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Makalay Sesay, middle left, and Valerie Lam, middle right, with their children, who are all friends through Open Door.

Open door to special needs

By Beverley Cohen

"She's HOW old?" The woman from the National Childbirth Trust group in East Finchley stared at my toddler Liora with amazement. I could see why, but it still hurt.

Liora wasn't toddling or anything close, she didn't make eye contact and constantly wiggled a rattle with absorbed repetitive hand movements. She was in her own little world, trying to survive two horrific stints in intensive care and regular epileptic seizures. I lived in constant terror of the seizures, and nobody had a clue how I felt except my husband who worked full-time. I was lonely.

Liora is now four and a half, with severe learning difficulties. I have local friends with normal children, but I don't think I could have achieved this without the help of the Open Door group.

For me, Open Door was where my nightmare was normalised, with all its blue-light ambulance trips to the horrific 'crash' room at the Royal Free, gruesome blood tests at Great Ormond Street and naso-gastric tubes. The relief was indescribable.

At Open Door I met Deborah Tysman, whose son Natan is autistic. "At ordinary children's groups, Natan's behaviour made him seem naughty. I felt people were thinking I was a rubbish mum but nobody judges us here." And I met Makalay Sesay, whose son Lamin also has autism. "I don't feel lonely any more in East Finchley," says Makalay.

Keeping the door open

I quote these women to underline my experience and to plead with anybody influ-

ential who may be reading this piece. Open Door has funding for the next six months but after that, who knows? The group, and Lorraine Jarman who runs it, were crucial in saving me from depression, enabling me to pick up and go on with my life.

It still hurts every time I go past the gates of a regular school and see all the mums and kids milling around. Liora

goes to a special school a long way from East Finchley, too far for me to mix with the parents. But, thanks to Open Door, I have found plenty of friends.

Open Door runs at Newstead Children's Centre, off Tarling Road, on Thursdays in term time from 10am to noon. Find out more at www.barnetmencap.org.uk/Open_Door.htm



By Adam Justice-Mills

I've been writing these articles in *The Archer* for a year, so let's see how those little changes have helped. I started out thinking that if everyone tried to do less harm, overall some big changes could take place. Amazingly, it seems to work.

I've had many comments about these articles. People have tried some ideas, been inspired to look into others, overall been more thoughtful and prepared to consider changing what they do.

However, there have been big changes in government-level thinking about "climate change" and it's become clearer how difficult fixing the world's climate will be. There's less support for big projects and more attention on changing people's lifestyles. We're all redefining what basic, normal and luxury mean, but more through reactions to the financial crisis than because of worried scientists.

So my articles, in future, will update progress on how "every little helps" and cast wider for what all of us as individuals can do.

Re times three

One idea that's loud and clear is: reduce, re-use, recycle. A snappy summary of an approach to doing less harm day-to-day. Measure and cut down on use of materials, packaging, food, water and energy. Make stuff last longer by re-using it (or letting other people re-use it). Minimise real waste (land-fill) by recycling as much as possible into raw materials for new stuff, through buying items that can more easily be recycled.

Re-use and recycling are on the increase, apparently, with more people passing stuff on through Freecycle or Gumtree web sites and local charity shops. Recycling of Haringey municipal waste has doubled to 25% in the last 10 years but needs to reach 50% in the next 10. Apparently recycling leads to more jobs than waste disposal (much of the stuff needs sorting by hand, though often at minimum wages) so there are even more positive benefits.

As to re-use, anecdotally it seems it's more acceptable now to pass things on and to receive items too. It's always in my mind to ask friends first, try Freecycle or DontDumpThat or, if you live in Haringey, take advantage of the council's white-goods pickup service. Let's see how much we can reduce, re-use and recycle this year.

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