



You don't know what you've got till
it's gone...
Annual Report 2023/2024



Healthy Exercise!

Welcome to our Lee Green Lives Community Report

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Our Community 2023–24

Pat Coyne, Lee Green Lives Chair

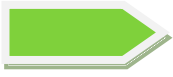
Chair’s Report – Our Biggest Challenge Yet

Lee Green Lives was officially born in 2010 out of an old disused unit in a declining shopping centre – Leegate – to help breathe some life into it before it was pulled down in favour of redevelopment. We succeeded in part working jointly with other traders and services to keep the precinct open and the hard work of a small band of volunteers and part-time workers. Now, 14 years later, we will be leaving with others as the developers, Galliard Homes, get ready to demolish the site. During that time, we have had to meet many challenges – regular, sometimes exhaustive fund-raising, recruiting volunteers, maintaining staffing and premises, and of course COVID, which forced us to shut for almost a year– to keep the show on the road. Now, of course, we have a bigger challenge with our exit from Leegate in October 2024.

We will leave with great sadness, not simply because we have come to love our home, but even more for the thousand or so people who have benefited from our activities and services. We are determined, however, that those still with us and other future participants and users will continue to have their needs met. That’s why we will be devoting these last remaining months looking for alternative premises and seeking new funds to keep Lee Green Lives alive.

While some funding has been made available to help us with any relocation, it won’t be enough to sustain either us or the other units with whom we have worked to get some support to help sustain us. Funds from Lewisham Council, Trust for London and Clarion Housing, among others, will also help in the immediate aftermath, but that won’t take us very far into the future. We know that, like so many others in the voluntary and community sectors, it’s not going to be easy.

That we have got this far over the many years and in recent months is a tribute to many people, past and present, too numerous to list. However, I would like to cite our coordinator, Shirley Kirkland, who has been with us almost since the beginning, our session and class leaders, together with the volunteers who have supported them, Lee Fair Share time bank (a valued partner throughout), and our trustees, for all the work they have done to keep us going through these difficult times.



Coordinator's report: Cost of Living crisis impacts on what we do

At the centre we see every day how much the Cost-of-Living crisis impacts on the people who visit us, use our services or take part in our activities. And their financial worries contribute to their health, in particular, affecting their mental health. That's had a big impact on the numbers visiting our Support & Advocacy service, and persuaded Trust for London to renew their funding to us for the next two years.

If you add in the continuing problems for people post-COVID, you can understand why it is also reflected in the lives of the people who use and have depended increasingly on our Warm Space project, sustained during the warmer months by it being re-named the Welcome Space, all funded by Clarion Housing.

More evidence comes from the increasing number of food vouchers we issue, as part of a Food Bank scheme run by the local Trussell Trust.

Our job also means supporting the session leaders and teachers, but I will let their reports speak for themselves. Meanwhile, administering the centre itself has been more time-consuming, whether its everyday enquiries or emergencies, dealing with maintenance of the building itself or ordering supplies, making sure volunteers are performing tasks suited to their skills and experience, or that visitors to know that they are in the right place for a meeting or activity.

Monitoring has been a real challenge, with funders wanting to know the demographics of the people their funding helps, while different funders want different sets of data. We have overcome some of these difficulties creating spreadsheets to help organise this information. With funders also requiring more detailed information, we have also had to provide it in sensitive ways to avoid using names and other personal information. In all of this, I want to pay tribute, in particular, to volunteer Valerie Miller, without whose help I could not have managed.

And, of course, much of this past year has been spent answering the question in one form or another, when will the development of the site take place and what will happen to the community centre? Well, now we know, which leads to another question, namely, what will we do without a community centre?

Shirley Kirkland, Community Centre Coordinator, Lee Green Lives

Activities and Services

Support & Advocacy: Numbers using the service double

The Support and Advocacy service has doubled in the number of individuals seeking support, over the past year. Our last annual report stated that the group least using our service were the younger community members aged 25-plus. However, this past year has seen a vast change, whereby we now support a much younger service user, alongside our usual over-45 visitor.

This sudden change has shown us that the support and advice we are able to offer is far less readily available within our local community, hence we are inundated with calls for assistance. Evidently, we now find ourselves balancing those needing support into work and accommodation, perhaps younger individuals, whilst calling for better living conditions and benefits for a much older, but less able age group.

In addition, the quality of the service we offer can be seen in the positive outcomes achieved on a weekly basis. The high number of service users who return week after week, speaks for itself. Indeed, our current waiting list now carries a three-week wait.

While problems vary, we have seen an influx of issues arising within the BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community, predominantly due to unemployment and homelessness. Where BAME individuals make up a large percentage of our community, our focus has been on inclusion within the centre and our monitoring of individuals is reflective of the support and engagement we deliver.

Regular issues also in need of support are:

- Housing, e.g., rent arrears/accommodation/repairs
- Benefits, e.g., Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Court Orders
- Food poverty
- Home Office, e.g., Indefinite Leave to Remain denied
- Education
- Legal matters

We shall continue to offer this valuable service, funded by Trust for London, aiming to continue this support with the very welcome increase in hours – now expanded to Wednesdays, 11am-3pm, to go with the current Thursdays, 11am-3pm.

Joanne Harvey, lead worker, Support & Advocacy



Warm/Welcome Space: Sanctuary for people facing poverty



Warm space in session over lunch at the Community Centre

This welcoming project has been operating now for a year, providing even more evidence of the impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis, reflected in higher heating bills, food poverty, and loneliness and isolation among local people. We have fed many vulnerable adults and children. Some adults are unable to cook for health reasons, and have become desperate, because of the ongoing high energy bills and the day-to-day living expenses, coupled with the decline in national social care spending. Funded by Clarion Housing, the project offers free meals on Wednesdays and Thursdays, between 11am-3pm. The service user numbers have steadily risen from roughly six to eight for the two sessions, to between 15 to 21 in early 2024.

Various healthy warm soups with roll, hot with a variety of traditional and cultural menus, are offered in the colder months. During the warmer weather, when it was called Welcome Space, the menus had a variety of salads with nutritious root vegetables, rice, couscous, and pastas, suitable for vegetarians and meat eaters; fish and meats are also offered. Always available are fresh fruits, with cold juices, tea and coffee, with biscuits. New service users are constantly joining and echoing a similar appreciation, the flavourful aromas and tasty foods, served with kindness and of high standard, according to oral and written feedback.

There is also a social aspect, with conversation and activities such as word searches, crosswords, connect four, chess, dominoes, books, computer use, newspapers. A quiet area is also provided just to relax and chat, bridging the loneliness that many experience.

Following a very successful Lewisham Council Food & Safety Team Environmental Health Inspection, in early 2024, I completed a level 2 in Food Hygiene and Safety in Catering.

Nearer to the end of 2023, we were fortunate to receive occasional food donations from our local Sainsbury's and Path Waze, with any items not consumed on the premises distributed to the users. Warm/Welcome Space project provides a sanctuary for many, in the process giving a real buzz to the local community, many of whom had become quite isolated, due to the shutting down of many premises, before and after the COVID lockdown. The meals are sometimes their only nutritious hot meals in days, others ask for the recipes to try out at home.

The sessions are partly supported by volunteers, who are highly valued and are rewarded with a thanks and a small gift when they leave to further their own life choices or for health reasons, and sometimes they return. Our sincere gratitude goes out to everyone involved in this 'Warm Space' Project.

Maureen Russell, project leader, Warm/Welcome Space

Healthy Exercises: Beacon towards better health and well-being

Lee Green Lives is a shining beacon in our community – a safe, relaxing environment for seniors of all backgrounds, race and gender, participating in healthy aerobic exercise.

The sessions include body strengthening, toning muscles, balancing, flexibility and memory to movement, remembering steps with critical thinking skills.

During our exercise sessions, a section is taken in dancing moves, accompanied by laughter when everyone gets to have fun, while listening to music and familiar lyrics.

Each individual has different needs for attending the exercise classes, and this is monitored through questionnaires that assess their progress. Some need assisting with balancing or flexibility, or just generally keeping fit and active with a full body range motion on stretching that can assist them in everyday domestic actions and chores – from putting on your shoes to picking things up from the floor, or reaching cupboards.

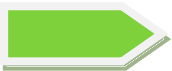
Then, of course, for many the sessions provide them with a chance to make new friends, in the process also improving their sense of well-being.

Studies have shown that the best thing we can do for our health is to participate in regular exercise, so actively engaging in movements is great for our overall health.

Classes had to be divided into two sessions during COVID to keep people keeping to safe distances in line with guidelines. We have maintained the two classes, with numbers increasing since then. The two classes are on Tuesday 10am-10.45am and 11am-11.45am.

All older people are welcome. Thanks to everyone for your hard work and support.

Jean Lee, tutor, Healthy Exercises



Reading and Writing: Greater confidence in dealing with life issues

Our literacy sessions aim to improve people's well-being by helping them to focus on activities which not only improve their daily lives through more confident use of functional language, but also by engaging in social interaction with others in the session. In addition, we have been able to signpost users to other services, including housing, health and further education, reducing their need to engage in the often intimidating first stages of dealing with public authority bureaucracy.

A core group of about four learners, each with a different ability level, objectives and interests, have been increasing their fluency in reading and writing, reporting improved well-being, concentration skills and self-confidence, one user even considering taking a formal level 2 English qualification at college. They engage positively with each other, sharing common aims and can practise together in a safe and mutually supportive environment. This includes greater involvement in the local community, several going to the local library with our volunteer Pat Mahony, who has supported them to become members.

In addition, their mental health and sense of well-being have improved with the enhanced support in concentrating on tasks outside their daily routine. Most have health issues that mean the continuing distance (desks) guidelines has ensured their increased sense of security.

Unfortunately, the sessions – held on Fridays 11am to 1pm – ceased in March 2024 owing to the end of the funding. My thanks to Felicity Crowe, who took over from me when a new job opportunity opened up for me in December 2023, and especially to Pat, who will continue to volunteer, working with some of the existing Reading & Writing users on Wednesdays, as well as some Support & Advocacy clients, who experience similar difficulties in accessing public authorities.

Alex Peach, tutor, Reading & Writing

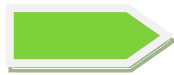


Lee Fair Share: Returning to normal

We are a time bank largely based at Lee Green community centre and operating in the Lee and Hither Green areas. We offer people a chance to make friends and get to know other local people by swapping and learning new skills. Time banks are based on what can best be described as a system of credit exchange, with members giving their time and skills to others, gaining hourly credits and, in turn, receiving help or support from other members.

As the country gradually recovered from COVID in the past year, Lee Fair Share's Coffee, Cake & Company sessions also gradually returned to normal. Attendance increased and the usual activities were planned, including Hot Cross Buns and Easter Eggs were enjoyed at Easter. Coffee, Cake and Company celebrated the Platinum Jubilee last year by having a tea party and toasting the Queen. A wonderful cake was made by Mary Donovan's talented grandson, Archie. A special raffle was held with the proceeds donated to the Disaster Emergency Commission, Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. The Chair Exercises and Pilates classes continue to be popular. We are very grateful to Patty Fullarton for these wonderful classes. I would also like to thank Karen Pratt for her popular French conversation classes.

Lorraine Spenceley, broker, Lee Fair Share Time Bank



Sewing: New skills plus a bit of make-do-and-mend

This sewing group has been going strong and we have a steady number of participants, all learning new skills or just attending simply to mend their clothing. This warm, welcoming space allows people to unwind and make new friends.

I think the participants get a lot out of attending and the experience enables them to learn a great deal. Mostly pupils develop the confidence to take their projects away and work on them at home so they can move forward on their work.

Our classes take place on Wednesdays from 10am and, while I think the time works well, being restricted to upstairs means we can only accommodate between five and seven people. I enjoy running these sessions, particularly with the level of support, with machines and materials always laid out, readily available.

Clementsia Paquette, tutor, Sewing Class



Knitting and Crocheting: Outstanding work in difficult circumstances

What do people get from attending our sessions? Those taking the class include it as a focal point of their week, making items to a high standard – something they would make for themselves, starting like myself as a beginner and moving onto a higher level. Some come for social reasons, the classes offering them a chance to meet others and make friends. However, numbers have not always been high, some citing the uncertainty around the community centre’s future as the reason for not continuing.

Funding for the group has been an issue, the loss of the grant a couple of years ago meaning I have had to carry on with the classes on a voluntary basis, earning a little money from donations and sales of my work.

I would like to see the daytime slot combine with the Warm Space session. Then, it would be good to expand to an evening slot for beginners and intermediates for local people who aren’t free during the day and might be able to pay a fee. It’s worth saying that many visitors have commented on the quality of work that the members have produced as being outstanding.

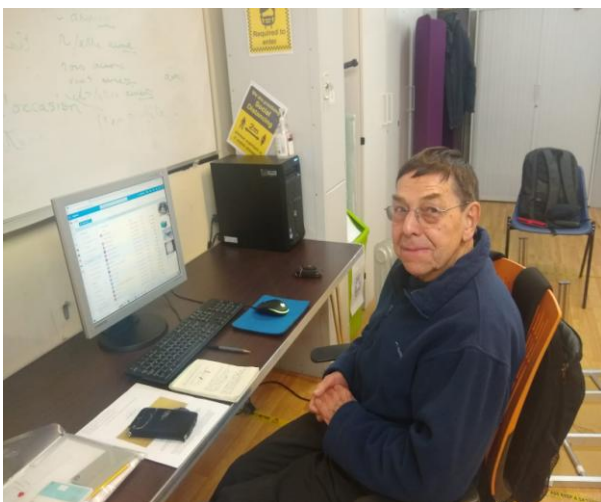
DeShaun Smith, tutor, Knitting and Crocheting



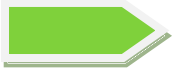
Computing and writing

Activities at the computer class continued as usual. Most users wanted to practice using the internet for things like shopping or travel. Several also needed help with their mobile phone, usually for email or internet connection and one user took the opportunity to learn touch typing, using an online tutor. That is a most useful skill. I wish I had taken it up.

Pat Coyne Computer class tutor.



Computer class at work



Lee Green Consortium: Together, we can work it out

The Consortium, a network of 18 community groups, had two important strands of work in the last two years. The first was to continue to oversee the distribution of the money we won through a bid for Lee Green’s Ward NCIL (Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy) Fund to local groups. The second was to coordinate work in support of some of our members scheduled to be made homeless with the redevelopment of Leegate shopping centre.

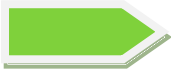
We were formed in 2016 to work together and make sure our voices are heard. Facilitated by Lee Green Lives, our main aims include supporting Lee Green Assembly’s work, celebrating and enhancing the work of volunteers, and developing groups’ resilience, particularly in securing funding for theirs and our collective activities.

Our successful 2022 bid to the NCIL fund, called “All in it together”, totalled £8,549. It was very different from those in other Lewisham wards because we didn’t specify what it was to be spent on, rather that it had to meet ward priorities and deliver community cohesion, particularly in the wake of Covid.

We allocated the money in three tranches during the 15 months on a wide range of local projects, including contributions to major annual local events and 20 other smaller activities and events. More recently, we have supported successful efforts to get more money for traders, services and charities in Leegate – including Lee Green Lives and three other Consortium members – to get more money to help them relocate. Finding alternative local premises is proving a real challenge, however, we are hopeful that our action in objecting to a change of use of the nearby historic Lee Centre is ultimately successful. Should that be the case, we will support an alternative community enterprise in efforts to resurrect it for community use for ourselves and some of the other threatened groups.

Jim Mallory Chair, Lee Green Consortium

Lee Green Consortium of Community Groups



Members of the Consortium

Friends of Manor House Gardens
Lee Green Lives (LGL)
Lee Manor Society
Arts Network
Friends and Users of Staplehurst Shops
(FUSS)
GRACE (Greenwich Refugee Aid &
Community Enterprise) Charity Shop
Lee Fair Share Time Bank
Lee Forum
Lee Green Open Studios
Lee Green Women's Institute
Leegate Traders Forum
Lochaber Hall Association
Manor House Library
Manor Park Friends
Newstead Tenants and Residents Association
Soul Refresh Café, Leegate
Street Wildlife Action Group (SWAG)
Users and Friends of Manor House Library



FUSS Fair 2023 One of the major local events, in part funded by Lee Green Consortium, It was attended by about 1000 people, who sampled wares on exhibit from over 40 community stalls.

Lee Green Lives

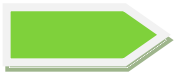


Our Vision

Our vision is for a safer, stronger and more cohesive community with opportunities for self-development and growth accessible to all.

Our mission

We aim to offer opportunities, advice and support for local people to work, play, think and learn together, and to address economic and social disadvantage for mutual benefit, health and wellbeing.



Our Goals

- To provide activities for the benefit of local people, especially the elderly, young people and people experiencing social or economic disadvantage with a focus on wellbeing, health, mental health, learning and opportunities to socialise
- To help local people to overcome difficulties with housing, health or lack of income
- To sustain a community centre at Leegate with the active participation of local volunteers
- To support the work of other local groups and organisations and to work in partnership through the Lee Green Consortium
- To contribute to the cohesion of the local community
- To advocate for the needs of local people and assist them to influence decisions that affect their lives or community

Our values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do. We aim to work in ways that are:

- **Welcoming:** we want everyone who comes to the centre to feel welcome and valued
- **Inclusive:** our activities are for everyone from the local community
- **User-led:** we encourage our volunteers and people using our services to help us design, develop and improve what we do
- **Collaborative:** wherever possible we work in partnership to improve outcomes for local people



Lee Green Lives Trustees 2023-24

Laura Cheek
Pat Coyne (Chair)
Elaine Curley
Simon Hooks
Jim Mallory (Secretary)
Caroline Mayow
Frances Migniuolo
Wendy Moss
James Rathbone (Treasurer)
Maureen Russell
Ralph White

A special tribute to Ralph White, who sadly and tragically died suddenly in September 2023. He was a great source of wisdom and strength to Lee Green Lives and to the wider community.



Manor Park Harvest Festival 2023 Environmental wading expeditions in the River Quaggy were a major feature.



Financial Accounts 2022-23

The full accounts are published in a separate document available on request.



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