

## **Harold Daniels Memorial Service Address Westhoughton Community Network**

Harold Daniels was a lovely man, kind, gentle – he also had his fun and cheeky side. He was passionate about community and instrumental in what has been achieved through Westhoughton Community Network over the past five years, as Chair, and as a supporter and friend of those involved in the community.

I first met Harold back in 2010 at a Neighbourhood Network group at The John Holt Centre run by Bolton CVS, this brought together community support agencies and some local community groups, one of which was the Rotary Club. During those meetings, it was clear that in talking and getting to know each other bonds are formed... funding changes meant that particular Network came to an end.

Aware that there was plenty going on in the community, a few of us thought it would be good to have our own network and to broaden it to the whole of Westhoughton.

And so the idea of Westhoughton Community Network was born – a forum for sharing information about what was going on in the community, supporting each other and promoting community groups and projects.

Harold, excited about the idea, offered himself up as Chair – well no-one was going to argue with Father Christmas! We were assigned tasks; Harold was to use his Rotary Club influence to provide a venue and some refreshments for the Westhoughton community groups that would be invited to the very first meeting.

That meeting took place at Brookfield Hall on the 9th August 2011, with Harold leading us into the unknown.

With anything worthwhile, it takes effort and dedication, it wasn't always easy, and it took some time for WCN to establish itself, find its feet and place.

Sometimes Harold would ask if people were happy with him being Chair – of course we were. By May 2016 there had been 21 WCN meetings at different venues across Westhoughton; in addition, several community fayres and group events involving many of the WCN groups, with a growing awareness of community endeavours and projects.

As Chair of our meetings he brought his sense of humour, conviviality and some order to the many and varied groups that make up the network.

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There was a reassuring quality about him; there were no airs and graces; he was genuinely interested in the person and what was going on in the community, which was a big plus for the meetings as it allowed for some informality and some banter, helping that sense of togetherness.

Out and about, he was forever promoting WCN as something to be involved with – I'd frequently get an e-mail or call to add such and such a group to the mailing list for the next meeting. Newcomers to the quarterly meetings warmly welcomed, and genuinely surprised that so much was going on in this little town of ours.

You couldn't help but like and be charmed by him. Harold was good with people; engaging, never judgemental. He knew how to connect... he'd have his little in-joke with you.

Steve Freeborn of Friends of Westhoughton Station got some speaking engagements through Harold, who would then rib him about commission owed; Mark Webster teaching Citizenship at Westhoughton High School, being from Wigan was teased about pies. I made a few trips to the Isle of Man last year, so he would make out surprised that I was actually in Westhoughton and not about to disappear!

With Harold at its heart, one of the biggest achievements of Westhoughton Community Network is that of groups coming together, forming friendships and supporting each other at the many community events and joint projects that we do in Westhoughton.

Westhoughton Methodist Amateur Dramatic Society teaming up with Washacre FM to produce radio plays; churches, community centres, the market and Urban Outreach coming together to set up a Grub Tub Network where donated food is collected, brought to a central point, and then by rota taken to Bolton for distribution to the poor and needy.

Harold of course going the extra mile... for as well as being on the delivery rota, he managed to secure a regular supply of boxes of bananas from a company [Dole] on Wingates Industrial Estate.

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He was involved with Westhoughton High School; Harold worked alongside Mark Webster on community-related activities. Being a Trustee of Senior Solutions and seeing the value in bridging the generations, Harold was always eager to support the students, and they in turn, loved to chat with him, as Mark told me, he made everyone feel good about themselves.

For the school Harold became - and still is - a role model for students about what it means to be an active citizen in the community, with his love for Westhoughton and the tremendous work he did working with so many different local groups.

Over these past few years I worked closely with Harold, we'd exchange emails, speak over the phone, discussing WCN matters and meetings... he invited me to some Rotary events representing WCN. I got to see the work of the Rotary Club – one of his many passions. [It was a privilege to be part of the Presentation Evenings when monies from the December Santa Float outings were shared out amongst deserving groups.] I also got to see Harold Daniels the compère and comedian. Ann Benn of Friends of Eatock Lodge reminding me that he used to ask his audience to save Christmas cracker jokes for his routine the following year!

I know he was very proud of Westhoughton Community Network, and cared passionately about what we all did together. [The sum of the whole being greater than the individual parts.]

We as a community have been all the better for his selfless and considerable contribution towards it.

In the days after his passing, there were so many messages, and so much affection shown for this wonderful man, a man who touched us with his charm and love of community; a man who we will miss greatly, but remember fondly.

God bless you Harold, and thank you.