

A YEAR OF SERVICE

END OF PROJECT REPORT

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FOREWORD

Selfless service is a fundamental principle that is common to all religions. As demonstrated by this report, people who do God do good – and that is something the Coalition Government wholeheartedly supports and celebrates. One of the ways we have done so is by creating ‘A Year of Service’, which ran throughout the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee year. What better way of commemorating Her Majesty’s 60 years of service than through recognising the ongoing service of people of faith?

The programme featured a year-long calendar of activity which not only highlighted all the social action that the faith communities undertake individually, year in year out, but also provided a framework to encourage people of different faith backgrounds to come together to volunteer in new and exciting ways.

During the year we saw nearly 200 multi-faith projects taking place – from restoring a community centre for Lent to feeding the homeless to mark Ramadan; from entertaining the elderly for NoRuz to preparing gifts for refugees during Pentecost. We defy anyone to read this report and not feel inspired by the potential of faith communities to come together to make a real difference.

We would like to thank most warmly all those individuals of different faiths who sat on the Reference Group: agreeing the dates and themes of the Year, enthusing their respective communities, and very often organising excellent projects themselves – with few resources to draw on apart from their own commitment and the goodwill of their communities.

We would also like to thank the Mitzvah Day Charitable Trust which was commissioned by the Department to lead on the central administration and promotion of the programme. Laura Marks, Helen Fitton and all the team worked with so much dedication and enthusiasm to make the Year a success. Our thanks are also owed to Jane Winter from the Faith Based Regeneration Network who wrote this report and to all other members of the Advisory Group who helped steer the development of the programme as the Year progressed.

For faith communities, every year is a year of service. Therefore we have just announced Together in Service – a further three-year programme of faith-based volunteering which builds on the success of 2012. This includes an ongoing calendar structure, a Fellowship of volunteers, and a grants fund to kick-start new multi-faith projects. We will be running a competition shortly to identify an external organisation or consortium to develop and run the programme.

Through this, and other projects, the Department for Communities and Local Government will continue to help faith communities do what they do best: come together to serve and support those around them.



RT HON BARONESS WARSI
Senior Minister for Faith and Communities



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INTRODUCTION

A Year of Service 2012 was the joint initiative of nine faith communities, facilitated by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and with the Mitzvah Day Charitable Trust (MDCT) contracted to fulfil central administrative and promotional functions.

It aimed to celebrate volunteering among people of faith, support integration by creating opportunities for cross faith social action connected to faith festivals (12 dedicated volunteering days, one each month), and showcase the volunteering that goes on in faith communities throughout the year.

It took as its inspiration the dedicated service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in her Jubilee year, along with the imperative to serve found in the writings and beliefs of each faith community.

This report highlights the learning from the programme. It aims to be a resource document useful for faith communities wishing to engage in cross faith partnerships focusing on social action and volunteering. It is not a full evaluation of the programme. Evidence is drawn from observation and from case studies received from the volunteering days. Not everything that happened in the Year was successful, but applying the learning that came from each event along with the wisdom of faith based practitioners ensured that the overall programme was a success. This is reflected in the report.

The report is written by the Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN) which was closely associated with the programme from its inception. FbRN sat on the advisory and reference groups and met independently with MDCT and DCLG. Staff attended at least one event associated with each faith project. This close relationship enabled FbRN to fully understand the nature and practicalities of the programme while also having the freedom to compile an honest report on the activities of the year.

Ramadan, a time to give



HOW THE PROJECT WAS ESTABLISHED

The imperative to serve is a fundamental principle for all faith communities. The programme set out to demonstrate this using twelve religious festivals or dedicated volunteering days drawn from nine faith traditions. Each of these provided an opportunity for cross faith volunteering in social action. The programme was established initially following discussions between DCLG and a range of faith interlocutors.

Planning and preparation for the project began in the summer of 2011. It involved establishing a project programme, inviting organisations to participate, setting a publicity framework and securing funding to support staffing. This six month lead-in period was essential in providing a secure project for participants to engage with from January 2012.

Representatives of the nine faith communities were invited to form a reference group (see appendix). Group members were recognised volunteering activists within their own faith networks, known by or recommended to DCLG. This group in turn relied on support from their own faith communities.

An advisory group comprising key stakeholders was also established (see appendix). This group comprised national strategic organisations with a particular expertise to offer the project. MDCT was contracted to create the brand and identity of A Year of Service and the website, employ a dedicated member of staff to run the programme and advise the reference group on publicity and promotion.

Each member of the reference group took responsibility for promoting the respective faith focus and agreed social action within his or her own faith community and for encouraging wider participation across faiths with the support of their own reference group. They reported to the national reference group on a monthly basis, contributed to the website, supported each other's events and received practical advice from the Year of Service staff.

Projects held on volunteering days were funded and organised by local faith communities, mostly under the oversight of reference group members. It is important to note with gratitude the huge contribution local faith communities made in time, resources and finance. Some events were organised by work places. Twenty five organisations participated.

The advisory group contributed to the overall shape of the programme. It advised on the planning of local cross faith initiatives and the national celebratory event. Three members of the advisory group attended the reference group. Both groups were convened by DCLG.

Every phase of development involved MDCT and DCLG. The administration of the project by the MDCT was funded by DCLG and the Cabinet Office. DCLG also provided a reference point for publicity and communications. It took the lead in work-place volunteering and attended as many of the faith based initiatives as possible.

This was a new style of partnership working for the department. It was successful due to two key factors: clarity of purpose, and excellent relationships between departmental staff and members of the reference and advisory groups. Both factors will be key in any future development of the A Year of Service initiative.

THE 12 FESTIVALS AND THE SERVICE LINKED TO THEM

The initial idea was to celebrate one “one-day” festival a month chosen by the relevant member of the reference group in agreement with his or her community. However it became clear that some of the chosen religious festivals would run for longer than a day so the advisory group decided to be flexible in inviting the different faith groups to choose religious festivals of whatever length they wished as the focus for “their” month, or to choose dedicated faith-led volunteering days (eg Sewa Day, Buddhist Action Day). It should be noted that the festival dates accord with the calendar for 2012.

Each faith group was invited to feed back the stories and learning from its events at the end of their month. While all event organisers were encouraged to respond, a decision was made not to contact them more than three times. This was out of respect for the amount of work they do and the extra demands placed on them to participate in the A Year of Service programme. We are very grateful to those who responded. Key learning points were replicated across the events; these are aggregated at the end of the report.

The programme formally opened in January 2012, with the first volunteering day in February. This meant that the reference group had to get straight into organising activities. Learning about the process and organisation of the volunteering projects went hand in hand with providing information about festivals and the social action events designed to illustrate them. This was a steep multiple learning curve for everyone. It worked because of the high regard and respect reference group members and staff from MDCT and DCLG had for each other.

SERVICE THEMES

The reference group were keen to ensure a balance of activities to illustrate the different faith festivals or foci chosen for the programme. It would have been possible to focus on one social issue such as homelessness or the environment for the whole year. However, in order to keep the programme varied and draw on the strengths of each faith tradition it was decided to include a range of social action themes. Each faith group chose a social action theme that resonated with its festival.

The overall programme calendar is included in the appendix. 144 separate events were recorded on the A Year of Service website. While the majority were held in London (75), events were also held in Berkshire, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Bradford, Bury, Cardiff, Colchester, Dublin, Feltham, Glasgow, Gravesend, Hertfordshire, Leeds, Leicester, Luton, Maidenhead, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Poole, Radlett, Scottish boarders, Sheffield, Slough, Southampton, St Albans, Taunton, Watford, Wessex and the West Midlands.

FEBRUARY

BAHÁ'Í – AYYÁM-I-HÁ

HOSPITALITY

This was the first festival in the year. The preparation time was very short. In addition there was pressure to provide a good platform at which the Secretary of State could launch the whole A Year of Service initiative. The national Bahá'í Centre provided a highly suitable venue. All those attending brought and wrapped toiletries to be given to a homelessness charity run through a local church. Participants also decorated cakes for the charity. Local Bahá'í communities also held events in Manchester and Poole.

The event was opened with a speech of welcome from Dr Kishan Manocha who encapsulated the meaning behind A Year of Service with the following statement:

“A Year of Service celebrates the oneness of God through acts of loving kindness”

Case study (South West London): Preparing hospitality for homeless people

“Overall the event worked well. The turnout was excellent, with representatives from all the major religions in attendance, including a number of prominent religious leaders. This created a very positive spirit. Secretary of State Eric Pickles attended the launch. Minister Andrew Stunell joined a small group to distribute the gifts and cakes at St Dionis Church. These were gratefully received by homeless people.

On the logistical front, we realised that we should have offered eg only vegetarian food to avoid complications with various dietary requirements.

The event led to a number of fresh contacts between representatives of different religions, as well as strengthening contacts that already existed. Notably for the Bahá'ís, the event helped strengthen an existing relationship with representatives from a local synagogue and created a new relationship with St Dionis's Church and the West London Churches Homeless Concern.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/bahai>



MARCH

ZOROASTRIAN – NoRUZ

VISITING ELDERLY PEOPLE

NoRuz is the most important festival in the Zoroastrian calendar. It celebrates the first day of spring. It is a time for visiting friends and relatives, sharing gifts and enjoying the company of others. To mark this festival the Zoroastrian community invited people of other faiths to join with them as they extended the essence of hospitality to local care homes. They provided entertainment, food and gifts to residents, and enabled staff and residents to enjoy the festivities equally.

Case Study (North West London): Hosting parties at care homes

“Our entertainer was in full form, playing for over 3 hours: “Golden Oldies” from My Fair Lady, Viva España, Lambeth Bridge and closing with a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts. Our five volunteers from the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe persuaded many of the residents to get up from their seats and dance, many were also singing. Even the 100 year old joined in by shaking her feet and waving her hands.

The staff were extremely cooperative; following the lead from their Manager many of them joined in the merriment and assisted the residents to dance. A wonderful buffet spread was laid out including beer, tonic wine and Indian vegetarian food prepared in house, which was hot and very tasty.

Before we departed all the residents were presented with a small gift by our volunteers. The residents were very appreciative, some of them requesting us to stay longer which our volunteers found very touching, they were also sad to leave. Our volunteers thoroughly enjoyed themselves and suggested making this an annual event, assuming we can find the funding to purchase the gifts and pay for the buffet and the entertainer.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/zoroastrianism>



MARCH

CHRISTIAN – LENT

CLEANING AND RESTORING

The festival of Lent runs for a period of six weeks rather than a single day or a few days as some other volunteering opportunities did. This should have provided plenty of opportunity for social action. There is another significant difference between Lent and the other volunteering opportunities: Lent is a period of internal, personal reflection, a time for confession and an opportunity to change lifestyle for the better. The usual focus is therefore not on social action. However, taking the theme of restoration the group decided to concentrate on cleaning local environments, reflecting the “cleaning up of lives” that happens during Lent.

Staff from DCLG took the lead in promoting this festival and three events took place in London boroughs, one of which was shared support for a lunch club, the focus being a welcoming and hospitable environment for guests.

Case Study (West London): Restoration work at a community centre

“This environmental event enabled DCLG staff of different faiths and beliefs to carry out volunteering and meet departmental expectations for staff to volunteer time in community projects. It was good to be able to do this following the government’s clear steer towards increased volunteering. We did practical work, supporting a local centre with painting, gardening and litter picking. It was important that we did work that would benefit the Centre, not just things that we were interested in or made good photo opportunities.

A benefit from the day was the opportunity for us to strengthen relations with a community based organisation. It also gave staff members of different faiths an opportunity to work together, recognising our shared call to serve. All volunteers thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The event was warmly welcomed by the Centre’s General Manager. We would like to repeat it on another occasion.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/christian-1>



APRIL

JAIN – MAHAVIRA JAYANTI

VISITING THE SICK

Mahavira Jayanti is the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Mahavira who revived Jainism 2,600 years ago. Jains celebrate this event by focusing on the three core elements of their belief: Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. These are necessary to attain total happiness and bliss and to bring out the true characteristics of one's soul such as friendship, equality, total perception and knowledge by spiritual liberation. Jains place a high regard on individual wellbeing and health so it was appropriate to focus on supporting people who were unwell during this festival.

Jains in London, Leicester, Manchester and Birmingham arranged visits to hospitals and care homes to offer support to staff and patients. The Jain community produced beautiful Get Well cards acknowledging Her Majesty's Jubilee year.

Case Study (various major cities): Visits to hospitals and care homes

“The Jain community is one of the smallest faith communities in England. However they arranged 12 visits to hospitals and care homes. Most volunteers attended one visit, some gave an incredible amount of time in planning and taking part in five of them. The Jains funded the project from their own resources. This was costly. Their dedication as an expression of faith was evident. This activity was undertaken just by the Jain group although some Christians joined with some of the visits.

Following the visits there was a reception for volunteers and multi-faith leaders. Volunteers narrated their experience of the joyful task of visiting the sick in A Year of Service. The reception gave the faith leaders the opportunity to share in the festival and to be inspired to consider developing the theme of cross faith social action in the future.”

Further Activity

Later in the year the Jain community organised another event entitled the “Love of Faith Walk”. This was a sponsored multi-faith walk taking in a number of worship centres from north London following a route to Westminster Abbey. The walk raised funds for children's charities at home and abroad. The walk was oversubscribed, with extra supporters joining at certain points along the way. The event was very successful. It illustrates how a faith group took the idea of A Year of Service and developed it outside of the original brief, but to good effect.

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/jain>



MAY

CHRISTIAN – PENTECOST

WELCOMING NEW ARRIVALS

Pentecost is celebrated by many Christians. It marks the receiving of the Holy Spirit 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. It is not normally associated with social action. In recent years some groups of Christians have marked it with community projects including street clean ups and community meals over the last May bank holiday weekend. This festival was chosen because Black-majority Pentecostal churches wanted to contribute to the project. It required a lot of hard work on behalf of the A Year of Service team to get engagement, for reasons identified in the case study. However, there was one very successful project in which a small group of volunteers from four faith traditions wrapped presents and served meals for asylum seekers and people new to England.

Case Study (South London): Preparing gifts for asylum seekers

“This project involved preparing gifts, bought by a local church and a Pentecostal group for clients at an refugee centre. Wrapping gifts gave the volunteers a chance to chat and get to know each other, making the activity fun and sociable. It meant when the volunteers met with the asylum seekers they came across as a single group.

Presenting wrapped gifts made the event special for the clients, as it felt a little bit like receiving Christmas presents! The gifts had been carefully chosen to be appropriate to the client group.

Volunteers met refugees from other parts of the world and other faiths, sometimes for the first time, and started to build friendly relationships. Some of the volunteers had direct links with the countries clients had come from.

The event really lifted the spirits of all those at the centre – both staff and clients. The centre staff are keen to run the event again and the participating Pentecostal Christian group also wish to be involved in further events.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/pentecost-christian>



JUNE

SIKH – THE MARTYRDOM OF GURU ARJAN DEV BRINGING SWEETNESS

All the Sikh Gurus taught the message of compassion, love, dedication, hard work, worship of one God and the commitment to peace and harmony for all the peoples of the world. On 16th June of every year since 1606 the Sikhs have commemorated the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru and the first Sikh Martyr. He was cruelly tortured with burning sand for five long days because he refused to comply with the wishes of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Many devout Muslims pleaded with Jahangir to spare him. He bore these brutalities with calm serenity. On May 30th 1606 the Guru asked for a bath in the river Ravi by the side of the Mughal fort. His bare body was covered with blisters, Guru Arjan repeated over and over, “Sweet is Your will, O God; the gift of your Name alone I seek.”

The Guru then calmly walked into the river, bidding farewell to his followers. He was gone forever, his body carried away by the cool, sweet waters.

Sikhs serve sweets and cool sweet drinks to celebrate this festival and extended this hospitality for the A Year of Service programme.

Case Study (Birmingham): Running a community celebration

Sweetness is more than just food and drink. One participating project was led by a Gurdwara well established in the city. They built on very good networking links with other faith communities and secular agencies.

“This was a great networking event as so many different communities attended. It was also a good opportunity to learn about different faiths and cultures. The event was very varied and appealed to all ages and backgrounds. We had fresh food, interfaith dialogue, an exhibition, entertainment, and health and wellbeing events.

We have received requests to host a similar event on an annual basis which we plan to do. This will bring people of faith together to network and build stronger links within the community. We have already built on this project. Many of the interfaith representatives involved on the day are now involved in various other projects at our centre. Some have even registered for our Chaplaincy course.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/sikh>



JULY

BUDDHIST – BUDDHIST ACTION DAY

CARING FOR OUR WORLD

Earthkind (Buddhist Action Day) on July 3rd is inspired by Asalha Puja. It emphasises “right action” to encourage all responsible humans (“earthkind”) to develop and express compassion and kindness for the welfare of all living beings and for our world. Right Action is one factor of the eightfold path to awakening introduced in the first sermon Buddha offered after his enlightenment.

Buddhist Action Day is an opportunity for Buddhists from all backgrounds and traditions – all those who are inspired by the possibility of awakening – together with well-intentioned people from all faiths and none, to join together in helping our local communities and fellow citizens.

Case Study (Manchester): Clearing a canal tow path

“On a beautiful summer’s day, 7th July, eleven eager volunteers set to work on tidying the banks of the Ashton Canal in Manchester between Bridges 4 and 5. They cut down shrubbery and cleared the tow path of litter and moss. The day was a huge success on many levels- practical and spiritual, and we hope to make this an annual event. We would like to run another day before the end of the year if we can.

Next time we would hope to invite a group from a different faith, we didn’t manage to engage another faith group for this event.

The event was successful for the following reasons:

- Working together as a team and bonding
- Making the canal path cleaner and tidier
- Working in a new partnership between our Buddhist Centre, MERCI who provided refreshments, Ancoats Canal project, and the Canals and Rivers Trust, British Waterways who provided the tools and equipment.

We were all energised by the day, refreshed physically and spiritually. It was good to see the results of our tidying as we worked.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/buddhist>



AUGUST

MUSLIM – RAMADAN

A TIME TO GIVE

During Ramadan Muslims pay special attention to charity and helping others. More effort is made to renew intentions to give time and money throughout the coming year than in the previous year. Working with the vulnerable and needy is a core part of the Islamic faith and in Ramadan this emphasis is even greater. Living in Britain, Muslims are encouraged to reach out, to build bridges and to work with colleagues and neighbours around them who are not Muslim, to share their faith and build on their shared values. Muslims fast for 29 or 30 consecutive days (depending on sighting of the moon) during Ramadan, from dawn until sunset. Iftar is the special meal prepared daily at the end of the day when the fast finishes. This is when Muslims open their fast and give thanks for the food they are eating.

The Taste and See project encouraged mosques and community centres to open their doors and welcome guests from their local communities to come and share Iftar with them. In many centres people joined together to create food hampers for homeless shelters. Iftar projects are growing in popularity in the Muslim community and a number were happy to carry the “A Year of Service” badging for 2012. The programme also enabled a new partnership with Iftar 2012 and the Ramadan festival.

Case Study (Leeds): Providing hampers for homeless people

“Our Community Meal and Feeding the Homeless” involved volunteers from the Mosque donating food and other items for hampers. These were prepared at the Mosque and distributed to local poor, homeless and needy people.

We aimed for local Muslims to devote a total of 100 hours to feeding people in the community. This volunteer-led social action fostered a sense of social responsibility. Youth groups visited churches, shelters, charity shops and neighbours to hand out food and other items of need to them. The youngsters first raised funds to buy the items required to prepare hampers for the homeless and refugees and had liaised with local businesses inviting donations.

The gifts of food were delivered to the local church, community cafe and to the vicarage for any homeless or other people who come to the door for food. Food parcels were also passed on to PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum seekers). The Mosque worked with the Salvation Army and St George’s Crypt, who provide frontline support for homeless, disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the city and its surrounding areas. The recipients of the hampers were extremely grateful for the warm, nutritious food they received.

The event also included an Iftar meal attended by Muslims and non-Muslims, people from all backgrounds and ages: men, women and children, students, youth groups, interfaith delegations, labourers, professionals, unemployed, homeless, refugees, tourists and many more. The event was extremely successful in bringing people together from across the social spectrum.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/muslim>

SEPTEMBER

CHRISTIAN – HARVEST FESTIVAL

FEEDING THE HUNGRY

The celebration of Harvest is a day of thanksgiving for successful harvests in many Christian traditions. It has roots in the Jewish harvest festival of Sukkot. Traditionally it is held on the Sunday nearest the Harvest Moon (the full Moon closest to the Autumn Equinox), but celebrations can happen any time from mid-September until the end of October. Celebrations usually include people decorating churches with harvest produce and bringing gifts of food in thankfulness for God's provision. Traditionally the food is distributed among the poor and senior citizens of the local community, or used to raise funds for charity. Nowadays festivals will include tokens of all kinds of work and occupations. Gifts of food are often given to food-banks, or other designated projects. Harvest Festival is celebrated in schools (church and state) and in other community settings. Harvest is a festival that a number of faith communities celebrate.

One of the successful elements of the A Year of Service Harvest programme was establishing a partnership with the Trussell Trust food-banks. This should secure further partnership working in years to come and help the Trust extend its work across faith communities.

Case Study (South London): Providing gifts for homeless centres

Southwark (Anglican) Cathedral contributed a short liturgical celebration of Harvest held in the Borough Market on 21st October 2012. The event was part of the Apple Day celebration. The short service with traditional harvest music, a reading and prayers included a speech by the Secretary of State for Communities. Those present recited a pledge:

“We will allow the seeds of love and wisdom to be sown in our hearts increasing our compassion; caring for our environment; sharing the earth's bounty; becoming more hospitable; practising greater forgiveness; striving together for the good of our London Communities; urging one another on in acts of kindness; so that we may bear fruits of hope and joy; friendship and care, to enrich the lives of every person who lives in London.”

The celebration concluded with gifts of food and clothing for two local homeless projects.

“We were very pleased with the event; it was the first time we had tried it. Many guests from other faith groups joined us, and several came to our service in the Cathedral prior to the celebration in the Market. Taking our faith right out into the Market place, and sharing the celebration with people of different faiths was a real benefit. Many people joined in who just happened to be amongst the crowd at The Borough Market's “Apple Day”. There was a great deal of good will from the Borough Market and The Lions Part who allowed us to use their staging. We hope to repeat the event.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/christian-2>



OCTOBER

HINDU – DIWALI

HEALTHY LIVING

Diwali is one of the most important festivals of the year in the Hindu calendar. It is celebrated in families by performing traditional activities together in their homes. It is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia and is also an occasion for celebration by Jains and Sikhs.

Diwali is known as the Festival of Lights because houses, shops and public places are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called diyas. These lamps, which are traditionally fuelled by mustard oil, are placed in rows in windows, doors and outside buildings to illuminate them. The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. It is the first winter festival of light, followed by Hanukah and Advent.

To celebrate A Year of Service during Diwali, the Hindu community decided to focus on healthy lifestyles. It is a known fact that the figures for conditions such as diabetes and heart disease are rising, not just in minority communities, and obesity affects every generation in the UK regardless of cultural background. These conditions temper our ability to contribute to community well being and can have an adverse effect on family life.

Case Study (East London): Running a health awareness event

“The healthy living event took place outside a supermarket to catch lots of people as they did their Saturday shopping. It was designed to promote healthy living amongst the local community. We promoted quitting smoking, walking, periodical medical check-ups and the benefits of diabetes screening to all over 35 years of age. The event went very well, over 500 people visited the stands and over 70 people went for diabetes screening which was in itself a success story. The event attracted people from a range of faith and cultural backgrounds, people from every age group participated. The event was a great success and we hope to build on it. Already we have helped another group run a similar activity in another area of the city.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/hindu>



NOVEMBER

JEWISH – MITZVAH DAY

PLANTING AND GROWING

A Mitzvah is a commandment. In Judaism there are 613 mitzvot, many of which relate specifically to a requirement to do good works. Three mitzvot underpin Mitzvah Day:

- Tzedek (Justice)
- G'milut Chasadim (Acts of Kindness)
- Tikun Olam (Repairing the World)

Mitzvah Day is when the whole Jewish community actively engages in social action projects. The aim is to connect people with charities, to bring the community together locally and to encourage people of different faiths (and none) to work together for the common good. Projects are based on the need to fight poverty and hardship, to bring joy where it is sorely needed and to help our environment.

The focus for A Year of Service was Tikun Olam. The Jewish community invited Jews and non Jews alike to take part in our shared duty to our environment. They ran hands-on environmental projects particularly focusing on planting and growing.

Case Study (St Albans): Hedge planting

“Our event brought Jews and Christians together to create a hedge in a local park. We have run an event like this for the past two years and expect to be able to continue doing so. Our commitment to supporting the environment has created a good working partnership with the local council who provide all the materials. We are also developing strong friendships between faiths. This year we were able to involve the Cathedral and hope to develop this faith-friendship.

Running an environmental project is a practical way of demonstrating the contribution people of faith make to their community. It shows we care, we get involved and we don't hide away in our religious buildings. Doing something in the community means others can be involved and together we can learn more about each other while also contributing to community wellbeing now and for the future.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/jewish>



DECEMBER

CHRISTIAN – ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

FIGHTING POVERTY

Advent is a time of watchfulness, prayer and preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas, providing a contrast to the busy-ness of parties and shopping. The festival is often marked by the successive lighting of candles in churches on each Sunday in Advent. At home people may light an Advent candle daily and open Advent calendars.

Jesus was born under circumstances of poverty, and into the frailty of human existence. He lived a life that reflected God's love for humankind; this inspires Christmas as an opportunity to give gifts, in celebration of the gift that is given to humanity in Jesus' birth. Christians are reminded to follow his example and command to love others through acts of service.

It was very difficult to get an Advent or Christmas project within the A Year of Service programme. There are a number of reasons for this, the main one being that unlike the majority of festivals chosen for the programme, the period of Advent and Christmas extends over a number of weeks rather than having a specific focus day

Case Study (West London): Preparing celebrations at a care home

“A local group of Christians and Muslims joined together to provide a Christmas celebration in an older peoples home. We helped to decorate the home with lights and festive decorations. We provided gift boxes for the residents; these contained important supplies, such as toiletries, hats and gloves that are ideal to have during the winter period. The event brought many people of different faiths or no faith together. It marked the social importance of Christmas through an act of kindness and was a step to building social ties across community groups.”

<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/days-of-volunteering/christian-3>

NATIONAL EVENT

TOGETHER IN SERVICE 27 NOVEMBER 2012

The national event presented an excellent opportunity for faith communities to celebrate their achievements throughout A Year of Service. It was part of the original project brief and the advisory group was responsible for drawing it together. The overall management role was held by DCLG, calling on expertise from the group and other interested parties.

The event was jointly funded by the Department as its contribution to Inter Faith Week, and the Coexist Foundation. All the time given by non Departmental staff was “in kind” thus reducing administration costs considerably. Small grants were provided to reference group members to enable them to produce displays.

The event took place in central London during Inter Faith Week 2012. Departmental Ministers wanted it to showcase projects which the Department had supported throughout the year, including through the Near Neighbours programme in partnership with the Church Urban Fund. This required a change of original plan for the advisory group. Whilst A Year of Service remained the central feature, other organisations such as Coexist Foundation, Faith Based Regeneration Network, Inter Faith Network and Near Neighbours also had a strong presence. The Faith through the Lens photographic competition final was held alongside the event, giving delegates the opportunity to visit the exhibition of finalists.

Two Departmental Ministers, The Rt Hon Baroness Warsi and the Rt Hon Don Foster MP, attended the event, visiting the different displays and giving addresses which were appreciated. Over 160 people from all faiths and none participated in the event, with additional people invited to the Faith through the Lens presentation.

The event had three aims:

- to showcase not just cross-faith projects but the social action of each faith community, demonstrating how a faith imperative to care was realised in practice. This gave cohesion to the many and varied projects featured and the different emphasis holy writings place on social action
- to resource, through seminar style learning, those present with practical advice for running and maintaining faith based social action
- to involve all the participants in social action through a one-off project.

To achieve these aims:

- reference group members were asked to produce a visual display illustrating their faith imperative to social action and invite three or four people from projects, willing to talk about their work. The organisers acknowledge the significant amount of work this required from the reference group members
- key organisations were invited to present seminars on faith based social action
- an art project was set up for the day producing a picture to hang in the lobby of the Evelina Children's Hospital.

KEY LEARNING FROM A YEAR OF SERVICE

Community projects can take years to embed. In this programme local faith communities either built on existing relationships and work, in which case running a project was relatively straightforward because all the networks and systems were already in place, or set up new projects specifically for A Year of Service. These were harder to organise. Some groups hope to develop the new initiative either annually or by building on newly made relationships. For others the one off event will not be repeated. There are lots of lessons to learn from this project which can be applied to other social action settings. The key points are highlighted here.

1 Give time to planning and preparation

- a* Identify a lead person prepared to take the initiative on and ensure that it succeeds
- b* Delegate a small group tasked to work with the lead person
- c* Ensure those involved in leadership are well supported
- d* Plan visits to centres with the staff or chaplain in order to be well briefed
- e* Be persistent in planning to ensure local faith groups remain involved
- f* Make sure all the participating groups really understand the event and can participate with confidence
- g* Make sure volunteers are clear about their roles and have the necessary support and checks in place
- h* Allow plenty of time to plan the event to ensure it is safe, successful, well organised, and that you can be flexible on the day if necessary
- i* Have a clear plan to develop the initiative and ensure it does not remain a “one off” event
- j* Communication and publicity should be a central part of planning:
- k* Communicate the event well but good publicity should not detract from the main purpose of the volunteering
- l* Locate the event in a public place, and at a busy time to help publicise it.

2 Communication and publicity is hard if there is no pre-established relationship with local media or no one skilled at publicity

- a* Give plenty of time to advertising the event so it reaches a wide audience
- b* Good media coverage increases the public profile of an event and faith group
- c* Social and electronic media are useful tools but face to face conversations generate the best results
- d* Take lots of photos and ensure you have permission to use them.

3 Provide good hospitality

- a* Hospitality sets the tone and atmosphere of an event
- b* Good hospitality happens when reciprocity is equal and people are valued for who they are
- c* Respect dietary and faith requirements when providing food
- d* Get advice from local centres (homeless and refugee centres, care homes) about suitable donated materials showing respect to the recipients
- e* Asking a care home to cater and offering to pay ensures food is appropriate
- f* Respect the privacy of those in centres expressing hospitality
- g* Accept the activities people want to offer even if they do not quite fit your agenda.

4 Build links with faith communities

- a* Take time to encourage people of different faiths to share events if there is no previous history of working together
- b* Open air events make it safe for people to talk about their faith because no one is constrained by a building
- c* There is good will among people of faith to work with each other. Acts of shared kindness help people to see they have common values although their expressions of faith may be different
- d* Manage the fine line between local autonomy in planning and running events within a national brand with sensitivity, deep listening and very clear parameters. The programme learned this lesson through the withdrawal of one significant national faith-led volunteering organisation from the reference group and subsequent activities, although a different body of the same faith community did then enter the process and participate at national and local level.

5 Know who your beneficiaries are

- a* Be clear about who your intended beneficiaries are, but recognise that all those participating will benefit in some way
- b* Recipients of care often offer as much back to the volunteers. It is important to recognise this in order that reciprocity is genuine
- c* Provide a variety of activities if you want all generations to participate
- d* Outdoor projects should be in a safe space so families can be involved. "I wanted to be involved and this environmental project is great because I know my child is safe."
- e* Real community engagement enables different groups to share the benefits of mutual working
- f* The environment benefits as much as individuals.

6 Make sure there is a strong link between a faith festival and social action

- a* When choosing festivals it is important to ensure they have an inherent element of social action. Lent and Advent did not work well for this reason
- b* Preparing and sharing food at appropriate times during a time of religious fasting demonstrated a depth of self-sacrifice at the heart of faith based social action
- c* Demonstrating the practical and spiritual aspects of faith through social action shows how they contribute to well-being
- d* Acts of kindness help people break down barriers (cultural or theological) which can divide, or which may cause prejudice and misconceptions.



7 Develop partnerships to create sustainability

- a* Having an established good relationship with local businesses, councils and other agencies makes planning and running the event smooth
- b* Working with a group of people known to those you are planning to visit helps create trust quickly
- c* A strong “faith diverse” community can naturally involve an extended group of people participating through friendships
- d* Respect the boundaries set by partners. These might relate to time, or areas where you can work, or the types of activity you can run
- e* Partnerships in work places helped to build trust and friendship between people of different faiths in a work setting
- f* Be clear about what you are going to do, especially when inviting partners to work with you
- g* Environmental projects make a very visual difference to the local community and create a strong sense of corporate ownership.

8 Provide adequate resources

- a* Expecting a faith community to fund a project in which they have been invited to participate needs to be handled with great sensitivity
- b* Organising an event required time and commitment of resources from local communities
- c* Having the capacity to be able to offer follow up resources is an asset
- d* Running the activities close to a centre aids the management of the event
- e* Having the right tools and safety equipment was essential for environmental projects; a good relationship with the authorities made this possible
- f* If working in the open air think about the kind of PA system you will need
- g* Being realistic about what could be done and focusing energy on that produced good results. While there is a desire to do more, this needs to match with human and financial resources.



SUSTAINING THE PROGRAMME

A Year of Service was a very successful programme. At least 143 events took place (<http://ayearofservice.org.uk/past-events>). New national partnerships were established with organisations such as The Trussell Trust, Iftar 2012, Ramadan Festival, St Vincent De Paul Society and Near Neighbours, through which several hundred more individual projects were included as part of A Year of Service. A number of prominent regional and national inter faith organisations took part, including the St Philips Centre in Leicester which ran multi faith Iftars and the Joseph Interfaith Foundation which organised the first ever visit by Imams and Rabbis to Wandsworth Prison to meet with inmates.

Overall the programme achieved all its main aims and demonstrated the high quality and quantity of faith based volunteering that contributes to community well being across the country. The advisory and reference groups were very aware of the limitations surrounding the project from its inception. It is clear that it is unrealistic, over a programme duration of just twelve months, to secure long-term traction and embed a new initiative in the public profile.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has therefore announced that it will continue to celebrate and facilitate faith based social action projects, and to help link them up across faith boundaries, through a further three year programme – Together in Service. This programme will build on the good start achieved through A Year of Service and will draw on the key learning points above. It will consist of three parts:

- An ongoing calendar-based structure, with each faith community taking it in turn (one every month) to highlight its own social action and to embark on multi-faith projects alongside other faith groups
- A Together in Service Fellowship which will link up and resource volunteers who have been involved in A Year of Service and Near Neighbours projects, so as to provide a ready supply of willing participants in further work
- A Together in Service small grants fund, to kick-start new inter faith social action projects.

A competition will be launched in spring 2013 to identify an organisation or consortium to develop and run the programme.

GETTING INVOLVED

If you would like to get involved in your own local cross faith volunteering activities the best way to get initial information is to ask at a local place of worship. Alternatively you can contact either the Inter Faith Network UK or The Faith Based Regeneration Network who will be able to put you in touch with local multi faith groups.

Details of the Together in Service programme will be published in due course.

APPENDICES

Reference Group

Anglican Diocese of Southwark: www.southwark.anglican.org

Board of Deputies of British Jews: www.bod.org.uk

British Sikh Consultative Forum: www.bscf.org

Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales: www.catholic-ew.org.uk

Christian Nightlife Initiatives: www.sa-cni.org.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government: <https://www.gov.uk/dclg>

Faith Based Regeneration Network: www.fbrn.org.uk

Faith Regen Foundation: www.faithregenuk.org

Indika Cultural Centre

Inter Faith Network for the UK: www.interfaith.org.uk

Jain Network UK: www.jainnetwork.com

Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs, Churches Together in England:

<http://www.churches-together-minority-christian-affairs>

Mitzvah Day Charitable Trust: www.mitzvahday.org.uk

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK: www.bahai.org.uk

Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK): www.nbo.org.uk

Sewa Day: www.sewaday.org

Hindu Council UK: www.hinducounciluk.org

Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe: www.ztfe.com

Advisory Group

Business in the Community: www.bitc.org.uk

Coexist Foundation: www.coexistfoundation.net

Department for Communities and Local Government: <https://www.gov.uk/dclg>

Faith Based Regeneration Network: www.fbrn.org.uk

Inter Faith Network for the UK: www.interfaith.org.uk

Lambeth Palace: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/pages/contact.html>

Mitzvah Day Charitable Trust: www.mitzvahday.org.uk

Office of Civil Society (Cabinet Office): www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society

Useful contacts for further advice (websites)

Faith Based Regeneration Network: www.fbrn.org.uk

Inter Faith Network for the UK: www.interfaith.org.uk

Mitzvah Day: www.mitzvahday.org.uk

Near Neighbours: <http://www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours/grants>

Programme Calendar

Month	Festival	Faith group	Social Action Focus
February	Ayyám-i-Há	Bahá'í	Offering Hospitality
March	NoRuz	Zoroastrian	Visiting Elderly People
March	Lent	Christian	Cleaning and Restoring
April	Mahavira Jayanti	Jain	Visiting the Sick
May	Pentecost	Christian	Welcoming New Arrivals
June	The Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev	Sikh	Bringing Sweetness
July	Buddhist Action Day	Buddhist	Caring for our World
August	Ramadan	Muslim	A Time to Give
September	Harvest Festival	Christian	Feeding the Hungry
October	Diwali	Hindu	Healthy Living
November	Mitzvah Day	Jewish	Planting and Growing
December	Advent /Christmas	Christian	Fighting Poverty

A YEAR OF SERVICE MEDIA COVERAGE

Media title Date appeared	Article title	Subject	For which day
Jewish Chronicle 24th November 2011	“Government teams up with Mitzvah Day”	Piece on plans for A Year of Service and Mitzvah Day involvement	General/Mitzvah Day
The Information Daily 29th February 2012	“Eric Pickles: First Volunteering Day Marks the Start of “A Year of Service”	Coverage of launch event, focusing on Eric Pickles’ speech	General/Ayyam-i-Há
i-volunteer: the social action network 1st March 2012	“Pickles launches “Year of Service”	Coverage of launch event, focusing on Eric Pickles’ speech	General/Ayyam-i-Há
Baha’i World News Service 2nd March 2012	“Government launches “Year of Service” initiative at national Baha’i Centre’	Coverage of launch event	General/Ayyam-i-Há
The Guardian 2nd March 2012		Launch of A Year of Service covered in Voluntary Sector network daily	General
BBC Local Radio 9th March 2012		10 interviews for various BBC local radio stations on A Year of Service, on 9th March 2012, including: BBC Essex, BBC Radio Northampton, BBC Radio Suffolk, BBC Three Counties Radio (Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire), BBC Radio Bristol, BBC Radio Gloucestershire, BBC Wiltshire, BBC Somerset, BBC WM, BBC Coventry and Warwickshire, BBC Hereford and Worcester, BBC Radio York	General
BBC Radio Kent 11th March 2012	Thought for the week	A Year of Service in Thought for the Week	General
National Union of Students 20th April 2012		News article about A Year of Service posted on NUS website	General
The Bridge June 2012	“A Year of Service”	Article covering joint Muslim-Christian event at Pembroke House	Lent
BBC Radio 4 12th June 2012	Thought for the Day	Lord Indarjit Singh discusses A Year of Service on the Today programme	Martyrdom of Guru Arjan
House of Lords 29th June 2012	House of Lords debate on Faith Communities	Baroness Hanham and Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks discuss A Year of Service	General
The Enfield Independent 5th August 2012	“Afghanistan Olympians visit Palmers Green Mosque”	Piece about Afghan Olympic team visiting Palmers Green Mosque prior to event	Ramadan
The Southampton Daily Echo 6th August 2012	“Food and faith a perfect combination”	Piece about interfaith interactive workshop	Ramadan

Media title Date appeared	Article title	Subject	For which day
The Enfield Independent 6th August 2012	"Afghan Olympic team enjoy fast-breaking dinner in Palmers Green mosque"	Piece about Afghan Olympic team visiting Palmers Green Mosque	Ramadan
Wembley and Willesden Observer 9th August 2012	"Hockey player joins interfaith event"	Coverage of Darren Cheeseman joining Iftar at Brent Mosque	Ramadan
Eastern Eye 10th August 2012	"Afghan runner in visit to mosque"	Coverage of female Afghan runner visiting Palmers Green Mosque Iftar	Ramadan
Eastern Eye 10th August 2012	"British hockey star is keeping the faith"	Coverage of Darren Cheeseman joining Iftar at Brent Mosque	Ramadan
Anglican Community News Service 17th August 2012	Archbishop of Canterbury's Eid Message	The Archbishop of Canterbury sent his annual greetings to Muslim communities to mark the end of Ramadan	Ramadan
Community News: Citizens Eye 17th August 2012	"A Year of Service – Community Iftaar"	Reporting on a Year of Service holding an open community Iftar	Ramadan
Jewish Chronicle 20th September 2012	"Mitzvah Day signs up 100 for eighth day of good deeds"	Reference to Mitzvah Day forming part of A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
Ilford Recorder 23rd September 2012	"Redbridge volunteers signing up for hands-on community action on Mitzvah Day"	Reference to Mitzvah Day forming part of A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
Jewish Chronicle 5th October 2012	"Sukkot's spirit of thanksgiving"	Article by Archbishop Sentamu on Sukkot and Harvest	Harvest
The Times Online – Ruth Gledhill Blog 5th October 2012	"The Ingathering: Out from the Desert at Sukkot"	Article by Jonathan Wittenberg on Sukkot and Harvest	Harvest
Enfield Independent and Harrow Times 5th October 2012	"Community groups from all faiths gear up for Jewish Mitzvah Day" also in the Harrow Times	Reporting on Mitzvah Day activities planned for November with reference to A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
Hendon and Finchley Times 12th October 2012	"Good deeds at home and abroad"		Mitzvah Day
Ham & High 20th October 2012	"Founder of Mitzvah Day says we need to make time for the elderly"	Interview with Laura Marks about the importance of giving time on Mitzvah Day with reference to multi-faith aspect this year with A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
London SE1 21st October 2012	"Eric Pickles joins Apple Day celebrations at Borough Market"	Article on Harvest Festival procession at Borough Market	Harvest
Ealing Gazette 2nd November 2012	"Multi-faith fair turns focus on healthy living"	Article reporting on healthy living festival which took place on high street in Southall	Diwali
Asian Image 6th November 2012	"Volunteers to put on Diwali event for elderly in Leicester"	Article reporting on A Year of Service charity event in St Philips centre for the elderly	Diwali

Media title Date appeared	Article title	Subject	For which day
Something Jewish 5th November 2012	“Prime Minister encourages people to get involved”	Article on Mitzvah Day support with political support from party leaders including David Cameron quote on a Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
eJewish Philanthropy 5th November 2012	“UK Political Leaders endorse Mitzvah Day”	The leaders of all three main political parties endorse Mitzvah Day with reference to Mitzvah Day forming part of A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
BBC Radio London 11th November 2012		Laura Marks interviewed about A Year of Service by Jumoke Fashola on Inspirit	Mitzvah Day
BBC Radio Manchester 12th November 2012		Laura Marks interviewed about A Year of Service on Jewish Citizen Manchester	Mitzvah Day
BBC Three Counties Radio 18th November 2012		Community activist Nick Grant interviewed about A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
Something Jewish 19th November 2012	“Annual Mitzvah Day success”	Reference to Mitzvah Day forming part of A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
Times Series 20th November 2012	“Mitzvah Day founder hails ‘greatest year’ of Jewish good deeds”	Reference to Mitzvah Day forming part of A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
Ilford Recorder 23rd September 2012	“Redbridge volunteers signing up for hands-on community action on Mitzvah Day”	Reference to Mitzvah Day forming part of A Year of Service	Mitzvah Day
BBC Radio 4 23rd November 2012	Thought for the day	Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks on A Year of Service for the Today programme	Mitzvah Day
House of Lords 22nd November 2012	House of Lords debate on Religion in the UK	Baroness Warsi discusses A Year of Service in House of Lords debate initiated by Lord Singh	General
LondonSE1 29th November 2012	“Baroness Warsi visits Coin Street neighbourhood centre”	Coverage of Together in Service event, focusing on Baroness Warsi’s speech	Together in Service event
Asian Express November 2012	“A Year in Service – Baroness Warsi celebrates all done in the name of faith”	Coverage of Together in Service event, focusing on Baroness Warsi’s speech	Together in Service event
Christian Today 4th December 2012	“Brothers in Arms”	Coverage of Faith Through a Lens photo competition, including A Year of Service category	General
Something Jewish 5th December 2012	“Interfaith dialogue supported”	Coverage of Together in Service event, focusing on Baroness Warsi’s speech	Together in Service event