

Hounslow Friends of Faith
Charity number 1147028
Annual Report 2014 -15

2014 – 15 has been another active year for Hounslow Friends of Faith.

We started with a most stimulating talk at our AGM in July 2014 by Dr James Walters, Chaplain at the London School of Economics. Many LSE students come from other countries and faith is often very much part of their identity. The Chaplaincy provides them with a safe space to practice their faith and to share discussions on difficult issues. Dr Walters felt that challenge is good as it can make us look at our faith with new eyes.

HFOF participated with the Hussaini Mission in Isleworth for the United Nations Day of Peace 19th – 21st September. Leaders of local churches and other parts of the Muslim community joined representatives of the Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish faiths, local Humanists and Hounslow Council in signing the statement 'United we say YES to peace'.

Guests also viewed an exhibition of art prepared by Westbrook, Nishkam and Tarbiyya primary schools and the Mission's own children on the theme of peace. The event was featured on the ITN Regional News at 6. Hounslow Methodist Church also marked the Day of Peace in their Sunday evening service.



In October volunteers from different faiths worked together to improve the patio garden at Holy Trinity Church in Hounslow High Street. This was our contribution to this year's Sewa Day, the Hindu inspired international Day of Volunteering.

HFOF ran two events during Interfaith Week in November. On 18th November Millius Palayiwa, Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation encouraged the audience to be truthful to their own scriptures and to speak truth to power. The aims of modern war are now unobtainable. We should highlight alternatives to armed intervention to our MPs. People should create friendships with those of other faiths to avoid conflicts and misunderstanding. Over refreshments we celebrated 14 years of HFOF with a cake made for us by the Brahma Kumaris. We held this event at the Civic Centre and are grateful as ever to Hounslow Council for their support for our work.



A few days later on 22nd November, over 65 women from different faiths enjoyed the diversity of their cultures at a celebration organised by our Women's Group. Among the activities at Heston Community Centre were mehndi hand painting, rangoli patterns and a demonstration of tying a Nigerian head dress. Somali ladies showed off colourful clothes, drink carriers and performed a traditional dance. Other dances from Gujerat and Israel were also enjoyed. Information was shared on clothing worn for weddings and other occasions before food from round the world was served.

Our Women's Group continues to meet approximately monthly at various venues. Topics have included Memories, How I practise my faith in everyday life and Emotional Resilience. The year ended with a session making flower garlands.

During the autumn of 2014 the promised training course for volunteers offering to work with people with life limiting illnesses took place at West Middlesex Hospital. Six students completed the training. Unfortunately due to administrative and other issues at the hospital it has not been possible to take this project any further.

In February, we were all shocked by the murders at the offices of the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris by Islamist extremists. Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, in partnership with Hounslow Friends of Faith (HFOF) hosted a Communities Roundtable at the mosque in Hounslow on 12th February. This brought together over 30 leaders of the faiths and denominations within them in the borough to share views and concerns informally in the wake of the recent events. Representatives of Hounslow Council and the Met Police also attended. Condemnation was expressed at fanaticism in faith, but also the need for restraint when using the highly earned value of freedom of speech.



HFOF members were pleased to attend Hounslow Jamia Masjid and the Hounslow Islamic Relief Association in Feltham for their open days later in the spring.

In February the Near Neighbours funding scheme sponsored by the Department of Communities and Local Government was extended to cover Hounslow and Heston. This fund gives grants to partnerships of two different faiths for small projects running over six months to tackle a social issue. Examples could be a celebration, a series of craft classes or work with isolated or homeless people. HFOF assisted with publicity for this fund, although take up so far has been low.

Our knitting group meets monthly in partnership with St Mary the Virgin Church in Twickenham. We ran a stall at the International Women's Day event at Hounslow Civic Centre on 7th March.



A visit to a Jewish synagogue was well supported by HFOF members on 18th March. Hounslow Synagogue closed a few years ago, so limiting the opportunity for making contacts and sharing knowledge of Judaism. The members of the orthodox synagogue in nearby Ealing met that need. Visitors saw the refurbished hall and were shown the scrolls of the Torah which are read through regularly throughout the year. Language similarities with

Arabic were noted with interest.

In May the general election took place. HFOF offered some background advice to various faith groups who organised hustings where candidates presented their arguments and answered questions.

On 23rd May HFOF supported the Candlelit Vigil organised by the Nepalese community following the devastating earthquake in that country.



Our annual Walk of Peace and Friendship this year was planned jointly with Westminster Interfaith. We were pleased to be joined by visitors from across London and beyond as part of their 30th Multi-faith Pilgrimage. Walkers met on Saturday 6th June 2015 at the Laxmi Narayan Hindu temple in Neville Close, moving on to Holy Trinity in Hounslow High Street, St Michael and St Martin's Catholic Church and Hounslow Jamia mosque. The final visit was to the Sikh Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Alice Way. The event was attended by Mayor Councillor Nisar Malik, a number of councillors and both MPs, Ruth Cadbury of Brentford and Isleworth and Seema Malhotra of Feltham and Heston.

As the event was larger than usual, we required more robust stewarding and first aid support. We are most grateful to Satwinder Ahdan (Bilo) of the Gurdwara and his volunteers for supporting us. The benefit was two way, as for some of the stewards this was their first opportunity of visiting places of worship of other faiths. As Seema Malhotra said in her words of support, there is great value in opening doors in enable links to be made.

Hounslow Friends of Faith's annual Meeting for Faith Leaders took place on 9th June with a half day conference on keeping safe and showing opposition to hate crime. The 'We Stand Together' campaign was organised jointly by Hounslow Police and HFOF and is part of a national move to celebrate diversity and help build a stronger and safer UK. It builds upon the strong bonds that exist between communities within neighbourhoods and together celebrates diversity and drives out all forms of hatred and extremism. The need to encourage greater reporting of hate crime and the support available from the Hounslow Hate Crime Support Service was highlighted.

Participants from the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh religions heard presentations on all aspects of crime prevention and keeping safe. Preventing a terrorist attack was also covered. Advice was shared between faiths and also information about social projects, walks of peace and witness and festivals. We also heard about the work of Tell MAMA, a group which monitors islamophobic attacks nationally and makes representation to the police and government. At the end of the event at Hounslow Jamia Mosque, a pledge was signed to show that hate crime has no place in Hounslow.



We continue to be involved in education. We have offered advice on RE issues to Heston Primary and the Suffah School. We have provided a Jewish speaker for the Tarbiyya School and a Christian for the Suffah School, both Muslim primaries. In July, the RE Department of the Green School held a 'Women of Faith Conference'. We assisted by providing women contributors from a number of faiths.

As a voluntary group, HFOF is often consulted on a range of issues. Debbie Brenner, HFOF committee member, serves on the executive of the Hounslow Community Network (HCN). This group works in partnership with the local authority on matters of policy and procedure relating to the voluntary sector. She also sits on the HCN Equalities Forum and has taken over attending the Hate Crime Prevention Forum on behalf of HFOF. Sandy Rahman has taken on being the link with the Patient and Carers Reference Group of Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group. We are grateful to them both for taking on these responsibilities.

The funding we had been receiving from LB Hounslow finished at the end of December. At present our activities are low cost and we have not so far needed to apply for outside funding for our core work.

The exception to this is a grant we have received from the Richmond Civic Pride fund. This is for a training programme for RE teachers in Richmond borough titled 'Peace and Remembrance: Using local World War 1 history in RE teaching'. It is being delivered through one full day and three after school sessions between April and October 2015. The climax will be a short exhibition of work produced by school pupils staged at Orleans Gallery in Twickenham 4 - 6 November. The aim of the training is for the RE teachers to increase their awareness and understanding of local stories of conflicts and peacemaking relating to the First World War and in particular Richmond's links with Belgian refugees. RE teachers will also explore rituals of remembrance.

Looking more widely, our Chair and Secretary have attended events run by the Interfaith Network of the UK and a reception at Kensington Town Hall organised by Unity of Faiths. Charanjit AjitSingh and Ajit Singh attended the Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Birmingham in 2014 and the IARC Peace Commission in Northern Ireland. In 2015 they also attended the World Congress of Faiths and the Modern Church conference in Hertfordshire.

The Future

This year there will be some changes to the committee. I am standing down from the committee after serving for nine years. We have created the new post of Committee Coordinator to plan and support our bi-monthly committee meetings. We hope to recruit the services of a volunteer minutes secretary.

I will continue in the new non-trustee role of Information Officer. As such I will remain as the contact point for HFOF, both receiving post, calls and emails and circulating information on HFOF activities and related matters of interest to the faith communities by email and the occasional newsletter. I will also aim to keep the website updated. I will attend meetings as required.

The committee have also decided to create the position of patron. This will be awarded to any individuals who have contributed to encouraging good interfaith relations and to the work of Hounslow Friends of Faith. This would be an indefinite appointment. The committee is pleased to appoint Jagjiwan Singh, a founder member of the group as our first patron in recognition of his significant contribution to Hounslow Friends of Faith over the years and to good interfaith relations both locally and nationally.

The committee plan to concentrate of the core activities of liaison and bridge building by holding an event for Interfaith Week, the Walk of Peace and Friendship and a meeting for Faith Leaders on a topic of common interest. Good community relations between people of different faiths and beliefs, and between those of faith and secular society depend on making and sustaining personal relationships and building friendships. We can all play our part.

Bessie White
Secretary
July 2015