



Device advice: Screen assistance in a friendly atmosphere at the Five Bells Computer Club.

Tea and tech down the pub

By David Gritten

From the outside, the Five Bells on East End Road has the appearance of merely an agreeable East Finchley pub. But step inside at a given time on a given day – Tuesday afternoons are particularly worthwhile – and the Five Bells turns out to be full of surprises.

Most of its customers are of a certain age: no surprise there. But there's a twist: they are visiting because of the support and options not always available to them. The Five Bells can now boast a team of volunteers, mostly senior citizens themselves, who help older people tackle skills that were hitherto new to them: on the internet, on laptops, smartphones and tablets. And the help they offer is free.

How it began

All this has been gladly received and appreciated. The original initiative began in 2016, with a project known as East Finchley Altogether Better. Its aim was to combat loneliness among older people, encouraging neighbours to get to know each other, and hopefully share common interests.

Happily, it has worked:

customers started visiting the Five Bells to explain what help they needed and were matched with relevant skills. And for years the pub's goodwill has given them a place to meet.

Onward and upward

Last October, the club was able to repay some of that goodwill after being awarded some National Lottery funding, enabling the Five Bells to pay for a Zoom subscription, internet access and printed flyers, among other useful upgrades.

Now members bring in their own devices and request assistance from Five Bells volunteers. Refreshments are made readily available and they have proved to be a useful means for members to socialise.

For her part, Toni Koppel, who is the computer club's co-

ordinator, completely understands why the Five Bells is such a success: "A lot of people live on their own. So the social aspect is really important. There's a reason for people to come together."

The Five Bells Computer Club meets on Tuesdays from 2-4pm. For more information, visit five-bells-computer-club.mailchimpsites.com.

The pandemic that no one is talking about

Students at the Archer Academy in East Finchley have set up a group to help people in the area who may be suffering from hygiene poverty. Here **Susana Rio**, one of the students, explains why it's being called a silent pandemic.

Imagine struggling to wash your hair because you cannot afford shampoo. Imagine feeling you have to skip school because you cannot afford soap to keep clean, or detergent to wash your uniform. For many, this requires no imagination; each day they face these unfortunate and dehumanising struggles.

In this country it is estimated that 3.3 million people are experiencing hygiene poverty and are unable to buy essentials like toothpaste and sanitary products, items that most of us take for granted and cannot fathom a life without. Hygiene poverty can leave people caught between paying their rent and being clean.

Anxiety and shame

Despite being a horrifying issue in our society, it isn't widely publicised or discussed in the media. It's a clandestine problem, seemingly invisible due to the shame that shrouds those dealing with it. Not only does it demolish their confidence and ability to enjoy life, the embarrassment that comes with hygiene poverty is almost unavoidable.

Fifty per cent of people who experience hygiene poverty stated they felt anxious and ashamed as a result of going without basic toiletries and a third of people said they felt lonely and isolated. One person stated: "I used to go out, see my friends, but I got anxious about the way I looked and smelt, so I became a recluse."



We are The Hygiene Project

We're a group of 15-16 year olds at the Archer Academy who have created a group with the purpose of helping this issue in our community. Our focus is on spreading awareness in order to help those who suffer from it to receive help and feel less alone, and to encourage action amongst those who can act.

We are also working with Finchley Foodbank to collect donations of hygiene products from students at our school. Fundamentally, hygiene poverty is a silent issue. It carries with it deep shame and it manifests in feelings of inadequacy and disgust. We want, at a basic level, for this to be seen and dealt with, to help end the silent suffering.

Katayoon's fighting spirit



East Finchley student **Katayoon Negahbani** is proving to be a big-hitter in the martial art of Taekwondo. Katayoon, a 13-year-old student at the Archer Academy, is a yellow belt in the sport and recently won two gold medals by beating two 14 and 15-year-old boys, both black belts. Her next tournament will be in Camden at the end of this month against teenage contestants from Greece and Turkey.

Left: Medal winner: Katayoon Negahbani

Join your
community
in **supporting**
your local hospice.

BIG
FUN WALK
2023

Sunday 21 May

- 8.5 mile walk East Finchley to Westminster
- London's most beautiful parks and stunning views
- Free lunch, refreshments and a goody bag

The start line is located next to The Cherry Tree Café

Pricing for adults £18, under 16 £13, and under 5s go free.

Register at bigfunwalk.co.uk

**North
London
Hospice**

