

## Kings Heath Centre for Space Exploration



## ‘Community Conversations’ through Near Neighbours funding

### Objectives

Living space, working space, public space. Can we make these spaces into places of well-being?

Space Explorers is about developing creative ways to engage the public in exploring, improving and enjoying their local area. Through events and actions that aim to surprise, intrigue and inspire, we are building an evidence base that indicates how public spaces are used, and how people would like to be able to use them, in order to inform development of these spaces, and recruit people interested in effecting changes and maintaining these spaces into the future. It aims to take people through the process of looking at better ways to improve ‘living space’ and promote the thoughtful, creative and innovative use of space.

### Plan

The ‘Community Conversations’ funding from Near Neighbours was intended to put time and resources into the development of groups of residents who could have conversations about how they use spaces where they live, work, play and relax and find new ways to see and use their spacial resources.

## What we have done so far

- Tiny festival - Monday 27 May 2013 - Brentford Road / Ardley Road one day festival looking at the possibilities of a small grass area on a residential street.



- Picnic in the garden at Heathfield Road Community Centre - Thursday 18th July 2013 - consultation with local residents to find places they'd like to see improved, led by artists Marcus Belben and Helen Grundy.
- Co-ordinated the planning of 'Playing Out' for National Play Day:
  - Two annual events saw road closures to coincide with 'National Play Day'. Roads were closed by teams of residents for several hours across in Kings Heath. There were a number of organised activities on each road run by paid for workshop leaders as well as playworkers and readers provided by Dens of Equality and Kings Heath Library.
    - 7th August 2013 - Three road closures
    - 6th August 2014 - Six road closures
  - Promotional event on Kings Heath Village Square with paid playworker, to recruit residents interested in Playing Out in 2015 - 2nd November 2013.
  - Liaison with Parks for Play, Dens of Equality, Sustrans, Amey, Birmingham City Council (Council Officers and Councillors), Hall Green Arts Forum, Kings Heath Library, All Saints Centre, Friends of Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham Play Care Network, and Traffic Safety and Management Limited.





- Produced a film with Rachel Gillies - Community Film Maker to document the 2013 event: 'Playing Out in Birmingham on National Play Day'.
- Attended Birmingham City Council's Child Obesity subgroup meeting and showed film - Playing Out was adopted as part of their policy as a result of this.
- Playing Out in 2014 linked in with the Sustrans led 'DIY Streets Kings Heath' initiative, which aims to improve the physical environment on the A435 through Kings Heath to make it more safe and pleasant for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 'Cage Park' - 7th December 2013
  - Albert Road Playpark consultation included residents working with horticultural therapist Stuart Holmes and community artist Layla Tutt doing tree dressing with 'wishes for the park'.
  - Supported by BCU architecture students and Kings Heath Residents' Forum
  - Landscape plan options for the park drawn up by volunteer landscape architects.
  - Consultation also informed Parks Department installation of outdoor gym equipment in park for adults and older children, and the renovation of existing play equipment.
- Support for 'Swan Corner'
  - A group of people who share an interest in the area surrounding the roundabout outside Swanshurst School, on the intersection of Brook Lane, Wheelers Lane and Cold Bath Road, including the school and the local pub. The project has involved pupils from Swanshurst School.
  - Gardening workshops took place at Swanshurst School with Marcus Belben and Graham Jones. The group have improved the physical environment through tree planting and planting up a willow igloo on the school grounds. They have done three litter pick days.
  - There are regular community events in school. Pupils created a dance performed on Veteran's day at the school as part of the work with Swan Corner Group. There was also a Christmas willow workshop as part of Swanshurst's Christmas community day.
  - The school group was around 40 people, Swan Corner has 50 on its mailing list, involved in range of activities, Future plans continue to support Playing Out, plant more on the roundabout, and to conduct an oral history project - with pupils recording the lives of local residents. The group will continue campaigning for safer roads.
- Social Media: Blog, Twitter, Facebook



## Rethinking the project

The focus of the project quickly shifted from our original idea of developing autonomous groups from the people we met at the time of putting together our application to adopting the 'Playing Out' model from Bristol (opening streets for play by closing them to traffic). It was our hope that by residents coming together to plan and run an event they would form their own groups and begin to investigate ways to use spaces in their neighbourhood.

The project took place over two years rather than one year as originally planned. With Playing Out being the most effective way to engage with residents it made sense to schedule events around Playing Out activities.

## What has been achieved?

### Swan Corner

A successful outcome of the project has been the formation of 'Swan Corner', a group of people who share an interest in the area surrounding the roundabout outside Swanshurst School, on the intersection of Brook Lane, Wheelers Lane and Cold Bath Road including the school and local pub and led by Marcus Belben. The project has also involved pupils from Swanshurst School in thinking about and working on enhancing the physical environment in and around the school.



The group have looked at how the space is used and at issues of safety and access. They decided to make some improvements to the physical environment through tree planting, gardening and producing a swan sculpture on the roundabout with local sculptor Graham Jones, whose time and materials we paid for. They are also involved in identifying parking and road safety issues and proactive in lobbying for improvements.

The group have a long-term view and hold regular meetings, make use of a new noticeboard and use social media to promote what they are doing and engage with others.

## **A Shift in Policy**

Screening our film at Birmingham City Council's Child Obesity subgroup meeting led to street play being incorporated into the Council's health policy across Birmingham. Creating a precedent for road closures will lead to both Council Officers and local residents feeling more confident in running their own events, so that more and more residents around the city have chance to meet, organise and play with their neighbours. This is a very tangible legacy which will gradually begin to shape the nature of relationships at a very local level and we hope encourage groups of residents to think about how they use the physical space in their neighbourhoods.

## **In the pipeline...**

What we would really like to see is residential streets across Birmingham closing to motor traffic and opening for play on a regular basis. The exciting news is that council leaders who support our initiative have invited us to discuss how we can give Birmingham residents this power over their own streets. We are also liaising with residents who were active for previous 'Playing Out' days and inviting new people to get involved in planning 'Playing Out' events for 2015.