

elpers!



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SPELL IT OUT: Natasha Clarke and Kirsty Palmer can't be clearer about how helpful GAVS is to their group

A simple introduction can mean so much...

BLIND Independence Greenwich (BIG) shares the Forum at Greenwich with GAVS, so day-to-day help and advice is always close at hand. New operations manager Kirsty Palmer told GT: "We have four different services - coffee mornings, a reading club, Braille club and tandem bike riding - on specific days of the week. "Many blind and partially-sighted people feel socially isolated so the aim is to remove the isolation and give them more confidence as they are included in the community." BIG has about 150 users and 30 volunteers. "Our volunteers are fantastic," said Kirsty. "They are there to provide support, even if it's just introducing someone to the person sitting next to them. "You need this help if you are at a coffee morning and have no facial recognition. Just the start of a conversation becomes so important." On day trips volunteers "buddy up" with one of the group to act as a sighted guide. They will also be at the front of the tandem on rides across Blackheath and in Greenwich Park.

BIG is part of the Royal London Society for Blind People which has set up a family drop-in service in Eltham for visually impaired young children and their families, and hopes to offer a nursery service in the near future. Kirsty was in her very first week at the project. She said: "I'm really enjoying it. I went to the coffee morning at the Forum on Wednesday and it was a wonderful inclusive session. "We asked the service users how we could improve what we do and anything we could add to the service for them. It was really positive and it was great so see how much they enjoyed it. "GAVS and BIG enjoy a very positive working relationship. We have been lucky enough to count on GAVS' support in our fund-raising activities and appreciate their impact through workshops. "We very much look forward to continuing working together in the future." ● **FIND out more about Blind Independence Greenwich at www.blindindependencegreenwich.org.uk**

in an important pond



GRATEFUL TO GAVS: artistic director Suha Al-Khayyat with some production programmes

ways." Little Fish Theatre is an offshoot of the Big Fish Theatre Company, which is based in Greenwich High Road, and has been going since 2008. "The Big Fish theatre has been in Greenwich since 1997," said Suha. "We work in Greenwich and other boroughs of London on community-based workshops and projects for mainly disadvantaged young people, including youth offending teams. "We work where there is quite a lot of poverty, using mainly theatre but also other art forms. "It's going really well now that we're established locally, along with Big Fish. "We've got very good links in Greenwich, thanks largely to GAVS." ● **FIND out more the Little Fish Theatre at www.littlefishtheatre.co.uk**



FAMILY FUN: the launch of the family drop-in centre in Eltham, attended by Eltham MP Clive Efford