



# Inter Faith Network day event for local inter faith practitioners

A SHORT REPORT

Thursday 30 July 2015  
National Council for Voluntary  
Organisations, London





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

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# About the day



Participants in workshop discussion

On 30 July, practitioners from a wide range of local inter faith groups from different parts of the UK came together for a day of learning and sharing held by the Inter Faith Network for the UK. This was the second event of this kind. The first was held in Sheffield in March.

The first local inter faith groups began to emerge in the UK back in the 1970s. From a handful of pioneering groups, local inter faith bodies have mushroomed in number to over 250 and there are also many types of local initiative which are not 'inter faith organisations' as such, including bodies such as SACREs and local multi faith chaplaincies as well as projects, initiatives and short term programmes. What are some of the features of the landscape today and some of the challenges and possibilities in working locally for inter faith understanding and cooperation?

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has, since it was established in 1987, advocated strongly for the importance of local inter faith activity. This has been a part of its overall pattern of work. Local activity is organically related to the very important work of national faith community bodies and also benefits from the work of national

and regional inter faith and educational initiatives of many kinds. Past IFN National Meetings have explored these links and the importance of the role of national faith communities and inter faith initiatives in supporting and encouraging local inter faith activity.

This day event was offered specifically for local inter faith practitioners to share their experiences, and to discuss issues of common interest and concern and for focused learning opportunities drawing on the kinds of questions and issues raised by IFN member local groups at link meetings in the last two years. It was open to all local inter faith groups in the UK and also local inter faith practitioners with a particular interest in the issues working in other contexts.

The event was facilitated by the Director of Inter Faith Network for the UK, Harriet Crabtree. She spoke, in her opening remarks, about the vital importance of inter faith work at local level and the commitment of those who carried this out. The day was an opportunity to strengthen this work through sharing of good practice, practical learning about particular issues, and discussion of matters of common interest.

# Morning session

## Local inter faith organisations: a whistle stop tour of 7 ways they make a powerful contribution to our shared life!

Ashley Beck, Inter Faith Development Officer, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Mr Beck said that although the presentation was based on 7 ways, there are many more! He said that different ways are relevant to different inter faith groups. The 7 ways he discussed were:

- **Building Neighbourly Communities**  
Local inter faith groups play a role in building relationships and friendships across faiths, being welcoming and hospitable, creating a safe space for people to ask questions and creating the conditions for dialogue, rather than monologue.  
Examples include inviting people to dinner, to observe a special service (eg Baptism/ naming/ dedication).
- **Envisioning**  
When people of faith come together to discuss their values, this helps find commonalities as well as differences, and create a shared vision for our community and wider society. That helps us make common cause together. IFN has explored shared values in such publications as *The Quest for Common Values* and *Living Well Together*. Visions and Values for the Future was the theme for Scottish Inter Faith Week in 2013.
- **Promoting understanding and raising awareness**  
This covers activities such as religious literacy work in schools, talks, seminars, exhibitions, dialogue events and visiting places of worship.  
The photo examples include a 'Living Library' event in Wycombe where you could take out a 'human book', an inter faith exhibition in a shopping centre in Leicester and a primary school assembly in Swansea during Inter Faith Week.
- **Witness**  
It is important for people of faith to be seen together; this sends a powerful message and can challenge misconceptions. Joint statements, sharing a platform and faith walks are a visible witness to unity and create a positive narrative.  
Examples include inter faith walks in Oxford (photo right), South London, Watford, Luton, Edinburgh and Reading. (Exhibition materials about inter faith walks in South London were on display at the event.)
- **Solidarity**  
Strong relationships make communities better prepared and equipped to deal with difficulties thrown at them, whether that comes from extreme or divisive religious or political voices, civil unrest, natural disasters or the impact of political, social or economic policies or developments or business policies/ practices. Friends look after one another – having a pre-existing network and friendships means you know who to call to ask for or offer help.
- **Social action and social issues**  
Local inter faith groups can be very hands on in their community and help





Ashley Beck, Inter Faith Network for the UK

those in need. This can sometimes go beyond the local area to national and international issues. This may involve responding to consultations, helping shape policy and also direct assistance. It also means that faith groups can come together to serve communities, for example during the recent floods, or to address problems, such as lack of access to food and basic amenities. Examples include an Inter Faith Week event in Northampton cooking food for homeless people and Hounslow Friends of Faith running event on 'end of life' care.

- **Modelling good relations**

This relates to modelling good positive interactions within faith communities themselves and within local communities. It makes positive dialogue and engagement normative and provides a model to the wider community/ society of what is possible when groups which may have some real differences of view on some issues are prepared to engage together, find common cause together and work together. This sends a very powerful message to communities.

The following comments and questions were offered. Ashley Beck's responses are included in italics.

- In Havering, during the Week of Prayer for World Peace, an event was held at which the key speakers were from the Israeli Palestinian Reconciliation Society. During the event two ladies from the organisation stood on the stage and asked if the audience could tell which was the Palestinian and which was the Israeli. The audience could not. This made a profound point.

- What is IFN doing to promote the involvement of young people in inter faith activity?

*IFN held an event at the beginning of Inter Faith Week 2014 which brought together young people and organisations working with young people. Reports from the event are available. From the event IFN has created a dedicated website about young people and inter faith engagement. This built on earlier work by IFN. IFN summer intern Amber Dillon is helping look at further development of this work.*

- The Women's Interfaith Network is currently employing an intern who is actively approaching colleges and universities about inter faith work.

## Different, distinct, together: faiths working in partnership

Roz Miller, Development Director, Islington Faiths Forum

Ms Miller offered the following reflections.

- Islington Faiths Forum (IFF) has 141 members from many different traditions.
- IFF makes a point of being responsive to the local needs of all communities, not just faith communities.
- There are 15 members on IFF's Committee, who are mostly faith leaders.
- Islington Council has supported IFF for 10 years. Without the Council IFF would not still exist.
- IFF runs a competition with schools each year to create an inter faith calendar.
- IFF has clear 'aims and objectives'. It is also important to communicate clearly an organisation's values.
- IFF emphasises that faith groups add to the wellbeing of the local community. This is done in many ways through for example:
  - Faith literacy and peace assemblies in schools
  - Community safety
    - Community safety work with young people, enabling them to have a voice



Rosalind Miller, Islington Faiths Forum

- Community safety forums working, for example, on hate crime
- Islington Muslim Safety Forum which was set up and supported by Islington Council
- IFF sits on the Safer Neighbourhood Board (set up by MOPAC)
- Emergency planning
- Mental Health & Poverty Issues
  - IFF set up Islington Mental Health and Poverty Networking Forum
  - IFF delivers training but faith is not brought into the discussions
- It is very important that IFF works with statutory agencies and partners. This enables a more coordinated and strategic approach; and a greater reach and impact. (IFF was involved in providing assistance following murders in the local community.) The agencies and partners are happy to help with IFF events and IFF is sometimes able to raise funds from them. IFF also works with the private sector and raises funds from businesses.



- Over 100 young men were involved in a recent football competition organised by IFF.
- It is important to engage well in challenging times. It is good to let people speak even if you don't agree with them. It is important to be respectful in order to foster trust. IFF held a debate last year on 'Religious Tensions in the Holy Land and their wider impact'.
- Faith communities should support one another in difficult times, for example through writing public letters.
- IFF has great support from faith groups.
- IFF has a great pool of volunteers, all committed to its work.

The following comments and questions were offered. Ms Miller's responses are included in italics.

- Does IFF have support from faith leaders and do they engage with you?

*Faith leaders engage well with IFF and support events. The Committee includes faith leaders. It meets every 8 weeks.*

- Do you pay faith representatives to go into schools?  
*All IFF faith representatives who go into schools work as volunteers. IFF fundraises in order to pay delivery partners, such as St Ethelburga's, to go into schools with them.*
- Some local authorities only seem to help with specific projects rather than general funding – is the same true in Islington?  
*IFF has been able to raise core funding from Islington Council until mid-2016. Islington Council is aware of the impact of IFF's work and its emphasis on serving the whole community, not just faith communities.*
- What does Islington SACRE do in relation to schools?  
*IFF has a seat on Islington Standing Advisory Council for RE, though it is not*



**Daniel Mohammed, Doncaster Interfaith, contributing to plenary discussion**

*very active at present. IFF keeps it informed about its work.*

- Inter faith groups have to be careful not to contribute to the institutionalising of charity. There is a risk that faith communities end up cooperating with a Government which is trying to run down the public domain, for example in social care and housing. In the questioner's experience 1 in 5 people in the local authority at all levels have a live faith connection. How do faith groups speak to members about the decisions they have to take every day which may not be in line with Godly perspectives?  
*IFF makes a point of communicating to statutory bodies that it is a 'community animal' and will not be put in a neat box. Last year IFF wrote a critique of the WRAP 3 training programme, noting that it stigmatised the Muslim community and setting out why it could not support it. IFF interacts robustly with local councillors and will always say if it does not agree with people. IFF's faith leaders cover the Godly perspective.*
- It is important for inter faith bodies to be 'critical friends' to local and central Government.
- In some areas it is difficult to involve faith leaders in inter faith groups. Participants are more likely to be people from the congregation or people who are just interested in the work.  
*IFF tries to emphasise that IFF serves faith groups. Once faith leaders realise this and understand that they are being asked to represent their community, they seem content to step forward.*

## A brief response from a local authority point of view

**Tania Robinson, Community Partnership Officer, Equality and Community Relations Team, Croydon Council**

Ms Robinson offered the following reflections:

- The presentation about IFF was very interesting from a local authority point of view.
- All local authorities are dealing with stretched resources so it is important to work in partnership with communities to deliver more smartly.
- Croydon Council works in partnership with Faiths Together in Croydon (FTC) and gives the group funding for a part time Administrator.
- Croydon Council also offers in-kind support. For example, an Officer from the Council attends FTC meetings and the Council assists with inter faith events, such as FTC's inter faith bike ride and events to commemorate Eid, Vaisakhi, Diwali, Chanukah and Christmas. The Council was able to find some public health funding to assist with the bike ride. It can be useful to look for different angles in engaging with local authorities.
- It can be harder to involve women and younger people.
- It can be difficult for local authorities when sometimes faith communities make requests for certain events to be held, such as cultural/religious dance events, but do not offer to help provide them.



**Tania Robinson, Croydon Council**

- It would be good to see new life breathed into ways of approaching issues, and to see controversial issues addressed as part of that.

The following comments and questions were offered. Ms Robinson's responses are included in italics.

- Croydon Council ran a very good conference on hate crime last year. Has there been any progress since then?  
*Actions have been identified and are being worked on gradually. Faiths Together in Croydon has plans for another conference at the end of the year.*
- Is there any way for local authorities to establish continuity and consistency in dealing with local inter faith groups?  
*The same officer always goes to FTC meetings.*
- How do local authorities make decisions on funding?  
*Croydon Council makes decisions on funding on a year by year basis.*

- In the past IFN has worked with the Local Government Association but there appear now to be few opportunities for local authorities to share information and to find out about inter faith work.
- Crawley Interfaith Network has approximately 300 members across 15 faith groups, but it still struggles to engage faith groups to work with it.
- Statutory bodies do not seem to be interested in inter faith work. They do not appreciate the work that inter faith groups do and so it is not on their priority list. One has to be very persistent to get any results.  
*Officers who work in local authorities would like to help. Local communities need to lobby local Councillors and relevant Cabinet members. Once they have recognised the need there is more likelihood that they can authorise funding and support by the officers.*

## Spaces, places and faith voices: learning for inter faith understanding

### Sumayya Kovariwala, Project Officer, Preston Faith Forum

Ms Kovariwala offered the following reflections:

- Preston has a population of 135,000 people. It has many places of worship including 15 mosques and 2 Hindu temples.
- Preston became a City in 2012.
- The Preston Guild is celebrated every 20 years. Preston is the only place in the UK that still celebrates its Guild status.
- The Faith Trail began originally with a single visit to a place of worship but it



was thought that it would be more meaningful if people were able to contrast and compare different places of worship.

- Preston Faith Forum received a grant from the Faiths in Action grant programme some years ago. They then wrote to schools and RE departments to offer visits to places of worship visits free of charge. When the funding came to an end PFF was still receiving requests to go on the Faith Trail.
- The Faith Trail is for use by the public as well as by, for example, schools and the corporate sector.
- A local housing group and a local church offer voluntary use of minibuses and driver to help people who would not otherwise be able to attend.
- In Preston many places of worship are grouped together so you can walk easily between them.



**Flyer from Preston Faith Forum's Faith Trail events during Inter Faith Week**



**Sumayya Kovariwala, Preston Faith Forum**

- The Faith Trail encourages people to identify their own sense of belonging within the wider world and provides students with good learning.
- The Trail tours are tailored to each group visiting.
- During Inter Faith Week PFF held a minibus trail the first day and then a walking trail the second day in the evening.
- PFF is currently working on a new leaflet which will make the Faith Trail even more accessible and interactive.
- PFF has received good feedback from visitors, including cubs and beavers (doing their World Faiths Badge). Some schoolchildren write their own feedback and thank you letters which is great.

The following comments and questions were offered. Ms Kovariwala's responses are included in italics.

- Medway Inter Faith Action Forum includes Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. It does not receive any funding. How can it start?  
*PFF no longer has funding for the Faiths Trail. Instead it charges a fee to groups, for example £100 to schools and £250 per half day to the corporate sector. The Trail was developed with volunteer assistance.*
- South London Inter Faith Group runs a Faith Trail in Streatham. This includes two different denominations of churches, a Hindu temple and two mosques. SLIFG promotes the Trail to school children and Year 6 usually attend. A contribution, even if only £1 per child, is encouraged just to help places of worship with refreshments, heating and lighting. Are the people of faith in the places of worship easily able to speak to the children when they visit?  
*It would be good to be able to provide training to the places of worship. PFF does offer the places of worship in*

*Preston feedback from the schools which have visited.*

- Is there a Jewish population in Preston?  
*There are a few Jewish families in Preston. The nearest synagogue is in Lytham St Anne's or Blackpool. Groups do sometimes ask to visit but this is not always possible.*
- It was heartening to hear how local authorities were helping some local inter faith groups. Bexley Interfaith Forum has, unfortunately, found the local authority unreceptive. BIF is trying to offer local authorities skills and faith community expertise. They received initially only £15 from the Mayor's Benevolent Fund and then when applying for £17,000 they were only given £700. How would you encourage grassroots involvement without local authority support?  
*It is important that the voluntary sector is supported by local authorities, but every place of worship is very supportive of the Faith Trail.*



**The Revd Stephen Southgate, West Cheshire Interfaith Network; Brian Ball, Enfield Faith Forum; Charulata Joshi, Hertfordshire County Council/ Hertfordshire Inter Faith Forum**

### **Nisha Mejer, Chair, Northampton Inter Faith Forum, and Northampton Borough Council (Museums Department)**

Ms Mejer offered the following reflections:

- During Inter Faith Week Northampton Inter Faith Forum (NIFF) wanted to entice more than just 'the usual crowd' to be involved. So they decided to hold an exhibition entitled 'Unity', setting out the history of the involvement of faith communities in Northampton. This would help to show a positive view of religions working together in unity, rather than the negative views shown in the media.
- The exhibition was held at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery.



**Nisha Mejer, Northampton Inter Faith Forum**

- Each faith picked a quote from their scriptures about unity and these were all put together on one wall.
- A display of photos of places of worship from around the world was on another wall.
- The exhibition was in the museum for over 6 weeks. There was a lot of footfall and NIFF gave interviews to university students for essays they did.
- It was important for the exhibition to have a legacy. NIFF might tour the exhibition or might loan it out in the future for fundraising.

The following comment was offered:

- This is an excellent example of the power and impact of good planning and an inspiring exhibition.

- It was laid out in 3 sections:
  - Medieval Times: when Christian and Jewish communities lived alongside one another and had places of worship on the same street.
  - The 1960s: a time when there was a lot of immigration and when faith communities lived and worked together. India was used as an example of a country from which people from many faiths had come.
  - The present day: NIFF itself, how it began and its members.
- Artefacts were borrowed from the religious communities and also kindly lent by the museum and local places of worship.
- Creating the exhibition was an example of faiths in action. There was lots of volunteering work and many young people were involved.



**Image of exhibits in Northampton Inter Faith Forum's Unity Exhibition**





**The Revd John Hall, Devon Faith and Belief Forum and Exeter Faith and Belief Group**

### **The Revd John Hall, Devon Faith and Belief Forum and Exeter Faith and Belief Group**

The Revd John Hall offered the following reflections:

- Devon Faith and Belief Forum and the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity are jointly working on a project to take resources into schools.
- There is a small minority faith population in Devon, for example it is less than 0.5% in the town of Ottery St Mary.
- It is, however, still very important that young people learn about different faiths.
- They are developing a faith speaker training programme, which they hope to launch in the Autumn. The training will take place in Exeter and will

subsequently be put into practice in pilot locations.

- There will be three workshops:
  - looking at the context of going into schools and other places;
  - developing presentation skills; and
  - reflecting on the learning from delivering the training in pilot locations.
- There is a need to lift the standard of the way faiths are discussed with young people. The training and faith speaker programme will be badged marked by Learning Outside the Classroom.
- Faith speakers have already visited nearly 200 educational establishments in Plymouth alone this year.
- There is a need for a way of accrediting faith speakers.

# Afternoon session

Mr Vivian Wineman, one of IFN's Co-Chairs, joined the event for the afternoon session. He welcomed participants, noting that the local inter faith work done by the grassroots was the most important. He looked forward to the discussions.

## Reflections from the workshops

Dr Crabtree invited brief reflections from the workshops that had taken place before and after the lunch break. The following points were offered:

### Workshop A: Getting the message across

- A local Police Engagement Officer used to try to engage with faith communities using newsletters but this was not very successful. He then learned how to use Twitter and can now say to



**PC Steve Savell, Metropolitan Police and Enfield Faith Forum**



**The Revd Mgr Vincent Harvey, Southampton Council of Faiths/ Portsmouth Roman Catholic Diocesan Inter Faith Group**

communities 'What can I do for you? How can I broadcast your good work?' This has been very successful.

- Know who is responsible for what within your group.
- Maintain relationships with each other and the press.
- Training is important – for inter faith groups, for faith communities and for the press. If training is not there, provide it!

### Workshop B: Funding and resourcing your work

- If member bodies would be willing to share the information, could IFN do a survey of how member bodies have found funds?



**Dr Maureen Sier, Interfaith Scotland; Rebecca Brookman, Near Neighbours West London; Sidra Naeem, Mid-Essex Inter Faith Forum**

- Local funds are often best for local groups.
- There is a reasonable amount of money out there but you have to know how to apply carefully and ensure that applications are tailored.

### Workshop C: Developing and maintaining programmes that work well for your area

- It is important to have a mission statement to know where the group is at and what it is aiming for – and to review this on a regular basis.
- It is important to have a passion for working with diversity.
- You need to know local communities better in order to engage with them.
- You need to know your own strengths, weaknesses and resources and to prepare a plan tailored to your group so you don't feel that you have failed.
- You need keep up with the challenges of emerging communities. (An example was given of Slough Faiths Partnership engaging with the new Somali community in the area.)

### Workshop D: Young people and local inter faith engagement

- Local inter faith groups need to know what their motivation is for wanting to work with young people.
- What is the offer to young people? For example, new skills or a chance to make new friends.
- How best do we talk to young people? Through social media, word of mouth, face to face? Social media is changing the face of inter faith work.

### Workshop E: Women and local inter faith engagement

- It is important to see inter faith women's groups as complementary to local inter



faith groups. At times women only spaces are appropriate.

- The Southall Faiths Forum is mostly men. Some discussions that have taken place, for example the closure of the maternity ward at Ealing Hospital, would have benefited from more women in the discussion! That was a motivation to get work going in West London.
- For some isolated women the social networking of women's groups is invaluable.
- Women bring special skills, such as communication, and are also good at discussing feelings. They are also good at discussing issues such as mental health or domestic abuse. It is important to be able to signpost them to places to get help.



**Julie Harrald, Loughborough Council of Faiths**

afternoon's session highlighted one particular current area of challenge.

### Mustafa Field MBE, Director, Faiths Forum for London,

Mr Field offered the following reflections:

- There have been many challenging situations recently – for example the

## Inter faith engagement in challenging times

Dr Crabtree said that local communities faced many different challenges. The



**Ashwin Soni, Crawley Interfaith Network; Iain Stewart, Edinburgh Interfaith Association; Daniel Mohammed, Doncaster Interfaith; Daniel Alai, Canterbury and District Interfaith Action; Fazle Khundkar, Interfaith MK**

impact of the actions of ISIL, attacks in Paris and the actions of Boko Haram.

- These issues can all damage faith communities.
- Communities are more connected globally than ever before.
- Even small issues such as parking can create tension between communities.
- Local inter faith initiatives can encourage positive engagement and create a stronger narrative. For example:
  - The Big Iftar is often led by Muslim groups working with local inter faith groups, but synagogues are now opening their doors to other faith communities as well for iftars [breaking of the fast at the end of day during Ramadan]. There can be tensions but it's good to be able to share a meal and talk and get to know one another. It is good to talk both about what you agree on and what you disagree on.
  - Public buildings, local authorities, police and schools have all tried to open up and engage.
- Social media is very useful – images can say a thousand words. The media can be used positively. Inter faith groups need to get the message across and tell everyone about the inter faith work being done. We need to get better at spreading the word.
- Everyone should be involved in spreading the message. Individual people can reach hundreds of others personally through Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms.
- Inter faith groups need to plan for challenges and to be prepared, for example, by putting together a crisis action plan, having good relationships in place and exploring how to bring calmness and reduce tensions with the right tone.
- It is not possible always to know when tensions will arise. But you can plan for some events, such as the 10th anniversary of 7/7 bombings.
- Faith communities must be more vigilant and more together.



**Esmond Rosen, Barnet Multi Faith Forum and Mustafa Field, Faiths Forum for London**

- Faiths Forum for London worked with British Future, (which is not a faith based organisation), to create the #WalkTogether concept. This had a clear message to walk together to commemorate the 7/7 bombings.
- Be prepared for social media. For example, prepare tweets in advance. If you're not sure how to use social media, get young people involved.
- Be prepared for the media. Simulate interviews with reporters so that you're ready when it happens.
- Preparedness is key.

The following comments and questions were offered. Mr Field's responses are included in italics.

- Would now be a good opportunity for Muslims to come together in a march to demonstrate that Islam has nothing to do with the extremism that is taking place in its name?  
*There is a lot being done, though more is needed. It should not all be Muslim-led because we are all in it together. All communities should be involved to give the most vulnerable the confidence to join in.*
- The Interfaith Adviser in the Diocese of Winchester last year chaired a meeting in Syria of Shia and Sunni sheikhs, bishops, Government representatives and rebel fighters, as gun battles were taking place. A few months ago he had laid flowers with a local sheikh where three Christians had been beheaded by extremists. It is possible even in the worst situations to work together. Some of these issues are very complex. Different communities can be polarised because of different political points of view and we can all be guilty of contributing to that. People of faith can help by listening to each other.
- It is important to remember that Muslims have gone through a process post 9/11 of having to face the challenge of being made to feel personally responsible for the community as a whole. They have to say "Not in our Name" all the time. However, a sufficient consensus is now building around uniting publicly to demonstrate anger at what goes on in the name of Islam. The Council for Christian Muslim Relations in High Wycombe has set up a working party to look at organising a gathering or march in the town centre to say "Not in our Name".

## A brief response

### Esmond Rosen, Chair, Barnet Multi Faith Forum, responds

Mr Rosen offered the following reflections:

- His responses are a consequence of his Jewish background on which his involvement in inter faith work is based. This is the positive politics of faith!
- He spoke of the inter faith work of the former Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks, and the development of the phrase 'Side by Side and Face to Face'.
- And also of Pastor Martin Niemoller's famous poem:

*First they came for the Communists, And I did not speak out, Because I was not a Communist*

*Then they came for the Socialists, And I did not speak out, Because I was not a Socialist*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, And I did not speak out, Because I was not a trade unionist*

*Then they came for the Jews, And I did not speak out, Because I was not a Jew*

*Then they came for me, And there was no one left, To speak out for me*

- If it's not safe for one faith community, then it is not safe for others.
- In Golders Green faith communities recently came together to stop extremist group from attacking the Jewish community.
- Barnet Multi Faith Forum has recently been re-energised and has issued various public statements in relation to





**Informal networking during the lunch break**

events which have impacted in Barnet and more widely in the UK.

- It publicly supported the joint statement by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Muslim Council of Britain in response to the situation in Israel and Gaza; acknowledged the Armenian genocide; remembered the 20th anniversary of Srebrenica and the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings, was represented at events to commemorate the Holocaust; and helped the Somali Bravanese community to rebuild their centre out of the ashes of an alleged arson attack.
- There will shortly be a public event in Barnet to recognise the covenant between the local authority and faith communities. [The Covenant for Engagement was created by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society to support faith communities to work with local authorities constructively and effectively.]
- Pastor Niemoller's message is being heard. We are trying to speak with one message and one voice. We need to continue to work together to promote good will and understanding.

The following comments and questions were offered. Mr Field's and Mr Rosen's responses are included in italics.

- The media can often make matters worse. How can we overcome this? How can people reflect on events in 7/7 in a local inter faith context?  
*#WalkTogether showed that people are not divided and are resilient. Difficult conversations are taking place and communities are trying to work together, but inter faith groups need to talk with everyone, not just with certain groups. Inter faith and faith groups need to challenge when appropriate in a way that is effective. The inter faith sector is often run by volunteers who are not always ready to engage with the media. The media is sometimes only interested in the negative but we need to make them focus on the positive. [Mustafa Field]*  
*Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks the Prime Ministers of Israel and Palestine came together with thousands of people in a show of solidarity. That was a good picture. A positive message needs to be spread. Communities should come together at every opportunity to show solidarity. [Esmond Rosen]*
- Sometimes local events lead to tensions, not just national/international ones. For example, in the Thames Valley

area child abuse has had a far greater effect than the 7/7 bombings. The press exploited the situation, for instance by only showing photos of Asians who were responsible, but not Europeans. Local mosques had called the local Council of Faiths to seek advice.

*It is important to be able to come together to talk about such difficult issues. It is often possible to find out when court cases are coming to an end and to prepare for the fact that the media will be reporting on this. Preparedness is key.*  
[Mustafa Field]

Dr Crabtree said that one of the difficulties of the impact of overseas events has been that the emphasis has fallen on one or two communities. This can lead to some communities feeling under pressure and to other faith communities feeling that they and their inter faith work is not seen as important. Inter faith engagement has often been seen, in part for historic reasons, through the lens of the Abrahamic faiths in this country and there has been less

visibility and less focus on the involvement of some of the Dharmic groupings. Bridges of understanding between all faith communities are important.

Local inter faith groups are needing to hold onto a sense of being together and supporting each other no matter what our backgrounds, but at the same time being honest and having critical discussions about difficult issues.

## Hopes and plans for the future – plenary discussion

Dr Crabtree invited open reflections, following the day's discussions, on hopes and plans for the next 5 years. The following were offered:

- There are people from 90 different countries in Liverpool. Some of them are from faiths (or parts of faiths) without a previous presence there. Does anyone have any views on that on a more national scale?
- We need to expand our sense of world consciousness. For example, recently a one-minute silence was held for the British dead in Tunisia, but silences have not been held for victims from other countries.
- We need to engage more young people in inter faith work.
- It is important for faith communities to come together to discuss difficult issues and to discuss social issues. Perhaps IFN could allow people to come together in Chatham House rules events to look at contested issues and develop responses to them further in a safe environment.
- We need more young people to get involved in inter faith activities. Young



**Chaudry Shafique, Council for Christian Muslim Relations in High Wycombe and the Revd Canon Cynthia Dowdle, Merseyside Council of Faiths**

people are very impressionable. Young people's opinions can change swiftly and frequently. Some young people are being pulled towards far right extremism. Being involved in inter faith dialogue and understanding should be more appealing to young people.

- Although wearing an 'inter faith hat' Muslims are often called on to speak about Islam. There is always a demand for Muslims to speak and to educate.
- The media often don't pick up on the positive work that is taking place. Positive messages need to be spread.

## Final reflections

### Dr Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland

Dr Sier offered the following reflections:

- Communications are very important.
- Partnerships are essential and bring added benefits. It is important for local inter faith groups to work with statutory bodies, voluntary bodies, and schools. They can share resources and share energy. Interfaith Scotland's women's group recently held a joint event with the Scottish Refugee Council and doubled its attendance numbers.
- Wherever and whenever possible look for appropriate and appealing ways to engage young people.

### Mehru Fitter MBE, Coventry Multi Faith Forum

Ms Fitter offered the following reflections:

- Coventry has well forged links between faith communities and it is a privilege to live there.



Mehru Fitter, Coventry Multi Faith Forum

- It is very sad that regional faith forums are no longer in operation in all parts of the country due to funding cuts.
- There is currently a climate of austerity but her dream is that:
  - the Government makes a u-turn and revives some funding streams;
  - poverty and food banks become history; and
  - with the guiding hand of IFN, the tremendous zeal and enthusiasm of local inter faith bodies, and the participation of people at grassroots level, we create a perfect orchestra that never plays out of tune!

## Closing words from the Chair

Dr Crabtree thanked all those who had attended, participated, presented and facilitated; the NCVO; her colleagues at the IFN office; and IFN's Co-Chair, Vivian Wineman. Local inter faith work is even more vital than ever and it had been a privilege to hear people's reflections during the day.

## SUMMARY NOTES FROM WORKSHOPS

### Getting the message across

This workshop was held twice. The morning session was facilitated by Ashwin Soni, Crawley Interfaith Network and the afternoon session was facilitated by Bessie White, Hounslow Friends of Faith. The presentation in each was made by Ashley Beck, Inter Faith Network for the UK.

Introductory points offered by the speaker are listed, followed by points made by participants in discussion.

#### 1. Introduction

- Good communication is generally two-way, not one-way. This is something we will all be familiar with through our engagement in dialogue, which involves two people listening as well as speaking. Today's short presentation will mainly be focusing on the 'communicating to' rather than 'hearing from' dimension of this.

#### 2. Overall aims

- The aims of the overall organisation or project shape what we need and want to communicate and to whom. For example, the IFN Integrated Communications Strategy begins with IFN's Vision, Mission and Values from its Strategic Plan. We aim to root our communications in these, as with all our work.
- For example, given their purposes, inter faith organisations will communicate in

order to raise awareness of their activities, advocate for the importance of inter faith activity, persuade people to engage, keep members engaged and make known projects and events.

#### 3. Audience

- Communicating well means being clear about who you want to inform and engage and choosing the appropriate methods. Think through who you want to reach and what you know about them.
- Examples of audiences might include members of your initiative, faith leaders, local authority officers, councillors, school pupils, SACRE members, Chaplains, people of faith, non-religious people, the general public, police, young people, and women. (People will, of course, often fit into more than one category).

#### 4. Key messages

- The key messages you want to get across will vary depending on context. Examples include information about your work, what you do and why; information or advertisements for events; project funding reports; formal joint statements; information to educate about different faiths.
- It can be helpful to have a list of key messages which members or Trustees are asked to mention if they give interviews. This can be particularly helpful when dealing with very challenging local issues, as it can help



avoid saying things which inadvertently inflame a situation.

## 5. Communication tools

- There are many different tools, from old technology such as printed leaflets, and reports and letters, to telephone and broadcast to media like Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and WhatsApp.
- Make time to think through your different audiences and what tools might be best to reach each of these.
- Is everyone catered for? For example, does someone help to find ways to include those who don't use email or smartphones, for example?

## 6. Joining the dots

- The following questions interrelate: What do we want to achieve? What do we need to say? Who do we need to say it to? How should we say it?  
Example: You want to raise awareness of an event. Key information will be when, where, what is it about, what does it cost? Your audiences might be your members, the public, local journalists. You might email or phone your members, but you might use flyers, the website or Facebook to reach the public and a press release to reach journalists.

## 7. Who communicates what and how?

- Who looks after communications? Think about having a designated person who will liaise as necessary with the Chair and other Committee members.
- How are communications agreed? It is important to have a simple protocol for deciding this – especially something like a statement (if groups make these).

- Remember to ask permission when releasing quotations and photos/recordings.
- Develop a mini communications strategy which covers the kind of points immediately above and also covers topics like:
  - whether members/ Trustees are authorised to speak on behalf of faith communities, or only to refer to the activity of the group.
  - whether people can post to Facebook and tweet and to what extent people's individual views can be given in those contexts.
- One person does not have to do everything – different aspects of communication can be carried out by different people so long as the process is well joined up. This makes good use of the skills of different individuals, such as writing or IT or speaking.
- Material you create for one context – such as the bulletin – can be used in another such as the website or on Facebook.

## Tips – Media stories and Interviews:

- Consider asking a local journalist to come in and talk about being interviewed and what helps get stories placed.
- Take a moment to consider before responding to each question while taking a full breath in and out. It can be unhelpful to begin responding until you are sure what you want to say (for example, if the question is framed “Would you agree that...” answering in terms of “yes... well, no...” could be confusing, or could be edited unhelpfully).

- It can be helpful to ask to know the first question before you begin on a live interview.
- Further media tips can be found on the Inter Faith Week website at <http://www.interfaithweek.org/media/media-tips>

### Tips – Websites:

- If you hire a web developer or are given free help, always ensure that you have the website account login details and passwords once their initial design and creation work is complete. This way, if your web designer leaves or stops trading, you can hand-over to someone else without the need to start from scratch.
- Make sure you have ownership of the website domain name (for example, [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)). Once this becomes well known, you do not want to have to change it simply because you do not have access to your registration account or because it belonged to the web developer, or you have let ownership lapse and someone else has bought it. It can also be very expensive to re-print leaflets, banners and posters which have your web address on.

### Tips – Social media:

- Always use strong passwords but which are also memorable. Advice on this can be found on the Government-backed websites [www.cyberstreetwise.com](http://www.cyberstreetwise.com) and <https://www.cyberstreetwise.com/cyberessentials/>
- Choose a user name on platforms like Facebook and Twitter which are easy to find. Acronyms are not always known to people who are not involved in your organisation or area of work, so if you use them, make sure you also show up

in the search result for your full organisation name.

- Platforms like Facebook and Twitter often work best when they involve two-way engagement. Consider how you will respond to those who like, comment, favourite tweets etc and who will do so.

### Tips – Advertising events:

- IFN has a list of tips on making events known through the media at <http://www.interfaithweek.org/media/media-tips>

### General Discussion:

- Not everyone is always aware of religious realities of people they want to communicate to. This includes being aware of when not to call or hold meetings.
- Not everyone can easily play a secretary role and there is a cost dimension as not everyone has access to a computer and the internet.
- It is good to network with communities in order to get the message across to the audience. This could include using Twitter. Also it is important to be friendly in order to create or maintain a relationship with the audience.
- Two-way communication is required when dealing with an audience. Our organisation built relationships with police, local government, health workers and LGBT groups. Dialogues should try to start this way: ‘How can we help you?’
- Networking with people is beneficial as people are able to share information with each other of which the other person would otherwise be unaware.



- It would be helpful if IFN targeted information about inter faith activity to local authorities. *It does this through circulation of information about Inter Faith Week, its Annual Review, and other relevant publications.*
- Re-tweeting is a helpful tool. Local council officers may be willing to do this, particularly for one-off events or projects.
- We do not always get through to people despite the good communication that occurs. Persistence is important.
- Some people can have mixed feelings about inter faith activity or be resistant to it as they do not know what it is. The nature of it needs communicating well.
- Food focused opportunities are an example of inter faith engagement which can be possible even where people find other kinds a step too far.
- It is important to control information release – especially official press releases.
- The new religious movements have widened the range of dialogue and communication now.
- It is good to always try new strategies; use cheaper methods as finance could be hard; keep ears and eyes open.
- Talking in person or on the phone or with Skype than using emails or letters or other forms of written communication. It is less easy to ignore and can be more personal.
- Building relationships with journalists is good. You should always aim to build long-term relationships. If you only call them when you want something, they may be busy or uninterested. But if you become a reliable source of information or stories, they will try to engage with you more.
- A good interviewer will ask you to unpack your answers.
- It is important to tell people stories as it is a good way to remember things and creates a better impact.
- To avoid misunderstandings, explain at the start of a meeting what the expectations are in terms of sharing what is said at it. For example, say if it is Chatham House Rules; whether it is expected that there will be an official minute that people should wait for; or whether people are encouraged to quote what is said (for example, on Twitter), and whether photography/ recording is permitted or not.
- Always update websites, as this is crucial for communication. Otherwise out-of-date information could create confusion and disruption. If your address or phone number or Chair changes, and the website does not reflect this, no one will know.
- IFN is good at referring people to relevant member bodies and others working in the field.
- Training in presentation and dialogue skills helps people put the important issues across well.
- The Board of Deputies of British Jews has a team of volunteers to go into schools. They also offer training to the volunteers.
- Some universities provide training for SACRE members.
- The age of ordinands is going up. Inter faith modules in training are often limited, particularly as the trend for part-time training alongside work

grows. There is lack of knowledge of other faiths which is quite scary.

- For Women's Day we did a skills swap – the health and fitness centre wanted some documents translated, so we did that for them and they gave us free access to the venue.
- We find that inter faith events which are not faith related go very well but events which are faith related are very hard to get people along to. For example, inviting people along to a social action event or a singing competition which happens to be inter faith is easy. Inviting people along to hear talks about what people believe is not so popular.
- Things are different everywhere – what works will to some degree vary depending on context.

## Developing and maintaining programmes that work well for your area

This workshop was held twice. The morning session was facilitated by Monsignor Vincent Harvey, Southampton Council of Faiths/Portsmouth Roman Catholic Diocesan Inter-religious group, and the afternoon session was facilitated by Charulata Joshi, Equality and Diversity Officer, Hertfordshire County Council/Herts Faiths Forum. The presentation in each was made by Harriet Crabtree, Inter Faith Network for the UK.

Introductory points offered by the speaker are listed, followed by points made by participants in discussion.

## 1. Our vision and our goals

- The work of local inter faith organisations is tremendously important.
- Activity will have more impact and sustainability when organisations are clear about their vision and goals.
- Vision and goals should be revisited regularly (every 3 years at least if possible). This helps avoid 'mission drift' and encourages a continued sense of clear common purpose.
- Structure is not exciting (!) but clear processes can help liberate creativity and enable strong programmes.

## 2. Scoping and planning

- Organisations are often so busy that there doesn't seem to be time for regular scoping and planning but it is good to build in time to plan and to consider the operating environment, perhaps every year.
- The operating environment constantly changes, so it is important to keep abreast of changes.
- Ask questions such as "What are local needs?" "What is the religious make-up of our area and how are we engaging with the different groups?" "Do we talk with our local authority?" "Are there other organisations doing similar work?"
- Partnership working can be very helpful, for example with local authorities, schools or other local bodies.
- Partnership working also requires time and care so that the different hopes and expectations are understood at the outset and working methods and outcomes agreed at the start.

- Optimistic realism/realistic optimism! Inter faith groups often feel an enormous weight of expectation: sometimes it feels as though an enormous amount is expected. People of faith like to try to rise to the expectation of helping others and can feel guilty when their slender resources of time and energy cannot always carry that through. It is good to be optimistic and to work with hope and commitment. Likewise, however, to say 'No' to something is not necessarily wrong. 'Optimistic realism' is needed!

### Discussion

- Our Council of Faiths currently comes together 3 times per year. It has not so far looked at its vision and goals and never done a scoping and planning exercise. It will do now!
- The difficulty with realistic optimism is that the work can be affected by peaks and troughs in government funding. But faith brings something extra in spite of the obstacles. It is a rich resource in itself that will help us move forward. *"In the depth of winter I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer!"* Camus.
- All faiths have something other than this world, which brings optimism, hope and motivation.
- Planning is essential.
- It is helpful to have a conversation about the issue of proselytising and the view of the group about this when planning in order to ensure trust in one another.
- It is important to find out who lives in the local area.
- Slough Faith Partnership is in close contact with the local authority and has a good local database and figures from the Census. It knows all the local faith groups in the area and keeps in touch with them all. There are many denominations within faith traditions. It is important to be aware of all the different groups in the area.

### 3. Resources

- Work needs to be planned with an eye to resources.
- In-kind resources, such as the use of rooms, can be useful.
- Human resources are very important, including volunteers which bring both skills and wisdom as well as hands-on assistance.
- There can be burnout in a small organisation where the same people are always called on to assist. It is good to have a pool of people and to think about ways to draw people in, for example advertising for volunteers/people who want the opportunity to learn skills, such as social media.
- Local inter faith bodies with broad programmes of work generally need some funding support.
- Even very small amounts of funding can be helpful, for example just to pay a speaker's travel expenses.
- 'Mission drift' can happen if a programme is developed principally to fit a funding stream that becomes available without ensuring this fits with other aspects of the vision and goals of the organisation.

### Discussion

- Most, if not all, local authorities are strapped for cash. Harrow Council does

not offer funding but does offer the local inter faith group use of meeting rooms free of charge at the Civic Centre. It also provides £1,000 towards one large event each year because it wants that event to take place.

- There is a member of Harrow Council on Harrow Inter Faith Council.
- Sometimes it feels as though local inter faith groups are an instrument of local authorities with these fulfilling their own objectives through inter faith networks.
- In our area a church is in danger of losing its centre because the local authority has raised rents too much.
- One of the roles of local inter faith groups is to support the local community. It is not just about funding. This can include chaplaincy support in hospitals. For instance, holding a service for those affected by the earthquake in Nepal or supporting hospital workers who are experiencing difficulties with employment rights and new structures.
- Our faith organisation runs a home care service, for those who could otherwise not afford the service. The local authority said that it was going to cut the funding for this completely. However, through contacting the local MP and councillors the authority agreed to hold the funding at the same level for one year and then to reduce it in order to give them time to raise funds. This shows that whether you can raise and retain support can be about your network of connections and established relationships.
- Local authorities can be useful for support.
- South London Inter Faith Group has always been an umbrella group. Its

funding comes from membership fees of only £10 per year. This has so far funded the work that's been done.

- Some groups have paid staff; some have only volunteers.
- Sometimes if you take one person away an organisation collapses. It is not appropriate to have just one paid worker carrying out a shopping list of tasks for others; everyone needs to be involved. Everyone needs to feel empowered, both Trustees and non-Trustees. Organisations need new blood and to look at membership structures to ensure different groups have a voice. Some people want to be Trustees because they think it's a 'golden ticket'.
- Herts Interfaith Forum has been established to link with different inter faith groups throughout Hertfordshire. It tries to put all groups in touch with each other and to meet occasionally – it is encouraging to know what neighbouring groups are doing.

#### 4. Programmes

- It is useful to think about different constituencies when planning a programme.
- Different types of activities can draw in different types of people.
- Groups often benefit from having one activity that they are known for, for example a group in Windsor and Maidenhead is known for their annual inter faith cricket matches among other things and some, such as Watford, are well known for annual inter faith walks or pilgrimages.
- It also good to think about different activities to avoid 'getting into a rut'.

- Perhaps consider swapping speakers or having exchanges with other local inter faith groups.
- Consider social action projects as well as dialogue and education.
- It is good to keep the local authority, the local Mayor and so forth engaged with your work.
- Special days or weeks can be useful to raise the profile of work.
- Looking at the list of Inter Faith Week events taking place gives an idea of what other people are doing.

### Discussion

- There are some challenges at the moment in drawing new members onto our Committee at South London Inter Faith Group. We hope to improve our website and want to ask 13 local boroughs to put information about their relevant work onto it. SLIFG continues to hold monthly lunch meetings – usually about 30 people attend, not always the same people. They aim to have a face to face meeting of all groups in South London each year. This can help prevent overlap and duplication.
- Food is also a good theme to consider.
- Interfaith MK holds a monthly meeting, at a different venue each time. This means that, for instance, there might be a Zoroastrian speaker in a Hindu temple or a Christian/Humanist giving a presentation in a mosque about their work with different faiths in Bosnia.
- Slough Faith Partnership was originally part of the Local Area Partnership. Slough Council wanted them to raise awareness and establish friendships between faith communities. We now do

a great deal. We come together, do faith walks, eat and drink together and visit places of worship and we held a conference on radicalism and a conference on mental health. Faith communities look at these issues from different perspectives. However, we still struggle with conflicting views between different parts of faith communities in the area.

## 5. Organisational underpinnings

- Administration is unexciting but crucial.
- People such as secretaries and treasurers are vital – they may not be visible but are they often key in keeping links together.
- Perhaps consider inviting someone to come in to discuss Trusteeships, training and so forth. This can be done for little money or perhaps through the local authority.
- Communications are very important – there is a need to make the work known. This can be through many forms. For example, York Interfaith Group use social media, emails and electronic newsletters – and one of their older members gets on her bicycle and hand delivers letters to those who don't use computers.

### Discussion

- It is sometimes better to have links to the work of other organisations on your website rather than describe it on your own as otherwise you have to keep the information constantly up to date.
- IFN has links to known local inter faith groups on its website. It is considering adding a way to search for these using postcodes.

- IFN has been writing to all members to encourage them to use social media. When using websites and social media it is important to keep material up to date and thought needs to be given to the sustainability of systems.
- It is good to consider where you can advertise your work.
- Having a website is helpful. A small grant of £200-£300 could be used for assistance with setting up a basic website or local trusts or authorities may sometimes fund such work.
- Websites should be optimised for search engines.
- Some groups have a Facebook page rather than a website or vice versa.
- Many organisations have been very focused on representivity over the last few years. This is important but it can lead to believing that having a particular title is the be all and end all.
- Successful groups keep many people on board but focus on the work.
- Sometimes it is difficult not to overfocus on representivity because agencies want a tick list of people to consult.
- Inter Faith Week is often good because it encourages visible outcomes and contributions to the local area.
- Sometimes leadership/management is inappropriate or dysfunctional. This applies to local inter faith groups in the same way as to all other parts of life.
- Some inter faith groups find it hard to involve some faith groups or parts of faith groups. Sometimes people will leave without saying why.
- Consider whether some aspects of the way the group works are off-putting to some people and find ways to explore these issues. Some groups may be uncomfortable engaging with others. There needs to be clarity (possibly through a statement in the group's materials or on their website) that people don't all need to agree in order to engage.
- Consider how to engage other constituencies, such as women and young people.
- Sometimes there isn't a recognition about how rooted inter faith work is in faith. Local places of worship need to be fully engaged and encouraging their members to take part.
- It is important on a regular basis to refresh links with faith groups and create new ones on a rolling basis, through conversations with their relevant personnel and invitations to be involved in events and projects.

### Discussion

- Many people embrace religion on a practical, local level but have problems with institutions. There is a need to create links with the local community beyond institutional structures.
- It is helpful to encourage people to focus differently to get 'buy in'.

## 6. Maintaining and growing participation

- There is a constant need to get people involved and to keep them involved.

## 7. Monitoring and evaluation

- Evaluating and monitoring can help focus the mind and improve planning. For example, internally it is useful in



deciding whether to hold certain events again and externally it can encourage funders.

- There is a need to think about criteria for deciding what is successful. This may be a mixture of measurables such as how many people came to an event or publications were created/ sent out. Or, it might, for example, include narratives of how individuals and communities think the work has affected their lives and interrelationships.
- Sometimes it seems as though we are never doing enough. Evaluating work can help us realise how much we have achieved.

### Discussion

- Islington Faiths Forum is only successful because it works at it and holds an Away Day each year to consider its work and to evaluate it. That was how they learned of the need to work on mental health and poverty. Building friendships with police, health workers, council, other voluntary groups is important.
- Evaluation needs to include measuring impact.
- The impact of inter faith work is often not seen for many years.
- Success needs to be internal as well as external.
- Crawley Interfaith Network tries to check on feedback from previous years in order to plan for the following year.

## 8. Affirmation and celebration

- Evaluation and reporting can help to make achievements known and to affirm and celebrate the work and people involved.

- Self awareness is important and recognising when we can do better. At the same time, it is important not to be endlessly or over-self-critical. Focus on positives as well as what can be done better.
- Being involved in inter faith work is part of living out our faiths in the world. A participant at the March day event in Sheffield reminded fellow attendees that it is a joy, a gift and a privilege.
- Take time each year to recognise and thank all who are contributing to the organisation's work.

### Discussion

- Writing an Annual Report every year is a good exercise because when you write down all that you've done, you realise you have done more than you think and it brings joy!
- Inter faith work should perhaps be more 'evangelical'. Mission statements are all well and good but people involved need passion and they need to share that with others.

## General discussion

- There is sometimes a disconnect between different levels of bodies at local, regional and national level. In the Diocese of Winchester there is wonderful work in different towns and areas but it is often not connected up.
- IFN has contact with local groups and regional bodies. Linking up is very important. The Regional Faith Forums in England played a key role in the former English Regions and the closing of some and downscaling of the work of others when their central funding was discontinued has been sorely felt.

- Faiths Forum for London, London Boroughs Faiths Network and South London Inter Faith Group have good working relationships. Some regions have many bodies which need to work together.
- The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hampshire covers a large area and it is often difficult to know what is going on across the region.
- In Northampton the local authority and faith leaders have signed the Covenant for Engagement, a set of principles drafted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society to support faith communities to work with local authorities constructively and effectively.
- There are several different groups operating in High Wycombe including Wycombe Sharing of Faiths (WSoF), the Council for Christian Muslim Relations in High Wycombe (CCMR) and Christian Jewish Muslim groups working on social action, each with a different emphasis. The local authority sometimes approaches WSoF informally. The police and local authority are very much involved with CCMR. In general links are all informal, rather than formal. It can be hard to link in with all structures. Realistically there isn't time to engage at all levels. Buckinghamshire County Council had set up a local inter faith group and then asked for it to be set up again – possibly because they had forgotten it existed!
- There is a member of the local authority on Southampton Council of Faiths.
- Islington was one of the first three local authorities to have a Fairness Commission, chaired by Richard Wilkinson who wrote The Spirit Level. This looked at salaries being awarded

against fairness. Faiths all share the notion of fairness.

- It is difficult when people from one tradition talk about how to be from another, for example a bishop talking about how to be a Muslim! We should let people talk about themselves.
- People of faith are relational by definition, so meetings are often more relational and structure is not given so much attention. It is very useful to have this advice on structure and considering what success looks like.

## Young people and local inter faith engagement

This workshop was facilitated by Becky Brookman, Near Neighbours Coordinator for West London, with a short opening presentation from Daniel Mohammed, Chair, Doncaster Interfaith.

Near Neighbours is a programme of the Church Urban Fund which aims to build trust and promote dialogue. There are two key objectives, which are to promote social interaction and social action. It works with 10 national partners and many projects include work with young people. The facilitator offered a short opening presentation based on her work with Near Neighbours West London drawing on these and other experiences of youth work.

Introductory points offered by the speaker are listed, followed by points made by participants in discussion.

### 1. How to approach youth engagement

- There is a need to think about why you want to engage with young people. For example, is it for a specific event, or for a youth forum?

- What is the offer to young people? The opportunity to form friendships? CV opportunities?
  - The subject of faith is not always the best place to start with young people. One possibility is to begin with the subject of shared interests/ areas of concern/ the chance to make a difference in their community.
  - The AWESOME acronym can be helpful to use when working with young people:
- A**ge (what age bracket is being targeted?)
- W**illingness (how willing are the young people to be involved?)
- E**mpowering (will the project empower young people?)
- S**ocial action (could social action be involved?)
- O**ppportunity (what sort of opportunity is this for a young person?)
- M**eaningfulness (will this project be meaningful for a young person?)
- E**ducation (will the experience be educational?)
- In Glasgow there was an incident where a gurdwara was vandalised with anti-Islamic graffiti. A youth project ran an event where they produced alternative graffiti.
  - Harrow Inter Faith Council – works with a local youth parliament.
  - Inter Faith groups could work with local youth councils. Working with a youth council as a way of reaching young people and reaching different communities.
  - A ‘food and faith’ event worked very well in Liverpool.
  - Hold inter faith meetings/events in places and venues where young people are already for example, youth clubs.
  - Peace competitions in schools with prizes, awards, displays of winning entries.
  - International exchanges.
  - International conferences.
  - In a Surrey school trips were arranged to mosques but some parents didn’t want their children to attend. Suggests that there is an issue of Islamophobia within the community.

## 2. Ideas for youth engagement

- Near Neighbours supported All Faiths and None and JCoSS to run an Interfaith Tent during Ramadan and hosted discussions and lectures.
- Youth leadership projects.
- Teaching code, learning faith (where a group of young people get together to learn computer coding and talk about their faith during refreshment breaks).
- United – a football project in Southall.
- Social media – not enough presence of inter faith activity. Inter faith organisations do not utilise social media as much as they could. Instead hate groups are getting more attention. Inter faith organisations are lagging behind.

## Women and local inter faith engagement

This workshop was facilitated by Dr Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland, with a short opening presentation from Charanjit AjitSingh, Hounslow Friends of Faith.

Introductory points offered by the speaker are listed, followed by points made by participants in discussion on the two questions highlighted in the programme.

### 1. Introduction

- Charanjit AjitSingh had been a college teacher and was the first female Asian college principal in the country.
- Many years ago when she had started Kingston Group for Racial Understanding – there were only three women on the group.
- Women were more involved in inter faith work than men but still all the leaders were men.
- She chairs Hounslow Friends of Faith. This has a women's meeting group. Within that, there is a knitting group which makes items and sells them to raise money for orphans. Lots of women wish to get involved in the knitting group.
- Initiatives like this form deep and closer friendships. There is an excitement about doing things together and she experiences it as
  - a better environment being particularly for women
  - with less prejudice
  - horizon broadening
  - perspective deepening

### 2. There are a growing number of women's initiatives – Why may this be and how is it contributing to deepening inter faith understanding and cooperation?

- Women work at a grass roots level.
- Women often don't have a voice if men are present.
- They have a sense of collective power that they can exercise.
- Women are the first educators of their children. Children will interact – building next generation of people that are more tolerant.
- Women and food is a good way to bring faiths together.
- Women are often well placed to tackle issues like use of public swimming pools by women who need or prefer single sex sessions. For example, a women's group could organise an hour each week for a female only swimming session.
- Some women are more comfortable in front of each other than in mixed contexts.

### 3. What are the challenges?

- How do you reach the hard to reach?
- Getting past ostracism and fear of domestic abuse within a faith community.
- It would be useful to do a survey to see how many leaders of inter faith organisations are women.
- Getting involved and in leadership roles in mixed gender inter faith contexts.



## ANNEX

### PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY

10.00 am	<b>Registration and refreshments</b>
10.30 am	<b>Opening of the morning session, welcome and setting of context for the day from the chair</b> Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK
10.40 am	<b>Local inter faith organisations: a whistle stop tour of 7 ways they make a powerful contribution to our shared life!</b> Ashley Beck, Inter Faith Development Officer, Inter Faith Network for the UK
10.50 am	<b>Comments and discussion</b>
11.00 am	<b>Different, distinct, together: faiths working in partnership</b> Roz Miller, Development Director, Islington Faiths Forum, considers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The importance of faith groups working together to add to the wellbeing of their local community</li><li>• The added impact of working with public agencies and service deliverers</li><li>• Why it is important that faith communities are able to engage well together with challenging issues – including those on which there may not be agreement – and some of the ways IFF has been encouraging this.</li></ul> Tania Robinson, Community Partnership Officer, Equality and Community Relations Team, Croydon Council, offers a brief response from a local authority perspective.  <b>Comments and discussion</b>
11.25 am	<b>Spaces, places and faith voices: learning for inter faith understanding</b> An important part of local inter faith activity is creating opportunities for learning. Discussions, open door days, faith trails, exhibitions and talks are among the ways groups are doing this.  Sumayya Kovariwala, Project Officer, Preston Faith Forum, gives an illustrated talk about the Faith Trail the Forum has developed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How it was developed</li><li>• How it is being used to increase understanding among people of all ages about faiths in the city</li></ul>

**Nisha Mejer**, Chair, Northampton Inter Faith Forum, and Northampton Borough Council (Museums Department), talks about ways that NIIF helps encourage learning about different faiths and inter faith engagement, highlighting their recent Unity Exhibition.

**The Revd John Hall**, Devon Faith and Belief Forum and Exeter Faith and Belief Group, gives a brief insight into a project DFBB and the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity are working on to help inter faith groups to train faith speakers to speak to schools and community organisations as part of their reaching out and helping increase religious literacy.

**11.50 am**      **General discussion**

**12.00 pm**      **Workshops**

Five workshops are being offered. Three – on ‘nuts and bolts’ are being held twice so that participants have a chance to attend more than one of these. The topics have been chosen based on some of the most frequent queries and requests from local inter faith bodies at IFN meetings and to the IFN advice and information service.

*Details about each workshop are at the end of the programme.*

**Pre-lunch workshops**

**A. Getting the message across**

**B. Funding and resourcing our work**

**C. Developing and maintaining programmes that work well for our area**

**D. Young people and local inter faith engagement**

**1.00 pm**      **LUNCH**

**1.45 pm**      **Post-lunch workshops**

**A. Getting the Message Across**

**B. Funding and resourcing our work**

**C. Developing and maintaining programmes that work well for our area**

**E. Women and local inter faith engagement**

**2.45 pm**      **Reflections following the workshops**

A chance to share reflections emerging from workshop discussions

**3.00 pm**      **Inter faith engagement in challenging times**

The operating environment for local inter faith groups in the last few years has been a challenging one in many respects. As well as the usual day to

day running issues, there has been an increasing impact on inter faith relations in the UK of overseas events and, in some areas, extreme voices at home.

**Mustafa Field MBE**, Director, Faiths Forum for London, offers reflections on this and the important contribution local inter faith initiatives can make to encouraging positive engagement and discouraging prejudice and extreme voices.

**Esmond Rosen**, Chair, Barnet Multi Faith Forum, responds

**3.20 pm**

**Discussion**

**3.30 pm**

**Hopes and plans for the future**

In May, a new Government was elected. This may be a timely moment to think about how local inter faith practitioners hope that the future of their work may develop and, in particular, the kinds of issues that they think that the Government should consider in relation to this. For example, how do local inter faith groups see:

- priorities and possibilities in the coming period for those working for inter faith understanding and cooperation at local level;
- the evolving relationships and emphases within their work between different strands such as dialogue, cultural engagement and social action;
- the importance of different types of support for their work: from government and other public agencies, the voluntary sector, local businesses etc;
- the role of central Government, local authorities and other public agencies in relation to this work and the future of partnership working; and
- the desirability or otherwise of funding programmes to support particular aspects of inter faith cooperation and understanding at local level?

**Discussion**

**3.50 pm**

**Some final reflections from:**

**Dr Maureen Sier**, Director, Interfaith Scotland

**Mehru Fitter MBE**, Coventry Multi Faith Forum

**Closing words from the Chair**

**4.00 pm**

**Close of programme**

*Note: PowerPoint presentations from some presenters are available on the IFN website at [www.interfaith.org.uk/presentations-jul2015](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/presentations-jul2015)*

## Workshop information

### A. Getting the message across

Facilitated by Ashwin Soni, Crawley Interfaith Network (Morning) and Bessie White, Hounslow Friends of Faith (Afternoon)  
Ashley Beck, Inter Faith Development Officer, Inter Faith Network.

### B. Funding and resourcing our work

Facilitated by Julie Harrald, Loughborough Council of Faiths (Morning) and Reynold Rosenberg, Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group (Afternoon)  
Led by James Banks of Social Profit Solutions.

### C. Developing and maintaining programmes that work well for our area

Facilitated by the Revd Monsignor Vincent Harvey, Southampton Council of Faiths/Portsmouth Roman Catholic Diocesan Inter-religious group (Morning) and Charulata Joshi, Equality and Diversity Officer, Hertfordshire County Council/Herts Faiths Forum (Afternoon)  
With an opening presentation by Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director, Inter Faith Network.

### D. Young people and local inter faith engagement (Morning only)

Facilitated by Becky Brookman, Near Neighbours Coordinator for West London, with a short opening presentation by her and from Daniel Mohammed, Chair, Doncaster Interfaith.

### E. Women and local inter faith engagement (Afternoon only)

Facilitated by Dr Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland, with a short opening presentation from Charanjit AjitSingh, Hounslow Friends of Faith.



Reynold Rosenberg, Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group; Margaret Slynn, Dacorum Interfaith/Hertfordshire Inter Faith/Westminster Interfaith; The Revd Richard Leslie, Hertsmere Forum of Faiths



## The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Inter faith understanding, respect and cooperation is ever more important in the UK today.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) links and works with national faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations, academic and educational organisations with an interest in inter faith relations, as well as with other organisations including Government and other public agencies, to strengthen inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. IFN is unique in its scope and role both within the UK and in Europe. It has been bringing organisations and people together for over 25 years and its work is always evolving to meet fresh needs.

IFN carries out its work of strengthening good inter faith relations through:

- providing advice and support to inter faith organisations around the country to add value to their work
- running a helpline which each year assists hundreds of people with their inter faith projects or issues
- advocating for support of local inter faith groups and national and regional inter faith initiatives
- producing resources, in cooperation with its members, on issues of common concern such as faith based dietary practice
- bringing its member bodies and others together regularly to meet and discuss issues of common concern
- other programmes of work including Faith and Public Life and Inter Faith Week

For more information about IFN, visit [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk).

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Department for  
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2 Grosvenor Gardens  
London SW1W 0DH  
[ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)  
[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

[www.twitter.com/IFNetUK](https://www.twitter.com/IFNetUK)  
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