

FAITH, BELIEF AND BELONGING IN LONDON

EXTENDING THE COVERAGE

ABOUT THE SERIES

This briefing paper is the first in a series on how faith and belief relate to social exclusion and belonging in London. Our thanks to Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith, The Exilarch's Foundation, and the Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London for their input and support which makes this series possible.

About 3FF

3FF, the Three Faiths Forum, has worked to build good relations between people of different faiths, beliefs and identities for over twenty years. We create spaces in schools, universities, and the wider community where people can engage with questions of belief and identity and meet people different from themselves. Our programmes enable people from different backgrounds – both religious and non-religious – to learn from each other and work together.

Our vision is a connected and supportive society where people of different faiths, beliefs and cultures have strong, productive and lasting relations. We believe the future belongs to people of all beliefs, that intolerance has no place in society and that diversity adds value.



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MESSAGE OF SUPPORT

As the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, I am Her Majesty The Queen's representative in Greater London, charged with upholding the dignity of the Crown. I have over 100 Deputy Lieutenants, who, like me, are volunteers. I have 32 Representative Deputy Lieutenants, one for each London Borough, providing a vital link with local communities across the capital. In addition, we are bridge-builders, connecting individuals, organisations and social networks, to enhance Londoners' sense of belonging and thereby increasing social inclusion within the capital.

This briefing paper describes how local projects contribute to making London a place of belonging. Through its rich heritage and diverse population, London is home to many faith groups from every religion. As The Queen said in her 50th Christmas broadcast in 2001: 'we all have something to learn from each other, whatever our faith', because living life according to a strong set of positive values is an antidote to exclusion. Overcoming differences and misunderstandings, reducing prejudice, ignorance and fear, and learning the ethical lessons of the widest range of faiths and beliefs are objectives enshrined in our strategy Building Bridges for a fairer London. In that spirit, we commend the work of Londoners from all faiths and beliefs who create a sense of belonging and inclusion in our great city.



Mr Kenneth Olisa OBE,
The Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London



INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper reports on 3FF's research about faith, belief and belonging in London. It is the first in a series of papers on how faith and belief in London relate to social exclusion and belonging. It accompanies our Evening of Faith Recognition and Celebration, which recognises the contribution of local projects to improving the lives of Londoners of all faiths and non-religious beliefs. Throughout this paper, we mention projects which have received awards for their contribution to and for faith communities in London. For more information please see our website at 3ff.org.uk/celebration.



We use the term 'faith and belief' as an aspect of people's identity, including all religious and non-religious beliefs.¹ People are defined by more than their faith or belief identity, but for many Londoners their faith or belief is an essential part of their lives.

London is an extraordinary city in its religious diversity. In the last Census of 2011, 70% of Londoners declared a religious affiliation. The largest group remain Christians (48.5%), joined by a rising number of other religious and non-religious groups. Beyond the numbers, faith and belief work in complicated ways in the lives of Londoners. Some people are more visibly religious than others due to modes of dress such as the headscarf or turban. People who identify themselves as belonging to the same faith may hold vastly different beliefs, and some people who appear religious may define themselves as non-religious or atheists.

Most scholars agree that faith and belief may contribute to both belonging and exclusion.² For many Londoners, their faith or belief provides a sense of belonging and is a source of wellbeing. In local communities, different faiths and beliefs can contribute to exclusion and social division, yet people motivated by their diverse faiths and beliefs also make important contributions to harmonious community relations. Here, we describe factors that contribute to both exclusion and belonging in London.



FACTORS FOR EXCLUSION

Belonging is an important quality for a healthy city, but it is difficult to visualise. We picture belonging as mobile phone coverage. Mobile phone signals are broadcast to all of London, yet many people experience patchy coverage daily. Three in ten Londoners report dropped phone calls in their own homes.³ Similarly, people may be more or less included in different neighbourhoods and at different times. All Londoners could fit on a spectrum ranging from a high sense of belonging to feeling detached or even alienated. Like patchy mobile coverage, exclusion is complicated and has many contributing factors. In this paper we highlight three factors which contribute to an incomplete sense of belonging: misunderstanding diversity, deprivation and social tension.



MISUNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY

London is a superdiverse city, where people from every nation and religion live as neighbours.⁴ In order for this great mosaic of diversity to add value to our city, we need to understand its patterns.

Minority (non-Christian) faith groups tend to live in larger numbers in a few London boroughs: Muslims in Tower Hamlets (46%), Newham, Redbridge and Brent; Hindus in Harrow (26%), Brent, Redbridge, and Hounslow; Sikhs in Ealing (9%), Hounslow, Hillingdon and Redbridge; Jews in Barnet (14%), Hackney, Harrow, Camden, and Redbridge; and Buddhists in Harrow (3%), Enfield, Greenwich and Hackney.⁵ The same trend holds to a lesser extent for people who declare no religious affiliation, with larger groupings in the inner boroughs of Islington (41%), Lambeth, Camden, Wandsworth, and Hackney.⁶

In addition to living in neighbourhoods closer to people of the same faith and belief, Londoners from minority (non-Christian) religious groups tend to live in similar areas to each other. Minority faith groups make up more than 40% of people living in Brent, Harrow, Hounslow, Newham, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets, and more than 30% of the population in Barnet, Ealing, Enfield and Hillingdon.⁷

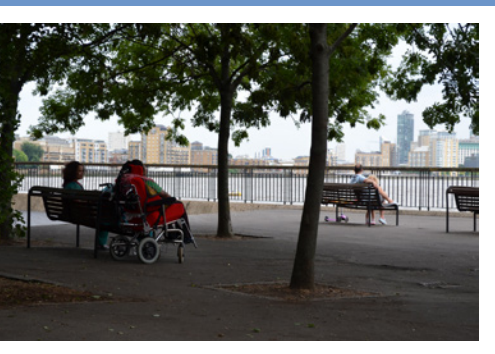
The clustering of faith groups can result in a lack of support for members of minority faith groups who live in other boroughs. In some areas with large populations of one faith group, other groups within the same faith might be overlooked (for example, Shia' Muslims in largely Sunni Muslim Tower Hamlets). Some minority faith groups are more visible and well-represented (e.g. Baha'is, Jains, Ahmadiyya and Ismaili Muslims) than others (e.g. African and Caribbean Traditional Religions, Alevi and Haredi Jews). Whilst minority faith group members often have access to specialised services in their local communities, they may also have limited interaction with people from other groups. This could include limited opportunities to learn and speak English.⁸

Another group that may be excluded are people from faith groups who are a minority on the basis of another protected characteristic, such as disability, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.⁹ For example, the Office for National Statistics estimated in 2014 that 2.6% of Londoners identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, the highest of any UK region.¹⁰ These groups can sometimes experience discrimination within faith communities or be isolated from others with similar identities, while in other cases faith groups provide them with much needed support. The complex patchwork of diversity in London can make it difficult for all people to be included equally.

DEPRIVATION

Another factor driving social exclusion is deprivation. The government regularly measures 'multiple deprivation' to identify areas in local authorities that have the highest incidence of poverty.¹¹ Boroughs in London with the highest levels of deprivation also have large black and ethnic minority (BAME) populations, including a high percentage of faith groups. The 16 London boroughs with the highest amounts of deprivation have ethnic minority populations greater than 40%.¹²

Rising house prices and persistent under-employment make communities in London vulnerable to poverty, which particularly affect the health and wellbeing of young and elderly people. In areas of inner London with increasing gentrification, inequality can create a sense of residents being left behind or pushed out of their neighbourhoods. Gentrification has moved Hackney, Haringey, Newham and Tower Hamlets out of the poorest 20 areas in England. Some outer London boroughs which in 2004 did not have any areas classed at 'least deprived' now include areas which fall into this category. These include Barnet, Bromley, Havering, Redbridge, and Sutton.¹³ For people struggling to afford a decent home or feed their families, deprivation dampens their sense of belonging in London.



SOCIAL TENSION

Social tension is difficult to measure, but it signals that people are likely to be excluded and discriminated against due to their religious, ethnic or national identity. One common measure of social tension is hate crime, which is collected by the Metropolitan Police. Hate crime is defined as 'any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic.'¹⁴ Incidences of hate crime against faith groups often rise in response to local and global events, with two recent examples being attacks on Muslims in the wake of the Lee Rigby killing in 2013 and the Paris attacks of 2015, and attacks on Jews following the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014.¹⁵

Another worrying trend has been attacks on ethnic and religious minorities and Eastern Europeans in the aftermath of the 2016 EU Referendum.¹⁶ The EU Referendum exposed deep social divisions. For some, the result of the vote for Brexit proved that immigrants are a problem and should not be welcome in the UK.¹⁷ For all Londoners, public debate around migration and multiculturalism can result in tension between longer-term residents and newer arrivals in neighbourhoods.¹⁸ New arrivals forced out of inner boroughs by rising house prices may find it difficult to settle into a new neighbourhood which is less diverse. Between 2011-2016, the boroughs with the highest increase in ethnic minorities were all outer boroughs (3% to 7% increase in Barking and Dagenham, Bromley, Bexley, Croydon, Havering, Hillingdon, Kingston upon Thames, Redbridge and Sutton).¹⁹ Without opportunities for these new arrivals to meet and build good relationships with neighbours from different faiths and beliefs, mistrust and tension can fester.



EXTENDING THE COVERAGE OF BELONGING

Stories of exclusion in London fill the airwaves and flood our social media feeds. As thick concrete walls interfere with mobile coverage, experiences of exclusion dampen a sense of belonging. At the same time, many Londoners work daily to extend the coverage of belonging to neighbours of all faiths and beliefs. Central government and local councils provide crucial services, and large charities offer expertise and effective support. In this paper we highlight local projects in the voluntary sector, learning from their examples of effective community action.⁷² of these projects are being recognised in our Evening of Faith Recognition and Celebration.

Local projects are important for four reasons. First, most of London's 24,000 voluntary organisations are small and local.²⁰ With one charity or community group for every 360 Londoners, these local projects extend the coverage of belonging to every neighbourhood and to many of London's diverse groups.²¹ Second, local communities in London are multi-faith spaces because people with different faiths and beliefs share the same public services and spaces. When local projects include different faith and belief groups, they reflect the diversity of their neighbourhoods. When local places of worship open their doors to serve people from all faiths and beliefs, they act as community hubs.

Third, local projects rely heavily on volunteers from the local area. Involving local volunteers creates a double benefit of belonging: local projects extend the coverage of belonging in their neighbourhoods, and volunteers and staff of local projects increase their own sense of belonging by helping others to belong.²² Fourth, local projects are often overlooked and under-appreciated. They are less flashy and less publicised in the media than larger organisations, yet their work has potential for deeper impact because they work with smaller numbers of individuals in a relational manner over an extended period of time.²³

We have identified four ways that local projects extend and enhance a sense of belonging to Londoners of all faiths and beliefs. These projects improve access for isolated people to life-enhancing services. They alleviate deprivation by opening pathways to employment and housing, and by addressing the causes of poverty. They reduce social tension by connecting neighbours from different backgrounds. They extend a warm welcome to people arriving from other parts of the UK and from other countries.



IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES

In the great diversity of London's neighbourhoods, individuals and groups can be overlooked and excluded. Places of worship and community groups often act as neighbourhood hubs, offering social connection, advice and support, particularly to elderly people and young people. Lunch clubs such as the Autumn Rose Club (Balham Seventh Day Adventist Church) and the Caribbean Hindu Cultural Society (Lambeth) have opened their doors for decades, providing a community of support for isolated people, and offering classes on healthy eating, exercise and wellbeing. Structured support for groups of minority young people provide them with skills and connect them with opportunities beyond their neighbourhoods. The Chaverim Youth Organisation empowers Haredi Jewish young people with skills and mentoring, as do the Baraka Community Association (Kensington & Chelsea) for Somali young people and the RCCG Rivers of Joy Church (Greenwich) for Black Pentecostal Christian young people.

Some Londoners face discrimination within faith groups and wider society due to disability, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and they may be isolated from others facing similar challenges in their local areas. Recognising this challenge, some local faith groups have developed specialised projects to provide support. The Maryam Centre supports Muslim women in Tower Hamlets with counselling and advice in a safe and confidential space using a non-judgmental approach. Open House at Oasis Church, Waterloo, provides a safe space for people of faith who also identify as LGBT. The Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health runs a drop-in centre in Forest Hill. These local projects are also connectors, referring people to specialised services offered by local councils and larger charities. By working at the neighbourhood level, projects such as the Springfield Community Flat (Lambeth) and Larches Community (Barnet) identify neighbours who need support and work to connect them to specialised public services.





WCEN has established a family therapy community network to address socio-cultural factors that lead to the poor uptake of mental health services among Black Caribbean and African groups. The project is innovative in its work with local churches and mosques in Wandsworth. Since 2011, 12 local church pastors (many from Pentecostal and independent churches) have taken an accredited training programme of Systemic Family Therapy, co-produced jointly by the Family Therapy service of South West London and St Georges NHS Mental Health Trust. In 2014, WCEN launched the Muslim Network for Family Therapy, and 10 local Muslim leaders have received two years of accredited training. WCEN's vision is to create a generation of trained therapists operating within local faith groups. These therapists are both carers and connectors who understand the needs of their communities and can help local people to access effective and appropriate sensitive mental health care.

CASE STUDY:

WANDSWORTH COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT NETWORK (WCEN)



ALLEVIATING DEPRIVATION

Local projects are at the frontline of effective responses to deprivation, boosting the coverage of belonging for neighbours and new arrivals facing homelessness, food poverty and financial problems. Working together, places of worship become places of refuge, hosting local winter night shelters and food banks. Drawing on their network of volunteers from each faith group, neighbours offer support to others from different faiths and beliefs, creating stronger links between faith groups at the local level.

Some local projects move past short-term relief to addressing causes of deprivation. Local responses to homelessness have led to specialised services in Haringey (CARIS

Haringey, Highway House) and Kingston-upon-Thames (JOEL Community Services). These projects offer long-term housing and specialised support for homeless individuals and families. Some local groups (Sufra NW, Norwood & Brixton Food Bank) have turned food banks into longer-term programmes for employment, advice and mentoring. Places of worship (St. Mark's Kennington) run debt advice centres. Local faith and community groups band together to advocate for better pay for all Londoners through the Living Wage Campaign. These relational programmes, working in partnership with local councils and larger charities, often lead to permanent homes, better jobs and a better quality of life.



Sufra NW London (Brent) is a community food hub bringing together 120 volunteers (including many young people) from many faiths and beliefs to alleviate the causes and symptoms of food poverty. It was set up in 2012 to redefine the traditional food bank model by providing for both the immediate and long-term needs of vulnerable people experiencing food poverty. In addition to its food bank, Sufra NW acts as a gateway to a wider programme of activities which improve skills, increase employability and enhance health and wellbeing. Sufra NW offers a community kitchen that provides a three-course meal for low-income families; welfare surgeries that offer advocacy on statutory benefits and housing; a food academy that delivers training in cookery skills for young people; an employability



programme that provides business skills training and job brokerage services; a refugee resettlement programme that includes ESOL classes and cultural activities; and a food growing project that creates a therapeutic space for people with mental health issues. Every year, the food bank and its subsidiary services support around 4,000 people.

CASE STUDY:

SUFRA NW LONDON



The Grenfell Tower fire destroyed even more than people's lives and homes. This terrible tragedy highlighted social divisions and inequality in London. Within hours of the fire, a network of local faith groups began a long-term response to support affected people in spiritual and material ways that continues today. Working together, the Central Gurdwara and the Sikh Welfare and Awareness Team, Al-Manaar Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, the Baraka Community Association, St. Clement's Church and Notting Hill Methodist Church (and many others) organised vigils and coordinated funerals, ran a joint network of collection centres for clothing and food, and offered advice and mediation between the local council and affected residents. The response of local faith groups working together has also created stronger relations between them and increased their social engagement in the local community.



CASE STUDY:

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE



WELCOMING THE NEWLY ARRIVED

London is a city with a constant stream of new arrivals, and people new to London can often feel isolated. Longer-term residents are well-placed to welcome their new neighbours and help them to settle into their new community. Many new arrivals come from other parts of London or the UK. Community cafés and centres, schools and places of worship enable neighbours to extend hospitality to new arrivals, helping them to build relationships with their neighbours.

Some new arrivals to the UK need specialised support to feel at home in London. For example, refugees and asylum seekers face deprivation and social stigma, combined with dealing with the trauma of war and persecution from their countries of origin.²⁵

Local faith groups (Alyth Refugee Drop-in) and community centres (Streatham Drop-in Centre) have opened their doors to act as drop-in centres for refugees and asylum seekers, offering English classes, skills training and a community of care. These projects also connect new arrivals with local volunteers, providing social networks and enhancing wellbeing. Specialised projects such as the Refugee Cricket Project make refugees feel at home through a sport that is both British and global.





The Parental Engagement Programme makes Marion Richardson School in Tower Hamlets a hub for community relations, building on the relationships forged in daily interactions between parents at the school gates and in the parent's hut at the school. The programme helps parents of young children, many of whom are newly arrived in the UK and in London, to develop community, enhance skills and feel at home in London. In the Londoners project, established families (mainly Bangladeshi and Somali) take six Saturdays over the year to show newly arrived families (Afghani, Chinese, Romanian and Spanish)

around London. The project has resulted in better involvement of newly arrived parents in school-sponsored family trips. In addition to English and computer classes, Alison Jones (Community Cohesion Coordinator) and Rumana Begum (Parent Support Worker) run discussion groups for parents and students about religion and culture. The parents organise four charity lunches per year to raise money for local charities, and 30 parents volunteer at a local night shelter over the Winter.

CASE STUDY:

PARENTS ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME AT MARION RICHARDSON SCHOOL

CONCLUSION



We recognise that these small projects cannot on their own solve the social problems facing Londoners. Like patchy mobile coverage, the factors limiting a sense of belonging are complex and require cooperative action. However, these small projects demonstrate the power of local responses to deprivation, social tension and misunderstanding diversity. The great diversity of Londoners can be a source of division or a powerful resource for inclusion. As neighbours work with neighbours to extend a sense of belonging, they live out their shared values across differences in faiths and non-religious beliefs. Working together to include others also enables faith and belief groups to become more hospitable and inclusive – making London a place where everyone belongs.



NOTES

- 1 We use the 'faith and belief' to refer to the protected characteristic of 'religion and belief' in the Equality Act 2010. For a list of protected characteristics, see UK Government (2017). The Equality Act 2010: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- 2 See findings of the Religion and Society Research Programme, including the 2013 report 'Religious discrimination in Britain: What difference does a decade make?': http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/religious_discrimination_in_britain_what_difference_does_a_decade_make. For the role of religion in violence and peace, see Mira (2015). 'The Paradoxical Role of Religion and Spirituality in Conflict, Peacebuilding and Governance': <https://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/cis/cis-research-the-paradoxical-role-of-religion-and-spirituality-in-conflict-peacebuilding-and-governance.html>
- 3 The Register (2017). 'One-third of mobile users receive patchy to no indoor coverage': https://www.theregister.co.uk/2017/11/01/nearly_one_third_of_punters_receive_patchy_to_no_indoor_mobe_coverage/
- 4 See University of Birmingham (2017). 'About Superdiversity': <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/superdiversity-institute/about/about-superdiversity.aspx>
- 5 ONS (2011). 2011 'Census': <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011/census>; GLA (2015). 'Percentage of Population by Religion', <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/population-religion-region>
- 6 ONS (2011) Census and GLA (2015) Percentage of Population by Religion.
- 7 GLA (2015). Percentage of Population by Religion.
- 8 Three boroughs (Newham, Tower Hamlets and Brent) have at least two times the national average of people who replied in the Census that they cannot speak English well or at all (as high as 8.2%). See Adam Dennet (2015). Urban Analytics: <http://adamdenett.co.uk/category/uncategorized/> from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/open-government-licence.html>
- 9 For a list of protected characteristics, see UK Government (2017). The Equality Act 2010: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- 10 Trust for London (2016). 'London's Poverty Profile': <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/londons-geography-population/londons-hidden-population/>
- 11 These are weighted to produce the composite Index of Multiple Deprivation: Income Deprivation (22.5%); Employment Deprivation (22.5%); Education, Skills and Training Deprivation (13.5%); Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%); Crime (9.3%); Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%); Living Environment Deprivation (9.3%). Supplementary indices on income deprivation affecting each of older and children and young people are also taken into account.
- 12 50% or greater in Newham, Brent, Redbridge, Harrow, Tower Hamlets and Ealing, 40%-49% in Hounslow, Croydon, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, Lewisham, Southwark, Hillingdon, Hackney, Enfield, Lambeth and Greenwich. See GLA (2016). 'London borough profiles': <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-borough-profiles>
- 13 The Independent (2015). 'Gentrification pushing some of the poorest members of society out of their homes': <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/gentrification-pushing-some-of-the-poorest-members-of-society-out-of-their-homes-says-study-a6695926.html>
- 14-15 Home Office (2015). Hate Crime England and Wales 2014-15 – Statistical Bulletin.
- 16 The Independent (2016). 'Hate Crime Surges by 42% in England and Wales since Brexit Result': <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crime-racism-stats-spike-police-england-wales-eu-referendum-a7126706.html>
- 17 Paul Bagulley from the University of Leeds, quoted in The Guardian (2016). 'A frenzy of hatred: how to understand Brexit racism': <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/29/frenzy-hatred-brexit-racism-abuse-referendum-celebratory-lasting-damage>
- 18 For a discussion on the relationship between Brexit and multiculturalism, see Ipek Demir (2017): <https://discoversociety.org/2017/02/01/brexit-as-a-backlash-against-loss-of-privilege-and-multiculturalism/>
- 19 GLA (2016). 'London borough profiles'.
- 20, 21 NCVO Civil Society Almanac (2017). 'Scope Data': <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac/17/scope-data/>
- 22 NCVO Civil Society Almanac (2017) 'Executive Summary': <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac/17/executive-summary/>
- 23 See IPPR (2016). 'Too small to fail: How small and medium-sized charities are adapting to change and challenges': <https://www.ippr.org/publications/too-small-to-fail>
- 24 See London Evening Standard (2017). 'London attack: Vigil in honour of terror victims to be held near London Bridge': <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/london-attack-vigil-in-honour-of-terror-victims-to-be-held-near-london-bridge-a3556661.html>; Telegraph (2017). "United against all terror": Finsbury Park vigil sees hundreds gather in wake of mosque attack': <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/20/united-against-terror-finsbury-park-vigil-sees-hundreds-gather/>
- 25 Trust for London (2016). 'London's Poverty Profile'.

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