



We would like to thank the London Borough of Newham for supporting our Community Activity programme.



Strengthening Communities



Community Links' approach to community development



communitylinks

105 Barking Road,
Canning Town,
London,
E16 4HQ

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t: 020 7473 2270 • e: info@community-links.org • w: www.community-links.org



Introduction

COMMUNITY LINKS is an innovative east London charity, running a wide range of community services and projects for people of all ages. Based in Newham, we have over 30 years of experience working with local people to support children, young people, adults and families.

Community Links' multi-purpose work is focused on achieving our four strategic aims.

- **RAISING ASPIRATIONS** – building confidence and life skills, empowering people to explore their dreams, set realistic and achievable goals and fulfill their potential.
- **EXTENDING OPPORTUNITIES** – supporting those for whom progression from school to college to employment does not run smoothly, enabling them to get back on track and make a positive contribution to their own lives and to the community.
- **TACKLING POVERTY** – ensuring families can meet their basic material needs – adequate income, appropriate housing, a safe and stable environment – and build a brighter future.
- **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES** – helping people to feel safer, building bridges across ages and cultures, and working to build a better society for all.

Community Links runs a network of 60 different projects. This report focuses on one of our projects, reflecting a small part of the work undertaken by the Community Development team. We have found time and time again that the kind of intense estate-based community action work which has taken place throughout this project, and the strong relationships formed between the project worker and the wider local community, can have a powerful and lasting impact on the lives and the well-being of the people who live here. The achievements set out here were co-ordinated by one part-time development worker, over two years.

David Robinson, co-founder of Community Links, suggests in the recent publication "Side by Side"

'It is not only possible for one human being to make a real and lasting difference to another, it is often all that ever does'

This report is designed and printed by Sheaf Graphics (0114 273 9067) on paper from carefully managed, sustainable forests.

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Worked with 17 centres across the London Borough of Newham, both our centres and other organisation's premises

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Activities



Supported 64 different activities provided by 31 different organisations

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Participation



Attracted 1,551 people to activities – 411 of whom had never taken part in a community activity before – and enabled residents to set up strong user groups at four of our own centres

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Events



Held or supported 22 community events which attracted 2,992 people

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Support



Assisted nine local organisations or individuals to access London Borough of Newham 'Go For It' grants and helped raise £12,574 in funding for small groups or individuals wanting to set up local activities

12

Future plans



Our work will continue to expand, with many new projects already planned



communitylinks

Centres



GUARDIAN JOURNALIST MADELEINE BUNTING VISITED AND WROTE

'The garden is teeming with children, there is a hubbub of chatting around tables in the community centre; the air is filled with the delicious smell of cakes baking and there is Loreen, smiling a greeting to one neighbour and then calling out to a couple of children to be sure to be back in the morning for more baking. This is Rokeby community centre, in one of east London's most deprived boroughs, Newham'
 Madeleine Bunting, *The Guardian*, 19 April 2010



Seventeen safe, welcoming and supportive community centres, accessible to all

local services. This is partly so that we, as an organisation, can respond best to identified needs, and also to ascertain the impact the project has had on the lives of local people over a set period of time. A baseline study held before the centre opened found that of 70 people interviewed 70% admitted to being afraid to go out after dark and 75% were in fear of crime. A recent survey of 50 local people found that 80% thought that the area had changed for the better since the centre opened.

'I have got to know people since I have come to the centre, it has changed people's perceptions and people feel more safe'

Rokeby estate resident

'I would say there has been a 70% decrease in ASBOs since the centre opened'

Sue Lawler, Community Safety Team

Of the residents we spoke to 32% told us that crime on the estate has gone down since Rokeby community centre opened and that there are no more gangs hanging around.

THE ROKEBY CENTRE

opened its doors to the people of this isolated and troubled area in Spring 2009. The centre is buzzing with activity from 9 in the morning until 9 at night and has very quickly become a real focal point for the local community.

'Everyone is using the centre, there's somewhere to go and meet friends now'

Rokeby estate resident

Each week around 225 people attend, 67% from ethnic minority and 62% from low-income families

Baseline Surveys

At each centre we support we conduct a yearly baseline survey to gauge how people feel about their area, their sense of community and also their knowledge of

A SAFER ROKEBY

Crime figures on Rokeby estate have fallen. Recent data received from Newham show that the number of reported ASB incidents has almost halved since the opening of Rokeby Community Links Hub. The number of reported crime incidents has been more than halved over the same period.



CASE STUDY

Toni – local resident, mother of three girls aged 13, 10 and 3



'When I moved here I felt quite lonely, you never used to see anybody around unless people cut across the green to get to the shops. You could sit indoors and not see or speak to anyone for weeks.'

'We used to have a lot of issues three or four years ago with youths riding motor bikes on the green and along the pavements – it was terrifying.'

'We used to have cars set alight and once a caravan was set

alight. There used to be a gang over at the benches and I couldn't let my kids out to play.'

'The centre has made a massive impact. We come here four times a week now and I have become involved in planning activities and leafleting. I always know where my kids are and I know that they are safe.'



HOSKINS CLOSE CENTRE

has run an Open Access Play scheme for a few years and has recently encouraged the larger community to come together for activities and events at the centre.

This is good for residents and for the children who

use the centre. They learn to work and have fun together through a range of intergenerational activities and events.

There is a group who meet regularly and socialise, practice aerobics, go on outings and reminisce about days gone by.

'When you started work, you could leave a job one day and get another one the next day, or the same day. But now, you can't do that. I was fourteen when I first started up Aldgate, no, Commercial Road, I started there as a machinist. Kids can't do this now, there is no work.'

You can't talk to kids now – they swear back at you. Parents don't worry about their kids. Since coming to the club we have helped Jan with everything. We have socials for all ages – we've got a Pie 'n' Mash night coming up next week. The kids are all right really now that we know them. We like coming here, it's not too far. It gets me out and makes a change to feel useful and to make new friends'

'Nifty Fifties' project participant



Activities

An exciting range of fun activities for all. Sharing common activities between cultures aids people's understanding of each other



CAPOEIRA A cross between dance and martial arts originating in Brazil. This beautiful activity has attracted lots of young people, diverting them away from crime and teaching them discipline, teamwork and a skill.



The Newham **STEEL BAND** ran a 12-week course and invited local families to participate.



KEEP FIT
Affordable
Keep Fit
classes run
every week
for anyone
wishing to
take part.



STORY TELLING Young parents or carers who often feel trapped and isolated come together with their children and tell them stories; a great way for the adults to meet others in the same situation and improve their social networks. Of course, the children get to hear some wonderful stories too!



HOLIDAY AT HOME A fantastic project which ran at Forest Gate Baptist Church for people who were not able to take a break away during the summer. There were art workshops and intergenerational activities.



STREETDANCE Led by a local young man this group has gone from strength to strength and has entertained users of the centre as well as holding regular classes and negotiating rehearsal studio space.



Participation

New people getting involved in new things



'Someone said that they think that the project is great and that it has brought the community together, and that she now knows and speaks to many of her neighbours who she did not know a year ago.'

CASE STUDY

Jude Greaves is 19 years old and is currently studying music at university.

'We moved around a lot when I was little but after my father died we settled down in Stratford from about the age of six.

'I have seen The Green change and reform, it has gone through a lot of changes and a lot of things have happened there, good things and bad things. It was often used as a base for criminal activities I remember a couple of times where cars had been stolen and driven to the park

and set alight. But since then the area has improved and I think it has a lot to do with the Community Centre.

'I got involved with Community Links and the centre when they had a meeting – my mum was there she told me to come along and that I might be able to get a job there so I went and introduced myself and I was put on a course for volunteering with Community Links.

'Eventually after volunteering for some time I got the job as a paid youth worker and I got the opportunity to teach dance around my area with a project called "Streetz on da Green". That came about when I was introduced to a wonderful

lady called Cecilia who works for Community Links. She knew that I could dance and she talked about the opportunity to teach dance.

'We started off practicing at the community centre but now we are in Maryland studios.

'I also set up a Facebook group for "Streetz on da Green" to keep people updated about times and dates, and to show our videos and pictures online. We managed to get some funding from Life Bank and which we used to pay the trainers, and for the studio hire. Community Links has enabled me to come a step closer to reaching my goals and achieving my ambitions.'



'I and my family have had a fantastic year and the kids have had some great opportunities that they otherwise would not have had – a big thank-you goes out to all the staff for all their hard work over the year!'



'The Centre was a very good idea . . . the area needed it, the staff here are very kind, considerate and helpful, and always work for the benefit of the children.'



'If childcare wasn't available I would never have been able to complete the training course.'



Events for all the family

Big Lunch

Four of our centres held a **Big Lunch** event where communities came together to share food, share space, share skills, share stories and build relationships which would last beyond the day



Big Lunch sharing locally-grown food



Pie 'n' Mash

Pie 'n' Mash introduced new communities to the traditional cockney favourite. Young and old joined together to sing popular east end songs and teach them to their new neighbours



Refugee festival running for the eleventh year in Newham, bringing all communities together with the message 'different pasts, shared future'



Support

Supporting other organisations to support the community

This Community Links project has worked with 31 different providers, working with children, young people, adults and elders. We have helped with fund-raising and organising projects



WINDOW WALL E7

'Thank you once again for taking me on board and giving me this opportunity. I will forever be grateful to you, for believing in me and being a great support throughout the project!'

Shofa Begum, local artist

'Your involvement has been invaluable as a stake holder and a community development worker. Your assistance in sourcing community groups and assistance with the window wall has been amazing.'

Shabana Qadir

LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

'Many thanks for agreeing to help us set up a discussion group of people in the local community in Stratford.'

Grahame Whitfield, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University

QUATRO

'Many thanks for seeing me today to discuss Forest Gate. The discussion was very helpful and I will be in touch again when we have made progress.'

Paul Dimoldenberg, Managing Director Quatro

YOUTHOLLOGY

'Thank you so much for helping me with the grant application form. I have filled in the rest of the form the best I could and as promised am sending it to you to check over. Many thanks.'

Sevil, admin at Youthology

BLUE PACIFIC

'Thank you, Cecilia, for your amazing support! Thank you so much for your professionalism and enthusiasm.'

Luis Lema



ACORN FC have worked in partnership with Community Links since 2008. They have provided our project with excellent support in community services analysis and referrals.

'Their work has been a major factor in the success of our



networking links, which have encouraged and enabled us to achieve our potential as individuals, and as a group.

'Community Links has become to us a most valuable resource. They are a solid and reliable community support service, who are experts in their field.'

Darrell Isles, Club Development Co-ordinator, Acorn FC

LEAD COUNCILLOR

'Cecilia has a really positive attitude towards working co-operatively with people in order to achieve better results. Her enthusiasm has a really good effect on the members of the community that she supports.'

'I have found it a pleasure to work with Cecilia and would choose her flexible approach to community involvement over any building-based approach.'

Cllr Kay Scoresby, London Borough of Newham

Penny is 46 years old and a lone parent of three

'I lived in Newham all my life, I was born in Forest Gate, grew up in Plaistow and for the past 21 years I've been in Custom House. It is hard to be a single mum because everything falls on your shoulders.'

'Financially it is very difficult too. The majority of my income goes on bills and it is not unknown for me to put £40 to £50 a week on gas in the winter.'

'A lot of the problems in this area are down to the fact that drugs are so readily available. There is a local drug dealer that operates right outside my kitchen window.'

'When my youngest son attended toddler group in 2004 I met a woman called Joanne there. She works for a local group called Community Childcare and they

CASE STUDY

help local people get into training and gain qualifications in childcare. They also support people along the way to become registered childminders.

'They were a life-saver for me. If it wasn't for them I would have been either on the dole or in a dead-end job that I hated. I completed my NVQ2 in childcare, health and safety training, first aid course and I am currently doing my NVQ3, all thanks to Community Childcare. If it wasn't for them I could never have afforded to do it.'

'I registered as a Childminder in October and gave up my part-time office job in February to become a childminder full-time. It is a job that I love and it is all down to Joanne and Community Childcare – I would recommend them to anyone!'



Future plans

Our work will continue to expand, with many new projects already planned



CITY FARM

A fantastic venue for delivering a range of activities in a real farm setting in Beckton; ideal for the whole community to get involved, for people to gain confidence and skills by working with animals and for people to find a much needed haven and get away from the strains and stresses of their everyday lives.

PLAY SOW AND GROW

An environmental project based on the site of the old Abbey Mills pumping station.

Community Allotments, events, raised beds, fitness trail, a bird cam and lots more will appeal to people and schools from all over Newham who would love to get involved in an outdoor project, enjoy gardening and nature and may have no space to grow plants themselves. There is a large kitchen in the renovated house on the plot, which we will use for healthy eating projects. Local residents can share and pass on



jam-making and other cooking skills to the young people who are using the project. With all the ingredients grown on the site!

a whole range of activities. There will be training rooms, a music studio, a community café and lots more.

NEWTOWN

A state of the art community centre in the north of the borough will provide a great space for



CRANBERRY

Based in Canning Town, work with families will be the focus of our small project on this troubled isolated estate.

People we want to thank

Darrell Isles, Acorn Football Club
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Councillor Akbar Chaudhary,
Forest Gate South
Councillor Marie Collier,
Canning Town North
Councillor Richard Crawford,
Stratford and New Town
Councillor Clive Furness,
Canning Town North
Councillor Patricia Holland,
Custom House
Councillor Ron Manley, West Ham
Councillor Patrick Murphy, Royal Docks
Councillor Kay Scoresby, Manor Park
Councillor Winston Vaughan,
Forest Gate South

Individuals
Penny Holland, local resident E16
Juliana Sultana, local resident E16
Toni Nash, local resident E15
Dee Smith, local resident E15
Geraldine Pollock, local resident E13
Josie Farrugia, local resident E15
Cilpa Beechok, student at Manchester University
P. Kaur, Fitness Instructor
Noreen Gilhespy
Tracy Morrell, Aerobics Instructor
Sanu Miah,
Community Development student
Shaka Daanwi,
Keep Fit and Dance instructor
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Community Development student
Mina Site
Community Development student
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