

St. Hilda's East Newsletter

JANUARY 2026

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year from everyone at St Hilda's East, we hope you've had a lovely festive period.

Thank you for being part of our community and for all the ways you've joined us in our spaces, activities, and programmes.

This newsletter shares a snapshot of what's been happening across our services, as well as a look ahead to the activities and support we'll be offering as the year progresses.

Cadent Centre of Warmth

As a Cadent Centre for Warmth, St Hilda's East provides a safe, welcoming space for anyone in our community who needs it during the colder months. Earlier this year, we were able to report a 163% increase in income maximisation

support, one of the highest rises in the Cadent network. This reflects the growing demand for help with benefits, budgeting, and managing debt.

Our Centre for Warmth can help with:

- Energy debts
- Keeping your home energy efficient
- Gas safety
- Claiming the right benefits

Last month, we hosted our Winter Warmer Extravaganza, welcoming 45 attendees to enjoy warmth, refreshments, and practical support. It was a wonderful chance for people to connect and access the help they need.

We're excited to build on this success with an even bigger festival event soon, offering more activities and opportunities to come together as a community.

Creative Activities

Creativity is a powerful tool for wellbeing, and at St Hilda's East, we're embracing it as a way to connect, express, and grow together.

We're delighted to welcome Zoe Walker as our in-house Creative Facilitator. Zoe will support and develop this creative focus, helping ideas flourish and making creativity accessible to everyone.

Projects have already taken shape, from hands-on clay workshops and still life flower painting to festive fabric Christmas tree activities. These sessions foster connection, learning, and self-expression, helping people feel engaged, confident, and supported.

This year, we'll be launching an even wider range of creative projects across our community groups, exploring nature, fashion, singing, textiles, bookbinding, mask making, ceramics, and much more.



Women's Group

Last year, our Women's group has enjoyed a variety of sessions, from self-care and mental health workshops with Tower Hamlets Talking Therapies to terrarium making. Our women-only activities foster creativity, learning, and friendship, while providing an escape from everyday pressures and a chance to focus on personal wellbeing.

Looking forward, we are excited to welcome the Women in Transition project, run by Hopscotch Women's Centre, to our Tuesday Women & Wellbeing sessions. Starting in February, these sessions will support women through life changes such as menopause, bereavement, parenting, and other transitions. The sessions will include practical workshops, creative activities, emotional support, and contributions from guest facilitators.



Cooking Club

Developing kitchen skills and sharing food with friends is at the heart of this monthly session. Service users follow simple, nutritious, seasonal vegetarian recipes and enjoy the chance to connect with others in Tower Hamlets.

One session in 2025 featured a blind tasting challenge, where a facilitator pre-made a slow-cooked meal and participants had to guess the ingredients to recreate their own versions at home. Attendees also received guidance on energy efficiency and carbon monoxide safety, as part of our work as a Cadent Centre for Warmth. Each participant was provided with a slow cooker to help make cooking easier and safer at home.

The Cooking Club offers a safe, supportive environment to try new skills, build confidence, and enjoy the social atmosphere. Participants report that taking part helps them feel more independent, engaged, and connected to the local community, while also learning practical tips for preparing healthy meals.

Young People's Programmes

Our youth programmes provide young people in Tower Hamlets with opportunities to develop skills, build confidence, and enjoy fun, engaging activities.

Our Brave Girls group continues to offer young girls in Tower Hamlets the chance to take part in supportive weekly sessions that help build wellbeing, confidence, and leadership skills. One participant described the group as a place where “Brave Girls helps you step away from your life and just be you. This makes me feel safe.”

We launched our new Multi-Sports Club in 2025, which includes mixed badminton and girls' football sessions - both of which have proved popular. The club is managed by, Christine, our Children and Young People's Manager, a qualified PE teacher, senior youth worker, and Level 1 Badminton coach.

Our coaches and volunteers hold a range of sports and youth work qualifications and provide strong, positive role models within a safe and supportive environment.

[Find out more](#)

Children are encouraged to take on rotating team captain roles, helping them build leadership, teamwork, and decision-making skills. For those less comfortable in this role, alternative responsibilities such as supporting coaches are offered, ensuring everyone can participate in a way that suits them.

Looking ahead, we will continue to deliver our Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme building on the success of our 2025 summer programme - which provide children eligible for free school meals with creative, sporting, and social activities that help keep them active, engaged, and supported during school breaks.

Early Years

Our Stay & Play sessions offer free, drop-in play opportunities for children under 5 and their parents or carers. These sessions take place every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday morning and give families a safe, welcoming space to relax, play, and explore together.

Children can enjoy a range of stimulating activities such as sharing stories in our reading area, physical play, exploring sensory plants in the garden, and trying new textures through messy play. The sessions support early learning and help children develop key social, physical, and communication skills.

In addition, St Hilda's East provides free, structured access to its sensory room for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), helping to support their social, physical, and sensory development. Earlier this year, four children attended sessions, gaining confidence, improving motor skills, and enjoying inclusive social experiences alongside peers.

The sensory room sessions also strengthened partnerships with local providers, offered specialist training for staff on autism and sensory processing, and introduced a quiet retreat space for children and parents who may feel overwhelmed. This work has built lasting capacity to support families and laid the groundwork for future SEND-focused initiatives.

The early years team at St Hilda's East includes experienced bilingual (Bengali/English) staff and volunteers who offer support to families on a range of parenting topics, including infant feeding, language development, and wellbeing. Whether you're looking for a space to play, meet other families, or support your child's early development, our Stay & Play sessions are open to all.

Over 50s Feeling Good

Our Over 50s Feeling Good programme remains popular, providing older people with a wide range of activities that support physical health, mental wellbeing, and social connection. Participants enjoy sessions such as seated exercise,

dance, dancercise, strength training, Pilates, visual arts workshops, coffee mornings, bingo, and the Men's Social group.

The programme also collaborates with partners such as Sadler's Wells and Historic Royal Palaces to deliver cultural and wellbeing activities that inspire and engage. These sessions give participants the chance to stay active, meet new people, and enjoy shared experiences in a friendly, welcoming environment.

Looking ahead, our Feeling Good programme will include weekly sessions and special activities such as a theatre trip to see Matthew Bourne's *The Red Shoes*, community safety workshops with local police and the London Fire Brigade, and a new weekly darts session at Club Row.



Men's Social Group

Our Men's Social Group provides older men with a safe and supportive space to connect, share experiences, and take part in activities that promote mental and physical wellbeing. Over the past year, the group has enjoyed a variety of trips

together including a historical walk around Shoreditch, Columbia Road, and Brick Lane.

Looking ahead, we are excited to launch our Men's Walking Group, which will be meeting at our Sonali Gardens site. These walks will offer a chance to stay active, enjoy the outdoors, and connect with others in a welcoming and supportive environment.

Sonali Gardens Day Centre

Sonali Gardens Day Centre continues to provide a welcoming and culturally sensitive space for older people in Tower Hamlets. The centre is supported by a team of bilingual Bengali-speaking staff and offers fresh halal meals prepared daily, purpose-built prayer rooms, and facilities designed to meet the needs of the local community.

During the week, attendees can relax in the day rooms, spend time in the garden, and take part in a range of activities including seated exercise, arts sessions, and discussions on news and current affairs. There are also supported opportunities to spend time in the local community, including visits to nearby shops and places such as the city farm.

We were delighted to celebrate Eid in 2025 with 56 Day Centre service users. The event included a welcome from a local Imam, prayers, musical entertainment, and a feast of home-cooked Bangladeshi dishes. Lucy Bingham, Director of St Hilda's East, said: "Events like our Eid celebration are at the heart of what we do, bringing people together, sharing culture, and building a sense of belonging. It was wonderful to see so many smiles and feel the warmth of our community throughout the afternoon."

Attendance at Sonali Gardens Day Centre is via referral only. Referrals are made through Tower Hamlets social services. If you, or someone you know, might benefit from attending, we encourage you to speak with a social worker or contact our team for guidance on the referral process.

LinkAge Plus at Sonali Gardens

LinkAge Plus continues to deliver a wide range of social, physical, and wellbeing activities for older people from our Sonali Gardens site. These include gentle exercise, creative projects, health and nutrition workshops, digital support, and community outings. Intergenerational activities with local schools and colleges also continue, alongside opportunities for peer support and one-to-one guidance.

The LinkAge Plus programme also supports those who are housebound or experiencing isolation through home visits and seasonal treat boxes. Feedback from participants consistently highlights the value of LinkAge Plus as a welcoming service where people can connect, feel supported, and maintain their independence and wellbeing.

Looking ahead, the LinkAge Plus programme will offer a varied programme of regular and upcoming activities:

- **Weekly Digital Support at Sonali Gardens:** New weekly sessions offering help with smartphones, laptops, and developing basic IT skills. These sessions are ideal for anyone who would like support using digital devices.
- **Falls Prevention Course:** An eight-week Falls Prevention course will begin in January, focusing on balance, strength, and confidence. Please contact the LinkAge Plus team for more information.
- **Carrom Board and Board Games:** Every Monday afternoon, participants are invited to join Carrom and board games in a friendly space to socialise and enjoy games together.
- **Line Dancing:** Weekly Line Dancing classes have resumed on Tuesday afternoons at the Tarling Centre. New participants are very welcome.
- **Photo Walk Group:** The Photo Walk Group offers the chance to explore the local area, discover new places, and enjoy being outdoors together.



Advice and Support

Need help with **welfare benefits, housing, debt, or form-filling**? Our Advice service offers free, confidential, and impartial support to local residents. Our team can guide you through options, explain your rights, and help you access the support you need.

Advice is available in person and by phone:

- **Club Row (appointments only):** Monday–Wednesday, 10am–12pm
- **Club Row (drop-in):** Thursday, 10am–12pm
- **Sonali Gardens (drop-in):** Fridays, 10am–12pm
- **Telephone:** 020 7739 8066
- **Email:** mail@sthildas.org.uk

Legal advice is available on Thursdays, 6pm-8pm at Club Row, and Wednesdays, 6pm-8pm at Sonali Gardens, offering support with benefits, employment, housing, or consumer/contract issues (drop-in only).

Our team supported residents in many ways last year, helping people access money they are entitled to and navigate complex systems:

- One older resident was left with a £605 council tax credit after deductions continued following the death of a family member. With no bank account, she could not claim the refund herself. Our team helped set up an online council tax account and arranged for the refund to be paid to a trusted family member, ensuring the full credit was recovered and helping her manage future payments online.
- Another client living in a housing association property was unaware her tenancy was classified as private. Her Universal Credit housing claims were repeatedly rejected, leaving her with significant rent arrears. Our team clarified the tenancy with the housing association, helped submit a corrected claim, and successfully secured **£17,883** in backdated payments, clearing her arrears and covering future housing costs.

These examples highlight how our Advice service can make a real difference, helping people overcome barriers, access vital funds, and feel more confident managing their finances. If you or someone you know could benefit from support, our team is here to help.

[Find out more](#)

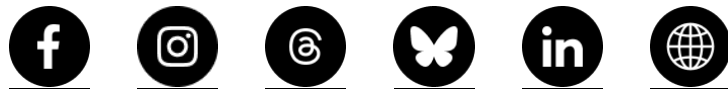
As we make our way through 2026, we are excited to continue growing and improving our services. This includes supporting our runner in the 2026 London Marathon, and making further improvements to our centre following essential roof repairs carried out this year.

Thank you for being part of our journey. Whether as a service user, volunteer, or supporter, your involvement makes everything we do possible.

With warm regards,

Lucy Bingham

Director, St. Hilda's East



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