

Grassroots

...a different point of view



"There can be no justice without peace, and there can be no peace without justice"
Martin Luther King Jr.

Annual Report

2023-2024

Acknowledgement of Thanks

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

Funders:

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Luton Council of Faiths

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Near Neighbours Programme

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Westhill Endowment Fund

Partners:

Churches and Other Faith Communities in Luton

Daughters of the Holy Spirit

Ghar se Ghar

Luton Council of Faiths

Near Neighbours Programme

Luton Council & Bedfordshire Police





Annual Report

2023-2024

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Foreword by the Revd Canon David Lawson (Chair)

I began last year's Foreword reminding us of the many complex and huge issues facing the world. Today the world is in a more dangerous and fragile state, or as Johny expressed it in a report to the Trustees: 'The world seems a very dark and hostile place.' The war in Ukraine grinds on, it is over a year since the October 7th attack in Gaza, with the conflict in the Middle East threatening to spread out of control. This last year has also seen the growth of far right political parties in Europe, and anti-immigration demonstrations and riots in many parts of the UK this summer. Nevertheless, Grassroots determined vision of engaging with the contemporary world is in no way diminished, continuing to work for a stronger and more cohesive, peaceful Luton.



Inter-faith dialogue and co-operation is needed more than ever today. Grassroots laid the foundations of what is now the Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), and we continue working closely with LCoF, and with the Luton Borough Council. There is also a facilitation of inter faith advisers across the C of E Diocese of St Albans, and last year's inter faith event at St Albans Cathedral was organised jointly with Grassroots. It is wonderful to know that the event will be repeated in November 2024. The words of the Catholic theologian Hans Kung are more pertinent than ever: 'There will be no peace among the nations, without peace among the religions.'

A highlight for some of the Trustees was a Spring walk from our offices through Luton arriving at the Guru Nanak Gurudwara, where we had an informative tour, learning about Sikh religious teaching and practices, ending with a splendid lunch there. In November 2024 the Catholic Bishop of Northampton, David Oakley, will also be treated to a similar tour of the town.

Over the last few years, Grassroots has been invited to a number of international conferences organised by European churches. The presentations of our work have been highly acclaimed, giving us much encouragement as to the undoubted value of all that is happening across Luton in terms of strengthening community relations. Grassroots has also hosted a number of visitors to Luton, and one such this year was from the Diocese of Linköping in the Church of Sweden. A multi faith group of over 30 people wanted to benefit from Luton's experience of inter faith work and all that is being done to strengthen community relations, while promoting unity in diversity. The reaction to all that the group experienced was 'ecstatic', and hopefully their experience will enable them to translate something of what they learnt into their own particular context.

I mentioned the demonstrations and riots that took place across the UK this summer. Thankfully Luton remained unaffected, though there have been profound concerns across all communities not just with what happened in the UK but what is also unfolding across the Middle East. The Annual Peace Walk in September, not only demonstrated the strength of community relations in Luton; it also acknowledged the crucial part played by Grassroots, the Luton Council of Faiths and Near Neighbours Programme over many years.

It is with great sadness, that as I am writing this Foreword, we have learnt that Sister Maire Hayes has died. Sister Maire was a dedicated and committed member of the Grassroots team for many years, contributing so much in so many ways to the Grassroots programme. She was a member of the Catholic Justice and Peace Network, and was at the heart of the campaign to make Luton a Fairtrade town. We cannot but think of Sister Maire at this time and express our profound thanks for all she has contributed to the flourishing of the life and people of Luton. Elsewhere in the Annual Report there is a tribute to Sister Maire.

The Annual Report as always gives a fuller picture of the range and variety of Grassroots commitment to the flourishing of Luton. We extend our deepest gratitude to the church bodies that fund us, as well as other funders. I am also hugely grateful to our Trustees for their insights and unstinting commitment to Grassroots. The last word of thanks but most certainly not the least goes to Johny, for his outstanding dedication to the work, and all he does so graciously and efficiently on behalf of Grassroots.

Annual Report Overview Sep 2023 – Aug 2024

In our globalised, but divided and wounded world, we are seeing a general lack of good political leadership, and a lack of professionalism, integrity and accountability in the media and politics. The current political trends are inciting people with majoritarian, sectarian, and nationalist agendas, presenting minorities, immigrants, and refugees, as threats to the majorities. When held accountable for its corruption, failures, scams or scandals, most governments and political parties, either blast-the-past, or blame the opposition for political conspiracies against them, but as people, as communities, we must believe in change. We must recognise that in our divided and wounded world, the call and the need to become 'one human race', and the need to be 'united not uniform', has never been greater.

We must learn lessons from all that has happened wrong in the past and try doing what is right in our present, to make a better future for all. It is bearing these thoughts in mind, we have held activities during the period Sep 2023 – Aug 2024 that have indeed brought people & communities together to recognise and celebrate the signs of hope in seeking a kinder world in which all may thrive. In this report, we have presented some key highlights;

KEY EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Annual Peace Walk 2023

In its 27th year, Luton's Annual Peace Walk (led by Luton Council of Faiths, supported by GRASSROOTS and Near Neighbours Programme) continued to be one of the most popular multi-faith events in the town. While also commemorating the UN's International Day of Peace (IDP), it attracted people of all ages from Luton's diverse communities.

Several dignitaries, who joined the event, included the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Susan Lousada, Mayor of Luton Cllr Yaqub Hanif, Luton MPs Sarah Owen & Rachel Hopkins, Bishop of Bedford Rt. Revd. Richard Atkinson and Cllrs. Javeria Hussain and Maria Lovell.

People visited Catholic Our Lady Help of Christians Church, Luton Christian Fellowship, Turkish Mosque, and Guru Ravidass Sangat Luton.



Primary School students and teachers gave presentations and shared their commitment to being an Eco-School, litter picking and planting trees. Sponsored by Near Neighbours Programme, CATALYST Youth Leadership & Mental Health Training graduates were awarded certificates. These young people shared their dreams for a better world and pledged to combat poverty and deprivation in our town.

May all these hopes, aspirations, and commitments for a better world bear fruits!

Inter Faith Week Event held at St Albans Cathedral

St Albans Diocese of Church of England, in partnership with GRASSROOTS Luton, held for the second consecutive year, the Inter Faith Week Event at St Albans Cathedral on 6th Nov 2023. About 125 people from different religious and those of no religious backgrounds were welcomed from Beds, Herts & parts of the London borough of Barnet, covered by St Albans Diocese.

Talking of this event, the Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers (DIFAs), Reverend Canon David Kesterton (Luton) and Reverend Tony Rindl (Watford) said we were struck by the connections in the language used by the different faith representatives on the event theme “Strangers & Co-Pilgrims – Sharing together how encounter with those of different beliefs strengthen our own faith.”



Representatives of 8 different faiths shared from their own perspective how their religious teachings led them to view the value of others and to respect those of different beliefs. There was a strong sense of unity of language and purpose, as each speaker placed the value on every member of the human race and the creation itself.



Multi-faith Storytelling – Tales of Wonder & Wisdom

Luton has suffered from religious extremism, racial and religious hatred propagated by far-right groups in the last 15 years or so. Scarcity of resources means there is little capacity to invest in our young people, who are in danger of being easily influenced by extremist or dominant polarising and divisive narratives, steeped in racism and religious intolerance. We therefore applied and received funding from the Westhill Endowment Fund, National Lottery Community Fund – Awards for All, and Near Neighbours Programme for an interactive and participatory multi-faith storytelling theatre project exploring 'golden rule' stories from Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. The project instilled in young people values of conviviality, mutual respect and environmental stewardship.



Over 12000 pupils (Years 3-6) have participated in the storytelling workshops in the last 2 years and all demonstrated an appreciation for the opportunity to explore a range of universal humanitarian values and character virtues through wisdom tales from different faith traditions: Hinduism, Judaism, Sikh, Christianity and Islam, dramatically and interactively performed by a professional storytelling theatre artist. This appreciation really came through in the way that at least a dozen pupils in each school enthusiastically shared their reflections on the values that they recognised in the stories' characters and on the shared estimation of these values (e.g. courage, generosity, trust, peace, perseverance, hope, faith, joy, determination, honesty, love, loyalty) across the different faith traditions.



Whitefield Primary Academy
@WhitefieldLuton

We were treated to a wonderful performance today, courtesy of the amazing @KhayaalTheatre. The collection of 4 tales from Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity & Islam explored a plethora of values common to all faiths, encouraging children how to show these values in their own lives.



Luton Faiths and 2 others

22:24 · 12 Sep 23 · 289 Views

A pupil stated that though she was irreligious, she loved the humanitarian values promoted and celebrated in all stories.

In a Facebook Post, Pioneer Trust managing quite a few Primary Schools, said, "All of our schools were privileged to receive the wonderful series of multi-faith stories, exploring key values that exist within different faiths. It encouraged the children to treat others, with respect, fairness, love and empathy. A wonderful experience for the pupils involved."

Another school teacher Grietje Reid said, "The stories are such a good example of how all the common values are present in all religions and the children recognised them too. I would recommend these performances to any school."

Given the super diversity of Luton and the town's predominance of self-identifying faith communities in an increasingly polarised world, these Multi-faith Storytelling Workshops helped to underpin difference with an edifying and unifying wellspring of inspiring common spiritual and ethical values. The enacted stories have spelled inter-faith and intercultural understanding in the most creative way, especially to young audiences. The project has left a lasting impression in young people's minds.

Swedish multi-faith delegation visited Luton

There were several days of rioting in Stockholm, Malmö, Linköping and Norrköping after far-Right group Stram Kurs planned and held Qu'ran burning demonstrations across the country in 2022. A news headline in May'24 suggested that Sweden could be on the 'brink of a civil war' as country is gripped by anti-migrant violence.

It was to mitigate risks posed by such socio-political developments in Sweden that a group of 30+ Swedish guests and visitors from churches, mosques, municipality, police, voluntary organisation, young people in the cities of Norrköping, Motala and Linköping, visited Luton from 11-14 Nov'23. They wanted to learn from Luton;

- How to develop inter faith work initiatives and strengthen inter faith relations
- How to tackle the growth of far-right activities and its after-effects and adverse impact on inter-faith and inter-community relations
- How in Luton, and in the UK, communities, government & Police, both locally and nationally, strive to work for peace and reconciliation and strengthen community cohesion while also acknowledging and promoting unity in diversity



The Mayor of Luton Cllr Yaqub Hanif (pictured above) welcomed and greeted them all at Luton Town Hall. Later, Adam Divney (pictured above), the Service Director for Citizen Engagement, gave an excellent presentation outlining the Council's vision for the growth and prosperity of Luton.

The Swedish guests were thrilled by the wonderful hospitality when they visited different places of worship in Luton. They learnt a great deal during their field visits to Discover Islam Centre, Luton Council's Social Justice Unit, Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion, The Feast, Grassroots & Near Neighbours Programmes.



The fact that Luton made an impact upon the Swedish group is a testament to everyone in Luton working to promote peace and understanding across communities.

The Church of England Diocese of St Albans and The Church of Sweden Diocese of Linköping have a long-standing partnership. During this visit, the Diocese of Linköping Bishop Marika Markovits and the Diocese of St Albans Bishop Alan Smith signed a special covenant (pictured left below) strengthening link between the two Dioceses.



And the Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore, the Dean of St Albans Cathedral presented a gift to The Revd Mattias Bähr, the Dean of Linköping Cathedral (pictured right above).

Additionally, Ryad Khodabocus of the Luton Council of Faiths illustrated practical examples and stories of interfaith community work & collaboration with an impressive visual slide show. Canon Peter Adams, Director of St. Mary's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, spoke about the difficulties the far right presents, and shared how community mediation helped in some really trying periods.

The Swedish group also observed a meeting of Luton's faith leaders (pictured below) and were astounded to see religious leaders having an honest and open conversation on both local and global issues that affect life in Luton.



We in Luton certainly have a wealth of positive and inspiring stories to share. Long may we continue to work together for peace and harmony in Luton and beyond, and may our cooperation, friendships, and relationships across faiths and cultures, continue to grow.

The Chair of GRASSROOTS Programme, Revd Canon David Lawson, said, "The group will return to Sweden with much to think about and hopefully in time translate something of the Luton experience into their own particular contexts."

Sujel Miah of Luton Council of Mosques said, "We are not about unity of opinion, but we are committed to the unity of purpose. We are voices of justice, compassion and peace. When people, communities, refugees are demonised and dehumanised, when a group of people are targeted, because of their race, faith or ethnicity, we, as people of faith, are called to act prophetically.

The Swedish Group Coordinator Susanna Löfgren said, "Everyone in the group has been so inspired and I think that this trip has proved to be just the injection of energy and tools that our local networks needed."

Inter Faith Week Event

During Inter Faith Week, a special community storytelling event was held at Luton's Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Stopsley. Stories are powerful and have a lasting impact on people. Using the local Award-winning Khayaal Theatre, Grassroots, jointly with Luton Council of Faiths, and Near Neighbours Programme delivered a multi-faith storytelling performance consisting of character and virtue-nourishing stories from different faiths.



Speaking of this event, the then Mayor of Luton Cllr Mohd. Yaqub Hanif said, "In our world full of negative stories, it is good to have an event like this, where we can share positive stories from different faiths and cultures. Very often religion gets blamed for the world's problems. It is actually not religion, but the 'misuse of religion' by a few people that creates problems. As we have watched and heard the stories from different faiths and cultures this evening, I am sure we have seen how religion only teaches good things. I hope the stories we have heard today will inspire us all to become better human beings and will encourage us to make our town and our world a better place for all."

Black History Month

During the Black History Month, we supported two key events. One was the 75th-anniversary commemoration event of the Windrush Generation in which a dozen Windrush local Heroes were honoured, including the two women (pictured right) Mrs Lorna Markland and Cllr Jacqueline Burnett, for their years of relentless services in representing and serving the black communities in Luton.



And the other event was the Black Culture Market at which there were a variety of stalls (pictured left) offering a range of creative and interesting products and materials, celebrating the contributions of black businesses and social entrepreneurs who add colour, vigour, and spice to the British cultural landscape. The organiser Dee Bailey said that Black History Month is not just a time for us to recognise and celebrate the invaluable contributions of black people to British society; it is also a great opportunity to inspire and empower future generations."

World Council of Reformed Churches Consultation



Just before Christmas 2023, it was a pleasant surprise to be invited to the Global Consultation in Haus Villigst, Schwerte, Germany 11-15 December led by the Lutheran World Foundation & the World Council of Reformed Churches on the theme “A Protestant Theological Approach to Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB)”.

Seventeen theologians, church leaders, and mission practitioners reflected on a significant rise in the documented violations of religious rights and freedoms in our world, and agreed to lend a Protestant voice to the ongoing discourse on FoRB.

The consultation was about striking a delicate balance between religious freedom concerns and tolerance to avoid making religious liberty absolute or disregarding religious beliefs altogether. The consultation utilised the “See, Discern, and Act” methodology. Contextual and thematic presentations provided an opportunity to see the issues more clearly. Theological reflections allowed for communal discernment on the issues through both Lutheran and Reformed lenses. Discussions in small groups and plenary led to clarity on possible future actions.

In its presentation, GRASSROOTS highlighted the positive manifestation of the FoRB, as well as the unpleasant aspects, especially when these freedoms are defined in an ‘extreme(ist) versions’. Recognising Martin Luther King’s statement that before you finish breakfast, you’ve depended on half the world, GRASSROOTS reminded that we are all ‘vulnerable’ & ‘dependent’ on others, and only when we come together, we can become the force of an ocean.

Faith Leaders School Assemblies

Thanks to our wonderful and supportive panel of local faith leaders who like previous years have been helping us to deliver a series of primary school assemblies on popular demand. It aims at fostering a positive environment and mutual respect amongst young people when they see the local faith leaders demonstrating how, despite their differences, they work together for the common good in our town.



"I enjoyed the opportunity to learn about different faiths and beliefs to my own. This assembly was fantastic and I was inspired by it," a student said. A teacher commented "The similarities between the faith leaders (e.g. believing in one God), faith leaders talking about their experiences in different countries and now all living together in Luton), religious clothing used to show what they wear, was all fascinating and hugely educational for us all in our school."

Keech Hospice 'Hare & Tortoise' Trail – Peace Artwork

In partnership with the Luton Council of Faiths, we supported the Keech Hospice Short Tail Trail appeal. (<https://keech.org.uk/whats-on/the-short-tail-trail/>)

This trail featured over 90 hare & tortoise big and small sculptures, placed across Luton's key landmarks, streets, and open spaces from 6th July – 12th September 2024. It brought colour and energy to the town.

With the help and donations from Luton's diverse faith communities, we sponsored 4 sculptures, costing £5,000.

After collecting the plain sculptures, we invited faith leaders, and young people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to colour the sculptures with peace artwork (as pictured below).



Our sculptures artwork theme was 'Peace' – Peace amongst humans and the ecosystem with bright colours representing diversity. A message on Hare was from a primary school pupil – *"Peace will always grow. If bees can spread their pollen, humans can spread peace"*. Faith leaders message on the Tortoise stated *"Slow and steady steps for peace"*. Under Hare's neck, the caterpillar evolution to a butterfly symbolises the evolution of life and signifies new beginnings. Butterflies are thought to represent change and transformation, comfort, hope, and positivity.



This was yet another example of good practice of inter faith cooperation showcasing how Luton communities can live well together and work for the common good. In a thank you message, Keech Hospice said that you and all those who worked with you should feel extremely proud of the positive and creative artwork on sculptures that you created. It helps to show Luton as we know it, as a warm, kind, generous and inclusive place to live and work.

NHS Bedfordshire Chaplaincy Training Day

We facilitated a group of Chaplains from different ethnic and national backgrounds, serving at the Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to visit different places of worship in Luton. At Guru Nanak Gurudwara Luton (pictured left below), Nelson Mandela's quote was remembered, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that gets to his head; if you talk to him in his own language that goes to his heart". Trust Chaplain Vanessa Bradley said these visits give chaplains confidence to connect with people from diverse backgrounds, not only with their heads but also with their hearts, even if it is simply greeting someone from another culture in their language.



At the Bury Park Jamie Mosque (pictured right above) it was said if we want to love our neighbour, we must know who they are; and it is much better we meet with people and learn from them who they are, rather than learning about them from the books, media or stereotypes.

In a hostile environment of mistrust and fear, it is easy to view all those who are different from us, as a threat or enemy. It is therefore important that we create opportunities for people to experience the welcome and hospitality of one another and help people discover that those different from us are not 'enemies'; they are our 'allies', because they share the same aspirations as we do, which are to be loved, valued and to work together for the peace and prosperity of all.



A Chaplain on the training day said, "My understanding of these religions from adherents' perspective will enable me to provide them effective referral, if not partial religious care when situation arises in my healthcare chaplaincy role. The idea of "humanity first" seems projected in all religions. GRASSROOTS Presentation on Luton's multi faith context has opened my eyes to continued efforts, towards sustainability of peaceful co-existence among people of different faith in Luton, and the need to see humanity first, before religion in healthcare chaplaincy services."

Another Chaplain said, "I really enjoyed the warm welcome and hospitality at all places of worship. I appreciate the work done by GRASSROOTS which illustrates the effort required to encourage and engender respect and collaboration between all of us."

Faith Leaders concerned with issues impacting life in Luton

With Luton communities' ties worldwide, many international issues affect communities locally, raising stress, anxieties, and potential community unrest and tension. GRASSROOTS through Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) plays a crucial role in acting as a buffer across faith communities and also a listening ear on the ground and helping communities and leaders to navigate through tense, contentious and uneasy local, national and global contexts.

We facilitate regular meetings of faith leaders and invite different places of worship to host these meetings, which seek to bring together members of the different faith communities and those with no particular faith affiliation for dialogue, cooperation, understanding, trust, and for greater social cohesion and community development in Luton.



We understand peace is not just about the absence of conflict and violence; it is also about constantly seeking to address issues of people's well-being. We therefore provide advice, consultancy, information dissemination, and networking to all public & voluntary sector agencies, particularly about the initiatives concerned with people's overall well-being. Keeping the big picture in mind and ensuring that peace and harmony in our town are held at all times, we encourage faith communities to work together with the local authority, Police & NHS.

We understand that listening and building bridges is an ongoing work. With the international, national, and local events and issues unfolding, the terrain keeps changing and it gets sensitive, so we constantly monitor communal tensions and work closely with local leadership to mitigate any risks.



Global-National-Local Issues Impacting Life in Luton

Israel-Palestine Conflict

The world currently seems a very dark and a hostile place, because of over 110 wars and armed conflicts according to the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law & Human Rights. Whether it is territorial disputes, control of resources, power struggles, ideological differences, or economic competition, seeing the conflicting interests between nations escalating into armed & bloody conflicts is extremely distressing.

We have all been appalled by the attacks in Israel by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza has caused immense civilian suffering.

Here, in the UK, we experienced record levels of anti-Semitism, anti-Jewish hatred. On the other hand, many are feeling that anti-Semitism needs redefining as all pro-Palestinian stance is currently misconstrued as being anti-Semitic and it certainly needs to be separated from criticising the Israeli government's actions.

We also witnessed in the last year, a deplorable and deeply concerning steep rise in Islamophobia – which is the fear of and hatred for Muslims. People often stereotype Muslims as a geopolitical threat or a source of terrorism.

In a joint statement with the Luton Council of Faiths, GRASSROOTS expressed condolences and prayers for those who faced death, injury and are suffering in this ongoing conflict. It reminded that as Jews, Christians and Muslims with shared Abrahamic heritage and those from different or no particular faith, we are called to uphold the highest of morals, unite in humanity and pray that reconciliation, peace and justice prevails for everyone. It called upon everyone to stay united in our longing for a peaceful solution which does justice to all involved in the region.

Hundreds gathered at Wardown Park Bandstand, to grieve and to pray for the peace in the Holy Land, in a Vigil organised jointly by the Luton Councils of Mosques and the Churches Together in Luton and supported by the Luton Council of Faiths. A number of young people, Christian-Muslim, and other faith leaders called for a transition from lamentation to action for ceasefire, and for peace and justice in the Holy Land.



Gulie Butcher, a Quaker and the Vice Chair of Luton Council of Faiths said, "Luton town came together as one at this prayer vigil – watching as the silent stars go by the hopes and fears of all the years. For in this world where there's war, we have watched violence, injury, loss of life, grief, inhumanity. We have felt, overwhelming sadness, disbelief, grief, anger, and helplessness. As the dark night breaks in and we all join together in prayer for the love of power to be overcome by the power of love, let's hope that nations speak peace unto nations and there is peace on earth, and goodwill to all humankind transcends all borders and boundaries."

Knife Crime in Luton

In a local Knife Crime incident in Oct'23, a 16-year-old boy was stabbed to death in Luton. We networked with the Bedfordshire Police, Luton's many schools, the Luton council, and also with Luton's diverse communities and faith groups to come together to express our collective shock and deep sadness at this tragic event. A silent candle light prayer vigil was held in Wardown Park.



Southport Attacks & Summer Riots

The horrifying killings of innocent children in Southport in Jul'24 left everyone shocked, but it has been even more upsetting to watch the subsequent civil unrest, the riots and the deplorable violent events in cities and towns across the UK targeting minority communities and the police. Far-right extremists hijacked the tragedy of Southport from a grieving community for their own hateful racist and Islamophobic agenda.

The Bedfordshire local authorities, Police & Fire Authority jointly stated "Bedfordshire is a safe, multicultural county. We, and all our communities, reject extremism, violence and those who seek to divide us."

We welcomed a multi-stakeholder meeting convened by the Luton Council, to discuss how to tackle misinformation of the potential rioting in Luton. With everyone else, we shared our deep concern and solidarity for anyone being targeted by hateful narratives. Together with others, we proclaimed that Luton will always be a no place for hate.

We facilitated C of E Bishop Richard Atkinson to write a letter to Luton's Mosques and all faith leaders, condemning the Southport killings, the subsequent riots, and the hate mails & threats to the Muslims/Mosques in Luton. Luton Council of Mosques acknowledged the overwhelming support from individuals, organisations and leaders across Luton and beyond. This solidarity, especially in times of fear, is a powerful force.

The town of Southport set an example by coming together to condemn the violence, support the victims and clean up the mess after the riots, but they must not be the only ones; we all must play our part too. And that is why in Luton, we invited people to make a short solidarity video with someone of a different background, sharing their stories of friendships and living well together, and upload it on #weareluton. These videos can be watched on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LutonFaiths/>



7th August 2024

Working Together for Peace and Unity

It is heartbreaking to see the riots and violence after the killings of innocent children in Southport. Additionally, we are seeing lots of anxiety and misinformation about the potential demonstrations in Luton.

THIS IS NOT TRUE.

Let us all keep calm and carry on as usual. Let us foster messages of peace, unity and solidarity with one another. Let us all be peacemakers. Every little peace helps.

Join #weareluton project, and upload a 10-20 sec video clip of solidarity between friends, colleagues and neighbours from diverse backgrounds. Talk to your neighbour, colleague or friend and make a small video or picture with a message.

Let's make peace, harmony, and positivity viral in any way we can.

Al Jalal Masjid (Mosque) Incident

An individual intentionally defaced the banner outside a Mosque, and painted a red cross behind it. This malicious act understandably caused distress among members of the congregation, particularly in the climate of heightened Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments. In its message to the Mosque, GRASSROOTS & Luton Council of Faiths said that such malicious acts are distressing for all those, who want to live well together in peace and harmony, and also for those who continuously work hard to strengthen community cohesion in our town. It is important that we keep meeting, dialoguing, and strengthening our relationship with one another. GRASSROOTS also facilitated the Bedfordshire Police, and the C of E Bishop Richard Atkinson to visit the Al-Jalal Mosque (as pictured below).



Faith Matters Articles in Luton News

Luton often gets negative publicity, so we have continued writing positive news, particularly about Luton's faith communities, which are making a significant positive contribution in keeping the values and virtues alive in our town. A few examples can be seen below.

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

OPINION

Faith Matters

by David Jonathan, Grassroots & Luton Council of Faiths

Break down walls for a world of acceptance and peace

Established September 1998, the organisation of Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) initially focused on educating its growing membership of South Asian descent about Islam, but later ICNA became an inclusive and diverse organisation.

Last week, Luton hosted the visit of Dr. Saïed Ahmed, who is the Executive Director of the Gain Peace Project, an initiative of ICNA. With friends from Luton Muslim Mosque, he visited the offices of Grassroots & Luton Council of Faiths to learn about the excellent inter-faith work carried out in Luton.

Appreciating a wide array of interfaith activities in Luton, he said, "My aim is also to bring out the excellent inter-faith work carried out in Luton."

Headlined by the partnership and collaboration of Luton's different faith communities in tackling food, fuel and digital poverty, and people coming together to combat the challenges of racism, climate change, drugs, and trade crime. He shared, "ICNA also works closely with many inter-faith organisations for the betterment of society by focusing on self-development, education, outreach, and social services. ICNA has committed to being a leading grassroots organisation."

Dr. Saïed identified many areas of common interest and intersection in Luton such as addressing issues around freedom of speech, tackling Islamophobia and far right extremism, fostering youth and women empowerment, and peace.

He concluded the partnership and collaboration of Luton's different faith communities in tackling food, fuel and digital poverty, and people coming together to combat the challenges of racism, climate change, drugs, and trade crime.

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

OPINION

Faith Matters

by David Jonathan, Grassroots & Luton Council of Faiths

River Lea and Wardown Lakes receive blessing from vicar

Last Sunday, most Churches observed the feast of Epiphany. It is principally remembered as the visit of the Magi (also known as the Three Wise Men or the Three Kings) to the Christ Child, and also the baptism of Jesus.

Popular Epiphany customs include singing, chalking the door - hanging one's house blessed, consuming Three Kings Cake, and removing Christmas decorations.

During the Epiphany Service at St Andrew's Church, Luton, the Vicar Revd Luke Larner spoke of his visit to a friend's Church where he kept a wall looking visitor in waiting, just realising that the man was not just a guest speaker that evening but also a highly respected charity leader.

He stated that appearance might be misleading. The whole point of epiphany is to have moments of enlightening discovery and realisation.

After the Epiphany Service at St Andrew's Church, Luton, the Vicar Revd Luke Larner celebrated the Feast of the Baptism by blessing the River Lea and praying for Wardown Lakes, and other local waters, and the world.

but our preconceived notions about God and people can frequently keep us from experiencing these moments.

He further reminded of the Roman King Herod in the Christmas story, who brutally killed innocent children to preserve his power and regime, and this year Luke said, the cry of Ramadan (a Palestinian city) takes on a whole new meaning given the terrible loss of life in the Holy Land in the name of power and land.

He concluded the service with a blessing of gifts for people to take home and bless their own homes by marking their doorway. People write the first letter of the names of the biblical Magi, or they write 'My Christ bless this house.'

After the Church service, all were invited to celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of Christ with a blessing of the River Lea at Wardown Park. This is a chance to give thanks for our river, water and local environment, and renew our commitment to safeguarding all creation. Without water, there is no life. So he blessed the River Lea, Wardown Lakes, and the seas of the world.

He prayed for all to have free access to the clean drinking water.

He also prayed for all the living things in these waters and for the Environment Agency and Luton Parks Services, and for the volunteers and charities, who help to maintain it.

Wednesday, May 19, 2024

OPINION

Faith Matters

by David Jonathan, Grassroots & Luton Council of Faiths

Catholic Priests visited Luton's different places of worship

A group of Catholic Priests from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton visited Luton's different places of worship - St. Anne's (Lea Valley), St. Mary's (Lea Valley), St. Peter's (Lea Valley), St. John's (Lea Valley), St. Michael's (Lea Valley), St. Nicholas (Lea Valley), St. Paul's (Lea Valley), St. Peter's (Lea Valley), St. John's (Lea Valley), St. Michael's (Lea Valley), St. Nicholas (Lea Valley), St. Paul's (Lea Valley).

The day was a chance to hear about and engage with a wide range of examples of how Luton's different faith communities are working together for the common good. The day also offered an opportunity to reflect on the principles that underpin the shared values and principles of effective partnership as well as some of the challenges that can be expected when working together across different faiths and cultures.

During a presentation, the group appreciated how Grassroots & Luton Council of Faiths and New Neighbours Programme create safe, brave and honest spaces, not just for the dialogue but for the collective action to promote peace and reconciliation, understanding and friendships, and acceptance rather than tolerance of one another.

It was also highlighted that there is more common between us than what divides us, but interfaith work is not about ignoring our differences. It is not about asserting or comparing our differences. Instead, it is about asserting and affirming our differences, but doing so in a way that does not breed conflict and confrontation. It is rather one of our learning and understanding and transcendence.

At members of the Luton Muslim Mosque, Luton Council of Faiths and New Neighbours Programme create safe, brave and honest spaces, not just for the dialogue but for the collective action to promote peace and reconciliation, understanding and friendships, and acceptance rather than tolerance of one another.

Wednesday, 14, Wednesday, August 2024

OPINION

Faith Matters

by David Jonathan, Grassroots & Luton Council of Faiths

Uplifting experiences of living well together are shared

In many neighbourhoods across England, different faiths and ethnic communities live and work in close proximity, although their interactions with one another are rarely noted or given special attention.

As a result, some argue that people live parallel lives and do not interact or integrate with one another, which is why multiculturalism has failed. That may be somewhat true, but that is not the whole story. In our increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies, people in general seem to be busy living with one another anyway. A report highlighted that in 2023, 45% of adults (18+) in the UK reported feeling lonely. Loneliness and isolation are considered as one of the largest public health challenges we face.

It is therefore not fair to say that multiculturalism has failed, and the recent violent demonstrations and attacks on individuals and communities of the Global Majority Heritage backgrounds were unjustified.

Despite a few inciting racial, religious and communal hatred, most individuals and communities want to live and co-exist peacefully in the UK. Therefore, multiculturalism is not a form of political correctness that erodes British cultural values. It is a set of values that are universal.

Such multiculturalism is well demonstrated in Luton, where many Lutonians from diverse backgrounds are sharing their positive and uplifting stories and experiences of living well together with people from different backgrounds. These 1-2 minute short videos can be viewed at www.facebook.com/groups/LutonFaiths. Even otherwise, we have often seen in Luton that in spite of poverty and deprivation, Luton's diverse communities talk together to identify and develop solutions that can improve our town and neighbourhoods. Luton's diverse communities talk openly and productively about challenging local issues, and work alongside the public sector agencies e.g. Police and the Local Authority, to make a positive difference in our town.

A Luton Council initiative (<https://www.luton.gov.uk>) states it is time to step forward Luton, Luton is one of the youngest and most diverse towns in the country, where 150 languages are spoken. With unparalleled connectivity, Luton is one of the best places for business growth. It is a vibrant town with a bold vision for the future and a place to live, work, study and invest. It declares "This is Luton's moment. Be part of it."

NEAR NEIGHBOURS PROGRAMME

Huge, complex issues face us all today - climate change, migration, war, poverty, famine, racism, religious hatred, the rise of far right politics. In addition, we have had the unstoppable cost of living crisis and the country still feeling the effects of the pandemic, followed by political & economic instability. Also a disproportionately high number of refugees have been placed in Luton in the recent years, which has remained a concern for Luton's welcoming and generous communities. In light of all these challenges, it is fair to say that the message and ethos of Near Neighbours Programme is vital in reminding people that we all are created to be interdependent, just like the ecosystem is and that we have no other option, but to transcend the barriers of our race, religion, gender, ethnicity and nationality, and live well together in mutual solidarity with one another.

In the last year, besides supporting several events in Luton, Near Neighbours Small Grant Funding supported 12 great community project applications submitted from Luton. Some of the successfully delivered projects are listed below;

STEP FORWARD STORIES OF LUTON by Att10tive Social Enterprise

It brought together nearly 200 people, mainly youth, from different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to tell their stories, and celebrate Luton's heritage, using art and videos. Nearly a dozen young people presented their videos that they prepared for 'MyLuton' Video Competition.

Councillor Zanib Raja said "The event and exhibition featured diverse artwork by local artists capturing the essence and spirit of our town. The project celebrated the beauty, diversity and vibrancy of Luton."

Montell Neufville, the Managing Director of Att10tive said "This was the result of months of hard work. And this wouldn't have been possible without our sponsors like Near Neighbours.



REACHING A NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD by Edible High Town

It ran 16 gardening activity sessions with volunteers and opened up one new community plot in an area, after co-designing it with residents. In addition to running social events, the project ran 2 coffee mornings to meet neighbours and give residents a safe and beautiful place to socialise.

Konni Deppe, the Project Coordinator said, "Working in this new neighbourhood has been incredibly rewarding - to open a garden on a fly tipping hotspot, turning it into a colourful little allotment, and then sharing the first home-grown potatoes was great."

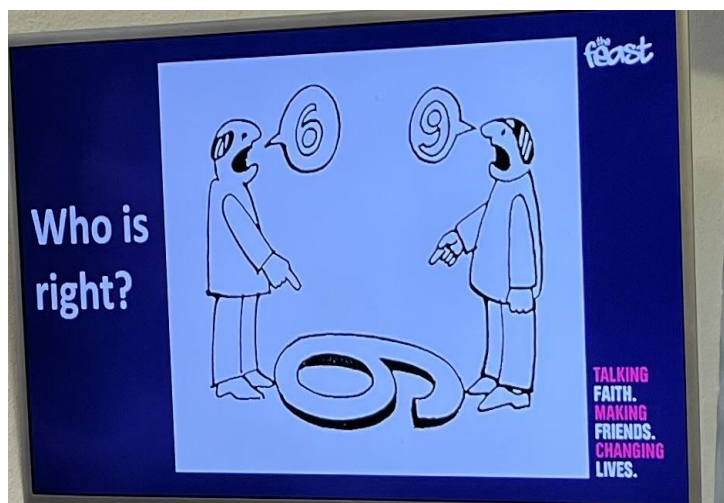
Gardener Dee said, "This project has been very rewarding, turning a small neglected piece of land into something so lovely from growing flowers to vegetables bringing the people of the community together, making new friends."



JOINING THE DOTS by Feast Youth Project

It ran 7 dialogue encounters for young people skilling them to disagree respectfully. They reflected on the value of listening to one another without judging each other. A participant said, it strengthens friendship and the work of creating cohesion and understanding between different communities.

Another participant said, there are probably many people like me out there that feel helpless and can't speak about their feelings, while these sessions open a gate to be empowered in day to day life and make a real change. It is nice to hear other people's perspectives. It is interesting to see how different people answer the same question.



OPEN DAYS & AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS by Luton Food Bank

To tackle food insecurity by intertwining community engagement with educational events, Luton Food Bank hosted Open Days, engaging with over 150 people to understand operations and volunteer opportunities, fostering inclusivity and trust-building. It also ran Awareness Campaigns on food insecurity, and promoted intercultural dialogues and cooking workshops, encouraging participation from various ethnic groups to share culinary traditions.

Many families in the community grapple with economic hardships, experiencing unemployment, financial instability, and limited access to resources and opportunities. A prevalent issue is the inadequate access to nutritious food. This project tackled these challenges by capitalising on community's strengths.



COMMUNITY READY, STEADY, COOK PROJECT by Shri Guru Ravidass Sangat

Based on Langar (free Sikh communal meals), this project provided cooking classes for those of non-Sikh faiths, including Eastern European communities, Asylum Seekers and new communities looking to make Luton their home. As different communities worked together, not only they learnt about each other's cultural and religious differences, and developed friendships understanding and community harmony, it also helped to improve the quality of life of many from the local disadvantaged communities.

It also helped organisations that may not have ever considered working together. They reprinted their recipe book to enable the project to continue.



LETS EAT TOGETHER by The Big Iftar Luton

Let's Eat Together campaign involved over 3000 participants and 16 different events held at High Schools, Luton Town Football Club, and at other community settings, such as the Dunstable Downs Visitors Centre. It was an ambitious initiative that brought together several community partners, faith leaders, schools and places of worship.

It was important to reach out to young people and women. It donated all proceeds from the campaign to the Luton Foodbank, to provide for the most vulnerable in the town. The Project Manager Mohammad Tariq said, "It was a celebration of Luton's diversity, unity and community spirit. The opportunity to bring together so many people from around Luton's diverse communities was a real blessing".



TALES OF WONDER & WISDOM – MULTIFAITH STORYTELLING by Khayaal Theatre

This interactive and participatory multi-faith storytelling theatre project explored 'golden rule' stories from Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. The project helped to instil in young people values of conviviality, mutual respect and environmental stewardship. It helped to underpin difference with an edifying and unifying wellspring of inspiring common spiritual and ethical values.

Over 1700 pupils participated in the workshops and all demonstrated an appreciation for the opportunity to explore a range of universal humanitarian values and character virtues (e.g. courage, generosity, trust, peace, perseverance, hope, faith, joy, determination, honesty, love, loyalty and more) through wisdom tales dramatically and interactively performed by a professional storytelling theatre artist.



FOOTBALL DIVERSITY TOURNAMENT by Luton All Stars FC

The biggest vibrant multicultural football diversity tournament in Luton history drew over 1500 participants, fostering not just talent, but also promoting community spirit through sport, celebrating the richness of diverse cultures, faiths, languages, and heritage. This was a young people led event – empowering young people with skills for life.

The tournament featured intense competition, culminating in the crowning of deserving winners in each age group. Participants and spectators alike were treated to thrilling matches and a vibrant atmosphere. The Chair of the Club, Mr Kwesi Edubatey said, "We are grateful to the Near Neighbours Programme for sponsoring the tournament. It helped us to promote social integration, by breaking down barriers, and tackling social exclusion and economic disparities, by providing equal opportunities to everyone to train and participate in the tournament."



CULTURAL HARMONY THROUGH EXCHANGE by Next Generation Scheme

It hosted six workshops involving 50 young & adults from diverse backgrounds joining together to learn and share about each other's cultural traditions, food, religious and folk stories, and arts to understand and respect each other better.

Plan activities like cultural displays and music performances to celebrate our differences and work together on creative projects. 80% of participants said they learnt two new cultural practices or traditions and 70% of participants formed better connections with people from other cultures. This prevented men women from potentially being drawn into the politics of despair, and made the community stronger and more united



BETTER HEALTH FOR ALL by Oasis Centre

This new 'English for Health' Course brought together women from different cultural, religious and language backgrounds in order to break down barriers between them and to learn the English language mainly to access health care and NHS services. Most women saw A&E as their first choice, but this course helped them to know appropriate NHS services to access.

Learners also made 2 trips to build confidence with their English speaking – a visit to the fire station for safety information and a shopping trip. Project Manager Gill Boyd said this health literacy programme empowered those with limited English to get the adequate healthcare support they and their families need. It also helped in tackling health inequalities pointed out during the Covid-19.



CYCLE ROOTS by Revolution Fitness

This project delivered 12 'learn to cycle' sessions facilitated by cycle coaches from Evolve Cycling Network. These took place in 3 blocks of 4 sessions for 10 women each, so by the end of all 12 sessions, 30 women of different ages were enabled to learn how to ride a bike with confidence. Unexpectedly, a few elderly participants, over 60 years, also joined. This was inspirational.

The project led 3 local bike rides: at Wardown Park, around the Lewsey area, and along the Luton Busway. This helped build confidence for new cyclists and also prompted other cyclists to organise bike rides in their local parks too.



BISCOT PEACE AND WELLBEING HUB by St Andrew's Church

St Andrew's Church set up a 'Peace and Wellbeing Hub' project in partnership with the Doctor's Surgery next-door to the Church, local councillors and other local stakeholders. It launched a community gardening project, health and wellbeing drop-ins, and regular community events involving a wide variety of faiths, ethnicities and cultures. It's 'Spring Festival' attracted over 200 people from the local community.

The Vicar Revd Luke Larnier said, "Running this project has brought a new lease of life both into our Church and our local community. We have no community spaces or parks in our ward, and so opening up our premises and gardens to our local community has meant a flourishing of local relationships and a new sense of solidarity in our neighbourhood.



LUTON ORCHARDS PROJECT by Edible High Town

GRASSROOTS has been important in helping to sustain Edible High Town (EHT) since its start in 2016. It connected EHT to Luton's faith communities, provided thoughtful advice on working in Luton's diverse communities, and helped EHT find funding for projects through Near Neighbours.

To help EHT build capacity, particularly to run the Luton Orchards project, GRASSROOTS, through Near Neighbours Programme, supported EHT to enrol in a 9-month course on Community Orchard.

The course helped to deepen and formalise EHT skill base to work with people around sustainability, biodiversity and to help Lutonians connect with nature around them. It covered fruit tree management skills such as pruning, planting and grafting, but also extended into areas such as:

- Considering climate change in the context of urban orchards
- Working with community groups to help them care for their orchards
- Analysing the potential orchard sites and planning successful orchards



Edible High Town Project Coordinator Konni Deppe presented GRASSROOTS Trustees each with a bottle of apple juice made of Luton Apples.

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY GRASSROOTS



Hindu Festival Diwali Celebrations in Luton



Luton in Bloom Garden Competition (Prize Winners)



Peace Garden Tree Plantation in memory of those died in Covid-19



East Fest – Celebrating Eastern European Cultures in Luton



*University of Bedfordshire Chaplain
Helen Burgess after her Commissioning Service*



*University of Bedfordshire
Annual Remembrance Service*

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY GRASSROOTS



Dr Sabeel Ahmed (L), Executive Director of ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) visited our offices



Jewish Festival Chanukkah Celebrations at Luton United Synagogue



Rev. Michael Anokye (2nd from right), the newly inducted Minister at The Olive Tree Church



Different faith communities welcomed the Peace Light flame brought from Bethlehem at All Saints



University of Bedfordshire
Annual Carols by Candlelight Service



Holocaust Memorial Day Service at
University of Bedfordshire

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY GRASSROOTS



All Saints Church Refugee & Asylum Seekers' Drop-in & Support Group



*Bahai Nawruz (New Year) Celebrations
Reinforced oneness of humanity*



*Multi faith gathering at the Big Iftar Event
showing mutual respect and solidarity*



*Catholic Priests visited Luton's different places of
worship strengthening bonds of friendships*



*GRASSROOTS Trustees visited
Guru Nanak Gurudwara*



*Good Friday Walk of Witness by Bury Park Beech
Hill Council of Churches*

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY GRASSROOTS



Luton Council 2040 Vision Conference



Blessing of River Lea by St Andrew's Church



*Loving Legrave Campaign by St Luke's Church
Community Cafe*



*World Day of Prayer Service prepared by
Women of Palestine*



*International Mother Language Day Online Event by
Purbachal – Eastern Sky Bangladeshi Cultural Group*



*Sikh Guru Shri Ravidass Ji's 647th
Birthday Celebrations*

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY GRASSROOTS



Beech Hill Methodist Church
90th Anniversary Celebrations



Buddha Day Celebrations by the Luton Sri Lankan
Welfare Association (LSLWA)



Colours of Eid Festival



Lord Lieutenant’s Annual Service of Thanksgiving



High Street Leagrave Methodist Church
200th Anniversary Celebrations



Sri Lankan New Year Celebrations by the Luton Sri
Lankan Welfare Association (LSLWA)

TRIBUTE TO SISTER MAIRE HAYES

A former member of GRASSROOTS Staff Team, Sr Maire Hayes, died peacefully on Tue 5th Nov. She suffered from the aftereffects of a stroke.

Sr Maire belonged to a Catholic Religious Congregation called "Daughters of the Holy Spirit", and as a religious Nun, she went off to Chile at a time, when the country was suffering under Pinochet's brutal military rule of political suppression through torture, murder, and exile. As a chaplain to the women political prisoners, Sr Maire came across a woman who became pregnant after repeatedly being raped by a prison guard. When this woman requested Sr Maire to ask the fellow prisoner (a doctor) for an abortion, the Dr replied, "She must bear a child for the revolution," and Sr Marie said, "For this I'd risk even my immortal soul."

Sr Maire was indeed a brave and a courageous Daughter of the Holy Spirit. She never hesitated to take a stand for peace and justice in the world.

Soon after 9/11, she arrived in Luton. She became the Inter Faith Coordinator for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton, and she carried out that role with great passion for nearly 20 years.

She was a great supporter of our partner organisation, the Luton Council of Faiths, and she contributed significantly to inter-faith & cohesion work in Luton. She stood shoulder to shoulder with Luton's different faith communities in testing times. Her spirit of defiance to those attempting to undermine the stability and integrity of diverse communities in our town has left a lasting impression on us all.

She was admired by many in Luton's diverse faith communities for her gentleness, humility, grace, astuteness, diligence, and the dignified way in which she contributed to life in Luton.

Prof Zafar Khan, LCoF Chair of Luton Council of Faiths said, "Sr Maire had empathetic and engaging personality. We'll sorely miss her. We are grateful for her life, her faith, and her selfless commitment to our town."

The Church of England's Bishop Richard Atkinson called Sr Maire "a faithful servant of Luton and beyond".

The URC (United Reformed Church) Ex Moderator Revd Dr Andrew Prasad, said, "We have lost a passionate inter faith advocate. Her legacy must continue."

Sr Maire was also a trained teacher. So after coming back from Chile, Sr Maire, went on to support the work of Cardinal Newman School in Luton. The former Head Teacher Jane Crow said, "Sr Maire was diligent, hardworking, supportive but also genuinely interested in making a difference for the students. She had a lively intelligence and great sense of humour. She'd brighten up all our meetings. What a life and what a great female role model she was. Sr Maire was way ahead of her time!"

Sr Maire also supported the work of a great charity called the Luton Irish Forum, whose CEO Noelette Hanley (present amongst us) said that Sr Marie was passionate for working cross community. She'd act out her values, and champion causes for common good. And that is so true, because Sr Maire laid the foundation of a Campaign, which was about Making Luton a Fairtrade Town.



As part of this Campaign Sr Maire was seen walking in the streets with Hindu & Muslim friends Mr. Thakor Morarji & Dr Anwer Usmani, holding in her hands, a 5-feet tall inflatable fairtrade banana, making a spectacle of herself, for the sake of promoting fairtrade & economic justice. Looking at such an effort collectively made by people from diverse faiths, many people would stop by say, “You are promoting so much more than just the fair trade. You are promoting hope for the world, not just for the fairtrade farmers & growers.”

In the 25th Anniversary Celebration event of GRASSROOTS, Sr Maire promoted Fairtrade by wearing a Luton Boaters Hat and arriving in an Indian Tricycle Rickshaw, driven by our colleague Mr. Ryad Khodabocus, Head of Community Relations & Development at Luton Council of Faiths.

Sr Maire also contributed as a member of the Roman Catholic National Justice and Peace Network (popularly known as NJPN). She also supported the work of CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development). She also supported the work of Near Neighbours Programme which brought neighbours of diverse backgrounds to work together. She led workshops and retreats introducing ‘Christ in Other Cultures’ using Jesus’s portrayal by artists from different parts of the world.

We will always remain indebted for her support, guidance, and leadership in many different ways. We are grateful for her life, her faith, and her selfless commitment to people’s wellbeing in Luton and beyond.

A Priest from the Church of Netherlands spent 6-weeks of internship at GRASSROOTS in Luton. She said, “I had little but very profound interaction with Sr Maire. She has left a lasting impression on me. She was a remarkable woman.”

Dr Nazia Khanum – a Muslim woman activist in Luton said, “When I think of Sr Maire, I vividly recall her lovely face and strikingly pure sacred voice, like the sound of a bell. Her devotion to duty and fairness was remarkable. Her robust support for women’s empowerment was seen in action in women’s events like Precious Pearls, marking the International Women’s Day.

May Sr Maire’s spirit of compassion and her spirit of courage-strength-resilience continue to inspire us all and keep us all united in our longing for peace, justice, and prosperity of all in our world!

Most condolence messages we received have ended saying may she rest in peace, but those of us who know Sr Maire closely, would know that resting eternally would be suicidal for Sr Maire. Therefore, we say, continue to be at work, Sr Maire. Since you are liberated from the limitations of your physical body – fly & hover around, for you are a true Daughter of the Holy Spirit.



Ahead of EDL (English Defence League) demonstration in May 2012, Sr Maire Hayes (in the middle) speaking at a Peace Rally held in the grounds of St. Mary’s Church in Luton, with Muslim & Sikh friends

Financial Summary

September 2023 – August 2024

Income	£
Grants received	110,564
Donations	4,692
Interest and other income	8,688
Sale of Fairtrade goods	10,936
	134,880
Expenditure – Charitable activities	
Advancement of Interfaith Relations & Community Development Work	70,258
Near Neighbours	29,239
Multi-faith Storytelling and Other Events	27,295
Admin, Governance & Fundraising	16,360
Total	143,152
Net Expenditure for the year	
Total	8,272
Reserves at 31 August 2023	
Unrestricted (Designated)	57,895
Restricted	5,058

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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www.facebook.com/grassrootsluton



www.twitter.com/grassrootsluton

Charity Registration Number: 1163427

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE
YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024

Miller & Co
Chartered Accountants
5 Imperial Court
Laporte Way
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU4 8FE

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

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**GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024**

The Trustees present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2024. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" in preparing the annual report and financial statements of the charity.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out on page twelve and comply with the Charity's Constitution, the Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published in October 2019.

This charity, Grassroots Programme CIO took over the assets of the former unincorporated charity Grassroots Programme (charity number 1057468) on 1 September 2016. Prior years' reports relating to charity number 1057468 may be obtained from the office at the principal address.

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

CHARITY NAME:	Grassroots Programme
STATUS:	Charitable Incorporated Organisation - Foundation Constitution. Registered Constitution and as a charity on 04 September 2015.
CHARITY NUMBER:	1163427
PRINCIPAL ADDRESS:	47 High Town Road Luton Bedfordshire LU2 0BW
TRUSTEES AND OFFICERS:	Those who served as trustees of the charity during the year were as follows: Rev D Lawson (Chair) Mrs J Bird Rev M Hindley (Resigned 31 December 2023) Rev P Horner Mrs R Tetlow Mrs S Marsden (Secretary) Ms D Purfield Mr B Roe (Treasurer)
CHARITY DIRECTOR:	Mr D Jonathan
BANKERS:	The Co-operative Bank Olympic House 6 Olympic Court Salford M8 2QP
INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS:	Miller & Co Chartered Accountants Statutory Auditors 5 Imperial Court, Laporte Way Luton Bedfordshire LU4 8FE

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Grassroots Programme is an independent charity. A board of trustees administers the charity. The trustees are responsible for the overall control and management of the charity and meet on a regular basis.

**GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024**

PUBLIC BENEFIT

The trustees confirm that they have complied with their duty, set out in the 2011 Charity Act, to have due regard to Charity Commission guidance on public benefit.

RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES

Trustees are appointed for a term of five years by a resolution of the trustees passed at a special meeting for which not less than 21 days' notice has been given.

Under the terms of the Constitution, newly appointed trustees are not entitled to act as trustees until they have signed, in the minute book of the trustees, a declaration of acceptance and willingness to act in the trusts of the Charity.

All the trustees are familiar with the work of the charity and an induction is performed for any new trustees.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The objects of the charity as set out in the Constitution are as follows:

- (1) To advance education for the public benefit in global issues to enable greater awareness of factors that will contribute to the relief of needy victims of breaches of human rights in such ways that are charitable in law.
- (2) To advance religion and promote understanding among Christians and those of other faiths.
- (3) To provide opportunities for the advancement of education among all ages, but particularly adults, in such ways that are charitable in law.
- (4) To provide relief of the aged, infirm and poor.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

In order to achieve its objectives, the charity runs a number of programmes and activities. During the year it ran the following specific programmes and activities:

WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEACE & UNITY

In celebrating unity, diversity, and community by bringing individuals from different backgrounds together, and in fostering a sense of togetherness, and promoting cultural exchanges, GRASSROOTS supported and promoted a few big events; Desi Fest Luton | East Fest Luton | Diwali in Luton | Luton in Bloom | Turk Fest | Big Iftar | Colours of Eid and numerous other religious and cultural festivities.

We also supported activities during the Black History Month. Two key events, we supported include the 75th-anniversary commemoration of the Windrush Generation in which a dozen Windrush local Heroes from Luton were honoured. And the other event was the Black Culture Market at which there were a variety of stalls offering a range of creative and interesting products and materials, celebrating the contributions of black businesses and social entrepreneurs who add colour, vigour, and spice to the British cultural landscape.

We also commemorated the UN's International Day of Peace (IDP) by organising a multi-faith Peace Walk event in the town, visiting different places of worship including 2 Churches, a Mosque, and a Gurudwara. At this event. Near Neighbours funded CATALYST Training Graduates were presented with their certificates. They shared their aspirations for a better world and their resolve to combat poverty, deprivation, and other current problems in the town.

During Inter Faith Week (IFW) 2023, we held several activities. We coordinated exchange visits between different places of worship. In a Diocesan IFW event held at the Church of England St Albans Cathedral, we invited people from different faiths to reflect together on the theme of "Strangers & Co-Pilgrims – Sharing how encounters with those of different beliefs strengthen our faith. Representatives of 8 different faiths shared from their perspectives how their teachings lead them to view the value of others and to respect those of different beliefs.

Stories are powerful and have a lasting impact on people. So, during this year's Inter-faith Week, using the 'lost art' of story-telling with the local Award-winning Khayaal Theatre, we delivered a special multi-faith storytelling performance consisting of character and virtue-nourishing stories from 4 different faiths. This was appealing, especially to young audiences. However, throughout the year, we rolled out Multi Faith Storytelling Workshops, supported by the Westhill Foundation and the Awards for All Funding. We also supported Luton Council of Faiths to deliver 15 School Assemblies by a panel of multi faith leaders on the theme how to make our town more respectful.

**GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024**

We hosted a multi-faith group of over 30 Swedish guests and visitors for 3 days in Luton. We convened a Luton & Swedish Faith Leaders' Exchange meeting during Inter Faith Week. At this meeting, colleagues shared good practices, exchanged ideas, and shared how to talk about difficult issues e.g. Israel-Palestine conflict. We also organised a number of field visits acknowledging and involving various other inter faith projects, initiatives, groups and organisations including the Police and the local authority – all focussing around the theme of strengthening cohesion in Luton.

The other networking event we supported was to connect faith communities and the NHS BLMK (Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes) ICB (Integrated Care Board), previously known as BLMK CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group). We organised a multi faith Listening event for the ICB to improve health and care services in Luton.

At the University of Bedfordshire Chaplaincy Commissioning Event, we coordinated different faith leaders to commit their support to the Chaplaincy services, especially for the overseas students arriving in Luton from very diverse backgrounds. We also helped with the multi-faith aspects at the Chaplaincy-led Carols by Candlelight event and Remembrance Service.

We facilitated a multi-faith training day for the Bedfordshire Hospital Chaplains and facilitated workshops and visits to different places of worship in Luton.

We supported the multi-faith attendance and participation at

- Luton's Peace Garden tree plantation events in memory of all those who died of Covid-19
- Lord Lieutenant's Annual Service of Thanksgiving for the voluntary organisations in Bedfordshire

We supported and contributed to the organising of the World Religion Day & the Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) events in Luton. A Holocaust survivor shared a moving account of his painful story. He said this wasn't the first genocide and sadly this wasn't the last. The human race is not good at 'Never Again'. Several civic dignitaries, including the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire and members of Luton's diverse communities lit candles in memory of all those killed during the Holocaust and the subsequent genocides.

This year's Annual World Day of Prayer (WDP) materials were prepared by the Christian women of Palestine. When it was prepared, no one foresaw the terrible war that is currently raging, still the service material felt perfectly appropriate for the present time. One prayer in the service booklet read; "God of Peace, we pray for a peaceful end to the ongoing situation in Palestine. We also pray for the city of Jerusalem, sacred to the three religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Let there be equality, freedom of religion, freedom of movement and freedom of expression." GRASSROOTS supported and promoted the event, in the print media and social media too. May we all continue to work for peace and justice in our world and bear with one another in love!

We also supported;

- A Bangladeshi community organisation called Purbachal (meaning Eastern Sky) 25th Anniversary Celebration Event
- Guru Nanak Gurudwara commemorating its founder Sikh Guru Nanak Dev Ji's 554th Birth Anniversary Celebrations
- Carols by Candlelight Event by University Chaplaincy called The Treehouse
- Chanukah Celebrations held at Luton United Synagogue.
- Peace Light Service
- St Luke's Café in promoting communal eating
- Shri Guru Ravidass Ji's 647th Birth Anniversary Celebrations
- 10th Big Ifar & Eid Events
- Good Friday & Easter Events
- Bahai Nawruz (New Year) Celebrations
- First-ever Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) New Year & Vesakh (Buddha Day) celebrations
- Beech Hill Methodist Church 90th Anniversary
- Leagrave High Street Methodist Church 200th Anniversary
- Launch of Knife Angel – a 27-foot sculpture highlighting negative effects of violent knife crime on our communities

GRASSROOTS supported the Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) appeal to support The Keech Hospice Short Tail Fundraising Trail. (<https://keech.org.uk/whats-on/the-short-tail-trail/>) Keech Hospice – Hare & Tortoise Sculptures were to be sponsored and with LCoF support, we brought diverse communities together to paint the sculptures. This was yet another example of good practice of inter faith cooperation, showcasing how Luton communities can live well together and work for the common good.

**GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024**

Partnership with C of E DIFA (Diocesan Inter Faith Advisors)

We have been facilitating regular meetings of DIFAs (Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers). We formed the Diocesan Inter Faith Network (DIFN). It has now over 20 members. We contributed to the national C of E's P & E (Presence & Engagement) network, particularly about our experiences of tackling issues and challenges caused by the Israel-Palestine conflict. We facilitated Bishop Richard's visit to different places of worship in Luton, where faith leaders appreciated Bishop's visit and discussed with him, local and global issues and concerns impacting lives locally.

World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC) Consultation

We were invited to attend and share our inter faith community work story at the Global Consultation held in Haus Villigst, Schwerte, Germany 11-15 December 2023 led by the Lutheran World Foundation & the World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on the theme "A Protestant Theological Approach to Freedom of Religion and Belief".

NEAR NEIGHBOURS PROGRAMME

GRASSROOTS has been hosting and administering the Near Neighbours (NN) Programme in Luton for over 10 years. Through its numerous projects and activities funded locally, NN helped communities to stay connected, especially as interfaith relations have been strained due to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. We worked hard to encourage a total of 17 Near Neighbours Small Grant Funding Applications submitted from Luton. The 12 successful projects funded by the Near Neighbours Programme in Luton are listed below;

- Att10tive Luton – a social enterprise helped young people celebrate Luton's diverse heritage, using art and videos
- Luton All Stars held biggest Diversity Football Tournament
- Edible High Town making High Town greener and more sustainable
- Feast Project held 7 dialogue encounters for young people skilling them to disagree respectfully
- Food Bank diversifying its volunteer base
- Guru Ravidass Sangat South Asian Cookery Sessions for diverse community groups
- Inspire FM multi-faith engagement at the 10th Anniversary of Big Iftar
- Khayaal Theatre delivered multi faith story-telling sessions
- Next Generation Scheme delivered cultural exchange workshops, promoting and celebrating diversity
- Oasis served women of diverse faiths and cultures with English speaking with a focus on accessing health services
- Revoluton Fitness ran biking sessions for women of global majority heritage
- St Andrew's Church Biscot Peace & Wellbeing Hub

BBC RADIO 1 BIG WEEKEND

This report will be incomplete, if we did not mention about the BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend – a famous British annual music festival run by BBC Radio 1, bringing world-class musicians to Luton's Stockwood Park for the first time. GRASSROOTS was invited to join on Sunday, at a special morning Breakfast Reception. We had opportunity to converse with Aled Haydn Jones, Head of BBC Radio 1 and also with the Director of Public Affairs. Over 100,000 festivalgoers had flocked to see this amazing weekend full of incredible performances. During the performance, there were fireworks, tears, smiles and a very special song just for Luton Town Football Club. It was the perfect end to an epic weekend of music. The festival was a real tonic for the town. Estimates suggest that the Big Weekend helped bring in £4 million for the local economy.

An Overview of Global, National & Local Issues Impacting Life in Luton

The world currently seems a very dark and a hostile place, because of over 110 wars and armed conflicts according to the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law & Human Rights. Whether it is territorial disputes, control of resources, power struggles, ideological differences, or economic competition, seeing the conflicting interests between nations escalating into armed & bloody conflicts is extremely distressing.

We have all been appalled by the immense civilian suffering in Israel-Palestine. Here, in the UK, we saw record levels of anti-Semitism, anti-Jewish hatred, and also a deplorable and deeply concerning rise in anti-Muslim hatred - Islamophobia. A top London school was taken to high court over prayer ban for Muslims. At a local mosque in Luton, an individual intentionally defaced a mosque banner, and painted a red cross behind it. This malicious act understandably caused distress among members of the congregation, particularly in the climate of heightened Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments. It is good that Luton's faith leaders have talked about Israel-Palestine as a political conflict, and not as a conflict between the Jews & Muslims, even though it may seem and feel and projected that way. At the end of last year, a prayer vigil was held in Luton for the peace in Israel- Palestine. All hoped and aspired for peace and an end to conflict in Israel & Palestine.

Nationally, the withdrawal of government funding to the Inter Faith Network (IFN) UK was a decision that is seen as short-sighted and harmful to interfaith and community relations throughout the country.

**GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024**

Locally, in a local Knife Crime incident in Oct'23, a 16-year-old boy was stabbed to death in Luton. We networked with the Bedfordshire Police, Luton's many schools, the Luton council, and also with Luton's diverse communities and faith groups to come together to express our collective deep shock and sadness at the tragic event. A silent prayer vigil was held in Wardown Park. We also supported a special faith-led event at one of Luton's prominent mosques propagating a strong message – Stop the Hate and Violence. It has no place in our civilised societies. One of our CATALYST-trained young persons contributed significantly to a multi-agency Knife Crime Summit held at Luton Sixth Form College later in Nov'23.

A neighbourly issue involving a place of worship could have potentially gotten out of hand, on the night of Christmas day. We mediated, mentored, and made people aware of the unpleasant consequences bringing disrepute to the whole of Luton town, and eventually we helped resolve the issue amicably as soon as possible.

The killing of children in Southport was shocking for everyone. What was even more shocking was the far-right extremists hijacking the tragedy of Southport from a grieving community for their own hateful racist and Islamophobic agenda. This triggered the civil unrest, the riots and the deplorable violent events in cities and towns across the UK targeting minority communities and the police. Thankfully, Luton stayed peaceful. The role played by the Bedfordshire Police, Luton Council, Luton Council of Faiths and the local communities, was commended. Such solidarity, especially in times of fear, is a powerful force, and strategies deployed to tackle misinformation, and calming anxieties, was a good and timely intervention.

People in Southport set an example by coming together to condemn the violence, support the victims and clean up the mess after the riots, but they must not be the only ones; we all must play our part too. And that is why in Luton, we invited people to make short solidarity videos with those of different backgrounds, sharing their stories of friendships and living well together, and upload it on #weareluton. (Watch it on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LutonFaiths/>)

Overall, our priorities during the last year have included, continuing to

- monitor tensions caused by the ongoing wars and conflicts, particularly the conflict in M'East
- mentor individuals and organisations (faith and voluntary) reminding and strengthening everyone of our collective resolve to keep peace in our town
- encourage and foster 'social interaction' and 'social action' across religious and cultural divides so that we can continue to work together for the common good
- build, consolidate & strengthen local partnerships & networks
- support local projects funded by the Near Neighbours Grants
- strengthen good and positive leadership in our communities

We must all strengthen our resolve to continue working together for safeguarding the vulnerable, for the stability and compassion in our society, and for the peace, unity, wellbeing, and prosperity of all in our town, as well as in our country.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The Trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, in particular those related to the finances of the charity and are satisfied that systems are in place to reduce exposure to the major risks.

RESERVES POLICY

The Trustees have a policy of aiming to retain reserves equivalent to six months average expenditure. This is due to the uncertain nature of funding received. The free reserves at the year-end were £57,895.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

The Trustees remain committed to the growth of the Grassroots Programme and the possibilities of expanding the presence of Grassroots Programme to other parts of the country. However, this is dependent upon the charity securing additional funds.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The charity had total income of £134,880 (2023 £114,576). The main sources of income were grants of £110,564 (2023 £101,807). The charity had total expenditure of £143,152 (2023 £116,416). Expenditure on charitable activities totalled £126,792 (2023 £97,216) which included governance costs of £3,584 (2023 £3,147). There was net income on the unrestricted fund of £1,498 and net expenditure of £9,770 on the restricted fund after transfers between funds. Total funds at the end of the year were £62,953.

**GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024**

The trustees would like to record their thanks to all individuals and associations who supported the charity during the year. All details of the income and expenditure of the charity are set out in the Statement of Financial Activities and the notes to the accounts. In the opinion of the trustees the charity was in a satisfactory financial position at the year end.

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The law applicable to charities in England & Wales requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP 2019 (FRS 102);
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 and the provisions of the constitution. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES:



Rev D Lawson
Chair



B Roe
Treasurer

Date: 7 November 2024

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS' REPORT
to the Trustees of Grassroots Programme

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31 August 2024 which are set out on pages 8 to 19.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND BASIS OF REPORT

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS' STATEMENT

Your attention is drawn to the fact that the charity has prepared the accounts in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) in preference to the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice issued on 1 April 2005 which is referred to in the extant regulations but has since been withdrawn.

We understand that this has been done in order for the accounts to provide a true and fair view in accordance with the Generally Accepted Accounting Practice effective for reporting periods beginning on or after 1 January 2015.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



R A Cox FCA
Miller & Co
Chartered Accountants
5 Imperial Court
Laporte Way, Luton
Bedfordshire
LU4 8FE

8 November 2024

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

	Note	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	2024 Total	2023 Total
		£	£	£	£
<u>INCOME FROM</u>					
Grants	2	64,000	46,564	110,564	101,807
Donations	3	4,492	200	4,692	9,567
Investment income		2,234	-	2,234	1,372
Sale of Fairtrade goods		10,936	-	10,936	1,830
Other income		6,454	-	6,454	-
TOTAL INCOME		88,116	46,764	134,880	114,576
<u>EXPENDITURE ON</u>					
Raising funds		16,360	-	16,360	19,200
Charitable activities	4	70,258	56,534	126,792	97,216
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		86,618	56,534	143,152	116,416
Net income / (expenditure)		1,498	(9,770)	(8,272)	(1,840)
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds for the year		1,498	(9,770)	(8,272)	(1,840)
<u>Reconciliation of funds</u>					
Funds brought forward at 1 September 2023		56,397	14,828	71,225	73,065
Funds carried forward at 31 August 2024		£57,895	£5,058	£62,953	£71,225

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses in the year. All incoming resources and resources expended derive from continuing activities.

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

BALANCE SHEET 31 August 2024

	Note	<u>2024</u>		<u>2023</u>
		£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS:				
Tangible assets	9		-	-
CURRENT ASSETS:				
Debtors	10	115		123
COIF Funds		44,938		42,703
Cash at bank		<u>20,504</u>		<u>32,627</u>
		65,557		75,453
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	11	<u>2,604</u>		<u>4,228</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS			<u>62,953</u>	<u>71,225</u>
NET ASSETS			<u>£62,953</u>	<u>£71,225</u>
FUNDS:				
Unrestricted general fund	13		57,895	56,397
Restricted funds	13		<u>5,058</u>	<u>14,828</u>
TOTAL FUNDS			<u>£62,953</u>	<u>£71,225</u>

The financial statements on pages 8 to 19 were approved by the board of trustees on 7 November 2024.

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES:



Rev D Lawson
Chair



Mr B Roe
Treasurer

7 November 2024

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

General information and basis of preparation

Grassroots Programme is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charity's constitution, the Charities Act 2011 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair view'. This departure has involved following the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention. The financial statements are presented in pounds sterling and rounded to the nearest pound. The address of the principal office is given in the charity information on page 1 of these financial statements.

Going concern

The financial statements have been prepared on a going concern basis as the trustees believe that no material uncertainties exist. The trustees have considered the level of funds held and the expected level of income and expenditure for 12 months from authorising these financial statements. The budgeted income and expenditure is sufficient with the level of reserves for the charity to be able to continue as a going concern.

Unrestricted and restricted funds

Unrestricted funds are grants and other income received for the objects of the charity without further specified purpose and are available as general funds.

Designated funds comprise unrestricted funds that have been set aside by the trustees for particular purposes. The aim and use of each designated fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements.

Restricted funds are those funds which are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor or the trustees. Expenditure which meets these criteria is identified to the funds, together with a fair allocation of administration and support costs. The aim and use of each restricted fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements.

Income recognition

Donations and other income are recognised when received. Grants are recognised when received or when the charity has legal entitlement to them, the amount can be reliably measured and there is sufficient certainty of receipt them.

Expenditure recognition

Staff costs and overhead expenses are allocated to activities on the basis of staff time spent on those activities. Support costs comprise those costs incurred directly in support of expenditure on the objectives of the charity. Governance costs relate to trustees' expenses, legal charges, independent examiners fees and attributable expenses of governing the charity. The trustees give all their time free of charge.

Expenditure is recognised when the amount can be reliably measured, there is a legal obligation to make it and it is probable that settlement will be required.

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

ACCOUNTING POLICIES continued

Leasing commitments

Rentals paid under operating leases are charged to income as incurred.

Pensions

The charity operates a defined contribution pension scheme for certain employees. Contributions in respect of pensions are charged to income in the year in which they are paid.

Debtors and creditors receivable/payable within one year

Grants, other debtors and creditors receivable or payable within one year are recorded at transaction price.

Fixed assets

The charity has a policy of capitalising fixed asset expenditure over £1,000.

Tangible fixed assets are stated at cost less accumulated depreciation.

Depreciation is provided on all tangible fixed assets, at rates calculated to write off the cost, less estimated residual value, of each asset on a systematic basis over its expected useful life as follows:

IT and office equipment - 33% on cost

2. INCOME FROM GRANTS

	Unrestricted	Restricted	2024 Total	2023 Total
	£	£	£	£
Grants for general purposes				
Methodist Church Beds, Essex & Herts District	15,000	-	15,000	15,000
URC - MIG (Thames North Synod)	12,000	-	12,000	12,000
Diocese of St. Albans	10,000	-	10,000	10,840
Luton Council of Faiths	12,000	-	12,000	12,000
Northampton RC Diocese	15,000	-	15,000	13,250
 Church Urban Fund (Near Neighbours)				
Near Neighbours Fund Projects	-	29,239	29,239	31,292
 Events				
National Lottery – Community Fund	-	9,900	9,900	-
Westhill Endowment	-	7,425	7,425	7,425
	64,000	46,564	110,564	101,807

Income from grants in 2023 totalled £101,807 of which £38,717 was attributable to restricted funds and £63,090 was attributable to unrestricted funds.

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME
NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

3. INCOME FROM DONATIONS & LEGACIES

	Unrestricted	Restricted	2024 Total	2023 Total
	£	£	£	£
Donations				
General	4,492	-	4,492	9,567
Events	-	200	200	-
	<u>4,492</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>4,692</u>	<u>9,567</u>

Income from donations and legacies in 2023 totalled £9,567 of which £nil was attributable to restricted funds and £9,567 was attributable to unrestricted funds.

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

4. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

Charitable Activities 2024	Activities Undertaken Directly 2024 £	Support Costs 2024 £	Total 2024 £
Events	23,845	3,450	27,295
Near Neighbours	17,372	11,867	29,239
Advancement of Interfaith Relations & Community Development Work	9,593	60,665	70,258
	50,810	75,982	126,792

Charitable Activities 2023	Activities undertaken directly 2023 £	Support Costs 2023 £	Total 2023 £
Events	4,036	-	4,036
Working With Women	4,360	-	4,360
Near Neighbours	20,276	11,417	31,693
Advancement of Interfaith Relations & Community Development Work	3,783	53,344	57,127
	32,455	64,761	97,216

£56,534 (2023 £40,089) of the above costs were attributable to restricted funds and £70,258 (2023 £57,127) were attributable to unrestricted funds.

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

4a. ALLOCATION OF SUPPORT COSTS

Support Cost 2024	Basis of Allocation	Advancement of Interfaith Relations & Community Development Work 2024 £	Events 2024 £	Near Neighbours 2024 £	Total 2024 £
Governance	Usage	3,584	-	-	3,584
Information technology	Usage	1,158	-	71	1,229
Staff costs	Usage	32,735	3,450	10,840	47,025
Depreciation	Usage	-	-	-	-
Office costs	Usage	23,188	-	956	24,144
		60,665	3,450	11,867	75,982

Support Cost 2023	Basis of Allocation	Advancement of Interfaith Relations & Community Development Work 2023 £	Events 2023 £	Near Neighbours 2023 £	Total 2023 £
Governance	Usage	3,147	-	-	3,147
Information technology	Usage	1,349	-	-	1,349
Staff costs	Usage	33,360	-	11,015	44,375
Depreciation	Usage	830	-	-	830
Office costs	Usage	14,658	-	402	15,060
		53,344	-	11,417	64,761

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

5. GOVERNANCE COSTS

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
	£	£
Trustee expenses	96	10
Independent examiners fee	1,398	1,362
Support costs	2,090	1,775
	<u>3,584</u>	<u>3,147</u>

6. STAFF COSTS AND NUMBERS

Staff costs were as follows:

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
	£	£
Charity director	45,000	42,500
Employers National Insurance - payable	4,955	4,674
Less Employment allowance	(4,955)	(4,674)
	<u>45,000</u>	<u>42,500</u>
Pension contributions	2,700	2,550
	<u>47,700</u>	<u>45,050</u>

Defined contribution pension expense is allocated to activities based on the time apportionment of the relevant employee.

No employee earned more than £60,000 during the year (2023 same).

The average number of employees during the year was as follows:

Administration	0.5	0.5
Charitable activities	0.5	0.5
	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

7. TRANSACTIONS WITH TRUSTEES

No trustees received any remuneration during the year. Travel costs amounting to £96 (2023 £10) were reimbursed to two (2023 one) trustees.

No trustee had any personal interest in any contract or transaction entered into by the charity during the year (2023 same).

8. TAXATION

As a charity, Grassroots Programme is exempt from tax on income and gains falling within sections 521 to 536 of the Income Tax Act 2007 or section 256 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 to the extent that these are applied to its charitable objects. No tax charges have arisen in the charity.

9. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	IT and Office Equipment	Total
	£	£
<u>Cost:</u>		
As at 1 September 2023	2,490	2,490
Additions	-	-
Disposals	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
As at 31 August 2024	<u>2,490</u>	<u>2,490</u>
<u>Depreciation:</u>		
As at 1 September 2023	2,490	2,490
Charge for the year	-	-
Disposals	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
As at 31 August 2024	<u>2,490</u>	<u>2,490</u>
<u>Net Book Value:</u>		
As at 31 August 2024	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
As at 31 August 2023	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

10. DEBTORS

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
	£	£
Prepayments	115	123
Accrued income	-	-
	<u>115</u>	<u>123</u>

11. CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
	£	£
Accruals	1,398	2,914
Taxation and social security	756	864
Other creditors	450	450
	<u>2,604</u>	<u>4,228</u>

12. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2024 £
Net current assets	57,895	5,058	62,953
Total net assets	<u>56,397</u>	<u>14,828</u>	<u>71,225</u>

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2023 £
Net current assets	56,397	14,828	71,225
Total net assets	<u>56,397</u>	<u>14,828</u>	<u>71,225</u>

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

13. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS

	Balance at 1 September 2023 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers £	Balance at 31 August 2024 £
Restricted Funds					
Near Neighbours	-	29,239	(29,239)	-	-
Events	14,828	17,525	(27,295)	-	5,058
	<u>14,828</u>	<u>46,764</u>	<u>(56,534)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>5,058</u>
Unrestricted Funds					
General funds	35,223	88,116	(86,618)	21,174	57,895
Designated funds: Spirituality of Justice	21,174	-	-	(21,174)	-
	<u>56,397</u>	<u>88,116</u>	<u>(86,618)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>57,895</u>
Total Funds	<u>71,225</u>	<u>134,880</u>	<u>(143,152)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>62,953</u>

	Balance at 1 September 2022 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers £	Balance at 31 August 2023 £
Restricted Funds					
Working with Women	-	-	(4,360)	4,360	-
Near Neighbours	401	31,292	(31,693)	-	-
Events	11,439	7,425	(4,036)	-	14,828
	<u>11,840</u>	<u>38,717</u>	<u>(40,089)</u>	<u>4,360</u>	<u>14,828</u>
Unrestricted Funds					
General funds	51,644	62,609	(74,670)	(4,360)	35,223
Designated funds: Spirituality of Justice	9,581	13,250	(1,657)	-	21,174
	<u>61,225</u>	<u>75,859</u>	<u>(76,327)</u>	<u>(4,360)</u>	<u>56,397</u>
Total Funds	<u>73,065</u>	<u>114,576</u>	<u>(116,416)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>71,225</u>

GRASSROOTS PROGRAMME

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS for the Year Ended 31 August 2024

MOVEMENT IN FUNDS continued

The trustees have determined that the Spirituality of Justice designated fund is no longer required hence the transfer to general funds.

The balances on the restricted funds will be used to continue the work of the projects in accordance with the terms of the funders. Details of the funds are as follows:

Near Neighbours – Bringing neighbours together for ‘social action’ and ‘social interaction’.

Events – includes Westhill Endowment Fund and National Lottery – Community Fund for the multi-faith storytelling workshops.

14. RELATED PARTIES AND CONTROLLING PARTY

There were no related party transactions requiring disclosure. (2023 £nil). The charity is controlled by the Trustees.