

‘None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.’ -Mother Theresa

10 years ago, I knew that I had to seek out like-minded people like myself, who had a great passion for RE and knew that bigger opportunities lay ahead through the power of collaboration. Like many subject leaders, my dwindling budget couldn't finance expensive advisers from the local authority and my subject never made it to the school development plan (SDP), therefore, I had to be very careful how I chose to spend my money. And that was when my journey as a NATRE affiliated local group leader began!

I have one person to be thankful for in my Local Groups journey: Juliet Lyal! Without Juliet's reassuring and helpful words of advice, I would never have had enough courage to have started up my very own group for RE leaders in my area: Frimley RE Leaders. Never one to lead but always one to follow, I will be honest and say that I lacked the confidence at first and by running my own group, I felt a bit out of my depth. My then year group leader, now head teacher of my school, Amy Wells, also gave me a much needed boost and said that she had every faith in me that I could do this.

Without looking back, I completed the paperwork sent to me by Juliet and before I knew it, I had 17 keen RE leads sitting in front of me. What a buzz! I had never been so happy to talk RE with so many people who felt like me- it was incredible- an experience that I will never forget!

When I had the opportunity to take over from Juliet as Local Groups Officer for NATRE, I knew that I had big shoes to fill. I knew that I had to do for others what Juliet did for me- she was and still is my inspiration for having the honour to be in this role. Connecting others like me, gives me much happiness as I know how much they are going to gain through networking.

What is a NATRE affiliated Local Group?

There are over 320 local network groups across the UK, Hong Kong, Cyprus, Brunei, Kenya, Pakistan and Thailand, connecting over 2000 teachers and RE professionals. These groups are coordinated by myself as the Local Groups and Networks Lead,

The NATRE affiliated groups come in different forms providing networking opportunities and engagement that is invaluable to teachers. The groups provide lesson ideas and solutions; help the RE network grow, share familiarity of the RE resources in the local area and provide opportunities to understand what is happening in the region and across the country.

The majority of local groups are affiliated with NATRE which enables them to benefit from the support we can offer. We always welcome groups from across the globe and offer online support for networking, teaching and leading all key stages. Our aim is that every teacher of RE should have a NATRE- affiliated local group within 10 miles (or 30 minutes) of where they live or teach! In the current times, virtual meetings are how many groups are still meeting. In the future, many groups may still choose to meet virtually where teachers who live in more remote areas can still connect and network easily with others. Childcare and travel issues can be a thing of the past!

Most of the Local Groups are run by class teachers and are mainly free to attend (the adviser run meetings may charge). Teachers who attend a local group will receive free half termly newsletters as well as termly downloads full of teaching resources and ideas to use in the classroom.

My love for connecting teachers to local groups doesn't end there. Since being in this role, I have started a global group, led by the amazing Helen Boyle, a teacher from Dubai, as well as 3 national groups: Decolonising The Curriculum, led by Malvika Acharya, SEND, led by Sarah Payne, and one for EYFS led by Catriona Card, all of which are incredibly successful and are well managed and led by exceptional teachers of RE.

Do check out <https://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/re-in-your-region/> to find your nearest group or to connect with one of national or global groups. If you don't manage to find a group near you would like to form a NATRE affiliated local group of your own, please contact me direct on localgroups@natre.org.uk.

How Does NATRE Support Local Groups?

Supported by NATRE with further support from RE Today Services and occasionally by SACREs or local trusts such as Culham St Gabriel's, local groups aim to open up the RE 'world' to class teachers, many of whom are non-specialists.

NATRE provides a termly newsletter for all affiliated group leaders to share with anyone who attends a NATRE affiliated local group meeting. Each newsletter includes national updates, news of local group activities, forthcoming courses, conferences, competitions and awards as well as reviews of new resources. It also includes an RE CPD PowerPoint to share.

NATRE offers support by email, phone and postal mail for group leaders and their group members.

On our NATRE website you can read our **Local Group News Board** to read about stories and ideas for your local group meetings!

Looking forward to helping connect all teachers of RE!

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