Young people’s history of Ladbroke Grove's 'urban village'

06/02/2013

Kensal House in Ladbroke Grove is a Grade II* listed building designed in 1936 by modernist architect Maxwell Fry working with social reformer Elizabeth Denby.

Now SPID Theatre Company which is based at Kensal House, backed by a £29,300 Young Roots grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), will work with local young people to interview elderly residents and piece together an account of life in and around the estate.

Kensal House, which comprises two blocks, was built as a symbol of progress and hope for the future. The groundbreaking concept incorporated community facilities such as a crèche, canteen and workshops and it was also the country’s first gas-powered housing development. The project’s aim is to look at the impact of the architecture and facilities on the social lives of the community who have lived in its 68 flats.

The young researchers will work with support from the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Twentieth Century Society and North and Central Kensington libraries. They will record interviews with older residents and use the information gathered to create a dramatic performance that will take place on the estate. They will also publish a booklet detailing its history and conduct guided tours around the development for the local community.

The original aim of the designers was to show that an 'urban village' (Fry's words) could be created from scratch, and simultaneously offer people healthier, happier, safer, and more fulfilling lives than those they had known in the slums.

The apartments in Kensal House were relatively spacious and consisted of either two or three bedrooms. Each had two balconies - one for drying washing, and another for relaxation. The blocks were placed on a north-south axis with the bedroom and living rooms on the outside, so ensuring that both benefited from sunlight during the day.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "This project will span generations by giving the young researchers glimpses of life in previous decades. It will provide them with new skills and also illustrate how design and the built environment can have a positive social effect."

For SPID Theatre Company, Project Leaders Mariana Sastre and Nnenna Samson, said: "This project will provide a unique opportunity for everyone in our community to both share their memories and also discover the forgotten histories of an incredible local building. Recording the lives of local residents past and present, as well as documenting the process, will form a strong project legacy so that everyone who takes part will be remembered for generations to come."

Kensal Youth Theatre member, Lakeisha, said: "I love the idea of the project and would like to be involved mainly because the thought of leaving a legacy and giving people a chance to be part of history appeals to me … I think it'd be great to be given an equal voice and give my input while learning."

Notes to editors

SPID (Specially Produced Innovatively Directed) Theatre Company is an award winning youth organisation that specialises in site-specific and promenade work. Since 2005 it has been based in the Community Rooms on the Kensal House estate. For more information, visit the SPID Theatre website.

Further information

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