

Young Grant Makers

islington giving

Reflection & Learning Report 2025-2026

> **Thank you for making our voices heard!**
>
> Pelin, Young Grant Maker

Introduction

2025 marked the seventh year of the Young Grant Makers (YGM) programme, working with a group of young people aged 16-25, facilitated by two former Young Grant Makers.

The YGM programme is part of Islington Giving's developing work to include more residents in making decisions about how our funds are used in the borough. We know that local people have extensive experience of using local services, they know where there are gaps in provision, and what kind of projects can meet the needs of their peers. Over the years, Young Grant Makers have taught us so much about the needs of younger people in the borough, the work we fund and how we can go about it in a more inclusive way. This year's cohort were no different.

Based on our YGM programme, Islington Giving has to date, also run two decision making panels for parents, two for older people in the borough, two involving residents aged 18 – 80+ and two for unpaid carers.

This report describes the 2025-26 project, reflecting the experiences of the two former Young Grant Makers, Freya Johnson and Kezia Adewale, who led and facilitated the programme this year.

With thanks to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Linklaters for funding the programme, and to our Islington Giving Coalition Partners for making it possible.



The background: What is Young Grant Makers?

In 2018, Islington Giving started the YGMs programme as our first resident participatory grant-making programme because young people had told us that they wanted to be more involved with decision-making in their local area. The YGM programme gives young people in Islington the chance to shape the services and activities on offer to young people, by making fully autonomous decisions about what projects they would like to see more of in the borough. At the time, young people also told us they wanted more real work job experiences, so the programme has been designed with this in mind.

This year's YGM cohort were given £195,000 to distribute to organisations working with young people in Islington.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

- Personal and professional development for the young people involved
- Skills development for the young people involved
- More informed grant making that puts decision-making power into the hands of young people accessing funded projects
- To have a diverse group of young people to ensure that the decisions made are reflective of the wide range of experiences of young people in the borough, e.g. age, gender, sexuality, ethnic background, religion, etc.
- Empowering young people



> **Young people in Islington have a lot to say and contribute to Islington it is so important to continue to see them in more roles of power.**
>
> Kezia, YGM Co-Lead 2025-2026

Key facts: Project timeline

RECRUITMENT

How we recruited Young Grant Makers

The recruitment of this year's cohort of Young Grant Makers focused heavily on inclusivity as we attempted to reach as many types of young people with different experiences as possible. This meant we were contacting organisations in the borough which we may not have had contact with before as we wanted to ensure the voices and experiences of these groups informed the decisions made. This included organisations who work primarily with refugees and migrants, young people in care, and young people from communities we may not have engaged with in the past, such as particular minority groups, Disabled and LGBTQ+ young people.

In addition to emailing educational institutions and local organisations to ask them to pass the opportunity onto their young people, we attended local organisations' sessions and events to chat to young people directly, utilised paid social media advertisements, and placed flyers in different community spaces across Islington, which included leisure centres, community centres, libraries, and youth hubs to name a few. As a result, we received 28 applications from young people within the month of recruitment.

> **My time with Islington Giving has helped me build confidence in my decision-making without feeling pressured, while giving me the confidence to know that my voice is heard and valued.**
>
> Yusuf, Young Grant Maker

We always aim to make the application to become a Young Grant Maker as uncomplicated as possible to reduce barriers to access and unconscious bias in the process. For this reason, we do not ask young people to send in a CV. The application simply consists of a Google Form asking some questions about their experiences of Islington, such as:

- What do you like about living in Islington?
- What issues are young people facing in Islington?
- If you could pick three things to improve for young people in Islington, what would they be?
- Why do you want to be part of a programme that gives young people power to shape their local area?



Key facts: Project timeline

SHORTLISTING

We tried to get a diverse group. A few applications were ineligible, mainly due to not being Islington residents. We had calls with everyone who applied about their answers and based on our discussions came to a decision about who to invite.

It was important to us that the programme would feature a range of ages (across the whole 16-25 age range), voices, experiences and personalities. We wanted to ensure those who may not usually have an opportunity to take part in a project like this were included, and that their voices were included as much as everyone else's. As a team we discussed the conversations we had had and the unique perspectives each young person could bring to the programme and created our list of YGMs for 2025/26.



WHO WE RECRUITED

We initially recruited for 12 young people but started the programme with 11 as one young person did not attend the first session and another decided not to join following the taster.These spaces were filled from our alumni, a group of young people who have taken part in one of our other resident led grant panels. Therefore, most of the programme ran with 12 young people, 10 of whom were new to Islington Giving and one previous young grant maker from the 2022/23 programme and one previous community panel member from earlier in 2025. Four weeks from the end of the programme one young person dropped out due to personal circumstances. Panelists were aged between 16 and 21, reflecting a trend that the upper end of the age group tend to be under-represented and reflects an area for improvement in future programmes.

11 young people completed the programme; four young men and seven young women. All our YGMs this year were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Refugee backgrounds.

> **The Young Grant Makers group is such an empowering experience that truly allows the youth of Islington to make beneficial impacts. It was truly a pleasure being part of the young grant makers..**
>
> Pelin, Young Grant Maker

Key facts: Project timeline

HOW WE SHAPED THE CALL

To support the Young Grant Makers in identifying the areas they wished to prioritise, we began by providing them with cards featuring a range of topics. Working in groups, they were asked to rank these topics in order of importance.

Following this, we conducted a "walking in someone else's shoes" exercise. Each young person was given a character card and guided through a series of questions about what life might look like for that individual. In response to each prompt, they stepped forward or stayed in the same place to reflect each perceived advantage or disadvantage. At the end of the exercise, participants discussed their positions, considering why they were standing where they were based on their character, and what support might be needed for young people in those situations. We gave them this activity to highlight disparities within the borough and encourage consideration of the experiences of young people who may not be in the space and who have experiences they may not have encountered or considered.

It also reinforced the importance of reflection and responsibility, reminding them that the decisions they make are not just about their own experiences, but affect all young people in the borough, and encouraged them to recognise their privileges being in this space, and the responsibility they hold in representing those who may not have had the opportunity to participate.

Following this exercise, we revisited the topic cards and worked to identify which issues were root causes, symptoms, or potential solutions. The group then discussed which of these they most wanted to address with the available funding.

From these activities and discussions, the key areas of interest identified by the Young Grant Makers were crime, mental health, neurodiversity, language barriers, and disability. YGMs were then tasked with researching these topics in groups and feeding back their findings to the wider group to develop their understanding of the key areas they identified and what the need for support in these areas may look like in Islington. We then moved on to more detailed discussions about the funding call, including considerations such as age range, target groups, and the overall priorities emerging from the areas they had identified.



Key facts: Project timeline

WHAT WE WANTED TO FUND

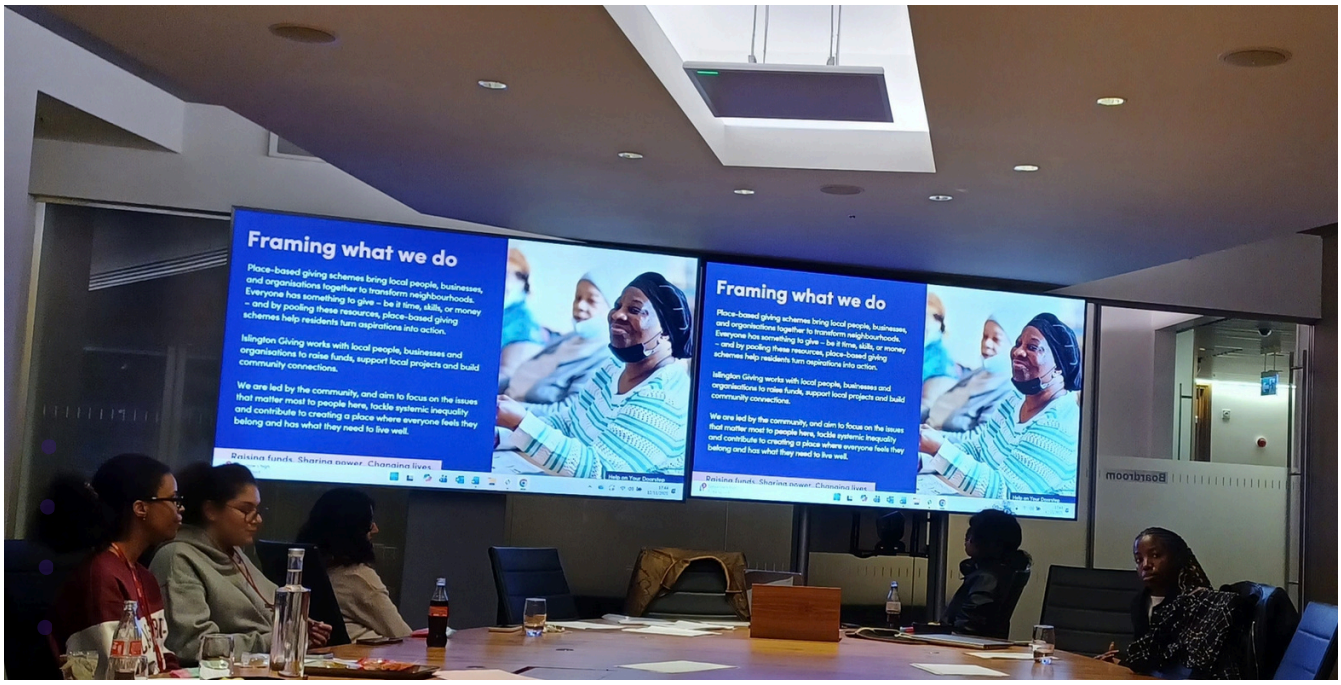
The Young Grant Makers called for projects that would support young people aged 13-20 (up to 25 for neurodiverse young people) to navigate transitions at key points in life. These projects should provide engaging educational opportunities to help young people find a path in life through developing knowledge and/or practical skills. The group had a particular desire for projects to reach young people who may otherwise be excluded from services, for example because of issues around crime, mental health, neurodiversity, language barriers or disability.

THE GROUPS WHO APPLIED

This year, 53 organisations applied for funding, requesting a total of £1.27 million.

Ten applied for the maximum grant of £35,000 over multiple years, while two applications were ineligible due to their organisational structure.

> **I believe I've met my goal which was to target and bring light to a small minority who are in need.**
>
> Young Grant Maker



Awarded funds

Our Young Grant Makers this year decided to fund 6 projects in full. They are:

Project / Organisation	Description	Funds
Copenhagen Youth Project	A peer mentoring and training programme providing young people with leadership skills, enabling them to work with other young people to explore, create and engage in positive and progressive opportunities.	2 years. £34,716
Tender Education and Arts	An in-school programme in 8 schools, teaching young people about healthy relationships through drama-based interactive learning, and upskilling teachers and school staff to be confident taking those conversations forward, supporting young people to navigate relationships and friendships, important for navigating life changes and choices.	2 years. £31,800.
HealthProm	Academic, social wellbeing and mental health support for young refugees to help them with the transition into life in the UK and improve educational and social outcomes.	2 Years. £24,915
NAFSIYAT	As established culturally informed counselling service, funding has been provided to extend provision to under 18s (13+ year olds). Alongside counselling, participants are provided with advocacy to support them practically around transitions (education support, housing, benefits, access to opportunities) and invited to take part in group sessions focusing on identity, belonging, intersectionality, racism, migration stories and cultural confidence.	1 Year. £19,869

Awarded funds (cont)

Our Young Grant Makers this year decided to fund 6 projects in full. They are (continued):

Project / Organisation	Description	Funds
Wipers	Targeted at young people facing barriers to education, training and work. Each young person aged 17-21 will receive 80 hours of support to set and reach their goals via mentoring, life skills workshops, connections with professionals within a range of industries, and support to learn to drive to increase independence and employability.	2 years. £35,000.
YourStance (and Mind of the student)	6-week programmes in alternative provisions or Young Offender provisions supporting Young People at risk of serious youth violence to know what to do in an emergency (first aid) alongside mental health and wellbeing support.	The programme will be run 8 times over 2 years in different settings within Islington. £35,000.
FRAthletics	Weekly fitness activities alongside life skills workshops and mentoring to help young people connect with something they're interested in improve health, and gain support to identify and move toward their goals (A donation over 1 year towards their request of £35,000 over 2 years).	In addition, the Young Grant Makers awarded their remaining £13,700 to FRAthletics

Running costs for the programme

2025-6 Young Grant Maker Programme Item:	Actual Cost* (£) *(not including programme management)
Project Leader and YGM Recruitment	83
Project Leaders	13,540
Project Leader Training	2,160
Project Leaders Tech	30
YGM session costs	451
YGM payments	9,834
YGM Travel Costs	261
YGM celebration event	424
Additional support to ensure all young people can access (eg support worker for young person learning disabilities	0
Additional technology to ensure all young people can access	0
TOTAL	26,783

Project timeline

> **It was engaging and fun!**
>
> Young Grant Maker

JULY

Recruiting YGM leads

AUGUST

Leaders begin and outreach/recruitment of Young Grants Makers starts

SEPTEMBER

Recruitment and interviews of young Grant makers begin

OCTOBER

Taster session and Young Grant Makers begin; call begins to take shape

NOVEMBER

The call is finalised and published; young people participate in teambuilding exercises and are trained in areas such as reading budgets, EDI and unconscious bias, and reading an application; Young Grant Makers visit Islington Giving corporate partners and a local organisation

DECEMBER

Training and visits continue; Q&A with funders and other charities took place applications are received, and young people read them over the Festive break.

JANUARY

Weekly meetings recommence, and the Young Grant Makers begin to assess the applications; shortlisting begins

FEBRUARY

Interviews are conducted; final decisions are made.

MARCH

Wrap up and celebrations

Young leadership



Kezia

YGM Co-Lead

As a previous Young Grant Maker, I thoroughly enjoyed myself, so I was keen once finished to stay involved in grant making and being a part of community panels. I applied for Young Grant Maker lead previously and was unsuccessful at the time. This year I felt it was perfect timing to take on a role that gave me the opportunity to continue my involvement at Islington Giving whilst taking on more responsibility to create and environment in which a cohort of Young Grant Makers felt comfortable taking up space and making impactful decisions.

I came in with some volunteering experience with young people and strong enthusiasm to learn more about the administrative and data collection aspect. Although a steep learning curve, I felt very supported by my co-lead Freya and managers around finance management and the more technical parts of the job partly through trial and error as well as numerous training opportunities thorough the year in facilitation, word, excel basic programmes used day to day. This in turn made me feel more confident leading sessions weekly and navigating the room to accommodate everyone's needs.

Something that helped immensely was looking back at my experience being a Young Grant Maker as well as looking to my co-lead, also a previous YGM, as someone I could learn from and using that to inform how I interacted with this current years Young Grant Makers. It was very interesting as I had the opportunity to see each YGM's individual growth - those who were louder in the group allowing for others to speak, the level of preparation when it came to shortlisting was impressive and crucial, the growth and confidence in decision making and public speaking, advocating for things they wanted in the room was excellent and very rewarding.

> **Young people in Islington have a lot to say and... it is so important to continue to see them in more roles of power.**

Whilst rewarding I did find some challenges especially with time management; making sure sessions were organised and fully fleshed out to make delivery flow better between myself and my co-lead. This was to make sure we were prepared for sessions as much as possible with a vast improvement seen through a separate allocated preparation period each week to talk through session the Monday before our weekly sessions. As in previous years, the job share of 8 hours each created a struggle to get all the tasks done within the time frame initially but, improved as time went on. If they were to run it again it might be beneficial to have one person with increased hours taking in a slightly bigger role in order to keep the tasks with one main lead.

On the whole being a Young Grant maker lead has given me a lot of confidence in the practical skills and built on my facilitation skills whilst being incredibly fulfilling. Young people in Islington have a lot to say and contribute to Islington it is so important to continue to see them in more roles of power.

Young leadership



Freya

YGM Co-Lead

I am very lucky (and grateful!) to say that this has been my second year leading the Young Grant Makers programme and each term has its differences, its success and its challenges.

When I started the Young Grant Makers programme two years ago, I had little facilitation experience and received training and support to increase my confidence. Since then, I have continued to lead on programmes and get jobs that I would not have had access to if not for the support and training provided by Islington Giving. This year, I entered the role in a much stronger place, having had the chance to mature and develop my skills with the foundations Islington Giving laid for me the first time round. Having experienced knocks to my confidence from previous roles in other organisations, I was lifted back up by the team and encouraged to grow and be even better than I could have imagined.

It is always such a joy to work with our lovely young people – watching them blossom as they learn and develop new skills is a wonderful thing and extremely rewarding. Our Young Grant Makers this time were a bit quiet to start with, but as they slowly came out of their shells and grew more comfortable with one another, the conversations they were having with one another became increasingly eye-opening.

I have always been a young person in Islington, but as we grow, I think it can be easy to forget how times change and how new groups of young people will experience an entirely different Islington to the one I knew growing up here – this is my key takeaway from the conversations we had throughout the Young Grant Makers programme this year.

I think some of the challenges in this role have been around capacity which we all tried to navigate as a team. Initially, we started the role as two 8-hour employees, but we realised this would need more time, so our roles were increased to 10-hours per week. I then started a new job towards the end of my time as YGM Programme Lead, and whilst all parties have been extremely supportive and understanding, managing both roles together is something I have had to learn to navigate! I also fell into the habit of playing it safe and comparing a lot to how the programme went two years ago and trying to keep some things the same. I quickly realised no two years are the same and tried to keep an open mind about the endless ways we could engage the YGMs and still have a positive outcome!

I think if this role were to happen again, it would benefit from having someone with more experience in post with more hours to manage the programme and have a YGM alumni in post to support them to gain the necessary skills to be able to go on to lead a programme like this by themselves, rather than having two previous YGM with less experience in programme management!

“It is always such a joy to work with our lovely young people – watching them blossom as they learn and grow.

Young leadership

Overall, it is always so rewarding to work at Islington Giving, especially with the YGMs. This is a role that I have found particularly nurturing this time around and has really helped me to rebuild my confidence and communication skills and nurture my facilitation and administration skills! Young Grant Makers is an incredibly important programme. Young people are not the future – they are the now, so the principle of power-sharing with young people is crucial to cultivating them!

Freya

YGM Co-Lead

How we found the programme: Insights from YGM interviews

As part of this year's YGM programme we thought it important to have the Young Grant Makers give feedback on their time through self-led interviews. They spent an afternoon in groups of two answering 20 plus questions a mix of prompts and questions they wrote. The following give an insight to their answers. Massive thank you to all the Grant Makers who contributed to this:

What was your favourite part about Young Grant Makers?

Amy - "The trips, going to different places, areas within Islington"

Mikala - "Linklaters was a nice place, I also enjoyed meeting the team at Macquarie"

What for you was a thing you found important for making decisions?

Anis - "Being in agreement with everyone else as it's ultimately not my decision alone."

Amy - "How the applications aligned with our criteria, focusing on things like mental health, extracurricular activities are important to young people, and making sure everyone was onboard."

Hanan - "To see what society want, not just what I wanted, to care about other people's needs."

Mikala - "The interview sessions, that was an experience. It was quite useful, when it's you interviewing so it a change in power. It gives an understanding of why people may seem nervous, why people ramble because it feels like a big deal."

What project that you funded stands out to you most?

Hanan- “Your Stance. I Thought it was very important when you bring in a person that they are authentic. I think they will benefit from this money. I didn’t know how many refugees were in Islington.”

Amy - “The Copenhagen Youth Project, recently I looked at their Instagram, and it seemed really good, I think they provide a safe space for young people and offer a lot.”

What surprised you about the grant making process?

Amy - How connected most places in Islington are and how they work together giving us opportunities to go to the places.

Anis - “How the corporate world and third sector intertwine, the process of seeing how companies and charities interact are interesting.”

Mikala - “For me, numbers are very limited in what they prove and what's impactful for the community. Before, I would think the more people it would benefit the more impactful it will be but sometimes being more nuanced could make a larger impact than going for the majority.”

What was the biggest challenge this year?

Hanan - “At the start I felt insecure about my English and expressing myself.”

Mikala - “I feel like sometimes I talk too much and feel like I overpower the conversation, so I tried to be mindful of making sure other voices were here in the space “

Anis - “Probably the interview process because of all the amazing projects we interviewed and shortlisted we couldn't fund all of them.”

Amy - “Coming to agreement with your group and all the Young Grant Makers as we all have different ideas of what we wanted to fund and they had to align.”

What is next for you/ how can we help you going forward?

Anis - “Looking to get a part time job, finding work experience.”

Amy - “Finish my degree, and although most locations we visited were corporate spaces still utilising my connections, exploring Islington more.”

Hanan - “Work more in community programming and choosing what I want to study at university."

Mikala - “I want to be more active in the community, hopefully university and get back into drawing and animation which was my childhood dream”.

Successes and challenges of the programme

SUCCESSES

- Retaining our young people (few drop offs)
- Young people were paid for their time and travel.
- Good participation – good growth from the young people.
- Young people were excellent at reading the applications. They were thorough and very honest and took it very seriously.
- We had a diverse group of young people, including neurodivergent participants, young people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and those with lived experience as a refugee.
- Young people were receptive to external opportunities offered to them, like visiting and making connections with some of our amazing corporate partners Macquarie and Linklaters.
- Young people were exposed to other working spaces and environments which seemed to motivate them.
- As leaders, we feel we responded well to last minute challenges, such as finding suitable candidates to replace any Young Grant Makers who stepped away from the programme
- We successfully distributed £195,000 in funding across Islington-based youth organisations!



SUCCESSES

Of 11 Young Grant makers at the end of the programme:

- 9 reported high levels* of confidence in their employability skills. 5 young grant makers noted an improvement in this area.
- 9 reported high levels of confidence in their leadership skills. 6 young grant makers noted an improvement in this area.
- 11 reported high levels of confidence in their decision-making skills at the end of the programme. 6 young grant makers noted an improvement in this area.
- 11 reported high levels of confidence in their teamwork skills at the end of the programme. 2 young grant makers noted an improvement in this area, with the majority already scoring themselves the highest score at the outset.
- 11 reported high levels of confidence in their adaptability at the end of the programme. 6 young grant makers noted an improvement in this area.
- 11 reported an improvement in at least one skill area as a result of taking part in this programme. The other reported high scores in all areas at the outset. An additional young person did not finish the programme for personal reasons, but noted an improvement at the mid programme evaluation.
- (*'high level of confidence' is a rating of 4 or 5 out of 5)
- 25% of participants reported improved networks, another 30% of the group already felt that they had strong knowledge of projects in the borough
- 40% of participants reported improved levels of skills and confidence after taking part in the Young Grant Makers programme
- In addition to these outcomes, both programme leaders report having gained further skills relating to facilitation, leadership and budget management.

> **Working with Islington Giving was such a beneficial opportunity, the project was organised from start to finish. I gained confidence, experience and new skills along the way. Big thanks to all the leaders who were all so supportive.**

Akousa, Young Grant Maker



CHALLENGES

- The unprecedented number of applications with 53 applications this year in comparison to previous years seen with 2021/22 having 37 applications with a total asking of £632,543 and 2023/24 having 34 applications totalling £577,218.

- Being fully inclusive and managing the needs of everyone in the space to fully benefit them and remove their barriers to taking part without them feeling othered.

- A number of the Young Grant Makers weren't keen to be featured in any online content, especially early on in the programme, resulting in having fewer photos and videos to share.

- At interview, the questions we decided to use could have been more relevant to the funding call, as they were quite generic.

> **Being in a safe space made me feel comfortable.**
>
> O'Reantae , Young Grant Maker

- Reaching more groups and diversifying the panel – we recognised we did not have any openly LGBTQIA+ people on the panel, nor people with physical disabilities, or with experience of the care system. Additionally, we did not have any 22-25 year olds on the panel.

- It was challenging to get hold of Young Grant Makers beyond the session, which would have been helpful to offer the level of pastoral support we would have liked.

Ideas that we thought could be Implemented for future cohorts of Young Grant Makers:

- We felt it could be beneficial for the YGM to have a test session on interviews and interview programme team as a test to make them feel better prepared for the interviews.

- YGM Open day for the call – invite organisations to come and hear more about the call – this would be so the young people could get used to talking about the call more and exactly what they want to fund.

- Have a list of organisations they still want to fund and see if Islington Giving would have the opportunity to find further funds for them.

- We felt there could be a conversation about leaving more time for shortlisting as a whole group if we have so many applications again

> **I'm listened to without being shut down.**
>
> Yusuf , Young Grant Maker



A final note from the programme leads



Kezia

YGM Co-Lead



Freya

YGM Co-Lead

2025/26 was the second year the YGM programme has been led by previous Young Grant Makers, which proved to be a success.

As programme leads, we feel that we have been given an enormous amount of autonomy on how we wanted this year's project to look, support from the at Islington Giving team, as well as from Cripplegate Foundation and other local partners. We appreciate the support and are grateful for the challenges and joy leading the programme has offered to us.

Through the success of leading the programme we feel the aims and objectives set out were met. Based on the progress monitoring completed at the beginning and end of the programme, we can see that the programme has positively impacted the young people involved and that they have had a positive experience. Our time at Islington Giving working on the YGM programme has been so rewarding.

We feel very lucky to have been able to work with such a curious, enthusiastic and talented group of young people and to have been able to carry the programme into another year and provide more organisations with much needed and deserved funding with even more funding than previous years. We are committed to creating spaces in which young people can carry out and enact change through grant making as utilising other opportunities that arise.

Thanks to

- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Linklaters for funding the programme, and to our Islington Giving Coalition Partners for making it possible.
- Linklaters, Macquarie and Arsenal for hosting three of our sessions.
- Laura Guy for excellent management, support, and guidance over the course of our roles and the programme.
- Anne Shewring for supporting the sessions and for teaching us about budgets and finances.
- Patrick Jones and Victor Momodu for assisting with shortlisting weeks.
- Tam Ali and Isy Miller for teaching us about communications and fundraising and for the incredible pictures, videos, and social media content to promote the programme and keep the world updated
- Most importantly the Young Grant Makers for being their amazing selves and committing their time, skills and enthusiasm to the programme - it literally could not have happened without them.
- Freya Johnson and Kezia Adewale, Young Grant Maker Leaders, 2026
- And, an addition from the whole team at Islington Giving, an enormous Thank You to Freya Johnson and Kezia Adewale for leading the programme and supporting the young people throughout the whole process with such passion, enthusiasm and vision.

> **We were helping as many people as possible!**
>
> Young Grant Maker

Group photo of our Young Grant Makers 2025-2026



For further information please visit:
www.islingtongiving.org.uk

13 Elliot's Place
Islington
London
N1 8HX

@isgiv

Islington Giving

Islington Giving is a restricted fund of Cripplegate Foundation, registered charity number 207499

islington giving