

HACKNEY MUSEUM CASE STUDY: Stoke Newington Common Users Group finding imaginative new ways of encouraging people to work together to improve their local area (2013/2014)

PEOPLE

This partnership between Hackney Museum and Stoke Newington Common Users Group (SNUG) demonstrates how imaginative ways of linking in with the museum's programme and with staff expertise can help local organisations increase membership; develop participation with more diverse communities; discuss the future of their area together; and make practical improvements to their environment

PLACE

SNUG proposed creating a hand-knitted model of Stoke Newington Common as a contribution to Hackney Museum's *Side by Side* exhibition, an exhibition that explored how people from all over the world live side by side in Cazenove Ward. The museum was able to provide funding for this, through its participation in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* programme. SNUG held public workshops both in the Museum, including a family-orientated workshop and in the local community. 30 local people took part in these '*Knitting the Common*' workshops, which gave them the opportunity to meet their neighbours, learn more about their area and develop their skills in knitting. Approximately 6,000 people were able to see the model during the course of the exhibition; it was a magnificent highlight, with many visitors reporting that it made them smile.



The hand-knitted model proved so popular that Museum staff helped to secure a location for permanent display, at Stoke Newington Library. This means it can continue to be enjoyed by even more local residents.

PLATFORM

Just as Hackney Museum acted as an exhibition platform for SNUG's hand-knitted Common, SNUG provided a platform for the museum to engage with the wider community living in the Stoke Newington area. It organised a Fun Day for over 1,000 local people; at the event, the museum selected and displayed photographs from its historic photographs collections to show residents how their area had changed over the decades.

The funding which SNUG was able to access through its collaboration with Hackney Museum also enabled the organisation to experiment with *Common Conversations*, a set of workshops designed to encourage the diverse communities living in Cazenove Ward to meet together to identify issues and discuss the area's future. SNUG also initiated a Garden Project, which encouraged neighbours living around Stoke Newington Common to work together to help maintain and improve each other's gardens; a practical platform to improve people's quality of life. The Museum helped support the organisation to develop and plan the delivery of all these imaginative ideas and SNUG particularly appreciated the open-ended nature of this process.

PROSPECTS

The programme that SNUG developed through its collaboration with Hackney Museum has had real practical benefits for individual local residents. For example, one elderly, disabled resident was no longer able to maintain her front garden which had become a jungle of brambles and weeds. Through SNUG's Garden Project, local volunteers tackled the jungle, making it a '*miraculous and beautiful space*'. Another example is that of a local pensioner, who cares for her grandchildren but had been quite isolated from the rest of her local community. She joined the Knitting Group for the *Side by Side* exhibition, developed new skills and confidence and is now so involved in the area that her grandchildren are often heard asking '*Where's Grandma?*' The profile of SNUG has been increased, not least in the eyes of the 350 people who attended these workshops which will help the community organisation develop its future programme

