

## **Analysis of activities in Bolton during the National Interfaith Week 2017**

**(This year 12<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017)**

The week of national interfaith week is very much part and parcel of events we all look forward to for many good reasons. The week gives you that extra initiative to do the best in your town to bring communities together which cements our everyday work. Through the Interfaith Network- UK, we are also able to learn new ways of uniting communities as well as the fact that many other groups, schools, places of worships are working on the same objective gives you a sense of unity and ownership.

Bolton is one of the largest towns in the country and is also a home to very diverse communities. Like anywhere else there are many positives and in ever changing demographics, Brexit, social media, terrorism and many other issues creates numerous challenges too. Past few months have seen number of terrorist attacks and rise in hate crime which has huge impact upon individuals and communities. Fortunately, every time the goodness and unity from all sections of communities have responded unbelievably in such a positive manner which is very inspiring to all members of the community who wants peace, harmony, mutual respect and build bridges of hope, trust and opportunity to prosper in our country. Locally the Manchester attack highlighted immense “humanitarian values” – kindness, compassion, caring, humility, sharing, generosity, respect and unity in the community.

So there are very many positives and to me, the work of interfaith organisations and community groups is to provide a platform through which we embrace the humanitarian values and **work together** for the betterment of our society and discard any other differences based on colour, creed, faith, dress code, outward looks, perceptions or any other which divides people.

So the **“National Interfaith Week”** gives us all an opportunity to work together and hold events which provides opportunity to build upon many existing relationships by getting to know more about one another through sessions of awareness raising , welcoming ,dialogue and likeminded people working together to make a positive difference in the community.

Our events began, not directly part of our work but over the years- supporting the Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday organised by Bolton Council.

Remembrance Sunday was as always an excellent ceremony with hundreds of people attending with numerous groups including school children, veterans and civic leaders paying Tribute and Respect to the heroes who gave their lives for our freedom today. Our young ambassadors joined the civic party and understood the significance of the ceremony. I think it is very important for communities to attend the ceremony.

## **Our Events-**

Our first event on 13/11/17-**“Open Day”** at was supported by our faith group partners – Bolton Christian Community Cohesion, Bolton Council of Mosques and Bolton Hindu forum. Amongst our visitors were eight people who had just arrived in Bolton from Iran, Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana, Iraq and Syria and others. Despite bitter cold and language difficult – they were pleased to be invited to open day and seeing faiths working together.

Following day 14/11/17 was **“Faith Trail”** by Bolton Muslim Girls High School with over 121 students and staff visited a Swaminarayan Mandir, Emmanuel Church and finally Zakariyya Mosque. The students had prepared superb art work with statements against “Hate Crime “and its implications. The students were very engaging as well as truly inspiring.

On Wednesday 15/11/ 17 – we supported – our annual event of **“Unity in Community”**. A wonderful- very diverse and intergenerational event with celebration of Eid, Diwali and Advent festivals enjoyed together. Led by our colleagues at Asian Elders Resource Centre and supported by many community groups and schools. There were many activities and promotional stalls, singing, dancing, wonderful contributions from four primary schools and food share. We also had special visitors – Mr David Hampshire, Assistant Director for

Interfaith Network UK, Mayor and Mayoress of Bolton. Hopefully they were impressed with the event and so many groups working together for unity in the community. The Asian Elders Staff deserve a lot of praise for their efforts.

On Thursday 16/11/17 – we had the very popular activity – **“Passport to Faiths and Food Share”**- which involved 10 diverse schools, faiths groups, many volunteers and Mayor – Mayoress and Chief Executive of Bolton Council. This year we had eight faith tables- Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism and Sikhism – everyone displaying key items of that faith and school children go around each table – where the presenter briefly explains about the core values –beliefs of the faith.... Children ask questions and their each individual Passport is stamped.... At the end each child will have visited all eight faith tables and hopefully got some brief knowledge of each faith... which they can google in their own time. This year we added two new faith tables – Bhai’ and Jain... which most people had not heard of.. so a real plus for us all.

In the end we shared food and ended with entertainment .... Christmas songs... poetry reading and so on ...each school received box of chocolates as an appreciation for their contribution. We have received many positive comments which are listed as a separate attachment. An excellent event for today’s young children to learn about various faiths and see the many things we share in common. It was a great team effort to successfully hold this event.

Finally on Friday 17/11/17- we had **–“No Place for Hatred- in Community”** - many of us are aware that for many reasons – “hate crime” statistics have drastically increased in last couple of years. Held in the evening, this event led by our Young Ambassadors group had excellent contributions from schools, young people, Greater Manchester Police, Bolton Council and many others from the community who aired their views through power point presentation, readings, statements, displays, singing etc about the damage and impact upon individuals and community which people have to suffer from a small minority who are prejudiced and blinkered in their views.

Apart from above events two of our colleagues also did presentations regarding the work of Bolton Interfaith Council at St. James CE High School and Pikes Lane primary School.

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## **Summary- An excellent week which helped to-**

(1) Strengthening our existing partnerships and forge new relationships to promote the ethos of interfaith working to enhance community engagement at various levels. Our events had many positive aspects and getting children and young people involved is always a good thing for the future.

(2) The support from many volunteers, schools, faith groups, places of worships – 12 schools, Bolton Christian Community Cohesion, Bolton Council of Mosques, Bolton Hindu Forum, Greater Manchester Forum of Faiths, Shree Ramachandra Mission ( Jainism) , Buddhist Centre- Bolton, Baha'i group, Swaminarayan Mandir, Zakariyya Mosque, Emmanuel Church, Victoria Hall Methodist Mission, Asian Elders, Mayors office, Bolton Council, Greater Manchester Police, Building Bridges, Bolton City of Sanctuary, Bolton CVS, ACIS, Bolton News, excellent volunteers and many others made it possible to have a very rewarding week.

I must also point out the four local Business organisations that supported the week of activities -Bolton Halwa Centre with refreshments, Minerva Prints and Carrs Pasties who donated 140 cheese pasties at no cost and John Bates with variety of fruits again at no cost for 180 people. Such generosity and support is to be valued and appreciated in totality.

By our joint efforts, BIC along with others have built good – honest and trustful relationships which helps us to deliver events during the week and much more significantly our daily work of faith trails, school assemblies, Interfaith young ambassadors, networking forum, various peace prayers for community, charity events with British Red Cross and supporting other partnership events.

The support & guidance from Interfaith Network – UK is always excellent and a grant from Interfaith Youth Trust is very helpful to us.

As for publicity, Bolton News also was excellent in promoting the week with three different articles.

Also my special appreciations for Ganshyambhai Patel, who took photographs, Piers & Janet Hardy, Rev.Fayaz, Saeedbhai Akuji, Shashikantbhai Merchant, Rehana & Sabiah Makkan, Puja Solanki, Jamilaben, Dip Bhatt , Muqadas Iqbal,

Josh Orme, Faith group partners and BIC Executive Members contributed immensely to a very successful and rewarding week.

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**Some of the statistics during the week- (a good guide)**

**Attendees – Adults - Children**

Monday	22	5
Tuesday	18	121
Wednesday	180	125
Thursday	35	104
Friday	41	10
<b>Total =</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>365 = 661</b>

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**Passport to Faiths and Food Share- 10- Participatory Schools -**

Brandwood Community Primary, Gilnow Primary, St Gregory's Primary, Bolton Islamic Girls High, Pikes Lane Primary, Eden Boys High, St Matthews CE Primary, St Brendan's Primary, Claypool Primary and Clarendon Primary

**Unity in the Community – Participatory Schools-**

Brandwood Community Primary, Pikes Lane Primary, Gilnow Primary and The Valley Primary.

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**Costs for the week – Yet to be finalised is app. £ 1,038.86p**

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On behalf of everyone at BIC, Thank you everyone for your support in so many ways and it was a truly inspiring week with a real team effort.

Kind regards in peace & friendship – Chan Parmar – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017

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**Separate Attachments:**

Feedbacks / Comments, Activity Poster, Press Articles, and Sample Photos.

