

Snapshots in the history of the voluntary and community sector in Kensington and Chelsea

Kensington and Chelsea is home to over 550 voluntary and community organisations. These are not-for-profit organisations, many of whom are registered charities, delivering services to meet the needs of local communities.

This display provides a snapshot of the history of this vibrant sector and also looks to its future.

Kensington and Chelsea has a long history of charity. In 1629 Viscount Campden created his first endowment for the people of Kensington. In the 19th century the area developed into a bustling London suburb. The new population included the Irish labourers who built the railways, a foretaste of today's ethnic diversity. The 'needy poor' had to rely on private charity from individuals and organisations, including churches.

The early post war decades saw rebuilding in the aftermath of war and the arrival of new migrants from Asia, the Caribbean, North Africa and Europe. Many found themselves crowded into the once grand, but now dilapidated, villas of Notting Hill and Earls Court, where they were exploited by slum landlords and discriminated against by employers.

Tensions boiled over in the 'race riots' in 1958, centred on Notting Hill. The decades that followed were the seedbed of community activism in the borough. Anti-racist groups, self-help organisations, housing associations, community nurseries and environmental activism grew as grassroots responses to exploitation and faceless bureaucracy. People demanded dignity, respect and a real say in their lives. While many groups were shortlived, others developed into more permanent organisations – many remain active today.



Spotlight on North Kensington

North Kensington has developed a diverse and active voluntary sector that was strengthened through the struggles of the 60s. A determination to improve social and living conditions resulted in the development of a number of key local voluntary agencies that worked with local people to campaign, influence and grow organisations.

Notting Hill Social Council (which later merged with Chelsea Social Council to become Kensington and Chelsea Social Council) was set up in 1960, a partnership across faith, secular and political groups, it led a number of key projects such as the setting up of Notting Hill Housing Trust in 1963 which later helped to set up Shelter. The Neighbourhood Law Service (now North Kensington Law Centre) was set up in 1968 to offer free legal advice and assistance to the community and was the first of its kind in the country, leading to a national network of centres.

Between the late 60s and early 90s many organisations emerged to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic residents, reflecting the changing nature of local communities. Initially community groups were set up to support newly arrived immigrants from the West Indies and Ireland but by the late 80s and early 90s the sector had grown to support a wider diaspora particularly from East and West Africa. In the 90s the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum was established to support this development.

Westway

The development of the Westway flyover in the 60s was a major point in the history of the local voluntary and community sector with many local groups having their roots in the community activism that sprung up in opposition to it.

The North Kensington Amenity Trust (now known as Westway Development Trust) was set up in 1970. It was a response to the demand of local campaigners that the land under the motorway be used to compensate the community for the damage and destruction caused by the road. The Trust has worked in partnership to support new organisations to emerge when a need has been identified.



Anthony Perry, first director of the Trust with the Mayor



Greater London Association for the Disabled staff in the charity offices under the Westway



Spanish festival under the Westway, early 80s

Spotlight on North Kensington

Case Study: Venture Centre

The Venture Centre is a community centre in Wornington Green. It began life as The Notting Hill Adventure Playground in 1959 with homemade play structures.

It then developed in response to the race riots in the area and the buildings were added during the 70s. Today the centre offers a wide range of activities for the local community from yoga to drama classes as well as its much loved adventure playground.



Children enjoying the Venture playground through the ages

Case Study: Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre

Al-Hasaniya was founded in 1985, to act as a bridge to help Moroccan women access local services. The centre provides support to deal with issues such as housing or domestic violence. It also aims to promote positive citizenship and greater understanding amongst communities. The centre recently celebrated its 25th birthday.

Founder Souad Talsi explains their ethos:

- *We work with the women and tailor our services to meet their needs. We act as grassroots advocates for them, we don't speak on their behalf, we speak with them.* ◦



Office opening in 1991



Women enjoying some of the group activities on offer



Spotlight on Worlds End

Worlds End is home to a number of well established voluntary and community sector organisations serving the needs of the residents of the Worlds End Estate and surrounding area.

Jane Gray, Manager of the Worlds End Neighbourhood Advice Centre since it opened in 1984, comments:

“ *There has always been good partnership working among organisations here. There was the Worlds End Forum where we could come together to discuss areas of concern and this has now evolved into the Chelsea Community Development Network.* ”



Case Study: Worlds End Under Fives Centre

The Worlds End Under Fives Centre was set up over 30 years ago, evolving from a once or twice weekly group run informally by parents and carers to a well established charity providing a range of free play, education and family support services.

Still housed in its original premises, a previously unused space on the ground floor of a high rise estate, the centre has grown to become a full time project reaching over 300 families, with a focus on supporting families in need.

The centre originally shared its premises with the Worlds End Pre School, the two groups worked side by side from the late 70s, and in 2008 the groups merged.



Visit by Blue Peter mid 70s



Drop in party late 70s



Pre School early 80s

Spotlight on Earls Court

A number of grassroots voluntary organisations grew up in Earls Court during the 70s and 80s to help tackle issues in the local area such as poor housing, drugs and prostitution. Provision was also developed to help meet the needs of homeless families that were being housed in small bed and breakfast hotels in the area.

Jennifer Ware, who has been involved in the voluntary and community sector in Earls Court for 37 years recalls 'there was a tremendous amount of partnership work between the organisations, especially those working with children and young people'.

However she bemoans that fact that many of these organisations are no longer in operation. She believes this is because of high property values and a lack of perception that Earls Court needs voluntary organisations due to an increase in wealth in the area.

Case Study: Response Community Projects

Response Community Projects was founded by local residents in 1975 to respond to the needs of disadvantaged members of the local community.

The organisation started by producing a free community newspaper. It then developed in 1978 to run a drop-in coffee bar with an information service on welfare matters, local activities and events. The organisation also organised the Earls Court Fair and later the Earls Court Festival which became a major local event.

Over the years Response has developed more services for the local community such as IT and English courses, projects for young people and cultural evenings.



Response community newspaper from 1992



Response office situated next to Nucleus Legal Advice Centre, another local voluntary organisation



Users at Response Community Projects today

Timeline

This timeline was produced by local voluntary and community organisations and records kept at the Social Council.

- **1958** Race riots in Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill areas.
- **1960** Notting Hill Social Council set up.
- **1963** Portobello Project set up for young people in the area.
Notting Hill Housing Trust founded under the leadership of Bruce Kenwick who two years later set up the homeless charity Shelter.
- **1965** Blenheim Project set up to work with young people, providing support and information.
- **1968** Neighbourhood Law Service set up to provide legal advice and assistance.
- **1969** Volunteer Workers Bureau (later the Volunteer Centre) opens.
- **1970** North Kensington Amenity Trust formed to develop and administer the land beneath the Westway motorway.
- **1975** Response Community Projects founded by local residents in Earls Court.
- **1978** Chelsea Centre opens.
- **1979** Building work on the Swinbrook Estate begins.
- **1982** Kensington Action Force set up to provide education and training for young people.
Pepper Pot Club founded.



Pepper Pot Day Centre



Coffee at Chelsea Theatre, formally Chelsea Centre

Timeline

- 1983** Learning Advice for Adults set up to provide advice and counselling for those thinking of training or re-training.
NOVA (New Opportunities for Voluntary Action) set up to run courses for unemployed people and with the Volunteer Bureau to develop new opportunities for voluntary work.
- 1993** Dadihiye Somali Development Organisation established.
Westway Nursery Association dissolved.
- 1994** Formation of Sixty Plus after the closure of Pensioners Link.
Ilys Booker Under 5s Centre opens as a nursery for children of working/studying parents.
- 2000** Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme started in Dalgarno.
- 2002** Kensington & Chelsea Social Council formed following the merger of Chelsea Social Council and Notting Hill Social Council.
- 2004** K & C Mental Health Carers Association created.
Dalgarno Neighbourhood Trust formed.
- 2005** St Clement and St James Community Development Project celebrates its silver jubilee.
- 2006** Community Development Programme at Chelsea Theatre begins.
- 2007** Plans to demolish Wornington Green Estate unveiled.
- 2008** Details of the North Kensington Action Plan published which include some radical proposals to redevelop large parts of the area.



Training at NOVA New Opportunities



Dadihiye Somali Development Organisation

Changing Times

What has changed in the voluntary and community sector over time? A number of people that have been involved in the local sector for many years look back and reflect:

Technology

- When I started it was pre-electronic information and it was a slower pace.* Cynthia Dize
- We had no PCs back then. We purchased the first one in 1989 at a phenomenal price. Before that we used type writers.* Jane Gray

Professionalisation

- To meet the requirements of funders the sector has become more professional. This is positive but it brings an administrative burden.* Jane Gray
- There has maybe been a loss of spontaneity.* Cynthia Dize
- At the Venture Centre I was the 'Co-ordinator', they didn't use the term 'Director' then.* Mary Gardiner

Relationship with government

- It's become much more formal and business like. It's so bureaucratic now and this concerns me.* Souad Talsi
- Heavy monitoring for funding means less time to spend delivering the work on the ground.* Jennifer Ware
- Contracting has tied up the relationship more tightly, it maybe took away some flexibility.* Cynthia Dize
- So many new initiatives from government over the years, you only get used to one and another would come along.* Jennifer Ware
- The government is more involved now. It will issue papers about How it thinks the voluntary sector should develop. We have lost some independence.* Robin Tuck

Fighting for social change

- There used to be a lot more lobbying and campaigning.* Mary Gardiner
- With the constraints of funding contracts and increase in administration people have found less time to concentrate on these areas.* Jane Gray

Memory...

- When I ran Kensal Under 5s we squatted in a playhut, a council building that a playgroup had moved out of. At the time squatting was quite common, I think the council were more entertained than appalled, they saw us as entrepreneurial. We were backed by Social Services, they wanted to stimulate community activity.* Mary Gardiner

Looking Forward

Today the voluntary and community sector in Kensington and Chelsea remains a vibrant and active part of the local landscape, delivering services that help give people a voice, access the services they need and get involved in their local community.

The past decade has brought a number of changes to the sector, such as the increasing professionalism and closer partnership working with the state. These changes have their advantages but they also raise questions and challenges.

Many organisations recognise a need to move with the times but also to ensure that they protect their distinctive character and ethos and maintain an independent voice.

The recession has brought further challenges with levels of funding to the sector being reduced while at the same time demand for its services has increased. Now more than ever, it is important that the sector remembers its roots and moves forward with a knowledge and understanding of its history.



This display was produced by Kensington and Chelsea Social Council



50 YEARS OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM 1960-2010