

At the centre of the action

A community group for people of all ages has a new £5 million home. **Jessica Odubayo** reports, photos by **Kois Miah**

A YOUTH and community group, which works with young people, families and pensioners is celebrating the opening of its new home.

The £5m Osmani Centre, was officially opened on Monday, February 13, to continue the work of the Osmani Trust and offer a range of health, educational, sports and employment programmes.

The trust was created in 2009 by the merger of Elite Youth and Brick Lane Youth Development Association, two groups with a combined track record of more than 30 years, working predominantly among young people, tackling racism, gang violence, drug misuse and other problems.

To mark the opening of the four storey centre, the trust put on a week of events – including a health and wellbeing expo, a conference exploring issues of self-image, a mental health awareness day and a conference targeting young people likely to be affected by gang violence.

Abu Hasanath, business development manager, spoke to East End Life about the new building.

"It is world class," he said. "There aren't many spaces like it."

"The centre is equipped with games, training and arts facilities, a studio, a multi gym with specialist equipment for young people, a roof garden, outdoor play area, training room and IT suites. It is filled with colour, but light and airy."

Tower Hamlets Council provided the greater part of the funding for the development of the centre, in Underwood Road, Whitechapel, while other stakeholders and grant-making trusts, including Canary Wharf Group and the City of London Corporation, paid for specific facilities.

"Osmani staff and volunteers raised a further £600,000 by holding sponsored fundraising events including a parachute jump, treks and collections," Abu said.



Mayor Lutfur Rahman opens the centre with, from left: mayor's adviser Gulam Robbani, centre secretary Sati Abdur Rahman and Cllr Rania Khan

Mayor Lutfur Rahman, who unveiled a plaque on Monday to officially declare the Osmani Centre open, pointed out that about 28 per cent of the population in Tower Hamlets consists of young people under the age of 25.

"It heartens me to see that so many enthusiastic youths will make use of the facilities at the Osmani Centre," he said.

John Garwood, group company secretary of Canary Wharf Group, spoke of his company's delight at being involved in the Osmani Centre's development by sponsoring its training room.

"It is a magnificent day for the centre," he said.

Sati Abdur Rahman, a founding member of the Osmani Trust and secretary of the new

organisation, told East End Life that the development of the centre had taken about four years from conception to completion.

He said: "Our opening celebrations started at the beginning of the year when we held an employment fair.

"Osmani Centre will give the community access to bigger and better facilities."

Osmani Centre patron, Sir Michael Bear, who was Lord Mayor of London last year, said one of the highlights of his term in office was to see work on the centre progressing.

Speaking at the opening celebration, he urged young people to make use of the facilities and realise their individual potential.

"We should make sure that London excels, especially during the year of the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympic Games," he said.



Football freestyler Dan Magness put on a stunning show of ball juggling



Shamur tests his lung capacity at the health and wellbeing day



The centre hosts football tournaments and school-based coaching



African cultural dancers entertained during the opening week

Realising ambitions

THE Osmani Centre runs a host of projects for young people.

These include Aasha gang mediation project, Amaal girl's group, Can Do community grants and engagement project, an education and employment project, football in the community, Healthy Futures, a healthy lifestyles scheme for children and adults, health trainers, Shaathi mentoring scheme and a school holiday club.

Mayor Rahman added: "The Osmani Trust does fantastic work in supporting young people to realise their ambitions.

"This new centre will not only enable them to continue and develop this work with teenagers locally, it will provide excellent facilities for the local community for generations to come."

For more information, email info@osmanitrust.org or call 7247 8080.

Football in the community project is hugely popular



Boxing is another of the sports on offer



Two singers at the opening



Two pals make use of the PlayStation 3



Advice is offered on all sorts of matters



Diabetes testing at the health and wellbeing day