



# Crafting a fairer future

For the first time in decades, large numbers of wildflowers are sprouting in Leeds city centre, bringing joy and a sense of natural regeneration. Reporter Anais Pedron finds out about the initiative behind this much-needed rewilding.



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Anais Pedron is a media officer for the Methodist Church in Britain.

Passionate about social and environmental justice, Anna Bland (31) wanted to make a difference in her local community that would have a wider reaching impact. But, having seen several activist friends suffer burn-out, and coming close to that herself in the past, she felt there had to be another way.

She says: “I’d heard about craftivism – combining craft and activism – and how its mix of creativity, contemplation and action could bring community members together to effect change.

“I felt craftivism offered a different flavour of activism that embraced the full humility of the people doing the crafting, but also the power holders we are hoping to influence.”

After meeting with two kindred spirits, the three launched their first craftivism campaigns in 2019, with the focus on climate justice

and, in particular, working for a greener and fairer future.

Part of Leeds Sanctuary (formerly Leeds Methodist Mission), a collection of city centre projects run by the Yorkshire West Methodist District, the Leeds Craftivists group has since grown to around a dozen members. They meet monthly to hear talks from experts, chat about issues that concern them, and, after a short meditation, make pieces of art by crocheting, knitting, drawing and painting.

## Kind

“The beautiful items we produce are sent, with letters explaining our views on a particular issue, to local council members to call on them to vote for change,” says Anna. “One of our principles is that we believe that if we’re hoping to build a kinder, more gentle world, then our actions must be kind and gentle too.”



Members of the Leeds Craftivists display their blanket highlighting the cost of living crisis

**Craftivism** – activism through craft – is unmistakably linked to social justice. The Methodist Church is a justice-seeking Church with initiatives and campaigns ranging from climate justice and our commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2030 to offering warm spaces to those in need during the winter. We are also supporting Methodist churches that want to gain Church of Sanctuary status for their work with migrants.

Rachel Lampard, the Methodist Church’s Director of Social Justice and Social Action, says: “Craftivism is a practical and gentle, yet powerful form of activism. It has helped people to have true conversations with MPs and has changed minds and policies. It’s about building relationships with those we’re crafting alongside as well as with those who have power.

“Through the act of creating, sitting with others, talking about what matters – or just being silent – craftivism enables lament, confession, restitution and hope. We don’t have to be expert crafters to join in. The creativity flowing within us all connects deeply with our longing for God’s justice. For Christians, craftivism can be a form of prophetic witness.”



Some of the handcrafted bees sent to MPs to call for a pollinator corridor



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Some of the craftivists’ larger projects have included a blanket designed to highlight the impact of the cost of living crisis on local people and how the issue links to sustainable energy. Before being sent to the council, the blanket was displayed in various Leeds venues to raise wider awareness.

### Biodiversity

A key focus of the craftivists over the past year has been biodiversity. Members had noticed that, while parts of Leeds, with their new developments and emphasis on green spaces, were good places for wildlife, some of the longer-established areas of the city seemed to have been forgotten.

The group swung into action, launching a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of providing habitats for wildlife, and calling on the city council to plant wildflowers to support insects and birds.

### Bees

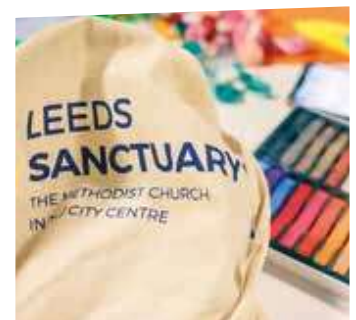
Linking to the RSPB’s Attack on Nature campaign, calling on national Government to protect biodiversity, the craftivists invited

local people to craft two bees – one to send to their local MP, and the second to contribute to the craftivists’ local campaign to create a pollinator corridor in Leeds city centre.

Anna says: “Leeds City Council were really receptive to our campaign, and it wasn’t long before wildflower seeds were being planted across the city! With the council’s permission, community members were encouraged to plant seeds, which they could obtain from us.

“Looking after our pollinators is vital, and so this feels like an important step in the right direction of making Leeds City Centre the richly biodiverse place we all want it to be.

“Of course, increasing flowers and pollinators is hugely beneficial to people’s well-being, and our work always connects with social justice, which is an important part of being a Methodist.”



The Craftivists are part of Leeds Sanctuary (formerly Leeds Methodist Mission)