

The Story So Far...



Toward the end of 2002, representatives from Essex Police met with members of the Trust Links Growing Together project, working in the field of mental health and therapeutic gardening, to discuss issues such as the regeneration of the local community, the prevention of race hate crime and the desire to create an environment whereby every one would feel valued and have a fair and equitable quality of life. This led to the creation of Southend Community-in-Harmony Partnership with the following aims:

- to celebrate the diversity, culture and heritage of the local community
- to promote a greater understanding and tolerance within the community
- to break down barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding and
- to encourage and facilitate partnership working among community groups for their mutual benefit



It was agreed that an excellent way of working to achieve the above aims would be to organise an open air event where diverse community groups could come together and have fun celebrating everything that is valued and worthwhile within the community of Southend. It was first hoped to hold such an event in September 2003 with a few interested groups, but it was considered prudent to postpone it until 2004, when contact could be made with more organisations whose members might wish to participate.

The inaugural event therefore took place on Sunday 27th June 2004 with the aim of celebrating together the diversity, heritage and culture of the community groups of Southend on Sea through music, dance, arts, crafts, visual displays, food, customs, children's games and other similar activities. It was held at Gainsborough Park and the organisations that participated were: DIAL, Essex Fire & Rescue Service, Essex Police, Growing Together, Milton Community Partnership, PPI Forum, Praise in the Park, Residents Association of Westborough, SAVS, South East Essex Chinese Association, South East Essex College, South East Essex Multi-Cultural Association, South Essex Partnership NHS Trust, Southend Adult Community College, Southend Borough Council, Southend CAB, Southend Credit Union, Southend District Pensioners Campaign, Southend Drug Action Team, Southend Ethnic Minority Forum, Southend

High School for Boys, Southend Hindu Association, Southend Islamic Trust, Southend PCT, Southend Sikh Society, Southend United Football Club, Southend Youth and Connexions Service, Trust Links, Westborough School, Youth Offending Service, Young Peoples' Substance Misuse Service and a number of other smaller groups.

The funding for this event needed to be secured beforehand and so applications were made to local and regional grant making bodies and so in this connection, thanks should go to Essex Police, Southend Borough Council, Southend United Football Club and ROSCA Trust for their generous donations and support that made holding this event possible. The then Mayor of Southend, Councillor Roger Weaver officiated at the grand opening at Gainsborough Park and later that afternoon he visited Trust Links' project, Growing Together next door and opened the community and wild life gardens there. Essex Police helped in overseeing the security and traffic arrangements on the day and were able to estimate that about a thousand people in total attended both events.

Following on from this success, the second event was held the following year, at Gainsborough Park on Sunday 19th June 2005 and opened by the then Mayor of Southend, Councillor Chris Dandridge. This too proved a great success and according again to Essex Police estimates, it was attended by around 2000 people. It was supported by ASDA Shoebury Store, ROSCA Trust, Southend Borough Council, the Young Persons' Substance Misuse Service and the Youth Offending Team for supporting us, both financially and in kind, not forgetting the Southend Drugs Action Team who seconded an employee on a part time basis to co-ordinate these first two events in 2004 and 2005 at no cost to SCHP, and we thank them all. The 2006 Event had a change of venue and was held at the Eastwoodbury Centre in Eastwoodbury Lane. This allowed us to save precious resources by utilising the infrastructure already in place there – a large sports field, a grandstand and the permanent clubhouse facilities and utilities. The event was opened by the Mayor of Southend Cllr Ron Price. We also welcomed Sir Teddy Taylor and a number of local dignitaries who joined upwards of 2000 people in enjoying the day – held again in scorching weather – the ice cream van once more doing a roaring trade. We had the usual representation of stalls with ethnic food and culture, displays, bouncy castles, Chinese lions, balloon clowns – and a miniature racing track activity, as well as entertainment provided by TAGS and a rock gospel group. We also greatly valued the support of our main sponsors, Southend Council, the Southend Fund, the Key Fund, the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund and ROSCA, as well as the financial support from public services and individual people and businesses in the town.

After the 2006 Annual General Meeting, we at SCHP asked ourselves some searching questions with regard to our future direction - as to whether we should carry on as before, organising a large open air event as in previous years or as to whether we should change direction somewhat. Overwhelmingly, the view of our members and supporters was that our aims and objectives were best served by organising a large high profile event every summer, expressing to the local people how we can all,

whatever our background, have a fun day together. Perhaps the main message emanating from our events is how important it is to achieve unity, tolerance, understanding, friendship and harmony among the different cultures, nationalities, races and religions in our town. Above all, we hope that we can - and wish to - be kind and compassionate to each other and enjoy being part of this multi-cultural society which enriches all our lives. We did indeed put on an event in 2007, held this time at Southend High School for Boys. The weather on the day was appalling but while our activities were curtailed and we had to operate mainly inside the school we continued to attract new groups and attractions including holding a football tournament for youth, mainly from estates in the town. We are planning to use the same venue for our 2008 event.

As a partnership, while our main focus has been putting on our big annual event we are committed first and foremost in fulfilling our afore-mentioned aims. We have received much encouraging feedback that we have begun to achieve those aims and we hope to do so to a greater extent in the future, reaching out to new groups such as the newer ethnic minority communities and those who are socially disadvantaged. In this regard, in February 2008 we received £10000 from Awards for All to find out more about and establish better links with the groups we are currently not touching and where the needs appear to be the greatest and begin to help meet some of those needs.

At the time of writing, we have just been awarded our charity status and are busily preparing for our 2008 event, which we hope will be the best ever.

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