



## Welcome to the autumn edition of the GRASSROOTS newsletter!

The charity sector in the UK is facing challenges like never before. Demands and expectations are huge in light of the constantly evolving global emergencies impacting people's lives and influencing perspectives at the local level. The continuing nightmare that is the war in Syria and the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis, the Israel-Palestine conflict, Indo-Pak conflict over Kashmir, and the horrific murder of Father Jacques Hamel in his church in Normandy, are just a few such examples. At home, we were appalled to hear the news of a young woman being brutally attacked in Milton Keynes in a racially motivated incident, which sadly led to the loss of her unborn child. This came just weeks after the murder of Arkadiusz Jozwik in Harlow, also motivated by racial hatred. Luton's faith communities have extended our condolences to both the families affected by these crimes. Our thoughts and prayers are with them during this difficult time.

Sadly, these attacks are not isolated incidents. Over the last few months we have witnessed a significant rise in the occurrence of hate crimes - from the desecration of places of worship to verbal and physical abuse inflicted upon people simply because of their race, religion or ethnicity. These are shameful and despicable acts of cowardice. We are disappointed by those cultivating a divisive and toxic narrative, allowing hate to flourish. Despite all these challenges, it is a real achievement for Luton to have remained a beacon of hope for the world. In its own humble ways, GRASSROOTS has continued contributing to the hope in our town by bringing people together and celebrating the rich and diverse community around us. A few brief snapshots are given in this newsletter.

## Royal Visit to Luton

GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths (LCOF) were honoured to host a private meeting with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge during their visit to Youthscape at the iconic Bute Mills in Luton. In collaboration with Our Minds Matters (OMM) and OM Group, GRASSROOTS and LCOF drew on many strands of work around youth empowerment and youth mental health in the town to facilitate a discussion about mental health from a multi-faith perspective.



*Duke and Duchess of Cambridge discussing mental health in Luton*

## Secretary of State Visit to Luton

Luton also had the honour of a visit from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, hosted by the GRASSROOTS 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 Story-Telling" 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.



*Rt Hon Greg Clark MP meeting community members in Luton*

## Other GRASSROOTS News

### **Eco-Iftar (*Iftar is the evening meal when Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast*)**

Held in partnership with All Faiths and None (AFAN), GRASSROOTS and LCOF hosted their second Eco-Iftar on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016 at St Margaret's Methodist Church. The event raised consciousness about the environment and Fairtrade, whilst also exploring the meaning of Ramadan. Guests enjoyed inspirational talks, presentations on Ecology and Fairtrade work, and storytelling by Khayaal Theatre, followed by a Fairtrade Iftar meal.

### **Vigil for Jo Cox MP**

The murder of Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spen, on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016 was shocking and depressing. 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, GRASSROOTS supported a vigil on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2016 at the Luton Town Hall War Memorial. People of all faiths and none joined in standing together against hatred and violence.

### **National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) Conference**

Over 34 representatives from parishes in the Catholic Dioceses of Northampton and Westminster met at St John's Parish Church in Sundon Park on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016 for the National Justice and Peace Conference. Led and coordinated by Sr Maire Hayes of GRASSROOTS, in the presence of Bishop Peter Doyle, the theme drew on Pope Francis' encyclical (letter from the Pope) *Laudato Si' - Care for our common home*, with keynote speaker Barbara Kentish of the Westminster Justice and Peace Archdiocese.

### **Solidarity following the Murder of Father Jacques Hamel**

GRASSROOTS' partner, Luton Council of Faiths (LCOF), strongly and unreservedly condemned the horrific murder of Father Jacques Hamel on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2016 in his church in Normandy. In Luton, local Muslims stood firmly alongside our Catholic brothers and sisters at this very painful and difficult time. 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 for the sanctity of places of worship and life. As people of moderation we must continue to work together, support each other, and foster peace.

### **Catalyst Youth Programme**

The Catalyst Youth Leadership programme was run in Luton for the second year, with young people aged 16-25 years old. Funded by Near Neighbours, the programme was led by the St Philips Centre in Leicester in partnership with GRASSROOTS and LCOF. The five days of intensive training covered a variety of personal and professional development topics. Participants met with local leaders from six different faith backgrounds, followed by a workshop on inter-cultural communication awareness.

## Dates for your Diary

**Luton Fairtrade Steering Group Meeting** on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016 at 10:30am at GRASSROOTS, 47 High Town Rd, Luton, LU2 0BW. Contact [jgrassroots@btconnect.com](mailto:jgrassroots@btconnect.com)

**LCOF Archery Project Tournament** on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct 2016 at 6pm at Luton Sixth Form College, Bradgers Hill Rd, Luton, LU2 7EW. Contact [jgrassroots@btconnect.com](mailto:jgrassroots@btconnect.com)

**Celebration of the Birth of Baha'u'llah and the Bab** (Bahá'í Community) on 29<sup>th</sup> Oct 2016 at 2pm at Friends Meeting House, 28, Crawley Green Rd, Luton, LU2 0QX.

**Training on Safeguarding & Vulnerable Adults** from Near Neighbours on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016 at 1-4pm and 6-9pm. Contact [near.neighbours\\_luton@btconnect.com](mailto:near.neighbours_luton@btconnect.com)

**Coffee with MPs** on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2016 at 6:30pm (venue TBC). Please visit [www.grassrootsluton.org.uk](http://www.grassrootsluton.org.uk) for more details soon or email [jgrassroots@btconnect.com](mailto:jgrassroots@btconnect.com)



*Attendees talked and shared food and stories together at the second Eco-Iftar in Luton*



*Members of the public from all faiths and cultures attended the vigil for Jo Cox*



*GRASSROOTS team members and other attendees at the NJPN Conference*



*Muslims stood in solidarity with Catholics following the murder of Fr Jacques Hamel*



*The Catalyst Youth Leadership programme engaged with youth from across Luton*