

NEWS

The train carriage cafe where sign language is used



The Dialogue Express Café in Newham is run by deaf and hard of hearing staff

Victoria Hollins
BBC London

Reporting from
Newham, east London

8 hours ago

On the edge of a 1960s council estate in east London, just a stone's throw from Stratford station and in the shadow of a concrete tower block, a train carriage has been turned into a café.

The Dialogue Express Café on the Carpenter's Estate in Newham is run by deaf and hard of hearing staff.

They are being trained by a local social enterprise called Dialogue Hub which aims to increase opportunity and visibility for the deaf community.

Its founder Hakan Elbir told BBC London: "We train them and then we invite Londoners to get in touch and communicate with them in their language." The language Hakan Elbir is talking about is British Sign Language (BSL).



Hakan Elbir founded the Dialogue Express Café to increase deaf visibility

When they arrive to order their drinks, customers follow a video on a screen at the counter which shows them how to place their order in BSL, which they then copy.

Trainee barista Karissa says it makes deaf people like herself feel less isolated.

She said: "This opportunity is very exciting for me because it connects deaf people with the community."

Fellow trainee Victor agrees. "It means a lot for me... it's more than just a job."

The café is part of what Newham Council calls "inclusive regeneration" - involving residents in the vast redevelopment of the Carpenters Estate.

The £1.4bn masterplan will create more than 2,300 homes on the estate and 50% are due to be affordable social rent homes.

However, the Carpenters Estate has been subject to multiple regeneration plans since 2003. The first residents were moved out in 2004 but no building work has yet taken place and less than half of the existing homes are occupied.



The council hopes the café will provide people with a community hub

Mayor of Newham Rokhsana Fiaz says Newham Council is committed to the most recent plan and to not regenerate the Carpenters Estate "would be a denigration of my responsibility to deliver homes".

She pointed out that 73% of residents had voted to support the regeneration masterplan in a 2021 ballot.

Ms Fiaz told BBC London: "We're doing it in a phase-by-phase approach... and we are confident that across each phase, over the lifetime of delivering on the outline masterplan, we will be able to deliver homes that people can afford."



Local residents have been showing support for the café

Work is due to start next month on renovating one of the estate's tower blocks.

The whole regeneration project is expected to take 14 years.

Local resident Eileen Barnard who has lived on the estate for 28 years, said: "There's nothing happening at the moment. We've got lots of little projects going on but redevelopment is what we want."

Eileen's friend Tahira Ahmad came to try out the Dialogue Express café and is confident local residents will see the planned new homes delivered.

She said: "We really appreciate this because it is bringing all the community together."

The Dialogue Express Café is open to everyone.

The council hopes it will provide people with a community hub while the building work - promised for so long - is finally carried out.

Listen to the best of BBC Radio London on **Sounds** and follow BBC London on **Facebook**, **X** and **Instagram**. Send your story ideas to hello.bbclondon@bbc.co.uk

Related topics

- Deafness and hearing-impairment
- London
- Regeneration

Top stories

- John Torode sacked as MasterChef presenter

6 minutes ago
- I'm 'disappointed but not done' with Putin, Trump tells BBC

7 hours ago
- How Trump woke me up for surprise interview - and the key takeaways

5 hours ago