

Building trust and confidence through serving ethnic communities.

"Family and Youth Empowerment Conference"

Birmingham, UK. - David Earle

We feel it is a blessing in Birmingham to have so many different ethnic communities here, each of which has the potential to add a certain flavour to the overall mixture of people on our streets and in our homes. Of course, we are all aware of the challenges posed as well, particularly regarding integration, acceptance and making a positive contribution to public life. Immediately after the Brexit referendum vote, we were reminded of the serious nature of some of the feelings in these areas, with a rapid spike in incidences of 'Hate Crime', especially towards East European and Muslim people. Patricia was invited by 2 UK Members of the European Parliament to be part of a Steering Committee to try and address hate crime in the West Midlands, and we have been working together for about 18 months with ten other people on a few different initiatives. One of these was a very good 1-day conference at which groups of teenage children, from a number of schools, came and presented their thoughts and ideas on the issue, using drama, music and the written word to highlight their particular concerns.

After the Interfaith Peace Blessing, in July this year, one Rwandan lady who had taken part with her family, and who represents the Rwandan community on the national level, approached Patricia and myself and asked if we, representing the Universal Peace Federation, could support her in organising a conference for Rwandan youth. The main aims were to help their young people appreciate the positive values in their Rwandan heritage, and to think through the challenges they face in establishing their identity here in the UK, particularly in terms of integration.

Following several planning meetings with Brigitte, the lady in question, and a Rwandan Christian pastor, we finally held the 'Family and Youth Empowerment Conference' on Saturday October 13th, 2018.



David speaking on Character Education



A good mixture of young and old in the audience

There were three talks : on Youth Character Education (David Earle), The Value of the Family for Transformation and Prosperity (Pastor Bishweka), and Rwandan Cultural Heritage (Rev Munyaneza). These were interspersed with traditional Rwandan dancing and some beautiful poems, written and read out by young people.



A traditional dance from Rwanda



Speakers : Rev Munyaneza and Pastor Bishweka

The main guest of honour, Her Excellency High Commissioner Ms Yamina Karitanyi, gave some concluding remarks, congratulating the organisers, encouraging a follow-up meeting with more young people, and detailing how far Rwanda has come since the appalling genocide of the early 1990's. Following her remarks, the room broke out into several minutes of spontaneous Rwandan dancing, and we finished with refreshments, fellowship and quite a bit of networking. A good beginning, but a long way to go.



Brigitte, the main organiser



The Rwandan High Commissioner



The 'Welcoming Committee'

