

## East London Voices, Sutton House

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### Short description of the project

Former Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) London - Westley Kerr - announced East London Voices as the successor project to the esteemed three year HLF-funded, London Voices project. London Voices successfully increased the capacity of four of London's National Trust properties to involve local families. Now its fifth year, East London Voices project continues to build Sutton House's capacity to creatively involve families in the running of the oldest domestic dwelling in East London.



Families getting involved at Sutton House © National Trust

The project has been made possible through established partnerships with four local schools, School Home Support children's charity, family learning tutors and artists. For a number of years the project has been funded by Hackney Learning Trust. East London Voices welcomes families already engaged with specialist practitioners from School Home Support each spring and summer term for 6 to 8 sessions which usually last a couple of hours.

School Home Support and the schools have established and trusting relationships with the families and so are exceptionally good at encouraging about fifteen new families to visit Sutton House each term, many for the first time. As well as this, many families' curiosity about this 500 year old house next door makes East London Voices really compelling.

Each term the partner organisations review family suggestions, look at their priorities for the term ahead and develop creative sessions that link to the history of Sutton House. The families usually spend half their time discovering something playful and compelling and spend the second half creatively responding to what they have found out about together. Over the course of the term, as their understanding and a passion for Sutton House grows, their work contributes towards temporary or permanent family interpretation. This has taken the form of pop-up books, films, tea parties and play features for the new garden opening August 2014.

## What would have happened without this project?

### **Interpretation**

Without East London Voices Sutton House would have been less engaging for families because participants have actively contributed to semi-permanent interpretation and activities for family events such as a film, trail and Alice in Wonderland style tea party.

### **Consultation**

The project meant that the voices of families using Sutton House regularly were heard in the consultation stages of the development of the new car breaker's yard themed garden at Sutton House. Without these, the new garden would not have been as family friendly.

### **Personal skills**

Without the project the children's interpersonal skills would not have developed: "The children by the end of the sessions have gained a lot more confidence and are able to work alongside other children as well as their parents." Miram Patel, Millfield's Primary.

### **Involvement**

Without the project there would have been less involvement from harder to reach families.

## What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

Over the last five years, East London Voices families have contributed as:

1. Consultants for interpretation and events
2. Consultants for the new garden – the 'Breakers Yard'
3. Ambassadors within the local community
4. Family volunteers designing and delivering workshops
5. Stewards of Sutton House

### **Strategic partners**

"Families have been able to achieve their targets inspired by this unique and relaxed environment, learning together and with the fun and playful approach towards learning through the arts. Some families have progressed to volunteer roles at the

school and in the community or to continue their learning” School Home Support Service Delivery Manager.

### **What were the main lessons learnt or challenges overcome?**

In order to weather changes – both internal and external – National Trust staff working at Sutton House have learnt that a clear and simple structure which can adapt to changing circumstances is essential. The facility to adapt the project to participant and organisational needs over time ensures that the project stays mutually beneficial. The on-going mutual benefits, positive outcomes and feedback also encourage partners to sustain commitment and resources when there are competing priorities.

### **What is the future of the project?**

Short term plans include developing more partnerships with playful specialists such as the literacy organisation Hackney Pirates, and using the new outdoor space, Breaker’s Yard. This will vastly increase the potential of the project to appeal to families and ensure the output such as family interpretation and events stay fresh and inspired. Sharing best practise amongst National Trust, Family Learning and Cultural sector networks has also nourished the project as well as improving practice more broadly.

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