

Grassroots

...a different point of view



"Peace cannot be kept by force - it can only be achieved by understanding"
Albert Einstein

Annual Report

2017-2018

GRASSROOTS welcomes co-workers, guests and visitors from Churches, other faith communities, and those of no particular faith affiliation, for events, visits to places of worship in Luton, and conversations over a cup of tea or a meal.

To be kept up to date with GRASSROOTS news, upcoming events and to hear more about the work we do, there are many ways you can stay in touch. We also have a quarterly newsletter which we would love to send to you, so please let us know if you would like to receive it.

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Grassroots
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Annual Report

2017-2018

Charity Registration Number:
1163427

Acknowledgement of Thanks

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

Funders:

Allder Trust
Church of England Diocese of St. Albans
Luton Council of Faiths
Methodist District of Beds, Essex and Herts
Near Neighbours Fund
Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton
United Reformed Church Thames North Synod
Said Foundation Amal Trust
Westhill Endowment Fund

Partners:

Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches
Churches and Other Faith Communities in Luton
Creative Muslim Network
Daughters of the Holy Spirit
Ghar se Ghar
Luton Council of Faiths
New Creations

Volunteers:

From Churches, Other Faith
Communities and of no particular faith
affiliation:

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Carol Bond
Catherine Aganoglu
Fahad Matin
Jasmin Khanom
Mahmooda Khanom
Marie Burns
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Rasitha Madusanka
Saida El Moujahid
Sue Bentley



Contents

Message from The Revd Canon David Lawso.	Page 4
Message from David Jonathan (Director, GRASSROOTS)	Page 6
Church Related Community Work (CRCW)	Page 8
Spirituality of Justice	Page 12
Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures	Page 16
Near Neighbours	Page 20
Inter Faith Relations	Page 24
GRASSROOTS 25 th Anniversary Celebration	Page 28
Visits to GRASSROOTS	Page 32
Awards	Page 34
Lifetime Achievement Award for Sr Maire Hayes	Page 36
Conclusion	Page 38
POEM: The Path	Page 39
2017-2018 Financial Summary	Page 40
Meet the GRASSROOTS Team and Trustees	Page 41



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Message from The Revd Canon David Lawson (Chair)



‘Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.’

The highlight for GRASSROOTS over the past year has undoubtedly been the 25th Anniversary Celebrations held on 22nd March 2018 at Venue Central in Luton.

Attended by nearly 400 people from a variety of Christian and different faith communities, the Celebration featured various presentations reflecting the diverse programmes delivered by the GRASSROOTS team. Among the many invited guests were a number of religious, political and community leaders.

The Celebration was an opportunity for GRASSROOTS to share with a large audience the passion and commitment of the team, and the variety of imaginative initiatives that have been undertaken over 25 years.

During the evening the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire presented GRASSROOTS with his High Sheriff Award in recognition of its service to the community.

In this anniversary year the team was also presented with another award – the Annemarie Schimmel Award for Championing a Muslim Cause – which we proudly received at a celebration evening in London.

The excitement and extra hard work that was invested in the Anniversary Celebration did not detract from the ongoing work of the team, to whom we remain hugely grateful for continuing to deliver their various projects over the past year, details of which you can read in the pages of this Annual Report.

A very big thank you is also extended to Ciaran O’Brien, who has been involved with GRASSROOTS since 2007 in a voluntary capacity, and more recently employed as Programmes and Operations Manager. Sadly, Ciaran left us in August of this year, but we are immensely grateful for all he has contributed to GRASSROOTS – his involvement in Fairtrade, developing the Friends of GRASSROOTS, and designing our website, to mention just a few of his significant contributions to the GRASSROOTS Programme.

We welcome back Revd Maggie Hindley as a Trustee, and also welcome a new Treasurer in the person of Brian Roe. As ever, I wish to thank my fellow Trustees for their steadfast commitment, experience and wisdom which are a blessing to all that GRASSROOTS stands for and seeks to do.

This Annual Report is set against the backdrop of Brexit, the growth of anti-Semitism in the UK, right wing populism which is emerging across Europe and elsewhere, the continuing refugee crisis and the instability in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world.

At the beginning of our Anniversary Celebration evening there was a candle-lighting ceremony as a symbol of peace in Luton, our country and the world, and highlighting that GRASSROOTS remains committed to bringing light and hope and making a difference in the lives of individuals and communities.

To quote some words of a former Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld:

‘For all that has been, thanks! To all that shall be, yes!’



Message from David Jonathan (Director)



Welcome to the GRASSROOTS 2017-2018 Annual Report!

The GRASSROOTS financial year began in September 2017 with a considerable workload to deliver, including 18 sessions of a pilot project called 'Real People Honest Talk' and the Catalyst Youth Leadership Training Programme, both initiated by the Near Neighbours Programme.

Ahead of Luton's 21st Annual Peace Walk on the 23rd September 2017, we had also organised 11 storytelling events in schools delivered by the Khayaal Theatre Company.

We were further invited to coordinate the Swedish Clergy Placement Programme in the Church of England Diocese of St Albans, from the Church of Sweden Diocese of Linköping.

In addition to the above, much of our time in the past year was spent preparing for two big events - firstly, the Near Neighbours Real People Honest Talk Celebration Event held on 28th February 2018, then the GRASSROOTS 25th Anniversary Celebration held on 22nd March 2018.

According to a well-known proverb, a journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step - and we are so grateful that David Cowling, the founding Director of GRASSROOTS, took that 'one step' in starting a small programme which developed and grew into the organisation we know today.

GRASSROOTS began with a small group of committed individuals and twenty-five years later, it is still a small group of committed individuals, who believe strongly in the words of Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Crossing the threshold of twenty-five years of life, GRASSROOTS continues to navigate its way through its countless dreams – knowing very well that not all dreamers are winners, but all winners are dreamers.

GRASSROOTS, alongside others, dreams of the world where justice reigns and peace prevails, where abundance of life flows limitlessly for everyone, but GRASSROOTS also takes seriously the extremely challenging context of our world as it is today.

A certain kind of political rhetoric, unacceptable just a few years ago, is seemingly becoming normalised today. Political fundamentalism, majoritarianism and general intolerance are on the increase, contributing significantly to the rise in identity politics, resulting in increasing hate crime, and further fuelling fear, misunderstanding and resentment on all sides.

In such a challenging context, we must of course acknowledge and celebrate all that GRASSROOTS has achieved in twenty five years 'well-lived', but we must not lose sight of the mountains that we still need to climb.

In light of all that has been done and achieved by GRASSROOTS in the past year alone - a few highlights of which are mentioned in this report - we are fully confident that by working creatively in partnership with Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) and with our other partner organisations, GRASSROOTS will continue to make a positive impact in Luton and beyond.

We thank you in advance for your continued interest and support in the work we do.



Church Related Community Work (CRCW) Project



Led by Karen Campbell, Church Related Community Work (CRCW) in Luton necessarily focuses on the local - local people, local concerns, and local action. That said, this has been a big year for the Church Related Community Work project, marked by some extremely significant yet unforeseen opportunities both in Luton and beyond, and giving rise to numerous areas of work which, though independent of each other, are intrinsically linked.

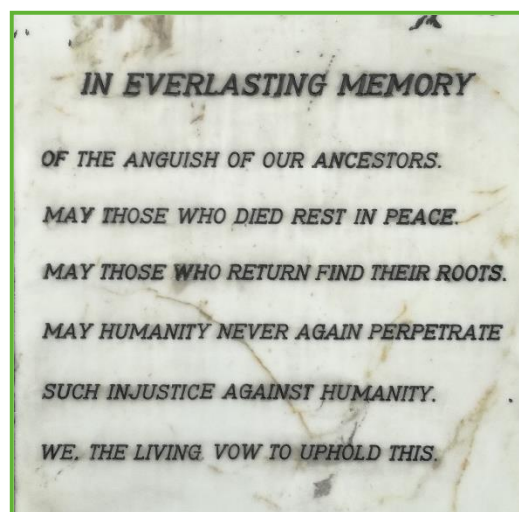
Constance Coltman Centenary Celebrations

Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the ordination of Constance Coltman, the first woman to be ordained in a mainstream church in the United Kingdom, a conference took place from 14th – 16th September 2017 called 'Women of the Way: Global Pioneers', for which Karen served as part of the planning group.

Held at United Reformed Church (URC) Church House in London, the conference gathered modern-day pioneers from around the world for story sharing, mutual encouragement and to identify those barriers still to be resisted and overcome. Karen was honoured to lead the Constance Coltman Celebration Service on Sunday 17th September 2017, the culmination of the celebrations, and to contribute a prayer and a poem to the proceedings.

CWM Legacies of Slavery

From October 2017 to January 2018 Karen was involved in the Council for World Mission (CWM) Legacies of Slavery programme, an initiative seeking to explore both the history of slavery and the ongoing legacies for communities today. The programme held a number of hearings in various locations of significance in the transatlantic slave trade (UK, Ghana, Jamaica, USA), including 'testimonies' from the local contexts. Karen helped organise and contributed significantly to the UK hearing, offering testimony as a Black, British-born woman. She wrote materials for the Ghana hearing, and was deeply impacted by a visit to Elmina Castle, where thousands of African adults and children were 'stored' - without sanitation, underfed, many dying, many dead - until the slave ships came to take them away (see image of a plaque from the castle).



The Legacies programme highlighted that whilst the physical chains may be gone, Black people - in Africa and around the world - remain shackled, their lives limited, by racism, economic injustice, poverty, health inequalities, perpetual and internalised messages of inferiority, and more – the continuing legacies of slavery today. Through worship services, presentations and discussion groups, the questions posed in the Luton and UK context are: Where do we fit in the picture? Do our words and actions help to liberate and build up, or shackle and tear down the people we encounter? And how can we be like Moses, engaged in the quest to set all God's people free?

A Fair & Festive Celebration

The annual pre-Christmas event held on 24th November 2017 gathered members from the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches, plus family and friends from the local and wider community, for an evening of festive entertainment and fine food. Showcasing singing, music and dance items by individuals and groups linked to the Council of Churches, plus a live musician and DJ, the evening was full of joy, and greatly enjoyed by all. Guests were further treated to a £5 voucher to spend at the GRASSROOTS Fairtrade Stall.

Same Difference

The Same Difference group meets at Beech Hill Methodist Church once a month and typically sees participants enjoy a shared lunch and lively conversations covering wide-ranging themes – from light-hearted topics, to contentious world and local politics – and includes one-off activities too. Originally a Near Neighbours funded project, the group has far outlived its funding period, with the culturally diverse participants volunteering to prepare foods from around the world, and each making a small contribution towards use of the premises.

Lent and the Good Friday Walk of Witness

During March 2018 the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches Lent Groups met on a regular basis, exploring the Passion according to the Gospel of John. Then on 30th March 2018 the Good Friday Walk of Witness took place, drawing on the Lent Group theme and visiting a number of churches as the walk progressed. Each stop was an opportunity to hear verses from John's account of the Passion of Christ, and to reflect on the messages and parallels the texts hold for us today.

Celebrating Windrush

Months of planning went into a special event on Saturday 7th July celebrating 70 years since the Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury Docks. Held at All Saints Church of England, the Celebration was a triumph, gathering well over 300 people to recognise the resilience and resourcefulness of the Caribbean community, lament the lack of welcome experienced by many, and celebrate their undoubted contributions to every sphere of UK life. The diverse programme included hymns and songs, poetry, a steel band and contributions from Church dignitaries including the Anglican Bishop of Bedford. Guests enjoyed Caribbean-style refreshments whilst browsing a display featuring photographs (including original passports), documents, written testimonies and reflections. A specially produced film featuring local people offered a fascinating glimpse into a history which has been underplayed. The Celebration was a truly joyful occasion in which it was acknowledged that we must all move forward together.

Devon Adventure Week

The annual Devon Adventure Week took place from 28th May to 2nd June 2018, bringing inner-city young people from a number of church and church-related contexts to experience a week of 'physical and spiritual adventure' at a Christian outdoors pursuits centre in Devon. Alongside activities such as climbing, abseiling, and a variety of watersports, the week encourages the young people and their leaders to 'live as family' - developing relationships, respecting negotiated ground rules, preparing meals and eating together. The week included a spiritual dimension, drawing on the CWM Legacies programme to explore the theme of 'Freedom', encouraging the young people in their faith journeys, and enabling them to make connections between faith, Bible, and world.

URC Prayer Handbook

Karen has been invited to write for the URC Prayer Handbook for the past several years. In 2018 she was privileged to be invited to contribute four prayers for the 2019 handbook and was also asked to take on the role of co-editor of the handbook for the next 3 editions from 2020.



Preparation for the Windrush Celebration saw members of the local community contributing photographs, passports, stories and reflections about their experience in coming to the UK



Women of the Way: Global Pioneers gathered modern-day pioneers from around the world at URC Church House



The 'Same Difference' Group continues to meet on a monthly basis for food, lively conversations and one-off outings



The Good Friday Walk of Witness visited a number of churches in the Bury Park Beech Hill area of Luton



'A Fair and Festive Celebration' was a great success, including a range of entertainment, fine food, and a GRASSROOTS Fairtrade Stall



Spirituality of Justice



To work for global justice, or even national or local justice, requires patience and persistence, as structural change is slow, difficult and costly. The Spirituality of Justice programme, led by Sr Maire Hayes, is concerned with how to be part of this change.

Networking with Justice and Peace Organizations

Sr Maire played a role in planning a National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) conference held on 20th – 22nd July 2018 titled 'In the shelter of each other the people live', examining how we might build a church and a society with the marginalized, the excluded and the most vulnerable at its heart. Guest speakers included Al Barret (a Vicar working on Community Building), David Mc Loughlin (a Theologian) and Sara Teather (Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service). The Conference was a success with over 200 participants enjoying the talks and workshops. The thought provoking input challenged those present to consider how their reflections can be put into action.

The Justice and Peace Commission (Northampton Diocese) met on 2nd June and 15th September 2018 to review the parishes' work on justice issues and to plan a conference on 13th October 2018 on 'Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery'. Further meetings have also taken place with the Religious for Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation in England and Wales, where Sr Maire helped to plan a Linking Day on 7th Oct 2017 with the theme of 'Framing a Different Narrative – the Arms Trade in a Changing Political Landscape'; and a conference on 'Renewing the Prophetic Imagination – Sustaining Creative Engagement' from 13th - 15th April 2018.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2018

The Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration was held on 25th January 2018 at the University of Bedfordshire on the theme 'The Power of Words'. The keynote speaker was Antoinette Mushimiymana, a survivor of the Rwanda Genocide. It was harrowing to listen to, and be overwhelmed by, this young woman's spirit of forgiveness; to hear the power of words for evil and for good. The event was well attended by people from across faiths and cultures, and included performances and speeches from Stopsley High School, Bedfordshire Police, an Imam from the Suffa-Tul-Islam Mosque in Luton, and concluded with the poignant lighting of the candles in memory of the victims of the Holocaust and the other Genocides that followed. A recitation of the Kaddish (prayer for the dead) took place at the end of the programme.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2018

Fairtrade Fortnight ran from 26th February to 11th March 2018. In Luton a number of activities took place to highlight issues around Fairtrade and promote the sale of Fairtrade products. Alex Mayer MEP visited GRASSROOTS on 2nd March 2018 to sign a letter of concern regarding recent changes to Sainsbury's Fairtrade commitment. Members of the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group later hand-delivered the letter to managers of the two Luton Sainsbury's stores, highlighting concerns about their new 'Fairly Traded' scheme and the loss of a recognisable Fairtrade Mark on their sugar. A campaign was also launched to raise £1000 to buy Fairtrade sugar for the Luton Foodbank. The greatest achievement during the year was to have Luton Town signs finally acknowledging that Luton is a Fairtrade Town after a long campaign.

Throughout the year, our Fairtrade Gift Pouches have continued to grow in popularity, often being made to order with the help of many volunteers from across different faiths and cultures. For us, this is justice in action.

A visit to the 'Many Yet One' – Community Art Project in Harpenden

The 'Many Yet One' project brings together symbols of faith and community common to different faiths and cultures. The symbolism of the colours, shapes (e.g. cross and star) and layout of the tiles in the artwork provide a visual connection to ages past, evoking the beautiful mosaics commonly used to decorate Jewish, Christian and Islamic buildings. Our sacred texts refer to God making human beings out of clay, giving the material itself a sacred connection to humankind.

The artist, Moriam Grillo, previously worked with the GRASSROOTS team in Luton to prepare artwork for the Peace Garden in All Saints Church in Bury Park.



Members of the community from across faiths and cultures were present at the launch of the 'Many Yet One' Community Art Project with artist Moriam Grillo (second from left)

Bedfordshire Dignity Network

Sr Maire was a keynote speaker at a Bedfordshire Dignity Network conference where the theme was 'Creating a dignified community for an improved life for all', looking at how Bedfordshire can become a place where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Over 80 people were present, reflecting the diverse population of our county, and heard Sr Maire's message that we should work towards a common culture of encounter that can reflect faith and culture, sharing commonalities and respecting differences. This should be a culture of non-violence and respect for life; solidarity and just economic order; tolerance; equal rights and partnership between men and women; and care for our Mother Earth.

Grenfell Fire Tragedy

The 'Rebuilding Lives' campaign was launched by GRASSROOTS in partnership with Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) to support those affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The appeal raised £3000, helping 80 people enjoy a fun day out at Wicksteed Park on 15th August 2018, bringing relief and respite to some of the families and children that were caught up in the disaster. The day included a trip to a theme park, the opportunity for children to cook a free lunch with their families, and a memento from the gift shop to take away with them. One of the parents attending commented "Thank you very much for everything. As a family we are very happy and enjoyed every bit of the journey".



The recitation of the Kaddish (prayer for the dead) following the symbolic lighting of candles in memory of victims of genocide on Holocaust Memorial Day



Sr Maire Hayes explaining the 8 stages of genocide at the Holocaust Memorial Day event in January 2018



Fiona Martin from Luton Irish Forum spoke about the campaign for votes for women during the Precious Pearls 2018 event



Over £1000 was raised during Fairtrade Fortnight to help support the Luton Food Bank and Luton's neediest families



Members of the Luton Fairtrade Town Steering Group delivered a letter of concern to Sainsbury's stores in Luton



Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures



The Working with Women Across Faiths & Cultures project is led by Ann Hyde, run in collaboration with a partner organisation called Ghar se Ghar (Hindi/Urdu words meaning Home to Home), which supports women from across all faiths and backgrounds in Luton. This work has been possible thanks to kind support from agencies including the Luton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), contributions from participants and additional support from the The Allder Trust towards the funding of one of Ghar se Ghar's workers via GRASSROOTS.

Ghar se Ghar Activity Groups

The main focus of the regular activity groups over the past year has been exercise and relaxation, with experienced exercise tutors working with those with different levels of abilities, and ending sessions with relaxation or meditation - invaluable tools in enabling people to manage the stresses of life. Tutors are also very well informed on general and topical health issues, and discussions on the wider aspects of living a healthy lifestyle often take place, as well as information being given. A variety of speakers and visitors to the group give an input and visits and trips are often arranged, as there is great social value to the Ghar se Ghar groups in combating social isolation. Friendships are made and members often make individual or small group arrangements for their own activities or outings outside the sessions. Exercise is a powerful tool in combating both physical and mental illness and Ghar se Ghar makes it easily accessible in community venues but with the addition of other activities that enhance the social well-being of the members.

Monday morning exercise groups continue to run in the Community Centre in the Bury Park area of Luton. These are women only sessions. A Tuesday morning group takes place in Ashcroft, meeting in the hall of the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church. A further exercise group meets in the Beech hill area on Friday mornings. Held in Beech Hill Methodist Church, this group is open to men as well as women.

Other Ghar se Ghar Activities

There was a total of 1530 group attendances at events and activities throughout the year, including group sessions. Activities included:

- A boat trip on 19th September 2017 along the Grand Union Canal from Kings Langley, provided by a registered charity which operates three large canal boats. Thirty four Ghar se Ghar members from across the groups enjoyed the day, cruising from Nash Mills Lock to Hunton Bridge Lock, spotting the herons and other wildlife, eating fish and chips on the boat, and being given a historical perspective by the captain of places such as the Overtine works (with accompanying 'Overtinee' music!).
- From July to October 2017, workshop experiences of Kathak ancient Indian classical dance were organised by the Amina Khayyam Dance Company, a touring dance company that uses Kathak in a contemporary way to tell new stories of global importance. The group is particularly concerned with issues which affect marginalized women, including acid attacks. Following the workshops the Ghar se Ghar groups attended a related performance, 'A Thousand Faces', at Luton Library Theatre.
- On 24th April 2018, thirty five members from across the Ghar se Ghar groups travelled together by coach to The Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living for lunch at the vegetarian whole-food cafe, followed by an afternoon of taster sessions on Mindfulness Meditation, Tai Chi, Mindful Movement (incorporating principles of Alexander Technique) and Positive Movement (combination of Adaptive Yoga with Alexander Technique.)
- Additional activities during the year included a nail pampering session, Christmas lunch at the Sun Hotel in Hitchin, and workshops to help prepare presentations for the Precious Pearls 2018 event.

Ghar se Ghar Referrals

Throughout the year there were 161 instances of providing one to one support or signposting/referrals to other support services such as the Police, Social Services and Counselling in regards to issues including domestic violence, health, housing, benefits and more.

Precious Pearls 2018

Held on 8th March 2018, the annual Precious Pearls event was better than ever, based on the theme 'Women and the Power of Words'. The programme included a wide range of comical presentations, entertainment and reflection. Presentations about women's right to vote and women who have had a significant impact in fighting for equal rights for women, including Florence Nightingale, Mary Anne Evans (aka George Elliot) and Emilene Pankhurst, were given by Fiona Martin from the Luton Irish Forum and members of the Ghar se Ghar Ashcroft Group. Local organisations supporting women in the community were also spotlighted, including the Oasis Project, Big Sista Project and Our Minds Matter.



Various presentations and performances took place during Precious Pearls 2018

As always, there was a vast array of talent on display including poetry, piano recitals, singing and dancing, to add entertainment and joy to the occasion. The evening ended with a selection of food from across cultures, a good deal of chatting and the opportunity to buy goodies from the GRASSROOTS Fairtrade Stall.

Circle Dancing

Circle Dancing sessions continue at Blenheim Baptist Church Hall, Hockwell Ring Community Centre and High Town Methodist Church, the latter of which is more of a prayerful/meditative style of dancing, as distinct from the others which are mostly a mixture of traditional folk/contemporary choreographies. In addition, there have been a number of special events throughout the year, including dance sessions for the Women's World Day of Prayer Preparation Day held at Central Baptist Church and the Women's World Day of Prayer itself at High Town Methodist Church; part of the celebrations for the 80th birthday of one of the regular dancers held at The Salvation Army; the GRASSROOTS 25th Anniversary Celebration; the Peak District four day dance event at Spring Bank Holiday; the Near Neighbours National Partners Meeting in High Town Methodist Church, the British Red Cross with women asylum seekers and refugees; and the United Reformed Church Heartland group of churches at a creative day in Harpenden.



Thirty-five Ghar se Ghar members went to The Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living for lunch and workshops including Mindfulness Meditation, Tai Chi, Mindful Movement and Positive Movement



Local poet Imrana Mahmood entertained attendees at Precious Pearls 2018 with her recital of 'I Have a Voice'



A Circle Dancing session was held at the Women's World Day of Prayer using music from Suriname



Circle Dancing routines often take place by linking hands and using a centre piece to help guide the dance



Ghar se Ghar members were treated to Kathak Dance workshops, a form of Indian classical dance used as an ancient storytelling device



Near Neighbours



The Near Neighbours Luton Hub, hosted by GRASSROOTS and led by Kim Greig, had a very busy time in 2017-2018 with 3 major programmes taking place. Luton was selected alongside the Black Country to be part of a new Near Neighbours pilot programme called 'Real People Honest Talk', the Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme was successfully delivered once again, and the Grants programme continued with over 50 grant applications made between May to November 2017, enabling deep and enriching engagement to take place with community and faith groups across the town.

Real People Honest Talk (RPHT) Luton

The Real People Honest Talk initiative sought to gather local people to share honest conversations about the challenges of 'living well together'. In Luton, 6 local discussion groups were created, drawing on contacts from the Luton Hub, including All Saints Church working with the Madinah Mosque, Luton Council of Faiths, Beech Hill Same Difference Group and local community, Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme, Bedfordshire Police's Community Cohesion Champions partnered with Stockwood Park Academy, and a final group consisting of members of the local community (including business people, charity workers, faith leaders etc). With trained facilitators creating a safe and welcoming environment for each group, the conversations flowed, and there was positive feedback during and after each conversation. Issues identified and discussed which affect Luton people included hate crime, littering, the environment, gangs, homelessness and bullying.

Catalyst

In October 2017 the 4th Catalyst Youth Leadership programme was run by the Luton Hub, this time with a new partnership with NN London's national Catalyst team. A brilliant group of young people were recruited from all over Luton, linked to different schools and colleges, and bonded extremely well together. The programme was supported by members of Luton Council of Faiths, The Hindu Christian Forum, local faith leaders from 6 different faith groups and Bedfordshire Police.

Awards

The Luton Hub of Near Neighbours won a number of awards in the past year. On 13th October 2017 it won the Mark West Award at the Luton & Bedfordshire Community Awards, for the:

“Person, group or business that has done the most to work in harmony with others, promote diversity, and positively discourage discrimination”.

A month later, on 24th November 2017, the Luton Hub won the Luton in Harmony Award at the Luton Best Awards for the:

“Individual or organisation that has proactively promoted community cohesion and celebrated diversity in the town through their initiatives which have helped to improve the public image of Luton”.

Kim Greig, the Near Neighbours Coordinator, was the proud recipient of the Community Cohesion Choice award for her work with the Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion Team, presented at the Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion Awards on 16th February 2018.

Real People Honest Talk (RPHT) Celebration

On 28th February 2018 the Luton Hub organised a very successful Near Neighbours Real People Honest Talk Finale Celebration event. The evening was attended by 124 people - an amazing achievement, given terrible snowy conditions and dangerous travel warnings. The event programme showcased the diversity of RPHT participants, with the sharing of views and opinions from across the Luton community, including young people, regarding issues of local and national concern. A variety of performances included a poetry recitation by a participant from Catalyst and a storytelling performance by Khayaal Theatre reflecting on the strength of a community.



Young people from Stockwood Park Academy and the Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion Champions were awarded a certificate for their involvement in Real People Honest Talk at the celebration event

Giving his opening address, The Venerable Paul Hackwood, Executive Chair, Church Urban Fund and Near Neighbours Programme, shared the vision behind the RPHT programme, then brought the vision to reality: In an impromptu open-floor session, the gathering was given opportunity to share their views on the RPHT programme. The excellent feedback received on this enjoyable evening was mirrored by the positive responses gathered in an anonymous evaluation survey, highlighting the success of the programme in both Luton and the Black Country.

Places of Welcome

Originally developed in Birmingham, Places of Welcome is a growing network of hospitality run by community groups, including faith communities. For a few hours each week they offer an unconditional welcome to local people. The initiative has 5 guiding principles known as the '5 Ps' - a hospitable 'Place', open to all 'People' regardless of their circumstances or situation, 'Presence' whereby people actively listen to each other, the 'Provision' of free refreshments are offered, and scope for 'Participation', recognising that all who come have gifts which they may be willing to share. Age Concern Luton became the 1st local 'Place of Welcome' in August 2018.

Other Activities

Other Near Neighbours activities supported by Kim include Community Cohesion Champions self-development programme & Diversity Day, Carnival Arts Africa Day for Black History Month, a series of Inter-cultural training sessions drawing on the African community development theory of 'Ubuntu' meaning 'I am because we are', and a community meeting to share reflections on the Government's green paper on the Integration Strategy.



Three intercultural workshops took place drawing on the community development theory of 'Ubuntu', focusing on themes of the 'Self', 'Others' & 'Us'



Members of All Saints Church and Madinah Mosque took part in Real People Honest Talk identifying issues they face in Luton



Real People Honest Talk participants shared the challenges of 'living well together' during sessions at Beech Hill Methodist Church



Near Neighbours supported a Diversity Day celebration run by the Community Cohesion Champions



Young people from across Luton took part in the Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme run by GRASSROOTS, Near Neighbours and LCoF



Inter Faith Relations



With BREXIT just around the corner, life is ever busy for the Inter Faith Relations project. We continue to speculate what might be revealed in terms of the practical challenges and implications for us all. Jonathan Tame, Director of the Cambridge based (Christian) Jubilee Centre, urges us to “re-affirm old solidarities” He says, “We are still British and notwithstanding our departure from the EU, we are still Europeans by culture, history and geography.” He highlights the need to bring people together in the task of building a post-Brexit Britain. Bringing people together to create a shared and harmonious future is not a new message for GRASSROOTS, or for many of our partners - it is what we have been doing for a lifetime, yet the need for this work today is like never before.

Inter Faith Week

Celebrating national Inter Faith Week, on 14th November 2017 GRASSROOTS delivered a session of the Diversity Game in partnership with Luton and Bedford Councils of Faiths, at the Central Bedfordshire Council, enjoyed by members of the Bedfordshire and Luton Emergency Volunteers Executive Committee (BLEVEC).

A reception held on 17th November 2017 was attended by more than 100 people from different faith traditions and none. The event showcased poetry and a first of its kind multi-faith women's choir. A highlight of the evening was pioneering multi faith storytelling by award winning Khayaal Theatre, with energetic and enriching performances of tales from different faith traditions.

Annual Luton Peace Walk 2017

On 23rd September 2017 more than 200 people took part in the 21st annual Luton Peace Walk. The event began with the launch of the High Town Peace Garden by Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Helen Nellis, Bedfordshire High Sherriff Vinod Tailor, Deputy Mayor Cllr David Agbley and MP Kelvin Hopkins. Children from St Matthews Primary School read a poem and participants received pots of locally produced honey from the Luton Quaker community.

A visit to Hope Church included presentations regarding the journey of the Peace Walk and a display of artwork by children from Ramridge Primary School. At Bury Park Jamia Mosque the highlight was an inspiring poem read by pupils from Chantry Primary School followed by certificates of participation awarded to those schools present. The journey ended at Guru Nanak Gurdwara where participants enjoyed insights into the Sikh faith followed by langar - a free community kitchen meal. The Walk served as a powerful witness to participants and onlookers alike of how Luton's diverse communities can live in peace, harmony and friendship.

Identity & Inclusion – Discussion at The Treehouse Chaplaincy

Treehouse, the University of Bedfordshire's Luton Campus Chaplaincy, hosted a discussion group on 16th May 2018 on the theme of Identity and Inclusion. University students explored the subject of identity and the ways in which our diverse identities can be used to enrich relationships in our communities.

Participants were encouraged to embrace who they are and discovered how to accept and learn from others whose faith and culture may be very different from their own. David Jonathan (Johny), GRASSROOTS Director, led the discussion, drawing on his experiences of growing up in India as a minority Christian. As Johny explained, those life lessons have helped to shape how he works with others in Luton to create healthy communities.

Multi Faith Storytelling

A multi faith storytelling project was led by GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) as part of a Values and Character Development programme. Delivered by Khayaal Theatre Company, storytelling performances took place in a number of Luton schools, celebrating values of generosity, courage, resilience and confidence through stories drawn from Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. Whilst highly entertaining in their own right, the performances served to support the Religious Education syllabus of the participating schools. Students enjoyed the imaginative and engaging sessions and were inspired to live in peace and harmony with their peers.

School Faith Assemblies

In June 2018, nine faith assemblies took place in Luton primary schools. Presented as 'BBC News Specials', the assemblies saw a panel of guests from diverse faith traditions sitting together to answer 'The Big Question - What would make our town more respectful?' Panellists reflected on how their faith contributes to respect and peace - despite the horror headlines which often suggest that religion serves to divide and encourage hatred - and spoke of our common humanity, love for both God and neighbour, and the ability to disagree respectfully. The 'studio audience' - the children - responded positively, asking challenging questions of the panel, and offering well-thought ideas of their own as to how we can build a more respectful town and world.

St Albans Diocese Readers' Training Day

On 13th February 2018 GRASSROOTS hosted a Training Day for Diocesan Readers, led by Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills, St Albans Diocesan Inter Faith Advisor for the Church of England. The day included visits to various places of worship and practical learning opportunities from Luton's varied inter faith initiatives, engaging people from diverse backgrounds in working together for the common good.

Harpenden Church hosts a Talk on Islam

An ecumenical group of Christians, and people of no faith affiliation, were invited to a talk on 13th February 2018 hosted by St Mary's Church in Kinsbourne Green, Harpenden. Organised by GRASSROOTS, the talk was delivered by Amjid Hussain of Central Mosque, Luton. The event proved an important opportunity for anxieties and concerns to be shared and prejudices to be addressed. Amjid held the ground graciously in responding to participants' concerns and challenging some of the misconceptions held towards Muslims.

Milestones

The year 2017-18 included a number of important historical milestones - from the 100th anniversaries of the right of women to vote, the end of the First World War and Polish Independence, to 70th anniversaries of the Partition of India and the arrival of the Empire Windrush bringing the 1st wave of large-scale migration from the Caribbean to the UK; the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King and, of course, the 25th anniversary of the GRASSROOTS Programme. GRASSROOTS work has, in one way or another, addressed all of these important milestones, all of which serve to remind us how our world is progressing, and also the work still to be done to create the world we would like to see for ourselves today and for future generations.



A session of the Diversity Game was run for members of the Bedfordshire and Luton Emergency Volunteers Executive Committee (BLEVEC) as part of Inter Faith Week



Several Luton schools enjoyed the engaging and interactive Multi Faith Storytelling sessions



The High Town Peace Garden was officially launched during the Luton Peace Walk 2017



The St Albans Diocese Readers' Training Day included visits to a number of different places of worship across Luton



Faith Leaders from Luton's diverse faith communities participated in 'BBC News Special' themed school assemblies



GRASSROOTS 25th Anniversary Celebrations



The GRASSROOTS 25th Anniversary Celebration was a rare and wonderful opportunity for GRASSROOTS to shine a light on the vast range of work undertaken over many years of service in Luton and beyond, with guests and dignitaries from all over the world in attendance.

Held on 22nd March 2018, the evening saw nearly 400 guests gathered from near and further afield; team members and trustees from today and yesteryear; members of partner organisations; and guests from various faith and cultural traditions with whom GRASSROOTS has engaged at different times.

Dignitaries from the Methodist, Catholic, Anglican and United Reformed Churches set the evening in an atmosphere of prayer, underlining GRASSROOTS identity as a Christian entity, committed to working for peace and choosing to 'light a candle rather than curse the darkness'.



Nearly 400 guests and dignitaries attended the GRASSROOTS 25th Anniversary Celebration including current and former team members, trustees, partners and friends



Revd Keith Brown, former GRASSROOTS Chair, attended the celebration event with his wife Gwen



Revd Dr Andrew Prasad from the United Reformed Church lit a candle representing peace in our town and across the world

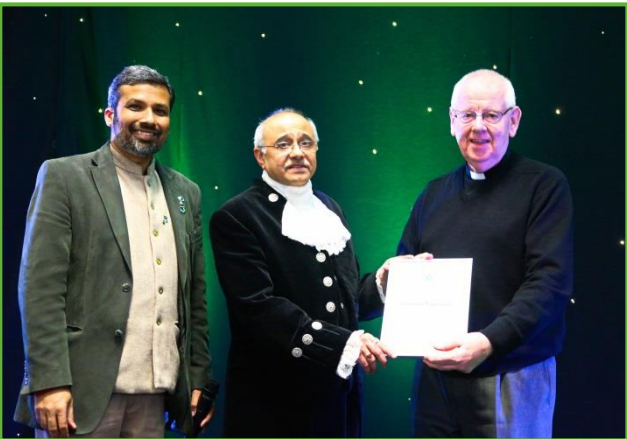
HM Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis, and Mayor of Luton, Cllr Mohammad Ayub, congratulated GRASSROOTS on its achievements, while the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Mr Vinod Tailor, presented GRASSROOTS with the prestigious High Sheriff Award in recognition of its services over the past 25 years.

The evening included a short animated history of GRASSROOTS, singing, dancing, poetry, reflections, and recognition of GRASSROOTS founder, David Cowling. Former staff members and trustees offered reflections on the early GRASSROOTS vision and its work and achievements in subsequent years.

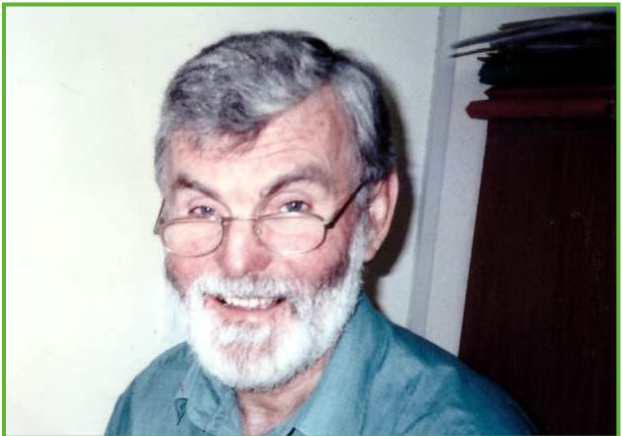
The evening's celebrations were further enriched by lively and colourful Indian (Gujarathi), Polish and Zimbabwean folk-singing and dancing, while the whole gathering was invited to join in the actions of a Circle Dance involving the symbolic sowing of seeds for peace.



Former trustees and early staff members reflected on the GRASSROOTS vision. From L to R: Irene McKay, Brian Davies, Leao Neto, Ann Hyde, Keith Brown, Shanthi Hettiarachchi, Paul Hackwood



High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Mr Vinod Tailor, presenting GRASSROOTS with the prestigious High Sheriff Award



David Cowling, founder of GRASSROOTS, was recognised for his vision, insight and passion in creating the GRASSROOTS Programme

In addition to a special GRASSROOTS Souvenir Booklet, Annual Report and Newsletter, guests were treated to a number of anniversary gifts, including mini jars of locally produced 'Peace Honey', packs of bee-friendly seeds, miniature Fairtrade chocolates and a Fairtrade candle, further reflecting GRASSROOTS ethos and work.

In a joyous and meaningful evening, a particularly moving moment saw representatives from the Luton Council of Mosques and Sunni Council of Mosques receive a letter of support from Church dignitaries as an expression of solidarity, and to condemn the 'Punish a Muslim' day which was causing anxiety within the Muslim community.

The Celebration was a wonderful event, highlighting the importance and impact of GRASSROOTS' work over the past 25 years, and the need for us all to recommit to working alongside each other to bring communities together, break down barriers and create a culture of peace in and beyond the borders of our town.



The Luton and Dunstable Polish Community Choir was amongst a variety of colourful performers providing entertainment for the Celebration



Representatives from the Luton and Sunni Councils of Mosques were given a letter of support in response to the 'Punish a Muslim Day'



Young people involved in various GRASSROOTS initiatives spoke about the need to listen to and support their generation



Visits to GRASSROOTS



Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for Faith, visited Luton on 8th February 2018. Lord Bourne met with a number of faith communities across the town before visiting GRASSROOTS, Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) and Near Neighbours. He conveyed how impressed he was with the work in which GRASSROOTS and our partners are engaged, and commended the collaborative efforts being made in the town on projects such as the High Town Peace Garden. Lord Bourne also took a keen interest in GRASSROOTS' work promoting and highlighting issues around Fairtrade and Climate Change, and work with young people, including the Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme and the Values and Character Development programme with local schools. He praised the excellent community work which takes place in Luton, and in subsequent weeks cited Luton as an example of best practice in the House of Lords.

Church of Sweden Clergy

On 9th September 2017 GRASSROOTS hosted a group of 30 Church of Sweden Parish Workers, from two religiously multicultural parishes in the Stockholm area. The group consisted of priests, deacons, pedagogues, youth workers, preschool teachers, musicians and caretakers, visiting Luton to see positive examples of activities which enhance inclusion and social cohesion.



Revd Richard Atkinson, Bishop of Bedford, addressing the delegation of Swedish Parish Workers



The Swedish Parish Workers spoke to local shopkeepers about community cohesion and wider issues surrounding life in Luton

Revd Dr. Helene Egnell, Bishop's Adviser for The Centre for Inter Faith Dialogue, Diocese of Stockholm, said, "Thank you for the wonderful day you arranged for us in Luton! We were overwhelmed by your generosity and the professionalism. Long live the spirit of Luton!"

Alex Mayer MEP

Alex Mayer MEP visited GRASSROOTS on 2nd March 2018, during Fairtrade Fortnight. Having participated in a discussion about Brexit, including fears about the possible impact on Fairtrade, Alex signed a letter of concern written by the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group regarding recent changes to Sainsbury's Fairtrade commitment. GRASSROOTS team members posed with Alex for her campaign highlighting organisations which educate others about ethical trade and promote and sell Fairtrade goods. She later joined in visiting the new 'Welcome to Luton' signs which now proudly declare that Luton is a Fairtrade Town!



Awards



It is extremely encouraging and affirming for GRASSROOTS that its staff members and partners have received the following awards. It is even more significant that we received these awards during the year in which we were celebrating our 'well lived' 25 years of community empowerment work.

COMMUNITY AWARDS (13th October 2017)

Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF)

- *Breath of the Compassionate (Artwork Project)*

Community Arts Award

Near Neighbours

- *Near Neighbours Luton Hub*

Mark West Award

Jasmin Khanum

- *GRASSROOTS Volunteer and CATALYST Youth Leadership Programme Participant*

Exceptional Achievement Award

Thakor Morarji

- *GRASSROOTS Volunteer and Luton Fairtrade Steering Group Founding Member*

Highly Commended for Service with a Smile

Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF)

- *Archery Project*

Highly Commended for Sporting Achievement

Sr Maire Hayes

- *GRASSROOTS Team Member and Inter Faith Coordinator for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton*

Lifetime Achievement Award

LUTON BEST AWARDS (24th November 2017)

Near Neighbours Programme

Luton in Harmony Award

Near Neighbours Programme

Community Project of the Year Award

BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE AWARD (16th February 2018)

Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF)

Inter Faith Champion Award

Kim Greig

Community Cohesion Choice Award 2018

Muslim News Award for Excellence 2018 (23rd April 2018)

GRASSROOTS

Annemarie Schimmel award for Championing A Muslim Cause



Lifetime Achievement Award for Sr Maire Hayes



This year has been particularly significant for GRASSROOTS - not only because GRASSROOTS celebrated its 25th Anniversary, but GRASSROOTS team member, Sr Maire Hayes, also celebrated her 50th Anniversary of being in the Religious Life.

Sr Maire belongs to the Catholic Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit. In her early religious life Sr Maire taught in secondary schools in Birmingham and Liverpool, and later lived and worked in Santiago, Chile, for 22 years.



For the past 14 years Sr Maire has been working in Luton as part of the GRASSROOTS team. She is a source of great inspiration and encouragement, a dear friend to many, and a trusted and much-loved colleague. It is for these reasons and many more that Sr Maire was awarded the much-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award at the Luton & Bedfordshire Community Awards on Friday 13th October 2017, in recognition of all she has done and continues to do.

CONGRATULATIONS to Sr Maire Hayes

and also to The Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton & the Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit

Thank you all for supporting Sr Maire's work in Luton!

Conclusion

Compiling this report has given the GRASSROOTS team the opportunity to look back over the past few months, to appreciate again the many wonderful moments enjoyed and the individuals (including team members, trustees and volunteers) with whom we have had the privilege to work. Particularly significant has been the GRASSROOTS 25th anniversary, and the related celebrations - all of which have left a lasting impression.

The GRASSROOTS Celebration Event was an amazing and exhilarating experience - in the preparations, delivery, and subsequent feedback and reflections. The memories from this year are enough not only to sustain us, but encourage and enthuse us in our current commitments, and all we might do in the years to come. Through our engagement and interaction with diverse friends and partners, we are reminded that Christian scriptures - and those pertaining to people of different faiths - provide a firm foundation and authenticity for our commitment to strive for a more just and peaceful world for all God's peoples.

The GRASSROOTS Celebration felt like something of a 'revival moment' - generating feelings of hope, reminding us of possibilities, and celebrating the real experience of what GRASSROOTS has been, and will continue to be, in encouraging people to journey forwards, break down barriers of culture and religion, and promote a sense that 'we are all in this together'.

Here at GRASSROOTS, we dare to dream - of peace, unity, and harmony. We seek and create opportunities to put our dreams into practical action. This does not mean we attempt to negotiate away, undermine, or sideline our differences, or the things that are unique in the various cultural and religious traditions. Instead, we seek to affirm the right of each individual and group to be fully who they are, whilst also being respectful of the conviction of others, their right to be fully themselves too. Alongside people of all cultures and traditions, we work to create a world where we can tackle day to day realities which at times seem to threaten the sanctity of human life, our co-existence, and even the integrity of our creation.

The challenges of the world can feel overwhelming, yet each one of us must discern how to effect change in our local and global world(s), how to extend a hand of friendship and solidarity for those who feel isolated, powerless and alone. We can, of course, choose to 'go it alone', but GRASSROOTS is committed to the belief that however we choose to respond, we are always 'better together'.



The Path

written for the Constance Coltman Celebration Service in September 2017

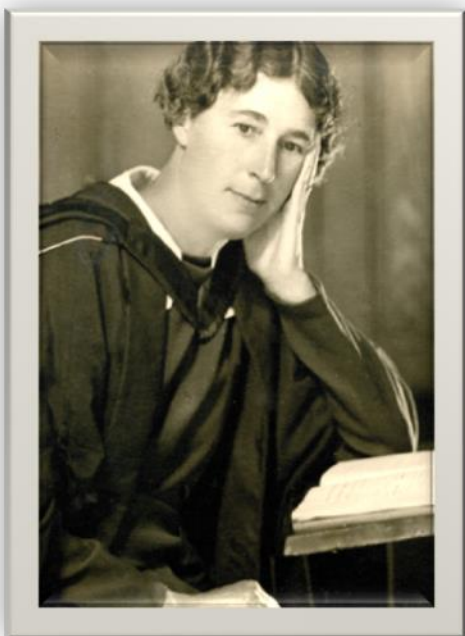
I look, but not sure what I see.
I ponder, not sure what I feel.
I yearn, not knowing what I yearn,
Which way to turn, just what is real.

I walk, tho I'm afraid to tread.
I linger, tho no stopping place -
Squeeze closed my eyes and hold my breath,
Somehow each moment to embrace.

They bid me come - 'This way!' 'That way!'
And I'm not sure just what to do -
A myriad paths before me turn,
But which - which one, is set by You?

Some I can see lead nowhere. Fast.
Yet others look alright to me -
Safe! The way already trod -
Are these the paths to set me free?

Still others glint, and brightly burn,
Glory promised in their light;
Their treasures call and beckon forth -
But 'glory' in whose sight?
Some paths do not reveal their way -
They twist and turn and disappear,
And tho I strain and squint to glimpse,
Their way, for me, is never clear.



Constance Coltman



And so I stop. Stand silent. Still.
Not knowing which the way to tread;
Subdue the noise within, without,
And listen for Your voice instead.

But in truth, I cannot always hear -
Can't quite discern the lilting sound
Above the tumult of my world -
And I'm beguiled by steady ground.

Yet still, I find, You lead me back -
You won't give in, You don't let go;
You call my name, You call me on,
Say 'Trust Me, for I know!'

And tho I still can't see each twist and turn,
Can't gauge the journey's length,
I'm reassured that smooth or hazardous
I journey not in my own strength.

And so, in faith, I take each step -
By grace alone seek courage new
To lift my eyes from paths below
And keep them fixed on You.

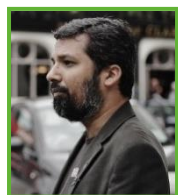
For I realise You are the path;
You are the way; You are my goal;
Inspiration, strength, and resting place -
Eternal lover of my soul.

© Karen Campbell: 2017

2017-2018 Financial Summary

Income	£
Grants received	135,562
Donations	6,857
Interest and other income	21
Sale of Fairtrade goods	13,752
	156,192
Expenditure – Charitable activities	
Mission Education and Advancement	74,810
Spirituality of Justice	14,077
Work with Women across Faiths and Cultures	5,621
Near Neighbours	59,862
Bury Park Beech Hill Church Related Community Work	3,805
Awards for All	13,069
Said Foundation	1,810
Other Events	2,883
	175,937
Governance costs	
Total	3,783
	179,720
Net Expenditure for the year	
Total	(23,528)
Reserves at 31 August 2018	
Unrestricted	7,378
Restricted	21,297

Meet the GRASSROOTS Team and Trustees



David Jonathan

Co-ordinator Community Cohesion and Interfaith Relations

Revd Canon David Lawson

Chair of Trustees



Sr Maire Hayes

Spirituality of Justice and Interfaith Coordinator for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton

Sheila Marsden

Secretary



Ann Hyde

Working with Women of Different Faiths and Cultures

Gordon Slater

Treasurer



Karen Campbell

Church Related Community Worker

Phil Horner

Trustee



Kim Greig

Near Neighbours Coordinator

Linda Jones

Trustee



Ciaran O'Brien

Programmes & Operations Manager

Ruth Tetlow

Trustee



We would like to thank Gordon Slater for all he has done in support GRASSROOTS over the years as he now steps down from his role but are also delighted to welcome back Revd Maggie Hindley as a Trustee and a new Treasurer in the form of Brian Roe!

