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Forever in our hearts: Ruth Kersley, above, with the first Grenfell mosaic and, right, the three others in the playground at Avondale Park Primary School. Photos Michael Greisman

A way to remember

By John Lawrence

When fire took hold of Grenfell Tower in west London, it claimed the lives of 72 people, many of them children. Families, schools and communities in the area were left traumatised.

Four months after the tragedy, glass and mosaic artist Ruth Kersley approached one primary school in the shadow of the tower with the idea of creating a permanent memorial to two families including six children and one staff member who lost their lives.

Mosaics of memory and hope

The project she started resulted in the four beautiful mosaics that today take pride of place in the playground of Avondale Park Primary School. The first panel shows Grenfell Tower placed among the ter-

aced houses and streets that cover the North Kensington area. The second and third represent portraits of the two families who died, and the fourth depicts a garden of hope filled with flowers created by one of the victims' classmates, now in year 2.

Ruth, of Abbots Gardens, N2, involved Avondale's children and staff every step of the way. Each class from nursery to year six created the drawings and helped to cut and stick the ceramic and glass tiles that form the mosaics. Ruth also ran an art club for older children once a

week after school and welcomed the offers of help from mothers and staff.

Shocked community

"I think it was a cathartic experience for them," said Ruth. "Here was something constructive to do in a situation where they felt so powerless. Some of those I worked with had lost their homes in the fire.

"For me it was an extraordinary experience. I've lived in East Finchley a long time but, through this, I got to know and care for a whole different community in W10 and W11 that I previously knew nothing about. They are lovely people."

It was a community still in shock. "I was both saddened and moved to spend time with the children and hear their stories whilst working in the shadow of the building," said Ruth. Avondale Park is just 300m from where the shell of Grenfell still stands.

"I could not have done this project without the support of staff, especially the wonderful headteacher Katy Blackler. She showed extreme fortitude at the time of the fire, keeping the school open from the immediate aftermath, ensuring that children had a safe environment and some normality in a traumatic situation."

'Forever in our hearts'

After six months of hard work, the four mosaics, created by the whole school, were unveiled at a moving commemorative assembly on the first anniversary of the blaze. The inscriptions they bear in English and Arabic read: "Forever in our hearts". Find out more about Ruth's work at www.ruth-glass.com.



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