

**Using Service Design  
to foster intergenerational  
connection across East London**

**By Savannah Fishel**

This document tells the story of a 2023 collaboration between East London Cares – a local charity of The Cares Family – and Savannah Fishel – an East London based Service Designer.

It includes the process and activities, key insights which emerged, as well as new designs and recommendations to **foster more intergenerational connection** in East London and beyond.

**Sadly, The Cares Family and East London Cares are no longer operational.** This document shares the work we co-created with participants in an effort to keep the learning alive and accessible.

Photos by El Dodds used with permission. For enquiries contact [el.dodds.creative@gmail.com](mailto:el.dodds.creative@gmail.com)

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It's like having  
family up the road -  
Maureen has filled  
a big void in my life



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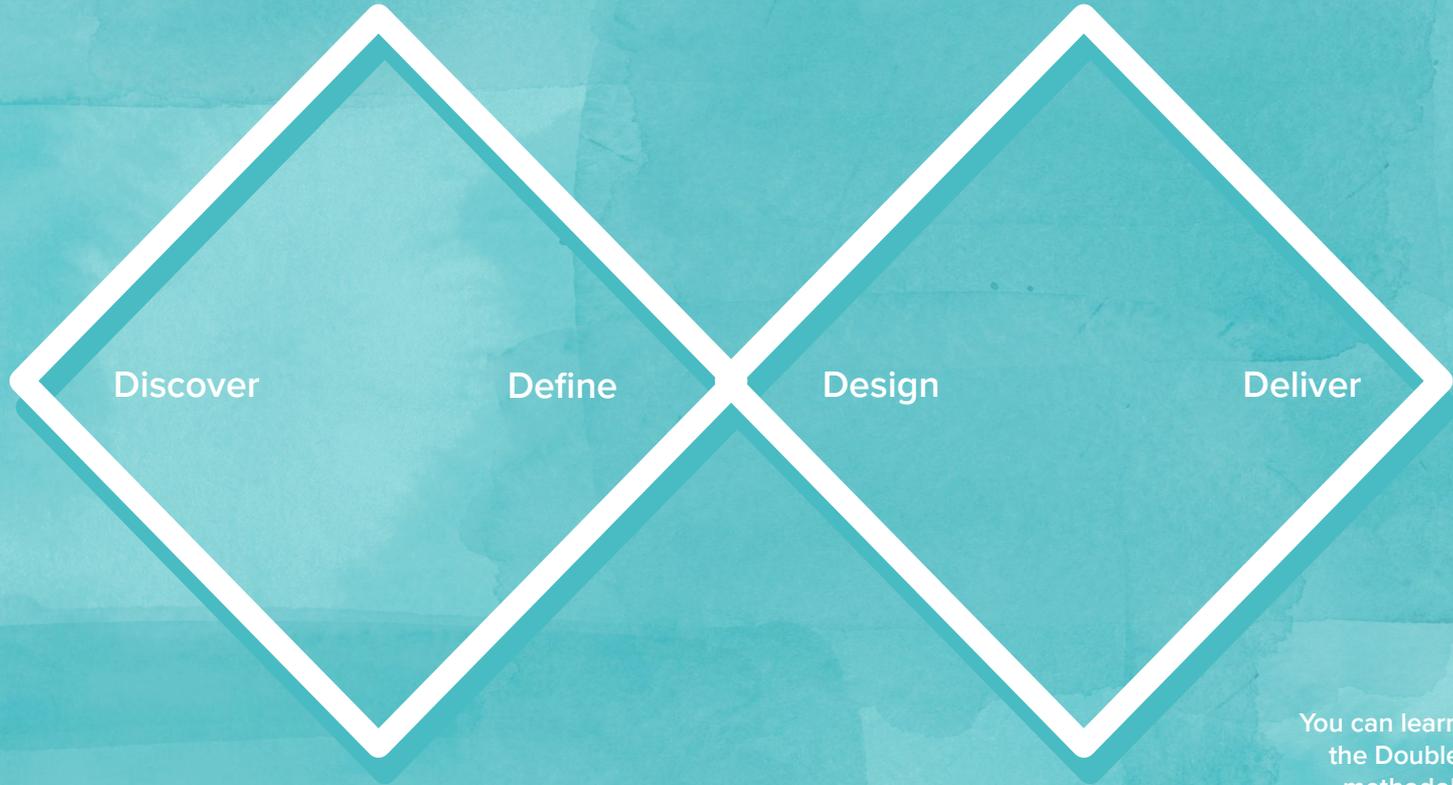
# The project in a nutshell

East London Cares (henceforth ELC) did fantastic work from 2019 to 2023 to bring people together to create community and connection through programmes such as intergenerational [social clubs](#), [one-to-one friendships](#) and [outreach](#). Before the organisation closed in November 2023, its team were eager for **more** East Londoners to benefit from their programmes. Our big question was:

*How can East London Cares engage more neighbours in a meaningful way, and as a result, foster more intergenerational connection across East London?*

During the Spring of 2023, ELC worked with Service Designer Savannah Fishel to capture insights around engagement and lead a process of redesign to support the staff team to consider how their activities could be more visible, accessible and impactful. Designs and recommendations needed to be **co-designed** with the ELC participants, known as ‘neighbours’, as well as **practical** and **low cost**.

# We followed a service design process:



You can learn more about  
the Double Diamond  
methodology [here](#)

# Discover

Discover



Define



Design



Deliver



# Research activities included:

Discover



Define



Design



Deliver



Immersion literature



Staff interviews



Street outreach



Survey



2 home visits



Social clubs



Reengagement calls



4 meetings with professionals



1 voicenote interview



5 phone interviews

# We used these boards to generate engagement and conversation in public places:



The boards sparked conversation, inviting people to:

- Rate how connected they felt to local neighbours and to other generations
- Share what connection means to them
- Share what they might like to share with - or learn from - a different generation

Discover

Define

Design

Deliver

# Key Insights

The research activities surfaced many key insights around:

- What engaged neighbours **gain** from ELC
- What engaged neighbours **like** and would want to **change** or **improve** about ELC
- How **connected** East Londoners feel to one another, and to people of different generations
- The **public perception** of ELC
- **Barriers** to engaging in ELC programmes
- **Ideas and recommendations** for increasing visibility and engagement.

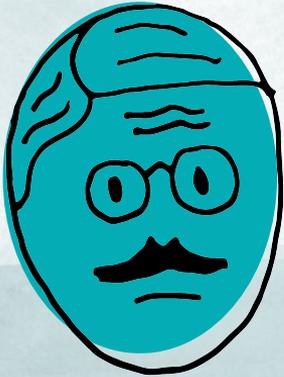
**Three** core **barriers** to engagement and re-engagement emerged (see following pages).

# Barrier #1: Visibility & stigma

Discover



*Would a younger person want to spend time with me?*



*I don't know if I'm the right kind of person*

Many local people hadn't heard of ELC, or more broadly had not often come across positive stories of non-familial intergenerational connection – so the **mutual benefit often isn't known!**

There's also a **stigma** issue, with many people – despite desiring more connection – not feeling they fit into a preconceived mould of a 'lonely' person, and therefore that they may not be the 'right' audience for ELC programmes.



## Barrier #2: Feeling safe

Discover

*They might judge me for being gay*

*What if someone uses a slur?*



Some people are concerned they may be **judged or discriminated** against by those of a different generation.

Both younger and older people worry about not feeling psychologically safe in an interaction with someone who lives such a different life to them – for example, LGBTQ+ people concerned about homophobia.



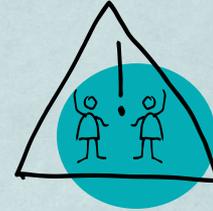
# Barrier #3: Bridging differences

Discover



*What if there's  
nothing to say?*

*I wouldn't  
know where  
to begin*



Some people were anxious about the myriad challenges of **socialising cross-generation** – for example, there was a prominent fear of 'awkwardness'.



# Synthesising what we heard...

**After synthesising what we heard into three core barriers, I created three 'personas'** (see the following pages), focusing on needs, preferences and interests of local residents who had potential to benefit from engaging in ELC.

These personas were used in codesign activities. They allowed participants to imagine and empathise with specific 'archetypes' when coming up with, or testing, ideas to support engagement across ELC programmes.

The following are examples of conversational prompts used during codesign:

- What would this person **gain** from ELC / what is it that they are looking for?
- What might **hold this person back** from engaging in ELC programmes?
- What might they like to **talk** about?
- What activities might they like to **do**? What might they avoid?
- What **opportunities** are there to engage this person in ELC?



# Shy Sean

28 years old

## Facts about Sean:

- Australian, lived in England for 6 months
- Nurse
- Living in a houseshare in Dalston
- Shy
- Struggles to meet new people
- Loves: photography, pop music, drag entertainment, travel.

“

What matters to Sean is...

- Finding **stability** and **connection** in a new place
- That his **values** and way of life are respected



## Some of Sean's anxieties around engagement in East London Cares:

*Will I have things in **common** with people from a different background and generation?*

*What if there's **awkward** silences?*

*Will I be **judged** for being gay?*



# Social Safiyah

70 years old

## Facts about Safiyah:

- Loves chatting to new people – in the post office, at the supermarket, when she goes to the Mosque
- Her children and grandchildren recently moved out of the house
- Passionate about giving back to the community

“

## What matters to Safiyah is...

- Doing something **fun**, purely for herself
- Giving back to the **community**
- Meeting **different** people



## Some of Safiyah's anxieties around engagement in *East London Cares*:

*Will I **physically** be able to get where I need to go?*

*I've got connections in the community, especially within my family. Am I the **right person** for ELC? What could I bring and how might I benefit?*

*Will I be able to **fit this around my existing schedule** e.g. family, health appointments, religious commitments?*



# Tentative Terry

91 years old

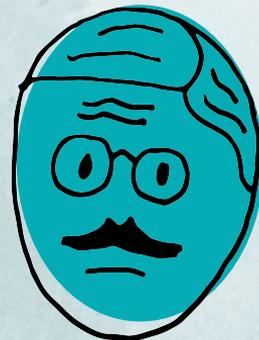
## Facts about Terry:

- Lived in East London all his life
- Jewish father, Irish mother
- Lives alone
- Wears a hearing aid
- Loves: classical music, history, jokes, animals

“

## What matters to Terry is...

- Feeling **young!**
- Going **beyond surface level** connection
- Having **company**



## Some of Terry's anxieties around engagement in East London Cares:

*Will younger people **want** to meet and connect with me?*

*Will we have anything in **common**?*

*What if I struggle to **hear** or keep track of conversation?*

*I like the idea... but maybe it would be **easier** to just stay at home*



# Define

Discover



**Define**



Design



Deliver



After gathering and analysing insights, we decided to open up the brief. The original brief wasn't focused enough on the **overarching** aim of ELC: to support people to *feel* more connected.

The question *How might we foster more intergenerational connection across East London?* allowed us to consider upstream societal barriers which were surfaced through research – such as stigma – and remain focused on people's experiences, instead of just on recruitment and retention.

How might we  
attract and retain  
more ELC  
members?



How might we foster  
more  
intergenerational  
connection across  
East London?

Discover



Define



Design



Deliver



# Design

Discover

Define

Design

Deliver



# Design activities included:

Testing new designs and activities to generate insights at an induction



*One-to-one friends* tested prototypes and gave feedback



A co-design workshop with staff and neighbours provided more feedback



Design



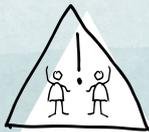
### 3 Core Barriers



Visibility & stigma



Feeling safe



Bridging differences

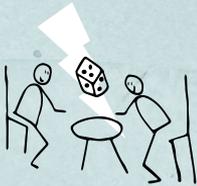
### 3 Design Goals



Cultivate culture



Forefront support



Spark connections

Cultivate a culture which promotes the mutual benefit of intergenerational connection and inspires people to engage.

Support new joiners to feel safe and supported across programmes.

Support neighbours to spark genuine connection once part of an activity.

Discover

Define

Design

Deliver



# Design Goal #1

Discover



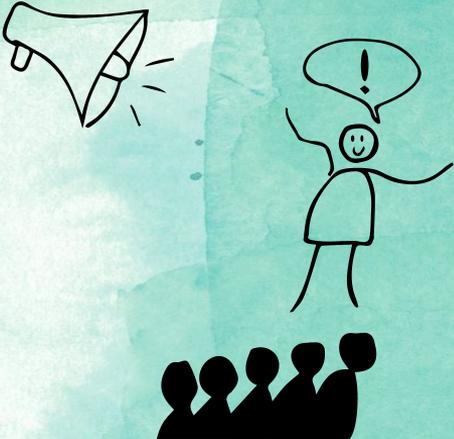
Define



Design



Deliver



Cultivate culture

# Postcards

We created a collection of postcards (see following pages for examples) which tells the story not of an individual or event, but of **relationships**. They're snappy, **heart-warming** and **accessible**, an alternative to traditional flyers. They signpost to more info but really, the focus is on the **story**, reminding people of the value of non-familial intergenerational connection.

*"We clicked from day one and can talk about anything - it's the highlight of my week"*

SUELI AND TSHIDI.  
FRIENDS FOR 10  
MONTHS



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*"My friendship  
with Maureen  
has filled a big  
void in my life"*

NICOLE (30)



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*Dear neighbour,*

***Greetings from Bethnal Green, East London!***

*We wanted to tell you about Maureen (80) and Nicole (30), friends for a year now. They both love music, learning new things, and Irish coffee - Maureen even played Nicole her solos from 75 years ago!*

*Maureen's family are in Derry, she's been here since the '60s. Nicole's from New Zealand. When she visits home she writes to Maureen, who is currently knitting her a beautiful new vest.*

***Age and background don't matter when it comes to true connections.*** East London Cares brings people together through free and fun social clubs and one-on-one friendship matches. ***We'd love you to join us.***

*Take care,*  
East London Cares



Call us to chat  
about our  
programmes:

Contact  
number no  
longer in  
operation

[www.eastlondoncares.org.uk](http://www.eastlondoncares.org.uk)

*"I've gained a friend, a  
role model, a life coach"*



*Emilia (28)*

*Friends with Sid  
(94) for 3 years*



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Dear neighbour,

Meet Sid and Emilia, who crossed paths at an **East London Cares Chair Yoga** session.

Three years on, they speak every week, sharing infectious laughter, fashion tips and chicken wings! Emilia cherishes Sid's life advice and stories of moving to London in the '60s: "He's an extension of my life, my favourite call on a stressful day."

**Age and background don't matter when it comes to true connections.** East London Cares brings people together through free and fun **social clubs** and **one-on-one friendship matches**. We'd love you to join us.

Take care,  
East London Cares



Call us to find out more:



020

9

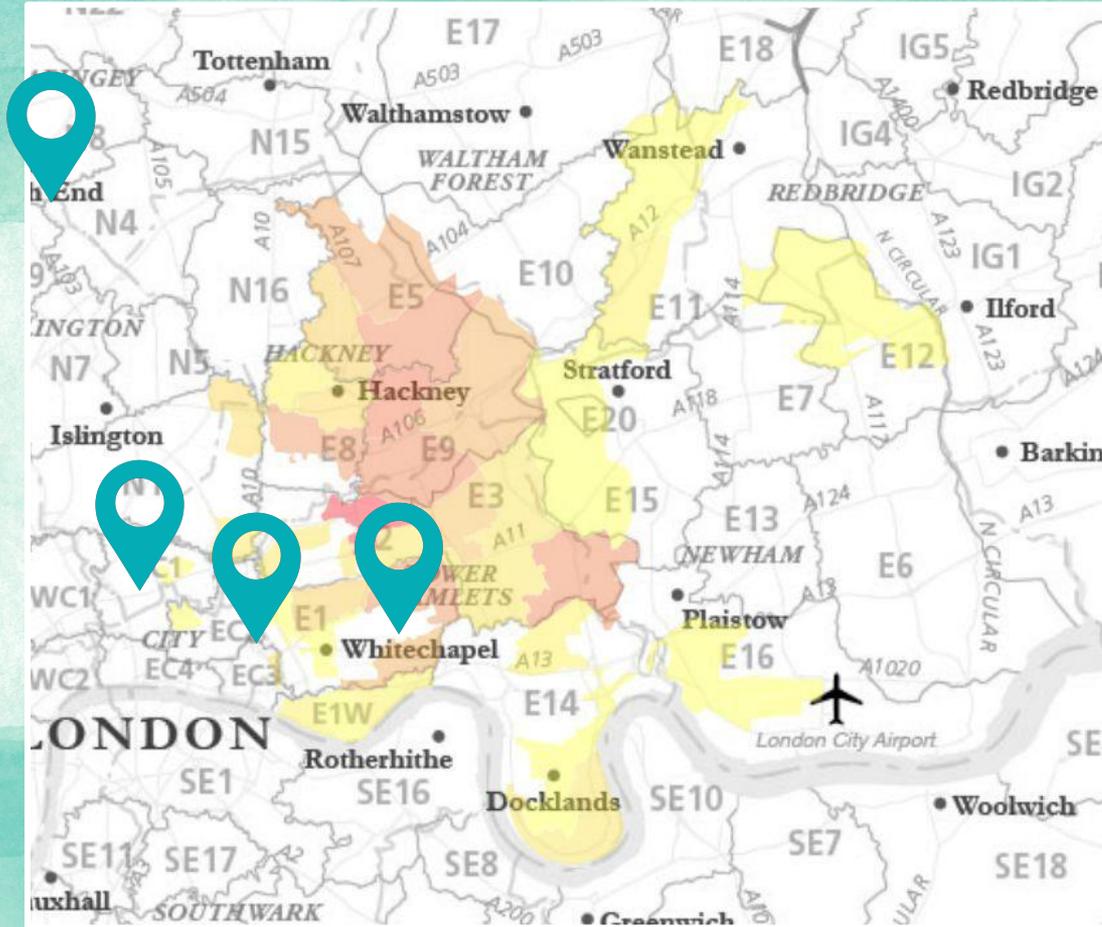
hello@

.uk

This map identified four areas which I suggested should be prioritised for posting the postcards and target outreach.

At the time, these areas:

- Had high levels of **loneliness indicators**, such as economic inactivity, unoccupied rooms or poor health (based on Census data)
- Were **underrepresented** in terms of neighbours engaged in ELC (dry spots).



# Ambassador Model



# Ambassador model: the benefits

This idea involved inviting and supporting younger neighbours who were eagerly involved in ELC programmes to take part in outreach activities – e.g. market stalls, sitting in cafes with promotional material, sharing their experience with others...

## Potential benefits:

### For the organisation:

- Increased outreach capacity
- Neighbours deepen their engagement and commitment
- Local residents hear the stories and experiences of engaged neighbours directly and authentically.

### For ambassadors (engaged neighbours):

- Outreach experience
- Support / upskilling from ELC
- Opportunities to meet new people
- Opportunity to support an organisation they care about and benefit local people
- Visibility via outreach sessions, website and social media
- Optional: a 'Champion' certificate (something to add to their CV).

### Agreed activity required to make this work:

- 'Outreach' tick box in induction next steps form (already happening)
- Pre-made pack sent to neighbours at 6 months inviting them to be involved
- Phone call to check in with the ambassador pre/post outreach.



# Ambassador Blueprint

One asset ELC had was highly engaged and passionate participants. This co-designed model sets out how those 'neighbours' could have actively engaged in outreach, and deepened their connection and commitment to ELC as an organisation.

	New Neighbour	Buddy	Invitee	Ambassador	Trainer
Months (flexible)	0	3 - 6	6	6	12
					
Experience	I'm <b>inspired</b> to engage in ELC programmes	I <b>enjoy</b> ELC events and welcome new neighbours	I'm <b>excited</b> to represent a cause I'm passionate about	I grow my outreach <b>confidence</b> , with support from ELC	I am <b>supported</b> to take on more responsibility
Key Activities	I'm introduced to the Ambassador model through the <b>induction</b> and <b>volunteer pack</b> . I indicate interest in outreach in the <b>Next Steps</b> form.	I regularly attend <b>social clubs</b>  A staff member asks me to <b>buddy</b> with someone at their first club. I chat to them before and check-in after.	An email thanks me for participation and <b>invites me</b> to be an Ambassador.  I speak to the <b>Outreach Officer</b> about what is required and receive my <b>training pack</b> .	I do my 1st <b>outreach exercise</b> alongside the Outreach Officer, then alone every 6 months  I'm <b>featured</b> on the Ambassador webpage and ELC social media	I accompany a <b>new ambassadors</b> on their first outreach exercises and may take over regular check-ins.
ELC Tasks	<b>Email</b> volunteer pack to all neighbours after induction.  Salesforce <b>tracks</b> those interested in outreach.	<b>Matching</b> regular and new neighbours where a buddy is requested (option is sent out when it is someone's first club).	ELC are notified when neighbour has been engaged for 6 months. If they had indicated an outreach interest, ELC <b>email</b> an invite and if accepted, the pack.	Outreach Officer checks in before/after each outreach and attends first. ELC update Ambassador webpage and <b>share</b> Ambassador stories online.	ELC can work closely with trusted Ambassadors to induct <b>future</b> Ambassadors.

# Ambassador Blueprint Explained

In a nutshell, neighbours would indicate interest in the Induction **Next Steps Form**, then once they'd been attending clubs they would be invited to **buddy up** with a newbie at their first club. The Buddy System would be a whole new layer of support offered, based on an idea that emerged in the codesign workshop.

**At 6 months** neighbours would be invited to be an Ambassador and receive a training pack, e-certificate (something for the CV) and a badge – all of which builds a sense of belonging to encourage commitment.

Ambassadors would have been **upskilled** to conduct outreach activities. This may have included something as simple as sitting in a cafe – compensated with a free lunch – attracting people with an engagement board and sharing their experiences of ELC.

As an optional extra step, experienced Ambassadors could have **trained** and supported new Ambassadors to increase capacity even further.

The Blueprint could have been displayed:

- On the website
- In induction packs
- Emailed out to engaged neighbours.



# Business Ambassadors: the idea

The idea involved capitalising on the many businesses ELC had work with / that supported the organisation, through developing a formalised Ambassador process. The goal would have been to support local businesses to refer neighbours, providing more streamlined referral routes.

## Local businesses could have:

- Gained new income through ELC social club customers
- Increased their brand visibility
- Helped improve the lives of local people
- Invested in a model shown to reduce loneliness – meeting CSR goals
- Improved employee and customer wellbeing
- Improved brand and values identity

## ELC activity to make this work:

- Visiting local businesses to talk about ELC and give them flyers (was already happening)
- Social media / website shoutouts
- Hosting a social club at the business up to and not beyond the £40 budget



# Business Ambassador Blueprint

	Introducing	Partnering	Referring	Championing
Business activity	Business understands the goals of ELC and is interested to consider partnership	Business is excited about the Ambassador model and agrees to work together	Business makes 10 referrals. Referrals are made through: chatting to regulars, putting up flyers/posters, making a direct referral on someone's behalf	Business makes 20 referrals and becomes an ELC AMBASSADOR
Benefits for businesses	Becoming part of reducing loneliness, benefiting wellbeing of customers and meeting CSR goals	Shoutout on social media	Income through 1 ELC social club at your business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income through an ELC social club at your business</li> <li>Visibility on the ELC website</li> <li>Customers are aware you're a company that cares</li> </ul>
ELC support / engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team identifies and reaches out to businesses (eg in-person visit)</li> <li>Business gets information on ELC and ambassador model eg ELC present to the business team EG at a team meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business receives ambassador pack</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ELC organise a social club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ELC organise regular social clubs and agree promotional messaging on website / social media</li> </ul>
Tools / materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ambassador blueprint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ambassador pack including flyers, ideas and contact details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where did you hear about us dropdown with business names added (or asked in initial phone call)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[OPTIONAL] Certificate to frame, and added to a webpage section</li> </ul>



# Design Goal #2

Discover



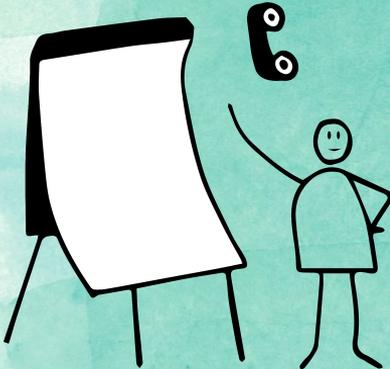
Define



Design



Deliver



Forefront support

# Warm Welcomes

One asset ELC had was highly engaged and passionate participants. This co-designed model sets out how those 'neighbours' can actively engage in outreach, and deepen their connection and commitment to ELC as an organisation.

Addressing challenges - Making you feel comfortable - Prioritising inclusivity

## Induction ◉ Your First Club ◉ Subsequent Clubs



# Design Goal #3

Discover



Define



Design



Deliver



Spark connections

# Chatter Matters

## Conversation Cards Across Ages

**What?** Chatter Matters is an idea for a card deck to support people across generations and backgrounds to enjoy asking and answering questions in a safe way. Neighbours can choose from 11 thematic topics, and colour-coding allows people to keep questions light hearted or dig deeper.

**How?** I began with a set of 5 design principles, such as 'positive' (*questions don't focus on what's been lost*) and 'accessible' (*don't assume any previous experiences*). I then crowdsourced what types of topics people would like to discuss or avoid. Opinions differed strongly, so variety and choice was key. I made a giant, editable paper prototype for the workshop, but I also got feedback through testing that has taken place through one-to-one friendships, and in the induction. Examples of feedback included a need for upfront instructions about the process of choosing cards, and that I should take out questions which encourage people to share opinions, and instead focus on more open, experiential questions.

**Why?** The discovery phase made it clear that activities are critical for breaking ice, and support for making conversation is valued. These cards won't be for everyone. Some people will much prefer a natural conversation to flow. But for many struggling, to know what to say is a major barrier to engagement and, crucially, re-engagement.



# Chatter Matters

## Design Principles



**Equal:** genuinely interesting for both parties / all ages.



**Positive:** avoiding a focus on the past and what has been lost.



**Accessible:** Easy to understand and read aloud.



**Varied:** A mix of lighter / deeper questions and topics to choose from.



**Open:** designed to spark ongoing conversation.



# Chatter Matters

## Conversation Cards Across Ages

*“I tend to avoid the clubs that are not around an activity... it can be very difficult to keep conversation going”*

*“I’d love to discuss relationships and politics as peers”*

### Here & Now



What animals do you see, or birds do you hear, near where you live?



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### Food & Drink



Can you tell me about a meal or flavour that is particularly meaningful to you?



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### Social Affairs

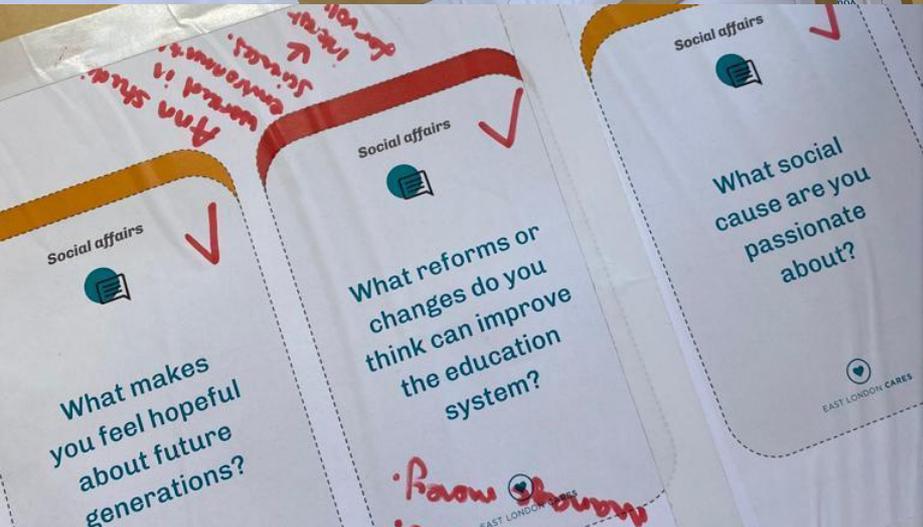


What gives you hope about future generations?



EAST LONDON CARES





“The cards were really successful with many neighbours talking about them at future clubs”

“Accessible, fun, leading to quite rich discussion”

“Politics can be risky, but it was fascinating discussing this with Tony.”

“I liked the varying colours...you can choose what you're drawn to”

“They're an inclusive ice-breaker. They don't assume any experiences”

“I always go back to the same boring questions - these took us outside the box”



# Summary

Discover



Define



Design



Deliver



This document tells the story of this collaborative project, including key insights which emerged, and the new designs and recommendations co-created to **foster more intergenerational connection** in East London and beyond. On the following pages you can find a **visual summary** of the activities, goals and outputs.

The Cares Family ceased to operate from November 2023, just after **implementation** of these tools and recommendations had begun.

We share the work in an effort to keep the learning alive and accessible.

For more information about The Cares Family legacy visit <https://www.thecaresfamily.org.uk/>

## Culture

## Outreach

## Onboarding

## Connecting

## Championing

### Objective

Support the cultivation of a culture which promotes and nurtures social connection across ages and backgrounds.

Identify and attract neighbours who would benefit from ELC, securing a consistent stream of appropriate referrals.

Welcome and inspire new members in a safe environment, whilst assessing suitability and offsetting potential risks.

Spark and deepen genuine connection amongst neighbours.

Inspire and support neighbours to champion East London Care's programmes and values.

### Neighbour Experience



### New Tools & Approaches

Collection of postcards & mapping of high risk areas

Street outreach, pop ups & targeted partnerships

Warm Welcomes system including Buddying

Chatter Matters conversation cards

Business & neighbour Ambassador models

# Other Ideas & Recommendations

Discover



Define



Design



Deliver



# Other ideas & recommendations:

## Social club logistics

- Though ELC was mindful not to publish locations online for safeguarding reasons, neighbours requested more specific **location information** on social clubs (where possible) as people were sometimes put off by the vagueness:
  - “Bow is a huge place”
  - “I’m nervous on the bus that I’ll get off at the wrong stop”
- Accessibility
  - Always check **toilet accessibility**
  - **Mix up the timings**, for instance, weekends may work better for younger neighbours
    - “For many younger volunteers like me, our schedules don’t allow much flexibility for going to social clubs during the weekday. I really appreciate it when there are evening and weekend clubs to get involved with”.



# Other ideas & recommendations:

## Recruitment and onboarding

- A social media campaign around common **misconceptions** / myth-busting
- Adding a **LGBTQ+ friendly** symbol onto the website and literature to reassure LGBTQ+ neighbours
- Make **staff support** which is on offer more visible in the literature, so that neighbours are reassured that they won't be without help if issues arise
- Invest in – and where possible, formalise – long-term **relationships** with community leaders within the communities you want to reach
- Consider **partnership** / **sponsorship** e.g. with private companies targeting different generations as well as the voluntary sector
- Include opportunities for participants to **anonymously submit** (and get responses to) **questions** / **concerns** as part of onboarding.



# Other ideas & recommendations:

## Outreach

- Access online groups for people looking for **social opportunities** and consider targeted ads e.g. **Google Ads** – when people search something like ‘friends in London’
- Tap into **existing networks**. Partnerships with community organisations are essential
- **Pop-ups** in post offices, bus stops and other informal spaces
- Use **badges** for visibility and to foster a sense of belonging amongst engaged neighbours
- Host **informational sessions** at local community centers, mosques, synagogues, libraries, and other public places to educate people about the programme and answer questions they may have. This can help to build trust and establish credibility in the community
- Leverage **local media outlets**, such as newspapers and radio stations
- Encourage attendees to invite friends e.g. **‘Bring a friend day’** or give out literature which neighbours can pass on to others
- Consider ways to **celebrate** neighbours who spread the word e.g. a ‘Referrals Leaderboard’



# Other ideas & recommendations:

## Social Clubs

Activities neighbours said they particularly enjoy - and would like more of - include:

- Dancing and music
- Making art
- Touring historical places
- Business visits and hearing about different companies
- “Trying different things. The pedi cycles in Victoria Park was interesting and amusing.”
- Casual meetups: “Just meeting people for a chat”
- Group dog walks.



Although East London Cares and The Cares Family are no longer operational, we hope this study offers useful learning and tips to other individuals and communities across the UK and around the world seeking to foster intergenerational connection.

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For more information about this project,  
contact [savfishel1@gmail.com](mailto:savfishel1@gmail.com)