engages in a wide array of activities, including English lessons, an advice clinic, and human rights campaigns. I chose to implement my Leadership-in-Action project at the ACAA because I have a strong academic interest in migration. I was also motivated by the chance to use my Persian, since many of the charity's beneficiaries are Persian-speaking refugees from Afghanistan.

Advice clinic for refugees and asylum-seekers

The ACAA operates a drop-in 'advice clinic' where refugees and asylum-seekers can come in with problems they need help navigating. I personally handled over 25 client cases from start to finish, covering a wide range of issues including housing, benefits, employment, and immigration. The Persian-speaking beneficiaries were pleasantly surprised that I could conduct the advice sessions entirely in their mother tongue. It felt extremely fulfilling to use my language skills in such a meaningful way.



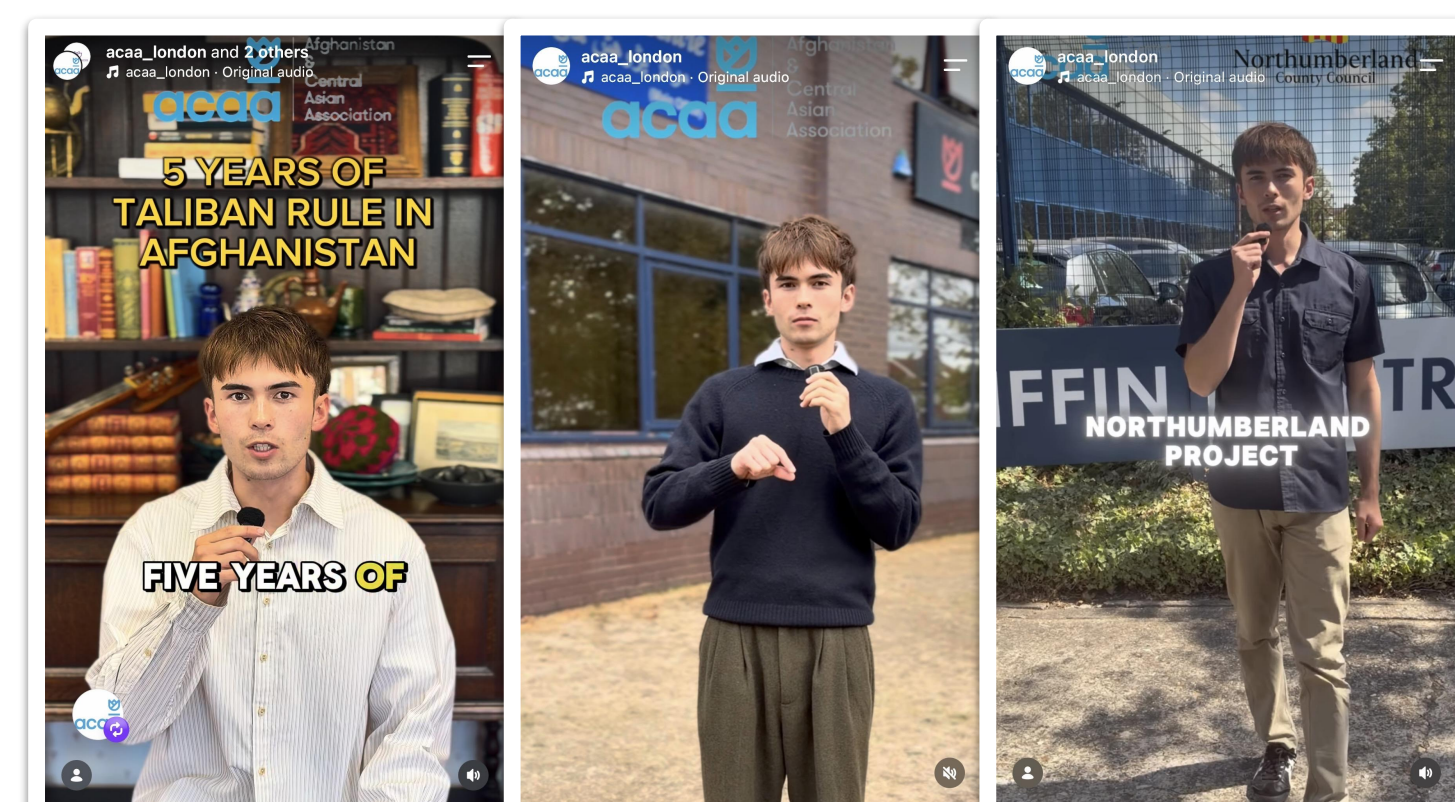
Advocacy for human rights in Afghanistan

Although the ACAA welcomes beneficiaries of all nationalities, advocacy for human rights in Afghanistan remains central to its work. I took the lead on planning a panel discussion marking five years since the Taliban's return to power. This involved everything from designing the poster, to inviting and corresponding with the six panellists. The event was held at Senate House, London, and brought together academics and local community figures to discuss the situation of women's rights in Afghanistan. Around 75 people attended, and it was rewarding to see the event come together after weeks of hard work.



Social media outreach

The ACAA maintains a presence on social media to raise awareness of its work. I supported the charity's social media manager in filming Instagram reels that promote the charity's services and projects. I personally featured in four reels. View counts more than doubled from my first to my final reel, whilst a standout reel about Afghanistan and under the Taliban reached over 75,000 views. My final contribution was a 'farewell' reel filmed in Persian, in which I reflected on my experience at the ACAA.



Conclusion

I feel very fortunate to have implemented my Leadership-in-Action project with the ACAA. My managers placed their trust in me to work directly with beneficiaries, and to lead several of the charity's own initiatives and events. This experience has deepened my understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK, and has strengthened my desire to continue working with marginalised communities. I would like to thank Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw Foundation for generously funding my project through the Laidlaw Scholarship.