



# Stories

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Celebrating 40 years of  
Community Links  
and sharing ambitions  
for the future.

COMMUNITY  
LINKS

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## Foreword

### **Sarah Barrett**

Administrator  
Community Links

### **Mohammed Motin**

Business Administration Apprentice  
Community Links

We are very pleased to be the introductory voices.

Why us? We are the new generation here, the people in current time using the services and also know the technology to reach more people. In the true spirit of Community Links we have been given the responsibility.

Our 40 stories celebrate 40 years of Community Links and also look forward, sharing ambitions. We hear the spoken truth from 40 participants, alumni, partners and supporters.

The four stories which we gathered ourselves left us with massive motivation; we want to be like some of these when we are older. In the full range of the 40 stories there is sorrow and good news; inspiring ambition and amazing impact; reflection upon what there is and what could be – and urgency.

The stories illustrate the unique purpose and spirit of Community Links, to find new solutions through involving the whole community, and the principles upon which this is based. We live these here every day: embedded in the community, deep value relationships, early action, every voice being heard and lessons learned. The benefit is far reaching, and lasting for our generation and the next – including for Sarah's little daughter Willow.

Above all, the stories are the truth – in their own words, honestly, what people feel and know. They give you a sense of hope that things can change.

Typically for Community Links we see, too, how everyone has a part to play. On behalf of Community Links we want to express special thanks to every one of our partners and supporters over the years; these stories and the countless others that are untold belong to each and every one of you.

Community Links has been inspiring and leading social change for 40 years – change in the lives of those with whom it works locally and change in the national systems and structures that shape all our communities.

Story by story 40 Stories leads us further forward by inspiring a simple question: what is my story of social change?

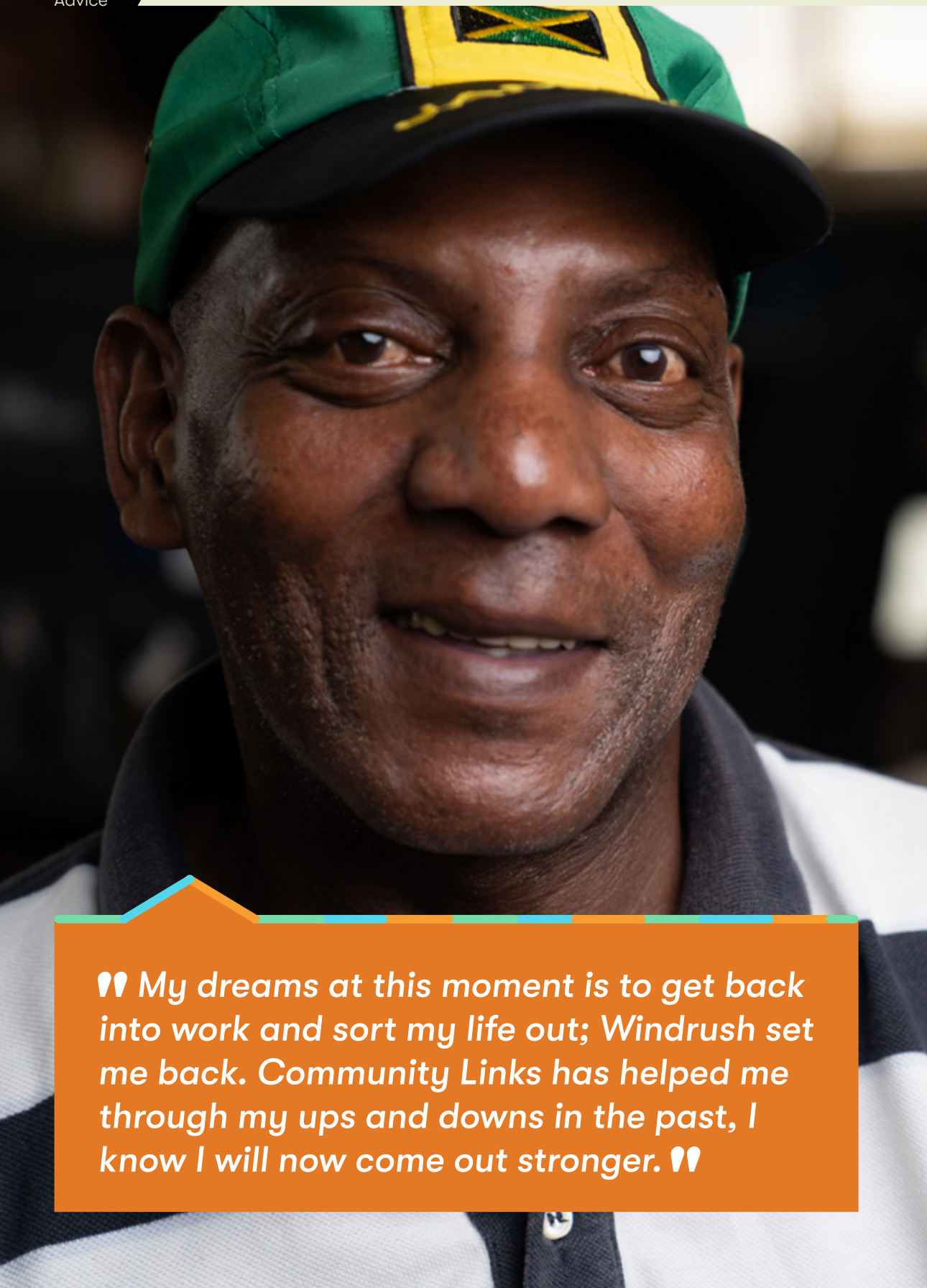
This book doesn't represent 40 years coming to an end. Rather, it fills us with hope and excitement as to what the next 40 years hold for us; it's a launch pad.

*Sarah shares her own story within 40 Stories and her ambition to keep progressing, to work in finance.*

*Mo supports our Senior Management Team and assists with the IT within Community Links, helping progress the ambition for our Centre to be a 21st-century Hub.*

# Advice

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💡 My dreams at this moment is to get back into work and sort my life out; Windrush set me back. Community Links has helped me through my ups and downs in the past, I know I will now come out stronger. 💡

## Linton Rowe

Member of the Windrush generation

“My dreams at this moment is to get back into work and sort my life out with my family, kids, grandkids. Once I get back financially I want to help them out with some money. My son and daughter only have part-time jobs as that’s all they can get at the moment. They are on zero hours contracts. I’ve tried to look for forklifting jobs but there are few vacancies in East London I can follow up. You need a CSCS card but I don’t have one. I want to get back into work as soon as possible.

The first time I ever went to Community Links was about seven years ago, to help me look for work. They see everyone. Community Links found me two jobs in a row, at Asda in Beckton and Britvic in Beckton.

Since then Community Links has been very important in coming forward, to help through all my ups and downs, advising me how to deal with situations and how to go about it. They have helped me progress in a lot of different ways, not just how to get into work. I sorted out with them housing, and they helped me a while back with my residence status when I was told my papers weren’t up to scratch and I wasn’t in the system to prove I was in the country.

The recent Windrush question from the government, about staying here, set me back. It felt personal, although I know it applied to us all. But I had come here, worked, done my bit and paid my dues. I became stressed and through the confusion lost my housing and ran into debt. My main challenge now is trying to get my Windrush papers, documents, passport, etc. from the Home Office and to solve my housing situation. I have no

permanent address; at the moment I am staying in a homeless shelter. Now Community Links is helping me to sort out my passport, debt and Windrush compensation.

Community Links has been there for me over the years, when it seemed there was no one else. I’m made to feel someone with them. I’m given help – but more, belief – and hope. Life has been tough recently, very tough. But I know I will now come out stronger, and keep hold of my dreams.”





💡 It is a reminder of the importance of trying for long-term sustainable solutions. 💡

## Moira Mahoney

Advice Worker  
Community Links

“Unexpectedly, I recently received this email:

‘Moira,

About 10 years ago my pregnant wife and I came to see you at Community Links. We were £80,000 in debt and seriously worried about our future. Your advice and help set us on the right track. We wanted to say thank you.

My wife and I had moved to London in our early 20s. Our dreams were modest – to live somewhere we felt at home where we could bring up a family.

The cost of higher education and living costs in London were astronomical. Despite living frugally we soon began to build up debts and could not keep on top of the interest. We needed to earn £600 a week to stay afloat in an industry built on freelance, unpredictable work. We approached a national advice agency; after waiting several hours, I was told there wouldn’t be time to see me.

Then I saw a poster of Community Links. We arrived there desperate for help and ashamed – highly educated people who had worked all our lives, tens of thousands of pounds in debt. The first meeting was truly a turning point in our lives. We had assumed we would have to declare ourselves bankrupt, leave London and return to living with our parents in our 30s with a child. You offered a very different proposition – we would contact our creditors and instantly freeze the accruing interest. We would then look at a voluntary repayment plan.

With a plan in place, the harassing phone calls stopped and a massive burden was lifted. Without the pressure to make money however we could, we could focus on planning our careers. We moved into better paid jobs and increased the repayment amounts. We worked steadily through the plan with Community Links, and with family members who were initially shocked but who could see that we had a plan in place and were doing everything we could.

With school-age children and both of us in full-time work, we have now successfully got a mortgage (which would have been impossible if you hadn’t advised against bankruptcy years back and helped with an alternative plan) and bought a home, something we never imagined we could achieve.

The day we received an email from our solicitor confirming everything had gone through we were in the vicinity of Community Links, as part of a series of free activities for children – a small way of sharing our knowledge and skills with the community in which we live. It prompted us to write now.

It is difficult to know how things would have turned out without the support of Community Links. We cannot thank you enough for your help at a crucial point in our lives, which turned into a turning point towards the stability we now have.’

Their story is a reminder of the importance of trying for long-term sustainable solutions, which we work so hard to do here at Community Links.”





💡 When I'm in a situation where I think – Who do I speak to? Where do I go? The light bulb comes on – Community Links! My hope is it will always be there. 💡

## Newham resident

Participant, Help Through Crisis Advice Service  
Community Links

"Community Links became part of my life when I started having a family of my own. I am a single parent who brought up my children alone and the fantastic people at Community Links do so much for parents like myself on a very low income.

Community Links is called Community Links because it is for the Community and they do exactly that. They have a fantastic scheme that allows parents like myself to fill in a form giving all their information so that they could keep in touch. On this form you had to write down your children's favourite toy. The week before Christmas they would call you to attend Community Links to collect gifts for your child or children so that they could enjoy Christmas like other children, who were well off.

I later started volunteering at Community Links in the summer holidays with the play scheme. The play scheme provided activities and trips out for children who were on their six weeks' school holidays, to help parents on low income to have somewhere to take their children to enjoy different experiences.

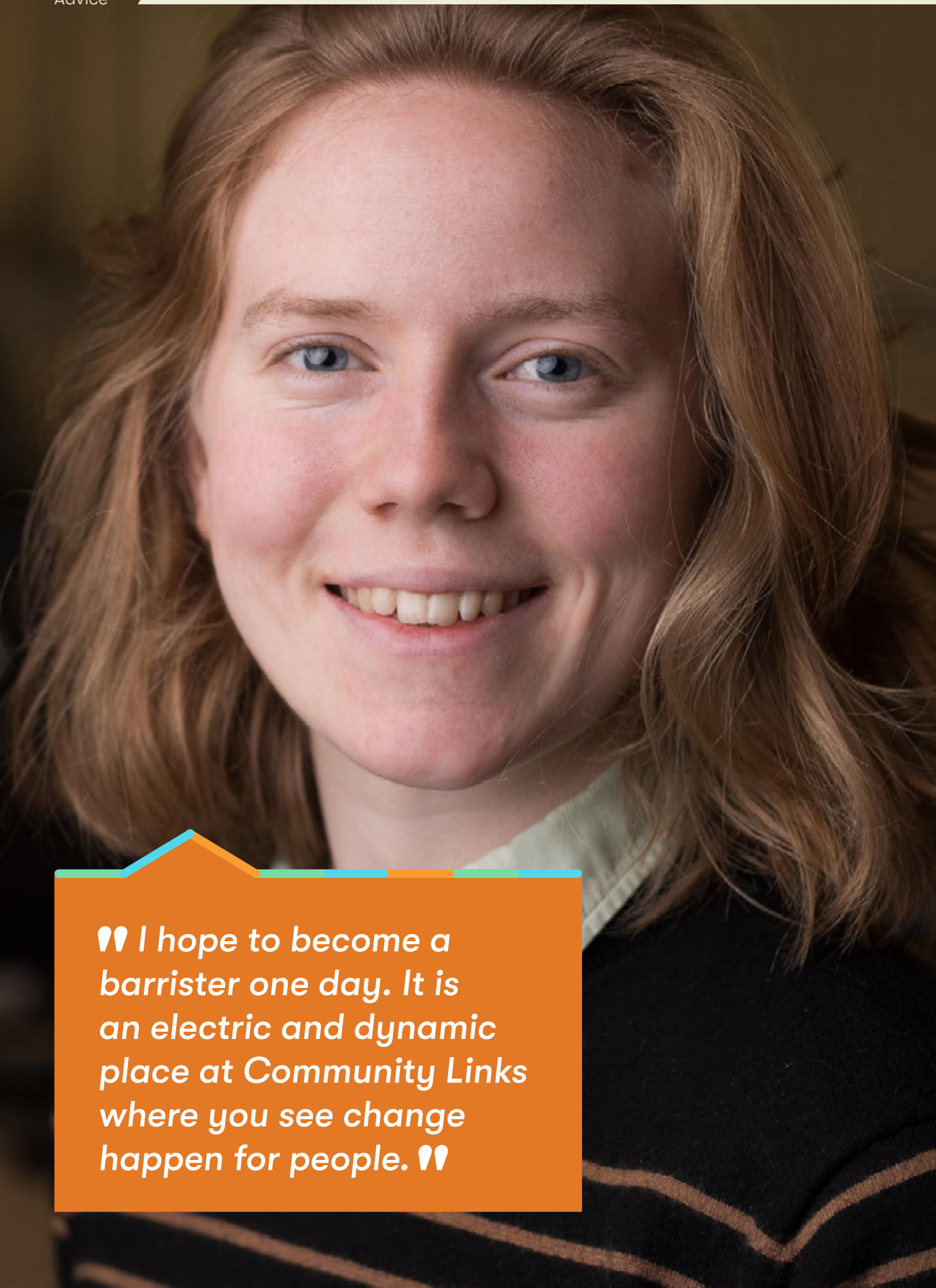
Community Links has also been very supportive with advice that I have needed when my income was very low or even stopped. They were also supportive on these occasions by making sure that my children and I had food to eat by giving us a bag full of food.

I have a disability and it helps that Community Links is still there for me. We even get opportunities on days out like to an exhibition. If getting to the exhibition or any other activities that they provide is too difficult to get to, due to your health or disability, they see to it that you get there safely, and back safely. You also get employment assistance like taking part in interview practice. Community Links is also multicultural and I like that – no one is discriminated against.

Even if the people at Community Links do not hear from me for some time, I never forget them. They do this because it's a passion and it's what they love doing. I always know that they are there for me when any difficult situation arises in my life.

I would like to thank you all at Community Links for the great work you do to help people like myself. My hope is it will always be there."





💡 I hope to become a barrister one day. It is an electric and dynamic place at Community Links where you see change happen for people. 💡

## Olivia Collin

Volunteer  
Advice Service, Community Links

"I graduated from university in July this year. I knew I wanted to take the year out and do some form of volunteering as a way of giving back and to gain some legal and advocacy experience, as I hope to one day become a barrister. I was scrolling through my University Careers Service website when I came across the advert for the placement in the Advice Team at Community Links. Months of slight anxiety about what my year would hold was erased, and I became fascinated by all the wonderful, and extremely diverse, projects Community Links is involved with. I knew it was exactly the kind of place I wanted to work. I applied that same day, had my interview a week later and accepted the offer on the day. I did not apply anywhere else and I have not looked back.

It's safe to say that if you work at Community Links you are thrown in at the deep end. On my first day I assisted the Advice team with the form filling session, on day 3 I was at an appeal and by the end of my first month I had already ticked off my main aim of representing a client before an HMCTS Tribunal.

I have had so many great experiences working at Community Links; it is an electric and dynamic place where you see change happen for people. I have learned how to listen to someone who is stressed and panicked and help them identify the problems that we can support with. I didn't know I could help people so much and it feels really good. The high point was being given a bottle of wine when I won a case for a client!

I am applying for scholarships to study at law school and competition for pupillage is fierce, but my experience at Community Links has given me the skills and human focus that I think will help me stand out. I empathise so much with people's situation sometimes it is hard not to feel overwhelmed, but I've had really nurturing support from my manager, John. Community Links is an asset to the community, and I feel proud to work here as a volunteer."



# Young people and employment



💡 I want to train and qualify as an Office Manager. Yesterday I was asked to take the Senior Management Team minutes; it took me away! 💡

## Asiya Tirike

Trainee Administrator  
Community Links

"I want to be trained and qualified to be the Office Manager in a few years' time. I want to be somewhere where I can help and make a big difference to people's lives with all the information in my head sharing with whoever needs it. That makes big change. Then I'd like to travel to another country and share what I've learned. All this would put a big smile on my parents' faces.

I wish I'd taken up the chance of education. But I didn't enjoy school much. It was hard to focus at that time. The Community Links' Future Links programme gave me the help I needed to get where I am now. When I was younger I used to see the school receptionist and ask how hard it was. I was told it was hard because you have to remember a lot of things. Community Links gets a lot of people coming asking for help. You can either help them or you can't. I really feel I've achieved something when I can.

When I look around a lot of young people I know I feel they have lost ambition to strive in life. They then circle themselves around bad people, out on the streets and even involved in gangs. It's about people believing in you and being given hope.

My manager was ill. I had to step in. Yesterday I was asked to take the SMT [Senior Management Team] minutes; it took me away! It was a very big request. I wasn't sure what I was doing, I've asked Tom for a template. The fact that I've been trusted to come in and write notes and not say anything; I feel very honoured. If I was Arvinda I wouldn't change anything. Community Links is achieving amazing changes every day.

It's not been a straight path but I really feel I will achieve my ambition I want now. That's amazing!"



“I want to start a foundation in the memory of someone that passed – and to work with young people that have trouble, and to make music.”

“My dreams are to become a youth worker, maybe publish a book... It’s given me a million ideas about what I want to do when I’m older.”

## Jamila and Lumear

### Peer Mentors

### More than Mentors, Community Links

#### Jamila

“My dreams are to become a youth worker, maybe publish a book, open my own hair salon. One after the other, or perhaps combine them which would be special.”

#### Lumear

“At the moment I’m starting a foundation in the memory of someone that passed, to basically make the foundation. I want to work with young people in school that have trouble and to mentor them. I would also like to be a musician, I love music, to make music.”

#### Jamila

“There are challenges. Finding a job is hard. I’ve never had a proper job and at the moment it’s hard. My dad has to provide for me, I don’t live with him, finding a job would be beneficial so I can provide for myself.

I was in the middle of year 11, I had just turned 16, when they told me about More Than Mentors. The moment I joined it I loved it. They taught us how to be a peer mentor. You see the young people you mentor benefit from it so much. We are able to connect with them, in important ways, we are one of them.

It’s made me more confident too. I’ve learnt about safeguarding and data protection. It’s made me want to pursue a career in a youth club. It’s made me one hundred percent sure that I want to work with children or young people. I’m much more confident than I was before. It’s given me a million ideas about what I want to do when I’m older.”

#### Lumear

“I have a few challenges. I’m going through dealing with someone that’s passed and my mother’s just given birth and she’s bedridden. Basically because I’m going through these things I know it’s preventing me from realising my full potential, these things are holding me back.

I attended a youth club when Community Links asked me if I would be interested in joining More Than Mentors. We help other young people deal with issues, sometimes they are heavy, which would get worse otherwise.

For me too it’s a big confidence booster doing this programme. It has made me more confident to support and mentor other people; now I feel like I’ve got a purpose I’m more driven. I’ve always wanted to work with kids. It’s given me an idea of what that will be like, it’s given me a lot of experience. Community Links has made me more driven and inspired and I feel that is what we are passing onto other young people.”

*More than Mentors is an innovative, evidence-based model of peer mentoring, co-designed and co-delivered in schools across London by Community Links, building resilience in young people, addressing early onset emotional needs and improving social and emotional wellbeing.*

*The Foundation the two young people want to establish is in memory of the third member of their mentor trio.*





💡 My dream is to run my own youth-led community space! 💡

## Tola Jaiyeola

Project Officer, Community Links  
Former volunteer

“My career dream is to run my own youth-led community space! Where young people will run everything. It will be a safe space for young people to take ownership of, promoting health and wellbeing, creativity and positive change. I have always been passionate about solving social issues through community integration, which I believe thrives when based on healthy, strong, positive relationships between the old and new generations.

I first walked into Community Links as a student volunteer, spending half a year volunteering on the Youth Team. I spent this time across several projects; being the ‘yes’ person and doing everything I could to increase my knowledge and experience in the sector. I then became officially part of the team, as a part-time mentor on the Talent Match London and Future Links programmes. These programmes don’t push young people into the first job going; they help them find and start a career.


This coincided with a time in my life, when I was struggling with the transition from being a young person to becoming an adult. I was 22, living alone, studying and working part-time in retail to make ends meet. Throughout my journey, I have faced similar barriers that the young people I work with face daily, such as housing issues and poor emotional wellbeing. However, with the professional and personal support I have received from some of my incredible colleagues here at Community Links, I was able to transform my experiences into something positive. I have found that being able to support my peers helped with my own healing process so much. One especially unforgettable moment for me would be how proud I was to welcome a new colleague to

Community Links – a young person who had graduated from the Future Links cohort that I had facilitated!

Almost four years down the line, I am now a full-time Youth and Employability Project Officer. The best part of my role is being able to build trusting relationships with the young people I work with on a daily basis and constantly having old participants getting in touch to tell me how amazing they are doing! It’s the most rewarding feeling.

I know from my experience of helping young people find their own path, just as I have been helped to find my own, that enabling young people to be part of planning the future is the way forward. A safe space where young people can take ownership is my dream, and I believe a model for the way ahead.”





💡 I have a new opportunity, and an ambition to teach other people. 💡

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## Participant Talent Match Community Links

“When I first came to Community Links it wasn’t just the educational aspect I needed, it was the personal bit as well. The Talent Match programme gave me the education I didn’t receive in school. We were all there to find our route, see what path to take.

At secondary school I had always been a rebel, trying to do things for myself. I started hanging out with the older kids. I wouldn’t say I was exploited, I would call it manipulation – being used for someone else’s interests. I got into drugs and gang life. My mum sent me away to family elsewhere; she was fearful I would end up murdered or on the news. I finished my education and returned after that.

When I came back, I was out of the drug game but they knew who I was. That’s when I joined Talent Match. They helped me get an apprenticeship in commercial insurance and things were going well. But then I got drawn into a fight not far away. The guy pulled out a knife and stabbed me eight times in the chest.

At the time of the stabbing, I’d just taken my girlfriend home and gone to get something. I’d told her I would be back in two minutes. While I was walking down the road my mum called. I was having problems with her, but she told me she missed me and asked me to come home. She’d cooked my favourite meal, lamb. I told her I’d be home in half an hour. Right after I finished on the phone, I got stabbed. I didn’t get home to my girlfriend, didn’t make it home to my mum. I realised then how short life is and how unexpected it can be.

I spent several months recovering in hospital and lost touch with Talent Match. I got involved in gangs and drugs again and was working on the county lines. Then some months after the first stabbing I got stabbed again, six times in my leg.

That’s when my girlfriend got back in touch with Talent Match and told them what had happened. Because I had changed my mobile number they hadn’t been able to reach me. Now they are helping me to get back on track, with a Skills Certification Scheme so I can get a job in construction. In the long term, though, I want to work with young people. I’ve shut some doors in my life due to my stupid choices. I’ve been through many incidents that people never go through. It slowed me down and has made me think of how I can teach other people to avoid the mistakes I’ve made.

A gang is a group of people – I want to use it as a positive force. Drug dealers make money from drugs, but if you think about it they’re just entrepreneurs. Give them something legal to do and they’d be successful. Just because they’ve been kicked out of school or are seen as bad by the community, doesn’t mean we should dismiss them. If we correct it and give each the right thing to do and the means to do it, they can go a long way.

Life brought me back to Community Links. I might have got pushed back to square one. But I have a new opportunity, and an ambition. The whole team at Community Links were there for me. To me, that’s family. You don’t have to be blood to be family.”





💡 I am starting to lose sleep now over what young people are doing. Where will they now get the support they need? Listening to what is coming from the ground more, is my dream. 💡

## Jason Turner

Young People's Programme Manager, Community Links  
Former detached youth worker

"Listening to what is coming from the ground more, is my dream. We can and must trust the community; otherwise you are doing an injustice.

As a young person I found my self-identity in sport and became a sessional worker, on Community Links' Street Sports programme. We'd listen to young people on the street, their challenges, their hurt. The football and hockey were just the tool – it was building the relationship that mattered. Countless times we'd see young people who used to terrorise youth clubs then become volunteers or sessional workers, secure full-time employment elsewhere and later become responsible parents.

To some young people we are Mum, Dad, aunt, or uncle – to others a mentor. They take on board what is important down to the relationships we build. We establish trust, they open up and then you are giving them support, which takes them in a positive direction. Not always is it perfect. Occasionally you see young people struggle again and again. Others give up on them, but we carry on. In the end they see the light and make that change.

There are opportunities out there for young people. But the need is to help them to believe these are for them and to access them. They need someone to stand by them, trust in their ability and give them a chance, repeatedly. This is where positive peer role models – an approach dating back to the start of Community Links – can have such an impact. The young people then start to see themselves in the role model.

But this is hard work, over a period of time, and often not understood – or supported. It is work on the streets and in centres, both of which have had to close because the funding is no longer available from the local authority or elsewhere.

I see now young people having to adapt a lot quicker and younger. Postcode violence is really bad now, the lengths young people need to go to survive, to keep credibility – carrying a weapon to not lose face – they've become desensitised. I am starting to lose sleep now over what young people are doing. Where will they now get the support they need?

I have some hope. From once frontline and now managing I see where policy makers, funding bodies and society can play a much bigger part. I hope in the future they can listen much more to what is coming from the ground and enable us to positively influence where resources go. Then we can achieve the progress we'd all like to see. The results will come, and we will see them endure and reach the next generation."

*Shortly after Jason gave this story his fears were, tragically, realised. Separate knifings occurred a short distance from two of Community Links centres and, then, one of his young peer mentors was fatally shot a short distance from home.*





💡 My ambition is to keep progressing, to work in finance; improving further what I can achieve for others and my family. I want everyone's future to be bright! 💡

## Sarah Barrett

Administrator  
Community Links

"I'd like to work in finance, to progress into a higher position, to sell my flat and buy a house and have more children. I'd like my daughter to have a good education, and basically be proud of her parents.

I'd also like to spend more time with my daughter especially after school,

I was at the Jobcentre and they referred me to Community Links, to do their New Deal programme in Tower Hamlets. In my induction week I stated that I wanted to get into Admin. I'd worked in retail before at Blockbuster Video while studying for my A-Levels. So they placed me in their Admin office to get work experience. It was only meant to be a couple of days a week, whilst I also got other experience. However, they were so happy with the way I was working I basically ended up working in the office full time until my final, thirteenth week was up on New Deal. I even got the chance to run the Admin office when both of the administrators were off sick.

When the thirteenth week came to an end they asked me to stay on as a volunteer. Then an administrator job came up at their other New Deal Centre, in Newham. I was put forward for that job and got it. I've been with Community Links ever since.

I've worked on many different programme contracts; with the different providers and partners, different systems, eligibilities, evidence requirements. Right now I'm working on the budgets for Talent Match and Create Your Future: compliance, quality checks, invoicing, meeting with auditors going through paperwork and finance.

In the journey I've made I have learnt how to make a difference to people's lives and in helping the community. First, that was by signposting someone to a job or other advice. More recently it has been by working on the systems and audits to the best of my abilities to maintain programmes here at Community Links. This will ensure we are able to help the next person who walks in the door. That is so important.

I've developed a lot of skills that will help me get into a future job or career. The most important thing I've learnt at Community Links is how to adapt to change. We talk about developing Ready for Everything Communities; ready for everything is what I have grown into here.

So my ambition is to keep progressing, to work in finance; improving further what I can achieve for others and my family. I want everyone's future to be bright!"



💡 I like helping people build their confidence and guide them socially and mentally. It is something I have learnt from my experiences at Links and is something I want to share now with others. 💡

## Dean Edwards

Advanced Personal Trainer  
CEO FitnessDEPT

"I have been working within the fitness industry for the last 15 years, based in one of London's finest health and fitness clubs as well as owning my own successful PT studio (FitnessDEPT). My clientele includes senior figures from the City, entertainment and law professions. Opening my own studio has been a life goal and a huge achievement for me, but I am always open to new opportunities to continuously challenge myself in life.

In addition to personal training I am an accredited FA football coach. I volunteer in the local community which allows me to work with vulnerable children. Through the enjoyment of sport this enables me to help gain their trust, build their confidence and guide them socially and mentally. I am able to show them that there are choices in life (because I had made a number of wrong ones).

Through my childhood the biggest challenges were social. You are all from the same environment, you all have aggression and you all need a release. Physically and emotionally you have a lot of energy to expend. I was being pulled into the office by teachers all of the time. Going to Community Links started to channel me in the right direction, whether it was through sports or other activities. It was a place to go, to get off my estate. The east end is tough and Community Links was quite a haven.

At Community Links the workers were on a level with us. They gave us tough love but also direction and advice based on their own experiences that we could relate to. They would say 'If you make this choice, then this will be the outcome'. There was a particular

staff member that was from my estate that I believed in, because he had graduated to Links himself and had been through the same experiences.

In my late teens I moved onto the Links Youth Exchange programme. I travelled with the charity to New Zealand, Portugal and South Africa. That was when I decided to become involved in voluntary work. We had thought that we had it hard but it was nothing compared to what we saw in South Africa. It really put things into perspective and led me to make different choices. It still hits hard now and it was quite deep; every single person in the group was affected by meeting other impoverished children; kids were dying, with nothing, no electricity and no food.

The experience was transformational and after that it changed my mindset and my decisions became different. I owe so much to Links and I want to continue to use what I learnt from my experiences to guide others."





💡 My ambition is to work in the banking sector abroad, for a time. To have something on my CV which is international would be amazing. 💡

## Daniaal Razaq

Client Services Executive, An international bank at Canary Wharf  
Former participant, Future Links, Community Links

"I left school and entered college for a business qualification. Future Links were helping me secure employment afterwards.

Then my world fell apart. I got really ill and was in and out of hospital for a year. I was diagnosed finally with ulcerative colitis disease. This causes ulcers and bleeding in my stomach and bowels and flares up at any time. I lost all morale. I couldn't leave the house because I thought I wouldn't manage my condition.

Then Future Links resumed with me. As well as their standard programme they provided me with training in how to manage interviews and the workplace.

In my first proper interview, with the Council, I came 13th out of 500 applying for 12 jobs. My family said 'there must be something waiting for you'. I then passed the interviews for an apprenticeship at an international bank at Canary Wharf. I worked in foreign exchange control and in trade reporting. They taught me there that there can be no room for assumption. They cared for me and their other staff as much as their clients. They gave me regular breaks to control my condition and it has worked for me and for them.

I progressed to becoming a full employee in the corporate division. I was working on non-banking financial institution accounts, but with my skill-set they moved me to working with banks, the hardest accounts of all. I work solely with banks these days. I work with five relationship directors and three relationship managers; we are a team. I'm also tasked with a special project each month where I provide special reports to all the banks.

There are some days I don't feel well but I don't cry about that. I just believe it will be better the next day and get on with it. It is people who make things run; it is important to invest in people. I've benefited from that. I want to do that for other people.

In the evenings I'm doing Level 3 Business Administration. At weekends I coach under-9s football. I have been supported in the past and I want to put something back into my local community. Unfortunately, the team is not playing as well as I feel I am doing at work! But we shall see.

I've also got married and would love to have kids. I would guide my kids to look after themselves and be good people, doing what good people do. And learn from the journey I have made.

My immediate ambition is to become a Relationships Manager – I am applying for that role now and I hope to succeed. Every day is a learning day, equipping me with fantastic skills for the future. If you put your heart into it you can dig out something. Future Links gave me the chance. My long-term goal is to work in the banking sector abroad, for a time. To have something on my CV which is international would be amazing."





💡 I want to study education, at degree level – I have always wanted to work in education. I know I can get there. 💡

## Jane Morrison

### Participant Create Your Future Community Links

“One of my long-term goals is to study education, at degree level – I have always wanted to work in education. Family demands took a toll on my time and strength, although I enjoyed caring for family, I almost lost that goal. It has taken me a little while to find myself again. On the journey of caring for family I managed to carve out time for myself. I was a school governor for 5 years and achieved a level 3 in governance.

I knew that Community Links had educational programmes and I was walking past and saw a sign for the ‘Create Your Future’ training course at Community Links and found out about it. During that training course I felt that I was being heard; that my ambitions were being heard.

I developed anxiety due to mobility issues and the pain would discourage me and make me feel isolated. I often had to cancel appointments because I was a bit anxious to come out and be amongst strangers who didn’t know my needs. While I was on the Create Your Future training course it was encouraging engaging with people I had not met before and attending group trips which helped build my confidence and self-esteem, helped further by encouragement from my tutor. After the first day I felt really comfortable. We covered a subject called Macrame and although craft is not one of my strong points, I wasn’t made to feel a failure at all. My competitive side came out and one day it was just like having an epiphany; I did it!

I actually feel as though I have some sort of footing which can spring board me to the future. I have just turned 51 and my short-term goal is to try and market some of the creative and inventive ideas for products I get. This integrates into my long-term goals of education. I want to eventually look at writing education programmes for people with special needs. I have a passion for that area. I believe that education helps bridge the gap from poverty.

I am starting the next Create Your Future training programme soon and the main difference already is in my confidence, direction and support; I feel as though I’ve got a cushion behind me. I am really looking forward to doing a course to come up to date with IT at Learn Direct, which Community Links signposted me to. That’s something I know I’m on my way to achieving. I consider Community Links as like part of a great big supportive family.”





💡 It was very overwhelming. That is why I have the ambition to start my own place one day. 💡

## Brixhilda Matia

Youth Worker, Asta Community Hub. Worker, Links Event Solutions  
Community Links

"I would like to open my own nursery during the day and in the evening I would like to turn it into a youth centre and have my own little youth centre. The challenges are I would need to look for a building, I know the areas that need it most, and how I can get funding for it!

Why do I say this? When I was young I attended open access play at Asta Community Hub. I was in year 6 when I started coming and it helped because I had just moved into this neighbourhood. Coming to an area where you didn't know anyone, having Asta allowed me to know everyone. Asta is obviously a controlled environment where I played with others and got help with my homework.

I moved up to the youth club and at 13 I started volunteering, as a young leader at Asta. When I turned 16 I spoke to the manager about working here and was interviewed and started paid work after that. At first the young people here were ones I had grown up with and so they tried to get away with everything. However, when I was at Asta no one got away with anything. As the younger ones came up to youth, I started guiding them into the right path from early on. At times it worked; however, at other times it needed a little more work. As I lived on the estate your youth work role never ends – it is technically a 24-hour job.

We ran a programme for girls to boost their confidence and self-esteem. It was then a turning point occurred for me. We had this young girl who started to disappear from school, then stopped going altogether and started taking drugs. It was obvious she was getting into heavy influence from some older

ones further away from us. We decided I should start to try and see her one-to-one, and outside the youth setting if that felt more private for her. Steadily I got her trust. We got her to pull back from the situations she was getting drawn into. Then we encouraged her to go back and finish her GCSE work – and she did and got 5 GCSEs. She's now doing a beauty and nutrition course in college and I am sure she will confidently help others one day. I found it very overwhelming. I had never seen myself before being able to help another person that much, I didn't think you could. That is why I have the ambition to start my own place one day.

I got in to university and I studied Early Childhood which taught me many valuable things. Also I now work at Links Event Solutions, which provides a financial return for Community Links and steady employment for many local people who have other commitments. We set up events and hire stages, marquees, bouncy castles and conference facilities in Newham and all round London. This has been good for me because it has taught me how hard you have to work to run something and have to work as a team. It has also given me a sense of enterprise which I know will be especially helpful when I get near my goal in the world today.

My ambition may shape a bit, maybe it will be with others and not on my own. We may need help too. But the idea is there because of what I have experienced, and what I live and I see every day. That is strong, and drives me."



💡 I'd love to do dance classes here. I want to be a world traveller – and dance all over the world. 💡

## Amani, Saira, Eden, Kayla, Guzide and Bailey

Amani, 11; Saira, 10; Eden, 9; Kayla, 8; Guzide and Bailey, 6  
Asta Community Hub  
Community Links

### Amani

"There are lots of things I want to do when I grow up; I want to be an architect, interior designer, chef, landlord or lawyer. We used to have a homework club here, I hope it will return.

We also get to go on trips, do arts and crafts and new things like sewing and cooking and being in a choir, that's improved my singing voice. I am the only child at home. Here gives me the confidence to be with others. I'd love to have a brother or sister but being around the other younger kids here it's taught me how to be a role model. It's even given me the chance to do some voluntary work experience."

### Guzide

"We love colouring in, playing with Lego together and playing hide and seek with our friends. It's nice to be able to play. When I grow up I want to be a teacher so I can teach people English and maths."

### Bailey

"And when I grow up I want to be a teacher so I can shout!"

### Eden

"My favourite part here is playing games and doing activities like cooking and sewing, I want to be a baker when I grow up so I can make delicious desserts, and my mum said when I am I can start teaching her."

### Saira

"There's usually an activity ready to do when we arrive at the Play Project and I'll play with that for a while. If I find someone is feeling left out, I'll play with them. It's that kind of place; you learn everyone helps each other here. We do baking and the food we make here is really yummy. I like trying new activities, new skills, I like making things.

I moved here from another area but quickly made friends here at the Play Project.

I'd love to do dance classes here because when I grow up I want to be a dancer. I'd love to be a world traveller and dance all over the world."

### Kayla

"I want to be a ballerina-teacher when I grow up. I'd love to be able to do dance here at the play project.

The best thing about this place is that it has tons of games and it is so much fun; in the summer I went on trips, swimming and we went to Chessington!

I hope it's always here."

*Asta Community Hub is located at the bottom of one of the blocks of flats on the isolated Silvertown estate beside the flight path of City Airport.*





💡 Our goal is to be a subsidiary record label for one of the UK's leading music companies, recording, managing artists and being a learning provider. Asta will be a powerhouse here for people to follow their own goals and aspirations. 💡

## Rhys Grant

Volunteer, Asta Hub Community Links  
Co-founder, Limitless Records

“Our goal is to be a record label for one of the music companies, recording and managing artists and to be a learning provider. We want to build a family for people to enjoy themselves musically and get off the street. Being an accredited learning provider added to the recording studio, here within Asta, we can provide the whole package to progress in life, whether they choose a path in music or not.

I see so many kids in school indecisive about what they want to do. Confidence is low in a community like this, some individuals learn more in intimate groups rather than in a classroom of 30. Some want to come because it is safe; there is a lot of gang-related fear here.

We've a long waiting list of young people wanting to connect with the studio. With accreditation we can provide social and employability skills, how to interview and stand out, alongside the technical skills. There are so many areas you can go down after that, in the creative; music, fashion, events, presenting, producing TV movies, engineering. Or you've simply got the confidence to see and follow what you do want to do rather than the wrong path.

I've been connected with Links since aged 7/8; attending play-scheme, then youth club and then becoming a young leader. The opportunities and mentoring we got helped me make the right choices in life. I see others who didn't get these, were bored and resorted to silly things. I could have stayed employed as a broker, but I wanted to give others what I got. I work as a club door supervisor at the

weekends to pay my way. I really want to be in the studio every day and see it grow, as a business. Getting accredited and becoming qualified tutors/assessors will give us this chance. It would be a great journey from an empty orange room here, with two/three minds thinking about a plan and having a dream.

We've got fantastic opportunity. Alongside the studio Tracy wants to open up a barber's shop. Why not? People need their hair cut and the youth need to be engaged. Whether we do this or other things we can give people the chance of self-belief – their eyes light up when they come out of the recording booth and see their peers who've been listening smiling, to just an idea they had in their room alone. Nothing compares to this. Asta will be a powerhouse here for people to follow their own goals and aspirations.”





💡 **My hope is to be financially secure. I'd like to get myself into a good job. Above all I just want my kids to be successful.** 💡

## Filiz Aday

Volunteer, Asta Community Hub  
Community Links

"My hope is to be financially secure; I'd like to get myself into a good job. Above all I just want my kids to be successful, study, get good grades and get good jobs. I feel like I need more confidence; I know it's hidden away inside me but it just needs to come out more.

In the past few years things have been a bit worrying here. You want to give your children independence and confidence to go out to where they need, but it's terrifying to think that your child or a friend could be affected by violence. It has felt a bit threatening as there were a lot of young people around who didn't know what they were doing with their lives. But now a lot of them have found positive things to do at Asta.

My son first came to Asta when we lived further down the road, but I didn't know anything about it until we moved closer. They had a taster session, a little bit of the gym, yoga, Zumba, healthy eating and so on. I needed my eldest daughter to come with me at first, but then I just felt so connected to everyone.

I brought my little one to POPS (Parents of Pre-Schoolers) and then I ended up being one of the people who ran POPS. I've also done a Parenting course which has helped me to run the sessions and improve my skills.

My confidence has grown as I've got involved in any kind of activity, whether it's helping with the foodbank or a children's party. I know more people now than I ever knew where I lived for longer before. Here it feels like another part of your house, giving you the freedom to express yourself. Asta is the centre of the community; everyone has a connection to it.

Sometimes people need help but don't know where to look, it can feel isolated on this 'island' with little else. At Asta there's always someone here that's close and who you feel comfortable talking to. And people come to me now for help and advice.

I know it does the same for my children, giving them a safe place to enjoy themselves, try new experiences and skills like the cooking sessions and recording studio here and get help with their homework. It's giving them a good start.

The Talent Match sessions that happen are a brilliant thing, helping young people get into something positive. For those of us who are older there is help with job searching and applications and interview confidence. I am now doing these and hoping I will succeed.

Community Links talks about ready for everything communities. It's up there on the notice board. It feels that's just what we are becoming. I know a lot of other people I talk with feel that too.

It makes me think, from when I was little to now, that there is a difference. A positive difference. One that I must now use for my next step, to achieve my ambition for work."

# Health

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💡 **My ambition is for our health programmes to have a national reach, based centrally but not detached because we are part of the community.** 💡

## Zoraida Colorado

Health Programme Manager, former volunteer  
Community Links

“My ambition is for our health programmes to have a national reach, based centrally but not detached because we are part of the community. My team of multilingual Health Facilitators and I run a series of programmes to raise cancer awareness and to increase the take-up of cancer screening services, in London. Our work is all about prevention, early action. We are thinking of a name, perhaps a Life Savers or Early Action Hub, where the passion, love and care runs through everything we do. Where the numbers of people we reach keep rising.

My journey at Community Links started 15 years ago. I was a new mum in a new country away from family, feeling lonely and depressed. I volunteered at Community Links and developed my skills. I had the chance to apply for an administrator job in the Policy team – and got it!

In 2010 we won funding from our local Primary Care Team for a project we had developed to increase the uptake of breast screening by calling women. That was the breakthrough. The increase target was 3%; by the end my team managed an increase of 16%. After that the contract was expanded to many other boroughs.

We also expanded our new ways for increasing breast screening take-up to schools, to reach girls to reach their mothers. On the first day a member of school staff discovered she had a lump and was treated successfully. It was really powerful. Quickly the project spread to other schools.

Above all is our drive to ‘prevent illness and save lives’, because at Community Links we see that ill health can be the start of so many problems. I hear people say ‘My husband or wife is ill, I cannot afford the bus fare, I’ve lost my job’ and they really begin to struggle to make ends meet. Keeping people healthy, is good economically for them and also for us all.

People ask, how do we succeed where others have not? We use relationships to help overcome the barriers: understanding, language, culture, transport, anxiety and so on. We used to have a script but no longer; because we are part of the community, the conversations are real and create change.

Recently there was another big leap. We won our biggest contract yet, to reach 85,000 people over the next 16 months in North and South West London, for bowel screening take-up this time. We are thrilled because we have always wanted to reach more people. It is so exciting; in this amazing organisation we have gone from a tiny project to a massive health programme.

So, I have the ambition for our health programme to have its own base, where our commitment shines through and our reach is national. There may be real hurdles but they are not going to hold us back. At Community Links you learn anything is achievable; there will be a way.”

## Jerome Lock-Wah-Hoon

Global Health Researcher, Maastricht University, Netherlands. Aid Worker.  
Former local volunteer, Health Programme, Community Links

"After graduating from my bachelors and moving back home, I became a volunteer at Community Links where I promoted good health at health events in the community. Whilst volunteering, I began work at King's College Hospital in South London. I was balancing two extremes under the umbrella of health: public health and community outreach, with clinical diagnostics in the hospital.

I then became heavily involved with Community Links, sexual health, shisha and tobacco campaigns. These campaigns focused on vulnerable populations. I was able to translate knowledge from my biomedical science degree and work in hospitals into health at the community level. In a sense, it can be seen as the full-circle of health, utilising science to then benefit population health at that very real community level.

I then moved to St Thomas' Hospital where I worked within infectious science. Whilst there, the West African Ebola crisis happened. Because of the skills I had developed in both public health at Community Links and in diagnostic medicine during my time in the hospitals, I was twice deployed out to Sierra Leone with International Medical Corps to work on controlling the epidemic. The NHS and British government facilitated both deployments.

This experience fuelled my interest in how diverse dimensions of health and non-health factors influence population wellbeing. After completing my masters in global health, I am now working as an applied researcher in the Netherlands, focusing on several international and global health topics.

The environment we live in greatly affects health and wellbeing. If an environment lacks biodiversity, clean spaces, clean water, clean air, or where the built environment does not support optimal conditions for human potential, it is going to influence risk toward disease. Respiratory illnesses, mental health issues, and other negative health consequences are linked to the environment one lives in. If you are in a place where available food is of the convenient, cheap, fast food type, or where fresh produce is too expensive, or where food is not of good quality, it will influence an individual's chances of acquiring type 2 diabetes, bowel cancer, and obesity. Such conditions are on the rise and seriously affect people's wellbeing. They also come with consequences to the wider community, health systems, environment, and economy.

Many public health organisations exist, but most operate on their own or in silo. They are not integrated into holistic organisations like Community Links. Here, teams that work on different social topics are colleagues and collaborators. With people in our community coming in for debt or legal advice, or with housing issues, they are exposed to the health work that happens under the same roof. I believe it is here that the greatest gains might be made for health programmes in the future, through greater connectedness with the diverse aspects and themes of social work and society. This is why the Health Programmes at Community Links are pioneering; I hope their reach will extend and lessons will be drawn from them for maximum impact."

💡 **The Health Programmes at Community Links are pioneering; I hope their reach will extend, and lessons will be drawn from them for maximum impact.** 💡



# Policy and learning



💡 I want to see wider collaborations involving individuals in communities to rid financial exclusion here and across London. My ambition is we start this, now. 💡

## Adam Moy

Banking and Financial Services lawyer  
Former Trustee and volunteer, Community Links

"I want to see wider collaborations with the individual voice as key stakeholder to rid financial exclusion for communities here and across London. Even in very difficult financial circumstances, I've seen that people are more than capable of making informed and reasoned financial decisions but are often penalised for doing so. I've spoken too with the wider banking and fintech community and believe they also want proactive solutions. My research indicates that we need bottom-up informed approaches which represent the individual narrative to ridding financial exclusion. The approach and solutions must be informed by the people with the lived experience.

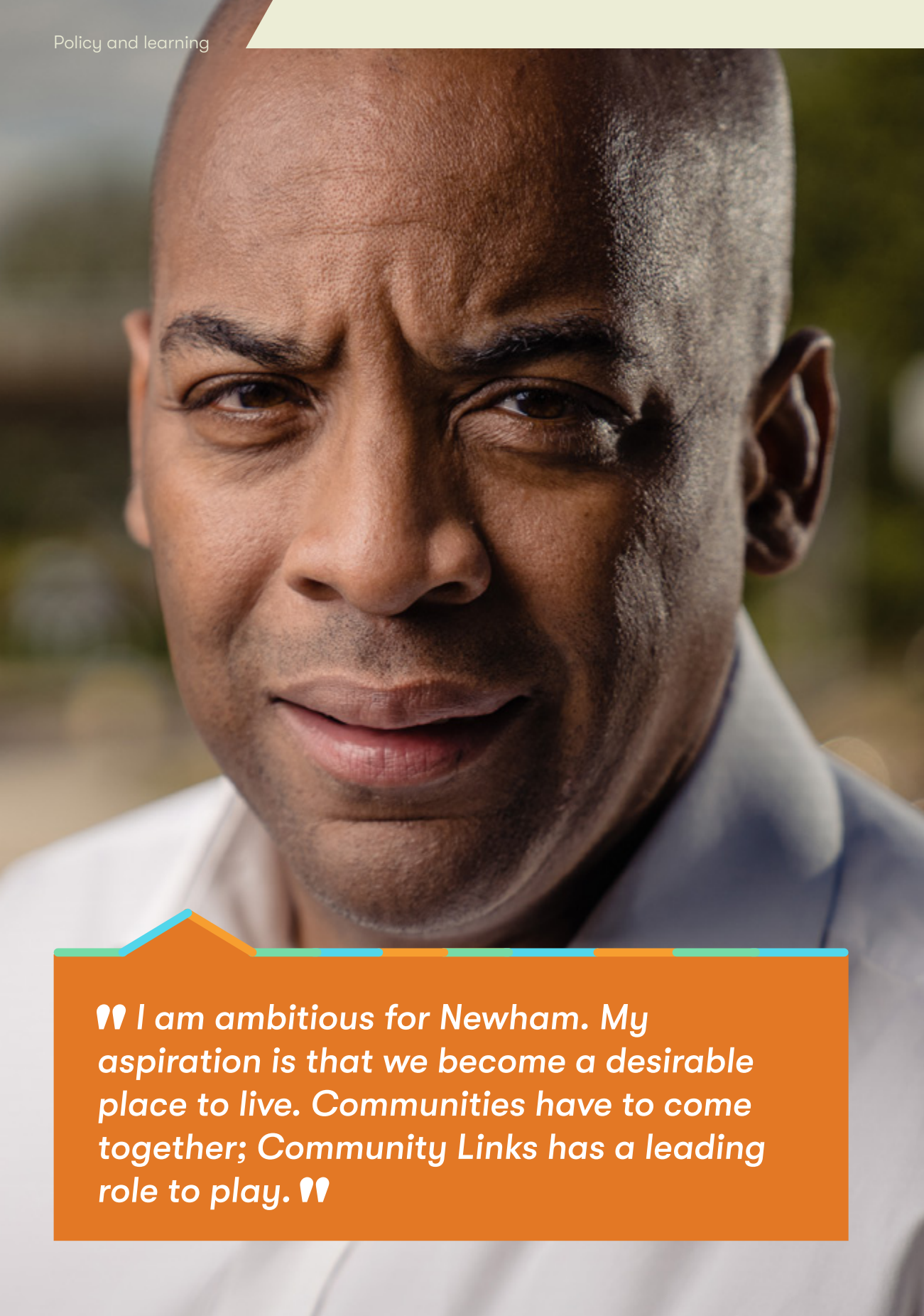
Community Links is a social action charity and that is where the root is. Positive change that resonates with the individual comes from empowerment and I can see that if we combine this attitude with wider networks, building it together, this will bring lasting solutions. It requires a strong evidence base and as a frontline charity, firmly embedded in the community for forty years, Community Links holds this – soft data, stories, the everyday financial decisions people make to run their lives. It's the reality and the truth. Connect this directly then with the policy making, which makes Community Links distinctive, and you can achieve systemic change.

I'm a banking and financial services lawyer by background and have served as a Trustee of Community Links. I left my job when my wife suffered a life-threatening stroke upon the joyous arrival of our second-born child. We felt vulnerable for a period of time ourselves. We had very positive interactions which helped us and we experienced first-hand the empowerment of self through the community.

If we can get everyone working together to plan a new approach, new models and products that address the needs of the individual in their community and society at large, we can and will rid financial exclusion. That's the big picture, what we are here for. My ambition is we start this, now."

*Adam has submitted his recent research for an MSc in Social and Cultural Psychology from the London School of Economics and Political Science (2016/17).*





💡 I am ambitious for Newham. My aspiration is that we become a desirable place to live. Communities have to come together; Community Links has a leading role to play. 💡

## Terry Paul

Councillor  
London Borough of Newham

“One of the major challenges Newham Council has faced is having less money. The budget has reduced by 40% since I became a councillor in 2010. I see my role, as Cabinet member for finance, as balancing need and delivery and managing complexity. It’s the interplay of complex issues like housing, worklessness, health, etc. that have us in the situation we’re in now. The complexity of managing modern living is a challenge.

When I grew up in Canning Town – and I only realised this when I got older – it was a different place to other parts of Newham. Canning Town was not a place you went to. But even though externally it has a hard reputation, when you talk to people who grew up there, you will find that Canning Town is one of the most diverse places in Newham.

It’s much more porous now. People are now coming into Canning Town from outside. Some might call it gentrification and there are some negative aspects to that; for example, people feeling left behind, but I welcome better houses, better facilities, because people need something more. For me, having Canning Town Station opens up London for work and for pleasure and culture for people in Canning Town. I think we should celebrate that change. But how can we make sure the area doesn’t lose its soul? I often think about people when I go to Canning Town now, and think about what they are getting out of the change.

From an early age I knew Community Links was part of the community in Canning Town. It’s an important organisation, going back to the Tower Blocks campaign, in the 1970s, through to now.

Once I became a councillor, I volunteered with the campaigns team at Community Links to get a different perspective on the work we needed to do. I learned a multitude of things at Community Links: how you carry out a project in the community, how you build a nucleus of support, to build change. I learned the hard mechanics of that.

There’s no point banging on about a campaign to influence government when people can’t put the food on the table. Community Links provides the spectrum, from advice and support to helping children who have been excluded from school or other provision – through to sharing the frontline experience with local and national government.

I am ambitious for Newham. My aspiration is that it becomes a much better place in the future than what it is and what it was. What does that path look like? We stop using the word deprivation in our sentences. Newham becomes a place where we’ve got the best schools in London, the best environment, and we become a desirable place to live. But the caveat is that communities have to come together. We have to release and connect the positives and strengths of every individual in the community. This is where Community Links, and the wider third sector, has a leading role to play.”



## Stephen Timms

Member of Parliament for East Ham  
Former Cabinet Minister

“My aspirations for the community are still really shaped by my experiences. I first came to Newham in 1976, so my experience of Newham is over the 40 years that Community Links has been here. Thousands of people had worked around the docks, but by 1977 the docks had almost gone, and in the years that followed the factories went as well.

I realised that what really improved people's situations was getting a job, so that became the focus of my political ambitions ever since. That means tackling problems of underachievement, problems with schools and it means bringing jobs into the area and enabling local people to be in a position to be able to access these.

Community Links has always been very good at working with young people; if they are looking for help in Newham then Community Links is top of the list. Also, for a long period Community Links has been the only advice provider in Newham. These services are a lifeline. Sometimes the only thing people can do is find someone to talk to. Many people come to talk to me, but often I've had to say 'You'd better go to Community Links'.

Early on, Community Links was a pioneer of the whole Corporate Responsibility movement and its impact has been huge. I've always identified Community Links as an imaginative, creative, innovative agency, bringing about the kind of change we need in our community.

I really welcome Links' strong attention to exposing the stories of what's happening to people in a way that can bring about change in public policy. Community Links has always

provided a lot of valuable information about our community to people like me, about the extent of problems, and they have come up with innovative ideas about what to do about them. David has been one of the leading thinkers on Early Action and you will hear people in Parliament talking about its value.

I claim responsibility for the old Town Hall being given to Community Links because I was the leader of the council in 1990. It's certainly been a hub since Community Links has had it with thousands of people passing through its doors each year and with start-up space, people setting up countless local projects and businesses. It's historically very significant, and we need it to continue to be a significant building at the heart of our community as well.

I think that we are quite a resilient community. We've always been a low-income community, but there's never been a sense of despair. Community Links has been an important part of that sense of optimism that things can change. Many resources locally have been cut as a consequence of austerity, but Community Links has been able to adapt and come up with a new model for supporting our community; I applaud this. I want the local voices from there to be heard more than ever for public policy. They are real, have imagination and generate a sense of optimism that things can change for the better.”

💡 **We are a resilient community. We have always been low-income but Community Links has been an important part of that sense of optimism that things can change – and will continue to be. 💡**





“Community Links does a marvellous job of bringing people together and helping them to conquer the endless challenges that people with low incomes must confront in today’s England.”

## Philip Alston

Professor

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

“I believe it is important that those who make government policy are held accountable. Organisations like Community Links are doing important work by informing policymakers of the important issues and by creating opportunities for communities to have their voices heard. My visit to Newham was an excellent opportunity to hear people speak spontaneously and passionately about the issues affecting them and was a good illustration of the impact government policy has on people’s lives. Community Links does a marvellous job of bringing people together and helping them to conquer the endless challenges that people with low incomes must confront in today’s England. It is a model of resilience and commitment.”

*Words of Philip Alston on 12 November 2018 after gathering evidence at Community Links from local people and other organisations in the community. This was part of a visit to nine cities in the UK meeting with people affected by poverty, front line workers, and officials from a range of political parties in local, devolved and UK governments. This is towards a final report to be published and presented to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.*

Community Links produces publications and draws together events that share the lived experience and the lessons from frontline projects with policy makers, to generate change in the systems and structures that shape people’s lives.





💡 Actually aiming to have fewer calls to 999 in the first place is where I want us to be. I'm now leading on a national consensus, it's an amazing opportunity. 💡

## Andy Rhodes

Chief Constable  
Lancashire Constabulary

"Actually aiming to have fewer calls to 999 in the first place, not charging around under flashing lights catching criminals, is where I want us to be. From the outside, people see the police as enforcement. But policing is about social impact, it's about people feeling safe where they live, about people who are vulnerable being protected. The lock-up-and-throw-away-the-key system isn't working. We need to spend upstream.

I came across 'Triple Dividend' [Community Links' first Early Action Task Force report] when I was Deputy Chief Constable. The report wasn't aimed at the police, but we feel at the bottom of the cliff too sometimes – where prevention and early action have failed. Its cliff metaphor became part of our language, from our crime plan to tons of frontline toolkits. It's a department-wide approach. We've secured the biggest Police Innovation Fund grant in the country and are using it entirely for early action initiatives. The first early action police cohort that came out of this was immediately assigned to work on prevention in intensive neighbourhoods and an early action board has been set up to facilitate collaboration between different partners and agencies sharing the same purpose in the region.

We would never even be on this journey without the Early Action Task Force set up by Community Links. We are experiencing real challenges through austerity, and work of the Task Force has helped us to light some candles instead of complaining about the dark. I remember telling the Task Force that the Lancashire Constabulary was spending 48% of its time dealing with issues that might have been prevented had they been addressed earlier. The Task Force offered positive language and a useful framework in which to develop preventative action and, above all, a new interpretation of success; a systemic view with people at its centre rather than a statistical account of narrow achievements.

I am now leading on a national consensus that's developing a new model of local policing, integrated with partners and community assets. Despite the huge cuts everyone is facing, it's an amazing opportunity for positive and lasting change."



# Enterprise



💡 I want to be able to provide more employment and training opportunities. We provide solutions and deliver on time, every time. 💡

## Karl Fone

Head of Trading  
Community Links

"I want to be able to provide more employment and training opportunities. Over the years we have helped a lot of young people with their confidence and their work ethic. If you're not an academic person, then you need a hands-on skill set and Links Event Solutions (LES) gives them that. Events are quite a pressured work environment, always with a time scale to meet. It gives the young people the opportunity to work independently, in teams, and to lead teams.

For myself, I want to do a formal Health and Safety qualification to bring the skills and knowledge together that I have gained whilst working at Links and an accountancy course, so that I understand and can use the same accountancy terminology used when talking to accounts and business mentors. I'd like to see more community engagement events in Newham, like family fun days – it would be great for local people and great for Links to deliver them. I know the importance of these events because I've delivered them for years. I've seen people travel from event to event with us, because it was the only way they could afford a day out for their children. Even if they couldn't afford the bus, then they would still come, they would walk miles to get there, because it was a safe and rewarding place for their children to play.

I've been involved with Community Links my whole life, since I was a bump. I was always in and out of the building as a child. To be honest, I was very withdrawn and preferred adult company, so I started helping out and it just snowballed from there really.

I worked on my first Links event when I was 16. When I was 19, we started working for paying customers and the business expanded. I grew it, but it was Kevin's vision – it was his vision to run events as a way of making money for the charity, but he gave me this opportunity. The self-storage side of the business was my creation. That part has been going for five years now – I started with one container, and now have over 40, bringing in over £45k per year for Community Links.

I'm feeling really positive about the future. The work Links Event Solutions does is not revolutionary but we provide a good service that our customers depend on and we provide local employment for the people of Newham – and a return for Community Links. We provide solutions and deliver on time, every time."



# Key facts

# Milestones

## Community Links' Story

**1977** Community Links formally established.

**1978** First Christmas Toy Appeal which continues today in partnership with the *Newham Recorder*.

**1983** Influential, resident-led "Tower Blocks" housing campaign begins. It resulted in the demolition of Ronan Point and similar unsafe tower blocks throughout the UK.

**1986** Our "Action Match" makes the case for companies to extend sponsorship partnerships beyond arts and sport and into social welfare, coining the phrase Corporate Social Sponsorship.

**1991** Community Links needs a bigger home. We acquire the Canning Town Public Hall. We negotiated a two-year agreement to take ownership on a 125-year peppercorn lease – provided that we could restore the building on time and at no cost to the borough. There were risks and benefits on both sides. 128 local partners eventually contributed more than £1m worth of materials or pro bono services and £1/2m in cash to restore the Hall and convert it for modern use. It was one of the first asset transfers of its kind and is a model that has been widely copied since.

**1994** Community Links awarded:

- *The Times* – Business in the Community, Community Enterprise Award for Community Buildings and Facilities and the Charles Douglas Home Award.
- British Urban Regeneration Association Best Practice Award.
- Best International Youth Exchange.

**1995** 1998 Richard House Children's Hospice and the Children's Discovery Centre start life at Community Links.

**1997** We suggest to the new Chancellor of the Exchequer that he should talk with some of the people who would be affected by his policies. We take young people to Number 11 to discuss New Deal, parents to talk about tax credits and single parents to address the benefit proposals. Several initiatives emerged, including the £450m Children's Fund breaking the cycle of poverty at grass roots.

**1998** We invent the UK's first Social Enterprise Zone to test new ways of harnessing all areas of government spend to tackle deprivation in one east London locality.

**2000** We begin New Deal work supporting long-term unemployed young people and are ranked first in London and the South East six years running.

**2004** We Are What We Do, our new international movement inspiring people to use their everyday actions to change the world, launches with our first bestseller: *Change the World for a Fiver*, which has sold over a million copies. In 2015 it evolves into Shift, an independent organisation designing consumer products and building social ventures to drive behaviour change and help solve social problems.

**2005** Apna Ghar, our Asian Domestic Violence Helpline, initiated and developed over a number of years by Su Bhuhi, becomes an independent organisation, Aanchal, 'saving lives and safeguarding future generations from the scourge of domestic abuse'.

**2005** S-Team, our sports programme, begins – using sport to bring together young people who are in conflict with or disengaged from their communities. In 2011 it uses the run-up to the Olympics to partner with elite athletes.

**2006** Our first social enterprise, Links Events Solutions, begins trading, providing local jobs and a return for Community Links.

**2006** Community Links awarded the Lord Mayor's Dragon Award for Community Engagement in London, for the second time.

**2007** We help to establish the Prime Minister's Council on Social Action. This unique cross-sector forum, chaired by the Prime Minister, serviced and led by Community Links, conceived the Social Impact Bond, ran the international Chain Reaction event and led the thinking on what was then called "personalisation".

**2008** Rokeby, our first purpose-built Community Hub, is opened by the Mayor of London. Crime on this estate is reduced by 56% in its first year.

**2008** Community Links awarded the Lord Sieff Award, Business in the Community: for outstanding individuals based in the community, for the second time.

**2009** Need NOT Greed campaign is launched to address the causes and consequences of the informal economy.

**2011** Government cuts result in a dramatic fall in public funding. Our long-time centres of excellence are at risk. Over successive years ahead independent funders generously rise to the challenge helping to maintain and continue to take forward our core local and national work and identified centres.

**2012** Links4Life project begins, supporting young people through school and work funded through our first social investment programme. We help over 700 young people and investors get their return.

**2013** The first wave of our research into Welfare Reform identifies families who are falling out of the system entirely as a result of the changes. We join forces with bishops of the Church to raise concern.

**2014** Education Links, piloted and developed by Community Links over the years, becomes an Alternative Provision Free School. It is chaired by a Community Links Trustee but

constitutionally independent, working with over 150 students who are not thriving in mainstream schools.

**2015** We set up the cross-sector Early Action Task Force (EATF) in 2010 to make the case for the primacy of the preventative approach. By 2015 early action appears in all party manifestos alongside specific commitments. We present our first report, 'The Triple Dividend', to the Public Accounts Committee. This leads to the National Audit Office undertaking, with our support, the seminal landscape review of early action. Many independent and official bodies adopt our classification approach and begin to prioritise early action. The Welsh government incorporate several of our ideas into the Well-Being of Future Generations Act requiring public bodies to take a long-term approach and the Early Action Funders Alliance is established, initially under our umbrella. The Big Lottery Fund, the UK's leading funder, make early action one of their three priorities, and a national early action network now numbering more than 650 organisations begins to assemble. The EATF has published twelve major reports.

**2016** Community Links awarded the Charity Times Overall Winners Corporate Community Involvement Award, for its frontline work in east London, for the second time.

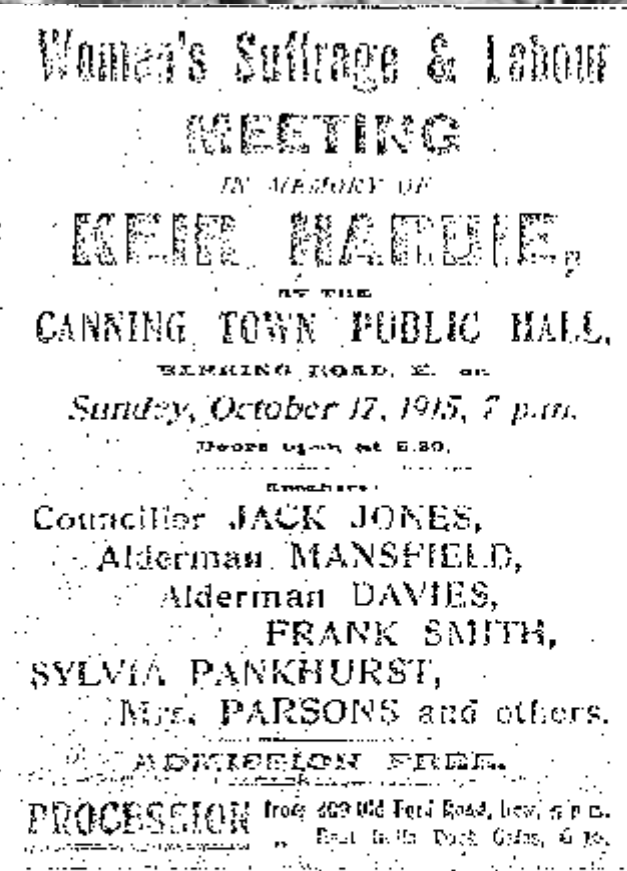
**2017** Our Trustees agree a strategic partnership with Catch22 to share support costs and explore identified co-working opportunities for new reach.

**2017** Community Links recognizes 40 years of leading social change and launches ambitious new strategy ahead: 'Ready for Everything Communities'.

**2018** Links Event Solutions, Community Links' events and storage social enterprise, awarded Newham Business Award Highly Commended, for Civic and Community Engagement.

**2019** Community Links launches 40 Stories, which celebrates 40 years of Community Links and shares ambitions for the future.





# Community Links Centre

## The Public Hall

Sylvia Pankhurst, with her sisters and her mother Emmeline, founded the Women's Social and Political Union, the "suffragettes". Sylvia campaigned to get women the vote in the early part of the 20th century. She was also a community organiser in east London, and a social innovator, establishing a cost-price restaurant to feed the hungry and opening an employee-owned toy factory to provide paid work for local women.

Sylvia spoke here at the Public Hall, addressing the crowd's big issues of the day such as working people's rights and why women should be allowed to vote. Regularly, the suffragettes met here. Other prominent social reformers who have spoken here include Keir Hardie, Daisy Parsons, George Lansbury and Bertrand Russell.

Documents in 1893 charting the original plans for the Public Hall at 105 Barking Road state the vision for the building as "Built by the people, for the people". Over 100 years it has been a centre of social action: responding to immediate need and promoting social reform. In times of war and flood it has served as a refuge, feeding and housing those made homeless. At other times it has hosted a variety of political and community events; records show "tea and entertainment for children selected from the poorest streets", public inquests, benefit concerts and performances of Gilbert and Sullivan.

In 1991 the Public Hall became the permanent home of Community Links. A centre of social change from 1893 to the present day – and ahead.

For well over a century people have found support, shared, planned and celebrated within its walls. History continues to build in this amazing place, where voices are heard and impact on the local community and much further afield is being achieved.

# Vision and Programme ahead

## VISION

'Ready for Everything Communities': Enabling groups of people who support each other to overcome problems, prevent them from occurring again and help each other to thrive and achieve their goals.

## ADVICE

We provide a comprehensive, wrap-around service delivering debt, welfare, housing and legal advice thanks to a team of in-house and front-line advisers and volunteers. We run workshops, walk-in free law sessions, walk-in welfare sessions, and a by-appointment advice desk to ensure our services are accessible to as many as possible and reach as many as possible. We connect people to the support they need, enable people to support each other and build capacity within the community to identify and overcome issues and prevent them from occurring again.

**Open Door Advice:** debt, housing, water & fuel arrears, welfare and employment advice.

**FreeLaw Advice:** private tenancy, consumer and employment legal advice.

**Form Filling Services:** for those for whom reading or writing are a challenge and/or where English is a second language.

**Tribunal Representation:** welfare benefit appeals.

Help through Crisis: holistic support for families in crisis to prevent future re-occurrence.

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYMENT

Our Youth and Employment services enable people to realise their potential by removing barriers to success, building confidence and improving life skills.

**Talent Match:** supporting 320 young people into work, helping them stay in employment and learning from the successes for future programmes.

**More than Mentors:** working with young people, schools and NHS pioneering a new model of peer mentoring which builds young people's emotional resilience and self-confidence, improves their attendance and attainment at school and offers a preventative approach to mental health and emotional distress.

**Create Your Future:** supporting BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) women into employment or further education and training, by increasing personal confidence, developing core skills and pursuing employment options.

**Asta Community Hub:** located on the Silvertown estate beside the flight path of City Airport providing an open door, secure environment and projects including:

- After-school club and Open Access Play for 5-11 year olds.
- Youth Club: for 11-19 years
- Music & Media Recording Studio
- Community Choir
- Gym
- Advice
- Foodbank

## HEALTH

We promote early diagnosis of cancer by increasing the uptake of the NHS cancer screening programmes and raising awareness.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EVENTS

**Silver Threads:** run by and for senior citizens of all nationalities providing different activities, entertainment and outings.

**Community Conversations:** in response to the issue of serious violence we held 8 community conversations on this to develop community led solutions, which we have published and will continue to develop this model of community engagement on other issues.

**Emergency Food Bank:** run by volunteers at our Community Hubs.

**Digital Skills:** Our Tech Know programme helps young people learn and use computer skills to work towards employment. The Click Start programme assists seniors to gain confidence and digital competency when using tablets, smart phones and computers.

**Christmas Toy Appeal:** giving each child whose personal circumstances mean that they will not be waking up on Christmas morning to a Christmas stocking, the opportunity to do so.

## POLICY AND LEARNING

Community Links has a long and proud history of drawing ideas and lessons for change from its base in East London and translating them into inspiring policy themes to influence others locally and nationally. We amplify the voices of our communities, highlighting the problems they face and proposing evidence-based solutions.

**Policy recommendations, publications and events:** on making Early Action common practice, better understanding the impact of Deep Value relationships, and learning how

our local community might eventually become Ready for Everything.

Positive interventions into policy areas including Housing, Mental Health, Welfare, Inequality, Employment, Youth and Social Infrastructure.

**Early Action Task Force:** building a society that prevents problems from occurring rather than one that struggles with the consequences. This includes the Early Action Network which numbers over 650 practitioner groups from across the UK; a regular Early Action Bulletin and Early Action Insights, an events programme focusing on Early Action in specific sectors and led by successful practitioners.

## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND SUSTAINABILITY

**Links Event Solutions (LES):** a social enterprise event management and hire company committed to delivering high quality events to match clients, brief and budget; ranging from product launches and team-building events to fun days and festivals. It provides a financial return for Community Links and training and sessional employment for local people, which is often a stepping stone to permanent employment elsewhere.

**Community Links Centre, The Public Hall, 105 Barking Road:** redeveloping our main Centre into a 21st-century Hub which is fully digital, sustainable and providing support for the whole community.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We partner with a range of other organisations in delivering the work and are always pleased to establish new partnerships.

## IMPACT

Please refer to our website for more on our current work and impact.



# Community



💡 Our dream is for more trips out; many of our group only get out to attend our club. We run it ourselves, but it's great when others join in. 💡

## Pat and John Weaver

Silver Threads Organisers  
Community Links

"We run the Silver Threads club, where pensioners of all nationalities come together to do different activities, play a good old game of bingo and have a chinwag. Together we do it here at Community Links on a Wednesday afternoon.

Our dream is organising more trips for the group; we'd love to be able to attend a different variety of functions. We collect subs, but we can't collect much more after that as everyone has to make ends meet. But it's not cheap as many of our members find it hard to walk and so we have to have a coach when we go out. It means a lot though; some of our members only get out of their house once a week to attend the club, so it is good for them to get out and about socialising. A grant might help us.

Many years ago now we noticed an advert for an afternoon for pensioners in Community Links, in this place where John boxed as a boy. We thought we would take a look, and met Beryl who ran it. We signed up, when it only had 12 members.

We became very good friends with Beryl. Unfortunately in time she became unwell and asked if we would keep the club going when her time was up. We both agreed. Sadly our Beryl passed away and in January 2008 we kept to our word and took over the club, naming it Silver Threads – and now have a whopping 60 members!

We do get to have some trips out, and a lovely Christmas dinner where we pull crackers together. We have a Christmas party here at Community Links; Lil and Flo always used to get up and dance the lot, I don't know where they used to get the energy from. It is always great to see everyone having a lovely time, especially when younger volunteers join in from one of Community Links' company supporters.

Sadly some of the members pass away. We always make sure we attend the funeral as these people are more than members; they are friends. And new ones join us.

We will have to think about who will take over when we cannot do it anymore. We all want to keep doing it ourselves, with a bit of help – that's the Community Links way! With the extra chance to be able to get everyone out a bit more. That's our dream."





💡 We know that the appeal will continue to make a difference each year for the most vulnerable children in our community – because our community will ensure that it does. 💡

## Christmas Toy Appeal

Newham Recorder and Community Links  
Christmas Toy Appeal

When Community Links first started its work with children in Newham, in 1977, we soon became very aware of not only the deep poverty that so many families were living in every day, but also the deep resilience that the children had, in making the best of their situations and getting on with their lives.

A discussion with one particular mother spawned the Christmas Toy Appeal. She shared with us that she had told her children Father Christmas had died, so he would not be leaving toys this year. There was just no way that she could stretch her low income to purchase even one gift for each of her children.

A week later, very nervously, we met with the editor of the *Newham Recorder* – to suggest an appeal for toys in the paper. He said yes, let's give it a go. So the first *Newham Recorder* and Community Links Christmas Toy Appeal was launched, by David Essex who went on to become a regular supporter.

Just over 400 new gifts were donated that year – of toys, books and games – and 100 children enjoyed waking up on Christmas morning to a sack with presents in, and not the empty one they would be waking up to otherwise.

Forty years and forty appeals on from then the Christmas Toy Appeal continues to grow, meeting the needs of the time. It raises thousands of gifts each year, but the Appeal's simple founding principle remains the same – to give each child whose personal circumstances mean that they will not be waking up on Christmas morning to a Christmas stocking, the opportunity to do so.

The need continues and the Appeal continues because it is the community's appeal. Whilst the *Recorder* and Community Links facilitate the appeal each year, it is Newham's community who contribute – schools, faith groups, businesses, clubs, organisations and individuals – as it has grown deeper and deeper into the community. Our corporate neighbours contribute alongside, with their own giving and volunteers picking and wrapping at the temporary warehouse.

We know that so many of the 100,000 plus children who have benefitted over the last forty years have felt so much more happy, more confident and much better placed to overcome their own personal difficulties as a result of the help they have received because they have told us so, years on, and often now when they are donating toys to the Appeal themselves.

One year there may no longer be a need for the Christmas Toy Appeal, but until then we know that the Appeal will continue to make a difference each year for the most vulnerable children in our community – because our community will ensure that it does.





💡 I aspire for us to have a place in the education landscape where we stand shoulder to shoulder with other schools. Our journey exemplifies the Community Links approach. 💡

## Sandy Davies

Principal  
Education Links

“We’ve come a long way with our school, but we are part of a bigger picture. I want alternative provision to be recognised and give validation to where young people have come from. People will then assume without question that the young people have had success and overcome difficulty, and have the potential to continue to succeed in future.

I was part of the Playbus circle, from which Community Links was envisioned. Later, one day, Community Links invited me to teach IT in a new group they were starting, for young people on the streets at risk because they had been excluded from school.

Three months into this pilot it hit me. In my teaching career so far exam results had been the focus; now the focus was the young person. Community Links gave me the space to do what was right for these young people, with no constraints. Success then followed. Education Links was born. Steadily we proved its worth and it grew. In 2014 we became an Alternative Provision Free School, chaired by a Community Links Trustee but constitutionally separate. In time we might even become an academies trust; there are other locations needing our standard of alternative provision.

Demand is huge. Today our young people are challenged by being bullied or being a bully, by how to speak, medical conditions like epilepsy, family break-up, drugs, gangs, child protection; violence, weapons and sexual harassment; some are looked after children. Many will tick seven boxes, have seven other agencies involved, and their social workers move on very quickly. Here at Education Links we are the one constant feature in their lives.

Twenty years on from the pilot I am very pleased to be where we are: an Alternative Provision Free School rated Good with Outstanding features. The first, Personal Development and Welfare of young people. That is why we exist. For 230 students through the door last year and our best year for GCSE’s. The second Outstanding feature, Leadership and Management. This gives us the basis to maintain our standard and get better and better.

I see many good stories come through and students revisit us, time and again. They might not always be in top flight jobs but they can be good parents. That has to be the greatest of impacts because, from poor or no parenting for themselves, this breaks the cycle.

Problem solving and idea generation go off the scale here. Responding to needs, managing adversity and steadily proving the case; I want our young people to be proud to be able to say they went to Education Links. I aspire for us to have a place in the education landscape where we stand shoulder to shoulder with other schools. Our journey of Education Links exemplifies the Community Links approach.”





💡 My hope is that others with ambitions are able to draw similar inspiration. 💡

## Su Bhuhi OBE

Founder  
Aanchal

“My dream is for our future. I love my children and now my grandchildren and I just see life grow. I believe it is important to remember that when we make change we make it not for just for ourselves and people around us, we make change in such a way that our children and our grandchildren and their grandchildren can benefit from what we do today.

The immediate need and this long-term view were the driving forces behind first Apna Ghar and now Aanchal today.

When I was younger I experienced domestic abuse. I well remember that one moment in life when I just wanted to pick up the phone and make a call for help. There was nowhere apart from close family members, to whom I did not want to cause grief. It was this life experience that inspired me to set up a helpline 10 years later, after I had joined Community Links as a secretary and had been providing a specialist support response to domestic abuse.

Community Links encouraged me in my ambition to set up the helpline, and we did. We realised this needed to be 24 hours, 365 days of the year. We had no money to pay people to answer the phone but that wasn't the point anyway. The Community Links way was for the women themselves to help make it run. Many were mothers and we had the bright idea to re-direct the calls to the women volunteers in their homes. This increased our response capacity multi-fold.

At Community Links we worked around values. I grew because of what Community Links and people there gave me. I remember when we asked London Councils for some help but they

turned us down at first. Community Links and quite a few service users went with me to an appeal and we got it overturned.

My project became known as Apna Ghar, ‘our home’, as more women rang the line for advice and some came to us with their children for safe refuge elsewhere. As service demands further afield, or lessons learned, continued to grow it made sense to become independent and so was born Aanchal: ‘a covering of the head’, symbolising protection, comfort and safety. The Helpline now has national reach. We are putting women and their children's lives back on the platform for happier and safer lives and have improved systems and laws to end domestic violence. But all based on never losing sight of the woman that knocks on our doors, and decided and designed with service users.

I have watched thousands of women over three decades achieve their milestones. It is my belief that violence in society has its roots in the home. That is why we are just as committed to addressing the social structures and cultural conditions that allow violence and abuse to persist. We are dedicated to saving lives and safeguarding future generations from the scourge of domestic violence.

These ambitions spring from our roots in Community Links. What I took away with me from Community Links was the experience of mixing passion with expertise to deliver the best by remaining close to those most in need of our services. My hope is that others with ambitions are able to draw similar inspiration.”





“We sold more than a million copies, local editions were produced across the world, and we had begun.”

## Shift

“It was quite a start!

We began as a Community Links project, originally called We Are What We Do. Our first product was a little book called *Change the World for a Fiver* – a unique anthology of 50 everyday actions all answering the question ‘what should a million people do to change the world?’ Each action was presented by a wonderful pro bono creative team in a style that was provocative, entertaining, sometimes rude and often beautiful. The *Creative Journal* said it was ‘simply brilliant’ and *The Bookseller* ‘a great idea beautifully executed... a publishing phenomenon’. We sold more than a million copies, local editions were produced across the world, and we had begun.

We Are What We Do has grown since into an independent social enterprise, now called Shift, with a special, if not unique, approach to behaviour change and to social innovation that focuses on design and consumer products.

We are now addressing a range of social issues including obesity, mental health and social isolation. We follow a research-based, user-centred design process to develop a deep understanding of these issues and the people involved, and develop products and services to tackle them. We aim to create things that people need and like, have a measurable social impact and can grow to scale as self-sustaining social ventures. Partnering with organisations like the NSPCC, NCT and Google allows us greater reach and impact.

Today we have a team in the US as well as in London and our current projects include Family Feeds and Box Chicken, created as part of our healthy fast food work; BfB Labs, which develops biofeedback video games that build resilience to mental illness; the Relationships Project rebooting real relationships in a world of transactions; and Historypin’s Storybox, increasing understanding and empathy amongst diverse local groups in the UK and US. Our team has won Webby and Tech4Good awards, were finalists in the Google Impact Challenge and were twice named New Radicals by Nesta and the Observer.

The Shift approach to social change draws deeply from the experience in east London, beginning as a Community Links project. None of it would be blossoming today without our original local roots.”





“I want to be able to expand my business and create a coffee shop which is accessible to people from all walks of life. We create our coffee with love and want to keep this going.”

## Natesh Chittlur

Owner, Moka House Limited

A local business neighbour of Community Links

“I want to be able to expand my business and create a coffee shop which is accessible to people from all walks of life, and bring a sense of togetherness within it. I want to be able to attract a larger customer base. Before I opened this business three years ago, I wanted to create a place where people can come and meet their friends, share their problems and use this space as a place to relax. It is safe to say we have succeeded in creating such a culture.

However, we still want to target a wider audience. My dream is to create a hub where people can express themselves. We have taken steps to make this place accessible as it is both buggy friendly and disabled friendly, as we know the importance of inclusion in the community. This is a family-run business and we want to incorporate our home values within our coffee shop to stand out from competitors.

At the moment, due to supplier costs rising and having limited financial resources, I am struggling to implement all the ideas I have come up with. We are working on loyalty memberships as I believe in rewarding our customers and I also want to create book clubs at Moka House. Since I opened I haven't had any funds for marketing and rely solely on word-of-mouth recommendations. As a small business it is very difficult to get yourself recognised and we still have people coming and mentioning that they didn't realise a coffee shop existed here. I have sacrificed family time to ensure this business moves forward and have stuck to keeping the prices the same after all the rising supplier costs while never compromising on quality. This is one of the reasons we have many customers even from

other countries like America, Australia or Italy who drink coffee only in our shop in London even if their stay is far away. I cannot afford to lose our customer base as competition is also growing every day.

I believe our dreams relate well with the vision of Community Links. Community Links is really important in this area. More people than you can count visit them each day. They meet an incredible number of different needs, but the way they do this is to help people solve things for themselves and so grow stronger. They are very committed to working with the whole community. I want it to succeed; in this way everyone will benefit. I was so appreciative of the work they carry out I used to go over to the Centre to see if they wanted to buy lunch, as I know everyone is very busy and it is not always easy to go out for lunch.

I am optimistic about the future. We want to succeed through our own efforts and continue to look at new ideas to expand our customers. But seeing Community Links succeed in its mission and having a strong relationship with them will be very important to this. We create our coffee with love and want to keep this going.”

# Founders

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💡 My hope for the future is that whilst needs change and people come and go, the recipe endures: Comfort and disturb. 💡

## David Robinson OBE

Co-founder  
Community Links

“Last night I volunteered on the new Community Links Food Bank. I was pleased to see that after 40 plus years there is no lessening in the organisational appetite for new projects meeting new needs. No shortage either of willing volunteers happy to devote their time and energy to a good cause.

But a Food Bank? In the shadow of Canary Wharf? In 2018?

Actually yes and twelve families during my watch desperate for its meagre assistance.

There is no doubt in my mind that there is more entrenched, energy sapping, will breaking poverty here today than at any time in my working life but it isn't that which troubles me most. Rather, it is the speed and apparent ease with which we, as a generation, have come to accept Food Banks as a regular part of the welfare landscape.

Community Links was built to meet need, here and now, as well as we can with what we've got. That must always be a priority but equally we must never stop working for the world to change. Sometimes this work has been contentious and combative, often willing and collaborative, but always rooted in the lived experience of Community Links and the people we meet. We have always spoken about bringing to the Minister's door the experience of the family at ours. Never has that been more necessary.

This mix is a very important part of what is special about Community Links – generosity and justice, fraternity and anger, old-fashioned kindness and the smartest thinking. These are the vital ingredients that we have tried to mix in equal measure. My hope for the future is that whilst needs change and people come and go, the recipe endures: Comfort and disturb.”



💡 I want us to use all our experience now continuing to build in a new environment. And not be afraid to take risk; hundreds and hundreds of people are happy today, and achieving higher, as a result. 💡

## Kevin Jenkins OBE

Co-founder  
Community Links

“The ultimate aim would be Community Links is no longer needed. Because what we’ve done in the community continues, without us.

I met David when I was still at school. From our work on the Play Bus we had an idea of the needs, and believed that we could fill the gaps offering a new way forward. Community Links was born. The community responded, with residents asking and suggesting what we could do. We were able to marry these with those in power to make change and create opportunities, for those who needed both.

It was hard work but it moved forward, growing organically; we never lost our roots.

I used to say you were important whether you were 10 days or 10 years. For lots of young people this became a lifetime vision and dedication. Time and again we’d have young people in difficulty coming to us and becoming young leaders. The same was for the adult work; those who had been advised becoming advisers and local people leading the tower blocks campaign over unsafe housing. There was anxiety from some quarters because we were challenging the status quo; we weren’t suited and booted. We had no resource but we would work with anyone. And we had the values, vision, drive and would overcome the knocks, bringing people with us.

We are multipurpose, which was and still is very difficult to sustain but makes the unique difference. We pioneered outreach work on the streets in the evenings. We then saw some of the same young people out on the streets during the day, excluded from school. So we piloted an experimental alternative education

group, which has now grown into a school, Education Links.

We took on people and changed their lives. More followed. I had a parent, with a record, who had developed his life with us, offering to pay me for their child to come to Education Links rather than mainstream school! Because he was involved half of Newham believed in us. At the same time others, from around the country, were coming to learn.

The consequences of funding cuts in recent years have been very hard to bear. But we had no control over the economic events around us.

I want us to use all our experience now continuing to build in a new environment. Thinking and working with local people, with the new Council, with our partners, friends and in new partnerships. And not be afraid to take risk; hundreds and hundreds of people are happy today, and achieving higher, as a result.

We will know we have been fully successful when people don’t need us anymore. Until then, when we see a need we will continue to respond. We are quietly, steadily helping people turn their lives around for ever. We can’t always measure it but looking at a generation who have already known us, I know it’s right.”





💡 The ultimate dream is Community Links remains cutting edge and daring in their approach, and grows, in order to make Early Action common practice. 💡

## Stan Harris OBE

Founding partner Lyndales LLP  
First Chair of Community Links Trustees

"I want to be able to see fewer places like Community Links in existence and to one day witness that such places are not a necessity. However, in the current climate there is a growing need for places like Community Links. The London Borough of Newham has changed immensely over recent years. Newham was the hosting Borough of the 2012 Olympics; we now have some flats one side of the road in Canning Town which share the same price tags as flats in Canary Wharf. Yet, after all of this boosting of the economy in recent years, statistically Newham remains as one of the poorest boroughs in London; the gap between the richest and the poorest remains immense. As a former trustee I still think to myself should Community Links become more corporate, or does it still take the same approach to attract the attention of investors?

When the organisation came into existence, David Robinson and Kevin Jenkins were driving it forward, we had editorials in *The Times*, we had Prince Charles to open our Centre and we had many directors coming to visit the place. Community Links was a daring organisation, it was cutting edge, it was doing things nobody else was trying and, of course, this wasn't all easy to execute; there were major risks taken. This is what actually sustained Community Links and I hope the partnership with Catch22 will continue to allow the organisation freedom in its approach and invest in this, enabling the innovation of Community Links and the brilliant brand that was built up to continue to grow.

There are many challenges I could address but one point I cannot stress enough is the early action approach. If you can identify problems

at an early stage and take action then the problem will be easier and quicker to solve. Knife crime and low levels of employment are an ongoing problem in Newham; if we could help young people at an early stage and take ownership the world would be a better place. I think the constant change in government plans doesn't help and it is an issue which needs to be addressed. Today we are seeing the government focus on Brexit to the extent that our minds forget the real problems we face. It takes a horrific incident for the focus to turn. This cannot be right, socially or economically. We have to continue to strive for change.

This takes us back to a founding principle of Community Links: everyone has to play a part. This is as imperative as it ever was. For local impact we need to see whatever resource there is in the borough be more spread. For far-reaching impact we need individuals who are in positions to influence or invest, to take part in what Community Links is trying to achieve. Finally, I think the diverse Trustee board can help drive forward the ambitions of Community Links and take these and the organisation to the next level. This responsibility is upon them; each one of us must consider and give them all the assistance and resources we can to achieve this vision."





💡 My dream is for a society where equality is the major driver for the way we conduct ourselves, the way we live, the way we share our resources and the way that society is organised. 💡

## Arvinda Gohil

Chief Executive  
Community Links

“My dream is for a society where equality is the major driver for the way we conduct ourselves, the way we live, the way we share our resources and the way that society is organised. A society where social justice is paramount, where we have an approach that takes care of those people who are weak, vulnerable, poor and those who just need a helping hand.

It is the reason why I am here at Community Links.

What I do for a living has always had to align with values I have as a person. I had known about Community Links for many years and the work that was going on here. When the role came up it felt the right thing for me. I was going back to working in a very community setting where I had begun in community social housing.

I am driven by the need and opportunity to make an impact. At Community Links, everything is within sight. You feel it, touch it, breathe it and work with and for it. Our recent work around gun and knife crime has touched us all. That’s the negative side of the work. A positive side is the note from a family, years after they have been assisted, who were motivated to write to say thank you. We see the impact each morning, with advisers and volunteers working with their skills for people, so they can leave them in a better place than when they arrived.

Battered and bruised by society and the system, by the time people come here they are totally disempowered; our job is to help them recover from that, as much as provide

a practical solution to their problems. That is why I am so committed to working towards creating a place and a space where all our callers have a positive experience; that they feel they are in a place that understands. We have to make the experience of every individual that is touched by this organisation a positive one, where we can.

Community Links has a very strong reputation. After the drastic cuts in public funding as a result of the recession it was my job to help Community Links get back on track. In that process we realised the train was not going to stay on the track by itself and needed a bigger engine to push it along, and that’s what we thought we were getting in Catch22.

This step is quite innovative in the sector; it is new territory for everyone. Now it is about how we make it work. The ambition is for the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts and how we create something out of this that continues to do the great work that we do but in a new context.

Getting it right is not just important for the future of Community Links. It is important that we preserve the plurality of the sector, from the very small to the very large, each different, special and unique in addressing the needs of our communities. This kind of approach provides us an opportunity to do that. It also leads us closer to a society where social justice is paramount.”



# Support and partnership



💡 **That's the thing with Community Links; when you help one person often you are going a long way to helping their entire family too.** 💡

## Aya Elwadia

Trainee Solicitor, Clifford Chance LLP

Pro bono volunteer, FreeLaw Advice Service Community Links

"My ambition is to contribute to social and environmental justice. With respect to social justice, I want to contribute to a world where people are treated equally, where differences are celebrated rather than simply being tolerated and where everyone enjoys equal access to justice. That is one of the reasons why I am proud to be a part of the Community Links community and to be a part of a movement that advocates for equal access to justice at a time of immense legal aid cuts.

With regard to the environment, my goal is to push for more sustainable business practices and to raise awareness on the importance of limiting our carbon footprint and respecting the environment. On a personal level, I try to live as sustainable a life as I can but there is always room for improvement and, I hope, that by sticking to my values, I can inspire others to do the same.

Volunteering as an adviser at Community Links is an immensely rewarding experience. Clifford Chance has a longstanding corporate partnership with Community Links which creates many opportunities such as this. Not only has Community Links made me feel part of a wider community, but it has empowered me to feel I can make a change.

As well as being able to provide advice to other members of the community, volunteering at Community Links has also enabled me to develop some of my own personal skills, such as interviewing and advising, which I am much more confident at doing now.

One of the challenges is being able to accept

that there are limits to how you can help as a volunteer adviser, but I try to rise above that by providing the best help I can.

One of the highlights of my work at Community Links was getting an employer to pay wages that were many months overdue to an employee with special abilities whose work was the only source of income for her family. My detailed letter to the employer had a real impact and her outstanding wages were paid in full. That was a very rewarding experience as I was able to make a tangible change to not only someone's life, but to their whole family as well.

That's the thing with Community Links; when you help one person often you are going a long way to helping their entire family too."





💡 **My dream is for Community Links to become an organisation that holds value to everyone in the community. We have the right people. I cannot wait to be a part of the jigsaw that still needs completing. 💡**

## Jane Underdown

Reception Desk  
Community Links

“My dream is for Community Links to become an organisation that holds value to everyone in the community, including the younger generation. Community Links can help reduce the problems the government is facing with the younger generation, with the correct funding.

I have seen people from all walks of life enter through those doors, having worked in Community Links for 24 years. People come in asking for help on a variety of issues but most importantly come into Community Links because they feel safe and in a place where they can share their problems. No two days are the same and there is a sense of achievement at the end of the day knowing that you were able to help someone.

Community Links is the place many turn to, not just from this borough but neighbouring ones also, and we have regular clients too from as far away as Clacton and Milton Keynes. This is through service users appreciating our work and ensuring that their friends and family are aware. Over the years, I have made many friends. Often people come in to say hello and ask how I am doing. Such little actions mean a lot and I feel as if this brings a sense of unity which is very important.

However, there are some people we are not able to help; due to funding restrictions we are not offering such services. Sometimes people come with their children and ask about our services as they have grown up with Community Links from being a child themselves. I wish I could say every time, yes we have a number of programmes, but I can't

always as funding available to run projects has been greatly reduced in recent years. Nor can I refer them on as other organisations have limited resources themselves or, as the days go by, cease to exist. This is tough as I know I would want my children growing up in a place with a variety of opportunities.

It's now time to take an active approach and make a change.

In the near future I hope we can get closer to achieving our mission by offering a larger number of services especially for the younger generation. For example, too often we see young fatalities on our door-step; yet we have Asta Community Hub where young people can attend, providing we can keep it open and extend its reach. We do have the right people at Community Links who can help reduce these problems. Backing them is what we need for an active approach.

The road ahead might look difficult but I believe with more funding we have the correct people to solve the issues in the community. I believe we are heading in the right direction and I am optimistic because I see people constantly passing me who can play a part in active change. I hope the next few years are full of success and cannot wait to be part of the jigsaw that still needs completing.”



💡 This health prevention approach really impresses as the way forward. I want to scale it up. 💡

## Wayne Douglas

Acting Head of Commissioning and Transformation  
NHS Newham Clinical Commissioning Group

“This health prevention approach really impresses as the way forward.

Community Links are the main provider for contacting bowel screening patients in Newham who have not taken up a particular screening as part of the wider national service.

I’ve seen Community Links have a connection with Newham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), previously the Primary Care Trust (PCT), for a number of years. I have worked with Community Links for at least the last two years in developing what has now become an established calling service for health prevention.

To put it simply, early diagnosis helps to save lives which is why pioneering programmes like these are important.

The national bowel screening programme ensures that high risk groups take what is called a bowel prep which detects cancerous cells. The issue we have is that there is a very low initial uptake, locally less than 45%. It falls to the CCGs to decide who follows up the remaining, greater percentage.

GP practices are always extremely busy. So we thought there might be another organisation who could undertake this on their behalf, hence Community Links’ involvement. Community Links is now contacting approximately 6,000 to 7,000 patients a year for the CCG in Newham. Prior to Community Links this was a really poor performing service; since their involvement they have made a significant contribution to improving the care we provide.

Community Links are doing a fantastic job in contacting and talking to these patients in a different, more personal way, in more detail and often in patients’ own languages compared to the initial letter. They have the ability to achieve real connection in the community.

I would highlight the distinct impact of Community Links and through this the significant results it achieves. This gives particular confidence when awarding them a contract.

My ambition is for Community Links to help us undertake health promotion on a wider scale. There are a number of national screening programmes and their approach could assist other areas. So, my ambition is to develop and look at more creative ways Community Links and the CCG could work together to improve health facilitation and health promotion. Their approach is the way forward. I want to scale it up.”





💡 Social cohesion is at the heart of the aspiration of Community Links, and that is so important to the future for us all. 💡

## Yasmin Waljee OBE

International Pro Bono Director  
Hogan Lovells International LLP

“We’ve had a corporate partnership with Community Links stretching back many years, providing pro bono volunteers to the advice services, annual core funding, free legal help and staff fundraising.

When we first started the partnership Community Links had case workers numbering up to about 35; now we’re down to about 5. That to me represents a complete devastation that the cuts and austerity have had on access to justice and all the work that Community Links did that was either funded through the local authority or legal aid provision. Both have been absolutely decimated.

Looking to the future, there will be a government consultation on legal aid and I’d like to see aspects of it restored for people who are in difficulty. It is false economy to cut funding for advisory services because you have a double cut as you can’t do as much pro bono legal support either.

We have always tried to be innovative; we are now pioneering new technology in the sense of remote form filling that helps people with securing benefits and returning to work. There is probably more scope to roll that out and do it more widely, but that requires infrastructure and support for Community Links. This is why I would like to see more funding for access to justice for the people that use Community Links’ services. Community Links is a bit like the A & E of the legal sector, and so I would like to see a national health service of legal aid.

I’ve been in my role for 21 years and my relationship with Community Links is almost as long as this. I met David Robinson and was

completely inspired by what he was trying to achieve by getting participants to be part of Community Links, advisory services, and so it is a pleasure and an honour working with them, being part of maintaining and developing those services. The partnership is very strong and it is very important to the firm and to our staff.

We are seeing the same levels of commitment as ever in terms of volunteering but it needs constant inspiration for people to understand the difference we can make in each other’s lives; no one’s life runs in a straight line and so it is good for my colleagues and me to see that and the change we can achieve, on a regular basis.

Corporate partnership has particular value and importance at Community Links. Community Links always ensures partnership is mutually beneficial, but they add an extra dimension. Social policy recommendations derive directly from their frontline experience, they don’t just provide services or policy alone, and they make connections with our people, whether that is through their direct involvement or hearing first-hand stories from the work. These build social cohesion ultimately. Social cohesion is at the heart of the aspiration of Community Links, and that is so important to the future for us all.”



“My ambition is this approach plays a major part in the future.”

## Nicola Pollock

Director  
John Ellerman Foundation

“My association with Community Links goes back nearly 20 years, when I first started at Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and was charged with creating the strategy and criteria for our new Social Development grants programme. My then boss, Margaret Hyde, pointed me in the direction of Community Links, as combining feet on the ground experience with seasoned understanding and analysis of the causes and solutions to the complexity of poverty and disadvantage – all with a human touch.

Community Links were an excellent source of advice and a great sounding board, all infused with Links’ values. Indeed Esmée Fairbairn later supported and participated in an Inquiry into values which Links led for the third sector. The ‘Living Values’ publication remains a fine and relevant reference point. Here at John Ellerman Foundation, Community Links has assisted our Trustees in understanding needs and thinking through a new grants programme and its criteria. Over the past two decades I have seen their influence extend within the philanthropic and policy world – but all grounded in their work in Newham. Links constantly impress with how they seek to maximise the return for grantee organisations, the people they work with and the funder, through creating local and national impact.

What is it that is particularly important? What I find special are its people, its values – the ambition and ability to work small and local while thinking big. This means that when you speak truth to power, which you do, it is based on everyday realities and offers practical solutions. It is constructive, and hopeful, as you talk of people helping each other

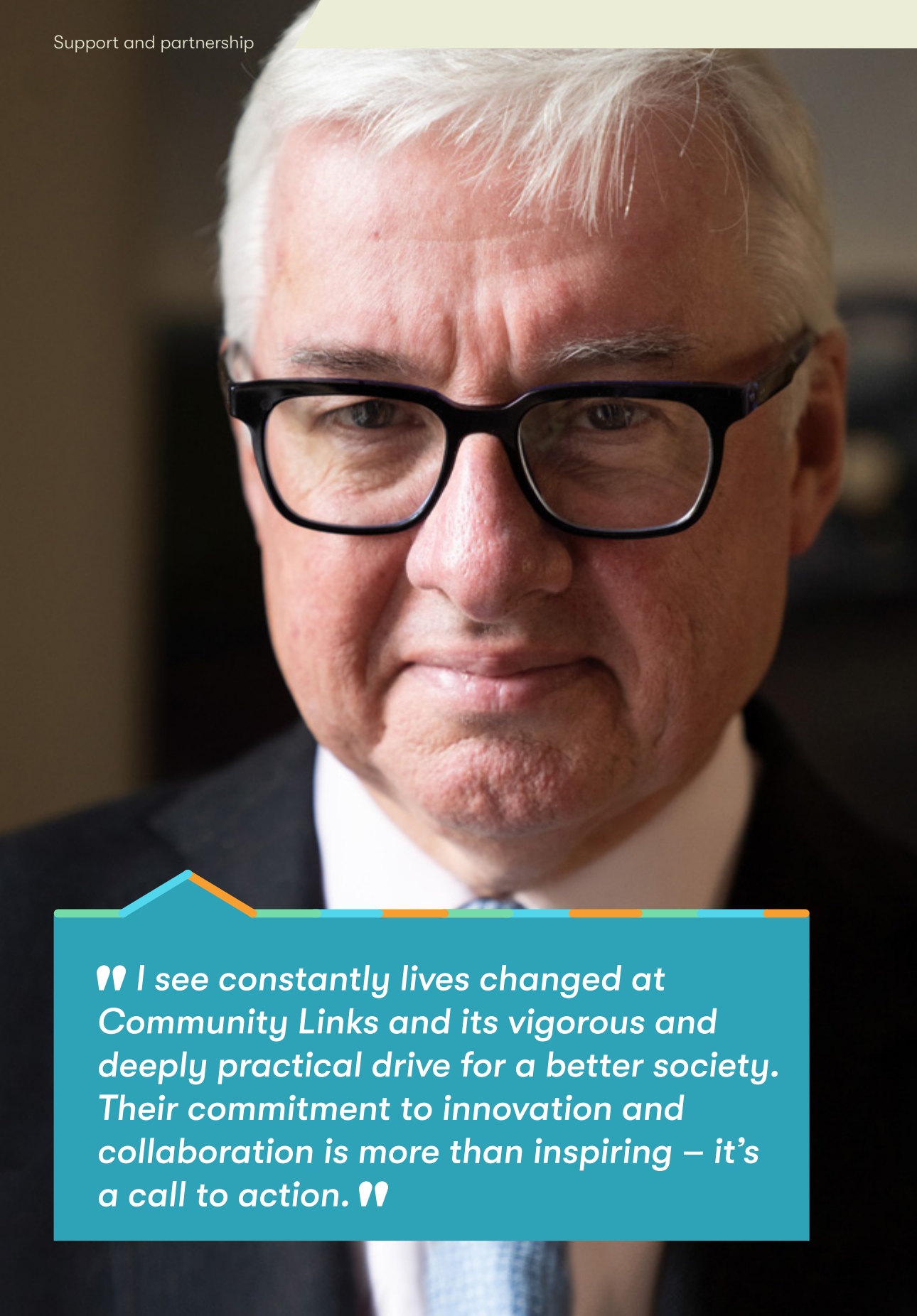
to thrive, and you live this. All this makes a powerful combination and means you make a unique contribution to social change – and frequently lead it. For example, I sense that what you have been saying for years about the importance of relationships is becoming more widely recognised, exemplified in Julia Unwin’s recent report for Carnegie UK on kindness. And I haven’t even mentioned early action where you have been particularly influential.

In short, Community Links is thoroughly rooted in every day experience and people-led, persistently innovative and ahead of the game.

So what does this tell us for the future, and the big challenges we face? The Civil Society Futures Commission which published in 2018 argued that charities should reflect their local communities and the people they exist to serve. They further explain that the real energy is in communities and that there, not Westminster, is where change happens. This is precisely the space Community Links occupies, and has from the start, for individual social change and wider social impact.

My ambition is for this approach to grow and play a major part in the future, particularly in those communities and populations who struggle the most. It is in all our interests to have communities which can help each other to thrive and achieve their goals. It is the message of hope based on evidence which Community Links conveys. It is a mission we all need to get behind.”





💡 I see constantly lives changed at Community Links and its vigorous and deeply practical drive for a better society. Their commitment to innovation and collaboration is more than inspiring – it's a call to action. 💡

## Michael Smyth CBE QC (Hon)

Personal supporter

Chair of Community Links Trustees 2011–2017

"I am continuously inspired by the conviction of its founding mission – to find new solutions to old problems and to involve the whole community in this. A society which brings us together to play our part, to the best of our endeavours, is a just and cohesive society. It is one that benefits us all. I want to see us make much greater progress in this direction.

I meet those who benefit from participating in the programmes of Community Links. I meet those who run them, grounded in the community; their tireless determination to release potential, and overcome the challenges, humbles and inspires. As does the unrelenting commitment to enabling the smaller voices to be heard. This authentic sharing of frontline experience with decision makers is achieving real, positive social change.

We all need positive relationships, guidance, affirmation and opportunities to lead full and fulfilling lives. So I want to see a society that enables this for everyone.

When I was a partner at law firm Clifford Chance I knew, through our FreeLaw volunteers, of the important work Community Links was doing. My fitness trainer, Dean Edwards, then told me how he had benefited from Community Links as a young person and inspired me to find out more!

So it was I became a personal supporter, and Chair of the Trustees. I have even roped in my family, with my wife Joyce playing a huge role in our fundraising efforts. I believe passionately in a society where everyone plays the best part they can and I see the immense and lasting impact that flows from those who are in a position to support personally.

It is here where I seek to play my part, to the best of my endeavour. Committing support ahead and encouraging others to do the same. Serious support is what is ensuring Community Links is here changing lives today and will be tomorrow – and to continue building a better society.

I consider it a responsibility, and a privilege, to play a part in building or rebuilding lives and in growing strong and collaborative communities which work for us all. I believe I represent a line of committed personal supporters in saying this, and I want others to join us and add to the impact. Community Links' commitment to innovation and collaboration is more than inspiring – it is a call to action."

**41st**  

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**story**  

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## What is my story in social change?

40 Stories inspires this question. You are invited to consider this – and with us to find an answer.

What is your ambition; how might you join this with ours? By providing core funding to help us take forward all our work, or by providing support for a specific programme or our capital development? Through renewing your previous support, or through providing support for the first time, achieving an impact that stretches well beyond what either of us might achieve alone?

We will be posting future stories on our website – and we will be adding the names of new donors and funders to our Roll of Honour which recognises all our supporters and partners.

We are actively seeking partners, funders and innovators who share our ambition for generating social change. Do connect with us now to renew your support or partnership, or assist for the first time; for us to progress further, together.

In this way we will create the 41st Story of social change, and more.

# How you can collaborate with us

For the 41st Story and more.

### Companies

By providing unrestricted funding which helps to secure and achieve all the work, or by funding a specific programme or capital development. Also by providing free services, pro bono expertise, volunteering and staff fundraising for our projects. Please contact us to explore possible opportunities.

### Commissioning Authorities

By agreeing a contract to deliver a particular programme or piece of work. We work with Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Police and Crime Commissioners and central government to deliver specific programmes, and have a strong track record of impact. Please contact us to talk about how we might be able to deliver a specific programme for you.

### Charitable Trusts and Foundations

By providing unrestricted funding which helps to secure and achieve all the work, or by funding a specific programme or capital development. Please contact us to discuss shared ambitions.

### Individual or Family Donors

By supporting personally with gifts, regular giving and legacies – of unrestricted funding. This is crucial to our sustainability to achieve the work, in the blended funding model which is necessary, but the hardest to raise. Alternatively, by providing support for an existing programme or new one of interest. Please contact us to discuss personal ambitions, and how you might continue to support or join us for the first time.

Multi-year commitments, and transformational gifts, are especially valuable as each enables us to plan ahead with confidence.

**To contact us:** see the details on the back of this book, or connect through our website or Twitter.

Thank you.



# Our Values

- To generate change.
- To tackle causes not symptoms, to find solutions not palliatives.
- To recognise that we all need to give as well as to receive.
- To appreciate that those who experience a problem understand it best and to help the smaller voices to be heard.
- To act local but think global, to teach but never stop learning.
- To celebrate the diversity that enriches our society and challenge the inequalities that diminish us all.
- To collaborate, because it isn't some of our activities that change complex lives, but the sum of them all.
- To be ambitious for the work that we believe in – but to build a network, not an empire.
- To be driven by dreams and judged on delivery.
- To never do things for people but to guide and support, to train and enable.
- To simply inspire.



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