

# Grassroots

...a different point of view



Impacting People's Experiences by Creating Opportunities  
to Encounter Difference

# GRASSROOTS 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

## Souvenir Booklet

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018

18:00 to 21:30

Venue Central, 196A Leagrave Road, Luton, Beds, LU3 1JD

Charity Registration Number: 1163427

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A Look Back at 25 Years of GRASSROOTS

Page 2



Still Providing a Different Point of View...

Page 3



Our Founder – David Cowling

Page 5



In the Beginning...

Page 6



Community Faith Development Work

Page 9



Over the Years

Page 10



Our Work Today

Page 13



A Table for All

Page 18



Near Neighbours

Page 21



Messages of Support

Page 22



So, What's Next?

Page 25



# A Look Back at 25 Years of GRASSROOTS



In 1991 the seeds of GRASSROOTS were first sown in Luton, inspired by founder David Cowling, and supported by the Methodist Church and Christian Aid. From the beginning a ground-breaking Christian programme of community engagement, GRASSROOTS' ecumenical work soon grew and flourished, with other Christian denominations, organisations and trusts offering their support and involvement. In those early days, GRASSROOTS was a resource for churches, helping them relate to a world undergoing rapid cultural, social, political and religious change, including here, in Britain.

Initially, GRASSROOTS invited Mission Partners from different parts of the world, bringing fresh and exciting insights as to how churches could engage with the changing cultural and religious face of Britain. Over time, this work expanded, leading to the formation of the Luton Council of Faiths, plus a variety of innovative, imaginative and cutting-edge community projects. Against a background of recent tensions in Luton, triggered by local, national and international dynamics, and further provoked by a number of extremist groups, GRASSROOTS has been at the fore in promoting inter cultural and religious awareness, and as such is held in high regard in Luton and beyond. Whilst the future remains both unpredictable and uncertain, GRASSROOTS can draw on the strength and confidence of its past achievements, its continuing vision for human flourishing, and a commitment to furthering the mission of God in Luton, as it continues to develop its work and to make a positive difference for the whole diversity of people it encounters.

GRASSROOTS is deeply indebted to all those individuals, churches, organisations and funders who have endorsed and supported GRASSROOTS over the past 25 years - they are too numerous to mention, but without their support much of what has been achieved would not have been possible. We are also hugely grateful to those who have been generous in their support of our anniversary celebration. To all attending the celebration evening, our sincere thanks, and we very much hope that you will catch something of the passion, commitment and energy which is the life blood of GRASSROOTS. 'For all that has been – thanks! To all that will be – yes!'

*David Lawson*

**The Revd Canon David Lawson**  
**Chair of GRASSROOTS**



## Still Providing a Different Point of View...



It is with a sense of both pride and privilege that we look back at the life of GRASSROOTS. Over the past 25 years GRASSROOTS has succeeded in creating safe spaces and pathways enabling people to engage across religiously and culturally diverse backgrounds, both locally and globally. In meeting with the 'other', people have discovered allies and friends in those who are often despised, or commonly perceived as enemies. GRASSROOTS' work in this area is recognised far and wide, and even today we continue to host people from across the world to learn from our experience.

Throughout its work, GRASSROOTS has demonstrated the understanding and capacity to 'act while reflecting' whilst also being adaptable, receptive and relational in order to be effective on the ground. It has encouraged Luton's diverse communities to become ever more mutually nourishing. The rhythm of life in GRASSROOTS has always been positive and dynamic. It has determinedly combated various challenges arising in the town, resisting provocation on all sides, and has successfully and significantly contributed to creating a culture of dialogue and cooperation for peace. GRASSROOTS has remained true to its calling, resisting both religious and secular pressures towards institutionalism, choosing instead to be 'different'. In so doing, it has been both a presence and a companion, remaining organic, and maintaining its ability to respond creatively to the issues emerging from time to time.

As a Christian ecumenical programme of community engagement, in dialogue with churches and other faith communities, GRASSROOTS strives to uncover a sharp edge of engagement with contemporary issues of community cohesion, peace and reconciliation, injustice and inequality, in Luton's diverse context. As we mark 25 years of successful working, it is fitting to acknowledge the support and encouragement received from the Churches and from our Trustees, and the efforts of my ever-enthusiastic, passion-driven staff team. Furthermore, GRASSROOTS could not survive without the commitment and support of its partners and many volunteers. 'May we all continue to help GRASSROOTS light candles rather than to curse the darkness!'

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Jonathan', with a horizontal line underneath.

**David Jonathan**  
Director of GRASSROOTS



**Let GRASSROOTS remain a  
'programme' of  
community engagement  
and community coherence  
and not become an  
organisation or an  
institution where  
structural legalities and  
survival can take priority  
over people's well-being.**

**Words of Wisdom**  
from David Cowling



## Our Founder

### David Cowling



David Cowling could rightly be regarded as a pioneer. An energetic yet unassuming man, his personal warmth, vision and capacity to uplift and empower those around him helped establish GRASSROOTS as the organisation it is today. Having served as a missionary in Kenya, David strongly believed in the liberation of the poor, the oppressed and the suffering. Without compromise, he dared to dream of a 'mission alternative', which led to the creation of GRASSROOTS. He saw in the story of Jesus the liberation of human beings, and he lived that out fully in his work overseas and back in Luton.

Through GRASSROOTS, David sought to listen to and echo the voices of the marginalised, challenging the Church to become a more effective agent for change. His vision was vast, seeking to integrate community development, education, partnership, mission, justice and spirituality.

During the early days of GRASSROOTS, David called for greater attention to be placed on social justice - beyond notions simply of charity - recognising that this was necessary to challenge the root causes of poverty and suffering. He invited Mission Partners from all over the world to share lessons, experiences and witness with each other. David's vision was transformative, proudly identifying that 'mission' is not ours, but that we are to be engaged in God's mission - a mission to bring peace, justice and life in all its fullness to all God's people everywhere.

David sought to offer hope in a world where hope, at times, was lost, inspiring those around him to work together for the better. As he often taught, "the magnitude of the darkness should never deter anyone from lighting one candle; indeed, it is always better to light a candle than to curse the darkness".

## In the Beginning...

The 'Grassroots Programme', better known as GRASSROOTS, was founded against a background of great political instability and social change in the UK and around the world. Rooted in the Christian faith and supported by the Methodist Church and Christian Aid, GRASSROOTS began as a programme of community engagement which also acted as a resource for churches. It encouraged the Church in the UK to engage with liberation theology, thinking about how the Church could be a positive influence for change, and reassessing the meaning and relevance of the Christian faith amidst the struggles of the world.

For founder David Cowling, God is a God who we experience in the 'different', so it was essential that we learn from the perspectives and experiences of people from different backgrounds, whilst also sharing insights from our own. To enable this, GRASSROOTS hosted several Mission Partners (known locally as Project Workers) from all over the world including the Czech Republic, Brazil, Ghana, India, Japan, South Africa and Sri Lanka, who led on projects (some examples follow), including:

- Building Plural Communities in Europe
- Cutting Edge Partnership - linking the Church with the community
- Rags & Roses – a Community Development Programme in Marsh Farm
- Renewal from the Roots – New Ways of Understanding the Bible
- Kairos Europa
- Spirituality, Regeneration & Development
- Justice Spirituality
- Faith in Europe



**Rags & Roses** was a Community Development Programme in Marsh Farm, a deprived area of Luton, based on the running of 'Rags & Roses' (a community café), later renamed Café 2000 (pictured above). This was also one of a number of venues for activity groups, presentations and educational talks, including delivery of the Bitesize Programme, led by GRASSROOTS, which sought to encourage adults back into learning. Staff and partners from across Luton and beyond contributed to the delivery of this work, including intercultural, interfaith, arts and crafts, creative writing and environmental activities.





**Faith in Europe** was delivered in partnership with the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Prague, and with St Anne's Church in Luton. The project focused on the cultural similarities and differences from a Christian perspective of life in a former communist country, compared to that of life in the UK. It sought to encourage better understanding of our European neighbours at a time when the EU was expanding greatly. GRASSROOTS also coordinated opportunity for work with marginalised communities to be presented at the European Parliament.



**Kairos Europa** was, and continues to be, a network of justice, peace and creation initiatives working in collaboration with ecumenical networks, churches, social movements, trade unions and non-governmental organisations, both in and outside Europe. The initiative finds its roots in the Kairos process, started in the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa in 1985. GRASSROOTS had a coordinating role in addressing the inter cultural and inter faith realities of Europe, and exploring local social economic alternatives, in partnership with a community enterprise.

**Cutting Edge Partnership** was a theme of work which sought to encourage and enable Churches to respond to challenges in society, share resources and insights, become reflective of the communities they serve, and to offer learning and transformation opportunities for those engaged in community mission.



**Global Xchange** was a British Council programme hosted by GRASSROOTS for a number of years. Young people from the UK, Indonesia, Philippines, Mongolia, Egypt and Syria visited Luton for learning and cultural exchanges.



**The time to act is now.**

**You may never have  
enough people and  
enough money to start  
anything. That day might  
never come.**

**Be brave and take a leap  
of faith.**

**Words of Wisdom**  
from David Cowling



## Community Faith Development Work

As the needs, resourcing and relevance of projects have inevitably come and gone, further initiatives have been developed and evolved over time into new streams of work. In particular, GRASSROOTS' focus on Community Faith Development Work not only grew, but still continues 25 years later!



*Ryad Khodabocus, Shanthi Hettiarachchi and David Jonathan have all been Community Faith Development Workers in Luton for and alongside GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths*

### First came **GRASSROOTS**

After GRASSROOTS' formation in 1991, interfaith engagement rapidly grew in importance. In its first five years, relationships were developed with different faith communities, the foundations of trust were built, and new activities were born.

### Then **LUTON INTERFAITH FORUM**

In 1996, GRASSROOTS formed a new group called the Luton Interfaith Forum, consisting of different faith communities from across the town. This group started new and exciting themes of work including the 'Inter Faith Pilgrimage', an annual walk between different faith communities to encourage mutual learning and engagement, and to help break down barriers and misunderstanding.

### And now **LUTON COUNCIL OF FAITHS (LCoF)**

Just five years later, as the work of the Luton Interfaith Forum and its membership continued to grow and become increasingly separate from GRASSROOTS, change was needed. In 2001, the Luton Council of Faiths was born (now better known as LCoF), becoming its own independent organisation. However, GRASSROOTS continues to work in close partnership with LCoF on a wide variety of innovative programmes.



# Over The Years

We have met a number of dignitaries and VIPs...



been the proud recipient of awards and letters of recognition...



hosted some **wonderful** Mission Partners including...



**Clockwise from Top Left:**  
 Shanthi Hettiarachchi, Vlasta Lišková, Pamela Parenzie, Leão Neto,  
 Suzie Viana, Magali do Nascimento Cunha, Silvio Marquardt, Albert Gyan

and we have also developed our Newsletters and Annual Reports to keep you informed of our work!



However, all we have achieved would not have been possible without our staff, trustees, volunteers, funders, supporters, partners and of course, the inspirational vision of our founder, David Cowling. Thank you all.

**‘Mission’ does not belong  
to us. It is not ours!**

**We are called to engage in  
‘Missio Dei’ – God’s  
Mission – concerned with  
life in its abundance for all  
people, everywhere.**

**Words of Wisdom**  
from David Cowling



# Our Work Today - Current Team and Trustees



**David Jonathan**

Director - with focus on Community Cohesion and Interfaith Relations

**Rev 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



*Thank You*

**Janet Bird**

Trustee



... to all of our trustees, for their support, guidance, inspiration and encouragement!

# Our Work Today

## Working with Women Across Faiths and Cultures

This project is concerned with developing recreational, educational and health activities for women, primarily from different faiths and cultural backgrounds, to address their needs, concerns and aspirations. The women are often from sections of the community frequently considered as 'hard to reach'.

The work is largely achieved through partnership with the women's cooperative 'Ghar se Ghar', running various activities including health fayres, Circle Dancing sessions, workshops, day trips and encouraging participation in other events such as Precious Pearls (a celebration of International Women's Day), the Women's World Day of Prayer and the Luton Peace Walk (organised by the partnership of GRASSROOTS and Luton Council of Faiths).





## Spirituality of Justice

Through this project, GRASSROOTS seeks to encourage dialogue between people of different cultures and faiths in order to foster a vision of human solidarity, development and the integrity of creation – a movement from dialogue to action for peace and justice. The overall aim of the project is to develop experiences of Justice Spirituality by building compassion and solidarity with and amongst people of different faith traditions in Luton and beyond.



In this, conversations with all people are necessary, along with the need to support each other in the public acknowledgement of faith and cultural festivals, to share the practices and beliefs of different faith traditions, and to show genuine concern for the common good, both locally and globally. The Spirituality of Justice project has led inter faith and ecumenical work around issues of Fair Trade and Trade Justice, and GRASSROOTS leads the award winning multi-faith Luton Fairtrade Steering Group, which succeeded in achieving Fairtrade Town status for Luton in 2011.



# Our Work Today

## Community Cohesion & Inter Faith Relations

Whilst engaging with people both within and outside the Church, working with people of different faiths, and in partnership with Luton Council of Faiths, GRASSROOTS recognises that engagement across faith and cultural boundaries is not so much a choice, as a necessity. In an increasingly busy world, it is time for 'breaking and sharing the word in action' - with all God's peoples, amongst all God's peoples. Our call to mission is to share our 'God of Love and the Love of God'.



Initiatives under this theme of work include organising peace rallies, vigils and related events in preparation for, and in response to, community cohesion issues arising from various local, national and international events; cultural and faith celebrations, such as Luton Peace Walk, One World Week and Interfaith Week; sports initiatives, including football, cricket and archery competitions; environmental projects such as Faith Woodlands and local legacy projects; and educational events, including the Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme and youth conferences.



## Church Related Community Work

The Church Related Community Work (CRCW) project works in partnership with the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches, devising and coordinating a variety of community development initiatives mainly focused on the area of the town in which the churches are located.

CRCW ministry seeks to encourage 'faith in action', enabling the local church to engage with the people and realities in its local community, working together to bring about positive change. In Luton, this has seen the building of new and strengthened relationships across faith and cultural boundaries through a range of social, celebration and arts-focused initiatives, always encouraging the churches to explore more deeply what it means to be a Christian presence 'in this specific place'.





## A Table For All

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

© Karen Campbell (2009)

**There's a missing dimension in our dialogue with people of different faiths and cultures. It certainly promotes good understanding between one another, but is yet to jointly call for actions for justice and peace.**

**Words of Wisdom**  
from David Cowling



# Near Neighbours

GRASSROOTS has been the hub for Near Neighbours since 2014, with the local Coordinator being part of the GRASSROOTS team. Near Neighbours is an initiative of the Church of England’s Archbishops Council and the Church Urban Fund and is supported by a multi-faith advisory panel.

A response to the Government’s desire to provide resources which are able to strengthen relationships in multi-religious neighbourhoods, Near Neighbours has two key objectives:

**Social Interaction:**

to develop positive relationships in multi-faith areas, i.e. to help people from different faiths get to know and understand each other better.

**Social Action:**

to encourage people of different faiths and of no faith to come together for initiatives that improve their local neighbourhood.

The work of Near Neighbours is supported by a small grants fund, providing seed funding for local groups and organisations who are working to bring neighbours together, to develop relationships of diverse faiths and ethnicities, and to improve their communities.

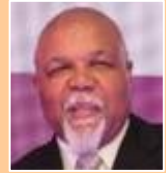
As of March 2018, the Luton hub has awarded nearly £500,000 to 170 projects delivered in the town, for initiatives which bring people together locally, are sustainable and involve a diversity of people.



## Messages of Support

Many congratulations to GRASSROOTS in reaching 25 years of outstanding service to the people of Luton. May you go from strength to strength; what began 25 years ago as a good idea is now today invaluable for peace and community cohesion.

**Pastor Lloyd Denny, Restoration Revival Fellowship**



Everyone concerned with GRASSROOTS works tirelessly to help us understand more about each other and how we can build strong and harmonious communities where all are respected and where diversity is celebrated. May your work continue long into the future.

**Helen Nellis, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire**

I am delighted to send my warm congratulations to GRASSROOTS to mark a quarter of a century of remarkable services empowering diverse groups and promoting peace and community cohesion in Luton. I wish you equal success for the next 25 years.

**Dr Nazia Khanum, Chair of United Nations Association (Luton Branch)**



To be the first Partner in Mission of the 'Grassroots Programme' was a great challenge! An unforgettable cultural, interfaith and existential exchange that is part of my formation for life and work that I will carry with me forever. My best wishes for your 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

**Magali Do Nascimento Cunha, Former GRASSROOTS Mission Partner**

GRASSROOTS is helping to transform communities in Luton and beyond through creating opportunities for positive interfaith encounters that promote justice and peace. My warm congratulations and good wishes to all involved on this landmark occasion.

**Rev Dr David Chapman, BEH Methodist Church District Chair**



What makes GRASSROOTS different from any other organisation I have come across is the people - their warmth, generosity, energy, creativity, dedication, openness and humility. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do, and most importantly, for who you are.

**Sarah Alexander, GRASSROOTS Volunteer & Former Team Member**



Our warmest congratulations to GRASSROOTS on your 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Thank you for your hard work, fantastic ideas, support and friendship. Many times we walked side by side, celebrating our solidarity. 'Sto Lat' Grassroots! Thank you! Dziękujemy!

**Bożena Briggs, Polish Community School in Luton and Dunstable**



I wish to congratulate GRASSROOTS on its 25 years of wonderful community service, for leading, motivating and guiding individuals and community groups to achieve peace, harmony and cohesion despite enormous challenges.

**Thakor Morarji, GRASSROOTS Volunteer**

GRASSROOTS opened a new chapter in my life, a new beginning in a different context. GRASSROOTS points out the path of personal and social transformation by creating a culture of encountering people who are different than oneself. May it long continue to do so.

**Rev Dr Leão Neto, Former GRASSROOTS Mission Partner and Trustee**



I am hugely pleased that GRASSROOTS has been here for 25 years and sincerely hope they are here for another 25 and longer. The potential divides we face in our communities as a result of Brexit and other challenges mean that its work is going to be needed more than ever.

**Revd Jenny Best, Former GRASSROOTS Team Member**

I would like to congratulate GRASSROOTS for reaching 25 years. I've been a councillor throughout that period and remember when they started here, so I want to wish you well for the next 25 years and look forward to continuing to work closely with you in the future.

**CLlr Hazel Simmons, Leader of Luton Borough Council**



As a Muslim it is a very important part of our faith to engage with people of all faiths and none, so congratulations to GRASSROOTS for all of its interfaith activities over the past 25 years, and for the resilience it has shown in making it this far.

**Ashfaque Chowdhury, Head Teacher, Al-Hikmah School**

**Be like 'Salt of the Earth'.  
It doesn't matter if we  
remain insignificant and  
invisible. What matters is  
that we keep adding  
flavour to life, even if it  
means, as salt, we have to  
dissolve and die.**

**Words of Wisdom**  
from David Cowling



## So, What's Next?

In response to the changing needs, challenges and opportunities at both a local and national level, the complex nature of working within the third sector, and the increased difficulties of securing sustainable and sufficient funding at a time of austerity, GRASSROOTS has identified four strategic themes which it hopes to focus on within its key areas of work in the coming years:

### Supporting Ecumenism and Engagement within the Church

We wish to advance our work with the Church by hosting visits of ordained and lay people, sharing our experience and best practice through giving talks, delivering bespoke training sessions, facilitating interfaith encounters and developing a published educational resource.

### Enhancing Regional Support, Influence and Resources

We wish to develop the 'GRASSROOTS Hub', a network which will enable organisations to connect with us, exchange best practice, share knowledge, engage in collaborative activities, identify sources of current research and influence policy at a local and national level.

### Developing Interfaith and Intercultural Competency

We wish to utilise our unique experience, skills and capabilities to develop bespoke training programmes, consultancy services and engagement opportunities for all sectors, including interfaith tours, visits and other encounters, linking spiritual life with secular life.

### Reaching People Living on the Fringe of Society

We wish to expand our engagement with those 'living on the fringe' of society, including those from groups seen as 'hard to reach', and place a heightened focus on youth development through continued delivery of our innovative Catalyst Youth Leadership Programme.

**We hope that you will continue to walk alongside us in the years to come.  
Thank you and God Bless!**



**Visit Our Website:**

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*Grassroots*  
...a different point of view