

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021



**BRIXTON
BUDDHIST
COMMUNITY**

CONTENTS

ABOUT US	1
What is an Order Member?	2
What is a Mitra?	3
What is a study group?	5
Gender diversity	5
Racial diversity	6
Trustees	7
Other leadership roles	8
Mitra Convenors	9
Centre team	9
 2020/21 IN NUMBERS	 10
 CHAIR'S REPORT	 12
 FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT	 17
 WOMEN'S MITRA CONVENOR'S REPORT	 20
 MEN'S MITRA CONVENOR'S REPORT	 22
 EVENTS COORDINATOR'S REPORT	 25

ABOUT US

Brixton Buddhist Community is part of the Triratna Buddhist Community; an international Buddhist movement founded in 1967 by Urgyen Sangharakshita. "Triratna" means "three jewels". These three jewels are shown in our logo.



They represent the three highest ideals that lie at the heart of Buddhism:



The Buddha
the ideal of
Enlightenment



The Dharma
the teachings of the
Buddha



The Sangha
the spiritual
community

We call ourselves Brixton Buddhist **Community**, rather than a group or an organisation, because this spiritual community - the Sangha - is key to our practise and understanding of Buddhism.

ABOUT US

Brixton Buddhist Community is a network of individuals united by the shared aim of developing spiritually and living in accordance with Buddhist principles of friendship; generosity; honest, kindly communication and care for each other's spiritual welfare. A key part of this vision is helping others benefit from the teachings of the Buddha, such as meditation, mindfulness, ethics and social engagement.

The community is made up of practitioners at different levels of commitment to the Buddhist path; Order Members, Mitras, people who attend regularly, and people who just drop in to our classes.

WHAT IS AN ORDER MEMBER?

Someone who has been ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order, is an 'Order Member'.

Ordination is a significant and powerful ceremony in which an individual makes a lifelong commitment to following the Buddhist path, placing this at the centre of their lives.



Training for ordination is a process which takes many years of personal practice, dharma study and periods of being on retreat. During their ordination, a practitioner makes commitments to practice for the benefit of all beings, to act in accordance with 10 Buddhist ethical precepts and to live in harmony with others. At Ordination they are given special meditation practice and a new Buddhist name to signify their commitment to the spiritual life. You can usually recognise an Order Member because they wear a symbolic white scarf (kesa) embroidered with the three jewels.

WHAT IS A MITRA?

Everyone who has contact with Brixton Buddhist Community, (such as coming to a class) is considered a 'friend'. However someone who feels a particular connection with our community and has decided to follow the Buddhist path can ask to become a 'Mitra' (which simply means 'friend' in Sanskrit). Becoming a Mitra marks a deepening of commitment for the practitioner, and there are special activities, including retreats and study groups open to Mitras to support them in this.

People ask to become a Mitra when they:

- Consider that they are Buddhists.
- Are trying to live in accordance with the five ethical precepts of Buddhism.
- Feel that the Triratna Buddhist Community is the appropriate spiritual context for them.

Once a person's request to be a Mitra has been accepted, they take part in a simple public ceremony on a festival day. This ceremony is recognised at all Triratna centres worldwide, and they will be regarded as a Mitra wherever they go.



Daisy's Mitra ceremony

Later on, some Mitras also decide to ask for ordination, and begin the process of training for ordination.

However, this is not an expectation and many people practice happily as Mitras within our community the rest of their lives.

WHAT IS A STUDY GROUP?

All Triratna Buddhist Centres offer a four-year programme of study which covers the key aspects of the Buddha's teaching and Sangharakshita's approach to it. These study groups are mainly for Mitras to help them deepen their commitment to the Buddhist path.

However, at Brixton we offer the first year of this programme to anyone who would like to deepen their understanding of Buddhism and Buddhist practice. If you are interested in joining a study group, then speak to an Order Member at one of our classes.



One of our women's study groups.
(Some of our groups meet online
and some in-person)

GENDER DIVERSITY

Within the Buddhist tradition, historically and culturally there has been a strict divide between men and women practitioners. The Triratna Buddhist Community is unique in the Buddhist world as it recognises equal ordination for both women and men, who both join a single sangha. However, it also recognises that there is much to gain by sharing our lives with those who have an experience closest to our own. In Triratna this has led to the practice of women being trained and ordained by other women and men by men. It is for this reason that alongside our many mixed events, our study groups and residential communities are often established as women's or men's groups.

Yet, we are aware that this structure does not suit everyone. In response to the emerging awareness of gender diversity, Triratna is currently in a process of creating more supportive contexts for people who are gender diverse, so that they have the necessary conditions to deepen their practice, become Mitras and train for ordination. These needs vary widely by individual, but examples include connecting people with the broader Triratna Gender Diverse Sangha, establishing gender diverse study groups and ordination training programmes, or in the case of people transitioning, supporting them to move between the existing men's or women's wings of the Order and movement.

RACIAL DIVERSITY

Brixton's rich cultural diversity is huge part of its appeal and we are keen that our community is fully representative of the community it serves. Although our community is increasingly diverse, especially at our classes, we still have a way to go. This is particularly true amongst our teaching team and trustee board. Our hope is that within a few years, our diversity work will mean more members of our sangha from Black, Asian and other ethnic groups will start to feel sufficiently experienced to step into more of these leading roles.

Currently we work with the other London Buddhist Centres to support London-wide People of Colour activities for our sangha members. Brixton's trustees are also developing a new diversity plan with input from the London Buddhist Centre's Mindful of Race Group, and our involvement with the European Chair's Assembly Diversity Group. We hope this initiative will offer more pathways into our community for people of all ethnic groups, as well as offer specific support for People of Colour to deepen their Buddhist practice within our community.



The Triratna People of Colour Group

TRUSTEES 2020-21

Brixton Buddhist Community is a registered UK charity. Decisions about the community's vision, activities, finances, and public communications are made by a board of trustees who meet bi-monthly. They are all volunteers, with the exception of Viryanaga, the Chair. Because we are a spiritual community, the trustees are all experienced Order Members able to guide the spiritual direction of the community. We are keen to have more women and people for colour on the trustee board, and hope to achieve this as more people in our community become ordained in the coming years.



AMARAPUSPA
Women's Mitra
Convenor



MAITRINARA
Men's Mitra
Convenor



VIRYANAGA
Chair



AMALADANA
Finance Officer



SUDDHAKA



SAGARASILA

LEADERSHIP ROLES

CHAIR

The role of the Chair is to oversee the direction of the community, support the team and all the volunteers, and make the many small day-to-day decisions involved with running a thriving Buddhist organisation. Initially this role was voluntary position, but as our community has grown in recent years, the work has also grown into a full-time responsibility, with Viryanaga now employed by the charity.



VIRYANAGA

PRESIDENT

Paramabandhu is the president of Brixton Buddhist Community. A president offers spiritual counsel and friendship to a community, and can be a source of help when issues arise. Paramabandhu is a senior Order Member, who along with others, hold responsibility for ordinations within the Triratna Buddhist Community. He is also an ex-chair of the London Buddhist Centre in East London, where he lives, and is a highly valued teacher. He visits us at least twice a year.



PARAMABANDHU

MITRA CONVENORS

We have two Mitra Convenors, both of whom are volunteers. Amarapuspa looks after the women's sangha, and Maitrinara takes care of the men's sangha.

A Mitra Convenor takes special responsibility for supporting Mitras within our community, both through running events and meeting with people individually. They also meet with men and women who are becoming more involved with our community, to help them find appropriate study groups or events to support their practice. They help to guide people in the process of becoming mitras and are also often a point of contact for Mitras who want to ask for ordination. They are always happy to hear from people interested in becoming more involved in our community.



MAITRINARA
Men's Mitra
Convenor



AMARAPUSPA
Women's Mitra
Convenor

OTHER TEACHERS

If you come to our events, often one or two of our trustees will be teaching. However, there are also some other wonderful Order Members who support our community though teaching. They either live in South London or regularly visit us. You may also see some of our Mitras who are training for ordination teach at our Monday meditation class.



MAITRINITA



VAJRATARA ARYANISHA

CENTRE TEAM

The centre team is the organisational hub of Brixton Buddhist Community. Together they are responsible for coordinating all the events, as well as managing our online content. Lizzy works two days a week, while Alex and Elena currently work one day a week each.



VIRYANAGA
Chair



LIZZY
Events
Coordinator



ALEX
Temp Events
Coordinator



ELENA
Online Events
Coordinator

2020/21* IN NUMBERS...

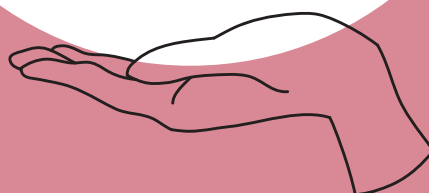
NEW MINISTERS
5



NEW STUDY GROUPS
2



ORDINATION REQUESTS
4



MAKING A TOTAL OF...

35

Mitras in the
Brixton Sangha

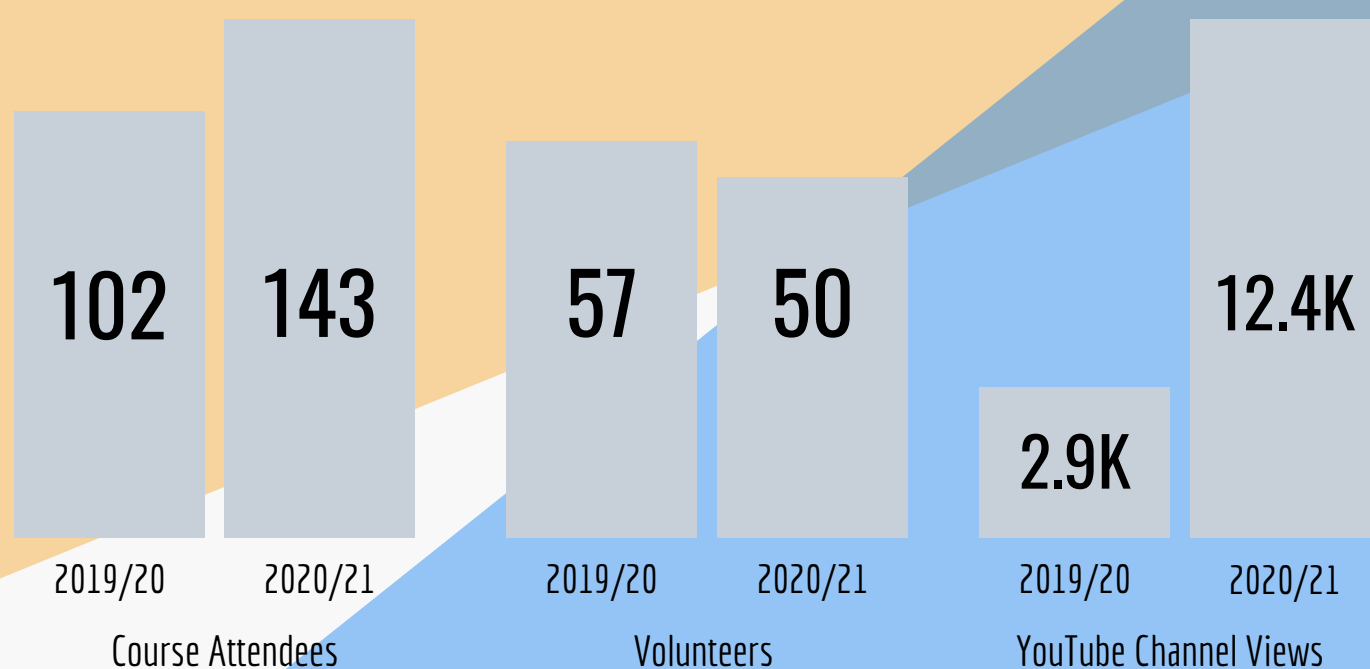
18

Mitras training
for Ordination

37

People in
study groups

OTHER CHANGES IN THE SANGHA



*Figures calculated by the tax year [6 April 2020 - 5 April 2021]. Some of the figures in the later reports differ due to having been calculated by the calendar year.

VIRYANAGA

2020-2021 Chair's Annual Report

I won't mention the 'C' word, but it's hard to summarise this year without saying something of its effects, not least that this annual report comes to you much later in the year than normal. Often when I reflect on the previous year for my annual report I find a particular thread of inspiration emerging. This year my main feelings are simple gratitude and a sense of pride in the team and volunteers of the Brixton Buddhist Community. Our community charted these extraordinary times commendably, and helped many others along the way.

Ever since the first days of the 2020 lock-down, we unfailingly produced weekly online content, and quickly adapted to each and every change in the rules to keep providing events. I have heard many stories about how our live-streams or videos were a 'lifeline' to people, and how a virtual connection to the Sangha gave them a sense of solidarity and support.

We did this despite various people in the team being unwell at times, including two of our teachers, Sagarasila and Amalavajra, who are suffering the long-term effects of the illness. I especially appreciated the culture of support which emerged in our community, and remains alive today, with everyone willing to step in to help whenever needed. I'd like to wholeheartedly thank everyone who taught at our classes this year, whether as a guest or a regular teacher, Maitrinita, Aryanisha and especially Vajratara who has been a frequent visitor bringing her wealth of experience and vision for Dharma practice. I'm also particularly grateful to Maitrinara, Amarapuspa and Amaladana for always being willing to do whatever was required to keep the whole thing going.

I found great inspiration in the volunteer class teams; the Monday night team and the Dharma night team, and the volunteer media team, who support our online presence and publicity. Again the same spirit of support and responsibility came through, and I found it a delight to witness the countless acts of helpfulness happening around me. There was a powerful sense of our community pulling together to do something important - provide meditation and the Dharma for all those who needed it. Thank you everyone!

"There was a powerful sense of our community pulling together to do something important - provide meditation and the Dharma for all those who needed it."

As we hopefully emerge from the phase of social restrictions here in England, I find I'm clearer about what the global Triratna community has to offer the world, and what we as the Brixton Buddhist Community have to offer the people of South London.

There are a great many negative consequences of the pandemic: there is a mental health crisis, many have lost livelihoods or loved ones, and there is an epidemic of social isolation and loneliness. Meanwhile, the agents of distraction and unmindfulness, such as alcohol, Netflix and 24-hour BBC news have boomed as people sought refuges from the uncertainty and fear of a situation out of their control.

"...what the Dharma offers and what our community has to offer, is a way... to positively thrive within the changing circumstances."

Of course, from the Dharmic perspective, our lives have never been controllable. Uncertainty and change is the very nature of existence. Yet, it is so easy to think that if we set up our lives in just the right way, we can somehow prevent ourselves from being affected by this eternal truth. The pandemic seems to have brought people face-to-face with these realities, and without the Dharma, many have fallen into despair or distraction.

Yet, what the Dharma offers, and what our community has to offer, is a way not only to come to terms with these realities, but to positively thrive within the changing circumstances. If we allow the wisdom of Dharma practice to change us in this way, we can then be available to respond with compassion to others caught up in the vicissitudes of life.

THE DEEPENING SANGHA

Without our normal unrestricted public classes this year, it's been hard to judge how many are now regularly involved in our community. I have a sense that many more people engaged with us online this year, and now that we have opened our doors again it remains to be seen who will come through them. I still haven't gotten used to introducing myself to someone new at a class only to find that they already know me from YouTube!

What is obvious however, is that many in our community have continued to deepen their experience and commitment to Dharma practice. I'm delighted that we had a number of new ordination requests this year, and that our festival days have continued to hold ceremonies for those wanting to become mitras and join our community formally as Buddhist practitioners.

Perhaps the most significant development for Brixton was the Ordination of ex-Charlotte, who became Aryanisha, meaning “she whose dream is of the noble ones”. Aryanisha was due to be ordained in 2020, but the first lockdown prevented that and she found herself in the difficult position of having to wait an entire year before she could finally join the Order. I witnessed her having a challenging year because of this, but she coped well, and we’re all glad she could finally receive her kesa in May 2021.

"...we're fortunate to now to have another Dharmacharini in the sangha, as well as one of the youngest female Order Members anywhere in the world. "

Aryanisha has been a teacher at Brixton for some years already, but we’re fortunate to now to have another Dharmacharini in the sangha, as well as one of the youngest female Order Members anywhere in the world.

THE FUTURE OF BRIXTON BUDDHIST COMMUNITY

As we tentatively open our doors again, it's been really nice to meet people at classes and be able to switch off the cameras at some events. At both our Dharma night class and Meditation class there have been plenty of newcomers visiting us for the first time. We are also working hard to get our in-person courses running again, as well as preparing for an in-person retreat in September.

However this is not without its challenges. We have fewer teachers than we did at the start of the pandemic, and our financial reserves are somewhat depleted after 18 months without in-person events. These would usually provide a significant proportion of the donations which we rely on. I would like to make a very big thank you to everyone who set-up standing orders or gave donations online last year. This was a major lifeline for us, and without these people giving, the sangha would not be in such fine health now.

Unfortunately, while we are in the process of returning to public events, there already looks to be a shortfall developing for next year's 2021-22 accounts, which will make it harder for us to deliver the vision of offering the Dharma to more people in South London. To address this I've recently launched an 'opening up appeal' seeking to raise £9,000 which will give us the funds needed to get public events running again, while also continuing to support a team member one day per week to produce additional online content.

Alongside our normal activities, for the past 12 months of Maitrinara, Amaladana, Adam and myself have also been meeting regularly as a Building Kula to explore the options available for buying or leasing our own permanent space. As of Spring 2021, an opportunity to take over the full-time management of Effra Space presented itself, which was an exciting possibility for us. Unfortunately, despite some detailed negotiations, this fell through and so for the moment we continue hiring rooms at Effra Space on an ad hoc basis. However, we remain keen to establish our own Buddhist Centre in South London within the next year or two and continue to look out for suitable property, as well as undertake the necessary financial planning needed to make this a reality.

SERVING THE DHARMA

I'd like to sum up this report by thanking everyone who has volunteered to support classes or courses in the last year. We remain a largely volunteer organisation, with just a handful of mostly part-time team members fulfilling a few core roles. Without all you wonderful volunteers offering your warmth, friendship, skills and time, everything we do just wouldn't be possible.

"Without all you wonderful volunteers offering your warmth, friendship, skills and time, everything we do just wouldn't be possible."

The centre team had a challenging year and went through a few changes in response to changing need. Last summer we recruited Jac one day a week, to help us with all the new technical challenges of running a online events. Jac made a major contribution in this area but stepped down late last year. We were then fortunate to be able to recruit long standing sangha member Elena to this role. She has been doing a wonderful job managing the tech and editing the videos for release each week since joining the team.

Things also haven't been easy for Lizzy, our event's coordinator, as she suffered a lengthy period of illness and was off work for some time. Lizzy usually works two days a week, and I really rely on her skill and experience to help me manage and coordinate all the events and activities. From an operational point of view, this was a big loss for the team, and made the first half of the 2021 particularly challenging. However, I'm delighted to report Lizzy has been starting to feel better and has been able to return in a limited capacity in recent weeks. When it was clear that Lizzy was going to be off work for some time, we took on Alex Bermingham as a temporary events coordinator one day a week to provide some cover until Sept 2021. It's been a joy to work with Alex and I've been very appreciative of his flexibility and willingness to help out.

Finally, I also want to thank the council of trustees, who all volunteer their time and energy to help to serve the community, as well as support me as Chair. There is a great deal of trust and shared vision that has built up between us over the years, and our meetings are both enjoyable and harmonious - a rare combination for meetings! The council currently made up of Amarapuspa, Maitrinara, Suddhaka, Amaladana, Sagarasila, and myself as Chair. I've been keen that we improve the gender balance and diversity of the council for some time now, and am hoping that this year this will finally be possible.

A big thank you also goes to Brixton's president, Paramabandhu, for visiting us twice yearly and for his consistent friendship, kindness and support of both me and our community.

Viryanaga

Chair of Brixton Buddhist Community
August 2021

AMALADANA

2020-2021 Finance Officer's Annual Report

"Brixton Buddhist Community's move from in-person to online formats was rapid"

Our forecast for 2020 was substantially challenged by the COVID pandemic. Prior to the lockdown restrictions over 40% of our income was from in-person events, either from cash or card donations, and in-person meetings were the basis of all courses, events, classes and retreats.

Brixton Buddhist Community's move from in-person to online formats was rapid, due in large part to a magnificent effort by the Chair, Danaprasada community and our technical team. This enabled us to overcome an existential threat to our level of income and achieve 82% of the pre-COVID forecast with a 17% increase in funds.

We have maintained our policy of providing all activities on a donation basis so that people are not excluded because of cost. We also retain our ambition to lease or own our own premises in order to better control our calendar of activities and provide a solid base for our growing sangha. The additional technical support that is required to run our online presence has caused us to augment the core team slightly with an additional 1 day per week for technical support.

"...this enabled us to overcome an existential threat to our income stream"

2020-2021 FINANCES

The following table summarises income and expenses by category for 2020 and shows our end of year cash balance*. The sections following give more explanation on these categories.

Income	2020	2019
Money from events	£15,449	£28,436
Money from fundraising	£21,411	£12,737
Gift aid	£11,259	£2,582
Subtotal	£48,119	£43,756

Expenses		
Event costs	£14,229	£14,230
Support for Lizzy, Viryanaga & Jac	£21,856	£10,828
Contributions to other Triratna Charities	£3,382	£800
Subtotal	£39,467	£25,858

Net Surplus/Deficit	8651	17898
Cash balance previous year	49900	32002
End of year cash balance	58551	49900

MONEY FROM EVENTS

All classes, courses and retreats were converted to an online format during 2020.

- Classes – 75% income against budget achieved. Some of this has been offset against reduced rental charges, see outgoings.
- Retreats - Retreat income significantly down as our 2 large Vajrasana retreats had to be cancelled
- Courses – Courses were attended by slightly more people than in 2019 (171 v 168)* and 68% of income was achieved against the budget. As with classes, some of this has been offset against reduced rental charges, see outgoings.

MONEY FROM FUNDRAISING

- Unrestricted – an increase of 8% compared to budget was helped by enthusiastic and innovative requests made online, and the generosity of the community.
- Restricted - restricted funds are composed of amounts collected to support Aryanisa's ordination retreat and donations to be made to Amaravati, and these total £3,703.

GIFT AID

We were able to claim higher levels of Gift Aid this year, although only 75% of budget was achieved as some retreat and course income could not be claimed against (these must be advertised as free)

OUTGOINGS

- Rent costs were 58% of budget due to inability to hold public classes with COVID restrictions.
- Payroll slightly above budget due to need to take on Jac (increased need for technical support)
- Contributions to other Triratna charities includes a 5% contribution to the European Chairs Assembly, of which we are part

OUTLOOK

Reserves were healthy at end of the 2021 financial year, but support costs will increase further in 2021-22 as a result of taking on Viryanaga full-time. Additional rental costs are also expected as classes open again. Our reserves will be needed for a lease on our own premises, so additional fundraising will be still be needed to balance the budget next year.

AMARAPUSPA

2019-2020 Women's Mitra Convenor's Annual Report

It has continued to be a joy to serve women in the Brixton Triratna Buddhist community as their Mitra Convenor. This is despite the challenging circumstances of the pandemic and lock downs. Meet-ups have mainly been over Zoom for much of the year. Classes and courses have mainly been recorded or live streamed.

Viryanaga, our chair, Maitrinara and others on the media team should be particularly appreciated for how much work they've done to keep activities running online. We continue to attract some great women who are engaged in exploring the Dharma. A new Brixton online women's study group started during the first lockdown. It includes a woman who moved to New Zealand, but stayed connected. The group is fairly large for online (8) but works well. To make up for the lack of more informal ways for getting to know each other, we have a 10 minute space at the end of each session where different group members talk about an item of significance in their lives from objects, to books, to images, to people etc. Most have become or are becoming Mitras.

My other study group, now in year three, is also large (8). The group has adjusted to being online despite missing meeting in each other's homes. It is an evening group and many will have been on Zoom all day with work. Despite this, there has been a good level of engagement. particularly when people share their projects. We have all been delighted to welcome back Aryanisha from her April ordination retreat. Aryanisha had been supporting the group as a Mitra and then moved into co-leading with me before her ordination. Her input has been very appreciated.

Saraka moved to Edinburgh at the beginning of the year. She carried on meeting with her year four group until April when they fully completed the Dharma Training Course.

"We continue to attract some great women who engage well in exploring the Dharma. "

All the women in that group had asked for ordination. Saraka has made some very valuable and helpful contributions to Brixton over the years, including being a regular and excellent teacher on our Sangha nights. She is missed.

We now have nine Brixton women who have asked for ordination. They and the sangha in general have benefited from involvement in Brixton by Vajratara who is on the ordination training team at Tiratanaloka. She has co-led a Brixton Sangha Retreat and also some wonderful study mornings in Brixton. Another woman Order Member, Maitrinita has also been involved with Brixton activities this year. Maitrinita is especially active with the London People of Colour events, and her involvement has been an inspiration for our Mitras in Brixton. Maitrinita has co-led two Brixton online sangha retreats and some workshops over the year. I have really appreciated her involvement.

"I would love to see more women ordained in Brixton Buddhist Community and look forward to continuing to support women in their spiritual development this coming year. "

This year I also have joined a team of Southern Region Order Members to plan region wide events for women who are in training for Ordination, such as some events at the Croydon Buddhist Centre which Brixton women are invited to. In addition, I am now the Chair of the women's Mitra Convenors Gathering - a meeting of women Mitra Convenors from Buddhist centres all around the UK and beyond, which is now increasingly

international. This has the aim of providing a broader context for Brixton women training for Ordination.

The Croydon and Southern region offers an opportunity for Mitras to meet a wider variety of women Order Members and Mitras in ordination training. This seems particularly important for a small situation like Brixton with very few local women Order Members.

I continue to be the only women Order Member trustee (out of 6 trustees). Aryanisha's ordination had been delayed due to pandemic conditions. It has been wonderful to welcome her back to Brixton. I would love to see more women ordained in Brixton and look forward to continuing to support women in their spiritual development this coming year.

Amarapuspa

Women's Mitra Convenor

August 2021



MAITRINARA

2019-2020 Men's Mitra Convenor's Annual Report

This year has obviously been a difficult year in many ways, but also an encouraging year in others. I particularly appreciated the way the sangha pulled together in friendship and in supporting Brixton activities, in our classes, courses and online retreats for the benefit of the many.

MEN'S GROUPS

Alongside our two established weekly men's study groups, a new group started to form during lock-down, initially online but more recently in-person. This group is being led by Amaladana and myself. It's great to see a new generation of men coming through who are enthusiastic about exploring the Dharma together on the basis of friendship. It has been heartening to witness the men in all of the study groups develop their confidence in friendship, meditation and the Dharma, as well as finding more ways to more creatively engage with their lives.

During the course of the last eighteen months, eight men from one men's study group took the step of deepening their connection to the three jewels and to the Triratna Buddhist community by becoming Mitras. The Mitra ceremonies were held during the Padmasambhava day, Sangha day and Buddha day festivals. Under the restrictions of lock-down the festivals were in-person but live streamed for the wider Brixton Buddhist community. During the ceremony each man talked movingly about the reasons why they wanted to become

Mitras in the Triratna movement. They each reported being affected strongly in their own ways by both the ceremony itself and the outpouring of support and love from the community, in the form of cards, presents and well wishings.

During the pressures of lock-down two men in our community took the courageous step to ask for ordination into the Triratna Buddhist Order. They joined the Going For Refuge group in Brixton which meets weekly to explore and develop their practice, and support each other

"It has been heartening to witness the men in all of the study groups develop their confidence in friendship, meditation and the Dharma"

on the basis of friendship. They also started to engage with the online ordination training retreats held at Padmaloka.

The Men's Chapter is also going strong. This group is for the male Order Members in the Brixton Community. Throughout the lock-down we met online weekly to share our lives and practice.

DAILY MEET-UP

During the first lock-down we quickly innovated to produce online classes, courses and retreats. But one of the highlights for me was the daily midday meet-up which ran for several months. This meet-up was both a source of support and a way of getting to know people in the sangha much better, as we checked in about how our lives were unfolding during those unprecedented times.

CLASSES & COURSES

Throughout the lock-down the Monday meditation class ran online or in-person every Monday without fail. This ranged from livestream broadcasts from men's community shrine room, back to live streamed classes at Effra space, and then now into in-person classes again. These weekly live streams were watched live by up to 35 people, and viewed on catchup by many more. Both established sangha members and people entirely new to Triratna, even to meditation, joined these classes regularly.

" The Monday night team is a real source of joy...They create the atmosphere of friendliness, helpfulness and inclusivity at these classes, whether online or in-person"

Many have reported that these classes were a source of genuine solace, community, and inspiration during some dark times. They also expressed a lot of appreciation for this regular opportunity to practice communally.

That we were able to run these classes week-in week-out was made possible by the dedicated and enthusiastic Monday night team. The Monday night team is a real source of joy and support to work

with. They create the atmosphere of friendliness, helpfulness and inclusivity at these classes, whether online or in-person, which helps people to relax and feel part of the evening, as well as helps the evenings run smoothly.

I would particularly like to thank the tech team who ran the gauntlet every week of getting the tech up and running for this event. I would also like to thank everyone else in the Sangha who were part of the teams for the online retreats and courses that we held throughout lock-down.

Prior to lock-down many men from Brixton had enjoyed the yearly working retreat at Guhyaloka in the awe-inspiring Spanish mountains. We weren't able to run these retreats last year but I am delighted to say the working retreat is back this summer as we join our efforts in to help renovate the house and garden of Alfoxtons in Somerset. This is Triratna's newest retreat centre, and is being developed into an eco-friendly retreat centre, primarily for creative and literary retreats.

COMMUNITY

The men's community in Streatham has been my main source of friendship and camaraderie during the lock-down. The community provides a real opportunity for us men here to grow through friendship and being closely involved in each other's lives and practice. Like everyone else we were really thrown back onto our resources during the lock-down, but the atmosphere of communal care helped create stability and support that felt very important.

We missed being a social hub for Brixton community, and not being able to host study groups, media team meetings, trustees meetings, as well as social events such as dinner and film nights, but I am delighted to say that, for now at least, we are able to welcome friends back in for these activities.

Sadly two community members decided to leave for health issues during the lock-down and they will be missed. Although

we are looking forward to inviting new men to join us to be part of this vibrant and supportive residential community.

Thank you.

It has become more obvious to me personally how much the Brixton Buddhist Community means to me and the myriad ways that we support one another to be forces of good for the world. I continue to feel inspired at the vision of co-creating a community of practitioners which takes as its guiding lights the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. A big thank you to everyone involved in helping the Brixton Sangha to thrive, and may all blessings be yours!

Maitrinara

Men's Mitra Convenor

July 2021

" The community provides a real opportunity for us men here to grow through friendship and being closely involved in each other's lives and practice."

This last year has been very interesting from the perspective of organising events for the Brixton Buddhist Community. The conditions of the pandemic have been challenging but have also afforded opportunities for different kinds of events and connections in the sangha.

" The conditions of the pandemic have been challenging but have also afforded opportunities for different kinds of events and connections in the sangha."

Under the leadership of Viryanaga, the centre team responded quickly to the need to move our events online. My sense is that people within the sangha were grateful for this and the ongoing connection it provided during a difficult and uncertain time.

The format of our events had to change; Monday night meditation became a YouTube livestream, followed by a

discussion on Zoom, while the Wednesday Dharma night class mostly aired as a pre-recorded video. At various points, when there was an ease in restrictions, we were able to hold in-person classes for limited numbers of people and some hybrid events. Our courses continued online and we saw an increase in bookings.

Some of the positive repercussions of moving online were that people who previously hadn't been able to attend our in-person classes and courses, either due to care commitments or health and mobility issues, were now able to attend. It also opened up our events to people living much further afield.

From my perspective, although there are obvious limitations of an online format, people attending these events still felt engaged with the Dharma and connected to the Sangha. The fact that many people who hadn't previously been engaged with our events became regular attendees, is testimony to this.

The move to online events also had impacts on the work of the centre team. My role became more focussed on producing online publicity and ensuring that information was up-to-date as we moved through various phases of lockdown. We also welcomed Jac onto the team to deal with the recording and editing of class videos and managing our Youtube channel, which became an important way for people to access our teaching and events. I've greatly appreciated this addition to the team as the move online (and the various alterations to events caused by lockdown plans changing) created quite a lot of extra work for the centre team. We had to get to grips with new systems and technology, as well as innovate and manage new ways of receiving income. The role of Online Events Coordinator has now been taken over by Elena.

"...we still hope to continue to reach people through the online platforms we have established during [the lockdown] and make our content accessible to a wider range of people."

We have continued to be greatly helped by the media team; a small but vital team of volunteers who help with our media and promotions. Emma has been a huge help in managing our mailing list communications, Olivier has provided excellent input on marketing and Lotte is very effectively managing our Discord channel. (Discord is an online chat room that we have made use of as a way of connecting the Sangha

during lockdown.) I have also benefited from an excellent and responsive team of proof readers. It has been such a pleasure to work with this team of volunteers and I feel hugely grateful for their support.

I also feel very grateful to Maitrinara who has been leading study sessions with the centre team. This has really helped me to feel connected to the vision behind the admin! These sessions, as well as our team check-ins have also helped to foster a greater sense of right livelihood among our remote-working team.

An exciting development in 2020/21 has been the creation of a Brixton Buddhist Community brand book and new logo. These were designed by Alex Bermingham who has thoughtfully reflected on the values of the community and sought to represent this through our branding. As the amount of people working on media and publicity continues to expand, this resource becomes increasingly helpful and necessary in ensuring that our visual presence is consistent and recognisable.

Overall, although the year has presented us with many challenges, I feel that the centre team has been given the opportunity to diversify the way we connect people with our community and events. Moving forward, while a return to regular in-person classes is obviously desirable, we still hope to continue to reach people through the online platforms we have established during this period and make our content accessible to a wider range of people.

The continuing success and growth of the Sangha during this period should give us great confidence in the commitment of our community, as well as in the strength of our events, whatever the medium.

Lizzy Laurance

Events Coordinator

July 2021



**BRIXTON
BUDDHIST
COMMUNITY**



info@brixtonbuddhistmeditation.org

Brixton Buddhist Community
is a registered UK charity
(charity no. 1084889)