Fall of the Wall anniversary remembered by Russian émigrés

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This year on Remembrance Sunday, one group of London residents will be recalling an event that has particular significance for them. Members of the Sutton-based Russian Community Association will be commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and marking the start of a research project made possible by a grant of £47,400 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Migrants from countries that were part of the former Soviet Union will come together on November 8 for a series of talks and documentaries, including old Soviet-era propaganda films. They will also be inviting along members of other minority ethnic groups who have had experience of totalitarian regimes before emigrating to the UK.

The events in Berlin in November 1989 symbolised the end of the Cold War and the project wants to capture the stories of people who were living in Britain at the time, or who had experienced life in the Soviet Union before and just after the Wall came down.

Volunteers will interview up to 40 migrants and collect artefacts, photographs and documents to build an archive of personal memories. These will be collected on a new website with participants encouraged to create their own web page about the experience of being an immigrant.

The material collected will also be used to create an exhibition to be mounted at a number of local venues, including Sutton Central Library in April next year. It is hoped that the wealth of information gathered will raise awareness about the significance of an event etched in the memories of older people but seen as remote and unfamiliar to the younger generation.

Commenting for the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: “This project will combine accounts of a pivotal event in world history with the stories of those personally affected by it and its aftermath. It will create a historical resource that also documents the experiences of those who migrated to Britain from the former Soviet bloc.”

For The Russian Community Association, Olga Bastable, said: “This is a unique project, which will help us to re-evaluate the events that happened 20 years ago, and which are still influencing our lives.”

Notes to editors

The Russian Community Association’s purpose is to provide services and support to the Russian-speaking refugees and immigrant community in London. Members of this community have come from the ex-Soviet Union republics including Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, with over £850 million granted in

London alone.

For further information

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