Life’s a picnic with Nisa-Nashim

Building up relationships between different local communities is central to the work carried out by the LJRC, so when we were approached regarding the establishment of a Leeds branch of Nisa-Nashim, we knew we wanted to be involved.

For those of you not familiar with it, Nisa-Nashim, meaning women in both Arabic and Hebrew, is a national Government-supported women’s organisation established in 2015 which aims to bring together women from the two communities for both sororal and social welfare purposes.

The LJRC’s Ann Dewar is one of twelve women – six Jewish, six Muslim – who form the steering committee of the newly established Leeds branch, headed by co-chairs Mrs Hilary Curwen and Cllr Salma Arif.

In addition to the well-attended launch event in June, the group also held an extremely successful bring and share picnic at Roundhay Park which, as well as being great fun, was deliciously over-catered!

Whilst enjoying the food, sunshine and great conversation, attendees also talked about women in less fortunate circumstances. As a result, Nisa Nashim will be collecting sanitary products for refugee women as part of Mitzvah Day, on November 27th. If you would like to help collect/contribute to this campaign or would like to join our mailing list to learn more, please email nisanashimleeds@gmail.com
It was one of those stories which wouldn’t have come to light a decade earlier but with the emergence of social media comes the advent of accompanying watchdog sites. On 26th April the Guido Fawkes website reposted a tweet which Naz Shah, now the MP for Bradford West, made back in 2014 calling for the “relocation” of Israel to the US together with an offensive and inflammatory graphic. Following this, the story was picked up by print and broadcast media, bringing additional material to light. On 29th July 2014 Ms Shah had written on Facebook “the Jews are rallying”; on 5th September 2014 she had compared Israel to Hitler on Facebook; and then there were the photos of her anti-Israel protests at Sainsbury’s and McDonald’s, during the latter of which she and her children “played dead” on the floor at one branch of the restaurant chain.

What followed under the glare of media pressure was her resignation as aide to the Shadow Chancellor, followed by her suspension from the Labour party.

The LJRC response was immediate: this was one of our local MPs and the matter needed to be urgently addressed. Additionally, these comments were in direct contrast to those expressed by her during some of the regular meetings which we hold with MPs from around the region. During a long conversation subsequent to this, Ms Shah apologised, expressed remorse and indicated that she would be willing to publicly meet the Jewish community to discuss her actions.

The result was a full-house meeting held at the Sinai Synagogue with attendees from Leeds, Bradford, Liverpool, London and York. A series of hard-hitting questions were put to Ms Shah by Simon Myerson QC, who acted as Chair and by members of the audience.

"I didn't get anti-Semitism as racism," said Ms Shah. "I think what I had was an ignorance...It is my job in the Muslim Community to highlight the issues of anti-Semitism." She also told the audience “I absolutely agree that Israel has a right to defend itself.”

Naz Shah was reinstated following a meeting of the Labour party National Executive Committee in July.
LJRC launches its brand new website

The LJRC will be seeing in its 100th year with a brand new website.

Launched earlier this month it is still under construction but is already accessible and packed with useful information, such as upcoming meetings and events, projects we are involved in and community contacts, all at the click of a button.

LJRC Programme Director, Ann Dewar, said:

"Our new-look website now makes it much easier for everyone to access key information and get involved in our activities.

"2017 marks our organisation’s centenary and we can say with pride that over the 100 years of our existence we've helped bring together the strands of our own community as well as help strengthen links between Jewish and non-Jewish groups. The website is a great way for us to showcase how far we've come and what we are continuing to achieve."

Check it out at www.ljrc.org

Diversity celebrated at local schools

We’ve all heard the expression, ‘same but different’ but when it comes to understanding our cultural and religious differences, as well as celebrating our similarities, it is a phrase that seems particularly relevant.

This is exactly what year six pupils at Brodetsky and Wigton Moor learned about at a thought-provoking presentation delivered by year 13 students from Allerton High School. Part of an interfaith volunteer project launched by the LJRC called ‘Faith in the Future’, the high school pupils wrote and delivered an inspiring presentation to both primary schools about the ways in which the life-cycle is celebrated by different faiths.

Being asked what being British means to them, learning about shared traditions and customs and taking part in a hijab-tying demonstration were just some of the discussions and activities that took place.

As well as being enjoyable for the audience, the sixth formers had a great experience delivering it. One of the participants said that she had been thinking of becoming a primary school teacher and that taking part had helped to confirm it. The programme has been so well received that the LJRC is hoping to roll this out to other schools in the not too distant future.
LJRC volunteer chefs cook up a storm

The LJRC’s Ann Dewar, together with her husband Robert, added their support to the LJWB’s fundraising drive by sponsoring a table at their recent pop-up restaurant. In a local version of the popular ‘Hell’s Kitchen’, professional Chef Papi put a team of local amateur chefs through their paces. As well as being lots of fun, the event helped to raise £4,000 in support of people with learning disabilities in our community.

Currying favour at the food festival

The LJRC’s newest Director for Interfaith, Simon Phillips, served up a wonderful evening for diners at a recent food event at the MAZCC.

Guests enjoyed authentic Israeli, Ashkenazi and Sephardi cuisine as part of the World Curry Festival, which was founded seven years ago by Zulfi Karim. Over the years the Festival has evolved from a focus on curry to a celebration of food across the different cultures and religions. This year places of worship and community venues opened their doors to hold hugely successful pop-up food events across the region. The MAZCC’s ‘Faith in Food’ event, which was organised and compered by Simon, was no exception and attracted people from various faiths and nationalities.

Food is traditionally used by all cultures and religions as a way of bringing people together. We’re sure you’ll agree, what better way to achieve that than to give people a unique opportunity to sample some of the finest food each culture has to offer?

Get well wishes from LJRC

The LJRC is helping to bring a little cheer to hospital patients with its all-new ‘get well’ cards. At the request of Chazan Alby Chait, the Jewish Chaplain for the Leeds NHS Trust, the cards were produced so that he can hand them out when visiting patients.
Leeds welcomes new arrivals at summer bbq

Families who have relocated to Leeds received a welcome that was every bit as warm as the recent summer weather at the first event of its kind.

Hosted jointly by Leeds Jewish Welfare Board and the Leeds Jewish Futures Programme, the barbecue provided an excellent opportunity for the new arrivals to meet each other and existing members of the community. The event attracted almost 100 people and was an instant hit.

Organiser, Susie Gordon, who heads up the LJF programme has been widely praised for her efforts in helping more than 50 Jewish families relocate to Leeds, both from within the UK and from countries around the world. She said: “Relocating can be a daunting experience. Helping families can make such a difference to someone who’s going through a life changing experience so the event was both fun and rewarding! “You can make a big difference with minimal effort and we’re always looking for people who can offer invitations for Shabbat and Yom Tov meals, as well as ‘buddying’ for events, hobbies and activities.”

If you’ve recently moved to Leeds, or would like to meet new arrivals, please contact Susie at the LJRC office.

Support group launched for faulty gene

A faulty gene that puts people at heightened risk of some cancers has prompted a group of volunteers to form a support group.

‘BRCA journey’ aims to raise awareness and provide support to people in our community who may be at risk. It’s made up of people who have been affected by BRCA and it will be holding its first meeting on Wednesday 7th December.

Genetic counsellor, Judith Edhouse, explains: ‘Our genes are our instructions for how we grow and develop. BRCA1 and BRCA2 are two genes usually involved in helping protect us from certain cancers including breast, ovarian, prostate and pancreatic. However, if one of these genes is faulty it won’t work properly, which means that some of that protection is lost, and the risk of developing those cancers increases.”

Carriers have a 50% chance of passing the gene to each of their children. And with around 1 in 40 people within the Ashkenazi Jewish population carrying the faulty ‘BRCA’ gene – amounting to roughly 250 men and women in Leeds alone - it’s a statistic that’s difficult to ignore. Contact us to find out more or to attend the December event.
In a show of support and solidarity 27 members of our community attended Stonefall Airmen’s regional cemetery in Harrogate to honour those who lost their lives during World War II.

Of the 1,061 graves, two thirds were soldiers from the Canadian Air Force who made up the no. 6 bomber group. Many died in Harrogate Hospital.

Seven of these men were Jewish Canadians. With no known relatives, Leeds AJEX and RBL MCB branch members, along with AJEX Chaplain, Rabbi Anthony Gilbert, attend the memorial service every year. Also paying their respects this year was LJRC president, Laurence Saffer, who laid the Leeds AJEX wreath.

Rabbi Gilbert visited each of the Jewish graves and recited ‘el malei rachamim’. The two Standards were dipped, a Magen David poppy was placed by each grave and a small stone was placed on top, as is the tradition. At the seventh grave Rabbi Gilbert recited the 23rd psalm in Hebrew and said Kaddish.

War Memorial Biographies

One of the civic elements of the LJRC President’s duties is to attend many of the Remembrance ceremonies held within the area. It was at one such event that Lawrence first came across a booklet of biographies for those war fallen who were being honoured at that cemetery.

“I was immediately struck by what a fantastic idea it was,” he said, “it immediately personalised the act of remembrance and it’s something we should replicate.”

As a result, the LJRC is working with Mandy Bergen, PhD, to create a commemoration booklet containing biographies of those in our community who lost their lives fighting in both World Wars. If you have any information, artefacts or photos of relatives who perished during the wars that you’d be happy to share please email: jewishwarmemorial@gmail.com

Speaking Up

Do you enjoy public speaking? Are you interested in Judaism, Holocaust education or Israel? Then why not join our newly re-formed Speakers’ Panel?

As part of our efforts to reach out to the wider community we’ve been speaking to schools and community groups to raise awareness about who we are and what we do. Such work has been particularly valuable with leaders of Muslim communities throughout Leeds and Bradford who are also looking for partners in peace.

If you’re interested in coming to our meeting on 6th December, please contact us to find out more.
May the force be with you

The LJRC has always prided itself on its long-standing partnership with West Yorkshire Police. Those ties were strengthened further after BHH Synagogue invited the force’s senior leadership team to hold its regular joint planning meeting there.

LJRC president, Laurence Saffer, discussed with them the community’s hopes and concerns, as well as the ongoing interfaith and community engagement work taking place. Officers were then given a tour of the synagogue and shown the Sefer Torah.

Paul Money, from the force’s senior leadership team later tweeted:

Spotlight on the LJRC’s Interfaith Director

Simon Phillips has held leadership positions within the Jewish and wider communities, both locally and nationally, for almost 25 years. Previously a lecturer and researcher in academic institutions, Simon currently works as a community engagement officer at West Yorkshire Police and has his own show on Radio J-Com.

Here the LJRC’s newest director gives us a flavour of some of the latest projects he’s been involved in:

“Since joining the LJRC team in March, one of my primary aims has been to encourage community cohesion by establishing links with other faith and minority communities. I’ve made good headway in achieving these goals, engaging on three broad levels: locally, city-wide and nationally. My role involves anything from providing guidance and support on local interfaith projects, to working with civic leaders, other faith communities and minority communities, as well as dealing with the Board of Deputies to address shared concerns from the Jewish community.

I’m also part of the Leeds Jewish Interfaith Network (LJIN), which aims to build relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish communities, both locally and nationally. This includes work to educate people about our religion, culture and history.

Additionally there’s scope to work with other communities regarding shared concerns, for example genocide remembrance within the Bosnian community; one of several areas I’ll be exploring in the coming months.”

The LJIN aims to meets quarterly. If you’d like to find out more or be part of the LJIN, please contact simonphillips90@hotmail.com or 07786 798929.
It has always been a central tenet of the LJRC that the Leeds Jewish community be an inclusive and welcoming one for everyone. With this in mind, a series of meetings were arranged at which Leeds-born Benjamin Ellis, a Trustee of Keshet UK, was invited to address local clergy and lay leaders.

Founded in 2011, Keshet UK offers training around safeguarding and inclusivity for the LGBTQ community in all areas of Jewish life. As a result of these meetings, some community members will be attending specialist safeguarding training and it is hoped that a Jewish LGBTQ social and support group will be established within the community.

Please get in touch if you would like to find out more.

Becoming Bar Mitzvah leaves such a vivid imprint on the memory that with the help of prompts, such as photographs, menus, benschers or a parshah, sufferers are able to recall their special day. Anecdotes can include anything from the food eaten and music played, to the conversations people had.

Some of the most cherished childhood memories of people suffering from dementia are being captured in a personalised inter-generational Bar Mitzvah scrapbook.

The LJRC was approached by Paul Tolkien on behalf of the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board and Leeds Jewish Housing Association to assist during the planning stages of The Bar Mitzvah Project, an initiative aimed at reclaiming some precious memories of those suffering from dementia.

We are now working on creating the new edition of the LJRC Year Book and YOU can help make it a very special one.

As well as providing an invaluable directory for the local community, our Year Book is one of the few ways we have of funding the work that we do. The LJRC doesn’t aim to make a profit but we do need to cover our costs. Please help by taking out an advert or becoming a Patron of our centenary edition.

We are your Rep Council, here’s to the next 100 years!

info@ljrc.org Tel 0113 2185869

Over 100 guests from different communities across Leeds and Bradford, including LJRC President Laurence Saffer, came together to help celebrate the 90th birthday of Rudi Leavor, the Chairman and President of the Bradford Synagogue. Mr Leavor has been President of Bradford Synagogue Council since 1975.

Happy birthday Rudi

Treasured memories captured in albums

A very special book has been published to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Concord, entitled A Leeds Interfaith Story 1946-2016. The book explores the origin and growth of the different faith communities in Leeds and of the key individuals who have promoted interfaith.

40 years of Concord

LJRC Centenary Year Book

Keshet UK