



Deep connections: Women's local inter faith initiatives in the UK



The Inter Faith Network for the UK

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The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) was founded in 1987 to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and their common ground and to promote good relations between persons of different faiths”.

IFN links in membership: national faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations, and academic and educational bodies with a focus on inter faith or multi-faith issues. It works with them to deepen inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. It carries out its work through raising awareness within wider society of the importance of inter faith issues, creating opportunities for linking and sharing good practice, and providing advice and information to help the development of new inter faith initiatives and the strengthening of existing ones. To find out more or to support IFN’s work of promoting inter faith understanding and cooperation, please visit www.interfaith.org.uk.

Cover photographs

Front cover

- Top Left: Women Together Wolverhampton meeting for discussion and craft
- Top Right: Women participating in Redbridge Faith Forum’s Inter Faith workshop to mark International Women’s Day
- Bottom Right: Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship’s Women Peace-ing Together working on a ‘Symbols of Peace’ banner
- Bottom Left: Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith meeting for a walk and a coffee in a local park

Back cover

- Top Left: Women from Coffee ‘n’ Laughs, Newport
- Top Right: Women of Faith in Community, Glasgow at the central Gurdwara at event held in association with Interfaith Scotland for International Women’s Day
- Bottom Right: Women at the Well interfaith group, hands weaving
- Bottom Left: Women from various local Nisha-Nashim groups planting trees for a local cause in Barnet, ‘Tiny Trees’

The Inter Faith Network for the UK closed in 2024, with outward facing operations ceasing in April.

In order to ensure that the material in IFN's publications remained available to the public, to inter faith practitioners, and to scholars after IFN's closure, the copyright status of publications has been changed.

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Executive Summary

- 1 This report is on the findings of a research project designed to: learn more about local inter faith initiatives led by women and principally for women; explore some of the challenges and benefits; and gather and share examples of work and experiences of 'what works' in order to encourage and inspire others.
- 2 The research focused on initiatives involving women of two or more faiths (and sometimes non-religious beliefs) which have inter faith understanding and cooperation as one of their primary aims. This included a small number of initiatives which see themselves as having a strong inter faith dimension although self-defining primarily in cultural terms.
- 3 The research identified 50 women's local inter faith initiatives in the UK: (i) 13 autonomous inter faith initiatives; (ii) 14 sections, wings or ongoing separate programmes of wider mixed gender local inter faith organisations or other types of local organisations; (iii) 4 initiatives or groups not multi faith in terms of the organisation or primary purpose but with a strong inter faith dialogue or multi faith social action dimension; and (iv) 19 branches/groups of two national women's inter faith organisations.
- 4 A relatively small number of mixed gender inter faith organisations have a women's group or other type of women's initiative within or linked to them. Among those that said that they did not, however, a number drew attention to the fact that women's engagement was important to them and was reflected in other ways in their work.
- 5 The highest concentration of women's local inter faith initiatives is in London (15), followed by the North-West of England (6). These amount to 30% and 12%, respectively, of the overall women's local inter faith engagement.
- 6 These women's local inter faith initiatives are part of rich wider tapestry of local women's inter faith activity, from shorter term projects and *ad hoc* events to activities in schools, higher education institutions, places of worship and other contexts.
- 7 The most frequently given reasons for establishment of the women's initiatives, and also reflected in purposes and aspirations, are: coming to know those of other backgrounds, including learning more about each other's faiths and beliefs; development of friendship; providing a women-only space (where there are those who need that); development of skills and confidence; and enabling a safe, secure and enjoyable environment for conversation and activity. Relationships are central, with expression of aspirations to continue to be places of mutual learning, support and encouragement and, for some, to ensure that next generation gets involved and gains a similar benefit.
- 8 Relationships and support are at the core of group dynamics. At the same time, however, responses gave a strong sense of the women's awareness of importance of their activity in helping to shape and improve relationships in the wider community and in tackling of challenging social issues such as racism, domestic abuse and climate change.
- 9 In terms of their faith focus and membership, of those surveyed, 38% of the initiatives have an intentional focus on just two, or three, faiths and 62% have a broader focus and membership. In terms of age, the majority of those reported as taking part are between 41 and 75. However, women of all ages are involved, even if not in all groups.
- 10 There are a wide variety of different structures, from formal to informal, as there are of meeting patterns, venues and resourcing. Activity times are chosen with care to fit with the family and work commitments of members.
- 11 The initiatives hold many different kinds of activities such as: dialogue, education, arts and crafts; activism; and celebrating or marking

special days, week and months. Health and wellbeing and sports activities are also held by some.

- 12 Many of the initiatives' activities serve more than one purpose. For example, knitting, quilting, embroidery, rugmaking, mural painting and other crafts carried out together are enjoyable in their own right; provide a focus which allows space for conversation and building friendships; and can also be a piece of activism that communicates something wider to the group and/or beyond about topics such as inter faith harmony, peace or tackling injustice.
- 13 Shared meals are also common feature. Just over half of the initiatives surveyed commented on sharing food as a highlight of their activity. Food also featured prominently as a 'top tip' shared by groups as an important tool in the smooth running of these initiatives.
- 14 A number of challenges were highlighted by respondents. A lack of resources was identified as a significant challenge by a number of the initiatives. In some cases, a women's local inter faith initiative has ongoing support from a wider multi-faith body to which it is linked or from another type of body such as a religious structure. However, most operate without that. While many have useful in-kind support and a few have grants, several respondents underline the desirability of some funding to support a development worker and carry out some regular activities. The short-term nature of most grants received contributes to a 'stop start stop' pattern to the work of some.
- 15 The significance of the encouragement and support of the Near Neighbours programme was evidenced in multiple responses.
- 16 There was reference in a number of responses to the need to develop skills and confidence for women's leadership at local levels and a number of the local initiatives spoke of this as part of their work. Roundtable and interview input from organisations such as Interfaith Scotland, Near Neighbours, Nisa-Nashim and the Women's Interfaith Network reflected their roles in providing support, asking questions and finding answers about what can help overcome the

barriers preventing women from engaging and leading in inter faith spaces.

- 17 Another challenge identified was coping during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research captures some of the frustration of Covid's fracturing of usual patterns of face-to-face meeting and loss of warmth of contact and then, through the project's second phase, a time of coming back to much missed in-person gatherings.
- 18 Other challenges were linked to communities and perceptions of the appropriate role(s) of women. 'Community support and interest', or rather its absence, was identified as a challenge by 54% of groups. A number noted inequalities and imbalances in various spaces and women's consciousness that they could be criticised from some from within their own communities.
- 19 The challenges were in some cases referred to as being risen to through provision of a 'safe space' and also through routes to gaining great confidence through ongoing learning and development of skills.
- 20 The benefits described by the participants were numerous: emotional support and friendship; greater understanding of each other's faiths or beliefs; increased representation of women in broader local inter faith organisations; creativity; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; stronger feelings of community; and sending a message of unity to the wider community.

Foreword

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was established in 1987 “to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain including an awareness both of their distinctive features and their common ground and to promote good relations between people of different faiths”. It has worked, with its member bodies, since that time to do so.

From the earliest period of IFN’s work, women’s contribution to inter faith understanding and cooperation has been part of its agenda. In 1990, it held a joint seminar with the former Women’s National Commission to explore women’s sense of religious identity and their roles within their faith traditions. In 1991, it went on to hold a day conference, ‘What are Women of Faith Saying?’ which brought together nearly 100 women from the UK’s faith communities to look at the role that religion played in their lives and ways that women might help in the task of creating better understanding between communities.

In 2006, IFN commissioned Dr Fatheena Mubarak-Iqbal to produce the report ‘Women’s Inter Faith Initiatives in the UK’. This influential report looked at some of the different types of inter faith initiatives set up and run by women nationally and locally, cited examples of ‘good practice’, and reflected on the role of women in inter faith work more generally. Women’s inter faith engagement in the UK has continued to develop. The Women’s Interfaith Network (WIN), established in 2003, expanded its work and subsequent years have seen also the emergence of a national Jewish–Muslim women’s body, Nisa-Nashim, in 2015 and the Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network in 2016.

There has also been a development of women’s local inter faith initiatives and, fifteen years on from the Mubarak-Iqbal report, IFN initiated a new research project looking at these. This is part of its ongoing commitment to supporting and encouraging women’s inter faith activity but also part of its wider work to support local inter faith activity more broadly.

The present report is based on research carried out during a period of four months between mid-October 2021 and mid-February 2022 and, after a gap linked to staff changes and funding challenges in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, subsequent updating research carried out from December 2022 to March 2023 by the IFN office. The initial project lead was Kirsty Healey.

The research set out to learn more about local inter faith initiatives which are led by women and principally for women, to explore some of the opportunities and challenges, and to gather and share examples of work and experiences of ‘what works’ to encourage and inspire others.

We hope that this report will be of interest and value to all those working to learn from, extend and deepen the vital contribution that women make to inter faith friendship, understanding and cooperation.

IFN is grateful to those who helped develop the survey; to the many local practitioners of different backgrounds and areas who provided information and reflections in the course of the research; and also to contributors from the national offices of Nisa-Nashim; Women’s Interfaith Network; Interfaith Scotland; the Interfaith Council for Wales; the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum; and the Church of England’s Near Neighbours programme. It is also grateful to Jeevan Sanghera and Tatiana Spencer who assisted on the second phase of research and Trustee Patricia Stoa, a local inter faith practitioner and former chair of the Catholic Women’s Network, who took a close and helpful interest in the project.

IFN is also grateful to funders of IFN’s work during the period in question, of which this forms part: the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; trusts; and individual donors.

Harriet Crabtree OBE
Executive Director
April 2023

1. Scope and methodology

1.1 Scope

The focus of the report is squarely on the local and on the range of ways that women are building inter faith relationships and working together through initiatives at the grassroots level. Whilst it does pick up questions of rationale and approach, it does not seek to present overarching analyses of issues of faith and gender but, rather, to focus on the practicalities of engagement.

The project focused on the UK and, given its duration and resources, did not seek to place local women's inter faith activity in the context of international developments of this kind. However, the significance of International Women's Day for many of the initiatives reflected a keen sense of global connection with other women.

The report looks at different types of local inter faith initiatives in the UK which are led by women and principally for women. Its focus is initiatives involving women of two or more faiths – and sometimes non-religious beliefs – which have inter faith understanding and cooperation as one of their primary aims. In a few instances, it has included initiatives which, while defined in other terms such as 'cultural', are described by the organisers as having a strong inter faith dimension.

The report includes a comparison of the figures for numbers of local initiatives between those at the time of the 2006 Mubarak-Iqbal report¹ and those at the present time. It does not, however, seek to make more detailed comparisons since its scope differs in a number of ways.

The research explored such key questions as:

- What is the current pattern of women's local inter faith initiatives in the UK?

¹ *Women's Inter Faith Initiatives in the UK: A Survey*, Fatheena Mubarak-Iqbal, Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2006

- What do members see as the purposes and benefits of their initiatives?
- What factors shape the ways in which the initiatives work?
- What challenges do members identify?
- What kinds of activities are run by such initiatives?
- What learning can be drawn from these initiatives to assist others interested in developing or strengthening local women's inter faith initiatives?

As detailed below in the methodology section, a number of routes were used to explore these questions: desk research; a survey; a Roundtable; and interviews. However, there is no claim to the comprehensiveness that a much longer study, and an academic literature review, might have permitted².

The initial research was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic which had affected the patterns of activity and meeting of most of the initiatives. Contact was made again with all the surveyed bodies during a second round of research between December 2022 and March 2023 so the report also reflects a return by the bodies to a period of closer to normal operation.

1.2. Methodology

The research used a number of tools: desk research a survey; a Roundtable discussion with both local and national contributors; and also some interviews with practitioners.

a) Terminology

'Inter faith' and 'multi faith': The project worked with definitions used by the Inter Faith Network in other contexts:

² *A number of publications which explore related areas have come out in recent times, such as 'HerFaithMatters: Women's leadership as creating peace, resisting violence, speaking for justice', Bonnie Evans-Hills, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2021.*

- ‘Inter faith’: used of interactions between people of different faiths, and in some cases between those of religious and non-religious beliefs.
- ‘Multi faith’: used where the emphasis is on ‘side-by-side’ working together rather than on interaction between those taking part.

‘Local’: The project worked with a definition of ‘local’ which included neighbourhood and wider (for example rural district, local authority or metropolitan area) grassroots initiatives. It did not include university women’s inter faith groups within the scope of ‘local’. There are a number of these, such as LSE (London School of Economics) Women’s Interfaith Group and a Nisa-Nashim group at the University of Bristol. They play an important role within the university context but are not usually active on a regular basis within local communities.

‘Initiatives’: The term ‘initiative’ was used since women’s local inter faith engagement takes a number of different forms, from autonomous ongoing organisations and looser groups, to wings of mixed gender local inter faith bodies and branches/groups of national women’s inter faith organisations.

‘Engagement’: The term ‘engagement’ was used to cover different types of interaction such as dialogue, socialising, arts projects and social action.

b) Desk research

The process began with a list of local women’s inter faith initiatives already known to IFN and included in its online list of local inter faith organisations (LIFOs). A check was also made against the list of women’s initiatives listed in the Mubarak-Iqbal report. In her report she had identified 42 national and local women’s interfaith initiatives. 21 of those were local bodies that were comparable in activity to those researched in the present project. However, 17 had ceased to operate. The remaining 5 were contacted.

Online research was then conducted to identify further women’s local inter faith initiatives not yet known to IFN. Searches were conducted using search terms such as ‘inter faith’, ‘interfaith’, ‘multi faith’, ‘multifaith’, ‘religious’, ‘women’ and ‘women-only’ and any relevant information was gathered from local inter faith organisation (LIFO) websites.

An initial working typology was created, identifying initiatives as ‘inter faith’ or ‘multi faith’ in the light of their focus and self-description and based on types of activities and approaches. This initial work helped inform the next stages of the project.

A ‘call for information’ was included in the December 2022 issue of IFN’s e-bulletin.

c) Survey

During October 2021, a survey was developed with assistance from local inter faith organisation Trustees on IFN’s Board and then piloted by six local inter faith organisations. Smart Survey was used. A copy of the survey is at Annex E.

As will be seen from the framing of the survey, some limited quantitative data was sought relating to issues such as types of activities. However, there was an emphasis on drawing in useful qualitative responses. Given the practical orientation of the research, the survey also included a request for ‘top tips’ and ‘words of wisdom’. These are included at Annex A to the report.

In a number of cases, where respondents had indicated that they were content to be contacted, follow up calls were made to explore further aspects of the responses. An initial outreach email was sent introducing the project and inviting the initiative contact to schedule a phone call with the Project Officer. Where this invitation was taken up, the Project Officer called the contact and went through the survey over the phone with the survey return sent for confirmation and any requested edits following the conversation.

In total, from 236 contacts made, there were 49 responses, 26 of which contained details about women’s local inter faith initiatives. It is primarily on data from and about those 26 initiatives that this report is based.

Between December 2022 and February 2023, women’s initiatives which had made substantive responses were given the opportunity to update information provided in the original survey response.

Initial survey mailing to local inter faith organisations

The survey was sent to the 220 local inter faith organisations and independent bilateral and trilateral groups with which IFN is in contact in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Most of the local inter faith groups on IFN's list are mixed gender inter faith bodies; a few are women's initiatives. Where the recipient was from a general local inter faith body, they were asked – where it had a women's initiative or knew of a separate local one – if they could forward it to the relevant person or group to complete.

Following discussion with Interfaith Scotland, Scottish LIFOs were not sent the survey. Instead, Interfaith Scotland's National Development Officer gave an input about Scottish women's local inter faith engagement at a Roundtable discussion (see below at 1.2d) and through an interview about Scottish women's local inter faith activity, some of which is directly led by it. Similarly, following conversation with Women's Interfaith Network (WIN) and Nisa-Nashim, their national offices provided information through the IFN Roundtable rather than their groups being surveyed. Further information about these national bodies' inter faith work and women is at Annexes [B, C and D]. The Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network indicated that it did not have local groups.

Of the 220 local inter faith initiatives originally contacted, 31 responded. Of those, 8 initiatives responded with information on a relevant women's local inter faith initiative that was currently functioning and an additional 2 respondents gave information on a previous group and on a variety of one-off women's events that had been held. Others indicated that they had no relevant initiative and did not know of any locally. Some respondents to the survey or through other routes wanted to underline that absence of a women's initiative did not mean absence of women playing a role or that women's concerns were not taken seriously. One observed that women played an increasingly visible role in many mixed gender local inter faith organisations.

Modified survey to women's local inter faith initiatives

It became clear at an early stage that because a few questions in the survey were framed in a way that assumed initial completion by a mixed gender inter faith organisation with a women's group, events or branch, some linked women's initiatives found it difficult to respond. A variant was created for women's local inter faith initiatives which cut out two questions related to the link and impact on a broader local inter faith initiative. This can be seen at Annex E. All other questions remained the same.

Two initiatives which had not responded to the first email invitation, subsequently responded to the variant survey.

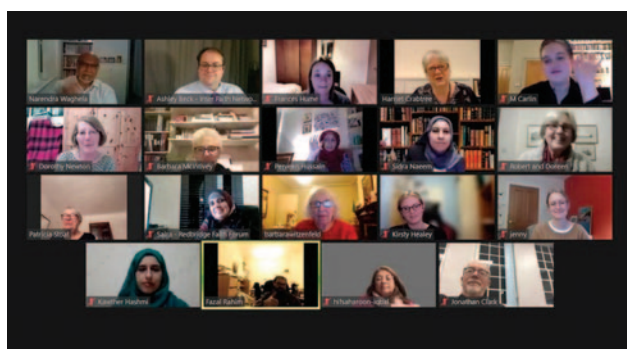
In total 33 initiatives (15%) responded to the survey sent to the 220 local inter faith organisation contacts (15%) on the IFN mailing list, with 15 (45%) providing information about women's local inter faith initiatives.

Subsequent surveying of initiatives identified through desk research

Desk research identified a further 11 initiatives and these were then surveyed.

d) Roundtable discussion

A by-invitation Roundtable was held by the IFN in November in Inter Faith Week 2021. This was specially designed to hear in more depth from some examples of particular kinds of women's local inter faith initiatives. It included participants from a number of mixed gender local inter faith bodies with



The Inter Faith Network for the UK – Inter Faith Week 2021 Roundtable on women's local inter faith initiatives and engagement (2021).

women's initiatives and from freestanding women's initiatives with a strong inter faith dimension. It also included opening presentations from the two UK women's inter faith organisations with local groups (Nisa-Nashim and Women's Interfaith Network) and an input from Inter Faith Scotland and one regional organisation (South East Forum of Faiths). It was facilitated by IFN's Executive Director. IFN's Co-Chairs and one of its Trustees with a particular interest in women's inter faith engagement took part.

Participants included: Shaz Akhtar, Near Neighbours and Women First Smethwick; Maeve Carlin Women's Interfaith Network; Cllr Jasbinder Dehar, Wolverhampton Interfaith Network; Doreen Haigh, Oldham Women Growing Together; Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal Nisa-Nashim; Kawther Hashmi South East England Faiths Forum; Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland; Perveen Hussain, Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group, Revd Babara McIntivey, Hounslow Friends of Faith; Sidra Naeem DL, Women Together (Essex); Dorothy Newton Finsbury Park Sisters Group; Fazal Rahim, Oldham Interfaith Forum; the Revd Jenny Ramsden, Touchstone; Patricia Stoat Nottingham InterFaith Council; Barbara Witzenfeld, Hounslow Friends of Faith Interfaith Knitting Group; Saira Yakub, Redbridge Faiths Forum; and then IFN Co-Chairs, the Rt Revd Jonathan Clark and Narendra Waghela; Executive Director, Harriet Crabtree, Project Officer, Kirsty Healey, and Project Director, Ashley Beck.

Participants shared information about the origins, purposes and activities of their initiatives and what they saw as the benefits and challenges. Some guiding questions were circulated in advance. The note of the Roundtable meeting has been drawn on for this report. Where cited, it is referred to as IFNRt.

e) Interviews

The Project Officer also carried out phone or Zoom interviews with the relevant staff member of Interfaith Scotland; and with a regional coordinator of the Near Neighbours (NN) programme of the Church of England and its National Programme Director. IFN's Executive Director spoke further, the latter in the second phase of the research. Material based on these interviews can be found at Annex D.



Women of Faith in Community, Glasgow at an event held with Interfaith Scotland, celebrating International Women's Day. Here, the women eating langar together at the Central Gurdwara after a talk at Glasgow Unitarian Church.

<https://www.facebook.com/interfaithscotland/posts/pfbid0PjxZYBk7s5RqrtaKNEDRe9TEyw5tuwmg89R5ThKCsnnwP-bLcgRun3u4GPcFUIlCDI>

Interviews had originally been planned with the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum and the Inter Faith Council for Wales. However, they indicated that, while women were very actively involved at the national level, they were not aware of women's local inter faith groups in their nations, other than one linked to Community House in Newport (with which the project was already in touch).

f) Other sources

Where information was not gathered through survey response or interviews, it is from online sources in the public domain or from referenced publications

g) Featured group core information

In the second phase of the project it was decided to add an annex with summaries of core information about each of the women's local inter faith initiatives on the experiences of which this report is based. These summaries, reflecting the position in early 2023, were cleared with them. The wider reflections of the communities given through surveys and other routes are drawn on in the main report.

2. Pattern of women's local inter faith initiatives in the UK

The project looked at a range of local initiatives in the UK which are led by women and principally for women and which have inter faith understanding and cooperation as one of their primary aims or as a strong dimension. It identified a number of kinds of initiatives which have an ongoing existence as organisations (even if of a loose kind) and it looked at their numbers and distribution across the UK.

2.1 Types of local women's initiatives

The initiatives fell broadly into four types in terms of their structure:

- i autonomous inter faith initiatives
- ii sections, wings or ongoing separate programmes of wider mixed gender local inter faith organisations or other types of local organisations
- iii initiatives or groups not multi faith in terms of the organisation or primary purpose but with a strong inter faith dialogue or multi faith social action dimension
- iv branches/groups of national women's inter faith organisations

i) Autonomous initiatives

- Canterbury Women of Faith³
- Coffee 'n' Laughs, Newport
- East Meets West – Women of Faith Together in Lancaster
- Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group
- Finsbury Park Sisters, London
- Sheffield Women's Interfaith Forum
- Tooting Christian-Muslim Women's Group, London *

³ Those marked with an asterisk were operating at the time of the first period of research but, as of March 2023, have either ceased to do so or have significantly metamorphosed.

- Women at the Well – Gloucestershire
- Women First Smethwick
- Women of Faith and Community Glasgow
- Women's Interfaith Understanding Group, Leicester
- Women Together Wolverhampton
- Women Together, Essex

13 initiatives

ii) Sections, wings or ongoing separate programmes of wider mixed gender local inter faith organisations or other types of local organisations

- Building Bridges in Burnley, Share Faith, Share Food
- Calderdale Interfaith, Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group
- Faith Network 4 Manchester, Women of Faith
- Hounslow Friends of Faith, The Interfaith Knitting Group
- Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship, Women Peace-ing Together
- Lincolnshire Council of Faiths, Women of the World *
- North Lanarkshire Muslim Women and Family Alliance sub group, Abrahamic Roots, Coatbridge



WIN, Forest Local Group – women representing the initiative at Waltham Forest Faith Fayre standing behind a table covered with the group's logo.

www.facebook.com/ForestWIN



Women from various local Nisa-Nashim groups coming together to plant trees for a local cause in Barnet, 'The Tiny Forest' (2022).

- Oldham Interfaith Forum, Women Growing Together
 - Reading Interfaith Group, Women's interfaith Coffee Evenings
 - Redbridge Faith Forum, Women's Interfaith Group
 - The Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP), Women's Sports Programme
 - Touchstone Centre, Bradford, Interfaith women's programmes *
 - Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum, Women's Group
 - Woking People of Faith, Ladies' Coffee Morning
- 14 initiatives

iii) Initiatives or groups not multi faith in terms of the organisation or primary purpose but with a strong inter faith dialogue or multi faith social action dimension

- Birmingham Women of Peace (Women's Federation for World Peace)
- Diocese of Newcastle and Hexham, Christian and Muslim Women Pray for Peace
- Ghar se Ghar (Working with Women across Faiths & Cultures)

- Watford Bridge of Peace (Women's Federation for World Peace)

4 initiatives, totalling 8%

iv) Branches/groups of national women's inter faith organisations

- 16 Nisa-Nashim local groups
 - 3 WIN groups
- 19 initiatives

2.2 Number and distribution of women's local inter faith initiatives

Overall, 50 local women's inter faith initiatives were identified, 19 of which were groups of Nisa-Nashim and WIN operating at the time of the first phase of the project. The initiatives are spread across England, Scotland and Wales. None were identified in Northern Ireland. The project did not extend to Ireland, but noted that there are also some initiatives there such as Sisters of Faith for Peace and an inter faith embroidery initiative, 'The Golden Thread'.

Table 1 below shows the pattern by nation and by English region.⁴ The largest concentration is in London, 15 groups (30%), followed by the North West of England, 6 groups (12%).

By the time of the second phase of the project, the work of Canterbury Women of Faith and the Touchstone Centre had been paused; Tooting Christian Muslim Women's Group had become an informal link; and Lincolnshire Women of the World had become 'Cosy Crafters'. The main report reflects their operation at the time of the main research phase.

Following the first phase of the research one further group was identified. This is Women at the Well, a Christian-Muslim Women's group in Gloucestershire. This was not surveyed but the report includes information about it from other sources and it is taken into account in the material about numbers and pattern of distribution of groups.

⁴ Note: The English Regions were East Midlands, East, London, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber.

a) Table 1: Type and location of women's local inter faith initiatives in the UK

Nation/ Region	Number of type i-iii initiatives	Number of type iv initiatives (Nisa-Nashim/ WIN local groups)	Total of types of initiatives i-iv	Percentage of total from types i-iv
England				
East Midlands	2	-	2	4
East of England	3	2	5	10
London	4	11	15	30
North East of England	1	1	2	4
North West of England	5	1	6	12
South East of England	4	1	5	10
South West of England	1	1	2	4
West Midlands	3	1	4	8
Yorkshire and the Humber	4	1	5	10
Total – England	27	19	46	92
Northern Ireland	-	-	-	-
Scotland	3	-	3	6
Wales	1	-	1	2
TOTAL	31	19	50	100

Types of initiatives

i autonomous inter faith initiatives

ii sections, wings or ongoing separate programmes of wider mixed gender local inter faith organisations or other types of local organisations

iii initiatives or groups not multi faith in terms of the organisation or primary purpose but with a strong inter faith dialogue or multi faith social action dimension

iv branches/groups of national women's inter faith organisations

2.3 Part of an even richer tapestry of interaction

The ongoing, structured, initiatives that the project identified are, of course, part of a much wider pattern of ways that women are coming together in local contexts on an inter faith basis. While not the focus of this particular report, some examples of this rich tapestry of interaction are shared below.

a) Shorter term women's inter faith projects

There are many shorter term women's inter faith projects. The project found a number of examples, such as ones: supporting refugee and asylum seeker women and their children; helping women develop skills as photographers; working with women who have experienced social and economic disadvantage; and providing a community café for women and 'Mum and Baby' coffee mornings.

A recent example of such projects is Brent Multi Faith Forum's 'Creative Conversations Project', carried out in 2019 and 2020 in the London Borough of Brent. Its purpose was to "welcome, share and celebrate the diverse voices of the refugee and migrant women of Brent by giving a voice to the voiceless; acknowledging their presence; and, amplifying their participation in society". Migrant women from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds took part in workshops, which were supported by writers, producers, performers and poets.
brent.cityofsanctuary.org/partners-of-sanctuary/bmff

Another example is that of Faiths Together in Croydon, which was approached by Croydon London Borough Council to propose an intervention to contribute to reducing the high domestic violence rate in the borough. In response, a women only event was organised which brought together 50 women from various faith communities.

Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network launched in Autumn 2022 a 'Women, Empowerment, Dialogue and Peace' project. That aims to bring together women from different faiths to empower them to challenge all forms of gender based religious violence and to work together for peace. It includes the presentation of 'The Dignity of Women – Scriptural Reflections' exhibition, which aims to



educate religious and secular communities on the role and status of women and in turn empower women to challenge any misrepresentation and discrimination they face. Through this project, it has been engaging at local level in a number of areas.

The Near Neighbours programme of the Church of England, with funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, has, across the last ten years in England, supported and encouraged a number of ongoing women's local inter faith initiatives and also a wide range of short term projects with an inter faith dimension which involve women.⁵ In an interview with the project researcher,

⁵ Examples of these are given in a number of Near Neighbours publications, for example:

- Near Neighbours blog post marking International Women's Day 2021 which highlights some of the women's initiatives supported by Near Neighbours - <https://www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/women2021>
- Near Neighbours blog post reporting on an event held in collaboration with another women's initiative during Greater Manchester Hate Crime awareness week, "Empowering Women, Sharing Love, Peace and Hope" - <https://www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/iwd-manchester>
- Near Neighbours Summary Final Evaluation (brap) which highlights Women First Smethwick, Near Neighbours' Women in Leadership courses and the impact of their Small Grants programme on women's initiatives - https://cuf.org.uk/uploads/resources/NN-brap-Executive-Summary_Final.pdf



Near Neighbours – Visit of the then Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to local projects in Bradford (2020). NN West Yorks Coordinator to right. Touchstone Centre’s ‘Weaving Women’s Wisdom’ exhibition was also on display

www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/bradfordroyals

its Director of Partnerships, Elizabeth Carnelley, talked about how in some areas women had sought out support from NN; in others it had worked with existing initiatives to mentor and help grow them; and in yet others, it had listened to expressions of local need and help projects come into being through grants and mentoring.

b) One-off or periodic events

The research also identified many one-off or periodic local women’s inter faith events and activities as well as individual events focusing on women (sometimes open to men and women). For example, a number of local inter faith bodies, such as West Wiltshire Multi Faith Forum, hold events for International Women’s Day.

From time to time, women at places of worship of different faiths hold inter faith events, such as inter faith events of some local branches of Lajna Ima’illah, the ‘Women’s Auxiliary Organisation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’. Faith communities also sometimes host local events with a focus on women and faith, such as a Catholic Diocese of Clifton Inter Faith Week event on Women and Faith.

c) Inter faith dimensions to the work of other types of women’s organisations

There were also many other instances of local women’s activities that self-define through other kinds of inclusivity, but sometimes pick up faith issues. For example, the Cornwall Inspiring Women Network a ‘women-led, diverse community organisation’ encouraged involvement in Inter Faith week, saying “Happy #InterFaithweek! While we tend not focus on religion here at IWN, we are all about inclusivity and love to celebrate the coming together of different cultures.”

business.facebook.com/inspiringwomennetwork/posts/4528816033862581

There are also bodies, such as the Bristol Women’s Refugee Network, which self-define as ‘multi-ethnic’ and ‘multi-faith’ but which, while not making reference to inter faith engagement a focus of their work, do – through the side-by-side engagement of participants – clearly have a strong dimension of inter faith learning and relationship building as a result of women of different faith backgrounds working together.

www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=490476839934619&set=a.403533778628926



Another example is Truby's Garden Tea Room in Milton Keynes. This is an 'interfaith community cafe run by Muslim women building positive relations'. It has been running since 2014. Its founder said, in a BBC interview in 2023, that the ethos of the cafe is to "bring all our communities and our Muslim community together so we can learn, trust each other and work together... our motto is that there's more that connect us than divides us."

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-64599510

d) Schools, colleges and universities

There are also increasing opportunities within education for young women and girls to come together which have inter faith outcomes either as a primary purpose or a secondary outcome. For example the schools linking programmes of the Schools Linking Network and bodies such as the Faith and Belief Forum offer many opportunities. So, too, have other programmes such as a girls coding programme of Faith Forum for London and activities in schools such as Eden Girls Schools and King's Norton Girls School and Sixth Form in Birmingham. A women's inter faith group at London School of Economics' is an example of such engagement on campus.

e) Inter Faith Week

National Inter Faith Week, which takes place each November, usually sees a number of inter faith activities focusing on women and girls.



Sixth form and Year 11 girls from Islamia Girls' School and Hasmonean High School at Arsenal in the Community learning event in Inter Faith Week 2019.

Photo: IFN

3. The ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of women’s local inter faith initiatives

This chapter explores a number of dimensions of how local women’s inter faith women’s initiatives function: reasons for which they were established; purposes and aspirations of their members; how long they have been going; the pattern of faith and belief backgrounds of women regularly involved and the age ranges; the ways they work; their sources of funding and ‘in kind’ support; and where, when and how often they meet.

Data drawn on in this section is, except where specified, from the 26 survey respondents.

3.1 Establishment, purpose and aspirations

A wide range of reasons were given for why initiatives had been established: from friendship between different groups of women in a particular area, to establishing a safe and private space for women to talk or to participate in an activity such as sport and

physical exercise. The purposes of initiatives reflected the reasons for establishment but were often explained within a wider framework of purposes such as dialogue or increased community cohesion.

The project also asked a separate question about the aspirations and long-term goals of the initiatives and this gave respondents a chance to share some of their long term vision.

a) Establishment

From responses to the question “How/why did this women’s initiative begin?” a general trend of desire for friendship and to offer service to others emerged from the survey – as it did from contributions to the Roundtable.



Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith – meeting in a local park for a walk and a coffee (2021).

twitter.com/samraKazam/status/1425755521097912328/photo/2

For quite a number of respondents, a desire or need for a 'women only' space was an important part of why they had begun as a women's initiative.

For example, Woking People of Faith Ladies' Coffee Morning, commented that the initiative had been started "... purely for women so that they had an event where they could chat amongst themselves and meet ladies of different faiths in a safe, non-judgemental space".

twitter.com/KateGreenSU/status/1143830158056574976



Women of Faith, FN4M – members visiting the Houses of Parliament (2019)

The respondent from Faith Network 4 Manchester's Women of Faith programme said: "A need was identified for women to have a space, as part of the faith network, to come together and express their views in confidence."

Women of Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group initiative, which is part of a broader mixed gender local inter faith organisation, commented that:

"...[T]here [were] a core group of women from various faiths who want[ed] to meet more often and separately from Calderdale Interfaith main group."

Another initiative, which is also part of a broader local inter faith body, explained that it had begun at a time when that body – Redbridge Faith Forum – had received funding for a women's initiative:

"The group was started after a need was assessed over the course of 2007–2009 following feedback from four well attended public forums on the following topics: Child Protection & Faith Communities (Feb 2007) Women and Faith (March 2008) The Role of Women in influencing and shaping society (March 2009) and Faith and Parenting (July 2009). The feedback from participants was that they enjoyed the opportunity to learn and also exchange dialogue and had requested

more forums on women's role in society. They had expressed a desire for more opportunities for dialogue between women of different faith backgrounds as there were few opportunities available in locality for women of different faiths and cultural backgrounds to meet together for dialogue and friendship. Furthermore, the initiative changed insofar as, at the suggestion of the participants, refreshments served during the meetings became multi-cultural and run in a pot luck style."

The respondent added that participants in the women's initiative were, as a result of taking part in the Women's Interfaith Group Workshop Programme, generally more active in the wider Redbridge Faith Forum LIFO.

Another initiative had its origins in the celebration of the anniversary of the local inter faith organisation to which it is linked, Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship.



Leeds Concord Women Peace-ing Together with anniversary banner.

"A group of women wanted to do something creative to celebrate Concord's 40th anniversary. A creative textile group was formed and secured some funding for an anniversary project." – Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship, Women Peace-ing Together

FODIP's Women's Sports Programme grew out of a dialogue initiative from the idea of a participant. Due to faith and cultural traditional views on modesty, the attending women wanted to meet in a private and safe woman only space. The women engage with a range of different types of sporting activities and

the chance for encounter is created. Its respondent also commented later in her reply on the importance of the women-only group in fostering friendship between women who lived in the same geographical area but whose lives were otherwise very segregated.

Coffee 'n' Laughs is a free-standing initiative based at Community House in Newport. Local women in the community were offering English language assistance to other women of *"all ethnicities, migrants and refugees"*. Out of that, it developed into an inter faith initiative *"formed and based with equality firmly rooted, so friendships were forged between all."*

This trend of a groups being established to strengthen friendship and links between women of the community is also seen in the Finsbury Park Sisters' group. This was established after women from a mosque and a church on the same road in London felt the need to get to know one another. Likewise, Building Bridges Burnley, Share Faith, Share Food initiative stated the reason behind their establishment was *"to bring women together"*.

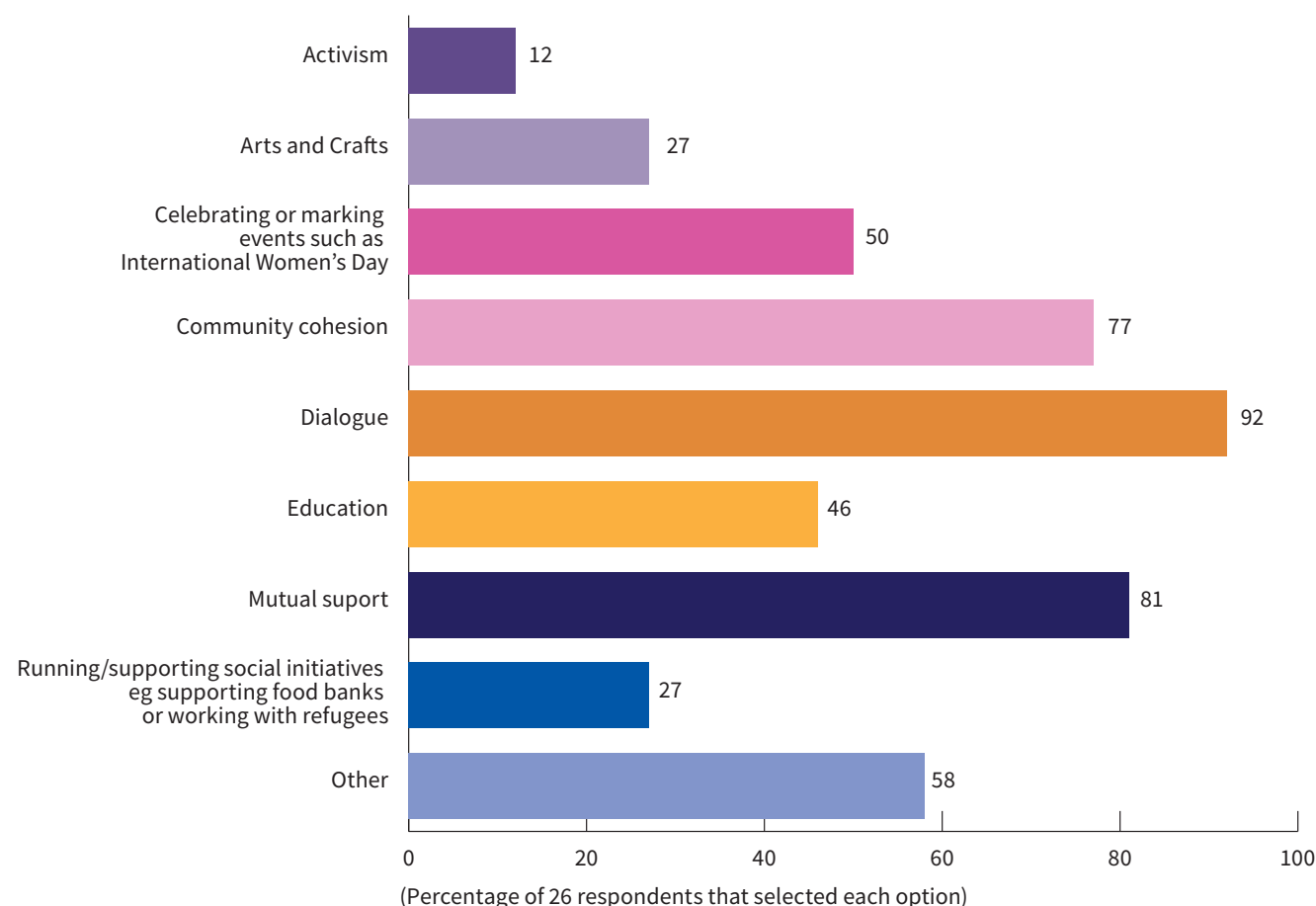
The Women's Interfaith Understanding Group in Leicester was originally formed as a local group to share friendship, ideas and resources. It was initiated by two friends, women of the Christian and Muslim faiths, as part of the work of Christian Aware's inter faith programme, Faith Awareness. The group developed into a multi faith initiative with women from six or more different faith groups attending.

b) Purposes

The purposes of the initiatives were also explored. Common purposes were to:

- foster friendship
- encourage dialogue
- increase community cohesion
- provide mutual support for women
- share food
- promote physical and mental health and improve wellbeing

Purpose of initiative (multiple answers possible)



- reduce isolation
- fundraising

The purposes of the initiatives usually align with the reasons for establishment. For example, FODIP's Women's Sports Programme was established as place for women of different faiths to allow them to engage in "fun activities" in a "safe space ... to partake in different sports together".

Although not a frequently stated purpose of the initiatives, arts and crafts such as embroidery, knitting, quilting, quilling, painting and creative writing featured heavily in the activities of initiatives.

A trustee of IFN, who is also a member of Nottingham Inter Faith Council, said at the Roundtable that she had been "been struck by the role that crafts and cooking could play in forming friendship and webs of mutuality between women of different faiths".

"To promote friendship and understanding between the various communities in Watford, starting with a sisterhood relationship between Christian and Muslim women and extending to all communities. The Bridge of Peace also seeks to empower women as ambassadors for peace in the family and community." – Watford Bridge of Peace

"Support of women with a focus on leading healthy lifestyles." – Ghar se Ghar, Working with women across Faiths and Cultures.

"Empowering women so they are confident." – Women Together, Essex

"Women of different faiths and cultures meeting for creative activity and friendship, promoting peace through conversation. Breaking down barriers. Working together for the benefit of different communities." – Women Peace-ing Together, Leeds Concord

c) Aspirations

When asked "What do you see as the aspirations / long term goals of the initiative?", many respondents talked about building strong local, inter personal relationships by breaking barriers.

"To grow in fellowship, recognising that our commonality far outweighs our differences."
– Canterbury Women of Faith

"Women speaking out in their communities."
– Building Bridges in Burnley, Share Faith Share Food

"To continue to bring women of all faiths, etc, together. To overcome fear and prejudice, building friendship and trust. To build on our common aspiration for peace. To continue to find practical ways to express our common desire for peace, through fundraising and supporting various causes each time we meet. To empower and encourage women to become leaders and decision makers, and to make our collective voice heard. To engage more young women in this process."
– Birmingham Women's Peace Group

"Identifying and fulfilling local community needs."
– Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group

"To continue to learn from one another and meet new people. Increase the number of younger women involved in the meeting. Create contacts with other faiths if possible." – Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace

"...[Through our project] to break down barriers between people of different cultures and language and faith communities, build friendship and promote community cohesion." – East Meets West – Women together in Lancaster

"That we know each other better" – Finsbury Park Sisters

"Better understanding of one another... To allow friendships to be fostered with people they may not otherwise meet or speak to." – FODIP Women's Sports Programme

"...[T]o continue to bring women together of different faiths and cultures to share their beliefs and discuss topics of interest including current affairs such as climate change and the need to care for our world."
– Redbridge Faith Forum, Women's Interfaith Group

"Maintain a network of friends and remain a contact group." – Tooting Christian-Muslim Women's Group

“Supporting women of all faiths and none, sharing our stories and encouraging the next generations.”

– Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum Women’s Group

“To keep going, to resource, to be a permanent place of learning and mutual support.” – Women’s Interfaith Forum Sheffield

“To get to know one another and discuss common issues and listen and learn about one another’s faith.”
– Women’s Interfaith Coffee Evening, Reading Interfaith

“To keep going. To secure funding to enable the initiative to continue. To enable women’s voices to be heard. To continue to actively participate in the wider faith network.” – Women of Faith, FN4M

“... [That] more and more women will benefit from this group, we will be able to meet physically, face to face and for long term friendships to be formed. A group that when you newly arrive to the area you can come along, feel safe, welcomed and supported.” – Women of the World, Lincolnshire Faith Council

The survey responses highlighted a range of reasons for the establishment of initiatives and the aspirations of the women’s local inter faith initiatives. A strong relational aspect was universally present. The importance of the relational work of the women’s local inter faith initiatives also came through the discussion at Roundtable. An IFN Trustee and local inter faith group member said in her closing reflections that the “huge importance of friendship [had] stood out: [women] encouraging and supporting each other and working across boundaries”.

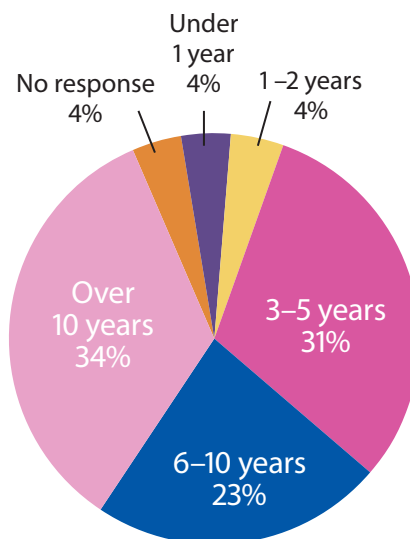


Women Together Wolverhampton – A local MP joined the women of the initiative, who had met for discussion and craft. They braided friendship bracelets together (2019).

3.2 Length of time initiatives have been operating

The initiatives surveyed ranged from newly formed groups to long established ones: 4% operating for under a year; 4% for 1 – 2 years; 31% for 3 – 5 years; 23% for 6 – 10 years; and 35% having run for over 10 years.

Length of time initiative has been meeting

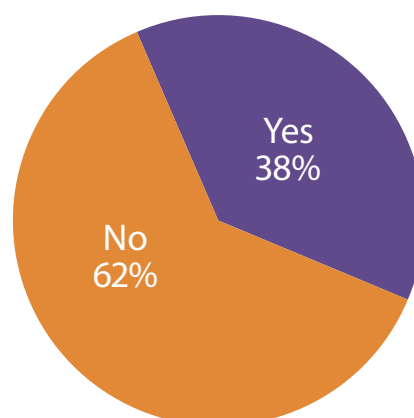


3.3 Faith and belief groups regularly involved in the initiative

19 (73%) of initiatives which responded to the survey had women from three or more different faith and belief groups involved. Faith traditions and denominations referred to were: Baha’i, Brahma Kumari, Buddhist, Christian (Catholics and Quakers were referenced in one example), Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim (Sunni and Shi’a were separately referenced), Pagan, Sikh, and Zoroastrian.

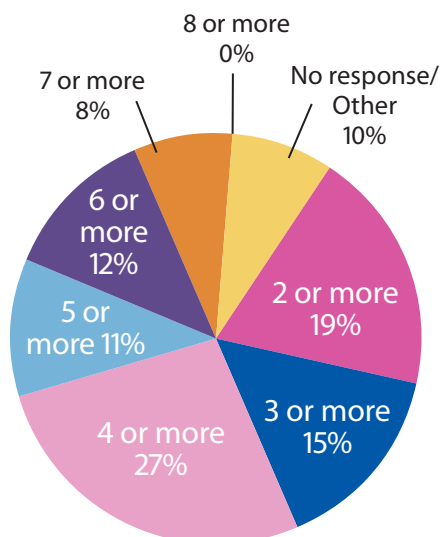
10 (38%) of the Type 1–3 initiatives surveyed identified themselves as having a special focus on

Does the group have a special focus on engagement between women of specific faith traditions (for example Muslim – Jewish, Hindu – Christian etc)?



engagement between women of specific faith traditions. Of those, 4 (15%) were bilateral, focusing on engagement between two faiths – in all cases Christian and Muslim.

Number of different faith and belief groups regularly involved in the initiative.



One initiative noted that it had begun with a bilateral focus and then widened:

Watford Bridge of Peace began with a focus on Christian-Muslim relations but as the group grew and changed, it “opened ... up to women of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds”.

FODIP’s Women’s Sports Programme focuses on engagement between Christian, Muslim and Jewish women but describes itself as open to women of all backgrounds.

Women Together Wolverhampton began with a relationship between a Mother’s Union group and a local mosque. This group has now expanded with four faith groups taking part.

Of the Type 1–3 initiatives on which information was sought through routes other than the survey, the three WIN local groups, Touchstone Centre and two of the Scottish initiatives are open to women of all faiths and none. Nisa-Nashim groups and one Scottish group are bi-lateral. The Nisa-Nashim groups bring together Jewish and Muslim women and the Scottish Group brings together Christian and Muslim women.

If one takes all types of initiative (Types 1–4) into account, bilateral groups rise to a total of 43% of the overall women’s local inter faith initiatives. This is a startling contrast to the position reflected in the Mubak-Iqbal report where only one of the comparable local women’s initiatives (of which there were 24 at that time) was bilateral or trilateral.

The survey question did not ask about the nature and pattern of involvement but this was a point which some addressed:

“The local community consists of Muslims, Baha’i, Buddhist, Quakers and Christians. We have had guest women speakers from Hindu, Sikh and Jewish faiths at our events.” – Calderdale Women’s Interfaith Group

“The attendees are not necessarily official representatives, but, rather, offer personal reflections from their faiths.” – Women’s Interfaith Understanding Group

7 respondents to the survey stated their initiatives were open to women of all faiths and none but that



Watford Bridge of Peace – the ‘Peace Arch’ which, since 2003, had been used for ‘sisterhood ceremonies’ between women of different faiths.

www.watfordbridgeofpeace.org/bop15

there was sometimes a majority of one or two faith groups participating.

“We welcome women of all faiths... The group is predominantly Christian, but with regular Muslim attendees, and a Hindu attendee” – Canterbury Women of Faith

3.4 Ages

All of the initiatives surveyed were open to women of all ages. The age groups from which women were most regularly reported as attending initiatives were 41 to 60, followed by 61 – 75 and then 31 – 40. One initiative responded that women ages 14 to 18 also took part.

“Our oldest peace activist is a 100-year-old Jewish lady! Although some women bring their daughters with them, we would like more young women to take part. For the last 2 years, we have organised a Young Women’s Speech Contest locally, as part of a national WFWP [Women’s Federation for World Peace] initiative, to involve and

empower more young women in the 18 to 30 age range. In 2021, the first 3 national winners in London were from Birmingham!” – Birmingham Women’s Peace Group

Four respondents mentioned children and grandchildren of the women coming with them to meetings or outings.

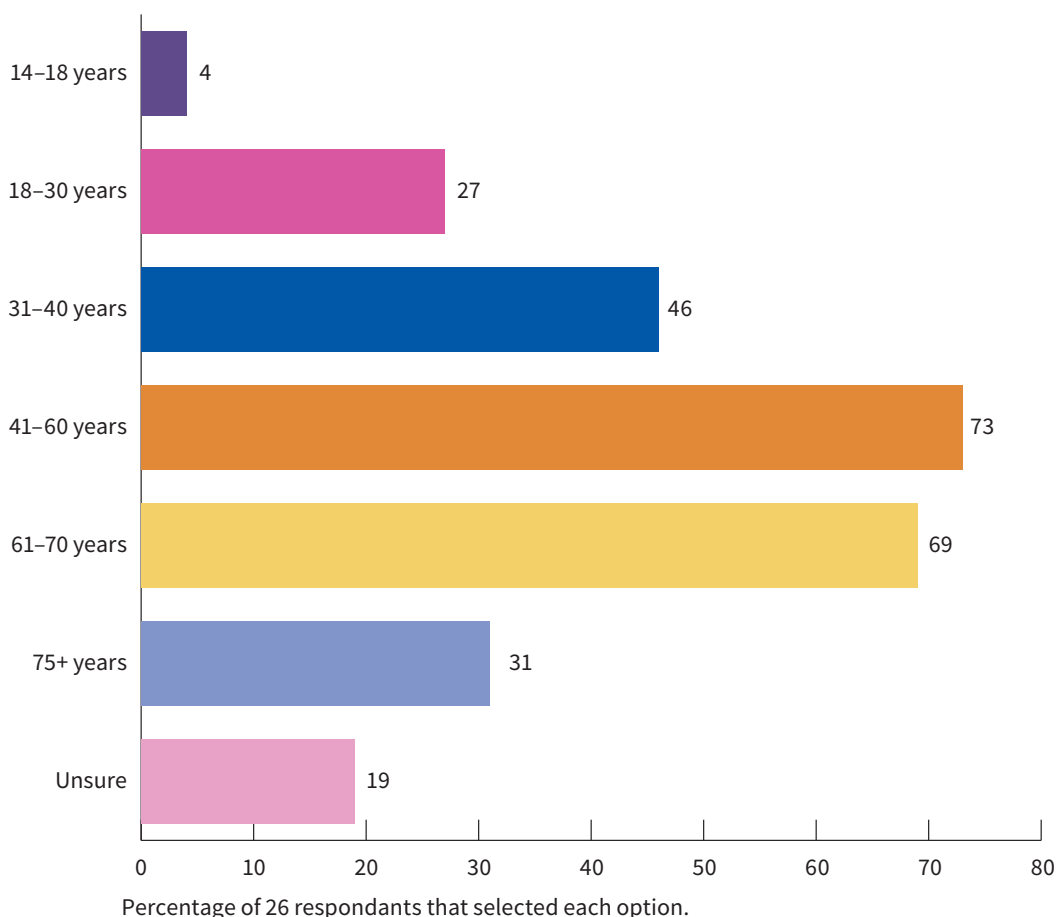
“Grandchildren [of the women] often attend. One girl has been coming since age 6 and she still comes and enjoys the meeting.” – Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace

“We get children attending with their mums too.” – Women Together, Essex

“If the atmosphere is right women will come and their children will feel at home.” – East Meets West – Women Together Lancaster

Finsbury Park Sisters shared at the Roundtable that they have held picnics at a local park, outside of school time, so attendees’ children can join them.

Approximate age ranges of attenders regularly present in the initiative meetings (multiple answers possible)





Women Growing Together, Women of Faith discussion.

East Meets West – Women Together Lancaster had set up an ‘Across the Generations Project’ which provides a space for refugee and asylum seeking women to practise their language skills whilst combatting loneliness in elderly people. It has a particular focus on interactions between these different age groups.

“The women ... vary in age with asylum seekers and refugees being anything from 18 to 60 and most but not all of the UK volunteers being retired.” – East Meets West – Women Together Lancaster

Four initiatives – Birmingham Women’s Peace Group, Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace, Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum Women’s Group and Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith – made particular reference to a wish to involve younger women and help the next generation of women in their aims and aspirations.

3.5 Numbers participating

25% (6) of surveyed initiatives said their meetings were regularly attended by up to 30 women, 21% (5) noted ‘unknown’ and 17% (4) said meetings regularly have 10 or fewer.

Number of regular attenders of initiative meetings



East Meets West – Women together in Lancaster – women and their children from the ‘Across the Generations’ project (2021).

The annual Christian Muslim Prayer for Peace meeting in Jesmond, Newcastle, has a regular group of approximately 30 women but often has 70+ women attending. The survey response stated the initiative is “thrilled how it has grown”.

Special events held by women’s local inter faith initiatives often see much higher numbers attending



than for their regular meetings. For example Ghar se Ghar in Luton noted that one past International Woman's Day celebration attracted very good participation. Birmingham Women's Peace Group reported more than 100 women attending some meetings.

"Pre-Covid, we would usually be from 100 to 120 women meeting in my home each time. Since Covid, we have tried to meet regularly online in Zoom meetings, usually from 60 to 100 women attending. However, Zoom meetings cannot replace being together in person, face to face and heart to heart." – Birmingham Women's Peace Group

Nearly a quarter of respondents noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had had an impact on numbers attending. A respondent from Newport's Coffee 'n' Laughs, for example, commented that there were more than 50 women in the group but that Covid had seen regular attendance at just around 12–5 each week.

FODIP commented that their women's sports initiative regularly had had over 80 women in attendance pre-pandemic, but that the return to meeting had been slow after the pandemic and that people had lost confidence.

There were other comments on the impact of the pandemic. A Ghar se Ghar respondent commented: "Zoom was tried with some but was not well attended" and that the women had therefore kept in contact with one another via telephone calls and WhatsApp. FN4M's Women of Faith initiative's respondent commented that despite innovating through supporting women online and the ability to maintain communication via social media, a drawback to moving online had been that the meeting space had lost some of the confidential feeling of face to face meetings which was important.

"Zoom meetings cannot replace being together in person, face to face and heart to heart. We have met 3 or 4 times in the last 6 months, and each time it was such a good experience to be together again." – Birmingham Women's Peace Group

At a meeting of Woking People of Faith's Ladies Coffee Morning, women were invited to spend two minutes sharing what they had been doing during

the Covid-19 lockdown. The group saw a desire for meetings to be increased during the lockdown, however moving forwards, the group decided it would meet at an annual face-to-face event. However, early 2023 saw them back enjoying each other's company in person:

"6 ladies joined our first face-to-face ladies' coffee morning since the pandemic! Our group was made up of 2 Baha'is, 1 Jew, 6 Christians and 7 Muslims and it was nice to have a real mix of faiths. We made sure that we sat next to someone that we didn't know, so that we got to know someone new. We chatted about various subjects as there was no set agenda. The Garden Cafe at Woking Hospice made us feel really welcome. We each enjoyed a hot drink of our choice as well as a slice of almond or a vegan black forest cake which we all agreed was delicious. We look forward to the next one." – <https://www.facebook.com/wokingpeopleoffaith/posts/pfbid02nFnGXXKemb7kWtjR5LaGjqhTnR1xXvL4qS4kHGg6usGxkvPXrBG4DC5tn5CtA3gTl>

3.6 Ways of working and structures

The survey did not ask for detail about the organisational structures of the initiatives. However, based on information provided through responses to other questions, a number of points emerge. Initiatives that are part of a broader LIFO, seemed to have more formal structuring, mentioning role titles such as: 'Minutes secretary' (part of a broader LIFO), 'Trustee' (part of broader LIFO) and referring to a project worker or workers (who were part of the broader LIFO). The organisers of one initiative, Women of Faith, part of broader LIFO Faith Network 4 Manchester, attend the broader LIFO's Trustee meetings and are involved in the wider management team of the network.

The roles of those involved in freestanding women's inter faith initiatives tended to be described in more general and informal terms. For example, the respondent who described their role as someone who 'helps with arranging the activities' and another who said "I support the Women Growing Together..."

A number of respondents commented that their initiatives were informal in structure and style. Only one mentioned having membership fees (which are sometimes an indicator of more formal structures).



Women of Woking People of Faith Ladies' Coffee morning at the first in-person meeting after the Covid-19 pandemic (2023)

The respondent from the Tooting Christian-Muslim Women's Group commented that the informality of their initiative had allowed it to continue to function but to adapt and change over time. Due to changing life circumstances of those involved, it had gone from meeting in a structured way to meeting informally as a social network of valued friendships that had grown organically between the women who had attended its meetings.

that they do not currently but did so in the past five years, and 6 (23%) do not.

Absence of funding was highlighted as a challenge by a number of initiatives, affecting their growth or even survival. FODIP's Women's Sports Programme commented on the difficulty of sourcing and gaining funding and noted that "funding to continue is always an issue".

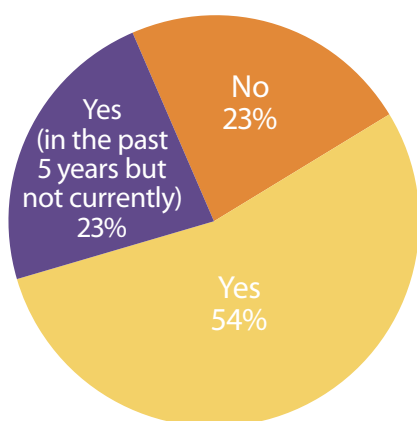
"In the long-term initiatives like this need sustaining by funding a full or part time post, this will enable the involvement of younger women." – Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith

Three main streams of funding/support were identified by women's initiatives: 35% received support through 'service in kind, eg administrative support or place of meeting'; 35% received project funding, such as from Near Neighbours or 'This Girl Can'; and, 27% received 'Other' types of funding or support.

3.7 Resourcing of local initiatives

14 (54%) of women's inter faith initiatives responded that they receive funding or 'in kind' support, 6 (23%)

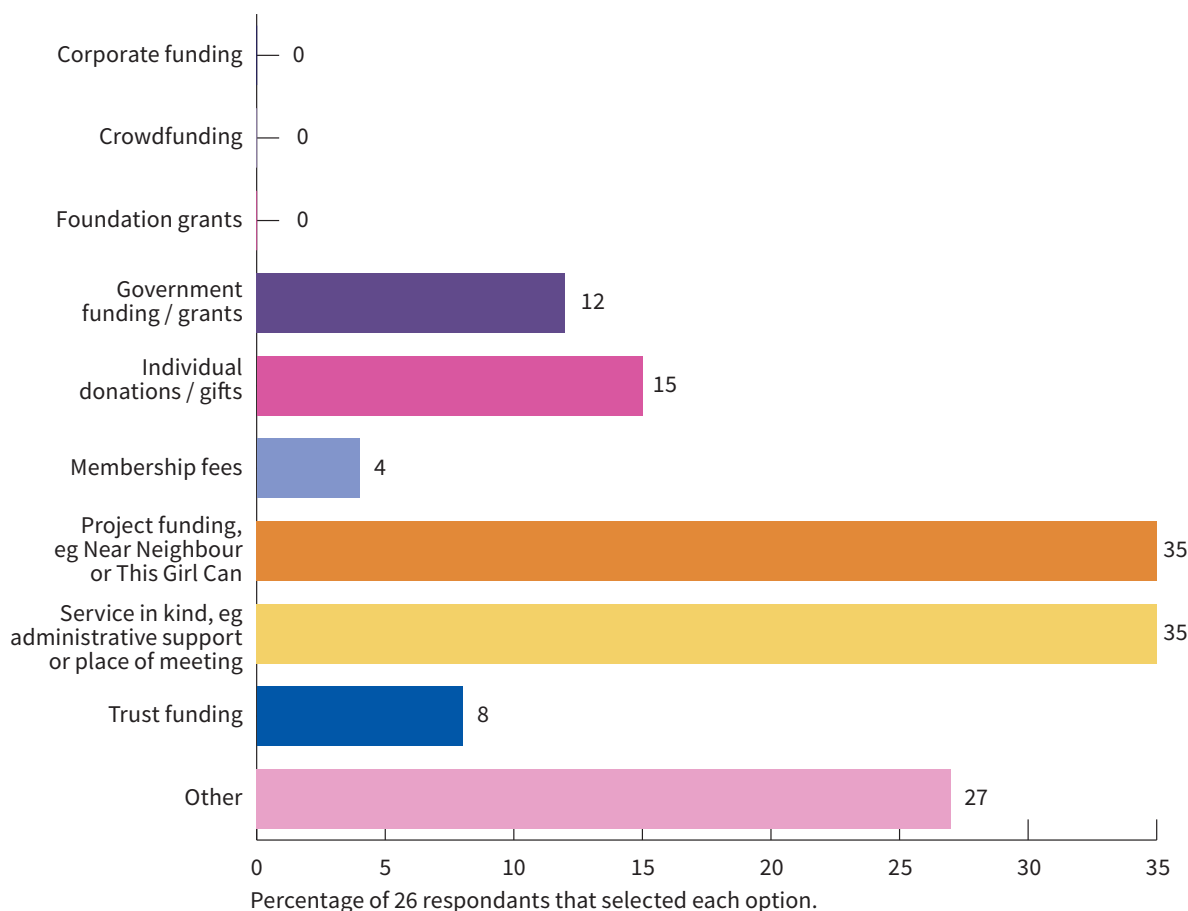
Does the women's inter faith initiative receive any funding or 'in kind' support?



a) 'In kind' support

'In kind' support was noted by a number of respondents. This took the form, for example, of administrative support or free or reduced cost use of places of meeting, such as community centres or places of worship and associated buildings.

Types of funding or 'in kind support' received by initiative at present or in the past 5 years (multiple answers possible)



Contributors to the Roundtable mentioned local places of worship and a local theatre as having provided rooms for meetings free of charge. There were also references to initiatives making use of venues such as a museum's public lunch hall facilities and outdoor spaces such as parks. The women of the initiatives often provide the refreshments themselves, bringing them from home to share.

Women of the World – Lincolnshire Council of Faiths was also, as the name suggests, linked to a wider, non-faith-based initiative (Women of the World Foundation) which provided funding that enabled a Zoom subscription. Meeting via Zoom had been the sole way of connecting throughout the pandemic for this group. This initiative wished to gain funding to hire a space to meet in person, having met solely online since its inception. However, in the course of the period of the research it metamorphosed into Cosy Crafters (see Annex C).

b) Project funding

Project funding was the second most frequently referred to source of funding. The Roundtable discussion highlighted the importance of the funding of Near Neighbours in supporting a number of women's initiatives in England. Four initiatives either currently received, or had received, funding from



Redbridge Faith Forum Women's Interfaith Group meeting to discuss a range of topics such as 'loving your neighbour' and to share tea and cake together.

Credit: Ellie Hoskins/Ilford Recorder

tinyurl.com/yc2rejsc

Near Neighbours. Near Neighbors as an organisation and its impact and focus on women's initiatives is explored further at Annex D.

The Near Neighbours programme had given Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith the opportunity to apply for some funding and through that funding it had been able to appoint a young woman who was then working as an administrator supporting the initiative.

Other named sources of funding for initiatives included the Christian Muslim Forum, National Lottery Awards for All and 'This Girl Can'. One initiative mentioned the city museum having given support for a Peace Project.

c) 'Other'

Of those initiatives that included further comment after selecting 'other' sources of funding, 5 identified the local county council as provided funding, especially for project-based initiatives. This had included funding from the Health Authority and council Community Wellbeing for some initiatives.

A central government grant scheme (Faith in Action) had, some years ago, supported a Redbridge Faith Forum's Women's Programming to establish a group back in 2008 which had grown into a regular program of women's only events and workshops.

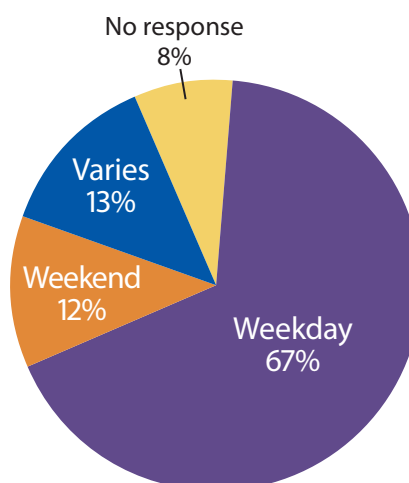
Council funding received by another broader LIFO, Calderdale Interfaith, was made available by that to support its women's initiative in Calderdale.

"[The] local Council has given some funding to Calderdale Interfaith and we [women's initiative] have full access to those funds"

For the Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace initiative, funding had come from the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle which had covers the costs of venue hire and purchasing refreshments.

In Scotland, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group wanted to support members and others in the local community and received funding from the Scottish Government's Covid-19 relief fund via Interfaith Scotland. The funding enabled the group to provide a variety of

Usual days of initiative meetings.



services such as: basic food provisions; fresh fruit for the elderly; check in telephone calls; help and assistance with hospital appointments; picking up prescriptions and delivering medications; and, providing top-ups on mobile phones. The group also provided 100 masks to Edinburgh Sick Children's Hospital for visitors, parents and administration staff.⁶ This is an example of a local women's inter faith initiative seeking funding to respond to local needs.

3.8 Patterns and places of meeting

The frequency of meetings and venues where initiatives meet were explored, including how they met during the periods of the Covid-19 pandemic when in person meetings were either not possible or limited.

17 (67%) of initiatives hold their meeting on weekdays, 3 (12%) hold meetings on weekends, 3 (12%) vary the days of meetings. The remaining initiatives offered no response.



Women's Sports Programme, FODIP – Two women practising boxing

www.fodip.org.uk/womens-sports-programme

Accompanying explanatory comments demonstrated that days and times had been chosen to fit around attendee's family lives, work commitments and travel arrangements.

FODIP noted that the times of its meeting were chosen for "[t]he time these women are available – many of these women are from traditional families and often live in extended families and care for their parents and children."

Patterns of meeting times varied between each initiative and were arranged to suit the requirements of the women attending. This included scheduling meeting times at lunch time to enable mothers (allowing for school pick up and drop off times), avoiding prayer times and to allow working women to join the meetings.

Two initiatives added comments to the effect that that altering meeting time might help to diversify the age ranges present at meetings.

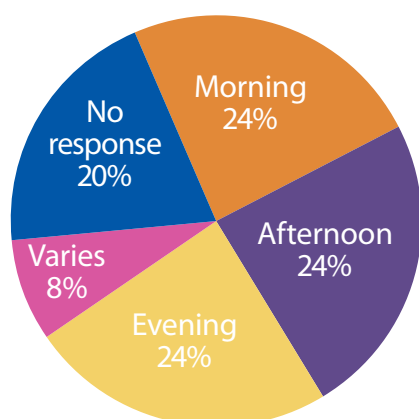
Women Growing Together, Oldham, commented that meetings times could "*change to a more convenient [time] to bring in younger women from the Muslim/Hindu faiths who are much younger who may be working during the day.*"

Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group said that "*more evening and week end events may attract a wider age range.*"

The timing of meetings varied across the initiatives with 24% (6) apiece holding morning, afternoon and evening meetings and 2 (8%) varying their meeting times.

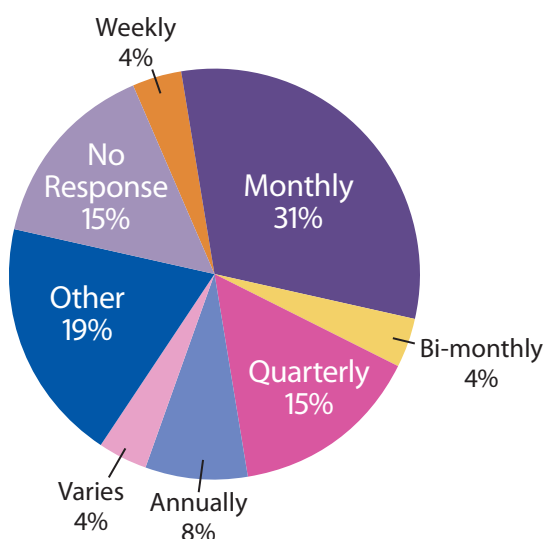
The initiatives meeting over lunch time shared a lunch meal as part of the meetings.

Usual time of day that initiative meets



The frequency of meetings varied widely, with monthly meetings being the most common at 31%; 4% meeting weekly; 4% meeting bi-monthly; 15% meeting quarterly; and 8% meeting annually. 4% noted that they vary their meeting frequency. 15% offered no response. The remaining 19% selected 'other' and accompanying comments highlighted the ways the Covid-19 pandemic had altered their frequency of meetings. For example, one initiative increased their meetings to twice a week and others chose to meet every two months rather than every six weeks.

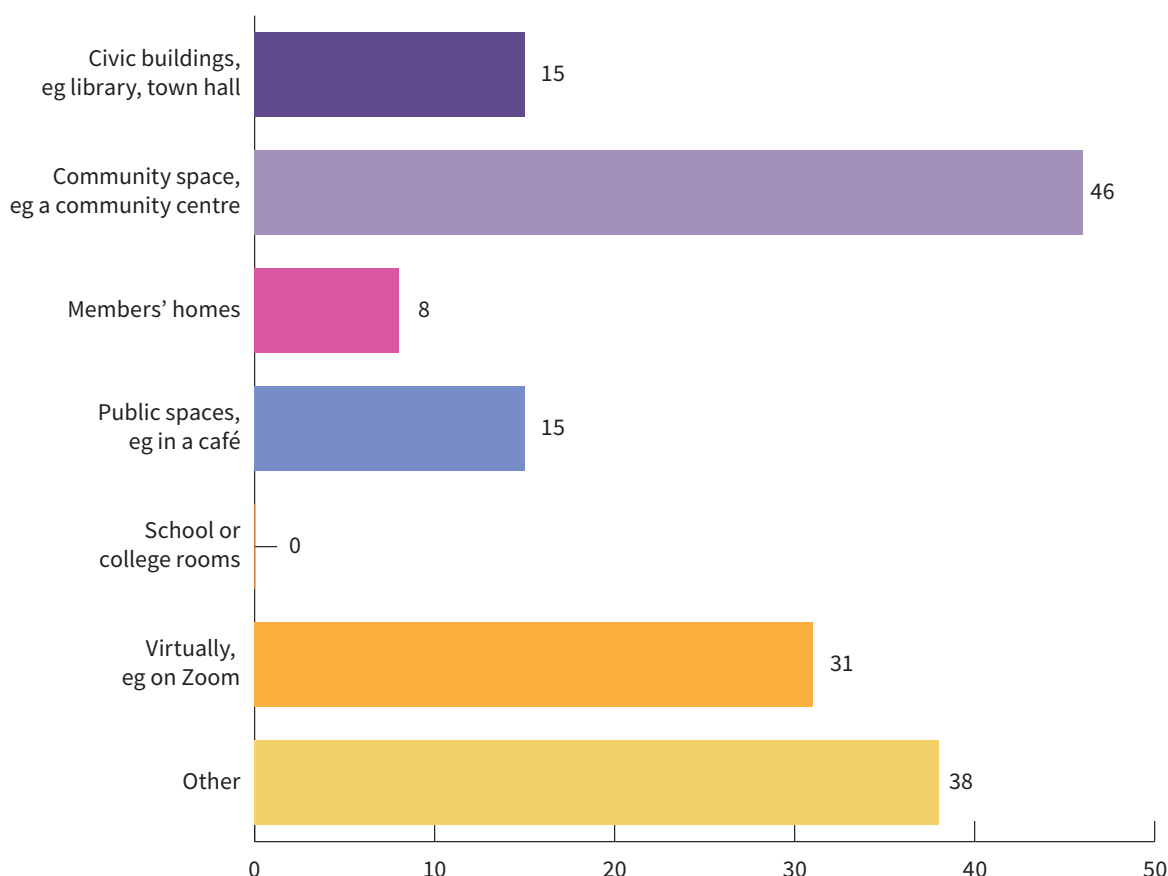
Frequency of meetings



The restrictions that came about during the Covid-19 pandemic had meant that women's local initiatives responding to the original survey had had to find alternative ways to maintain connection. Online meeting platforms (such as Zoom) were mentioned by 30% of women's local initiatives as being used extensively.

Some initiatives have chosen to maintain communication informally – for example through WhatsApp or telephone calls – rather than through regular meetings. A number commented that their group prefers 'face to face' meeting to online meeting platforms.

Usual meeting place for initiative (multiple answers possible)



a) Places

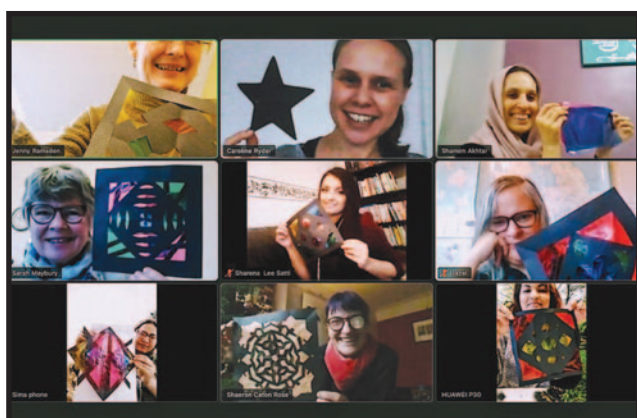
The venues for holding women's initiative meetings vary, with the most popular meeting venue being 'Community spaces eg a community center' at 46%. This may be due to the types of 'in kind' support that initiatives receive and the types of venues that provide rooms free of charge. Two respondents noted meetings had been held in a member's homes to the pandemic.

38% responded 'other' and mentioned faith venues or halls/fellowship rooms attached to faith venues as their places of meeting. Redbridge Forum of Faiths Women's Interfaith Group noted at the Roundtable that meeting in faith venues also enabled the women to be welcomed into, and to experience, different venues belonging to other faiths.

Coffee mornings, women's conferences and dialogues were held via Zoom by a number of women's local initiatives and at least one initiative has continued with a hybrid of online and in-person meetings.

"We moved to zoom during the pandemic and now try to have hybrid meetings when we can" – Women's Group, Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum

The impact of the move online varied, with some initiatives sharing during the Roundtable that this had allowed them to continue their regular meetings or even to extend them – for example Women Together, Essex had welcomed a woman from Wales to their meeting. Some also mentioned seeing a growth in the number of attendees and being able to create/hold bigger events.



Touchstone Centre – women from the 'Art of Friendship' initiative joined together online to discuss "What has made us wonder over the past year?" and used the discussion as a prompt to create stained glass panels.



Coffee 'n' Laughs – Lantern making arts and craft activity (2019).

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0bwyHjxoqCUhoGZHWxg94nqU4b6ovqPdcgMPTV-MgpGSBr6uZD7Rhkc8H7R5c85wel&id=126233567826073

Some had chosen not to use virtual meeting platforms. For example, Women of Faith and Community (WFC) in Glasgow had decided to maintain communication via a WhatsApp group rather than continue meetings online. The group members had noted that not all members had access to social media and technology and they did not want to create an exclusionary feeling. The WhatsApp group was also accompanied by regular phone calls with those who might have otherwise felt isolated. Despite initial concerns, the group found the messages flowing on WhatsApp from one another a source of comfort and support in times of sorrow and in times of joy (such as with the birth of a baby). Prayer requests, songs and jokes were shared.

"We have to agree that WhatsApp has kept our group together" – Women of Faith and Community, Glasgow⁵

⁵ Further information from Interfaith Scotland Spring 2021 Newsletter Interfaith Scotland Newsletter (pg.29) - <https://interfaithscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Interfaith-Scotland-Newsletter-Spring-2021.pdf>

This chapter has highlighted various dimensions of the functioning of women's local inter faith initiatives. These are further explored in the course the following chapters.



4. Activities of the women's inter faith initiatives

Respondents to the project survey were invited to share information about their activities and also to provide some 'top tips/ best practice examples of the activities, events, initiatives that are engaged with by the group that you/ the group would like to share'. This chapter draws on those responses and also on activity information that the initiatives provided in other parts of the survey returns, as well as on Roundtable input and some external sources such as blogs and newsletters.

The examples given are by no means an exhaustive list of the activities that each women's initiative undertakes. However, they give a flavor of their wide-ranging activity.

Activities are grouped around the initiative purposes given in the survey: arts and crafts; activism; dialogue; community cohesion; celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day; education; and mutual support.

In combination, the dialogue and education activities have a strong dimension of what is sometimes called 'religious literacy' - although that was not a term used by respondents.

Many activities achieve more than one purpose, for example, an arts and crafts activity may at the same time be a piece of activism – as in the case of the activity of Women Peace-ing Together. Or it might be a context for dialogue, friendship building and also helping the local community. For example, The Interfaith Knitting Group of Hounslow Friends of Faith enables both conversation and creation of items which help others. Indeed, having an activity with a particular purpose such as social activism, creating a quilt or artwork or meals or holding a sporting activity can be a vital factor in creating an atmosphere conducive to meaningful dialogue. As two contributors to the Roundtable commented:

"The women [of the initiative] had gradually gotten to know each other but had not found that they had enough purpose. It was one thing to have an aim but another to have some practical cause or activities that

would spark closer connection. The latter was initially lacking." – Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith at the IFNRT

"It was good to have something to do – if you could knit and you joined a knitting group, you knew you were going to be able to participate. Women could chat and get to know each other at the same time – which is what people needed." – The Interfaith Knitting Group, Hounslow Friends of Faith Knitting at the IFNRT.

4.1 Dialogue

Dialogue is a fundamental part of the activities the women's initiatives engage in as they facilitate deeper connection and understanding between the women. Its importance, and its evolution, is referenced in a number of responses:

"We are challenging each other more now. Getting beyond politeness. Conversations and relationships are going deeper." – Sheffield Women's Interfaith Forum

Some different contexts for, and kinds of, dialogue are discussed below.

a) Informal dialogue

The Ladies' Coffee Morning group of Woking people of Faith, meets as a friendship group and provides an opportunity for women to meet other women of "different faiths in a safe, non-judgemental space". There is usually no set agenda for the meetings which are very informal. When it was Ramadan, the women attenders all refrained from eating or drinking during the meeting in respect for those fasting.

"We talk as friends. If faith comes up then we run with it, however it is not the main topic of discussion."
– Ladies' Coffee Morning, Woking People of Faith

b) Organised dialogues on particular topics and issues

Groups often include dialogues and learning events about particular topics. For example, Sheffield

Women's Interfaith Forum referred in their response to breaking down misunderstandings through dialogue and education through discussion at meetings about a variety of agreed topics such as 'Faith and society: the common good'.

The women bring and share food together and sit around round tables to hold conversations. The Sheffield Women's Interfaith Forum's organiser highlighted in her response the importance and significance of the physical layout of the room during meetings as being crucial to facilitating discussions. The discussions have deepened as the women have got to know one another.

"Think about layout and space... we set it up so women sit round roundtables and have conversation."
– Sheffield Women's Interfaith Forum

Women Together Essex holds meetings which include a morning session featuring speakers from different faiths on a wide variety of topics from weddings to health topics such as mental health, to education, and race/hate crime. This is followed by lunch (see further below under 'Sharing Food').

Women Growing Together, Oldham, has explored a number of topics. For example, it created an exhibition on 'Women in Belief – Suffrage and Women of Influence'. In 2021, as part of Greater Manchester Hate Crime Awareness Week, it held a Zoom event to raise awareness of Hate Crime. Following a presentation from a woman who is an Oldham Council officer, a woman shared her own personal experience of being a victim of Hate Crime. Further information about the event: oldhaminterfaith.org.uk/women-growing-together/

c) Intergenerational dialogue

Across the Generations is an intergenerational project for women run by East Meets West – Women together in Lancaster initiative. It enables asylum seekers and refugees to meet older members of the local community and the women participants have conversations about home, country and culture together. The refugee and asylum-seeking women have improved their English skills and found comfort, while being away from their families, through these meetings. For the older local women, the encounters provide a source of interest and stimulation and



Sheffield Women's Interfaith Forum – 'Faith Conversations' meeting (2018).

tinyurl.com/539237br/

relieve loneliness. The initiative is aiming to expand the meeting encounters to include triads and group meetings.

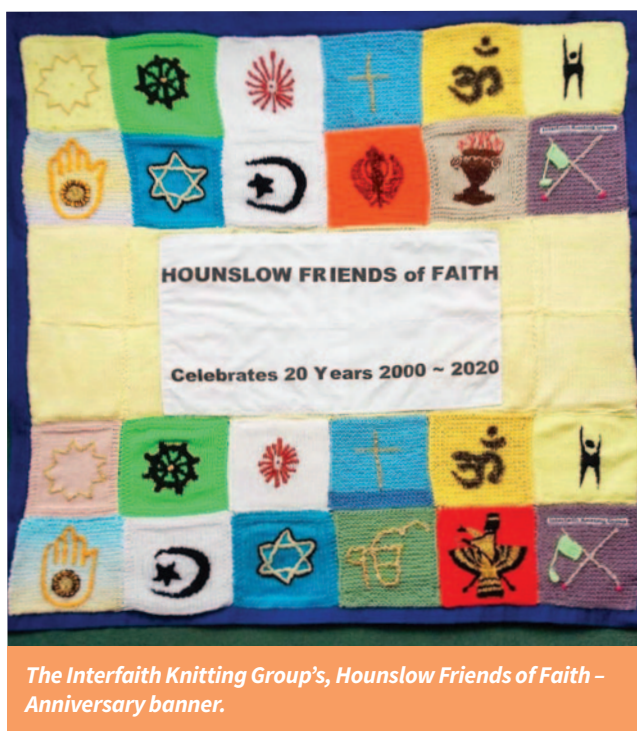
Activism

Some of the dialogues described in the previous section have been linked to wider social activism. Groups use them to open up areas of social concern. For example, Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group held an event to explore tackling the climate crisis.



Women Peace-ing Together, Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship working on a 'Symbols of Peace Banner' (2018).

concord-leeds.org.uk/textile1.php



The Interfaith Knitting Group's, Hounslow Friends of Faith – Anniversary banner.

Women Peace-ing Together, part of Concord Leeds Interfaith Fellowship, initially began as a space for women of different faiths to meet for creative activity and friendship making. One of their projects was a patchwork Women Peace-ing Together banner with words and peace symbols. The banner was included in the Leeds City Museum's Symbols for Peace Exhibition.

4.2 Arts and Crafts

a) Knitting

The Interfaith Knitting Group of Hounslow Friends of Faith knits items, such as blankets, jumpers, scarves, socks, baby clothes, hats and mittens. These have been donated to help members of the local community and those further afield. For example, warm winter items that were made were donated to help rough sleepers in the community in Hounslow and Richmond and other items have been donated as far as The Gambia, West Africa. To celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Hounslow Friends of Faith, the Interfaith knitting Group made a knitted wall hanging (see picture above).

b) Mural painting

Together with a local artist, Women Together, Essex painted a mural in the center of their town. This depicted the women of the group. It was one of eight murals painted by community groups in Basildon

“inspired by the area and challenging a different hard-hitting issue”. The group created the mural to make women in the town feel safe and to send a message of solidarity to the women of the town. The mural was reported on in the local news: www.echo-news.co.uk/news/19535055.art-murals-painted-across-basildon-town-centre/

c) Quilting and patchwork art projects

Quilting and creation of patchwork art projects is an activity which a number of initiatives do. For example, to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum, its women's Group created a wall-hanging of 24 patchwork squares each reflecting the different faiths of the women in the group. Each patchwork square depicted different shared and specific symbols of faith. 17 or 18 women from the group took part. The finished piece was displayed in the local library. The work of the Women's Group featured in the local paper.



Members of the Women's Interfaith Group, WAMCF standing with a patchwork banner co-created to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the broader LIFO (2021). Credit: Maidenhead Advertiser

“The wall-hanging is a celebration of unity within diversity – although our faiths have different details, we're all united together.”⁶ – Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum Women's Group

The Bradford Touchstone Centre women's inter faith initiatives programme had quilting at the heart of a number of activities. One of its quilts is shown in the picture overleaf of a visit by a then IFN staff member, Madiha Hussein, to Bradford in Inter Faith Week 2019.

⁶ A member quoted in <https://www.maidenhead-advertiser.co.uk/gallery/maidenhead/172803/interfaith-group-women-make-patchwork-celebrating-diversity.html>



York quilt

York Interfaith does not have a women's group but women linked to the group created a special lockdown quilt during the pandemic, with panels linked to the different faiths groups.

d) Rug weaving

The Touchstone Centre has run a project called 'Weaving Women's Wisdom'. This is centred on women's wisdom in and across faith traditions. Launched in 2014, it has worked alongside 20 groups in Britain and Pakistan to enable women to converse about matters of life and faith. Each group has been asked to consider four questions: Who are the wise women that have influenced my life? What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Who are the wise women in my holy text and faith tradition? And what is the wisest piece of advice I have been given or read from one of the wise women we have discussed? In the light of their conversation, each group has been provided with a starter pack of materials and the invitation to make a rug. The women have learnt how to weave and gone on to weave rugs which represented their different conversations. The exhibition has travelled widely.

"The results are stunning and have given great opportunities to women who are often sidelined in more formal interfaith dialogue." – Touchstone Centre



Touchstone Bradford quilt (2019)

At the Roundtable, Touchstone's Interfaith Worker described how the rugs had been exhibited at the Houses of Parliament. She had accompanied the Exhibition. It had been at the height of war in Syria and it had provided a unique opportunity to highlight the importance of women's local inter faith work:

"It was an amazing opportunity to chat to MPs and to the other people walking past about the importance of grassroots women's interfaith engagement. At the same time that the exhibition was at the Houses of Parliament, there was an emergency debate about whether or not to take military action in Syria. The juxtaposition of debate and the exhibition and the MPs passing between one and the other presented an amazing opportunity."

– Touchstone Centre

e) Other arts and crafts

Other arts and crafts are also at the heart of the activity of groups such as Women at the Well Gloucestershire. A blog about the development of their work and also its connection to environmental activism is reproduced overleaf. General arts and crafts also form part of the activities of a number of other groups such as Coffee 'n' Laughs in Newport.

f) Writing

The Women's Interfaith Understanding Group in Leicester partnered with Christians Aware – Faiths Awareness branch to produce and publish a number books. For example, the members have produced a prayer book, 'Faith Offerings' which includes prayers and stories from different faith traditions contributed by members. It has also produced a cookery book

Women at the Well interfaith group – sharing faith through art

In January 2021, an open invitation went out for Muslim and Christian women in Gloucestershire to come to a community-led group. They would get to know each other, read stories about women at wells in the Bible and the Qur'an, and craft their responses. The group has flourished – and they now have their own exhibition.

Henrietta Cozens, a member of St Catharine's Gloucester, shares how the Women at the Well came about, and the stories behind the craft they have created.

"It was at the start of 2021 that three of us put our heads together to come up with a way to creatively engage Muslim women with Christian women, and both with Scripture. A Holy Book Club, using the Scriptural Reasoning method, had previously been running in Gloucester, but numbers had dwindled. Previously, that group had made and displayed a 'Tree of Life' at Cheltenham's Christian Arts Festival (CAF), and with the spring 2021 Christian Arts Festival approaching, an opportunity was seen.



"We advertised for women to join us in crafting our responses to Scripture passages featuring women at wells, which would then be displayed at CAF – and 30 people signed up – half Muslim women, half Christian women.

"We gathered together (unexpectedly on Zoom, as another lockdown had started) and read passages about Hagar, and about the Samaritan woman that Jesus met. Through one of our members, we also learnt about Jordan, a water-poor country where Muslims and Christians work together to conserve water. We made a big bluey-green quilling banner to show our personal responses to the physical and the spiritual. After we finished, we had a surprise email from the Chaplain at the University of Gloucestershire, asking if we could hang it in the university's faith space ('The Sanctuary').

"After three months, the banner was moved to Cheltenham Open Studios, then, last summer, to Discover de Crypt (where it was used for a prayer event for COP26, and admired by the Young Climate walkers). Its current hanging place is The Museum of Gloucester."



The group ran its second project last Christmas. They looked at passages on gardens and provision through nature, in the Bible and the Qur'an, quilling greetings cards showing garden scenes, or Christmasy plants to give to friends.

Henrietta says, "Our most recent project was called *Vessels of Faith* – and we met in the Museum Café on



five occasions. Starting with the story of Moses being placed in a basket on the river through the faith of his sister and mother, and then to the boats that Jesus taught from, and finally looking at ourselves as vessels plus heavenly vessels, together we made a large basket-vessel from our old clothes.

“Developing an environmental conscience of reusing, recycling and reducing fabric and natural resources has been a bonding point for our interfaith community.”

The Women at the Well’s first full-gallery exhibition of their creative work showed in the Community Gallery of the Museum of Gloucester. The Revd Dr Cate Williams, Environmental Advisor for the Diocese of Gloucester, along with Imam Ahmed of Ghousia Mosque, helped to launch the exhibition to 62 people at an evening event.

<https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/2022/women-at-the-well-interfaith-group-sharing-faith-through-art/>

See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=po-9pizIPF0>





Christian and Muslim Women Pray for Peace. Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle website

called 'Faith, Festivals and Food' and some members contributed to a 'Meeting people of Faith' series which was put together by Christians Aware. The group is currently working on a new book about the work of local people who have been involved in inter faith work in Leicester.

4.3 Celebrating/ marking events

Women's local inter faith initiatives regularly mark faith festivals of members and also other types of event.

a) Annual 'Pray for Peace' event

Each year, Catholic, some other Christian, and Muslim women, and their children and grandchildren, gather at St Mary's Chapel in Jesmond to pray for peace. The Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace group has a core group of 30 regular attenders who come each year and has grown year on year with attendance reaching 70+ women. The women offer prayers from each faith tradition and light candles at the medieval Shrine. After the prayers, the women move to a nearby venue to socialise and get to know one another. There have been talks on the similarities between the rosary and Muslim prayer beads during this meeting. They then share refreshments together.

"It is important for women to learn together and from each other at the event and the socialising after the prayer event has a "lovely atmosphere and buzz".

– Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace

b) Faith festival celebrations and shared learning

An example given of women joining those of other faith backgrounds at their festival celebrations was a Women Together Wolverhampton Eid event for women of all faiths and none, at a local mosque. 'Food, fun, activities and friendship' were the elements that made up the event. This event was supported by Near Neighbours and the coordinator of the initiative highlighted on a NN blog some key factors to consider when organising women's only inter faith events and meetings – www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/iwd-blackcountry

The Coffee 'n' Laughs group in Newport uses members' faith calendars as an opportunity for shared learning: *"We share information [such as] – during Christian advent we have often read the different accounts of Christ's birth from the Bible and the Koran."*

c) City wide cultural diversity celebrations

Women's local inter faith initiatives sometimes play a role in local celebrations. For example, Watford Bridge of Peace was one of the co-founders of a city wide 'Watford Celebration' event. This is an annual community event which celebrates the diversity of faiths and cultures of the town. The event includes traditional dances, singing, musical performances, poetry performances and stalls featuring local community groups. The women of the initiative



Women First Smethwick – women of the initiative touring Holy Trinity Church in Smethwick during a tour of various places of worship to mark Inter Faith Week 2017.

www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/2018/2/8/womens-interfaith-tour-in-sandwell

volunteer to support this event. Further information:
www.watfordcelebration.com/

d) Visits to places of worship

Women First Smethwick went on an inter faith tour of various local faith venues during Inter Faith Week. The group travelled together in a mini-bus, stopping to be guided around each venue. They visited a church, a mosque, a Hindu temple – where they had lunch – and a Sikh Gurdwara, where they were offered chai and sweets. www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/2018/2/8/womens-interfaith-tour-in-sandwell

To mark Inter Faith Week 2021, the Calderdale Interfaith Women's Group visited a nearby synagogue and Hindu Temple. The members travelled together and those who required transport were supported to attend the places of worship visited.

e) International Women's Day

Ghar se Ghar holds an annual celebratory event in Luton to mark International Women's Day. This is called 'Precious Pearls' and has taken place for over 10 years. The gathering is described as always having been "a wonderful gathering of women from across all faiths and cultures". The theme changes annually. Previous themes have been Women Weaving Threads of Harmony, Women Sharing Hopes and Dreams and Women Caring for Mother Earth. The event is held in the evening and features talks, poetry, songs and dances. The event has brought nearly 100 women together. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the event moved online. However, in 2023 it was back in



Faiths Forum Women's Inter Faith Workshops programme participants marking International Women's Day 2023



person, held by Ghar se Ghar Friends at the Near Neighbour's Luton hub:

"This week we celebrated @womensday in our #Luton hub. Ghar se Ghar Friends group held the event – women also held in their thoughts, hearts, & prayers, all Ukrainian women & girls & other hundreds of refugee & asylum-seeking women in UK, whose safety & well-being is in jeopardy." – twitter.com/nearneighbours/status/1634237044917452837

Many of the other groups also noted that they regularly marked IWD. For example, Women Together (Essex) held an IFW event in 2022 with dignitaries, including the Mayor of Chelmsford and Witham who came to talk about their achievements as strong women in the local community. Basildon Council funded a sandwich lunch and teas for the event. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCm-Fz04F28 In 2023, they went on to hold a special talent show (see image above).

Other examples of marking International Women's Day include a 2023 event focusing on faith and mental health held as part of the Redbridge Faith Forum's Women's Interfaith Group Workshop programme. This took place at the VPH Hindu Centre in Ilford and was attended by 35 women from different faiths. At the heart of the event was a discussion around mental health and faith from a women's perspective:

- In times of difficulties does having faith lift our spirits? How?
- How does your faith help you maintain mental stability?

- When the unexpected happens how does that affect our mental health and belief?
- Is having a faith helpful or can it burden us with conscience?
- Does having a strong faith protect us mentally or can it cause more stress because of other people's expectations?

Small group discussions formed the core of the event.

4.4 Sharing of food

Just over half of all the women's inter faith initiatives surveyed included comments about the inclusion of food, refreshments or sharing meals as part of their meetings. Many events have been held by the initiatives that have centered on food as a way to bring women together.

"Always engage in hospitality – bring and share a small dish of vegetarian food – that always works well"
– Canterbury Women of Faith

Share Faith, Share Food, Building Bridges Burnley focuses on bringing women together with four essential 'F' elements, those being Fun, Friendship, Food and Faith. At the meetings, the women all bring dishes of food to share together.

Women's Interfaith Coffee Evening, Reading Inter Faith Group normally met in a local coffee shop or as

guests of a local place of worship prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, but then moved their meetings online. During the time they are together, they share refreshments while getting to know one another and discussing common issues. They listen and learn about one another's faith over coffee and other refreshments.

The meetings of Women Together, Essex always include a lunch where members of the initiative share the dishes they have brought to the meeting. During the pandemic, when meetings had to move online, the women cooked together online. Each woman had a dish to cook and then they ate together, watching everybody to continue the shared meal aspects of the in-person meetings. The organiser of the initiative said that this had worked out very well.

When Finsbury Park Sisters go on visits and trips to places of interest together, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum, they take lunch and share their food together in the venue's public dining areas. They also hold picnics together.

Touchstone Centre, Bradford brings women together share personal stories and recipes with one another, creating meaningful connection and a space for learning and understanding. The women of the 'Food Stories – Sharing Faith through Food' group then cook the recipes together and share the dishes together.



Touchstone Centre – women from the 'Food Stories' initiative learning about each other's family recipes and then cooking together (2022).

The recipes and stories can be seen at:
faithfulfood863021319.wordpress.com/

“[A participant] *shared the story of her Aunt Audrey’s apple pie, and how it brought the family together. We followed her recipe and made her apple pie and it brought us together too.*” – Quote: mobile.twitter.com/Touchstone3/status/1499412331041800198]

4.5 Social Initiatives and activism

The women of the Redbridge Faith Forum Women’s Interfaith Group have an ongoing engagement with environmental issues. For example, they held an online workshop – ‘Repairing the World’ where women from different faith communities shared the initiatives and actions they had taken to help repair the world and their reasons for their actions, based in their respective faith traditions. A list of practical actions were shared and signposted, such as EcoSikh, community bike rides, ways to make places of worship more eco-friendly and tips for hosting environmentally friendly meals (such as using stainless steel cups). More information and the links provided are available at:
redbridgefaithforum.org/womens-interfaith-virtual-workshop-wednesday-9th-feb-2021-at-1pm-repairing-the-world/

Environmental issues are also central for Women at the Well Gloucestershire: “Developing an environmental conscience of reusing, recycling and reducing fabric and natural resources has been a bonding point for our interfaith community.”

Just over a quarter of survey respondents (7) said that running/supporting social initiatives was a purpose of their initiative. Examples ranged from environmental initiatives to peace activism, dementia awareness raising and charity fundraisers are given below.

Women linked to Touchstone Centre’s Women’s inter faith programmes came together for a ‘Women’s Inter Faith Charity Abseil’ down the bell tower of a local church to raise awareness and funds for a charity working in Syria. They also did a sleep out for the homeless.

Finsbury Park Sisters held a Ladies’ Late Lunch fundraising event. The lunch was held in the rooms of the Parish where the women usually meet. This



Finsbury Park Sisters – women from the initiative met for a picnic in a local park and played ‘the Asian sport of Kabbarddi’ together (2017).

finsburyparkmosque.org/interfaith-picnic-between-sisters-from-finsbury-park-mosque-and-st-thomass-church/

fundraising event was for a Kitrinos Healthcare, which works in refugee camps on the Greek Island of Lesbos. The doctor who founded the charity and a colleague spoke at the event.

a) Health, wellbeing and sport focused activities

Women of Faith, FN4M, held a range of awareness raising talks on a variety of Health and Wellbeing topics. One all-morning event included a presentation from a Macmillan Community Outreach Officer discussing signs and symptoms of cancers affecting women, a Q&A on Health and Nutrition, Indian Head Massages, a meeting with a Homeopathist and a chance for other community groups to share their work. The women shared a vegetarian – halal/kosher lunch.

Ghar se Ghar runs exercise classes and provides health education to support women leading healthy lifestyles. Exercise sessions are held which are followed by coffee and friendly discussion. Sometimes a speaker comes to present on a topic to the women.

As noted earlier, both FODIP and FN4M also have physical activity programmes for women. Other groups, such as the Finsbury Park Sisters, occasionally include activities of this kind in their events, for example playing kabbarddi in the park.

This chapter highlighted a small selection of the types of activities that women’s local inter faith initiatives take part in. The variety of events provides a range of ideas that other initiatives may draw inspiration from.

5. Some challenges and benefits

The present chapter explores in greater depth some of the structural and practical challenges that women participating in, and running, women’s local inter faith initiatives have identified and also some of the benefits.

5.1 Challenges

Challenges identified by the women range from logistical ones of fitting in their inter faith activity with family commitments, to community and societal expectations, and even sometimes misogyny and obstruction.

The challenges are discussed below under the sections of the survey with which they most closely align.

Participants were asked about what factors had shaped the way their initiative/group functions and its pattern of participation: work/life balance; family

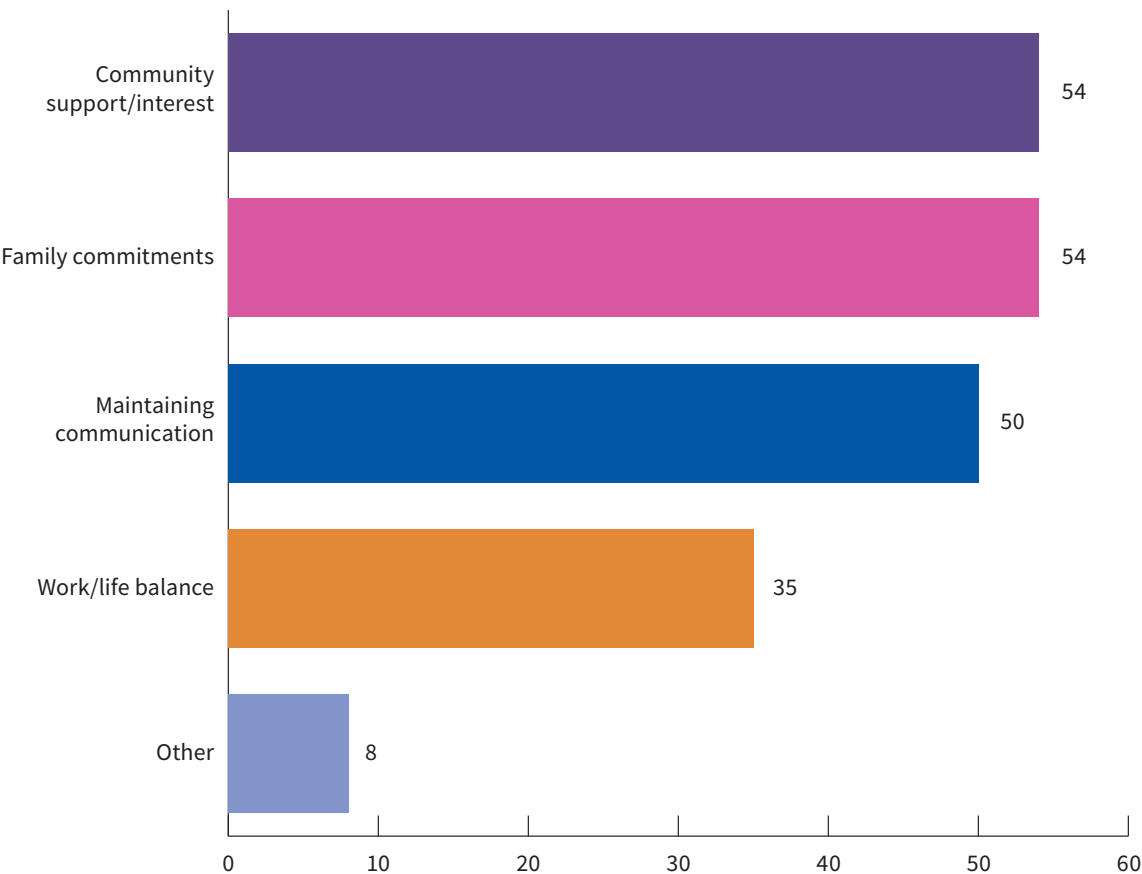
commitments; maintaining commitment; community support/interest; and ‘other’ (with a comment box).

a) Equality and leadership

14 (54%) respondents identified ‘Community support and interest’ as a shaping factor for their initiative. In their comments, some talked about inequalities and imbalances faced by women in various spaces in the faith and inter faith landscape. This was also reflected in contribution to the Roundtable and in some of the interviews.

The survey respondent from Women Growing Together, Oldham Interfaith said that, *“The WGT began as the interfaith forum’s leadership which comes from the various places of worship was led mainly by men.”*

Factors shaping the way the initiatives function and patterns of participation



A contributor to the Roundtable from the same group commented that prior to the women's only initiative as part of their broader LIFO, there had been a lack of women present during decision making processes and discussions with external bodies such as the local council. Although, this was now changing with the development of Women Growing Together.

"When [Oldham Interfaith] had met Oldham Council during the years before [Women Growing Together] they had not had any women representatives. [Oldham Interfaith] would be meeting with the leader of Oldham Council the next day and a few women who sat on the inter faith steering group would be attending the meeting." – Oldham Interfaith IFNRt.

The great influence and impact that women working at local grassroots levels has was highlighted by a Roundtable contributor who also expressed some frustration at what she saw as an overfocus in much discourse on leader-level inequalities.

"The civic and faith leader levels are male dominated. Change on that front is important but I am uncomfortable with a narrative that the civic and faith leader level is the influential level. Grassroots women are the ones making a real change and influence in the community." – IFNRt

Interest in developing leadership skills and confidence was evident in some of the responses.

Near Neighbours, Women's Interfaith Network, Nisa-Nashim and Interfaith Scotland all identified clearly the importance of the development of women's leadership skills at local level, including in the inter faith context.

Near Neighbours staff outlined to the research project its approach to supporting women in faith communities and groups where faith is a central part of women's identity. This includes supporting those whose participation may be affected due to patterns of leadership reflecting cultural traditions and views of women in leadership. In that context, Near Neighbours recognises and nurtures the leadership roles that women may take via different avenues, such as women who teaching and community organising. It does so through helping women strengthen their skills through such routes as mentoring and training. One of the coordinators

described this in terms of "nurturing local women's leadership skills and capabilities; supporting women to hold their own in all areas of their lives; helping them build resilience; encouraging them to stand taller; and providing spaces for women to share their experiences and know they are not alone".

Where women face criticism and cultural barriers, Near Neighbours provides support and help through a pragmatic approach, asking and finding answers to questions such as what will work, what will help women engage and lead.⁷

Interfaith Scotland also supports leadership in women in inter faith work, for example, through a Women and Leadership Workshop with Dr Susan Madsen, Professor of Leadership and Ethics from the USA.

"The workshop focused on developing women's leadership through strengthening identity, purpose, and confidence ... Participants mentioned the importance of having female role models and the impact of seeing women in public life in positions of leadership." – Interfaith Scotland⁸

Women's Interfaith Network (WIN) also supports women in leadership development.

"The [local] groups are self-running, planning their own events and with their own initiatives shaped in the context of the grassroots context in their own communities. WIN provides training and support for the women who are committee members so its programme has a women's leadership element. That is part of our work that WIN would love to grow." – WIN at the IFNRt

For Nisa-Nashim, developing and nurturing leadership in women is one of the aims of the organisation:

*"To foster leadership skills and feelings of empowerment in women, and to shift leadership culture in the two communities to embrace women's contribution."*⁹

⁷ The project spoke with the Near Neighbours' Partnerships Director and its West Yorkshire Coordinator and heard from its Black Country Coordinator at the Roundtable. This section reflects those inputs.

⁸ Interfaith Scotland (2020), Newsletter Summer 2020 pg4 available at <https://interfaithscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Interfaith-Scotland-Newsletter-Summer-2020.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.nisanashim.com/about/>

Local groups are co-chaired by a Muslim and a Jewish woman who are supported by Nisa-Nashim on their ‘shared leadership journeys’¹⁰. Alongside women in local groups building leadership skills, Nisa-Nashim, as an organisation, says that it lifts up the views and voices of the local groups at national level.

“[Women only local groups] have also helped enable those views to be shared with policy makers and government departments. Previously their voices and their opinions were not always getting through.”

– Nisa-Nashim IFNRt

b) Women-only discussion spaces

The research survey also captured the importance of women’s local inter faith initiatives in providing spaces for women to talk with each other. For the most part, respondents focused on relational reasons that they liked to come together, such as friendship and common interests. Sometimes, however, the spaces are seen as valuable because there were difficult issues the women wish to discuss together and/or may not feel comfortable raising in other contexts.

There were also some observations from respondents such as:

“... some men do not wish their wives or daughters to go to a group where there might be men present.”

– Hounslow Friends of Faith Interfaith Knitting Group

“Both Muslim and Jewish women from traditional backgrounds need a private space to participate in sports and physical activity due to the importance of modesty for them.” – FODIP, Women’s Sports Programme

It is noteworthy that, although the term ‘safe space’ was not used in the survey questions, it was used by 27% of respondents about their initiative.

A ‘safe space’ has been variously defined. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it thus: “place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.” Project contributors

used it in ways that echoed that but were shaped by their own context.

At the Roundtable, the Women First Smethwick contributor noted that that group had provided a ‘safe space’ for exploration and sensitive conversation:

“It is a great group through which women have the opportunity to build local level friendships and, very importantly, to have conversations about perceptions they might have had about another faith or another ethnicity or a diversity in a safe space.”

The Women’s Programme of Redbridge Faith Forum, in the survey, also highlighted the freedom to share viewpoints in a safe and secure environment:

“RFF is not aware of any other faith-based projects in Redbridge that bring together women of different faiths in a safe and secure environment where they are able to share their beliefs and viewpoints about many issues with no fear of rejection or discrimination. It is also exceptional in that it is the members who decide on the topics they wish to learn about and discuss.”

A sense of vulnerability at times came through respondents’ comments which perhaps pointed to one of the reasons for desire for ‘safe space’.

“..[M]embers are willing to risk criticism within their own faith community by being involved in a mixed faith group.” – East Meets West – Women Together Lancaster

The interviews held as part of the project also included some observations about desire for ‘safe spaces’.

For example, the Nisa-Nashim contributor to the Roundtable commented from its experience of reasons that its groups were established:

“[I]t was about having that safe space where women could connect as women and know that their voices would be heard where sometimes in other, mixed-gender, spaces they might have concerns that they would not be represented or, for cultural or religious reasons, might not be comfortable...”

¹⁰ <https://www.nisanashim.com/about/>

... If one looked around the country there were lots of initiatives that involve women and men. Nisa-Nashim was something unique and the point was that they wanted to develop relationships specifically through the women. There were lots of things that happened that affected Muslim and Jewish women in particular but they didn't always have the opportunity to say how they were feeling or to express their views. Setting up Nisa-Nashim allowed a safe-space to develop where their views could be heard."

c) Working within the context of family and work commitments

54% of survey respondents highlighted family commitments as a shaping factor for their local inter faith initiative. Family commitments were touched on previously when exploring the patterns of initiative meetings (at page 26). That was in the context of choosing good times to meet. However, some socio-cultural expectations of women are also noted, at the Roundtable and in the surveys, as shaping the women's initiatives:

"There's a notion that, as women, we can't just be women with our own identity – we have to be somebody's wife, mother, daughter or there is always something else that is attached to us that takes the priority away from what we might necessarily want to do." – Nisa-Nashim contributor to IFNRT

This point was expanded on, highlighting the additional barriers that women face in starting an initiative,

"I have been involved with lots of inter faith groups and also women only groups with Muslim women and I have seen the barriers and that women will say 'We would really like to do this but we can't because of x or y'" – Nisa-Nashim IFNRT

d) 'Maintaining communication'

50% of survey respondents noted 'maintaining communication' as a shaping factor.

The Women's Interfaith Understanding Group emphasised that maintaining communication had been a positive shaping factor which had enabled the initiative's membership to grow:

"Spreading the word about the initiative in members' own networks and inviting new people along."
– Women's Interfaith Understanding Group

The move online that came with Covid-19, however, impacted for some time the levels of communication that were had between the women of the initiatives, as was explored at page 26.

Women moving on from the town was another challenging shaping factor mentioned, for example by Watford Bridge of Peace and Reading Interfaith, Ladies Coffee Evening. When key members leave, there is sometimes a gap which has an impact.

Survey respondents were not asked about communications methods. It was, however, striking during the initial research, how limited many women's local inter faith organisations options were for learning about their work or getting in touch. Three quarters of surveyed initiatives either have a section of, or are mentioned on, a LIFO or other organisation's website. However, these sections or mentions do not always have contact details for the initiatives and do not always give a deeper insight into the work and activities of the women's initiative.

Many did not have a website or any social media pages. This may reflect their level of informality and person-to-person networking.



Coffee 'n' Laughs – Attending a procession in Cardiff marking the Centenary of Women's Suffrage in 2018. Women from the initiative joined another group 'Age Alive' at the event. The banner reads 'We Shine Brighter Together'.

tinyurl.com/4k385772

e) 'Work/life balance'

35% of respondents noted work/life balance as a shaping factor. This had a bearing on the timings of the meetings as discussed at page 26.

f) 'Other'

8% selected 'Other' shaping factors. Further comments highlighted the following points:

"The health of regular attenders, the weather (a section of the meeting is held outdoors), venue capacity, suitable times." – Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace

"Capacity and Covid." – Women's Interfaith Forum Sheffield

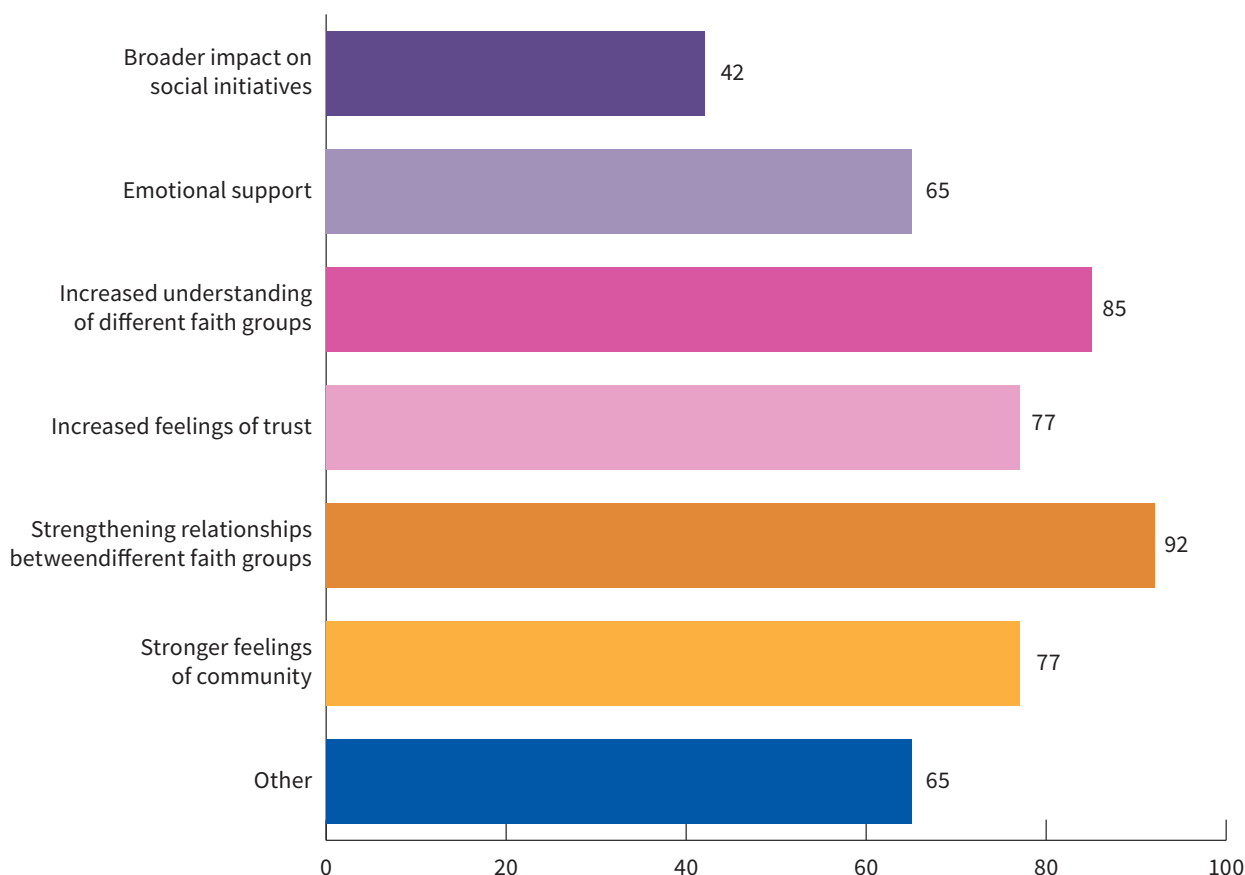
The range of shaping factors, barriers or challenges that women and women's local inter faith initiatives is broad and, outside of structural and socio-cultural barriers, is unique to each initiative and indeed to each woman participating.

"Don't assume people won't engage in something because of their faith & culture or just accept what those who set themselves up to be the 'spokesperson' say. People are individuals and have their own ideas and feelings about what they will get involved in." – Ghar se Ghar

5.2 Benefits

The respondents to the survey and participants of the IFRT highlighted a variety of benefits that engaging in women's local inter faith initiatives brings to the individuals, broader local inter faith organisations (where women's initiatives are part of such) and to the wider local community. Inter faith activity creates opportunities for encounter, learning and the development of friendships between those involved, through the opportunity to interact well with each other. Inter faith activity can also lead to the formation of coalitions for change as people and communities build on their shared values and concerns and work together on practical projects for the common good.

Benefits that attenders/ members involved with initiative have experienced (multiple answers possible)



a) Benefits to individuals

92% of survey respondents noted strengthened relationships between different faith groups as being a benefit of the local inter faith initiatives, 85% stated there was increased understanding about different faith groups and 76% highlighted increased feelings of trust.

“The group enables a different view of the world to be seen by the attenders.” – Women’s Interfaith Understanding Group

65% of responders selected ‘Other’ and gave accompanying comments exploring how the initiative had changed over time and they highlighted numerous benefits.

65% of respondents noted emotional support as a benefit of the initiatives and 54% mentioned ‘friendships’ at least once in one or more of their answers, highlighting the important relational benefits that women have experienced through involvement with the women’s local inter faith initiative.

“Factors which have maintained and developed the group are: overcoming tensions and building friendships amongst one another, effective practical action together.”
– Birmingham Women’s Peace Group

“Valued friendships organically grew between the women who attended the meetings.” – Tooting Christian-Muslim Women’s Group

“Personal connections and similarities found, breaking barriers, close friendships were formed, we realised we all deal with same challenges, it is very enriching, it opens your eyes to another world.” – Watford Bridge of Peace

“Numbers have increased and local level friendships been made.” – Women First Smethwick

“Friendships [have] developed through it, with women going out, shopping together, meeting up in a local café and just building those local level relationships.”
– Women Together Wolverhampton

“Educational challenge for the members. Enjoyment! Friendships forming.” – Women’s Interfaith Understanding Group

Coffee ‘n’ Laughs in Newport, was initially established as a space for women to learn English (speaking and reading). However, over time, the initiative matured into a group of women meeting as a *“strong network of genuine friends as opposed to the initial set up as a service of users”*.

The Touchstone Centre contributor at the Roundtable also highlighted the importance of the friendships made through the initiatives and commented that the role of the initiative was to:

“[B]ring different women together in various creative ways for them to deepen understanding of each other and for them to form deep and genuine friendships.”

Along with the friendships that were formed through the initiatives, benefits such as combatting loneliness and isolation and increased overall wellbeing were highlighted.

“Meeting new people” – Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace

“[It] gives members something to think about and prepare for between meetings and gives a reason for the women to get together and talk.” – Women’s Interfaith Understanding Group

“Increased wellbeing, reduced isolation.” – Women of the World, Lincolnshire Council of Faiths

“Increased confidence” – Women Together Wolverhampton

National organisations, which support local groups or branches of their organisations, such as Nisa-Nashim, also commented on the impact on individuals through the space for encounter and friendship that women’s only local inter faith groups provided.

“The majority of women who were part of [Nisa-Nashim] had met for the first time through the organisation. Prior to that some Muslim women had never met a Jewish woman, nor some Jewish women a Muslim woman. The whole point of the organisation was to bring together



Women Together Wolverhampton – women of the initiative met for discussion and craft (2019)

Muslim and Jewish women in order to develop relationships and friendship and to develop understanding, trust and respect for the beliefs and customs, the rituals and practices of the other faith group. [Nisa-Nashim] worked to build social cohesion through positive relationships and experiences.”
– Nisa-Nashim at the IFNRT

Although no survey question specifically explored the enjoyment that the women felt engaging with the initiatives, just under a third (31%) of respondents used the word ‘enjoy’ in their responses. Comments made at the Roundtable also highlighted the enjoyment that the attenders felt at initiative meetings.

“It was about friendship, about chatting, about women of different ages enjoying each other’s company.” – Finsbury Park Sisters at the IFNRT

Feedback had been very positive from attendees that events were very enjoyable and inspiring: women loved to interact with each other and you can do a lot of creative arts and activities together.” – Interfaith Scotland at the IFNRT

The increase in women attending women’s local inter faith initiatives and the breadth of activities engaged in speaks to the overall enjoyment that women gain

from being attenders of women’s local inter faith initiatives.

b) Benefits to a broader local inter faith organisation

Where a women’s initiative is part of a broader LIFO, some benefits to both the women and that wider group were identified.

Women were, in those cases, usually involved in both and it was also noted at the IFNRT that despite the importance of women’s local inter faith initiatives, it should not be thought that women’s contribution to inter faith work must occur, or most naturally occurs, in a single gender setting.

Redbridge Faith Forum, at the IFNRT, commented that the women who engaged with the *Women’s Programme* normally attended the other events’ of the broader LIFO and were more active.

“Women have gained confidence to join our wider public events and also been willing to recommend us within their faith group.” – Redbridge Faith Forum, Women’s Programme



Tooting Christian Muslim Women's Group



Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group



'Milagros' – tokens of prayer and hope - created by Touchstone's women's inter faith 'Art of Friendship' group at a workshop led by artist Shaeron Caton Rose.

"Women taking [a] more active part in other activities BBB [Building Bridges Burnley] organise" – Share Food, Share Faith, Building Bridges Burnley

Although not part of a broader LIFO, the women of Watford Bridge of Peace became more actively involved in their local inter faith organisation due to links between the founder and that, their respondent mentioning:

"Further involvement with Watford Interfaith Association, Watford Celebration and Peace Garden." – Watford Bridge of Peace

Inter faith activity in a women's only setting is seen by respondents as bringing about a range of important benefits for individuals, groups and broader initiatives.

Another initiative noted in the survey that as it had developed the women of the initiative had begun to hold deeper conversations on a range of topics which may not have been discussed in a mixed-gender setting or some women may not have felt comfortable with discussing them in that context..

"[S]haring more and more our common concerns regarding issues which affect all of us as women: domestic violence, family breakdown, forced marriage, religious/racial/social integration, trafficking, problems regarding young people, helping refugees and asylum seekers, etc. Regardless of our faith / no faith."
– Ghar-se-Ghar

Some broader LIFOs have held events and discussions for women. For example, Loughborough Council of Faiths, which does not have a separate women's initiative, commented in their survey response that they have held a range of events for women or focused on women such as celebrating International Women's Day.

"[W]e have occasionally had one off events such as a social event with crafts and activities from various communities coming together on International Women's Day, women's Eid meals hosted by the ladies at the Mosque, and small-scale informal discussion between women of different faiths" – Loughborough Council of Faiths

Faiths Together in Croydon, a mixed gender LIFO had been approached by the local council to hold an event to support tackling domestic violence. There had been presentations by a woman Islamic scholar and woman vicar on anti-violence and how to recognise domestic violence. The women-only nature of this event meant that certain barriers to participation and engagement were removed for some attenders.

‘Because it was a women-only event, the Muslim women who usually wear the niqab felt comfortable taking off their veil. This was an eye-opener for some present.’
– Faith Together in Croydon

c) Benefits to the wider community.

77% of survey respondents noted that there were stronger feelings of community as a benefit of the women’s local inter faith initiative.

‘It is important for people of different faiths to meet one another as friends, to see their commonalities and know the worth of talking and listening to other faith communities. From the local, things spread.’ – Women’s Interfaith Understanding Group

42% felt a broader impact on a social initiative had been a benefit of their women’s initiatives. These broader social initiatives have been explored at page 38 and the women’s activities included things such as fundraising for community and international projects and donations of handmade crafts to vulnerable people in the wider community.

A range of other comments also highlighted the benefits that the initiative had in the local community. For example, the importance of seeing women of different faiths together in the local community and for the women to greet one another in the local area:

‘It’s good to be able to greet each other in the local area.’
– Finsbury Park Sisters

‘[The women] sometimes made trips together, meeting at the station and then travelling together on a bus or on a tube (which was pretty significant – others seeing them, chatting and being together in friendship causes interest and sometimes conversations with other passengers).’ – Finsbury Park Sisters at the IFNRt

Women of Faith, FN4M noted the benefit of having a *‘space to discuss local issues such as Black Lives Matter and also political tensions abroad and the impact of these tensions in the UK’*.

In conclusion, many and wide-ranging benefits for the attenders of the initiatives, to broader LIFOs and to the wider community were identified. These included emotional support and friendship for the women attending, increased representation of women in LIFO structures to strengthened relationships between different faith groups and stronger feelings of community.

The solidarity between women has massive potential strength to inspire and change communities and individuals.

– EAST MEETS WEST, LANCASTER

Concluding reflections

This research project has shown the richness and value of women's local inter faith initiatives. They make a significant contribution to inter faith understanding and cooperation and help bring about deep personal connections which benefit the women involved and also their wider communities.

The numbers of such initiatives are not large. This reflects that, for example, mixed gender local inter faith bodies often highlight women's engagement through their main programmes rather than setting up separate women's programmes. Another likely reason is that women of different faiths also participate increasingly in other, mixed gender, inter faith contexts. Yet, even though there are these other opportunities, women's local inter faith initiatives have an important role alongside those – feeding into them; giving women skills and confidence to contribute more strongly; and also offering a distinctive type of experience that is valuable in its own right.

Women's local inter faith initiatives do not always last for long periods of time. As noted in the report, a high proportion of the local women's initiatives that Fatheena Mubarak-Iqbal recorded in 2006 are no longer operating. New ones have emerged. However, particularly where these are not rooted in wider ongoing bodies, they are often fragile because they usually operate on a voluntary basis and have little funding or administrative support. This is not a report which set out to make recommendations. However, in the light of the responses received, there appears to be a strong case for funders supporting such women's initiatives given the clear benefits that they bring.

The report includes, in the annexes, information about Nisa-Nashim and the Women's Interfaith Network. Although, following consultation with them, their groups/branches were not surveyed, the significance of their work is clear and they continue in very important ways to raise the profile of women's inter faith engagement, as does the Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network.

As the report has shown, there are a wide range of reasons why women set up and take part in women's

local inter faith initiatives, such as: making friends with women of different backgrounds; seeking understanding of other faiths and to raise awareness of their own; developing skills and confidence in areas such as public speaking and community leadership; helping develop and deepen bonds between local communities; artistic expression; working on social issues; and simple enjoyment of conversation and shared activities.

In some cases, there is also a factor of finding a space that is more welcoming and 'safe' than contexts where women's voices may not be fully heard or where they may experience prejudice, constraint or even misogyny. It is clear that there remains a need, in some contexts, to address community or other barriers to participation.

A number of the groups have arts and crafts at the centre of their activity and produce, on a regular basis, beautiful works which also speak of the themes and social causes that matter to them. Where participants speak a number of different languages, there is the additional benefit that crafts activity can take place companionably without expectation of extended conversation and relationships can develop as the work takes place. Even where language is shared, such activities can enable a more natural dialogue and interaction to develop, as can working together on social projects.

What is striking across all the stories told by the women who have contributed to this project is the quality of deep connection: friendships forged, experiences shared, and a sense of commonality and shared endeavour. This was highlighted in many of the responses which speak of the development of long-term, enduring friendships.

The women who have contributed have shared generously their tips and words of wisdom. Perhaps those – and the many examples of good practice shared in the report – may inspire you to create or develop further your own women's inter faith initiative. Or, indeed, to apply them as relevant to any inter faith body's work.

Annex A

Top Tips and Words of Wisdom

The project invited respondents to add any 'top tips, and 'words of wisdom' that they thought might inspire and assist others developing women's local inter faith initiatives. Many responded – each offered their thoughts in their own style and out of their initiative's particular context. The responses were wide-ranging and sometimes included several thoughts. They are presented here in alphabetical order of the initiative.

BIRMINGHAM WOMEN'S PEACE GROUP

"Start small, try to be consistent, create an environment / safe space where women can share their heart and their stories / life experience in confidence and trust. From the heart, and not simply an intellectual exercise. Try to be genuinely inclusive, such that we can learn from everyone, and discover our common humanity and shared values. To truly believe that God works through people of all faiths, with no conversion agenda. The power of friendship can take away all fear and prejudice towards someone from another religion, race, etc. Freeing our hearts so that we become genuinely open to one another."

"Combining theory (values) and practice (of those values). Bringing older and younger generations together. Bringing women of different social status together in the same meetings."

BRENT MULTI FAITH FORUM CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS PROJECT

"Be clear on the intention and aims of the project and ensure these are embedded into and throughout the project."

"Make goals measurable and create a system for documenting and evaluating impact."

"Engage a diverse group of stakeholders, including members of the community the project aims to serve."

"Make sure that the project is accessible and welcoming to all members of the community it aims to serve. "

"Partner with existing organisations or resources that can provide additional support or expertise."

"Continuously communicate with stakeholders and the community. Listen and be prepared to make adaptations."

"Be prepared for flexibility when things don't go as planned – find creative alternatives and learn from the ups and downs."

"Most importantly embrace and enjoy the process of bringing your project to life."

"It takes persistence and patience – don't give up!"

"Co-creation; the group co-created a poem and had shared pride in the completed poem."

BUILDING BRIDGES IN BURNLEY, SHARE FAITH, SHARE FOOD

"Our 4 F's – Fun, Friendship, Food and Faith. We attempt that all these elements happen when we meet."

CALDERDALE WOMEN'S INTERFAITH GROUP

"Keep an eye on what is going on locally and work in partnership with other community groups"

"Organise what you enjoy and are interested in. It will bring joy to others."

CANTERBURY WOMEN OF FAITH

"Welcome and hospitality at a grass roots level, respecting all who come along." "...[A]lways engage in hospitality, eg bringing and sharing a small dish of vegetarian food."

"Be realistic with expectations. Grow the contacts and increase the communication network."

CHRISTIAN MUSLIM WOMEN PRAY FOR PEACE (NEWCASTLE)

"Ensure there are enough refreshments."

COFFEE 'N' LAUGHS

"...[C]elebrate each other's festivals..."

"Food, food and more food!"

"Simple craftwork allowing for conversation."

"[U]nspoken ground rules about respect being maintained by the group leaders, and making everything informal."

EAST MEETS WEST – WOMEN TOGETHER IN LANCASTER

*“Welcome people by name when they come to a meeting. Give all the opportunity to showcase their home country through preparing lunch for the group. Give equal importance to religious celebrations/practices from different faith traditions and show openness eg ‘Experiencing Ramadan’ enjoying Christmas lunch, putting a name on Christmas/Eid presents”.
[A tip from their Across Generations work with women asylum seekers]*

“Make love your aim and you won’t go far wrong! Love with full acceptance, knowing that an embrace and a smile communicate beyond the scope of language. If the atmosphere is right women will come and their children will feel at home. Differences melt away. Even those from countries at war with one another discover an unforced unity. The solidarity between women has massive potential strength to inspire and change communities and individuals.”

FINSBURY PARK SISTERS

“It feels important to meet informally in a place that feels comfortable to all, to share food and conversation and to be able to chat if we meet in the street; and the visits to mosques, museums, GLA etc feel important in their own right – it is good that people see us together – and good that we travel together on tubes/buses.”

“Just start – small if necessary and keep trying – and talking together...”

FN4M– WOMEN OF FAITH GROUP

“Be yourself. Be confident. Create a safe environment to make women feel comfortable Make sure all voices are heard. Ensure equality”

FODIP – WOMEN’S SPORTS PROGRAMME

“...[F]inding a safe, secure private space for women to feel comfortable and confident; using good trainers/leaders who are able to support the women; welcome all women keen and encourage physical activity; and work with the group to ensure they are involved with decisions and travel of group/programme.”

GHAR SE GHAR/GHAR SE GHAR FRIENDS

“Be open to all sorts of ideas and contributions. Dig deep and find out what skills people have – everyone can do something that can be valued and shared. Don’t assume people won’t engage in something because of their faith & culture or just accept what those who set themselves up to be the ‘spokesperson’ says. People are

individuals and have their own ideas and feelings about what they will get involved in. Do lots of things together and enjoy them.”

LINCOLNSHIRE FAITH COUNCIL - WOMEN OF THE WORLD/COSY CRAFTERS

“...[T]hat it is great to have a time to come together with other women to just talk.”

WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD COMMUNITY FORUM (WAMCF) WOMEN’S GROUP

“...[R]egular speakers on shared concerns; eating and drinking a lot together and enjoying each others’ company; creating something – in this case a wall hanging of 24 patchwork squares which reflect faiths and is displayed publicly.”

WOKING PEOPLE OF FAITH LADIES’ COFFEE MORNINGS

“Rather do it than don’t do it!”

WOMEN’S INTERFAITH COFFEE EVENING, READING

“...[T]ime to share ... stories”

WOMEN’S INTERFAITH FORUM SHEFFIELD

“Work from the bottom and not the top down. Start with the women and grow the initiatives.

“Food! Food is essential. “

“Think about layout and space. We set it up so women sit round roundtables and have conversation.”

WOMEN’S INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING GROUP, LEICESTER

“Regularity is important to build confidence in attenders”

“It is important to enjoy the meeting and also to learn something. Combining a shared meal and a talk works well.”

“[E]ach member bringing a dish to share. This breaks barriers and helps logistically as food preparation is shared.

General words of encouragement and to build a local group and then network with others.”

WOMEN TOGETHER, ESSEX

“Everyone brings a dish to share and we eat together. This brings in more people. Everyone showcases a talent they have by leading the art or craft activity on each session or participating in a talent competition.”

“Women Power Empowers.”

WOMEN TOGETHER WOLVERHAMPTON

“Join a group”

Annex B

Locations of women’s local inter faith initiatives



Annex C

Women's local inter faith initiatives in the UK

The descriptions below offer a summary description of the main features of women's local inter faith initiatives described in this report. They are based on any input from them to an IFN Roundtable held in November 2021; 2022 survey responses; and any updates received during the second phase of the project by March 2023. Information on groups in Scotland was provided by Interfaith Scotland.

Where there is a publicly available website page or Facebook page, details are included.

Details of entries were checked with the initiatives in March 2023.

ENGLAND

Birmingham Women's Peace Group

Birmingham Women's Peace Group has been running since 1992. It began following a chain of a prayer organised by the Women's Federation for World Peace to pray for victims of the conflict in Bosnia. The organiser continued the prayer for peace on the 21st of each month echoing the date of the UN Day for Peace which falls on 21 September. That was the seed of the Group.

The Peace Group aspires to bring women of all faiths together, overcoming fear and prejudice, building on a common aspiration for peace; to empower and encourage women to become leaders and decision makers; and to make women's collective voice heard, engaging more young women in this process. Its purposes include: marking events such as International Women's Day and the UN days for Peace, the Family, Human Rights and the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls; community cohesion; dialogue; education; activism; mutual support; running/supporting social initiatives such as helping refugees; and raising funds to support guest speakers and their causes.

The Group evolved from an Ecumenical Christian group to an inter faith one through participants bringing their friends from other faiths. It has involvement from Christian, Baha'i, Brahma Kumari, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian women as well as others. It also aims to involve women of different ages and social backgrounds.

During the pandemic, the Peace Group met fortnightly on weekday evenings, whereas before the pandemic it had met every six weeks. Since the pandemic, numbers have been gradually returning towards the previous level of up to 120 women..

The Group meets in members' homes, community spaces and virtually. There is an invited guest speaker and a focus on a particular cause, charity, NGO or issue. The talk is followed by a Q&A, discussion, collective prayer and fundraising and/or practical help.

The Peace Group has been drawn together and supported since its outset by a Birmingham member of the Women's Federation of World Peace UK.

www.wfwp.org.uk/

www.facebook.com/WFWPUK

Brent Multi Faith Forum Creative Conversations Project

Creative Conversations emerged from the Brent Multi-Faith Forum's City of Sanctuary working group. The working group, in partnership with Brent Council and local charities, identified 'Radical Hospitality' as a workstream. Creative Conversations aimed to welcome, share and celebrate diverse voices of refugee and migrant women of Brent by giving a voice to the voiceless; acknowledging their presence and amplifying their participation in society.

Note: This initiative ran during 2019 and 2020. The pandemic stopped the second block of 12 week sessions, and the project has not resumed, although the hope was that it would be re-established.

There were three different faith or belief groups involved, and a diverse group of cultural backgrounds. The intention was to provide an inclusive space for a small group of women of different faith traditions to encounter one another through the creative workshops and to develop connection and friendship.

The group met weekly on weekday afternoons in order to enable school drop off and pick up. There was a shared lunch. It met in London Inter Faith Centre.

Activities included arts and crafts, dialogue, education, mutual support, and workshops designed to draw similarities between various diaspora as well as enable the public to encounter stories. Writing was an important part of the process and the group co-created a poem. Facilitators of the project included a poet, a playwright, and author, and storyteller/performer.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; personal connections made such as sharing trauma and using space to share experiences; increased understanding about different faiths and strengthened relationships between women of different faiths; increased feelings of trust; feeling of community; and a sense of impact on social initiatives. The

initiative also encouraged a writer to pursue being published in English.

The initiative received project funding from Near Neighbours and also in kind support from Brent Council and the London Inter Faith Centre.

brentmultifaithforum.org.uk/

Building Bridges in Burnley, Share Faith Share Food

Share Faith Share Food is a women's inter faith initiative of Building Bridges in Burnley. It has been running since 2014. The initiative's purposes are community cohesion, dialogue and mutual support. Its aspirations include enabling women to speak out in their communities.

Women join together monthly for 'friendship, fun and food' and all bring something for a shared table. The group usually includes participants from Baha'i Christian Jewish and Muslim communities. It normally meets in a community space on a weekday evening – although it did not meet during the pandemic.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; stronger feelings of community; and women taking a more active part in other activities organised by Building Bridges in Burnley.

It is serviced by Building Bridges Burnley.

bbburnley.wordpress.com/

Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group

Calderdale Women's Interfaith Group (CWIG) began over 10 years ago. It is part of Calderdale Interfaith – a local inter faith organisation that has been going for over 20 years. The Women's Interfaith Group was started by a core group of women who wanted to meet more often, separately from the main group.

CWIG aspires to identify and fulfil local community needs. Its purposes and activities include: arts and crafts, celebrating/marketing events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, education and mutual support. It sometimes partners with other organisations to do things such as an International Women's Day activity. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

The Group has around 250 people on its contact list. It has Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and Quakers regularly involved and guest women speakers from Hindu, Jewish and Sikh faiths.

The Group meets monthly on a weekday morning. Additionally, around ten regular attendees meet for coffee

mornings every fortnight in community spaces or a public space, with speakers addressing health issues, an inter faith topic, raising awareness of an issue, and with creative workshops. It is considering arranging evening and weekend events to attract a more diverse age group.

During the Covid-19 lock down, the Women's Group continued with its coffee mornings by Zoom. It also held some other online activities, such as one about climate change and caring for the environment.

Calderdale Council provides some funding for the work of Calderdale Interfaith Group and the Women's Group has access to those funds.

www.calderdaleinterfaith.co.uk/

www.facebook.com/CalderdaleInterfaith/

Canterbury Women of Faith

Canterbury Women of Faith began in 2015. Its origins were in a meeting of a local Church of England rector with a number of Muslim women. It was then decided to expand to women of all faiths and none.

Note: This Group has not met on a regular basis since Covid-19 and it may not regroup, its organiser noting in her update the establishment of a new (mixed gender) local inter faith organisation in Ashford. The details below reflect its initial survey response in early 2022.

The group's activities and purposes have been dialogue, education, mutual support and sharing food/welcome and hospitality. Its aspiration was to grow in fellowship, recognising that commonality outweighs the differences.

The group was a small one with Christian and Muslim attendees, and also one Hindu attendee. There was a core group but at each meeting some new people come along. It met quarterly on weekday evenings, so women who worked could attend. It usually met in community spaces such as a church hall and a mosque.

Benefits experienced by those taking part were described as including: a broader impact on social initiatives, increased understanding about different faith groups, increased feelings of trust, strengthened relationships between different faith groups and feelings of community.

www.martinpaul.org/interfaithrelations.htm

Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace (Newcastle)

The Annual Christian Muslim Women Pray for Peace gathering has taken place for over ten years in Jesmond Dene, Newcastle. Catholic Christian and Muslim women and young children come together to pray. The focus of prayer is Our Blessed Lady, as both faiths share devotion to her. The initiative was begun by a Catholic woman and a Muslim woman.

Around 30 to 70 participants meet at Jesmond Shrine for prayers for peace (the number of people attending has grown each year). They then go to a nearby Catholic church hall to socialise over vegetarian refreshment and for a talk

on the similarities between the rosary and Muslim prayer beads. The main purposes and activities are prayer, dialogue, education and cohesion. The gathering is usually on a Saturday afternoon to avoid clashing with other important events. During Covid, meetings were held online.

The group's aspirations and long term goals are to: organise continued and additional meetings; continue to learn from one another and meet new people; increase the number of younger women involved; create contacts with other faiths; and potentially expand to mixed-gender.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups and feelings of community; and meeting new people.

The Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle provides support to cover the hire fee of the hall used for the after-prayer event and covers the cost of refreshments. Its Interreligious Relations team organises the event.

diocesehn.org.uk/services/faith-mission/

Dudley Women Together

Dudley Women Together was launched in 2019 with the aim to bring together women from different faith groups, ethnicities and backgrounds in a secure and friendly environment so as to be able comfortably to ask questions about each other's faiths and cultures, and break barriers through socialising.

The purposes of the group include: arts and crafts; community cohesion; dialogue; mutual support; and local level friendships. Its long-term aspirations are to continue to enable women to meet and to create 'pockets of change'. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and stronger feelings of community.

The group usually meets within a community space, with women of all faiths and none attending.

The group was nurtured in its earlier stages by Near Neighbours, from which it has in the past received funding.

www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/2019/10/17/ulvhmrf82emm2ulht53ub4d76txn1o
www.facebook.com/nearneighboursbc

East Meets West – Women of Faith Together in Lancaster

East Meets West was established in 2006. It has two women's programmes/initiatives particularly relevant to this project: the Wellbeing for Women project and the Across the Generations Project. Its stated purposes are not promotion of inter faith understanding and cooperation but these come about through its members coming

together. There is a strong inter faith dimension.

East Meets West's purposes include: arts and crafts; community cohesion; dialogue, mutual support; and running/supporting social initiatives. Benefits described as experienced by attendees include: emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

The group has developed over time to welcome female asylum seekers and refugees and now works with universities from time to time as well as artists and freelance tutors.

The Wellbeing for Women project came about during the easing of the lockdown to boost the morale of asylum seeking and refugee women as they did not have means to go on holiday or days out. The group found tutors and venues for classes in painting, handicrafts, tai chi, etc *The Across the Generations* project was generated by a refugee member who is now co-chair. It was designed to enable asylum seekers and refugees to meet older members of the community and have conversations about their home country/culture and break down barriers between people of different cultures, languages and faith communities, build friendship and promote community cohesion.

East Meets West meets regularly. It has Christian and Muslim women involved. It meets in the fellowship room of Lancaster Baptist Church, usually on weekday afternoons from 12–2pm to have lunch together.

East Meets West has received funding or in kind support for its projects from Lancashire County Council; Awards for All; as well as local funding (eg Lancaster Community Wellbeing Fund) for its annual outing to the Lake District.

Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M) – Women of Faith group

Faith Network for Manchester's Women of Faith group has been running since 2014. It brings together women from different communities and cultures and different ages, enabling their voices to be heard.

The group's purposes and activities include: activism; arts and crafts; celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day; community cohesion; dialogue; education; mutual support; running/supporting social initiatives; and providing a safe environment for discussion. Among these are: sports activities and events, such as a 'Sunday cycle' and Women of Faith Sports Panel; workshops on issues such as antisemitism and Islamophobia; learning trips (including to the Parliament and to Bosnia); health workshops; celebration of different faith festivals; shared meals and picnics; and visits to places of worship. A number of events have been held in partnership.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups;

increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; stronger feelings of community; and space to discuss local issues such as racism and hate crime, and political tensions abroad and impact of those in the UK.

The group usually has women from five faith groups involved but is open to all. It normally meets quarterly at the FN4M Manchester Multifaith Centre or in a public space such as a library or cafe. Some online meetings have been held. Day and time vary to accommodate needs of attenders and also according to the type of activities.

It has in the past received project funding from sources such as Near Neighbours, the local authority, and – for its Sunday Cycle project – Sport England and This Girl Can. It does not at present have project funding.

The Women of Faith group is serviced by FN4M and the women who take part also participate actively in the wider faith network. Its two organisers attend FN4M Trustee meetings.

fn4m.org/
www.facebook.com/FN4Man

Finsbury Park Sisters

Finsbury Park Sisters emerged in 2013 after a female member of St Thomas the Apostle Church in Finsbury Park realised that their congregation and that of Finsbury Park Mosque at the other end of St Thomas's Road did not know each other. The two worshipping communities reached out to engage and during the following six months the Sisters group was developed.

The group has subsequently grown to include 20 or so regularly attending Sisters of different ages – including women from Muslim Welfare House in Finsbury Park and from local churches (Finsbury Park is on the border of three London boroughs: Islington, Hackney and Haringey). The group has welcomed Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu women at some meetings. Others who come regularly have no attachment to a faith.

The Sisters group is informal and describes itself as being about friendship, talking together and enjoying each other's company. As well as friendship, the group sees its purposes as community cohesion and dialogue, where there is interest in connections and respect for differences. Its aspiration and long-term goal are for those who come to get to know each other better. Activities include: social meetings (at least once a term) where food is brought and shared; visits (at least once a term to places like the Victoria and Albert Museum and the East London Mosque); picnics with children in the park; and learning to cook each other's dishes.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: getting to know each other better; increased feelings of trust; and strengthened relationships between different faith groups in the local area.

The group did not meet on Zoom during the pandemic. It met after lifting of restrictions and, as of 2023, they have resumed meeting and hope to do so regularly.

The group usually meets in St Thomas's church hall or in Finsbury Park Mosque's meeting space. These spaces are provided as in-kind support when they are available. Food and refreshments are provided by the mosque and church as well as those brought by participants

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FODIP – Manchester Women's Sports Programme

Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP) is a charity the remit of which is "to host and facilitate sensitively inter faith dialogue on the Israeli Palestinian conflict, within and between Jews, Christians, Muslims and others in the UK, and to promote co-operation through dialogue". It has a young women's forum and the women's sports programme was the result of a forum participant suggesting a project to bring groups together through fun activities and sports.

FODIP then began to provide a private space for women from traditional Muslim, Jewish and Christian backgrounds in Manchester to participate in sports and physical activity in ways which respect the importance of modesty for them. This crystallised into its Women's Sports Programme which began in 2017 (and won a Spirit of 2012 Connecting Communities award the following year). The programme has been running since that time, with a break during Covid.

The programme's purposes are community cohesion and dialogue; the aspiration is that the women who take part will gain a better understanding of one another and develop friendships with people with whom they may not have otherwise met or spoken. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and stronger feelings of community.

Around 15 women from 14 to 75. take part regularly but a much wider group is engaged. There are usually two sessions a week. The group meets in community spaces which can provide a safe and private space for women only.

The programme continues to be serviced by FODIP. It has in the past received some project funding, for example from Near Neighbours and This Girl Can.

www.fodip.org.uk
www.facebook.com/FODIPOfficial

Ghar se Ghar / Ghar se Ghar Friends

Ghar se Gar ('Home from Home') began in Luton over 25 years ago to provide support for South Asian women there. It evolved from a women-of-all-ages and child-care corner, and an evening mother and children/youth group. Women of other cultures started to attend. The faith and culture of

the tutors (Hindu and Muslim) encouraged women from those groups to attend, while sessions in Church halls brought Christian and other faiths.

Ghar se Ghar developed a special focus on engagement between women of three specific faith traditions: Christian, Hindu and Muslim, with group leaders from these.

When it began it was for all ages but later came to be for 60+, while still providing telephone support for younger women. There were originally three regular groups plus other short-term sessions when needed and when funds were available. The groups came together from time to time for events and trips and such activities as its annual International Women's Day event, running for over a decade which brings together 100+ women.

The purposes of the group were described in the survey response as: mutual support, exercise classes, health education, signposting, and social support. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and stronger feelings of community.

During Covid, Zoom proved unsuccessful as a meeting medium. Following Covid, amid continued funding challenges and also the growing range of other activities available for South Asian women, it was decided to close the organisation as a limited company. However, it continues as a small community group Ghar se Ghar Friends and has one very active group. This meets twice a week in community spaces or church halls on weekday mornings for exercise sessions followed by coffee and a discussion or speaker. Participants pay a small amount towards the sessions.

Hounslow Friends of Faith Interfaith Knitting Group

Hounslow Friends of Faith (HFOF) is a local inter faith organisation in West London which began in 2000. From it, emerged a freestanding women-only inter faith knitting group which began about 10 years ago.

The knitting group's purposes include: arts and crafts; community cohesion; mutual support; and running/supporting social initiatives. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and the ability of women to chat and get to know each other.

The group meets once a month in a church in Twickenham. Women from several faiths come and work together on knitting projects such as baby clothes and a special banner for HFOF's 20th Anniversary on which all the different faith groups' symbols were represented.

The group is convened by a committee member of HFOF and so is provided with administrative support. The Twickenham church provides the group's meeting place free.

The HFOF respondent also noted that for a number of years, it also had a women's group which organised speakers, issues, discussions, picnics and outings. This ceased when the organisers became too busy.

www.hounslowfriendsofffaith.org/project/
www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064740876800

Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship Women Peace-ing Together

Women Peace-ing Together began when a group of women wanted to do something to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Leeds Concord's Interfaith Fellowship in 2016. A creative textile group was formed.

The purposes of Women Peace-ing Together are arts and crafts and dialogue. Its aspirations are for women of different faiths and cultures to meet for creative activity and friendship, promoting peace through conversation; to break down barriers; and work together for the benefit of different communities. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; and strengthened relationships between different faith groups.

Four different faith or belief groups are regularly involved. The group meets to work on textile projects for celebrations or on items such as baby clothes or items to donate. Since Women Peace-ing Together has been active it has changed from a fairly large group of women with a textile tutor to a small group of mainly older women who enjoy a knit-and-natter style of meeting. It meets monthly in civic buildings on weekday mornings.

During Covid women kept in touch by email and phone.

The group has in the past received project funding and some support 'in kind'. Funding was received for creating the multi-faith banner for Concord's anniversary 2014 – 2016 and Leeds City Museum provided support for a peace project 2016 – 2018. More recently some support was received from Leeds Library.

concord-leeds.org.uk/textile1.php

Lincolnshire Faith Council – Women of the World / Cosy Crafters

Women of the World was started in 2021 because Lincolnshire Faith Council and The Centre for Reconciliation wanted to connect with women across Lincolnshire, providing a welcoming space for women of all backgrounds and faiths to come together. During 2022 WoW evolved into 'Cosy Crafters'

The Women of the World group's purposes included: marking events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, mutual support, increasing integration in the city, reducing isolation and improving wellbeing. Its aspirations/long-term goal were for more and more women to benefit from meeting face-to-face and long-term friendships to be formed. Benefits experienced by those taking part were described as including: broader

impact on social initiative; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and increased wellbeing/reduced isolation.

WoW had regular attendees from seven different faith or belief groups: Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Pagan, Sikh and no faith. It met monthly on a weekday morning. Since WoW evolved into Cosy Crafters, it meets every Wednesday during term-time. Women can still come and chat like at women of the world but now they bring their craft projects with them to do.

Lincolnshire Faith Council and The Centre for Reconciliation run the group, provide craft items and arrange for teaching of skills like embroidery and crochet.

WoW received some project funding from the National Lottery Awards and also trust grants.

www.facebook.com/LFCouncil/
www.tcf-reconciliation.org/

Redbridge Faith Forum Women's Interfaith Group

Redbridge Faith Forum is a charity with trustees from all different faith groups in the London Borough of Redbridge. It established the Women's Interfaith Group in 2009 after a need was assessed between 2007 to 2009 following four public forums.

The Women's Interfaith Group is part of RFF. There are six faith groups involved. Its work has developed across the years into a broad and diverse programme. It is based around regular workshops with speakers on topics decided by the women from health to climate change and current affairs. The group's purposes include celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, and mutual support. Its aspirations/long term goals are to bring together women of different faiths in a safe and secure environment where they are able to share their beliefs and viewpoints about many issues with no fear of rejection or discrimination.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community. Also, since it has been active, regular members have gained trust and confidence in sharing their beliefs which they know will be respected. The wider local inter faith organisation is described as also having benefitted in that women have gained confidence to join wider events and they recommend engagement with the Faith Forum to their faith group.

Women's events are held bi-monthly – usually held at different faith venues, with the group having a chance to tour the place of worship at the end of the session. During the pandemic, when the group met quarterly virtually,

attendance dropped. However, it is climbing again subsequently.

The group is serviced by Redbridge Faith Forum. Faith venues let it use their premises and sometimes provide free refreshments.

[Redbridgefaithforum.org/](https://redbridgefaithforum.org/)

Tooting Christian-Muslim Women's Group

Tooting Christian-Muslim Women's Group was formed in 2015. It came out of the inter faith experience of the initial organiser at St George's College in Jerusalem, looking to create a space for people of faith to share what they had in common.

The group's purpose was dialogue; its aspirations were to maintain a network of friends and remain a contact group. Ten Christian and Muslim women attended regularly, meeting in community spaces. It met about every six weeks, on a weekday evening and also had trips such as a walk at a local National Trust garden and to an exhibition at the British Museum, which showed art and artefacts related to faith. Valued friendships organically grew between the women who attended the meetings. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: the friendships formed; as well as strengthened relationships between different faith groups.

The group had free use of the meeting space at a community centre and some funding from the Christian Muslim Forum for activities, such as shared meals.

The group shifted from meeting in a structured way, due to changing life circumstances of the women, to meeting informally as a social network. It now keeps in touch via a WhatsApp group, exchanging festival greetings, with members inviting one another to events and sharing updates. As of 2023, the women meet once a year over a meal.

Watford Bridge of Peace

Watford Bridge of Peace (WBP) originated as a project of Women's Federation for World Peace following the outset of war in Iraq and earlier concerns about the impact of the 9/11 attacks in the US on the peace/stability of the world. A member reached out to local Muslims and the initiative began in 2003. Women from the Muslim and Christian community in Watford were invited to a Bridge of Peace ceremony, to befriend each other and learn about each other faith and community.

WBP seeks to empower women as ambassadors for peace in family and community. Its aspiration is to promote friendship and understanding between the various communities in Watford, starting with a sisterhood relationship between Christian and Muslim women and extending to all communities. Its purposes are activism, arts and crafts, celebrating/ marking events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, education, and mutual support.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: a broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; stronger feelings of community; personal connections/similarities found; breaking barriers; and close friendships.

Among its activities are discussion, work on Watford's Peace Garden and on the Watford Celebration, family fun days and visits to places of worship. They also take part in the interfaith Pilgrimage during National Inter Faith week visiting places of worship around Watford. In 2017 WBP donated its Peace Arch to the Peace Garden. The Arch was used in conducting sisterhood ceremonies. It was vandalised but was recently restored with community support.

WBP used to meet monthly on weekend afternoons in community spaces. Members are presently meeting less regularly but are keeping contact with each other. They meet socially during the activities described above. WBP has a strong link with Watford Interfaith Association, of which its founder is an active member.

The group has received some project funding via government funding/grants, individual donations, council funding and PREVENT funding. There has been in kind support through, eg reduced prices for venues and service in kind.

www.watfordbridgeofpeace.org/

Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum (WAMCF) Women's Group

WAMCF was established over forty years ago to bring together various faiths in the Borough. Its Women's Group emerged over ten years ago. It was created to allow women a chance to meet, to share stories and discuss issues concerning women of faith in a safe setting.

The Women's Group has the purposes of community cohesion, dialogue, education, and mutual support and the aspiration to support women of all faiths and none and to encourage next generations. There is a focus on both learning and enjoying each other's company. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: a broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; and strengthened relationships between different faith groups.

The women who attend are from six different faith and belief groups. The group meets in community spaces and places of worship. It meets bimonthly on weekday evenings, enabling those with daytime commitments to attend. Its meetings include regular speakers on shared concerns and arts and crafts activities, such as the creation of a wall hanging of 24 patchwork squares which reflect different faiths and is now on public display.

The group moved to Zoom during the pandemic and has subsequently been experimenting with hybrid meetings where possible.

The group has received some project funding through a grant held by WAMCF.

www.wamcf.org/womens-group/

Woking People of Faith Ladies' Coffee Mornings

Woking People of Faith (WPoF) is a local inter faith organisation which promotes community and religious harmony for the benefit of the public in Woking and environs. It established Faith Ladies' Coffee mornings in 2009 so that women could have an event where they could chat amongst themselves and meet ladies of different faiths in a safe, non-judgemental space.

The purposes of the initiative are: community cohesion; dialogue; and mutual support. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and stronger feelings of community.

Participants from Christian, Muslim, Baha'i, Jewish and Buddhist communities attend. They talk as friends. If faith comes up then they run with it. However, it is not the main topic of discussion.

The group has met in community or faith institution spaces or public spaces such as cafés. Pre-pandemic, the events were held annually, alternating between a weekday and a Saturday. During lockdown, the group moved to monthly Zoom meetings, again alternating between weekdays and Saturdays to accommodate everyone.

Face-to-face meetings were re-established in March 2023.

The Ladies Coffee Mornings group is organised by the part-time Administrator of Woking People of Faith and members of their Events Committee. WPoF's work is supported by Woking Borough Council.

wpof.org.uk/

Women at the Well Interfaith Group – Gloucestershire

In January 2021, an open invitation went out for Muslim and Christian women in Gloucestershire to come to a community-led group. This was initiated by a member of St Catharine's Gloucester. 30 women signed up for the first event – half of them Muslim women and half of them Christian. The idea was that the women would get to know each other, read stories about women at wells in the Bible and the Qur'an, and use craft to reflect their responses. The initial context was an approaching Christian Arts Festival and the group made a banner with their crafted responses to scripture passages featuring women at wells.

The group initially met on Zoom due to lockdown but has since met a number of times at the Museum café in Gloucester and has undertaken a number of projects. Its activities include reflection on scripture, crafting and art. It

has held an exhibition of its work at the Museum of Gloucester.

www.facebook.com/groups/841452686866074/

Women First Smethwick (Sandwell)

Women First Smethwick (WFS) started around 2016 at a Methodist Church in Windmill Lane, Smethwick from a meeting of a group of women who decided that they wanted to meet other local women. They made a connection to Near Neighbours and to Faithful Friends Sandwell and a group then formed. The group then moved to Holy Trinity Church, Smethwick.

WFS welcomes women of all faiths and beliefs. Its purposes include celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, mutual support and friendship. Its long-term goal is to have the opportunity to build local level friendships and have conversations about perceptions of each other's faiths or ethnicity/diversity in a safe space.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: increased understanding about different faith groups; and strengthened relationships between different faith groups. The group describes itself as having broken barriers between faiths and encouraged better friendship circles across different faiths.

Activities have included discussion, cooking and trips to different places of worship, including a faith places tour arranged by Near Neighbours. Before the pandemic, the women made Christmas cake together and marked International Women's Day. During the pandemic, the women met online.

The group is informal and does not receive funding. It received some servicing support at an early stage from the Near Neighbours local coordinator.

Women Growing Together, Oldham

Oldham Inter Faith Forum (OIFF) is an inter faith body which has been working since 2001 to promote harmony, understanding and cooperation between all members of the community. Early on it had, for a time, a women's group called the Oldham Women's Interfaith Network (OWIF). In 2016/17 it began developing a new initiative, Women Growing Together (WGT).

(WGT) brings together Oldham women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to take part in activities and social events, creating opportunities to learn about each other's faith and culture. It aims to help challenge stereotypes and prejudice through friendship, knowledge and fun. Its purposes include celebrating/marketing events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, education, mutual support and running/supporting social initiatives. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: increased understanding about different faith groups; increased

feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

In 2018, the local authority asked the women if they could help it mark the Centenary of Women's Suffrage, and they put on an event celebrating women. This was the start of holding twice yearly events.

Women from four faith and belief groups take part. The group meets weekly on a weekday morning, but it is considering changing that to make it easier for younger women to attend who may be working during the day. It usually meets in community spaces, public spaces, civic buildings, virtually and in OIFF offices.

The group met monthly on Zoom during the pandemic and explored themes such as the significance of prayer in each of the member's different faith lives and hate crime. It recommenced in person meetings after the pandemic.

WGT is supported by Oldham Interfaith Forum, which meets the costs of events and venue bookings. For a short period of time it had funding from 'Near Neighbours' for a part time worker.

oldhaminterfaith.org.uk/women-growing-together/

Women's Interfaith Coffee Evening, Reading

Women's Interfaith Coffee Evening, in Reading, began in 2019. It provides an opportunity to chat with women of different faiths over a cup of coffee.

Its aspirations/long-term goal is for the women who attend to get to know one another and discuss common issues and learn about one another's faith.

It is a small, informal, group with women from three faiths groups involved.

It has the purposes of dialogue, mutual support and friendship. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

The group meets monthly on Zoom on a weekday evening.

The group does not receive funding or in kind support.

www.rifg.uk/

Women's Interfaith Forum Sheffield

The Women's Interfaith Forum Sheffield was established in 2018 to create a space for women of all faiths and none to be able to come together and have conversation. It began meeting in the wake of the Manchester Arena bombing, with the hope that by breaking down barriers and dispelling myths about each other's beliefs and traditions the women could help build better relationships and understanding and a stronger and safer community.

The purposes of the Forum include celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day, community

cohesion, dialogue, mutual support, running/supporting social initiatives and breaking down misunderstandings. There is discussion about issues relating to women's place in religion and what different faiths teach about social responsibility. Activities also include story sharing and singing. The Forum aspires to be a resource and a permanent place of learning and mutual support.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

Women from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities and of no religious faith have been regularly involved. The Forum has also engaged with the Hindu and Sikh communities. The Forum has a small inter faith steering group. It normally meets quarterly on a weekend afternoon at St Mary's Church. During the pandemic it did not meet as regularly but met in person once and on Zoom and its steering Committee kept in touch via WhatsApp.

St Mary's Church makes space available without charge. The Forum does not receive any funding.

[www.stmarys-church.co.uk/items-1/sheffield%E2%80%99s-women%E2%80%99s-interfaith-forum-\(wif\)](http://www.stmarys-church.co.uk/items-1/sheffield%E2%80%99s-women%E2%80%99s-interfaith-forum-(wif))

Women's Interfaith Understanding Group – Leicester

The Women for Interfaith Understanding Group is a Leicester-based group linked to the organisation Christians Aware. It has been coming together for around 30 years. Its aim is to bring women of different faiths together to build bridges and learn about one each other's lives, work and how to live together in harmony.

The purposes of the group are described by it as including: celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day dialogue, education and dialogues. Its discussions cover topics such as love, pilgrimage, the environment and parenting. Other activities include occasional trips to places of worship and some publications, such as: a prayer book, a book on food from different faith traditions, and one on Pioneers of Inter Faith in Leicester.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

The Women for Interfaith Understanding group is small but has a core of women from six different faith or belief groups regularly involved. It meets monthly on a weekday evening, in members' homes or virtually.

The group does not receive funding but does have support from Christians Aware.

www.christiansaware.co.uk/Women_for_Interfaith_Understanding.html

Women Together, Essex

Women Together was set up in about 2011 to support vulnerable women from all faith backgrounds. Its long term goal/aspiration is to empower women, giving them confidence.

The group's purposes are arts and crafts; celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day; community cohesion; dialogue; education; mutual support; running/supporting social initiatives; sports and mental health support.

Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as including: a broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support; increased understanding about different faith groups; increased feelings of trust; strengthened relationships between different faith groups; and feelings of community.

The group meets quarterly in a civic building or virtually. There are women from four different faith or belief groups present regularly, though sometimes from more. Children occasionally attend with their mothers or grandmothers.

The group's meetings run from 11am to 2pm, with an external speaker on a chosen topic. Each faith then gives their perspective on the topic. Members bring a dish to share for lunch. In the afternoon there is a craft activity where skills are shared. Sometimes a special time such as South Asian Heritage Month or Black History Month is marked. Outside organisations occasionally come to showcase their services. The group also holds fitness sessions and talent shows and competitions.

During the pandemic the group did outdoor activities such as designing and painting a big mural of members in the town centre and a sponsored walk to raise money for the Queen's Green Canopy. The group resumed meeting after the pandemic. Among their early events was a Platinum Jubilee party. Recently, they began playing cricket, badminton and learning to cycle weekly.

Women Together has received funding for many fitness activities under the banner of BAME, vulnerable, mental health, isolation and women. A local theatre has provided it with a space for some of its meetings.

www.essexmindandspirit.co.uk/womentogether.html

Women Together Wolverhampton

Women Together Wolverhampton began as a partnership between a Mother's Union group and a local mosque. Its aspiration is to continue building local level friendships.

Its purposes include celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day, community cohesion, dialogue, mutual support and friendships at the local level. Benefits experienced by those taking part are described as

including: increased confidence; emotional support; and the development of active friendships.

Women from four faith or belief groups and none take part. The group meets in public spaces and faith venues. Before the pandemic, it held an Eid celebration at Al Aqsa Mosque in Wolverhampton (hosted by Near Neighbours). The group relaunched after the pandemic with an event at Tabernacle Baptist Church.

The group received some support and project funding from Near Neighbours in the past but now continues on a voluntary basis.

www.near-neighbours.org.uk/blog/iwd-blackcountry

SCOTLAND

Abrahamic Roots, Coatbridge

Abrahamic Roots, Coatbridge (AR) was established in 2007, as a sub-group of North Lanarkshire Muslim Women and Family Alliance, for women to meet and explore the similarities and differences between the Bible and Qur'an and form bonds and friendship.

AR is a bilateral group involving Christian and Muslim women. It meets monthly on Saturdays in Coatbridge.

At the meetings members of the group join together and enjoy worldwide cuisines, celebrating different religious and cultural events through art and cooking. They also visit places of worship and historical significance such as Iona, the Edinburgh Mosque and Scottish Parliament. In 2017 the group presented at a seminar organised by Interfaith Scotland focusing on women's inter faith groups and relevant issues. It gave a history of the group, outlined their activities and presented the 'joys of challenges'.

It has created an opening and closing prayer for its meetings which is representative of all the Abrahamic faiths.

interfaithscotland.org/local-interfaith-groups/abrahamic-roots-group-coatbridge

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG)

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) began in 2007. It aims to provide an open and informal environment for women of different faiths to engage with one another.

The group's activities include dialogue events, cooking, sharing of food, and craft activities. Topics discussed include rituals or practices of different faith groups; peace circles; violence against women; storytelling and gracious listening; and artistic project work.

EWIG welcomes women of all faiths and none. It meets quarterly. Some of the meetings are timed to coincide with events such as International Women's Day and Scottish Interfaith Week.

interfaithscotland.org/local-interfaith-groups/edinburgh-womens-interfaith-group

Women of Faith and Community, Glasgow

Women of Faith and Community (WFC), Glasgow was established in 2010 for women to discuss commonalities and work towards a better understanding of one another's faiths and beliefs.

The group welcomes women of all faiths and none. It meets on the first Monday of the month. From time to time the group holds an International Womens Day event or an outing. It has held a pilgrimage to four places of worship in the West End of Glasgow and various other events including events to mark Scottish Interfaith Week and World Harmony Week.

During the Covid-19 pandemic WFC partnered with Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow and Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group. WFC maintained communication via WhatsApp, email and by phone in order to not exclude those without social media.

Its programme for the year is created around what the group members would like.

interfaithscotland.org/local-interfaith-groups/women-of-faith-and-community-glasgow

WALES

Coffee 'n' Laughs, Newport

Coffee 'n' Laughs has its origins in an initiative started in 2007 for local women to help migrants and refugees with English Language. This was at the initiative of Community House Presbyterian Church of Wales, which employed an inter faith development worker in order to make friendships in the diverse area of Maindee.

Over the course of subsequent years it has matured into a friendship network with a significant inter faith dimension.

The group's purposes are: celebrating/marketing events such as International Women's Day; community cohesion; dialogue; education; mutual support; and running/supporting social initiatives. Benefits described as experienced by attendees include: a broader impact on social initiatives; emotional support, increased understanding about different faith groups, increased feelings of trust, strengthened relationships between different faith groups and feelings of community.

The group meets weekly on a Thursday afternoon. It notes that it is also very active through a WhatsApp group. Most of the women are Muslim and Christian but there are also Baha'i, Hindu and Sikh members.

Coffee 'n' Laughs is supported through Community House Newport through grant funding received by that.

communityhousemaindee.org/coffee-and-laughs

Note: the project received no information about any ongoing women's local inter faith initiatives in Northern Ireland.

Annex D

National initiatives supporting women's local inter faith initiatives

INTERFAITH SCOTLAND

Interfaith Scotland (formerly the Scottish Inter Faith Council) was formed in 2003 to 'help ensure good relations between the diverse religion and belief communities of Scotland and also to share good practice in interfaith dialogue, education, engagement and training nationally and internationally'. Interfaith Scotland, as a national body, links local Scottish inter faith groups and facilitates dialogue, training and education for communities, faith leaders, youth and schools, women and the general public.

As part of its work, Interfaith Scotland facilitates a range of events for women across Scotland. These have included marking Refugee Festival Scotland and International Women's Day – for example in 2021, holding an IWD event called 'Women's Voices in Climate Action'. It often partners with other women's groups to hold spaces for women to discuss and explore a range of topics. For example, in 2020, during Covid, it held an online seminar on 'Women and Leadership', for which 60 women of all faiths and none from across Scotland and the UK gathered for a virtual evening of prayer and reflection for the health and well-being of humanity. It organised an Interfaith Service with Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network as part of that event. In 2021, it partnered with other women's organisations to hold a three-part series on Zoom, exploring inter faith engagement and why it is important; lived experiences of

Ramadan and Eid; and commonalities between faith groups and discussing the value of faith in society today.

Interfaith Scotland also organises occasional women only inter faith retreats. The retreats are open to women of all faiths and combine prayer and meditation, reflective walks and personal reflection. The retreats provide opportunities for women to share commonalities across faiths.

Scottish Interfaith Week, which is led by Interfaith Scotland, also features women's inter faith events and workshops. In 2021 these included a creative writing workshop and a women's dialogue event on 'Connecting Women of Different Faiths, Beliefs and Cultures', held in collaboration with Bridging the Gap, a Glasgow based charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers which works to bring young people together to counter sectarianism.

Prior to 2013, Interfaith Scotland held an Annual Women's Seminar at the University of Glasgow on a variety of themes. The desire was identified for more regular women's events and in the lead up to the Scottish Referendum in 2014, various dialogue events were held in Dundee, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Inverness and Portree with the theme 'Values and Visions for the Future of Scotland'. From then on regular local seminars have been held across Scotland. Between 2015 and 2019 the theme for the local inter faith dialogues was 'Health and Wellbeing for body and soul' looking at the links between spirituality and health. These local dialogue events took place in Dumfries, Stirling, Forres, Edinburgh, Dundee and Kirkwall.

interfaithscotland.org



Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Glasgow event for women and children from many faiths and cultures to celebrate Refugee Festival Scotland and The Great Together

NEAR NEIGHBOURS

Since 2011 Near Neighbours has brought people together from different faiths and backgrounds to improve their local community. There has been a particular focus on working with women and especially those in diverse communities. Near Neighbours' local coordinators have enabled work around issues like domestic violence, period poverty, menopause, and forced marriage, and have worked to build confidence and leadership amongst women in different communities and co-operation across faiths.

Many women's projects have been funded where the kind of grassroots work being done would have not been easily funded by mainstream or larger funders. As an example, in 2022, in East London, Near Neighbours funded Womanewer, which brought together 80 diverse women who have

experienced sexual violence or trauma to do activities together in a safe and supportive space. Volunteers devoted 250 hours to supporting women through activities including yoga, self-defence classes, and sharing stories through art. Participating women came from a range of ages, faiths, and ethnicities – white British, African, Indian, Pakistani, Arab, and Southeast Asian. The project helped those who were isolated to connect with other women in the local community and created a safe space for women to be able to talk about the abuse they have experienced.



Then IFN staff member, Kirsty Healey with the Revd Elizabeth Carnelley, Near Neighbours.

In the section below, the work of one of NN's partner bodies, Wellsprings Together, with women is described in greater detail following an interview by the project with its West Yorkshire Coordinator, Kaneez Khan MBE

Wellsprings Together

A range of women's only inter faith initiatives are supported by Wellsprings Together. Since 2011 Near Neighbours has been funded to work in West Yorkshire and there has been a creative partnership with Wellsprings enabling work across faiths and ethnicities.

The vision of Wellsprings is 'faith in action transforming communities together across the Anglican Diocese of Leeds to see the flourishing of all who live there'¹. The organisation works 'faithfully with partners to address deprivation, isolation and division within our communities. [Their] team working across the Diocese of Leeds helps to support and coordinate projects across geographic, religious and civic boundaries'² on a range of work streams including Parish enabling, food security, social inclusion, and community building.

As part of these work streams, and through their partnership with Near Neighbours, a variety of women's local initiatives function. The broad aims of these inter faith/

multi faith initiatives are to: nurture local women's leadership skills and capabilities; support women to hold their own in all areas of their lives; build resilience; encourage women to stand taller; and provide spaces for them to share their experiences and know they are not alone.

The initiatives have an intersectional approach, acknowledging the overlapping social identities of the women and the individual and unique experiences of discrimination and oppression that they face. Women from a diverse range of faith and cultural traditions are welcomed, valued and supported by a range of different initiatives through which women can understand their differences whilst realising their commonalities. The initiatives and their organisers carry out a range of activities such as informal mentoring, shared cooking, craft activities and shared dialogue to bring local women together and understand their cultural differences whilst building strong and lasting relationships with one another.

Both the women organisers and the women attenders of the various initiatives face vast and difficult challenges from both within and without the local communities. These include deep community disapproval, from different faith and cultural traditions of the women engaging with the initiatives, systemic racism, misogyny and challenges to funding which enables these initiatives to function. Despite the challenges and barriers that the women, the organisers and the initiatives face, there is mutual desire between the women of the different communities to come together and the organiser noted that she feels great honour in being part of nurturing relationships which may last 30 years or more between the women.

Example initiatives:

- **Real People Honest Talk Leeds, a Near Neighbours initiative**, brought local women together to discuss areas of mutual concern, the things that matter to them. The Covid pandemic had had a negative impact on the relationships built as part of the shared dialogue initiative but the organisers had encouraged the women to come back together by encouraging the attenders' desire to keep in touch. WhatsApp had been a helpful way to maintain connection throughout the pandemic. Organisers support the women to persist with their relationships, in spite of the wide cultural divides that exist between the women, and facilitate and encourage the women's relationships to grow. Further information: wellspringstogether.org.uk/whats-new/real-people-honest-talk-in-leeds
- **Bahar Women's Association** engages women by supporting them through English Language classes. These classes support newly arrived [Kurdish] women to the area integrate into society. The lessons empower the women and support their independence by enabling them to conduct simple activities, such as phone calls, in English. This was funded by Near Neighbours

¹ Wellsprings Together – Accessed February 2022, <https://wellspringstogether.org.uk/about>

² Wellsprings Together – Accessed February 2022, <https://wellspringstogether.org.uk/areas-of-work>

- **Touchstone, Bradford**

- **Circles of Life Women Together** ‘empowers Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) women and young girls to build confidence, develop new skills and take positive risks in an environment which builds resilience amongst communities and makes a difference in their lived experience’.

NISA-NASHIM

Nisa-Nashim is a Jewish and Muslim women’s network which was founded in 2015 by Laura Marks OBE and Julie Siddiqi MBE. With increased levels of hate crime and mistrust around minority groups Nisa-Nashim aims to bring these two communities together through their women. ‘Nisa’ and ‘nashim’ are the words for ‘women’ in Arabic and Hebrew and reflect their similarities.

The majority of women who are part of Nisa-Nashim meet for the first time through the organisation. Prior to that some Muslim women have never met or befriended a Jewish woman and vice versa. The organisation brings together Muslim and Jewish women in order to develop relationships and friendship and to develop understanding, trust and respect for the beliefs and customs, the rituals and practices of the other faith group. Nisa-Nashim works to build social cohesion through positive relationships and experiences.

Nisa-Nashim has developed relationships specifically through the women. Many issues affect Muslim and Jewish women in particular but they don’t always have the opportunity to say how they are feeling or to express their views. Setting up Nisa-Nashim has allowed a safe-space to develop where their views can be heard. It has also helped enable these views to be shared with policy makers and government departments.

Nisa-Nashim operates primarily through local groups and special interest groups. The groups always have a Muslim woman and a Jewish woman co-chairing. There are approximately 25 groups – local and special interest – across the country around half based in London. There are area groups in a number of the main cities in England and Scotland (Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester). The ‘special interest groups’ include a book club, ‘Sisters in Law’ (members of which are all Jewish and Muslim lawyers or solicitors) a Teachers group and a Police Officers group. A group of local councillors launches in parliament this summer.

Nisa-Nashim recently established an Israel/Palestine working group which “focusses specifically on this thorny topic trying to find ways to discuss it without tearing ourselves apart”.

During the pandemic, Nisa-Nashim and its groups continued to be very active. The new technology meant that women across the country were able to stay connected. Nisa-Nashim used Zoom to hold workshops on wellness and events linked to Eid, Chanukkah and Passover.

www.nisanashim.com/

WOMEN’S INTERFAITH NETWORK

The Women’s Interfaith Network (WIN) started in 2003, based on a friendship between two women – one Jewish and one Muslim (Lady Gilda Levy and Pinky Lilani OBE) – in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack and a rise in hate crime, prejudice and division. These women felt a strong way to connect was first to connect as women and to build friendships from that starting point.

WIN is a woman-led organisation with grassroots groups in London and the South East. The groups are self-running, planning their own events and with their own initiatives shaped in the context of the grassroots context in their own communities. WIN provides training and support for the women who are committee members so its programme has a women’s leadership element.

WIN also has national projects. A key example is its Faiths Against Domestic Abuse (FADA) campaign which it started in response to the rise in domestic abuse cases during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides a locus to come together, either as people of faith or as allies to the faith communities, to say that every community is affected by domestic abuse and that it has no place in any community – to say ‘No’ and to affirm their support for the women in their communities. A FADA event was held linked to Inter Faith Week.

Another WIN national project is an educational project of animated films called the ‘All of Us’ campaign – www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYRNsVlaN2A. The first film is about division, conflict and what can bring people together. The second film is about mental health. A further example is a mothers and daughters theatre project which WIN did some years ago. That was an opportunity for intergenerational and intercultural conversations about faith and identity. More recently, it held a Time to Talk Climate Panel promoting women’s voices on environmentalism:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=viopwCF1qvo.

WIN is expanding its work with a partnership with Westminster charity Unfold, bringing together its members with asylum-seeking women through a programme of shared meals.

WIN views its women’s focus as important in order to provide a safe space where women can connect as women and know that their voices will be heard where sometimes in other, mixed gender, spaces they may have concerns that they will not be represented or, for cultural or religious reasons, may not be comfortable.

WIN uses social media platforms, and it has trustees who put its message out. However, it notes that getting the message across and communicating the work being done is a challenge for any small charity such as WIN.

wominet.org.uk/

Annex E

Survey on women's local inter faith engagement

Women's local inter faith initiatives and engagement

Thank you in advance for kindly taking the time to share your local inter faith organisation's knowledge and experience of women's local inter faith initiatives – either within your organisation or separate local bodies. The purpose of the survey is to learn more about ongoing women's inter faith initiatives, helping strengthen IFN's work to support and encourage local inter faith activity.

A short report will be produced at the end of the project and it will also feed into practical resources to help others wanting to strengthen or develop women's inter faith engagement at local level.

The initiatives about which information is sought are ones involving participants from two or more different faith communities. They might include women also of non-religious beliefs.

All questions are voluntary aside from questions 1, 2 and 4 which pertain to your contact details (please refer to the Data Protection Statement below for information about how your personal data will be processed). However, the more information you are able to share, the more it helps IFN in sharing and encouraging activities that help to deepen and strengthen inter faith understanding and cooperation.

Thank you very much.

DATA PROTECTION STATEMENT:

Data which you provide in this survey may be drawn upon by the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) for informing the research into women's local inter faith initiatives. Data may also be used for the wider purposes of IFN's work of promoting good inter faith relations in the UK. Answers you have given may be quoted, and may be attributed to your organisation but not to you personally.

Any contact details which you provide in this questionnaire will not be passed to third parties without your permission. If any of your responses are not for publication or use as part of the research, please state this clearly at the end of your answer.

IFN can be contacted at any time to have any contact details/ personal information you have provided viewed, changed or deleted. IFN's Data Protection Policy can be provided on request.

IFN processes data in accordance with its Data Protection Policy and the Data Protection Act 2018. It is registered with the ICO. *

☐ I confirm I have read and agree to the Data Protection Statement

Comments:

1. What is the name of your local inter faith organisation? *

2. What is your name (the person filling out this form) and preferred contact details? *

Name

Phone

Email

3. What is your role within your local inter faith organisation? *

4. Does your local inter faith organisation have any initiatives run by women, and for/ involving just women or usually just women? This might be, eg a women's group, a group with a particular focus such as crafts or dialogue or a regular programme of, eg women's workshops. *

☐ Yes ☐ No

5. What is the name of any such group or regular women's programme? If you have more than one such initiative, please list these.

6. How/ why did this women's initiative begin?

7. What is the purpose of the women's initiative? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Activism
- ☐ Arts and crafts
- ☐ Celebrating or marking events such as International Women's Day
- ☐ Community cohesion
- ☐ Dialogue
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Mutual support
- ☐ Running/supporting social initiatives eg supporting food banks or working with refugees
- ☐ Other (please say more):

8. What do you see as the aspirations / long term goals of the initiative?

9. How long has the women's initiative been meeting/ been active?

- ☐ Under a year
- ☐ 1–2 years
- ☐ 3–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ over 10 years

Comments:

10. How many attenders does the group usually have on a regular basis?

- ☐ 5 or less
- ☐ 10 or less
- ☐ 15 or less
- ☐ 20 or less
- ☐ 30 or less
- ☐ 40 or less
- ☐ 50 or less
- ☐ More than 50
- ☐ Not known
- ☐ The pandemic has affected the attenders the group usually has. Please provide further information

Comments:

11. What number of different faith and belief groups are regularly involved in the women's group?

- ☐ 2 different faith or belief groups
- ☐ 3 different faith or belief groups
- ☐ 4 different faith or belief groups
- ☐ 5 different faith or belief groups
- ☐ 6 different faith or belief groups
- ☐ 7 or more different faith or belief groups

Comments:

12. Does the group have a special focus on engagement between women of specific faith traditions (for example Muslim-Jewish, Hindu Christian etc) ?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

13. Approximately, what age ranges are regularly present in the women's group? Please select all that apply

☐ 14 – 18 years

☐ 18 – 30 years

☐ 31 – 40 years

☐ 41 – 60 years

☐ 61 – 75 years

☐ 75 + years

☐ Unknown

☐ Unsure

Comments:

14. How often does the group usually meet? Please note in the comment box if the pandemic has affected that.

☐ Weekly

☐ Monthly

☐ Quarterly

☐ Annually

☐ Pandemic has affected how often the group usually meets. Please give further information

Comments:

15. Does the group usually meet weekdays or weekends?

☐ Weekdays

☐ Weekends

☐ Varies

16. At what time of the day does the group usually meet?

☐ Morning

☐ Afternoon

☐ Evening

☐ Varies

Comments:

17. What are the reasons the group usually meets when it does?

18. Where does the group usually meet? Please select all that apply

☐ In members' homes

☐ Community spaces, eg a community centre

☐ Public spaces, eg in a café

☐ School or college rooms

☐ Civic buildings, eg library, town hall

☐ Virtually, eg on Zoom

☐ Other (please specify):

19. Does the women's inter faith initiative/ group receive any funding or 'in kind' support?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Yes (in the past 5 years) but not currently
- ☐ No

Comments:

20. What types of funding or 'in kind support' does/ did the women's initiative/ group receive, or used to receive, in the last 5 years? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Trust funding
- ☐ Foundation grants
- ☐ Project funding, eg Near Neighbours or This Girl Can
- ☐ Governmental funding/ grants
- ☐ Crowdfunding
- ☐ Corporate funding
- ☐ Service in kind, eg administrative support or place of meeting
- ☐ Individual donations/ gifts
- ☐ Membership fees
- ☐ Other (please specify):

21. What factors have shaped the way the initiative/ group functions and its pattern of participation? Please select all that apply

- ☐ Work/life balance
- ☐ Family commitments
- ☐ Maintaining communication
- ☐ Community support/ interest
- ☐ Other (please specify):

22. How has your women's local inter faith initiative/ group changed over the time it has been active?

23. How would you describe the benefits that attenders/ members of the group have experienced being involved with the women's local inter faith initiative?

- ☐ Broader impact on social initiatives
- ☐ Emotional support
- ☐ Increased understanding about different faith groups
- ☐ Increased feelings of trust
- ☐ Strengthened relationships between different faith groups
- ☐ Stronger feelings of community
- ☐ Other (please specify):

24. How do you think your wider local inter faith organisation may have benefited (or not) from there being a women's local inter faith group/ initiative within it?

25. Please give any top tips/ best practice examples of the activities, events, initiatives that are engaged with by the group that you/ the group would like to share.

26. Words of wisdom for new groups or to inspire women to create a new group.

27. Did there used to be a local women's initiative/ group as part of your local inter faith organisation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please provide more details about this past group.

28. Do you know of separate or different women's local inter faith initiatives/ groups in the area in which your local inter faith organisation operates?

☐ Yes ☐ No

29. Please list the name(s) of these initiatives and some brief information if you are able to.

Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

Faith Community Representative Bodies

Baha'i Community of the UK
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Buddhist Society
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Churches Together in England
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Druid Network
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
Hindu Council (UK)
Hindu Forum of Britain
Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain
Institute of Jainology
Jain Network
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
Methodist Church in Britain
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
Muslim Council of Britain
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Pagan Federation
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
Salvation Army United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland
Spiritualists' National Union
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB
United Reformed Church in the UK
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Educational and Academic Bodies

The ASHA Foundation
Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme
City, University of London Chaplaincy
Durham University Chaplaincy Network
The Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts at the University of Wales Trinity St David
Islamic Foundation
Middlesex University Inter Faith Network
National Association of SACREs
OneSpirit Interfaith Foundation
Religious Education Council of England and Wales
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter
The University of Lincoln Multi-Faith Chaplaincy
University of Salford Faith Centre
Wales Association of SACREs
Woolf Institute

National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum
Interfaith Scotland
Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Rhyngffydd Cymru
Faiths Forum for London
North East Regional Faiths Network
South East England Faith Forum
Abrahamic Reunion (England)
All Faiths Network for the UK
Children of Abraham (Imams and Rabbis Council of the United Kingdom)
Christian Muslim Forum
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Council of Christians and Jews

Council of Dharmic Faiths
East of England Faiths Agency
Faith and Belief Forum
Interfaith Alliance UK
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
Khalili Foundation
London Boroughs Faiths Network
Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
Nisa-Nashim
Religions for Peace (UK)
Scriptural Reasoning
St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society
United Religions Initiative (UK)
Westminster Interfaith
Women's Interfaith Network
World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group
Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum
Barnet Multi-Faith Forum
Bath Interfaith Group
Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Blackpool Faith Forum
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Multi-Faith Forum
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Bristol Multi-Faith Forum
Building Bridges in Burnley
Calderdale Interfaith Council
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action
Cheltenham Inter Faith

Cleveland and Tees Valley Inter Faith Group	Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Cornwall Faiths Forum	Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum	Plymouth Council of Faiths
Crawley Interfaith Network	Preston Faith Forum
Faiths Together in Croydon	Reading Interfaith Group
Cumbria Interfaith Forum	Redbridge Faith Forum
Devon Faith and Belief Forum	Rugby Inter Faith Forum
Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum	Salford Interfaith Network
Exeter Faith and Belief Group	Sheffield Inter Faith
Gateshead Interfaith Forum	Slough Faith Partnership
Greater Yarmouth Inter Faith and Belief Network	Solihull Faiths Forum
Harrow Interfaith	South London Inter Faith Group
Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum	South Shropshire Interfaith Forum
Hertsmere Forum of Faiths	Southampton Council of Faiths
Hillingdon Inter Faith Network	Southwark Multi Faith Forum
Horsham Interfaith Forum	Stafford and District Friends of Faith
Hounslow Friends of Faith	Stratford-on-Avon Interfaith Forum
Hull and East Riding Interfaith	Swindon Inter Faith Group
Inter Faith Isle of Man	Faiths United (Tameside)
Islington Faiths Forum	Torbay Faith and Belief Forum
Keighley Interfaith Group	Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Inter-Faith Forum	Wakefield Interfaith Network
Faiths Together in Lambeth	Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum
Lancashire Forum of Faiths	Warwick District Faiths Forum
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship	Watford Inter Faith Association
Leeds Faiths Forum	Wellingborough Inter Faith Group
Leicester Council of Faiths	Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group
Interfaith Forum for Leicestershire	Westminster Faith Exchange
Loughborough Council of Faiths	William Campbell-Taylor (City of London Interfaith)
Luton Council of Faiths	Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum
Maidstone Inter Faith Network	Wisbech Interfaith Forum
Faith Network for Manchester	Interfaith Wolverhampton
Mansfield Interfaith Group	Woking People of Faith
Medway Inter Faith Action Forum	Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)	York Interfaith Group
Milton Keynes Council of Faiths	
Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester	
Newcastle Council of Faiths	
North Herts Faith Forum	
North Kent Interfaith	
North Kirklees Inter Faith	
Northampton Inter Faith Forum	
Norwich InterFaith Link	
Nottingham Inter Faith Council	
Oldham Inter Faith Forum	
Building Bridges Pendle – Interfaith Community Project	

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