

COUNCIL ON FAITH NEWSLETTER

The official newsletter of the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith

London's Outstanding Community Groups Celebrated at Sixth London Faith & Belief Community Awards



Outstanding community groups, inspiring individuals and unsung heroes were celebrated at the London Faith & Belief Community Awards ceremony, held at Westminster Abbey on Wednesday 23rd November. The annual Awards event, an initiative of The Faith & Belief Forum, supported by His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith, showcases the pivotal work of London's faith and belief communities by gathering local champions to shine a light on their inspirational work.

38 projects were awarded across a range of categories from *Community Resourcefulness in Response to Covid-19* through to *Environmental Sustainability*; *Supporting Women*; and *Promoting Inclusion*. The presentation happened in front of an audience of over 300, including MPs, DLs, the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London and the community groups themselves. Further to the 38 award winners, another 60 excellent projects were highlighted as recognised projects. Each winning project received £500 to help them continue their work.

This is the first time that the Awards have been held at Westminster Abbey, by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. It was very special to be able to gather at this historic venue to celebrate together how Londoners of all faiths and beliefs are working for a fairer and more inclusive city.

Sir Kenneth Olisa, His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, spoke at the Awards, "this event is about saying thank you to those who help to increase Londoners' sense of belonging through their actions and principles. At the heart of this is faith, which gives so many of us our sense of identity and duty. The amazing projects celebrated through this scheme, show us how faith teaches selflessness and strength. These are values that need to be projected and I am glad that by supporting the London Faith & Belief Community Awards we do just this".

The Awards would not have been possible without the work of a number of Deputy Lieutenants. David Dangoor DL Chairs the Council on Faith. Bushra Nasir CBE DL has sat as Chair of the Steering Committee since the inception of the event and also took on the role as Chair of the Judging Committee. Dr Sheila Gewolb DL, Dr Mustafa Abu Lisan DL, Pastor Nims Obunge DL, Babulal Sethia DL, Colleen Harris DL and Rosi Prescott DL all worked on the Judging Panel.

The event was made possible thanks to the generous support of sponsors Dangoor Education and Direct Line Group.

The full list of winners, recognised projects and highlights of the evening can be found at [London Faith & Belief Community Awards - The Faith & Belief Forum \(faithbeliefforum.org\)](https://faithbeliefforum.org).

Interview with Bibi Khan MBE DL

For the full audio interview, please visit:

<https://soundcloud.com/faithbeliefforum/fbf-meets-bibi-khan>

You've had a fascinating life and career, can you tell us about your personal and professional background?

I was born in Guyana and I travelled to the UK to join my parents and some of my siblings when I was 8. I remember my homeland fondly, despite not having returned. I have three children and eight grandchildren who are my inspiration. I spent my school years in Haringey and became a fashion designer, attending the London School of Fashion. My father was a tailor and my mother was a seamstress. I subsequently worked for Haringey Council for 34 years as a team clerk, housing manager, case manager and eventually a project manager. My experience in Haringey shaped the foundation of my community and religious work.



As Guyanese Muslims, we spoke only English and we wore western clothes. We were mixed with Muslims, Jews, Christians or those of no faith. You could go to your aunt who was Hindu and it was like being with your parents. They had that love and affection for you. We brought that love as a group of people coming to the UK.

My father and other community members erected the first purpose-built mosque and constructed three additional floors as the community grew. 1983 we formed, 1988 we bought a synagogue and from 1988 to now, we have established an amazing centre which now has accommodation for children, a banquet hall and additional prayer areas. All of that was funded by dedicated friends, users and supports. No big business or councils gave us finance. I was appointed and accepted to the role of President in 2019 after my father passed away in 2018. A woman in this position caused some annoyance and some members even left. But with the backing of several spiritual leaders in the community, I considered it a blessing to carry out this significant role. It's so important to see a woman in this role, running a mosque. We have an Imam to look after the religious side, I don't interfere there.

In the Queen's new year's honours, I was awarded an MBE for services to local government and community cohesion. That was awarded by the then Prince Charles. I'm privileged to share that award with my community. This year will be LICs' 40th. We will celebrate with our community and those who make a difference to it.

Can you tell us more about your social and multifaith work?

Charity has always been at the heart of community. LICs has been a part of the multifaith forum in Haringey and we work collaboratively on issues like gangs, drugs or mental health. Those issues affect many of us. We value and celebrate the multifaith forum and I'm vice chair of Haringey's multi faith forum.

We have so many groups – churches, temples, mosques and synagogues. We enjoy going to each other's buildings. It's separate to meeting the needs of the Muslim community. We encourage people to support other initiatives. For instance, we work with sisters from the synagogue to cook food for the homeless and work with Tzedakah and Mitzvah day to provide clothing. We've gone to the synagogue to pack and distribute items. There's no reason that communities can't work together for the benefit of everyone. We need to do that as life is so hard, people face so many problems.

We can't solve it all, but we can work towards it. Soon, this February, we are holding children's education for Holocaust memorial to teach and educate about the Holocaust and other genocides. We hope and pray that this will shape youngsters to appreciate each other. We've also helped build about 30 houses in countries where there were natural disasters. We've provided wells where there isn't access to fresh water. So, our work in the community is with every group and all of them have different things that we participate in and help with.

You won an F&BF Award for the Covid-19 Community Support Programme. What did you do during lockdown?

That was an amazing award, especially as it was in such an inspiring place. Covid came from nowhere and hit the community so hard. Many of the people who died were elderly in the Asian community. Listening to information on deaths was so scary. People were isolated and in their homes. We had to quickly learn about how to communicate with people in their homes through social media and zoom meetings, to check that people were alright. Then, when we opened the mosque for a little period, we had to say that you need to be 2 metres apart. But in our religion, you need to stand shoulder to shoulder. That clashed with religious guidance. There were some arguments, some people thought you shouldn't sanitise with an alcohol gel. We had to say 'you aren't eating it, it just kills the germs'.

We held an art competition for children and put the winner onto our next calendar. That was such a boost. We did zoom calls with doctors, councillors and religious leaders for the community. We also promoted vaccine messaging, counteracting misinformation. We held vaccine sessions at the mosque and led by example; our Imam took the vaccine at the mosque. The Mayor of London also heard about LICs' work, especially in helping with Covid support.

Can you tell me about how your faith inspires your day to day charitable work?

My faith plays an essential part of everything I do. It's in my heart, Islam is the religion I believe in. But whoever needs our help, we have a duty to help everyone, irrespective of their background. This is exactly what our religion teaches us. Growing up in Guyana cemented this. My aunts and uncles are from all different faith groups. They loved us for who we were, not our religion or what we did, what custom we had. When we were young, I went to Sunday school to learn about Christianity! Our mosque therefore has that message that it puts forward about being inclusive. It's not always easy I have to tell you, but it's something that we always promote.

The fact that you can talk about things, even if they don't go perfectly, mean that you can deal with things and differ in a positive way, without fighting. We have to recognise that we all have different opinions, but you must be able to share them. For instance, during Covid, when we were helping by taking food and snacks to doctors and nurses and to vaccine centres. It wasn't just us as Muslims doing that. LICs might have had the ideas, but community members came with to transport, take, donate things. It was amazing looking at people's faces as we delivered 30,000 packages for people to break their Ramadan fast at the hospitals. Or delivering 5000 packages to peoples' homes if they couldn't get food.

So, can you say it's just faith that guides you? I don't think so. When you come to LICs, it's not just prayers. When it's time to pray, we pray. But all of us need access to schools, university, we work, hospitals, GPs. So, we all use all the services that there are. To understand all of these areas, do we say it's faith? I think it is because it's something I believe in: helping. I believe Allah, as we would say, places this into our hearts to be able to do this work. It's not about you, it's about the people you can benefit, the message of helping.

What do you like about being part of the Council on Faith?

I was really blessed to be appointed a DL because I believe in the message of building bridges for a fairer London. It's so important to raise awareness of the community work going on. It's about being respectful, supporting and looking out for each other. The Lieutenancy communicates all of that. Our actions and the way we behave can make all our communities safer. It's important to promote equality, to make sure our voices are at the heart of all services we provide. We need the tools to safeguard all our members. It's also important to communicate the role of the Royal Family, to recognise their work and, more importantly, for them to recognise the work in communities being done by their supporters.

I'm looking forward to engaging with the group about their religion and practices, as it allows us to understand more fully what affects us. Sometimes, it gives clarity on how similar each of our faiths are. We have more in common than what divides us. The next meeting of the Council is going to be at LICs. I'm so excited to show them our centre, but more importantly share some important knowledge about our mosque and our people.

What are your aspirations for the Council on Faith?

I see the Council on Faith as the heart of the Lieutenancy. Supporting, engaging, belonging, trusting, and cementing our faiths. By working together, it encourages cohesion and understanding. In return, it alleviates or minimises risks between communities. I want to share ideas, communicate the message and in return, be part of a truly inspiring message for the people of London. It's all positive, so I'm really excited to be part of the Council on Faith.

Southwark Faith & Belief Awards Celebrate Local Heroes

In keeping with the Council on Faith's vision to build bridges and showcase local faith community work, the Southwark Faith & Belief Awards in September highlighted community projects in the borough, inspired by faith and belief, which provide much-needed services to local community groups.

The Awards were hosted at the Southwark Council building on Tooley Street, SE1. 80 local community members were present to celebrate the work of 20 faith and belief groups in the borough, before 7 projects were ultimately presented awards. There was also an excellent interlude by local poet, Tyrone Lewis, who delivered captivating renditions of his original work on the theme of family, representation and community – a truly memorable moment.



The winning projects were celebrated for the excellent work they provide. Among the winners were; Growing Hope Brockley, who provide free therapy for children with additional needs; the Dulwich Islamic Centre Covid-19 Vaccine Drive, which helped the local Muslim community get information and access to Covid vaccines, building trust and disseminating useful information about healthy practices during lockdown; and Love North Southwark, a community organisation which responded to the pandemic by providing food to those who couldn't access or afford it during lockdown.

The full list of winners and information about the Awards can be found at [Southwark's unsung heroes celebrated in Awards Ceremony - The Faith & Belief Forum \(faithbeliefforum.org\)](https://faithbeliefforum.org).



Events Attended by Monarchy, Council on Faith Members and DLs

King Charles III highlighted the vital role that religious communities play in civil society and supporting religious communities during his Christmas address last year. “Our churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and gurdwaras, have once again untied in feeding the hungry, providing love and support throughout the year. Such heartfelt solidarity is the most inspiring expression of loving our neighbour as ourself”. He highlighted too a moment of his own faith journey, a visit to Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity, saying the moment had an indescribable meaning for him personally.



King Charles spent 16th December immersed in Jewish culture after visiting Jewish community centre JW3 in Camden. He was received by Representative Deputy Lieutenant, Ms Roxane Zane as well as JW3 founder Dame Vivien Duffield and chief executive Raymond Simonson. During the visit, His Majesty met volunteers preparing meals for the on-site food bank, joined the annual pre-Chanukah reception with Holocaust survivors and also unveiled a commemorative plaque before departure to mark the occasion. If that wasn't enough, there was also time to take in a self-defence class, speak with pupils from a local school who were wrapping presents for asylum seekers and receive a presentation from Dame Vivien Duffield of a Chanukiah with the inscription that “one person's candle provides the light to many”.



On the same day as his JW3 visit, Sir Kenneth Olisa received HM The King when he visited the Community Security Trust. CST is a British charity who aim to provide safety, security and advice to British Jews. CST chief executive Mark Gardner said: “The visit meant a lot to our volunteers, staff and trustees, and we thank the King for demonstrating his support for our work and the wider Jewish community.”

Over Christmas, there were many festivities enjoyed by the Royal Family. Received by The Lord Lieutenant of Great London, the Mayor of London and the Mayor of Harrow were the King and Queen Consort, The Prince and Princess of Wales and extended Royal Family members too.

Separately, Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, Colonel Jane Davis, received HM The King at an Advent Service (pictured) at the King's Cross Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London were all in attendance. The King also met representatives from charity Open Doors to official open King's House.



On 7th December, Paul Herbage DL received HRH The Duke of Gloucester, as The Grand Prior of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of ST. John of Jerusalem when he attended an Installation and Investiture Ceremony at the Priory Church, St. John's Square, London EC1.



Dr Sheila Gewolb DL represented the Lord Lieutenant at the visit by the Countess of Wessex to ZSL London Zoo to tour its newest exhibit, Monkey Valley. Her Royal Highness was briefed on the range of work done by ZSL and then joined children who receive support from the Kaleidoscope Palliative Care and Community Children's Nursing teams as they created Christmas festive-themed activities for the ring-tailed lemurs.

The Council on Faith met on 22nd February. Present in person were David Dangoor, Bushra Nasir, Nims Obunge, Martin Russell, Randeep Lall and Bibi Khan from the Council on Faith as well as Phil Champain and Jessica Hazrati from the Faith & Belief Forum. Present online were Babulal Sethia and Rosi Prescott from the CoF, Candice Mendes da Costa from Maccabi GB as well as Carrie Alderton and Matthew Gold from F&BF. The meeting was held at London Islamic Cultural Society by Bibi Khan.

