

Birchfield Bugle

ISSUE 6

Spring 2010 newsletter of the Birchfield Residents Action group

Spring Clean for Community Hut



Some of the Team 54 with delighted Plot holders. Their Allotment Secretary, Radley Watson, seen centre, holds a certificate from the Prince's Trust. On his left and right are supervisors from Newtown Police Station. (photography by Mojtaba Abedini)

Volunteers working with the Princes Trust spent 2 weeks giving the neglected old Livingstone Road Allotment Holders' hut a spring make-over. The interior has been freshly painted by the team made up of 12 young people from the Metropolitan College in Sutton Coldfield.



Councillor Mahmood Hussain seen preparing to open the new facility.

The Prince's Trust 54 Team is on a programme that supports 16-25 year olds who have struggled at school, have been in care, are long-term unemployed or have been in trouble with the law. The programme is based on individual and Team challenges in the community and is designed to help improve job prospects for young people through team building activities, a week-long residential trip, a community project and a two week work experience placement.

Prince's Trust Team Leader, Ricardo Atlan, added: "Throughout their 12-week programme, the Team were full of enthusiasm but hadn't always known the best way to make the most

of their abilities. This certainly isn't the case now! They've become a lot more confident, organised and willing to try new things; all of which will help them achieve their future career goals. I'm proud of all their achievements." They will tackle projects in the community to help them gain their City & Guilds Certificate in Personal development and Contributing to the Community For further information or if you would like the team to support further activities in the neighbourhood please call Kam or Liz on 07966916597.

Officers based at Newtown police station persuaded local businesses to donate items for the project, with *Greggs* giving £400, whilst *Law,*

Leisure and Learning supplied paints, *Dobie Seeds* gave £100, *Asda* £250 and *Discount Builders Merchants* gave a generous discount. Councillor Hussain who opened the gates to the Plot holders said the project "would provide a long awaited community facility for local groups to use". Yvonne Wager, the Neighbourhood manager explained that, "the plot holders would be able to use the hut as base from which to sell their surplus produce". Birchfield Residents Action group would like to use the hut to show a monthly cultural film from our diverse community, let us know of any you would like to see. Contact us at brag07@gmail.com



The interior of the hut during the Spring clean operation by Prince's Trust team 54.

This edition has been funded by



How are you today?

Who can you talk to about health services in our area?

Its really difficult to know where to turn if you have a problem with your GP, Dentist, or Hospital treatment. There are several solutions.

Pictured right we see the **Vitality Partnership – Laurie Pike Health Centre – Patient Participation Group** meeting with a doctor and practice management staff. It is open to all and they meet every 2 months to hear what the practice is hoping for in the way of improvements, for example, being able to see the doctor of your choice. They also discuss patient concerns and suggest ways of making patients feel more welcome. Your GP should have the same scheme to involve patients.

If not the **Patient Participation Network**, set up by the Heart of Birmingham PCT provides a place to not only meet patients from around the area with similiar problems, but you will meet NHS staff with special responsibilities such as dealing with complaints, or Dignity in Care. A Saturday event is being organised on **June 19** at St Johns Church, Perry Barr, to increase awareness of Health & Wellbeing services in the area. A similiar event, Be Healthy in Birchfield, organised for National Bike week on **26 June**, will take place at St Clares School, Robert Road. At all these events NHS staff will be keen to tell you about services available and hear your concerns. They also hope that you will become are more aware of GP and dental services in the area. A patient who attended a local meeting for the first time gave us this report.

“My understanding was that it was set up both to educate us as to how the



NHS works, but more importantly for them to listen to patients experience as users of the NHS. This was not the first meeting so I can't talk for what usually happens, but I was surprised at how it was set up. There was a full and very informative agenda. The presentation by Barry Henley, a non-executive director of HOB PCT was interesting and informative, we learned a lot about how it all works and who does what. It was so good we felt we could have used a whole meeting asking him questions. But as there was a speaker on Mental health services, time was limited. This may have accounted for a very rushed presentation with so many fact and figures thrown at us about Mental health that I didn't retain any of it by the end. Now we were running out of time, and the PPI officer was aware we were not happy about finishing the meeting without some patient feed backs. She extended it but some members had left and the Complaints officer that stayed left me feeling that he was not really interested and simply referred us to PALS. I felt very disappointed at the agenda set up which puts Patients experience last on the agenda. THIS shows where it is in terms of priority. There seemed no avenue for feeding it back for the PCT to learn from. As this was my first meeting there is hope that things may change to make it OUR meeting instead

of THEIRS, otherwise there is a danger it will become yet another PR participation exercise.”

Another way of keeping in touch about Health issues is to become a member of **Birmingham LINK**. They hold meetings across the city and we

caught up with two local members recently. Noorin Akhtar, pictured below right, who presents her Community programme on Noor TV at SKY 819, and often features Health issues. Noorin is a practice manager in Aston, apart from her active work in the community, for which she was nominated for the Council's Local Hearts Citizens Awards. One of her patients is Shazad Zaman, pictured (below) on her left and before he was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1999, he worked as a driver for Securicor. As a result of his operation he has become disabled and partially sighted. He says that “I just want to be a voice for the disabled people of Birmingham-that's why I decided to get involved with Birmingham LINK.”



Shazad and Noorin

Now he is also an elected core group member of Birmingham LINK. You can see their activities on the website at **www.birminghamlink.org**, where each action group has a page, for example, Older Persons issues, Mental Health, Maternity & Womens' issues, and Long Term illness. As we are in the Heart Of Birmingham Primary Care Trust area a special action group has been set locally to deal with issues that may arise. The Older Persons Action Group will shortly embark on a consultation which will involve finding out views about activities/facilities offered to older people across the city. The group wants to find out if enough is being done to tackle the isolation or boredom that many older people feel.

LINKs Freephone number is 08006-525-278



Shown below is a recent meeting of the LINK core group when they met at Handsworth Community Fire Station. There are several local people elected to this core group.

Have you noticed? These lads hope you have

This group of apprentices based at Livingstone House are on a six month Council Neighbourhood Champions Training scheme to give them work experience before applying for other jobs where their skills can be put to good use. They often seen out and about keeping the area tidy and making environmental improvements. They are pictured here with supervisor, Patrick McGhee (third left), on a tidy up of the neglected "Secret gaden" at the rear of Grosvenor Avenue, which now has a much



improved play space for local children. He says "These lads, once long term unemployed, all come from the local area, this I believe gives them a sense of pride improving the areas in which they live. This group is nearing the end of there time on Birchfield and have gained an NVG level 2 in enviromental services, this combined with the work experience they now have should stand them in good stead when seeking future employment."



The lads pictured above have been helping to improve the appearance of those "Void areas" that we highlighted in our Spring 2007 issue when we asked the question "Why are there so many vacant spaces in our area?". Urban Living has provided funds of £150,000 for these hoardings which you would have seen around the OLD LIBRARY site, and around the Demolition site, as well as other areas where there is regeneration going on. Tess Randles, Urban Living Communications manager, explained that, "the cost, for these 8 sites over two years, trained up four

local residents in the process. The work involved consultation, preparing the site, placing the backing to the hoardings, photography, design and print and erecting the final boards on key sites by the trainees". Shown above from left to right are local lads, Teon Thompson, Simeon Trail, and Curtis Tweed. They certainly help to brighten up the area and hide the eyesores. Its a pity that the proposed play area, opposite the Calthorpe Arms, that we asked for in our Spring 2006 issue has not happened, seems that the Council want to build on it some time.

Our hard working Beat Sweeper, 21 year old Jason at has been keeping the Street Cleansing wagons busy by phoning in details of fly-tipping around the area. He had his work doubled during the recent demolition of Tweed tower as the amount of dust created was unbelievable. His real hate is coming to work on Monday mornings and wading through piles of disgarded fast foods wrappers and broken bottles left by the weekend revellers keen on enjoying themselves but not wanting to keep our area tidy.



This not uncommon unsightly mess of material left by a landlord's house clearance on Westminster Road, next to the lads' hoardings breaks our heart. Surely they can at least afford a skip.



ABOUT TIME TWO - Tower Demolition Starts



This panorama of the Birchfield Road taken from the top of the remaining Birchfield Tower block, shows Tweed Tower being chewed away by the giant biting jaws of the demolition machine. It was taken off site at the end of April, and will not return until O2 turn off the power to their mast still situated on Birchfield tower. It is being resited on the old Bingo hall across the road, but due to technical difficulties it cannot be switched on yet. According to a Council Official, it would take 8 weeks from any switch-off time before the machine could start demolishing again.

Phone Mast, machinery or not, one crucial factor in the progress of this demolition is the Human factor. There are still 6 households remain living in the properties listed for demolition, they are waiting to be offered either the right price for their property or an offer of accommodation that will be acceptable to them. Most have been residents of the Birchfield estate for 20-30 years, and are adamant that they will not be moving until their demands are met. The recent visit for a Birmingham City Council publicity photoshoot by Councillor Lines, regeneration chair, (featured on BRAG's website), accompanied by the Urban Living and Demolition company chiefs passed unnoticed by remaining residents or members of Birchfield Estate Regeneration group.

The remaining residents have had to endure the dust and noise

created by the demolition, even the presence of burglars stripping pipes from the unoccupied flats has not daunted their determination to remain until satisfactory offers have been made by the Council. One family has complained that the council web site offering a Choice Based Lettings Scheme is not working, as they cannot find any 3 bed room houses. Council Official, Shahid Iqbal, who is in charge of the redevelopment project told the **Bugle** that once the site is cleared, developers' proposals would be assessed and a design chosen for the future redevelopment. This could take up to 2 years and the final phase of construction would not be completed until 2015.

A group of local residents together with Housing officials has been set up to oversee the design phase, and they meet every two months at Livingstone

House. Councillors and Urban Living are also in attendance. They are pictured below in session discussing the progress of redevelopment, and getting to know more about the process of designing new housing taking into account householders expectations, and understanding the planning process.

Local resident, Sakil Pathan, who is also chair of Birchfield Estate Regeneration Residents Group, said that being involved with the architects and planning designers has given the project a new meaning, we feel that our views are being heard and acted upon". He is pictured on the far right of the lower picture of the group. His vice chair, Mr Yashwant Patel is to his left. Other residents have come to complain about the amount of dust generated by the day to day slow demolition, with the prospect of more to come...



BIRCHFIELD Estate Regeneration underway?



This view from the other side of the tower, facing west, shows one of the cleared areas, with the three remaining owner occupied houses. The right hand side of the view shows the remaining maisonettes, with the allotments beyond.



6 households still occupy these properties, and 4 of the ladies who have been in their family homes for up to 30 years are shown firmly standing together outside the blocks above that remain undemolished. One lady has decided to move away from Birmingham to be near her son, but the others are determined to stick it out until they get the right type of property offered, in the location of their choice



DREAM ON- THEY MAKE THEM COME TRUE



Team Leader, Verral Culton, in front of the Client's Dream Job display wall.

Many folk from our area are sent by Job Centre Plus to visit the Newtown branch of Pertemps Peoples Development Group, known as the Newtown Advancement Centre.

The Bugle was invited to a quick tour of the facilities that are to be found. Teresa May, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Work & Pensions, who is now Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equality, had just visited in a whistle stop tour so we could not ask her any searching questions. However, Team Leader Verral Culton, was at hand to explain Pertemps role, and give us some background to the company.

PPDG has over 600 employees operating out of 30 locations throughout England, as far away as Middlesbrough and Liverpool. They even have a company in Australia for those wanting to go down under. But staying in Newtown for the moment Verral took me to the Dream Wall.

This is where clients are encouraged to "unearth the sparkle of brilliance in themselves", and imagine just what they could achieve with these aspirations. Within stretching distance is the Job Table where folders contain the reality of what is available. Carl a member of the team responsible for finding work placements explained that Pertemps wants to make an impact on a person's life. This involves helping with job search skills using IT, then job interview confidence boosting, and encouraging people to stay in their job. He helps those in what is known as the Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) to gain a foothold towards full employment.

They are helping the 18 to 24 year olds and Lone Parents who have been on benefits for more than 3 months and also ex-offenders who often find it hard to get work after leaving prison. Clients were being given training in job searching, and they can later relax in the downstairs Activity Base, which is also open in the evenings for local people to use.

There is a cafe area and Internet

computers are available. The Health Exchange has a computer terminal where information on a range of Health topics can be accessed, in the public reception area. There is also a Creche for the mums with children. A large part of the floor area is taken up by the staff connected with Aston Pride who were seen interviewing clients as well. Their B6 ACTION PLAN involves helping clients record their journey (job search), and supporting them if they are sick.

Near to this open plan area is a classroom where Learn Direct helps those who need to improve their English and Maths skills, such as refugees and economic migrants.

"They can take City & Guilds exams too when they are ready," explained Yan the Polish tutor, "as well as learning basic skills".

The Outreach team have a very important function in going out to the community and finding those who would benefit from the facilities at this Advancement centre. "We reach vulnerable women," explained Tina Savill, who is the Outreach coach, "as well as going to events in the community where we can engage with potential clients".

There are many heart warming success tales to tell of clients who have been successful in fulfilling their dreams and gaining a permanent job. Some go on to self employment like the "Recycling Man" and employ other local people, we hope to tell his story in our next issue.



Above two members of the Outreach Team discuss where they be going next.



Sumayah shows off some of the Mendi designs her clients have produced on an Outreach Team activity.



In the same building a credit union helps clients save money and take out responsible low cost loans.

FAITH IN ACTION 'Kingdom Workers saved to serve'

Each issue will highlight some of our local Faiths outreach to the local community. Here we invite the New Testament Church of God in Lozells to tell us about their Outreach week over Easter, their Missions Co-ordinator, Athonette Parris, reports

"During the open week we provided toiletry and food packs, immigration advice, pedicures and health checks as well as prayer and a listening ear. Food was provided throughout the week and hot meals served during the hours of 12-2 pm. Members of the church gave their time, skills and abilities throughout the week to befriend and serve others willingly, as Christ would have us to do. They helped to complete benefit and housing forms, sign-posted people to other services such as alcohol and drug misuse support services, provided leaflets and advice on a variety of issues and the health team conducted blood pressure and general well being checks.



During the open week we encountered and engaged



with approximately 150 people who we never would have gotten to know if we had not opened our doors to welcome the community in this way. Relationships were built and people received hope and encouragement. They were fed and provided for and we know the work was not in vain as recipients commented that, they appreciated the service we provided. We believe that the church must be a source of guidance and support to the community and as workers in the Kingdom of God we aim to continue to be a light and salt in our community in whatever way we can.

We would like to thank *Russell's supermarket, Cleone Food Ltd, Salah and Sons Grocery store, Soho Road*

Cosmetics, Davis Bakery and the many individuals who responded to our outreach drive for tin foods and toiletries amongst other things as they gave unselfishly to help make the week a success.

Overall, the week reiterated the need for churches to get involved with other projects and work together with the community to reach out to people of all diversities, faiths and cultures who for whatever reason are experiencing a need. We endeavour to continue to shine our light in the community as, "the harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few, we therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers into his harvest".



Birmingham counts down to 2011 Census

On 27 March 2011 all residents in the UK will be asked to take part in the census by completing a questionnaire about their household.

The census is an estimate of the population that is carried out every ten years. Everyone is asked the same questions on the same day to paint a snapshot of the city's population and its characteristics. When residents fill in the census questionnaire their answers are turned into anonymous statistics that are used to help the council and other organisations decide where local services, transport, housing, and schools are needed.

The questionnaire covers a broad range of topics including health, sex, age, marital status, language, employment, relationships between household members, ethnic background, religion and type of accommodation.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimate that each person counted in the census is worth £5,000 to the Local Authority over 10 years. This means that an undercount of just 100 people could mean Birmingham

misses out on £500,000 worth of funding.

From now until census day on 27 March 2011, ONS and Birmingham City Council staff will work together with community organisations and local partners to raise awareness of the importance of the census and to support residents who need help in filling in the questionnaire.



How you can help

You can help make the census in Birmingham a success by filling in the census questionnaire yourself, and supporting those around you to do the same. The questionnaire must be completed in English, so can you support those whose first language isn't English? Are you a member of a community group that could hold a drop-in centre on census day? If yes, the please get in contact.

During the course of the 2011

Census over 600 part time -opportunities will be created in Birmingham. All posts are being recruited by Capita on behalf of ONS and will be advertised through their website www.censusjobs.co.uk.

The recruitment of Community Advisors- who will be responsible for promoting the Census at a grass-roots level to encourage participation in the community - starts on May the 17th.

Other positions will include: Co-ordinators who will oversee fieldwork activities and Collectors responsible for following up questionnaires from non responding households. ONS would like to promote these opportunities widely within local areas and gain people with experience of working with local communities.

If you have any questions about the census, want to get involved, or have suggestions about how we can make it a success in Birmingham please contact Amerdip Kaur, Senior Policy Officer, Corporate Policy and Performance Team, census@birmingham.gov.uk

BIRCHFIELD CHILDRENS CENTRE offers help to WIDER COMMUNITY



Clients are seen here consulting knowledgeable EDAS staff members who have been helping many deprived folk since 2001 across many areas of the city.



Residents in Birchfield are set to boost their incomes by having free financial advice in accessing services.

Families are being offered the chance to get support on issues such as housing, debt management and help in accessing benefits they may not have been aware of. The service is run by trained advisors from lead Handsworth based charity,

Education Development Advisory Service (EDAS), every Monday between 10am and 2pm at Birchfield Children's Centre, Houghton Road.

Various community languages can be offered including Polish.

The project was organised by Be Birmingham neighbourhood manager for Birchfield, Yvonne Wager and EDAS. Yvonne Wager said: "There's no neighbourhood office located in the Birchfield area and the aim of the programme is to give residents access to additional support and boost their incomes whilst reducing the pressures of the current economic climate."

The project will run until 31st March 2011 which is part funded via Successful Neighbourhoods fund

which provides small grants for Birmingham grassroots organisations in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods to create opportunities for local people to address concerns about their area, ensuring they have the tools they need to get involved. General Manager, Shajna Begum EDAS said: "We have offered support to hundreds of families in Lozells over the last eight years and pleased to be extending our services to Birchfield, with this One Stop service."

"Our services have helped to raise the standard of living for those people who are facing extreme difficulties and are disadvantaged. We do this by directly raising the level of income by helping claiming unclaimed benefits. During the period 2007-2008 EDAS Foundation generated income in excess of £120,000.00 across 13 highly deprived Birmingham wards." She goes on to describe how the "EDAS Foundation believes that the home factor life has an impact on the education attainment of children and young people, thus we aim to positively deliver services which impact the quality of life in the home and

education. Providing opportunities and support to disengaged and disadvantaged communities to excel in life and within society." They describe themselves as having, "a proven track record in delivering high quality advisory and advocacy services in partnership with Surestart Children Centres across Birmingham to increase income generated in the area for the advancement and betterment of lifestyle". Let's hope that the new Government's Cut-Backs will still enable them to achieve their aims.

Their Key Areas of Work are:- **Debt Advice:** council tax arrears, rent arrears. Mortgage arrears, credit cards, bills, etc.

Housing Issues: Homelessness, disrepair, transfer applications, over crowdedness etc.

Welfare Rights: Benefit entitlements, help claiming unclaimed benefits etc.

Grants and Fund Applications: Community care grants, crisis loans, budgeting loans, Severn Trent Trust Fund etc

Other issues: General letters and telephone calls. They can also advise on **Immigration** issues.

UPDATE TO NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE MEETINGS The chair of BRAG makes this comment :-

"Since the Central Neighbourhood Forum was allowed to 'take-over' our Neighbourhood Police meeting we have had one joint meeting at the beginning of March. Before our meetings were frequent, but we have had no information about the next meeting 2 months later." (*editor, the Neighbourhood police Teams have*

been changed and they in the process of planning how to have an effective meeting with us) "Our fears that this would not be in our best interest have been realised. The area that the Forum claims to represent is far too big, and our experience from the Forum in the past was that it made a great deal of noise, but was ineffectual

and too politically involved to a) represent all residents, and, b) have the time to do that.

We need our own Police meeting back and BRAG will lobby for that, it was the most effective way of getting involvement and collaboration for a safe neighbourhood for all, and getting the police to listen to our concerns."

Birchfield Residents Action Group (BRAG) was set up to highlight problems within the Birchfield area. Our aim is to cooperate with all the organisations working in and responsible for the well being of our residents.

Our hope is to regenerate pride and find agreed solutions to the problems.

This quarterly newsletter illustrates some of the current activities that are happening in our area, and has been kindly funded by Be Birmingham's Successful Neighbourhoods fund.

Contact us at brag07@gmail.com,

www.brag.btik.com.

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