

“Being Human Ought to be Enough”

Report of a conversation on Creating a Fairer Scotland: What Matters to You?

Craighead Institute for Life and Faith

About this event

This event took place at Renfield St Stephens, Glasgow on Saturday 10th October 2015. 18 people¹ took part in the 2 hour conversation which was convened and facilitated by the Craighead Institute for Life and Faith and was open to people of all faiths and backgrounds. Funding was provided by the Fairer Scotland Engagement Fund.

The Craighead Institute aims to strengthen people to work for a more just world by integrating their life, faith and values. It is particularly concerned to ensure that the voices of people who are marginalised are heard. The organisation runs courses and offers reflective sessions to help (primarily lay) people turn their faith commitment into action for social justice in their community and develop their leadership capacities.

The reason for holding the event was to engage people from faith communities in the National Conversation in order to include their views and experience of social justice issues.

In her introduction, Karen Armstrong from the Social Justice and Regeneration Division at Scottish Government explained that inequality is a priority for the First Minister. The Scottish Government wants to hear people’s voices about how to create a fairer Scotland and is serious about setting a long-term goal: 2030. Some 100 events will have been held by December. Next steps are a Citizens’ Assembly to be followed by a People’s Action Plan. Karen described with enthusiasm a typical week in her job and the range of groups she has visited. Officials are being encouraged to listen openly and report to Ministers on all the views expressed.

Participants

The conversation was publicised by email and personal contact through a range of networks including Interfaith Glasgow, the Iona Community, the Amaan project, Justice and Peace Scotland and Faith in Communities Scotland.

Booking was through Eventbrite, email or word of mouth. The event was booked out with 30 people registered. On the day the overwhelming majority of the 18 people who attended were from Christian denominations and included former participants in the Craighead Institute’s Integrating Life and Faith course, members of the Justice

¹ Plus the organiser and representative from Scottish Government

and Aid Network, St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, St Aloysius Public Life Group and the Glasgow Homelessness Network.

Participants worked in four small groups. Images were spread on the tables and participants were invited to pick one that represented what a fairer Scotland would mean to them. This then opened a group discussion with some feedback shared across the whole room. Each person wrote something on a green leaf post-it and attached it to their image and these were photographed.

What can be done?

Having identified issues that they felt mattered to them for a Fairer Scotland, participants were asked to work in the same groups to talk about what action they thought was needed to address these. Points were put up on flipcharts and then discussed in the whole group. All the points are reported below, organised under the themes that emerged. These themes are summarised with a title and an explanatory sentence.

Accountability

Policy and legislation should be made accountable to values of fairness and equality

- What are ethical boundaries of Government/power?
- Laws should be taken into account in a FAIR way.
- Subject to enquiry – accountability- values

Co-production

Policy should be made with and for people and civic groups

- Discuss policies/laws with public rather than imposing.
- People power – get behind groups with conviction-freedom of speech is now lost!
- Listen (national conversation) different perspectives – then ACT.

Civic capacity building

Improve people's capacity to influence by informing them about different powers at Scottish and UK levels, providing local opportunities for people to discuss issues in a safe space and supporting citizenship education.

- Government help us understand who has responsibility for what can be done by the Scottish Government and what is UK responsibility.
- Help people understand different levels of power e.g. Scotland/Westminster and where to take issues.
- Small groups like this, conversations in communities may give people confidence to speak to councillor, MSP. (Voice to the voiceless).
- Communication
- Education to involve citizenship – including everyone in society, many are unaware of how other people live

More respectful attitudes and behaviours to all people and their human rights.

There was a strong conviction in all the groups that respect for all people should be modelled from the highest level and that stigmatising language should be challenged. As one participant put it poignantly:

“Being human ought to be enough”.

- Role models – how to behave. Culture of being disparaging/disrespectful.
- Lack of respect from some officials at high levels – use of language
- Government to role model respectful behaviour – hopefully this will cascade.
- We all need to role model respectful behaviour to each other as people.
- Stop rubbishing people (including politicians).
- . Respectful for people e.g. those on welfare – they are people not scroungers (use of language).

Value and build family and community

Support must be directed to supporting families, early years and community networks to counter individualism

- Value parent who wants to stay at home to raise kids.
- Grow communities – big focus on the individual.
- Integrated health /education support for early years (0-5), funding for play groups/support groups losing funding, this also reduces places for mum's to get together for support.

Access

Reduce barriers to accessing benefits and require communication and procedures to be accessible and inclusive.

- Reduce bureaucracy in benefits assessment/fit to work.
- Help to be available for people to help to complete forms.
- Make services accessible language/technology/IT/particular needs/disabilities

Be intolerant of poverty and challenge culture in which it is accepted.

There was disquiet that we are too accepting of poverty (food banks) and a desire to address poverty and its causes directly.

- Limits to pay day loan charges.
- Benefits systems – no safety net, sense of punishment – access
- Access to food – good food.
- Do we need to help struggling food banks – crisis assistance. Being mindful of the Canadian experience.

How can you and your community play a role in helping to shape our future?

We decided to adapt this question by focusing on sharing examples of activities that participants knew to be happening in their communities or were already involved in ('seeds of hope') in order to build awareness of what can be done and encourage further involvement.

The groups were invited to answer this by reflecting: what inspires you? what gives you energy? what draws you?

Seeds of hope

- Public life group
- Letting people know about the availability of palliative care.
- Support for carers who don't recognise themselves as such (e.g. carers for people with dementia).
- Support for hospices.
- Re-cycling glasses to third world.
- Recycling rosary beads abroad.
- Highlighting dementia care in church.
- Raising awareness of support of hospice movement.
- Food banks – blessing food donations.
- 24 names at advent. A candle lit at each Mass – representing a persecuted Christian – connect have booklet with names.
- Picked up young man on drugs.....now he's on a mission in Indonesia. He had never been touched by love in his life. One church goes out on Saturday nights to invite people for a coffee.
- Helping people challenge DWP – Glasgow Homeless Network. Peer Advocacy Group supporting people.
- Local Pub sent a lorry every day to camp at Calais – with pots, pans – to help out. They just did it.
- Joyous Choir of Maryhill Integration Network – music together despite really difficult lives of asylum seekers and refugees.
- New resource by Amaan Group for women asylum seekers to look after mental health.
- Media dealing with Scottish issues
- Cultural awareness of Art and Background – new programme for identity.
- Practical – glasses, hearing aids – recycle – church group initiatives.
- Difference Craighead has made through Integrating Life and Faith Course – confidence to speak out, enlivening sense of social justice, spark that can be lit at the right time.
- Justice and Peace Scotland connecting many social justice organisations. Has website, magazine and many local groups nationally.

- Youth Music Initiative - under Creative Scotland funding, Lanarkshire Guitar and Mandolin Association enabled 100 primary school kids to access music tuition by overcoming the barrier of financial restraints, providing free instruments and reduced fees – making participation possible.
- Loaves and Fishes – support families in crisis and homeless people with food, toys for children and meals.
- Helping Hands Initiative – do odd jobs around homes and gardens for people who are elderly and /or infirm.
- Paired reading in schools – helping children become confident.
- Poverty Truth Commission – those in poverty sit at the table with officials and politicians – their voice is equal.
- Glasgow Women’s Library – offers opportunities and support to women from all walks of life living within Glasgow; meeting places, literacy classes, crafting, financial information, support connections.
- Springburn Food Initiative – not a Food Bank! Creating access to cheap sources of good food.
- Our local hospices, providing care and support for those living with life limiting illnesses and their families, including supporting children and young people. They also provide bereavement support..

Final thoughts

At the end the group gathered and passed round a lit candle and silently thanked each person for their contribution. Over lunch participants were asked to reflect on what they had noticed, wondered or realised from the session and to note their thoughts on a speech bubble. These are the responses.

- Enjoy discussions groups, making friends and [considering]other topics.
- There must always be hope!
- Thank you to Craighead for bringing together a group to put forward our views to Scottish Government. We all want a fairer Scotland where everyone is treated with Respect, where all children are given access to health, education and care that is not a postcode lottery. We also need a “safety net” and the benefits system fixed.
- A wonderful morning most informative – hope it bears fruit. Everything was super, people, discussion etc. St Aloysius – (Public Life Group).
- I’m glad that my Scottish Episcopal congregation is finding ways to undertake activities with our neighbouring Mosque. Getting to know each other is really good. Today has been a very positive experience.
- It was an amazing opportunity to share thoughts and talk about how we make a contribution to tackle injustices. Thanks so much for letting me join the group.

- The value of forums for safe and secure discussion very helpful in the present social climate.
- Would like to live in better society where people could live, work and play together.

Self evaluation

The methods we used to gather views were appreciated by participants and the event evaluated very well (see Final Thoughts above). There was a sense that the opportunity for such open discussion was rare. Participants appreciated that a Scottish Government official attended and demonstrated real commitment to listening. It was disappointing that the event was fully booked, but that only two thirds of the places were taken up. Within the short planning timescale available we were not successful in making this an interfaith event, but the contacts we made in preparation will hopefully bear fruit in future.

Next steps

This report will be sent to all those who registered for the event, together with news about the extension of the engagement fund. People will be encouraged to publicise the National Conversation through their networks and told of the ways that they can send in views. The Craighead Institute will write a blog and submit short pieces about the event and the Conversation in relevant publications such as Inspires and Open House.

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We dedicated this event to Donna Louise Docherty, a volunteer with the Glasgow Homelessness Network who was passionate about making a difference to the lives of others and who sadly died on 5th October 2015

Craighead Institute, 2016.



‘Creating a fairer Scotland’

What matters to you?

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00479666.pdf>

People across Scotland are being asked to take part in a national discussion about how the country can be a fairer and more equal place to live in.

Capturing the voices of those with direct experience of poverty and exclusion will be vital.

The Craighead Institute invites you to join in the conversation

Renfield St Stephens

Bath Street Glasgow

Saturday 10th October 10-12md

Set out your vision of a fairer Scotland and suggest practical solutions, based on local and personal experience from the perspectives of people of all faiths and backgrounds.