



Solidarity with migrants and refugees in troubled times

By Liam Cunningham

With the crisis in Afghanistan, refugee policy is again at the top of the political agenda. As we know all too well at times like these the media can promote fear, politicians can use populist rhetoric and division can spread in our communities.

To combat this Initiatives of Change's Sustainable Communities Programme organised an inspiring and timely four-day training programme at the Tarling Road Community Hub in East Finchley entitled "Intergenerational Dialogue for Social Cohesion with Migrants and Refugees in Europe" from 23-26 August.

Across four days at the end of August, more than twenty participants gathered with members from the host community, activists, faith leaders, and local political representatives with the goals of building relationships across generations and strengthening relations

across religious, political, and ideological divides.

Speaking, listening and sharing

Amina Khalid who organised the training said: "With so much conflict in the world, we must double our efforts to work together towards a common humanity. Being a witness to war and conflict first hand, I have come to understand the importance of building bridges with those who do not share the same values as myself."

In dialogue with Tauhid Pasha, the International Organisation for Migration's acting Chief of Mission, Jimmy, an

activist and musician from Manchester, shared his story of internal displacement. He said: "Although I am a white British man, there have been many moments where I felt an 'outsider' in my own country".

Several local politicians spoke. Councillors Barry Rawlings, Sara Conway and Arjun Mitra joined in an interactive dialogue session as they shared some of the issues facing their communities. One of the younger participants asked Cllr Barry: "Did racism exist in the past?"

Over 60 people consisting of participants' family, friends and community members joined to celebrate the closing ceremony as participants gave moving testimonies and received certificates from Councillors Arjun Mitra and Sara Conway.

The project was run in partnership with the Spanish organisation Foro-Abraham, supported by the International Dialogue Centre and hosted by the Somali Bravanese Welfare Association



The gentle art: Instructor Rod McArthur holds a Tai Chi position. Photo Mike Coles

Martial arts that can heal your body

By David Gritten

For many people, the phrase 'martial arts' conjures up images from film or TV of two men using their legs and arms to land blows on each other. It often looks hostile.

But there's far more to the martial arts than that, insists Rod Macarthur, who teaches Tai Chi and a similar, if somewhat gentler discipline, Qi Gong (or Chi Kung), to a weekly class of some 22 students at East Finchley's Martin School.

Graceful movement

"My first teacher told us: 'You're healing your body when you're doing these movements,'" Rod recalls. "And for me that's been true. I've been learning about martial arts since I was a teenager. I don't like running, I don't like going to the gym. But something clicked with me when I was about 13. It may have been when the first rerun of David Carradine in *Kung Fu* came on TV! That got me hooked to this enchanted world of graceful movement.

"I did it for a while, but then moved away from it. I became office-bound and started to get a lot of neck trouble. I recognised I needed to move around more, saw an ad for a local Tai Chi class and went along. It had such an appeal for me and it sorted my neck out."

As for the notion that he was

healing his body, Rod admits to being sceptical at first: "But now I think there's definitely a grain of truth in it – and I'm testament to that. At least you're giving your body time to heal by exercising it in a way which is very low impact yet also beneficial to the way your body works."

Challenges and changes

He teaches classes under the auspices of the Mei Quan Academy, which was established in 1990 and began teaching Tai Chi in 1992; it now has 40 branches in Greater London alone and offers teaching in both Tai Chi and Qi Gong. Rod hopes to introduce a dedicated Qi Gong class soon.

"Some students are currently online," he observes. "So while I'm in the hall, I'm also delivering a 'broadcast class' on Zoom at the same time."

Rod, who has a notably relaxed manner, admits: "I'm a bit evangelical about it at times. I say it's changed my life, which is a grandiose statement – but it has. The change is linked to being set certain challenges in Tai Chi by teachers. They've made me assess parts of my life I felt needed to change."



Ready to serve: Viola Slodzinska was an excellent cook involved with East Finchley Neighbourhood Support's Food Project

In memory of a local hero

By Carol During

Many of you will have come across the familiar face of local resident Violetta Slodzinska, who sadly passed away on 12 September.

Viola, as she was fondly known by many in the community, was one of the lead caterers with The Food Project, providing free meals to individuals and families who find themselves in need every Tuesday from the Phoenix Cinema in East Finchley.

The enormous support given by Viola to local people during the pandemic was the subject of a past article in this newspaper. As a result of her efforts, Barnet Council recognised Viola by featuring her on its community posters.

Before her illness, Viola was

a regular supplier of quality handmade food which was sold locally at Budgens and Tony's Continental on the High Road.

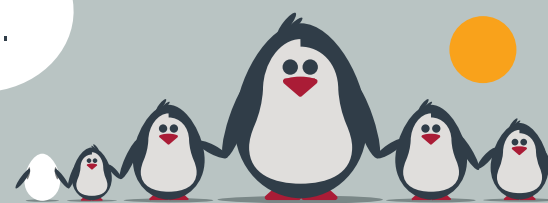
We, the friends and family of Violetta, are now asking the community to support our efforts to raise money to help with her funeral costs. For those who are able, please could you help by making a contribution at: justgiving.com/crowdfunding/violas-sendoff. Next month *The Archer* hopes to carry an obituary for Viola. Personal memories of her are welcomed at news@the-archer.co.uk.

Back to the table

East Finchley Table Tennis Club has resumed playing at the Green Man Centre in Strawberry Vale, N2. Players meet there to play on three tables on Tuesdays from 2.15 to 3.45pm and on Thursdays from 10.15 to 11.45am. New members are welcome, with a cost of £20 for six sessions. Call Mike on 07815 970475.

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