



Building communities

In times of austerity, communities can grow stronger if they're equipped to tackle the challenges and make the most of new opportunities. As a housing provider operating in some of London's most deprived areas, we're in an ideal position to deliver programmes that bring our communities together and enable people to improve their lives, help their neighbours and give back to their local area.

During 2010-11 we've worked with our many partners to provide a wide range of programmes covering arts and culture, local business, neighbourhood safety and family support. At the core of this work is our aim to underpin the social and economic fabric of our neighbourhoods and help people achieve their aspirations.

To ensure our programmes deliver the outcomes our residents need, we've changed

our approach to resident involvement and consulted with over 1,000 residents to understand their different local issues.

By continuing to provide services that help our neighbourhoods help themselves, we are supporting the next generation of budding social entrepreneurs, young filmmakers, volunteers and community leaders to build a stronger east London and Essex.



Francesca Okosi,
director of support operations

Starting Point

At a time when local services are facing cuts and unemployment rates are rising, we're seeing significant increases in applications for our business support service, Starting Point. Allowing residents of Barking and Dagenham to set up social enterprises, Starting Point has become the embodiment of the Big Society.

The service offers local community groups and social enterprises access to hot desk facilities, meeting areas, business support and guidance, start-up funding and networking opportunities.

We've recently received new grant funding of £250k from the Oak Foundation which covers at least 50% of the funding required to run the service over the next three years, along with the opportunity to potentially replicate Starting Point in a neighbouring borough.

New Shoots

Green fingered Newham residents have been taking part in our New Shoots project, which helps local residents grow their own food. We've set up three food growing sites across the borough on previously disused land. Working with OrganicLea, we ran workshops to teach people how to grow their own organic fruit and vegetables and then supported them to put this knowledge into practice.

542 Newham residents have participated in our food growing sessions and learnt gardening and healthy eating skills.

so what?
120 social organisations have been supported to set up through Starting Point - delivering services to more than 10,000 people.



In 2010 Trevor Palmer decided to start his own community based sports development programme to help young people get active and motivated.

Trevor said: "Coming to Starting Point has helped in many ways. I come here twice a week to hot desk, have meetings and run the business. After coming here I received training, advice and useful contacts within the industry. Without Starting Point I would not have been able to run the business professionally and effectively."



Julia Weedan, who attends the New Shoots workshops and runs an allotment at her children's school, said: "It's a success because it's all about the group and people's enthusiasm. It's been really

positive. Having your fingers in the earth breaks down the barriers between people. You get to meet your neighbours, be outside, have a laugh and learn something new."

Arts and culture

In 2010–11 we ran a variety of projects that brought people together and enabled them to express their creativity and learn new skills.

Three of the key projects were:

- Our **Film East** course for aspiring young film makers, gave 37 young people the skills they need to work in the media industry. The course has been running for four years in partnership with Circus Media, with funding from London Development Agency, The Arts Council, London Councils and Merchant Taylors.
- Residents at our Taylor Place development in Tower Hamlets benefited from a project borne out of our partnership with the Bow Arts Trust. Together we ran **Mapping Spaces**, which enabled residents to come together and creatively map their area with a local artist. The project culminated with their works being exhibited in Bow Art's local gallery, The Nunnery.
- **Blue Train** brought together over 100 foyer residents and local students to lead on a project inspired by the V&A Exhibition *Diaghilev and Ballets Russes*. Working alongside professional artists, performers and curators, participants created their own artworks and performance which was showcased at the V&A. Blue Train was delivered in partnership with the V&A and AK Arts, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England.

We've also continued to showcase impressive local talent through our East Gallery space at our Stratford head office. Residents, local schools and arts groups have wowed our customers with creative and interactive artworks. Some of the highlights were:

- Focus E15 foyer resident Rasheed Bushra's **Exploring Spirituality** exhibition.
- The **Story of Stratford** project and exhibition was supported by the new Westfield Stratford City. It consisted of interactive artwork and media, based on the work of local school children who took inspiration from the regeneration of the area.
- The **Blue Train** exhibition displayed a variety of artwork from our youth-led arts project, including costumes, poetry, installations and theatre backdrops.



Sarah, a proud parent of one of the children who participated in our Mapping Spaces project, said: “My son Charlie got an insight into a different way of being creative which will help him with his learning and development. To be part of a local community project is truly rewarding.”

so what?
308 residents took part in our arts and culture programmes in 2010-11.



Newham foyer participant Rasheed Bushra said: “Blue Train enabled us to start our own artistic revolution, taking the concept of evolution and power and coming together to perform our own work- designed to blow away not only the V&A but our own perceptions of ourselves.”

Children's centres innovate

Our seven Sure Start Children's Centres in Epping Forest play an important role in providing parents with children under five with support to improve their family's wellbeing and financial stability.

Since we opened the centres in 2009, they have grown into thriving community hubs where parents from all backgrounds benefit from the tailored services.

The community needs vary throughout the area, however one key target we worked hard to reach is increasing the take-up of new mothers breast feeding. We developed the breastfeeding volunteers scheme in 2009 and trained numerous volunteers to go out into the community and support new mothers to breastfeed. They do this through professionally supervised support groups, hospital sessions and home visits.

Local breast feeding rates have increased by 77% since our volunteering project started. We've also introduced an innovative new service for families with children with disabilities, called Tacpac. We've worked with the creator of this method to deliver sessions that encourage multi sensory interaction through touch and music. This helps the baby develop communication, sensory, neurological, and emotional skills. The service has proven so popular, that we now have a six month waiting list for the sessions.



so what?
1479 families are now registered with our seven children's centres, which is almost 70% of our catchment area.

Local parent Robin Strickland took up a work placement at our Sunrise Children's Centre. This led him to complete an NVQ level 1&2 qualification in childcare. In 2010 Robin registered with one of the agencies we use for our crèche provision and has started working in his area of study. Robin said: "The children's centre has been great for me. They have really helped me turn my life around and give my child a better life. It's because of them I'm still working and I plan to stick at it to show my appreciation."

Volunteering service

Since 2006 our volunteering service has provided numerous hours of valuable assistance to our residents with support needs, helping them to live more independently, gain confidence in learning new skills, or just being available to talk to when they are lonely.

The programme has also given volunteers new skills which improve their chances of gaining paid employment. These new skills were developed through their volunteering experience in roles such as housing, administration, training, and fundraising.

In February 2011 our volunteering service achieved the Investor In Volunteers accreditation. This was a year-long assessment involving a review of the policies and the management processes used to recruit volunteers, find suitable opportunities for them and support them in their role.

In 2011 our volunteering service was also shortlisted for a National Housing Federation 'What we are proud of' award.



After arriving in the UK as an immigrant from Cameroon and endless searching for jobs, Alain decided to volunteer to improve his employability. Alain said: "Volunteering gave me the confidence and the practical exposure that I really was looking for to find a job in my qualified field. It opened my eyes to various opportunities that exist in housing and related organisations. Using the skills and experience that I gained at East Thames I applied for a job at Metropolitan Housing Partnership and I got it."



so what?

156 volunteers took part in volunteering activities and gave 7,710 volunteering hours

so what?

7 residents have been elected to our new Housing Scrutiny Panel to put our services under the microscope.

Resident involvement

With big changes underway to housing industry regulation, the focus is shifting to enable residents to scrutinise services and to hold their landlord to account. Resident involvement is an essential part of our own service improvement and in the past year we've changed our approach to get more residents involved in monitoring and improving our services.

The approach provides a number of new ways for residents to get involved, ranging from becoming a scrutiny panel member or Board member, to being a mystery shopper or resident inspector.

We developed the approach after residents told us they wanted a wider range of opportunities to get involved, catering to their varying availability. Their views emerged during a consultation in late 2010. We literally went round the houses and spoke to over 1000 residents. This consultation also gave us valuable information about residents' priorities at a local level and from this, we created local offers for 13 of our estates. The local offers are similar to a local action plan. They set out actions to address the top local issues residents told us were important, such as maintenance or antisocial behaviour.





Tracey McGurl, manager of Focus E15 Foyer, was been awarded a commendation by the Metropolitan Police in recognition of her work to reduce antisocial behaviour around the Foyer.

Creating safer neighbourhoods

Our resident's safety is of paramount importance to us. From time to time we need to take action to prevent or tackle antisocial behaviour (ASB).

Tracey McGurl, our foyer manager at Focus E15, was recently awarded a special commendation from the Metropolitan Police for her partnership working which successfully tackled ASB issues in the area around the Stratford foyer.

Neighbours of the foyer had expressed concerns over large groups of young people congregating outside. Tracey started a problem solving group with representatives from the Police Safer Neighbourhoods Team, residents who live near the foyer and members of East Thames' neighbourhood management team. The group developed a joint action plan, which has delivered positive results.

Our Time for Youth programme is funded by London Councils and uses creative projects to divert young people from antisocial behaviour. Almost 500 young people have taken part in the programme. One example is a film making course we delivered in partnership with Homes for Havering.

A group of 22 young residents worked alongside professional film makers to write, direct and shoot a short film that explored local issues on their estate.

so what?
Overall crime around Focus E15 foyer has fallen by **43%**. Police call outs to the foyer are down by 77%.



One of the budding directors from our Time for Youth Havering film making course, Connor Tilbury, aged 15 said: "We all had great fun showing what everyday life is like for people living here on the Waterloo Estate – and being filmed doing so. It's definitely made me want to do more film-making."