



A LIFE NOT A SERVICE

Supporting Islington's Families





Islington Giving is an independent group of funders, residents, businesses and voluntary organisations working together to tackle poverty and inequality in the borough. We want Islington to be a place where everyone – regardless of circumstance – can live a fulfilled life.

Underpinning Islington Giving is local knowledge and a belief that everyone can give – time, money, resources or ideas - to make a difference. We have raised over £5 million since launching in September 2010 to invest in organisations that change lives. The focus of our work is on three interconnecting areas:

- Investing in young people
- Supporting families
- Reaching isolated people

All our work aims to open up opportunities for people to enjoy life and socialise, to build skills and possibilities, and to make connections with each other and to services.

This report describes how Islington Giving will support Islington families over the next 5 years. In partnership with other funders, local businesses and services, community groups and residents, Islington Giving will fund and support high quality activities and schemes for families facing isolation, financial hardship and limited opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Islington Giving has invested over £500,000 to support opportunities for local families over the last 5 years. We want to develop and grow how we support families over the next 5 years. By learning through doing, grounding our approach in understanding families' experiences and identifying where we can help families most, we will ensure that we direct our resources as effectively as possible.



Islington Giving has funded 17 organisations that work directly with families, reaching over 3,500 local parents and children.



We've supported a parent mentoring and outreach programme, an intensive programme of support for families caring for children with additional needs and a wide range of weekend and holiday activities from camping to creative workshops and cultural experiences.



Projects help families take part in activities together, at times they want them, which help improve relationships. Parents say they feel better connected to support. They are more resilient when facing the challenges of parenting in difficult circumstances.

To inform our future work we have looked at local needs, reflected on what we have learnt and listened to residents and those who support them. We wanted to know where Islington Giving could make a difference.

THE CONTEXT

Islington is one of the most unequal places in the UK. Some of the wealthiest families in the country live alongside some of the poorest. Home to world class venues, Islington has the second lowest amount of open space of any Local Authority in the country.

Approximately **45,500** young people under 19 live in **21,500** households in Islington.ⁱ

 **MORE THAN A THIRD** of those children and young people live in poverty.ⁱⁱ

 **JUST UNDER A QUARTER** live in workless families.ⁱⁱⁱ

 **MORE THAN 1 IN 10** residents live in households that are legally defined as overcrowded.^{iv}

 In 2015/16, 25% of assessments conducted by adult social services identified mental health concerns about a parent/carer as a factor.^{vii}

 31% of assessments conducted by children's social services identified concerns about the child's parent/carer being the subject of domestic violence.^{viii}

 **ALMOST 1 IN 4** Islington pupils has a special educational need or disability.^v

 **MORE THAN 1 IN 8** children and young people in the borough experience mental health conditions.^{vi}

Support available locally

Islington benefits from a vibrant voluntary sector and a wide range of statutory support services for families ranging from a family information service to early years and youth services. These are vital in supporting Islington's families but we know they cannot meet every need. Many services are stretched so thresholds for access can be high and often only offer time-limited support.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

Islington Giving's Supporting Families programme to date has revealed some important insights to help inform our future work.

Flexibility is crucial. Families are diverse and complex. Activities and services which don't build in some flexibility and / or are always offered at set times and places will exclude some families. "We planned our summer activities with young parents who had been part of some of our previous projects, so we could learn from them what would work best. This meant that our project was really well attended." **All Change Arts**

Networks are critical. Organisations must have the ability to connect families to local opportunities and to refer into specialist support. "Using experienced staff at our weekend drop in sessions really improved the service we offered. We were constantly able to talk to parents about other local services and to tailor advice to the needs of a wide range of parents and children."

Paradise Park Children's Centre

Support is not always best delivered by professionals. Providing a space to socialise, learn from each other and access more informal methods of support can be the catalyst for families to find new ways of doing things. "Sharing experiences with other parents who have experienced the same things makes me feel better... Sharing ideas and thoughts helps." **A parent caring for a child with additional needs**

It takes considerable time and effort to reach local families. Connecting with families who are more isolated and not already linked to opportunities can only be done by working in partnership with local statutory and voluntary organisations and residents. One organisation reflected that recruiting on a first come first served basis through their website and local advertising largely attracted those who were already well networked. Learning from this they now work with Children's Centres and community groups and reach a more diverse range of families.

WHAT WE HEARD

Building on all our knowledge gathered over the last 5 years we held conversations from November 2016 to May 2017 with a range of parents in different settings and people who work with them. In some cases our conversations were in-depth while others were focused on testing out ideas. We spoke to parents directly while additional information was gathered from set questions posed to parents by staff in voluntary organisations.

People told us that key challenges many families in Islington face are:

- Financial hardship
- Social isolation
- Relationship conflict / domestic violence
- Housing issues
- A family member living with a physical or learning disability and / or mental ill-health

These challenges have significant impacts on families, often combine in complex ways and are not easily resolved. Families require ongoing support to build trust, resourcefulness, resilience and social networks.

Families told us that they would like support:

“THAT’S GOOD AT NOT MAKING ME FEEL LIKE A PROBLEM”

“WHERE PEOPLE NOTICE IF YOU ARE NOT THERE”

“WHERE I FEEL ACKNOWLEDGED AS AN INDIVIDUAL”

“WITH SOMEONE CARING AROUND YOU WITH NO HIDDEN AGENDA”

A LIFE NOT A SERVICE

Formal ‘services’ are not always what families want.

This was eloquently communicated to us by a carer of a family member living with a learning disability who told us that she wanted **‘a life not a service’** - normal opportunities to go out, socialise and engage in activities just as other families do. This sentiment was echoed by others we spoke to.

Despite the support that currently exists for families in Islington, need remains high. Much more has to be done. Families are diverse; what works for one family may not work for another. Sometimes support for the whole family can help. Sometimes supporting one family member – child or parent – improves life for the whole family. We need a varied menu of support and activities to enable families to flourish.

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Everyone we heard from agreed that families would benefit from:

- practical support for managing and alleviating poverty
- access to opportunities - whether to pursue interests for joy and enrichment, or to build skills and confidence to help look to the future
- long term support for reassurance and building resilience.

We have distilled these key themes into four action areas which will shape Islington Giving’s work with partners to support families.

HOW WE WILL RESPOND

Islington Giving's Supporting Families Programme aims to complement and add to existing support for families and make a lasting difference to residents.

We will work with partners to take action on:

ESTABLISHING A FAMILY CATALYST FUND

Families and those that support them highlighted the benefits of having access to funds which families can use flexibly. The Family Catalyst programme will make funds directly available to:

- i. open access to opportunities for time alone or to pursue interests for joy, such as a hobby or a family day trip.
- ii. help family members build their future by for example covering course or membership fees.

DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS

We heard that parents and young people would like more opportunities to develop confidence and skills towards realising future aspirations. Islington Giving will work with The BIG Alliance (the Businesses for Islington Giving Alliance) and organisations that can help parents and young people to fulfill their potential and their ambitions. This could include practical support and help to step into work or volunteering.

BUILDING SOCIAL NETWORKS

Families said they want more access to informal and personal support. Islington Giving will invest in organisations which offer long term relationships and help families build connections with each other. This could for example include support for children of parents living with mental ill-health or for family members experiencing domestic violence.

PROVIDING FREE ACTIVITIES

Residents told us that they want opportunities to go out, socialise and engage in activities just as other families do. Islington Giving will partner with a wide range of organisations to 'unlock' Islington enabling families to make the most of the borough at times and places that families want.

THANK YOU

- Amanda Gibbs, Parent
- Anat Toffel, Women's Resilience Awareness Project Facilitator, Solace Women's Aid
- Andrea Bernard, Acting Team Manager, One Support
- Anne Cartwright, The Manna
- Anne Dowling, Parent
- Carly Oldham, Service Manager, Single Homeless Project
- Ciaran Rafferty, Principal Grants Officer, City Bridge Trust
- Clare Palmer, Parent
- Claudia Coussins, Islington Parent Programme Manager, Chance UK
- Dorothy Newton, Trustee, Cloudesley
- Florence Adu-Amponsah, Parent
- Gary Grinham, Parent
- Geoffrey Baruch, Director, The Brandon Centre
- Jacqueline Broadhead, Corporate Policy and Equality Manager, Islington Council
- Jenny Ling, Stronger Families Practice Development Manager, Islington Council
- Jyoti Mayer, Parent Support Manager, The Parent House
- Kate Kelly, Interim Director, Creative Islington
- Ken Kanu, Director, Help on Your Doorstep
- Luisa Dornelas, Team Manager, Early Help for Families, Islington Council
- Margaret K, Parent
- Maria Cripps, Service Manager, Cranstoun
- Mark Austin, Parent
- Melanie Griffiths, Director Cloudesley
- Melinda Sanchez, Parent
- Mina Kunde, Parent
- Natasha Agius, Parent
- Richard Barron, Director of Fundraising and Marketing, Buttle UK
- Roderick Cobley, Trusts & Grants Fundraiser, Peter Bedford
- Ross Adams, Senior Programme Manager, Chance UK
- Ruth Beecher, Service Manager, Early Help for Families, Islington Council
- Satya McBirnie, Team Manager, CASA Blenheim CDP
- Sharmeen Narayan, Senior Manager, Solace Women's Aid
- Silvia Aced Rodrigues, Parent
- Stephen Spencer, Service Coordinator, Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants
- Susan Caulker, Parent
- Suzanne Lee, Artistic Director, All Change
- Zoe Baxter, Recovery & Opportunities Coordinator, Single Homeless Project

And other parents who wish to remain anonymous

ISLINGTON GIVING

All income raised by Islington Giving is spent directly on supporting residents through organisations working in Islington. The running costs of Islington Giving are met by Cripplegate Foundation (charity number 207499).

Our guiding principle is for everyone regardless of circumstance to be able to give, whether with their time, expertise, resources or money. We believe we can achieve more when people with different ideas, perspectives and resources come together to find solutions to local needs.

To find out ways in which you can give back to Islington, please get in touch:



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References:

ⁱ Islington's Family and Parenting Support Needs Analysis, November 2016, p. 3

ⁱⁱ Islington's Family and Parenting Support Needs Analysis, November 2016, p. 3

ⁱⁱⁱ Official Statistics: Children in out-of-work benefit households: 31 May 2015, combined with 2015 GLA Population projections

^{iv} Islington's Family and Parenting Support Needs Analysis, November 2016, p. 3

^v Islington Children and Families Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2015-2025, p. 11

^{vi} Children and Young People's health Strategy 2015-2020, p. 41

^{vii} Islington's Family and Parenting Support Needs Analysis, November 2016, p. 10

^{viii} Islington's Family and Parenting Support Needs Analysis, November 2016, p. 9