

# Who is my Neighbour?

“Who is my neighbour?” someone asked centuries ago. An old question, but one with striking resonance today. Neighbours are not so much defined by geographic proximity, as those to whom we show mercy, or seek to help and even love, not for personal gain, but for their benefit. We must have the heart of a neighbour to see and help a neighbour. “Who is my neighbour?” should perhaps be “To whom can I be a neighbour?”

## Neighbours4U



is a project managed by **Hope in the Community Ltd.** Primarily operating in the Thames Gateway areas of Medway and North Kent, its aim is to assist residents in implementing regeneration and renewal projects. Its belief is that residents are the best people to control the regeneration of their neighbourhoods. The project links residents in neighbourhoods that have been through the process of regeneration with those starting out, allowing them to share successful experiences and to encourage and inspire other residents to become involved.

Neighbours4U is a “Guide Neighbourhood” (GN) within the national Guide Neighbourhoods Programme (GNP), funded by DCLG as part of the Governments’ “Together We Can” initiative. The GNP is managed by Regenerate, a project of Housing Justice. Its tag line says it all: “by Residents, for Residents”. Launched at the end of 2004, it now comprises 15 GNs.

There are resident-led groups across the country with experience and success in delivering exemplar community projects, shaping the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods. The GNP brings these together with other resident-led projects that would benefit from such expertise and support.

Current funding ends in March 2007, but already local authorities and development agencies are seeing the benefits of resident-led regeneration. Long-term regeneration will need to build on this success, but will need funding.

Neighbours4U employs a Community Development Worker, Kevin Jennings, to act as mentor to residents who become involved in the programme. It uses experienced trainers to deliver courses on community development as well as running seminars on relevant topics. By facilitating networking between residents and sharing experience and best practice, Neighbours4U provides ongoing support. It arranges and funds visits to and from other GN projects, hosted by experienced Resident Guides who have “got the T-shirt”. The GNP also operates a grants programme, awarding seed-corn grants up to £10,000.

Neighbours4U, unlike most other GNs, is not focused on one community or estate. It spreads expertise across a range of resident-led projects.

Kevin believes the GNP is removing barriers to effective networking. “Networking has been quite patchy in the past, usually going through well-established organisations when what is needed by new projects is access to someone closer to the coalface - who has recently done what they are trying to do”. He hopes Neighbours4U will catalyse the empowerment of residents. He cites the isolated village of Grain where a chapel is now also a community centre



“The focus in the Thames Gateway is on new build, and existing neighbourhoods’ needs may easily be overlooked. But we can show how residents in established communities such as Grain have developed much-needed facilities.”

Neighbours4U already supports several projects. Their variety is astounding, but each seeks to benefit its neighbours and each has a story to tell of how Neighbours4U and Hope in the Community have provided efficient, effective and timely support. A few examples illustrate this:

- Activities Programme Service for Adults with Learning Disabilities
  - A venture set up to develop programmes tailored to the individual needs of participants and carers. The project is operational, stimulating much interest from the private and statutory sectors. Neighbours4U provided funding, initial set-up support and training.
- Hope Street Centre
  - An underused church building is being extensively redeveloped to create a multi-functional community-centred facility to enrich a deprived community. The £1½m programme is in progress, with project management, training and funding support provided by Hope in the Community and Neighbours4U.



- Friends of Hillyfields
  - Residents close to a recently refurbished park have joined together to continue improving the area, to promote the park, and to create community cohesion. The park is being further developed and the group intends to provide a “park watch” scheme to help maintain its beauty. Neighbours4U is providing support and advice on establishing the group as a constituted body, and has awarded a seed-corn grant.

Neighbours4U is creating a resource library for use by associated projects. It contains a range of reference material and equipment to assist in furthering their aims. Hope in the Community has established a training and conference centre and offices at Northfleet. The centre will be available to associated projects at a reasonable cost and is in the heart of the Thames Gateway area.

**For further information,** visit [www.neighbours4U.net](http://www.neighbours4U.net) or email Kevin Jennings, at [kevin.jennings@hitc.org.uk](mailto:kevin.jennings@hitc.org.uk) Links to further information about the national programme are available on the web site.