

**Kashif Ashraf: 'a proper Oldham lad' with a fascinating story to tell**

# Believe in Oldham...

**Why this man's positive outlook is one we can all aspire to**



**KASH to his friends . . . and there are many of them**

A PROPER Oldham lad is how Kashif Ashraf likes to be described and, after spending one-to-one time in his company as to opposed to sharing space at any number of networking events, I can see where he's coming from.

Not that he has had what I would describe as a traditional Oldham upbringing, aside from the fact that whenever he returns from one of his frequent trips abroad his first port of call is invariably the outside market at Tommyfield for curry and chips — “an absolute gem of culinary taste.”

Talking of food, I like wedding cake as much as the next bloke — two marriages, two quite fantastic days in the company of two lovely women says it all really — but I cannot imagine an arranged marriage.

Yet this is how this 43-year-old, of Firwood Park, Chadderton, met his wife Sabeen — a distant cousin to whom he was introduced while on a trip to Pakistan.

“Yes, it was totally arranged. I got married in Islamabad in a traditional ceremony.

**Deal**

“The exchange rate was good in those days so we got a great deal — and then had a second ceremony back here in Oldham for all the people who weren't over there,” he recalls without a hint of embarrassment. Or regret.

He may be a “proper Oldham lad” but he loves his wife dearly and has two wonderful children — Shariq and Emaan.

Shariq (11) will be the first family member to attend Hulme Grammar School when he starts the September term.

A beautician, Sabeen has a business in Westwood which complements Kash's personal life as project manager with Positive Steps

**MARTYN MEETS**  
 A regular profile of Oldham's movers and shakers  
 by **MARTYN TORR**

Oldham, the brand name for Connexions which, for those of you with long memories, will recall was born out of the Careers Service.

He works with the business community, linking education with youth offenders needing guidance to get into the world of work and also supports a police mentoring programme.

In May, he will have been with the service for 19 years, a remarkable stint in an organisation which also supports the Youth Offending Service, the Drug-Alcohol Team and Adult Guidance.

He believes he has been “lucky in the extreme” to work with two inspirational chief executives, initially Tony Temple — whom Kash describes as “a true legend” — and more recently, with Tony's successor, Tim Mitchell, “a visionary who has moulded me and taught me how to embrace change.”

Yet all this is a far cry from his adolescent years when he worked alongside his uncle Tariq Amin in

the family poultry business.

Having achieved eight distinctions and a merit in his Foundation subjects at The Oldham College, an 18-year-old Kash was somewhat disappointed to be refused a place at five universities.

Cue the indomitable spirit of the family and Kash's first experience of the family's strength of will.

“My aunt Rifat Abidi was horrified. She ordered me into her car, drove me to UMIST in Manchester and marched me into the admissions office where she demanded an explanation as to why I had been refused a place.

“I was hugely embarrassed but the guy offered me a place there and then,” recalls Kash, who read business and administration for three years and got a BSc (Hons) in management sciences.

While studying, a young, impressionable Kash spent lots of time with his Uncle Tariq, meeting, networking and generally learning about

the world of work.

“It was a steep learning curve but it made my studies a breeze and I sailed through my exams.

“It was a massive shock when my uncle told me to get a job — I had just expected to go into the business with him.

“Tariq was a brilliant role model but he told me the only way to learn was to get a job in the big wide world.”

**Legends**

And so it came to pass that Kash was interviewed by the Careers Service after being introduced to the possibility by a good friend for whom he had worked as volunteer in the fledgling AKSA Housing Association.

“I was actually helping at the handover of the first property ever let by AKSA when Tony Temple was trying to get hold of me to offer me a job.”

Not long into his new career, Kash was invited to join a trip to London in the company of former Oldham Council chief executive Colin Smith; Bill Kneen, the former head of education; and current Mayor of Oldham, Councillor David Jones — then chairman of education.

“We were going to present a petition to MP Michael Meacher and the Houses of Parliament about cuts to the educa-

tion budget. There I was in the company of three true Oldham legends. They had briefcases and important files but Bill Kneen had a plastic carrier bag. I remember nervously asking him why.

“He told me that people with plastic bags are unlikely to be mugged in London! And that was another amazing experience.”

Kashif's eyes sparkle as he recalls the story and his infectious toothy grin is only part of the charm of a man who has probably never had an argument in his life.

His life has been a series of such recollections, from the time he met Colin Powell and Heather Mills in the company of a friend who had been invited to meet Prime Minister Tony Blair, to his involvement in the first ever Curry Chef of the Year awards in Oldham.

It's been a veritable menu of life-changing experiences which have shaped his destiny.

This “proper Oldham lad” likes nothing more than to accompany his mother walking around town and is constantly surprised by the amount of people who stop for a chat.

“My mum was one of the first interpreters for Oldham NHS in the 1980s and still trying to walk anywhere in Oldham with

her is difficult with so many people saying hello.

“It makes me feel proud and is probably a big influence in my getting involved in working in a job that helps the people of the town.”

He also explains his voluntary roles outside of his working hours.

Let's see . . . he's on the Scanner Appeal Committee, the Coliseum Theatre board, as an Oasis Academy Oldham board member, Oldham Racial Equality Partnership Committee member, a governor at The Oldham College, where he is vice-chairman of the resources and curriculum sub-committee and an LEA co-opted governor at Burnley Brow School (his old primary) where he sits on the finance sub-committee.

“I am by far the longest-serving member of the committee — it's something I would never give up,” he says.

Having spent time with him I have the distinct impression Kash will never give up on anything.

He passionately believes in his home town and says: “I am just a lad from Oldham. If I have achieved anything in my life it is to prove that in Oldham, if you want it, you can do it.

“I work with some marvellous people in a wonderful town and have a loving, caring and close family.

“What more could a lad from Oldham want?”

**‘If I have achieved anything in my life it is to prove that in Oldham, if you want it, you can do it.’**