

## The Iona Community at Solas

The Solas Festival describes itself as 'gloriously diverse' and in 2014 it certainly lived up to that with its music line-up taking festivalgoers from hip-hop workshops to singer-songwriters via a kora player and a cabaret act. The result was an ethos proudly celebrating social justice, solidarity and encouraging openness, questioning and discovery.

This questioning atmosphere especially shone through in the 'Backchats', three workshops run by the youth team, pitched specifically at young people to enable them to discuss and explore ideas of interest and importance to them. We discussed issues from referendum politics to what life as a stand-up comedian is really like with Josie Long and prejudice and discrimination in football, with United Glasgow FC, a local football club sponsored by the Unity Centre which aims to address racism, financial exclusion and discrimination particularly among asylum seeking communities. Through these discussions, the young people at Solas were given a space that was uniquely theirs, to engage with important issues affecting them,



their communities and their futures. As part of this programme, the Iona Community Youth Team worked alongside the GK Experience, part of the Priority Areas team of the Church of Scotland, camping and sharing community and fellowship with their young people and staff.

The talk tent, sponsored by the Iona Community, was an engaging venue hosting a variety of speakers, discussions and an information point; many thanks

must go to the Iona Community volunteers who staffed this venue and whose contributions ensured that the weekend went as smoothly as possible. A huge variety of talks and discussions occurred here including Kenny McBride, our Poverty Project Worker, discussing 'poverty premiums' and a session in which members of the Community shared their personal experiences of being a member. The programme featured talks on topics as diverse as the role of religious art to the referendum and speakers from across Scotland and further afield.

As well as engaging with issues through discussion, the Iona Community was represented at Solas by the Wild Goose Resource Group and their innovative and fresh forms of worship, drawing people together to encounter old ideas in new ways. '150 Psalms in 60 minutes' was a real highlight of the weekend. Called a 'total installation' rather than a conventional service in the way people may be used to, over the space of an hour, 150 candles were lit as every Psalm was read, seen, written or

represented in a variety of forms, while Gaelic recordings were played. This was a moving and very creative multimedia, multisensory event to which people were invited to drop in and out of as they felt moved. Wild Goose also hosted the 'Big Sing', an opportunity for everyone to come together with one voice and celebrate community and diversity together through song. About 50 people joined together to sing unaccompanied songs in a number of languages.



The weekend was one of engaging with fellow festivalgoers and the world around them through discussion, talks, song, art and more. Thank you to all Iona Community members and supporters who contributed!



*Photos by Chris Long, used by permission*