

## Case Study: Religion and Belief Guide

Source: East Sussex and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services

Date: 1 December 2008

### Summary

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) in partnership with West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) produced a Religion and Belief Guide to provide staff with an improved understanding of religion and belief in East and West Sussex. The Guide was launched at ESFRS Headquarters on 17 November 2006.

### Background

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service serves a population of approximately 753,000 within the constituent authorities of Brighton & Hove City Council and East Sussex County Council. The demography of the area varies considerably from socially-deprived areas to areas of significant wealth. ESFRS serves a sparse rural community as well as heavily populated urban areas. The larger towns and the City of Brighton & Hove are popular tourist destinations with the summer population increasing significantly, along with the risk of fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies. The City area alone attracts eight million visitors each year for both business and leisure purposes.

ESFRS recognises that potentially, all members of the community are at risk from fire, however, trend analysis and local knowledge has identified those groups of people at greater risk. The most vulnerable groups in the community are: Elderly people; People living in socially-deprived areas or on low incomes; Residents of houses in multiple occupation.

ESFRS and WSFRS are committed to the goals of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 including:-

- Serving communities to the highest standards tailored to their needs
- Ensuring that communities know that the Service understands their needs and respects difference
- Encouraging and valuing greater diversity and treating everyone with dignity and respect

### Key issues/problems

The predominant religion in Sussex is Christianity and there are relatively small numbers of other religions and beliefs. This provides the need to ensure that ESFRS and WSFRS understand the other religions/beliefs in our communities and tailor our policies, practices and service to meet these diverse needs.

- The staff at ESFRS and WSFRS have a limited understanding of religion/belief in Sussex and the Guide provides an opportunity for a better understanding of these groups to improve 'operational diversity'.  
How do you ensure that these communities have the same access to our services as everyone else in the community? Are there specific needs that could be identified to ensure

that the professional services that we deliver are respectful of individuals' religion and/or belief?

- ESFRS and WSFRS wanted to establish and build good partnerships and relationships with religion/belief groups in the communities of Sussex and ensure that fire safety messages were communicated to these groups.

### **What we did**

- All other Fire Service and Emergency Service Faith/Religious guides were researched including, *"Faith and Diversity in our Community"* by West Midlands FRS and *"Cultural awareness-understanding our multi-cultural society"* by Kent FRS and *"Faces of Britain-a cultural guide"* by Avon and Somerset Constabulary.
- Established partnerships with West Sussex FRS and Ian Chisnall from Churches Together in Sussex and started to engage with and build relationships with religious and non-religious groups in Sussex.
- Researched and drafted the Quick Facts section of the Guide from websites, Government reports including, *"The Needs of Faith Communities in Major Emergencies"* and from face to face meetings with local groups.
- A Guide was produced and distributed to every attendee from diverse religious and non-religious groups.
- ESFRS supplied 500 Guides to WSFRS and over 100 Guides were given to Sussex Police and the Government for the South East (GOSE).
- Copies of the Guide have been distributed to Inter-Faith Networks and adhoc individuals throughout Sussex and beyond.

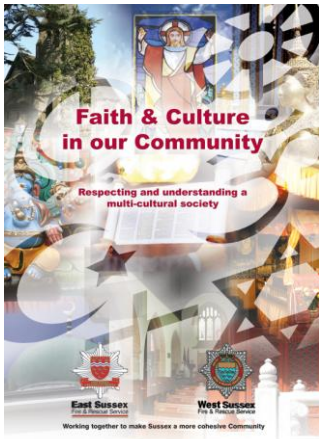
### **Key outcomes**

This Guide was intended to address the following:-

- Provide a Guide to increase staff awareness of religion/belief in our communities.
- Promote a positive commitment by ESFRS and WSFRS to people of diverse cultures and religions and a willingness to understand their needs.
- Build links with our diverse religious and non-religious community groups.
- Support our community and our staff as a better understanding of our communities will improve our service.
- Support partnership working with other Fire Services and agencies in order to provide Best Value and shared resources.
- To help ESFRS and WSFRS to embrace and respect religion and belief in the workplace in line with its obligations under The Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003.

The Guide has been supported by Inter-Faith Groups in Sussex and seen as a best practice by Sussex and Kent Police. The Government Office for the South East have highlighted this best practice and the Second Edition of the Guide is being sponsored by The South East Fire Improvement Partnership.

Resources



**Buddhism**

**Faith**  
 Buddhism began in Northern India over 2,600 years ago, and is based upon the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama who became known as the Buddha, 'the enlightened one'. After searching for a way to free himself and others from suffering, he discovered enlightenment. For the next forty-five years he travelled from city to city, willing to listen to the requests to address him for instruction, leading him within close to the Buddha, and he left a legacy in the form of a teaching (the Dhamma) that was, at that time, passed orally by the disciples, until the language is commonly written and found in the Pāli Canon and the Sūtra, Vinaya and Abhidharma (commentaries) are now permitted to preach, they are spiritual occupations who can only teach when asked to do so.

In order to help people realize that the correct understanding of life is inadequate, the Buddha spoke about Suffering (dukkha) as an unsatisfactoriness. He summarized his teachings as the Truth about dukkha, its origin, its ending and the path to its ending. These core teachings were to be preserved against being misinterpreted and used for gain. They are known as the Four Noble Truths, but that is an oversimplification, because that first Arahant from our present. Complete happiness can be gained by the mind, which is the absolute cessation of craving. This is achieved by the four noble truths, which comprises of following what is referred to as the The Noble Eightfold Path, i.e. the path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. All eight components of the path are required to be developed together in order to achieve full enlightenment. The eight Noble Truths which represent the doctrine as taught by the Buddha. The eight noble truths are: The Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths and the Path to the end of suffering. Buddhism is divided into a number of different traditions and there are four main schools: The Theravada, or 'Teaching of the Elders' and Mahayana, or 'Greater Vehicle'.

**Dress**  
 Generally there are no religious requirements for everyday dress for Buddhists. Buddhist monks or nuns of the Theravada school wear robes of orange or saffron colour. They shave their heads and carry shaves, in which they only the hair that other Buddhists give them as they are prohibited from growing hair of having money.

**Language**  
 The main language for Buddhists is the spoken language of the country of residence. Depending upon the particular school the teachings have been written in other Pāli (Theravada schools) or Sanskrit (Mahayana schools).

**Main Faiths**

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