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A report on RFF 8th annual Women's Conference and Public Forum

Part of our International Women's Day celebrations, Redbridge Faith Forum in collaboration with Street Pastors and Alzheimer's Society

12th March 2014

The Vine Church, Riches Road, Ilford IG1 1JH



Caring for All our Neighbours

Who is my neighbour? How can we care for all our neighbours?
How do we show our love and compassion to those whose behaviours and lives are at odds with own? Important/vital questions for people of all faiths and none.

The aim of the evening was to raise awareness, help us understand more, inform and challenge some myths, misconceptions and attitudes.



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Redbridge Faith Forum Report from Women's Workshop 11th December 2013

Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF) in collaboration with the Alzheimer's Organisation and Redbridge Street Pastors held its 8th Annual Open Forum on 12th March, marking International Women's Day. Nearly 60 (men and women) attended this stimulating and informative event entitled 'Caring for All our Neighbours'.

How the topic for the Open Forum came about

RFF has a thriving women's group which meets every two months. The purposes of these workshops are to enable women of all ages and from different faith backgrounds to

- meet together and discuss informally topics of importance to them;
- discuss and learn from one another what our different religions teach;
- visit each other's places of worship;
- grow in mutual understanding and respect.

As with all our events women of no faith are welcomed. Indeed many who subscribe to belonging to a faith group say that they are not practitioners, so it is a fairly mixed group.

Over the previous workshops the main topic for discussion had been on an underpinning precept or command of all the faiths to 'Love thy neighbour'. People of faith do not of course hold all the cards or monopoly for love of neighbour. In discussion a number of questions were posed which included: 'How do we show our love and compassion to those whose behaviours and lives are at odds with our own?' Hence, the collaboration with two other charitable and voluntary groups fully involved in 'Caring for All our Neighbours' particularly for the vulnerable in our society.

Although the event arose from the women's group, and was organised to celebrate Women Day there was an open invitation to all -men and women - to this important evening. As always it was great to meet, eat and join in with so many people from different backgrounds

The Venue

The Vine Church in Riches Road gave us a truly generous welcome; many thanks are due to Rev. Francis Ackroyd and his team. In particular thanks go to Dulcie for all the support in setting up the large and very attractive hall and to Ken and Isaac who managed the sound and vision equipment so professionally. Additional external support for the aspects of the event was gratefully received from Near Neighbours and the two presenting groups which contributed to a delightful buffet.



The Programme



Vinaya Sharma and Jacquie Grieve (of RFF management committee) opened the programme giving the background to the event. Alli Anthony of the Alzheimer's Society gave the first presentation, sharing her extensive knowledge, expertise and personal experiences. She gave details of the four main types of dementia and emphasised the importance of early diagnosis. She gave sound and sensitive advice on symptoms to look out for. We were all encouraged to think through the process of making a cup



of tea to demonstrate the number of stages required as an indication of the difficulty and numerous stages involved in managing such a familiar activity when the brain is not functioning so well. It also brought it home to us all how small things can be so distressing and fearful to Dementia sufferers. For example a black doormat can appear like a worrying hole which cannot be trod on. Alli demonstrated the positive impact of loving and showing compassion to people suffering from dementia. She also talked about how difficult it can be for long term carers to continually show that love and compassion. Information was available for support for carers.

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Alli's presentation was very much appreciated:

'[It] was very informative and inspiring [particularly] details of brain.'

'[I have a] better understanding of dementia [and] Views of memory loss and aging.

'I have learned a great deal more about dementia. Wonderful work'

'[One of the things I found most interesting] the different types of Alzheimer's/Dementia, and the different causes and effect.

98% of those completing evaluations said they had gained more insight into Alzheimer's and dementia, the needs of carers and support available for carers.



Monica Abdala and her team of Street Pastors spoke passionately about their work with prostitutes who work in a particular area of Redbridge. They lent us their expertise and gave presentations which were real eye openers. They talked of the women's background and how they had become involved in prostitution. Some were duped, some coerced (sadly sometimes by family members or boyfriends), others in desperation to support a child or children. They told of their drive to close down websites and 'chat rooms' that advertised and 'graded'

(rather degraded) the women. The Street Pastors had created a safe space for the women (hosted at the Salvation Army) where women could talk through their experiences and possible ways out of the prostitution. Monica reported that, without exception the women felt abused and degraded. The team were aware of the issues for the local community but firmly believed in restorative justice and the value of giving care and compassion to the women.

Following the Street Pastors' presentations Monica said:

'It was real a delight to have been given the opportunity to raise awareness and lovingly open the eyes of many on the night. An elderly lady had tears in her eyes when she said that she would never ever look at 'the women of Ilford Lane' the same way she used to....that made my day!!

In response to the question: 'What did you find most interesting/informative this evening?' several responded:

'Street Pastor's presentation on prostitution,'

'The work of the street pastors and prostitution'

'Work of and value of Street Pastors.'

'The Street Pastors talk was very insightful. Enlightening. A stronger awareness.'

'Greater understanding of street workers as people.'

100% of those completing and evaluation said they had gained insight in to the work of the Street Pastors.

In addition to information to hand from the Alzheimer's Society and Redbridge Street Pastors, a number of charitable and voluntary organisations held stalls to display their work and the support they give to the community; many thanks go to Redbridge Carers and Redbridge Domestic Violence One Stop shop for sharing their valuable information.

In Summary and Conclusion

While the two presentation groups seemed to be poles apart, there was real connection in that they can test our resolve to 'love our neighbour'. Ally and Monica helped to raise awareness of some of the needs of 'neighbours' in our community who need our compassion. They both clearly explained the causes of the behaviours of the two groups.

At the end of each presentation, time was allocated for members of the audience to ask questions or share stories which granted everyone further insights. Issues had become very much clearer to all present and all expressed their appreciation for the clear and compassionate information and presentations.

'Both talks were interesting and informative'

'Both subjects were of interest. Both topics were equally good.'

'We should see suffering people as human'

'Just confirmed that we must care for each other'

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