



Welcome to the second issue of our newsletter.

The last half year has seen the Forum grow and develop. It has attracted new members and brought other groups under its umbrella. New faces include the West Berkshire Malayalee Association, the West Berks Indian Society and the African-Caribbean and Associates Society.

We are sometimes asked if the different member bodies (such as associations based on faith, country of origin or place of work) “compete” with the Forum for attention or primacy. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the Forum’s job to enable the member organisations and individuals to be independent, for them to maintain their unique character, leadership, focus and membership. The West Berks Minority Ethnic Forum merely provides a support structure for the individual, free-standing member groups. It is able to explore any synergies such as sharing facilities and, where possible, can loan out equipment to save each individual group having to invest in its own infrastructure. Where scarce resources can be shared, duplication can be avoided and expertise can be spread and nurtured.

Regrettable it may be when events do coincide but it just goes to show what a rich, varied and busy calendar of multi-cultural events do occur in our area”.

NADEEM SOOMRO CHAIR



NADEEM SOOMRO



west berkshire
me forum
www.all2gether.org.uk

Executive Committee

Chairperson

Nadeem Soomro

Vice Chair

Mukesh Bansal • Yen Bradshaw
Azmal Shah

General Secretary

Ruwan Uduwera-Perera

Treasurer

Shamim Ahmed

Youth Representative

Jaymal Amin • Maria Shahzad
Fatima Mobashir • Bushra Begum

Project Manager

Waheeda Soomro (non-exec)

mission statement

THE FORUM SEEKS TO:

- Celebrate the ethnic/cultural and spiritual diversity in West Berkshire
- Build trust and understanding between community groups and statutory service providers by working together and utilising joint resources
- Influence and support community safety initiatives

If you share this vision to create a more equitable society within West Berkshire then please come and join us for:

SOCIAL EVENTS

Community Dialogue, Festivals,
Parents & Children Clubs...

SPORTING EVENTS

Badminton, Football, Cricket...

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Classes in English, Mandarin, Bangla, Arabic...

DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSION

Faith, Diversity and Community Cohesion...

*YOUR INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT
TO EQUALITY IS THE ONLY
CRITERION FOR MEMBERSHIP
OF THE WBMEF.*

“It’s not all about saris, steel bands and samosas . . .”

What does Community Cohesion really mean in the west of Berkshire?

In issue 1 of ME News there was an introduction into the idea of Community Cohesion and how it is being picked up by the different organisations in the area.

Many people first became aware of the term “community cohesion” following the ‘summer of discontent’ in 2001, when major youth disorders occurred in some of England’s northern towns and cities. The causes of the troubles were poverty,

deprivation, poor access to amenities and that people were suffering from both overt and covert bigotry.

Although geographically West Berkshire is a very different sort of place compared with the northern cities and towns; however, it too suffers from pockets of deprivation, poor access to services and, due to the rural nature of the area, people can feel very isolated and marginalised.

The West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum is therefore seeking to work with all

statutory and voluntary organisations in support of a community cohesion approach to making West Berkshire a more equitable place to live. It keeps, at its heart, respect, the development of understanding, making the best of our resources and providing points of contact for those who might otherwise feel isolated and separate from our diverse communities.

Community Dialogue & AGM

This took place in April 2009 and was hosted by Szechuan Inn in Thatcham. Approximately 100 members from the different communities within the Forum attended the event. The executive committee was elected; representatives from the new emerging groups were also elected.

Victors, not victims

Food is often at the heart of many WBMEF events and there have been ample opportunities to savour well known dishes such as dhal, dosai and dhansak. However it hasn’t been all sarees, steel bands and samosas! The Forum has also been engaged in some of the harder issues which come to the surface when cultures live side by side. It is at such times that WBMEF becomes an advocate, advisor and champion for members of minority communities who are suffering as a result of others’ negative attitudes.

Whilst this can often be traumatic for the person who has become subject to unwarranted harmful treatment WBMEF will always make the sufferer’s health and welfare the first and principal priority.

Eid-ul-Adha Celebration

The Islamic festival of Eid-ul-Adha (Feast of the sacrifice/pilgrimage) took place at St Bartholomew’s School hall in November 2009. Local school children led an informative presentation for the guests.



Bollywood Dance Classes

These classes are a great opportunity to enhance health and wellbeing of the community. The classes are very much in demand and will start to take place in January 2010. We are working in partnership with Park House School and Trinity School who will be hosting a weekly evening class each.



Mandarin Classes

These classes started in September 2008 and are successfully continuing every Friday during term time at Falkland Primary School.

Diwali Extravaganza

The WBMEF and WBIS supported in organising this event with the Mayor of Newbury. It was a very successful fundraising event bringing communities together to enjoy the atmosphere of Diwali; the festival of light.

me&you

We are continuing to engage with women and children from minority groups, offering mother & toddler groups and holiday craft activity sessions. It is hoped that we can now offer more developmental programmes and meet the specific learning needs of the women in these groups.



Your Health, Your Say

The Forum actively participates in the LINks – an independent body consisting of members of all communities within West Berkshire – which acts as a watchdog on local Health and Social Care matters. The WBMEF will continue to press for equality of service delivery for Minority Ethnic communities and to ensure that the statutory bodies – such as local authorities, hospitals, health centres, dentists and doctors surgeries provide culturally sensitive and appropriate services for all.

Culture Fest

Newbury Racecourse was home to CultureFest, the premier cultural event of the last six months when over 1,000 people turned out to plunge into a pool of creativity.

The crowds were entertained by displays of martial arts from Indonesia and the Lion dance from China. People had the opportunity to take part in vibrant drumming workshops and learn the shapes and moves of Bollywood dancing. We saw the artistic sweeps of Chinese calligraphy and the delicate swirls of henna tattoos. Traditional dances from Scotland and Thailand provided both energetic and elegant displays.

The event was so successful that people have already started to book their organisations for next years event. CultureFest 2010 is already being planned so if you know of any performers who would like to take part we are always looking for something new, something traditional or something different. If you can think of anyone with specific artistic expertise, particularly those who have enthusiasm and can get the audience members involved, then please ask them to give us a call.



Other Community involvement

The West Berks Minority Ethnic Forum proudly put on a float at the Newbury Carnival and won the prize for 'Best Community Entry'. Numerous people called in at our stall in Goldwell Park to find out more about what we do.

The inaugurations of the West Berks Malayalee Society, West Berks Indian Society and the African-Caribbean and Associates Society were backed by the Forum.

We supported the Navaratri celebration organised by the Indian Society.

Thatcham Festival provided another opportunity to meet community members and supporters.

Two sunny days at the premier agricultural event in the region, the Royal Berks Show, partnered with the Greenham Common Trust.

An outing to Cotswold Water Park gave families an opportunity to be out in the countryside.

We supported the Onam (harvest) festival organised by the Malayalee Association.



Wherever I lay my hat that's my home . . .

Sovereign Housing Group is probably the largest social landlord in our area and because of that the Forum has been working with them in a number of key areas. The Forum has been training staff to help raise awareness of the differing needs and aspirations of our diverse communities. Sovereign, is keen to encourage the knowledge and expertise of its staff to ensure equality in service delivery becomes part of people's daily thought processes at work.

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

Faith, hope and charity underpin many of the world's religions and so, as part of an overall drive to create understanding, tolerance and respect in a multi-cultural, multi-faith West Berkshire the WBMEF has supported a number of initiatives. It is hoped that these will foster greater understanding, dismantle barriers and de-mystify some of the myths around culture, faith and belief.

Vodafone Muslim Society, with the support of WBMEF, held a special information evening at the local Mosque during the month of Ramadan. It provided an opportunity for friends to meet informally and to learn about the discipline of fasting as a way of expressing one's faith. People of all faiths and people of no faith were welcomed into a hospitable environment where the commonality and the differences between diverse religions practising forms of fasting were explored and discussed in mutually open and respectful ways. Following the discussions everyone was invited to break the fast together and enjoy a traditional meal (Iftar) together.

Five a side football

We held our second five a side football tournament on 8th November 09 at the Newbury Indoor Football Centre - New Greenham Park. The standard was very high and all those who participated thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Lads from Northcroft Sports Centre won the tournament after a tough final with the lads from Vodafone Muslim Society.



Mentoring

Continuing from last year, this scheme has been very popular and successful. We have now signed up seven additional Thames Valley Police officers to be mentored by the West Berkshire Indian Society members.



Community Cricket Tournament

We held our first Community Cricket Tournament on 2nd August 09 at the Falkland Cricket Ground. Names were picked out of a hat to mix teams from the Council, Police, Restaurants, Vodafone and Community Members, it was a superb example of community cohesion coming together. The Newbury Mayor's team won the match by a small margin.

• FORTHCOMING PROJECTS •

The Forum will continue with its current efforts and hopes to introduce new exciting community cohesive projects and celebrate West Berkshire's diversity. Some of the new initiatives include:

Chinese New Year Event
Culture Fest 2010
Community Dialogue
Women & Faith Conference
Sporting Events Engaging Rural Communities
Access & Involvement in the Countryside

We hope you have found our second issue of *me* News informative.

We will be keeping you updated with our work in the next edition of this twice yearly newsletter.

If you would like details on specific projects and events please email: waheedasoomro@yahoo.co.uk

For general information on the work of the WBMEF please email: communitydialogue@me.com

The WBMEF website is currently under construction but some pages are accessible so please take a look.

www.all2gether.org.uk



west berkshire *me* forum

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