FOCUS ON COMMUNITIES

Photographs taken by Tower Hamlets and Hackney residents, exploring their views about community.

Tower Hamlets and Hackney, London 2023
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Focus on Communities
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Introduction

‘Focus on Communities’ was a project developed by PhotoVoice which took place January - July 2023.

The project’s aims were to:

- Strengthen participation in the arts for disadvantaged communities in Hackney
- Work with a range of Community Centres across Hackney, to provide free photographic storytelling workshops
- Strengthen opportunities for community members to share their perspectives on what community means to them, particularly those who may not have other opportunities to take part in the arts.

Four local organisations from Tower Hamlets and Hackney took part in a series of five workshop phases, each three sessions long, using participatory photography.

The project targeted groups who may not usually have access to these types of creative initiatives, and encouraged them to explore their local area, with a focus on what is most significant to them and what they think could be improved.

The project has captured views from those aged 4 - 70+ to ensure an inter-generational perspective is captured.

Across the workshops, participants have built skills in technical photography and using a camera, through discussion based activities and photographic practicals and out-shoots.

Each participant has been supported to discuss how they experience their community and write a story for one selected image. These images are contained within this booklet.

They have produced a range of fantastic insights which depict distinct perspectives across different ages ranges and local neighbourhoods within East London, and present their selected work to both celebrate and improve their community.

PhotoVoice, 2023
About PhotoVoice

PhotoVoice is an award winning non-profit organisation based in the UK, and a global leader in participatory photography.

Its vision is for a world in which everybody has the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their own story.

Its mission is to promote the ethical use of photography for positive social change, through delivering innovative participatory photography projects.

By working in partnership with organisations, communities, and individuals worldwide, PhotoVoice helps build the skills and capacity of under-represented or at-risk communities, creating new tools of self-advocacy and communication.

First established as a charity in 2003, PhotoVoice has delivered over 120 projects worldwide, addressing advocacy and campaigns, communications, co-designed resources, monitoring and evaluation, and research.

More information about PhotoVoice can be found at www.photovoice.org.

About the Focus on Communities Partnership

Four local community organisations worked with PhotoVoice to deliver the workshops, helping to support five different groups.

Bethnal Green After School Club

An OFSTED registered non-profit after-school club, BGASC has been providing a nurturing and engaging environment for children aged 3-11 for 7 schools in Bethnal Green since 2014.

Through their commitment to quality care and educational support, they aim to empower young minds, foster creativity, and inspire a love for lifelong learning.

www.begasc.com
Boiler House Spaces

Established in 2010 by two Hackney Estate residents who saw a growing need to connect and deepen local relationships and opportunities within a safe and positive environment.

They aspire to realise the enormous potential in strengthening community networks, and their person-centred, welcoming community spaces are essential to making this possible.

They believe community spaces are crucial to increasing community capital (supportive networks) and harnessing their local community’s incredible skills, assets and stories.

Boiler House Northwold Youth Provision is funded by the Guinness Partnership.

boilerhousespaces.com

Engage Here CIC

Engage Here develops projects that create space for thinking and togetherness in a wide range of settings, using creativity and imagination to engage and empower.

engage-here.co.uk
Hackney Circle

Hackney Circle is Hackney’s creative community for older residents. It’s free to join, and members receive regular information by email or post about free or affordable cultural activities and social events in Hackney’s wonderful theatres, cinemas, gardens, museums, music venues and more.

hackneycircle.co.uk

Postcode Society Trust

Thanks to the support of the players of People’s Postcode Lottery, ‘Focus on Communities’ was funded by the Postcode Society Trust.

www.postcodesocietytrust.org.uk
The first set of workshops with Bethnal Green After School Club had 10 participants for the full three days, and plenty of other friends who joined along the way! The group included children as young as four who had never held a camera before. This group focused their work on local nature and particularly liked going for photo-walks and playing photo games in the playground.
I choose this from my area because I like it and it has pink petals.
I love my picture because I like to pop these.
In my school we have all these blue pictures.
On my way to school I see the big and blue canal.
Bethnal Green. Roman Road. Windsor House. I love it here because it’s my home and I love dogs.
My area has trees which makes it nicer to look at because it's green.
When I’m on the bus it’s calm like the blue ocean.
I took a picture of a bird because I like to see them on my way to school. I love birds.
In my garden, we grow olives which I love because I’m vegetarian.
The second set of workshops with Bethnal Green After School Club had seven participants aged 5 to 11. This group was deeply reflective and thoughtful about themes of community, and had lots of conversations about the differences in their local neighbourhoods. Together, the group discussed how community can mean different things to different people, which is reflected in their work. Each participant took time to carefully select their image and come up with a unique story that tells us about what’s important to them.
Graffiti

When I open my door, I see graffiti. It’s been there for many years and it’s so beautiful. The colours of expression. It shows how we are all different and how it doesn’t matter how we look, but who we are.
Don’t be afraid to be different

Diversity is everywhere in our community and there is always someone trying to be unique. In my community there is always skaters who use football pitches to stake. The fruit bowl represents that the cherries are all the same but the orange is unique and different. If we were all the same it would be boring. Don’t be afraid to be unique.
Big fat death

This picture represents the deforestation and animal cruelty as the tracks and bulldozers have run them and the trees down, destroying the animals habitats and lives!
The Green Dinosaur

One day there was a girl who saw a homeless person and she gave him a box of pastries and a dinosaur hoodie. He took a tik-tok about it (a green dinosaur eating pastries) and then he got loads of views and got rich. Then a few years later, he thanked the girl and gave her £100,000. She used it to create a homeless shelter.

Always be kind to homeless people in the community. They will pay you back one day.
I like my bike and riding it. I love going fast and the feeling of the wind being blown in my face is cool. I like the sound of the leaves blowing crazily in the air. I like looking at the other bikers on the road and wanting to be like them when I'm older. Bikes are a big part of our community.
Daisy

Flowers play a huge part in community. When I think of community, I think of the people with smiles on their faces. A flower is something simple but it can do a lot to someone’s day. I believe that a flower is all it takes for a happy community and one single thing can change a lot.
This shows community as there is always beautiful nature in our community and it can bring back people to grow plants and flowers so it can be a nice environment.
This set of workshops had 16 participants over different days, and participants shared cameras at times to allow everyone to have a turn. Over the course of three weeks, lots of young people took part. They focused on technical photography skills and had lots of questions about how to make the most of the cameras. This group was active and naturally applied their own personalities to their images. In the greenery of the Boiler House community centre, many of them chose to focus on local nature and the people who make up the community.
This picture is about the beauty in our community and about nature and the best bits about our borough.
I saw these flowers and I didn’t think anyone else noticed them, so I quickly took a picture of it, so that is how it is my favourite photo.
I like nature because it’s cool, smells nice, looks good and more.
I chose this photo because the ice cream van reminds about ice cream and that I like it. Because ice cream brings us good vibes.
Diversity comes in many forms within this estate. Some live, some don’t and that’s the reality of this community. Nature can be found through the depths of the grass, the gated areas of this community. This photo to me has many different meanings, it is your job to figure out the meaning.
So I like really plain things and while we were walking I saw a really plain plant and decided to put the focus on it, and the photo turned out really good and it looked how I wanted it to look.
The workshops at Cohen Lodge were a small, friendly and chatty group. Participants brought different views to their work, and different styles to how they like to participate. These sessions were full of conversations, with participants bringing a wealth of knowledge about local life and sites that they applied to photography with curiosity. We had many laughs and didn’t take the process too seriously! It was a space to create something new, about the real people stuff, and created space to talk about things through photography. Making new connection in the brain. Supporting social connections.
Happy Feet

My kids have always called me penguin and now their kids do too. It’s stuck with me. Being a mum goes on and on and on.
Rock n Roll

£250,000. I like it but the cost is a bit too much. This is in the park in Mabley Green.
Hackney Circle workshops had 12 participants who all brought different perspectives, histories and wisdoms to the workshops. The group explored a range of key social issues and often had respectful debates where participants reflected on their different views. These sessions involved lots of interesting conversations and appreciation for the local area. Sharing images with each other was a group favourite, and all involved offered helpful feedback to help improve each others’ images and captions. It was tricky choosing an image each as everyone had plenty of stories to choose from.

The group especially valued expertise that comes with age by sharing beautiful glimpses of their views on past, present and future.
This is a moment object in the city of London. This is a public bus in the city, that convenes people into the city and different places of their destination. On the bus you can see some advertisements on them which was paid for. There were private transport around offices with houses and some flats above the offices. Traffic lights to help people to cross, shops for people to do a bit of shopping. The green trees gives you fresh air and shape.
Nourishing and nurturing the Hackney Community

Made in Hackney is a local food cookery school, opened in 2012. The school delivers meals to people in Hackney in need of them. It runs free cookery classes, supported the community throughout Covid 19, and now the school is supporting the community through the cost of living crisis.

Among the beneficiaries of this fantastic school are local community groups, young people in care, homeless people and many more. The school makes it possible to learn new skills, deepen community connections and inspire healthy lifestyles and lasting behaviour change around food. More importantly forming friendship and making new ones.
Inside Out

Directly opposite Dalston Kingsland station, the location of the photograph, is our largest UK homelessness organisation’s charity shop. In their window it states “Homelessness stops here”.

Seems like it does!
I think that I shall never see a sight as lovely as a tree. A tree that looks at the blue sky so high. And lifts her leafy arms spreading love so warm. Shining through is my late son’s favourite colour. I really do admire it.
Ever wondered about the beauty of meandering pathways and plants on the estate?

Such a good tonic for mental health. I do feel released and happy after the walk on my estate. Thinking my late son is walking along.
I love Hackney. I’ve lived and worked here my whole life. However, electronic bikes are very much beginning to change its landscape in recent times, where they are left recklessly by users in uncompromising places and positions. They have now become a nuisance and a hazard to the elderly and the young.
Two members of the local canine community meet on Butterfield Green. A great place to hang out with a ball.

During the Covid Crisis, I was in isolation, one of the extremely vulnerable. They brought me my medication and throughout, gave me reassuring advice over the phone.

Another life line was Made in Hackney. They delivered delicious vegan meals, hot from their kitchen, to my flat door. They always followed up with surprise phone calls. Their warm, spontaneous and genial conversations really lifted my spirits.

Kingsland Pharmacy, Made in Hackney and Route Cafe (A teaser. Go there and discover!) Such generous people.

I choose this photo because it means so much to me. It will always remind me of the good people in Hackney, especially the nurses and doctors of the NHS who risked their lives, caring for us.

I know that the shot is not good technically, but it is truthful.

This is how it is: Kingsland Road, Dalston. I would not change this photo, just as I would not change where I live.

That lovely vitality of Hackney!
My Chinese Community

When I whistleblew to stop my managers from killing us and the world during the Covid lockdown, rather than thanking me, they tried to bribe me to leave.

When I refused they victimised and bullied me for two years until I became to a suicidal mental health point.

I found sanctuary in Hackney’s many caring communities. With my fellow Chinese silver haired seniors, my sufferings were soothed away with line dancing, eating freshly cooked delicious chinese food, singing karaoke and even playing mahjong.
I like to think this photo illustrates vibrancy and many layers within the Greater Hackney community. As I see and experience it now, I see Dalston, and particularly Ridley Road market as the beating heart at the centre of the borough which has changed drastically in the 28 years I have lived here.

For me it is a snapshot of Hackney, right here, right now.
The expansion of the railways led to the expansion of Hackney. The population changed over time as people come and go from all around the world. A cosmopolitan place, the people are known to be friendly and you can always find community.
PROJECT IMPACT
Key Successes

Intergenerational Delivery

The participants who contributed to ‘Focus on Communities’ ranged from ages 4 to 70+, providing the project with rich insights across a wide age range. Each group brought with them distinct community expertise, with different thematic areas they wished to focus on. This project also worked with a younger age range than is typical for PhotoVoice which allowed us to expand upon our organisational delivery knowledge.

Local Partnerships

The project sought careful and considered partners who may not usually have access to high quality creative opportunities. Working with each partner in an in-depth way before the workshops, and getting to understand how they operate helped to foster great new partnerships that we hope will continue to flourish in the future. This way of working allowed a tailored approach and curriculum for each group.

Community Led Insights

Participants have produced a range of high quality captioned photographs which depict a range of viewpoints on lots of different elements of their communities. Behind the images, there have been hours worth of discussions between participants, PhotoVoice, and partners, exploring what is really important for these communities and how things can be improved. This booklet will allow a wider audience to benefit from these considered insights.

Meaningful Distribution Opportunities

All participants and partners have been happy to have exhibition opportunities and to support the production of this booklet. Ensuring that participant insights are shared beyond the workshop has been a key element in securing participant engagement and helping amplify voices.

Partner Feedback

I am grateful for the using photo cards as a metaphor. Interpretation of the photo cards was key to informing me more about stories. The way that Lauren facilitated fascinated me, and I learnt tips I have now used in my own facilitation. It was a useful tool to create safety within the Cohen Lodge participants as sometimes it felt like skating on thin ice, perilous but thrilling! All the processes were important to gain insights. Lauren listened, affirmed and echoed ... if needed. Interesting to observe themes to emerge.

- Melissa, Engage Here CIC

Focus on Communities allowed Hackney Circle members to express their local community in a safe space and had their feelings and thoughts listened to and recognised. Older residents have felt left out
When we spoke about the development of our community, it was evident that conversations about how their community is developing, which is a shame as many have lived there for decades.

This project lets you see the space we call home through different perspectives and makes you value what we all call home. PhotoVoice brilliantly brought together Hackney Circle members to tell a unique story of Hackney, one which wouldn’t have been told otherwise.

- Hackney Circle

I absolutely loved the workshops. They were a haven for a few weeks where we shared our images and talked about our local area and what we think of it. I would like to thank you very much for involving me within the project and for the opportunity to take part in exhibition. I am so excited to see everyone else’s work.

- Participant

Participant Evaluation and Feedback

- 94% of participants enjoyed the workshops
- 94% of participants agreed that the course helped them think more about community.
- 81% of participants agreed that the workshops had a positive impact on their wellbeing.
- 91% of participants agreed that they had learnt new things to use in the future.

This was a very rewarding experience for me over the few weeks it took place. I especially liked the sharing of what we individually saw or felt in each other’s photos. The structure of the course also gave us pointers and the confidence to take photos and to understand how to compose or frame an image before pressing the shutter button.

- Participant
Acknowledgements

Facilitating these workshops provided many different and wonderful insights, as participants quickly built skills in photography despite many of them never having tried it before.

We’re delighted to be able to share their images and insights, and hope that everyone enjoys the rich variety of perspectives they provide.

Our gratitude to all of the participants for their time, efforts, and creativity.

PhotoVoice would also like to thank all the partners who provided their help and time, with special recognition to the co-facilitation and workshop support:

• Amara and Dana (Hackney Circle)
• Reinako and Becky (Boiler House)
• Chiho and Moona (Globe After School Club)
• Melissa (Engage Here CIC at Cohen Lodge)
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