

## **Interfaith Work with Women in Luton**

*Ghar se Ghar* is an organisation that is organised by a Muslim, a Hindu and 2 Christian women. It grew up naturally through the shared values and the commonly held beliefs of the women, as they attempted to address local needs through a bottom up rather than top down approach to the community.

### **Background**

A women's Arts Co-operative in Luton was funded to work in the Bury Park area with youth as a target group a few years ago. No easy task for a couple of white women in a predominantly Asian/Muslim neighbourhood. They linked in with *Ghar se Ghar* an existing group which supported women and families from the minority groups, fulfilled their targets and emerged from the experience having gained tremendously themselves and having a commitment to giving ongoing support to the Asian women without whom they would not have been able to do their work. When *Ghar se Ghar* was then in danger of foundering, having difficulty in coping with the complex demands of funding the women came together and formed a new *Ghar se Ghar* organization- a not for profit workers co-operative with charitable aims.

### **What Does Ghar se Ghar do?**

*Ghar se Ghar* organises group activities which provide:-

- Health Support: exercise, relaxation by qualified tutors & health education;
- Social Support: relieving social isolation;
- Individual Support: help with social/domestic difficulties e.g. domestic violence; support in accessing a variety of health, legal, social and welfare organizations.

*Ghar se Ghar* encourages the integration of people from different ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds. This is not always an easy task as people do not always want to engage with 'the others.' This does not mean that *Ghar se Ghar* gives up!

There are several groups across the town, which meet in community venues. The groups emerge where and when there is a need and close when the need subsides. The use of some church halls as venues encourages congregation members as well as local residents to take part in exercise groups with Hindu or Muslim female tutors.

Discussion groups on social issues over the last few months involved women from a range of countries: -Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia and U.K.

Events are held from time to time which include participation, in particular from the Christian and Muslim community. In the last 12 months there have been events involving women from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire, Jamaica & Caribbean, Italy and Greece as well as the countries mentioned above.

International Women's Day Event- Bury Park 2008

**\*CELEBRATING WONDERFUL WOMEN\***



***STORYTIME:*** Hear the real life stories of ordinary and extraordinary women

***GIVE YOUR BODIES A TREAT:***

**Exercise**



**Relaxation**

**Shoulder Massage**

**Hand Massage**

**Yoga**

***ENJOY YOURSELVES:***



**Dancing**



2009

- **A summer picnic** to the Faith Woodlands Project, Maulden Woods – This is a partnership between Luton Council of Faiths, Bedford Council of Faiths and the Forestry Commission. Different faiths worked together to create a signposted walk, a sacred space and labyrinth to encourage a body mind and spirit connection with Creation. Women went on a guided walk and heard storytelling from one of the Forestry Commission Rangers and did some circle dancing in the woods.
- **A Diabetes Awareness Raising Event**, which provided professional health education as well as a social event.

- **A Food from Around the World Event** for International Womens' week 2009. This involved 10 women (plus one husband!) preparing food from their different cultures to exchange ideas and experience. This was attended by 60 people and a great success.



Cooks and organisers at the event. March 2009

*Ghar se Ghar* is able to continue, not only because of the constant struggle to secure small amounts of funding from here and there, but because Muslim, Hindu and Christian women work together, in many instances 'from the goodness of their hearts.' They are indeed special women, who are comfortable both with their own faith and culture, but also with the faith and culture of others. In this comfort, they make the others feel comfortable too. They are happy to share their beliefs and practices and what is more, want to know about that of others, with a mind to look at the similarities, whilst respecting the differences.

The Spirit is before them, leading the way; behind them when they need a gentle push; below them when they are nearly crushed; beside them when they need accompanying and always above them as their great Creator- all of them wonders of creation and journeying on a pilgrimage through life. They choose to walk together- in 'God's Gang', rather than in that alternative one of darkness, of suspicion, of separation. The expression of Spirit may come from "St Patrick's Breastplate" or it may come from "The Navaho Blessing." Either way, the women weave the strands of light, co-operation, honesty and hope into a blanket in which to wrap the children and grandchildren of the future.

Luton has recently had some bad press as a result of a small extremist minority. Let us celebrate the good things that are going on here and the fact that there are people who promote co-operation understanding and friendship across many different faiths and cultures.

13<sup>th</sup> May 2009  
Grassroots, Luton