

War generation finds its voice

BY LARA CERRONI

SINGERS from the Fern Street Settlement turned back the clock as they performed a range of wartime classics to entertain visitors at Idea Store Chriss Street.

The performance launched a two-week exhibition called Voices of the East End, about memories and songs from the wartime generation of the borough.

Eight residents from the Poplar community centre, aged from 70 to 95, are the stars of the fascinating exhibition made possible by funding from The Scarman Trust.

They have been taking part in a singing course through Idea Store Learning, where they have recorded a CD of their favourite songs and memories.

Course leader Roshi Nasehi, has been running singing classes at Fern Street for the past five years.

She said: "It became clear from the sessions that this group of elderly working class east Londoners are in many ways the last of a special generation – they lived through the Blitz and have seen and experienced the enormous changes.

"They're full of stories and observations that deserve to be recorded along with the songs they grew up singing, which are at risk of being lost forever."

Eighty-five year old Margaret Turpin from Poplar has been taking part in singing classes for the past 15 years. She has already featured on three CDs and performed with the group on numerous occasions.

Margaret said: "I really enjoy the class. It's nice that we can all come together and have a good sing-along."

The group gets involved with everything from planning the sessions to picking the songs they sing.

As well as participating in the classes, this term they were also able to take part in the Voices of the East End project.

Local sound artist Graham Dowdall recorded the group singing, talking and reminiscing for a radio documentary. The documentary, which is full of character and history, is now available to borrow from Idea Store Chriss Street and forms the basis of the exhibition.

Seventy-seven year old Peter Girdler, who performs a duet on the CD with Maisie Bailey, shows that you are never too old to learn something new.

He said: "I never sung in my life before I started the course at Fern Street Settlement. I'm now a mature student and we all really enjoy the class."

He added: "Now I'm always singing as it makes me happy."

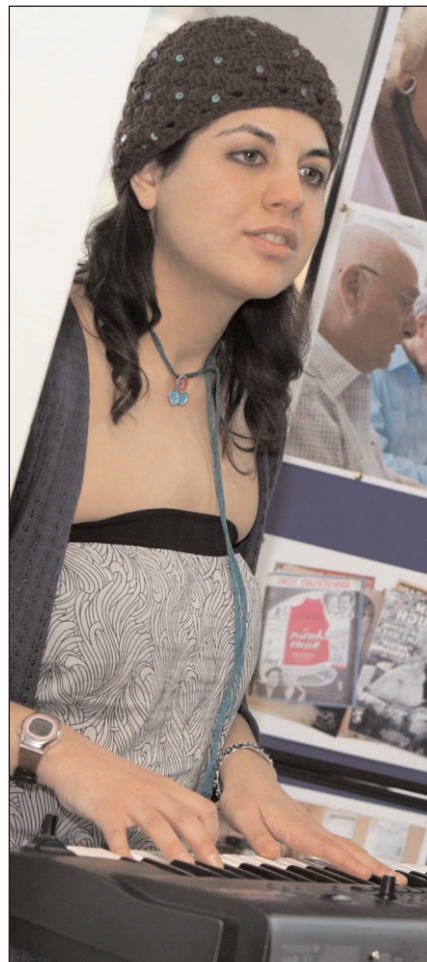
To find out about Idea Store Learning courses pick up a course guide at your store, visit www.learningladder.co.uk or call 7364 5665.



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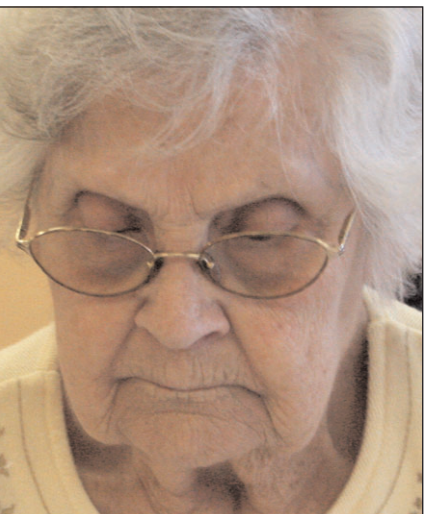
Course leader Roshi Nasehi



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