

## Creating A Neighbourhood - by Dr. Haris Livas-Dawes

MARCH 2010

Westbourne East is ostensibly a Neighbourhood Watch group, but it's really a neighbourhood group. What is a neighbourhood? An old Hull City Council publication defined it as 2000 people. That's wrong... a neighbourhood is composed of the people on one street living harmoniously. Westbourne East's motto is "Increasing Neighbourliness in our Local Community." To this end we have, in the last nine years of existence, completed 22 projects in the fields of environment, education, culture, health and community get togethers. The most recent accomplishment is an Olympic Frieze.

This story of neighbourhood activity illustrates the holistic nature of community activity and how one thing can lead to another. Haris Livas-Dawes shares with us the journey of community activity in one Hull neighbourhood.

**B**ack in 2000 when my husband and I moved to Hull I was invited to join the Avenues and Pearson Park Residents Association (APPRA), since they had heard about my successes in running the Concerned Citizens Forum in the East Riding when every year we ran public meetings, public surveys, environmental activities (Community Garden and Millennium Grove) and programs in schools from primary to end of secondary. All of this occasioned an invitation for me to speak to a Select Committee of Parliament on Community Affairs.

At one APPRA meeting I said I didn't see any Neighbourhood Watch groups in the area and the response was, "Why don't you start one." So I did and at the inaugural meeting to which all of the residents of Westbourne East were invited and where the speakers were myself, a Neighbourhood Watch officer and a police officer, I asked for volunteers to form a committee and got them. We decided to meet at each other's homes on a rota basis and that the host or hostess would chair the meeting, thus spreading leadership duties around to everyone. The meetings are always accompanied by a good glass of wine "on the house." I, as the organiser, decided that all our activities should be documented and so I've created a Project Notebook for each in which the history of the entire project from idea to completion is saved for posterity in the form of paper documents and numerous photos. Keeping these notebooks was the proof needed for our winning the Community Initiative Award presented by Prince Andrew and myself winning the Yorkshire Water/HANWEG silver medal.



Haris is from Greece where everyone makes a wreath for their door on May Day. So we had a May Day wreath contest.

# Creating A Neighbourhood - by Dr. Haris Livas-Dawes

## Promoting creativity

One of our projects was the Neighbourhood Frieze. I'm from Greece and work with the British Museum, home of the Elgin Marbles, so I borrowed the idea of the Parthenon Frieze. Our frieze is made up of laminated sheets of cardboard strung on a metal chain so the frieze can be hung around a square room or in layers on a wall. Each household on our street got two pieces of cardboard and were asked to depict their neighbours on each side of their house. Naturally, to do this one had to know one's neighbours, so those who didn't already know each other could have a friendly meeting. The frieze required no real artistic talent; anyone in the household could be the "artist" and use any medium (pen, pencil, crayons, paint, charcoal, pastel, collage) as long as the depictions "said" something about their neighbours. Of course, no names or house numbers were used.

When I proposed this idea most of my committee said it wouldn't work, that no one would want to do it. My idea always is that if the proposer is enthusiastic enough, people would want to do it. And they did. The Neighbourhood Frieze has been exhibited 9 times both locally and nationally and concurrently I have given a number of speeches on Community Cohesion.

The Frieze is a cultural project, and so when London won the right to stage the Olympics I started thinking about the Cultural Olympiad, which runs for the four years between Olympics and is a chance for the new host to showcase its county's cultural achievements. It would be a shame if communities missed out and so the Olympic Frieze was born. Each household again got cardboard, but this time were asked to depict an Olympic sports hero (real or imaginary) or an Olympic sport on the cardboard. I believe in partnership working so this time we worked with Art Link, a community art centre and one of their development workers ran several workshops for our residents to help them to realize their visions. I attended these workshops with an idea of what I wanted but no clear idea how to depict it. The worker helped me.

Another partner in the Olympic Frieze is the Hull City Council Manager of all the Leisure Centres of Hull who has worked out a schedule for its viewing as it travels around the various centres for a couple of months in each. Now, as I write, it is in the Ice Arena. We always accompany frieze exhibitions with leaflets for the public describing "How to do it".



## Promoting health

Our health project came from the fact that an NHS clinic exists at the end of our street and I thought a Tai Chi Trail would be good for the patients who walk back and forth to the clinic and also interesting for the general public. Our partner was CASE, a charity for adults with learning disabilities, its purpose being to teach them a trade. Their Woodwork Department developed a series of wooden panels, each depicting one Tai Chi movement so if a person stopped at each panel (attached to residents' fences) and did the illustrated activity they would have a mini-workout. The idea caught on and all kinds of people were to be seen staring at the panels and then attempting the exercise. Our Health Trail was featured in Hull in Print, the glossy magazine produced by the Hull City Council. Unfortunately, the day after the inauguration ceremony for the trail, the signs were

vandalized and the glass cover over each was broken. We never let adversity get us down so the signs were collected and new ones made and put up, which have survived everything but bad weather.



Haris with one of the plaques from the Tai Chi Health Trail

## Promoting information

Our education project was for new residents on our street. The Avenues area in Hull consists of 4 parallel avenues with wide grass verges and large imposing Victorian houses. They were built for large families and most today are small. The landlords are mostly absentee and realised a business opportunity to turn the houses into flats for refugees and asylum seekers or old persons' homes or care homes for children, or those with mental

health problems. This makes for a great variety of residents who come and go, so for the new ones our special magazine tells them everything they need to know about the neighbourhood, even including the days to get the garbage bins out.



## Promoting the environment

Our environment project was several years in the making, but is now complete. The verges are wide and grassy, but we had a vision of spring flowers, so around each tree we planted concentric circles of daffodils, a new circle each year.



The street is awash with colour each spring and fills everyone with good cheer. We advertise the planting days in our regular newsletter and invite people to show up shovel in hand to help plant. I have usually hosted a luncheon afterwards for everyone who has helped, as I believe a social event after hard work is another way to increase neighbourliness.

## Promoting fun

Our big activities to get everyone to know each other have been our street parties. Running street parties is not for the faint-hearted as there are countless regulations that have to be considered, not least being Health & Safety. And the street has to be closed to vehicular traffic at each end, which needs special council permission.

There have been 3 of these parties so far for which we always provide a form of entertainment, either by our own residents or a nearby group that can sing, dance or put on a short play, and we have always provided food - ethnic food - as there are a number of ethnic restaurants nearby and I found, on approaching the owners, that they were happy to contribute giant casseroles of one of their country's favourite dishes to introduce people to the idea of enjoying food they had not tasted before. Providing seating has also to be considered as for one of our parties we suggested people sit on the verges. The event took place in drizzly rain and wet grass is not so comfy.

In addition to our street parties we have held a Jazz and Junk event, in the huge garden of one of our residents. We had a DJ playing jazz records while people picnicked and exchanged their old "junk" for someone else's old "junk".

Of course, as a NW group we haven't neglected anti-crime activities. A neighbourhood policeman or woman has always sat on our committee and from them we have found that our efforts have paid off and the crime level is almost zero. We first provided all households with security lights, then we offered them security devices like locks (working in partnership with PROBE). We have advised on fire safety, organized a gating scheme, and lately supplied all households who wanted one with a CCTV camera.



# Creating A Neighbourhood - by Dr. Haris Livas-Dawes

## We won't be stopping anytime yet!

**A**re there any downsides? One is finding funding, or finding the time to fill out the many pages of application necessary to get funding. And another is finding willing volunteers for the committee. We don't have any trouble with membership in our group. We do visit and ask for £2 a year from residents to cover our newsletter costs, but no one is obliged to pay. All

residents are members whether they pay or not. But we've found that, although people like having things done for them, they are not so keen to give up their time to a committee which actually organizes these things. But I think these two are problems for all groups. And they certainly haven't stopped us being creative and pro-active.



**(Top) The Police Tree for our Tree Dressing Contest. One of our early projects was a Tree Dressing Contest with prizes. Our avenue with its wide grass verges is lined with beautiful old trees and some newer ones. Residents were invited to decorate the trees in front of their houses. The results were most imaginative and featured in an article in the Hull Daily Mail. The neighbourhood police are members of our steering committee so they decorated a "Police Tree."**

**(Left) A view looking down the avenue at some decorated trees**

To follow up anything in this VOICES, contact Haris Livas-Dawes at: [h.p.livas@googlemail.com](mailto:h.p.livas@googlemail.com)

For the Regional Empowerment Partnership contact COGS, **0114 268 7070**, [mail@cogs.uk.net](mailto:mail@cogs.uk.net). More VOICES are available on the regional empowerment website [www.yhep.org.uk](http://www.yhep.org.uk)



Managed by the  
Community  
Development  
Foundation

Funded by the  
Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government