



Annual Report 2015 – 2016

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding” – Albert Einstein

Grassroots
...a different point of view

GRASSROOTS

GRASSROOTS welcomes co-workers, guests and visitors from Churches, other faith communities, and those of no particular faith affiliation for events, visits to places of worship in Luton, and conversations over a cup of tea or a meal.

To be kept up to date with GRASSROOTS news, upcoming events and more about the work we do, there are many ways you can stay in touch. We also have a quarterly newsletter which we would love to send to you, so please let us know if you would like to receive it.

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Grassroots
...a different point of view

GRASSROOTS Annual Report

2015-2016

Charity Registration Number:
1163427

Acknowledgement of Thanks

GRASSROOTS is blessed to have the support of many funders, partners and volunteers, and we wish to say thank you for enabling our work to continue and grow:

Funders:

Allder Trust
CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development)
Church of England Diocese of St. Albans
Luton Council of Faiths
Methodist District of Beds, Essex and Herts
Near Neighbours Fund
Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton
United Reformed Church Thames North Synod

Partners:

Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches
Churches and Other Faith Communities in Luton
Creative Muslim Network
Daughters of the Holy Ghost
Ghar se Ghar
Luton Council of Faiths
New Creations
Reconciliation Walk Community
University of Bedfordshire Treehouse Chaplaincy
University of Bedfordshire Students' Union (Beds SU) and Volunteer Services

Volunteers:

From Churches, Other Faith Communities and of no particular faith affiliation:

Anwer Usmani
Bozena Briggs
Carol Bond
Catherine Aganoglu
Ciaran O'Brien
Fahad Matin
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Message from Revd Maggie Hindley (Co-Chair)



A different point of view...

From where I stand (at the London Inter Faith Centre), Luton doesn't get very good press!

Four men arrested in Luton on suspicion of terror offences! shouts the BBC. We hear of violent clashes between the EDL and local Muslim youths. It seems as though most of the things that make ordinary mortals anxious about the way the world is going have a home in Luton - the long-simmering xenophobia on which the Brexit vote has lifted the lid; the extremism that has fuelled terrorist attack after terrorist attack across the world and close to home; the language of hatred; demeaning poverty in an affluent nation.

Thank God, then, for GRASSROOTS, and its commitment to representing a different point of view, and for the way it embodies a new, better, life-giving story.

Thank God for its routine work of bringing people together across differences of culture, faith and race, age and gender and social class, to do the work of creating communities intentionally working for the common good and able to withstand the threats outlined above.

Thank God for GRASSROOTS' resilience, its ability to be there for the whole community in times of trouble and to respond quickly in an emergency, and for its ability to grasp new opportunities that will work well for people without compromising its core values.

You will find examples of all these things in the reports that follow. Thanks then, to the staff – Ann and Bonnie, Ciaran and Johny, Karen, Kim, Maire and Ryad, who as a team represent considerable diversity – for their courage and hard work, imagination and compassion, long hours and contentment with modest pay.

Thanks also to our volunteers, who come from many diverse backgrounds, and thanks to the faithful trustees for the way they ensure the work has its proper legal and managerial underpinning.

It is good that this year has seen GRASSROOTS in its first year of being a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), under a new constitution, keeping us in line with modern developments.

The work of GRASSROOTS would be impossible without the generosity of our funders, who come from across the Christian denominations.

Our sharing of human and financial resources with Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) is also so fruitful, especially in this time of austerity, and essential to our work.

Watch out for the publication of our new theological reflection coming soon titled 'Why we do what we do'. Here are a few words from the conclusion – hopefully not too much of a spoiler!

"GRASSROOTS takes into account every individual's 'whole-self', seeking for the gifts, skills, talents and potential of each person to flourish. Numerous threads continue to contribute to the ever-evolving tapestry of GRASSROOTS work."

A different view of work and human nature and community and of Luton Town. We need many more organisations like GRASSROOTS.

Revd Maggie Hindley

Co-Director, London Inter Faith Centre and Co-Chair, GRASSROOTS



Church Related Community Work (CRCW) Project



The past year has been marked by significant changes for the Church Related Community Work (CRCW) Project, led by Karen Campbell. January 2016 saw the departure of our Chair, Rev Sue Chapman, as she moved to a new pastorate, while our Treasurer, Rev Phil Horner, retired at the end of July 2016. The focus of activities has also been under transition as the project has moved intentionally into its second, and final, 5-year term.

United Reformed Church (URC) Multicultural Celebration

On 26th September 2015 a group of 22 people travelled from Luton to Birmingham for the URC's bi-annual Multicultural Celebration. The programme, with Karen Campbell acting as host, included various choirs singing in different languages, solo artists, a cello recital, steel band and Scottish dancing. A definite highlight was a 'multicultural fashion show' led by the Luton contingent, showcasing both life in Luton and various other cultures present on the day - a visual celebration of a town and Church where everyone can be different, yet all can belong.

Re-Visioning the Vision

At the 5th year CRCW Project celebration on 21st February 2015, guests were invited to reflect on the work of the project to date, and offer suggestions for the future. On 7th November 2015, a gathering entitled 'Re-Visioning the Vision' met to consider this feedback. Members of the Project Management Group were joined by representatives from the Bury Park Beech Hill churches to look through the responses and consider how these might relate to the Vision Statement produced in 2010 when the project began. Creative Arts strongly emerged as a focus for the CRCW Project's second term, with suggestions including art projects, poetry, and a community choir. This work has already begun!

'Celebration' - Bury Park Beech Hill Christmas Event 2015

In recent years the Bury Park Beech Hill Christmas Dinner and Dance has become something of a tradition. Building on the principles of the Same Difference project (see below), on 27th November 2015 we held an event simply titled 'Celebration', incorporating food and music from different cultural traditions. Entertainment was provided by members of Oakdale's Zimbabwe Fellowship, English Folk Dancing led by a member of Beech Hill Methodist Church, a female dance group called the 'Diamond Divas', plus live music and song. Several friends from High Cross United Reformed Church, Tottenham, also journeyed to Luton to join the festivities, which were enjoyed by over 100 guests drawn from the churches and local community.

The 'Same Difference' Project

At the time of last year's annual report, 'Same Difference' was still a fairly new initiative. The project sought to gather people of different backgrounds to explore themes in life which make us both the same, and yet different - e.g. birth, marriage and death. Whilst funding for the project has since ended, enthusiasm for the sessions has not, and participants chose to continue meeting on a monthly basis in 2016, taking turns to prepare food and lead reflections. Themes have included Remembrance and Fasting, with several sessions spent sharing individual life stories through music and songs. In recent months' new individuals have been attending, and gatherings have ventured beyond the usual meeting place of Beech Hill Methodist Church, and into local cultural restaurants.

A Roma Easter Party

A child-focused Easter celebration took place on 28th March 2016, Bank Holiday Monday, in the halls of Bury Park URC. The party gathered 16 children for an afternoon of crafts, games and archery, followed by a pizza lunch and Easter eggs. Roma parents shared games and conversations both amongst themselves and with members of the small volunteer team. The party was attended by three non-Roma children, and it was good that the youngsters could simply be 'children together', rather than having a sense of being separate or 'different'.

'A Touching Place' Creative Writing Sessions

'A Touching Place' was the name of a series of 3 creative writing sessions which took place on 7th, 14th and 21st May 2016. Planned and delivered in collaboration with Imrana Mahmood, a member of the local Muslim community, the sessions created a space where people of different backgrounds could encounter each other, discovering points of connection expressed through the medium of the written word. The group of 14 participants, including Christians, Muslims and Hindus, explored the themes of 'Identity', 'Peace & Turmoil' and 'Luton Psalms', drawing on writings from different faith traditions. Some had no previous experience, or expressed a complete lack of confidence in their abilities, but were both surprised and delighted at what they were able to produce, frequently reducing the group to tears with the depth of reflections written about themselves, their lives, the world and the refugee crisis.

Devon Adventure Week

Karen Campbell co-led this annual youth residential, taking inner-city youngsters to the Devon countryside for a week of spiritual and physical adventure, from 30th May to 4th June 2016. During a week of glorious sunshine, the theme of Roots and Foundations was discussed using the Bible, poetry, art and personal experience to reflect on questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What does it mean to be rooted?', 'What are my foundations?' and 'What does God think of me?' The 12 young people also enjoyed various outdoors pursuits including camping, surfing and coasteering - an activity which involves jumping into the sea off rocks of various heights!

The Bury Park Beech Hill Big Bus Ride

On the gloriously sunny morning of 6th August 2016, 108 travellers headed off for a day in Brighton. While previous years have involved visiting friends in Clacton-on-Sea, Rev Sue Chapman's move to Hove opened the door to this new destination. Our group was delightfully diverse, with ages ranging from 3 to well over 83; Black, White, British, Caribbean, African and Asian. It was especially pleasing to have 30 members of the local Roma community taking part in the trip. Having thoroughly enjoyed the beach, the travellers journeyed the few miles to Hove for afternoon tea hosted by members of Hounsom Memorial Church, one of Sue's new congregations. The Luton group were thrilled by Hounsom's wonderful hospitality, with one of our members later reflecting, 'although we were meeting for the first time, they really felt like old friends'.

A Grand Garden Party

This joyful event took place in the newly-opened All Saints Peace Garden on 27th August 2016. Guests from the Council of Churches and the diverse local community gathered to enjoy cultural foods, face-painting for children, and poetry reading from participants of the 'A Touching Place' creative writing sessions. Artwork was on display from the church's weekly arts and crafts group, whilst two church members were on hand to share the story of the Peace Garden and Community Allotments project, which has seen derelict land within the All Saints grounds transformed into a beautiful community space ideal for prayer, reflection and story-telling, with a second area providing mini-allotments where local residents can grow their own produce.

Luton Primary School Assemblies

Can people who are different live in harmony? This was the 'Big Question' being addressed in 3 primary school assemblies back in September 2015. In preparation for the Luton Peace Walk, Karen Campbell was invited to participate in the assemblies with colleagues from Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), GRASSROOTS and representatives from the local Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities. Re-creating a television panel show, Karen acted as presenter to question the faith panellists as to what is distinctive about their respective religions, what we can learn from each other, and what will make Luton a more respectful place. The panel then took questions from the 'studio audience' - the children of the schools - who wanted to explore issues such as 'Why did God make religions?', 'Why are we different?', and 'Why are some religions always arguing with each other?'. In 2016 these efforts increased with visits to 12 schools further exploring the theme 'How can we make Luton more respectful?', and with the panel expanded to include representatives from the Bahá'í faith. So can people who are different live in harmony? As one panellist reflected, for the sake of humanity, the answer must be 'Yes!'

Other Key Events and Activities

During the past year Karen Campbell, our CRCW Project Worker, has also been involved in:

- An increased frequency of leading worship for churches both in and outside of Luton including the farewell service for Rev Sue Chapman and her husband, Colin, as they left Luton for a new ministry
- Continuing to write 'Thoughts from Your CRCW' for inclusion in church newsletters helping to keep people connected and further reflect on themes addressed in worship services
- Joining the ecumenical team of local ministers in leading the Council of Churches Lent Groups, developing the theme of Pilgrimage for Lent 2016
- Leading part of the programme for the URC's annual Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Ministers Gathering, and contributing to 'In Our Own Words', a sharing of BAME ministers' stories
- Leading a bible study at the URC General Assembly on the theme 'People of the Way', exploring the possibility that different people may be called to witness to different aspects of God's truth



'Celebration' was the name of the Bury Park Beech Hill Christmas Dinner and Dance with food and music from different cultural traditions



Willing participants from the Same Difference project have continued to meet, share and enjoy each other's company



A Roma Easter Party saw 16 children enjoy an afternoon of crafts, games and archery followed by a pizza lunch and Easter eggs!



The 'A Touching Place' Creative Writing sessions gathered 14 participants including Christians, Muslims and Hindus



The Bury Park Beech Hill Big Bus Ride took 108 people from all faiths and cultures to Brighton for a wonderful day out



Karen Campbell, CRCW Project Worker, helped to facilitate a number of insightful inter faith discussions at Primary Schools across Luton



Spirituality of Justice



At the end of 2015 we saw an increase in the flow of refugees to Europe. We have become used to hearing about the death tolls of people fleeing war, persecution and the negative impacts of climate change on the daily news. We have become used to seeing images of processions of desperate people, streaming along roads, jumping on lorries, boarding trains, being blocked at borders, drowning in the seas, in their attempts to reach Europe and safety. Against the backdrop of such a scenario, the *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis' Encyclical) has had a significant influence on society as a whole, as did the proclamation of 2016 being the Year of Mercy. Mercy, for Pope Francis, requires leaving the safe place, and confronting complexity, even evil. "Mercy is not blind to the ways social structures can diminish human dignity and perpetuate inequalities. Environmental devastation, racism and 'the economy of exclusion' should compel us to grapple with mercy, not as an abstract ideal, nor a theological concept, but as something tangible that requires individual and collective action" (John Gehring). We have examples of this in the lives of Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. The Corporal Works of Mercy, as outlined in Matthew 25, are very much part of the Spirituality of Justice Programme, led by Sr Maire Hayes.

Fairtrade Activities

The work of the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group continues with a special emphasis on raising awareness of Fairtrade by engaging with Luton's faith communities through their respective religious festivals. At a meeting of the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group on 18th November 2015, an overview of the year's achievements highlighted the success of selling 430 special Fairtrade gift hampers for Eid, Diwali and Christmas. Profits from the sale of Eid hampers supported tree planting in Palestine, Diwali Hampers supported Keech Hospice, and Christmas Hampers supported the Fairtrade Innovation Fund, meaning that all profits were donated to help the local community and others around the world. Another event of significance was the Annual Fairtrade Supporters' Conference held on 17th October 2015 at Kings College Campus in London. Five Luton colleagues attended, subsequently reflecting that a workshop on Making Schools Fairtrade was inspiring and could lead to positive work helping pupils learn about different countries and issues relating to Climate Change, whilst a workshop on Eco-Sustainability had clearly highlighted the links between Eco-Farming and Eco-Sustainability. The participants further left with the message that Fairtrade is about being 'SMSC' - Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural. Fairtrade palm leaf plates and wooden cutlery were also used at events throughout the year, helping to promote ecological and sustainability issues.

Bishops Conference for the Inter Faith Co-ordinators

At the Bishops Conference of the Roman Catholic Dioceses in England and Wales on 7th March 2016, the Inter Faith Co-ordinators presented their reports on their engagement with inter faith work in their respective dioceses. The day offered a challenge to strike a balance between dialogue and proclamation, and offered inspiration to those involved in inter faith dialogue in their own respective communities.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2016

This day titled 'Don't Stand By – Make the World Listen' was held in Luton Town Hall on 24th January 2016. There was a moving sketch on 'Bullying' by pupils of Stopsley High School and a reflection on the 'Impact of Slavery on African Caribbean Communities'. The lighting of candles, to commemorate the 11 million victims of the Holocaust, by various representatives of the different faith communities, is always an emotional moment and is worth contemplating, given the times we live in (e.g. Refugee Crisis, Britain First March in Luton, the rise of Hate Crime etc). The Holocaust Memorial Day closure was given by Rabbi Danny Rich, who spoke of the need to build resilience in our communities and to stand together against any form of hatred.

Laudato Si': Cry of the Earth – Cry of the Poor

On our multicultural and fragmented planet, no one can be heard by everyone. However, Pope Francis comes close, with the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. He has brought the Catholic Church to the forefront of the ecology movement and has established himself as a prophetic World Leader, with two recent speeches to the US Congress and the UN General Assembly. "Sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, is crying out, pleading that we take another course" (*Laudato Si'*, 53). In Luton's Spirituality of Justice Project, we are seeking to make *Laudato Si'* part of our life and work. Over the past year, Sr Maire Hayes has both given talks on and attended conferences about *Laudato Si'* at a number of events all over the UK, including a CAFOD conference on *Laudato Si'*; 2 days of reflection in parishes in Newton Abbot, Devon and Olney, Bucks; a retreat day held with the Associates of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit in Northampton; the Religious of England and Wales for Justice and Peace conference, and the Northampton Diocesan Commission for Justice & Peace.

Women's World Day of Prayer

The Women's World Day of Prayer 2016 was prepared by the women of Cuba, with the underlying theme 'Inclusion not Exclusion' drawing on Isaiah 11:1-10 and Mark 10:13-16. The title of the women's prayer was 'Receive Children Receive Me', with the resources communicating a message of hope for the future by asserting that no one is to be considered a non-person any longer, as were women and children in the times of Jesus. Deeply meaningful prayer services held in Luton's different Churches reflected on Cuba's history and exploitation by the World's Powers.

Local-National Conferences on Justice, Peace & the Integrity of Creation

Over recent months we have seen the initial outpouring of sympathy for those seeking safety in Europe turn to fear and xenophobia. The European Union (EU) has failed to rise to the challenge of a coherent response to welcome and resettle refugees. The focus now is on how to keep people out. As well as a practical challenge, this also raises questions about the fundamental values of the EU and the UK, so there is a need for those involved in justice and peace to engage with politicians to seek a just response to what is a long term issue. It is these issues that were at the heart of the planning of a number of meetings and conferences in 2016 in which Sr Maire Hayes was involved, including a 3 day planning meeting of the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) reviewing strategies for the present situation in our society, the NJPN Conference on the theme of 'Justice, Power and Responsibility: How Can Democracy Work for the Common Good?' and a NJPN networking day focusing on the theme 'Creation – The Cry of the Earth'. The NJPN AGM heard a reflection from 'Hear Our Voices' – a charity working with children and young people who have experienced family members being arrested, tried or put in prison. In this 'Year of Mercy', let us remember that "Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of the life of the other" (James Keenan SJ).

Standing Together

In the past year a number of conferences and workshops have been delivered to help support organisations stand in solidarity with Luton's diverse communities. A Community Cohesion Conference on 27th November 2015 saw organisations and community representatives come together to develop a shared multi-agency understanding of community cohesion, while a Hate Crime Workshop delivered by Bedfordshire Police on 10th February 2016 was helpful in explaining crimes against people of different race, religion, gender, disability and sexual orientation. The Luton community actively stood together in solidarity at peace and memorial vigils on 16th November 2015 following the Paris Bombings and on 20th June 2016 following the murder of Jo Cox MP. Zafar Khan, Chair of Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) said, "as Lutonians, we commit ourselves to continue our efforts of living at peace with our neighbours and building together a strong united community in Luton and across Britain." LCoF also unreservedly condemned the horrific attacks in Lahore on 27th March 2016 and Orlando on 12th June 2016, and the murder of Father Jacques Hamel in his church in Normandy on 26th July 2016. Members of the local Muslim community stood firmly alongside our local Catholic brothers and sisters at this very painful and difficult time.

Other Key Events, Meetings and Dialogues

Sr Maire Hayes has been involved in a number of other key events, meetings and opportunities for dialogue over the past year:

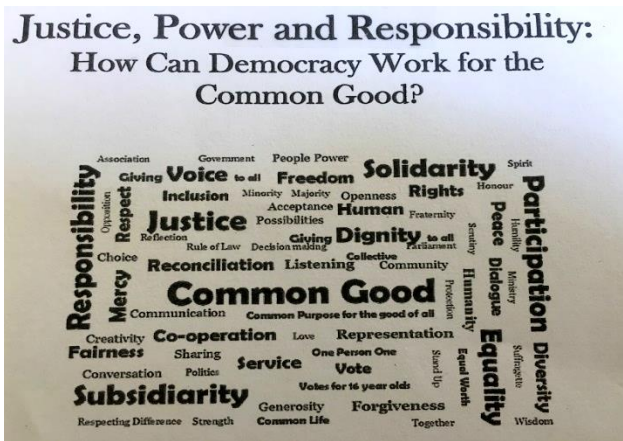
- A Jewish-Christian Relations Study Day in St Albans reflecting on the topic of preaching in Holy Week from the perspective of Christian–Jewish Relations
- A meeting of the Pastoral Councils of the Luton Deanery and Bishop Peter of the Northampton RC Diocese, where Bishop Peter shared his experiences of the Family Synod in Rome
- A visit to No. 10 Downing Street where David Cameron had invited various Christian Churches and organisations to hear his Easter speech, praising the work that faith groups do with those who are poor
- A visit to Luton by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, to meet with those involved in local Near Neighbours projects, showing his interest and congratulating Luton for being an example to other towns in the UK (more details on page 19)
- A talk on Remembering Srebrenica given by Dr Nazia Khanum, Chair of the United Nations Association (UNA) Branch in Luton, on her experiences of visiting Srebrenica in December 2015
- The celebration of Naw-Rúz (Bahá'í New Year) alongside others from Luton's Bahá'í, Hindu, Muslim and Quaker communities, where the festivities included a Seven Day Adventist Gospel Choir!



Linda Jones from CAFOD spoke at a conference to examine Laudato Si', the Encyclical from Pope Francis



The Northampton Diocesan Commission for Justice & Peace met to discuss 'Laudato Si' and its implications for us'



The National Justice & Peace Network (NJPN) Conference in Swanwick discussed 'How Can Democracy Work for the Common Good?'



People from all different cultures and faiths came together in solidarity to hold a vigil in memory of Jo Cox MP



Following the murder of Father Jacques in Normandy, members of the Muslim community stood firmly alongside Luton's Catholics



Secretary of State Rt Hon Greg Clark MP visited Luton and showed great interest in the important community work in the town



Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures



The Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures project is led by Ann Hyde in collaboration with a partner organisation named Ghar se Ghar (Hindi/Urdu words meaning Home to Home). The work that took place from 2015-2016 was made possible due to the kind support of funders including the Luton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Near Neighbours, Luton West Indian Community Association, contributions from project participants and whilst not funding the work directly, the Allder Trust has continued to contribute towards the funding of one of Ghar se Ghar's workers via GRASSROOTS. This continues to be an invaluable support to the organisation.

Ghar se Ghar Activity Groups 2015-2016

The main objective of these activity groups is to provide exercise and relaxation to women from all different backgrounds, with the level being adapted according to the needs of the participants. This helps participants to improve their physical health, combat anxiety and depression, and become less socially isolated. Time is also given to the wider aspects of living a healthy lifestyle and related discussions. Speakers and visitors are invited to give input and events and trips are often arranged with a view to further educate and learn from new experiences.

Bury Park -

Monday morning exercise groups continued to run in the Community Centre for 1½ hours as women only sessions. New Thursday morning exercise sessions ran from early May 2016 with Luton West Indian Community Association.

Ashcroft -

Tuesday morning exercise groups continued to run in the Sacred Heart R.C. Church Hall, although due to a kitchen fire these sessions temporarily moved to St Anne's Church which kindly allowed the group to use their premises.

Beech Hill -

Friday morning exercise groups continued to run in the Beech Hill Methodist Church and remained open to men as well as women.

New weekly sessions started in May, for and funded by The Luton West Indian Community Association, based at their lunch club in Bury Park Community Centre. This is a positive expansion of work and makes wider links with the local community. Other activities have taken place as the opportunities arose - for example, joining in with the Penrose organisation's 'Walk & Talk' event in May, an activity supporting positive mental health, involving a walk on Dunstable Downs. Ghar se Ghar has a history of working in co-operation rather than competition with other local community groups in the town.

Throughout the year there were 163 instances of providing one to one support or signposting/referrals, including to support services such as the Police, Social Services and Counselling. There was a total of 1782 attendances at group sessions, events and trips, which included talks on Fire Safety and a visit to a Fire Station, input from Neighbourhood Watch, a Christmas lunch and party, and 3 trips with support from Near Neighbours funding. The first of these, an educational trip to the beautiful village of Stoke Bruerne in Northamptonshire, took place on 22nd September 2015, including a visit to the British Waterways Museum, a boat trip down the Grand Union Canal, lunch and an afternoon stroll through the historic village. A second trip took place to Bedford on 24th November 2015 where participants went on a 'Faith Tour', including visits to Jamia Masjid Gulshane Baghdad (Muslim), All Saints Church (Christian) and Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Sikh). Participants learnt about different faiths and were able to experience places of worship other than their own, which they had not done before. A final trip took participants to Neasden Hindu Temple on 2nd February 2016, when a coach load of 49 women from different faiths and cultures thoroughly enjoyed their day out together. The trip included a guided tour of the temple, a visit to an 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition, a presentation of the history of the building, attendance at the daily Arti ceremony in the maha-mandap sanctuary, and a talk with Q&A session followed by lunch. The trip left a lasting impression on everyone. These educational visits were not only interesting, informative and enjoyable for participants, but brought them together in another way as the 'Ghar se Ghar' family.

2015-16 has seen Ghar se Ghar successfully achieve accreditation as a provider for the Social Prescription pilot scheme, taking place in selected areas across Luton. This will enable GPs and other health professionals to refer or direct patients formally or informally to Ghar se Ghar, in order to help them adopt healthier lifestyles and improve their social involvement.

Precious Pearls 'Women Sowing Peace'

This annual event to celebrate International Women's Day took place at Bury Park Community Centre on 10th March 2016. The evening was well attended by a diverse group of over 100 women from across faiths and cultures. The theme of 'Women Sowing Peace' motivated a wide range of presentations and activities under the headings of Inner Peace, Family Peace, Peace in the Community, Peace in the Environment and Peace in the World. The programme included talks on the history of International Women's Day, the 'Bread and Roses Strike' in Massachusetts in 1912, Laudato Si', Fairtrade in Luton, local support services and community initiatives promoting peace and community cohesion. Other contributions included a standing meditation, poetry recital, singing, dances and the opportunity to have hands painted with mehndi (henna) hand designs. There were also personal reflections from participants on how Ghar se Ghar has brought many benefits to their lives, particularly helping them in becoming more socially active and less isolated. This was a hugely enjoyable event and the friendliness and laughter of the women was a positive sign of solidarity across all of their faiths and cultural backgrounds. As always the event finished with the sharing of food.

The event inspired a reflection that if you do not know or have any contact with people from other faiths and cultures, then it is very easy to view them with suspicion, particularly as Europe struggles to deal with not only mass immigration, but also the recent spate of evil attacks on ordinary people in day to day ordinary circumstances. It will be tough for communities to stick together as more of these atrocities take place. Knowing the 'others' as individuals becomes more important, thus increasing the value of organisations like Ghar se Ghar, GRASSROOTS and initiatives such as the Precious Pearls event.

Circle Dancing

Circle Dancing sessions have continued throughout the year and take place on a regular basis at Blenheim Crescent Baptist Church Hall, St Anne's Church Hall, Hockwell Ring Community Centre and High Town Methodist Church. The High Town Group is more of a prayerful/meditative style of dancing, as distinct from the others which are mostly a mixture of traditional folk/contemporary choreographies. Other dances that Ann Hyde has been involved in include:

- Harvest Thanksgiving Service at Wigmore Church on 4th October 2015 where a performance dance called 'The Fruitful Earth' from 'The Creation' suite of dances was practised with some of the church members the day before to use in the service, and then members of the congregation joined in The Seed Dance, a communal dance which took place at the end of the service
- High Town Dance Festival at High Town Methodist Church Hall on 10th October 2015 which included a young Morris Dancing group, Polish traditional dance and Street Dancing. A Circle Dancing session was provided in which all age groups joined
- Christmas Dances at Hockwell Ring Dance Group on 12th December 2015 which included dances relevant to the festive season
- The Women's World Day of Prayer Preparation Day at the Central Baptist Church on 25th January 2016 included Circle Dancing using music from Cuba, whose women prepared the 2016 materials, giving the opportunity to choreograph an upbeat dance arrangement
- URC Churches 'Heartlands' Day in St Albans on 18th June 2016 where two different Circle Dance workshops were provided
- Residential Dancing at Youlgrave Village Hall in the Peak District on 28th August to 1st September 2015 (August Bank Holiday) and 27th May to 31st May 2016 (Spring Bank Holiday) with 34 participants at each. More dances and songs were learnt as well as experiencing a session of Morris Dancing and Welsh dancing
- Bakewell International Day of Dance 2016 at Bakewell Town Hall on 25th June 2016 which had a wide range of dancers including Turkish, Spanish, Armenian, Latvian, Greek, Morris and a group of Romanian children

When we do not know what words to say to God, to ourselves or to each other, it is possible to connect with all three by dancing together to beautiful music.



Ghar se Ghar members went on an educational trip to Stoke Bruerne including a boat ride and visit to a museum



The second trip for Ghar se Ghar members was a Faith Tour in Bedford, visiting three different places of worship



The final Ghar se Ghar trip went to the Neasden Hindu Temple in London featuring a tour, Q&A session and wonderful lunch



The Precious Pearls celebration in Bury Park opportunity to have hands painted with mehndi (henna) hand designs



The Dancing Divas performed once again at the Precious Pearls event, in addition to other dances, singing, poetry and story telling



Circle Dancing continued to be successful and many opportunities for one-off dance sessions arose throughout the year



Near Neighbours



In the middle of March 2016, GRASSROOTS was thrilled to hear the news that Near Neighbours (NN) would continue for another year (Stage 3). The Small Grants Programme re-opened in May 2016 for 6 months until the end of November 2016, leaving the final 4 months for attending events and project activities, and collecting final project evaluations. In the past year the Luton NN Support Group has continued to support Kim Greig, NN Coordinator for the Luton Hub. In a meeting held in June 2016, the group also took the opportunity to thank Rev Janet Mackenzie (Luton Area Dean) for her time, support and commitment over the past two years for the NN programme in Luton, as she moves on to become the Archdeacon of Hertfordshire.

NN 1000th Grant Celebration

The NN programme celebrated its landmark 1000th national grant to local communities in Luton on 27th October 2015. Members of Luton's diverse communities gathered with local partners, dignitaries from the Department for Communities and Local Government, Near Neighbours Directorate and the Bishop of Bedford for the celebration. A few exemplary projects were showcased by Luton recipients explaining how the very ethos of NN has generated capacity for more learning, engagement and steps towards better cohesion. The highlight of the day was the 1000th grant being awarded to the 'Peace Garden and Community Allotments project' in Luton, run by local Christians and Muslims, and headed by All Saints Church. Project leads, Rev David Kesterton and Husna Rasul, see the project as a testament and commitment to build on dedicated community engagement over many years by various individuals and key organisations like the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches, Luton Central Mosque and Medina Mosque, with the new development of a shared community space on church grounds which are over 100 years old.

Khayaal Theatre Group: Muslim-Christian Storytelling

Two storytellers, a Christian and a Muslim, worked together by researching, adapting and performing stories, celebrating shared virtues and good neighbourliness from their respective traditions. At St Peter's Church on 13th February 2016, the Khayaal Theatre Group delivered the first of four NN funded Muslim-Christian Storytelling events to a very receptive and engaged audience. Subsequent events took place at the Treehouse (University of Bedfordshire Chaplaincy), St Mary's Church and the Medina Mosque.

Visit to Lambeth Palace with Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

A garden reception was held at Lambeth Palace on 19th May 2016 to celebrate the growing movement and success of NN, and was attended by colleagues from GRASSROOTS and Ghar se Ghar, Luton. With a number of dignitaries present, the event was hosted by the Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury. This was a well-deserved treat for our local unsung heroes Ann Hyde (Catholic), Nila Soni (Hindu), Pari Rashid (Muslim), and Marie Burns (Catholic) who have been working tirelessly over the last 10 years with the Ghar se Ghar programme.

Visit to Luton by Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Luton had the honour of a visit from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, on 8th June 2016 hosted by the GRASSOOTS programme. In his meeting with local community members, faith leaders and volunteers, mainly linked to Near Neighbours projects, Mr Clark showed genuine interest in local initiatives ranging from unique 'Christian-Muslim Storytelling' to 'multicultural cooking sessions'. On asking how his Department could further help communities locally, all agreed that it was important for programmes like Near Neighbours to be continued.

Catalyst – Youth Leadership Training Programme

The vision of the Catalyst programme is to contribute to the building of a future leadership that prioritises civic engagement and builds association between different faiths and communities. It is designed as an integral part of the NN Programme and its aims and objectives relate directly to NN aspirations and other aspects of the wider programme. Catalyst involves the training of young people through the establishment of networks and support systems which utilise the best of inter faith principles and practice. In the past year, the NN Luton Hub delivered a Catalyst programme in partnership with St Philips Centre, Leicester. The programme ran on July 12th, 13th, 14th, 19th and 20th. Recruitment was very successful, with Kim Greig networking and outreaching through Hate Crime workshops, previous NN projects, Youthscape, the Youth Offending Service and other community initiatives. Local faith leaders, Bedfordshire Police and local community based groups helped deliver training, making this third programme more locally delivered than ever before.

Nehemiah Community Workers

The continuation of NN has meant further funding support for the Nehemiah Community Workers until the end of September 2016. All 4 community workers will remain in their part-time roles and continue the good work that they are undertaking. Over the past year they have also been busy and successful in applying for further funding from various funding streams, namely the Foyle Foundation Trust House and Awards for All, which will allow 2 of the community workers to continue in their posts for a further year after September 2016. The remaining 2 community workers will continue working for their host organisations in new roles.

The Feast

The Feast Programme is about building the capacity of young people aged 11-18 years to live well with others who are of a different faith and culture to their own. The Feast is continuing to invest in the Luton programme and a new Community Development Officer post has been created working alongside the Youth Worker to develop the programme further, increasing capacity and project activities.

Near Neighbours Coordinators Meetings

The three-monthly Near Neighbours Coordinators meetings continue to focus on updates, changes, developments and programme progress. It is also a good way to share best practice, and learn from each other. Recent meetings have discussed the future of Near Neighbours after March 2017, exploring a possible increase in the delivery of Catalyst across the country.

Other Key Events and Activities

There have been many NN events and activities in Luton over the past year, including the following:

- In October 2015, the Treehouse (University of Bedfordshire Chaplaincy) hosted a Muslim-Christian women's encounter group which met weekly to share their faith journeys. It is hoped that the developing friendships will lead to work with local schools to talk about building bridges of understanding and friendship
- In November 2015, the Restoration Revival Fellowship began delivering a project inviting people of different cultural and faith backgrounds to participate in professional workshops based around music, with the aim of creating a musical production relating to faith and Black History
- In November 2015 during Inter Faith Week, Inspire FM hosted inter faith talks on the radio by identifying and negotiating relevant subjects and speakers from across different faiths and cultures, with help from Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), culminating in a 'Near Neighbours' style reception event
- In January 2016, a collaboration between the Bedfordshire Police and Al-Hikmah Islamic School held a 'Community Celebration' thank you event for all those involved in promoting and maintaining Community Cohesion in Luton and to build community and inter faith relations for the future
- In July 2016, a variety of community Iftar's (the meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan, the month of fasting), took place including an Eco Iftar, Inter Faith Women's Iftar, and The Big Iftar. At each event Kim Greig was given the opportunity to talk about successful NN projects in Luton and encourage community groups to apply for funding
- In November 2015, Women Talk secured funding to help them continue supporting women facing multiple barriers to personal development and employment, helping them to break the cycle of low self esteem, addictiveness and abuse
- In July 2015, funding was given to the Big Sista Mentoring programme at the Purpose Driven Trust, which helps to educate, enable and empower young girls to believe in themselves and remain in school by building confidence, self-awareness, healthy living, etiquette, life skills, and personal development
- Following the start of meetings in May 2016 between Kim Greig and NN grant applicants, 15 projects have been funded and 21 applications are being processed. The deadline for applications of Stage 3 NN funding is scheduled for November 2016



Rev David Kesterton (Christian) and Husna Rasul (Muslim) were joint recipients of the 1000th NN grant to change this...



... into this! The project has transformed the space into a wonderful Peace Garden and Community Allotments



Khayaal Theatre Group delivered four Muslim-Christian Storytelling events in Luton with help from NN funding



The Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme was successfully delivered with input from local faith and community leaders



Kim Greig, NN Luton Coordinator (far right) with the four Nehemiah Community Workers from across Luton



The Treehouse (University of Bedfordshire Chaplaincy) hosted a Muslim-Christian women's encounter group funded by NN



Inter Faith Relations



By our Baptism we are called to be prophets, communicating across beliefs, cultures and continents. Being in Dialogue is not something a Christian does but something a Christian is. It is what defines us as followers of Christ, who always sought to communicate by being non-judgemental and open to the experience of the other. Our inter faith activities over the past year, both those that are proactive in developing inter faith relations, and those that are reactive to tragic events occurring around the world, are a reflection of this belief.

Paris Attacks

On the morning of 14th November 2015 we woke to the heart-breaking news of the horrendous terrorist attacks in Paris. Words cannot describe the shock, outrage and disgust felt by people near and far in the wake of this atrocious event. As with all terror attacks, there was a clear goal - to increase fear, hate and encourage even more violence. With a commitment not to let such extremism win, on 16th November 2015 Luton Borough Council and the town's faith communities gathered for a Peace Vigil outside Luton Town Hall, adding their voices to the many millions of others around the world to strongly condemn this attack on the city of Paris. Whilst extremist minorities continue to stir up hatred, division and violence, the vigil called upon the vast majority of peace loving people, from across different faiths and those with no particular faith affiliation, to stand together in solidarity.

Lahore Killings of Christians

Christian leaders expressed horror at the massacre of more than 70 people in Lahore on 27th March 2016, Easter Sunday, the most significant day in the church calendar. As the Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury condemned this attack, locally, Luton Councils of Mosques also expressed their deepest regret and condolences to the local Churches and the wider Christian community (their statement can be found in Appendix A).

Orlando Attacks

Luton's faith communities were again deeply saddened at the news of an attack in Orlando on 12th June 2016. Through LCoF they sent a clear message that despite claims made by ISIS, Omar Mateen, the man responsible for what is now the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, does not represent any faith (see Appendix B).

The Murder of Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spen

On 16th June 2016 came the shocking news of the murder of MP Jo Cox. In a country where democracy and freedom of speech are heralded, the senseless killing of a person like Jo Cox, who was passionate about refugee and women's rights, who had campaigned against modern slavery, and was a former head of policy at Oxfam, is intolerable and disgraceful. Jo's husband, Brendan Cox, said "we all must unite to fight against the hatred that killed her. Hate doesn't have a creed, race or religion, it is poisonous." In-keeping with the spirit of these words, a vigil was held on 20th June 2016 at the Town Hall War Memorial. People of all faiths and no particular faith joined in standing together against hatred and violence. (The vigil invitation can be found in Appendix C).

Murder of Father Jacques Hamel

Following the horrific murder of Father Jacques Hamel in his church in Normandy on 26th July 2016, local Muslims stood firmly with our local Churches at Sunday Services on 31st July 2016, giving away roses as a symbol of sorrow and solidarity at this very painful and difficult time. They proclaimed that the killing of a man in prayer shows that the threat of hate, extremism and terrorism is very real and knows no boundaries. It shows complete barbarism and disrespect to the sanctity of places of worship and life. LCoF also issued a statement, highlighting that as people of moderation we must continue to work together and support each other (see Appendix D).

Annual Luton Peace Walk

The 19th Annual Luton Peace Walk was held in the Lewsey area on 24th September 2015. The day showcased collaborative working between Chantry Academy, St Martin de Porres and Southfield Primary schools, local places of worship and the local authority, supported by the Near Neighbours programme. During visits to the Lewsey Christian Centre, St Martin De Porres Church, St Hugh's Church and the Zakariya Mosque, highlights included school pupils wearing sandwich boards displaying their colourful artwork, while selected pieces were mounted in St Dominic's Square, the distribution of Peace Roses at the Mosque, and Peace Balloons being released at St Hugh's. The Luton Fairtrade Steering group supported the launch of Peace Honey, in which the children's artwork was made into labels for locally produced honey. The day ended at the Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj Temple (Hindu) with an opportunity to try Archery and Gujarati vegetarian food.

United Nations (UN) Day at University of Bedfordshire Luton Campus

GRASSROOTS convened the UN Day talk on the 22nd October 2015 focused on the Magna Carta, how this document helped form the UN Charter, and deliberating on its contemporary significance. A flag-raising ceremony was held on UN Day. A message was strongly reinforced to urge the UN and its member states to put more effort and resources into conflict prevention with a view to moving closer to the goal of saving succeeding generations from war.

Britain First's unannounced 'Christian Patrol'

Britain First carried out an unannounced 'Christian Patrol' in the Bury Park area of Luton on 23rd January 2016, managing to provoke a small number of Muslims and film their reactions. The footage was cleverly edited for use as a marketing tool to gather support for their anti-Islamic stance. According to some reports, the video, uploaded onto YouTube, got nearly 20 million hits in a short space of time. On 24th January 2016, however, church leaders from Luton also visited Bury Park, declaring that the members of Britain First and their actions do not represent Christians, Churches or Christianity. They handed out flowers and a short letter (see Appendix E) to Muslims in the Bury Park area, spreading the message of peace and goodwill. Within a week, both the Luton and Sunni Councils of Mosques (LCM & SCM), together with support from LCoF and others, printed and circulated a leaflet encouraging people with some 'Do's and Don'ts' on how to deal with extremists (see Appendices F and G).

Inter Faith Week

During the national Inter Faith Week from 15th to 22nd November 2015, hundreds of events took place across the country aimed at celebrating different faith traditions in the UK, fostering strong relationships between people of different faith backgrounds, and increasing understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs. In Luton, GRASSROOTS and LCoF collaborated with the local Muslim Community Radio Station, Inspire FM, to broadcast examples and experiences of good inter faith work and practice in Luton, using a number of special guests including colleagues from across Luton and beyond. Other events included the launch of the Faiths Working Together toolkit in Lambeth, where Karen Campbell (CRCW Project Worker) gave a presentation of NN projects in Luton; the Robin Hood Feast on 20th November 2015, was a joyous festive gathering of over 80 people of all faiths, ages and backgrounds enjoying plentiful food, conversations and a topical quiz. An Inter Faith Week Reception held on 22nd November 2015 at Dallow Community Centre was hosted by Inspire FM and LCoF, and gathered people of all faiths and none to share food, conversations, poetry, archery, words of inspiration from faith leaders and simply enjoy each other's company.

Eid Gathering at Al-Hikmah School

For the second consecutive year, on 9th October 2015 the Bury Park Jamiah Mosque invited people from different faiths, cultural and professional backgrounds to visit their place of worship alongside their single faith Al-Hikmah School, and to share a post Eid-UI Adha meal. Headteacher Ashfaque Chaudhry expressed his joy, gratitude and honour for the good response. Attendees made an informal visit to a class, meeting pupils and sharing conversations - a heart-warming occasion for students as well as for the visitors.

Eco Iftar

In partnership with All Faiths and None (AFAN), GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) held their second Eco Iftar on 14th June 2016 raising consciousness about the environment and Fairtrade. The event was hosted at St Margaret's Methodist Church where attendees heard inspirational talks, presentations on Ecology and Fairtrade work by GRASSROOTS and LCoF, the meaning of Ramadan, and storytelling by Khayaal Theatre. A delicious organic and Fairtrade dinner was served. In-keeping with the spirit of the event, compostable tableware was used, while guests were also able to purchase Fairtrade products and local honey. Other Iftar events were also supported by GRASSROOTS colleagues during June and July 2016, including a Fastathon for Luton Food Bank, the Big Iftar in St George's Square, Iftar at Hockwell Ring Mosque and Iftar at the Luton Turkish Mosque.

Fostering Inter Faith Dialogue

There were many other opportunities to foster Inter Faith dialogue throughout the year, including the sharing of our experiences at a United Reformed Church Conference, an evening of sharing at the Milton Keynes Inter Faith Network Group, the 'Culture in Conflict' Film Conference at the Hat Factory, the celebration of Diwali at the Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj Temple (Hindu), the Bahá'í New Year celebrations (Naw-Rúz) and a talk delivered to a group of Methodist women from Leagrave about 'Multifaith Luton'.



Following the Paris terrorist attacks, the Luton Community came together at a Vigil for Peace and Solidarity at Luton Town Hall



School children from across Luton designed many pieces of peace-themed artwork in preparation for the annual Luton Peace Walk



Locally produced 'Peace Honey' including labels designed by Luton school children was launched during the annual Luton Peace Walk



A flag raising ceremony preceded talks and a panel discussion about the Magna Carta at the University of Bedfordshire on UN Day



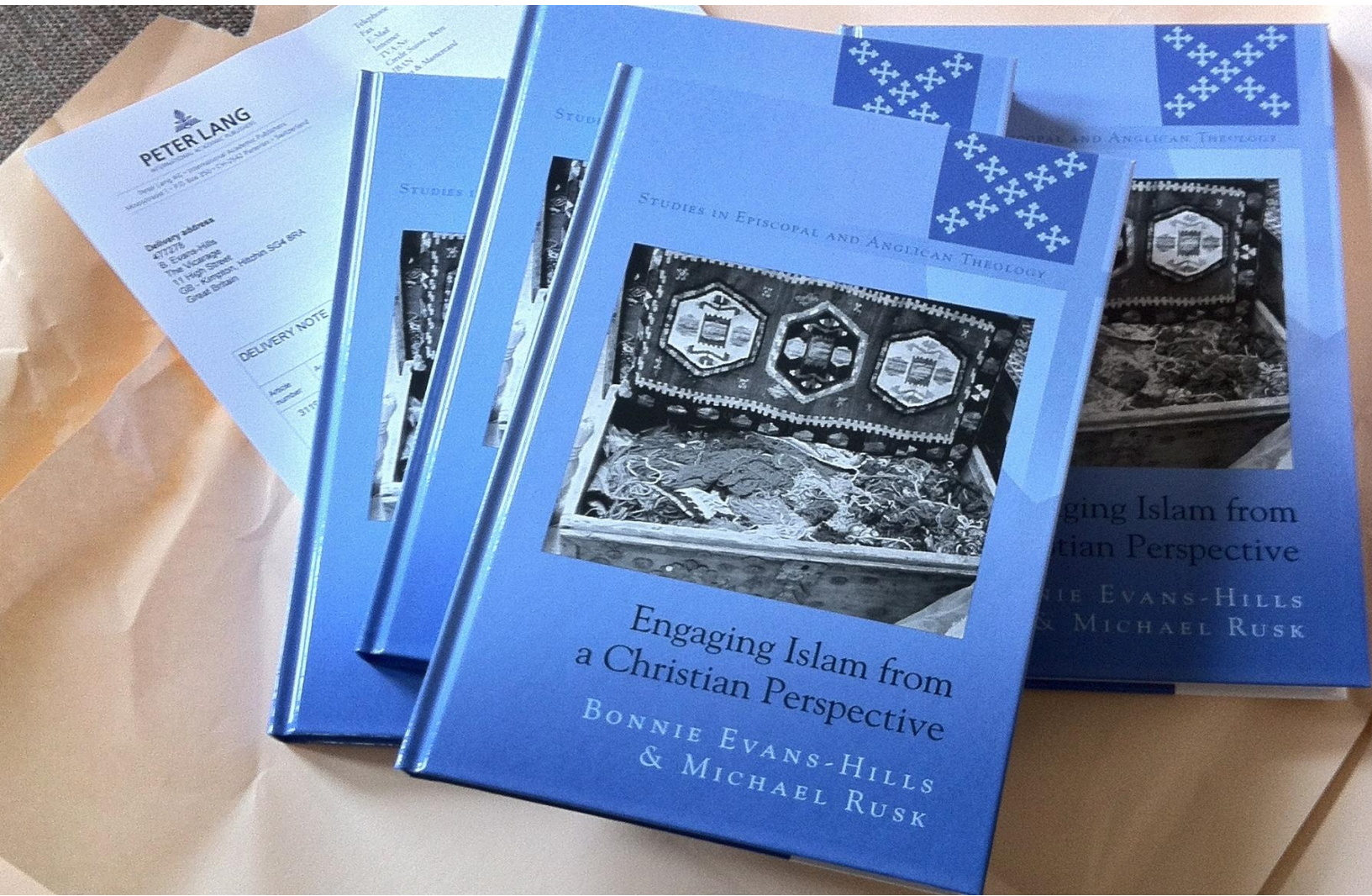
A panel of women offered their perspectives on inter faith work and how to bring peace in the town for Inspire FM during Inter Faith Week



Guests at the Eco Iftar learnt about Ecology and Fairtrade, and was able to purchase Fairtrade goods on the night



Report from Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills



Springtime 2015 began with quite an adventure. Three years previously I had met Shaykh Habib Ali Jifri on his visit to Leicester. Unknown to me at the time, a question I had asked him about the welcome, or lack of, Muslim women receive in the local mosques, was filmed and placed on social media. It still makes the rounds and I continue to be recognised from it! However, Shaykh Ali al-Jifri had answered very graciously, and spoke quite strongly for the rest of his tour about the honoured place of women in Islam. When he returned to the UK last April, he wanted to come and have tea with me in my parish – which now happened to be in Hertfordshire. So we arranged a date and time, and he came for tea and cakes in my village of Kimpton. We invited friends from GRASSROOTS and LCoF. He made quite an impression!

Thus began a full and busy year and more. What follows is an account of the headline activities of my ministry within or connected to inter faith relations in Luton. It is not comprehensive, nor does it include activities elsewhere. I have, however, included something of the international work I have been involved in, as this has found a connection locally.

I am slowly building links between rural Hertfordshire and my work in Luton. David Jonathan and Ryad Khodabocus (from GRASSROOTS and LCoF) and a community police officer in training joined the Bench Working Party in Kimpton as they made repairs around the village. This was followed by two members of the group attending community awards with Inspire FM.

During Lent of 2016, Rehana Faisal, who is a member of the Muslim community in Luton, joined one of the sessions in my parish of our Lent course. The course consisted of four sessions: 1 – looking at the environment, with a leading environmental sustainability expert; 2 – a session with Mary Jane Burkett from Brighton Voices in Exile about the refugee crisis; 3- Fiyaz Mughal from Faith Matters spoke to us about Islamophobia and its connections to radicalisation; and 4 – a service of contemplation bringing together the three themes. Rehana also visited St Albans cathedral for an introduction to Scriptural Reasoning. There have now been regular quarterly sessions of Scriptural Reasoning, with the support of the Cambridge Inter Faith Programme at St Albans Cathedral Study Centre.

Of course there have been the usual visits first from EDL – now greatly diminished, and later Britain First, and along with the team I have been present as observer, offering support where possible to local communities. That Britain First leaders, and by default the organisation itself, are no longer able to have a presence in Luton, or any mosque in the UK for that matter, is a welcome development.

Along with David Jonathan, there was a visit of Bishop Richard to the Borehamwood Synagogue, one of the largest in Europe. The welcome we received was wonderfully warm. We met the last rabbi of the synagogue that was sold in Bury Park, who shared with us something of his memories and experiences. And along with Bishop Richard there were visits to two mosques and a Muslim school more recently.

Of course the visit of Archbishop Justin Welby to Luton in June 2015 was a tremendous boost for morale of local churches, faith communities and the local authorities. His presence in Luton was part of a three-day visit to the whole of the Diocese of St Albans.

In the autumn we were visited by the Revd Mark Poulson, Inter Faith Adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury and national Inter Faith Adviser to the Church of England. He visited the GRASSROOTS team as well as Luton deanery chapter. This had been preceded by the visit of the national Presence & Engagement Programme Coordinator, Kat Brealey.

I was very pleased to see the publishing of my first book this year, 'Engaging Islam from a Christian Perspective' by Peter Lang Pub. in the U.S. With my co-author, Canon Michael Rusk, we held several book launches. There have been a few appearances on Inspire FM, each of which has been both a privilege and a delight.

As part of a course I am teaching through the diocese for those training for Lay ministry, to become Readers, we visited a mosque in Luton, as well as having a session with Revd David Kesterton at All Saints Church in Bury Park. The group greatly enjoyed the visit – delighted at the welcome they received in the mosque, including delicious brownies – an honest and inspiring session with Revd Kesterton about ministry in a context where the Christian community is in a minority, and a delicious Indian meal in Bury Park.

A visit by the Rt Revd Alan Smith, the Bishop of St Albans, to All Saints Church was an excellent opportunity to launch a campaign in conjunction with the Diocese of Birmingham called #LoveYourNeighbour – an effort following the EU referendum to encourage a spirit of unity in the face of increased xenophobia. The occasion was the opening of All Saints Church's Peace Garden and Community Allotment in the grounds of the church and vicarage – a real gift by the church community to their surrounding neighbours.

Alongside Bishop Richard, one of our local curates from Leagrave, the Revd Emma Young, on placement, and several other diocesan clergy, I attended an event at the Bhaktivedanta Manor in Watford, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Hare Krishna movement. I was also attending on behalf of GRASSROOTS. The speakers were the Revd Kumar, a Baptist minister who has converted from Hinduism to Christianity, and Shaunaka, the Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, who had grown up an Irish Catholic. It was a fascinating evening, followed by a delicious vegan meal.

International

Following up on our 'inter faith' visit to Sweden in autumn of 2014, a group of Swedish chaplains visited us in Luton, listening to the various roles of chaplains in our multicultural contexts. They heard from Peter Adams from St Mary's Church, the Town Centre Chaplaincy, the Revd Andrew Goodman, Chaplain at the University of Bedfordshire in Luton, and from a hospital Chaplain in North London. This has also connected with some of the work being done with the Anglican Inter Faith Network (formerly the Network for Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion NIFCON), through an upcoming book about to come out with contributions from GRASSROOTS members and others within the Diocese of St Albans and partners in Sweden.

I attended a dialogue session in Geneva with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue in Tehran. This was part of an on-going dialogue between the two organisations and includes delegates from all over the world, Christian and Muslim.

In connection with the WCC, I attended a consultation in Treviso, Italy, of the European session of a UN group looking at Ending Incitement to Atrocities Leading to Genocide. This was one part of five sessions globally seeking to find ways of preventing genocide. The consultation consisted of faith leaders and community workers. We concluded that the predominant factors contributing to such tensions were increasing radicalisation among the younger generation, lack of opportunities, and the growing refugee crisis. Among the people I met were Edit Schlaffer, founder of Women Without Borders, who was seeking to do a pilot project in Luton. She was present alongside Saleha, supporting her as she shared the story of the radicalisation of her son growing up in Brussels and his subsequent travel to join Daesh in Syria, where he was killed. Edit later worked with Luton's Prevent officer on the pilot project, a 'Mothers' School', which has now taken place.

In May 2016 I was invited to attend the UN World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul on behalf of the AIFN (mentioned earlier). This was an incredible opportunity, and I have since written a reflection on the summit, which incorporated previous trains of thought as well as more recent. I am sharing this reflection separately, but it outlines some of the areas of focus I am interested in continuing to work.

In connection with this, local authorities and individuals in Luton have been interested in finding ways in which those arriving on lorries at Toddington services or at Luton Airport, who are seeking asylum and yet arrive with nothing, might be provided with a humanitarian pack of food, toiletries, change of clothes and contact details where they might find further help. We would also like to find ways of working with other organisations in order to set up greater support for refugees and those seeking asylum within the area of Luton. This is part of a wider, diocesan initiative for which we are seeking a volunteer who might be able to help map and coordinate efforts. If interested, please do get in touch with us at GRASSROOTS.

The Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills
St Albans Diocese Inter Faith Advisor



Zafar Khan, Chair of LCoF, offered a gift to Shaykh Ali al-Jifri during his visit to Kimpton where he also met parishioners



There was a 50th anniversary celebration of the Hare Krishna movement at the Bhaktivedanta Manor in Watford



A group of Swedish chaplains visited us in Luton, listening to the various roles of chaplains in our multicultural contexts



A consultation in Treviso (Italy) was held by a UN group looking at Ending Incitement to Atrocities Leading to Genocide



Bonnie Evans-Hills (Christian) learning and sharing with Jewish and Muslim participants at the UN World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul



The UN Summit convened 9,000 participants from around the world to support a new shared Agenda for Humanity

Conclusion

The U.S. election and EU Referendum has exposed political intolerance and bigotry. Under the guise of avoiding 'political correctness', truth-telling has been twisted into fear-mongering and scapegoating. People have good reasons to be angry. People have good reasons to be fearful too, but all suffering being attributed to immigration and extremism hugely undermines the roles played by poverty, climate change, unfair trade and war crimes in creating such suffering.

We cannot fight violence with violence. We cannot fight hate with hate. Richard Rohr, a Catholic theologian, suggests that if being contemplative, we can hold light and dark together. He says, "If we do not own our fears, they will continue to manipulate our politics, culture, and religion, reinforcing a polarized and divided society. We must bring as much passion to our cause as do those who call for building walls, but our job is to tear down walls. We have the capacity to grow beyond tribalism and nationalism into a new identity, one that holds space for everyone to belong and be loved. I hold out hope that human consciousness can evolve to the next level."

Challenges are endless. People are restless. Extremism in all spheres of life, religious and political, seems to be on the rise. In such a scenario, when things may seem hopeless, Richard Rohr's words constitute perfect inspiration for GRASSROOTS to continue our process of outreach and transformation, and hold out our hope with and alongside people and communities, locally and globally.

Title Pages Image Guide

Message from Revd Maggie Hindley (Page 4)

Top Revd Maggie Hindley, Co-Chair, GRASSROOTS
Bottom Inside the High Town Methodist Church where GRASSROOTS is based

Church Related Community Work (CRCW) Project (Page 6)

Top Members of the community enjoyed a day of activities at A Grand Garden Party
Bottom Karen Campbell, CRCW Project Worker, chairing a discussion at a Primary School Assembly

Spirituality of Justice (Page 10)

Top Laudato Si' was the theme at the Northampton Diocesan Commission for Justice & Peace Conference
Bottom People from diverse communities gathered at the Holocaust Memorial Day in Luton Town Hall

Working with Women Across faiths & Cultures (Page 14)

Top Ann Hyde leading an activity at the Precious Pearls celebration at Bury Park Community Centre
Bottom GRASSROOTS and Ghar se Ghar colleagues meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace

Near Neighbours (Page 18)

Top Bishop Richard Atkinson presenting the 1000th Near Neighbours Grant award
Bottom Rt Hon Greg Clark MP visiting the Peace Garden and Community Allotments

Inter Faith Relations (Page 22)

Top Roses given out by members of the Muslim Community at the Luton Peace Walk 2015
Bottom Prayer Vigil for victims of the attacks in Turkey & Brussels held at St Mary's Church on 23rd March 2016

Report from Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills (Page 26)

Top Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills, St Albans Diocese Inter Faith Advisor
Bottom Book launch of 'Engaging Islam from a Christian Perspective' (co-authored by Bonnie Evans-Hills)

Refugees

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(now read from bottom to top)

By Brian Bilston



2015-2016 Financial Summary

Income	£
Grants received	118,304
Donations	10,000
Interest and other income	84
	128,388
Expenditure – Charitable activities	
Mission Education and Advancement	37,487
Spirituality of Justice	19,629
Work with Women across Faiths and Cultures	8,620
Near Neighbours	45,423
Bury Park Beech Hill Church Related Community Work	3,960
Awards for All	1,275
	116,394
Governance costs	
Total	10,654
	127,048
Net Incoming Resources for the year	
Total	1,340
Reserves at 31 August 2016	
Unrestricted	22,711
Restricted	8,718

Meet the GRASSROOTS Team



David Jonathan

Co-ordinator and Community Cohesion and Interfaith Relations



Sr Maire Hayes

Spirituality of Justice and Interfaith Coordinator for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Ann Hyde

Working with Women of Different Faiths and Cultures



Karen Campbell

Church Related Community Worker



Kim Greig

Near Neighbours Coordinator



Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills

St Albans Diocese Inter Faith Advisor



Ryad Khodabocus

Community Relations Development Officer, employed by Luton Council of Faiths, working closely with GRASSROOTS



Ciaran O'Brien

Volunteer and Admin Support Worker

Appendix A



SUNNI COUNCIL OF
MOSQUES - LUTON



**The Rt Rev'd Richard Atkinson, Bishop of Bedford,
Bishop's Lodge
Cardington
Bedford
MK44 3SS**

Dear Bishop Richard,

We are writing to express our deepest condolences with you and the wider Christian community at what seems to be the deliberate targeting of Christians in a terrorist attack in Lahore, Pakistan.

This was a disgraceful and cowardly attack on the lives of innocent people, completely contrary to the teachings of Islam. In the Holy Quran, the killing of an innocent individual is equated with the killing of all of humanity. The sorrow in Pakistan, and indeed beyond, is heart-breaking beyond words and measure. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families.

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) made a covenant with Christians many years ago in which he declared to Christians that "You are in my protection and my covenant and my security from any type of despised thing". These actions constitute a direct violation of that oath and the teachings of our Faith, and we unequivocally condemn them.

The motive of these groups is to divide and damage communities. We reject that, and indeed are committed to ensuring that does not happen. On Friday, members of the Muslim community stood outside Luton Central Mosque to greet our Christian neighbours. Our message then, now and for the years to come is one of peace.

Yours Truly,
**Sunni Council of Mosques
Luton Council of Mosques**

cc.

Churches Together In Luton
Luton Council of Faiths
Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills (Interfaith Adviser)
Peter Adams (Inter-faith relations & Peacebuilding, St Mary's, Luton)

news release



16th June 2016

For Immediate Release

Working Together for Peace and Unity

We are deeply saddened at the news of Orlando attack. As the families mourn their losses, we send a clear message that despite claims made by ISIS, Omar Mateen, the man responsible for what is now the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, does not represent any faith. We deplore such attacks in the strongest terms.

As people from different faiths working together, one of the key principles we follow is, respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions. We must be free to disagree, but without letting our disagreements lead to conflict and violent attacks.

We call upon everyone to stand firm by these values, speak out against any extreme voices and violent actions, encourage education and dialogue, and work together on the basis of our common values for increased understanding, cooperation and harmonious coexistence.

We join in with the rest of the world in sharing and passing on our condolences to the families of deceased and our condemnation too, of such evil acts of mindless violence against the humanity.

Appendix C

From: David Jonathan
Sent: 17 June 2016 13:39
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Vigil on Mon 20th June at 5pm at Town Hall War Memorial

Dear All

The murder of Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spen, is shocking and depressing. In a country where democracy and freedom of speech is heralded, a senseless killing of a person like Jo Cox who was passionate about refugee & women's rights, who had campaigned against modern slavery, and was a former head of policy at Oxfam, is intolerable and disgraceful.

Jo's husband Brendan Cox said; "we all must unite to fight against the hatred that killed her. Hate doesn't have a creed, race or religion, it is poisonous."

Keeping with the spirit of above words, a **Vigil is being held on Monday 20th June 2016 at 5pm at the Town Hall War Memorial.**

YOU ARE ALL ENCOURAGED TO JOIN IN STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST HATRED & VIOLENCE.

With best wishes,

David Jonathan (Johny)
GRASSROOTS & LUTON COUNCIL OF FAITHS
47 High Town Road, Luton, Beds. LU2 0BW

01582 416946 / jgrassroots@btconnect.com

www.grassrootsluton.org.uk

You can now join us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) too!

news release



26TH July 2016

For Immediate Release

Working Together for Peace and Unity

Pour Jacques Hamel 'Pour la paix, pour un meilleur vivre ensemble': (In Memory of) Jacques Hamel, for Peace and Cohesion

Luton Council of Faiths unreservedly strongly condemns the horrific murder of Father Jacques Hamel in his church in Normandy a few days ago. We stand firmly especially with our local Catholic brothers and sisters in this very painful and difficult time. The killing of a man in prayer shows that the threat hate, extremism and terrorism is very real and knows no boundaries. It shows complete barbarism and disrespect to the sanctity of places of worship and life. As people of moderation we must continue to work together and support each other. Such violence perpetrated by those claiming a link to ISIL, or said by that body to have such a link, continues in different parts of the world. The attacks are designed to rupture the fabric of civil society - not just in France but throughout Europe and beyond: to create suspicion, fear and hatred. Those with such agendas know that co-existence between communities is a threat to their way of life and political motives. Communities living, working and growing together are the polar opposite of their desire to create a religious war and divisions.

It is vital that in Luton and the UK we continue to strive for harmony and tolerance and continue to shape a free, safe and plural society where everyone is comfortable with their identity. We should continue to be committed to tackle tough issues with honesty and constructiveness and to work peacefully to resolve disagreement. But first and foremost we need to listen to each other and to each other stories with grace and compassion. Communities will, and must, continue to reject and stand against brutal violence where it is claimed by perpetrators to be in the name of their religion. It is vital that we support communities that may be rendered vulnerable by events overseas or at home.

There must be no room for prejudice which singles out any community because of criminal actions carried out by a few in the name of its religion. We simply cannot let them tear our communities apart and people of goodwill who are of faith and of no faith must come together to show that we will always remain united in the face of hatred, extremism and terrorism. Our heartfelt condolence and prayers goes back to France, Father Jacques Hamel and his loved ones, the Catholic Community and indeed to all countries around the world affected by terrorism. The French statement listed was one that Jacques had said many times and we honour his memory with what he stood for - life, inter faith and co-existence work.

Appendix E

A Message of Peace from Christians in Luton

As members of churches in Luton we want to share with you our deep regret at the Britain First demonstration outside Bury Park Community Centre on Saturday. We understand they carried crosses, claimed to be a "Christian Patrol", and were highly provocative in their words and actions.

They have corrupted the meaning of the cross, which for us is a symbol of reconciliation, forgiveness and selfless love.

As Christian leaders in Luton we wrote to Britain First in May 2015, asking them not to demonstrate in Luton, and saying clearly they didn't represent the church in Luton. We told them of our commitment to the message of Christianity in our town, but also to love our neighbour, and live at peace with them. We continue to reject their actions, and the way they seek to represent the teachings of Jesus Christ and the church.

Today we want stand with you as friends, neighbours and fellow Lutonians. We want to stand together with you in opposing all extremism that seeks to divide us.

May peace be with you!

Please contact us via interfaith@stmarysluton.org

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH FAR RIGHT & EXTREMIST GROUPS – DO'S

UNITED WE STAND

Extremist groups like the far right are looking for a reaction, the best and most peaceful way to react is by doing some of the following:

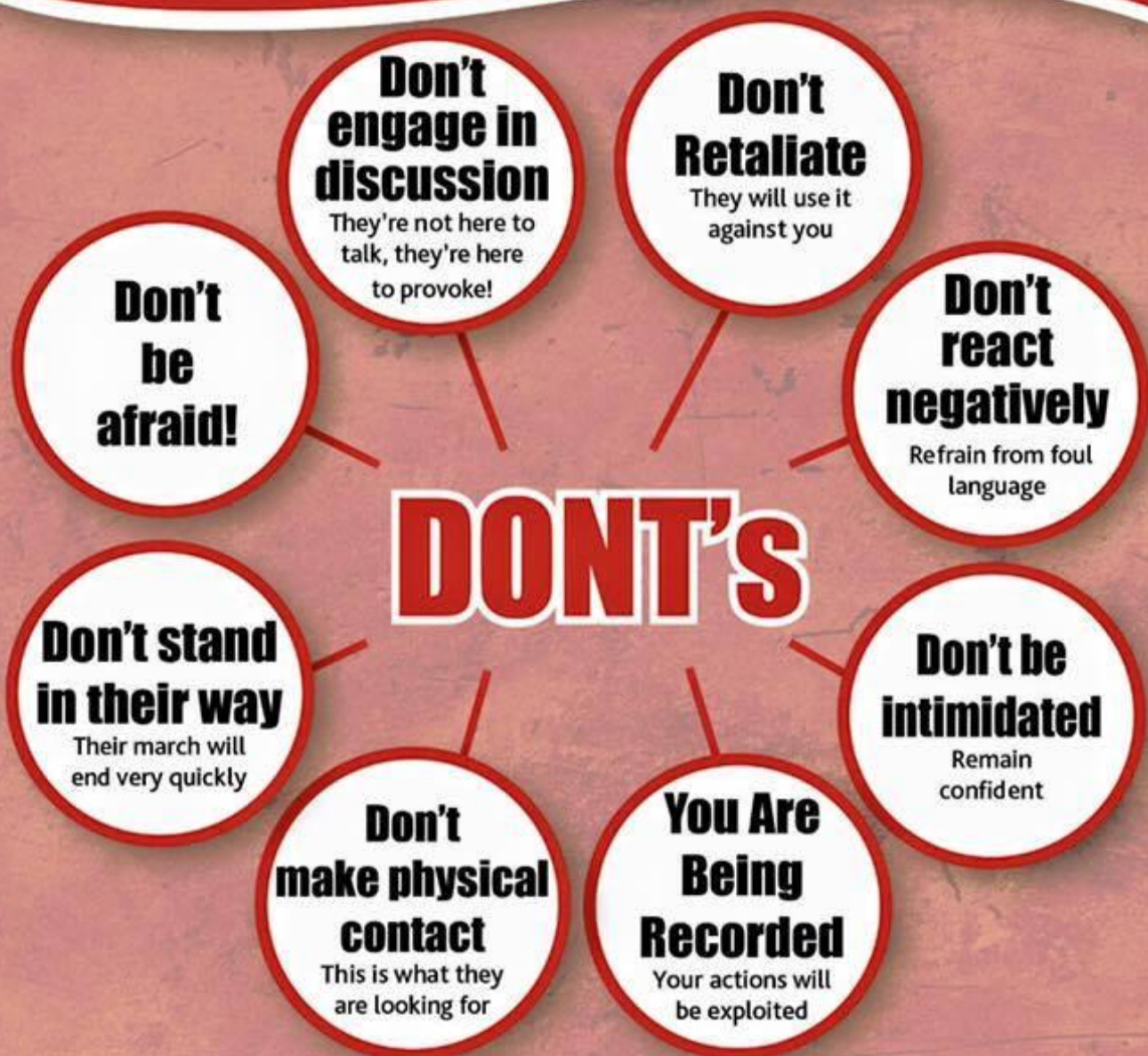


Appendix G

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH FAR RIGHT & EXTREMIST GROUPS – DONT'S

THEY CAME. THEY FAILED.

Extremist groups like the far right are looking for a reaction so they can use this against **YOU**, as they did very recently. Below are some useful ways of how **NOT** to react.





PLEASE SUPPORT US & BE A FRIEND OF GRASSROOTS

As a non profit-making charity, GRASSROOTS relies on the generous contributions of those who support our work to enable us to continue what we do. By becoming a Friend of GRASSROOTS you will be able to help us continue making a huge difference to the communities both in Luton and beyond.

In return for your kind help you will not only have our deepest gratitude but you will also:

- Be allowing us to continue our current work
- Give us the ability to deliver new projects and initiatives
- Receive a quarterly newsletter on our news, events and activities
- Be invited to a yearly celebration of our work and achievements
- Receive an annual report detailing our highlights and insights
- Have the satisfaction of knowing you have made a **real difference!**

We welcome any donation, large or small, so if you are able to assist us please do. You are able to pledge a monthly donation or make a one-off contribution either online, by post or over the telephone.

If you do not wish to donate or are not in a position to be able to, that's fine! We still welcome you to attend our events, stay up to date with our work or even volunteer (if you have the time!). No matter what you can do, we thank you so much for your support!

Visit Our Website:

www.grassrootsluton.org.uk

Call Us:

01582 416946

Write To Us:

GRASSROOTS Programme, 47 High Town Road, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU2 0BW

You can pledge your support and donate in many ways:

ONLINE

Visit our website at

www.grassrootsluton.org.uk

and make a one-off or regular donation via CAF Donate using the 'Donate Now' link!

If you are an online shopper, you can also help us fundraise without donating a single penny. Simply create an account at www.giveasyoulive.com/join and find GRASSROOTS, click on 'Shop Now' and then click on the link to where you want to shop (e.g. Amazon or Argos). Then simply shop as normal, and every time you do, they will donate money to us!

POST

Cheques can be made out to 'Grassroots Programme' and sent to our address, which is at the bottom of this page.

PHONE

We encourage you to use the above methods but if you prefer, you can also make a one-off donation or set up a Direct Debit by calling us on 01582 416946.



