

Triratna Southampton AGM Chair's Report 2024

Principal Charity Aims

Triratna Southampton's charitable aims concern the furthering of the Buddhist religion in the form of the Triratna tradition and using applications of the Buddha's teaching to promote the health and well-being of all. We do this whilst maintaining a strong connection with the various structures and ethos of the broader Triratna movement.

We make teaching and meditation freely available to anyone in the local area who wishes to visit our centre and supporting those who wish to take their initial interest further with a deeper understanding and practice of Buddhism.

Fellowship and community (Sangha) is an essential supporting element to Buddhist practice and cultivating a welcoming centre culture is an important part of our work.

This year has seen a marked increase in newcomers attending our centre as well as the continuing strengthening of the bonds of community and deepening in the practice of Sangha members of longer standing.

The latter is demonstrated in the form of three men making a provisional commitment to the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha by becoming Mitras (Sanskrit for friends). There has also been one new request from a woman to take this commitment deeper by training for ordination in the Triratna Buddhist Order.

Activities

Our regular weekly events this year comprised:

Wednesday evening study for three separate groups of Mitras, now three to four years in their courses.

Thursday evening study for men, regular attendees and Mitras. This evening was established this year by Dhammavijaya with support from Paramajyoti and has proved very successful.

Friday evening meditation and Puja (devotional ritual) led by the team. Due to low attendance this was suspended in May 2024 and replaced with a schedule of monthly full moon Pujas.

Saturday morning teaching of meditation and Dharma. In the autumn of 2023 the focus of this was changed from Sangha Morning to make the sessions more attractive to, and appropriate for, newcomers to our centre. Saturday mornings now consist of 'Learn to Meditate' and 'Going Deeper' sessions which have proved very successful. We have welcomed many new visitors who have benefited from meditation teaching and with some becoming regular attendees.

Beyond our weekly calendar there were also monthly mornings for women, four very well attended festival days and a six week course in the autumn.

Another important activity is the monthly Parents' Sangha created by Dan, Katrine and Ben where families with young children can come along, for crafts, meditation, chanting and other activities. These have flourished over the course of the year with ten families involved and as many as five families attending together in the spring. Connections have been made with other Triratna family activities nationwide with residential events being planned.

The Parents' Sangha is a model for events run by committed people beyond the Order team which bring additional vitality and diversity to the centre.

We also ran three weekend retreats, one at Rivendell retreat centre in Sussex and two on the Isle of Wight courtesy of Linda Lees and her family. Such retreats perform an important role in strengthening community and deepening experience and understanding of the Buddha's teaching Dharma. They also are important in raising funds to support the running and development of our centre.

Beginning in July 2024 we will also be opening on Monday evenings offering a variety of drop-in classes and courses during the year. Once again we will be catering for and welcoming newcomers as well as more experienced people.

Centre Team and Trustees

At the core of our centre activities is an Order team of six people, Amalasraddha, Dhammavijaya, Kalyanatara, Saddhabahaya, Sudarshini and Utpaladhi (who re-joined the team in January 2024).

Amalasraddha was also centre manager until stepping down in April 2024 when that position was filled by Andy Whitehouse taking our centre team to seven. Amalasraddha has served the centre in this role since its opening in 2017 and we wish to express our deep gratitude for all she has done.

Ricky Evans, who contributed enormously to the centre in many ways in recent years, left the centre team at the end of 2023 to live and work at the Padmaloka retreat centre. We would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his creativity and contributions.

During the year the chair position was held by three co-chairs, Amalasraddha, Saddhabahaya and Sudarshini. Saddhabahaya and Amalasraddha also led on Safeguarding. Dhammavijaya and Kalyanatara are our men and women's Mitra Convenors respectively.

Essential to the centre's functioning is financial reporting and this role has once again been carried out expertly by Emily Smith.

We also benefited from a lengthy stay at the centre by Jinapalita who once again lived in the community, contributed to classes and a course, and turned his hand to painting, plastering and a fair few other things besides.

Community

In addition to the team members mentioned above, our Sangha comprises around twenty five active Mitras of whom fourteen are training for Ordination.

Around this established core Sangha there is a wider circle of similar size made up of people who attend the centre regularly, semi-regularly or as newcomers. 2024 has seen a marked expansion in this latter category including people who attend our Saturday morning events, men's group and Parents' Sangha. It is especially welcome that more young people are attending the centre.

Volunteer Contributions

Our centre benefits enormously from the efforts of a large number of volunteers in different areas. Sangha members are enthusiastic to support the centre and its activities, contributing both energy and creativity and developing fellowship in the process.

Contributions at various times during the year:

- treasurer - Emily
- centre care team - Jan, Isabel and Katherine
- communications team - Merl, Oli, Ricky and Dan
- Saturday morning team - Dan, Dylan, Ricky Jan, Wendy and Isabel
- shrine care and flowers - Rick and Paramajyoti
- festival day shrines - Merl and Linda Lees
- courtyard garden - Kalyanatara, Dylan and Linda Marias
- maintenance and development - Ricky, Dylan and Jinapalita
- Parents' Sangha - Dan, Katrine and Ben
- home and business as a retreat centre - Linda, Stuart and Hugo

Outreach Activities

Once again we have conducted school visits although limited resources have restricted our ability to respond to all requests. We hope to be able to do more going forward and make further connections in the local area.

Residential Community Above

For most of the year three people lived in the accommodation above the centre and the space was also used to host Jinapalita as a guest. People move on for various reasons and at the time of writing there is only one resident. Rental income is a very important income stream for the centre and we hope to attract more community members in the coming year. Plans are being developed to refurbish the accommodation making it more attractive and comfortable. Living in community can be a very positive basis for living a Buddhist life and we hope that the community will thrive in the future and also offer a warm welcome to guest teachers.

Looking Forward

The trustees and centre team undertook two initiatives during the year with a view to ensuring a bright and expansive future for Buddhism in the

Southampton area. The first took place in the autumn when the team plus Jinapalita held a vision meeting and captured various thoughts and ideas, including for the refocusing of Saturday mornings mentioned above which has proved so successful. The second was a visit by centre consultant Viryanaga who visited for three days in March, conducted many interviews and has given us a wealth of ideas and constructive criticism which we will be applying to our thinking and activities in the coming months and years.

Financial Report and Reserves Policy

Total income was almost £3,000 lower in 2023 when compared with 2022, £37,695 versus £40,562.

Approximately £2,000 of this was due to less income from courses, resource issues meant that we could not run as many and the income from those that we did run was lower. Another major reduction was due to the fact that we ran a fundraising campaign in 2022 to refurbish the centre which was not repeated. Fortunately the residential accommodation above the centre was fully occupied during 2022 and this offset the reductions mentioned above with a £5,500 increase in rental income.

Total expenditure remained almost the same at £35,318, up from £35,303 in 2022. However, beneath these similar figures there were some significant changes in our expenditure profile. Both interest rates and energy costs increased significantly due to world events. Water usage also increased due to the additional tenants. These increases were offset by reduced staff costs due to the change from a supported chair to a co chair arrangement of non supported Order Members and by not repeating the same level of refurbishment activity.

Triratna Southampton operates a policy in accord with our constitution whereby the equivalent of three months average expenditure, including our loan repayments and insurance, is held in reserve. Based upon our 2023 expenditure this amount is in the region of £9,000

Saddhabhaya and Sudarshini