



Voluntary**Action**Islington

Celebrating
50 Years
of Service

Working for a fairer Islington by supporting community and voluntary action

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Foreword

Congratulations to Voluntary Action Islington on fifty years of service to the people of the Borough, and warmest wishes for the next fifty.

Islington has a rich culture of voluntary and community activity. We depend on each other in a way that many communities don't, and VAI coordinates and shepherds and monitors that activity in ways that enhance all our lives.

I was very proud to work closely with VAI when I was your MP, and I'm proud now of everything that the organisation does.

Well done for the past fifty years.
Thank you, and good luck for the future,

Chris Smith

Lord Smith of Finsbury, Patron of VAI, Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and formerly Islington councillor, MP for Islington South, Cabinet minister and Chair of the Environment Agency



This history was compiled by Joe Irvin OBE chair of VAI Trustee Board, with editing by Emma Hutchins (vice chair) in November 2020.

Voluntary Action Islington - A Short Walk Through Our History

Voluntary Action Islington has been supporting local activity in the London Borough of Islington for over five decades. We exist to strengthen our local voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) to deliver services effectively and promote social justice. We are a one-stop source of help providing advice, advocacy, news, resources including funding and volunteering support.

A little over 50 years ago, a group of local people committed to improving the lives of people in Islington came together to create a new voluntary body, which became known as the Islington Council of Social Service (ICSS) – later renamed Islington Voluntary Action Council in 1977 (IVAC), then Voluntary Action Islington from 2009 (VAI). It was an ‘umbrella body’, offering to nurture and support all the hundreds of charities, community groups and other voluntary organisations of all shapes and sizes within Islington. It aimed to foster better communications, create a hub of coordinated activity, and help provide a stronger collective voice for the sector.

This publication briefly tells the story of our first 50 years – and in doing so tracks trends and issues as they emerged and evolved across civil society. We pay tribute to the founders of Voluntary Action Islington and all the people who have served as volunteers, staff and trustees, our member organisations and everyone in the Borough’s voluntary and community bodies, as well as our hugely valuable partners in the public sector, charitable trusts and businesses.

We share some of the stories, successes and challenges, as VAI was born and grew to maturity. We hear from some of those most involved and we look forward to our next fifty years.

Most of all we celebrate the thousands of Islington residents whose lives have been shaped and enhanced by the work of VAI and its predecessors.

Joe Irvin – Chair of Trustees VAI

‘Twinkle in The Eye’ 1960s

The idea of ICSS emerged from the political and social atmosphere of 1960s London. The shackles of post war Britain were being shaken off. Poor housing, inequality, poverty and disadvantage persisted. But there was a growing social awareness, less willingness to tolerate injustice and an emerging passion for social action. The history of charities and voluntary bodies stretches back to Victorian times and beyond. But as historian Peter Shapely wrote: ‘The late 1960s and early 1970s gave rise to a new form of civil society.’ Many of the new groups that emerged in this period were imbued with a spirit of self-help and had a radical, campaigning edge. [1]

Crucially, powers were being devolved from the Greater London Council to London boroughs, including responsibilities such as children’s services, public health and welfare. The number of voluntary organisations was rising as people came together to try to tackle social problems, but there was little communication or coordination between them.

In response, similar Councils of Voluntary Service were being set up across the country, with help from the National Council of Social Service (the predecessor of today’s National Council of Voluntary Organisations, NCVO).

Islington Council of Social Service

Patrons :

The Rt. Rev. Bishop of Stepney
(Dr. Huddleston)
Hugo Brunner, Esq.
Sir Basil Spence
Lionel Hale, Esq.
The Mayor of Islington
Councillor D. W. Bromfield
Sir James Tait

Details :

Mrs. Elizabeth Hoodless, J.P.

1970

¹. J Davis Smith 100 Years of NCVO and Voluntary Action
(2019) ISBN 978-3-030-02773-5

Our Founding Members

In this setting in Islington, a group of local people in voluntary organisations, faith organisations, public services and local councillors formed the backbone of those who created ICSS. They posed the question: Could social change be advanced by bringing the local voluntary sector together and working with the public sector?

This founding group included Elisabeth Hoodless (a young national charity leader and our first Secretary), Pat Haynes (a stalwart of Tribune newspaper and our Treasurer for 40 years), Rev R E Simpson (our first Chairman), Oscar Abrams (Director of the Keskidee Arts Centre, Britain's first Black arts centre), Chris St Hill (a Caribbean-born community relations officer), Robin Forrest representing the Citizens' Advice Bureau and many other councillors, faith and voluntary sector activists.

The support and encouragement of the local council was vital to the emergence of Councils of Voluntary Services (CVS), and ICSS was no exception. The benefit for the Council was to create a positive relationship with, and to help strengthen, local voluntary and community sector organisations so they in turn could better support the community. The council was taking on new responsibilities devolved from the Greater London Council. Voluntary organisations were often more closely in touch with sections of the community than the local authority was. Consequently, the council agreed to provide core funding, and nominate representatives to serve on the VAI Executive Committee.



Elisabeth Hoodless



Oscar Abrams

An open meeting for interested parties was convened and a Steering Committee set up to pave the way for the new organisation. In May 1970, after a period of consultation, the Committee approached the the London Borough of Islington for support. The Council debated this proposal in September 1970 and agreed to give its support. But the hard work had just begun.

As Rev R E Simpson, our Chairman, wrote (with a set of marvellous mixed metaphors) in ICSS's first annual report in 1972:

“Drawing up an attractive Budget is one thing, raising the wind is another; and new-born babies cannot survive simply on abstract statistics; they need actual pounds and pence.”

ISLINGTON COUNCIL of SOCIAL SERVICE

Annual Report 1971-2

Dame Elisabeth Hoodless was a founding member of the ICSS. She was Executive Director of the charity Community Service Volunteers (now Volunteering Matters) for over 50 years after joining in 1963. (Edited article from 2011)



The sixties had been an exciting time in Islington – responsibility for childcare and eldercare had been transferred from the Greater London Council (GLC) to Islington Council, housing associations such as Circle 33 were pioneering new approaches to social housing and change was in the air. I was a councillor from 1964-68, my husband Donald from 1968-1982.

There had been an influx of socially committed young people like us, attracted by affordable house prices lower than anywhere else in inner London. People like Jack Straw, a barrister; Robin and Christine Mabey, public servants; Simon MacLachlan, a solicitor; Pat Haynes, a councillor; Gus McDonald the Tribune circulation manager and Robin Forrest of the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

The number of independent not-for-profit groups was growing but there was no clear communications network: no way to circulate ideas, share premises or learn from others' experience.

The National Council of Social Service (now NCVO) had a London officer whose job was to promote the development of Councils of Social Service. He was a super star: he introduced us to existing councils in other boroughs, to sources of funding and produced model constitutions. It seemed to take a long time, but we made it happen.

Our first achievement, in the heady days of community development, was to recruit Simon Kaplinsky, a South African refugee, a civil engineer and another super star. Our aim was to learn how to help people to engage in their own community to improve it. He found a derelict factory near Newington Green and secured funding to transform it in collaboration with local residents. His skilfully sensitive approach mixing building skills with the capacity to empower people to formulate their plans transformed the life expectancies of the participants enabling them to sustain the development.”

ICSS is Born - 1971

On the chilly winter evening of 10 February 1971, Islington Council of Social Services (ICSS) was born at a meeting with 120 representatives filling the prestigious Council Chamber of Islington Town Hall. The Mayor, Councillor Robin Goodman, presided.

Its stated objectives were:

- To promote cooperation between the voluntary and statutory services
- To stimulate voluntary effort in the borough
- To provide a central information service
- To provide a duplicating and secretarial service for organisations without such facilities

1971 was a year of great change in the world. The digital age began with the invention of the microprocessor, brutal conflicts in Asia and Africa led to an exodus of migrants seeking safety, Greenpeace was formed as environmental awareness grew and in the UK we moved to decimal currency.

117 member organisations joined ICSS in its first year, but individuals could also subscribe. A look at the founding member organisations paints a picture of the local voluntary sector at that time (some of which had names that seem outdated nowadays). It included voluntary organisations and charities working in the areas of health and disability, children and young people, community relations, older people, housing associations, welfare advice bodies and sports associations. But there were also faith bodies, and public sector agencies like education establishments, welfare, police and probation services, not to mention – remarkably – local branches of political parties. In addition, the Executive Committee had six nominees from Islington Council. (This format continued until 1975, and there were still two council nominees until 1999).

Some of the early member organisations of ICSS (1972)

- British Polio Fellowship
- Caledonian Road Community Project
- Campaign for Homosexual Equality
- Caribbean Overseas Association
- Caxton House Settlement
- Circle 33 Housing Trust
- Citizens Advice Bureau Islington
- City University
- Community Service Volunteers
- Cross Street Baptist Church
- Cypriot Youth Social and Cultural Society
- Elfrida Rathbone Committee
- Family Planning Association
- Family Welfare Association
- Greater London Association for the Disabled, Islington Committee
- Hackney and Islington Association for Parents of ESN Children
- Hackney and Islington World Development Action Group
- Islington Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital
- Islington Boat Club
- Islington Borough Youth Committee
- Islington Central Methodist Church
- Islington Committee for Community Relations
- Islington Old People's Welfare Association
- Islington Poverty Action Group
- Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association
- The Islington Society
- Islington Society for Mentally Handicapped Children
- Keskidee Centre
- Liverpool Road Association
- London Marriage Guidance Council
- Martin Luther King Centre
- NSPCC
- North London Spastic Society
- Optimists Swimming Club
- Polytechnic of North London
- Rotary Club of Finsbury
- St Mary Magdelene Church
- Society of St Vincent de Paul, St Joan of Arc Conference
- Thornhill Association
- Trades Council, Islington
- Tufnell Park Residents' Association
- YMCA

The newly-born organisation had an Executive Committee (equivalent to a board of trustees, who are also unpaid volunteers), with officers including a chairman, vice chairman, honorary secretary and treasurer. As today, it would be the job of the trustees to steer the organisation and ensure it kept to its charitable objectives for the public benefit. Patrons and Vice Presidents added their support and prestige. These were all people who gave their time voluntarily without any payment.

Officers of ICSS 1971-72

Patrons: Dr D W Bromfield (Mayor of Islington 1971-72), Hugo Brunner (publisher), Lionel Hale (critic, writer and broadcaster), Sir Basil Spence (architect of Coventry Cathedral), Sir James Tait (first vice chancellor of the City University), and Trevor Huddleston (Bishop of Stepney and anti-apartheid leader).

Vice Presidents - Local MPs: George Cunningham, John Grant and Michael O'Halloran (In 1977 these VP roles were merged into the Patrons)

Chairman: Rev R E Simpson

Vice Chair: S Woodcock

Treasurer: Cllr Pat Haynes

Hon Sec: Elisabeth Hoodless

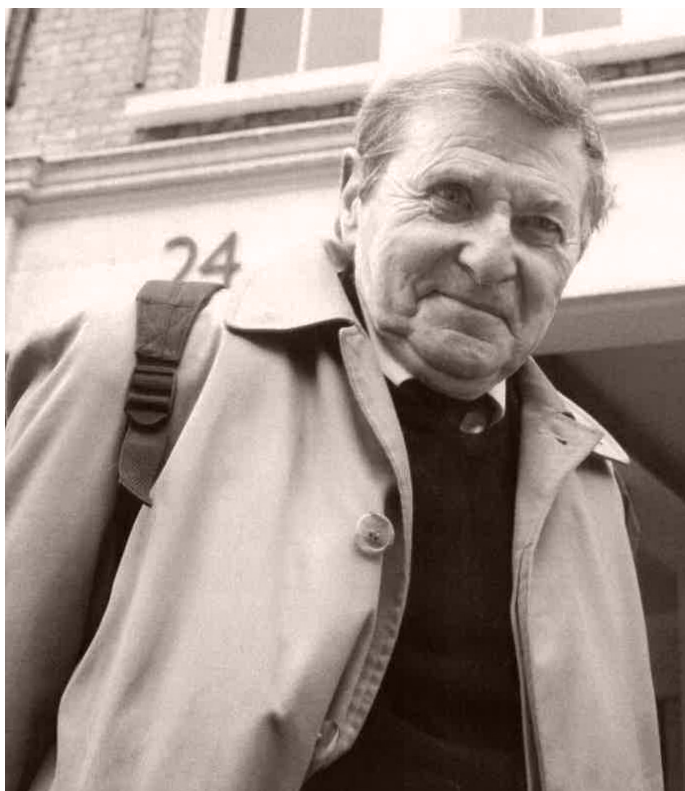
In June 1971 interested members of the public and organisations were invited to an Open Forum to help shape the early work programme of ICSS. Also in June, Anne Sugden became the first employee as Executive Secretary, to be followed by Laurie Millward (1972-1976).

In July, office accommodation was leased at **309 Upper Street** made available by the Independent Order of Oddfellows Manchester Unity Friendly Society.

Initial funding was provided by the City Parochial Foundation (now Trust for London) and Islington Council. Today this four-storey redbrick building stands opposite the Almeida Theatre.



ICSS picked up steam; in 1972 it organised an exhibition of the work of member organisations, produced a Directory of Social Services and jointly published with Age Concern (now Age UK Islington) a handbook on pensioners' rights.



ICSS founding member, Pat Haynes

Pat Haynes was a founding member of ICSS and Treasurer for 40 years. He worked at the Tribune newspaper and was an Islington councillor 1971-1992. As Mayor in 1983-84 Pat visited over 50 voluntary organisations, including the Annual General Meeting of IVAC. Pat's memory was honoured through the establishment of our annual Trustee of the Year Award. (Edited article from 2011 on right).



The inaugural meeting of Islington Council of Social Service was held on 10th February 1971 in Islington's Council Chamber with over 120 representatives.

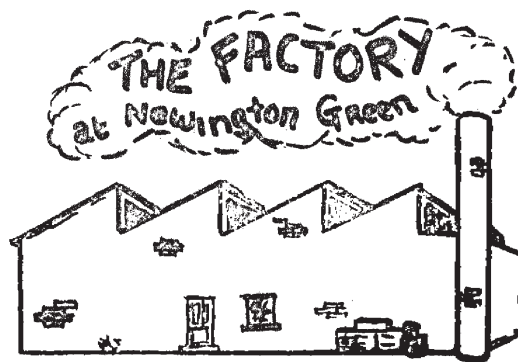
I recall we were, at the time, homeless! At that time, I was a bookkeeper at the Tribune newspaper and arranged to let Islington Council of Social Service use Tribune's spacious library. We soon acquired a lease of some long-empty offices on the top floor of 309 Upper Street, and it wasn't long before a number of projects were initiated, some still flourishing.

1972 was a key year for early developments. A Directory of Social Services was published for sale and over 400 were sold. The Council

proposed several neighbourhood councils and Islington Council of Social Service set one of them up. A review of local charities was undertaken; as a result, Islington Relief in Need was established. The Islington Old People's Welfare Council was re-launched as Age Concern and a handbook jointly produced.

In February 1973 the first community worker was employed, working in the Mildmay ward. In 1975 the Factory Community Centre opened with a mother and toddler group, a youth club, and a language club. The Blackstock Advice Centre was also set up. On 1st April 1975 the inaugural meeting of the Islington Disablement Association was held and after various changes still continues as Disability Action in Islington."

Islington Council was considering a radical plan to create a series of devolved neighbourhood forums. ICSS was engaged to trial one in Mildmay. The first community worker was employed. One of the first issues brought up was the lack of community facilities and an empty factory was identified as a potential focus for community activities, resulting in 1975 with the Factory' Community Centre and separately the Blackstock Road Advice Centre.



In 1976 a new project organised a survey of disability access to public buildings such as the Odeon Cinema and Town Hall, which continued for several years. Projects like these were run by ICSS itself, though a number were later given independence after this period of incubation.

Our Early Work - 1971-75

“Voluntary organisations working in partnership with a progressive authority can achieve changes of truly impressive dimensions.

ICSS chair John Ward
in Annual Report 1976-77

At the request of the Charity Commission, ICSS brokered discussion to merge and form new organisations in the field of charitable sickness relief, older people (now Age UK Islington) and disability (now (Disability Action Islington).

In 1973 professional staff at ICSS were put on equivalent terms of employment to local authority employees. Islington Council was considering a radical plan to create a series of devolved neighbourhood forums. ICSS was engaged to trial one in Mildmay. The first community worker was employed. In 1972

there were just three community associations in Mildmay. By 1975 with ICSS encouragement a further nine groups had formed. One of the first issues brought up was the lack of community facilities and an empty factory was identified as a potential focus for community activities, resulting in 1975 with the 'Factory' Community Centre and separately the Blackstock Advice Centre.

ICSS launched a regular newsletter, contributed to public plans including ILEA secondary school reorganisation and promoted recognition and standards for childminders.

In 1976 a new project organised a survey of disability access to public buildings such as the Odeon Cinema and Town Hall, which continued for several years. Projects like these were run by ICSS itself, though a number were later given independence after this period of incubation.

Simon Kaplinsky was the first community worker employed by ICSS (edited interview from 2011)



I was involved in the Tufnell Park Play Area in 1971. There was an old derelict Victorian house owned by the council, and local people lobbied the council to provide money for a summer project. Things have changed enormously in terms of health and safety. It was a three-storey house, and just to illustrate the differences in attitude, the kids climbed out of the dormer windows, hung onto the gutters three storeys up, and one of the helpers, I think it was a psychiatrist, said “Don’t worry, leave them there, kids have got to test their limits!”.

Although I’m an engineer, I was interested in community work and eventually became a community worker at ICSS in 1973. The local authority wanted to promote the idea of neighbourhood forums, so they set up two experimental projects: one funded through the ICSS. A housing association provided a base in Mildmay and I started to work with tenants in the Mayville estate.

Two resident associations sprang into life and we established King Henry’s adventure playground. We lobbied for that and had demonstrations. We also helped to get the Mayville Estate Community Centre going.

The Government had a series of initiatives for urban aid to stimulate local activity. I came from a construction background and saw this empty building (an old piano factory). I thought, we can do something here. We won a grant of about £30,000. That was the start of the Factory Community Project. We did all the renovation and came out on cost, probably due to my experience in the construction industry.

Small voluntary organisations have problems now, in terms of maintaining budgets, proper accounts, employment laws. Organisations like Voluntary Action Islington have a role in providing that sort of thing and are absolutely critical in times of threat.”

Age of Maturity - Late 1970s

“ ICSS is now entering a new phase to promote and develop the interests of voluntary organisations and community groups in Islington. To do this we need a name which accurately describes what we are about. I commend to your consideration Voluntary Action Islington.”

John Ward Chair of trustees 1977
(This name was adopted,
but not until 30 years later)

In 1975 the Board was reconstituted to become more streamlined, comprising twelve elected members, two nominated by the local authority and up to four co-opted trustees. The Chair, Vice-chair and Treasurer were elected from within the Board. This is not dissimilar to

our structure today, though there are now no specific local authority places since 1999.

Between 1971 and 1977 the grants from Islington Council rose from £4,000 annually to £51, 000, however over the following three years it fell to £24,000 pa.

In 1977 ICSS changed its name to **Islington Voluntary Action Council (IVAC)**. This avoided any confusion with publicly provided social services, and it captured the proactive spirit of ‘voluntary action’ prevalent at the time.

The membership had grown and become diverse. It now included arts and crafts projects, anti-poverty, sexual and race equalities organisations, sports and leisure, legal and welfare advice bodies.

New aims were adopted:

- To provide a focal point for collective action by member organisations, voluntary organisations and other community groups

- To ensure that the voluntary movement in Islington is properly funded, properly informed of all developments and funding arrangements and other policy matters
- To support and encourage community work, community development and community action
- To constantly bring to the attention of statutory bodies the contribution of voluntary organisations and self-help groups and their potential for growth
- To encourage a continuing re-appraisal of the roles and modes of action of statutory and voluntary organisations.

Campaigning for change

In 1978 IVAC coordinated the Action Group of Voluntary Organisations to campaign against LBI funding cuts.

There was a concerted effort to diversify income, bringing in support from the UK national government and charitable trusts. Additional money provided a focus for discussions with the Council about a new UK government partnership scheme.

A decision was taken to hive off several organisations set up and incubated by ICSS. These included Mildmay Neighbourhood Forum, the Factory, Blackstock Road Advice Centre, Under Fives work and the Highbury Project, which all became independent voluntary bodies in their own right. New projects included a Job Creation Scheme, a Bulk Buy project and a Volunteer Working Group to explore the feasibility of creating a Volunteer Bureau (forerunner of the Volunteer Centre). A directory of groups needing volunteers was published revealing ‘an enormous need by groups for voluntary help.’ A further Handbook for Pensioners was produced jointly with Age Concern, helping retired people through the labyrinth of benefits, housing, health and other rights.

IVAC produced a report on the non-safety of playground and play-equipment on housing estates which the Council acted upon. The result can be seen today in the much safer equipment and ground surface in many of Islington’s play and recreation areas, for the benefit of local children.

Riding The Storm 1980s

In the late 1970s the UK Government had begun a period of partnership with the voluntary sector. But the 1980s was a time of turmoil. The incoming Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 ended several initiatives designed to support voluntary work. The 1978-79 IVAC annual report featured a picture of a gravestone with the caption 'In fond memory – Partnership – RIP'.

The new Government talked of a 'welfare pluralism' in which charities might provide a substantial part of public services (echoed later in the 'Third Sector' of the late 1990s and 'Big Society' in 2010). However, against the background of a recession, this turned in reality to a 'contract culture' where large voluntary organisations were hired to deliver government contracts such as the Youth Training Scheme. Overall direct UK government funding of voluntary organisations was in fact increasing (from £93 million in 1979-80 to £292 million in 1987-88). However, it was concentrated on large national bodies. Little of this filtered down to local charities and local authority expenditure was being constrained. ^[2]

Major cuts were made to some parts of public spending including welfare benefits and central

support for local authorities through Rate Support Grant. The ability of local authorities to raise funds locally through taxes known as 'rates' was also curtailed.

The economic recession of the early 1980s put further pressure on voluntary organisations, whilst the need for help was rising as unemployment and poverty rose. The Greater London Council, which had stepped up support for voluntary action, was abolished in 1986, to be followed by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in 1990.

In 1981 several Islington councillors defected from Labour to the newly formed Social Democratic Party (which in 1988 merged into the Liberal Democrats), eventually forming a majority on the Council. This caused instability in the local political scene. The new Council leadership set about putting 750 council properties on the market and selling available property. In the May 1982 elections, a Labour majority was re-established and some of the cuts reversed, including funding for Pensioners Link and core grant for IVAC.

² Crowson et al (2011) 'The voluntary sector in 1980s Britain' in Contemporary British History 25(4) 491-498 p 449 quoted in Davis Smith 2019

In the face of funding cuts, IVAC found imaginative ways to raise funds for its work. For example, a late-night fundraiser at Screen on the Green cinema was organised. Meanwhile IVAC continued to work hard to serve the local community and voluntary organisations in the Borough. By 1981 the newsletter circulation was up to 750 local organisations.

The Employment Project set up in 1978 increasingly concentrated on youth unemployment and campaigned for a local Cooperative Development Agency. In 1981 IVAC established a 40-place training workshop designed to meet the needs of Black unemployed young people. Though ethnic minority and community relations groups had from the start been involved with ICSS/IVAC, this was an early example of a project aimed specifically to benefit BAME communities.

Pay and conditions of employment within the voluntary sector at this time were still quite haphazard. In 1981 IVAC brought together representatives of voluntary sector management committees, trade unions and Islington Council to begin three-way negotiations on wages and conditions in the voluntary sector.

In 1981-82 the Council began its decentralised Neighbourhood Forum process, which ICSS had pioneered from 1973 in Mildmay. IVAC convened a panel of community and voluntary groups to press for community participation. In 1983 a student on placement with IVAC helped to start PACE - the Islington Police Monitoring Group.

In October 1983 IVAC convened a major Voluntary Sector Conference to look at the abolition of the GLC, rate-capping, decentralisation, government policy on volunteers, lack of resources for groups and how to ensure real community involvement. IVAC also played a leading part in events marking the GLC's Anti-Racist Year 1984.

In 1983 Bryan Simons stepped down as general secretary after six years in post and was replaced briefly by Mike Phillips then Steve Balkam who served from 1983 until 1989.

In Islington, Councillor Bob Crossman had become the first openly gay Mayor in the UK in 1986 and IVAC Vice President Chris Smith became the first serving MP to come out as gay in 1984, marking and encouraging a shift in public mood.



IVAC at 322 Upper Street N1

New premises were found at **322 Upper Street** in 1984, now the site of an estate agent, next door to Nando's and opposite the Bull pub. This was seen as a major improvement, giving IVAC a 'High Street' ground floor presence which was improved to provide wheelchair access and with a purpose-built training room. This allowed IVAC to offer a comprehensive training programme and a wider range of voluntary sector support services. It also published a well-received guide: 'Managing Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups'.

Organisational changes were made in 1986, establishing new structures within IVAC. Meanwhile, more projects which had been nurtured and run by IVAC were made independent. The Access Unit was floated off to Islington Disability Association and the Islington Employment Unit became a separate entity.

At IVAC, a new Advisory Financial Service was set up, providing accountancy support to local voluntary bodies. During 1988 IVAC began an experimental 'payroll' service for groups and the Training Officer negotiated access for voluntary groups to some of LBI's training courses.

At the end of the 1980s there was still a great deal of pessimism about the future of the voluntary sector amid persistent economic hardship, financial constraints, and rising demand for services. In 1988 the Islington Gazette reported that 'Four out of five social security claimants in Islington will be worse off next month as a result of benefits changes being introduced by the Government'. After growing to £119,000 in 1989 the grant from the London Borough of Islington to IVAC was cut by £17,000 (about £34,000 in today's money).

In 1989 IVAC's General Secretary, Steve Balkam, succeeded in inviting the prominent academic and activist Professor Stuart Hall to give an address at IVAC's Annual General Meeting. His seminal speech entitled 'The Voluntary Sector Under Attack?' set out a very broad if controversial overview to understand the challenges facing the sector and consider how to respond. It was a feather in the cap of IVAC to provide the platform – agree with it or not – for such an important insight. The full text of the speech was converted into a pamphlet, still available on VAI's website.

'The Voluntary Sector Under Attack'

A very exciting development for us this year was publishing, both as a booklet and as a tape, the address given by Stuart Hall at last year's AGM. Entitled 'The Voluntary Sector Under Attack', it has received exceptionally good reviews and has quickly established itself as required reading for all those interested in the growth, development and future of the voluntary sector.



Stuart Hall, Professor of Sociology at the Open University, describes the political and social sea-change that is overtaking voluntary organisations in their attempt to adapt to the enterprise culture and the 'Thatcher revolution'. He warns of the temptations of the philosophy of private greed and outlines a strategy which, he believes, could position itself to articulate a new social vision.

He managed, in one evening, to cover the political movements of the past thirty years, to uncover the thinking and ideology of the 'new right' and finally, to put our task in the voluntary sector

into an historic perspective - something we often fail to grasp in our headlong attempts to run our overstretched organisations.

We are very grateful to Stuart Hall, now a Patron of IVAC, for letting us publish his text and distribute it to a much wider audience - including organisations in Canada and Australia!

'Stuart Hall's address should be read and re-read by anyone remotely concerned with the voluntary sector'

- Tim Cook, Clerk, City Parochial Foundation.

'He manages to dissect the mechanisms of Thatcherism, reveal the hold it has taken on social policy and yet still offer us hope'

- Christian Wolmar, The Observer.

Campaigning and Widening Our Scope – Late 1980s and 1990s



Andy Gregg

In 1989 Andy Gregg took over as Director of IVAC. Under the leadership of Andy and chair Oscar Abrams (a founding member of ICSS in 1971), IVAC joined defiant protests against cuts to voluntary sector support from both national and local government. At a time of economic hardship these cuts doubly affected those most in need of support, and harmed attempts to bring together diverse local communities.

From 1990 onwards unemployment started to decline from a historic peak. However, this did not immediately convert into a more generous local public spending regime. Indeed,

there was additional controversy with the introduction of the Poll Tax (officially known as the Community Charge), replaced in 1993 by the Council Tax. This created extra turbulence and uncertainty in financial support for local authorities.

Meanwhile IVAC was nurturing the growth of new parts of the voluntary and community sector, reaching out more to Black and ethnic minority communities and the emerging community organisations supporting refugees through the creation of new forums set up in 1990.

In 1991 IVAC demonstrated the confidence and vibrancy of the local voluntary sector with an exhibition of the work of Islington's voluntary sector being held to mark 20 years of IVAC. The council nominated IVAC to administer environmental improvement grants to small groups. IVAC received funding for both an Employment Development Officer and an Environmental Development Officer. This reflected a growing awareness of the environment following the 1990 UN Earth Summit.

In 1992 IVAC celebrated its 21st birthday in style. The Mayor of Islington, Councillor Joan Herbert, marked the occasion with a party at Islington Town Hall, with over 100 people

attending. They included representatives from the voluntary sector, funders, councillors, council staff and people who had worked at IVAC over the previous 21 years.



Dear Friends

I am very pleased to have been asked, as the Mayor of Islington for 1991/92, to offer an introduction to IVAC's Annual Report. As the Mayor I have the pleasure in being an ex-officio President of many of the Borough's voluntary groups and I hope to have visited, if not all, as many of them as possible during my term in office.

Since May, which is the beginning of the Mayoral Year, it has amazed me to discover just how many voluntary organisations there are in Islington and the wide variety of services that they offer to our community. In today's economic climate it must be difficult to keep progressing as we would hope and I would like to congratulate each and every person involved with these groups for the amount of sheer dedication and devotion they give. Let's hope that in future years things may take an upward trend and in doing so, make life a little bit more comfortable not only for the users of the groups, but also for the organisers.

I wish you all success in the coming year.

With best wishes.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Joan Herbert". The signature is written in a cursive style, with "Joan" and "Herbert" clearly legible. There are some horizontal lines drawn under the name.

Councillor Joan Herbert
Mayor

Andy Gregg was the General Secretary of Islington Voluntary Action Council from 1989 to 1996.



In the early 1990s Islington Council was facing severe cuts and was reining back spending on both the voluntary sector and council services.

Throughout my period at IVAC we had a diverse group of trustees representing the Islington voluntary and community sector. We were very ably chaired by Oscar Abrams who was the Director of the Keskidee Centre, Britain's first black arts centre, and a founding member of ISCC

IVAC monitored the negative effects on the voluntary and community sector of constant cuts and threats to local services. Islington had been a leading council in the development of a multi-cultural and equality-based approach to funding community provision. A few months before I arrived as the General Secretary, IVAC published a study of the effect of cuts to

the voluntary and community sector written by the well-known Black activist and academic Professor Stuart Hall.

This study was presented at IVAC's AGM and Conference in 1988 and received very positive feedback.

As well as challenging the local authority's cuts in aid for the voluntary sector, IVAC also supported the growth of new parts of the sector in this period and developed good links with Black and Minority Ethnic groups and particularly the emerging refugee organisations. IVAC set up the first Islington Refugee Working Party and developed a strong commitment to equal opportunities and the growing diversity of the sector. We developed positive relationships with the Council's Race Equality Unit and chaired the very active Community Care Forum."

IVAC's turnover had risen from £59,000 in 1986 to £240,000 by 1992. Local authority grants to IVAC rose from £99,000 in 1990 to £190,000 in 1994.

At national level the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service, devoted to supporting councils for voluntary service (CVS) organisations like IVAC, was formally launched in April 1991, effectively separating from NCVO. IVAC joined this new network (later to become NAVCA, the National Association for Voluntary Action).

Throughout the 1990s IVAC continued to provide development assistance for many local groups in Islington, especially for small and start-up groups. It also supported government-sponsored Health Action Zones and the Neighbourhood Support Fund to improve public health and community cohesion in Islington. Meanwhile IVAC played a prominent role in the emerging Central London CVS Network, coordinating the work of similar organisations across the central London boroughs. This work continued in various forms and today is incorporated in London Plus.

In late 1990 John Major took over as Prime Minister. However, after winning a general election in 1992, his government was rocked by a crisis, as the UK was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), sending interest rates spiralling, the value of sterling plummeting and the economy into decline.

His administration was notable for establishing new Standards in Public Life applying to public bodies and charities, and creating the National Lottery, the proceeds of which would be distributed to charities and voluntary groups by its grant-making arm.

The Third Sector - Late 1990s



Gracia McGrath with Jeremy Corbyn

Andy Gregg was followed as CEO in 1996 by Gracia McGrath until 1999. In 1997 the Labour Government of Tony Blair was elected, and he would serve for a further nine years. Stringent government spending was maintained in the early years, except for a 'New Deal' work and training programme for young people and allowing local authorities to use the proceeds of previous council house sales. In later years as the economy grew, a period of support for the 'Third Sector' emerged, though mainly as a way of delivering public services. Growing aid for projects like Sure Start centres for

young children offered new opportunities for local voluntary participation. Tax reforms were introduced to encourage charitable giving.

In 1998 a Compact encouraging cooperative behaviour was devised and agreed between the UK Government and the voluntary sector. After the vacuum left by the abolition of the GLC in 1986, a Greater London Authority was created in 2000 with a directly elected Mayor.

In 1997 Joseph Jeffers of Stonewall was elected chair of IVAC. The President was Mayor of Islington Councillor Meg Hillier, later an MP and Minister. A Financial Management Support Unit continued to offer accountancy advice. A Small Groups Team was established to focus help for smaller organisations. A wide range of training was offered, ranging from fundraising, to equal opportunities to public speaking.

Equality legislation improved rights against discrimination, and improved rights at work including a National Minimum Wage and maternity rights. The old Section 13 was repealed and civil partnerships for same sex couples introduced.

The 1997-98 annual report featured IVAC joint work with local organisations.

SHAD (Support and Housing Assistance for people with Disabilities) provided a 24-hour service to enable people with disabilities to live independently in their own homes. IVAC helped SHAD – with ongoing information, training and advice – take on a new set of care packages for service-users, appoint its first staff, establish itself as a not-for-profit company and apply for charity status.

Islington African Project was founded in 1983 to meet the needs of the large local African community and to enhance race relations in the Borough. Since its inception IAP had been a member of IVAC and described the two bodies as ‘best friends’. Rebecca Brown of IAP said: “IVAC’s role and contribution to my Project has been immeasurable. We have sought advice and training from IVAC on a regular basis. We are also enthusiastic readers of IVAC’s Newsletter.”

Islington Music Workshop was set up with IVAC assistance in 1983 to provide recording

and rehearsal space for local musicians. IVAC helped them to put together a successful bid for vital funding and develop into a nationally recognised training agency.

Holloway Neighbourhood Group was established in 1974, with three sites – the Fire Station Youth and Community Centre, HNG Nursery and the Stress Project – pioneering the treatment of mental illness with complementary therapies. The group began a new phase with building work to improve access to the Fire Station and create a new space for a community digital arts project. IVAC offered advice and support for staff training, contracts, equal opportunities and a staff handbook.



David Abse

David Abse took over as Director under new Chair David Vandivier from 1999 to 2006. Following the death of a former IVAC trustee Cllr Milton Babullal, a by-election was

won by the Liberal Democrat candidate and Labour lost its majority on the Council. The new administration proposed significant cuts to voluntary sector support.

A group led by IVAC devised a campaign against these cuts, proposing an alternative to LBI's medium term financial strategy, with support from the Charities Aid Foundation and the New Policy Institute, researching and in some cases correcting the Council's figures.

The new council administration promised an external review of the voluntary sector by the New Policy Institute but despite some concessions the result was a further rounds of cuts, now amounting to £2.1m. As a result, 200 jobs were lost in the sector and thousands of Islington residents suffered a loss of service.

Nevertheless, membership grew from 169 in 1997 to 357 in 2000. IVAC joined the successful campaign to have a Health Action Zone in Camden and Islington, opening up a partnership with the Health Authority.

New chair David Vandivier adopted a new approach to build fences with the Council. Looking back after a decade as chair in 2008,

he wrote: "Six or seven years ago we had what I think was the last old style demonstration at the Town Hall, where we protested against the sale of council premises. It had catastrophic effects and the then leader of the Council was a bit taken aback. IVAC took a two thirds cut in funding. After this episode we adjusted our tactics – as you would. Since then we have taken IVAC and the voluntary sector to a new level of partnership working in the true sense of the word. I realised that the future success of the sector would be diversity in funding and this has proved to be the case."

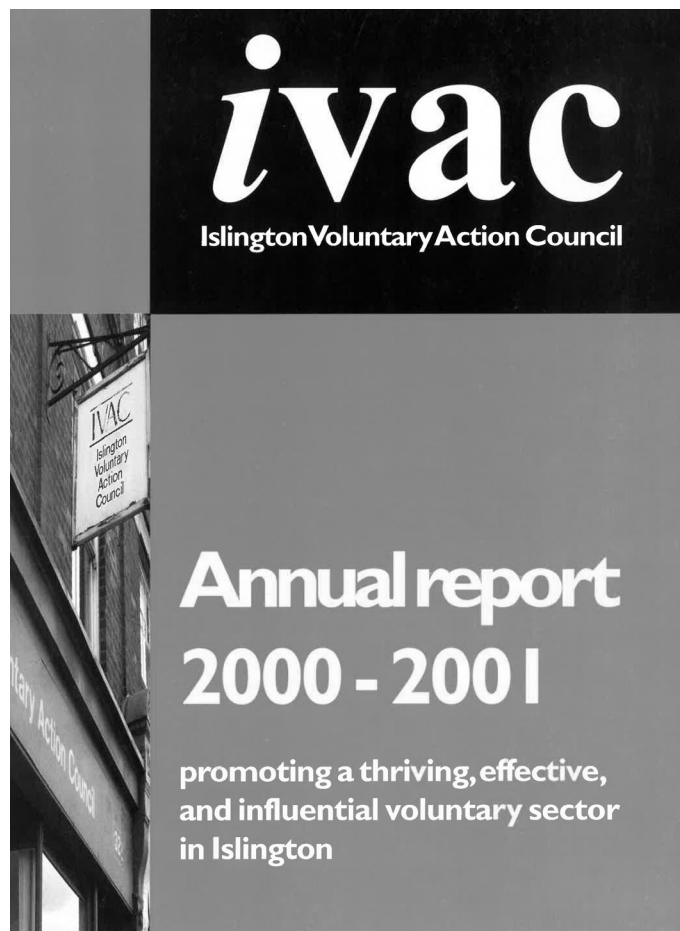
New central government funds were made available such as SureStart (early years), the Children's Fund, (5-13 year olds, at risk of social exclusion), Connexions (marginalised 13-25 year olds), Neighbourhood Renewal, and the New Deal for Communities (housing estates) - all involving the voluntary sector. With increased support from the Cripplegate Foundation and other charitable trusts, together with LBI funding for a Partnerships Development officer, IVAC made up the gap created by the LBI cuts.

In 2000 IVAC formed a partnership with Allied Dumbarton (later Zurich Group) insurers to launch a stakeholders' pension for voluntary sector groups.

IVAC took a leading role in representing the voluntary sector in the broad Islington Partnership and newly developed infrastructure created to meet the UK Government's agenda for Neighbourhood Renewal. IVAC was selected by the Government Office for London to create a new Community Network, taking forward voluntary sector interests in the forthcoming Local Strategic Partnership.

In January 2001 an event was held at the Islington Business Design Centre to celebrate IVAC's 30th anniversary. Speakers included local MPs Chris Smith and Jeremy Corbyn as well as VAI Treasurer Pat Haynes. It was a celebration not just of IVAC but of the whole of Islington's voluntary sector.

The nationally inspired partnerships continued in this period, with varying success. IVAC worked over several years to negotiate a local Compact with the Council to be completed by 2003.



IVAC set up a new Islington Voluntary Sector Health Network in 2002, where voluntary organisations with an interest in health and social care could meet and discuss issues. An Islington Black and Minority Ethnic Network was established too. This reflected growing

social awareness and BAME activism, including among specific ethnic community groups, anti-racism groups and refugee support bodies.

In 2002, facing continuing financial stringency, Islington Council decided to reduce funding again for the voluntary sector. This included selling off the council-owned premises 322 Upper Street, where IVAC was based. This prompted a crisis for the organisation. The IVAC premises was not only a centre for its operations but a meeting place, a hub of voluntary activity and a place to turn to in time of need for local organisations.

In 2003-04 IVAC moved to temporary premises in **Aztec Row, 1-6 Berners Road**. This is still a multi-purpose office building near the Angel. However, uncertainty persisted until 2009 when new premises were found near King's Cross.

IVAC developed its Funding Advice Service and employed staff to promote Health Partnerships and ICT Support for local VCSF bodies. It developed a new website including the IVAC Health Check, to help members analyse their organisation. The Islington Link project with the

Council was set up to provide online resources. The Islington Community Network continued. A new network for voluntary organisations' chief officers (ICON) was formed.

From 2003 IVAC played a central role hosting Lisa Charalambous to support the Central London CVS network with sister organisations in London boroughs (forerunner of today's London Plus). It had a strong focus on developing learning and skills in the sector.

For two years from 2005 IVAC hosted a cross-London project Achieving a Quality Standard, supporting 154 organisations to achieve the PQASSO quality standard. IVAC's Capacity Building team was now supporting 530 organisations a year by 2005-06.

IVAC's turnover rose from £619,000 in 2005 to £1.1 million in 2006, and after a dip in 2008, to £1.5 million in 2009.

The Modern Era 2006

Mike Sherriff took over as CEO of IVAC in September 2006 and would stay for a decade. This period in many ways marks the start of a modern era. IVAC had come through a tough financial period affecting the whole local voluntary sector. The new Gordon Brown Labour Government recognised the value of voluntary sector 'infrastructure bodies' both nationally and locally. A new Charity Act came in 2006, said to be the biggest change in charity law for four centuries. It included a 'public benefit test' for charities, and a new legal form - the Charitable Incorporated Organisation - that offered smaller charities the protection of incorporation without having to register as a company.

A Minister of the Third Sector was appointed, and an enhanced Office of the Third Sector was set up within the Cabinet Office. Central government funding for VAI reached a peak, including projects to promote urban development, social cohesion, and help children in early years.



Mike Sherriff

In 2008 a national network was set up alongside the NHS to help service users and residents to influence health and social care provision, known as LINK. IVAC was chosen to support the setting up of this new LINK body for Islington.

In April 2009 Islington Voluntary Action Centre and Islington Volunteer Centre merged to become **Voluntary Action Islington**, offering a more stable, unified and one-stop support service to all of the local voluntary sector against a background of austerity.

New premises were found at **200A Pentonville Road** near King's Cross station, VAI's current location, shared with other voluntary groups. These were made available as part of a section 106 planning agreement between the Borough as planning authority and the developer of the new building. It resolved the long running location problem created by the Council's decision to sell the previous offices. This new Resource Centre allowed VAI to continue to provide help, free of charge, to local charities and provided a home and a meeting hub for voluntary organisations.



The Islington Volunteer Centre had started in the early 1990s as an independent project sourcing volunteering opportunities initially for people who used English as a second language. It matched people with suitable volunteering roles in local charities. From these early beginnings it became part of a national network, under the National Association of Volunteer Bureaux and from the late 1990s was based at Manor Gardens. The NAVB morphed into Volunteering England by 2004, causing a name change to Islington Volunteer Centre. By then it had four main projects: helping ethnic minorities, disabled people, people with experience of addiction and ex-offenders to engage in mainstream volunteering. IVC also ran the Borough's main volunteer brokerage service, putting residents in touch with charities that needed their help, as well as a Best Practice service to support organisations to engage and manage volunteers. Today this remains the only nationally accredited volunteer centre

Mike Sherriff served as Chief Executive of IVAC, then VAI, 2006-2016.



I joined IVAC following a huge dispute with the council, who had sold several premises used by the voluntary sector. We successfully bid to the Big Lottery Fund for a 5 year project that assisted many local organisations with building management.

When I joined IVAC the council were keen to rebuild better relations. The Government required councils to involve the voluntary sector in Local Strategic Partnerships, responsible for allocating funds from central government. Numerous initiatives were open to the voluntary sector and IVAC's turnover reached over £1.5m.

In my time, the most long-lasting changes were merging with the Volunteer Centre, moving to the new Centre on Pentonville Road and adopting a new name and web site as Voluntary Action Islington.

We were the first CVS to become an accredited Living Wage employer. We invested in the Credit Union. We recognized the amazing work of local volunteers at the annual Volunteer of the Year Awards.

After one fact-finding visit, I remember the then Chief Executive of the Council declaring as we jumped on a bus: "Your chairman is the missing link"! At first, I was surprised as I knew he had a mixed reputation, but she explained that we were very lucky to have him as chair because he could make links between community activists and the local council. To me this is the unique role of a CVS and a positive relationship between voluntary organisations and a progressive council can maximise benefit for local communities."

In 2010 the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government led by David Cameron took office and launched the idea of the ‘Big Society’. No UK government in living memory had trumpeted the role of the voluntary sector as loudly as this. Proponents hailed it as a new recognition of the role of voluntary organisations within ‘civil society’. However, critics saw it as little more than a slogan, hiding a disengagement from partnership between government and national voluntary sector representatives and a cover for privatisation. Core funding for national infrastructure bodies was ended, and the Compact was revised. In 2013 the crucial requirement was removed for government and local authorities to give 12 weeks’ notice before withdrawing funding for voluntary organisations. Moreover, it marked a period of measures that aimed to restrict recipients of public funding from criticising Government policy.

At the 2015 general election the Conservatives gained an overall majority. This administration continued the policy of austerity and launched a controversial referendum on membership of the European Union. The latter resulted in a vote for ‘Brexit’ and the replacement of David Cameron as PM by Theresa May and

then Boris Johnson. This gradually ended EU funding for voluntary organisations in the UK. Austerity bore down heavily on local authorities. According to the National Audit Office, direct government revenue funding for English local authorities fell by more than 50% in real terms during the decade from 2010-11 and 2020-21^[3]. This was partly counterbalanced by rising council tax income, but still resulted in a 26% reduction in spending power.

VAI’s turnover fell from a peak of £1.5m in 2010 to £500,000 in 2015. Grants from all sources dropped from £1.5m to £485,000 over the same period. However official membership stood at 475 in 2017, compared with 238 in 2006.

New Direction

In 2010, acting on the findings of its ‘Invisible Islington’ report ^[4], 2008 Cripplegate Foundation invited local and national organisations to launch Islington Giving, a place-based initiative to harness the power of community fundraising. VAI was from the start a consultative partner.

3. NAO The local government finance system in England: overview and challenges 10 Nov 2021 HC 858

4. Invisible Islington: living in poverty in inner London (cripplegate.org)

Islington Giving has since raised over £6m and awards grants to voluntary organisations providing support to Islington residents to address poverty and inequality.

During 2011 VAI launched a major consultation to modernise its identity and purpose, with a view to maximising the impact of a now more limited budget. The outcome was a set of new aims for VAI:

The outcome was a set of new aims for VAI:

- Providing support to our members
- Improving the effectiveness of the local voluntary and community sector
- Developing the voluntary sector in Islington
- Mobilising our members to influence change

In 2011 VAI celebrated its 40th anniversary. A special presentation was made to Pat Haynes, who had been a founder of ICSS and Treasurer throughout the first 40 years. He wrote a fascinating self-published record of his time as a councillor, [5] which also illustrates his involvement in the ups and downs of ICSS, its emergence as IVAC and its transformation into VAI. It shows how he had been a powerful advocate for the Islington voluntary sector and in particular VAI.

A new website was established in 2011. That year 75,000 people were matched with a volunteering opportunity. The Capacity Building service supported 30 smaller groups, compiling valuable information packs.

Collaboration was a growing theme, including sharing of premises, community accountancy, and supporting the borough's Community Network. VAI continued to support the BAME Forum, which organized Black History Month in the Borough. A Children's Voluntary Sector Forum was supported, bringing together charities and voluntary organisations going support for children.

VAI also launched a new Voluntary Action Academy – a new way of providing training and information for community groups and volunteers. New projects covered volunteering and supporting children's voluntary organisations. VAI played a leading role in promoting quality standards in the sector, helping 20 organisations to gain national accreditation. VAI itself was accredited by Investors in People for its treatment of staff.

5. Haynes, P An Islington Councillor 1971-1992 Spider Web 1994

“We believe that it is absolutely vital in the current economic and political environment that existing and emerging voluntary and community sector organisations continue to have access to high quality and proactive support, delivered by organisations that are independent of statutory sector bodies.”

Mike Sherriff, CEO, and Andy Murphy, chair,
2011-12 IVAC annual report

In 2012 the Olympic and Paralympic Games came to London with an unprecedented involvement of 70,000 volunteers. In this period, Volunteer Fairs were organised to attract organisations and potential volunteers. Help for volunteers seeking employment was stepped up.

Volunteer of the Year Awards were organised annually in Islington to celebrate the fantastic work of local voluntary organisations and volunteers during the year.

A ‘Pat Haynes Memorial Award’ for trustees (often overlooked as volunteers) was established in honour of our long serving Treasurer.



In 2014-15 VAI became the first Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) in the country to be accredited as a Living Wage employer. It guaranteed to pay at least the London Living Wage to its staff and negotiated with the Borough (itself a signatory) to ensure council funding supported adherence to the London Living Wage among voluntary organisations.



VAI was also looking at new areas of support for local groups. We negotiated to free NCVO membership for one year for current VAI members. A valuable partnership was struck up with London Metropolitan University, where VAI's Voluntary Sector Conference was hosted for several years. LMU also offered advice and information to VAI members. In 2015 voluntary sector hustings were organised by VAI for political parties in the run-up to local council elections, with four major parties represented, giving the local VCSF the chance to question the candidates.

In 2016 Mike Sherriff retired after nearly 10 years' service. In the annual report of that year VAI chair Phil Kelly described 2016-17 as "a year of planning for change".

Under new CEO Guljabeen Rahman in 2016 VAI prioritised supporting the local VCSF in four areas:

- to be more sustainably resourced (e.g. through the 'Open 4 Communities' funding database)
- to deliver more effective services (e.g. through Capacity Building Essentials)
- to influence policy (brokering meetings between the VCSF and Council departments)

- to help volunteers to gain more skills, social contacts, employability and improved health (primarily through the Volunteer Centre).

Community safety was also a focus, with VAI jointly organising a 'Quit Knives, Save Lives' event. A Women in Leadership conference was well received, as well as networking events for trustees and CEOs. VAI's current CEO Navinder Kaur joined in 2020.

The COVID-19 Pandemic 2020-22

From early 2020 the problems facing the community in Islington were intensified by COVID-19 – the worst global pandemic seen for many years. This resulted in a series of national lockdowns, severely restricting travel and close contact with others. Despite itself being hit by the lockdowns, Islington's vibrant Voluntary, Community and Faith sector (VCFS) underpinned the response to the pandemic. From food banks to medical deliveries, to educational help, to mental wellbeing, to combating loneliness, to assistance in the vaccination programme, Islington's voluntary and community organisations came to the fore.

The COVID-19 pandemic had repercussions for our whole society. The economic impact on businesses and employment pushed many more people into poverty. Voluntary and Community Sector (VCSF) organisations and local authorities were disrupted but demands on their services increased.

In response, Voluntary Action Islington made a major contribution to support the Borough's crisis response, mounting a huge effort around volunteering, communicating and working closely with VCSF organisations and Islington Council. As the main representative of the local VCSF sector, VAI joined the strategic Islington COVID-19 Response Group whose remit was to coordinate the pan-sector response to support the most vulnerable residents.

From January 2020 VAI partnered with Age UK Islington, Manor Gardens Welfare Trust and Help on Your Doorstep to recruit and manage volunteers for the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme at the Islington local clinics. By mid-May 2020, 790 people had registered to volunteer since the start of the crisis in March (making over 1,700 in total). One problem was that many VCSF organisation did not have the resource to design volunteer role descriptions, interview and screen candidates, induct new

volunteers and perform basic supervision. VAI designed a programme to address this gap. VAI increased personalised support to organisations and created a handbook for volunteer managers and a resources pack to work during COVID-19, with safeguarding and risks assessment updates. Volunteering opportunities were uploaded to our online volunteer platform Simply Connect and help with initial screenings was provided. VAI also provided over 900 volunteers to the mass vaccination site at the Business Design Centre and the pop-up clinic at the Emirates Stadium.

Part of the response to the pandemic was the creation of a network of Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs). VAI hosted a workshop for MAGs advising on how to organise themselves as formal organisations.

In addition to support for the borough, VAI was successful in applying for funding via the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for local emergency planning which enabled VAI to provide additional online support to those recruiting and managing volunteers.

There was a surge in local people wanting to volunteer. VAI increased online communication, deployed staff to urgent new tasks and recruited volunteers to support local VCSF partner organisations to fulfil their new needs, supported by the Volunteer Centre.

A large part of our activities went online, including our annual conference which was attended by 60 participants, and our Volunteer of the Year Awards and AGM.

The VAI website was redesigned, and a COVID-19 support section added, with daily information updates. Additional online support to those recruiting and managing volunteers was also established.

Emerging from the crisis

In the aftermath of the pandemic, life returned to something more like normal in 2022. But this was not an easy time. The pandemic had scarred the community and left many individuals isolated and deprived. Mental health issues were rising. Many returned only tentatively to workplaces, and many continue to feel concerned and vulnerable. The educational development of many children had suffered from the closure of schools and would struggle to make up ground. Voluntary and

community groups stepped forward to offer coaching and tutoring for children with English as a second language. The outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine gave another impetus to refugees needing comfort and support in the UK.

VAI undertook a project to improve voluntary sector resilience (with National Lottery Fund support). A further project aimed to bridge gaps between would-be volunteers and local voluntary and community organisations by improving their practice for an era of remote working. Also, with support from MOPAC, VAI ran online community safety forums.

Capacity building support continued to be vital, especially for smaller groups through one-to-one advice and group sessions. VAI also held open briefings, regular advice sessions, funding advice sessions and National Lottery one-to-one surgeries. In 2020-21 VAI provided over 70 face-to-face advice sessions to 60 local organisations, including advice on fundraising, charity registration funding, governance and starting a community organisation. Another 50 organisations benefited from telephone and e-mail support.

Funding support is another major area of VAI's work. As well as funding advice sessions and National Lottery one-to-one surgeries, VAI continues to host the Islington Council funding database 'Open 4 Communities' on its website, which can be accessed by members and non-members, with over 300 subscribers for regular funding updates. VAI regularly meets and feeds intelligence into the Funding Group composed of the National Lottery Community Fund, Cripplegate Foundation, Cloudesley and the Big Alliance. In partnership with LBI, VAI also promoted the Mayor of London's Young Londoners Fund and supported organisations with their applications.

VAI collaborated with four other volunteer centres to help North London Partners in Health and Care (NLP) develop a volunteering strategy in North and Central London.

Through the Volunteer Centre, from April 2020 to March 2021, 1,369 new volunteers were registered, 276 volunteering opportunities were live, and 2,417 registrations of interest in the different roles were advertised.

VAI continued to host the successful Volunteer of the Year Award event with over 60 organisations attending in 2021, and awards sponsored by DoubleTree by Hilton.

Five awards were presented by the Mayor of Islington in the following categories: Young Volunteer of the Year: 16-25 year olds, Volunteer of the Year: 26-60 year olds, Older Volunteer of the Year: 60+ year olds, Pat Haynes Memorial Trustee of the Year and the Volunteer Team of the Year.

Looking Ahead

Navinder Kaur joined VAI as chief executive in 2020. Here she looks ahead at what the future holds for Voluntary Action Islington'



Islington is made up of diverse and vibrant communities, with so much to be proud of. Our

communities are served by a passionate and committed Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) that plays a unique and vital role in reaching all our communities and providing services from early intervention to more intensive, long-term support.

The strength and impact of our local ecosystem of VCFS organisations was clearly seen through its rapid fire and solution driven response to meet the desperate need emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strength within our communities was also more visible – with an army of residents stepping up to help their

VoluntaryActionIslington

neighbours and other vulnerable people around them and doing so with heart-warming commitment and passion.

Our communities are facing harsher challenges than ever before, with deepening inequality and the worst cost of living crisis since the 1970s. But we are already seeing how the VCFS, and residents are again stepping up and focusing their support on those who need it the most.

The strength of our communities and the VCFS has been and continues to be key but so is our public sector, who we are extremely grateful to for also stepping up and working so collaboratively with the VCFS and residents.

Going forward, we hope to harness and build upon the strengths of this highly effective partnership by working in a more integrated way with our colleagues from across Islington council, health authorities, and charitable funders.

Our Strategy for the future

We have drawn on our experiences of the last 2 years - having gained so much valuable insight from working with our colleagues in the VCFS.

In our new strategy we set out how Voluntary Action Islington will work more effectively to support the VCFS so that it continues to play its crucial role to make life better and fairer for all of Islington's communities.

Our strategy embraces four main objectives:

- We will continue to support VCFS organisations that are focusing their efforts on the boroughs most pressing issues, such as inequality, poverty and poor health
- We will seek to amplify the voice of our local communities by working more closely with the VCFS as representatives of those who are less heard and through our own community development activities
- We will collaborate with partners in the VCFS, public and commercial sectors to maximise resources and impact
- We will continue to help residents who want to access volunteering opportunities to enhance their skills and want to benefit the community.

Looking back at our 50-year history, you can only be amazed at the good-will, and inventiveness of the people that went before us. We respect our history, and learn from it, and we are prepared to face old and new challenges by reflecting on our history and by creating new ways to harness the benefits and impact of our collective power.

I'm hopeful that in 50 years' time, Voluntary Action Islington will still be providing vital sustenance to the local VCFS in all its splendid diversity and help in every way we can to make life fairer and better for all of Islington's people."

Navinder Kaur
CEO, Voluntary Action Islington



Voluntary**Action**Islington

Celebrating 50 Years of Service:

Islington Council of Social Service - 1971

Islington Voluntary Action Council - 1977

Voluntary Action Islington - 2009



Working for a fairer Islington by supporting community and voluntary action