

Islington Giving Young Grant Makers 2020 – Evaluation

“It was a really wonderful experience. It was a great opportunity to not only make a difference in your community but also meet lovely new people. It was great to learn new skills like evaluating grant applications and to find out more about Islington.”

“I felt like I was doing something good to help other young people out there. The team that we worked with was really good. I've become more positive by doing it.”

“I think the group worked together very well. Everyone respected each other and made sure to let other people have a say and discuss their opinions. It was a comfortable place to talk.”

(all quotes from this year's Young Grant Makers)

A group of local young people aged 16-22 became Islington Giving's third group of Young Grant Makers (YGM) in March 2020.

The programme was soon disrupted by COVID-19 and [lockdown](#). We paused for several weeks to plan a new course of action. Although still new to the programme, the group was keen to carry on and at a time of such uncertainty, when young people were feeling particularly powerless in many areas of their lives, it felt more important than ever to delegate power to young people so they could make funding decisions about youth activities and support in their local area.

After some careful planning, we resumed online sessions, meeting weekly via Zoom from April until September.

Key facts on YGM 2020:

- The programme was made possible by the support of [BBC Children in Need](#), the [National Lottery Community Fund](#) and Islington Giving.
- We interviewed YGM participants at the end of February and started work together in early March.
- We held three face-to-face sessions and 23 sessions online over a 7-month period
- Nine of the 12 young people we started working with in March came together in person to make their final decision-making in September.
- The YGM had full decision-making power over a delegated [budget of £70,000](#).
- They funded [seven groups](#) working with young Islington residents

The YGM group invited applications for projects that *are looking to support young people in a safe and supportive space where they can talk and be themselves. These projects will focus on creating a sense of community.* They prioritised projects that:

- Enable the creativity and potential of young people to support and guide their future
- And/or are a space for young people to speak about their mental health, including any fears they have about the current social climate
- And/or give young people the confidence to speak up on social issues that affect them and their mental health, having conversations they may not have had in the classroom.

The 2020 YGMs awarded the following grants.

- [Action Youth Boxing Intervention](#) – Real Talk – £18,140
- [Craft Council](#) – Reclaim, Rethink, Reclaim – £10,560
- [The Dynamic Autism Group](#) – DAGs Online project – £3430
- [Galbur Foundation](#) – Promoting Mental Health Through the Arts – £10,000
- [MEWSO](#) – Girl Matters – £11,448
- [Prospex](#) – Girls Group – £11,875
- [Small Green Shoots](#) – The Future is Creative – £4080

Aims and Objectives

“Finalising funding for the projects that we felt met the requirement of our call and honestly just creating the call itself. It was hard and long and, given that we did it all online, an amazing feat.”

The aim of the YGM programme is to give young people in Islington the means to shape their local area, their community and their opportunities, and achieve influence within local and wider society. There are two principal objectives:

- 1. Personal and professional development for the young people involved.** The programme will offer training, support and experiences that are directly relevant for personal and work-related development, developing life and professional skills. Young people will be able to describe their grant-making experiences in CVs and job applications.
- 2. More informed grant-making that models giving young people power to make decisions.** By bringing young people’s insights and understanding of their local borough to Islington Giving’s grant-making, and by giving young people the confidence, tools and power to allocate funding to local groups and activities, we

aim for Islington Giving's work to be more alive to the community and the wider population of Islington's young people.

The 2020 Young Grant Makers identified success in the following ways:

- *“Choosing charities that are fun and beneficial to young people living in Islington”*
- *“Getting through these difficult times while managing to get online every week to create a call, go through applications and pick some great projects to fund.”*
- *“Getting a list of projects we will be funding, even though we were working online and there were barriers, we got through, which at the end was very satisfying.”*
- *“Having fun, enjoying the journey and not being down on myself.”*
- *“At the start of YGM, success was about not worrying about judgment and my ideas being different to others'. It's hard to overcome this one but I think I have.”*

The 2020 Young Grant Makers step-by-step

Joining the Young Grant Makers

Finding out more about the programme. Discussing what concerns and angers us about young people's lives in Islington, and what could be improved.



Kick off

Getting to know each other and our community. Creating a group agreement. Reflecting on our communication styles. Deciding what success looks like to us. Researching our local area and the issues we care about.



Lockdown!

We started working online in April and started by reflecting on how COVID-19 and lockdown will affect young people's lives?



What is a funder and what do they fund?

Meeting funders and meeting groups previously funded by Young Grant Makers.



Creating an open call for funding applications

Designing an open call - setting our priorities and criteria for our funding.



Social media and advertising the call

Training

Learning how to read an application form and learning all about budgets. Thinking about our communication styles to prepare for interviewing applicants and negotiating with each other. Reflecting on the process so far and our skills and strengths.



Shortlisting!

Meeting the shortlisted applicants

We met with all the shortlisted applicants over Zoom and asked them our questions.



Final decisions!

We individually ranked all nine shortlisted applications and shared our rationale. We came together in person for the first time since March and negotiated which projects we wanted to fund.

The background

Islington Giving started the Young Grant Makers in 2018 because young people told us they wanted to be [more involved with decision-making](#) in their local area. By delegating a budget to the Young Grant Makers and supporting them with training and guidance as they reach their decisions, we hope for Islington Giving's work to be more alive to the community and the wider population of Islington's young people.

Who were the Young Grant Makers 2020

The Young Grant Makers were between the ages of 16 and 22 and were all juggling different pressures as they completed the programme.

Two Young Grant Makers were looking for work at the start of the programme. One had her part time work affected by COVID-19. Five were in year 12, and had their studies affected by school and college closures, and were managing remote learning. One Young Grant Maker could not complete her A-Levels and was waiting to see if her grades and university place would be affected. Another was in a year out before university. All of the Young Grant makers spoke about how their lives were affected by lockdown, particularly not being able to see friends or family, and experiencing the support from clubs, activities and mental health services reduce over this time.

Evaluation – how we met the aims of the programme

Aim 1: personal and professional development

The Young Grant Maker programme offers training, support and experiences that are directly relevant for personal and professional development, developing life skills and skills for the world of work – with lots of opportunities for reflection and building self-awareness along the way.

“[I would tell a friend that Young Grant Makers] gives you skills such teamwork, leadership, social skills, communication and helps with decision making. It’s very exciting and helps you view other people’s perspectives. In the end it’s very rewarding and when you look back on everything you realise how much of an impact you have actually made.”

“I’ve learnt resilience and determination when things are hard, good listening skills and being able to effectively work in a team”

We believe Young Grant Makers develop skills across the following areas. Here is what they said about their skills development:

Teamwork skills

“I like how we work collaboratively and even though we are physically far apart we have managed to work together on something I’m really proud of”

“I learnt how to work in a group and share my opinion”

“I think I was already quite good at working in a team but what YGM has helped me learn is that everyone’s ideas need to be heard and very one needs to be involved in the project.”

People skills

“I’ve learnt to work with new people to get their opinions and to hear what they have to say. I’ve also learnt that working with other young people can help you in life and to get on the right path.”

“This year my social skills have developed and especially when working online. It’s a different kind of social, so you have to communicate in different ways.”

“I feel more confident in myself. I’m normally the quiet one but I gave my opinions.”

Communication skills

"I've learnt about the different work and communication styles my team had and I learnt about my own communication style."

"I've learnt how to navigate online platforms and to be more patient and considerate of what others have to say and when I should and shouldn't speak, especially with being online."

"I think I've developed better ways to articulate myself."

Critical thinking and analytical skills

"Success for me as a Young Grant Maker has been being more decisive, being more organised, taking responsibility for my own learning and being able to work independently."

"I've learnt about some of the financial side of grant giving and what kind of person I am in a team. I have also learnt it is really important to follow things up when you have questions and it is also okay to ask questions!"

"How to read a grant application and what to look out for. I learnt what it means to be a funder and certain terminologies."

"I have developed greater decision skills and critical thinking"

"I've developed patience and an eye for detail"

Leadership skills

"I've learnt how to work and lead in a team. Specifically how to involve others and make sure people are heard."

"I've developed confidence and decisiveness."

"I am a listener who just wants everyone to win but I needed to learn how to be decisive with my choices. I learnt that everybody is different. This can be really beneficial for the group."

We also asked the Young Grant Makers to think specifically about what they had learnt from someone else in the group:

- *"To keep positive!"*
- *"Some of the group taught me a lot about differing perspectives and coming to agreements that work for everyone."*

- *"People have their opinions and I've learnt that it's really good to hear others' point of view."*
- *"Determination! How people with different situations were able to push through and be on Zoom every Tuesday which gave me motivation"*
- *"One person taught me that you have to say your opinion, you can't sugar coat and you have to get straight to the point."*
- *"From one person I learnt not to pick on personal preference alone."*
- *"The kindness, patience and consideration of some Young Grant Makers has taught me to do the same and to be more like that. I think having those skills and being more like that is very beneficial and allows you to make decisions with a very open mind"*

Aim 2: more informed grant making that models giving young people power to make decisions

"I like knowing we have the power to change things and that things will be improved as a result of the projects we fund"

"Sometimes as a young person you may feel like you don't have a say in things, especially around money and funding things. I feel lucky."

"What surprised me was that all of us had a major role in choosing the shortlist and each and every one of us could be a factor in a project being out of the shortlist. Which has its pressures but I feel proud being able to choose the projects in this way."

"I was surprised at how much of a decision we had! I wasn't sure if maybe the adults would be more involved in our decisions."

The Young Grant Maker's open call

When they first came together during the interview in February, the YGM group identified their passions and priorities in making Islington a better place for young people:

- Mental health support;
- Guidance for the future: helping young people decide who and how they want to be (instead of *what* they want to be);
- Support around homelessness and secure housing;
- Opportunities to create a community

During lockdown, when we moved online, the group began to explore the impact of COVID on young people through the lens of these priority areas. Here is what they discussed.

<p style="text-align: center;">Mental Health</p> <p>Coronavirus is affecting anxiety levels about the present, and the future. Isolation affects our mental health, as do stress and financial insecurity.</p> <p>Young people may have lost their safe space – like school or youth clubs. Their home lives may be unsafe or unsupportive.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Housing</p> <p>Young people may be experiencing stressful or abusive situations at home. Not everyone is able to work from home and we will see an increase in unemployment.</p> <p>People aren't getting enough support – this has been the case for a long time but now the cracks in our society are beginning to show.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Guidance for the future</p> <p>We don't have a sense of direction because we don't know what will happen in 6 months and what the future will look like.</p> <p>We are not receiving the same quality of education and some young people will struggle to learn online and manage their time. There will be an increase in unemployment.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities to create a community</p> <p>We have seen groups and clubs get cancelled and many young people's sense of community has reduced.</p>

The YGM's powerful [open call](#) brought together their original priorities with their and their peer's experiences of coronavirus, to reflect the need for additional support and sense of community in this time of disruption and uncertainty.

You can read more about how the COVID-19 context shaped the call [here](#).

"I didn't think we'd have the opportunity to promote access to the arts because it's really hard and people don't talk about it a lot. I'm so proud of how we put it forward and we've done so much funding around that issue. The 7 projects we supported are amazing and to think we made all those decisions online to fund amazing projects -- I'm so proud of us."

The reach

This year, the YGM call expanded the reach of Islington Giving. One third of the applications that the YGM received and almost half of their funded groups had not applied for funding from Islington Giving before.

Their funding expanded the youth offer in Islington. The funding decisions they made supported new projects (MEWSO; Galbur), extended the reach of projects that already exist (Action Youth Boxing Intervention; Prospex), and supported a national charity to do work locally (Craft Council). They supported projects to move online (Dynamic Autism)

and ensured digital projects were accessible to all by providing funding for communication devices (Small Green Shoots).

An emphasis on co-production

YGM models youth-led decision-making, and we hope this will inspire conversation and action about opportunities for youth leadership in Islington, particularly within the funder community (for example around participatory grant making) and within the organisations we give grants to (for example, around coproduction). This year's YGM group felt passionately about youth leadership and decision-making, and so designed a funding criterion around coproduction, asking that:

Projects must demonstrate that young people have been given a say how projects are designed and run. This might look like:

- Projects being led by young people's needs and issues
- Young people being part of any solution to their needs and issues
- Young people being given the opportunity to speak out if they're unsatisfied and to give feedback on the project

Accordingly, co-production was a key lens through which the YGM assessed applications and they asked several questions to shortlisted applicants to follow up:

- Were the young people involved in planning the project at all? In what way?
- Can you tell us more about how young people devised this project?
- You said that you ran a survey with young people to shape the project as it is today. What did you ask – can you share this with us?
- How will you form the youth advisory group and how will it work?

An emphasis on adaptability

The YGM were creating their call at a time of uncertainty, where funders including Islington Giving were adapting ways of working to be responsive to the crisis. As they developed their call, the group were given opportunities to meet other funders, as well as groups working in Islington, to understand the impact of the crisis, in terms of funding, fundraising, staffing and project delivery.

Young Grant Makers were interested in how groups are operating in "the new normal". They wanted to know how services might be adapted, either to be delivered safely in person or online. The group also considered their own first-hand experiences of youth activities and services being altered: what worked, and what didn't. They developed a criterion around this:

- *In the current moment with coronavirus, projects must be adaptable. For example, we want to know your plans about how and when you'd work in and out of 'lockdown'.*

In follow up questions to shortlisted applicants, they asked:

- *You haven't written about how the sessions would be adapted in the case of a second wave/second lockdown. How would you manage this?*
- *What will you do if the pandemic doesn't allow you to start as planned? Could you adapt to be on-line, live streamed or other alternatives?*
- *Your application talked about going online if needed – how would you support the young people to access devices/technology to do this?*

Value for Money

Part of the training we delivered was around budgets: considerations for groups when building a budget, and how to read a budget. When assessing each application against the criteria, the YGM also scrutinised the budgets and raised any questions and concerns.

The YGM group were particularly interested in value for money, and a number of projects did not make it through because the group thought they were too expensive per participant.

'I was worried about the maths but it wasn't that difficult.'

Their call and criteria highlighted the value of giving young people the freedom to design the parameters within which they make decisions. As a funder, we know that the call that the YGM produced could not have been written by Islington Giving staff: it captured their priorities in their language. Their criteria reflected how they want the projects, activities and services they make use of to feel: safe, comfortable, non-judgmental, inclusive, adaptable to changing circumstances – and which appeal to young people and give them a say in the design and running of sessions.

Delivering the YGM programme during COVID-19 – what did we learn?

"I've learnt that we are resilient and we didn't let this stop us as much as we thought it would."

"At first it was a bit weird and I kind of got a bit of anxiety joining online calls but it's gotten a lot easier and there's much less anxiety behind it now"

"It was nice to catch up every week and see everyone. Sometimes I felt quite shy but it was great to work as a team towards something throughout these strange times."

"It was difficult because you never know really what someone else is thinking. It's also harder to communicate online. Although as time went on and we were doing may more online sessions I feel like I got better at working online and have adapted to it quite well."

- **Consultation.** Before moving online we consulted with the YGM who all said they wanted to find a way to continue the programme. During the sessions we regularly reviewed how it felt to work online and what changes could be made. Before our final face-to-face session we also spoke with each young person individually as part of our risk assessment, and we also offered the option of joining via Zoom for young people who were concerned about coronavirus or who were self-isolating.
- **Engagement.** We originally recruited 12 young people for the YGM group and 11 joined for online sessions. One person left the programme early on. Between April and September we worked with ten young people, with a core group of around six. For some participants, the weekly sessions provided structure during lockdown. For others, consistent attendance was more difficult, either due to the challenge of managing self-directed studying at home, or other pressures around lockdown. Nine Young Grant Makers attended the in-person session where final decisions were made.

Designing the process. The programme and session plans were originally designed for in-person, with an emphasis on exploring knowledge about Islington and the role of a funder before the YGM group designed their call. Whilst we did adapt timelines and process for online delivery, the uncertainty of lockdown meant we were working to translate this original plan onto working online instead of reviewing the entire arc of the programme for working in this format. For any future work online, we would support Young Grant Makers to design their call earlier, as when the applications come in is where the programme came alive and the decision-making task became 'real'.

- **Adapting the process.** Key changes to the YGM process:
 - In previous years, we ran a two-stage application process, shortlisting using Expressions of Interest and then inviting groups to share a full application. This year, all groups submitted a full application that was used to shortlist, which minimised the duplication of steps in the decision-making process.
 - We set an expectation that all Young Grant Makers would read their assigned applications between sessions. In previous years, we had allowed time in sessions to do this.
 - All Young Grant Makers met all nine shortlisted applicants over three weeks of Zoom interviews, before making their final decisions. They heard from each applicant and had the opportunity to ask the follow-up questions they had identified. In previous years, only some young people met with each applicant, and we facilitated a verbal feedback to the whole group. This year, YGM group missed meeting groups in person and

seeing activities happening, but the adapted Zoom meetings gave all Young Grant Makers an overview of and a stake in all applications.

- At both the shortlisting and the final decision stage, we asked the group to 'rank' the applications individually and share the reasons why. This tentative ranking helped to facilitate a group negotiation process where the Young Grant Makers challenged their own assumptions, explores outliers, which encouraged critical thinking.
 - Islington Giving staff supported the Young Grant Makers by doing *due diligence* and sharing findings about the financial health of the groups that applied. We still ran training on charity finances, but the Young Grant Makers focused instead on the project budgets. This did call for greater levels of support from the Islington Giving programme team.
- **Using Zoom.** We facilitated the programme via Zoom, using a mix of break out rooms, whiteboards and annotation, chat-box and polls. We created an appendix of our safeguarding procedures to respond to online working, and used a secure, password protected Zoom meeting, with 2-3 staff members attending each session. As we reviewed how it felt to work online, we made adaptations in accordance with the Young Grant Maker's feedback – switching up between work in a bigger group and work in smaller groups, and increasing the use of chat box. We limited our meetings to between an hour and an hour and a half as experience of Zoom suggested this was the maximum amount of time people could usefully be on a Zoom call. In previous years, our sessions have been over two hours so we had to shorten some of our work plans.

"I think we did really well, especially considering the circumstances. I feel like everyone got a chance to be heard and that the small breakout room groups really helped with that."

- **Accessibility.** It was important to budget for and offer support around Wi-Fi, data and tech devices to ensure that the programme was accessible. However, this offer was not always taken up and technology issues were frustrating for some Young Grant Makers
- **Facilitation.** Working online in this way was new to us as a staff team. When we began facilitating online, we realised that a lot of conversations with the Young Grant Makers were being triangulated through staff members. We made some adaptations, like turning off our cameras and muting ourselves during group discussion, but at times restricted the opportunities for Young Grant Makers to take the lead in group discussions.
- **Confidence and energy.** When working in-person, a lot of Young Grant Makers' learning and growth comes from the experience of being together and forming as a group– with fluid discussions and socialising before and after the session and during breaks. Without this additional time, the group had less opportunity to

build their own relationships with one another, which affected how confidence and energy could develop organically over online sessions. This meant the Young Grant Makers felt more awkward speaking in both the large group, and in smaller break out rooms, particularly early on, than they had in the initial in-person sessions. For much of the programme, Young Grant Makers were not going to school or college, not meeting friends, not being stimulated in any of the normal ways. They were joining us after a day at home, and sometimes energy levels reflected this.

'I think it's easier for us to talk comfortably in smaller groups as we're less worried about interrupting something important. It's hard to be aware of the whole group when we can only see a few people at a time on screen'

- **Participation.** Some Young Grant Makers preferred to join their sessions with cameras off. Whilst still engaged in the process, it meant the way that there was an inequality of participation, which needed to be named and addressed.

During a year that has been overwhelming and disempowering for many young people, we were committed to delegating decision-making power to the Young Grant Makers by adapting the programme. At the start of the process, we were unsure how it would work, but yet we attained this goal: the group came together to make funding decisions that they are really proud of. However, the quality of debate during the in-person final decision-making session highlighted how fruitful in-person sessions would have been and what the group had missed by only being able to participate remotely. If the programme is run online again, it needs careful thought and redesign so as to embed as many skills development and personal development opportunities as possible.

What would you tell a friend about being a Young Grant Maker?

- *"Young grant makers is a great way to get involved in the area that we live in to benefit the lives of other young people in the same borough."*
- *"It's an amazing and really really fun opportunity where you can make friends and make a real difference. It's such a rewarding feeling when you've finished!"*
- *"What I would tell a friend about joining YGM is it is such an amazing opportunity. It is honestly so much fun and you get to meet some amazing and really cool people. Everyone is so nice and the journey is incredible. There is so much support given along the way and you will gain so many new skills. I'm so glad I applied!"*
- *It is such an incredible experience and you will learn so much about Islington and the grant making process. It is something you need to be committed to. You will be so proud of what you accomplish in the end if you stick through it. There were so many great young people I met on this journey who are so intelligent, kind and compassionate. [Islington Giving] really created a safe and enjoyable space for us. I honestly didn't know how we were going to continue because of lockdown but we made it work. It is a opportunity you wouldn't want to miss out on."*

How do you feel about Islington?

- *“After being a YGM, I'm even more invested than before in making Islington a better and safer place full of opportunities. It was great to create change. Especially after all of the statistics you shared in the beginning of the sessions about Islington.”*
- *“In a way I do feel more connected, knowing that I had a part in deciding which charities get help from the grants given, which will help all the young people participating in projects, so you could say that by being a young grant maker I'm helping them directly, even if I did only give my opinion on which charity should get a grant.”*
- *“Now I know of how many more projects there are out there in Islington which shows there are communities out there inviting people.”*
- *“I feel like I understand Islington needs as well as all it has to offer, especially in regards to culture and creativity.”*

Young Catalyst Grants

To thank the Young Grant Makers for their hard work and participation, they received a [Young Catalyst Grant](#) at the end of the programme.

With this grant, the Young Grant Makers chose a range of items to support them with their lives and futures: from driving lessons to singing lessons, a harp to home studio equipment, tablets for college and university, and art materials.

One Young Grant Maker said:

‘Thank you for the opportunity to get singing lessons. Singing is something that I loved doing when I was little, but I stopped because stuff happened with my mum. It was always such a huge passion of mine - I wanted to be a singer when I grew up and now with this opportunity it could be something that happens! And I feel more of an understanding of what we've given to other young people who live in Islington, because now they have the opportunity to fulfil their dreams and get support.’

Next Steps

We are considering the future of Young Grant Makers and how and when the programme will run again, taking into account local restrictions. We are committed to delegating decision-making power to young people in Islington. If you're interested in finding out more when we next launch an opportunity for young people to get involved, please follow @isgiv on Instagram and Twitter and [sign up to our newsletter](#).

Inspired by our learning from the YGM programme, Islington Giving has also launched our first Supporting Families Resident-Led Panel, who will be distributing £115,000 to support local families. You can find out more about that [here](#).

Thanks to:

- [Children in Need](#) and [National Lottery Community Fund](#), who made the programme possible and shared their experiences as a funder with the Young Grant Makers
- All groups who applied for YGM funding
- Suzanne Lee from [All Change Arts](#) who spoke to the Young Grant Makers about the effect of lockdown on groups and the impact of grants
- Norman Leet and Youth Bank International
- Jabu Maseko

"I think the impact we're going to have is on the young people that take part in these projects, projects that help them and give them opportunities that they wouldn't have thought were open before, and hopefully in the long term will see people taking an interest or a step that they didn't think they could. I think we should be very proud of ourselves for doing that, and also for even just getting this far, simply for how difficult it was and for how much work we've put in during such a weird time."

"It's an incredible experience. I have met so many wonderful and kind people and I am so grateful to have been a part of it"

*Please note: the quotes in this evaluation have been taken from evaluation surveys at the start, middle and end of the YGM programme, as well as transcripts of reflection sessions.