| **THIFF Forum Meeting Minutes: Dying Matters Awareness Week 2021** |
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| **Location:** | **Online, Zoom** |
| **Date:** | **Monday 10 May 2021** |
| **Time:** | **6-8pm** |

## **Welcome – Rev Alan Green, Chair**

Rev Green welcomed attendees, noting that for some it was their first meeting.

## **Rachel Buttrick from London Borough of Tower Hamlets: Community Collect Programme**

* Council involved in distributing tests, part of broader asymptomatic testing programme.
* Asking faith settings to distribute ‘take home’ testing kits to make testing accessible to all
* The council would appreciate the support of faith groups for either option below:

1. As a community collect point – giving tests out to worshippers and the general public

2. Not publicly advertised – given out to worshippers as they enter/leave building.

* Council can provide support, supply infection prevention items, cleaning materials and test information that can be given out.

**Questions:**

*Q: What is required if becoming public distribution center, e.g., space and staff?*

A: Sufficient space for desk and a socially distanced queue of a couple of people. The council can provide agency staff for community collect point that is serving general public. Test kits do come with information so any volunteers etc. would not need to have in-depth conversation, but to advise people to read instructions and point out the website or telephone helpline number. Non-public distribution may be more viable for smaller buildings.

*Q: Are the instructions in community languages?*

A: This is a work in progress at the moment.

*Q: How many faith communities are already signed up?*

A: A number of faith settings have signed up and others are interested.

*Q: How long will this be running?*

A: Not sure as funded by central government up until June but might be extended.

*Q: What is the intention behind the programme?*

A: People pick testing kits up as they are going about their everyday lives so putting collection points in churches makes testing ordinary part of life, like for example libraries. Faith leaders have the reach to people that the Council does not.

Surge Testing

In addition to the Community Collect project, the council is also requesting the faith settings within surge testing areas distribute PCR tests. If anyone is interested, please email Faith Covid Assistance Partnership jenny.hadgraft@faithaction.net or THIFF at info@faithintowerhamlets.org

## **Dying Matters Awareness Week & Rev April Keech, St Paul Old Ford**

Dying Matters started in 2009 in Hackney and attempts to address issues around death and dying. It has now become a national organisation and is funded by Department of Health and NHS England to bring issues of death out of the shadow. We hope that the borough plans a programme of events in the future to support the awareness weeks.

Death Cafes

* Death Cafés are a safe space to talk about death and to listen to others talking about their experiences of losing someone or planning for their death, and its impact on them and those around them.
* Started in Hackney but now thousands worldwide.
* Anyone can advertise their Death Café on the website but have to sign up to their guidelines.
* Ideal setting for a Café would be: A large enough room to accommodate some tables and food and drinks.

Guidelines include:

1. Listen as well as speak
2. No judgmental comments on how someone else has experienced or thinks about death
3. No giving advice or making commentary
4. Give space for people to speak and then pause a moment. Raise hand to say I have finished…helps with heightened emotions.

Tips:

* Ask people to introduce themselves
* Have some written prompts on each table
* Use the first ten minutes to remind people of guidelines and set aside ten at the end so that people don’t leave with heightened emotions.
* Feedback forms are helpful – most people feedback that the sessions are very valuable
* Have a list of local and national resources around bereavement and mental health available
* Sharing your own experiences of death may be useful
* Aim for no more than 20-25 people in a face-to-face setting, or 10 if online.

Experiences:

Some people find death hard to talk about due to cultural norms, or how their family deals with death.

Others have ‘frozen grief’ – that they have not managed to help with, and the sessions really help.

*Comment:* I attend a death café – held at a church but not about religion. Due to Covid there is a huge amount of bereavement not being reached and the death café a really good thing for this.

**Questions**

*Q: Do people go away with gratitude and celebration for their life?*

A: People come for all kinds of reasons, people may talk about a terminal ailment and want a different space to talk about it…. people do feel it makes them think and appreciate their lives. People leave feeling more positive than they thought.

*Q: How much time do you put aside for the Death Café to happen?*

A: Two hours but less time for a small group.

*Q: Is the intention for people to regularly attend?*

A: People sometimes dip in and out. Some groups do meet regularly and build trust with one another.

*Q: What should you do to prepare for starting a Death Cafe?*

A: Go and take part in one first and make some table prompts and guidelines. Talk over with the leader of the group. Grave Talks – five different sections, life, death, funerals, grief etc., produced by Church of England but not faith based, just question prompts, but start with simple prompts.

*Q: Can it be useful if setting up for own community? Or should an outsider organise the sessions?*

A: It is great if the person knows the community, maybe someone who has had pastoral training and has a sensitivity, they should go to one to see how they are run. Some people run men only sessions, or youth sessions with the relevant safeguarding etc.

*Q: What types of setting should be used? Can it be done in cafes and workplaces?*

A: We have capacity to make our large church space into a community space, by sectioning part off. The setting depends on the size of the group as there can be issues around space and confidentiality – it helps having a contained space that helps people feel safe.

*Comment:* A place like the Idea Store is good as it is neutral for all faiths.

## **Hate Crime**

Unfortunately, there was not a Met police representative available for the meeting, but Rev Green could provide details on hate crime statistics:

266 Hate crimes from beginning of January to end of March – which is a rise. Hotspot in North West of borough.

203 race hate

50 faith hate

31 homophobic hate

2 transphobic hate

7 disability hate

3 vulnerability hate

Hotspots: Weavers – Columbia Road, mainly race hate crimes but also 11 anti-Semitic crimes by one person until their arrest. Should be remembered that one person committing the crimes can figures seem skewed, so the analysis of these stats is important.

*Comment:* General trend is that it is rising, year on year, in Coventry they are asking people to rely on community info and perception rather than the data, conversations and feelings are more important than usual as the data can be weak and not comparable to previous years.

*Comment:* Misogyny will be added as hate crime from autumn, following Sarah Everard murder and long campaigns. Police forces will have to monitor this – hate crimes on the basis of gender.

## **AOB**

Memorial Events

The borough is planning for memorial event linked to pandemic for July; to mark the last year and a half as we are seemingly coming out of pandemic. It will aim to honour and remember people, recognise effects of community work, and bring people together. There will be a formal borough event alongside local get togethers to celebrate all these things and also to mark sadness. Updates to follow.

Asylum Seekers

THIFF attended a virtual meeting of London councils on asylum seekers – the whole position of hotel situation is chaotic and hard for councils to be on top of – particularly if they are not informed of people being put in hotels. There are currently 2000 people across London, and their re housing dates are being constantly extended. There is concern around the treatment and the health of the asylum seekers. Care for Calais are doing work in the borough, but things are very disjointed at present.

Partnership Racial Inequality Delivery Group

Tower Hamlets has been clear that institutional racism still exists, and Rev Green is now the faith rep on the delivery group. The work is a worthwhile attempt to ensure that Black Lives Matter is integrated into all borough policy and work, but delivery may be difficult and there are concerns about how it integrated with the other existing hate crime work.

*Comment:* Benedicta at No Place for Hate reminded that newcomers to the No Place for Hate forum are very welcome, and it is open to all. [See here for details](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/community_and_living/community_safety__crime_preve/hate_crime/personal_pledge.aspx).