



eastendlife

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR TOWER HAMLETS PRODUCED BY YOUR COUNCIL

Home and away

The Government-funded Projecting British Muslims project aims to undermine extremism.

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'Best parts of three cultures'

"I think we have the best parts of all cultures – being British, Bangladeshi and Muslim. It's important people know that we're in a country where we can use education to better our lives."

TV PRESENTER KONNIE HUQ

News

Building links with Bangladesh

BY KELLY POWELL

MORE than 200 people packed into the Mile End Park Ecology Pavilion last Tuesday to hear from speakers including former Blue Peter presenter, Konnie Huq.

Konnie – along with other high-profile British Bangladeshis – was in the borough to discuss a recent trip to Bangladesh.

Their visit, part of a Government-funded project, saw them publicise the role of British Muslims in UK society.

The programme, called Projecting British Muslims, aims to build partnerships with young people at home and abroad.

On their return the delegates spent a week in Tower Hamlets, visiting organisations which work to promote community cohesion, to share their experiences.

TV presenter Konnie was clearly inspired by her trip. Speaking to the audience of young people, councillors, business and community representatives, she said: "People in Bangladesh don't really know what life's like for Muslims here since 9/11 and 7/7.

"Lots of people there think everyone's rich and that Muslims aren't allowed to wear headscarves. Our trip was a chance to tackle those misconceptions."

Fellow delegate Tower Hamlets author Rabina Khan added: "At the universities we visited, students asked me if we all live like the characters in the book Brick Lane. I was pleased to tell them no – we're examples of people who have accessed opportunities of living in Britain."

Konnie added: "I think we have the best

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Author Rabina Khan



The five delegates with Cllr Abdal Ullah and young people from the Newsnite project at the meeting in the Ecology Pavilion

parts of all cultures – being British, Bangladeshi and Muslim. It's important people know that we're in a country where we can use education to better our lives."

The delegates had spent the previous week visiting projects in the borough which are funded via Tower Hamlets Council as part of its Preventing Violent Extremism work. Some 28 projects are running locally as part of the programme, which comes under the Government's Prevent scheme.

Lead councillor for a cleaner, safer, greener borough, Abdal Ullah, said: "The work we're doing locally is starting to make a real difference.

"One of our projects, run by local group Al-Isharah, recently translated the Friday prayers at the East London Mosque into British Sign Language. For one lady, this was the first time in 28 years she'd been able to understand what the imam said.

"This kind of inclusiveness is what One Tower Hamlets is all about – no matter what our faith or background is, we can all contribute to making ours a better borough."

The five delegates represented a range of British Bangladeshis – as well as Konnie and Rabina there was Mesba Ahmed, chief executive of community sports organisation London Tigers, Mohammad Bilal Abdullah, director of Ebrahim Community College in Whitechapel, and entrepreneur, Jamal Quayam Khaliq, who owns Taj Stores and Le Taj restaurant.

Among some of the organisations they visited was the Mile End Community Project's lively Newsnite event, where they heard from local youngsters about what it



Konnie Huq and Bold Creative youth champion Rukia Begum review their film using i-flip cameras as part of the Tagmap project

means to be British, Bengali and Muslim.

The weekly sessions, modelled on the BBC's current affairs programme, allow young people to discuss topical issues in open, relaxed debates and always end with a football match.

Speaking to the delegates, the young people shared their own views of life as British Bangladeshis, considering the benefits of living in Britain and their own experiences of visiting Bangladesh.

As part of their discussions, delegates learned about the group's role models, who range from Bill Gates to Banksy, and had a chance to hear them perform freestyle raps.

Earlier in the week innovative youth agency, Bold Creative, hosted a visit from Konnie where she took part in a workshop with ten young girls, as part of a new initiative to build leadership skills.

The girls' opinions were filmed as part of the Tagmap project, a digital mapping tool designed to give young people a video-voice in the UK.

The project combines film making, social networking sites and Google Maps, enabling young people to make and watch films and start conversations about important issues.

Visit www.tagmap.wordpress.com to find out more.



Author Rabina Khan, one of the five delegates