

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

Note of Link Meeting for Local Inter Faith Organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber

From 2pm to 4.15pm on Thursday 20 May 2021

by Zoom

Present: Ms Jay Anderson (Leeds Faiths Forum); the Revd Canon Hilary Barber (Calderdale Interfaith Council); Maurice Bartley (Rotherham Interfaith Group); Sr Patricia Harriss (York Interfaith Group); Ms Perveen Hussain (Calderdale Interfaith Council); Ms Anne Linehan (Calderdale Interfaith Council); Mr Avtar Matharu (York Interfaith Group); Fr Leslie Pinfield (Huddersfield Inter Faith Council); Ms Denise Raby (Keighley Interfaith Group); the Revd Dr David Randolph-Horn (Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship); Ms Fazila Shreef (North Kirklees Inter Faith); and the Revd Canon Mark Umpleby (North Kirklees Inter Faith).

In attendance: Dr Harriet Crabtree (Chair); Dr David Hampshire; and Mr Ashley Beck (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

Ms Kaneez Khan (Near Neighbours West Yorkshire) for Agenda Item 4.

Apologies: Bradford Concord Interfaith Society; Hull and East Riding Interfaith Society; North Lincolnshire Multi Faith Partnership; and Sheffield Womens Interfaith Forum.

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and introduction

1. Dr Harriet Crabtree, Executive Director of the Inter Faith Network, welcomed participants to this meeting for local inter faith organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber. It was an IFN regional link meeting of the kind held for local groups in different regions of England which offered participants opportunities to share reflections and news. It was always a particular pleasure to be involved in these meetings as they were about some of the most important inter faith work.
2. The meeting observed a brief period of silence to remember and give thanks for everybody working for good inter faith relations particularly at difficult times such as the present pandemic.
3. Dr Crabtree explained that, following IFN's usual practice, there would be a note of the meeting. That would be cleared in draft with participants before final circulation and adding to the IFN website. If there was anything that a speaker preferred not be minuted, please could they indicate. Screengrabs of the meeting might be used. If anyone did not wish to be in these, please could they indicate. [No requests were received to be removed from photos].
4. Apologies were noted.

5. Dr Crabtree gave a brief update on IFN's work. Since local inter faith groups in this region had last met, IFN had continued to carry out its usual work such as the link meetings and preparation for Inter Faith Week. However, the pandemic had meant that IFN had needed to focus much of its energy and work on helping faith communities and inter faith bodies respond to that. This had included such actions as creating a special section of the website, ringing up local groups periodically to find out how things were going, and sharing good practice on what people are doing on the social media. Conversations with local groups to date had reflected a range of different experiences, from challenges where people were not able to engage digitally (at least initially) to really interesting discoveries about new ways with positive dimensions. It would be good to hear how groups represented at the present meeting had been finding Covid shaping their work. She added that responding to the impact of overseas events, in particular Israel and Gaza, might also be something that groups planned to comment on given relevance in terms of local inter faith relationships.
6. Brief roundtable introductions followed.

Agenda Item 2: Roundtable sharing of news, information and ideas

7. Dr Crabtree invited groups to speak about their work, noting that there would be opportunities for questions time permitting. In each instance the speaker was introduced at the beginning and thanked at the end of their contribution.

Calderdale Interfaith Council

8. Ms Anne Linehan said:
 - She is Treasurer of Calderdale Interfaith Council (CIC).
 - CIC started life originally as a Churches' organisation about 1993 and became Calderdale Interfaith Council approximately 8/9 years later.
 - CIC has representatives from all local faith communities (She is a Buddhist and has been for 40 years).
 - Inter faith work provides an opportunity for people of different walks of life to come together to promote good relations between people of different faiths and spiritual beliefs. This work is taken forward on a basis of mutual respect and understanding.
 - I love being a part of Calderdale Interfaith Group. I studied comparative religions and being part of the Interfaith Group has given me the opportunity to hear so many wonderful speakers who actually practise their faith. Your respect for that faith grows incredibly through the way you see people living their life and trying their utmost to live up to the faith that they choose to practise.
 - As a child, although I loved my Sunday school I did not like going to Church. But I must admit that among the usual highlights of my year which I have missed during COVID has been going to our wonderful Halifax Minister where they sing all the hymns that I learnt as a child.
 - As well as more general inter faith activity, CIC also co-ordinates a Women's Interfaith Group. In normal times, the Women's Group meets on the second and fourth Thursday of every month for coffee and a general chat. We have managed to continue to meet monthly throughout this Covid period through

the wonders of Zoom. We have started to plan the rest of the year now. We are hoping to hold a food festival in July, our AGM in September, an event on Climate Change Awareness in preparation for COP26 in November, and something for Inter Faith Week.

- The Society for Applied Buddhism have been holding the most fantastic webinars on Climate Change.
- Using Zoom webinars has brought some new ways of working and that is positive. But I must admit that, much as I have enjoyed some of the Zoom, meetings, I cannot wait for the day when we can meet in person again and when I can chant with my fellow Buddhists once again.

9. Revd Canon Hilary Barber said:

- The sitting Mayor each year chairs the Interfaith Group, rather than someone from one of the faith communities.
- 3 Councillors are each year assigned to be part of the management group of Calderdale Interfaith and there is a Council Officer - who is also very involved in hate crime and social cohesion issues - who acts as the main go between.
- We also have an Administrative Officer who organises much of the admin side of things for Calderdale Interfaith and that has freed up volunteers. Instead of being tied down with all the boring stuff they can do the things that they really want to do.
- This administrative support has made our backbone much more solid and it is helpful that the Council has also given us grants.
- One of the things that has kept Calderdale Interfaith strong has been signing the Faith Covenant with the local Authority.

[Note: Canon Barber's points were made when he joined later in the meeting but have been combined here with those of his colleague.]

10. Dr Harriet Crabtree commented that she had had the pleasure of being part of Calderdale Interfaith's last Interfaith week event at Crossley Heath School in Halifax in 2019 and, more recently, one of its Women's Network Zoom meetings this year.

Keighley Interfaith Group

11. Ms Denise Raby said:

- Keighley Interfaith Group (KIG) started in 2000 as a result of the Millennium celebrations, developed following the 9/11 attacks for about 8 years it kept growing very strongly.
- Since 2013 the group has been fragile. Tim Garthwaite kept it going until he needed to take a step back. I then joined as the Secretary.
- Currently, the majority of members are Christian. There are two Buddhists and not very many Muslim members. We have started talks and discussion groups but pre-Covid the only thing supported was the annual Faith Walk and occasionally meals (with rather low numbers). There are also other groups doing their own things.
- I used to live in Birmingham and was involved with a lot of inter faith activity there and I tried bringing some of what we did down there up to Keighley.

- Despite our best efforts, there seems low interest locally in the group and it we cannot seem to really engage any people from the Muslim faith, apart from on the high level on which Jonathan Pritchard has engaged as the Town Chaplain. So the main reason I am here today is to listen to what other local groups are doing and how they are faring and to draw ideas from that for a presentation to KIG
 - KIG does not work with Near Neighbours and Wellsprings Together and that should be explored.
12. In response to a question from Ms Raby, Dr Harriet Crabtree said that many groups said they faced challenges and went through phases where there was lower engagement. There were others present at the meeting who might be helpful to be in touch with following the meeting. She asked if people would be willing to have their email addresses shared after the meeting. All signalled agreement.
13. Mr Avtar Matharu (York Interfaith Group) suggested engaging faith communities through their own networks. If it would be helpful he could speak to York's Muslim representative on its committee to see if her network reached out to Keighley. Ms Raby thanked him for this offer.

North Kirklees Interfaith

14. Canon Mark Umpleby said:
- North Kirklees is made up of Batley, Dewsbury, Mirfield, and Birstall. In the period after the late Batley and Spennings MP Jo Cox was murdered in June 2016 North Kirklees Interfaith was reformed. I have only been part of it since that time.
 - North Kirklees Interfaith (NKI) functions as a group but we also network and work with the Council and with various groups that are working in the community, in particular the Jo Cox Foundation (of which is also part).
 - NKI meets around every 6 weeks. Members at the moment are from the Christian and Muslim Communities. We did have a couple of Jewish friends previously but sadly they are no longer part of our Group.
 - We have organised a number of events such as 'Roses for Peace' where, during Inter Faith Week, we hand roses out outside prominent places with a message on a label. We did that in Dewsbury and Batley originally but last year we went further afield to Birstall and to Heckmondwyke and another areas. It was great for people to have that visibility and just to see that and the response.
 - We try to encourage people to reflect and think about what it means to live together as people of different faith. My fellow Co-chair is Imam Soni who is a Sunni Muslim. He and I do a lot of partnership working together. We go into schools and do double acts in assemblies and lessons. We also go to the mosque and to church and speak at each other's places of worship and engage others in discussion.
 - Events at Batley Grammar School recently have brought challenges not just to our own Community but nationally. As a Group we put together a Statement and released it and was great to see the kind of connection from various groups of people within the Community and the appreciation of that

Statement. It is not always easy to put words together at such a difficult and challenging time. We have been trying to work with schools a bit following that.

- One of the Officers from Kirklees Council who is part of the Cohesion team attends and contributes to NKI's meeting. She also helps with some of the organisational and administrative stuff.
- Some of us are also working together with Kirklees the Council on a Faith Covenant. Work on that has been ongoing for numerous years but sadly Covid has rather put in on hold.
- As part of the work of the Jo Cox Foundation and the Great Together we normally have a community service in the Memorial Gardens where we invite people of all faiths and backgrounds to come together. Obviously we could not do that last year so we decided to go online. Things online have no boundaries and the Jo Cox Foundation asked us to make a national kind of service. That national inter faith service was a really wonderful event. It concluded with a statement in which people of every faith and belief took part in that. As a result of this we've made many new connections with people both locally and further afield.

15. Ms Fazila Shareef said:

- We have had our first International Women's Day event. We invited people from all of the community and also from the Council as well. We talked about the challenges and successes faced by women during Covid over the past year. It was a fantastic event. It was really informative to see how people have managed to cope not just with family life but also loss of jobs, and to hear how they have been helping neighbours.
- In our meetings, we have talked about how Covid has impacted our lives as North Kirklees Inter Faith and how we help our communities.
- I run a local community group and I do work with other community groups as well. I cook on a Wednesday for the elderly and I just try help out wherever I can to make life easier for people who can't get out because of Covid. I also started a mental health group for Ladies and I am hoping that our inter faith group can get more involved with that as well because people are really affected by mental health issues - it is just not just the elderly now, or us as adults, but our school kids are suffering because they can't meet with their friends or go out to see their grandparents. It would be really good if we could guarantee one-to-one conversations once community centres start opening. Or possibly we could get into our mosques and churches with our students to discuss issues that are affecting them.

16. Ms Jay Anderson commented that it was nice getting involved in the National Great Get Together service, helping in the background and facilitating the availability of people that she had connections with to enable a broader faith representation on that.

17. Dr Harriet Crabtree commented on the importance of the joints visits to schools and places of worship that Canon Umpleby and Imam Soni had pioneered – also of their very effective social media coverage of that. This was an encouragement to others.

18. The Revd Dr David Randolph-Horn commented on the important role for women's networks in the context of engaging the Muslim community with inter faith activity. He recalled how, in the 1990s when he was working nationally with the Inner Cities Religious Council of the Government, they had realised the importance of involving Muslim and other women as these women forged links across faiths, building on each other's contributions. Muslim women seemed more able than the men to get involved in inter faith activities without having to consider whether it was politically okay to do so.
19. Dr Crabtree asked if any of the Muslim women present would like to comment. Her own impression was that the situation had changed somewhat, with women in most faith communities playing a slightly more visible roles and often finding themselves now also having to be very careful as the men who do so.
20. Ms Perveen Hussain said she thought that the Muslim women that would get involved with inter faith work were probably finding it as difficult to find the time and to make the commitment because they may also be working outside of the home. She added that Calderdale Interfaith does a number of events with Halifax Friends of Palestine (she noted that she was not speak for the whole of Calderdale Interfaith and saying everyone was pro-Palestinian) and that fact might also mean that some people would not wish to get involved. People make their judgements on such considerations regardless of their background.
21. Denise Raby commented that in Keighley there is a lot of involvement with women by Wellsprings and Near Neighbours. Getting more Muslim men involved is not so easy. There are plenty of people doing things but nobody wants to come under like an umbrella. It would be good to see more cooperation among local initiatives.

Leeds Faiths Forum

22. Ms Jay Anderson said:
 - Leeds Faiths Forum (LFF) was founded back in 1997/1998 as Leeds Faiths Communities Liaison Forum. It was established as, and remains, an independent umbrella organisation for faith community bodies in Leeds.
 - LFF was rebranded and reinvigorated around about 2001, around the time of the 9/11 terrorists attacks. It established itself as a strategic partnership body and critical friend between faith organisations in Leeds and statutory bodies. Leeds City Council has a nominated seat on the Executive Board which helps facilitate that engagement.
 - Over the last 5 years or so, the pattern of membership of the Executive Board has changed quite substantially, as has the local and national inter faith landscape of the UK. We are modernising and developing towards greater inclusivity. We want to broaden our representation of other minority faith groups, I kind of champion that, sitting there as the Secretary and being a Pagan.
 - We have been doing a lot of work in the background in terms of being in contact with Leeds City Council and redrafting our Faith Covenant documents. We have also been working with Leeds City Council's Public Health

Department and the Third Sector Voluntary Action Leeds and their Communities of Interest Group.

- We will be launching soon a new strategic plan as a basis for our work in the coming period.
- Like some other local inter faith organisations, we have sometimes struggled to retain the full spread of membership. Many representatives are older people and there is a bit of generation gap. I have for a number of years usually been pretty much been the youngest person involved (I am now 43).
- During Covid, we have been carrying on doing our every other month Executive Board meetings on Zoom. So things have been progressing but at a slower pace.
- We are very aware of COP26 coming up and the Board has some work planned with Faith for the Climate. The other thing we have got coming up in a couple of months' time is a Leeds Kindness Festival. Inter Faith Week has yet to be planned but that will be one of our major things on the agenda for the next Executive Board meeting. I hope we will be able to do a relaunch post Covid of the Light for Leeds event at Kirkstall Abbey, as well as highlighting that they have got a year-long faith and inter faith Light for Leeds Exhibition up in the Museum. Hopefully everybody who has gifted things to the Museum will get to go and see them and take friends and family.

23. Dr Harriet Crabtree added that Leeds Faiths Forum uses social media strongly with regular posts. Their Twitter and Facebook accounts were a good example of how local inter faith groups can use social media to make their work known and encourage engagement.
24. In response to a query from Canon Umpleby, Ms Anderson said that she or Geoff Turnbull at the Council would be the people to speak with about the Faith Covenant work. She could provide the latter's contact email address if wished.

York Interfaith Group

25. Mr Avtar Matharu said:
- York Interfaith Group has been in existence for 32 years. I have been its Chair for the last two.
 - We aspire to the same values that other Inter faith groups do. We also have the Act of Commitment on our website (the one from the faith communities at the end of the Millennium).
 - In terms of events, we have actually maintained a strong presence all the way through lockdown. We meet once a month and our monthly meetings moved immediately onto Zoom. All the major Faith groupings participate and we have a strong presence every month.
 - We have seen benefits of our meetings moving to Zoom. One of these is that our membership has increased. Also, we are not paying any rental so our funds in the bank have also increased. A further benefit is that Zoom has allowed us to actually have some long distance speakers.
 - In terms of events, we have had Faith and Visibility, Faith and Ecology, and Faith and Finance. We have also had what I would call a Young Generation Faith on the topic 'misconceptions of my faith'. That involved students who

were under 30. They reflected on their life experiences and faith, and also on living in York.

- Last year we had a project to create a special interfaith quilt based around Lockdown, with different panels made by different groups. That now is part of the Borthwick Archives at the University of York. The Guildhall at York belongs to the University of York and the Quilt is going to be on display for all communities and all visitors coming into York to view.
- Our next monthly meeting in June is to plan Inter Faith Week. We have a theme of 'light out of the darkness' and we will also be connecting to COP26 and having talks around Faith and Climate, Faith and Sustainability, Faith and Finance etc.

26. Sr Patricia Harriss said:

- Under Avtar's Chairmanship I think we have started to go out into the world rather more than perhaps we used to. For example he did a very good visual talking about the importance of vaccination and with scientific input about it not being dangerous for people of any race etc and the importance of everybody doing it. That was I think a particularly important piece of input.
- Also worth flagging up is that, I think for the first time ever, we have representation from across the main faith groups on our Committee, now having a Hindu, a Jew and a Muslim also. We have been really working hard on that and so are very pleased.
- Last year we had a meeting on Faith and Covid - is it God's punishment or what is it? And how does faith respond?
- During the Zooming period we have struck a good balance between, on the one hand, forum items in which various points of view are brought in and topics relating faith are often applied to the concerns of everyday life and, on the other, meetings with straight inputs.

Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship

27. Dr Randolph Horn said:

- Leeds Concord is in a very good place. We have enjoyed meeting on Zoom and have had some fabulous meetings on it in spite of our membership generally being a bit elderly. We are indebted particularly to Jay Anderson's technical facilitating expertise at meetings (she is a member of Concord as well as Leeds Faiths Forum).
- We are seeing the overall age of the membership of the Committee going down partly because of deaths.
- We have got good lively input from most of the faith groups but we could do better on Buddhist and, sadly, we just lost a Hindu representative.
- We are setting up a new Charity in which Jay and I both serve with a young Muslim imam. It will give grants for inter faith activity by young people and to help them take part in national and regional inter faith events.
- We have had really good sessions on Black Lives Matter and on faith perspectives on use of money and wealth and on sex and gender.
- At our AGM we had really good input from St George's Crypt on the development of work with the homeless.

- Dr Harriet Crabtree noted that Leeds was one of the cities in the country where there are two or more different inter faith initiatives. One, Concord, was older than the other, LFF. They had slightly different functions and they had developed a positive working relationship. There are a number of other places, such as Birmingham, where there are two or more initiatives.
- Dr Randolph-Horn responded that Concord was for individuals and LFF was a more strategic body which liaised with statutory organisations. When LFF had first been set up there had been some hostility from Concord but that was well back and the relationship was good now.
- We are beginning to plan an input on Holy Places from John Battle the feisty Roman Catholic and ex MP. We are hoping he will do something on this for Inter Faith Week at Kirkstall Abbey based on research he has been doing into the northern abbeys.
- We are likely to carry on doing Committee meetings on Zoom.

Rotherham Interfaith Group

28. Mr Maurice Bartley said:

- Rotherham is a very small group and we take part as individuals with very little representation from the faith groups as such.
- We are people who for the most part have been involved with political and other movements for creating a better sense of community within the whole of Rotherham. I myself have been a Quaker for about 30 years and was interested in a more cohesive community anyway.
- We started in 2009 after the Charter of Compassion was launched by Karen Armstrong. We very impressed by the Charter and we made it the basis for our approach. We aim to treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves (the golden rule) and we try to avoid controversy and getting bogged down in theological questions and issues of that kind.
- We meet up once a month and during Covid we have been meeting online through Zoom. We have very valuable meetings but we don't get speakers and we don't have very involved meetings but we just meet as friends and try to preserve those friendships is at the heart of our group.
- We have a link with the Rotherham Ethnic Minority Group and in normal times meet at the community centre and have a room free.
- Every year in Inter Faith Week we celebrate that with an open invitation to what we refer to as a Tea Party Reunion. The Mayor very often comes because it is at the Community Centre and we get a good turnout for that.

Former Huddersfield Inter Faith Council

29. Fr Leslie Pinfield said:

- In Huddersfield, the Huddersfield Inter Faith Council simply stopped meeting – I can't remember quite when.
- I have continued to be a point of contact for various groups. Thank you to Leeds Concord and to Calderdale for keeping me on your mailing lists and sending me the information as it comes up. One or two other groups are also continuing to do that.
- In the meantime, the Area Bishop (the Rt Revd Jonathan Gibbs) has tasked me (in my inter faith adviser role) with revisiting all the faith communities in the

area, particularly post Covid to see how they are and how things are going and to continue to promote contact between them and working with the Council on that.

- The Cricket World Cup Tour, when the trophy will be toured in Huddersfield and surrounding areas in September, has the potential to be a catalyst for reconnecting with lots of different groups and people because there is quite a range of venues, schools and religious places of worship which we will be visiting. I have talked with Mark Umpleby about this in Batley as well, so this could be a good opportunity for me as part of that work to revisit all those different people.

30. Responding to a query from Dr Crabtree, Fr Pinfield said that it was the case that the old Kirklees Faith Forum was also no longer functioning. Canon Umpleby said that NKI was seeking to develop some new links, including through a new person at Huddersfield Parish church.

Some reflections from the perspective of IFN

31. Dr Crabtree offered some reflections from the perspective of hearing what groups have said in other regions about 2 or 3 issues as the meeting agreed that that would be useful.
32. During the pandemic some groups' membership and activities had been affected by their willingness and ability or otherwise to use digital communication. Some had thrived; others not so much. Particularly where groups were predominantly made up of older members there had been at least an initial reluctance to embark on the use of Zoom. Groups had also been hesitant to reach out to new people when changing COVID measures they didn't know what their activities would be. Even if many meetings returned to in-person ones it would still be good to find ways to help increase confidence and skills in using Zoom or another such platform where that was needed. IFN had been doing work to support this.
33. Some emerging questions during the pandemic had been How do you keep a structure going when you are not meeting in person? More particularly, how do you do so when there are often not enough people to do the basic Secretary/Chairing/Treasurer roles and there may not be someone with good IT and digital skills. These were questions that, of course, went beyond the pandemic. Local authority or other external support on administration could be helpful, for example of the kind noted by Calderdale Interfaith.
34. Another question for all local groups, regardless of the pandemic, was how does one convey the positive stuff that makes people actually want to join? How does one make one's really important work known and then how does one welcome people? What is it that people think they are joining? Why would they want to take part and what would they get from it? Sometimes these things were taken as self-evident but they are not always - especially for younger people. Across the years IFN had heard many times from young people that they didn't necessarily want to take part in regular monthly meetings where a lot of the stuff seemed to be business. They were interested by conversations about particular topics and by going out and helping people.

35. When thinking about developing and extending membership the following steps, drawn from suggestions from local groups, might be helpful:
- Discuss and agree how you will put across the 'story' of your group – what it is, why its work is important and what people will gain from getting involved. Create a checklist and a timetable and use it and review it year on year.
 - Be clear about how outreach will be done and by whom. Use your channels of communication effectively and be clear who has responsibility for what.
 - If you are in an area where there are new initiatives whose work might not be badged as 'inter faith' but seems to be overlapping with yours, consider what action you might take. Developing positive relationships will be important.
36. On the point about local authority support (para 33), Canon Barber said that he thought that there was a recognition that local authorities had shifted on some fronts from being delivery organisations to commissioning organisations. In that context, faith and inter bodies had much to offer and the ability to deliver it in a more meaningful way than local authorities could ever achieve. Local authorities which were astute would recognise that. Partnership was win-win on both sides with clear advantages for each.
37. Canon Umpleby said that NKI had developed the relationship with the Officers with the Kirklees Council Cohesion team so much so that someone from the Cohesion team was leading the work in their area in relation to Inter Faith Week. They were drawing everyone together, not just from North Kirklees Interfaith but from across the region to talk and to plan. For example, the Council person is leading in terms of co-ordinating next week's NKI Inter Faith Week planning meeting.
38. Sr Patricia Harriss said that when York Interfaith had in person meetings it held these in a room in the Council offices. That gave them a connection with the Council, with which a relationship was building up. The group also had an extremely good relationship with its City Centre MP who came to a great many of their meetings, especially in Inter Faith Week, when she was in York. The MP automatically consulted them to hear faith perspectives on particular matters of national interest that concern such matters as inter faith relations and race relation.

Ms Kaneez Khan joined the meeting

39. Dr Crabtree asked about whether groups had been dealing with any particularly challenging issues, for example impacts of overseas events on inter faith relations.
40. Canon Barber referred to a time when Calderdale Interfaith had been asked about endorsing particular statements relating to racism (in the wake of debate about issues of racism in political context). Members had had an interesting and important conversation, at the end of which the group had concluded that they were about unity and holding together things that they shared and learning to get to know each other and to rub along well together. They did not want to spend time on things that potentially could blow them apart

41. Maurice Bartley commented on a major problem in his area some years back when far right demonstrations had caused great aggro. In the course of one of those 13 young Asian men were arrested. The Rotherham Interfaith Group felt that it was part of its remit to support in any way they could because they had been at the March and seen what had happened. Fortunately the young men were all exonerated in Court and none of them were held responsible for what happened. They were merely trying to defend their community against what was coming against them.
42. Dr Harriet Crabtree welcomed Ms Kaneez Khan to the meeting. Ms Khan was the Near Neighbours Coordinator for West Yorkshire. She was a person who had been working for some years with enormous degree of passion and commitment to encourage and support engagement with and between faith communities and good relations. As part of this, she had done work to encourage also very direct and honest talk about tough issues.

Agenda Item 3: Support, encouragement and learning from communities

43. Ms Khan's presentation is below:

"Hello everybody and my apologies for not being able to join the first part of the meeting. I have just come from speaking at the Makkah Masjid – the first real in person meeting through my job that I've done for some while! It was with Imam Qari Asim and his team and it was just so nice.

I'm going to talk about Inter Faith Week last year and how what we did [through Near Neighbours and Wellsprings Together] helped highlight how faith communities have been working to make difference during Covid.

During Covid, when everything got shut down, we saw how many people from faith communities went into action to support people who had lost job, or were on the breadline with not enough benefits to support them. Amazing work was done across the whole of the country. The value of faith communities at times of crisis was really clear - how everybody stood up. I saw this first hand across West Yorkshire: Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, everyone was going nonstop from March to help others.

It got harder for faith communities as food and financial needs increased and loneliness, mental health, suicide and self-harm rose. But the work still had to be done or some people would have gone hungry or possibly even died. The faith communities stepped in and we wanted to celebrate that. I was seeing so many 'thank you's for frontline workers and others but I did not see that same type of appreciation being express for what was going on within the faith communities. So for Inter Faith Week, I wanted to show what the West Yorkshire, Faith and Community sector had been doing to support people during the Covid pandemic and I wanted a thank you to be said

We put together a series of small short films. For two weeks I travelled around the whole of West Yorkshire with my mask on and I interviewed different

groups. They were videoed, with the assistance of Pishdaad Modaressi Chahardehi, and photos were taken as well. We created twenty two 20 second videos in total and a 4 minutes one encompassing all the groups covered. We used the photographs as a taster so people knew that something was coming. The videos were released during Inter Faith Week, with the 4 minutes overview shown on the final Sunday. We were so proud of the videos. I felt "That's it I've shown it, I've given the space for recognition that faith communities needed in a national way, through a Yorkshire lens." Through those videos we showed our appreciation and the importance of what the faith communities were doing and why they should be centre stage alongside the nurses and doctors and other front line worker who have given so much.

Harriet was mentioning challenges. We are in the middle of a very complex week right now, with Israel and Palestine and the conversations with young people and trying to get it right and so many things. A lot of people have very strong views about what is going on. We can go for peace, we can go for unity, we can be friends but sometimes - and we are at that point here in Leeds - people want to have conversations and they need to be had but not yet because people are very upset. We are going to have to give it a bit of time, take a deep breath and help organise the kind of dialogues that can be helpful in Leeds. I am in the middle of that - as Harriet knows I am always in the thick of it - and I think Mark and Fazila know that as well. But I think it is really important that we get this right for us in Britain as well as for people that are over there. We really need to get it right for everyone. We don't want us all arguing with each other across the world, we want us all to live peacefully together. We can all fight together for a land where there is peace and people can live alongside each other. That is where I am at right now."

44. Dr Harriet Crabtree asked Ms Khan to tell the meeting a little bit more about the inter faith work she had been doing to help encourage initiatives in a few areas. I think, for example, that you have worked with Mark and colleagues in the Kirklees context and you have also had some other engagements in one or two other areas?

45. Ms Khan continued:

"Kirklees is a very complex area. I remember I was so naïve when I started working there and there was a lot to learn. There are so many brilliant groups over there and people like Mark and Fazila. Near Neighbours has an initiative called 'Real People Honest Talk'. We also have a young leaders programme, although we have not had the funding for it recently. We have held Real People, Honest Talk conversations in Leeds, Bradford and Kirklees. Participants talked about things that were important to them within their communities.

In a conversation in Dewsbury the conversation was very difficult because some people wanted to dominate the conversation, insisting that we are all living in peace whereas others from some communities were saying we are not living in peace together, we are not living alongside each other. We would not allow the voices of the second group to be suppressed because everyone's voice is important and it needed to be heard that some people were saying that

everyone was not getting along with each other, that they felt isolated in their own community where they had lived for decades. Conversation in some of the other areas were also very hard. Some of the young girls in Kirklees reflected in what they said a level of misogyny within that community from the Muslim men that was a really hard time to get your head round. Muslim women have experienced it to a deep level (I have myself).

We have a series of four conversations: four each in Kirklees, Leeds and Bradford and then we all bring everyone together to have a big conversation in each area. When we have the big conversation, we might have workshops or table conversations but mainly people are all invited just to listen. We invite the Council leaders, vicars, imams, Police - anybody who has got any interest in what is going on in that area is invited to come along and join the conversation. We have some films of that as well, for example of the conversations in Bradford and Kirklees. If anybody wants any of these links I can send them on afterwards.”

46. Canon Umpleby said that Ms Khan was absolutely right in terms of the challenging and difficult situation in terms of some of those conversations. However, he had attended the big conversation with her and for him to hear from the young people from the schools was wonderful. It was not nice to hear some of the things because they were talking about some the really difficult situations they faced but you could see how the young people from different schools had joined together and that these discussions were important. At the last NKI meeting they had been talking about trying to hear the voice of young people. Someone from our group was talking about his work as a governor at college where young people were talking about the Batley Grammar School situation and they were sharing their opinions and we said it's really important for us to hear and for a way, hopefully, for North Kirklees Interfaith to grow younger as well. Ms Khan said she would work with NKI to look at how it could do that more to hear the youth voice.

47. Ms Khan added a final contribution:

“What’s playing out in Leeds right now is so complex. I went and met one of my Jewish friends this morning as well because I knew I could have a conversation with her.

What we hope is that when dialogue is ready to happen there will be somebody who can handle it. We are going to ask Bishop Nick [the Anglican Bishop of Leeds] to come in and help us. It needs to be done properly and when the time is right. I learned so much about timing and dynamics from the RPHT conversations in Kirklees, Leeds and Bradford and I’ve been encouraging people on group chats to put a break on things until the time is right. It is important not to destroy years and years and years of relationships that we have worked so hard to build within Leeds. So, thank Allah, we have put a break on things and we will take our time and do this properly and when we do come to dialogue we are going to listen, to respectfully listen to each other.”

48. Dr Harriet Crabtree thanked Ms Khan for her important contribution to the meeting – especially at such a pressured time - including her crucial points about

the importance of proper listening and establishing your relationships that can be drawn on when the difficult times come. Local inter faith bodies sometimes sounded self-critical when talking about their own work but the real significance of the long-term relationships. That they helped bring about should always be remembered.

Agenda Item 4: Local inter faith bodies and engagement with schools and other education settings

49. Dr Crabtree invited IFN's Assistant Director, Dr David Hampshire, to speak about IFN's resources for schools and about the engagement of local inter faith groups with schools and other education settings. She noted that he came from an RE background and was a former RE advisor with a passion for work with schools.
50. Dr Hampshire said that between 27 February 2020 and 19 January 2021, IFN had held eight regional link meetings with about 95 local inter faith organisations participating. Representatives of over a third of those groups had spoken about their work with schools. From those meetings a number of different types of work could be identified, as well as some relevant factors:
 - a) The most common type of engagement in schools was visiting, particularly assemblies and sometimes classrooms. This was true for just under half of all the groups that mentioned schools work. On the whole they were more likely to be going to primary schools than secondary schools but some had secondary school involvement as well.
 - b) Some of the groups engaged with non-mainstream schools, such as pupil referral units, they were focusing on educational settings where they felt that pupils learning about inter faith or inter faith encounters was really important.
 - c) One group organised an annual sixth form conference as well, which they believed was successful.
 - d) A smaller number of groups had a facilitating role. They facilitated schools being able to access places of worship or they organised open doors days or organised activities such as faith walks or visiting different places of worship.
 - e) Some groups focused their schools work around special times such as Inter Faith Week or special memorial days, such as Remembrance Day. One group had done events around Black Lives Matter.
 - f) Some groups had a special focus, or way of working, to respond to the needs of their communities, such as going into schools to show how people from different faith traditions could be friends. Such work was designed to show how people can talk and live well together in areas where there might be some levels of segregation.
 - g) A local inter faith group had become involved in health education in the school because there were particular issues in the community around people's health and they wanted to go to contribute to that.
 - h) There were also groups that provided practical assistance to children of school age in context of the pandemic. One group organised a programme whereby brand new school uniforms were bought for children from the poorest backgrounds. They had realised that a lot of these children's families

could not afford a good school uniform so they were going to the second hand shop. The hand-me-down shop arrangement had stigma attached to it, meaning children didn't want to go to school. The local inter faith group facilitated the purchasing of brand new school uniforms for children.

- i) Some groups also focused on particular types of activities for schools such as arts and poetry competitions.
 - j) One group wanted to engage young people with their work and asked young people to help them with their digital outputs. A school student has been involved in the design and management of their website. It was also good for that young person's CV. This is a different way of engaging with young people.
 - k) One of the notable differences across the eight regions covered was that some groups had funding for their work and some didn't. Of those groups that had money, some received it from the local authority to engage with schools and others had developed a service level agreement with schools to work with them. The majority of local groups had no funding. Where funding was available, or had been in the past, it was when groups had been established in partnership with a local authority to have an educational reach.
 - l) Most local groups have one or two ways of engaging with schools. This came down to capacity and the expertise of people in the group.
51. Dr Hampshire concluded by saying that there was clearly a tremendous amount of engagement with school on the part of local groups and that schools work is seen by them as incredibly important and valuable. He drew to the attention of the meeting the latest report on RE by Ofsted, published in the previous week. One of the things that had emerged very strongly was how faiths are represented in the classroom. There was a tremendous opportunity for inter faith groups to work with schools to help RE teachers communicate better what it means to have a living faith tradition. IFN had produced a number of resources over the years for schools. Most recently, in 2019 and 2021, it had produced Teacher Resources for primary schools and secondary schools to help pupils learn about inter faith activity in the UK. Many examples were included and the resources pointed schools to their local inter faith groups. There had been very positive feedback from SACREs, teachers and members of inter faith groups. Local groups could promote and use these resources themselves [he showed the resources on IFN's website via screen sharing]. He also highlighted IFN's publication 'Shared Values: The Golden Rule' which could be printed as a poster and displayed in the classroom. As a final point, he noted that using a Facebook page and/or a Twitter account was one important way of engaging with schools.
52. Dr Harriet Crabtree thanked Dr Hampshire and invited those present to make any observations they had or ask a question. She asked Canon Umpleby if he would like to speak first in light of the high profile incident that had happened in a school in his area.
53. Canon Umpleby (NKI) said that NKI's immediate aim had been to support Batley Grammar School. This had been helped by the existing connections that enabled members to have conversations with the school and also to link with others that might offer some support to the school and to the Trust of which the school is part. The Trust is looking to move forward with this issue. Dr Harriet Crabtree

said that she understood that there had been some quite positive engagement as a result of the discussions that followed. Canon Umpleby said that that was correct.

54. Ms Perveen Hussain (CIC) said that before lockdown they had held some of their events in schools, for instance Holocaust Memorial Day was hosted by Calderdale College, which was an FE college, and young people had been involved in that. CIC held three or four large events every year and one of those was the annual celebration, in which all the faiths participated in some way or another and where there was a meal together. The last annual celebration was held at Crossley Heath School. There had been student participation: Hindu students sang, Muslim students recited from the Qur'an and sang also; and there was a Jewish presentation. This had proved to be a way of becoming more involved with those schools and CIC had maintained those links even though it had been difficult during Covid.
55. Dr Harriet Crabtree thanked Ms Hussain. As noted earlier, she had been at the event at Crossley Heath School. She recalled sitting at a long table and engaging talking with a number of other people there over the delicious supper. One particular family, who she recalled were from a Hindu background, talked about how they had sent their son there from quite a distance and about the importance of inter faith engagement and the importance of him learning alongside people of different backgrounds. People were evidently pleased to be part of the event and glad to be engaging with each other.
56. Ms Anne Linehan (Calderdale Interfaith Council) said CIC was hoping to engage other schools in Calderdale with its faith and climate change event in October. Up until about three years ago CIC had also used to do once a year event at Calder High School. That was part of a learning for life day and used to have representatives from about six of the major faiths going in and rotating one class at a time. This allowed pupils to meet people from the religious backgrounds they were studying and for any misrepresentation to be countered. All religions were complex at it was difficult to be able to have a comprehensive understanding of them. It helped to hear from actual practitioners.
57. Dr Hampshire said that inputs from practitioners were very valuable. At the same time, research had shown that sometimes when people did go in to represent their religion they didn't necessarily represent it as they live it. Rather they wanted to represent it as they thought it should be lived because they didn't want to be seen as letting the side down. What was needed is an accurate representation of a faith tradition in its complexity. There was a need to avoid stereotypes as they can be very damaging and also to break barriers down. He noted that lots of schools now use Zoom and Teams and that this could open new ways to engage with schools.
58. Dr Crabtree said that, in terms of breaking down barriers, the model of friends from different communities going around and speaking about the importance of friendship - as exemplified by Canon Umpleby and Imam Sony in Batley - appeared very helpful approach.

59. Dr Randolph-Horn (LCIF) said that personal connections could be a good way to develop work in schools. He had a connection with a parent who has school aged children and they go into the school together to talk about the importance of friendship, coming as they do from different backgrounds.
60. Dr Harriet Crabtree thanked Dr Hampshire for his contribution. He was available to be contacted if there were any questions about work with schools or if desired he could speak to a meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Local inter faith online and digital presence and activity

61. Dr Crabtree invited groups to offer one very brief suggestion for successful online and digital engagement by local faith bodies or a suggestion about what support and assistance might help strengthen that.
62. The following suggestions were offered by participants:
 - If you don't have somebody in your organisation who is relatively tech savvy find somebody! It's amazing what you could do with a little bit of knowledge. (LFF)
 - If you're organising a general meeting it's important to have a lot of voices. (YIG)
 - Share photos of all the events you are holding so that the public can see what you're doing. (NKI)
 - On Twitter make sure that you're tagging lots of people in because that encourages them and gets them to see it. (NKI)
 - Be clear about the advantages of Zoom meetings and do not apologise for them not being the real thing. Some things are better on Zoom. Also, set meeting up in a warm and encouraging way. (LCIF)
 - Play to your strengths. For example, I (Perveen Hussain) am good with Zoom and WhatsApp but hopeless with Facebook and Twitter! I can share anything and everything on WhatsApp. (CIC)
 - Use both in person and online meetings so as to reach a much wider audience especially in the winter time when it is horrible weather. (CIC)
63. Fr Pinfield commented that a new clergyman in his chapter was using one of those fancy electronic backgrounds of the kind where you appeared against a picture of beach in the Bahamas. He was delighted to see that everybody at the present meeting was in the natural environment of their home or in their office!
64. Dr Harriet Crabtree drew the meeting to a close thanking everyone for their contributions. It was a privilege being able to facilitate these kind of regional local and faith discussions. She hoped that all had found it helpful and wished them well with their continuing important work.
65. The meeting closed at 4.20pm.

20 September 2021