

## The Alliance for Childhood London Forum

### Notes from the Meeting held on 19th June 2017

We held our first meeting of the London Forum at City Hall on 19th June 2017. It was attended by around 20 people including members of the Greater London Council, people involved in play organisations and members of community groups.

We were welcomed by Marion Briggs from the Alliance for Childhood. Then Holly Weir, Senior Strategic Planner at the GLA, began with an update on the progress of the Mayor's London Plan. Members of the GLA are working on the plan with a view to going out to consultation at the end of the summer. We will all have a chance to comment on the proposals.

#### **Building Communities with Resilient Children at their Hearts**

Al Aynsley Green, former first Children's Commissioner for England and now Professor of Advocacy for Children and Childhood at Nottingham Trent University, spoke passionately about how we are failing our children and how we need a paradigm shift in thinking about the importance of children and young people – the starting point being a consideration of what children and young people need to achieve their potential and the need to stop working in silos where the various groups concerned with children do not communicate with each other.

Children are the decision-makers of tomorrow and will be responsible for future policies which will affect us into our old age. We have a vested interest in the development of self-determined, healthy, educated, creative and caring young people. This country is falling short in many areas including physical and mental health and education, compared to many other countries in the world. It is a crisis we need to address. Practical action is needed and not just a talking shop. What can each of us do to improve the life of young people? We can begin by putting the child and family's needs at the centre, seeing the world through the eyes of the child, young person and family. It takes a village to raise a child.

Read more here: [www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/building-communities-with-resilient-children-at-their-hearts](http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/building-communities-with-resilient-children-at-their-hearts)

Points from the discussion which followed:

- We need a broad vision. Children have a low status. Every Child Matters was stopped as government Policy but people continue because it provides a valuable framework. The GLA needs a wider strategy. The issue is more than just about play. It's a special issue.
- Look at deprivation - where and how to provide the services that are needed.
- There is a question on how to give voice to young people. GLA members meet with the Peer Outreach Team, a group of 16 to 35 year olds. (See note from Susan Crisp below.)
- Look at the life course of people. What does this person need at this point or milestone in their life?
- Intergenerational interaction is important.

#### **The Old Tidemill Garden, Deptford**

We heard from Owen Hodgkinson and Andrea Carey about their community group in Deptford which is trying to save an area of wild garden, the Old Tidemill Garden, from being sold off for housing by the local council. It is valued as a green space and used by children and the local community, They achieved an element of success in having the planning decision delayed.

Lewisham Council is reducing green spaces for children without consulting at a stage where the community can make a difference. Deptford Neighbourhood Action is there to give the community power. An architect in the group has put forward an alternative plan, which includes the Old Tidemill Garden, to that of the developers, which will build over it with housing. The Community collaborated in producing the plan. In shaping neighbourhoods, the planning system needs to protect play. Neighbourhood design with community collaboration - community collaborative planning is essential. Tim Gill's report for the Mayor, *Sowing Seeds\**, states that only 4% of London's children are able to access outdoor space. Children need wild outdoor spaces. They experience better mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Here is their website: [oldtidemillgarden.wixsite.com/deptford](http://oldtidemillgarden.wixsite.com/deptford)

Former young Mayor of Lewisham, Jacob Sakil spoke about the consequences of Youth Services being separated out from the Council and the consequent lack of Youth Workers in Lewisham is shocking. A Youth Centre was built in Sydenham at the cost of £3.5 million. For the young people it was too expensive - they just don't have the money to go there or buy the food. It would have been more useful in the centre of Lewisham where there are more young people who would benefit. It is an example of a planning decision which did not involve the young people who were to be the main users. They should include them in the decision making process. They could have ended with a better result with for example having the restaurant free one day a week; train young people; give help with mental health problems. Support like this can help young people to find their way and keep them out of the criminal system. Once in the criminal system, it is difficult to get out.

Points from the discussion:

- Developments such as Convoys Wharf in Deptford are fragmenting the community.
- 400 households are in B&B's because of the building of luxury flats. We need homes for families.
- It is important to include young people as part of the planning process.
- If you listen it is expensive, but if you don't listen it becomes more costly in the end.
- Use media and engage young people. Facebook is their source of information.
- Bunkers or silos where people live within their own profession and do not have any interaction with others who have the same interests. They lose sight of the commonality of what we want to achieve.
- People on the ground do not see the silos, including young people.
- Sure Start Centres and Every Child Matters - replication does not always work. Not many protested when they were closed down.
- Collectively we can make waves where people are politically indifferent to the importance of children

## Conclusions

Al Aynsley-Green posed the question: What practical step will you go from this meeting and take?

- Support the importance of advocacy for children in terms of and with reference to the UN convention on the rights of a Child
- Arrange a workshop for Playday in August
- Within silos are people doing their best under the constraints placed upon them by external systems/pressures. One action: take time to forge a personal relationship with someone in a different silo to my own because this helps to support other professionals as well as to circumvent the often artificial barriers.
- Provide information about the Peer Outreach Team. Work with the Peer Outreach Team and the youth event for summer. Invite GLA Play Roundtable to next meeting. (See below)
- work more around CYP'S rights ([www.colelearning.net/cyp/unit1/page6d1.html](http://www.colelearning.net/cyp/unit1/page6d1.html))
- It is important to have active involvement at this stage of the London plan and not wait for the consultation process. A wide range of children's issues need to be incorporated and not just a policy on play.
- Set up a group of children to advocate the importance of green spaces to the Council

## [The Peer Outreach Team](#)

The Peer Outreach Workers Team is made up of 30 young Londoners aged 15-25yrs old from diverse backgrounds and life experiences. They are commissioned by the Mayor to engage, inspire and gather the opinions of other young people in the capital. Their work helps shape the policies, strategies and services. The Peer Outreach Team work's with hundreds of youth organisations across the capital and holds quarterly networking meetings of youth organisations at City Hall.

More details about recent activity is in the [bulletin](#). At the moment one project is working with the All Party Parliamentary Committee on serious youth violence. They are making sure that young people's views are heard and engaging with young people who have been involved in or at risk of violence. This insight will also contribute towards MOPAC's work to tackle knife crime.

For further information contact Rebecca Palmer - [rebecca.palmer@london.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.palmer@london.gov.uk)

\* Tim Gill *Sowing the Seeds - reconnecting London's children with nature*. November 2011. London Sustainable Development Commission  
[www.londonsdc.org/documents/Sowing%20the%20Seeds%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf](http://www.londonsdc.org/documents/Sowing%20the%20Seeds%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf)

## **Next London Forum**

Our next London Forum is on Tuesday 3rd October, looking at London as a Child Friendly City with Adrian Voce, chairman of the Europe wide Child Friendly City Network. What are the elements that make a city child friendly? How do we create a city environment where children can thrive and be happy? We will send out the programme soon. Please let me know if you would like to take part.

[www.childinthecity.org](http://www.childinthecity.org)

Contact: Marion Briggs [marion@allianceforchildhod.org.uk](mailto:marion@allianceforchildhod.org.uk)