

Carers' Panel report

June 2024

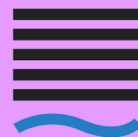


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Introduction

In early 2024 Islington Giving ran a fund for carers. This took a participatory approach, consulting with carers and carers' organisations to shape the model, decide upon priorities for the fund, and recruiting carers to take part in the panel which had authority to determine what organisations to fund in the borough. This report provides an overview of our first Carers' Panel and includes some reflections and learning to be implemented for the second, to be launched in late 2024/early 2025.

Objectives

1. To support people doing unpaid caring work in the borough
2. To involve carers in deciding how best to use the money

Summary

This was the first year of a two-year project. The grant pot this year was £60,000. In year two, we will be seeking matched funding for £40,000. The total grant pot of £100,000 over two years has been generously funded by The Mercers' Charitable Foundation, whilst the costs of organising the panel and providing remuneration and resource was funded by City Bridge Foundation.

We were mindful to ensure that the process for distributing the funds was proportional to the amount of funding available and considered the time carers had to take part in this process, in addition to the time groups would take to apply and the likelihood that they would be successful. For this reason, we opted to define the criteria with the steering group and invite key organisations to apply, rather than having an open call for funding proposals.

Islington Giving has a range of experience and knowledge of resident led giving spanning over seven years, sharing power with a diverse group of participants. However, working with carers specifically was a new experience for us. Having spoken to experts in the borough (including Adult Social Care commissioners and the Carers' Hub Manager), we began to understand some of the challenges that carers may have participating in an intensive way. Therefore, we sought to ensure as many carers as possible could have some part in the process; if not directly as a panel member, then within the organisations we might support, with whom they are already connected.



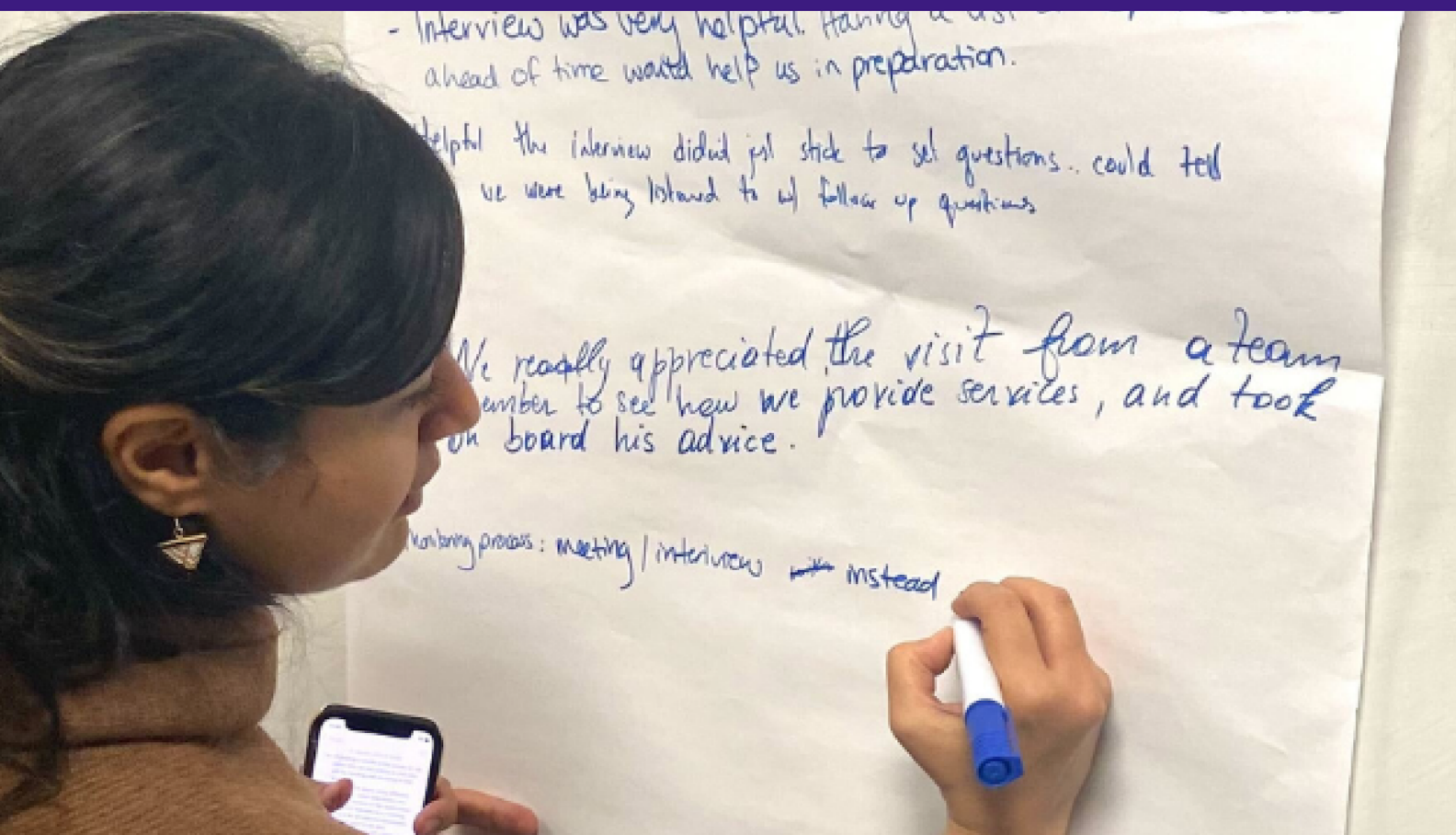
There are a range of carers in the borough – children caring for parents, parents caring for children with additional needs, often into adulthood, older people caring for partners. We hoped to reach as many groups as possible. For this reason, research of the existing groups and inviting groups serving a range of different carers to apply was considered the best way to direct funds. We also wanted panel members to represent a range of caring experiences

The initial stage of the process was consulting with local experts who are involved in service development and delivery for carers and carers themselves. This helped us to consider how to create an accessible opportunity for carers, supported us to gather a list of key priorities for carers locally, and to begin to research key local organisations who are supporting carers.

We reached out to 39 carers organisations to discover what work was taking place locally to support carers. We also requested support to raise awareness of the opportunity to join the Carers' Panel both via emails and during a presentation to members of the Carers Hub.

The carers panel included three carers with a range of personal and caring experiences. The panellists selected seven groups who were invited to apply and developed documents to send to groups. In order to capture the priorities of a wider range of carers, groups were asked to ensure that their members were meaningfully consulted and that the findings from this would shape the funding application. The carers panel offered support to groups to conduct this consultation. The groups were selected based on their presence and importance to carers in the borough, supporting a range of types of carers and providing a range of interventions.





All seven groups applied for funding having consulted with their members, and the carers panel supported two groups with this process. We funded all seven groups between £8-10,000, with a total of £60,000. The groups funded were ADHD Islington, Community Language Support Services, Islington Mind's counselling service, Islington Mind's Mother2Mother group, Kinship Care, Manor Gardens Centre and Parent House. Funding was requested for a broad range of purposes including direct grants to carers, wellbeing sessions, counselling, events, outings for carers and their families, practical support and advocacy.

The remainder of this report provides more detail on the stages of the process, as follows:

1. Consultations
2. Recruitment of Panel Members
3. Research into Carers projects/organisations in Islington
4. Application and Consultation process
5. Decisions
6. Budget
7. Reflection and Learning

Consultation

Prior to starting the project, we liaised with some local professionals who have experience of working with carers, to gain an understanding of how we could best involve carers, considerations for accessibility as well as their view on key organisations in the borough and priorities for funding.

With Islington Council's Carers' Strategy lead:

- 'Opportunities' tend to be less of a priority for carers than advocacy and support, for example to maximise income or negotiate with care agencies or medical provision.
- Opportunities for the cared-for person that provide something for carer or simply respite, are valued, though many carers don't want anybody else to care for their person.
- Providing a wide range or flexible offer is probably most valuable.
- In engaging carers, we need to consider remuneration which does not affect income/benefits and is flexible as things can change quickly - lots of short notice cancellations, for example. Online opportunities tend to work well for many carers.

With Manager of Age UK Carers Hub, Islington

- Supported us to gather a list of key carers organisations in the borough.
- Agreed with the steer from Ruby, above.

With leaders of a Parent Carers' Forum:

- Respite itself can be hard to fund and to source.
- Recruitment of support workers is very difficult, and the limited local respite option is oversubscribed or cannot cope with the complex cases whose carers most need respite.
- If a carer wants to spend a catalyst grant on a course, but cannot attend it because of their caring responsibilities, we could at least look at what extra help is needed for them to do this. Of course, the respite help could cost more than the Catalyst grant.

With members of Islington Mind's Mother2Mother group during an Islington Giving grants assessment. Participants are mothers who care for an adult child with a long-term mental health condition.

- The group valued the longstanding support network that had been formed amongst adverse group of women with a shared understanding of the caring role.
- The group said having something during the week that is just for them and allows them to reconnect with themselves was important to be able to continue to care for their child.
- The group said they would love additional funding to increase capacity for their psychotherapist (who can currently only see 8 of their group in any one term) with their current budget, or alternatively that they would like a short trip away as a group.

With 15 members of the Carers Hub.

- They provided a summary of the key organisations they use.
- They spoke about the priorities for carers in Islington, list below.

In addition, e-mails were sent to 39 groups who support carers in the borough. In this email we asked for the following:

- A summary of what support they provide to carers in Islington (which would form the basis of the research in selecting funded groups)
- Their impression of priorities for carers and what additional support would be beneficial.
- Groups to ask their members if any would be interested in joining the Islington Giving Carer's Panel.

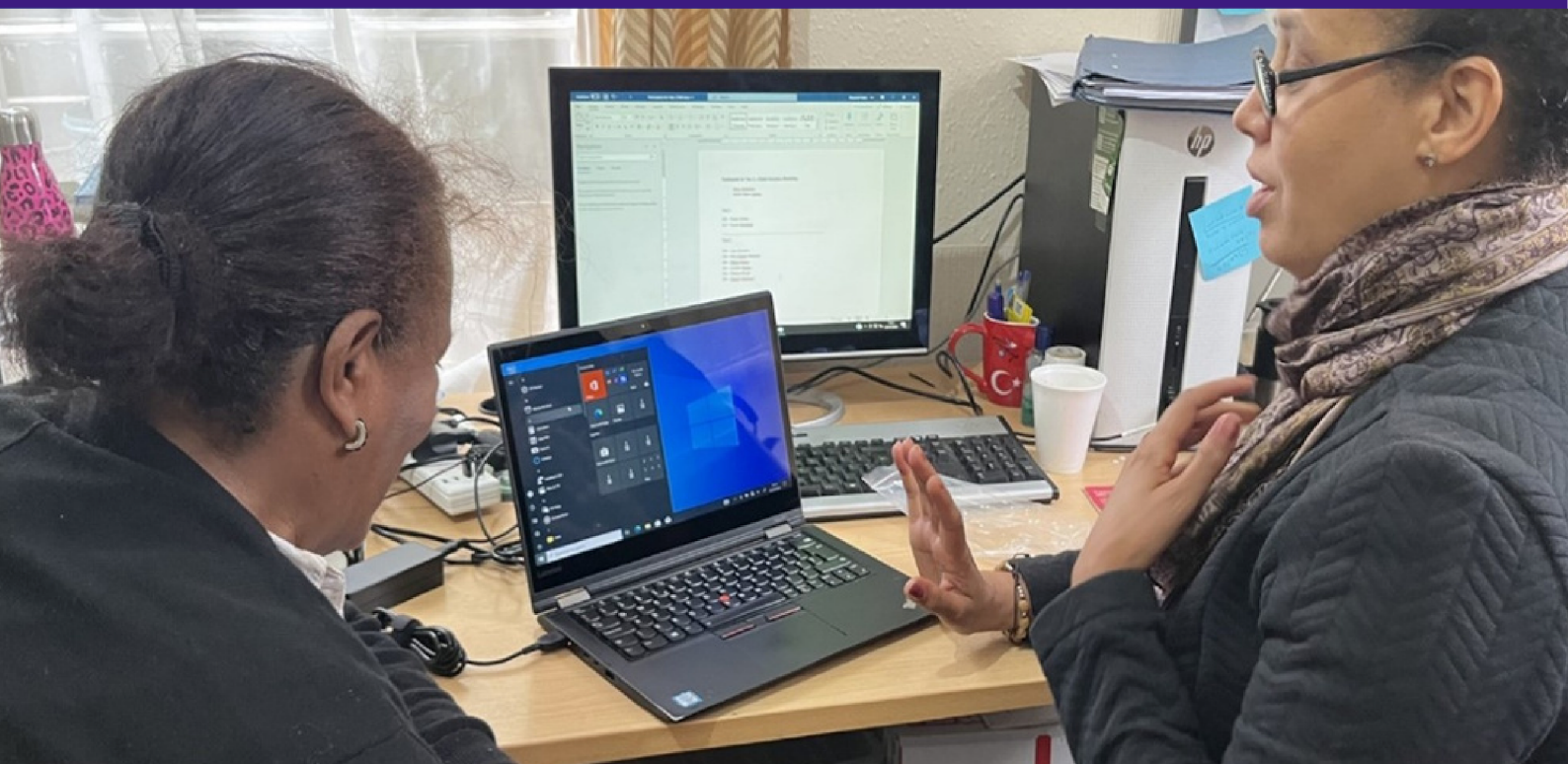


Priorities

From discussions with carers, the key priorities identified were:

- General advice, specific advice regarding Education Health and Care Plans, finances and grants, housing including supported accommodation, Face-to-Face advice.
- Leisure Activities
- Training for caring role
- Life coaching, careers advice and re-training for a new career to continue working around caring role or after a career break
- Respite or breaks for the carer
- Opportunities for younger carers
- Housing
- Discounts on TFL/Carers' oyster card, discounts on gym or outings
- Mental health support or counselling
- Identity/coping when caring role changes or ends
- Support to recognise being a carer to be able to access support

Image: Community Language Support Services, Islington



Recruitment of panel members

As a result of the information gathered at consultation we decided to take a different approach from our other Participatory Grant-making Panels. Ordinarily, in recruiting panel members, we have a more formal application and interview process (for example, for Young Grant Makers). Being aware of the time barriers for carers, we opted to have a simple expression of interest. We also took a more light-touch approach to the number and length of meetings, with 5 x 1.5 hour panel meetings across 3 months, on a consistent time and day. There was opportunity for more involvement for those with more capacity to attend eligible groups and consult with the carers who access their services.

We hoped to have a range of different carers (in terms of the age of the cared-for person and type of care provided) to reflect a broad range of experiences. We anticipated having 3-5 carers on the panel, in a steering-group type role initially, whilst ensuring that the views and priorities of other carers in the borough were captured through the grant-making process.

How we recruited

As described above, we reached out to groups we were aware of in Islington whilst scoping the existing services and asked them to promote the opportunities to carers using their services. This approach had the benefit of targeting carers who already had the capacity to be involved in a project.

We also attended a Carers' Hub forum meeting and promoted the opportunity there. We had 6 expressions of interest through this but were only able to reach one carer who eventually joined our panel.



Who were the panel members

We recruited four panel members, of which three attended sessions. All were women based in Islington aged between 35-55. One was the carer for an adopted child, one cared for an adult child with autism and mental health issues, and one cared for her partner. There was another carer who expressed interest and was offered the opportunity but was unable to make meetings due to challenges in their personal life and with their caring role.

Of the three panel members, one came via Carers' Hub, one via Islington Mind and one was previously involved with Islington Giving as a community researcher so heard about the opportunity via our alumni communications.

How many sessions/responsibilities of panel members

4 panel meetings took place in person and 1 took place online, due to poor weather and attendance. Meetings took place fortnightly on a Tuesday morning.

In addition to the core responsibility of attending panel meetings, panel members were also invited to be involved with consultations with the groups selected to apply, based on their interest and capacity. Two panel members took up this opportunity.

Remuneration & Wellbeing fund

Remuneration was offered either via payroll, the London Living Wage, vouchers or catalyst grant. All three panel members opted for vouchers.



The grant from The Mercers' Charitable Foundation also included a fund towards wellbeing of Islington Giving staff, so panel members were also offered an additional £150 to be spent towards their wellbeing or personal development, as a lack of confidence and opportunities to find work around their caring roles were key barriers that the group identified.

One member chose to buy a kitchen appliance to help her cook healthy meals, another purchased some clothes as she had had No Recourse to Public Funds for a long time and was not able to buy herself something nice for a long time.



Experience of panel members

"I was slightly apprehensive about going on the panel at first due to a previous experience on another panel elsewhere that was slightly stressful. However, I needn't have been as I thoroughly enjoyed the whole process and the team were great to work with and really supportive in helping guide us through. I learnt a lot about the grant making process and it felt really good knowing that I was contributing in some small way and helping other carers. It was also lovely meeting other carers. I especially enjoyed visiting one of the carers groups for a consultation. It really made a difference meeting the people who would be benefitting from the grant and hearing their stories and the wonderful work they do.

It was a very inspiring, motivating and an uplifting experience. Being on the panel also opened up further opportunities as I was able to attend other Islington Giving events and also led me to finding employment with Islington Giving/Cripplegate Foundation, which I am very excited about. Overall, the whole experience was very positive and it helped me through a difficult period of time (associated with being a carer) by offering me a space that was solely for me with the bonus of being able to give back to others, which also felt like it was for me!"

"I would like to say it was really appreciated to be a part of funding through carers panel. This is not going to be one off - keep going it's really helpful for unpaid carers out there, that really need help sometimes. Thank you for those opportunities to take part in the panel I really enjoyed that."

It really made a difference meeting the people who would be benefitting from the grant and hearing their stories and the wonderful work they do.

Carers Fund Panellist

Research into carers projects

We spoke to key carers' organisations to grow a list of groups who were supporting carers in the borough. We also looked through resources provided by local carers' groups about what services are available locally and nationally. We reached out to 39 groups via email. We had responses from over 20 groups. Some were disregarded as potential for funding as they were not providing services to Islington residents specifically (for example, national helplines). This left us with a list of 14 groups providing key services to carers in Islington.

ADHD Islington

Age UK's Carers Hub

Angel Shed Theatre Company

Centre 404

Community Language Support Services
(CLSS)

Family Carers Action Group

Islington Bereavement Service

Islington Mind – Counselling for Carers

Islington Mind – Mother2Mother

Kinship Care

Manor Gardens

Memory Café

Parent House

South Islington Stroke Club



Overall, the whole experience was very positive and it helped me through a difficult period of time (associated with being a carer) by offering me a space that was solely for me with the bonus of being able to give back to others, which also felt like it was for me!"

Carers Fund Panellist

Application and consultation process

During panel meetings, the panel members considered the approach proposed by Islington Giving to select a number of groups to invite, based on the funds available and a maximum grant level set at £8,000. This proposition was based on the funds available and the desire to support key existing services in the borough whilst also seeking to reduce the amount of time wasted by groups applying when the odds of success were low. In our recent other rounds of participatory grant-making around 30 groups who applied were unsuccessful and we wanted to avoid this in the current process.

Panel members reviewed and added to the list of carers priorities (see section 1) and agreed a list of potential projects that organisations may want to apply for funding for; nothing that this was not exhaustive and other ideas would be considered. The list included catalyst or crisis grants for carers, additional projects and respite. It was required that the funding must be used for an expansion of a service, rather than continuation funding, in order to add to the available support for carers in the borough.

Panel members selected eight groups to invite for funding, subject to further research regarding the number of carers the organisations worked with. One of these groups was dropped from the shortlist prior to invite on the basis that they were more focused on the cared-for person than the carers themselves, which was important to the panel members.



We wanted to support a diverse range of carers groups, i.e. carers of those with mental health issues, those with learning disabilities, neurodiverse groups, refugee support groups, child/adult, physical disabilities...

Melissa, Young Grant Maker 2022-23

As we wanted to capture the views of a wider range of carers, we wanted to ensure that groups included evidence that they had consulted with the carers using their services when formulating their proposal, and we offered support to deliver this if requested.

Seven groups were invited to apply via email and provided with an application pack and online application form. Islington Giving staff and panel members provided consultation support to ADHD Islington and Kinship Care, whilst the others conducted their own consultations.

Application timeline

January – February 2024

- Visit spaces carers currently access (eg Carer’s Hub, Support Groups, etc) to ask carers about their priorities.
- Carers are recruited as panel members.
- The call for proposals is developed based on what we have heard from carers in Islington.
- Invitations to apply sent on 28th February 2024

March 2024

- Islington Giving provided consultation support to the organisations that requested this, whilst other groups did this themselves.

April 2024

- Deadline for applications 5th April
- Decisions made by panel and communicated with groups

May 2024

- Release £52,000 of funding released to local groups plus £8,000 allocated but not yet paid to a group pending registration, see below.

Decisions

Of the seven groups invited to apply all requested the maximum of £8,000. In addition, panel members allocated the remaining £4,000 in the available pot as below.

Groups invited to apply	Consultation process	Funding Requested For	Amount Awarded
<p>ADHD Islington – a led by and for group which offers a monthly opportunity for parent carers of a child with ADHD to meet others and gain support and advice.</p>	<p>Meeting with 10 group members and Islington Giving via Zoom</p>	<p>Venue hire to offer sessions at an additional location monthly. Meditation and mindfulness coaching sessions. Two wellbeing events per year. Two trips per year for carers and their children.</p>	<p>£8,000 over three years – not yet paid as they are in the process of charity registration.</p>
<p>Community Language Support Services – a led by and for organisation offering a mother tongue advice service to Middle-Eastern and North African communities predominantly – in the past year they provided advice and advocacy to 121 carers.</p>	<p>Via focus group, calls and home visits to 70 carers.</p>	<p>16 additional counselling places for Islington carers</p>	<p>£10,000 over three years - (£2,000 added to request to increase reach)</p>
<p>Islington Mind Counselling</p>	<p>Needs assessment based on demand – due to the sensitivity of counselling a consultation was not appropriate.</p>	<p>16 additional counselling places for Islington carers</p>	<p>£8,000</p>

Groups invited to apply	Consultation process	Funding Requested For	Amount Awarded
<p>Islington Mind – Mother2Mother – A group for mothers who care for an adult child with a mental health diagnosis. The sessions run every Monday and provide a meal, group therapy, peer support, advice and wellbeing activities.</p>	<p>The group led its own consultation with 8-10 usual members</p>	<p>Funding to provide Yoga and complimentary therapies on a weekly basis to enhance the group’s usual sessions. -Funding for two trips out of London -Funding for two mini-trips to museums or stately homes.</p>	<p>£8,000</p>
<p>Kinship Care – A national organisation which provides local services including peer support groups, a national advice helpline and advocacy for Kinship Carers.</p>	<p>In person meeting with group members by Islington Giving, in addition to online questionnaire consultation.</p>	<p>Funding for additional staff time to provide hands-on support to carers to apply for benefits and additional grant funding to improve their quality of life.</p>	<p>£8,000</p>

Groups invited to apply	Consultation process	Funding Requested For	Amount Awarded
<p>Manor Gardens Centre – A community centre and advice service in North Islington. Manor Gardens do not have a specific carers project, but provide advice and support to a large number of carers through their other services.</p>	<p>Manor Gardens consulted with carers who use the community centre and advice services.</p>	<p>Manor Gardens applied for a 6-month pilot project offering weekly support groups, monthly learning opportunities/talks and quarterly events for carers.</p>	<p>£10,000 (£2,000 added to request to extend pilot by a further 2-3 months)</p>
<p>Parent House – A service supporting parents with a wide range of activities in the South of the borough.</p>	<p>Focus group conducted with 11 existing group members by Parent House in addition to research findings of wider trends.</p>	<p>Expanding the number of carers who can access SEND Friends group, which involves parents with a SEND child of any age in Action Learning techniques to collectively problem-solve; identifying and supporting the challenges parents face, such as accessing ECHP's and accessing support from schools and providing ongoing peer support. In addition, providing opportunities for carers to access a spa day for wellbeing.</p>	<p>£8,000</p>

We were pleased that using this process we were able to reach carers of both adults and children with a diverse range of caring experiences and other demographics. There was also a good breadth of services available from the priorities identified by carers during our research and consultations, including wellbeing activities, (ADHD Islington, Mother2Mother, Parent House), learning opportunities, personal and professional development opportunities (Parent House, Manor Gardens), financial support (CLSS), outings (ADHD Islington, Mother2Mother), advice and advocacy (Kinship Care, ADHD Islington) and counselling (Islington Mind).

Budget

Source	Amount available	Amount spent	Surplus / deficit
The Mercers' Charitable Foundation (for which the Mercers' Company is the Trustee) – for grants	£60,000	£60,000 (£8,000 of this is allocated to ADHD Islington but is being held awaiting due diligence documentation)	£0
City Bridge Foundation – for panel costs	£8,000	£2121 – programme management £348 – panel expenses Total - £2469 (TBC)	£5,531 surplus (TBC)
The Mercers' Charitable Foundation, Wellbeing Fund	£3200 across both panels	£450 - £150 for each panel member	£2750 – to be allocated to next carers' panel plus celebration events

Reflection & learning

This was the first panel Islington Giving has run specifically for carers, and the first panel run in this way, with an invitation to groups to apply. The objectives of the panel were:

1. To support people doing unpaid caring work in the borough
2. To involve carers in deciding how best to use the money.

It seems that these objectives were achieved successfully, funding a range of support and activities for carers in Islington, based on the priorities agreed through involving over 140 carers in the process, from development of the programme, to consultations with the groups invited to apply and through the panel members themselves.

Having taken a new approach, there are a number of learning points, including some actions to take forward in the second carers' panel in late 2024/early 2025.

Learning points:

- In one case, it was felt that what was requested in the grants application was not strongly aligned with the majority of carers involved in the group's consultation. We were clear in the application process that the group would need to be confident to deliver what was requested, but it was felt by one group leader that the organisational decision to apply for something else could create disappointment for group members.
- It was difficult to get responses from groups during the research phase which limited the groups included in the list for consideration. This was despite multiple attempts to contact in some cases key local groups.
- Many more carers expressed interest in the panel member role than those who were able to commit. Including consultations was a useful way to ensure that carers who cannot commit to sessions could still feed into the process, but it would still be useful to consider ways to involve more carers in a substantial way.

- There is a lack of projects for carers who are children and young people in Islington. This was reflected by professionals and some of the carers we consulted with. It would be great to involve young carers on a future panel, but due to a lack of services for them, targeting them using the recruitment methods we used was not effective.
- Participants in previous panels have expressed interest in accessing further opportunities, once their panel is over. Following this panel, Islington Giving had a new role in place, of Alumni Manager, who has capitalised on the involvement of panel members who have been involved in several other opportunities since the panel concluded three months ago, including one successfully taking up a paid role at Islington Giving. This demonstrates the willingness and enthusiasm of residents to be involved in our work and the importance of the Alumni Manager in connecting people with opportunities.
- We had allocated funds for respite costs for panel members and, although none of the carers on the panel took up this offer, for accessibility and equity it will be important to continue to offer this for future carers' panels.
- We did not find local groups specifically supporting people caring for somebody with a physical disability or disease, whereas support for carers of individuals with autism and other neurodiversity, dementia and other mental health issues were more common. The groups funded and the make-up of the panel members was reflective of this.



It was a very rewarding experience making the final decisions, knowing it would be helping many carers who often do not receive the recognition they deserve.

Sarah Page, Carers Fund Panellist

Actions prior to next panel



- Further research of local groups including those who were e-mailed but did not respond, dropping in to services to involve groups who did not reply and to find out the barriers to email communication.
- Review the process with the groups included in this round of funding – was the application process, invite strategy and consultation beneficial or did it create problems for the groups, such as managing expectations of members or creating more work for groups.
- Think of other ways of involving Young People who are carers, such as through targeted social media campaigns or schools/youth clubs.

With thanks

- To our panel members, for your enthusiasm and commitment to the process, and for sharing your time and expertise with us.
- To the Mercers' Charitable Foundation (of which the Mercers' Company is the Trustee) for their support of carers' organisations in the borough and their interest in involving local people in directing these funds.
- To City Bridge Foundation for supporting the costs of running this programme and their openness to test different approaches to meaningfully involve residents in our work.
- To Islington's amazing local Voluntary Sector organisations who are providing essential support to carers in Islington and who supported this programme from start to finish.

For further information please visit:

www.islingtongiving.org.uk

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