



Things can only get better

Two years ago, East Finchley Altogether Better (EFAB) was launched with the aim of tackling loneliness and isolation in the community. Since then the organisation has flourished although many of us may not be aware of how much it does.

In EFAB's first full year, up to 2,000 East Finchley residents took part in well over 4,000 hours' worth of projects, equivalent to 589 days of companionship. This was possible thanks to volunteers giving up hours of their time to run projects and local venues donating meeting spaces free of charge.

As EFAB looks ahead to 2016, we asked its co-ordinator Lisa Smith for her highlights from the last year and where she hopes the organisation will go next.

THE ARCHER: What achievements is EFAB proudest of in 2015?

Lisa Smith: It has really been a year of growth for EFAB, with new project groups like Computers and a Cuppa at Homefield Gardens, Cooking Skills sharing, Mindfulness Meditation sessions, Talkie Walkies walking group, and the Personal Shopper service with Advocacy in Barnet all taking off. We are much better known in the community, supporting around 20 activities.

Who runs EFAB and how do you decide what activities to offer?

EFAB is all about partnership working. We support the local community to develop their ideas for the groups and activities they would like, and then help to make them happen.

Ok, so as an example, what would people learn at a Computers and a Cuppa session?

Our Computers and a Cuppa sessions are there to show people that they don't need to be afraid of modern technology and that anyone can get online

and use the internet. Many learners come in not knowing what it's all for. Our community friends help them to set up an email address and show them how to send photos and Skype



The cooks prepare for action. Photo Mike Coles

with family who live away, how to use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, how to shop and bank safely online, or just troubleshoot issues that they may have on their machine. The sessions are really sociable, informal and fun.

What kind of support is EFAB getting from traders and businesses in East Finchley?

Many organisations in East Finchley support us by lending their venue space or by helping us spread the word as 'Street Champions'. We leave our newsletters in many different business premises. The Finchley Youth Theatre and the Phoenix Cinema have helped us by hosting our Pop Up info shops where we can meet new people, and the Phoenix is also working with us on free screenings for older people and those with dementia. We also have the Silver Service £5 meal deal scheme being offered in eight different restaurants and cafes in the area, and would like more to join in and offer the deal to over 60s on a Tuesday.

Many of EFAB's groups

are aimed at wellbeing among older people. Are there activities for younger age groups?

Actually all of EFAB's projects are open to all age groups and we tend to have a good mix

of younger and older adults at most of them, with a teenager recently attending our meditation sessions and people from their 30s through to 80s at our coffee morning on Mondays. We want to help people engage with their community and reduce isolation and loneliness, problems which can be prevalent as people get older but are not limited to this age group.



Tea and computers at Homefield Gardens. Photo Mike Coles

What would you say to someone who may be a bit nervous about coming along and joining in a group?

All of our groups are friendly and welcoming, and the people there will be pleased to meet you! Many people coming along for the first time are slightly nervous about joining in with a new group, and some have shared with us how hard it was for them to take that first step and get in touch. But then they report feeling welcome and pleased they came, and that they now know how much there is going on in East Finchley.

What are the toughest challenges you face in organising groups or activities?

We have a very limited budget, so often rely on the kindness of the community in order to make things happen. Also we obviously need people to give their time to get involved and set up project groups and share their skills. This takes a certain type of person, who is happy to commit their energy to the project and be open to discussion about how it is going.

We have been extremely lucky to have many local people already engaged, and we are always happy to meet more!

What do you hope EFAB will do in 2016?

We hope to continue to grow, so that we really can try to reach those isolated people in the community. New projects that we've been working on include a dance group and a 'Spring in your Step' group where older people walk with children and their parents, maybe as part of a walking bus to school. We're also looking at expanding the successful table tennis group.

How can people get involved?

Everyone is encouraged to get involved by volunteering their time and becoming an EFAB Community Friend, either participating in a group, or helping to lead one. You could be involved in more than one group: learning to cook in our Cooking Skills sessions, then helping others learn IT at Computers and a Cuppa for example. If anyone has an idea for a group or project that is not-for-profit and would benefit the community, we would love to hear from them. Call me on 07909 998453 or email us@

efab.org.uk. You can also check out our new website on www.efab.org.uk

EFAB: what's on and when?

Here's the current list of EFAB community activities in East Finchley; they are open to everyone. Some sessions you can just turn up to, for others you make a booking by calling Lisa Smith on 07909 998453. Volunteer helpers also welcome. Stay up-to-date with the latest information at www.efab.org.uk.

Coffee and Chat: drop in for friendly cuppa and share local info. Mondays 10.30am to 12.30pm at the Clissold Arms, 105 Fortis Green; £1 a head.

Computers and a Cuppa: making computers easy to use. Tuesdays 2pm to 4pm at 4 Homefield Gardens, off East End Road, N2; Wednesdays 2pm to 4pm at Wilmot Close, off Tarling Road, N2; Thursdays 10am to 12pm at Seasons Café, 205 High Road, N2; free.

Cooking Skills: learn to cook healthy recipes on a budget, then share a meal together. Thursday 10 and 17 December from 5pm to 8pm and more dates in January; £5 per session.

Men's Shed: learn and share skills in woodcraft and metalwork. Mondays to Thursdays 10.30am to 3.30pm, Alexandra Rd, N10 2EY; free.

Mindfulness Meditation: relax your body and still your mind. Tuesdays 7.30pm to 9pm at the Archer Academy, Beaumont Close, N2; £4 per session starting 5 January for six week set.

Mums Who Run: get fit with other women at your own pace. Meet Fridays fortnightly at 9.30am in Cherry Tree Wood; free.

Personal Shopper Service: helping those less able to go out. Volunteer to help someone shop or book to get help with your shopping.

Table tennis club: fitness and fun. Tuesdays 2.30pm to 4pm at Shree Aden Depala Community Centre, Church Lane, N2; free.

Talkie Walkies: exercise and socialize with a 45-minute walk and a cuppa afterwards. Meet Mondays 12pm at the Clissold Arms, 105 Fortis Green; free.

Shared Reading Groups: read aloud or just listen in a friendly group. Fridays 10.30am to 12pm at the Old White Lion pub, High Road, N2; free.

Street Champions: deliver the EFAB monthly newsletter and help spread the word. Volunteers welcome.

Young people's centre: a place to relax and socialise, run by young people. Day and venue to be confirmed. Over 18s needed to assist in leading the group. Can you help?

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6.00pm *Carols By Candlelight*

Christmas Day service 10.30am

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