

FFWPU Birmingham, UK: Youth Service - Creating a Peace Garden in Small Heath

David and Patricia Earle
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David and Patricia Earle share about their experiences in organising a youth service project in Birmingham in order to create a Peace Garden.

Creating a Peace Garden in Small Heath

This has been one of the most challenging experiences we have had in a long time! When we decided to try and organise a youth service project, to create a Peace Garden in one of the most deprived areas of Birmingham, little did we know what we were letting ourselves in for. Starting more or less from zero, to find the participants, to raise the funds, to work with a new partner organisation, to work in a predominantly (85%) Muslim area, and to deal with all the rules and regulations of safeguarding, etc, has been an incredibly difficult journey.



The Peace Garden will be situated in an existing EcoPark, run by the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust. It is one of only a few green spaces in Small Heath, an intense area of narrow streets, terraced housing, Asian shops, halal butchers, severe speed bumps, and slow-moving traffic.

Last week, 12 young men spent three days clearing the site, and working with wood to build a new fence and benches. This week, we have 12 young women continuing that work, and hopefully reaching the point of being able to plant some flowers and shrubs to make the area more beautiful. Quite a number of

the young people are children of ladies who have been part of the Women's Peace Group for some years.



Each day begins at 10.00am, with the young people working until 12.30, when lunch is provided by ladies, again from the Peace Group. After lunch, work continues for another hour and then we conclude the day with some special activities from 2.30 to 3.30pm. The young men have had the privilege of hearing from Dr. Mike Balcomb, and Rev. Carver Anderson and Imam Shahid Tameez both of whom are trying to tackle the issue of gun and knife crime.

This week, the young women heard from two female City Councillors, and from a dynamic young woman who is the Lead in Violence Reduction for the Police Crime Commissioner. Our 3 guests then presented plants donated by a wonderful Ambassador for Peace, Nancy Duan, to each of the 12 participants as a memory to take home from the project.

As always, it's so interesting to see the young people when they arrive and then at the end of their time together, having worked hard for several days and made friends in the process. We will encourage those who want to consider doing a small follow-up project back in their own community, and if they do that then we could bring them into Parliament for a special Youth Award. This would provide some continuity for all that has been invested.

All in all, incredibly hard work, but extremely rewarding in so many ways.

- David and Patricia Earle.

