

YOU ARE IN: ARTS MAKING CONNECTIONS I...

Making connections in Greenwich – How Eltham Arts inspired Pragya Kumar to help bring the community together



CHRISTIAN FISHER ADDED 28TH FEB 2018 0



BEING ABLE TO FEEL LIKE YOU'RE A PART OF YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THESE MODERN TIMES. DESPITE THERE BEING EVEN MORE WAYS TO KEEP IN CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS THROUGH THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA, THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE A REAL CHAT WITH A FRIEND OR A CATCH UP WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE THE SAME INTERESTS. IN FACT A STUDY BY PITTSBURGH UNIVERSITY LAST YEAR CLAIMED THAT FOR MANY, SOCIAL MEDIA COULD EVEN MAKE PEOPLE FEEL LONELIER, *WRITES NICKY SWEETLAND...*

But making friends when you move into a new area can be very difficult; with the busy lives we lead, particularly if the culture we are met by is different from the one we are familiar with.

Pragya Kumar moved to Eltham just over 13 years ago and told me: “To be honest, when I moved here I loved everything about it. I’m from India and when I moved to this country I ended up straight away in Eltham.”

But there was something missing for the artistic Pragya: “When I started off, there wasn’t much in the creative side happening around here and I used to be very frustrated about that.”

After trying a few things in the Blackheath area and doing some research, Pragya – who was working as an Interior Designer in Southwark at the time – found just what she was looking for. “I stumbled upon Eltham Arts,” Pragya enthused, “It’s been amazing since then; we’ve done so much and it’s just fantastic.”

Pragya – who explains that she has always painted and has even exhibited work locally -quickly became part of the team and her local artistic acumen took off from there.

And after having a family made fulltime work more challenging, Pragya decided that putting a bit of art back into the community would also become part of her career. So, after undertaking a course and becoming qualified as a Teaching Assistant, Pragya jumped at the chance and put her skills as an artist into helping local schools. “I designed a few projects for the schools; thinking up a topic and coming up with art projects to go with that project,” Pragya explained.

The projects in the local schools were such a success with the pupils, that after a visit to a local care home Pragya decided to branch out and took on the challenge of providing art classes for the elderly.

“When we got there, they were doing this drawing session with just a couple of bits of paper and pens out and they expected the residents to draw something. I thought it was really boring for them so I decided to make things a bit more exciting.”

But that’s not where her community work finished. Last year along with some likeminded friends, Pragya created a very special community project called Cultural Connections. “We decided to come up with a group, which was about sharing cultural ideas, so either your lifestyle or your festivals, anything; art, textiles. What we usually do is meet up and share some food together; everyone cooks something, and then we pick a topic for that meeting. It could be fabric one day or it could be art, or it could be tourism. So the idea is we are able to talk to each other about first hand information.”

The group have already hosted a ‘Taste of India’ event and recently celebrated Chinese New Year at the Maritime Museum in Greenwich. “It’s been welcomed by the community because everyone likes the idea of it,” Pragya explains, “Until you communicate with the different communities you don’t know the similarities you have.”

And Pragya’s dogmatic approach to building links in the community were also instrumental in the launch of Eltham Arts’ most recent foray; the multimedia Wall Project. The initiative, which is running throughout 2018 and into 2019, aims to bring people in the local community together through art.

Pragya is leading the visual arts aspects of the project and comments, “It’s come along at a really important time in politics; we have so many walls that we are building around us, not just in the political world but socially. In London you have so many communities that have walls between them. People aren’t as strongly bonded as they should be, living in a city like this where you can’t really do without each other.”

If you would like any further information on Cultural Connections you can email info.ccideas@gmail.com and for information on Eltham Arts’ Wall project you can find details on the website www.elthamarts.org

