

Small band with a big aim

AS global attention is transfixed by financial turmoil among the world's richest institutions, a small band of people are working to remind us of the dire poverty in which the majority of the world still lives.

The Surrey Heath Coalition Against Poverty is an eclectic group of residents with one aim in common — the eradication of poverty.

The coalition describes itself primarily as an awareness organisation but also raises money for global and local organisations.

Each of its members is involved in their own charity work and fundraising. Four years ago they decided to come together to co-ordinate their efforts and organise events for the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

This year the day is on Friday October 17.

Coalition chairman Tish Mason said the inspiration for the coalition came from an event she attended in 2004.

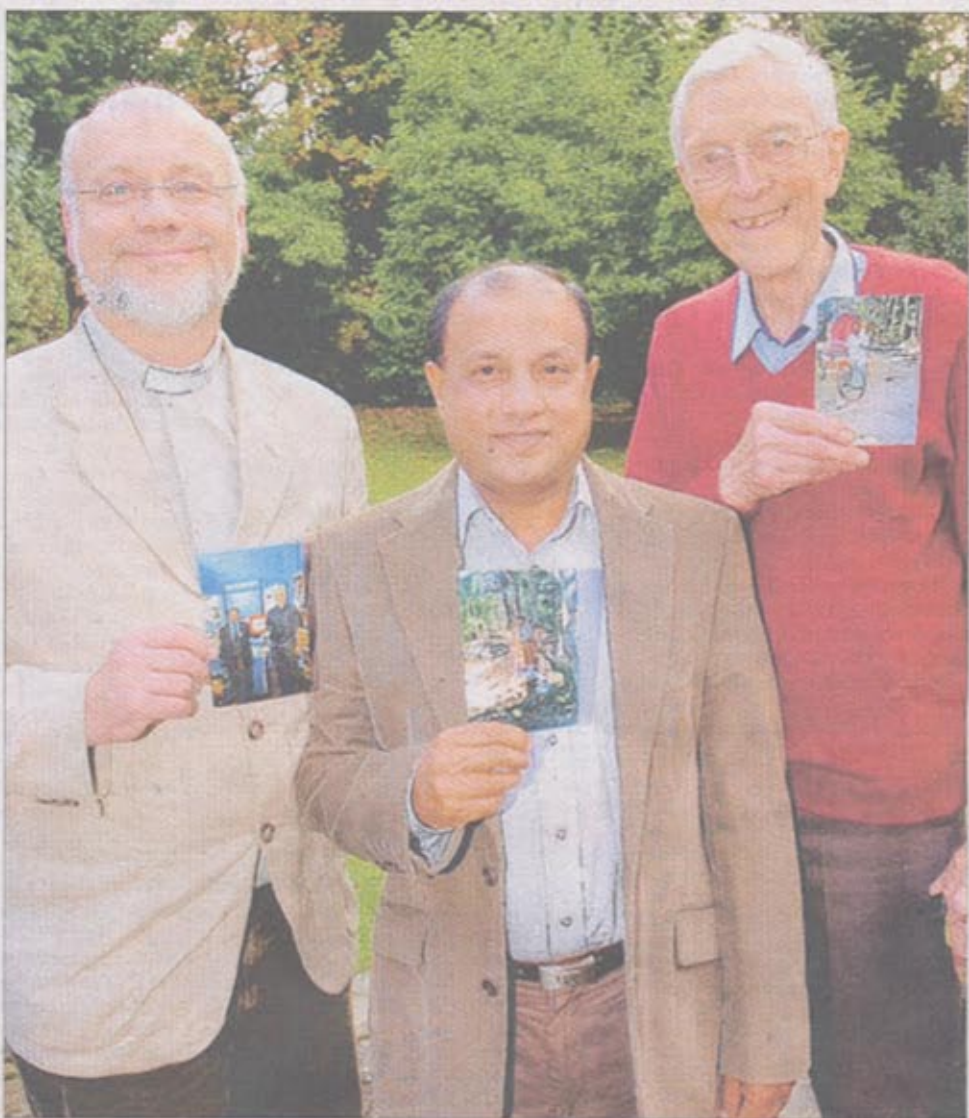
"I went to a conference in Paris for the French charity ATD Fourth World and I was struck by how much they did over there for the UN's eradicate poverty day," she said.

"They had all these events and marches and in the UK we weren't doing anything like that."

When Tish got back she spoke to her friend, and Christian Aid member, Peter Bateman, who agreed that they should start a local organisation to contribute to poverty eradication.

Since the organisation's first event at the Old Dean Community Centre, Camberley, in 2005 it has gone from strength to strength, organising bigger and better events.

One of the co-founders, Luthful Karim, said he joined



The Rev Bruce Nicole, vicar of St Michael's Church in Camberley; Luthful Karim and Peter Bateman are co-founders of the Surrey Heath Coalition Against Poverty. Picture: Ben White

because of the poverty and hardship he had seen when he was growing up in his native Bangladesh.

Mr Karim came to Surrey Heath from his village, Nimadhal in the Sylhet district, when he was 18 to study mechanical engineering at Farnborough College of Technology.

Though he is now a successful businessman and restaurant owner, the Frimley resident has never forgotten the challenges and grinding destitution people face in his home country.

His experiences motivated him to do something to help them and for more than 20 years he raised money for poverty relief initiatives in Bangladesh and other countries.

Mr Karim said that one of his projects for his home village highlighted how far money raised in Surrey Heath could go.

In 2001 the 58-year-old decided to raise funds to build a water purification and pump system for the Nimadhal community.

"Living in this country I realised that Bangladesh had become synonymous with flooding, yet there is no drinking water in the country," he said.

"Then it came into my mind that living here I was in a position to make a difference."

Within six months he had raised the £5,000 needed to provide clean water for hundreds of Bangladeshi villagers.

He has continued to raise money to maintain and expand the purification system, which now has a network of 25,000 water pipes and numerous pumps throughout the village.

Though the group's aim to eradicate global poverty may seem a lofty ambition for a small band of Surrey residents, Mr Karim summed up the

motivation behind the Surrey Heath Coalition Against Poverty.

"Life is very short and you can't do everything that you want to do," he said. "But if you can change one person's life for the better in your own lifetime than that is an achievement."

"But if you can inspire others to help then that will multiply your good intentions and make them more effective."

Various events for local and International charities have been organized by Mr Karim.

If you would like to get involved please contact Mr Karim on 01252 334 084 or 07904 414834