

# WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

The Official UN Observance in the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of February



## Interfaith Buddies: *Tackling Lockdown Loneliness Together*

3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021



During the global pandemic, health professionals across the globe identified loneliness as a key factor in poor mental health and so Interfaith Scotland hosted an Interfaith Buddies series to keep connected to each other; to strengthen interfaith harmony and understanding even during a lockdown situation and to build good mental health for the people of Scotland.

The Interfaith Buddies event brought together individuals from diverse faith communities to 'buddy up' with someone from another faith tradition for friendship building and understanding. The Interfaith Buddies series has had over 60 people sign up from seven different faiths and beliefs (as well as those with no religious affiliation) and everyone who took part said how much they learnt from their buddy and how important friendship is in tackling 'loneliness during lockdown'. Participants shared the depth of their interfaith experience as they explored together the themes of Love of God; Love of Neighbour; and Love of Good and Love of neighbour. We then created a short 10-minute video that highlighted the experience of four of the participants and can be found on our Interfaith Scotland YouTube Link (see below). We also featured the Interfaith Buddies Programme on our e-newsletter and bi-annual newsletter and are able to report that this scheme has been picked up by organisations in Scotland (including Scottish Government) as a way of building good relations during the pandemic.

The YouTube link to the event can be found below;

<https://youtu.be/Hzmbmtn175s>

## Some comments from participants (Zoom chat)

*Thanks for holding such a welcoming and open space - so good to share*

*Inspirational*

*Helped me so much to improve my mental health*

*I don't feel so lonely now*

*Thank you so much - that was just magic*

*Really inspiring thank you*

*Fantastic to have diversity of gender and age - well done*

## Event Information

After an introduction to World Interfaith Harmony Week by Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, two speakers gave a presentation on the theme of 'Connecting through Conversation'. Our first speaker was Trishna Singh, the founder and Director of the Sikh Family Support Charity, Sikh Sanjog, and Punjabi Junction, a café that is the first Sikh women's social enterprise in Scotland. Trishna gave an engaging talk and stated

*As Scottish Sikhs we have much in common with our fellow Scots but it is only through conversations that barriers are broken and friendships are created. We see an increase in the number of people who are simply longing for more opportunities to make real one to one face to face connections with their fellow human beings be they from any race or culture. The staff at Sikh Sanjog have tried to reach out to as many people of different communities and backgrounds as possible.*

The second speaker was Anish Subramaniam, a school pupil from Aberdeen who shared the fascinating research that he had conducted with over 150 people from different backgrounds to find out more about their mental, emotional and spiritual health during the pandemic and ways in which people were connecting with one another, with online activities and showing acts of compassion in supporting others. A copy of the research is available on request from Interfaith Scotland.

Participants were then partnered with a person from a tradition other than their own and had the opportunity to explore what their faith tradition had to say about the World Interfaith Harmony Week themes of Love of God, Love of the good and Love of neighbour. After the talks we heard very moving accounts from some of the buddy pairs who reflected upon their experiences. Rev Peter Gill, a Church of Scotland minister from Pakistan and founder of Renfrewshire Interfaith Group, was paired with Lindsay Taylor, a Scottish Muslim and the current Chair of Interfaith Scotland. Peter and Lindsay were moved and inspired by all that they shared in common on their faith journey. It is envisaged that this event will support people during the global pandemic and beyond by creating opportunities for individuals from the grassroots of Scottish society to build a deep and meaningful friendship with someone from a faith tradition other than their own and that these friendships will last well beyond the pandemic and the Interfaith Buddies scheme will be built upon in the years to come.