

# Health Melas 2002 to 2014

## A Story of Community Health Fairs

The first ever Health Mela took place in Preston in 2002, when the chief guest was **Professor John Ashton** CBE. A staunch advocate of the Health Mela approach to promoting public health awareness, John is President of the UK Faculty of Public Health and we're delighted that he will be visiting us again as chief guest at the 2014 Leyland Health Mela. Anticipating his visit John said,

*"It is a particular pleasure to return to the Health Mela. The strength of community leadership in Central Lancashire on matters to do with health and wellbeing is an example for the whole country. I am really looking forward spending time in conversation with visitors to the Mela and to meeting with old friends."*

Professor Ashton's return affords an excellent opportunity to show just how much the Health Mela concept has developed in the intervening years. Over the following pages, we'll take a look at how the events themselves have changed and we'll examine some of the key events and supporters that have helped to shape their progress.

Though it began as a simple discussion amongst a small, voluntary team, the Health Mela concept has grown beyond all expectations and has achieved widespread public and professional recognition. This includes endorsement by many leaders in the public health service and NHS.

Today, the Health Melas receive favourable mention in government reports and are supported by some of the most eminent names in the fields of healthcare, equality and human rights.

We are particularly pleased that **Professor Dame Sue Bailey**, immediate past President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2011-14) and Chair of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, will be chief guest at this year's Fleetwood Health Mela which has, as its theme 'the Mental Health of Children and Young Adults.'

The National Forum for Health and Wellbeing is grateful to all supporters, past and present, who have contributed to this continuing success story.



Professor John Ashton CBE



Professor Dame Sue Bailey



## Message from NFHW Chairman

Professor John Ashton's return gives me a welcome opportunity to reflect on the activities and the success of the Health Melas over the past thirteen years.

During his visit in 2002, John picked up on the characteristics that made that inaugural Health Mela special - its particular emphasis on accessibility, community engagement and empowerment. Looking back, I'm delighted to see that the novel ways in which we set out to promote health and awareness have proved so successful and that the same model is now expanding well beyond the North West.

We can be especially proud of our ever-strengthening links with universities, with teaching hospitals and with Rotary. These and other valued partnerships are greatly enhancing the value of our work. Together, we have the capacity, the skills and the commitment to build and improve the Health Mela concept so that we can continue to bring lasting benefits to local communities across Britain and beyond.



Professor Ramesh Gupta  
CBE MD FRCP

# The Health Mela Story



The idea of a community-based event to promote public health awareness arose in 2001 during discussions between the Gujarat Hindu Society and Professor Romesh Gupta. This led to the formation of the Lancashire Gujarat Health Users' Forum in Preston. This small, voluntary team recognised that many local people from minority ethnic backgrounds were slow to engage with health professionals and, consequently, they were not benefiting from the early detection and treatment of serious conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

The plan was to hold a community festival - the Sanskrit word for which is Mela - where people could obtain free advice and health checks as part of a day-long schedule of entertainments. By delivering support in a fun and familiar setting, the event would help people to overcome their reluctance to seek assistance - thereby enabling communities to take greater responsibility for their wellbeing.

The first Health Mela, held at the Gujarat Community Centre in Preston in 2002, was a great success and proved beyond all doubt that the idea was a good one. Scores of visitors took advantage of free health checks and gathered information from a wide variety of stall holders.

Since then, approaching 30 Health Melas have taken place in different parts of the country, attended by an estimated 25,000 visitors. Thousands have taken advantage of free 'health MOTs', some of which have helped people to seek treatment for previously undiagnosed conditions. Others have obtained help in stopping smoking and in making other healthy changes to their lifestyle. The Health Melas have quite literally changed people's lives.



As the Melas have grown, so the focus has widened from minority ethnic groups to the mainstream. There is still a strong multicultural flavour to the events but now, the Health Melas help a very broad spectrum of society. Recognising this, the Lancashire Gujarat Health Users' Forum changed its name in 2013 to the National Forum for Health & Wellbeing.



Health Melas have now taken place in Preston, Chorley, Bolton, Salford, Bradford, Leyland, Blackpool and Fleetwood but, thanks to close ties to Rotary International, there are plans to take the concept even further afield. A good example of this stems from Rotary's work with Academy@Worden - a school in Leyland that has agreed to host the town's 2015 Health Mela. A short while ago, Rotary introduced the school to Mohsin Khan, principal of a school in Uttar Pradesh, and as a result of their meeting the same model may soon be extended to India.



The support of universities has played a pivotal role in helping the Melas to reach this ever-growing audience. Bolton University now hosts the offices of the NFH&W as well as a series of health-related conferences and, in 2014, the University of Bradford's Student Central was the venue for the city's first Health Mela. Another valued partner is Manchester University, whose Health Olympics programme has been providing the backbone of the Health MOT service for many years. Working with the 'Blood Drop' team from Lancashire Teaching Hospitals, supervised teams of medical students



regularly attend the Melas to carry out tests for blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol. Finally, the University of Central Lancashire has also provided invaluable support. Not only did it provide teams of trainee nurses and physiotherapists at the 2014 Preston Health Mela, it has also agreed to host the event in 2015.

These venues provide a clear illustration of how the Health Melas have grown. They began as a single annual event at a community centre in Preston but they now take place at civic and university sites across the region. In the early days, they were accompanied by small community workshops and now they take place alongside major conferences and seminars in association with the centre for research in Health & Wellbeing at the University of Bolton.



Endorsed by leading figures from the field of healthcare, equality and public policy, the Health Melas have come a long way since their humble beginnings. We can be proud of our achievements but, more importantly, we can look forward to taking even greater steps in the years to come.





# TIMELINE

**PRESTON** **2001**

- Lancashire Gujarat Health Users Forum established in partnership with the Gujarat Hindu Society to promote health of South East Asian and wider communities.
- Series of monthly 'Health workshops' introduced.

**PRESTON** **2002**

- Two day Mela held in the new Gujarat Hindu Society Community Centre.
- First Chief Guest, Professor John Ashton, Director of Public Health North West
- Health checks offered for blood sugar, cholesterol etc.
- Royal Preston Hospital staff, the 'Blood Drop' team provide professional support.
- Number of visitors exceeds organisers' expectations.

**PRESTON** **2003**

- Monthly health workshops continue to attract support at GHS Community Centre.

**PRESTON** **2004**

- 'Sloppy Slippers' campaign organised in collaboration with Age Concern.

**PRESTON, MANCHESTER** **2005**

- Principal Guest, Prof. Raman Bedi, Chief Dental Officer, delivers message of support from Sir Nigel Crisp, Chief Executive, Department of Health.
- Medical students from University of Manchester (supported by LGHUF to form the 'Health Olympics' team) provide health counselling.
- Road accident awareness theatre presentations.

**PRESTON** **2006**

- Ambulance and fire tender prove a big attraction to children.
- Anna Walker, Chief Executive of the Health Care Commission visits Preston to meet LGHUF.

**PRESTON** **2007**

- Healthy walks organised in association with Lancashire Wildlife Trust.
- Charity dinner to support Rosemere Cancer Trust.

**PRESTON** **2008**

- Second Rosemere Charity Dinner.

**PRESTON, CHORLEY** **2009**

- Presentation 'Promoting Healthy Living – Empowering Communities', at NW Evaluation Network Conference, Bolton.
- Involvement in Falls User Carer Forum

**PRESTON, BOLTON UNIVERSITY, CARDIFF** **2010**

- Health Mela crosses the border to Wales.

**PRESTON, BOLTON UNIVERSITY, LONDON** **2011**

- First discussions on collaboration with Rotary International.

**PRESTON, BOLTON UNIVERSITY, LEYLAND** **2012**

- Mela moves to Guild Hall to celebrate Guild Year.
- First collaboration with Rotary Club of Leyland and Rotary International fully engaged in Health Mela programme.
- Name changed to National Forum for Health and Wellbeing reflecting an expanding role.
- Mela team joins Guild Torchlight procession.

**PRESTON, BOLTON UNIVERSITY, LEYLAND, FYLDE COAST (BLACKPOOL), BRADFORD UNIVERSITY** **2013**

- Chief Guest Paul Buckley, Director of Education and Standards at the General Medical Council praises contribution of 'Health Olympics' team.
- Shami Chakrabarti, Director of Liberty, is honoured Guest.
- Permanent office base for NFW established in University of Bolton.

**PRESTON, BOLTON UNIVERSITY, LEYLAND, FYLDE COAST (FLEETWOOD), BRADFORD UNIVERSITY** **2014**

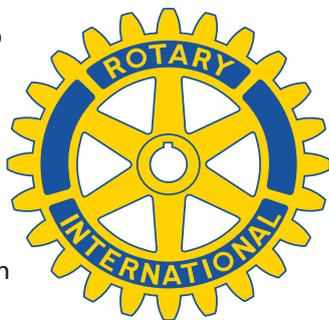
- Professor John Ashton returns as Chief Guest at Leyland
- Proposals for events in West Lancashire and Merseyside.
- NFW is finalist in E3 Business awards 'Social Enterprise' category
- Guest lecture at University of Bolton by Rotary District Governor Kevin Walsh.
- Conference with University of Bolton, 'An Holistic Approach to Health and Wellbeing'.
- NFW applies for charitable status.
- Secondary school link - Academy@Worden to be host for 2015 Leyland Mela.
- International link as NFW supports planned Health Mela in India.

**2015 ONWARDS** **2015**

- 2015 Preston event to be hosted by University of Central Lancashire.
- Guest lecture and conference series continues at Bolton University.
- Firm plans for Health Melas to be held in 2015 in Cumbria and East Lancashire.
- Event series planned to continue in Bolton, Bradford, Leyland and Fylde coast



It all began in 1905 when Paul Harris, a Chicago Attorney, formed the Rotary Club of Chicago where professionals from diverse backgrounds could exchange ideas and form meaningful and lifelong relationships. It wasn't long before the Club decided to include charitable work in their activities and amongst the first project was the provision of public toilets in downtown Chicago. Rotary's impact on Health and Wellbeing is well grounded!



Rotary is now in every corner of the world with around 1.2m Rotarians in 34,000 Clubs. Here in the NW of England we have Clubs in most of our cities and towns with 71 Clubs in Cumbria & Lancashire.

*Our humanitarian activity is focused in 6 ways:*

-  COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
-  EDUCATION
-  MOTHERS AND CHILDREN
-  WATER & SANITATION
-  DISEASE PREVENTION
-  PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

## Of the things we think, say or do;

1. **Is it the TRUTH?**
2. **Is it FAIR to all concerned?**
3. **Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?**
4. **Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?**



**Our strategic health focus is the eradication of Polio from the world** We started this work in 1984 and with many partners including the Gates Foundation we are close to finishing the job. Rotarians throughout the world have been involved in awareness raising and fund-raising, and we have helped immunise more than 2 billion children in 122 countries.



District Governor Roger Mason says, "Rotarians are leaders in their communities, exchanging ideas as to the best ways to serve their communities. Health Melas are a very positive way to take action and help those that need support. Rotarians in Cumbria and Lancashire are delighted to support these Health Melas and work with a whole community of health professionals. The service provides a positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of many people."



Rotarians in Cumbria & Lancashire have been supporting the Health Mela concept for several years, with successful events held in Preston, Leyland and the Fylde. We have plans for more events to be arranged in East & North Lancashire and West & North Cumbria following the success of a Rotary Foundation Global Grant application. This funding, from Rotary's own Charity, is unusual in that it has brought capital investment for life saving equipment including Community Access Defibrillators into our own local communities.

Immediate Past District Governor of Rotary in Cumbria & Lancashire, Kevin Walsh - the prime mover behind the Global Grant application - said, "Our capital investment in life saving equipment is being well received in our communities. By also investing in the personal health and wellbeing of individuals through the Health Melas, we may well reduce the need for the use of defibrillators in the future."



Commenting on this year's Mela, Tony Harrison, President of the Rotary Club of Leyland said 'Rotary is at the very heart of the community and we are delighted to be working in collaboration with our partners again this year to help promote the health and wellbeing of our local community. Whilst the day will be a fun day there is a serious message in that each of us have a part to play in ensuring our own health and wellbeing. This event provides a perfect opportunity to meet with a range of health professionals in a friendly environment.'



Welcoming people to the Mela in Fleetwood, President Robert Wright said "As a community pharmacist, I have been at the "sharp end" of health and wellbeing for over forty years. Over that period I have seen a greater public perception of self-help when it comes to matters of health. This Mela provides a fun, friendly, family focused opportunity to get on the road to healthy living and, best of all, it's free! However you take advantage of this health MOT, I guarantee one thing: YOU'LL FEEL BETTER FOR IT!"



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