

Grassroots

...a different point of view



Annual Report

2016 – 2017



“Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

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.

Visit Our Website:

www.grassrootsluton.org.uk

Email Us:

admingrassroots@btconnect.com

Call Us:

01582 416946

Write To Us:

GRASSROOTS Programme
47 High Town Road
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU2 0BW

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2016-2017

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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:

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Near Neighbours Fund
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Churches and Other Faith Communities in Luton
Creative Muslim Network
Daughters of the Holy Ghost
Ghar se Ghar
Luton Council of Faiths
New Creations

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Message from The Revd Canon David Lawson (Chair)

“Faith is not certainty but the courage to live with and for God in the presence of uncertainty and to hear the voice of God even in the heart of the whirlwind.” (Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi)

We live in a world of great uncertainty and fragility, the last few months being proof of this. We have witnessed some terrible events in this country and elsewhere, creating a sombre mood in hearts and lives. The Christian faith encourages us not to be overwhelmed by such events but rather as Jonathan Sacks says, to have ‘the courage to live with and for God in the presence of uncertainty.’ We believe that evil will never have the last word - love and goodness will always triumph. In the terrorist attacks in Manchester, London, the fire in Grenfell Tower, and more recently in Spain and Finland, we witnessed that spontaneous outpouring of love, courage, kindness and selflessness.

The GRASSROOTS team is testimony to a group of people courageously living and working in this world of uncertainty, particularly in Luton, making a difference and making the voice of God heard in the diverse work they do. Those of us who are trustees are deeply impressed and humbled by the range of imaginative and cutting-edge work undertaken – Inter Faith Relations, Working with Women Across Faiths and Cultures, Fairtrade, Church Related Community Work, Near Neighbours and much more. An affirmation of GRASSROOTS work and its impact on the local community came from a visit of the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Charles Whitbread, in March 2017 to a trustees’ meeting, just one example of the high regard in which GRASSROOTS is held by the wider community.

This year has seen changes in trustee membership and responsibilities with Maureen Borbone, Maggie Hindley and Karen Drayton stepping down. We are enormously grateful to each of them for their very significant contributions to the work of GRASSROOTS, and they continue to be very much in our thoughts and prayers. In light of them leaving, we are delighted to now be welcoming a new trustee, Janet Bird, onto the board. I also wish to express a huge thank you to my fellow trustees for their wisdom, experience and commitment to all that GRASSROOTS seeks to do. Our thanks is also due in no small measure to those who fund and support us in many other ways.

In the pages of this Annual Report you will read more of the impressive work done by the team over the last year. This year we celebrate 25 years of GRASSROOTS, and more than ever, given the times in which we live, GRASSROOTS has still much work to do. We trustees are always inspired and encouraged at our meetings when we listen to the huge range of work undertaken by the team. It is only right then that I offer them personally our deepest gratitude for their particular contributions – so thank you Johny, Ryad, Ciaran, Sister Maire, Karen, Ann, Kim and Bonnie – we are incredibly proud of all you have done over the last year and pray that God will continue to give you courage to continue living and working in these times of uncertainty.



Message from David Jonathan (Director)

A recent edition of the Wigmore Community Church magazine featured an article entitled ‘May You Live in Interesting Times’. The article went on to explain that the words in the title are often falsely attributed to Confucius, but were reputedly made up in 20th Century America and “*certainly seem to apply to our times*”.

“The rise of Daesh/Isis in the Middle East, the war in Syria and terrorist attacks in North Africa and Europe; problems between Russia and Europe; the aftermath of the UK leaving the EU; the outcome of the Presidential election in the USA; 60 million refugees worldwide (UN estimate) because of war and climate change; 255,000 homeless people in England; insecure, poorly paid employment with zero hours contracts on the rise; an increase in hate crimes against immigrants and people of different origins since the referendum; increasing loneliness in our society — the list of problems seems endless and it is easy to feel helpless in the face of them.”

Interestingly the article continued using another subtitle asking ‘What can we do?’. While it gave helpful tips (e.g. giving to relevant charities and praying), it also triggered my memory of what was said at the end of an event that we had organised in December 2016. The event was ‘Coffee with MPs’ – a space to deliberate, with our MPs, upon various issues such as those listed above.

Gavin Shuker MP spoke at the end of the event, saying that “*There is a risk that we, as a nation, begin to withdraw from the complexities in the world. People are very keen right now to rock the boat and protest vote, which we have seen in Brexit, Trump, the re-election of Corbyn etc. During these challenging times people are happy to become a commentator rather than an active participant.*”

“We need to write the alternative narrative, not the next one. It is very easy to act against what you do not want, but we have to compromise to ensure that we can have aspects of what we do want. We need to have a government and politics for our time, and so must not go back to an old model of state rule. There is a real risk that in light of the political and societal turmoil we have encountered in 2016, we will move away from the democratic structures we have had, or at the very least see a weakening of them. We need to find peaceful acts of defiance to counter the challenges that we face.”

I think some of the activities held during the year 2016-2017 do indeed represent GRASSROOTS’ commitment to continue writing the alternative narrative and not the next one. May God continue to bless not just the GRASSROOTS team but all whom we work with too.



Church Related Community Work (CRCW) Project

Led by Karen Campbell, Church Related Community Work (CRCW) in Luton necessarily focuses on the local - local people, local concerns, and local action. That said, the local context is always influenced by the wider picture - what is happening regionally, nationally, or even globally. Nowhere is that observation more true than in Luton.

Home From Home

Home From Home was a major area of work undertaken during 2016-2017, which emerged as a positive response to the divisive EU Referendum campaign and result. This project sought to create a space where individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds could encounter each other, reflect on their journeys 'to this place', both the joys and the pains, and listen to each other to help identify the parallels in their respective stories. Whilst this began as a one-off pilot session, several sessions were delivered in response to its success, including the opportunity to share cultural foods, music, poetry and photographs. Each session sought to spotlight a different cultural group, starting with born-and-bred Lutonians and migrants from within the British Isles, moving on to people from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, Eastern Europeans (Romanian Roma and Polish), and concluding with 2nd/3rd generation migrants.

Same Difference

Meeting on a monthly basis, the Same Difference initiative provides an opportunity for participants to learn about and share something of the different cultures by which we are blessed to be surrounded, discover new insights and broaden our horizons, all in the company of friends - both longstanding and new. The culturally diverse group has now become self-sustaining, with participants volunteering to prepare a variety of foods, and continuing to explore topical issues from their diverse perspectives, including family, childhood, holidays, marriage and much more.

Bury Park Beech Hill Big Bus Ride

On 12th August 2017, 54 travellers set off for an annual day-trip to the seaside, and it was wonderful to welcome several first-time participants. The group (which spanned several generations and cultures) was received for afternoon tea at Hounsom Memorial Church in Hove, with warm smiles, hot drinks and an abundance of cakes! The wonderful Hounsom team had even laid on activity tables for the children, leaving the adults free to engage in a getting-to-know-you challenge. This event aims to build stronger relationships between the Bury Park Beech Hill churches, and extends the invitation for others to join in on a family-friendly occasion.

Near Neighbours Funded Community Crafts Project

During 2016-2017, Karen joined forces with Ruth Bullock (a member of St Peter's Church of England) and Husna Rasul (Community Worker with All Saints Church of England) on a Community Crafts Project. The project aimed to gather participants from diverse backgrounds to enjoy sessions of arts and crafts, whilst enabling new contacts to be made and friendships to be developed. A much-enjoyed taster session took place during the October 2016 gathering of the Same Difference group, and then on 24th November 2016 a number of inter faith messy play activities were run at Foxdell Infant School, Luton, for children and parents, with a Community Crafts session taking place during the lunch break for parents and teachers. A further session took place at Building Blocks Children's Centre on 1st December 2017. In February 2017 this project settled into a regular weekly slot at All Saints Church.

Together Ethnic and Minority URC

On 1st October 2016 GRASSROOTS hosted 'Together Ethnic and Minority URC', a network of the United Reformed Church (URC). Feeling influenced by the fallout from the EU Referendum, Karen led a session on the theme of 'Home', asking three members of the gathering to stand whilst others discussed what they could tell about these colleagues just by looking at them. Those standing were then asked 'Where are you from?', 'What brought you here?' and 'Where is home?', leading to much surprise at how much we can discover about others once we take the time to listen to them, and how much of their life stories may resonate with our own! This highlighted how too often we judge 'the other' by what we think we see or presume to know, but if we take time to listen to people's experiences first-hand, we challenge stereotypes and discover truths which may pleasantly surprise or enable a new empathy to unfold.

A Multicultural Christmas

The Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches annual festive celebration took place on 25th November 2016. The event saw around 80 guests from churches and the wider community gather together for an evening of food, music and entertainment, drawing on the richness of cultures which call Luton 'home'. This included singing from a Zimbabwe Fellowship, songs in Hindi and Polish and a Line Dancing demonstration and tutorial, all by members of local churches. Touching reflections and poetry were also offered from a local Muslim woman, Imrana Mahmood, who has previously supported Creative Writing sessions as part of a CRCW project.

Beech Hill Together on Tuesdays (TOTs)

On 24th January 2017 Karen led a session for Together on Tuesdays, an afternoon fellowship held at Beech Hill Methodist Church, reflecting on the story of Jonah trying to run in the opposite direction to where God was sending him. It was noted that Jonah displays both positive and negative attributes, and considered the extent to which we are sometimes like modern-day Jonahs, trying to ignore, disagree with, or run away from God's call. It is humbling to realise that, despite our reluctance, God sometimes insists that 'the person I want for this task is you!'

United Reformed Church (URC) Heartland Day

It is rare that the whole GRASSROOTS team is able to collaborate on one project. It was a great pleasure, therefore, for the whole team to lead a reflection day for the United Reformed Churches in Hertfordshire, Luton and Dunstable, collectively known as the Heartland Group. Held at Wigmore Community Church on 11th March 2017, the day drew on the denominational theme 'People of the Way'. Karen planned and lead the worship and Bible Study, drawing on materials from different faiths, which was followed by a variety of workshops including 'Fairtrade & Interfaith', 'Intercultural Insights', 'Circle Dancing', 'Mission is...', 'The Diversity Game' and 'Creative Writing' - each led by a member of the GRASSROOTS team, and Revd Jenny Spouge (a former GRASSROOTS team member).

Leading Worship

Throughout the past year the CRCW remit has included leading worship both within the Council of Churches (Bury Park URC, Oakdale Methodist Church and Beech Hill Methodist Church, plus preaching for All Saints and St Peters Church of England churches) and beyond (Trinity Walthamstow, Trinity St Albans and Harpenden URCs).

Lent Groups and the Good Friday Walk of Witness

In March and April 2017, Karen shared with the local ministry team in leading Lent Groups for the Bury Park Beech Hill churches. It was also a solemn privilege to prepare a reflection for the final calling point of the Good Friday Walk of Witness, focused on Luke 23:44-48 - The Death of Jesus. Parallels were drawn between the hopelessness of that first Good Friday, and the perceived hopelessness of Good Friday 2017, as world relationships deteriorate and evil seems to be gaining the upper hand. Those present were reminded, however, that unlike the crowds in the Bible text, we need not turn away in despair. We are privileged to know that Good Friday is not the climax of the Easter story. We must not allow evil to have the final word.

Devon Adventure Week

Karen was part of the leadership team for the annual Devon Residential for young people aged 11 to 16 years from 29th May to 3rd June 2017. The week's programme included Bible Studies, discussion groups and creative sessions exploring the theme 'The Power of Words', plus opportunity to enjoy a variety of outdoor pursuits not available to participants in their home environments, including rock-climbing, abseiling, surfing and camping. The residential was extremely positive, a reminder of the importance of this initiative for urban young people.

United Reformed Church Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Gathering

This residential gathering took place from 12th to 13th June 2017 at the High Leigh Conference Centre in Hoddesdon. Aimed at gathering Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) members for fellowship, reflection and personal development, Karen helped to help facilitate the programme, reflecting on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The gathering explored current day issues in need of reformation, and produced a number of theses to be distributed within the United Reformed Church (URC) and beyond.

Constance Coltman Centenary Planning Group

In 2016-2017 Karen continued to serve as part of the Constance Coltman Centenary Planning Group, a collaboration between the United Reformed Church (URC) and the Congregational Federation. The group is tasked with planning a series of activities and events leading up to the 100th anniversary of the ordination of Constance Coltman in September 2017, the first woman ordained in a mainstream Christian denomination in the UK. During the year, the group has met to further work towards a residential gathering of international woman pioneers, a public lecture, and a commemorative service, all scheduled to take place in September. Further opportunities have included:

- **The Feminist Theology Journal**
Karen Campbell was invited to write a contribution for a special Autumn 2017 edition of the Feminist Theology Journal, to celebrate 100 years since the ordination of Constance Coltman, reflecting on her own journey and the specific challenges and obstacles that remain for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women who feel called to ministry.
- **Modern-Day Pioneers Interview**
As part of the Constance Coltman celebrations, the United Reformed Church (URC) included Karen Campbell amongst a number of women identified as continuing to break new ground in the Church. As a result of this, Karen was interviewed to talk about the reality of CRCW ministry in Luton amongst people of all faiths and none, being the only Black person serving in the URC in the ministry of CRCW (and by default the only Black female Church Related Community Worker), and the different ways we seek to live the Gospel, often without speaking a word of religion. This interview is featured in the Woman Alive magazine for September 2017.

Writing Opportunities

In addition to the Feminist Theology Journal (detailed above), Karen has also contributed to the URC's Reform Magazine on the theme of 'Why go to Church?' (May 2017) and a book review (July 2017); written four prayers for the United Reformed Church (URC) Prayer Handbook 2018; and continued to write the monthly 'Thoughts from Your CRCW' article for local church newsletters, in addition to other public and private writing.



Members of the Roma Community preparing a special lunch for attendees and guests at a Home From Home session on the theme of Roma Culture



Attendees during a Home From Home session sharing their stories of coming to and adjusting to life in the UK



Fruitful discussions taking place at the Same Difference monthly gathering with attendees from a diverse range of cultures



The Bury Park Beech Hill Big Bus Ride took a group of 54 people to the seaside for an annual day out



A packed-out hall was present to enjoy food, friendship and festivities for A Multicultural Christmas celebration



Spirituality of Justice

There are photos/images/conversations that invade attention and generally fade away over time. Then there are photos/images/conversations that are unwittingly saved, stored away as if for some unknown future use. All these images are easily recalled. The writing of this report has recalled both images and conversations of the past year, reminding us of the words of poet Lucy Berry, saying: *“To tell you the story, to sing you the song of my landscape, the tune of the meaning I march to, to tell that to your ears...”*. Below is a reflection of the seeds that this project, led by Sr Maire Hayes, has sown during 2016-2017.

National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN)

In September 2016 Sr Maire Hayes participated in a three-day planning meeting where the strategies of the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) to meet the challenges in our society today were reviewed. Following this, preparation took place for the NJPN conference which took place in Swanwick from 21st to 23rd July 2017, entitled ‘Sabbath for the Earth and the Poor’. This is the challenge of Pope Francis. The conference sought to identify the current realities within our society, find ways to live out and advocate different value systems and provide a space for creativity, celebration and contemplation. The key messages throughout the gathering were the need to connect more with the natural world, live more sustainably so to avoid a ‘privatised religion’ which does not engage with the struggles of the most marginalised, and the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* #139 which sum up our challenge: *“We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social but rather one complex crises, which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time, protecting creation”*.

Religious for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

The Religious for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission organised a conference from 24th to 26th March 2017 entitled ‘Half the Sky: Women Holding Up and Holding On’. The conference was a reflection on our journey of hope, using Psalm 139, various songs of Leonard Cohen and ‘The Journey’ by Mary Oliver for inspiration. Professor Tina Beattie introduced her talk with Rebecca Solnit’s description of ‘hope’ (a gift we in GRASSROOTS try to keep on sowing!), reflecting that: *“Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency. Hope should shove you out of the door because it will take everything that you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of earths treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal... to hope is to give yourself to the future and the commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable”*.

Holocaust Memorial Day

On 26th January 2017, the annual Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration event took place in the University of Bedfordshire (Luton Campus). The lighting of the candles in memory of the 11 million victims, followed by the recitation of the Kaddish (Hebrew prayer for the dead) and a survivor story, was a moving moment. There was also an impressive theatrical moment depicting the results of bullying by the pupils of Stopsley High School. This was followed by an interesting quiz for people to engage in understanding the meaning and significance of the Holocaust. These two aspects had enhanced the educational thrust of the event.

Sr Maire had contributed for many months to the planning of this event, and also contributed to the proceedings by reading out the 'Path to Genocide' based on Gregory H Stanton's 8 Stages of Genocide:

1. **Classification**
2. **Symbolisation**
3. **Dehumanisation**
4. **Organisation**
5. **Polarisation**
6. **Preparation**
7. **Extermination**
8. **Denial**

This event created a mixture of emotions and helped attendees to think through our past, our present and our future. Sadly other genocides have taken place since the end of WW2, most notably in Rwanda and Bosnia. In Syria and Iraq today, Christians are being killed purely because of their religious beliefs. We must speak out against such atrocities.

'The Big Question' Inter Faith School Assemblies

Inter faith assemblies took place across the town in 12 primary schools in preparation for the Luton Peace Walk, featuring a diverse group of people representing different faith communities and those of no particular faith affiliation, using the format of a BBC News Special to explore 'The Big Question' - How do we make our town more respectful? Sr Maire joined them at three of the schools, where they spoke of their faith, solidarity with others from different backgrounds, and gave consideration as to whether and how they are able to agree, disagree, and remain in positive and respectful relationship with each other. The highlight of each assembly was the wide-ranging and challenging questions and observations offered by the 'studio audience' - the school children themselves.

Coffee with MPs

On 9th December 2016, Luton MP Gavin Shuker met with representatives of the public of Luton at the Holy Ghost Parish Catholic Church at a gathering organised by GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF). Discussions were focused on many local issues including conversations on the rise of poverty and lack of housing in Luton, along with wider challenges including the refugee crisis and the growing threat to human rights and British identity.

Fairtrade

The Luton Fairtrade Steering Group continues to function well in raising awareness of the act of solidarity in buying Fairtrade goods, which are now sold at many GRASSROOTS events. In 2017 the theme of Fairtrade Fortnight was *'Don't feed exploitation. Choose Fairtrade – because farmers deserve a fair deal'*, and so an event was arranged by GRASSROOTS at Luton Town Hall on 28th February 2017, featuring Patrick Kaberia Muthaura, a Fairtrade tea producer from Kenya, who was the guest of honour. He gave everyone an uplifting and engaging presentation of how Fairtrade has helped his community. He said: *"We do not want charity or aid. We want business to trade fairly with us so we can help ourselves"*. Children from St Joseph's Catholic School, the first Fairtrade school in Luton, gave a wonderful presentation of what they are learning about Fairtrade. This was followed by Harriet Kelsall's passionate talk on Fairtrade Gold, and a presentation by Sue Bentley on Fairtrade Footballs. Cllr Jacqueline Burnett then expressed the strong commitment by Luton Borough Council to continue promoting and supporting Fairtrade Luton.

Justice and Peace Commission - Northampton Diocese

Sr Maire is a member of the Justice and Peace Commission within the Northampton Diocese, which is currently focusing on the plight of refugees, discerning how best to adopt Pope Francis' Laudato Si, promoting CAFOD initiatives, talks and campaigns, and the promotion of Fairtrade, work which has been commended by Bishop Peter Doyle during a meeting of the commission that he recently attended. A Diocesan wide event is now being planned for 2018.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

An ecumenical meeting was held on 21st January 2017 on the theme of prayer, given by Sr Gemma Symonds CJ where discussions took place on 'Lectio Divina', which is about reflecting on our day in the light of the gospel. Sr Maire contributed to a group of about 30 people from across different Church denominations in Luton, who were uplifted by the welcoming and friendly atmosphere. It was stated that the most powerful and sacramental signs of the love of God can be expressed in working alongside our Food Banks, in giving a lift to our neighbours and in such simple human gestures which are often considered insignificant.

Information and Raising Awareness on the Situation of Refugees

The situation of many thousands of migrants and refugees is still in the headlines of our media services. We must express our solidarity with these marginalised peoples. Pope Francis says: *"Migrants and Refugees are not pawns on the chess board of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons. Rather than simply being a statistic they are persons who have faces, names and individual stories"*. We express our solidarity as we are able to, but it is also essential to accompany the refugees in defending their rights and to raise awareness and address the underlying causes of the migration of peoples. On 8th October 2016, The Religious of England and Wales (for which Sr Maire is on the planning team) held a Reflection Day in Notre Dame de France, London, titled 'There are no strangers here; only friends we haven't met yet', a quote by W.B. Yeats. There was an overview of the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in London and the home counties, highlighting the importance of 'Welcome' and the many difficulties that refugees face when reaching our shores, and that of the Catholic Worker's Farm in West Hyde, Hertfordshire, which provides accommodation, food, English lessons, counselling and other services for 21 destitute women asylum seekers.

Deepening Understanding and Experiences of Spirituality of Justice

It is not just about doing things. It is also about taking time to think and reflect on what we see and engage with, and then let it impact our spirituality so that it continues to be a positive and meaningful influence in our lives. In her report from 2011-2012, Sr Maire noted that *"Spirituality has to be such that it fosters compassion, dialogue and solidarity, with and among peoples of different cultures and faith traditions that make up our society"*. It is, therefore, important to deepen our relationship, our encounter and experience with God in order to recognise God in all peoples, thus bringing alive the meaning and significance of seeing God through the lens 'of the Incarnation'.

With this in mind, Sr Maire attended a talk by Father Daniel O'Leary on 10th December 2016 on the theme of 'Unwrapping the Gift'. This was an occasion to pause and contemplate where we may have met God in our lives and mission, and where perhaps people have met God in us. Another talk given by Professor Tom O'Loughlin on 21st May 2017 titled 'Do you need theology to live a Christian Life?' offered a thought provoking lecture which emphasised that we must purify our idea of God... for the face of God is the face of the suffering Jesus – Jesus was not the 'powerful Jesus'. We must help to give a name to the deepest goodness in others and in ourselves. An additional opportunity came as Sr Maire helped to organise a talk in Olney on the Spirituality of Aging on 13th May 2017, identifying that it does not matter where we are in our age group or stage of life, the journey that we are making from birth to death is one of pilgrimage, a journey of alpha and omega. A quote from Bernard Shaw offers a lasting thought: *"This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one: being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish, little clod of ailments and grievances, and complaining that the world will not devote itself to make you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the more I give myself the more I live. Life is no brief candle for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment. I want to make it burn as brightly as possible, before handing it on to the next generation"*.



People of different faiths and no faith affiliation came together across Luton's schools to discuss how they live and work together respectfully in BBC News Special themed assemblies



Gavin Shuker MP came to Coffee with MPs to speak to members of the community about a wide range of society challenges and concerns



The Fairtrade Fortnight event at the Luton Town Hall was full of children and adults from across a diverse range of backgrounds



At the Holocaust Memorial Day event, candles were lit in memory of the 11 million victims of the Holocaust during WW2



The Religious for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation conference focused on the theme of 'hope' in these challenging times



Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures

Run in collaboration with a partner organisation named Ghar se Ghar (Hindi/Urdu words meaning Home to Home), the Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures project is led by Ann Hyde. During 2016-2017, project events and activities that took place were made possible due to the kind support from agencies including the Luton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Near Neighbours, Luton West Indian Community Association, British Heart Foundation, and contributions from project participants. The Alder Trust has continued to provide invaluable support towards the funding of one of Ghar se Ghar's workers via GRASSROOTS.

Ghar se Ghar Activity Groups

The main focus of Ghar se Ghar activity groups is to provide exercise and relaxation to women from different backgrounds, with the level being adapted according to the needs of the participants. Time is also given to the wider aspects of living a healthy lifestyle and related discussions take place in addition to information sessions. Speakers and visitors to the group often give an input, and visits and trips are often arranged. There is great social value to the Ghar se Ghar groups in combating social isolation. Exercise is something that is culturally acceptable for those who may not venture out of the home for other social activities and for others who live alone, the connection with others on a regular basis is a lifeline to keep them afloat in an otherwise isolated existence.

- **Bury Park -**
Monday morning exercise groups continued to run in the Community Centre for 1½ hours as women only sessions. Thursday morning exercise sessions were provided from (May 2016 - May 2017) for the Luton West Indian Community Association.
- **Ashcroft -**
Tuesday morning exercise groups continued to run in the Sacred Heart R.C. Church Hall.
- **Beech Hill -**
Friday morning exercise groups continued to run in the Beech Hill Methodist Church and remained open to men as well as women.

Exercise is an effective way to improve both physical and mental health. It helps to combat anxiety and depression, enhancing a feeling of wellbeing through the release of endorphins. Exercise is a powerful tool, which is why the Ghar se Ghar groups are so important to women who would be unlikely to go to a gym or exercise in any other way.

Other Ghar se Ghar Activities

There was a total of 1980 attendances at events and activities throughout the year, including group sessions which included:

- Presentations from the East of England Ambulance Service regarding awareness raising of job opportunities for minority communities
- Presentations from the East of England Ambulance Service regarding volunteer recruitment for activities in health promotion within different faith and cultural communities
- Involvement in the 'Local Heroes' Exhibition Phase 1 (by Revolution Arts) where two staff members had photos taken and put into the exhibition
- A practical, educational session on CPR for the British Heart Foundations 'Restart a Heart Day' where CPR is taught on 'Resusci Anne' simulation dolls

Along with other events and trips which included:

- Circle dancing and five craft workshops provided to Bury Park and Ashcroft groups (including card making, papier-mâché picture frame making and nail art), delivered by New Creations
- Christmas lunch at the Sun Hotel in Hitchin
- The Bury Park feast – a seasonal celebration
- A trip to Waddesdon Manor, a National Trust House, and its Christmas Fayre
- Participative Indian classical dance workshops provided at all groups by the AKDC touring dance theatre company, as outreach prior to attending their performance of 'A Thousand Faces' which is linked to cases of acid attacks on women

Throughout the year there were 205 instances of providing one to one support or signposting/referrals, including to support services such as the Police, Social Services and Counselling in regards to issues including Domestic Violence, Health, Housing, Benefits and more.

Precious Pearls 'Women Sharing Traditions and Cultures'

Our annual Precious Pearls event took place on 9th March 2017 at High Town Methodist Church, with 144 women from different faiths and cultures gathering together to celebrate International Women's Day. This year's event had the theme of 'Women Sharing Traditions and Cultures' and featured a wide range of information sharing, entertainment and activities. Led by Ghar se Ghar and GRASSROOTS, the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches were again a partner in this popular event.

The women-only gathering enjoyed song and dance performances including a rendition of the Jamaican folk song 'Linstead Market' by members of the culturally diverse Beech Hill exercise group, the Ghar se Ghar organisers singing nursery rhymes, the Sathiya Sai singers in full voice, an Indian stick dance, the Diamond Divas with a number of their own choreographies and a traditional folk dance called 'Muffin Man'. Special piano recitals were offered by Muskaan and Kushbu Jonathan, reminding the older generation in attendance of a time when many more families had a piano at home than they do today. Humorous anecdotes were also offered from Irish, Bengali and Jamaican backgrounds, along with an amusing intercultural sketch about the names of mealtimes in the UK, and how people can so easily get confused by the difference between lunch, dinner and tea!

Speeches and stories were shared on a wide number of topics including reflections on Hajj (Muslim) and Lourdes (Christian) pilgrimages, military careers for women, the Ghar se Ghar trip to Waddesdon Manor, the work of the Luton Irish Forum, creative writing and poetry, a local community crafts group, domestic violence support services and the importance of supporting Fair Trade. The programme was rounded off with a reminder about the origins of International Women's Day - the call for justice for women, desiring Bread (to feed their families) and Roses (in recognition of their womanhood). As usual, the evening concluded with a chance to socialise and enjoy an array of delicious food from different cultural backgrounds, reflecting the rich diversity of the group, a great explosion of joy and togetherness! GRASSROOTS also displayed a wonderful array of fairly traded goods, explaining the origin and story of different products to those taking a look.

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:

- A dance for the Winter Solstice season, provided for the Bedfordshire Climate Change Group at the Friends Meeting House in Bedford
- A session provided for the Women's World Day of Prayer Preparation Day held at Central Baptist Church, and then for the Women's World Day of Prayer itself at the Sacred Heart RC Church, both in Luton
- A dance prepared especially for 'Precious Pearls' including women from across the regular circle dancing groups
- Two circle dancing workshops for the United Reformed Church (URC) Heartland Day held at Wigmore Community Church in Luton
- A circle dancing workshop for the 'Great Get Together' day in memory of Jo Cox MP, held at St Nicholas Church in Harpenden
- A dance for the Summer Solstice season, provided for the Bedfordshire Climate Change Group at the Friends Meeting House in Bedford
- The Bakewell International Day of Dance in Bakewell and a four-day Spring Holiday residential in the Peak District

Dance choreographies by Ann Hyde have been growing over the past year, with one of note being to the song 'Lost in Peace'. This piece of music emerged from a Near Neighbours Catalyst residential trip that brought together mainly young people from Lancashire in 2015. A young man and woman that were present decided to record something together and discovered the words to the ancient Sanskrit mantra 'Asatoma Sadgamaya'. The beautiful song was the motivator for the latest choreography.

Women's World Day of Prayer

The Women's World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical movement of informed prayer and prayerful action, which originally began as separate days of prayer organised by individual Christian denominations in America in the mid 1800's. It has now become a global ecumenical day of prayer which is estimated to touch 3 million people in 170 countries and islands. The service is prepared by women from a different country every year for global participants to follow. This year the service was prepared by the women of the Philippines, with the theme 'Am I being unfair to you?' based on the scriptural reading from Matthew 20:1-16. It is indeed a difficult and thought provoking text.

Luton had a preparation day for the service on 30th January 2017 where there was a Bible Study on this parable, highlighting that whilst our Christian reflex is to affirm the promise that 'the last shall be first and the first shall be last', we must really imagine ourselves as the workers who toil all day only to receive the same as those who worked for only an hour. Then we should consider, honestly, how do we feel? The scenario painted by the parable can be deemed outrageous on many levels, and totally unfair by worldly dog-eat-dog, individualistic standards - and yet, this is the point! In God's kingdom, with its upside-down values, the last shall be first and the first shall be last - but ultimately, everyone will be welcome, everyone will be equal, and everyone will have their fair share. The Bible Study concluded with a poem titled 'A Table for All' by Karen Campbell, which can be read on page 31 of this report.

Three services were then held on the actual Women's World Day of Prayer on 3rd March 2017 at Sacred Heart Church Stopsley, The Salvation Army and The Holy Family Marsh Farm. It was a very special service that brought denominations together across Luton.



The Diamond Divas were one of the groups to perform at the Precious Pearls event with their own unique and entertaining choreography



Over 140 women from a diverse range of cultures and faiths came together in friendship and solidarity at Precious Pearls



Regular Circle Dancing sessions take place across Luton which are accessible to all, inviting people of all abilities, ages and experience to join in



New Creations provided circle dancing and 5 sessions of craft workshops to the Bury Park and Ashcroft Ghar se Ghar groups



A wonderful trip was taken by members of Ghar se Ghar to Waddesdon Manor and its Christmas Fayre



Near Neighbours

In April 2017 it was announced by the Government that the Near Neighbours programme would be funded for a fourth year in Luton, led by Kim Greig. With the current and difficult climate of Brexit, a national increase in hate crime and political uncertainty, all has highlighted the need for the Near Neighbours programme in communities across England. With another year of work (until March 2018) including more grant opportunities for the Luton community, the Luton Hub can increase its support and continue to grow its impact and positive reputation.

At present Near Neighbours is scheduled to finish at the end of March 2018 unless the present Government decides to continue to fund and create a fifth phase of Near Neighbours. Whilst this uncertainty currently exists, Near Neighbours and the Church Urban Fund (CUF) have clear future plans to grow the Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme and the new pilot programme of Real People Honest Talk, to further challenge community differences and encourage people to live together peacefully, as so many Near Neighbours funded projects have done so far.

Near Neighbours Events and Activities

Since October 2016, Near Neighbours project developments have included a vast array of recruitment focused, educational and innovative activities between Kim Greig (Near Neighbours Coordinator, Luton Hub) and community organisations. These activities have included supporting the High Town Community Gardeners; Arts, Crafts and Health Workshops with Biscot Faith Partnership; a volunteer post funding for the Luton Foodbank; Cultural and Diversity training for young people; Safeguarding programmes for young people in multi-faith communities; Luton Roma Church and a cultural music project; a Street Pastors night cafe for migrants and new arrivals; and a Somalian women's project for healthy living and integration. At the time of writing, other groups including the OM Hindu Youth Group, Meaningful Education and the Ghana Society are all in the process of developing innovative Near Neighbours projects.

Safeguarding in Faith Organisations

A 'Safeguarding in Faith Organisations' workshop was delivered on 1st December 2016 in partnership between Kim Greig, John McCallum (Near Neighbours, Leicester Hub) and Strengthening Faith Institutions (SFI) to look at an Introduction to Safeguarding and Good Practice; information of who to contact locally for advice and reporting; and a look at case studies and toolkits. Over 65 people attended the workshop and great feedback was reported, with an excellent opportunity for the Luton Safeguarding Board to represent and promote themselves within the faith community in Luton.

Robin Hood Feast

The Robin Hood Feast has been an annual celebration since the beginning of the 'On Target with Faith Communities for a Healthy Luton' Archery project 3 years ago, led by Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) and supported by Near Neighbours. Held on 16th December 2016, the event gathered together families from a wide range of different cultures and faiths, for an evening of entertainment, a quiz, a presentation on the success and story of the project and the sharing of a grand 'medieval' feast.

Young People

Young people have been a strong focus over the past year with two stand-alone youth led initiatives: The Hate Crime Ambassadors and the Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion Champions, both groups of young people achieving their objectives through educating others around Hate Crime and bringing people together to experience other cultural dances, music and food.

One significant event of note is the Community Cohesion Champions 'Celebration of Community and Culture' day on 11th March 2017 which had over 400 people attend, featuring a vast array of cultural entertainment and input from a number of different community organisations working with and providing a service to the Luton community. Kim Greig continues to work with Community Cohesion Champion, a training opportunity for young people (aged 13 to 15 years) to learn about the Police, the work they do, community and development and how they can be active citizens in their own community.

Catalyst and Alumni Day

The Catalyst Youth Leadership programme continues to be of importance and value in Luton. Following previous course delivery, two of the Luton graduates, Jasmin Khanom and Usman Ahmed, went to Loughborough to join Riaz Ravat from the St Philip's Centre and a group of Catalyst Young People from Leicester for a Catalyst Alumni Day at Leicester Army Barracks. It was an excellent joining of young people and a good pilot for a Catalyst Alumni event. Jasmin and Usman thoroughly enjoyed the experience at the army barracks which involved team building and drill training, with a brilliant message of leadership.

A new Catalyst programme is being delivered in October 2017 (during half term), with the hope for more delivery throughout 2018.

Near Neighbours continues to be a permanent fixture on the agenda for Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) quarterly meetings recently held in the Quaker Luton Friends Meeting House and Medina Mosque. In a recent meeting a presentation was given on crowd-funding for the Catalyst programme and a showing of the local video that was produced, with the hope to generate support and financial contribution for the next Catalyst programme in Luton.

Community Allotment & Peace Garden at All Saints Church

On 9th February 2017, we were extremely privileged to host the Permanent Secretary of State, Melanie Dawes, who was visiting key people in Luton connected to Near Neighbours projects. The visit consisted of a tour of the Peace Garden and Community Allotment with Rev David Kesterton and a round table discussion with David Jonathan (Director, GRASSROOTS), Ryad Khodabocus (Community Relations Development Officer, Luton Council of Faiths); Rev David Kesterton and Maqsood Anwar (Near Neighbours funded project 'Cohen's Yard Community Inclusion Project', with All Saints Church and Medina Mosque) and Karen Campbell (Church Related Community Worker, GRASSROOTS).

Examples of Other Near Neighbours Funded Projects

Whilst the Near Neighbours funded projects in Luton all offer many positive outcomes, a selection of some of those funded over the past year include:

- **UBUNTU Intercultural Training Sessions**
An innovative Near Neighbours funded project that took place was a series of inter-cultural workshops delivered by Cultural Kinetics, based on the African philosophy of 'UBUNTU', loosely translated to 'I am because we are'. These sessions focused on some intercultural theory and practice, looking at how our culture and faith affect how we engage with others and form opinions on them, how we can listen without defending and speak without offending, and providing a framework for positive cross-community engagement and partnership.
- **Butterfly Project**
The Butterfly Project works with women, focusing on domestic violence and other related issues, through the medium of art. This was a hugely inspiring project, with the 'Walk a Mile in Her Shoes' exhibition of artwork by survivors of domestic abuse a significant highlight. This work gives a voice to individuals whose experiences are ordinarily hidden, isolated and unknown.
- **Home from Home**
The 'Home from Home' project led by Karen Campbell (Church Related Community Worker and GRASSROOTS team member) brought people together from all ages and ethnicities and looking at the heritage and migration of how people arrived and when they arrived in Luton. Differences in cultural heritage, singing, struggles, political history, and understanding discrimination in the UK and in one's homeland were among subjects discussed.
- **High Town Community Gardeners**
The 'High Town Community Gardeners' project continues to flourish with over 50 people attending one of the most recent community clean-up/gardening days. This work has made a positive change to the environmental locale in High Town in Luton, and whilst its Near Neighbours funding is coming to an end, they have found further funding to continue to develop and prosper. This is a great example of how Near Neighbours enables projects that are sustainable to be created and grow. As they have evolved they have now named themselves 'Edible High Town', with the aim to transform the community garden areas they have already improved into sustainable vegetable patches, and we hope this will be a huge success.
- **Inter-cultural and Inter-faith Cookery Classes**
A great example of how communities can be brought together is found in this collaboration between the Sikh Shri Guru Ravidass Bhawan and the Luton Irish Forum, where fun cookery lessons have taken place, and both new partnerships and friendships have been created. Furthermore, many of the non-Sikh participants have now become volunteers at the Sikh place of worship!

Real People, Honest Talk

'Real People, Honest Talk' is a new strand of work for Near Neighbours that is being piloted in Luton towards the end of 2017 and early 2018. It will bring people together in conversation and action around difficult and sensitive topics of concern to people around how we live well together and how we cope with differences. From September 2017 onwards, the Near Neighbours Luton Hub will be organising, delivering and coordinating up to seven groups of people that will meet on three occasions each.



Two of the Catalyst Leadership Programme graduates from Luton, Jasmin Khanom and Usman Ahmed, joined other Catalyst graduates from around the country for a Catalyst Alumni Day at Leicester Army Barracks



Members of the Sikh Shri Guru Ravidass Bhawan and the Luton Irish Forum communities have been coming together for cookery lessons



Kim Greig and John McCullum (Near Neighbours) and Strengthening Faith Institutions (SFI) delivered a Safeguarding Workshop in Luton



The Community Cohesion Champions held a 'Celebration of Community and Culture' day bringing together people from all over Luton



The annual Robin Hood Feast was a colourful and entertaining celebration of three years of successful Archery project delivery



Inter Faith Relations

On 14th February 2017, HOPE NOT HATE launched its annual 'State of Hate' report. The 76-page report looks at the most influential groups and individuals disseminating hate in Britain and abroad. While introducing this report, HOPE NOT HATE's Chief Exec Nick Lowles says:

"Views once thought beyond-the-pale are now being expressed by politicians and their supporters which were once the preserve of the dark corners of the internet. We reveal how liberal democracy is under threat in both the USA and Europe, plus further east from Putin's Russia. While Britain's extreme right-wing political parties and street groups remain politically marginalised and fractured, they too pose a growing threat of violence, in some cases even terrorism. And there is also an emerging threat from 'alt-right' social media activists and vloggers, who are becoming increasingly influential voices for white nationalism and those who oppose multiculturalism on both sides of the Atlantic."

In the light of all this, we believe the following activities have contributed, in small but significant ways, to change the current trends of hate.

Peace Walk

The 20th Annual Peace Walk took place on 24th September 2016, starting at the Town Hall War Memorial and then leading on to the Shri Guru Ravidass Bhawan (Sikh Temple), the Luton Central Mosque and All Saints Church. The crowd from different backgrounds was fantastic with a number of schools participating. Attendees learned about the Sikh culture and traditions, the Islamic faith and enjoyed great Punjabi hospitality. When leaving the mosque, people were handed a Fairtrade pouch of goodies.

At All Saints Church, an iconic mosaic artwork called 'Breath of the Compassionate' was unveiled, at the newly developed Peace Garden. Inspired by William Morris artworks, it comprises 5000 tiles made from scratch by the local community and over 500 school children. Over 2000 pupils benefitted through school assemblies led by a panel of different faith leaders on the theme 'What will make our town more respectful?'. It was a day of sharing cultures, faith and friendship with our neighbours from across the town.

The day also featured a celebration of British traditions with English Afternoon Tea, opportunity to realise one's Robin Hood dream by trying archery under the guidance of local community coaches, and experiencing powerful stories of wisdom by local storyteller Eleanor Martin from Khayaal Theatre Company.

Diwali Thali (Fair Trade Gift Hampers)

Diwali, a word coming from the ancient language of Sanskrit meaning “rows of lighted lamps”, is the festival of lights celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. Organised by Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) and GRASSROOTS, people across faiths brought greetings and expressions of friendship to Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj (Hindu Temple) on 31st October 2016. Words of wisdom, commonality and appreciation of the other in a plural community were food for thought on the night. The temple also had a Fair Trade Diwali, selling ‘Fair Trade Thalís’ and bringing some light and justice to the dark side of trade, whilst raising money for charity. This is a prime example of thinking locally and acting globally.

Inter Faith Week

With 500 plus events held during the 8th Annual Inter Faith Week from 13th to 20th November 2016, coordinated by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, its Co-Chairs, Bishop Richard Atkinson and Jatinder Singh Birdi said: *“People of different faiths and beliefs working together for the good of our shared society, have sent a powerful signal about the importance of positive inter faith relations”*. In Luton, an evening of fellowship and conversations at Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj (Hindu Temple), was held by Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) and GRASSROOTS, pondering together over issues that have been used very much to influence contemporary politics. Questions included “Why does migration happen? How does or must integration happen? What makes us British? Who decides what is British enough or not?” A sobering reflection was offered by Natu Bhai Solanki (Hindu Vice Chair of LCoF) who said: *“To prove my Britishness outside Britain is easy but within Britain it still remains a challenge”*.

Visit from Rt Revd Dr Richard Atkinson to Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF)

Bishop Richard Atkinson (Bishop of Luton and Bedford), being the Co-chair of The Inter Faith Network for the UK, visited a meeting of the Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) on 22nd November 2016. Reflecting on Inter Faith Week 2016, he noted that there had been over 500 notified events nationally for the first time, but that more were likely to have taken place. There is a sense of the growing penetration and impact of inter faith work within our society, and that more young people are becoming involved. Richard then offered his thanks for all of the work that GRASSROOTS and LCoF does, and for the contributions from the different faith communities in Luton. An image that he reflected upon was a bridge leading into the village of Cardington which was constructed in 1778 by John Smeaton, often regarded as the father of civil engineering. Bridges are places of meeting, enabling a path through obstacles and walked over from both sides, concepts that draw comparison to the work of reconciliation and coming together in solidarity. A bridge also requires the right sort of tension for it to work otherwise it collapses, and so difference of opinion or belief can also be positive. Richard then commented that there has been a strong increase in nationalism since Brexit, and that it did not start something new but instead ‘rolled back the carpet’, which has contributed to an increase in racism and hate crime towards people of different faith and cultural backgrounds. Luton, however, continues to be a shining example of bridge building, and whilst it is important for us to celebrate our successes, we must also continually ask how we can get even better. It was noted that we must set our own agenda, as opposed to letting the far right set it for us, and engage with even more women and young people in the work we do.

Building Bridges Not Walls

A global initiative was made local on 20th January 2017, as ‘Building Bridges Not Walls’ was kindly coordinated in Luton by Revd Jenny Spouge, currently ministering at Wigmore Community Church in Luton, and who is a former GRASSROOTS team member. On this date Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States of America, and so on the suspension bridge in Luton’s Wardown Park, people from different racial, cultural, national and faith backgrounds, stood together for a simple, hopeful and unmistakable message saying we will build bridges, not walls, to a peaceful and just world. A mother said simply: *“I am here for my baby’s future”*. She, along with many others recognised how Donald Trump’s election had been driven by hate and fear, adding to the rise of a new far right politics in western democracies, demonising immigrants, Mexicans and Muslims and mocking women and disabled people. Jeremy Williams, another local participant said that it might seem ‘pointless’ we are standing against democracy but that’s their choice in America. Here in Britain, we choose to be open and welcoming to people of all different backgrounds.

Peace and Solidarity Vigils and Statements

On 29th January 2017 we were deeply saddened by a sickening terror attack at the Quebec City Islamic Cultural Centre in Canada. Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), which is a voluntary body of Luton's different faiths and cultures, issued a statement to condemn such an act of barbarism, disrespect to the sanctity of a place of worship and attack on religious freedom. It was noted that the US election campaign, driven by hate and fear, has added to the rise of a new far right politics in western democracies, and that we must combat extremism, hate crime and racism head on and nurture the good in many citizens.

Again we were shocked and grieved by the violent, depraved and cowardly terror attack on Westminster on 22nd March 2017, with a great loss of life and many injured. In response, over 200 people across faiths and cultures joined in on a Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) peace vigil on 24th March 2017, supported by GRASSROOTS. With such short notice, people come together in remembrance of the victims and their friends and families. The message was loud and clear. Hate mongers, extremists and terrorists have no place in our civil and democratic society. Sadly, those who share similar evil ideologies would take advantage of such events to drive communities further apart and for political gain. Those who turned up committed to stay united by our common humanity and work for the common good. Leaders condemned such evil acts in the strongest terms and said they will not be driven apart. People were reminded to be vigilant towards such evil and support one another.

Following the horrific attack in Manchester on 22nd May 2017, this message was repeated as people from across the town came together once again on 23rd May 2017, adding their voices to the many millions around the globe in condemning the actions of those responsible. Soon after there were further sickening attacks at London Bridge on 3rd June 2017 and Finsbury Park on 19th June 2017. This caused us to reflect that many people seem to be losing heart. Many people feel both confused and powerless. The forces against us seem overwhelming: terrorism, militarism, extremism, nationalism, racism, consumerism, individualism. These forces seem very powerful and seem to be fully in control. Many people feel helpless. The world is so vast and so complex, and we are so small. What can we do? But we'll never stop doing what we can, even if it simply means standing for peace together with neighbours from different faiths, cultures and nationalities.

Conversations on the Abrahamic Faiths

Three of the major world religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are very closely related in their origins, their stories and their holy scripture. Together they are referred to as the 'Abrahamic Faiths' under Prophet Abraham, the patriarch. They also have similar beliefs about morals and ethics but can differ in their expressions, culture, doctrine, theology and aspects of beliefs. Historically, relations between these faith groups have been both conflicting and cooperative. The city of Toledo in Spain is still a testimony of such coexistence. An evening of dialogue looking at the above took place on 30th March 2017 at the Holy Ghost Church in Luton, bringing together many interested people. Led by Sr Maire Hayes from GRASSROOTS, guest speakers including Rehana Faisal from Luton An-Nisa Trust (LANtern) and Suffa-tul-Islam Mosque, Brian Green from Luton Hebrews and Orthodox Synagogue and Monsignor Kevin McGinnell from Holy Ghost RC Parish Church. Contemporary 21st century issues were also discussed, and a food donation was made to the Luton Foodbank by the organisers on the night.

Alex Mayer MEP East of England visit to Luton

Alex Mayer MEP for the East of England visited Luton on 7th April 2017, looking at some of the community cohesion work that takes place in the town. She met with a cross section of key community representatives within the Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) network including GRASSROOTS. Alex pointed out that the critical thing now is how we keep a good relationship with our European partners and friends in light of Brexit. It was agreed between those present that building relationships with others is sacred, priceless and key to any success. Many concerns and anxieties were raised by those present including hate crime, mental health issues, extremism and business. Alex reassured those present that the top priority in the EU parliament negotiations is about the rights of EU citizens, and then lit a Peace Candle and was presented with a Fairtrade pouch containing fairly traded goodies, before visiting the Peace Garden at All Saints Church.



Community and faith leaders joined people from across Luton in standing together in solidarity in response to the cowardly terror attack in Manchester



Natu Bhai Solanki (LCoF Co-chair) and Cllr Tahir Khan (Mayor of Luton) unveiling 'Breath of the Compassionate' at the Luton Peace Walk



Those visiting the Luton Central Mosque during the Luton Peace Walk were given a Fairtrade pouch of fairly traded goodies to take away



Luton rejected the politics of hate, fear and division on the day of Donald Trump's inauguration saying let's 'Build Bridges Not Walls'



Alex Mayer MEP came to Luton to find out more about the challenges faced in Luton and the community development work that takes place



Report from Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills

Activities and engagement over the period 2016-2017 has been incredibly busy, with many rich and exciting areas of work taking place, led by Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills, Inter Faith Advisor for the St Albans Diocese.

Reader Training

A Multi-Faith Awareness module was offered to Readers in training during the 2016 Autumn Term. Readers are lay people who have been selected, trained and licensed by the Bishop of a diocese to preach, teach and lead worship in a pastoral context. As part of their course, students also attended the Luton Peace Walk which they enjoyed immensely. This left a positive impression upon them. Another module is being offered in the 2017 autumn term.

Refugee Crisis / Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre

Bonnie presented a report on the refugee crisis to Diocesan Synod on 11th March 2017 and has now created a booklet which will soon be distributed to parishes. In the course of this work, Bonnie visited St Mary's Church Watford, to interview a group of Iranian Christians being supported there. Bonnie also participated in a conference from 29th to 31st March 2017 in Woking with the World Council of Churches and the Council of European Churches for developing a strategy for providing a better theological response to the refugee crisis. Furthermore, Bonnie has visited the Yarl's Wood Immigration Centre twice, once before Christmas, and once after accompanying the Rt Revd Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans. This has helped to develop a better understanding of the situation there. The Diocese of St Albans is encouraging support for the Yarl's Wood Befrienders group who meet with those being detained and offer pastoral support, but support and prayers are also needed for the chaplaincy team who provide help and assistance to all who are being detained, as well as to staff.

Work with Sweden

The launch of a joint book publication with Sweden called 'Why Interfaith?', held on Friday 9th September 2016, was organised on the UK side by Canon Andrew Wingate. The book was inspired by the 2014 visit by a team from the Diocese of St Albans to its link diocese in Sweden to discuss issues surrounding interfaith encounter. It contains contributions from people within the diocese, but also elsewhere, as well as from Sweden. Further initiatives are ongoing, with a visit of Swedish clergy and church leaders to the UK having taken place on 6th to 9th September 2017, including a day spent with GRASSROOTS in Luton, and a future programme of exchange of clergy and church leaders is being planned some time in 2018.

Response to Terror

The recent acts of terror within the UK, from both the far right and so-called 'Islamist' influence, have presented a quandary as to how best to respond. Luton Town Council and Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), alongside GRASSROOTS, are very good at responding with holding vigils and making statements – and all of this is vitally important to the health and well-being of the community. But what can be done that provides more concrete results?

There is a report below of Bonnie's visit to Israel, where she met with 16-year-old students from a mixed school in Israel. Among the ethos of the school is that of including in the curricula a process of facilitating discussion among the students – of every age, from the very young to teenager – of how the conflict, and events including horrific violence, affect the lives of each of them. It is in making those friendships and in hearing how events affect their friends that makes for a humanising process. It is time-consuming, results do not bear fruit overnight, but it is a process that brings hope.

Inspired by this school, and following the terror event in Manchester, Bonnie put together a short leaflet that was sent to youth leaders and interested people that outlined a process of beginning conversation. It was well received, alongside assurance that it has been helpful in enabling young people to come to terms with events. That leaflet has now been printed, with the help of staff at GRASSROOTS, and will be sent to parishes alongside the booklet on the refugee crisis. However, enabling people to meet face to face and have those conversations is another process which would help to break down suspicion and fear between communities.

To this end, Bonnie, and David Kesterton at All Saints Church in Bury Park, Luton, are proposing that group visits to Luton and a programme of study could become a reality. It is hoped that a more formal programme for parish and group visits can be organised with All Saints Church, partly because so many of the Readers in training who have taken part in visits would like to bring their parishes, but also because GRASSROOTS regularly receives requests for visits! The idea for this programme would be three-fold: to provide a programme for schools in rural Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire to visit places of worship in Luton; to enable and encourage parishes and community groups in these areas to do the same; and to provide a course with theological, practical and social justice aspects to those studying for or in ministry.

Presence & Engagement

With the National Presence & Engagement task group, Bonnie visited the University of Bristol to meet with a professor of law, Dr Julian Rivers, to discuss the on-going controversies surrounding inclusion of caste in equalities legislation. The current government is conducting a public consultation on the legislation, coming to an end on the 17th September 2017. Bonnie visited Radlett parish, and then led a group of Presence & Engagement clergy on a visit to the parish. We heard how despite heavy investment in what is essentially a flourishing parish, changing demographics have meant the numbers in the congregation are diminishing as the older generation are moving out of the area. This is directly reflected in the number of new families moving in and increased attendance at the synagogues. It was interesting to listen to one of the local rabbis reflect that these families are culturally Jewish, and not necessarily 'devout' – which means there are challenges for both the church and the synagogue. The parish is nevertheless flourishing with a full-time youth leader, planned social housing project, and more.

United Nations

As part of on-going work with the United Nations, a consultation was held at Youthscape in Luton for faith-based organisations in the UK to feed into the UN efforts at prevention of genocide. The meeting looked at flashpoints identified by a European consultation as radicalisation to violent extremism, the refugee crisis and the more recent spike in hate crime following Brexit. A report, affirmed by the UN office, has since been completed and was due to be submitted in a session at the House of Lords on 22nd March 2017 by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. Unfortunately, this was the very afternoon of the terror attack in Westminster and so this could not happen, but it has since been submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury as well as government ministers. On 14th July 2017, Bonnie was then invited to New York to speak to the United Nations launch of the UN Plan of Action for Faith Leaders, of which all of the above was a part.

Visit to Iraq

From 30th April to 5th May 2017, Bonnie was invited to a conference in Karbala, Iraq, by the al-Hikmah Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation. She was the only woman in an otherwise all male group of invitees, which included a Papal representative, Christians from Germany and Bosnia, and Sunni Muslims from the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Indonesia, and Russia, amongst others. The group not only attended talks, but toured both shrines in Karbala and another in Najaf, visited a refugee camp, a pilgrim centre that also produces artificial limbs, and an ancient mosque that was being refurbished. What the hosts had not informed the visitors, but was posted on a board outside, was that this mosque had been demolished by Coalition Forces. Bonnie is hoping to work with Iraqi women colleagues in finding ways of supporting the numerous women who have been left without support after their husbands and older sons were killed by ISIS.

Visit to Israel

From 14th to 18th May 2017, the Council of Christians and Jews invited Bonnie to participate in a leadership programme in Israel for both Christian and Jewish leaders. The programme was designed to investigate as many aspects of the conflict as was possible. They visited a settlement, met with an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson and a government minister, went to Jericho in order to meet with Fatah leadership, Bethlehem to meet with Palestinian leadership and peace workers, and also met with Israeli and Palestinian peace workers in Jerusalem. Among the highlights was a visit to the school Hand in Hand (Yad be Yad) in Jerusalem. Set up eighteen years ago, the students are from Israeli Jewish and Arab, Palestinian Christian and Muslim backgrounds. They are encouraged to talk with one another, and with their parents and teachers, about how the conflict affects each of their lives. Some of the students were asked what hopes they had – sadly they replied that they had no hope. They were then asked what concerns they had for the future – each of them replied that it was the army. The Israeli Jewish student replied that she would refuse to join the army as she did not wish to carry arms against her friends or their families. This would have serious consequences for her with respect to education and job prospects. The Muslim Israeli student replied that she would not join the army – although her father is in the army, to the displeasure of the rest of their family. His feeling is that he can do more to change things within than without. The Palestinian Christian student replied that she saw the army as an occupation force. This group of students were clearly close friends, and each of them a powerful voice for their people and their generation.

Visit to Iran

From 19th to 24th August 2017, Bonnie was invited to take part in a dialogue between the World Council of Churches and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran, Iran. This dialogue has been on-going for twenty years, and Bonnie has been involved for the last twelve, for previous dialogues. This particular session felt as if considerable progress had been made beyond the usual platitudes so many government-level dialogues can have. This does not mean the previous twenty years were worth nothing – rather they were a vital stepping stone towards trust that enabled this to happen. What was striking was the first day of formal dialogue contained some radical, if subtle, statements. Chances were taken, which can be understood as a tremendous act of trust on the part of our partners in Iran. The second day seemed more of an official corrective – which was necessary politically inside the country. The most valuable conversations, as always, happened on the side – at meals and on visits. The current team at the centre have a clear affection for one another – and for the WCC team. This makes all the difference in the course of conversation. Archbishop Sarkisian, from the Armenian Christian community in Iran, is part of the WCC team – but also works with the centre on a regular basis. The team visited his church on the first day with a delegation from the centre, but also joined him for a meal at the Armenian compound in Tehran later in the week.

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

Working with Barbara Glasson and members of the Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group within Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Bonnie has helped produce a free practical theological resource which uses the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* produced by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). This is to help people gain a practical understanding towards application of its guidelines, provide a wider perspective of the UK context and develop deeper theological reflection on interfaith engagement. This can be found online or by contacting GRASSROOTS.



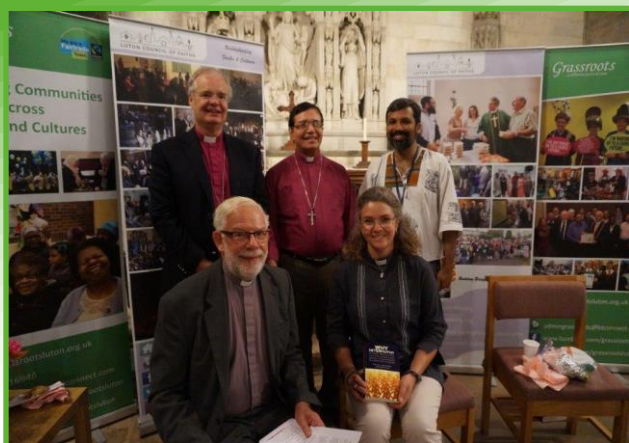
At the Hand in Hand (Yad be Yad) school in Jerusalem, students from Israeli Jewish and Arab, Palestinian Christian and Muslim background are encouraged to talk with one another about how the conflict affects each of their lives



A group of Swedish clergy and church leaders came to the UK and visited Luton to learn from and visit different faith communities



Bonnie Evans-Hills led a group of Presence & Engagement clergy in Radlett parish to learn about the challenges faced there



Bishop Richard Atkinson joined the launch of 'Why Interfaith?', a new book with contributions from David Jonathan and Bonnie Evans-Hills



Bonnie Evans-Hills was invited by the al-Hikmah Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation for a conference in Karbala, Iraq

Conclusion

As we are commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation of Christian faith in 2017, it is imperative that Christian mission must demonstrate how the Bible speaks into public life.

The Reformation recovered the essence of the gospel and influenced the western culture and institutions, sacred and secular.

Likewise, may Christianity, where possible in partnership with others, influence the modern world, which is increasingly becoming:

- Crippled by individualism-capitalism-consumerism, and
- Fractured by the religious and political extreme rhetoric promoting hate and fear of the other.

At GRASSROOTS, we believe in the theory of continually being reformed and renewed to remain relevant to our local context. This report presents a modest overview of how our life has been in the past one year.

Title Pages Image Guide

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

Karen Campbell leading the worship and Bible Study for the URC Heartland Reflection Day

Spirituality of Justice (Page 10)

Sr Maire Hayes sharing the story of the Fair Trade pouch for the URC Heartland Reflection Day

Working with Women Across faiths & Cultures (Page 14)

Ann Hyde leading an activity at the Precious Pearls celebration at High Town Methodist Church

Near Neighbours (Page 18)

Kim Greig and colleagues with Permanent Secretary of State, Melanie Dawes, visiting Near Neighbours projects

Inter Faith Relations (Page 22)

Ryad Khodabocus, David Jonathan and colleagues with Alex Mayer MEP on a tour of All Saint's Church Peace Garden

Report from Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills (Page 26)

Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills with GRASSROOTS volunteers, Mahmooda and Jasmin Khanom at the Great Get Together

A Table for All

Come as you are, because you are welcome.
Come take your place, and hear now the call,
The table is spread, and the music is playing -
Come take your place at the Table for All.

Don't ponder now who you think is worthy,
When, where or how RSVP they sent;
Instead come with gladness, and joy overflowing,
For each person present was God's first intent.

No special place for royal or mighty,
Earthly wealth and position a thing of the past
At the Table prepared with upside-down values,
Where the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

No longer division 'tween haves and the have nots;
Here no oppressed, neither those who oppress.
Where the world has said 'no' to dignity of justice,
Our God, at His Table, says 'yes'.

And don't be fooled into thinking God does not see colour;
His Table for All is no sea of grey -
He creates and admires, and declares 'It is good',
No matter what racist or bigot may say.

He calls to His people from every direction,
From the east to the west, the north and the south;
There's drink for the thirsty of every nation,
A banquet abundant for every mouth.

A rainbow of women and men at His Table;
Different languages, customs, and faiths from all lands,
Invited to sit, talk and learn all together,
More human made by the joining of hearts and of hands.

So come sit with prince, and come sit with pauper,
With old and with young freely come take your rest;
Whatever the label, the burden you carry,
Lay it down, for now you are most honoured guest.

And let us not wait to dine at that Table,
For though it's not yet, the Table is now-
Where valleys are filled, and mountains are levelled
And a sharing of fate emerges somehow.

Oh the Table is spread, and the music is playing,
Let's listen and hear and respond to God's call,
And live into being the Kingdom we cry for -
The Table with room for All.

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2016-2017 Financial Summary

Income	£
Grants received	159,693
Donations	7,594
Interest and other income	26
Sale of Fairtrade goods	13,935
	181,248
Expenditure – Charitable activities	
Mission Education and Advancement	63,668
Spirituality of Justice	22,173
Work with Women across Faiths and Cultures	8,580
Near Neighbours	50,131
Bury Park Beech Hill Church Related Community Work	1,379
Celebrate England	8,907
Other Events	2,092
	156,930
Governance costs	
Total	3,544
	160,474
Net Incoming Resources for the year	
Total	20,774
Reserves at 31 August 2017	
Unrestricted	22,853
Restricted	29,390

Meet the GRASSROOTS Team and Trustees



David Jonathan

Co-ordinator and Community Cohesion and Interfaith Relations

Revd Canon David Lawson

Chair of Trustees



Sr Maire Hayes

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

Sheila Marsden

Secretary



Ann Hyde

Working with Women of Different Faiths and Cultures

Gordon Slater

Treasurer



Karen Campbell

Church Related Community Worker

Phil Horner

Trustee



Kim Greig

Near Neighbours Coordinator

Linda Jones

Trustee



Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills

St Albans Diocese Inter Faith Advisor

Ruth Tetlow

Trustee



Ryad Khodabocus

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



Ciaran O'Brien

Programmes & Operations Manager

We would also like to thank our trustees who have stepped down this year for all they have done:

Maggie Hindley
Maureen Borbone
Karen Drayton

