

27 April 2015

Case Study: Community Living Room and Kitchen



Over the last eight months the L8 Living Sustainably project has been hosting a range of pop-up community living rooms and kitchens.

Appearing where people gather - events, sheltered accommodation, churches, community centres, the pop-up living room and kitchen has been attracting local residents to 'heat and eat' together in a warm and welcoming environment.



The idea behind this project is to bring neighbours from across the community together to spend time

together and share a meal, meaning they don't need to pay for heating or to cook food alone at home. This alleviates the pressure on those struggling with fuel and food poverty, often having to choose between heating or eating or neither.

Taking a clear and simple approach is effective. Anyone and everyone is invited to come and spend time with us, to receive information empowering them to make changes so they can become more energy and food secure.



Ray Oldenburg, an urban sociologist from New York has developed the concept of the 'Third Place'. He sets out the ideal characteristics of such a hub and these inspired our design for the community living room and kitchen format.

'Third places' are free or inexpensive with food and drink provided, that they are highly accessible for many, within walking distance for target attendees. Gatherings involve regulars, those who habitually congregate there and can offer a warm welcome to newcomers. The space operates as a social leveller and conversation is the main activity, avoiding wifi and computers, with activities involving cooperation such as cooking and crafts.

27 April 2015



It is important that venues are ‘characteristically wholesome’, the inside of a ‘third place’ should be without extravagance or grandiosity, and should have a homely feel and be culturally neutral or multi-cultural, which is vital for the L8 community. The aim is that users of ‘third places’ will often have the same feelings of warmth, possession, and belonging as they would in their own homes. They feel a piece of themselves is rooted there, leading to community ownership of the space, which is ‘small, local, open and connected’.



There are examples across the world of ‘third places’ being created. An old library has been rejuvenated into a community learning space in New Hampshire, an old shop offers a place to relax with others in Rotterdam and a revolving kitchen exists in Liverpool.

A combination of these three projects has resulted in the creation of the L8LS community living room and kitchen, a resource tailored for use by the communities in the L8 area which supports and empowers people to take steps to ensure they can keep warm and eat good food.



So how are we doing this?

We’ve run workshops in the community living room where attendees make hot water bottle covers from old jumpers, draught excluders from old tights, and learn to knit and crochet as well as how to DIY draught-proof their own homes on a budget. We also give out tips and easy guides to becoming more energy efficient in your own home as well as contacts for collective switching and further information helplines and advice.

At the same time one of the project’s volunteer chefs serves up a warming pan of soup, made using ingredients sourced in the L8 Superstore, a local affordable supermarket. Attendees can also take part in the cooking and leave with a recipe for the soup as well as seeds and guidance on how to grow the vegetable and herb ingredients – which is often all that’s in it!

An unintended, yet incredibly valuable and powerful, consequence of this work is that it

27 April 2015

can contribute to **combatting social isolation** in the area.

Between 1996 and 2012, in the 45 to 64 age group, the number of people living alone increased by 53% between 1996 and 2012 (the biggest change in any age group). This is partly due to the increasing population aged 45 to 64 in the UK over this period, as the 1960s baby boom generation started to enter this age group.



The increase in those living alone also coincides with a decrease in the percentage of those in this age group who are married (from 79% in 1996 to 69% in 2012), and a rise in the percentage of those aged 45 to 64 who have never married, or are divorced (from 16% in 1996 to 28% in 2012).



Nationally there were nearly 2 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2012, a figure which has grown steadily but significantly from 1.6 million in 1996. Community spaces provide a neutral levelling environment where parents can share experiences with others, they can provide the wider support network that would usually come from living near to extended family members.

In the **L8 area**, Princes Park ward has the highest proportion of one person households of all Liverpool wards (56.2%). Furthermore, the numbers of families living in Princes Park (both with and without children) is low. In Riverside 45.9% of households contain a single person only, which is also high for Liverpool. In both wards one household in ten consist of a pensioner living alone.

27 April 2015



People love coming along and being a part of the living room and kitchen project.

Last Autumn the Great British Bake Off TV series pulled in an average of 12.3 million viewers across the series. More than three fifths of adults have baked at home at least once this year, compared with only a third in 2011 - a quarter now do so once a week.

Getting involved in cooking, and doing it in partnership with others, is becoming increasingly popular. In addition, preparing food with others boasts benefits for community cohesion and resilience building, enabling neighbours to forge connections and get to know the skills and talents of those who live near them.

This strengthens our imperative to continue this work, as struggling with fuel and food poverty is something no-one should face alone.

However, **the challenge is great.** In 2012, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at around 2.28 million, overapproximately 10.4 per cent of all English households.

In L8, there is an above average number of houses lacking central heating and we've met many home owners, living alone, who simply can't afford to make this change to their homes. 20% of households are in fuel poverty compared with the England average of 14.6%. and 100% of the households are located in health deprivation 'hotspots' 100.0% compared to the England average of 19.6%.

The community living room and kitchen can help assist households out of fuel and food poverty and goes some way to improving the wellbeing of people local to the L8LS project.



However, in BME communities the pub is often not the hub anyway and Princes Park has the highest BME population in Liverpool (51.2%) while in Riverside 20.4% of the population is BME.

The closure of many natural third spaces – pubs, SureStart centres, libraries, community anchors – has resulted in fewer opportunities to discuss topical issues. But this is also an opportunity for the Community Living Room.