

Grassroots

...a different point of view



"It is not enough to say 'We must not wage war.' It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but the positive affirmation of peace."

Martin Luther King Jr.

Annual Report

2022-2023

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Message from the Revd Canon David Lawson (Chair)

Huge, complex issues face the world today - climate change, migration, war, poverty, famine, racism, religious hatred, the rise of far right politics. These are just a few examples impacting upon all of us in some form or another, and Luton is no exception. However, Grassroots core vision is a commitment to engage with the contemporary world, seeking to 'make a difference' through its various projects and collaboration with its partners in Luton.



The past year has been as busy and varied in terms of Grassroots involvement in the life of Luton and beyond, and it is only possible to mention a few significant events. During Inter faith Week in November 2022 Grassroots organised the first ever St Albans diocesan inter faith event held in St Albans Cathedral. The event was a huge success and will be repeated again in November 2023. Fairtrade, close to the heart of Grassroots, created its annual campaign focusing on the impact of climate change on the future of food. Grassroots commemorated this by co-organising the 4th annual Fairtrade Cake Baking Competition held in St Anne's Church. It involved people from different faiths and cultures and the three winners were awarded Fairtrade prizes.

The resourcefulness and initiatives of people in Luton never fails to surprise, and trustees at a recent meeting heard about the work of the Luton Orchards project, part of Edible High Town, a community gardening project. Luton Orchards invite people to donate apples which are converted into apple juice. Luton's popular Annual Peace Walk celebrated its 27th year, drawing people of all ages and faiths, signalling hope for a more peaceful world, and also a stronger, more cohesive Luton.

A memorable trustees' meeting was one in which we had a conversation with Renate Japenga, an ordinand of the Dutch Protestant Church, and an intern with Grassroots for several weeks. She had little exposure to interfaith issues and was keen to learn from Luton's context. We also learned much from her about the move to the Right in Dutch politics and the need for the Dutch Church to be a voice for justice. The trustees also heard about the situation in Palestine, as Maggie Hindley, one of our trustees, shared with us her experience of recent visits to Palestine, where injustice is meted out to its people on a daily basis.

During the year representatives of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities, in Luton hosted an event in partnership with Roots, an organisation bringing together Israelis and Palestinians in their common search for peace in the Holy Land. Sadly, as I write this Foreword, extreme violence has broken out in Israel, leaving the world stunned, with peace in the Holy Land a possibility as far away as ever. May we all stay united in our longing for peace in the region and in prayer for all those who are suffering as a result of the conflict. We long for a peaceful solution which does justice to all involved.

A significant visitor to Luton this year was King Charles, who prior to his Coronation visited Luton, and met community leaders and voluntary organisations, as well as visiting and participating in prayers at the Guru Nanak Gudwara. During his Coronation, King Charles promised 'to foster an environment in which people of all faiths and beliefs may live freely.' The other visitor was the Papal Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendia. The Archbishop met Luton's faith and community leaders and heard about the diverse work being done across Luton. Our very own Sister Marie Hayes presented the Archbishop with a copy of Luton's Jeremy Williams' book entitled 'Climate Change is Racist.'

I continue to be enormously grateful to our trustees for their commitment and insightful contributions to our discussions and reflections. Of course, our overwhelming thanks goes to Johny, who continues to serve and promote the work of Grassroots with such dedication. The pages of the Report offer you a more comprehensive view of the life and work of Grassroots over the past year.

The Revd Canon David Lawson
Grassroots Chair

Annual Report Overview Sep 2022 – Aug 2023



During the last year in our country, a BBC news headline reported “Three PMs in two months – Is political chaos the UK’s new normal?” (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63383616>) In addition, we have had the unstoppable cost of living crisis and the country still feeling the effects of the pandemic. Amidst such political and economic uncertainties, least desired was a 102% rise in anti-migrant hatred as reported by the Hope Not Hate research stating 73% of people in the UK think that Britain is going in the wrong direction and the far-right wants to take advantage of that. <https://prnewslink.net/releases/30796.html>

Against such a demanding and challenging backdrop, we are glad to report that despite limitations of resources and manpower, we have held activities during Sep’22 – Aug’23 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, there are some of the key highlights;

During the first week in Feb’23 in Luton, GB News (right-leaning news channel) hosted by Nigel Farage, tried challenging GRASSROOTS and various other faith groups and organisations in Luton about community cohesion. Stephen Yaxely Lennon (Tommy Robinson) also focused his attention once again on Luton targeting Luton’s Discover Islam Centre, the Muslim community and the Luton Borough Council with negative allegations.

Also following a verbal assault on a faith leader by a far right extremist, Luton’s faith leaders stated; “We are deeply distressed by the radical and extreme far right elements. They target Luton and the way in which Luton’s communities are abused online is simply horrifying.” Meetings were convened involving representation from the Police, Council and faith leaders to ensure there are measures put in place to respond to any potential issues & threats that may harm the community cohesion that we have worked hard to build in our town over the years.

Also, a spate of Quran burning in Sweden, Denmark and the rise of Finland’s far-right party True Finns has highlighted how globally, there appears to be a growing intolerance of both immigrants and Islam, particularly in the right-wing political discourses. Majoritarianism backed by nationalism is becoming a threat globally.

It was therefore worth inviting faith and community leaders coming together to discuss the PASS (Protecting All Spiritual Scriptures) Initiative in a special meeting held on 1st Aug’23 at the Luton Central Mosque. The meeting acknowledged that the deliberate burning of any sacred Scripture is an egregious violation of human rights. Letters of concern were sent from Luton to the UK’s Prime Minister and to the Deputy Secretary General of the UN and Luton Council passed a resolution and proposed to lobby other local authorities too, to strengthen the legislation to prevent such hostile acts of burning any religious scriptures and provoking communal discord.

In another incident, following series of attacks on churches in the Punjab Province of Pakistan in Aug’23, in several statements Luton’s Muslims denounced the heinous attacks on Churches in Pakistan, saying, “As Muslims, we firmly uphold the principle of equal rights for all, regardless of creed, faith, belief or religion. In this time of adversity, we stand in solidarity with our Christian brothers, sisters, and their families. Our Christian brothers and sisters, just like any other religious community, have the right to live and practice their faith freely within the wider Pakistani community. Their rights and freedoms must be protected, ensuring that they can flourish alongside their fellow citizens. We stand united with our Christian brothers and sisters, reaffirming our commitment to living in peace and harmony with one another and creating an inclusive society for all.”

In a letter to the UK High Commission of Pakistan, the Luton Council of Faiths Chair Prof Zafar Khan urged the Government of Pakistan to take strong and firm action against those responsible for these acts of violence and ensure the safety and well-being of not only Christians but all religious minorities in Pakistan.



Luton's faith leaders gathered at Discover Islam Centre to discuss Islamophobia and its impact on women and young people in particular and also how far right extremists use it to stir up hatred in our communities



Following Quran burning in Scandinavian countries, Luton's faith leaders discussed 'Protect All Spiritual Scriptures' (PASS) Initiative and called for stringent laws to prevent desecration of religious texts and provoking communal hatred and unrest

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Faith Matters

by David Jonathan,
Grassroots and Luton
Council of Faiths

Condemnation of the attacks on churches in Pakistan

We are shocked and extremely saddened at the recent reports of the attacks on churches in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. Muslim leaders, Mosques, and Inspire FM Radio in Luton, unequivocally condemned the actions of the mob and those who instigated them.

The Luton Council of Faiths Chair Prof Zafar Khan said: "These attacks stand out as an offence against God and humankind. Any attack on a place of worship is an attack on all. Hatred targeting any community because of its faith and belief is a scourge that mustn't be and cannot be tolerated."



"May we all work together to build a society based on tolerance, acceptance, and unity", stated Ailana Qazi Abdul Aziz Chishti MBE in his Friday Sermon at Luton's Jamia Islamia Ghousia Mosque

In a letter to the UK High Commission of Pakistan, Prof Zafar Khan urged the Government of Pakistan to take strong and firm action against those responsible for these acts of violence and ensure the safety and well-being of not only Christians but all religious minorities in Pakistan. In a statement, denouncing

the heinous attacks on Churches in Pakistan, the Masjid-e- President Ali Syed Rahat Gilani said: "As Muslims, we firmly uphold the principle of equal rights for all, regardless of creed, faith, belief or religion."

He too called upon the Pakistani Government to take action against those responsible for these appalling and un-Islamic deeds and said: "In this time of adversity, we stand in solidarity with our Christian brothers, sisters, and their families."

In his Friday Sermon at Luton's Jamia Islamia Ghousia Mosque, Ailana Qazi Abdul Aziz Chishti MBE called it a deplorable incident that goes against the Islamic principles and teachings of peace, harmony, and coexistence among all religions. He said: "Islam teaches its followers to respect and honour religious and cultural diversity."

He urged the Pakistan Government to take immediate action against the perpetrators and called for strict measures to prevent any form of religious intolerance and violence in the future.

He emphasised: "Our Christian brothers and sisters, just like any other religious community, have the right to live and practice their faith freely within the wider Pakistani community. Their rights and freedoms must be protected, ensuring that they can flourish alongside their fellow citizens. We stand united with our Christian brothers and sisters, reaffirming our commitment to living in peace and harmony with one another and creating an inclusive society for all."

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II Passed Away

In Sep'22, the nation's beloved and the longest-reigning queen in British history, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II passed away. Various religious groups in Luton mourned as she was admired by the faith communities for her gentleness, humility, grace, astuteness, diligence and the dignified way in which she carried out her duties as head of state, defender of faith and ambassador to the rest of the world. We are grateful for her life, her faith, and her selfless commitment to our country. God bless our country, and may we all continue to be inspired by the life of our Queen. May her soul rest in peace!

We helped in organising 3 special events – two at the footsteps of Luton Town Hall and one at the town parish church St Mary's, supporting the Luton Council and the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire.



Luton's faith leaders joined the Mayor of Luton in a Special Service of Commemoration at St Mary's Church following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III

The Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla were blessed by clergy and leaders of many different faith traditions. Over the long weekend (May 6-9, 2023), around the country, in the village halls, city centres, places of worship, and in the countless street parties, celebrations marked the historic ceremony in which King Charles was crowned as the monarch of this multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country and commonwealth. It is great that His Majesty The King has been a lifelong advocate for Christian faith, and for the diversity of the UK's faiths. After a local thanksgiving service was held at Woburn, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Susan Lousada, wrote to GRASSROOTS; "Thank you so much for organising the faith representatives at the Thanksgiving Service. I think that the inclusion of the other faiths perfectly echoed the message that came from His Majesty; that all faiths are welcome, and should be acknowledged within our communities. Thank you so much for helping to make the service so special."



(L) We supported Luton's Global Parade to celebrate the coronation and its live screening in St George's Square, and (R) we helped organise different faith leaders' participation in HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire's Special Service of Thanksgiving, celebrating the Coronation at St Mary's Woburn.

His Majesty King Charles visited Luton

His Majesty King Charles visited Luton Town Hall, Luton DART and Guru Nanak Gurudwara in Luton. HM King Charles officially opened the newly built Guru Nanak Gurudwara in Luton. The event was attended by many members of the Sikh community, civic leaders, and representatives of other faiths. His Majesty King Charles spent considerable time meeting with people. He listened to the children at the Gurudwara singing Kirtan (Sikh religious devotional singing). He encouraged volunteers at the Luton Sikh Soup Kitchen who serve free meals in the Town Centre to those in need. He also visited the massive new Kitchen at the Gurudwara where hot meals are cooked for hundreds every day. Since the start of his reign, so many of King's engagements have been about championing diversity and celebrating an inclusive Britain. The King actively supports all communities and all faiths.



During his visit to Luton, His Majesty King Charles (above) was welcomed at Luton's newly built Guru Nanak Gurudwara. He also met with Luton's faith & community leaders at Luton Town Hall (below).

Hatters Promoted to Premier League

After a nail-biting victory in Wembley on Sat 27th May 2023, Luton Town Football Club called Hatters was promoted to the Premier League. It was One Town, One Family & One Dream at Wembley on Saturday 27th May as over 36,500 Luton Town fans walked to the Wembley Stadium. Hatters' victory is great, but we shouldn't pretend it's all about football alone. It was also about people from diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds coming together, proclaiming "We are Luton"! Luton Council held a celebration event in St George's Square on Monday 29th May 2023, in which Lutonians gathered in thousands to give our victorious football team the reception of their lives. Watching Luton's celebrations, a member of the public tweeted saying "I don't think I have ever seen so many people wearing different religious headgear at a football celebration as there was in St Georges' Square today." Well Done Hatters! Well Done Luton!



(Above) The Mayor of Luton Cllr Mohammad Yaqub Hanif joins Luton Town Football Club in celebrating its victory and promotion to Premier League. (Below) Luton's Faith Leaders also proudly cheering up the Football Team.

NEAR NEIGHBOURS PROGRAMME – Key Events & Activities

Despite very limited funding announced by the government, Near Neighbours Luton with the help and support from GRASSROOTS & CUF (Church Urban Fund) delivered 7 Luton community projects funded by Near Neighbours grants as listed below;

1) Att10tive – Social Enterprise “I Am Unique” project brought together young people to tell their stories using Poetry, fashion, paintings, drawings and photography, showcasing who they are and what is unique about them.

2) Edible High Town – A local community group held weekend gardening events for local residents, addressing issues of isolation, loneliness, anti-social behavior and environmental issues such as fly tipping.

3) The FEAST – A youth inter faith initiative brought together teenagers from different faiths to build friendships, explore faith and change lives. through sit-down meals, ice-breaker games & meaningful conversations.

4) Guru Ravidass Sangat Luton – A Sikh Temple (Gurudwara) harmonised diverse communities through food, cooking and teaching how ‘Langar’ (free Sikh communal meal) is a concept that is important and integral to their faith.

5) The Trauma Healing Collective – Muslim/Black Women delivered Trauma Healing services for those impacted by sexual & domestic violence, neglect, birth trauma, addiction and mental health.

6) The Treehouse Community & Faith Centre – University Chaplaincy in Luton Campus offered a range of spiritual and social activities and support to young people from over 100 countries in Luton.

7) Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) – LCoF delivered an intergenerational project by organising School Assemblies as Question Time with Faith Leaders on the theme of how to make our town (and world) more respectful.

Catalyst Youth Leadership 4-Day Training Programme

Funded by Near Neighbours, Catalyst Youth Leadership is an exciting and innovative programme to help young people, aged 16-26 from different backgrounds, and develop them into positive role models. It equips young people with the skills and confidence to take on leadership roles, develop local social action and transform their own local communities.

Over 50 young leaders aged 16-26 have been trained into positive role models in Luton so far from Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and no faith backgrounds. This course included topics of Faith, Identity & Belonging, Leadership Styles, Qualities & Challenges, Media & Effective Communication, Social Action and Positive Change. The feedback Catalyst participants provided, included comments like “these four days have been of high quality leadership training”, “the trainers were extremely good & inspirational”, “we gained practical skills and knowledge to build confidence, effective communication and leadership skills”, “we are glad to have had this amazing opportunity to discuss and critically think about some of the most pressing issues of our time”..

The course illustrated how our identities are complex because we are shaped by many different factors such as our upbringing in life, where we live, our racial, ethnic, religious backgrounds etc. And all these factors influence our understanding of issues such as immigration, integration, gender & racial justice, violence & extremism, citizenship, equal economic opportunity and freedom of speech. Young people therefore learnt about how prejudice and stereotypes are formed and how to identify and tackle the challenges of discrimination. They learnt how we all can take away something positive that another race, religion or belief, other than our own, brings to the British society.



Led by Att10tive – Social Enterprise, “I Am Unique” project brought together young people to tell their stories



The FEAST – A youth inter faith initiative brought together teenagers from different faiths to build friendships



Luton Council of Faiths delivered School Assemblies as Question Time with Faith Leaders



Guru Ravidass Sangat Luton harmonised diverse communities through cookery sessions



CATALYST Youth Leadership Training in Luton involved young people from different faiths



Young people spiritual and social activities offered at Treehouse – University of Bedfordshire Chaplaincy

Young People trained as Mental Health Champions

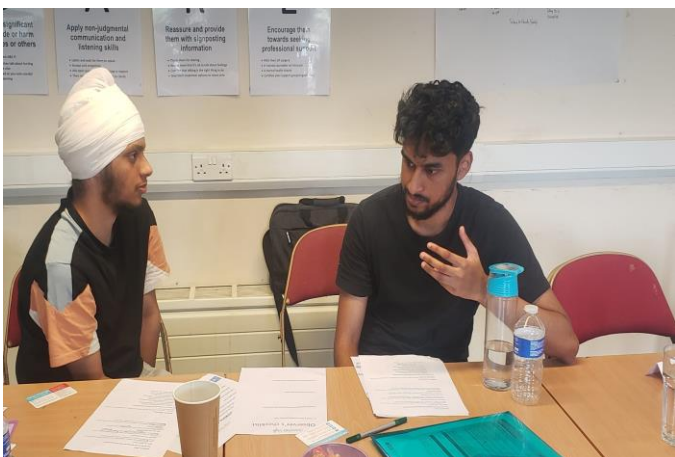
After completing Near Neighbours CATALYST Youth Leadership Training in Luton, a few young people from Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and no faith backgrounds followed it up with a 2-day Mental Health First Aid training programme. It covered the topics of suicide, self-harm, PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder), phobias, anxiety and depression. It also discussed how to spot signs of these issues and how best to support people.



The topic of mental health has been discussed far and wide, especially in relation to the lasting effects of the coronavirus pandemic on young people. A participant remarked, "It was a specialist training to improve our understanding of mental health issues and how to identify, understand and help someone who may be affected by it. Additionally, we now know how to use HeartMath to promote personal resilience, boost positive wellbeing, and tackle stigma related to mental health."

A community worker at The Feast youth engagement programme said, "Being on the same learning level as young people has been quite enlightening. It was a good idea to have a cross-generational discussion."

Trainers Rosalind Paul and Ryad Khodabocus said, "We are confident this training will significantly improve the lives of young people in Luton. With the current climate we find our communities in – it has never been more important to educate ourselves on how best to support those around us with mental health related issues and how to self-care and grow stronger and resilient as we serve others."



The ongoing climate change, refugee and cost of living crises have caused extreme economic & social disadvantages in our world today. These have also increased the difficulties with mental health. Therefore, it is critical to provide training opportunities like these to strengthen our shared relationship and obligation to one another. Each of us may contribute in some way, particularly if we have prepared ourselves by participating in training programmes like these.

Question Time with Faith Leaders

Grassroots, the Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), and the Near Neighbors Programme have worked with the local faith communities over decades to ensure that inter-community relations in Luton are not strained. At times when tensions rise, we are able to mitigate the risks and threats through our strategic interventions, which is great given that 76% of Luton residents identify as being religiously affiliated.

The launch of an intergenerational project, where young and old can talk together in our schools and across communities about how to make our town (and world) respectful, is one of the many ways we have been promoting community cohesion in Luton. With help from Near Neighbours we developed a similar project idea five years ago. Considering its success Near Neighbours supported our initiative once again.



Seeing a local group of religiously and culturally diverse faith & community leaders, coming together, creates a positive and lasting visual impact on young impressionable minds. They demonstrate how they work together for the common good, despite their religious differences. And because these are respectable faces in our local communities, it makes it interesting to hear them talk about peace and harmony from a local perspective.

Project Lead Ryad Khodabocus of Luton Council of Faiths said, “It entails sharing with young people how to navigate peacefully through the differences and disagreements in society. It presents an alternative and a positive model of inter-faith relations, as opposed to the constant negative portrayal in the media that religions are all about hating and killing one another.” It is commendable that the religious and community leaders express their ideas in a way that is faithful to their own faith traditions and does not undermine the ‘other’.

Appreciating the project, a school teacher sent a message saying, “Thank you so much for coming to our school assembly. After the assembly we had a long discussion in our class about the meaning of religion, what place they take in our lives and how people can work together. It was really good. One student commented he had never seen a Christian and a Muslim together being friends. It opened his eyes.”

Long may we continue to inspire young minds!

Multi-faith Storytelling

Over 3000 young people from key stage 2 engaged with Khayaal Theatre multifaith storytelling from the Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh faiths traditions. This Award-winning project sponsored over two years by Westhill Endowment enabled audience in Luton schools to appreciate and reflect on the common values & virtues across faiths and cultural traditions.

The stories captured the children's imagination who jubilantly, expressively and wholeheartedly engaged with Eleanor the storyteller following the twists and turns, lows and highs and morals of the stories - not missing a beat. They chimed in when prompted, filling in words, echoing punchlines, and had an opportunity to play a range of animate and inanimate characters with playful zeal.



Our storytelling project has turned out to be even more important as we watch with huge sadness the distressing situation in Israel and Palestine and the suffering of citizens throughout the region. The stories shared as part of our project highlight 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. We are glad that through our storytelling activities we are able to reinstate the values of mutual respect, sanctity of life, and interdependence on each other. We are able to highlight the importance of the strength that comes from being united in concern and respect for one another rather than divided by prejudice and hate.

We believe the rich diversity, particularly within the art of storytelling, is far more palatable and culturally relevant in the contemporary British context, particularly when we are trying to impact on the young people. Amidst the negative stories of hate and intolerance, constantly propagated by the media, our multi-faith storytelling project, help to dispel many prejudices and promote the spirit of a harmonious multi-cultural coexistence. Moreover, it also aims to inspire children from minority backgrounds to discover and connect back with their respective positive faith and cultural heritage, which is not at odds with the British values, rather complements it.

KEY EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Annual Peace Walk 2022

In commemorating Int'l Day of Peace we co-organised Luton's 26th Annual Peace Walk at which people from different faiths and those with no particular faith affiliation came together in solidarity and walked and talked with one another while visiting different places of worship too. At this event, it was inspiring to hear the amazing refugees & asylum seekers' support work carried out by the partnership of Madinah Mosque and All Saints Church. A few teachers & pupils from 3 schools recited poetry on the theme of Peace. A teacher said events like these help nurture young minds positively. They learn that peace and harmony are not abstract theories; instead they are practical and life fulfilling possibilities, provided we work to turn these possibilities into living realities.



Peace Walk started at High Town Methodist Church, where people's donations for Luton Food Bank were collected. People were then led to visit Luton Peace Garden areas where trees have been planted in memory of those who passed away due to Covid. At the Ukrainian Chapel, people expressed solidarity with Ukrainians and with all those suffering because of wars and conflicts in different parts of the world.



Peace Walk concluded at the newly built Guru Nanak Gurudwara on Dallow Road, where the Sikh hospitality known as 'Langar Seva' (a Sikh religious obligation) was, as always, outstanding and admirable.

It was a time of the year when communal tensions were fuelled by the social media across many areas in the country, mainly between Hindus & Muslims. The reasons for this were unclear. Media speculated it was after an India v Pakistan cricket match in August 2022, but many people said tensions were stoked by three factors: social media, outside interference and the police inaction. Despite this unrest in many areas in the country, Luton stayed calm and mature, and Luton's faith communities remained focused on working together for peace and raising funds for human flourishing, locally as well as globally.

Annual Fairtrade Fortnight 2023

During the Annual Fairtrade Fortnight 27th Feb – 12th Mar, in Luton, we co-organised the 4th Annual Fairtrade Cake Baking Competition involving people from different faiths and cultures, strengthening the Luton Fairtrade campaign which has been going strong for the last 18 years.



The bakers were invited to present their cakes with recipes and the packaging as evidence of using the three fairtrade ingredients. Nearly 50 guests, friends, and neighbours were then asked to taste the cakes and choose the three best cakes – the best-looking cake, the best-tasting fruit cake, and the best-tasting sponge cake. The top three winners were given Fairtrade prizes.



Expressing gratitude to all those who had taken part in the competition, the event organiser & host Revd Anne Crosby, Vicar of St Anne with St Christopher Parish said, “By choosing Fairtrade teas, coffees, sugar, fruits, biscuits, and chocolates, you support 7 million people in 59 developing countries.”

St Albans Abbey hosted first ever Inter Faith Week Event

In commemorating this year's Inter Faith Week (IFW) 13-20 Nov'22, Church of England St Albans Diocese, in partnership with GRASSROOTS Luton, held its first ever Inter Faith Week Event at St Albans Abbey on the theme "God's Justice in our World; Let's make a difference TOGETHER". Over 125 people from different and no religious backgrounds attended. This event addressed topical themes like Climate Change, Racial Justice, Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation.



The Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers Revd David Kesterton (Luton) and Revd Tony Rindl (Watford) said, "The evening certainly exceeded our expectations. We were struck by the connections in the language used by the different faith representatives on the topics addressed." Host of the event The Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore (Dean of St Albans Abbey) stated "It was a very special evening. It was particularly good to meet and talk with lots of women who were in the room. Those I was sitting with all commented on the unity of language and purpose."



The St Albans School students' heart-warming performances enthralled everyone. The students recited poetry and sang a moving acapella version of "You raise me up". St. Albans Abbey musicians also performed instrumental music to make guests feel welcomed at the Abbey.

Lord Lieutenant & Bishop visit different Places of worship

Mrs. Susan Lousada, soon after taking over as the HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, asked GRASSROOTS to arrange for her to visit Luton's different places of worship, which included Luton Central Mosque, Luton United Synagogue, and Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj Hindu Mandir (Temple) in Lewsey Farm. These visits aimed at forging connections, strengthening bonds, and encouraging one another for peaceful co-existence. Sharing one another's concerns and aspirations during such visits helps to maintain strong community ties in Luton.



The Lord Lieutenant expressed her delight saying it has been an honour to have been chosen for the prestigious position of His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire. "I look forward to serving all people in Bedfordshire and representing our monarchy," she stated. "I will continue to shine a light upon all the organisations and individuals that work tirelessly in building a fairer, kinder, respectful county where all can flourish and feel welcome." Bishop of Bedford The Right Reverend Richard Atkinson also highlighted the importance of striving to work together for the common good.



MP Sarah Owen meets with Luton's Faith Leaders

In commemorating Inter Faith Week 2022, over 50 faith and community leaders, from diverse religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, attended a special meeting with Luton North MP Sarah Owen. Prof Zafar Khan, Chair of Luton Council of Faiths said, "Inter Faith Week is indeed a time when the spotlight is on all the organisations like ours who work tirelessly for inter faith understanding and cooperation in Luton and across the UK. Our work to build connections between people of different faiths and beliefs is enormously important, and in the aftermath of COVID-19, finding new ways to make connections and renewing our friendships is vital."



"Developing and strengthening patterns of cooperation for the common good is needed more than ever before as we tackle the devastating impact of the cost of living crisis, which is hitting us all far more than expected. Nearly 400 new refugees have also been moved into Luton, which also puts additional responsibility upon us, as to how we look after them while they are here in Luton."

Luton North MP Sarah Owen is also the Shadow Minister for Faith and she is spearheading with Stephen Timms MP, the Labour Party's new work on Faith Champions. At this special meeting, MP Sarah Owen said, "Other parts of the UK do not have as active inter faith engagement as in Luton, so one of my tasks is to shout about good things happening in Luton." She stated "I came to politics to make a difference, to make a positive change; and I remain committed and determined to do as much as I can."



Luton Peace Garden Initiative awarded a Royal Tree

Luton was hit hard by the pandemic resulting in around 800 deaths to date. Many could not say goodbye to their loved ones which made the grieving process even more difficult. The Luton Peace Garden Initiative supports people's bereavement process by helping them to plant a tree in memory of their loved ones. The project was launched in December 2021. Since then, nearly 665 trees of 800 target have been planted so far. The Project Lead Sujel Miah said, "Although some trees may need replacing, most trees have withstood the extreme cold weather and scorching hot summer last year. Thanks to the efforts of our many volunteers."



Despite the rain and cold, over 65 volunteers of all ages, including the Catalyst Youth Leadership Trainees in the pic above, braved the weather and joined forces to plant over 100 trees in Jan & Mar'23

*For more info or to support the project visit;
<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/Peacegarden>*



Luton Peace Garden Initiative has wider environmental benefits such as greening up Luton by either planting orchard fruit trees or trees like Lime or Beech trees which are adaptable to Luton soil. As the county of Bedfordshire has lost an alarmingly huge number of insects and butterflies, our tree plantation will help the environment in this way too. Thanks to all those who have supported the project including the Luton Council of Faiths, and Luton & Sunni Councils of Mosques. Discover Islam, Grassroots, Community Interest Luton, Churches Together in Luton, iCare, Friends of Wigmore & other Parks, Luton Council, Luton Rising, and Natural England.

Luton Peace Garden was awarded a Royal Tree in Jan'23, as part of the late Queen Elizabeth II's Green Canopy UK-wide tree planting initiative.

The special tree is planted at the Wardown Park Arboretum.



NUNCIO to Great Britain visited Luton

Pope's Ambassador NUNCIO to Great Britain, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía (2nd from left in the pic below), visited Luton and met with representatives of the Grassroots, Luton Council of Faiths, Churches Together in Luton, and the CEOs of Noah, Chums, and Luton Irish Form. Nuncio took keen interest in listening to people. Applauding Pope's encyclical Laudato Si on caring for our common home — planet Earth, Sr Maire Hayes presented Nuncio with a book by Luton author Jeremy Williams – Climate Change Is Racist: Race, Privilege and the Struggle for Climate Justice. Nuncio responded saying we must respect and love one another and together we must become a beacon of hope for justice, peace and reconciliation in our world.



Bedfordshire Lieutenancy visited different places of worship

Mrs Susan Lousada was appointed as HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire in September 2022. Soon after her appointment, she visited Luton's different places of worship "It was a really positive experience which I found very rewarding and informative" she said. She extended this opportunity to the wider Lieutenancy and encouraged the Deputy Lieutenants, to visit the Central Mosque and Guru Nanak Gurudwara. They all said, "We learnt a great deal. Our hosts were so welcoming and so very generous with their time and patient in their explanations." They asked numerous questions and reflected upon how to be respectful of other beliefs without compromising their own.



HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Susan Lousada said "Bedfordshire is a wonderfully diverse county, and it is very important to me that those of all beliefs, and indeed those with none, feel respected and welcome. I am so grateful to Bishop Richard and Johny at Grassroots for giving the Bedfordshire Lieutenancy the opportunity to meet some of our local faith leaders. I am also deeply appreciative to those leaders and faith communities for welcoming us all so warmly."

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY GRASSROOTS

Black History Month

During Black History Month in Luton several events were held. We helped and supported the Black Culture Market, which was about supporting & celebrating the contributions of black businesses and social entrepreneurs who add colour, vigour and spice to the British social and cultural landscape. Secondly, we promoted the launch of an interesting photographic illustration & exhibition of the contributions and sacrifices made by the African soldiers as part of the British Empire in World War II. Lastly, we supported a special event celebrating the Windrush generation that was held at All Saints Church Luton, during the Black History Month.



Diwali in Luton 2022

Diwali in Luton 2022 was special this year because it helped to diffuse communal tensions in Luton fuelled by social media across many areas in the country in Sep'22. Hindu-Sikh-Muslims and friends from other religious and ethnic backgrounds got together to co-organise this event, which was attended by thousands and all joined in proclaiming the message – we are one human race. This was significant in defying the Hindu-Muslim communal tensions incited by a few miscreants in a few parts of the UK. In fact, Luton's Hindu community raised £1,100 for the Pakistan flood appeal, as seen in the pic below. This is one way in which Luton's amazing community cohesion continues to transcend borders and barriers, globally and locally, and long may it continue.



Hindu New Year (Annakut Festival) Celebrations

At BAPS Swami Narayan & Shree Sanatan Sewa Samaj Hindu Temples in Luton, these celebrations were joined by members from different faith communities. Lauding volunteers for their efforts to arrange, not just hundreds of food items prepared carefully (as seen in the pic), but also feeding hundreds of people in the evening, Mr Yogesh Mistry, Secretary at the Hindu Temple in Lewsey Farm said, "The most enjoyable and rewarding part of Annakut festival was the sharing of foods together with one another regardless of religion, colour, age, gender or social status. May the New Year bring health, wealth and happiness to all! May the dignity of every human being and that of the creation be preserved in the coming year!"



Guru Nanak Dev Ji's 553rd Birth Anniversary Celebrations



These celebrations were held with vigor and devotion in Luton. Guru Nanak is the first of the 10 Sikh gurus and the founder of Sikhism. The new three-storey £5m worth of Luton Sikh temple is named after him – Guru Nanak Gurudwara. Gurudwara means 'Door to the Guru'. At the Gurpurab celebrations, it was heartening to see, not just priests and adults, but also young children beautifully dressed in traditional clothes, taking an active part in the 'Kirtan' (meaning devotional singing) and also serving food to all. Welcoming a Scouts group, Sikh volunteers explained that Guru Nanak Dev Ji welcomed the needy and the poor. This shows that his priority was not in religious doctrines but in the dignity of all creation and all human

beings. Guru Nanak Dev Ji's concept of 'Ek Omkar' talks of the oneness of humanity & oneness of God.

Luton's Annual Peace Light Service



Each year up to 1 billion people cross a border. Every two seconds, a person is forced to flee for safety. Every day 44,000 more people are driven from their homes. As a result a high number of refugees and asylum seekers were abruptly relocated to Luton, whose safety and wellbeing was put at risk in unsuitable housing. It is commendable that despite media hostility towards refugees, thousands around the country are stepping up to support people seeking sanctuary in our country and in our communities. At the

start of this year, Luton has also received a 'City of Sanctuary' status. Bearing this in mind, this year Luton's Annual Peace Light service theme was "Sanctuary". The service was an expression of peace and goodwill to all men and women of all backgrounds. For over twenty years, local scouts, civic guests and friends from other faith communities have gathered in December for the Annual Peace Light service at All Saints Church in Luton. A flame is brought from Bethlehem to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ at this service.



Carols in The Mall



Every year in the Christmas Season, besides mince pies and presents, one more thing people look forward to, and that is, singing Christmas Carols. At the annual 'Carols in The Mall' event by Churches Together in Luton in partnership with the Luton Town Centre Chaplaincy and The Mall, the NTCG (New Testament Church of God) band of musicians and singers, led Christians from different Churches to sing

together Christmas Carols. While serving mince pies to shoppers, the Churches Together in Luton Chair Michael Singleton said, "It is this feeling of togetherness and being part of a collective endeavour that complements the spirit of Christmas."



Launching the Prayer Tree, Jessica Rowlands, the Town Centre Chaplain, said, "People of all faiths and none are welcome to choose a prayer bauble or write a prayer request and add it to the Prayer Tree. These messages and prayers will be included in the St Mary's Church Christmas Eve Midnight Service."

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity



This is an annual observance, which has more than 100 years of history. In Luton, Deans and Heads of different denominations got together and invited Christians to reflect together on the theme – What is Interfaith and why should Christians be involved with this? Guest Speaker Revd Dr Richard Sudworth, Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury and National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser for the Church of England shared a wealth of reflections from his experiences of inter faith community engagement. He said as we seek to persistently work together with others for the common good, we also learn to love each other better and that is what matters the most.

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD)

Tens of thousands of people from across the country watched the UK online Ceremony joined by parliamentarians, faith leaders, and lit candles in their windows in remembrance of those murdered, and to stand against prejudice and hatred today. In a world scarred by genocides, HMD helps us to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of other people killed under Nazi persecution of other groups and during more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. Genocide must be resisted every day. We cannot be complacent. Even in the UK, prejudice and the language of hatred must be challenged by us all. There is still much to do to create a safer future for all.



World Religion Day



It occurs annually on the third Sunday of January, and was first established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in Wilmette, Illinois. The first day was observed in 1950. Since then, the event has now taken on a life of its own, as it's no longer just followers of the Bahá'í faith that celebrate this day. People from all religions, across the globe, come together to mark this special day. At an event in Luton, Carl Puran of Luton Bahá'í community said, "As Bahá'ís we believe in the oneness of religion and humanity, and that no one should be treated differently because of their race, age, gender, color, sexuality, or whether they believe in religion or not."

Bahai New Year



For over 3,000 years, Nawruz, the Iranian New Year, has been celebrated by more than 300 million people all around the world. It marks the first day of spring, which has a great spiritual significance, representing the triumph of good over evil and joy over sorrow. The Luton Bahai community celebrated Nawruz with full fervour, after a gap of 3 years due to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. They wished for a better world for everyone. While savouring the incredible spread of delectable cuisine and Persian rice, all guests wished the Baha'i community in Luton a very Happy New Year and desired that everyone may have good health and prosperity in this New Year.

Turk Fest

Over 200 volunteers helped coordinate various arrangements at the largest Luton Turk Fest 2023 ever held by the Luton Turkish Community Association. People travelled long distances to be part of this large outdoor extravaganza. More than a dozen members of the Ottoman Marching Band from Istanbul were funded by Turkish Airlines and flown into Luton to dazzle and entertain the crowds. Children from the Turkish Language School performed excellent stage performances. People could take selfies with men and women costumed as cultural relics in a tent. In remembrance of the suffering brought on by wars and conflicts around the world, all were invited to join together in an act of solidarity and fly doves for world peace.



Colours of Eid Festival



Besides other Eid festival celebrations in the town, an outdoor extravaganza event Colors of Eid Festival was held in Luton Town Centre, with lots of traditional music, poetry, and singing. All faiths and communities were welcomed to try the delights of locally made traditional food and sweet treats and get a traditional mehndi (henna) design and enjoy the costume display. An opening procession from the Town Hall to the Market Hill Stage was led by Luton's traditional Desi Bhangra Dhol Drummers, Dhols Royce. The event was led by Sarah Salim, of ALIF New Beginnings, an arts organisation that aims to celebrate and promote Islamic arts and culture across all art disciplines.

Luton Food Bank commemorated 10th Anniversary



Far more people are depending on food banks than ever before in Britain, and certainly in Luton. It is not just unemployed and poor, but many employed people and pensioners are also seeking help due to the cost of living crisis. Luton Foodbank, like all the other Food Banks across the country, is run entirely for the benefit of people in and around Luton who need emergency food. Luton Food Bank was started for a 3-month period initially, but over a decade it is still here. GRASSROOTS continues to support Luton Food Bank and its vital services in Luton. Luton Food Bank is not associated with any one faith tradition. Whatever one's personal faith or belief, it values the contributions of all.

Guru Ravidass Sangat 40th Anniversary Celebrations

This year Shri Guru Ravidass Sangat Luton marked an important milestone while celebrating its 40th Anniversary. In 1983, the dream to establish a place for worship and a focal point for the community was established. Forty years on, Luton's Ravidassia community continues to embody the values of Shri Guru Ravidass, in sharing and supporting others, providing hot meals for those in need, particularly during the Covid pandemic. Their working across communities and supporting interfaith work have all contributed to helping build strong community cohesion in our town. Thank you for your hard work and commitment.



Inspire FM 25th Celebrations



Inspire FM, a local community Radio Station reached its extraordinary 25-year milestone. It started in a back office in 1997. For 13 years it ran only for a month of Ramadan (Muslim month of fasting). On public demand it applied for a full time Community radio license in 2010 and since then, with the help of the community and local businesses, it has been broadcasting full time for the last 12 years. It now has 2 studios, 30 shows, 50 volunteer presenters. Over 25 years, it has served and inspired thousands of people. It has given many people access to training, volunteering, and job placements. It has promoted a culture of giving, ensuring no one goes hungry in our town.

Windrush 75th Anniversary

The 75th anniversary of the Windrush Generation was marked with several events across Britain. GRASSROOTS was invited to attend a national commemoration service held at Southwark Cathedral. Locally, United Luton Caribbean & African Committee (ULCAC) held a Civic Ceremony at Luton Town Hall, while Pastors Llyod Denny and Vincent Cox conducted special services honouring Luton Windrush generation. May the 75th anniversary of the Windrush Generation inspire us all to stand up for justice, peace, equity and dignity of all human beings. We must honour the Windrush generation's resilience and determination and hold light to their experiences to strengthen our communities and build a flourishing future for all.



A Dutch Ordinand's Internship at GRASSROOTS

Training to become a priest in The Church of Netherlands, Renate Japenga (Left in the pic) chose to come to Luton for a 6-week Internship at GRASSROOTS. Renate was not just keen and curious to learn, she was also brave and open to experiences of meeting people from diverse religious backgrounds, and visiting different places of worship while also attending various events and activities.



Europe has witnessed an unprecedented scale of migration. Also due to the arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers, the European citizens are getting exposed to a much wider and diverse range of religious and cultural lifestyles. It is therefore crucial for religious leaders to be able to help people make sense of the rapid demographic changes in the contemporary Europe. People (Europeans in particular) need help in understanding, accepting, celebrating and embracing the 'difference'. It is with this intent Renate willingly and courageously immersed herself into Luton's diverse context. She spoke with educators, students, community groups, faith leaders and the local media. She held herself with integrity and grace and made positive contributions.

She identified GRASSROOTS as an expression of 'soft leadership style', which is full of empathy, but also of assertiveness, persuasion, negotiation, and mediation for peace and reconciliation.

In an act of solidarity with Luton's different faith leaders, shared at a meeting of Luton Council of Faiths, she said, *"I light a candle as a symbol of light in this world and as a symbol of all the work that Grassroots and LCoF is doing to make Luton an enlightened place. May the Love carry (y)our work for the people of Luton."*

"May we see Goodness in the faces of each other. May the Light of the candle reminds us of our longing to peace and justice for everyone and give us hope and inspiration to be with each other in solidarity."

GRASSROOTS invited at the WCC 11th General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany

It is humbling that GRASSROOTS Luton was invited to lead a Workshop at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th General Assembly 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31 August – 8 September 2022.

GRASSROOTS Luton Workshop Title was: Celebrating Difference Staying Faithful – Building Life Flourishing Communities Together with People of Different Faiths. Here's a brief reflection on what we delivered in our workshop.

Mostly inter-faith work is understood as “dialogue” with learned people of certain ages and gender. In this workshop, we shared practical examples of inter-faith community work we have carried out in Luton over the years. We shared stories of how in a super-diverse, multi-faith, multi-cultural town of Luton (UK), just north of London, where over 140 languages are spoken, Christians & people of different faiths join together to feed the hungry, to tackle digital and fuel poverty, to plant trees and create peace gardens. We demonstrated how it is possible to restore justice, peace, and the integrity of God's creation, by putting our faith into action, by complementing one another and not competing against one another, by acknowledging and celebrating differences and yet staying faithful to our own religious and cultural identities.

Many people across Europe and the world know of Luton as the birthplace of one of the far-right extremist groups called the English Defence League (EDL). We shared stories of why and how it was started in Luton. How all faith communities united together against all extremism, and on multiple occasions, prevented communal riots, ensuring peace & integrity of the town is held at all times and particularly safeguarding our young people that they are not criminalised.

Thanks to the globalisation we are living in an increasingly inter-connected world. We all must therefore create space for everyone to feel welcomed to partake in and contribute to God's mission, so that in God's beautiful world, everyone may have life – life in all its abundance, life in all its fullness. How do we create such ecumenical and inter-faith space? How can we confidently move in Christ's love towards reconciliation and unity, but not uniformity? This workshop focused exactly on all that.

It was worth telling our story on a global platform. Our workshop had the highest number of registrations. People who attended our workshop were greatly inspired by the ecumenical and inter faith aspects of our work. They were impressed by the consistency and conviction with which we have, over the years, kept ourselves focused and rooted within a very diverse and complex context of Luton. We have been ‘acting while reflecting’, and have remained adaptable, receptive and relational in order to be effective and authentic on the ground.

Long may continue the work and services of GRASSROOTS!



Farewell to Ann Hyde

After serving GRASSROOTS for over 23 years, Ann decided to step down in December 2022. As the longest service member of GRASSROOTS Staff Team, she worked in numerous projects initiated by GRASSROOTS but for the last 15 years she focussed on working with women across faiths and cultures. She worked in partnership with a women's co-operative group called Ghar se Ghar (Hindi/Urdu words meaning home to home).



GRASSROOTS Trustees thanked Ann for over the years she helped to cultivate a safe space for disadvantaged 'hard to reach' women, from mixed ethnic minority and indigenous communities, to discuss and discern responses to their issues of isolation, depression, stress and health-related problems (or who may be at risk of increased health & mental health problems because of cultural isolation).

Pari Rashid, one of the Co-Directors of Ghar se Ghar, said, "It's been a great privilege to have known and worked alongside Ann since 1991. She has always been incredibly supportive and helpful and always on hand to offer advice and kind words in both a professional and personal capacity. In fact, it was Ann who helped me set up the women's support group Ghar se Ghar, back in 1992. I have fond memories of the many meetings that were held at Ann's house, which were fortunately followed by cakes, kindly baked by Cathy (Ann's mother).

"Over the years Ann Hyde and Marie Burns (Ann's friend) have been consistently involved in supporting the running of Ghar se Ghar group activities. I honestly believe that if it wasn't for Ann and Marie, we would not be able to run the organisation. Therefore I would like to use this opportunity to express immense thanks to Ann and in turn wish her good luck and best wishes on behalf of Ghar se Ghar and all its members."

Ann also introduced Luton to Circle Dancing. It is a traditional folk & choreographed music from around the world. Besides providing light to moderate rhythmical physical exercise, it also broadens understanding of different cultures through music and dance and most of all it is a wonderful way to have fun and make friends. Her contributions to the Women's World Day of Prayer events and services in Luton can never be forgotten.

Thelma Williams, one of the World Day of Prayer Coordinators in Luton said, "Ann gently introduced us to circle dancing. She took us through the dance steps very clearly. Those who had mobility problems were happy to watch and share the experience so that both found it beautiful."

Another World day of prayer committee member Julie said, "We will miss Ann and her contribution to our preparation days. Her prayerful Circle Dance became a regular feature. Ann could always be relied upon. She wouldn't let you down."

Aileen Stewart said, "I was first introduced to Ann at the World Day of Prayer, which initially brought together the most ecumenical gathering of Christian women in Luton. Ann gave us a prayerful insight into music and movement. She made it so easy to follow. It was so enjoyable."

Valerie Alderman said, "It was always appropriate – a real sharing and an experience for young and old."

Ann's neighbour said, "I always looked forward to seeing Ann as a neighbour during my daily walk after my stroke. In difficult times she was a real good neighbour, always friendly and very positive."

A member at Wigmore Church, Sheila Marsden, who is also a GRASSROOTS Trustee, said, "Ann has visited our church services and enhanced our worship. She has a quiet serenity. She encourages participation and makes sure that you are comfortable, especially with the circle dancing, as it is new for many. Ann makes it accessible for all. I hope that Ann will continue to bless others. Thank you, Ann. We love you."



Ann Hyde leading International Women's Day Event called Precious Pearls



Ann Hyde leading Ghar se Ghar Women's Group in one of its activities



Ann Hyde leading prayerful Circle Dance in one of the Women's World Day of Prayer Services



Ann Hyde organised Ghar se Ghar Women's Health & Well-Being Day

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Luton & Bedfordshire Community Award

GRASSROOTS, a community engagement programme in Luton, has completed 30 years of its extraordinary & outstanding services of bringing Churches and different faith communities together in Luton. There could not have been any better way of acknowledging and celebrating this 30th year milestone than GRASSROOTS being presented with the prestigious COMMUNITY AWARD – the Mark West Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Award.

Bedfordshire Police Chief Constable Trevor Rodenhurst and Catherine Gunn, Principal of Barnfield College presented the Award at the glitzy and dazzling 13th Luton & Bedfordshire Community Awards 2022 ceremony.

In choosing a winner for THE MARK WEST DIVERSITY, EQUALITY & INCLUSION AWARD, Judges were looking for the person, group, business, or organisation that has done the most to work in harmony with others to promote diversity, equality, and inclusion with the aim to positively discourage discrimination and to support the whole town, involving people from all backgrounds and sectors.

The Award nominator Dr Nazia Khanum, Chair UNA (United Nations Association) Luton, said what is unique about GRASSROOTS, are its principles of 'Partnership' & 'Empowerment'. Dr Khanum said, "GRASSROOTS has remained 'the unsung hero' in the truest sense, because over three decades, it has worked in the background 'quietly' and 'modestly', but 'consistently' and 'persistently'. Therefore, in acknowledging and celebrating the 30th year of GRASSROOTS' remarkable and outstanding services, it has been my privilege to wholeheartedly commend GRASSROOTS for the prestigious Mark West Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Award."



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

BBC 3 Counties Radio Make a Difference Award

At a fabulous awards ceremony hosted by the local BBC 3 Counties Radio Station, GRASSROOTS Luton received Highly Commended “The Together” Category Award. This award is given for breaking down barriers and bringing together people from different walks of life. Acknowledging 30 years of GRASSROOTS’s remarkable services, its Chair The Revd Canon David Lawson said, “Mindful of all that is facing our world today, it is critical that Grassroots continues to be a sign of hope through the work it does to promote justice, peace and reconciliation. The oft-quoted saying is as relevant as ever: ‘Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.’

He also thanked the four Church denominations - United Reformed Church Thames North Synod, Beds Essex & Herts District of The Methodist Church, Church of England St Albans Diocese & The Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton. He said, “It will be impossible for GRASSROOTS to do what it does if it wasn’t for the invaluable support of all these Church denominations. We are indebted to them all.”

The Revd Dr Reynaldo F. Leão-Neto, currently working as Assistant Connexional Ecumenical & Inter Faith Officer for the Methodist Church of Great Britain, has been a Former Mission Partner and Project Worker at GRASSROOTS. He also held the reigns of GRASSROOTS as its Co-Chair during 2004 - 2012. In a statement, he said, “It shows great recognition of Grassroots’ work, its consistency, creativity and resilience. GRASSROOTS Team deserves it and others who contributed in the past to the Programme are also part of the achievement. We who witnessed the dangers on the way have even more reasons to be thankful to God, and to the churches that support(ed) the Programme.”



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

An Honorary Canonry Awarded

For his services to community cohesion and interfaith relations in Luton, GRASSROOTS Director David Jonathan has been offered an honorary canonry at the St Albans Cathedral. In his message to David Jonathan, The Lord Bishop of St Albans The Right Reverend Dr Alan Smith said, "I feel that the contribution you have made to the life of the diocese, the church and the wider community makes you a very worthy and deserving recipient of a canonry."

Professor Zafar Khan, Chair Luton Council of Faiths said, "I am delighted to know that the Diocese of St Albans has invited David Jonathan to be a Lay Canon. I extend my heartiest congratulations on this important recognition accorded to him. He is a treasure to the world of peace-building. Few persist as he does, with humility and generosity. This recognition is just another long line of testimonies to what an impact his work has made. I agree and associate with Bishop's remarks that he is a deserving person for this honour."



Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion Award



At a special glitzy Award Ceremony, Luton Annual Peace Walk event, which GRASSROOTS co-organises, won the Cohesion Award in the category of Promoting Diversity. The Award citation stated: "Luton Peace Walk is an annual event organised by Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) and GRASSROOTS, with the aim to promote cohesion and interfaith relations. The peace walk includes visits to religious locations across the town, and provides the opportunity for residents from all backgrounds to come together, learn from one another and discover shared bonds. The Peace Walk is always well-attended with a great mix of young and old taking part. Each year a number of schools also get involved, ensuring that the young people of Luton understand one another and barriers are broken down." Additionally, GRASSROOTS Director David

Jonathan's nomination read; "He has been involved with people from all faiths and backgrounds to help build a stronger community in town. He spearheads a variety of community initiatives, helping to bring the diverse communities of Luton together. He can also be found most weekends and evenings working tirelessly behind the scenes of numerous events helping to support the work of local communities."

Financial Summary

September 2022 – August 2023

Income	£
Grants received	101,807
Donations	9,567
Interest and other income	1,372
Sale of Fairtrade goods	1,830
	114,576
Expenditure – Charitable activities	
Advancement of Interfaith Relations & Community Development Work	71,523
Spirituality of Justice	1,657
Work with Women across Faiths and Cultures	4,360
Near Neighbours	31,693
Multi-faith Storytelling and Other Events	4,036
	113,269
Governance costs	
Total	3,147
	116,416
Net Expenditure for the year	
Total	1,840
Reserves at 31 August 2023	
Unrestricted (Designated)	56,397
Restricted	14,828

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