Angels in Wanstead

Diana Korchien

In the 17th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Diana Korchien



"I don't feel much like an angel," said Diana as we met at Leytonstone's All You Read Is Love for a coffee and chat. This from a woman who has successfully brought up two girls, moved to Wanstead in 1987, was a picture editor and trade magazine editor, press officer and campaigner, who is still integral to the Seeds for Snaresbrook project, who has participated in Transition Leytonstone, is co-coordinator of the Wanstead and Woodford Friends of the Earth, runs a regular stall at the Wanstead farmers' market, sacrificed birthday celebrations when she stood for the local Green Party in a very Tory constituency, where she got more votes than the national average, created a calendar of climate change, vital for unlocking the doors to widespread environmental networking which is much needed and for which she is looking for a publisher, and supports a campaign to help schools save money through solar power. Angel or not, there's no doubt she has done huge good for the community.

She shares the coordinator position with Ann Williams (read next month's *Wanstead Village Directory* to find out more about her), having, she says, become a 'serious serial activist' in 2009 when she offered to assist in Transition Leytonstone (a community initiative that aims to make Leytonstone the best and most sustainable place to be). The group is still a force today and she's still in it.

One of those people who lives just the other side of the borough borders, Diana started attending the Wanstead and Woodford Friends of the Earth because the Waltham Forest one kept on closing and reforming. She became co-coordinator in May 2010 and Ann Williams joined her in 2011, so they've shared the work for a good few years. In that time they've been given two Earth Movers Awards (which recognise people who have made a real and genuine difference to other peoples' lives through working with environmental issues) and were runners up for the Friends of the Earth's Group of the Year, making it to the final in 2012. When they won the top prize for the Earth Movers Awards Diana went to Castelton, Derbyshire to receive it at the annual Friends of the Earth Base Camp (they don't call it a conference or meeting).

In 2013, Diana and Ann successfully applied for an Olympic Legacy grant for their Seeds for Snaresbrook project. Diana laughs when she recalls that it took four months for the decision to be made, at which point it was almost too late to get the seeds out for when they had intended. Seeds for Snaresbrook is a community project and the original idea was that residents and shopkeepers would get involved in seeding tree pits with wildflowers, each taking maybe one location of the roughly 1,200 in the area. This would increase the bee population, give them more forage and be attractive too. They didn't intend to seed all the pits themselves, but in the end, that was what happened.

Diana attributes the success of the group to the good working relationship between both co-ordinators, saying neither of them could have done it single handed. The collaboration allows both to work to their strengths as Diana tells me: "What I do is collaborate with others. I don't believe you can do what you're best at on your own. I am best at networking, putting across the ideas and because of what I believe in I can't help but be involved in sustainability groups."

It's not surprising that both Diana and Ann are feeling tired. While I can't imagine either of them stopping their campaigning, as promised last year they are standing down from co-coordinating the Wanstead and Woodford Friends of the Earth. They're working hard on recruiting new members, on setting up a transition that will keep the group healthy and are hoping that more people – particularly young ones – will join.

Diana said: "Green issues are my passion. I try not to bore people but know I bore my husband. I didn't used to be political because it seemed like too much hard work. It is hard, but if you're ready for it, it's like a party." They meet on the third Thursday of every month at The Nightingale pub. If you're interested in green issues, why not go along.

For more information on Wanstead and Woodford Friends of the Earth, visit **foe.co.uk/wanstead**

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