



Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving Funding during the pandemic

Themes, impact and celebration
of Islington's voluntary sector

islington
giving

*Cripplegate
Foundation*

Executive Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic created a crisis on a global scale that no-one could have anticipated.

It has quite insidiously exploited the fault lines that already exist in society, and it is abundantly clear that it has contributed to increased isolation, poverty and inequality in Islington. The poor have got poorer, and the rich richer. Those on the wrong end of increasing inequality – whether that be in relation to race, disability, gender or health – have generally suffered the worst consequences of the pandemic. This has been both directly through deaths attributed to Covid alongside the negative impacts of infections, or indirectly through increased isolation due to the complete closure of public life, no access to furlough or other government support, redundancies and contraction of key labour markets – particularly the low wage hospitality and catering sectors that we know many poorer Islington residents disproportionately rely upon.

If it wasn't obvious before, it is now abundantly clear that the sector provides a vital role in supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Islington. As Covid-19 began to spread at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 and the country was plunged into its first lockdown, it immediately became apparent that as local funders, well integrated into the fabric of the voluntary and community sector in Islington, Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving would have to

respond quickly to help groups adapt to meet the needs of the people they support. Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving have supported groups with funding to respond to this community need at both the individual and organisational level and the information documented in this report goes some way to demonstrate the impact that this funding has had to date. It touches upon the work of 43 organisations that received a total of 50 grants across all of Islington Giving and Cripplegate Foundation's funded programmes. Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving funding – whether Crisis funds, longer term funding support or ongoing funded programmes – have collectively played a key role in helping ensure the worst impacts of the pandemic, for both residents and the sector locally, have been mitigated.

The intention of this report is therefore to celebrate this response and the many positives that have arisen from this crisis. More fundamentally, it is hoped that by documenting these positives it can help ensure they can be sustained and built upon to provide a more cohesive and connected response, across the public, voluntary and private sectors, to the many challenges faced by people living in Islington as we emerge from this pandemic.

The report is divided into the following sections:

A collective response to digital exclusion

In a borough suffering some of the highest levels of inequality in the country it was immediately obvious that there was going to be an urgent need to get those not already digitally connected online. However, it was also obvious that as a funder with limited resources we were not in a position to meet this gap on our own and moreover, that this was a much bigger issue than what provision of hardware solutions could solve alone. This section therefore focuses on how funding was used to provide holistic solutions to the digital divide including: the importance of training, wrap around support and tailored digital solutions; the added value of digital enablement and online provision; support provided to improve organisation's digital infrastructure; the importance of offering alternatives to digital, including access to outside space and; looking beyond the immediate crisis, the roll out of hybrid delivery.

An evolving approach to food insecurity

Islington Giving's Crisis fund specifically provided funding for emergency food support and this section documents how many projects used the flexibility of Islington Giving's Crisis Fund to supplement and compliment food received from other sources, enabling them to offer a fuller package of support, including more holistic and culturally appropriate provision. While the pandemic has brought the level of food poverty and insecurity in Islington to the surface, it has also demonstrated the power of communities when they work together. Active steps are now being taken to make links with a growing food co-operative movement. While this section highlights the fragility of current access to food it also focuses on how the pandemic has brought into sharp focus

the need to strengthen local food networks and asks whether this has been an unintended positive outcome from the crisis.

How the crisis is impacting the sector

Across every organisation, and particularly for frontline staff, the crisis has taken its toll on wellbeing and stretched capacity and resources to the full. This section focuses on smaller organisations and how they have struggled to continue operating throughout lockdowns but while precarious financially, they are also resilient due to the passion and commitment of the people running them. It also focuses on the contradiction relating to how those organisations that have taken steps to improve their sustainability by diversifying income streams suffered the greatest financial pressures resulting from the complete closure of public life.

Moving Forward: An endnote on the positives

The final section concludes by focusing on some of the key positives and learning to emerge from this collective response. It is divided into the following benefits for the sector and local residents: increased reach, access and connections; increased partnership working, co-ordination and collaboration and; increased recognition of the value and importance of the sector. It also focuses on the following learning points for Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving as funders: the importance of trust and flexibility; as well as quick and flexible funding, the importance of continuity and stability with existing programmes; the need to support groups experiencing loss of earned income, and; how the crisis has provided an opportunity to fund new groups.

Introduction

Working closely with its coalition partners, Islington Giving realigned some previously committed funds and launched a public facing Covid Crisis appeal, raising over £400,000.

As the country was plunged into its first lockdown, it immediately became apparent that as local funders, well integrated into the fabric of the voluntary and community sector in Islington, Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving would have to respond quickly to help groups adapt to meet the needs of the people they support.

At a regional level, London Funders also mobilised quickly to launch a collaborative London Community Response Fund (LCRF) with many of the Trust, Foundation and statutory funders supporting the sector across the capital contributing funds. This enabled organisations to apply through one central application to a consolidated pot of funding. Islington Giving chose to align its funding to LCRF allowing it to pull out applications specific to Islington and ensure fast turnaround in decision-making and release of funds.

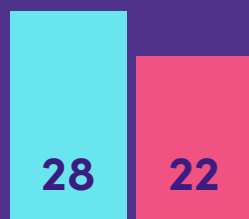
While all funded groups have had to adapt the way they operate, this report collates information derived from monitoring reports and follow-up conversations with grantees that have significantly changed the way they work to ensure support reaches the most vulnerable Islington residents. Much of the impact highlighted emanates from

support provided through Islington Giving's Crisis fund. However, both Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving complimented this emergency support through its ongoing funding programmes, with groups adapting what they were already delivering to respond to the immediate crisis. This report therefore provides a consolidated picture of the impact across all of Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving's funding programmes.

The charts below show the breakdown of grants directly funded through Islington Giving's Crisis Fund compared to other programmes and also the breakdown of grants across the three core funds administered through Cripplegate Foundation. The majority of funding has been provided through Islington Giving, with the bulk of the grants made through the Crisis Fund. Just over a third of grants were made through Islington Council's Community Chest (ICCC) or Cripplegate Foundation.

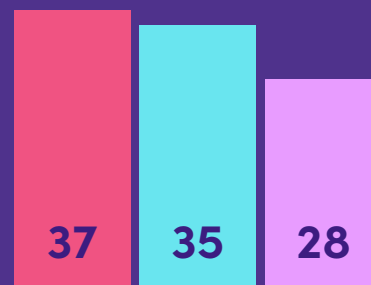
Funding has generally had good reach into specific communities where the impact of the pandemic has been most devastating – both in relation to deaths but also the economic, social and health consequences of lockdowns.

Number of IG Crisis grants vs grants from other programmes



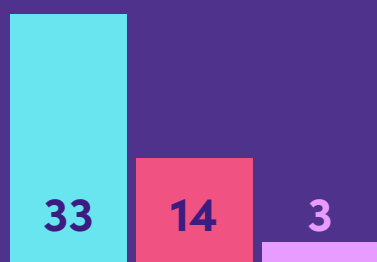
■ IG Crisis Grants
■ Funding through other grant programmes

Number of grants supporting BAMER and Physical and mental health including disabilities



■ Everyone (not targeted)
■ Physical and mental health including disabilities
■ Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee Communities

Number of grants by Fund

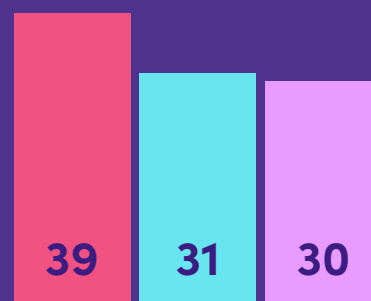


■ Islington Giving
■ Islington Council Community Chest
■ Cripplegate Foundation

Crisis support has broadly covered three areas: digital exclusion; befriending; and food distribution and these are discussed in the first two sections of this report. Slightly more organisations have directed their support at digital inclusion compared to food and befriending which were roughly equal. The final two sections look at how the crisis is impacting the sector and some of the lessons and positive outcomes to emerge.

Just over a third of grants have directly supported people with mental and physical illnesses and disabilities, while just under a third have targeted support to Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) communities.

Breakdown of key areas of Crisis Support



■ Digital support
■ Befriending
■ Food



A collective response to digital exclusion

As lockdowns and social distancing became the standard response to the pandemic, services and support moved online. It was well understood before the pandemic, that the most marginalised in society are disproportionately impacted by digital exclusion and would therefore suffer the greatest as digital delivery quickly became the norm. In a borough suffering some of the highest levels of inequality in the country – almost half of Islington's children live in poverty and the borough has some of the highest concentrations of poor mental health and isolation – it was obvious that there was an urgent need to get those not already digitally connected online.

Early on in the crisis, Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving combined forces and worked with the Council to provide £60,000 towards the purchase of 359 laptops to help with remote learning, mostly for Year 10 school children who were identified as falling through the gaps in statutory provision. This immediate response complemented wider efforts from central government as well as a generous donation of computers from Islington Giving partner, the Arsenal Foundation, who distributed laptops to pupils at New River Green College, the local Pupil Referral Unit. However, demand for IT was still huge from across the sector and the need to help vulnerable residents benefit from the adapted online support on offer was now paramount.

This led to Islington Giving collaborating on a tech appeal set up by local youth organisation Yes Outdoors. Islington Giving provided funding, promoted the appeal and made it easy for people and organisations to donate through its website.

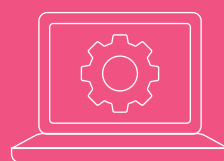
Through its local networks it was also able to link in Mer-IT, a social enterprise that refurbishes computers. Help on Your Doorstep and Brickworks Community Centre both helped with logistics and distributing computers to residents who would most benefit. Collectively through Islington Giving, Cripplegate Foundation and the tech appeal at least 472 additional devices (laptops/desktops/tablets/smart phones) were donated to residents in need.

However, ensuring residents without previous access to IT now had a device was only one element of solving the digital exclusion problem. Many residents had no idea where to start with their new, or indeed previously owned devices while many others could not afford data packages or broadband costs. Others simply had no intention or desire to get online. It is in this space that the voluntary and community sector excelled; by offering tailored appropriate responses to each person's individual circumstances.



£60,000

provided by Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving towards the purchase of 359 laptops to help with remote learning



212

digital support group training sessions supported by Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving's funding programmes

The importance of training, wrap around support and tailored digital solutions

For many residents getting access to a donated device was only the beginning of the journey to overcome digital exclusion. 314 people were also provided with data packages, some of whom may already have had access to IT but were simply unable to get online due to the cost. Moreover, there is little point in being able to access the internet if you don't know what to do once you are there. Through a mix of short and long-term support the voluntary and community sector has enabled people to gain confidence and skills in using the internet and this is a real positive to come out of the pandemic. Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving's funding programmes have supported the delivery of 212 digital support group training sessions and many more one-to-one support sessions. In some instances, funding enabled capacity to be increased, allowing groups to do more of what they were doing already: Funding enabled us to **"...increase our digital classes in partnership with Islington Pensioners Forum from fortnightly to weekly."** As well as enabling people to navigate the internet, connect to friends and relatives and to access mainstream statutory services, this support provided a double benefit of facilitating access to host organisation's specific digital activities and online programmes.

The added value of digital enablement and online provision

Many of the projects providing IT solutions to residents also delivered activities and support online. Providing devices alongside digital service delivery enabled people to be supported to access provision they could trust and albeit in a different form, were usually at least somewhat familiar with. This provided continuity and simplicity which helped to increase access to meaningful

interactions, particularly throughout lockdowns. For example, one local organisation working with older people provided a mix of stand-alone tablets for those with access to WiFi, other tablets were purchased through a contract so that they included WiFi as part of the package as well as buying a variety of standalone data packages, with each package matched to individual interests. Accessibility features on the tablets were enabled for those with visual and hearing impairments. This ability to tailor digital devices to suit individual needs has enabled older people in different circumstances to participate.



Equipping both independent older people and those in care homes with access to digital devices, data and contributing to phone/broadband costs has enabled people to connect meaningfully with the world outside, to participate fully in creative sessions, to see one another and their team regularly, to have fun, to create new work, to meet new people, to experience new things, to take part in offers from other providers, to develop new skills and digital confidence, and to access entertainment (e.g. live streamed concerts) – making a significant difference to people's quality of life."

In another example, a local refugee community organisation applied to Islington Council's Community Chest to deliver ten digital inclusion training sessions to the local Eritrean community. As well as delivering the training the grant enabled the purchase of ten tablets for participants to use during the sessions. These were then retained for other service users to access and to provide ongoing support, training and advice. This multiplied the value that each device

could bring to the wider community in the knowledge of the huge demand the organisation was facing.

The two quotes below are from projects providing access to both IT and online activities and offer a further illustration of how such localised support has wide ranging benefits, including for the family as a whole:



We provided a laptop and pre-paid dongle to a young teenager who was isolating with his elderly grandmother. The laptop helped him to access our online Homework Club as well as our online mentoring support. His grandmother telephoned to thank us for providing so many solutions to support them both during the lockdown."



...it has kept us sane and fit through the last few weeks and is such a nice way for the kids to see friends and feel a bit of structure and normality."

Support to improve digital infrastructure

As important as it is to ensure those without access to digital are able to get connected, it has been just as vital to ensure organisations are digitally equipped to respond appropriately to the needs of the people they support. This became even more urgent as staff were forced to work from home literally overnight. Two organisations received funding to buy computers to ensure more effective homeworking and an additional two organisations – both of whom work with very vulnerable clients including people with poor mental health, learning

and physical disabilities – received funding to make significant investments in their IT infrastructure to enable them to operate remotely. One used funds to buy mobiles and as a contribution towards running costs enabling staff to keep in close contact with their members ensuring they continued to receive maximum ongoing support. This meant they could deliver remote staff meetings, support people to learn video conferencing on phones and to use WhatsApp groups and group-calls to stay in touch. Such support was vital for maintaining social connections and wellbeing, reducing isolation by ensuring continuity and a sense of community that might otherwise have been lost. While undoubtedly helping to avert crises, people were also supported through crises, limiting their negative impacts when they inevitably did occur.



It helped to know there was always somebody there when I was feeling down/ not feeling very well"... "They kept my interest up in engaging me with info about the courses, including a link I can tap into (for) subjects I was interested in."

The second organisation was supported to completely transform their IT infrastructure to enable all staff to work from home with suitably equipped laptops. They also needed work smartphones to deliver their telephone advice line from home. The IT enhancements meant staff could deliver their specialist welfare benefits and debt advice service through home-working, ensuring ongoing advice and support was provided to 668 vulnerable residents throughout lockdowns.

Alternatives to digital

Despite this amazing support, documented above, and the diversity of locally tailored digital content on offer, it was abundantly clear there were still many people who were never going to benefit from the expanded digital provision now on offer. While this group of people likely includes some that can access and are able to use the internet, such as young people suffering from problems caused by and/or exacerbated through multiple lockdowns, it also includes many others, particularly very isolated older residents – all of whom were still in desperate need of regular ongoing human contact.

The first thing many local projects prioritised following the first lockdown was to phone all the people they were in contact with to get a better understanding of their support needs.



We were immediately concerned about the vulnerable people we support. This was compounded by early evidence that people were struggling, anxious and affected by the almost immediate closure of support services they rely on. Garden workers compiled a list of priority people to contact, before moving on to contact as many members as possible over the phone... this involved making over 60 phone calls and we then narrowed this down to a list of 16 people who we continued to call regularly to check up on."

Many then set up regular befriending programmes and a diverse range of creative face-face opportunities arose over the course of the pandemic year. To date, with the support of Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving's funding, well over 700 befriending relationships have been established through 17

organisations who have maintained regular, long-term contact. A further 53 dial-in social group chats and 319 in-person meet-ups were delivered through North London Cares supported through Islington Giving's Older People's programme funding.

Access to outdoor space

The lack of access to green space in Islington is well documented but Islington is also one of the most densely populated local authorities in the UK. From this context, it is easy to understand the desperate need for people to get out of their homes throughout lockdowns. Four projects stand out in how they were able to offer some kind of solace and momentary escape from the isolation and unacceptable living conditions that blight the lives of so many in the borough.

Culpeper Community Garden offered food growing opportunities to six adults with learning difficulties who were unable to stay indoors, and the garden workers regularly provided support, advice and encouragement on how to stay safe. A small group of artists with a range of severe and enduring mental health conditions were given access to paint in the peaceful garden setting, a lifeline that was **"a ray of sunshine in this dark season."** A family with five children were also given exclusive access to the garden (two hours a day, three days a week) because not only were they living in overcrowded conditions, but one of their children suffered from life threatening health challenges which meant they could not visit public parks or even shops.

Freightliners Farm provided ongoing support to their volunteers with learning disabilities and mental health conditions who were experiencing extreme isolation, particularly during periods

of lockdown. Those who benefitted said that the support the farm offered was one of the few contacts with the outside world they received. When they were able to return, they appreciated the opportunity to get back to some degree of normality, to talk to staff about the pandemic but also to get away from it by focusing on other interests.

A Community Garden based at Pooles Park Primary School reported that throughout the pandemic people saw the garden as a refuge, ***“a beautiful space outside where they can feel safe and at ease”***. Many of those accessing the garden space felt the garden took away all their worries, helping them to forget about the pandemic for a short while and reported that if it wasn't for this space, they would still be in their flat, feeling isolated.

Both Freightliners and Pooles Park offered produce, plants and seeds to the local community, allowing residents to take a little bit of nature for them to nurture at home, ***“the seeds were a ‘lifeline’ and had kept all five children busy and happy during lockdown”***. Freightliners even contributed fruit and veg to a food bank, supporting local food distribution efforts that are the focus of the next section of this report. One of their staff who lives locally stated how she could see a farm-grown plant in gardens and balconies down every street on her walk home – whichever way she went!

Meanwhile, a fourth project delivered through Little Angel Theatre managed to set up some impromptu neighbourly outreach sessions on the street outside their studio space. Not only did the groups enable connections between local people who had never met, it provided regular social interaction for several residents who were living alone with the sessions quickly becoming an important part of their week. Through the group, some locals received support

with daily tasks including shopping and this had a significant impact on their day to day lives.

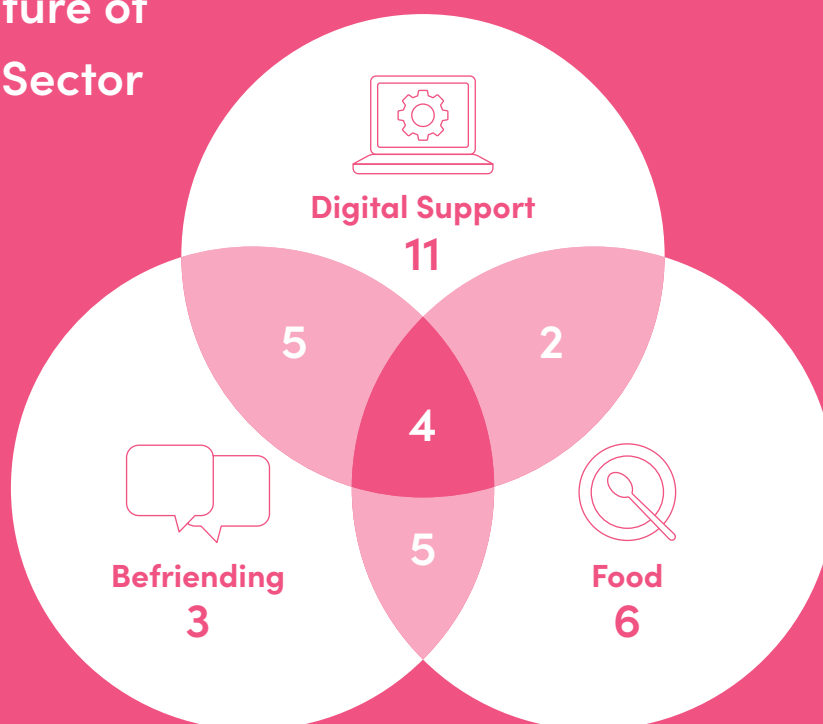
Islington Giving Crisis funds also enabled Little Angel Theatre to run an online programme of support as part of their Spectrum Theatre for autistic young people. In practice, a common feature of the support provided across the pandemic period has been its hybrid nature with almost every funded organisation reporting that they intend to keep some element of hybrid delivery going forward.

Hybrid Delivery

As touched on above but illustrated clearly through the diagram below, many organisations settled on a mix of offers that were able to encompass both the digital and physical realms. The majority of the 17 organisations that carried out some form of befriending for example also provided support with accessing food (nine provided both befriending and food support, four of which also provided support across all three areas). Only three of the 17 funded organisations providing befriending support focused solely on befriending. Nine projects also provided a combination of befriending and digital support, five of which focused on digital and befriending but not food provision. Similarly, for the 17 organisations providing support with food distribution, only six focused on food alone. Of the three key areas of support, digital inclusion was the area where most projects focused solely on one area of support with half of the 22 organisations focusing solely on this area. Two projects combined food and digital.

Below are just a few examples of the amazing creativity and thought that has gone into offering hybrid solutions with one organisation in particular standing out in its creative ability to mix digital and analogue delivery:

Hybrid Nature of Voluntary Sector Support



- Working with both older and younger people directly, but also benefiting the wider community as a whole, a local creative arts organisation produced a combination of postal poetry greetings cards and Instagram-poetry as well as digital podcasts and audio CDs enabling them to engage with different audiences. The Instagram project produced poetry and imagery that was shared with the wider community, encouraging them to 'stay safe' – to wear a mask and get vaccinated. Three music podcasts created by a group of older people were posted online and recorded onto CDs for care home residents and a CD player was donated to one care home resident whose player had stopped working. A common theme arising from these creative projects is the sense of connectedness that comes from people's ability to make a positive difference, contributing to the wellbeing of the wider community – something that has been especially valuable throughout the pandemic.

- Another organisation specialising in social activities for vulnerable adults received funding to replicate their physical programme online. This was achieved through a mix of interactive Zoom sessions (167 sessions with over 2300 attendances), pre-recorded 'special events', talks, wellbeing tips, and links to other resources. They were acutely aware however that this would not reach all the 1000-plus people on their database. Therefore, they produced a regular newsletter that was physically posted to people who had requested it. Furthermore, the pandemic was used as an opportunity to build on work they had already began to progress pre-pandemic to address specific access barriers. Working closely with the local authority and with funding from Islington Giving's Disability Fund, 500 DVDs and CDs were produced to replicate their physical programme as close as possible, then distributed to local residents with visual and hearing impairments.

- As well as sending out phone data and providing access to regular Zoom sessions an organisation supporting refugees and asylum seekers offered one-to-one English language sessions over the telephone. They also operated a telephone support service and sent out worksheets and art materials by post in order to reach those that were digitally excluded.
- Across a range of funded organisations almost 3000 people received wellbeing packs containing activities, tips and health information. As well as being made available online, they were also posted and even hand delivered – one pack made it all the way to the US! Meanwhile, North London Cares reported distributing a phenomenal 23,490 of their #AloneTogether activity packs!
- As part of a long-term music engagement project embedded in a local care home that was left devastated after the first Covid wave, musicians used their own iPad to live-stream music to the bedside of residents who were unable to join the live sessions taking place in the gardens. The live-streams were particularly beneficial for one resident, bringing him ***“...invaluable comfort and distraction. Soon, he joined us in the garden, where we played him all the songs he’d written. The boost was immediately noticed by his carers. The transformations in his mood, sense of purpose, and self-value are clear, undeniable, and amazing. He now brings his guitar to our sessions, strums along, and chats and laughs with the musicians.”***



≈3000

people have received wellbeing packs containing activities, tips and health information, across a range of funded organisations



23,490

#AloneTogether activity packs distributed by North London Cares



An evolving approach to food insecurity – from food emergency to food security

With some of the more established local foodbanks closing just when they were needed most, Islington Giving's Crisis fund provided funding for emergency food support, helping to establish two new foodbanks and ensure sufficient stock for a third that remained open.



Other foodbanks closed increasing demand (but) we had a massive influx of volunteers due to COVID-19, which has been fantastic – we have always struggled to recruit enough volunteers in the past”.

Crisis funding has supported at least seventeen projects locally to distribute well over 11,500 food packs and 5,300 cooked meals. When the total number of shopping orders are factored in, many more people have been supported with food deliveries.



We are aware of the underlying food poverty among households of older people as well as families on the estate and this was highlighted during the lockdown period and beyond. Also, some people were just too scared to come out of their house, so delivery of a food bag... was considered a real life-line.”

The example below exemplifies the key role mutual aid groups have played in supporting local people and how a simple food delivery helps to create deeper connections, blurring the lines between emergency food support and befriending:

Through a local mutual aid group, food and supplies were delivered to one elderly man with severe mobility and health issues who was required to shield and self-isolate for the duration of the lockdown and beyond. Deliveries took place week after week, allowing him to stay indoors and stay safe. He was connected with local volunteers – his neighbours – who quickly formed friendly relationships and who are still running errands and checking in on him.



Without the Cally & Barnsbury mutual aid group I would have been in a real pickle. I am so grateful for the time and help of the volunteers, and for the food they have delivered to me that has been absolutely invaluable throughout this difficult year.”

Many projects providing food have used the flexibility of Islington Giving's Crisis Fund to supplement and compliment food received from other sources, enabling them to offer a fuller package of support, including more holistic and culturally appropriate provision, as demonstrated through the following quotes:



Receiving funding from Islington Giving... meant that we were able to purchase specific food-stuff ... relying on surplus food and donations is not sustainable and we cannot provide well-balanced meals or food parcels as we don't know what we are going to receive on a day-to-day, week-by-week basis.”



Local donations of food from individuals and businesses have been truly amazing. However, these donations are not always the healthiest... and often come in bulk... With the funding secured we were able to purchase the food that was needed to ensure that the food we were able to cook was nutritious. By being able to purchase food that we need we have established relationships with suppliers.”



It is fantastic that we could receive donations of surplus food... but without knowing what we were to expect, it was difficult to plan ahead and respond to individual dietary and cultural requirements. We already had links with suppliers established, so we were able to spend the funding on food that was needed."



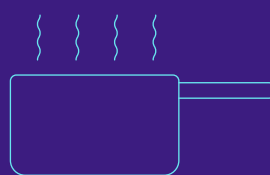
Everyone got a veg bag, a fruit bag and a salad bag, along with recipe ideas and encouragement to try new ideas."

Many projects used the opportunity that sending out food packs provided to offer wider more holistic support. One project distributed "survival kits" with useful items like masks, hand wash, activity booklets and arts & crafts projects to encourage members to keep active and safe, while others also distributed phone cards and data where the need was identified.



My partner has lost his job and the centre has helped a lot. The parcels have helped us to feed our children and enabled us to spend the benefits we are getting on other essentials. The hygiene products and cleaning products have been a god send, as they are so expensive, especially sanitary towels and hand gel. Nowhere else is giving them out, but they are as important as food as we need to stay clean and clean our house to kill the virus. Thank you to everyone at the Mildmay who have supported our community and my family."

It is undeniable, as one funded organisation reported, **"that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the surface the level of food poverty and insecurity in Islington"**. However, it has also demonstrated the power of communities when they are able to work together. There are now emerging signs of deeper thinking around the need for collective solutions to address this most acute and pressing problem. As well as demonstrating the fragility of our current access to food, the pandemic has brought into sharp focus the need to strengthen local food networks, and this may well be an unintended positive outcome from the crisis. Many local community centres are now working more strategically across their provision to think longer term about how they can help improve food security for the most vulnerable locally. There is increasing interest and active steps are now being taken to make links with a growing food co-operative movement. Local food co-operatives are being developed that seek to build on the better links with surplus food providers established throughout the pandemic.



5,300
cooked meals
distributed by at least
17 projects locally
with the support of
Crisis funding

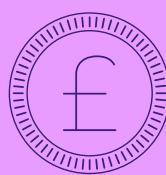
Linked to this, there is also increasing interest in food growing and developing more sustainable local sources of fruit and vegetables such as that donated through Freightliners Farm described above. Moving towards more co-operative forms of support also helps to reduce stigma associated with accessing food banks. The model encourages users to volunteer their time and, in this way give back to the local community by taking a role in managing the project and in the process, develop skills and confidence. It also encourages people to think about pooling resources, recognising that by coming together, people can develop more sustainable models of food provision.

“

The pandemic has demonstrated the high level of food poverty experienced by families and vulnerable people in our immediate community, hence, need for community-led food hub projects like ours are essential to support local community. This is why we are looking at establishing a community food co-op now.”

“

In acknowledgement of the stigma that surrounds food banks and free food one approach we took was to set up a food stall, like any stall you'd find on an ordinary street market, so that people could come along and select what they needed.”



Islington Giving Crisis
Funding has helped
local groups leverage
£300,000
in additional funds

How the crisis is impacting the sector

Across every organisation, and particularly for frontline staff, the crisis has taken its toll on wellbeing and stretched capacity and resources to the full. Smaller organisations have found it most difficult to continue operating throughout lockdowns and this corresponded with an inevitable drop in applications to Islington Council's Community Chest small grants programme. Groups have been forced to postpone activities, particularly where they rely on public facing venues such as community centres that have remained closed throughout the pandemic.



Due to delays and postponing activities some projects are still delivering previously funded/ongoing projects while others, having moved core services online, are using existing funding to extend provision. Additional pressure on services, reduced capacity and disruption to staff and services, combined with uncertainty over lockdowns and timescales for resuming pre lockdown delivery are all factors that are likely to have had an impact on the ability for organisations to apply for funds. However, while precarious financially, the passion and commitment of people running

these projects provides a level of resilience that simply cannot be measured by finances or other quantifiable metrics alone. There is optimism that most, if not all will therefore bounce back.

Reflecting society more widely, some organisations have managed the crisis as an opportunity, adapting quickly, raising more funds and 'future-proofing' their organisations, while other less resilient groups have not fared so well. One notable exception to this relates to the many organisations that have taken steps to

improve their sustainability by diversifying income streams. Ironically, when faced with the complete closure of public life, it has been precisely these organisations that have appeared to suffer the greatest financial pressures. The ability for Islington Giving's Crisis fund to get money out the door quickly when it was urgently needed has been a key factor in the support provided to many organisations, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

“

This grant also contributed towards the running costs of the centre when other income streams had ended.”

“

The grant... got us through the first six months of the pandemic ...we really would not have still been here or able to do anything without the support so a massive thank you.”

“

The funding was a great help to us at a very difficult point.”

One key positive outcome to arise from the funding provided through Islington Giving's Crisis fund and specifically, the way in which it was aligned through the London Community Response Fund (LCRF), was its ability to help leverage funding from other sources. Four local organisations for example received match funding from City Bridge Trust alongside an Islington Giving Crisis grant. Operating through LCRF meant that other funders could prioritise local groups for funding where they had expressed an interest enabling Islington

Giving funding to be maximised locally. Working collaboratively with other funders through a single application portal in this way has meant that more resource has flowed into the borough than may have otherwise been the case. Furthermore, working through LCRF certainly assisted Islington Giving in being able to make quick decisions and this helped to ensure many of the projects were funded early in the crisis.

“

(The support)...came at the start of the financial year, when other sources of funds had not come through and were in doubt... being able to continue to work with people has definitely and literally saved lives.”

Not only did this ensure support got to where it was needed fast, helping projects to move quickly to realign and adapt provision, but having a place-based funder make quick responsive decisions added a level of due diligence and reassurance for other funders, particularly through further LCRF waves of funding when Islington Giving funds had been exhausted. Many organisations reported that Cripplegate Foundation or Islington Giving funding helped them leverage additional funds over the course of the pandemic with just under £300,000 in additional funds raised.

Receiving this additional funding was “**....not possible without IT to do homework!**” (funded through an Islington Giving Crisis grant).

In short, Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving – including Crisis funding, longer term support and previously planned programmes – have played a key role in helping to ensure the worst impacts of the pandemic have been mitigated locally.

Moving Forward: An endnote on the positives

The final section of this report attempts to identify some of the positive areas of learning to emerge from Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving's funding relationships with local organisations in Islington throughout the pandemic. This can broadly be divided into benefits for the sector and the community more widely and learning points for Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving as funders more specifically.





Benefits for the sector and community:

● Increased reach, access and connections

including to some of the most vulnerable residents – it is undeniable that the extension to online delivery has increased reach for many organisations proving to be a more attractive offer for many people who are least likely to engage in face-to-face activities. There is also strong evidence that some people facing specific barriers are able to progress more quickly in the digital realm. It is therefore clear that digital provision in some shape or form is here to stay and will be retained by most organisations as we move forward beyond the pandemic. As three local groups commented:



We have attracted a lot more people to the digital classes than used to come regularly to the live classes. We ran a survey and found that a sizeable minority of people said they would not come to a live class but would continue coming to online classes. This has led us to believe we are reaching more isolated people. We have also shown a lot of people in our digital class and our befriending service how to connect to online classes and sessions as well as showing them how to use their equipment when they get stuck."



We have actually found that our attendance figures are beginning to rise as clients are more confident accessing online support."



We gained significant experience providing remote support and activities, over the phone and by using online video services ... with growing user, staff and volunteer involvement. We will use this learning in the long term, providing remote support to expand our reach to clients less able (e.g. due to mobility issues or anxiety) to attend on-site appointments or activities."

Alongside online delivery, increased collaboration, networking, telephone and doorstep befriending have all enabled services to access people that they were not previously in contact with.

A local community centre talked about how the emergency support has increased awareness of the wider support they can offer and how this has helped to bring residents into other activities:



We've been able to connect with many families that had never visited before, it is a shame that we met them in such shocking and distressed circumstances, but now we are working with those families and engaging them in our centre-based activities"

And from the resident's perspective...*"I didn't have any information about the activities that are delivered at Elizabeth House prior the lockdown, I am grateful for all support I have been getting..."*

As well as increasing reach and access, another local community centre reported how food has acted as a conduit for wider welfare support and importantly, provided opportunities for residents accessing support to give something back:



During the pandemic we have established a stronger connection with the local community through the food distribution provision and welfare checks. Through this we are able to create an opportunity for local people to volunteer and support their local community, most of whom never knew or used our community centre but are now able to see the services we are providing and are able to contribute to delivering community-led activities."

- **Increase in partnership working, co-ordination and collaboration** – this has occurred across all levels. The benefits for organisations of increased funder collaboration through the LCRF has been touched upon already but organisations have also formed new partnerships and appear to be working closer together and this looks set to continue. The sector has also worked more closely with public and statutory services, particularly in the co-ordination around the Council's We Are Islington central point of access.



In response to the Covid -19 crisis Octopus (network of local community centres) was able to work with Islington Council to design and implement an inter-referral process for those needing support, the impact being that the community food hubs were connected into a borough-wide distribution of food; an inter-referral service including We Are Islington"

Working online and from home has also provided more flexibility around when hours are worked, creating greater access and new opportunities to increase networking, including the ability to attend online events. There is evidence that this has begun to break down some of the barriers that exist between different sectors, building new relationships and increasing trust. Building on work that Cripplegate Foundation has supported with key voluntary sector agencies and the Council through its Development Partner programme, more relational ways of working are also developing. Perhaps the most relevant example is the way the Council's We Are Islington helpline has responded to resident need, not least through a more informed understanding of what the sector is able to offer locally but also in how communication takes place to identify and respond to requests for assistance.

- **Increase in recognition of the value and importance of the sector** – as documented throughout this report and beyond, it is the community alongside the voluntary sector that has been quickest to respond and adapt to rapidly changing and increasing need. It is not an exaggeration to say that the sector's ability to provide holistic solutions has helped to save many lives. Arguably the greatest contribution the sector has made is in helping maintain mental health by preventing or ensuring crises do not escalate. This can only be achieved through trusted relationships and the delivery of holistic joined-up services that are the hallmark of the sector. Organisations have found creative ways whether that be in person, remotely, or more often through a combination of both, to ensure vital lines of communication and support have remained open to the most vulnerable throughout the course of the pandemic.

Learning for Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving:

- **Importance of trust and flexibility** – being place based has enabled Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving to form long term relationships locally including with organisations not currently receiving funding. This has enabled quick decisions to be made and the ability to get funding to where it was needed fast. Where funding relationships have been in place pre-pandemic, the high level of trust that exists across partners has enabled funded groups to be more responsive. For example, Catalyst funds were readily reconfigured to support immediate and pressing needs (see below for more details) while Community Chest funds were reconfigured and/or extended to deliver in different ways or respond to urgent needs.

- **The importance of quick and flexible funding but also continuity and stability with existing programmes** – while the benefits of the former have been comprehensively covered in sections above, continuity for existing programmes has enabled a balance to be struck between quick responsive grants during the immediate crisis with ‘business as usual’. Over this period Cripplegate Foundation continued to work in partnership with the Council through the borough’s Resident Support Scheme including providing an additional £25,000 to its £50,000 annual contribution, ensuring increased access to individual crisis grants for residents in immediate need. Cripplegate Foundation has also administered five Community Chest funding rounds for small groups, carried out a significant review and subsequent funding through its Main Grants Programme, and

established a resource and space for new projects to be funded through the Programme in 2022. Islington Giving has undertaken two annual Young Grant Makers Programmes and set up a new Supporting Families participatory grant making panel, providing vital new funding for local organisations. Across both Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving the ground-breaking Catalyst Programmes have continued. This funding has directly benefited individuals, functioning as a vital safety net throughout the pandemic and has complimented the support provided through Islington Giving’s Crisis fund. For example, Catalyst grants were used throughout 2020 to meet basic needs (such as food, clothes and bills) – something that would not usually be within its remit. Some awards were made for tech (laptops/tablets, mobile phones and data) and there was a notable increase in requests for household items that clearly enabled people to more comfortably stay at home (including radios, TVs, kettles, washing machines, DIY, cooking equipment, furniture, cleaning products). However, more traditional awards also continued to be consistently made including for courses, equipment, and gaining formal identification (DBS checks, passports) that have helped residents secure employment.

- **Supporting loss of earned income** – expanding on the previous point, being able to provide a mix of new quick responsive funding to help meet urgent needs balanced against continuity around established and planned funding programmes has proved a vital lifeline to many organisations locally, particularly those that suffered a loss of income from other sources as a result of lockdowns.

● **Opportunity to fund new groups** – a key positive for Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving has been the development of new and the strengthening of existing relationships with organisations we have not been able to fund in the past due to the limitations on available funding. The diverse range and spread of organisations and in turn, the people supported directly, that have benefited from funding over the past 18 months is an amazing reflection of the diversity, vibrancy and reach of the voluntary and community sector in Islington and as a small part of this wider system, Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving is proud to have played its part.

In conclusion, the Covid-19 pandemic has created a crisis on a global scale that no-one could have anticipated or has ever experienced. It is abundantly clear that it has contributed to increasing isolation, poverty and inequality and has largely and quite insidiously exploited the fault lines that already exist in society. The Nuffield Foundation has found for example that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities for those in the poorest 10% of earnings distribution, some ethnic minority groups and children facing food insecurity. The poor have got poorer, the rich have got richer and those with poor physical and mental health and/or on the wrong end of increasing inequality – whether that be in relation to race, disability, gender or health – are more likely to have suffered the worst consequences of the pandemic. This may be directly through deaths attributed to Covid or the negative impacts of infections, or indirectly through lack of access to furlough or other government support, redundancies and contraction of key labour markets, particularly the low wage hospitality

and catering sectors that we know many poorer Islington residents disproportionately rely upon.

However, it is often these very same people at a neighbourhood and community level – the same people that make up the voluntary and community sector – that reacted and adapted quickest to respond to the urgent needs they could see emerging. Herein lies the real value of the sector and it has proven its worth time and again over the past 18 months. If it wasn't obvious before, it has now become abundantly clear that the sector provides a key role in supporting people with the many challenges they face. This is true at the best of times but the way it has collectively stepped up to fill the gaps in this moment of such unprecedented crisis is testament to its value. Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving have supported groups with funding to respond to this community need at both the individual and organisational level and the information documented in this report goes some way to demonstrate the impact that this funding has had to date. It is hoped this report shines a light and celebrates the amazing creativity, love and compassion that flows from the wonderfully diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector in Islington and all that it has achieved. The intention has been to celebrate this response and the many positives that have arisen from this crisis despite the obvious challenges and tragedies. More fundamentally, it is hoped that by documenting these positive outcomes, this report helps ensure they can be sustained and built upon to provide a more cohesive and connected response across the public, voluntary and private sectors to the many challenges faced by people living in Islington going forward as we begin to emerge from this pandemic.

Appendix: List of Funded Organisations and Fund

Organisation	Funding Programme
All Change	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Cally and Barnsbury Mutual Aid (Highbury Vale Blackstock Trust)	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Chabad	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Elfrida	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Elizabeth House (Octopus)	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Freightliners	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Galbur	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Healthwatch	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Healthy Generations	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Healthy Minds Healthy Bods	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Hilldrop (Octopus)	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Hillside	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Hive Foodbank	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Hornsey Lane (Octopus)	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Islington Centre for Refugees	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Islington Peoples Rights	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Little Angel	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Maha Devi	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Mildmay	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Mind	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Mobile Repair Service	IG Covid Crisis Fund
Whittington Park	IG Covid Crisis Fund

Organisation	Funding Programme
Help on Your Doorstep	IG Covid Crisis Fund, IG, CG
Stuart Low Trust	IG Covid Crisis Fund, IG Disability Fund
Manna	IG Covid Crisis Fund, CG
Yes Outdoors	IG Covid Crisis Fund, IG
One True Voice	IG Covid Crisis Fund, ICC
Sports and Life Skills	IG Covid Crisis Fund, ICC
Spitz	ICC
Federation of Iraqi Refugees	ICC
Eritrean Community UK	ICC
Finsbury Clerkenwell Volunteers	ICC
Aphasia Reconnect	ICC
Lifechances	ICC
Amberliegh	ICC
SLOW	ICC
Friends of Pooles Park	ICC
Maa Shanti	ICC
Minority Matters	ICC
Community Language Support Services	ICC
Small Green Shoots	IG Young Grant Makers
Culpeper	CG
North London Cares	IG



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