

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

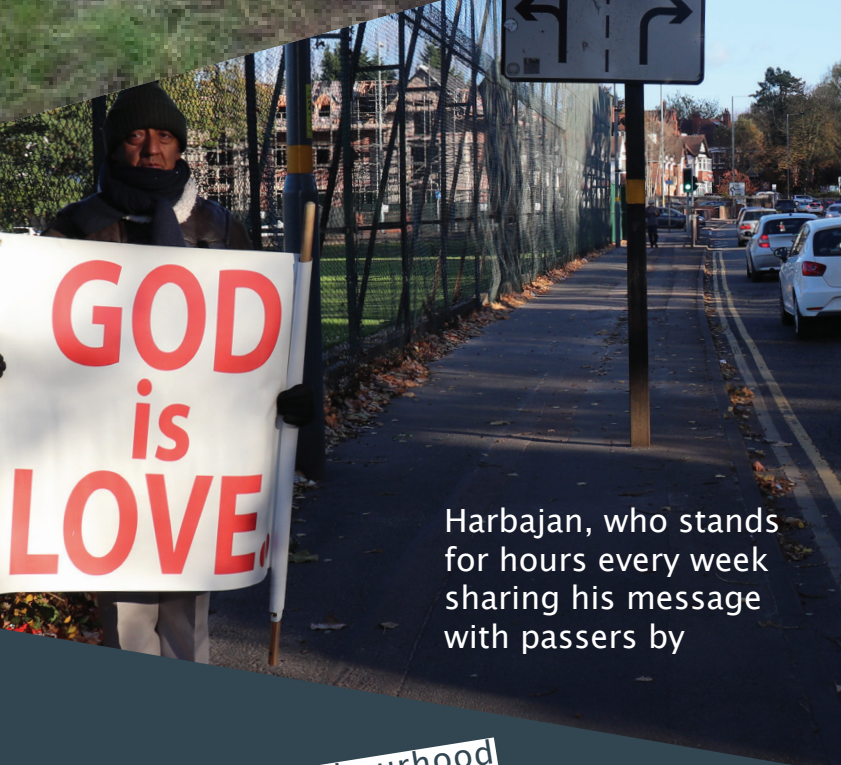
brought to you by Balsall Heath & Sparkbrook Forums, funded by LIF (Birmingham City council)



Image: Calthorpe Park Graffiti



Local residents clearing planters on Edward Road



Harbajan, who stands for hours every week sharing his message with passers by

An Elected Neighbourhood Council for Balsall Heath?

Balsall Heath Forum has been discussing the idea of a neighbourhood council for Balsall Heath. It would have around 10 elected councillors for legal and formal decision-making and represent the area to outside bodies as a permanent voice for Balsall Heath. As a legal entity, it could also apply for funds and even take a small element from the council tax to pay for running expenses.

John Newson is currently researching the best working model on behalf of Balsall Heath Forum and would like to hear from individuals and organisations who have ideas, or questions about this opportunity. Please contact john.n@phonecoop.coop.

Editorial

There's no denying we are living in troubling times. Even if you don't listen to the news or engage with social media, you only have to walk along the streets to see it. The politics of our times are evident everywhere. In this newsletter we wanted to celebrate some of the voices of hope and people of action, of whom there are many in Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook. One of the most diverse places in the country, this area is culturally rich and full of dynamic people contributing in their own way, whether it be picking litter off the streets, updating planters, running community enterprises, or even simply sharing their own message of hope.

Unfortunately, there isn't the space to do justice to those people here, this time, but we hope you'll be inspired by some of the examples of action and change.

As in so many important fields, funding is limited for these newsletters. This edition comes to your door but there will be fewer copies of the next edition available in public spaces. Beyond that, we are investigating funding options and ideas to run an editorial team of young people representing different parts of our community. If you would like to contribute your ideas, or submit to the next print edition, please email the editor at editor.nno@gmail.com.

Elisabeth Charis

Putting Social Value Into Action



DR. ANITA HALLIDAY MBE 1940-2018



A life dedicated to equality and opportunity for all

One evening, two young women with loaded bags set out along the wrecked streets of Balsall Heath. They are part of a team of five delivering their handmade printed newsletters, The Heathan, door to door. It will take them several evenings but they are committed to sharing the best of Balsall Heath with its residents. It is 1975, a time of huge social change. Society is in turmoil. People are scared and there are many and complex tensions.

One of the women, Anita Halliday, had been working as an academic in the sociology department at Birmingham University but walked away from a promising academic career to set up a school in a terraced house in St Pauls' Road with Dick Atkinson. Back then, there were many young people spending their days on the street playing in bomb 'pecks', deserted bits of ground of craters and rubble which the bombs had left behind. Anita was committed to giving them and others like them who had been abandoned by the education system, a new chance in life. She worked tirelessly, initially as a volunteer and later as a paid member of staff.

Val Hart, who also worked at the school, remembers how difficult it was, "We started with five young people but they were incredibly challenging. These were the pupils no one wanted in their school- disruptive, angry, rebellious."

Anita earned their respect, refusing to believe that any one of them should be thrown on the scrapheap. Her utter commitment was to the disadvantaged, the dispossessed, the downtrodden.

Over the following years, the school grew, first to two houses. Later it took over the old Infants school on Clifton Road. Eventually, in 1979, the Nursery, the adventure playground and the school joined together to form St Pauls' Trust.

With Anita's resilience, determination and passion, the Trust went on to become a major volun-

tary organisation, employing over 150 people with an annual turnover of £3.5m amid a revitalised community neighbourhood. The mission statement was, 'To work with and for the community in Balsall Heath'.

A school friend of Anita's described her as, 'extraordinarily clever' and said she 'could have had any career she chose' and it is not surprising that Anita has achieved great things given her clarity of vision and determination.

Clearly though, what has left such an impression on all the lives she touched is something more even than that. It is not just that she was so instrumental in building this important institution, it is also the little extra things: the holidays she took the pupils on, the groups she set up to represent the underrepresented and so much more. One year St Pauls Trust had no external funding whatsoever but Anita got everyone through the year with sheer grit and will power. In those days they did whatever they could to get by, from selling their homemade newsletters door to door, to "outrageous" jumble sales, themselves powerful community events.

Anita brought a "terrific creativity and a sense of fun to everything" even in the most difficult circumstances. Some of the staff from St Pauls remember how she made staff training days memorable, thought provoking and cohesive. Her sense of humour brought a touch of magic.

Val discusses how their small team made such a huge transformation to the community, "[Dick Atkinson] and Anita between them really had a huge effect on Balsall Heath because they were never just trying to do a school or a nursery or adventure playground. We were aiming for re-growth of a community -that was the big thing- involving local people in doing it. It was never imposed -, never 'this is what you've got to do. It was 'what do you think we should do next?', and 'shall we do this?' . [They were always] searching for the maximum opportunity for people."

Repeatedly called 'an inspiration', 'formidable' and her impact 'immeasurable'. It has even been said that she 'deserves a pyramid no less', for her deep & devoted commitment' (Sephi). For those of us who feel insecure or incapable of such great achievements, it is worth remembering that this great woman was always worrying.

"It was a huge responsibility being responsible for all the staff and St Pauls'. It felt like it was a huge burden. It was all resting on us and if we didn't win this or that big funding bid, then jobs would go and lives would go. It was really hard feeling that weight. She worried endlessly about whether she was doing enough or whether someone else could do it better." (Val).

For the amazing things Anita Halliday achieved, for the innumerable lives she touched and changed for the better, perhaps that is what makes her influence so significant: her real, deep and distinct care for her fellow human beings.

Images: 1. Anita talking at a staff conference around 2014; 2. a Balsall Heath 'bomb peck' from Ghosts Streets of Balsall Heath. Reprinted here with kind permission- Janet Mendelsohn; 3. extract from the first newsletter, The Heathan.



FEATURED

Arts on Prescription

'Although we are being quite ambitious with our current funding, we cannot ignore recent evaluation reports on similar schemes'



Cristina Piñero Maese

Balsall Heath Forum have recently launched an Arts on Prescription or social prescribing scheme called Community Link Service (CLS), which is funded by the Local Innovation Fund. We have started working with Dr Walji & colleagues surgery in Balsall Heath Health Center, wishing to offer a practice embedded and connected to the community with a focus on empowering patients to look after their own-health, support each other and their community. After mapping the community assets in Balsall Heath & Sparkbrook through our Community Knowledge Officer (CKO), our Community Link Worker (CLW) facilitates connections between people and community-based groups and their activities. These may be arts and creative activities, although social prescribing may also include physical activity and walking; gardening and the natural environment; debt and housing advice and support; and peer support. The purpose is to help people through creativity and increasing social engagement for people experiencing a range of challenges such as mental health problems, bereavement, chronic pain and long-term conditions.

The Community Link Worker role could be described as health coaching. As the Better Conversations Resource Guide puts it, “health coaching is a patient-centred process that entails goal setting determined by the patient, encourages self-discovery in addition to content education, and incorporates mechanisms for developing accountability in health behaviours.”

Active involvement in creative and community activities can provide a wide range of benefits, including the promotion of wellbeing, quality of life and health, increased levels of empowerment, positive impacts on mental health and social inclusion for people with mental health or suffering isolation.

One of our aims is to look into making this service available and sustainable in Balsall Heath & Sparkbrook, joining other successful social prescribing practices in our community like Saheli Hub & Birmingham Wellbeing Service Partnership.

Our main concern when we started the project was to research into the smart data collection system that would make it easy for both the community link worker and health professionals to see what happened after the referral, and other possible feedback loops within the intervention pathway. Although we are being quite ambitious with our current funding, we cannot ignore recent evaluation reports on similar schemes, and we believe that some good effort should be put into creating a strong social prescribing platform which acknowledges comprehensive intervention pathways, that could later on be shared with other neighbourhoods with a know-how guide to get their social prescribing going.

Ageing Better

Not long ago, a new project called *Connect Sparkbrook*, launched in Sparkbrook. It's part of the *Ageing Better in Birmingham* programme and will be delivered by The Muath Trust. With a focus on Sparkbrook as an area, it aims to improve connectivity and reduce isolation for people over 50. The project will develop local people's skills, knowledge and understanding of local voluntary and community organisations and community groups and individuals.

Mumtaz Shah, of The Muath Trust, is the Project Co-ordinator for Connect Sparkbrook and responsible for the day-to-day delivery. Having extensive experience in working within the Community Development Sector, Mumtaz understands the necessity for a joint-approach in this area. He said,

"I'm very excited about this new role. The project has a lot of potential to improve connectivity and combat social isolation for those over 50 in Sparkbrook. There are several organisations that are doing excellent community development and engagement work within Sparkbrook, and I'm proud to help make this expertise, knowledge and skills available to smaller groups and organisations that lack the capacity or the know-how."

In his role, Mumtaz also supports the East Birmingham Collective to meet

the aims and objectives of the Ageing Better in Birmingham's Sparkbrook Hub, to improve access to services for older people.

Connect Sparkbrook focusses on the following activities:

VENUE ASSESSMENT – To provide an assessment of the accessibility of venues and facilities in the area and to improve access to community assets for older people. Develop activities and initiatives that enable services to be extended effectively across communities.

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING – Identify current activity within organisations and growth potential for volunteer/asset involvement and social prescribing related activities. Develop networking / sharing processes between organisations, and provide formal and informal activities that bring groups and their identified

active citizens together.

NETWORK & SOCIAL MEDIA DEVELOPMENT – To assess organisations' current social media usage and offer training and support on the identified needs and to provide social media training to individuals to increase their active citizenship role.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT – Development of library of resources to identify resources available within partnership/area. Identify organisations willing to share resources and develop a processes around resource development and identifying needs for area / groups and purchasing equipment.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about any of the above activities or would like to get involved then please contact: Mumtaz Shah on: 0121 753 0297 or email on: ageingbetter@muathtrust.org

Call the midwife!

Did you know that pregnant Women & families from Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook are choosing to give birth at Home with the full support of South Birmingham Women's Homebirth Team?

The Midwives can come to you for Ante-natal visits, attend your birth and follow up with post natal visits and feeding support, all in the comfort of your own home.

Come along to our Homebirth Workshops & Story telling group to find out more from our Homebirth parents and Midwives from the team to find out more, and follow us at the addresses below.

homebirthteam@bnwft.nhs.uk
Twitter: @HomebirthTeam
Instagram: @homebirthteam
0121 335 8098



KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY SAFE

It's no secret that there have been monumental cutbacks to the policing service in the UK. That and the consequential decline in officers has made national and international headlines. Amid reports of crime figures and bad news stories, it's easy to despair, but communities around the country are taking back control. We met with Sergeant Christopher Rigby of Hall Green Constituency at Edward Road Police Station to find out about our local neighbourhood team and how us normal residents can work with police to prevent crime.

Talking with Sgt Rigby and meeting some of the team, what is immediately apparent is how hard everybody is working. Each day, the Police Constables have a very responsive role, which is part of the reason the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are so useful.

"[PCSOs] provide some consistency for neighbourhood policing" says Sgt Rigby. "As warranted officers we end up having to deal with whatever needs dealing with [in response to the day to day] whereas community support officers get more of an opportunity to build up a relationship with people and build up those networks."

Whilst Sgt Rigby points out there are "a lot of positives" in the existing relationship between the local team and the community, police are trying to develop it.

"We're looking at linking in more with the mosques and other religious establishments", he says.

There are more than fifty religious establishments in the area and mosque managers are hopeful that people will sign up to and promote the community messaging service called WM Now (www.wmnow.co.uk).

WM Now is an online service anyone can sign up to. It has live police updates of what's going on where you live and work.

"If people sign up to WM Now, we can target different streets. We can get quite a bespoke messaging across. We can say, 'there's been vehicle crime that's affected these few streets'. The service is still very much a work

in progress and we need to make sure we're getting the right content out there- that's a battle for us, really, to make sure we get better content. For instance we can put out a description and say that on such and such times we've had vehicles broken into or house burglaries or whatever it might be, this is what they're doing in terms of their modus operandi, these are the times-.

There's potential for people being more proactive.

If we could link in with particular residents and on the back of that they have whatsapp group that can be effective. Ultimately, then, you've got people who are aware."

Residents on many streets around the UK have started using the messaging app WhatsApp to manage crime in the area and it has been found to be very effective in monitoring and reporting crime. PSCO Lorraine Whelan explains how residents from a cul-de-sac in Birmingham ousted regular drug dealers by standing together in this way.

"I can understand why people wouldn't want to stand alone but the idea of a whole road -When you have a situation such as drug dealing, if you have quality information such as car registrations and so on criminals start to feel uncomfortable if they know there are lots of eyes on them and the curtains are twitching, it makes a big difference."



Police do still promote Neighbourhood Watch and Street Watch but have struggled somewhat. Many people will join the groups and attend the meetings but once the police stop attending every meeting the group can dwindle. Sgt Rigby says,

"Things tend to come to the fore when there's an issue. When everything is quiet that sort of resilience falls away a little bit. It's almost like you need one person on every street to keep it going. You can't do enough as far as crime prevention is concerned. People can cascade the message across."

The message from the meeting was clearly that individuals talking to each other is absolutely key. There are so many success stories where groups on streets have got together in an area and made a difference and many residents will remember Balsall Heath as a shining example of this. These days the accessibility of certain websites and the apps like WhatsApp make it that much easier. If you have something going on your street or would like to talk about it, please contact the editor at editor.nno@gmail.com.

The usual prevention advice prevails

Take care of your home by

- securing doors, windows and gates,
- leave a light, radio or TV on when you go out,
- close curtains,
- tell a trusted neighbour.

Most burglars gain entry via a door or window left open.

Keep your car & belongings safe

- by locking up and removing your belongings,

- by not parking on dark streets.

CrimeStoppers is an independent, freephone charity which 'gives people the power to speak up and stop crime 100% anonymously' (crimestoppers-uk.org)

You Can Take The Boy Out Of Balsall Heath

Neville Wray

When I was asked to write a piece about growing up in Balsall Heath, the first thing I did was close my eyes to picture myself as a child. The image that came back with perfect clarity looked twelve, was already over six foot and impossibly skinny. Intriguingly, my subconscious dressed me in turquoise Converse high-tops, Bermuda shorts displaying more colours than a sunny autumn day in Cannon Hill Park and a resplendent white bomber jacket about four sizes too big for me. The Converse were forced on me under duress during a shopping trip at ten. This was before Converse were cool and overpriced. My Bermuda shorts were effectively a part of me during the summer of 86 at eight. Thankfully they were reversible, each side equally hideous. The bomber jacket, which had the biggest legacy during my childhood was a gift from my dad at twelve. I remember feeling like a movie star strutting round Balsall Heath in it. This was in part due to its almost luminous nature, but mainly because it had my name sewn into the left breast. These were some of my most cherished items of clothing growing up, which offsets the fact that I never owned any of them at the same time.

The fact I appeared as a twelve-year-old in this subconsciously created vision, initially makes little sense. If I'm recreating a romanticised childhood version of myself, then surely it should have been younger. I've always loved Balsall Heath, I think of myself as B12 first, Brummie second and European a very distant third. My formative years were filled with a freedom that would be frowned upon today. I can remember walking between Saint John and Monica's on Chantry Road and my home on Jakeman as young as seven. Disappearing from breakfast to dinner on weekends, doing things ranging from exploring the River Rea via the ladders in Calthorpe Park, jumping over the gates of Heath Mount Primary school to play games of football in teams ranging in size from 5 to 25 and spending the day playing arcade games in the dark and dingy environs of the Pepsi Cafe on the corner of Hallam Street. All these experiences came during primary school and before I tasted life outside the comfort blanket of Balsall Heath.

It wasn't until I went to senior school in Acocks Green, that I questioned the area I grew up in. It got to the stage where I would dread people asking:

"Where are you from?"

This was in no way because I was embarrassed, I wear my home like a badge of honour, even now. It was because I always felt the need to defend the preconceptions people had of Balsall Heath. For anyone growing up in other parts of Birmingham during the 80s and early 90s, Balsall Heath was always synonymous with certain less wholesome activities, putting it politely. For this reason, whenever you told people you were from Balsall Heath, they looked at you with either pity, fear or a mixture of both. The issue I had with this perception was how much it differed from my experiences.

The Balsall Heath I knew was vibrant and exciting, with a real sense of community. We didn't have much, most of my friends growing up were from single parent families struggling to get by, but people watched out for each other. The reason we were afforded such freedom, was because there was a network of parents and locals who would always keep an eye out for the groups of children rampaging throughout B12s borders. Many a time I found myself on the wrong end of a scolding from somebody for being too loud or playing football in the wrong place. These telling offs were always taken with respect and humility. You had it drummed into you that manners cost nothing, so backchat or disrespect were never an option. When I compare this with the ways some of my school friends and peers from other areas spoke to their parents, let alone other people, it's little wonder their disregard for Balsall Heath always built up resentment in me.

Even now, having not lived in Balsall Heath for over 20 years, I still think of it as my home. I often take the Rae Valley cycle route on my commute to town, even though it nearly doubles my journey time. On a quiet day, I like to stop at the junction of Cannon Hill and Edward Road and take in my surroundings. The shops have changed and any faces that I might recognise have aged. Yet, even with these differences, on the occasions I do stop, inside I'm still that 12-year-old boy, excited for the adventures the day will bring.



Find out *What's On* at Neighbourhood News Online

Rachel Gillies, Community Knowledge Officer, funded by LIF

Almost weekly I find myself becoming aware of projects, organisations or events in Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook that have popped up. There is loads of positive stuff happening including community gatherings, talks, exhibitions, support for new parents, volunteering opportunities, an exciting new swimming timetable at Moseley Road Baths and so much more. However, it's unlikely that any of us are making full use of what is happening on our doorstep.

I'm sure that I can't be alone in this, so I'm going to be spending the next few months putting together an online directory of neighbourhood events and organisations on the Neighbourhood News Online website. Whatever your needs or interests, the idea is that the site can direct you to the information that you need.

I'm going to be speaking with active citizens within the community who have information and events to

share, to encourage them to regularly add details to the site. It would be impossible for me to know everything that is happening across the whole neighbourhood, so I need your help to make sure that Neighbourhood News Online really represents everything that is happening for residents in Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook.

On the site you'll be able to find much of the latest news as well as up to date events and organisations' listings. Plus, you can fill out the handy forms with your own information.

If you are part of a community group, resident group, charity, cultural or arts organisation or if you are just really tuned into what is going on locally, please get in touch so that we can help to make the site a really useful resource for the whole neighbourhood.

You can contact Rachel at comknow.nno@gmail.com or ring 07967 093 256

Building Healthy Lives at George Perkins Day Nursery

For a while now at George Perkins we have recognised that in order for children to learn and fulfil their potential they need to be healthy, happy and hope-full. This then was starting point for our award winning "Building Healthy Lives" initiative. The main areas of focus for the initiative are around healthy attitudes to food, being physically active throughout the day –not just specific exercise but finding opportunities to be active throughout the day, and now a real focus on emotional health and wellbeing which we believe underpins everything. Every member of the team vests a lot of time and energy into really getting to know their Key Children, understanding how they communicate and what their likes and fears are. They use this to then support the children to grow in all areas of their development.

Having seen what a difference this has made to the lives of the children at nursery, we are keen to extend it into a "Building Healthy Families" action plan that we hope would involve as many members of the community as possible. We believe that instilling these values and life skills in children when they are very young is the best way to ensure they are on the right path for the rest of their lives. Children are great at influencing those around them, so can extend the initiative into families. We would love to hear from anyone who would like to support us in our project.

email to: info@georgeperkinsdaynursery.co.uk

call on: 0121 446 4143