

Summary notes from Discussion Session #3: Integration

These notes are intended to act as a summary of the views and opinions raised at the discussion session on community integration, held on Thursday 23rd June in the Four Squares Tenants & Residents Association hall, and which 8 people attended.

What brings communities together?

- Shared spaces offering a range of community amenities and which encourage people to congregate such as The Blue, Southwark Park, Time & Talents and Canada Water Library.
 - It was felt that it is the programming of these spaces for a range of users that determines their success – there should be something for everyone.
 - People who are passionate about such spaces are essential to making them work.
 - Accessibility is also important, for example being open after work and at weekends.
- Schools were thought to offer a unique sense of community and opportunity, for adults just as much as children.
 - There is potential for schools to be ‘more open’ to the community, for example Compass School offers a coffee morning for parents, but there are safeguarding considerations too.
 - There is a shared ambition for the new secondary school facility to be well-used by the community.
- Everyone agreed that community events are extremely important for supporting community cohesion.
 - The Carnival, Biscuit Factory Fete, events in the Blue and local church events were noted as working particularly well.
 - It is not always clear to newcomers just how much is going on, so effective communication is key.
- Social media was noted as being extremely well used in the neighbourhood by people of all ages, and a powerful tool for community interaction.
 - Facebook groups are particularly popular.
- The power of a shared interest was also discussed, such as children and even dogs, but it could be anything that can bring people together through mutual interests.

Marginalised groups

- There are particular groups of people in the area who are at risk of feeling marginalised, such as the elderly and those living alone.
- Skills development was discussed as one way through which their confidence could be developed leading to greater engagement and integration.
 - The Shed in Rotherhithe was noted as one such example.

Having a stake in change

- How the existing communities can have a stake in change was considered important for successful integration.
 - That could be access to better homes, amenities, services, etc.

Integrating new residents

- It was felt that long-standing Bermondsey residents have always been happy to welcome newcomers, as they have done for generations.
- Some believed the responsibility was on new residents, to take the time to get to know and understand the community – it won't just happen.
- Community Council meeting and social media were considered good ways that new people can find out what's going on, though again effective communication and means of disseminating information is essential.
- 'Community contracts' were discussed as one potential way through which newcomers could be encouraged to play an active part in the community.