

Friday 19 July 2013, Hackney Wow Cubs' interview:

## Rebecca Davis takes her Beau Belles ice-cream van to the Open East Festival, 27–28 July, for the re-opening of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Beau Belles Ice-cream van

Rebecca Davies / beaubellesicecreamvan@gmail.com

theicecreamvan.tumblr.com / @theicecreamvan

queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk / barbican.org.uk / createlondon.org



**Anna: Why did you decide to start driving around the country in an ice-cream van?**

**Rebecca:** I think everyone loves ice-cream vans. I thought it would be a great place to re-invent as a library. I invite people to come to the ice-cream van. Inside there's two benches you can sit at and two desks and I listen to peoples stories and then we have a party celebrating the stories. I think libraries are really brilliant ways of people coming together to learn and read. I wanted to put loads of books of all these different celebrations and all of my reasearch into the van. It's probably the noisiest library in the world because we play lots of music and there's lots of talking going on.

**Anna: Where did you get your inspiration from?**

**Rebecca:** I've done projects in different communities and that's where the idea started. My inspiration comes from listening to lots of people and being fascinated by their stories of how they come together as families and friends. I thought it would be great to have conversations in different places across the UK and as I'm an illustrator and like drawing I thought, well, I want be an illustrator in a van recording peoples stories.

**Asa: Who did you buy the ice-cream van from and what's its history?**

**Rebecca:** I bought it off the internet from a gentleman in Doncaster. The van was made in 1987, so she's only two years younger than I am. It's always been used as an ice-cream van. This gentleman with his daughter would go around and sell ice-creams – it's always had an ice-cream past. I think this is the first time it's been used as a library. I'm just going to put it out there: It might be the first ever ice-cream van library in the world!





Rebecca Davies in her East End bingo caller jacket with Hackney Wow Cubs from Colvestone Primary School E8  
Clockwise: Rebecca, Lili, Isaac, Anna, Asa, Melvin and Michael.

**Asa: Did you design and decorate the van yourself?**

**Rebecca:** I decorated it myself. It had the old stickers on it; Sponge Bob Square Pants and funny old icecream stickers like 'Fab for 50p' I thought I better take these off as I'm not selling ice-creams anymore. I did my illustrations based on the festivals I've been to that we talked about in class and I painted them on the side of the van. I painted pictures of ice-creams that children from Canon Barnett Primary School invented and portraits of some of the people I met during the project.

**Asa: Has the van got a name?**

**Rebecca:** Yes, she's called Beau Belles. Traditionally if you were born within the chime of the Bow Bells you were known as a true Cockney. In my research in the archives I found an old flyer for a 'BEAU BELLES' Cockney Night spelt in French, which I thought was quite 'pizazzy', so that's what I called my ice-cream van.

**Rebecca: Do you like it? Hackney Wow Cubs:** Yeah!

**Asa: Do you live inside this magical van?**

**Rebecca:** I would love to live in the magical van. However it gets quite warm in there in the summer months and very cold in the winter. But I would be very open to suggestions and designs if you were to re-invent the interior of the ice-cream van as a little home for me because I would like a bed in there and a shower. Do you think it would fit a bath tub? I'm not sure...



**Michael: Does the chime play when you open up?**

**Rebecca:** I've worked with choirs, music groups and musicians that re-invented the chimes for me. They're my new versions of ice-cream chimes I play from my van.

**Michael: Do you actually sell ice-cream?**

**Rebecca:** No, unfortunately. However I will be doing an event soon and I'm hoping to sell or give out some ice-cream there. Some people do ask if they can have ice-cream but usually they are ok when they can come inside the van. I don't know about you, but lots of people haven't been inside an ice-cream van.



Michael shares his story with Beau Belles' mobile library

**Isaac: How many stories have you got so far?**

**Rebecca:** Almost 100 stories, which I think is quite impressive... but I would love to have 1000 stories...

**Isaac: Which is your favourite story that has been given to you?**

**Rebecca:** There are so many stories that I love. All of them are so different. Today when you were telling me stories about Halloween, Easter and all the different clubs and societies you are part of, I thought these are all brilliant. I love listening to stories, it's educational and it's fun!

**Isaac: What's the worst and funniest story you have?**

**Rebecca:** Oooh the funniest story... a lady recently told me that when she was working in a pub, a gentleman with a wooden leg came up to the bar and threw his wooden leg over the bar. She laughed for hours. She was telling me stories of working in Hackney pubs; about the bingo and karaoke singing... I'm a really bad karaoke singer!

**Lili: Are any of the stories in the Beau Belles library yours?**

**Rebecca:** I don't think I do have my story in the van. Maybe I should put this interview in the van, it would be my story. I do now have a story in my van – it'll be this one.

**Lili: After collecting all your stories what are you going to do with them?**

**Rebecca:** We're going to some more destinations so lots of people in the UK can listen to the stories. I quite like the stories in a permanent place, probably in a local history archive and they're also online. I'd like it to be a place people can visit, so I might donate my ice-cream van. I would be open to suggestions if you can think of somewhere you would like to visit the van and sit and read books.





**Lili: What's the best thing about travelling about the country in an ice-cream van?**

**Rebecca:** The best thing is to meet new people and hearing new stories and meeting people like yourselves and getting inspired.

**Melvin: Where can you see the ice-cream van this summer?**

**Rebecca:** This summer you can see the ice-cream van at Open East Festival, which I'm very excited about. It would be lovely to see you all there.

**Melvin: What will you be doing at the Open East Festival on 27–28 July?**

**Rebecca:** I will be doing bingo calls, I will be an bingo caller for the weekend. We have these really long tables so 100 people can sit down at the same time and play bingo. There will be lots of music and lots of books and it will be a big party – and maypole dancing!

**Melvin: What kind of bingo is it and can children take part?**

**Rebecca:** It's East End themed bingo so I've re-written all the bingo calls. They will revolve around Cockney and East End traditions like Duck and Dive number Five, that's Cockney rhyming slang. Rosie Lee number 3, Bethnal Green number 13, Hackney Wick 66...

It certainly will be great fun for children with maypole dancing, lots of East End songs and bingo! And, you can win an illustrated plate that I'm firing up in a kiln.

**Thank you!**

Open East Festival has been produced by Create London in partnership with the Barbican. It has been commissioned by the London Legacy Development Corporation. For more information about Open East Festival on 27–28 July visit:

[queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/events/2013/6/open-east](http://queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/events/2013/6/open-east)  
[barbican.org.uk/music/event-detail.asp?ID=14778](http://barbican.org.uk/music/event-detail.asp?ID=14778)  
[createlondon.org](http://createlondon.org)

Beau Belles ice-cream van is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and produced by Artsadmin.

