

# Islington Giving Residents' Panels: listening to local voices

“I had this image pop into my head of people walking past us, and going into the organisations we've funded. It's such a good feeling knowing we are able to impact so many young people. They won't even know it's us funding the projects, but knowing we can make that impact in other young people's lives is heart-warming.

(Islington Giving's Young Grant Maker)



Former Young Grant Makers Kezia and Freya talking at Islington Giving Local Voices panel event (November 2021) at National Youth Theatre

# Islington Giving Residents' Panels: listening to local voices

“A truly unique experience which has given me the opportunity to feel confident making huge decisions. I have developed so many new skills such as analytical and critical thinking skills as well as improving on others such as teamwork and communication skills.

The world is changing in ways that require new ways of thinking and a stronger commitment to transparency, inclusiveness, and collaboration. At Islington Giving, we have a long history of valuing local experiences and collaboration, listening to and learning from people who know the many sides of our borough. Islington Giving first piloted a residents panel, our Young Grant Makers programme, four years ago and we have been building on this ever since.

Despite the many amazing opportunities we have on our doorstep, Islington remains one of the most unequal boroughs in the UK. At Islington Giving we're committed to making Islington

a more equal place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. To get there, we believe that residents who take part in, and benefit from, the groups and projects we fund should also participate in the decision-making about how our grants are awarded. This is where residents' panels can help.

Since 2018 our first residents' panel, Young Grant Makers, has awarded a total of £315,000 to 26 organisations, while engaging 31 young people in decision-making. In addition our very first Family Panel awarded £114,000 to ten organisations in 2020. Read more about the impact of our panels in the following pages.

# What is a Residents' Panel?

Residents' panels are at the heart of a process often referred to as **participatory grant-making**. The main aim of residents' panels is to share power with local people most affected by the issues we're trying to address, by engaging them in the decision-making process.

Through Islington residents' panels Islington Giving aims to:

**Diversify decision-making** by learning from, and listening to, people who live in the borough

**Challenge our own perceptions** and ways of doing things.

**Share power** and be more accountable and transparent to the local communities in which we work .

**Open a platform** for local residents to create opportunities for their borough

Through our Young Grant Maker and Family panels , we partner with people who live in Islington, have local knowledge, ideas and a deep understanding of their local challenges and needs. We seek to recruit residents

that reflect Islington's diverse community, and who have personal experience of the issues being addressed. We also seek to engage people who would not normally put themselves forward for one reason or another.

As part of the process, a group of residents are supported by Islington Giving's experienced staff team. Using their own experiences and the skills they develop during the course of the programme, the panel will tell groups the kind of work they are interested in supporting. They will receive and discuss applications, and meet people from the shortlisted projects, finally making decision about how the funds should be spent. With residents' panels Islington Giving is contributing to a more inclusive and fairer borough.

Our residents' panels are funded by our generous individual and business donors, as well as BBC Children in Need (Young Grant Makers), and the National Lottery Community Fund (Family Panel and Young Grant Makers).



To date, our residents panels have involved over 50 residents, and given out over £430,000 to 34 local voluntary groups



## What next for our Residents Panels?

We are committed to continuing and expanding our work with Islington residents, and are hoping to develop and pilot new residents' panels alongside our Young Grant Makers and Family Panel.

In the next year we are hoping to run a panel for older

people, and will be launching a microgrants programme at the end of 2021 for individuals and small community groups looking to make a difference in their local area.

We are also exploring ideas for a residents' panel focusing on green community projects.

# Young Grant Makers:

Four years of funding decisions by and for local young people

“ *One word to describe it... I had supercalifragilisticexpialidocious... but I'm changing it to joy, because that's what I get from being a young grant maker.'*

The Islington Giving Young Grant Maker programme has been running since a pilot in 2018 when young people told us they wanted to be more involved with decision-making in their local area.

In the four years between 2018 and 2021, a total of 38 young people have been recruited to be Young Grant Makers, with some young people returning for a second year. The applicants do not need any previous similar experience to be accepted onto the programme, and we do not ask for CVs or covering letters. We do ask, however, for the young people's ideas about what would make Islington a better place for themselves and their peers.

Through weekly sessions over five months, supported by the Islington Giving

programme team, the Young Grant Makers have full power to make decisions over a delegated budget, for local youth activities and support. Islington Giving also supports the group with specific training on communication styles, interviewing skills, teamwork, assessing application forms, and reading budgets.

While always broadly focused on young people, the more specific theme for the grants is discussed and decided by the Young Grant Makers every year. The latest (2021) group invited funding applications from projects that help young people understand what success means for them, giving them the right support to get what they need to realise their own, individual potential.



Young Grant-Makers 2021  
(above) and 2020 (right)



There are so many issues facing us as young people. We have spoken about poverty, inequality and cuts to services. We've spoken about how boredom and a lack of support is at the root of a lot of issues. Home-life is key to the opportunities open to young people: whether it's stable or not; whether it's encouraging or not; whether there is money or not. We also know that how a young person feels about school or college can change their future: does it feel ok to be at school or not; are teachers supportive and interesting; do the subjects interest everyone? We've also had conversations around what safety looks like for different people – including knife crime, assault, harassment and racism. We've spoken about how young people might lack trust in authorities and many people don't expect much from young people or give us opportunities.

(YGM 2021 group)

# Young Grant Makers:

## Key facts

- Young grant-makers is a panel of 12 young people aged 17 to 24 who come together over five months to make decisions about funding for local projects for children and young people in Islington.
- The programme has been made possible with the support of BBC Children in Need, the National Lottery Community Fund, City Bridge Trust and, most of all, donations to Islington Giving over the years, and most recently to the Children and Young People's appeal.
- In 2021, the Young Grant Makers had full decision-making power over a budget of £85,000. They received 27 funding applications, requesting a total of £330,341. Every year the panel is able to fund about a quarter of received applications.



- Each year more than 400 local young people will benefit from the funded projects.

Over the four years, Young Grant Makers have funded the following groups, ranging from sports and creative activities to employment training and counselling:

**2021:** National Youth Theatre, YES Outdoors, Mary's Youth Club, Isledon Arts CIC, Global Generation, Eat Club, Breakin' Convention

**2018-2020:** Crafts Council, Action Youth Boxing Intervention, MEWSO - Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation, Prospex, The Dynamic Autism Group, Galbur Foundation, Small Green Shoots, All Change Arts Ltd, The Access to Sports Project, Holloway Neighbourhood Group, Daylight Theatre Foundation, Isledon Arts CIC, Creative Opportunities, Brandon Centre, Amberliegh, Copenhagen Youth Project



“ I’ve learnt that everyone will have different opinions, but it is important to listen to everyone because they may change your mind as they might see it in an alternative perspective.

## Breakin’ Convention “Out of the Box” (funded by Young Grant Makers in 2021)

Run by the hip hop theatre company Breakin’ Convention, Out of The Box invites a group of young people to come together to pitch a creative idea of what they collectively can work towards, such as a music documentary, a short film, a theatre piece, a music album or a live event. Once agreed, the group will organise roles, tasks, and budget themselves, with regular meetings and support from Breakin Convention artist mentors, including guest speakers in the field they have chosen. The project will build young people’s confidence and help give them the chance to become professional creatives. The Out of the Box group is currently preparing a hip hop theatre performance, showcased in Sadlers Wells in December 2021.



# Family Panel

Supporting local families, parents and carers

Launched in 2020, our Family Panel invites local residents to take part in decision-making about funding for groups and projects aimed at supporting local families. Islington Giving recruits eight residents that reflect Islington's diverse community and who have personal experience of the issues being addressed. We are particularly keen to engage people who would not normally put themselves forward.

The family panel members don't need any previous experience with grant-making. Panel members need to be/have:

- a desire and enthusiasm to effect change in their local community
- some experience of the issues being addressed i.e. social or financial isolation, relationship conflict / domestic violence / disability or live with a family member who has a physical or learning disabilities and / or mental ill-health.

In its first year, launched six months into the first Covid-19 lockdown, the focus was on funding projects that open up Islington, to tackle isolation and to connect with others in their community.

- resident in Islington, reflecting the mission and objectives of Islington Giving
- parents/carers of children under 18 (or under 30 if you are a parent/carer of a child with a disability)

“*This was the first thing I'd done in my quest to get involved with something local now that my kids are a bit older. I thought the Panel was a really good representation of Islington residents. I am looking for my next project and would love to hear if you felt there was any where I could help.*”

Islington Giving's first 2020 Family Panel received applications from groups totalling over £550,000 and were able to award a total of

**£114,900** to **ten 12-month projects.**

Most of the funded projects provide activities specifically to isolated families, collectively reaching

**1,560 Islington residents** and involving **140 volunteers** over a 12-month period.

The 2021 Family Panel (pictured below) has received 21 applications to their call that ended in November 2021. The funding decisions will be made in January 2022.

We are inviting applications for projects that engage and empower isolated parents/carers.

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# Family Panel

## Key facts

“All Panel members have had a great input. Thought there would be more clashes but it was just about understanding more. There were no egos.

- Family panel comprises eight Islington residents who come together over three months with the aim to make decisions about a pot of funding for supporting families and parents in Islington.
- The programme has been made possible by the support of Islington Giving donors and the National Lottery Community Fund.
- The family panels have a full decision-making power over a budget of £115,000.



- In 2020 the Family Panel received funding applications from 33 groups, asking for a total of over £550,000 for their projects.

The funded activities ranged from family cooking courses and family-friendly city farm activities to specialist activities for both children and parents with learning disabilities.

The groups funded by the Family Panel in 2020 were:

**Arc, Parent House, Hornsey Lane Estate Community Association, Bags of Taste, Elfrida, Maa Shanti, Minority Matters, Memory Gardens, Memory Café, Freightliners Farm**

# Freightliners Farm

(project funded by Family Panel in 2020)

The supporting families grant from Islington Giving provided the farm with much needed funding to enable local families to access the farm throughout an extremely difficult year. Farm staff were able to maintain the farm as a space for the local community and reach local families at home through daily live learning sessions, provision of “have a go at home” activity packs and farm-linked learning resources.

Despite a number of lockdown restrictions during some months, we anticipate the farm will have hosted around 9,000 individual visits from 2,000 different families between April and October 2021.

“*The children have all been so excited for this trip and were so thrilled to see all of the animals. I would also love to thank Jane for being such a fun and engaging tour guide. It was really great for the children who have been largely stuck at home this year to be able to visit the farm and the mums have been incredibly grateful for this trip.*

Feedback from Family Support Worker with a Women’s Refuge



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To find out more, please visit

[www.islingtongiving.org.uk](http://www.islingtongiving.org.uk)

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