

Together in Batley

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The Life and Legacy of **Jo Cox**

22 June 1974 - 16 June 2016

Jo Cox - 10 Year Anniversary

A Life Remembered: The Early Years of Jo Cox

Before she became a widely respected Member of Parliament and a voice for compassion in public life, Jo Cox was known as Helen Joanne Leadbeater—a bright, determined girl growing up in West Yorkshire, whose early years gave every indication of the qualities which would make her the remarkable person she would grow up to become.

Born in 1974, she was raised in a close-knit family by her parents, Jean and Gordon Leadbeater. Home life was grounded in strong values of hard work and community, and at its heart was her deeply rooted bond with her only sibling, her sister, Kim. Their relationship was one of enduring closeness, offering mutual friendship and support that would remain a defining part of both their lives.





Her education began at Royds Infant and Nursery school in Heckmondwike and then on to Cawley Lane School, where she quickly stood out as a diligent and capable pupil. Even at a young age, she displayed a natural curiosity and a commitment to doing her best - qualities that teachers and classmates alike came to admire. Alongside her studies, she embraced the full breadth of childhood experiences, along with her sister Kim: attending Brownies and Guides, representing the local swimming team, participating in dance classes and BMX biking, and developing the confidence and discipline that would underpin her later achievements.



She went on to attend Heckmondwike Grammar School, where she truly flourished. A gifted student, Joanne was good at sport and excelled academically; she became Head Girl—an honour reflecting both her intellect and her character. She was widely regarded as smart and popular, yet she carried herself with a quiet modesty. There was a natural shyness about her that tempered her achievements with humility, making her all the more respected by those around her.

At sixth form, she pursued A-levels in Chemistry, Biology and Geography, demonstrating both intellectual breadth and determination. These subjects reflected her curiosity about the world—its systems, its people, and the challenges it faced. Her academic success opened the door to one of the country's most



respected institutions: The University of Cambridge.

Her time at Cambridge, where she studied at Pembroke College, marked a significant transition. As a northern, working-class student entering a very different environment, she initially found it difficult to settle. It was a world far removed from the one she had known growing up - she desperately missed her sister Kim, her friends and family, and she experienced a strong sense of loneliness.

Yet, true to her character, she persevered. With grit, resilience, and determination, she adapted, found her footing and made a group of lifelong friends, and ultimately succeeded - graduating in 1995 with a degree in Social and Political Sciences.

Following her graduation, she stepped into the world of politics and public service, beginning as an adviser to Labour MP Joan Walley from 1995 to 1997. This early experience offered her invaluable insight into the workings of government and policy-making. She then became head of Key Campaigns at Britain in Europe, before moving to Brussels to work as an assistant to Glenys Kinnock, alongside her husband, former Labour leader Neil Kinnock.

In the following years, her commitment to humanitarian work came fully into focus. From 2001 to 2009, she worked at Oxfam and Oxfam International, holding a series of influential roles. Beginning in Brussels, she led campaigns on trade reform, later becoming head of policy and advocacy at Oxfam GB, and eventually heading Oxfam International's humanitarian campaigns in New York City.





Her work took her to some of the world's most challenging regions, including Darfur and Afghanistan, where she witnessed first-hand the impact of conflict and inequality. These experiences deeply shaped her political outlook and strengthened her resolve to advocate for those without a voice. During this time, she also contributed to the publication of *For a Safer Tomorrow*, authored by Ed Cairns, examining the evolving nature of global humanitarian policy.

Her dedication to humanitarian causes led her to work alongside Sarah Brown, supporting efforts to reduce maternal mortality worldwide. From 2009 to 2011, she served as director of the Maternal Mortality Campaign, an initiative backed by Sarah Brown and former Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

In the years that followed, her influence continued to grow across the charitable and policy sectors. She worked with Save the Children as a strategy consultant, contributed to the work of the NSPCC, and served as director of strategy at the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood. In 2013, she founded UK Women, a research institute dedicated to addressing the needs of women across the United Kingdom, where she also served as CEO. She later worked with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation between 2014 and 2015.

Alongside these roles, she remained deeply engaged in advocacy and leadership. She was national chair of the Labour Women's Network from 2011 to 2015, a strategic adviser to the Freedom Fund, and served on the board of Burma Campaign UK.

Throughout this remarkable journey—from a diligent pupil in Heckmondwike to a graduate of Cambridge, from a quietly determined schoolgirl to an influential voice in humanitarian and political spheres—Jo Cox's defining qualities remained constant: intelligence, empathy, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to others.

Those who knew her in her early years would have recognised the same traits that later defined her public life. She had always been driven not by recognition, but by purpose. And it was that purpose, rooted in her upbringing and shaped by her experiences, that left such a lasting mark on the world.

During these years, she also built a happy family life. She married Brendan Cox, and together they had two children, who became the centre of her world. Despite the demands of her career, she was deeply devoted to her family, and those who knew her often spoke of the joy and grounding brought to her by her son Cuillin and daughter Lejla. Her children were her most precious legacy—an enduring reflection of her love, values, and hope for the future.





Despite her international work and growing influence, Jo's ambitions were always rooted firmly at home. In terms of her political aspirations she was clear that she only ever wanted to stand as a candidate to be the MP for Batley and Spen—her home seat and the community that had shaped her. When she was elected as its Member of Parliament in 2015, it was the fulfilment of a deeply held goal. For her, politics was never abstract; it was personal, grounded in the lives and experiences of the people she represented.



As an MP, she brought with her the same empathy, determination, and quiet strength that had defined her since childhood. She believed profoundly in the possibility of a better future—for her constituents, for communities across the country, and for those whose voices were too often unheard. She approached her role with sincerity and purpose, always striving to build bridges and bring people together.



In her short time in parliament, Jo made a huge impact and gained respect across the house. She campaigned passionately on a range of local, national and international issues, including education equality, improving support for children with autism, achieving a 50:50 parliament, tackling loneliness and protecting civilians in conflict



She set up the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Friends of Syria to help politicians understand the crisis and possible policy options, and started working cross-party on the report 'The Cost of Doing Nothing' making the case for action to protect civilians from atrocity in conflicts around the world.

From a diligent schoolgirl in West Yorkshire to a committed public servant, her journey was marked by resilience, compassion, and an unwavering belief in others. And at the heart of it all—beyond her achievements and public life—remained her greatest source of pride, her family, and the legacy of hope and humanity she leaves through them.



16th June 2016

The life and work of Jo Cox came to a devastating and abrupt end on 16th June 2016, when she was murdered in her constituency by a far-right extremist. It was an act of violence that shocked not only her local community in Batley and Spenningshall, but the entire nation and much of the world beyond.

Her death was not only the loss of a Member of Parliament, but of a mother, a daughter, a wife, a sister, and a friend. The impact and pain were unimaginable. Those closest to her were left not only grieving the absence of someone they loved, but grappling with the knowledge that her life had been taken because of the values she stood for: compassion, inclusion, and unity.



For her family, the loss was profound. They had known her not as a public figure, but as Jo - daughter, sister, wife, mother - and constant presence in their lives. The grief within the family was shared by a wider community that had long regarded her as one of their own.

In Batley and Spen, the sense of shock was immediate and overwhelming. Constituents who had come to know her as a dedicated and approachable representative struggled to comprehend the loss. She had been visible, engaged, and deeply committed to the people

she served. Her absence was felt not just in political terms, but in the everyday connections she had fostered—conversations, visits, and acts of kindness that had quietly built trust.

Across the United Kingdom and beyond, tributes poured in from political leaders, humanitarian organisations, and members of the public. Many reflected on her belief, as expressed in her maiden speech to Parliament that: “we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us”—a message that resonated even more powerfully in the wake of her death.



The tragedy became a moment of reflection, prompting conversations about tolerance, extremism, and the kind of society she had worked so hard to build. Yet even in the face of such tragedy and loss, her legacy did not end there.



Carrying Forward a Vision: The Jo Cox Foundation

In the weeks and months following her death, those who had known and worked alongside Jo sought a way to honour her life in a manner that reflected her values. Out of this shared determination, a national charity - The Jo Cox Foundation - was established by her family, friends and colleagues, and in her constituency of Batley and Spen a group of volunteers came together to start to build a powerful local legacy



The foundation was created not simply as a memorial, but as a living continuation of the principles Jo had championed and the values she lived by. Its mission—to bring people together, strengthen communities, promote global humanitarianism and foster respect and understanding—echoes the very causes that defined her life’s work.

The foundation worked with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office on the development of the Jo Cox Memorial Grants. Through the grants, £10 million of funding was provided to global projects focusing on two areas that Jo was passionate about: women’s empowerment and building resilient communities to combat identity-based violence, including mass atrocities.



And in the UK, through initiatives that encourage community connection, combat loneliness, promote civility in public life and foster dialogue across divides, the foundation has sought to turn grief into action. It reflects Jo’s enduring belief that change begins at a local level, through people coming together with empathy and shared purpose.



The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness was instrumental in building social connections and tackling loneliness across the UK. The commission’s work led to the establishment of an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness and the appointment of the world’s first ever Minister for Loneliness, leading cross-government work on the issue.

In many ways, the work of the Jo Cox Foundation stands as a testament to the impact she had on those around her. Friends, colleagues, and supporters have carried forward her vision, ensuring that her voice—though silenced far too soon—continues to be heard through meaningful action.



**THE GREAT
GET TOGETHER**
INSPIRED BY JO COX

Her legacy, therefore, is not only found in her achievements or in the memory of her life, but in the ongoing efforts to build the kind of world she believed in, one that is kinder, fairer, more inclusive, and united.

At the heart of the work of the Foundation is The Great Get Together campaign – taking place every year on Jo’s birthday weekend in June. The annual Great Get Together is now a national tradition of street parties, community picnics, runs, music events, coffee mornings and simple acts of togetherness. National polls estimate that more than 17 million people across the UK have taken part in Great Get Together events over the last decade.



**THE GREAT
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A Community United: More in Common, Batley & Spen

Nowhere is the spirit of Jo's memory championed more acutely than in her former constituency. In the years since her death, the people of Batley and Spen have come together in remarkable and enduring ways to honour her life and continue her mission. What began as grief has been transformed into collective action—an expression of the very unity she championed. Much of this work is spearheaded by the volunteer group 'More in Common, Batley & Spen' – a non-political group of dedicated volunteers made up of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and led by Jo's family and friends. They came together in the aftermath of Jo's murder, and on the surface may appear to have very little in common! But they have achieved some powerful things over the last 10 years.

'More in Common' is about reaching out across the political spectrum and to people from all backgrounds to bridge divides and make a difference on issues that affect us all. It's not about trying to agree on everything or pretending we're all the same – it is simply about bringing people together, celebrating all that we have in common, promoting mutual respect and understanding and building a strong community where everyone has a sense of identity and belonging.

Community events have played a vital role in this work, none more so than the annual 'Run for Jo' which takes place at Oakwell Hall Country Park in Birstall. Founded by local Labour Party members Julie and Caroline, both of whom worked closely with Jo, the run was created as a way to channel grief into something positive. Knowing Jo's love of running, they sought to honour her in a way that felt personal and meaningful.



Every year hundreds of people come together to run or walk through the beautiful grounds of Oakwell Hall, covering either 6.5km or 2.5km and enjoying live music, food and entertainment. It is not about competition, but about coming together—families, friends, and strangers alike—

sharing in something that Jo herself loved. The atmosphere is one of warmth and inclusivity, where remembrance is combined with celebration, and where her spirit is felt in every step. This year's event will be the last one, but it promises to be bigger than ever.

1000 children from schools across Batley and Birstall came together for 'Step into the Future', walking through the town to Batley Bulldogs rugby stadium, singing songs and carrying banners emblazoned with their school names and 'More in Common'. They took part in a series of fun activities where they got to meet pupils from other schools, not only in remembrance, but in hope - looking ahead to a future shaped by the values Jo stood for.



Batley saw its first ever open-air Iftar, which optimistically catered for 200 people and was overwhelmed when over 1000 people came to the memorial gardens. Pupils from a local primary school performed a play which explained the meaning of Ramadan, community leaders spoke about how our community will remain united even in the face of adversity and people prayed together in the open air. Roberto's restaurant brought extra food out to help feed everyone and the sense of community and togetherness was magical.

At Upper Batley High School, a place Jo visited many times and held great affection for—an annual Great Get Together bake-off has become a much-loved tradition. Staff and students take part in the competition under the theme "More in Common". Year after year, the event has grown, drawing in wider participation and strengthening bonds across the school community. It is more than a competition; it is a celebration of shared values, creativity, and unity.

The school trust, led by Sam Vickers, has played a central role in keeping Jo's memory alive through initiatives like this—ensuring her message continues to inspire younger generations.



The Friends of Batley Station remember Jo with regular Great Get Together events and the dedicated group of volunteers worked with Northern Rail and Jo's family to secure a permanent memorial to Jo at the station



And up at Batley Bulldogs a number of matches have been held in Jo's honour, with the volunteers from 'More in Common' working closely with the club and its Sporting Foundation on a number of projects.



This spirit is also encapsulated through The Jo Cox Way bike ride which sees participants from across the country travel 280miles from West Yorkshire to London, revisiting Jo's political journey. Started in 2016 by Sarfraz Mian, a businessman from North Yorkshire, with five of his friends, the ride has grown every year with now over 100 people taking part – of all ages, and from all backgrounds and walks of life. The ride is a physical and psychological challenge and epitomises the 'more in common' spirit, celebrating community, friendship and resilience.





In Jo's hometown of Heckmondwike there have been Great Get Together family fun days with live music from local artists, face-painting, circus skills and the local Scouts making pancakes. Fairfield School organises 'The Big Sing' where children from local schools come together in the town centre to sing songs, accompanied by live music played by staff from Spen Valley High School. There have been coffee mornings at libraries in Heckmondwike, Cleckheaton, Birstall and Mirfield, and a 'Great Lego Get Together' at Batley Library, along with many more events across Batley and Spen and beyond.





These gatherings are more than commemorations; they are living expressions of Jo's message. They bring neighbours together, bridge divides, and remind all who take part that her vision for a kinder, more united society is still being carried forward.



Ten years on from her brutal murder, in these moments of shared endeavour, in quiet solidarity, and in collective purpose, Jo's presence is still deeply felt.

Across Batley and Spenningsdale there are many more tributes to Jo. At her old school, Heckmondwike Grammar, her portrait hangs in the school hall and the 6th Form Centre bears her name, as does a plaque at the Bronte Birth Centre at Dewsbury and District Hospital, which her parents and

sister proudly opened in 2016 –Jo had cut the first turf as the MP and Jo and Kim were both born at the hospital. And in Liversedge, the Jo Cox Community Wood has become a very special place for many local people to visit. It was developed by the Spenningsdale Civic Society, a number of whose members knew Jo, and is filled with trees which have been sponsored by local families in memory of loved ones and to celebrate special occasions.



Further afield, 'Place Jo Cox' in Brussels is a place where many of Jo's friends from her time working there go to remember their time together, listening to live music or sharing moments of quiet reflection. And in May 2017 the French Burgundy town of Avallon named a street 'Rue Jo Cox' in her memory. Like her life, her legacy has reached places far and wide.

The pain of loss and grief is never easy, and when someone is taken far too early in such a violent way it is easy to give into anger, rage and despair, but what Jo's legacy has shown is that there is another way. It shows that the anger, hatred and division in the world can be counterbalanced with a different narrative – one of hope and togetherness – and one that shows, as Jo said, we do indeed have 'far more in common than that which divides us'.





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Every decade or so, the world is tested by a crisis so grave that it breaks the mould; one so horrific and inhumane that the response of politicians to it becomes emblematic of their generation — their moral leadership or cowardice, their resolution or incompetence. It is how history judges us. We have been tested by the Second World War, the genocide in Rwanda and the slaughter in Bosnia, and I believe that Syria is our generation's test.

— Jo Cox



RUNFORJO

10th
ANNIVERSARY

& FAMILY FUN-DAY



part of
THE GREAT
GET TOGETHER

INSPIRED BY JO COX

Sunday 21st June 2026

9am-2pm Oakwell Hall & Country Park



JOIN US FOR THE TENTH AND FINAL RUNFORJO & FAMILY FUN-DAY IN MEMORY OF JO COX

In 2016 Jo Cox was killed doing the job she loved as the MP for Batley and Spenningsdale. It is more important than ever now to come together to remember Jo, her values and her words 'we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us'.

Join us for the 10th Run for Jo in a place Jo loved and visited with her family, to celebrate her life and all that she stood for.

RACE START & FEES

- 9.30am 6.5k cross country challenge: £20
- 11.15am 2.5k fun run: £10
- Virtual 10km at a time and place of your choice individual entry £25 (includes postage)

All entrants will receive a limited edition RunForJo t-shirt and medal.

email: moreincommonbatleyandspen@gmail.com

INSPIRED BY JO COX

Sponsored by GMB Union



BOOK ONLINE

For the cross country challenge visit: <https://racebest.com/races/runforjo2026>

For the fun run visit: <https://racebest.com/races/funrunforjo2026>

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