

# Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

## Newsletter

November 2006

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Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGTO) is an independent voluntary organisation representing and promoting the needs and rights of tenants and residents associations (TRA's) throughout the London Borough of Southwark.

One of the main aims of SGTO is to provide help, assistance and resources to existing TRA's and support the formation of new, tenants and residents groups. If you do not belong to a TRA and would like to get involved, or would like further information on how to get involved, **please get in touch with us!**

### Southwark Alliance

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**In East Dulwich, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding has transformed a Tenant Hall into a thriving Community Centre. This surely could be a model for other Tenant Halls in the Borough. [ADD Picture](#)**

The Council designated East Dulwich as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area and Nancy Wells, a Community Worker, has been working on the East Dulwich estate for about 18 months. When she started the tenants had mistrust of the Council but still a majority of them wanted things to happen. Half a million pounds was available to be spent over one year and the Council produced a delivery plan which was agreed with the T&RA, giving tenants some control. The aim was to bring services together in the one building and for local community groups to be set up and supported.

A number of events were held which brought the Community Centre alive again – for under fives, health awareness, a lunch group – and there was also investment in a toy library and in an IT suite. One year on and the T&RA is developing a business plan with consultancy support from Lorraine Hart (Environment Trust) – also paid for from Neighbourhood Renewal. The intention is to set up a Trust to run the refurbished Community Centre. Nancy is now working with Besamer Grange T&RA in their new Tenant Hall at Denmark Hill. An early achievement has been the setting up of a parent and toddler group. Nancy is thinking of working on Lordship Lane and we have connected her with Jackie Porter. Nancy says “T&RA's need to grab me and tell me exactly what they want”. She hopes her innovative work with tenant halls could spread to other parts of the borough.

Nancy as a Community Worker has been funded throughout the period by the Neighbourhood Renewal part of Southwark Alliance (SA)

The Southwark Alliance (SA) is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Southwark. Established in 2001, it works with others [What?] to shape service provision and strengthen local communities. The Alliance plays a crucial role in driving improvements across the whole borough. Through its neighbourhood renewal strategy, it allocates funds to revitalise less well-off neighbourhoods.

More information about the SA can be found at [southwarkalliance.org.uk](http://southwarkalliance.org.uk)  
Contact Steve Tennison, Partnership Manager on 020 7525 7557  
Email: [lsp.co-ordinator@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:lsp.co-ordinator@southwark.gov.uk)

# Assessing the needs and concerns of BME Tenants in Southwark

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SGTO has launched a borough wide initiative with BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) tenants. The project is running in accordance with guidelines set down in the **Vision\*** for **Tenant Involvement**, Charter, which states that SGTO, must include "a self-managing branch/section or wing to address the needs and concerns for BME communities and to work in partnership with the Council".

This month, we started by interviewing five active residents of the Borough, asking them about their concerns and their ideas on issues such as representation and access to resources.

**In the following weeks, SGTO will be organizing, focus groups on your Estate, with the close involvement of BME residents & community organisations.** SGTO will be using the findings of the "*Empowering communities, improving housing: Involving black and minority ethnic tenants and communities*" Guide produced by a research team at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham.

SGTO believes this guide is an important contribution and a useful tool as it draws on "eighteen months research including surveys of local authorities and new landlord organisations, workshop discussions with independent tenant advisers, housing and tenant involvement staff in different parts of the country."

\*The Vision is a legally binding document endorsed by both Southwark Council and the Tenants Council in June 2004

**If you want to help us organising a focus Group with BME on your Estate, we would like to hear from you! Please contact us on 0207 639 6718.**

## Ola Adeluala is the Chair of ASCO TRA

**Ola is a British national of Nigerian origin.**

She has been living in Southwark borough for the past 10 years and has been involved in her TRA for 3 years. "The Council has neglected the Estate." she told us.

"We are not getting the support we need from them. We used to attend training provided by the Council without any problems, but now we ourselves have to deal with transport costs and child care so we can no longer attend these training courses." In addition, Ola believes that because issues such as parking and anti-social behaviour still continue to plague the Estate, tenants and residents' believe that their complaints and grievances are going ignored and as a result see meetings as a "waste of time".

Ola said that housing problems affect everyone in the Estate and were not exclusive to BME. "Some elderly white women – between 70 and 85 years old – came to complain to me the other day about their accommodation and told me they wanted to move away. The lift in the tower block is broken and as they are old they have difficulties walking, and psychologically it's affecting them a lot. Housing disadvantages is a problem for everyone, whether you are black or white"

Ola is grateful for the support she received from SGTO Tenant Resource Centre at Bells Gardens. "SGTO have always rescued us" she said, and "we just hope the Council could support us better in the future".

## Assessing the needs and concerns of BME Tenants in Southwark

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### Thalia Brown is a Committee member of Urwin & Friary TRA

Thalia is a British citizen of Ghanaian descent and is also involved in TMO (Tenant Management Organisation).

She has resided in Southwark for 15 years and joined Unwin & Friary TRA 5 years ago. "I attended an AGM meeting organised by my TRA and at that moment I understood that the TRA belongs to all tenants and not only to the few, so everyone in the Estate could get involved and make a difference." Thalia's main concern is about youth involvement: "we have an issue with drugs in the Estate and if we don't work with young people, and don't understand how to handle them, then it's going to be hard to solve this issue. We also need a few wardens in the Estate because many problems come from outside."

Unwin & Friary TRA will be organising a lively and all-inclusive Christmas lunch for Estate tenants of all age groups, cultures and religions. Come and join them!

ADD PICTURE

### Jackie Porter is a member of Lordship Lane & Melford Court TRA

"I used to be the Treasurer, then became the Assistant Chair, but now I am just a member of the TRA because of other commitments, and it's nice to give other people a chance"

**Jackie was born in British Guyana and arrived in England in November 1968.** She has lived in Southwark since 1988, and joined her TRA as soon as she arrived. "There were not many Black people in the meetings at that time but it has since changed. The more people that join the TRA means more recognition for the Estate and that's why I joined." Jackie believed that Southwark Council "is still not offering Black and minorities a decent choice of housing" and doesn't properly recognise the disadvantages specifically affecting minorities in the Borough.



She doesn't believe SGTO can be an important player representing BME in the Borough but welcomes SGTO's initiative of organising a focus group meeting in some Estates with BME tenants. A key to improving the involvement of BME tenants, she believes, is "to offer child care and transport arrangements during meetings."

### Patrick Yorke is the Chair of New Camden TRA

**Patrick is of Ghanaian descent.** He has been living in Southwark for 17 years and has been involved in his TRA since 1999. As a BME tenant, Patrick believes that "there should be total involvement and participation of BME in all Community programmes." Control of the programmes should not be in the hands of a few people, but "should be fully shared by all groups from all ethnic background."

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### Navy Choudhury is the Vice-Chair Lady of the Bengali Women's Group

Navy, of Bangladeshi origin, arrived in the UK aged 3, and ever since has lived in the Borough of Southwark. Navy has been involved in the Bengali Women's Group for 5 years and is also a member of the Bengali Women's Health Project.



"I had a child and lots of free time on my hands. I thought that working in a community organisation would be most valuable use of my time. There are urgent needs and I really wanted to give something back to the community."

Navy believed that the Bengali and Muslim communities are often under-

represented in local communities groups and at Council meetings because of a series of obstacles to "overcome". "The first one is the language barrier and although the Council have been improving translation and interpretation services, there is still not adequate provision at council and local meetings. A general lack confidence is apparent with many people in our community fearing they are not articulate enough when dealing with housing issues. It holds them back in attending meetings and dealing with people from diverse cultural and social background."

Navy welcomes the SGTO initiative to organise focus groups with BME tenants throughout the Borough of Southwark. Key to making tenant participation successful, she believes, is that "meetings should be small workshops and organised during daytime because it's more appropriate for family life" and that interpretation, "child care facilities ... and transport costs should also be covered."

## Tenant Resource Centre

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### Visit the Tenant Resource Centre at Bells Gardens Community Centre

Free access to computers (Internet, Word, Excel, Publisher, Power Point)

And low cost photocopying/ printing

### We want to hear from you!

If you like us to advertise an event your TRA or local community group is holding, or if you have a vacancy you wish your tenants to know about, please contact us at the Office.

For general feedback on the Newsletter, please contact Naima at [executive2@sgto.co.uk](mailto:executive2@sgto.co.uk)



### Come and Visit!

SGTO, Bells Gardens Community Centre

19 Buller Close, Peckham

London, SE15 6UJ

Tel. 0207 639 6718

Email: [info@sgto.co.uk](mailto:info@sgto.co.uk)

Opening hours:

Tuesday and Friday from 10 am to 2 pm