



Good Neighbours Scheme:

Creating a community





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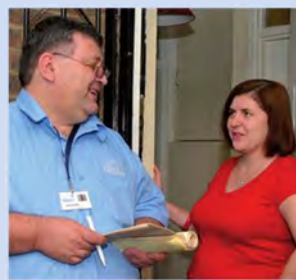
When Islington Giving first granted us the funding to run our Good Neighbours Scheme in 2011, I was thrilled.

The team and I could see the huge potential to make people's lives richer by creating self-esteem and reaching out to the most isolated people on the New River Green Estate.

This report is about sharing the results of the Scheme and making recommendations to other organisations. I'm exceptionally proud of what we have already accomplished, but I'm also excited about what the future holds, both for the Good Neighbours Scheme and for the fantastic people who live on the New River Green Estate.

Ken Kanu

Help on Your Doorstep Director



About Help on Your Doorstep

Help on Your Doorstep is a charity that aims to make a visible difference to health and wellbeing in the communities we serve. We're doing that every day by empowering individuals to overcome the barriers they face and improve their lives through our Connect services in Islington, North London. We proactively put people in touch with services that can help them to find work, training, childcare, assistance for older people and much, much more.

The Scheme background

The Good Neighbours Scheme is based on the idea of working in a small geographical area – the New River Green Estate – to create a real sense of community, addressing both poverty and isolation.

It's a Scheme with two key principles:

1. Taking part in one's community is good for the individual and the community.
2. Everybody has the capacity to give and to take part in their community in a useful and meaningful way.

The specific aims of the Scheme were:

1. To develop and facilitate local volunteering as a means of involving people who don't normally engage in volunteering, in activities that benefit their community.
2. To address any additional social welfare advice or support issues presented by the volunteers and beneficiaries through referrals into Help On Your Doorstep's network of partner services.
3. To recruit 40 volunteers and 100 beneficiaries.



The people and the place

Islington is a diverse borough – home to the very rich and the very poor. It has the second highest level of child poverty and the lowest life expectancy for men in London. New River Green in Canonbury is home to around 1500 people. Just over half of the estate's population is white British which is just under the Islington average, and there are increasing numbers from the mixed, black Caribbean, black other and black African populations. A high proportion of the Estate's population are affected by isolation, poverty, poor health and a lack of personal development opportunities – issues that not only act as a barrier to employment, but also as a barrier to volunteering – that's why this Scheme is particularly focused on being inclusive.

"A high proportion of the Estate's population are affected by isolation, poverty, poor health and a lack of personal development opportunities"

The methods

We use three key methods to achieve our aims in the community, as follows:

Bringing people together: From day trips to weekly Stay & Play sessions, we use one-off and regular social activities to provide residents with opportunities to get to know one another.

Group volunteering: We provide group volunteering opportunities at our big community events and regular groups. This gives people the opportunity to step forward and take ownership of their own community in a way that suits them.

One-to-one volunteering: This type of volunteering offers people different ways of being a good neighbour. It ranges from doing odd jobs to collecting children from school or shopping.



“The Estate used to be a place with a great community spirit – this Scheme is helping the community get that back.”

Val Henney,
Project Co-ordinator

The Scheme Co-ordinator

Day-to-day this Scheme is run by a Co-ordinator named Val Henney (read an interview with Val on page 10). This is a three-day per week role based in the Connect offices in the Walter Sickert Community Centre in the heart of New River Green. The role involves:

- Setting up and providing administration
- Advising on best practice
- Developing new projects and ideas
- Building enthusiasm and celebrating success
- Promoting inclusivity
- Provide free DBS checks.

The Reference Group

Our Reference Group is made up of one local councillor, two people from local organisations and six residents. The group meets 4-5 times each year and is a valuable way to test out ideas and get feedback.



Monitoring and evaluation

We monitor this Scheme on a quarterly basis with the key performance indicators being:

- Number of local residents involved in volunteering and community participation.
- Number of local people benefitting from the activities of local volunteers
- The proportion of volunteers/participants from groups who are known to have a higher chance of becoming isolated or socially excluded, including unemployed people, older people, lone parents, recent migrants, those with health issues or disabilities, and carers.

Achievements

In the two and a half years since it was set up, this Scheme has had a huge impact on the local community. Hundreds of people have benefited, creating a real ripple effect to the wider community.

Highlights from the Scheme so far:

- 60 volunteers have been recruited
- Over 300 people have benefitted
- Over 300 people have attended events
- Over 80 people have been on one of our annual day trips
- 20 people have received 1-2-1 support via volunteers
- Secured £25K health funding to deliver local wellbeing projects.



"One of the ladies provides the biscuits for the older persons group. She doesn't come in, she just likes knowing she's helping."

Val Henney

Older People

We held a free afternoon event specifically for the older people from the New River Green Estate attracting over 60 people.

Our weekly Older Persons coffee morning now attracts around 10-18 people per session. Teas and biscuits are provided along with newspapers, exercise classes and a weekly visit from a manicurist! We are also setting up an older persons lunch club which we expect to be very popular.



"It really helped me to do something nice with my kids that I would not have been able to afford otherwise"
Resident

Families

We held a large daytime event for children and parents from across the neighbourhood, attracting 50 people. This was an exceptional turnout as it rained heavily all day.



"People here really know and trust Val so she will be able to bring in lots of families who wouldn't normally access our services. She's very familiar and so she helps them to see that it's safe – that's the bit that really important."

Danielle Henry,
Family Support Worker

Parents from the New River Green Estate told us they needed a new weekly Stay & Play session. We set this up in the community centre and the session is now partly run by community volunteers, empowering the community, building self-esteem and providing a vital service for an important group of people.

We are working with our local Children's Centre to set up an after-school Stay & Play session for older children.

The Southend trip

Every year we fundraise and organise for a coachload of residents to go out for a daytrip to Southend-on-Sea. As well as boosting the wellbeing of everybody involved, this is a great opportunity for people to meet other residents they don't usually speak to.

When the benefits reforms were introduced, we put on an event to help local residents understand how these changes would affect them.

From Christmas parties to cake sales, we regularly organise fundraising activities for specific events. This not only raises much-needed money, but provides valuable volunteering opportunities.

"My brother lives in Southend. I never get to see him as I am unable to afford the fare so this trip gives me the opportunity to spend the day with him which is great."

Resident



We act as a central hub to help people swap and give away their unwanted items. This is a great way to build relationships between people who would never normally meet.

"I was worried about going on this trip as I thought my family would stand out being Muslim and made to feel uncomfortable, but Val assured me that we would be fine. We had such a great time meeting other residents and that we can go again next year."

Resident

Information sharing

People know that if there is a resident who they think might be isolated and in need of help, that they can talk to our Good Neighbours Co-ordinator, Val. We then contact these people and see if we can find a volunteer to help or signpost them to services.

We are in the process of setting up two Tenants Associations, empowering people to take ownership of their own community issues and to work together.



“Volunteering has given some of the residents the boost they needed. We’ve seen them take on college courses and apply for jobs because they’ve got that extra bit of experience.”

Val Henney

We know that it’s the small acts of kindness that make a difference: taking out somebody’s rubbish, dropping children off at school, doing somebody’s shopping etc. Our volunteers do just these kinds of activities.



“The estate used to have social committees and lots of generations of the same families. Now, residents don’t know each other and it leads to people feeling isolated. When I heard about the post I knew it would be a big job, but I also knew that it was something that could have a really big impact.”

Interview with Val

Valerie Henney, Good Neighbours Scheme Co-ordinator

Having lived on the New River Green Estate for over 40 years and worked for Help on Your Doorstep, Val Henney certainly understands the needs of the people living on the New River Green Estate, but she also sees the huge potential.

When people talk about the Good Neighbours Scheme, the first person they bring up is Val Henney. From consulting with residents to setting up and running the groups, Val’s role is enormously varied as she helps the residents to help each other. She says:

It was the Scheme’s focus on small acts of kindness that Val found so positive.

“People can get housing advice and healthcare but often it’s much more basic day-to-day things like getting shopping done or having somebody to chat to that are missing. This Scheme gives people confidence and builds trust.”

Day-to-day

Val spends the majority of her time setting up events, running groups and building enthusiasm. You have to be proactive, be seen in the community – use the bigger events like the day trips and luncheon groups to recruit people to volunteer to be kind.” And this idea of ‘being kind’ is a phrase that Val uses often when encouraging people to get involved, “Volunteering can seem a bit scary. Being kind is a much more manageable idea.”

There is also a regular spot in Val’s diary for calling the volunteers, taking care of them as much as they take care of each other. “The volunteers come in and I can see they’re starting to stand taller; they make more eye contact as their confidence increases.” She’s even seen some of the volunteers start training courses, “Volunteering means you can get character references and you’ve got that bit of experience.”

Sustainability

Val focuses on creating projects that are sustainable – empowering the volunteers to take control of their own events and groups. It’s a focus that is starting to pay off: “We’re seeing mums from the Stay & Play group starting to take ownership of the session, and some of the older people get together to attend another lunch group.”

For Val, her role is much more than just a job; she prides herself on being available to chat to the residents whether she’s working or not. And it’s the benefit that the Scheme is bringing that gives her the real sense of job satisfaction.

“That’s what I get out of this – seeing people growing in confidence and the community start to rely on each other again.”

“We joined up with Val to do our door knocking. We literally go round knocking on people’s doors to find out how they’re doing and how we can help.”
Danielle Henry,
Family Support Worker



Casestudy: Danielle

When 26-year-old Danielle thought that one of her older neighbours might appreciate some help, she spoke to Good Neighbours Scheme Co-ordinator, Val.

Danielle knew that Margery, who lives upstairs in her block, was in her 80s and had problems with her knee, making it difficult for her to get about. She wanted to do something neighbourly.

"Margery didn't really know me, but I knew that Val could talk to her. I'd already been CRB checked as part of my job as an early learning teacher, but Val was able to do this again so that Marjorie felt safe and could trust me."

Previously, Margery had been doing her shopping at the expensive express supermarkets nearby, but Danielle and her partner had a car so were able to drive to the cheaper supermarkets further away. This meant that Margery was able to save money as well as getting her shopping done. Now, even though Danielle no longer has a car and is pregnant with her third child, she still makes the time to help her neighbour, "Margery is a really proud woman and never wants to bother me but I can always make a bit of space in my trolley or pick up a couple of extra bits. I'm a bit of a bargain hunter so I like saving her money!"

But the shopping is really only a small part of the volunteering relationship between the two women. When Margery's cooker broke down and she was waiting for it to be repaired, Danielle offered to cook her meals, and Danielle regularly calls Marjorie to see how she is or pops in for a cup of tea and a chat. And while Danielle helps Marjorie with the shopping, in turn Marjorie keeps her up-to-date with all the latest news from the area, "She always knows what's going on!" says Danielle.

There's no doubt that this has been a positive relationship for Danielle as well as for Margery, "It makes you feel good to be helping somebody. I've got a nan and I wouldn't like to think of her being in that position – I'd like to think that people would help her if she needed it."

Throughout the volunteering, Scheme Co-ordinator, Val, has been there to make sure the arrangement keeps working for both women. "She calls me up every-so-often to check I'm ok but it's really relaxed," says Danielle. "She doesn't hassle me but because she phones it reminds me to pop in and check on Margery."

Danielle has also been involved with the Good Neighbours Scheme in other ways, taking her children on the trip to Southend as well as to the Stay & Play. "Because it's free, you can go along even if you're a bit broke. It makes you feel part of the community."

Danielle is a real advocate for volunteering and believes it's something everybody should do, "People should volunteer. If you're young and able and can help somebody else out then you should do it – people should be kind."



Case study: Margery

For Margery, the Good Neighbours Scheme's coffee mornings, events and volunteering have opened up a whole new community.

Margery is in her 80s and has lived on New River Green since 1988 with her grandson, Jordon. While previously she had known a few neighbours, an ongoing problem with her knee had severely diminished her mobility – making her more isolated and meaning she was forced to shop at the expensive nearby convenience stores. She never went to any social groups because they were simply too far away.

So for Margery, the new coffee morning set up by Good Neighbours Scheme has been something of a lifeline. "It's just opposite to where I live so I go there and have a chat every week. I didn't think I would like it but I really do enjoy it!"

The session includes coffee, biscuits, newspapers, plenty of chat and even a visit by a volunteer manicurist – a real treat! And, thanks to feedback, part of the session is dedicated to fitness, with Co-ordinator Val leading a stretch band class. This has proved so popular that many of the participants have asked for written instructions to take away so they can repeat the exercises at home.

"This week the group wasn't on because it was a Bank Holiday but I've been doing the band exercises every day so I can impress

them all when we meet again on Monday," laughs Margery.

Another visitor is an NHS nurse who comes in every so often to give advice and take blood pressure etc. This is really valuable service for the group, particularly those who have GP surgeries that are far away.

Between 10-18 men and women attend the coffee mornings each week. Before going, Margery only knew one of the members so it has dramatically increased her social circle. "It's nice to meet people. It gives me more of a sense of community. Now, people stop in the street and say hello and ask if I'm alright, which is lovely."

Acts of kindness

Another person that has been brought into Margery's life thanks to the Good Neighbours Scheme is her younger neighbour, Danielle. When Danielle (interviewed on page 12) kindly offered to do some shopping for Margery, the Good Neighbours Scheme was there to support them both, helping build trust and communication. By doing her shopping, Danielle has helped her new friend to save money, budget, plan her meals and eat better. "She'll call me up and say 'Margery they've got an offer on, shall I get it?' she's very good at shopping." Their relationship has really grown so that now Danielle regularly pops in for a coffee and even cooked meals for Margery when her cooker broke down.

But Margery is also keen to do her bit, so she always helps out at the Christmas Bazaar, serving on the bric-a-brac stalls, which is another "really nice" way for her to meet more people in her local community. And then, of course, there's all the adhoc conversations that happen when she pops into the office or Val calls her up to check that everything is well. "People are very thoughtful," says Margery. "It goes a long way."

Recommendations

1. Understanding your community

For this Scheme to be successful, it needed to be based on real consultation with residents. The Co-ordinator spent lots of time getting out into the community: knocking on doors, setting up events to draw people in and simply talking to people in the neighbourhood. She also used questionnaires to help people to think about their needs.

The benefits:

- Establishes the Co-ordinator as a person to be trusted.
- Consultation spreads the word about the Scheme and builds excitement.
- Enables activities to be based on real priorities
- Helps identify those who may be isolated.

2. Respecting and valuing community members' contributions

The underpinning principle of the Good Neighbour Scheme is that everyone has something to offer. This applies not just to participating in group or one to one volunteering activities, but also to shaping the service and its programme. The Co-ordinator makes a point of ensuring that all viewpoints are valued and strives to either incorporate these ideas into plans for scheme activities or share them with others more able to address them.

The benefits:

- Makes the service more inclusive
- Helps marginalised individuals and group see that they can have influence

3. Local ownership and accountability

Although the Good Neighbour Scheme is delivered by Help on Your Doorstep, the key decisions are made by a local steering group consisting of residents, local services and a ward councillor.

The benefits:

- Local decision making makes the scheme more relevant and responsive to community needs

4. A strong collaborative support network

There are many agencies working on the New River Green Estate who have been willing to provide advice, time and space etc. In return, we help these agencies by providing volunteers and filling the gaps in service that they are not able to provide.

The benefits:

- Provides knowledge of the community from people in-the-know.
- Saves money and time in setting up activities.
- Introduces members of the community to the agencies.



5. An effective passionate Co-ordinator

Much of the success of this Scheme has been down to the commitment and enthusiasm of our Co-ordinator. This role needs somebody who has a real passion for the area and the people, strong interpersonal skills, energy and an ability to undertake various roles required including volunteer recruitment community development, support work, advocacy and event planning.

The benefits:

- Provides a friendly face for people to confide in.
- Inspires other potential community leaders.

6. A realistic approach to sustainability

Since this Scheme was first set up, our focus has always been on creating social and volunteering opportunities that could shift to being volunteer-led. We have learned that this is not always easy so it's important to set realistic goals.

The benefits:

- Enables us to build in sensible time frames into our planning
- Manages expectations

7. A range of approaches to addressing isolation

Isolation affects people from all sections of the community. There are many reasons for isolation and it affects people in different ways. The Good Neighbour Scheme recognised very early on that it would need to offer a variety of opportunities for people to become more connected with their communities. As a result the programme includes the facilitation of one to one befriending or practical help relationships, opportunities for volunteering in groups and a wide range of regular and one of social events.

The benefits:

- Engages more people
- Enables people to make choices that suit that suit their preferences

8. Focus on people's assets not 'deficits'

The Good Neighbour scheme actively involves people who have barriers to participating in their community as volunteers. Working on the premise that everyone has something to offer, we have created opportunities for people to participate as frequently or infrequently and for as long or as little as suits their circumstances. Many isolated people want to be involved as 'contributors' rather than as 'beneficiaries' and this approach enabled them to do so.

The benefits:

- Empowers and values people
- Builds community capacity by drawing on everyone's assets

9. Where possible build on what already exists

On launching the Good Neighbour Scheme it became apparent very early on that there were a number of informal and more formal support systems acting in the community that had the desire and capacity to do more. These included community minded residents, small groups and local services. One of the Co-ordinator's main priorities was to link up local residents with existing networks where possible and only develop new opportunities where there are real gaps.

The benefits:

- Creates sustainable relationships for local residents
- Supports local voluntary and community activity



10. A flexible, evolving delivery model

Flexibility is a must for this type of Scheme. It is very important to for a activities to evolve in response to the emerging need of the community. A good example is our Stay & Play group. To begin

with, many of the parents brought small babies and toddlers, so the group could be fairly open in its structure but as the children got older they needed more routine.

The benefits:

- Helps keep people motivated.
- Enables us to respond to the community

11. Communication

There are 1500 people living on the Estate so it's important to keep the communication levels high. We do that by word of mouth, producing newsletters four times a year, local posters, through groups and networks, using feedback forms and contacting people on the phone or face-to-face.

The benefits

- Keeps people up-to-date.
- Reminds people to get involved.
- Helps build support.



12. Make things fun

We have learned that whether you are putting on a fundraiser or an information event, there has to be an element of fun to draw people in.

The benefits

- Attracts more people.
- Gets residents talking and builds enthusiasm for future events.
- Makes dry information more interesting.



A final word from Ken Kanu

This Good Neighbours Scheme has helped over 300 people from across the Estate. But just as important is the way it has helped create a community: people have more friends to say hello to in the street, they notice if somebody hasn't been seen in a couple of days or if a neighbour low. It's that ability to look out for each other that creates social cohesion and makes people feel part of a community – which is just what the Good Neighbours Scheme is all about.

Ken Kanu

Help on Your Doorstep Director

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