

The importance of multi-faith.

Why multi faith events are important and how they can contribute to co-operation and co-existence in the current situation.

Unity. The United Kingdom. 'United Kingdom,' what does this mean? What is it that we should stand united for? Stand united against?

Multi-faith is as important now in the 21st century as ever. Living in the diverse city of London, which has faced such severe destruction both physically and emotionally, is it still important to live in a society enriched with the vibrancy of different faiths and cultures, or is it a reason to segregate from others to form divisions amongst ourselves?

Should we, the citizens of one of the most powerful cities in the world, one of the most powerful countries in the world, the 'United Kingdom', stand isolated and disassociated with our neighbours? Is this the place for boundaries of intolerance and prejudice to be created? Should lack of knowledge and understanding of the environment around us promote violence instead of creating awareness for our personal and social growth towards mutual respect and understanding?

What makes us British? Is it the fusion of the faiths from all areas of the world, carefully entwined with the vibrancy of global friendship and consideration? Is it the union of individuality and commonality where uniqueness is renowned as part of the culture, something encouraged and to be proud of? Is it just simply the celebration of diversity?

So let's start with 'diversity', the diversity within London. Is this an unimportant topic, or 'politically incorrect'? We hope not. Over the last couple of years we have discovered that 'diversity' in fact goes to the heart of what the London community is all about.

After all, we all encounter at first hand the complex and bewildering diversity at work within each community. Community identity is no longer straightforward, if indeed it ever was. Dynamics of young and old, ethnic groupings, gender roles, peer pressure, wealth and poverty, dishonour and respect, networks and boundaries, are what make communities.

We cannot afford to ignore this diversity amongst us. Neglected or suppressed, diversity becomes the occasion or excuse for prejudice, discrimination, hatred, despair, as events in Oldham, Bradford and elsewhere have reminded us.

But the other side is this diversity within communities, which can be the source of their renewal. In other words, self-help and mutuality - often identified as the core values which support community projects - are founded upon the rich diversity which exists within each and every community.

Multi faith events such as this one not only help us to promote this diversity, but highlight the good that it does to our society at the same time. It incorporates the extension of knowledge with the chance to create solutions to problems which may

have occurred due to the lack of this knowledge. It also enforces the compassion that we must have towards one another, which is shown to us through religion and faith from throughout the world and throughout history, where mistakes due to prejudice and cruelty have had devastating effects. To prevent such incidents from happening again, and to ensure that a harmonious environment is created and maintained, these multi faith programmes are vital for this city, country and world.

Whilst helping with this multi faith project, we were asked a question which was based on the concept of a 'British Identity', a topic we had frequently discussed. We were asked to comment on how people of different faiths could have a common identity. Whilst we were discussing this, people commented on the core principles of the World Religions being the same. They compared values such as truth and compassion which were common foundations to all the religions. This got me thinking....

People of different faiths may not want a common identity, not because they are against the beliefs of others and do not want to join together to form one identity of mutual friendship etc... because although they want to stop all prejudices both inter-religion and intra-religion, the vibrancy that different faiths and cultures bring to London make it an interesting place to live in, and although we stand united in harmony, we remain individual and unique in our own identities (as individual people).