

# Seeds on the Wind

The Luton Church Related Community Work Project (2010 – 2020)

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**BURY PARK BEECH HILL  
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**



## Seeds on the Wind

### The Luton Church Related Community Work Project

In the heart of a seed,  
buried deep, so deep,  
a dear little plant lay fast asleep.  
“Wake”, said the sunshine,  
“and creep to the light”;  
“Wake”, said the voice of a raindrop bright.  
The little plant heard  
and it rose to see  
what a wonderful outside  
the world may be.

Childhood rhyme recited by Veronica Wedderburn - CRCW Management Group,  
expressing how people have grown and learned to see ‘the wonderful outside’.



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# Acknowledgements

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# Breathe

Here we are,  
Here we stand,  
At one with sky and sea and land;  
At one with Earth, and all therein.  
Close your eyes  
And breathe life in.

Draw deeply now upon the air;  
Make every breath a silent pray'r,  
From heart, from soul,  
From deep within;  
Close your eyes  
And breathe life in.

May every second swell with praise  
And wonder at this best of days -  
The sounds, the smells,  
The touch, the taste,  
Let not one moment go to waste;  
But every heartbeat strive to tell  
Of life abundant,  
Life lived well.

So close your eyes, and breathe life in;  
Let life abundant flow within -  
Like sea and sky and all the land,  
Sustained, renewed, by Unseen Hand;  
With all the Earth, and all therein,  
Let's pause awhile  
And breathe life in.







Trip to the Leprosy Mission Festival of Flowers at Southwark Cathedral









# Setting the Scene...



Church Related Community Work (CRCW) is a ministry of the United Reformed Church (URC) concerned with bringing about positive change in local communities. It encourages the local church to consider 'What does it mean to be a meaningful Christian presence in *this* place?'

Those called to CRCW ministry are usually appointed to a single church, or perhaps a small group of URC congregations working together in a local area. The Luton Project has been different.

The CRCW was called to work with the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches, comprising:

-  Bury Park United Reformed Church
-  Oakdale Methodist Church
-  All Saints with St Peters Anglican Parish
-  Holy Ghost Catholic Church
-  Beech Hill Methodist Church, and
-  The Asian Christian Fellowship (non-denominational)

Ten years ago, the area in which the churches are located was poorly perceived by many onlookers and subject to negative attention by the media.

Bury Park and Beech Hill had a long history of receiving newly-arrived migrant groups. They had changed rapidly over the years since most church members first lived here, becoming super-diverse communities with people of many different faiths and cultures. The majority of local residents were now Muslim.

In the face of this changed context the Council of Churches applied to become a CRCW Project, with the stated aim:

*'The Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches seeks to draw on the expertise of the past to enable the churches to take forward their growing realisation that God's mission is for them to be fully active participants in the multi-cultural, multi-faith community in which they are situated.'*

It was to this Project that newly-qualified Church Related Community Worker, Karen Campbell, was appointed, working with the Council of Churches under the umbrella of local community development programme, Grassroots. In the ensuing years, many seeds have been sown. Some have taken root, others have not. Shoots have developed and often flourished, developing multiple branches. Flowers have blossomed and fruit continues to be harvested.

The aim of this book is to celebrate what has happened during the life of the Project, to remind people *"I did that, that was good"* and perhaps encourage others living elsewhere to think *"maybe we could try this idea"*.

The Project has completed its maximum ten-year term, but there is no reason for the seeds to stop being scattered, no reason why new shoots should not continue to appear.



## Listening to God

Church Related Community Work is inspired, informed and underpinned by faith. From the outset it was important to listen for what God might be saying. Looking to the Bible, the parable of the sower appears in three of the four Gospels - Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15. The story enables us to draw a number of messages of relevance to the CRCW context:



Experienced gardeners understand the importance of preparing the ground to make new growth possible. This may mean removing any stones and weeds before sowing seeds, making it easier for the new shoots and roots to develop; adding fertilizer to nurture the tender young plant.

Once there are signs of growth it may be necessary to provide stakes or other support until the plant has sufficiently matured to stand alone. In the case of very tender varieties of plant, it may mean finding solid rootstock into which they may be grafted.

For people and communities embarking on a new project, preparing the ground can mean removing the stones of doubt and weeds of hopelessness, building confidence and nurturing new growth. It might mean finding allies to provide support, or looking around for pre-existing initiatives in which people can become involved.

The hand of a 'gardener' is a key companion throughout the growing season - to keep removing weeds which might hold ideas back, to keep adding the 'fertilizer' of encouragement, and to point out the sometimes hidden developing fruit until people are confident enough to recognise these for themselves. Sometimes the gardener needs to say 'don't worry' if, despite all effort, seeds don't flourish, and encourage people to seek new life in other ways.



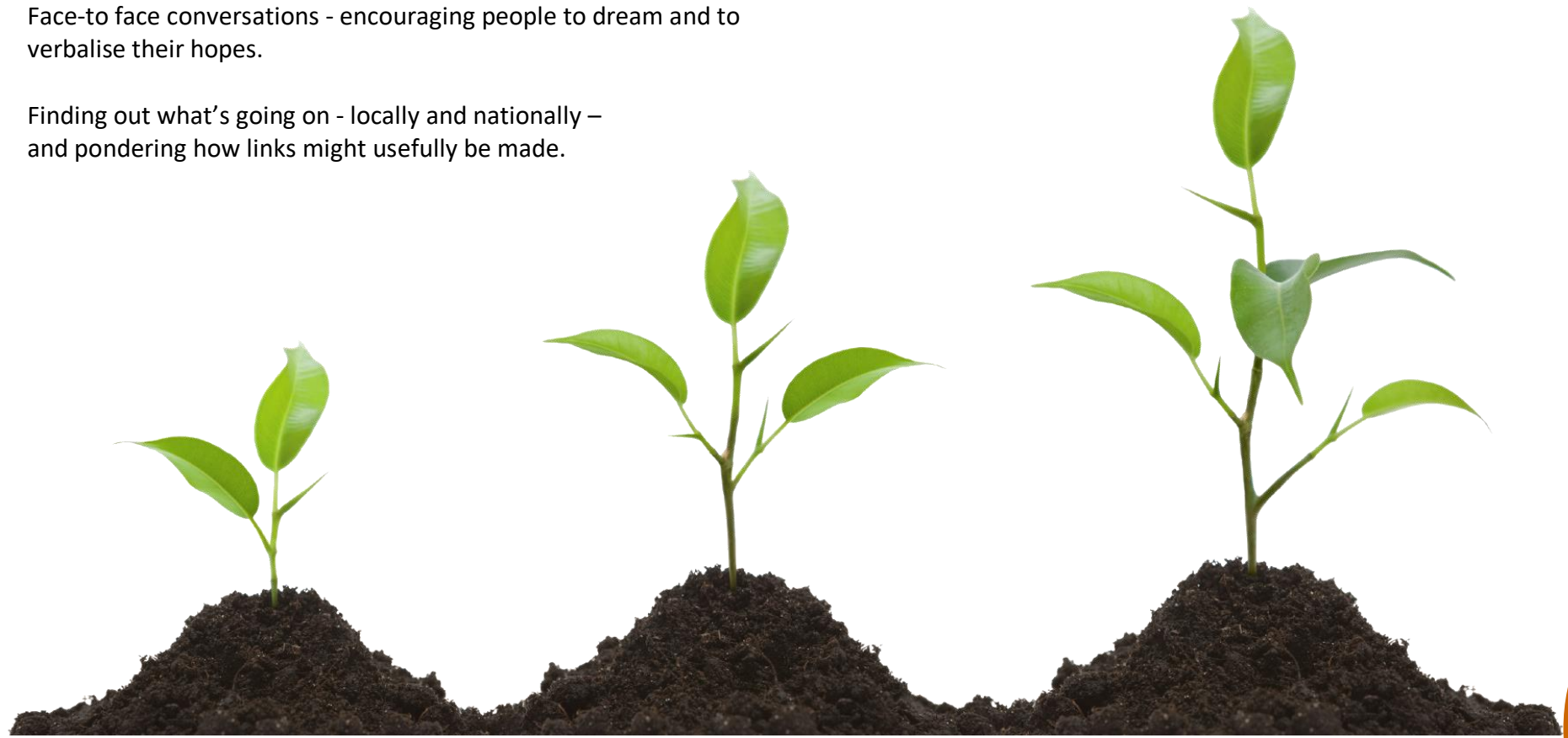
## Preparing the Ground

For the Luton Project, the process of preparing the ground included;

- 🌱 Visions and Dreams Morning - gathering people from the Council of Churches for biblical reflection and discussions exploring 'Who are we?', 'Where are we?' 'What do we want to do/be?' It encouraged focus on the realities of the local churches and their local community - the strengths and challenges, joys and sorrows. The aim was to begin to dream a different future, starting to name the changes to work into being:

***"The fact that someone was appointed (as a CRCW) shows someone's investing in here."***  
**(Methodist Minister)**

- 🌱 Being present - looking and listening, picking up the stories and the atmosphere both within and outside the churches.
- 🌱 Face-to face conversations - encouraging people to dream and to verbalise their hopes.
- 🌱 Finding out what's going on - locally and nationally – and pondering how links might usefully be made.



## Sowing Seeds and Grafting In

Seed sowing involves taking time to hear suggestions of what can be made to happen, and 'reading the signs of the times' which can be turned into action or counter-action. Grafting in is discovering things already happening that can be 'joined in' or inviting others to join what we are doing to build strength and avoid wasting energy in competing initiatives. It is not always easy to work out which 'gardener' sowed the first seed or which way round the projects are grafted into each other - but together we create a garden of interlinked plants. For the Luton Project this included:

- 🌱 Conversations that sparked ideas: 'Can we have a seaside trip?', or a request for a dinner and dance.
- 🌱 Interest in creative writing.
- 🌱 An exercise group seeking to rent a space.
- 🌱 Political unease from EDL and Britain First marches, and Brexit-fuelled attitudes to 'the other'.
- 🌱 An invitation to be part of work with Roma people.
- 🌱 Luton Fairtrade initiatives
- 🌱 Luton Council of Faiths initiatives such as the Faith Woodlands Communities Project and the Archery Project
- 🌱 United Reformed Church national and regional Multicultural Celebrations
- 🌱 Local annual events for One World Week, International Women's Day and Holocaust Memorial Day
- 🌱 Small grants opportunities from the Church Urban Fund 'Near Neighbours' programme and the related 'Real People Honest Talk' initiative.

### ***'But some seeds fall on stony ground'***

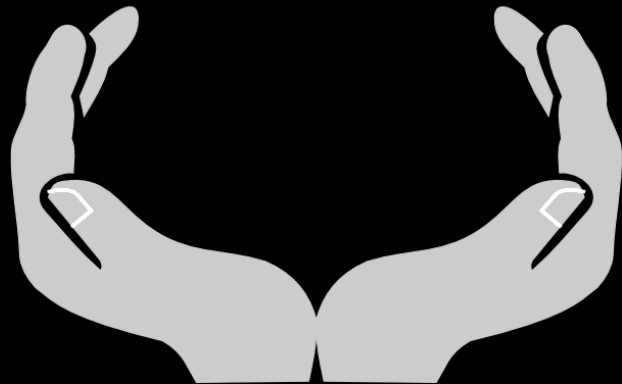
- 🌱 A proposed Council of Churches youth group was trialled but did not come to fruition. However, many local young people have been engaged through the archery project and others have participated in an annual youth Adventure Week in Devon in which the CRCW was heavily involved.

## This is Me

What do they see when they look at me?  
A black woman with white hair?  
The colour defines me I'm sure.  
I learnt this very young,  
Constantly being asked where I was from.

I'm more than my colour!  
There are so many sides to me!  
I'm a Mother, a Sister, an Aunt, a Godmother.

I love to sing hymns -  
And lyrics are important -  
But don't make assumptions about the music I will like.  
I've survived teasing all my life for choosing to be different,  
Yet the rhythms are never far away.  
Foot tapping cannot be stayed.



What you see might look confident  
But quite often inside I'm afraid,  
Yet at the same time determined not to be put off,  
not to be confined, not to be prevented from experiences  
that fine tune the 'me' I've become.

I can be vocal with an opinion to share,  
But I strive to be open-minded, friendly and fair;  
Above all I seek not to offend.  
A peacemaker at heart with words that can mend.

Sport has been a love all my life -  
Football, Athletics, Tennis and Everton FC.  
Playing, watching, listening, discussing, arguing.

This is the 'me' I want the world to see.  
Colour does not define who I want to be.  
Allow me to be me!!

*Written by a participant of the 'A Touching Place' Creative Writing project.*

© Ailsa Harris



# And then the Growing Begins...





## The Annual Big Bus Ride

*This arose from a chance conversation: 'Can we have a seaside trip?'*

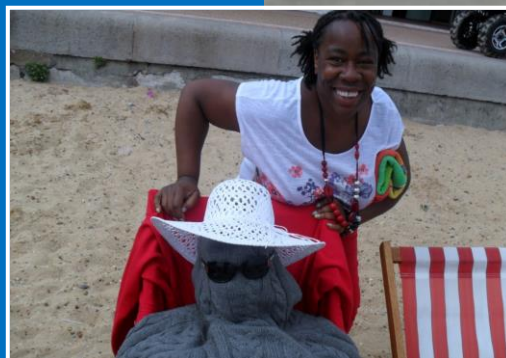
The request coincided with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012, giving rise to 'A Right Royal Excursion' - a day in Clacton, with afternoon tea hosted by the local United Reformed Church.

The trip has become an annual event involving a day at the seaside with family and friends, plus a time of shared fellowship, developing the sense of 'being church together' while enjoying the hospitality of partner churches in either Clacton or Brighton who host our group for afternoon tea.

Participants have included British, Caribbean, African and Asian members; tiny babies and seniors aged 80+; members of the local Roma and Eastern European communities, plus a family from a Black Pentecostal church which worships in one of the Council of Churches premises.

Host churches have also been positively impacted by this diversity, with one local member reflecting:

*"Although we were meeting for the first time, they really felt like old friends."*





## One World Week Event

*The town's annual One World Week event prompted the formation of a Council of Churches united choir gathered from various churches and Christian traditions to sing songs of unity and peace. It included faces from different parts of the world, the young and the not-so-young, men and women, clergy and lay people - a brilliant picture of 'unity in diversity'.*

*"This had a disproportionately big impact on people: we're here and we matter."*

(Council of Churches participant)

The buzz from the One World Week event led to the **Bury Park Beech Hill Variety Evening** - an extravaganza of music, song, dance, rap, poetry, drama and comedy, and '**This is How We Do It**', a Council of Churches home-grown celebration of One World Week with members contributing cultural poetry, songs and dance. The latter event invited contributions from Luton Roma Church, who shared a song and testimony, plus drumming from Nyabingi – a mental health charity working with Luton's African and Caribbean communities. Food was provided by participants of the Cooking and Befriending Project funded by Near Neighbours. Participants from Beech Hill Methodist Church decided to continue as a singing group for their own enjoyment, subsequently participating in worship and contributing to wider events including the annual Council of Churches festive celebrations and the Luton Peace Walk.

*"People have grown in ways they didn't think they would."*

(URC Minister)







ONE WORLD WEEK



# The United Reformed Church Multicultural Celebration

*A biennial event held in Birmingham celebrating the cultural and spiritual diversity of the United Reformed Church.*

Groups from the Council of Churches travelled to Birmingham in 2011, 2013 and 2015 to participate in all-age fellowship including folk and gospel singing, national dances, story-telling, poetry, drama, art, comedy, native-tongue choirs, solo artists, cello and steel band music, as well as shared food and shared worship. Taking part helped members of the small, Council of Churches congregations develop a sense of being part of something bigger than their everyday norm. People were enthused and excited, declaring:

*"It was a wonderful day in multicultural worship!"*

*"I'm putting the date of the next one in my diary from now, and I am telling everyone to be there!"*

## Cause for Celebration

*An annual regional celebration of the multicultural United Reformed Church.*

A group from the Bury Park Beech Hill churches travelled to Tooting in July 2014 for a day of worship, workshops, conversation and celebration - our first time participating in this event. It was a joy to see some of the often restrained Council of Churches members released to dance and praise with freedom. The Luton CRCW delivered two workshops reflecting on running church community projects, and a third encouraging participants to pen their own 'Urban Psalms'. During the closing worship, the Luton participants stood with members of various urban URCs, sharing the contributions they had prepared together in dance, drama and singing workshops. Having started the day bleary-eyed, by the time of the return to Luton people were buzzing and alive, uplifted by the events of the day. Groups from Luton participated on two further occasions.



# Faith Woodlands Communities Project Events



*These events were held in collaboration with Luton Council of Faiths.*

The **Easter Woodlands Fayre** saw more than 50 people from the Council of Churches enjoy a sunny day out in Maulden Woods, getting to know each other while exploring the woodland through a variety of playful activities including an Easter egg trail, 'Nature's Palette'- gathering samples of the diverse colours to be found in the woodland, and 'Meet a Tree'- being introduced to a tree while blindfolded, then challenged to locate the tree once the blindfold is removed. The day ended with a picnic and Easter reflection in the 'sacred space' in the woods. Whilst undoubtedly 'fun', this was also an important opportunity for cross-cultural learning, one white church member reflecting,

*"I learned a lot about hospitality. I brought my own packed lunch... the folks from the Asian Christian Fellowship brought containers of food to share!"*



The **Woodland Harvest Celebration** - following a recreational morning in local woodlands, approximately 50 people enjoyed a light-hearted afternoon of food, laughter and reflections hosted by the Council of Churches. In a Luton 'first', the celebration saw Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, clergy and lay-people, Black, Asian and White people, all dining together - an achievement enabled by personal invitations being extended through visits to local places of worship. Fellowship shared on that day forged new friendships and led to a warm invitation for a visit to a local mosque.

*"I just felt hugely privileged - sitting at a table with a Sikh, Muslims, a Hindu, and a Catholic Sister... it didn't matter that I was the minister of the church."* (Minister of Beech Hill Methodist Church)



## Shooting Stars Archery Club



*As part of Luton Council of Faiths' town-wide Archery Project, the CRCW trained as an Archery Coach to develop an archery group in the All Saints church hall.*

This led to the formation of 'Shooting Stars Archery Club', offering archery beginners courses for people of all ages and backgrounds, which continued operating as a self-financing, independent archery club after the wider project ended. Members from the Council of Churches have been involved in every aspect of the club's governance alongside volunteers from the community, so that Shooting Stars has remained a true partnership between church and community.

Shooting Stars pioneered the Annual 'Robin Hood Feast', a festive gathering which for several years invited archers and their families to celebrate the town-wide archery project. In 2012 the event gathered over 80 people for a joyous evening, with participants of all faiths, ages and backgrounds enjoying plentiful food, conversations and a topical quiz. With the wider project having ended, the club continues to hold more local, but equally diverse, annual celebrations. Shooting Stars has proved incredibly effective in enabling and strengthening friendships across faiths and cultures which would probably not otherwise happen.



## Connecting Communities - the Beech Hill Exercise Group

*Much Church Related Community Work involves being well-placed to link people together.*

A proposed women's exercise group came to fruition hosted by Beech Hill Methodist Church, run by local community organisation, Ghar se Ghar, with the neighbouring medical centre carrying publicity and promoting the group to women who might benefit most. Over time, members of the church decided not just to host the group, but to join it. The group has grown to be multicultural and multi-faith; men and women; a space where people laugh together and engage with each other, building friendships within and between faiths, without the need to 'talk faith'. A member of the exercise group is a committee member for another community organisation, **Dilkhush (Hindu) Lunch Club**; through this link, Dilkhush also found a home at Beech Hill.

## Near Neighbours Cooking and Befriending Project

*Enabling people to move from living parallel lives to living well together.*

The early years of the CRCW Project saw people starting to share spaces, but without much opportunity for sharing lives. Enabled by Near Neighbours funding, the 'Cooking and Befriending Project' sought to develop relationships further, gathering people from diverse faiths and cultures to cook and eat together. Participants included members from the Council of Churches and the Dilkhush Committee. As well as sharing great food, people were able to learn about each other - their countries of origin, families and careers. Successive projects have scattered new seeds and enabled existing roots to flourish - building on a core group of people, drawing in new participants and deepening the level of sharing.

## Food between Friends

This 7-week project drew more than 50 participants, including Christians, Hindus, Muslims and members of the Baha'i faith, represented by people of British, Caribbean, African, Asian and Roma backgrounds, with input from Saladmaster - a local organisation promoting healthy cooking and eating. Each week members of two different cultures would collaborate, taking a lead in preparing both food and reflections. People shared something of their heritage, their faith, childhood memories and hopes for the future. Relationships built during the project led to an invitation to join the annual celebration of Naw Ruz, the Baha'i New Year.

*"I've never had Indian food before, but now I have - and I like it!" (English participant) / "I have lived in Luton a long time, but I never knew any Asian people. Now I meet people on the bus or in the street - we stop for a chat." (African participant)*

## Centre of Attraction

A home-grown, multicultural fashion show, 'Centre of Attraction' was the fundraising finale of the Food between Friends project. More than 100 guests gathered for a night of fashion, food and music, with catering and models sourced mainly from the project participants. While the catwalk featured a variety of outfits for summer, winter, sports and special occasions, the highlight was a finale of fashion from around the world, including India, Ghana, Romania, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Sierra Leone and the Gambia - the models delighting in showcasing clothing from their own wardrobes.

*"It was a truly powerful image - everyone standing together, all different and free to be themselves, yet all belonging and united. 'This' is what the Project is about!" (Member of the CRCW Management Group)*



### The Same Difference Group

A group of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds meeting together to share food and talk about the life experiences that we all have. We spoke of birth, childhood, families, faith, holidays, courtship, marriage and death. We learned that, although we may have different customs and beliefs, we all have so much in common.



### Birth, Childhood & Family

"The picture of me and my great grandmother is very special. She was the head of the family. She was generous and gave things to the poor. She lived to be 101 years old."

A new birth brings happiness to all the family.

Every child deserves a good home, a good upbringing, good parents and a good education.

### Marriage

"I remember my wedding day. It was very cold and I was very nervous. My husband was shaking and could barely repeat his vows. But we got through and are still together after 49 years."

"I got married in December 1965 and came to England in August 1973. I had my three children in Nairobi, Kenya and my son was only 18 months old when we came to the UK. We were happily married for 45 years."



### Holidays & Leisure

"We really enjoyed our first river trip down the Nile in Egypt. We visited places that we had only read about in the Bible, but to see them was wonderful."

### Older age

Retirement, a time to do what you want to do, when you want to do it, where you want to do it, and, how you want to do it.

"I retired of ill health when I was 60, but I still do volunteer work."



### Death & Bereavement

God's garden must be beautiful. He always takes the best. He always takes the best. He always takes the best.

## The 'Same Difference' Project

'Same Difference' sought to explore how people of different faiths and cultures mark common themes in their lives, such as birth, childhood, marriage and death - discovering what makes people both 'the same', and yet 'different'.

Conversations were aided by the sharing of personal photographs and mementos, with various participants taking the lead in facilitating sessions. The opportunity to share home-made cultural foods again proved very popular!

When funding for the project came to an end, participants chose to continue meeting, taking turns to prepare food and lead sessions which vary from deep reflections to light-hearted conversations, exploration of faith, family, traditions, and life in general.

Reflections from project participants include:

*"We found out we're not all that different."*

*"It's changed attitudes, it's changed mine."*

In 2016, the group completed work on a photo-banner, charting some of the themes explored.

The banner has been used as a visual means of information sharing and invitation to join the on-going sessions which have included visits to other projects, local restaurants and even a Luton Town football match.



## Real People Honest Talk (RPHT)

*This initiative of the Near Neighbours Programme gathers people of diverse backgrounds to share honest conversations about their local communities - exploring what is required to live well together, identifying the difficult issues, and planning together a response.*

In late 2017 the Same Difference group hosted the first round of Real People Honest Talk, with members of the local Muslim community invited to add fresh voices and a wider perspective.

Conversations flowed freely and participants who had only just met could have been mistaken for long-time friends as they explored together issues of common concern, including 'parking' and 'the lack of respect and understanding within neighbourhoods'.

*"It was creating those safe spaces - and we could respond to difficult things being said. We may say we have open, honest conversations but they can still be superficial - unless we're uncomfortable, we're not doing the work we need to do."* (Muslim participant)



## Work with the Roma Community

*An invitation to work with Luton Roma Church (LRC) came at the start of the CRCW's ministry.*

Over successive years, work included fostering awareness and understanding between the Council of Churches and LRC; developing Roma Children/Youth Work, drawing in and working with volunteers from the wider community; and hosting events to raise awareness of relevant issues.

'**Stand Awhile in the Other's Shoes**' - created space for the voices of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities to be heard, while '**Europe on Trial**', a mock trial featuring real-life judge, lawyers and witnesses, considered testimony as to how the rights of Roma people are breached by European governments, particularly the UK. Both events were opportunities for church and wider community participants to recognise that people from Traveller communities often have the same aspirations for themselves and their families as the rest of society, one contributor reflecting:

*"We don't have 3 heads. We're human too!"*

**Devon Adventure Week** - enabled by donations from Council of Churches members, three Roma young people participated in a youth residential in North Devon, spending time with Black, inner-London peers for mutual sharing about faith, culture, and life in general whilst enjoying a variety of outdoors pursuits.

Luton Roma Church has - to varying degrees - found 'home' in Oakdale Methodist Church (its original location), All Saints Anglican Church (children's work relocated to the All Saints hall), Beech Hill Methodist Church (hosted a 3-day 'holiday club') and Bury Park United Reformed Church (this was the first external group permitted to use the church's worship space). Following a decision for LRC to split, the newly-formed Bethel Fellowship moved back to Oakdale and continues to meet there.







## 'A Touching Place' Creative Writing Sessions

*The CRCW Project's mid-term celebration invited people to say what they wanted. One popular response - 'More creative activities, please!'*

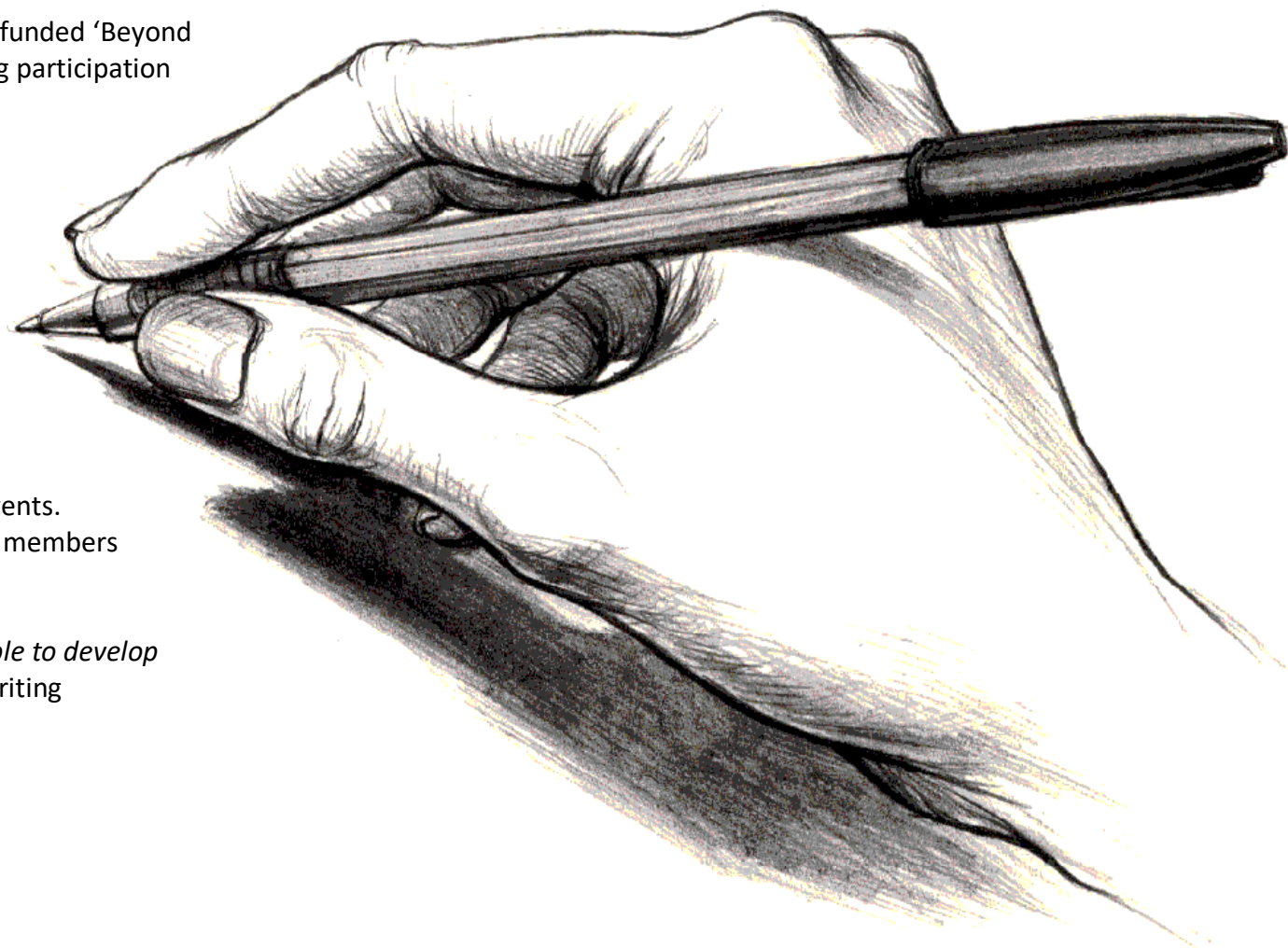
'A Touching Place' was a series of three creative writing sessions run in collaboration with Dar Aminah, a local Muslim women's organisation. The sessions created space where people of different backgrounds could encounter each other, discovering points of connection expressed through the medium of the written word. Participants, including Christians, Muslims and Hindus, explored themes of 'Identity', 'Peace and Turmoil' and 'Luton Psalms', drawing on writings from different faith traditions. Despite several participants having no previous experience, or lacking confidence in their abilities, people were surprised and delighted by what they produced.

The collaboration continued in the Near Neighbours funded 'Beyond Borders' project, coordinated by Dar Aminah, inviting participation from members of the former group, with the Luton CRCW invited to lead further creative writing sessions.

*"I realise how much I owe (Karen) - I've gained confidence to do things."*  
(Project co-planner, Dar Aminah)

Writers have had opportunity to present their work at various events, including the Precious Pearls women's celebration, Grassroots 25th Anniversary Celebration, a Grand Garden Party and wider URC events. Relationships formed have seen Council of Churches members join book and film clubs run by Dar Aminah.

*"I've met people I'd never have met, and I've been able to develop another part of my life because of that."* (Creative Writing participant)





# Home from Home

*This 2017 project arose from a desire to address unease caused by the Brexit 'debates'. It was enabled by:*

- 🍷 Relationships having been built over time with various church and community groups, including an awareness of their varied heritage
- 🍷 Bringing the various people together, inviting their contributions, while drawing in new participants

Funded by Near Neighbours, Home from Home gathered participants of diverse backgrounds to chart an informal oral history of migration to Luton, including opportunity to share cultural foods, music, poetry and photographs.



The project drew well over 50 participants, with seven sessions each spotlighting a different cultural group, including born-and-bred Lutonians and migrants from within the British Isles, people from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, Eastern Europeans (Romanian Roma and Polish), and concluding with second/third generation migrants.



Participants responded in different ways to the questions 'What brought you here?' and 'What makes this home?', with space to tell their own stories in their own words, hear reflections from cultural perspectives they had not previously encountered, sample foods they may never have tasted and discover new things about friends and relatives they had known for many years.

Together they agreed to move beyond 'political correctness' as they explored the themes through personal testimonies and honest reflections. Participation from members of Bethel (Roma) Fellowship helped build connections between the Roma community and wider community - this was the first time many individuals had been in the same room as a Roma person!

*"This was experiential, which enabled people to feel acknowledged, affirmed and valued, diminished 'us and them' boundaries and enabled expression of deep things." (Project participant)*

## Commemorating Windrush

*Growing from a proposal by All Saints Church, the Windrush events became what they were by drawing on relationships previously established and inviting people to contribute.*

June 2018 marked 70 years since the Empire Windrush brought the first wave of 'Windrush Generation' migrants from the Caribbean to start new lives in the UK. The Windrush Generation frequently faced racism, prejudice and a clear message to 'go home', the Church often being silent, and even complicit in this rejection. An afternoon tea held in May 2018 gathered members of the local Caribbean community to talk, laugh and reminisce, with a number of participants taking part in taped interviews to produce a short film later screened as part of a special commemoration held in July.

The July event recognised the resilience and resourcefulness of the Caribbean community, lamented the lack of welcome experienced, and celebrated their undoubted contributions to every sphere of UK life. More than 300 guests enjoyed hymns and songs, poetry, a steel band, contributions from Church dignitaries, and our specially produced film. A 'poetic comedy script', specially written for the event by the Luton CRCW, was delivered by two colleagues in role as older Jamaican women, drawing gales of laughter from the audience. The event was completed with Caribbean-style refreshments and a display of photographs, documents and memorabilia. A second Celebration held on Windrush Day 2019 was equally varied and well-enjoyed, including personal testimonies and input from a local primary school choir. Two smaller, follow-up gatherings have enabled deep conversations and mutual sharing with members of Madinah Mosque and the Luton Irish Forum.

*"It has shown that this was not only a Jamaican issue - it's about communities not 'a community'."*  
(Reflection from the Local Authority Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Officer)

### Who knows how far the seeds may blow?

Two members of High Cross United Reformed Church, Tottenham, were amongst guests at the 2018 Celebration. Inspired by what they saw and heard, they subsequently planned and delivered a Windrush-themed Holiday Club for youngsters aged 4-15 years using many of the ideas and display materials from the Luton event, and went on to host their own celebration, screening the Luton film and kindly inviting the CRCW to bring a touch of the Luton magic to their programme.





## Annual Festive Event

*'How about a Dinner and Dance?' This throwaway comment is the seed from which grew the Bury Park Beech Hill annual festive celebration, bringing together church and community.*

This began as a Christmas social event seeking to gather members of the churches, their families and friends for a light-hearted evening of food, music and laughter while building a greater sense of fellowship and belonging together. In subsequent years the event has taken many guises, often drawing on wider Project themes, e.g. 'A Multicultural Christmas' and 'Centre of Attraction' fashion show, with food and entertainments celebrating the diversity of the church and community; and 'A Fair and Festive Christmas', supporting and promoting Luton's Fairtrade campaign.



These all-age, affordable events invite input from the whole breadth of individuals and groups encountered through the CRCW Project, showcasing their culinary, artistic and creative talents, and promoting deeper fellowship both within the churches, and between members of the churches and the wider community.

# Fairtrade Events

*Enabled by links with the Grassroots Programme and the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group:*

- Green shoots - **'Decorate Your Bunting'** event, held at Beech Hill Methodist Church, inviting members from Madinah Mosque.
- Continued growth - **'Meet the Grower'** Fairtrade Fortnight community event, held in the Holy Ghost Parish Centre.
- Bearing Fruit - the Council of Churches **Fair and Festive Christmas** event.

March 2011 saw members of the Council of Churches joined by friends from the wider Luton community at Beech Hill Methodist Church, with specially invited guests from Madinah Mosque - launched in 2010 as the second Fairtrade mosque in the UK. Participants decorated Fairtrade cotton bunting, supporting a world record bid by the Fairtrade Foundation, while enjoying a range of Fairtrade refreshments.

The event saw Christian and Muslim participants united in their commitment to the **Making Luton a Fairtrade Town** campaign whilst building cross-cultural friendships in the spirit of the **Luton in Harmony** initiative. The member churches were delighted to receive press coverage for the event, both in the local newspaper and an interview on local radio, raising their profile and recognising their work. Links made led to personal invitations to successive Mosque Open Days, with positive responses from Council of Churches members. This was the beginning of warm and ongoing friendships which saw participation from Madinah Mosque in the CRCW Project mid-term review. In 2012 the CRCW Project hosted 'Meet the Grower' - an audience with 'Tookie', a Fairtrade banana farmer from St Vincent in the Windward Islands.







# Cohen's Yard Community Inclusion Project

*The CRCW Project mid-term review (2014), prompted exploration of new possibilities in partnership with friends from the local Muslim community.*

The CRCW, the minister of All Saints Church, and a member of Madinah Mosque started an intentional conversation - 'What practical work can our communities do together?' Walking the local area, the seeds of a project were sown on encountering Cohen's Yard - a small unsightly park with broken equipment, largely used for antisocial activities.

This was the only green space within walking distance of several surrounding streets, many of which are populated by families with young children. So, the Cohen's Yard Community Inclusion Project was created, engaging local people in reclaiming the park as a community resource.

The project blossomed, enlisting several partners including Grassroots, Luton Council of Faiths, Luton Borough Council and Building Blocks Children's Centre. Supported by Near Neighbours, activities included:

- A door-to-door community survey to determine what local residents want;
- 'Cohen's Yard Green Clean Day' which gathered over 40 volunteers of different faiths, cultures and ages to clean the equipment, pick litter and plant seeds;
- 'Cohen's Yard Action Day' saw business volunteers repainting the equipment while students from a local Islamic school litter-picked and created a planting area;
- 'Cohen's Yard Family Fun Day' - drew well over 300 participants for a day of family-focused activities including a bouncy castle, bucking bronco, children's archery (courtesy of Shooting Stars Club), music and free food.

*"This was great. I used to come here as a child, but we stopped coming because it got so bad!"*

(Local resident)

Prompted by the community's lead, Luton Borough Council installed new fitness equipment, gates and fencing to further improve the park. Building Blocks Children's Centre subsequently ran their own fun day supported by project partners. Cohen's Yard continues to be well-used.









## Precious Pearls

*A pre-existing annual celebration of International Women's Day coordinated by Ghar se Ghar and Grassroots, the CRCW joined the core planning group.*

The Council of Churches has become a named partner in this multi-cultural, multi-faith event, with Beech Hill Methodist Church acting as host on one occasion.

With the CRCW's encouragement, women from the Council of Churches have joined in singing, dancing, presenting fashion shows, reciting poetry, sharing reflections and contributing stories from their own life journeys.

Creative contributions from the culturally diverse Beech Hill Exercise Group - comprising women from Beech Hill Methodist Church and the wider community - have included a rendition of the Jamaican folk song 'Linstead Market' (2017), poetry performance (2018) and 'Dem Bones' (2019).

The CRCW has also encouraged participation from individuals and groups linked to the Council of Churches and from women met through various community events and local initiatives.

*"There is something very special about Precious Pearls that cannot be put into words - you simply have to be there to understand!"* (Precious Pearls attendee)



## A Grand Garden Party

*Celebrating the newly-developed All Saints Peace Garden.*

In August 2016, guests from the Council of Churches and the diverse local community gathered to enjoy cultural foods, face-painting for children, and poetry reading from participants of the creative writing initiative 'A Touching Place'. Artwork was on display from the church's weekly arts and crafts group, whilst two church members were on hand to share the story of the Peace Garden, which has seen derelict land within the All Saints grounds transformed into a beautiful community space. The party was well enjoyed, with guests commenting:

*"It was a lovely event!"*

*"It was really good to do something like this outdoors";* and

*"All these ideas help bring people together across different faiths and cultures".*



## Preaching and Leading Worship

*The CRCW received an unexpected invitation to lead worship for Bury Park URC.*

Before coming to Luton, the CRCW recognised no desire or sense of calling to lead services. While unexpected, this request to respond to the needs of the local church enabled her to become part of the gathered community on a Sunday, helping her to understand the people and the relevant issues, to share the vision of the CRCW Project and invite people onto the journey. The CRCW was also able to discover gifts in preaching and leading worship - a role extended to and greatly valued by several of the local churches, and cherished by the CRCW herself. In the ensuing years, the local context has informed numerous services for churches in Luton, Dunstable, Harpenden, St Albans and Walthamstow. Luton dynamics also formed the basis of a Bible Study for the United Reformed Church General Assembly in 2016. We may never know what seeds have been scattered through these wider engagements.

# The Garden Matures...





## Places of Welcome

Even as the CRCW Project reaches its end, new life continues to emerge. Community development work is a slow process. It often involves 'taking the long way round' in order to include people on the journey:

Some time ago the CRCW had a vision for a joint Council of Churches initiative. She had listened to the realities facing the local churches, heard reflections from the wider community that some of the Bury Park Beech Hill churches are perceived as being closed, and pondered what it might mean for the churches to be a meaningful Christian presence in this place. Could the Council of Churches work together to establish an open space offering a warm smile and a cup of tea to whoever might happen to come along?

Such an initiative might, in some small way, address the growing issue of loneliness

amongst people of all ages and backgrounds. It could be a simple yet practical way for the churches to put their faith into meaningful action in the local community.

Located in the heart of bustling Bury Park, Oakdale Methodist Church seemed the ideal venue for such a venture; a small, manageable premises - one room where folks can gather around tables, a second offering privacy for one-to-one conversations or prayer. Might we dare to open the doors and see what happens? Unfortunately, the minister of Oakdale Church was soon to retire. The time was not right, but the vision never went away.

In 2018, the CRCW put the suggestion to the Council of Churches meeting. As the considerations began, awareness of a UK-wide movement called 'Places of Welcome'

emerged via the Near Neighbours Programme in Luton. This mirrored the CRCW vision of the churches opening the doors each week to offer a welcoming space.

A member of Oakdale Methodist Church volunteered to take the lead in gathering a team of people drawn from across the Council of Churches to make the initiative happen. The CRCW encouraged, but did not play a major role. She did not need to!

The Bury Park Beech Hill 'Place of Welcome' opened its doors in June 2019.

These are early days, but no matter how things work out, this is a HUGE development - a development which would not have happened without the work of the Luton CRCW Project. It has taken time - but this was the right time!



## Admiring the Garden

The pages of this book have highlighted some of the seeds sown during the period of the Luton CRCW Project, the plants which have grown, fruits and flowers of different colours and sizes which have emerged. Space does not permit us to tell the whole story - the ongoing work to maintain the ground and keep it fertile.

It is hard to record the impact of day to day, weekly and monthly activities - delivering acts of worship, writing newsletter articles, continuing to engage with people in the local churches and community and inviting them into the vision, prayers and articles informed by the Luton context written for national publication. The Project has received visitors from the UK and beyond, and has encouraged local people to journey out.

These are just small glimpses of one CRCW Project in action - the growth which has been enabled in and through the Luton context. We hope there is enough here to inspire the Luton people to continue their adventure even after the Project ends, and to inspire people elsewhere to do what they can with whatever opportunities and resources they have available in their own locales. And, whilst the future remains to be seen, let us remember that we are all called to be faithful, but only God can make our efforts fruitful.

We end with a quote from the Luton CRCW reflecting on her ministry, but which surely applies widely to Christian ministry, mission and discipleship:

*“Church Related Community Work can sometimes feel like a precarious business. It is often unpredictable.  
Situations can change almost in the blink of an eye.*

*Much time may be invested but apparently bear little fruit, whilst some initiatives seem to spring up and blossom beyond expectation.*

*Planned projects might come to fruition, but the emerging fruit may hardly resemble that which was expected.  
New shoots can appear seemingly out of nowhere, whilst established pieces of work may unexpectedly die.*

*I can say with confidence that this ministry is not for the faint-hearted!”*

**Karen Campbell, 2015**







## A Table for All

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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## ***Peace***

Where is this peace  
that passes all understanding?  
The peace which the world  
cannot give?

It is there, between us -  
flowing from you to me.  
In the warmth of the touch.  
In the sympathetic look.  
In the heartfelt prayer.

It is there, as we meet  
together for worship.  
As we draw closer to the heart of our faith;  
as we share around the table.

It is the peace of the Lord.

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*Written by participants of the 'A Touching Place' Creative Writing project.*

## ***The Tears of God***

God, you gave us our world,  
but your tears fall like rain upon us  
as we destroy it.

You made it beautiful,  
and yet we do not see.  
Our eyes are blinded by our greed  
for more and more.

You call us -  
but we do not listen,  
filled with our own importance.

Your tears pool around our feet.  
And yet -  
and yet -  
you love us still,  
even in our madness.

We do not deserve your love and  
forgiveness.  
And yet you give it,  
generously.

Bring us to our senses,  
Lord of love.  
Make us anew -  
washed clean in your tears,  
to serve you always.

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## ***STOP***

STOP - oh STOP!  
The crying, screaming,  
terror, clamour -  
NOISE  
Stop dividing, splitting, tearing,  
becoming so TRIBAL  
Giving little children words of hate to say;  
Giving young people weapons of war;  
Creating images of fear and desperation.  
It's easy to talk,  
Less easy to act.  
A feeling of hopelessness,  
wanting to do more  
we cry STOP - oh STOP!

START - oh START!  
The quiet, slowing,  
resting, being -  
SOLACE  
Start listening, laughing, loving,  
becoming more HUMAN  
Enjoying each other's company;  
Understanding how each one ticks;  
Creating images of harmony and restoration.  
It's the best way to live,  
Each one a blessing.  
A feeling of joyfulness,  
on a journey together  
we cry START - let's START!

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