



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

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." (John 3:16). When we speak of Advent, or preparing for Christmas, we are welcoming the Christ, the Prince of Peace, being born into human history. Our world today is groaning for peace; it feels that now more than ever we stand in need of the glad tidings "Peace on earth and goodwill to all people". However, if we reflect on the account of the first Christmas, we see that Jesus' world was not much different from our own. Jesus was born into a place which had seen a succession of military overthrows by conquering assailants, and where warfare had been rampant for millennia. Expectations were high - surely the Christ would overthrow the Roman overlords of the Jewish State. But Jesus did not do this. Instead, he created and offered alternatives - a different way of life; a different way of seeing God; a different way of living in God's world; a different model of God's kingdom, transcending the manmade walls of nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture and language. At GRASSROOTS, we seek to reflect the real message of Christmas in our work - reaching out to those who are often on the margins, the despised, misunderstood, or frequently forgotten. We pray that Christ may be continually reborn in our hearts and through our actions as we reach out to our world, inspired by God's extravagant and unlimited love.



### Real People, Honest Talk

'Real People, Honest Talk' (RPHT) is a new strand of work which took place between October - December 2017 as part of the Near Neighbours Programme, hosted in Luton by GRASSROOTS. The initiative brought people together from across the town to share in conversations about difficult and sensitive topics of concern, and to encourage the creation of new community-led social action projects as a response to the issues highlighted.



*People from across Luton discussing issues in the town*

RPHT created safe and open spaces where 'ordinary people' - not just community leaders - could speak honestly about their anxieties and aspirations. The initiative saw six different groups formed across Luton, each meeting three times, and included people of different ages, cultural and faith backgrounds. Topics discussed included poverty, bullying, intolerance, parking and lack of interaction between neighbours. Project activities will follow soon.

### A Fair and Festive Christmas

A Fair and Festive Christmas Celebration was held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017 at the Holy Ghost Catholic Parish Centre in Westbourne Road. Arranged under the Church Related Community Work (CRCW) Project in partnership with the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches, the event was a warm and friendly showcase of cultural foods, songs, poetry and dance presentations, including live music, and attended by a wide range of people from Luton and beyond.



*Music was a key part of the Fair and Festive Celebrations*

A Fairtrade Stall run by GRASSROOTS attracted a great deal of interest from event guests. Tastefully handcrafted eco-friendly Christmas Gift Hampers proved particularly popular. Other festive items on sale included Nativity Nesting Dolls, the Nativity in a Bottle and Jolly Angels. GRASSROOTS has an exciting range of fairly traded goods on offer from their shop. For more info, please email us at [admingrassroots@btconnect.com](mailto:admingrassroots@btconnect.com) or call 01582 416946.

## Other GRASSROOTS News

### Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme

A new Catalyst programme was delivered by GRASSROOTS, Near Neighbours and Luton Council of Faiths from Monday 23rd to Friday 27th October 2017. Participants enjoyed an intense five-day programme covering a range of training subjects including the media, presentation skills, leadership and more. A key part of the programme offered the opportunity to meet with people from different faith backgrounds, including Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and the Baha'i faith, in order to learn more about Luton's diverse faith traditions.

### Inter Faith Week Activities

Inter Faith Week 2017 took place from 12th to 19th November. GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) joined forces to deliver two activities contributing to the hundreds which took place across the UK. On 14th November 2017, in partnership with Bedford Council of Faiths (BCoF), a session of The Diversity Game was facilitated at Central Bedfordshire Council with the Bedfordshire and Luton Emergency Volunteers Executive Committee (BLEVEC). On 17th November 2017, a Multi Faith Storytelling event took place in High Town Methodist Church attended by over 100 people. The event showcased poetry by Umera Fatima from the Luton Sixth Form College, and a multi-faith women's choir. The main presentation was given by the award winning Khayaal Theatre Company, telling stories from different faith traditions through artistic performance. The evening was sponsored by Amal (a Said Foundation project) and the Near Neighbours Programme.

### Visit from Swedish Delegation

On 9th September 2017 GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) hosted a group of 30 Church of Sweden Parish Workers from two religiously multicultural parishes in the Stockholm area. The group consisted of priests, deacons, pedagogues, youth workers, preschool teachers, musicians and caretakers, visiting Luton to see examples of activities which enhance inclusion and social cohesion. The struggles and challenges, prospects and opportunities of being church in 'multi' areas, were well explored and shared during the day.

### Lifetime Achievement Award for Sr Maire Hayes

Earlier this year, GRASSROOTS team member Sr Maire Hayes celebrated her 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Religious Life. Sr Maire is a nun and belongs to the Catholic Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit. In her early religious life Sr Maire taught in secondary schools in Birmingham and Liverpool, and later lived and worked in Santiago, Chile, for 22 years. For the past 14 years she has been working in Luton as part of the GRASSROOTS team. Sr Maire is a source of great inspiration and encouragement, a dear friend to many and a trusted and much-loved colleague. It is for these reasons and many more that Sr Maire was awarded a much-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award at the Luton & Bedfordshire Community Awards on Friday 13th October 2017, in recognition of all she has done and continues to do.

## Dates for your Diary in 2018

For details contact us on 01582 416946 or at [admingrassroots@btconnect.com](mailto:admingrassroots@btconnect.com):

- Holocaust Memorial Day Service on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan from 6:30pm at Uni of Beds
- Fairtrade Fortnight from 26<sup>th</sup> Feb to 11<sup>th</sup> March (event details coming soon!)
- Real People Honest Talk Celebration on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb from 6:30pm at Venue Central
- Precious Pearls on 8<sup>th</sup> March from 6:30pm at High Town Methodist Church
- GRASSROOTS 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on 22<sup>nd</sup> March from 6:00pm at Venue Central

## Contact Us Online

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*Young people from across Luton took part in the Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme*



*The Khayaal Theatre Company delivered a wonderful Multi Faith Storytelling performance*



*A delegation from Sweden visited different areas of Luton and met community members*



*Sr Maire Hayes celebrating 50 Years of Religious Life with colleagues from GRASSROOTS*



*From us all at GRASSROOTS, we wish you a blessed, peaceful and very Merry Christmas!*