

**Marilyn speaks about the origins of the Peace Mala and her Interfaith work. interviewed by Amanda Harwood 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017.**

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**0-4 mins:** AH: Can you explain to us about Cyril's idea of Peace at Community House? Marilyn explains that it is not just the idea of peace at Community House but Cyril's idea for peace in the world. She explains Cyril's leanings towards the Quakers and that he had been to Hiroshima when he was Mayor of Newport, as a local peace envoy. He was Minister at Community House and it was his idea to build a Community centre that anyone could use – that anyone could come here and be supported, and it be a place of peace. "We've worked for the past 50 years carrying on with this ethos" (of Peace in the world).

Marilyn attended church when Cyril was not the minister anymore. What he believed was still carried out. A Christian church ran the church the time, 'To show God's love in the community'.

A large community changed from Welsh white to become a diverse community – people from Bangladesh and Somalia amongst many.

Marilyn was interested in interfaith work and was teaching full time, so she did not have much time. She was part of the Management committee at Community House that was chaired by Cyril.

"Once I retired though, almost one week later, I took on a job at Community House and this job was called Interfaith Development Worker. Without any real experience, except the experience of working with people, I started the work ten years ago now. That would be July 2007. It has been a fantastic ten years although I haven't been actually working as a paid employee for that time. I was for six years, then I decided to retire. The retirement has not meant very much because the work still goes on. In that time Community House has changed from being run by the Church to being run as a charitable company with its own Trustees. I am the Secretary of the Charitable Company and the Company Secretary. I still do very much the things I did when I was working there. One of those projects that I took on was to become involved with Peace Mala.

**4 – 6 minutes: AH:** Can you tell us a little about who started Peace Mala and how it started?

**MP:** Yes, it is very interesting. It was a really good project started by Pam Evans, who was head of R.E. in a school in Swansea. It was a school with great diversity amongst the pupils and she found that after 9/11, the Muslim children were being much castigated for what had happened. They were having a really bad time, so she sat and thought about what she could do. She came up with the idea that every faith, every single faith, has at its core the idea of the "Golden Rule". The Golden Rule which says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". So, in each faith that is a part of it.

Pam decided to design a mala, which for her was a bracelet with beads on it. Each coloured bead, and the beads were the colour of the rainbow, would represent a particular World Faith. So, it was a double rainbow with a white bead in the middle,

which stands for everyone's own spiritual journey. Of course, lots of people say that they don't have a faith but that in itself tells you something about them and is something that might change.

**6 – 9 minutes:** So, Pam's idea was as people strung the beads and learned about the golden rule for that particular faith, then they would learn that we have more in common than separates us, and that everyone deserves respect. Since then the idea has gone out so that all the equalities are included, not just faith. So, you have gender for example and we know that lots of people have a bad time because of their gender. That is something that is a part of Peace Mala now. Basically, everyone deserves respect and should be treated as a person in their own right. They might believe something different from you, might do something different from you but the way to deal with them is to find out; to find out what they believe, to find out what they are and to respect them for that.

Pam took Peace Mala to other schools to engage children with the ethos. They included topics such as ***Global Citizenship***.

**9 – 12 minutes: Marilyn speaks about Community House becoming a Peace Mala Centre.**

**MP:** Community House was honoured to become the first Peace Mala, Community Centre.

**AH:** How did that actually come about? Did you go and see her?

**MP:** What actually happened was that she was at an event in Cardiff. This was just as I started to do the interfaith work in Community House. One of our Elders met her and she explained the project to him. He came back to Community House full of this idea. At the time because I was doing a job that no one else had done, there weren't many rules and regulations about how this job would be done and what the job would entail. So it seemed to me that this was a really good project that would fit in with our idea of interfaith in Community House. We were doing most of the things that a Peace Mala Centre would be required to do.

**AH:** Sorry to butt in but did you actually make the bracelets as well?

**MP:** Yes we did. So first of all when we had our peace events, Pam came up from Swansea and did workshops making the peace malas. I think this probably happened two or three times before we actually became a Peace Mala Community Centre. Two of us went to local schools and explained the peace mala project to them. We took in information and the beads to be strung. There was quite a lot of activity around that and then, when we decided we would apply for accreditation.

I filled in a long form, in which I could put all of the things that we do at Community House. This was against various aspects that were required of a peace mala accredited centre. We knew that we were doing most of the things. There was no doubt about that and we did not have to do anything in particular.

The only problem that we did have, I suppose, was that it does say on the peace mala form: "to engage with charities for animals", things like a donkey sanctuary or

whatever. We were so busy with everything else we did, we not really do that. We did feed the birds in the garden and we did also grow vegetables in the garden, with some of the groups. One of our Elders plants hundreds of trees and had done it for years and years, so we did have something to put in that area. Most of it, where you talked about interfaith, we do over and above what we needed to do.

It was still a challenge filling in the form to get everything together and to get photographic evidence of all of it. Since I have taken thousands of photographs while I have worked, it was just a case of organising it. So we were a peace mala centre.

**12 – 14 minutes:** It was really very exciting because we went to Manchester, three of us. There were Susan Lewis, Ingrid Wilson and myself. We went to Manchester and we were presented with our certificate by Terry Waite. He was a peace envoy in the Lebanon who was captured and kept in prison, in solitary confinement, for quite a few years. He was a fantastic person to be presenting our certificate. The event was in an old monastery, which had been done up. It was absolutely wonderful, a wonderful, wonderful place. Cyril Summer's daughter sent us message, as we were on our way to Manchester, to say "Have a lovely day, well done! " Then I was able to talk about Cyril on the stage and say how he would have really appreciated the event. I also said how we were able to carry on his vision.

Since then, three years later, we had to do it all again. This time we did not have a grand event, but we did have an event in Community House. After the first time because there were lots of people who were interested and we could not all go to Manchester. So we had our little event in Community House. A certificate was presented again but this time to one of the Muslim women. She is someone who supports our work very much, Sughra Muhammed. The second time Pam came from Swansea to present the certificate in Community House and again we had children from the local school doing a peace mala workshop, people singing and all sorts of the really nice things that tend to go on in our events at Community House. That was really lovely.

**15 – 17 minutes:** We are now in the process of applying for our Gold Award. Marilyn is not sure how it will differ – she reiterates that Community House has been working on the Peace Mala ethos for over 50 years. Pam still visits our events and is keen to get local children involved. We hope with the A Thousand Voices project to bring it into the local schools.

***AH: Has Peace Mala been introduced into Secondary Schools or is it just Primary?***

Marilyn explains that she visited a Secondary School near Merthyr – it was mainly Welsh white and she doubted that they would take it on because in areas of diversity it matters more.

**18 – 20 minutes:** There is a drive in Manchester and in a special school to link to Peace Mala. Recently there was a Peace Mala liturgy in Llandaff Cathedral. Marilyn explains that this was a big event and women from Coffee 'n' Laughs attended. We sang the new Peace Mala anthem together. On our Peace Day on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017, we had a singing workshop and learnt the new song so that we could perform it. Children from Manchester and Swansea attended the liturgy in Cardiff.

**21 – 23 minutes: *How does Community House promote a peaceful society?***

MP: With such diversity in Maindee – for instance, in the local primary school 33 languages are spoken at home. It would be easy for people to stick within their own communities and be isolated. If something goes wrong, you need to be able to call on people and be friends. It is important to try and understand each other and make friends. So, to promote a peaceful society, we have lots of groups that meet here – ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), with a creche attached, there's Coffee 'n' Laughs women's group that has IT lessons...we do loads of things together. The women here support the ethos of Community House. There's an Asian men's group here that we've worked hard to keep going. We want to open it up so that they learn new activities other than sit and play cards. There are new people coming into Community House.

AH: Are people of other faiths coming?

Marilyn mentions another interfaith group, but it doesn't appear to be going so well and she feels partly responsible, however there have been a lot of illnesses so attendance has been low – they plan to restart it. There are many faiths coming to Community House – we have Bahia, Muslims, Jews and even Pagans. Marilyn feels optimistic mainly because some new people who have come to the area who are very charismatic and capable of getting things done. The Bahia community have arranged events and everyone is welcome. One member (used to be a Trustee) has started the Onyx Foundation – Dr. Abdullah wants to work with Community House at a higher level. He wants to try to get people of different faiths to agree, seek out things in common and take this to the Welsh Assembly. He is part of the Interfaith Council of Wales (Marilyn is also a member).

**26 – 28 minutes:** Lots of Christians, from Eritrea, Pakistan and the Caribbean use our Church as a place of worship. We have parties together, but we don't worship together because our Churches 'are Church' in a different way. Eastern Europeans come here for English lessons and we have events, for example we will have a Christmas party and people will come and talk to each other. We have a number of Asylum seekers from China and other countries. Marilyn supported an Iraqi asylum seeker for a while.

AH: Is your reach expanding?

Marilyn explains that they have been able to expand on their existing activities. They received a grant from the People's Health Trust which is mainly Lottery money. The aim is to set things up so that people will eventually run things for themselves, for instance someone would be encouraged to organise a trip or an event, so different people would get involved in different aspects of arranging an event. We have paid for an ESOL English teacher out of the money and also a

**29 minutes:** creche, hired rooms, computer teachers and singing events. The grant has enabled us to do lots more than we couldn't do before.

There are difficulties concerning the integration of asylum seekers due to formalities. Older people come here now, many are widows and with the funding we have been able to attract younger people.

**30 – 32 minutes:** At St. Julian's comprehensive school, there are pupils getting involved and want to start something similar for 15-25 year olds. Marilyn explains

that they put on activities that people want rather than put on activities that we think they want.

AH: How can we support Peace Mala?

Pam Evans retired from teaching not long after starting the Peace Mala project. She does the work on her own – she has trustees on board but they are always short on money. They can make some money by selling the beads and delivering workshops and by 'hosting the Doves'.

When you have a dove you pay £20 to support them. Apart from that, tell people about it and hope that schools would take it on because it is a really lovely project – any school that takes it on would be a better school for it. We would do threading the beads workshop and explaining the ethos behind it. There's a lovely website and animations with music by Carl Jenkins, showing the peace mala dove flying across the world. Google Peace mala and you'll find it.

### **33 - 36 minutes: Plans for the future**

We will carry on our interfaith work, I'm sure of that and hope that Peace Mala will be part of that. We hope to get our Gold award soon – in February we will have a Peace Mala event that Pam will come to. We will have the 3 schools involved, they have already been on a discovery trail at Community House with **A Thousand Voices**. It will be building an on-going relationship between us and the local schools. St. Joseph's have already made a wall display about the pupils' visit to Community House. We hope that they will continue to be a Peace Mala school – maybe this could be an annual event. Year 4 children from Maindee Primary school come in to visit the older people at Tuesday Lunch Club to talk about artefacts from the Second World War. It is a marvellous history lesson.

**37 minutes – 38 minutes** (end): We hope that as a result of the A Thousand Voices project, we hope that younger people will come to Community House and get involved in new projects over the longer term because the Trustees are getting old!