Connect

News for our Tenants and Service Users

APRIL 2010

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SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT FUTURES

Welcome

Welcome to the Spring edition of connect. After this very long and cold winter it is a real joy to feel some sunshine and see the flowers beginning to bloom.

This year is St Martins' 30th Birthday and as part of our celebrations we will be organising a number of events to which residents are, of course, invited.

Our AGM in September this year will focus on you, our residents, and showcase the many talents and skills you have. If you would like to play some music or read a poem or show off any talent you have, please let us know and we will ensure you are included.

As part of the Islington Exhibits project, which is an initiative to unlock hidden venues in Islington and give artists a space to display their work, we have commissioned an artist-in-residence, who will work in Wilton Villas with residents to produce a work of art which will be exhibited as part of the exhibition. The artist's name is Daniel Locke and he will begin his residency in April. For more details look on **www.islingtonexhibits.com**. We will let you know where the work will be exhibited once a venue has been arranged.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Connect and find it interesting. If you do, please let us know. If you don't, then please let us know and work with us to make the changes you think it needs.

John Thompson Chief Executive
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Service Users' Feedback

Do you remember completing our annual service users' confidential survey, a couple of months back? Your views were looked at by an external consultancy and we now have the results back.

Much of your feedback is very encouraging; most of you said you know about tenant involvement opportunities, such as the policy review groups and 26% said you want to be more involved. This is great news and we look forward to working with you again and perhaps meeting some of you for the first time.

Also, satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of maintenance work increased to a whopping 98%. This is fantastic and we'll try to keep up the good work!

There are, though, one or two areas which you think we can improve upon, such as offering a more flexible key working service and improving the standard of decoration in some locations.

A focus group of staff and service users will be meeting to look at the survey results and develop an improvement action plan. If you would like to take part in this group please speak to your key worker.

Board Members visit NHF Conference

The National Housing Federation (NHF) is an organisation which promotes the work that housing associations do and campaigns for better housing and neighbourhoods. St Martins is a member of the NHF and two of our ex-service user board members recently attended a conference. Hopeton Elliott and Catherine Cox travelled to the International Conference Centre in Birmingham in February and learnt much about how the board management role and the wider housing sector are changing.

Catherine reports here on the highlights of the conference for her:

"This event is a must for board members. The event was organised to a very high standard and presentation was flawless with very informative speakers. I attended a packed programme, but two speakers over the weekend had a big impact on me.

Lord Falconer QC focused on board performance and the need for each board to meet the challenges of a new regulatory framework. His main points were that "mega mergers" are over (phew!) and that there is now a new identified need to pay board members (hooray!) regardless of income or benefits and spoke of the hard work that we all do as board members having a recognised need to be rewarded.

In his closing keynotes Matthew Taylor, MP and NHF Chair, saw a key role of all boards to provide more affordable housing in rural areas and asked if something doesn't work how do we as boards make it work'? The second focal point of Mathews talk was a strong need for tenant satisfaction.

A massive highlight was the conference dinner. Beautifully set out with fantastic food, it was a good chance to talk to other board members. We had the pleasure of being seated on Matthew Taylor's table and talking to the chair was a big highlight of the event and talking to other board members opened my eyes to the bigger picture of the housing sector."

Catherine Cox, Board Member

My Road to Recovery

Oliver Bowes has featured in Connect before in the context of his work as a film maker and musician. In this article Oliver, who lives in St Martins' accommodation at 558 Caledonian Road and suffers from mental ill health, describes his own approaches to keeping himself well. Oliver has embraced the "recovery approach" and has identified 5 steps which have worked well for him.

"Mental ill health can be complex and very difficult to overcome. My own experience of mental illness has, at times, been horrible; I have certainly done things which might have caused harm both to me and to other people. At one time, the fantasy worlds in my head took over my whole existence and the thought that I might recover was far from my mind.

However, over the past couple of years I have found new purpose in the activities I undertake and I have been able to use the recovery approach to help me improve my life. The first step to recovery for me was to know myself; to accept my illness and to want to work towards getting better. I found that I was able to use my key worker to help me develop goals and plan my recovery. Support is really important.

The second step for me was taking a disciplined approach to my medication. By gaining a better understanding of my "meds" and how they help me manage my illness, I have gained insight into my moods and behaviour patterns.

I have found, as my third step, that healthy living has helped hugely. Regular balanced meals; proper sleep, and staying off alcohol have all contributed to my sense of wellbeing.

Fourthly, and this is really important, I discovered that observing my own mood patterns and identifying events which trigger bad feelings has been key to maintaining a positive state of mind.

The final step for me has been to have goals based around education, travel and friends. Many of my goals are already in motion. Because I like to write I have developed many friends and contacts in the publishing world. Doing things like starting a computer course or using the internet can really open the world up.

Following these five steps has really helped me in my life. I am sorting out my illness, looking after myself, making friends and realising my ambitions. But nothing happens overnight and so if you are reading this and thinking you might like to achieve similar goals, just remember to stay relaxed and take things at your own pace – there's no reason why you can't make huge strides in your life too.

Oliver Bowes

Angela's Poems

Angela Rickwood grew up in Hornsey Rise and has lived in North London all her life. She has had many positive experiences living in London and is happy to be a resident now at Davenant Road in Holloway.

Having written her first poem – "sorry you had to leave" – in 1993, Angela has since written much more and aims, in time, to publish a book of her work.

Angela says, "I didn't take my GCSE in English at school but realised I had some talent for poetry and have pursued it really passionately since. I get my inspiration from people and experiences in my life and I enjoy expressing my feelings and inspiring strength in my poetry."

Aside from her poetry, Angela enjoys skating, horse riding and all types of music, especially reggae and lovers' rock. She also loves animals, dogs in particular, and seeing her friends. A big movie fan, Angela recently enjoyed seeing Avatar.

These two poems by Angela are part of a new collection which will shortly be published in pamphlet form.

The Sun Shines Down

As the sun shines down there, standing in
the wilderness,
Is a lion

Beneath his mane lies a river and as he slowly
looks into
The water the connection of life comes
towards him

My Lord why do I have such a beautiful mane
When man himself tells the story when beauty
is skin deep?

The Lord replied, My Soul when man was
given sight
He was also given strength for these words
are truly spoken

For capability of judgement overrules man's
faults
For one man is neither better than yourself
For when all was made beauty lies within
And now the power of eye says all.

Lady

When a lady sheds a tear
It's because she is lonely
And needs someone to hold her tight
When a lady calls your name
It's because she feels that you are still there
for a shoulder to cry on
When a lady tells you she cares
It's because she finds in you
The comfort of warmth
And when a lady tells you she loves you
You have her in the palm of your hand
But if you squeeze her a little too tight
She begins to unfold a little
And all meanings come to a stand still
And all her trust she has
Goes to a cold running river
Flowing through thin air reflecting onto
a midnight stream
Where the Lilly pad floats
Beside it lays a lonely flower amongst many
other flowers
for she will not be alone
For when you pick her stem
Pick it carefully
For like the flower she will only die once
But her seed will live on.

Poems by Angela Rickwood

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Changing Rooms

Recently, some of the young people resident at Cadogan Terrace in Hackney decided they would like to take charge of decorating their rooms. Here's how they got on…

"During the half-term we were allowed to paint our bedroom, after years of asking! Staff arranged to help us, we attended some meetings to plan things, picked the colours we wanted, and off we went! Before we started painting Simon asked me to do some of the preparation work, which was cleaning the wall with sugar soap. It was like magic - the walls were really clean. If I had known about sugar soap before I would have used it to wash my wall before. Next I used some polyfilla to fill in some of the holes in my wall. I had never used this before but it was so easy, it took us all morning preparing the room and all the afternoon painting. Simon did the edges and I used the roller to paint the walls; it was really easy. This was a useful skill to learn because when I move on I now know how to paint my walls. I will always remember how to use polyfilla and I will certainly do my own painting from now on. It was fun and I learnt some new skills."
Esther Okpohare

"I liked being able to paint my bedroom because it made it feel more like mine. I had done decorating before so it was easy to use the roller. The painting was really quick but it took longer to put all the masking tape around the edges and set up the room. With the staff helping it felt more like a social event than work. The only bit I didn't like was getting paint on my clothes, and I think if I was to do it again I would choose a different colour but the project was fun."
Jasmin Barrett

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