

Weaving Trust

MK50 Celebration Event

Church of Christ the Cornerstone

28th January 2017

Contents

	Page
Introduction	2
Executive Summary	3
Testimonies	6
Text messages	
• Celebration	10
• Concerns	12
• Why things are good	13
• Suggestions	14
• Weaving Trust	16
Contributions from the floor	18
Closing Poem: Little Things	19
Appendix 1: Institutions represented	21

Introduction

On 28th January 2017, as part of the MK50 celebrations, approximately 100 people from 50 different institutions attended a Weaving Trust event, sponsored by Citizens:mk, at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone.

The MK50 event was similar in format to the others we have held. It started with four testimonies from people of different religious traditions talking about their experiences of living in Milton Keynes. This was followed by a carousel of six minute conversations when all attendees talked about their own lives and experiences with someone they didn't know. Participants then had a short period of quiet reflection when they texted some of their own insights, foresights, celebrations and concerns to a central number. After a short break for tea and cake, wonderfully provided by volunteers from the church, we reviewed those texts and held a short group reflection on life in Milton Keynes with a number of people making verbal contributions from the floor.

Weaving Trust has run about a dozen much smaller events during the year hosted by organisations as diverse as: the Muslim Association, Q-Alliance (a support group for the LGBT community), St Frideswide's Church, the Synagogue, the Police, Woodhill Prison, MK Dons and several more. Feedback is universally positive: people always have a good time and find that they are moved, enlightened and energised. We believe that it is important to take positive steps to develop and protect our sense of community, particularly at present. As a first step we can get to know each other, celebrate our diversity but let the strangeness, and suspicion, fall away.

The main output of a Weaving Trust event is the insights and emotions people take with them. In this report of the MK50 event we have recorded the testimonies, text messages, and verbal contributions made on the day. We have collected the messages into themes that seem appropriate, but otherwise left them as received.

The report ends with a poem read at the close of the meeting.

If your organisation would like to host a Weaving Trust event or if you would otherwise like to become involved please email:

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Executive summary

The MK50 Weaving Trust event was attended by about 100 people representing some 50 institutions from diverse faiths, races and backgrounds. However, this was an invited and self selected group and although well informed and committed, not as diverse as it may first appear. There were no isolated mothers, no 'hoodies', no regular users of the food bank, no homeless people. This report should be read in that context. The point was emphasised by one of the texts we received:

"Milton Keynes has a wealth of talent. It also has a mass of people who are barely surviving who need greater support – especially immigrant families."

The event consisted of readings of four personal testimonies followed by a large number of one to one conversations and then a period of personal and group reflection collected as text messages and verbal contributions from the floor.

Participants found the event to be very enjoyable, rewarding and affirming exemplified by statements such as:

"Talking with new people is energising - why don't I do it more often? How can we break down barriers and overcome our fear of strangers?"

"I've made so many wonderful friends since moving to MK 6 years ago, but today it was wonderful to speak to people who I'd not usually get the chance to do so. Hearing stories you never knew about and having a very brief peak at other people's worlds!"

This is in keeping with feedback from other Weaving Trust events and reveals a strong desire for people to simply get to know each other and converse.

There was a considerable sense of celebration of Milton Keynes. This was mostly centred on perceptions of its people:

"So many wonderful people both born in MK or have moved to MK have adopted the role of caring. Working and volunteering their time to build communities, welcome neighbourhoods, support new friendships: so many invested in charities, trust and organisations. This to me is so important and beyond nice to see and hear. Valuing people is what's special about MK which is my Town of Birth and place of work."

There was also a delight in the city's amenities, particularly its parks and greenery.

There was speculation on what makes the city so good, exemplified by statements such as:

"I have been struck by the number of people here who give of their time, efforts and expertise to help to improve some aspect of life for others."

However, there were also a number of concerns, perhaps best summed up by a speaker from the floor warning us against complacency and pointing out that other cities, new once and populated by immigrants with a desire to get along, such as New York, ended up with a less tolerant and forgiving attitude. She urged us to take positive steps to maintain tolerance and value diversity. The point was also captured in a text:

"Now there is the real danger of us all living in our own social bubbles, events like today are extremely welcome and important in building a society that interacts and empathises."

There were a number of suggestions for enhancing and preserving the life of the city. They mainly centred on: creating more multi-cultural events; using the talents that exist in the community better; communicating better the wonderful work that is going on but which seems to be news to many of us; and utilising our green spaces. There were also pleas to help with loneliness and homelessness. Some of these ideas are vague, and possibly being addressed in one form or another, but they do represent the thoughts of the people in the room, who for the most part are well informed and engaged with the community.

Having facilitated the event, and studied the various texts and verbal contributions we received, our sense is that there is great optimism amongst this informed and influential group but also an underlying concern about integration and isolation, particularly with regard to newcomers to the city. This concern is heightened by the plans for huge growth.

This issue came out particularly strongly in the contributions made from the floor and are perhaps well illustrated by a text we received regarding loneliness:

“MK is lovely for families with children but I think it needs a regular event where lonely people of any age, nationality, creed, either who have no family or want to meet new friends and share various MK activities can meet up and eventually exchange details. There are many lonely people, elderly and single parents with no family, who are very lonely. I am sure they would even pay a small fee.”

The recent report by Dame Louise Casey commissioned by the government also identifies deep concerns over issues of integration and isolation throughout British society.

From all this evidence we therefore present the following statement as an important issue for Milton Keynes:

How do we develop and extend a caring sense of community, which embraces our diversity and everyone, and can accommodate a large influx of new people?

We suggest that this issue can and should be addressed at three levels:

1. ***By local government:*** there are some things that only local government can do, but we cannot outsource all our responsibilities and duty of care to it.
2. ***By charities and local projects:*** there are many highly motivated people engaged, sometimes heroically, with wonderful projects to enhance the lives of others and we can hope that more such leaders will come forward.
3. ***By ourselves as citizens:*** we could just spontaneously take the initiative ourselves.

To illustrate the point, one of the issues identified by Dame Casey is lack of English language skills particularly by immigrant women, who therefore feel and become isolated. We are aware that this problem exists in Milton Keynes. How can we help?

We could ask local government to provide English classes (level 1). But this will take forever, and there is no money anyway, so the woman, and we, will have to live with the consequences.

We could hope for someone to develop a local project to teach English, or pick up the baton our self (level 2). This is uncertain.

Or we could say “hello” to the new comer, invite her to something, show her the ropes and be available as someone she could talk to (level 3). Given the right environment this woman will learn English for herself, and be motivated to do so. This can happen immediately, won’t cost anything, and may well be enjoyable, but we are perhaps inhibited by natural reticence, concern about ‘interfering’, mutual suspicion, or concern about being sucked in to something we can’t get out of.

All three levels have their role. However, the idea of Weaving Trust is to encourage community by facilitating conversations between people who would not otherwise meet, and allowing ourselves to be affected by the other's experience and situation. There are other similar initiatives in Milton Keynes, some of which are referred to in this report. They may not have measurable goals but they are important and deserve to be supported.

Going forward Weaving Trust needs support to build our team and capacity for delivering events, and we are happy to help anyone who wants to host an event. However, a more challenging objective is to run events in which the more isolated and deprived members of our community also participate – we need help to reach those communities, and willing participants to listen to them.

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Testimonies

A Christian Voice

My husband and I first visited Milton Keynes in 1984. We took a good look around, looked at each other, and both said “we would never want to live in Milton Keynes”, and returned to our home village in Essex without a backward glance.

We continued to visit regularly for the next 16 years – and remained steadfast in the opinion that Milton Keynes was “not for us.”

Then in 2001 we came again, looked around as usual, and finally “got it”. At last we saw “the attractive town that enshrined opportunity and freedom of choice” - here I am quoting the founding fathers declared aim. We moved here in 2002.

The first Sunday here I took myself along to the nearest church, and this is where I got the first hint that some things might be done differently here in MK. This was when Rev. Tim Norwood told me I was in an ecumenical church, and fortunately also explained what this strange new word meant. Apparently we were in a partnership of churches encompassing the U.R.C., the Methodists, Anglicans and the Baptists, and these influences would be reflected in differing styles of worship. This was certainly a new idea to me. I had grown up at a time and in a place where doctrinal differences were defended as fiercely as any land borders. Reflecting on this unexpected idea as I walked home I felt excited and sure I would like it, as indeed proved to be the case.

Since that day I have found MK to be a wonderful place of diversity and opportunity; where age or gender present no barriers, and I have met wonderful people, people with open minds who have stretched mine, and infectious “get up and go”, and “can do” attitudes, and fascinating life stories to tell. Very rarely since moving here have I found it necessary to fall back upon the weather as a subject for conversation!

During the past year I have been privileged to be part of the Citizens:mk Weaving Trust Campaign. This has been a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and learn a little of their lives. Our conversations have been diverse, thought provoking, memorable, and changed some of my long held preconceptions. But whilst our differences have been fascinating, what has been equally amazing is how much common ground we have found.

As MK celebrates its 50th anniversary I would like to say “congratulations MK. Well done, and here’s to the next 50”. And I certainly hope to see some of them.

A Muslim Voice

I want to tell you a little story. It's a story about migration.

At one of the annual pilgrimages the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH), met six men from Yathrib (Yathrib was the Jewish name for Medina) and spoke to them about Islam reciting portions of the Quran. The six men accepted Islam, five of them returning the following year bringing seven more who also accepted the Prophet's message. In the third year even more people came from Yathrib accepting the message of Islam. They pledged to support him and invited him to come to Yathrib as an arbitrator to reconcile among the hostile tribes.

Faced with persecution from the Makkhan Arabs, the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Yathrib with his friend Abu Bakr. The people of Yathrib welcomed the Prophet (PBUH) and chose him as their leader not only because he was a neutral new comer but because he was of a good character - gentle in composure, merciful in character, beautiful in manners, elegant in speech and most compassionate and forgiving.

Under the Prophet's (PBUH) leadership, the tribes of Yathrib agreed a charter to work together for the betterment of their community providing protection to each other. The Prophet (PBUH) built the first mosque in Yathrib which was a community centre and open to everyone men, women, Muslim and non Muslims.

Like Milton Keynes Yathrib was an oasis, a fertile land of about twenty square miles which was surrounded by volcanic hills, rocks and uncultivated stony ground. It was not a commercial centre but an agricultural settlement in which the various tribal groups comprising Jews, Christians and Pagan Arabs lived 'cheek by jowl in a state of deadly hostility in their hamlets and farms' until the Charter which ensured peaceful co-existence of the diverse communities within Yathrib.

In the same way as Yathrib welcomed the Prophet (PBUH) and the new Muslims, Milton Keynes has welcomed me and many of us. When on 23 January 1967, Milton Keynes came into being the people living within the Milton Keynes area accepted and welcomed the new city, we have in our turn accepted and welcomed many different communities now settled within Milton Keynes.

Regardless of who we are and what we believe in, we have this unique ability to come together to celebrate the things that we have in common. We have all come from somewhere and made Milton Keynes our home. It's a city which has allowed me to be myself – a Muslim, British woman who misses waking up to her cup of English Breakfast Tea when away from home!

I have a dream that one day in Milton Keynes I will be standing telling people of our journey to create a multi-faith centre in Milton Keynes and within it a community café – maybe Truby's Garden Tea Room*. I pray Allah guides us to be the best of people, loving, caring and respecting each other.

* the speaker organises Truby's Garden Tea Room which is a multi-faith opportunity to meet and share. For more information visit their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/trubysgardentearoom/>

A Jewish Voice

Hello, I am the Interfaith Coordinator for Milton Keynes Jewish Community.

A few days ago, a friend sent me an article in the Guardian commemorating the 50th anniversary of Milton Keynes, and listing 50 things that are great about Milton Keynes. Sadly, what I love best about Milton Keynes was not included: its diversity.

I joined the Milton Keynes Jewish community in 1999, and shortly afterwards attended my very first interfaith meeting. I was amazed at how many faiths were represented - 8 or 9 different faiths, I think. But it's not just diversity of faith, it's ethnicity and culture too, and it was this that inspired my husband Andy and I to start projects such as Friends For Life and subsequently the One World Club, aimed at bringing people of different cultures together through the performance arts.

More recently, we also created One Voice, an initiative using performance, the sharing of food and above all dialogue to bring together initially the Muslim and Jewish communities but ultimately people of all faiths and none.

The most moving event of recent years for me as Interfaith Coordinator for the Jewish Community, however, was the Abrahamic Faiths Service held at the synagogue on 14th November 2015, when Muslims, Christians and people of other faiths too poured into the synagogue because they wanted to witness and participate in a Sabbath Morning Service, and also to make friends with the Jewish people and with one another.

It is this openness, this ability to reach out to one another in friendship and build bridges, not walls, which I find inspirational about Milton Keynes, and which I think could make our city a shining example to the rest of Britain.

A Secular Voice

In my role as community organiser for Citizens:mk, I have 1:1 meetings every day with leaders across Milton Keynes: leaders of faith, leaders of schools and leaders of the Council; also leaders of businesses, residents associations and gangs. From a thousand 1:1 meetings, I conclude MK people enjoy three general qualities: humility, can-do attitude and tolerance.

I don't know if it's because MK doesn't have a long, deep and proud history to boast about, or because we're used to being mocked for our roundabouts, concrete cows, and sometimes our football team, but MK people seem to me humble. One of my first 1:1 meetings was with Lynda, who you just heard. After hearing about the activities and events she had organised in the Synagogue and beyond, I said 'you are a leader'. 'Not me,' she said, 'I'm not a leader'. That seemed humble. Again and again I see community leaders doing important work for others and not seeking credit.

People here have a can-do attitude. MK is famous for its entrepreneurship, its business start-ups and innovative approaches, and I see it in community work too. Kurshida here is driven by a vision of a community in which her daughter can enjoy gender equality...and she sticks her neck out to make it happen. Like many in MK, she has ideals and a can-do approach to making them real.

And I think we're generally tolerant. Many who visited Zainabiya Centre for the first Weaving Trust event in April 2015 expected to hear stories of discrimination, harassment and abuse. Then we heard the testimony of a young Muslim man, who had grown up in MK schools and was now working successfully. He said he found MK to be tolerant and he was proud and grateful to have grown up here. If we are generally tolerant and welcoming people, and I think we are, maybe it's because so many of us are immigrants, having come to MK from elsewhere. All the people you've just heard speaking have come here from somewhere else.

Recently Citizens:mk was approached by a professor from Warwick University who is testing some American research which suggests that four minutes of facing another person, without distractions, builds trust...creates a permanent interest in finding out more about the other person. Today you'll be getting more than four minutes. At a time when many national political leaders seem to be talking win-lose, and some are feeling hopeless, Weaving Trust is important.

Text Messages

Participants were asked to record their insights about Milton Keynes by texting a special number. These are the responses, organised into themes by the event organisers after the fact.

The main headings we have identified are:

- Celebration of Milton Keynes
- Concerns
- Why things are good here
- Suggestions
- Weaving Trust

<p>Celebration: People</p> <p>So many wonderful people both born in MK or have moved to MK have adopted the role of caring. Working and Volunteering their time to build communities, welcome neighbourhoods, support new friendships. So many invested in charities trust and organisations. This to me is so important and beyond nice to see and hear. Valuing people is what's special about MK which is my Town of Birth and place of work. [8057]</p>
<p>It's really opened up my eyes to the diversity of people, faiths and groups in Milton Keynes and how many community and charitable organisations there are which are dedicated to the social cohesion and celebration of them. Perhaps this is what makes MK so different. We're not just roundabouts and concrete cows after all! [8058]</p>
<p>I love MK and the people that live here. I am feeling happy and very enthusiastic after the one to one activity I am energised and feel extremely positive. Mk is a very special place. We are both 50 this January and I am going to enjoy celebrating all year! [8079]</p>
<p>I found it difficult to answer the question 'How do you feel about Milton Keynes?'</p> <p>For me MK is a community of communities. I can say how much I love these communities and the variety of relationships I have – the place means little to me, the people are everything.</p>
<p>One of the riches of Milton Keynes is the diversity of nationalities. ~this should be better celebrated.</p>
<p>How privileged we are to be living in this beautiful place and be part of such a vibrant and amazing community! [8035]</p>
<p>I am struck by the thought that we are learning to go beyond mere tolerance to discover the joy of mutual hospitality. [8055]</p>
<p>There is so much going on in Milton Keynes that I didn't know about. So many wonderful people doing wonderful things! [8096]</p>
<p>MK was planned to promote harmony and it seems to have succeeded we just all get on in MK we are we, there is no us and them [8101]</p>
<p>Milton Keynes for me is now home and I can't imagine living in any other part of the UK. My first impressions of MK were of green and lakes and a feeling of space. I still marvel at the beautiful sunsets and sunrises that you can observe from many parts of the city. What makes MK a good home is the people. I've got so many opportunities here that I'd never have had in another city or town. I'm involved in a number of community initiatives, which I hope in my small way will contribute to making the city the welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and aspirations.</p>

I love the sense of imagination that the people of MK have. No idea is impossible. [8103]
It's amazingly that people have come to MK for what they expected to be a short time and have then stayed.... and couldn't imagine living anyway else [8052]
Celebration: Amenities 35 years and counting MK has been a fantastic place to bring up a family. My children benefitted from mixing with others from different backgrounds . [8110]
Milton Keynes has been a good place for my children to grow up. It has provided some amazing extra-curricular activities around music and dance. [8108]
I have lived in Milton Keynes since 1978. I love the combination of trees, grass, lakes, river and canal and all the many amenities of Milton Keynes. [8098]
I love the open spaces and so many places to walk, cycle or run without hindrance. I appreciate having an easily accessible local centre to shop in. I enjoy the park, artwork and the many things which make MK such a special place. We are now retired my husband having spent his time in MK as a GP but we are still active and busy primarily in our church. I would be reluctant to leave MK as so much of our lives are based in this place. [8116]
People really love MK and are passionate about how well everything is connected [8031]
I love the amount of parks that are in Milton Keynes. [8060]
I have lived in Milton Keynes since 1978. I love the combination of trees, grass, lakes, river and canal and all the many amenities of Milton Keynes. [8094]
A great place. Packed with great people and places [8082]
I was born & brought up in Milton Keynes. The thought of a new city in 1973 was terrifying-we thought we would be completely swallowed up. However, the reality has been quite different. I love our city, the amenities & the open spaces & always defend it if speaking to people who slate it. [8073]
Celebration: Other Ideas, business initiatives, voluntary contributions weave themselves together forming MK [8063]
MK has sticky floors - people never quite get up the strength to leave [8083]
Milton Keynes is the punch line of many jokes, but those who live here don't mind - everybody loves an underdog! [8048]
I came to Milton Keynes in the 70s because I wanted to be part of its history and I was. I moved away for 15 years and when I came back it felt like home. [8112]
I have spent half my life in Milton Keynes, and I'm now an old woman. Living here has taught me to participate in a variety of wonderful community led activities, like The Global Centre and Sust!, One World Quilt 2000, MK Forum, and Speakeasy. To name a few. I've learnt how to become an active member of my community, to lead, even to stand in front of a group of strangers and talk to them. And I've made some wonderful friends, we have grown old together, *text missing* [8106]
I hope we can take this sense of connection forward into the next 50 years [8080]

Concerns: isolation & integration

Now there is the real danger of us all living in our own social bubbles, events like yesterday are extremely welcome and important in building a society that interacts and empathises. [8125]

I am amazed at the number of organisations & charities working with young people who have learning difficulties.....but sad that there are so many people in need of help.....I wonder if it is a higher percentage in MK than other parts of the country. [8045]

Milton Keynes has a wealth of talent.
It also has a mass of people who are barely surviving who need greater support – especially immigrant families.

Considering all the new events that followed BRITAIN and the rise of far right politics on both sides of the pond I am so concerned about the increase of hate and racist incidents [8100]

Milton Keynes is such a beautiful diverse place and everyone should try and work towards social integration more especially police and social services rather than dividing people [8067]

We create problems because we don't try to understand others and sometimes make assumptions about them because of something we see them doing - for instance walking around the shopping centre midweek = lazy jobless and feckless rather than, perhaps, working a non-standard pattern [7969]

Communities sometimes appear closed to 'outsiders' - often where several people of one ethnicity live in the same vicinity and behave in accordance with their cultural heritage which differs from those around them. [7968]

Concerns: behaviour

When we are stressed or squeezed (e.g. financially or for time) ourselves and we can take that out on others - for instance, commuters refusing to give up the (clearly marked) seats for a wheelchair user, pushing onto trains or not volunteering to give up their seat to someone who clearly needs it. [7970]

One problem is loud, angry behaviour - shouting and swearing, for example - in public places. And not knowing how seriously to take it. I don't actually mind swearing, per se, and if shouting is just young folk being boisterous, it's no big deal. But slanging matches are unpleasant... I feel critical but that is just getting drawn in to the hostility. So it is hard to know how to respond. [7978]

Bored kids behaving a bit badly - throwing stones to see if they can hit a telegraph pole, but with some hazard to others. I don't want to ignore this but it's not easy to comment without creating antipathy; and if I cheerfully challenge them I am fearful I may still be playing into their stereotypes and become a soft target for some verbal hostility... I suspect that underlying this is inequality, the kids knowing they are from poorer families and have fewer chances... [7979]

A member at a political party meeting said she was concerned that the voting there might be rigged - I said she sounded very mistrustful; and after a pause she said, "yes". For me this was a faint whiff of the paranoia that drives conspiracy theories... It was as if she had no other way of explaining things that were, or might be, happening she didn't like... [7980]

Concerns: transport

I have this afternoon spoken to a 17 year old and heard of the difficulties of traveling around MK on the busses. [8107]

A big worry for the future is the amount of traffic- the grid\roundabout system has been brilliant up to now but cannot cope for much longer. [8124]

Why things are good

MK is a town of immigrants. My hope is that we could stop being a collection of many communities, and become a single community of many individuals. [8062]

Milton Keynes is a diverse city where every individual is treated with respect. [8033]

I love that we are connected, that our stories, long and short, converge in Milton Keynes. [8041]

I have been struck by the number of people here who give of their time, efforts and expertise to help to improve some aspect of life for others. [8085]

The unseen (mainly) role of the many volunteers who contribute to the well being of citizens / residents of MK.

Those who live in Milton Keynes seem to be able to be positive and enthusiastic about it without being blind to its faults and aware of the need for improvements [8086]

It's amazing how different we are, yet we all have Milton Keynes in common.
It's good to find out about someone else's life and tell them about yours and who are and what you do to benefit Milton Keynes. [8087]

Interesting that people with very different backgrounds can be so similar to myself [8089]

It occurs to me finally what it is about Milton Keynes... everyone I meet does many jobs, had several avocations, gets involved with a community, if not many communities. The consequence is a preparedness to work together, openness toward others and a hopeful approach to dealing with diversity and all its impacts. We ask ourselves the right questions about how to work with newcomers, how to accept their reciprocal offerings in turn for our hospitality. As an outsider i was not invited just to stay or live, but to get involved and to contribute what i personally can. If you deploy this approach in all things, there is no need to reject others out of fear, when you can accept them as co-conspirators and friends. [8092]

We are all the same in our need to belong, no matter what our colour, race or creed. [8093]

People greeting each other on the Redways - and sometimes even stopping to talk [7971]

Strangers doing a small act of kindness for someone else - picking up something they have dropped while out walking or shopping for example [7972]

Milton Keynes helps build community through the physical layout of the City, with the mixed tenure estates that lie off the main roads, and with the green open spaces and the artwork, which help to relieve the stresses of everyday life [7973]

Participating in a craft class with people from different ethnicity and cultures, and meeting teenagers speaking 5 languages [7988]

A Senior Romanian nurse told me that anti European attitudes and racist comments were a temporary phenomenon and things would soon settle down. [7975]

Suggestions: multi-cultural events

There is tremendous openness in Milton Keynes, a great potential to be tapped into for further connections. We need to find ways to have more events like today, and to bring in more communities, whether districts, faith or ethnic-based. There is a lot of divisiveness in society as a whole, but in MK we CAN do things differently. We have proven that today. [8069]

Sport between faiths, different organisations, and companies etc. [7990]

Create specific events where we do things together e.g. competitions, multi-cultural picnics, celebrations of cooking or traditional celebrations - what is the Polish equivalent of a maypole?

Milton Keynes is a remarkable place with such diversity. However, today I have met those who have always been around but hypothetical to me as I've not seen, heard from them. We need more opportunity to come together and celebrate the diversity we have.

We are more than the organisations we represent. We are people with stories.

Happy Chinese New Year! [8071]

Music, food and performances bring people together - they provide a shared enjoyment and point of contact [7982]

Start from strengths. Even the poorest, most hard-pressed of the new communities know their own special foods and have their own music and dance. Might it be possible for more of them to host events to share and showcase their cultures? If they knew a good venue was available... [7983]

Connections made re bikes bambino book groups playgrounds settling down houses retirement growing food community action faith and much more [8109]

Suggestions: use our talents better

We are all still very enthusiastic about MK! There should be a way for those of us who have knowledge and experience of getting things built and done to join with those who want to achieve so we can inject those in power (land owners) with enough faith in us to risk a little bit of land on bright ideas. [8051]

We are so diverse, and we have so much energy to make things better. Everyone is an "important person" and we need to harness that energy together better.

Seek out leaders among the young people in our communities and ask them to create a social media presence to support our activities and share information around trust/mistrust issues... [7984]

Get some simple meals sponsored and invite leaders of disadvantaged communities to meet with a few other leaders from Citizens:mk, and elsewhere, to hear how things are for them... [7985]

Get alongside the poorest communities, and if that is not possible (it may not be), get alongside people who can... start where people are, literally and culturally [7986]

There is so much talents, skills, cultural depth and diversity within Milton Keynes. The MK Council should be doing a lot utilising all of that to advance our community. [8117]

I love this beautiful city. The Council should be creative about how to approach the so many eager to get involved individuals, communities and organisations rather than being stuck in its old ways.

Milton Keynes as a modern city should raise up to the challenges and become a model for other UK towns and Cities. [8120]

Helping in local school with reading - there is no colour with children. They are delightful [7989]

Suggestions: communication

There are so many wonderful things happening in MK that no one knows about. We need to get better in documenting, telling our stories, sharing the good work... [8097]

We need to work with the Council and other significant agencies in the city to think systemically about the changes that are coming and the unintended consequences of their actions - good and bad! [7977]

Diversity must be celebrated and supported each day. Relationships need nurturing and in Milton Keynes we can be a leading city in this respect if we all try. Our home has many new comers which makes it ideal as a centre of community building. [8046]

It is important to provide opportunities for young people in MK to present their visions and dreams to MK councillors and politicians [8091]

We in MK could share more with other communities from our experiences of renewable energy, recycling. [8064]

The city turns out to be full of organisations I have never heard of, doing great things. [8044]

Keep MK open & welcoming [8075]

Suggestions: loneliness

MK is lovely for families with children but I think it needs a regular event where lonely people of any age, nationality, creed, either who have no family or want to meet new friends and share various MK activities can meet up and eventually exchange details. There are many lonely people, elderly and single parents with no family, who are very lonely. I am sure they would even pay a small fee. [8084]

Suggestions: homelessness

I feel the time is right for a cohousing community to emerge in Milton Keynes. [8090]

It would be great if we could together provide enough shelter to get all rough sleepers off our streets. How about the Leicester model. There 7 different faith groups take turns to provide space for camp beds and a meal. Volunteers are centrally organised so different groups work together. If Leicester can do it, so can we. [8104]

Could there be a designated area where those who choose to be homeless and refuse help offered could put up a tent? [8032]

Wouldn't it be great to use abandoned buildings for the homeless [8042]

I would like everyone to have a decent affordable homes and homelessness to be gone forever [8043]

Suggestions: parks and green spaces

Our parks and open spaces may give us the opportunity to stage multicultural events (such as the IF) [7976]

We need to preserve the green areas, play and leisure areas of MK. They are in valuable. [8037]

A city of tolerance, please let's hope it stays that way.

A city of communities, but please can the landscaping make these communities more visible, it is hard for outsiders to understand this city if they just drive through or visit briefly.

A community that welcomes involvement and makes it easy for people to become part of things.

Talking with new people is energising - why don't I do it more often? How can we breakdown barriers and overcome our fear of strangers? [8059]

Weaving Trust

Flowers in the frost. Hope blossoms [8111]

I've made so many wonderful friends since moving to MK 6 years ago, but today it was wonderful to speak to people who I'd not usually get the chance to do so. Hearing stories you never knew about and having a very brief peak at other people's worlds! [8074]

A privilege to be part of the 'Weaving Trust' event.
An opportunity to meet people from different communities, cultures, religions and backgrounds that I would never normally converse with.
To listen to their stories, hear their opinions and beliefs with respect and grace as they did mine.
An effective, simple and inspirational way of bringing people together. [8123]

I was amazed to see how in such a short time, we recognised so many connections with the person facing us, whether it was to do with places, life circumstances, interests. .. [8039]

It is so important to talk to new people. We are often so busy in our own world, jobs that it takes someone to set up an opportunity for us to be able to have the time and space to meet other people from all walks of life in MK. It can only serve to bring communities together. Thank you for today. [8056]

I spoke to a teacher at a school and her challenges to involve the Somalian community, an artist getting to know MK, a musician, a journalist.
Despite our diverse backgrounds we have one thing in common our love for MK.
Thank you MK for letting me have my home within you. X [8114]

I like meeting so many people that are passionate about what they do.
I like that everyone I have met has been friendly and inviting into Milton Keynes.
I love that I can talk about myself to anyone and to listen to other people about their aspirations and past experiences.
I like that even in the short time I talked to the people in my group, I feel like I am round people that I have known for a lot longer than I have. I feel as though everyone can understand who I am through my positive experiences and future aspirations. [8081]

I was moved that W. trusted to tell me, a complete stranger, that she was gay. I'm told by a close relative that when you tell someone you're gay it's like coming out every time [8072]

This was an incredibly rich experience. I talked with a number of people - we all had things in common as well as interesting stories to tell. I have made new connections to support the job I do as an educator in this city of ours. [8077]

It would be great if we can make such meetings for the youth as well. They will be the ones shaping the future of Milton Keynes. [8066]

A very useful event so grateful that I have the chance to meet and talk to people and learn more about them. Fascinating ! Thanks for opening my eyes to the diverse community of MK [8078]

I'm also very impressed at the church and Citizens:mk for doing this. Well done. [8095]

Excellent way of meeting and conversing meaningfully! [8088]

The conversations we have just had confirm what a diverse and inclusive place MK is. Where MK leads others should follow [8102]

Today weaving trust has provided a structured setting in which people who would not ordinarily socialise could do this. We need more things like this [8105]

Any real contact that starts to go beyond the small talk and allows one to meet the person – i.e. sharing experiences and hearing how things really are for others; deeper communication and sharing

of oneself. I have to be in contact with myself, and open and ready to hear what is said. Testimony and 1:1s can do this, but neither is guaranteed, and it can happen in practically any setting. [7981]
It was nice meeting new people and having a conversation with them. It's good for cohesion and unity. Thank you for arranging this event. [8040]
Overwhelming positive intent in this gathering [8036]
Enlivening [8038]
It's good to get to know people who I would normally ignore. [8053]
Weaving Trust very good lets have more. [8054]
Thought provoking and enlightening about self and other. [8061]
I think that it's nice that so many people from different parts of Milton Keynes and backgrounds can come together to share stories and experiences. It's important that Milton Keynes carries on being a very diverse and tolerant place. Milton Keynes should be a place where everyone feels welcome and accepted [8065]
Eye-opening [8049]
Very refreshing talking to a mature 15 year old about her hopes and dreams for MK - her love for this city was obvious. [8070]
A good opportunity to talk to people, even some I see every Sunday but don't really get a chance to speak to. Interesting to hear about plans of expansion for MK hospital, as this is an issue that worries me. Also interesting to hear about groups that people are involved in. [8050]
The six conversations revolved around the same themes [8047]

Contributions from the floor

Towards the end of the meeting participants read the texts they had all previously sent, these having been collected into a database and projected on a screen. We then reflected in silence, Quaker style, on the testimonies, our conversations and the written contributions and some of us felt moved to offer verbal contributions from the floor. These are summarised below:

Speaker 1 spoke of getting older and having lived in Milton Keynes for a long time. She was aware of huge growth in the City and the arrival of large numbers of new people. She was concerned that these new comers would not be aware of the wonderful activities and charitable work that is going on and may therefore not find it as easy to integrate. She was concerned about our inability to communicate with people, and pleaded with us to do something collectively to communicate and integrate with these newcomers, and with ourselves.

Speaker 2 picked up on a theme mentioned in the fourth testimony that we are a city of immigrants in that many of us came here from somewhere else and therefore had to make something for ourselves in our new home. But she pointed out that New York was once like that, and by implication held it out as a warning. She was concerned that we need to take deliberate steps to stay tolerant and welcoming, perhaps by organising specific events (she referred to this event as an example) or taking other actions, and warned us against sliding into something else, almost by neglect.

Speaker 3 pointed out that the participants in this event probably did not represent 'new people' and echoed the need to help newcomers to find out what is going on and how to integrate and participate.

Speaker 4 commented on the physical layout of the City as a grid system and used this as a metaphor for our cultural and social structure. She wanted us to work to build a social framework through which people can make contact.

Speaker 5 spoke of being typically white and British but having grown up abroad in a culture very different from that of her parents. From this experience she felt that we could come together and feel united in our relatively new and common home, irrespective of colour or beliefs

Closing Poem

Little Things

*I'm sitting in Costa's Coffee shop;
There's a baby crying;
There always is –
Mothers use the place like a crèche;
The table needs wiping;
And there's a piece of cake trodden onto the floor;
But the coffee's good.*

*An older man comes in;
There's something wrong with his legs;
He eases himself into a chair;
And seems grateful for the rest;
Later his wife brings the tray;
She's a bit flustered and out of breath.*

*There's a middle aged man;
I've seen him before;
With his two sons;
He seems a decent sort, and a good father;
He's speaking into his mobile phone;
Not loud;
And being very positive about his divorce.*

*There's a woman about my age;
She's taken some care with her appearance;
Fastened her blouse with an elegant broach;
And done up her hair;
She's done it for us;
She looks nice.*

*The mother can't comfort her baby;
She's getting increasingly harassed;
Which is making things worse;
When she gives up;
With a middle distance stare;
That takes in a pretty girl;
In a bright, smart cream dress;
Stained with a tiny chocolate smear;
Which has annoyed her;
But then she sees a friend;
And waves and laughs.*

*And everyone is doing their best;
When suddenly my mind disconnects;
And I see the World in wide angle view;
And I know, know;
That now, at this very moment, right now;
Somewhere –*

*There's a man actually pulling a trigger;
A child dying of AIDs in Africa;
A girl being gang raped in the Flavela;
And I'm screaming "What makes this happen?"
In a kind of falling panic...*

*But then, somehow, come back;
To this quiet Middle England town;
And blessed;
Where it's the little things;
That bring this familiar eye pricking sensation;
Of gratitude, and sadness, and compassion.*

*Alan Bainbridge
20th July 2010*

Organisations represented

Arts gateway MK
Bletchley & District Allotment Association
Camphill
Church of Christ the Cornerstone
Citizens:mk, prison work
Future Wolverton
Global Outreach Foundation MK
Jubilee Wood primary School.
LetNet
Lord grey school
Mayor of Milton Keynes
MECG
Milton Keynes Academy
Milton Keynes Community Bank
Milton Keynes Council: all political parties
Milton Keynes Humanists
Milton Keynes Jewish Community
MK Mission Partnership
MK Quakers
MK Snap
MK YCAB
MKC Sheltered Housing
MKMA
New Life Church Milton Keynes
Our Lady of Lourdes RC Parish
People with learning disabilities
Q-Alliance
Refugees welcome
Resident
Service Six
Social enterprise All Small Things
St Augustine Catholic Church
St Edward the Confessor
St Frideswide's Church
St. Francis' Children's Society
Stantonbury LEP
Still Green Co-Housing Group
Summerfield School
Thames Valley Police
The Middle Eastern Cultural Group
Transition MK
Truby's Garden Tea Room
Westbury Arts Centre
Westbury Fabric and Fibre Crafters Guild
Works for Us
YourMK
Zainabiya Islamic centre