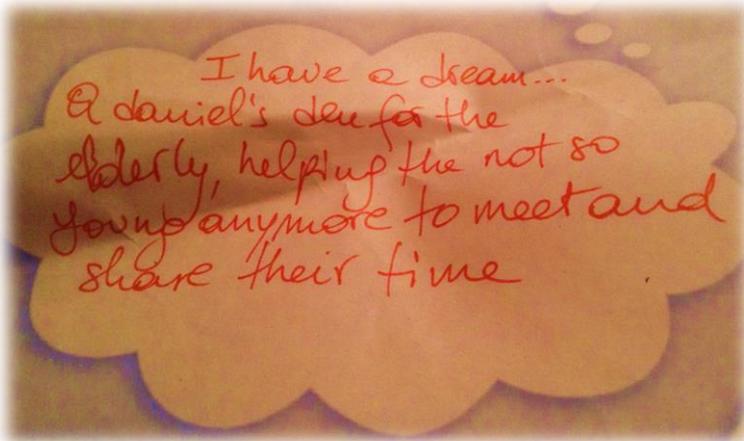


# The Open Table – our story

On January 30<sup>th</sup> 2015 we opened the doors to a 6 month project called The Open Table at an empty shop at the top of Wembley High Road. This was part of The Big Local – a 10 year project to promote community regeneration. Daniel's Den had been approached to do something for the parents and under-fives in the area and we also felt led to do something for the over 65's too, having received a special request on our 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The three themes of 'kindness, patience and faithfulness' from our quality characteristics were key to what we did and we felt this was a real need down this busy street and area.



We approached Near Neighbours for funding and this was our proposal:



To run an Open Table project where parents and under-fives and over 65's can receive a community meal and engage in social activities in a safe space on a weekly basis. Building relationships and community are key features. This was very much in line with Near Neighbours objectives: to bring together diverse local people, to create relationships of friendship and trust, and to help transform your neighbourhood for the better.

We were thankful to Near Neighbours for awarding us funding to enable the project to run efficiently. We also received kind donations from Wenzels the

bakery as well as some practical support from Brent CVS and The Big Local.

## What did we do?

This was the basic format for the day

9am set up

9.30-11am Daniels Den (pop up style as space limited)

11-11.30am Community lunch

11.30-12.30pm Team time

12.30-2pm community lunch and activities for the elderly!

2-3pm tidy up and review

As we opened the doors on that first day little did we know what would happen...?





## Who came?

Over the six months we welcomed:

40+ families of under 5's – 50 children and 40+ parents/ grandparents and carers  
25+ over 65's

A team of 10 volunteers (at least 3 each week)

Fed up to 10 homeless people (for a number of weeks)

## Here are some of the highlights of what worked well

- ✓ We were able to give advice on everyday matters ie local painters and decorators
- ✓ We linked up with new families
- ✓ We were in a very visible position on the High Road



- ✓ Friendships were built up and wonderful to see people sharing telephone numbers, passing on clothes, birthday presents

- ✓ We were able to give food to the homeless
- ✓ We were a conduit for a local bakers shop to use food that was left over to feed people in need

- ✓ People loved trying new things – sandwiches they couldn't afford to buy and food they would never make themselves

- ✓ Local church members baked cakes to share – giving an outlet for them to be involved

- ✓ Good for others to be exposed to what we do and there was certainly a wider audience who saw (and even better - understood what we do ie that

we are not a nursery or childcare!) ie Brent CVS, The Big Local etc.

- ✓ New sense of community in the over 65's and one of the members invited the rest of us to lunch at a local centre for the elderly where he goes
- ✓ There was a stable team of 3 volunteers and others came along to join in. We recruited one new volunteer as a result



- ✓ Leafletting people on the street and encouraging them to come that day was

effective – you could point them in the right direction and they saw the sign on the pavement – with balloons

- ✓ There was lots of opportunities for creativity – especially for the over 65's and they found themselves doing things they hadn't done for years ie games
- ✓ Lots of opportunity to do things together
- ✓ Opportunity to eat homemade cake – could see 'love' being practically expressed
- ✓ The craft activities went down so well ... see these puppets ... a truly intergenerational activity. This was one of the biggest surprises for me – how you can use the same activity with both age ranges.



*Same activity enjoyed by young and old*



*Having fun*



*Telling stories*

- ✓ And the potato heads



*The amount of laughter these potato heads produced was amazing and mums loved reporting how the hair was growing!*

## Of course there were challenges

- The smallness of the premises meant that people felt 'exposed' when they came in. They couldn't slip in and be anonymous. This is a big issue in this area.
- It wasn't easy to build community – often people are suspicious of accepting help and may also feel pride 'I don't need any help'. The venue was out on a limb and having 'a community' to own it was a challenge (we run sessions in a school or church where there is already an existing community and this makes such a difference to the sense of belonging)
- The state of the premises had its challenges – inconsistent lighting, doorbell not working (this was big issue as the door had to be locked due to security), missing hoover for cleaning etc.
- Disappointing take up by other volunteers after initial enthusiasm.
- Many people came once and LOVED IT yet never came back. This has puzzled and disappointed us and we are questioning why. We feel the smallness of the venue and vulnerability was a factor in this. Would love to have the time and people to follow this up ...



- Some 'hard to reach' family need extra support – we didn't have the people to do this
- Publicity was and is an issue ...

## What people said

- It's really great – I can meet new people
- Nice bus ride – not too far
- Good to get out and have a change of scenery, even if it is 'just Wembley'
- Get fed up shopping in same old place
- Loved the different activities – making the potato heads especially
- Everybody welcomed me
- I've loved the games, especially Head Bands
- I keep bumping into people on the street – feels good



*Every week the wonderful food donations from Wenzels had to be prepared*

- Eating together is fun especially the variety of food, soup and homemade cakes
- People bring food – sharing friendship
- It's been good to share life experiences ie cold cures 'a lettuce helps you sleep'

When we asked the older people about why some people might find it hard to come, this is what they said

- They need a core friendships group – someone to invite them
- They may query your motives – why are you doing this, you want money
- Word of mouth is the best form of advertising
- People set in their way, lonely, depressed
- I once wanted to go to a centre but 'didn't have the nerve to go through the door'

## So what about follow up?

People were very sad when the doors closed on July 17<sup>th</sup> but Joan and I were happy. 6+ hours every Friday (as well as preparation ie buying food, collecting/sorting food donations and preparation of craft activities on other days) was a lot of work and whilst we saw lots of positives, we knew that this work wasn't sustainable from our point of view due to other time constraints. We agreed to do this as a short term project, to 'test the water'.

Two things we have put in place as a result of The Open Table project are:

1) On the second Friday of the month we run a play session at Play Wembley for local parents. This is at a discounted price and in the local area. We also have been happy to see some of the family come to Daniel's Den at Elsley Primary School, on the edge of the Big Local area.

2) On the second Friday of the month we are running a 'drop in' lunch for the over 65's at St Michael and All Angels Church, Stonebridge – this is on the number 18 bus route, a short ride from Wembley Central. The numbers coming to this are growing and the friendships formed during the 6 months have enabled this group to have a real core and new people are coming to this. Being located within an existing community is enabling other links to develop and recently some of the elderly folk attended the nativity play in our weekly Daniel's Den sessions. We have applied for funding for a coach trip to the farm which we are hoping to invite the 'drop in' members to join the families of Daniel's Den.



## Other positive outcomes

Having run the project for 6 months in this shop on Wembley High Road, several other outcomes have emerged.

- We have been invited to be one of the partners with the Big Local in delivering services to improve community regeneration in the Wembley Central area. This will include funding to continue our work in Elsley Primary School but there is also talk about supporting work with parents and toddlers in other local primary schools
- We are being approached to offer advice about setting up toddler groups in other local areas – this is part of our vision to see parent and toddler groups being within walking distance of every family. This will require further long term funding
- We have seen the potential of intergenerational work and we are hoping to develop this further. One of our groups recently performed a nativity play in sheltered accommodation and offered soup and rolls as we had in The Open Table. This was warmly received. We will be looking for more opportunities like this.
- There is still a huge need to reach out to ALL families and publicity is key. Posters, noticeboards are needed so that people know what is happening. Word of mouth is such a powerful tool but following up first time visitors is so important. This takes time and investment – simply organising our database and sending out emails and updating our presence on the web takes time and money.



## Case studies

### *Ocean and Ryan, Mary and Petruta*



*Petruta knew nothing of Daniel's Den until she was given a leaflet on the High Road by Jo. She came along with her son Ryan and bumped into Mary, Ocean's grandmother and also Special Guardian. Mary is a local lady who lives round the corner from this new venue. She had recently become fully responsible for the care of Ocean and was wondering where she could go with her. Mary suffers from severe arthritis and is unable to get on the bus with the pushchair. She wanted somewhere she could walk to and one of our former mums at the local school told her about the Big Local. Mary was delighted and came with her friend Linda. They joined in all the activities and as the friendship grew between them and Petruta, Ryan and Ocean too became buddies. There has been the sharing of birthday presents, advice and telephone numbers and a real sense that for all of them a valuable friendship and support*

*network has been formed. This is something we see happening in all our groups a wonderful to see people for different backgrounds (Irish and Romanian) forming friendships that matter.*



*Petruta and Ryan had never heard about Daniel's Den until I gave them a leaflet on the street - now they are members of the group at Elsley Primary School and here Ryan is starring in his first nativity play!*

### **John**

John says that the first day he came through the door was 'one of the happiest days in my life. The welcome I received was wonderful and I felt listened to and valued'. John came every week without fail and it was a joy to see his confidence grow in so many ways. He invited a number of us to have lunch with him at a local centre for the elderly and is now considered an essential part of the core group.



# Thank you

This report has been compiled by Joanna Gordon December 2015

Thank you to everyone involved in this project:

- ✓ All the parents, children, carers and over 65's who came along, joined in the fun and made new friends.
- ✓ For my co-worker Joan and our amazing team of volunteers
- ✓ For Brent CVS and The Big Local for all their support
- ✓ For Near Neighbours for their funding
- ✓ For Wenzels Bakery on Wembley High Road who donated food and for the volunteers who helped collect it



## Daniel's Den

As part of the  
**BigLocalWembleyCentral**



Every Friday (term time only)  
(old CFIS shop) Chesterfield House, Park Lane  
Wembley Central

### Over 65's group

**12.30pm-2pm - Free Lunch followed by activities—games, crafts etc**

**Ideal opportunity to meet new people in the local area**

**Dates:**  
May 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd      July 3rd, 10th and 17th  
June 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th,

For more details go to our website: [www.danielsden.org.uk](http://www.danielsden.org.uk)  
Or call us: 020 8908 6986    07436273844



## Daniel's Den

As part of the  
**BigLocalWembleyCentral**



Every Friday (term time only)  
(old CFIS shop) Chesterfield House, Park Lane  
Wembley Central

### Parents & Toddlers Group

**9:30am - 11am - A group session. Including craft, refreshments, toys, fun and friendship.**

**11am - 11:30am - A simple lunch for Parents and Toddlers.**

**Dates:**  
April 17th, 24th,      June 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th,  
May 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd      July 3rd, 10th and 17th

For more details go to our website: [www.danielsden.org.uk](http://www.danielsden.org.uk)  
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