

# Voluntary**Action**Islington

## Pulling **Together**: funding, resources and collaboration

### Islington Voluntary and Community Sector Conference

9 July 2015

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## 1 Introduction

We were very pleased to find that, even though this year's conference coincided with a tube strike, yet again more than 100 people made the effort to turn up and make it a very worthwhile event. As well as the usual conference partners - Voluntary Action Islington (VAI), Islington Community Network (ICN) and the London Borough of Islington (LBI) – this year we were grateful to London Metropolitan University (LMU) for generously providing their wonderful Great Hall as the venue.

**This conference is always a lovely opportunity to network. Thank you!**







Following our usual format we began with speakers and presentations setting the scene and giving encouragement and ideas for future work. A wide range of workshop discussions aiming to promote opportunities for collaboration then kept delegates busy until the conference was rounded off by a guest panel who gave their take on issues that arose from the discussions.

Information stalls were focused on funding, to fit in with the 2015 conference theme, though local groups were also represented as usual:

- City and Islington College
- Creative Islington
- Hillside Clubhouse
- Islington Advice Alliance
- Islington Carers Hub
- Islington Giving / Cripplegate
- Local Giving
- London Community Foundation
- London Capital Credit Union
- London Metropolitan University
- Octopus Community Hubs Network
- Richard Cloudesley's Charity
- Trust for London
- Voluntary Action Islington

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## 2 Speakers and presentations

<p><b>Mike Sherriff</b>, CEO of Voluntary Action Islington, introduced the theme of the event: funding, resources and collaboration.</p>	
<p><b>Dr Liz Charman</b>, Dean of Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, London Metropolitan University, welcomed everyone to the Great Hall, the venue kindly provided by LMU. She also spoke of the University's pride in its growing commitment to the Voluntary Sector.</p>	
<p><b>Kathy Evans</b>, Chief Executive of Children England, warned of the danger of assuming that a competitive marketplace is the best model for the Voluntary Sector, whose primary currencies are the value of feelings and dignity – for which there is no cash equivalent.</p>	
<p><b>Cllr. Richard Watts</b>, Leader of the Council, assured delegates that a strong working relationship with the Voluntary Sector is important to the council and collaboration is key to this. Because of government cuts to the council budget, the relationship will be different in future but it must remain strong.</p>	
<p><b>Ginney Sell</b> talked about the collaborative work of <b>Hillside Clubhouse</b>, a mental health rehabilitation service with an emphasis on employment and education. Ginny gave some great tips on working with both local and large partners.</p>	
<p><b>Rowan Arts</b> brought a contingent of presenters to share the work they do bringing artists, venues and audiences together through their Islington Exhibits, Holloway Life and Holloway Arts Festival projects. A performance by local rapper Northie (pictured) brought the house down.</p>	

## 3 Recommendations

Drawing on the workshop discussions and the responses of the panel, recommendations for work over the coming year have been agreed. Next to each recommendation is a list of the organisations that have been asked to act on them. The organisations involved are: Islington Advice Alliance (IAA), Islington Community Network (ICN), London Borough of Islington (LBI), Octopus Community Network (OCN) and Voluntary Action Islington (VAI).

- 3.1 That larger advice organisations in the borough, particularly if successful in winning “Help Through Crisis” funding from the Lottery, develop strong links with smaller local groups whose members and service users need advice services. **IAA / ICN / VAI**
- 3.2 That VAI encourage the lead partners for the new ESF/BLF Better Opportunities Fund projects to deliver work in Islington in collaboration with local community organisations. **VAI**
- 3.3 That VAI, ICN and OCN identify and promote opportunities for cross borough funding applications. **VAI / ICN / OCN**
- 3.4 To continue to strengthen the relationship between London Metropolitan University and local community organisations. **VAI / ICN / OCN**

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- 3.5 To encourage and facilitate the sharing of resources, including premises, using the VAI Directory, VAI News and networking events. **VAI / ICN / OCN**
- 3.6 To investigate and promote opportunities for Operational Research Society volunteers to work with local organisations to reduce costs and improve use of limited resources. **VAI**
- 3.7 To monitor the impact of changes in government policy and the provision of statutory and voluntary organisation services and to speak out and lobby when there is a negative impact on local communities. **VAI / ICN / IAA / OCN / LBI**
- 3.8 To keep under review the support available to the VCS and new needs of and demands on residents and VCS groups as they emerge. **VAI / LBI**

## 4 Workshop Discussions

**Brilliant - has been really useful for us - we've met people we can work with and learnt about funding opportunities for our work.**

### 4.1 Advice

Islington Advice Alliance led discussion on a new Big Lottery funding opportunity, Help Through Crisis, which could provide £300,000-£500,000 over five years. With Islington Law Centre acting as lead organisation, partners could seek to deliver the dissemination of best practice and the development of collaborative projects, offering hands on advocacy and advice, for instance through training on welfare benefits and housing issues, the passing on of specialist advice, and an advisers' forum to engage in policy work. A forum could also help reduce the burden of fundraising by identifying pots of money members could tap into. Some challenges were considered: resources would be stretched and protocols would need to be established; there was also concern that recipient organisations should feel confident that when they refer clients the specialist organisation would have the capacity to assist. On a positive note, recipient organisations would be able to pass back their own expertise and it was suggested the specialist organisations could run a consultancy line for other advisers. Identifying methods of getting basic practical information over to residents, for instance on housing, benefits, the points needed to get a Council flat, how to avoid the bedroom tax, etc., was thought useful. This might involve producing written information or holding community meetings. The key message from the group was the importance of training, support and resources for community and other local organisations around crucial advice issues.

### 4.2 BLF / ESF Funding

London Voluntary Service Council advised on the new Building Better Opportunities fund, which is a partnership between the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) and the European Social Fund (ESF): <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/england/building-better-opportunities> ESF has a list on its website of organisations interested in working in partnerships, including whether they would be a lead or delivery partner, and what sector they are based in. The key messages suggested that organisations use their networks and choose the right partners to collaborate with, and that there is an opportunity for the council and VAI to play a role in coordinating and creating links with other boroughs in the two clusters. It is difficult to see how smaller organisations will be able to engage, but the desire to do so remains.

### 4.3 Cross-Borough Collaboration

Greater London Volunteering facilitated this workshop. Participants began by noting why cross-borough work is useful: areas of deprivation are often on borough boundaries, people move between boroughs and some communities are connected by interests rather than locality. It was suggested that funders need to understand that community need is broader than one borough and that they could perhaps collaborate to meet it. It would be useful to broker peer networking for similar specialist and niche services and/or groups and networks on broader topics (e.g. inter-

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generational network) and to know how to connect with any existing networks or other regional and sub-regional structures. Staff need to have a good overview of such structures so that they can join the most relevant meetings and events. It may be possible to work with Local Authorities on developing cross-borough opportunities. The group's key message was that it is hard to navigate networks outside our own borough and so there is a need for mapping and raising awareness of cross-borough partnerships and regional / sub-regional areas such as NHS, public health, ESF areas, bi/tri-borough commissioning, etc.

## 4.4 Further Education

City & Islington College supported this group, where the main topic was apprenticeships which the College can help employers to arrange. The key message was that funding is available to employers to support apprenticeships, and that new standards and assessment approaches have been developed for them by groups of employers called 'trailblazers'.



## 4.5 Health

Whittington Health asked group members to talk about how to better engage communities with health services. Doing so in a community setting was discussed, for instance in Children's Centres, through more effective use of contact with all kinds of health professionals (e.g. midwives, health visitors, etc.), and through the voluntary sector, for instance using the many local networks, including the ICN. It was also noted that people generally want a single point of contact. Poor health was linked to a lack of awareness of services. This may be for various reasons, including a lack of literacy and numeracy, and language barriers (therapy may be difficult if English is a second language). Involving people in social networks and activities is important for health. Closer partnership between health services and voluntary sector groups such as the Women's Therapy Centre and the Stress Project would enable both to better support patients. Throughout the value of early intervention and prevention rather than cure was stressed. The key message was about how people can get help with their health, how health services can identify early that people need help and link them to it, and whether NHS resources can be used for referral and outreach.

## 4.6 Higher Education

LMU hosted a workshop on their collaboration with the voluntary sector. The key message asked how we can challenge the government over youth policy and advance the educational attainment of our children.

## 4.7 Neighbourhood Initiatives

**Excellent Venue. Well organised.**

Joe Irvin, trustee of VAI and Living Streets Chief Executive opened discussion of local opportunities for collaboration. A representative of Highbury Estate Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) advertised their new premises, which they want to make more use of. The group talked about collaboration, not in aid of seeking grants, but to bring different types of group together, i.e. not TRA with TRA, but with arts, sport, education, ESOL, dance, place-making, etc. These activities develop communities and overcome individual problems. The key message was the importance of groups introducing themselves to each other and finding out what's on offer. The VAI directory and the ICN can help with this.



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## 4.8 Older People’s services

Age UK Islington introduced this topic. Participants agreed that they had different approaches, but the same goal. Making better connections, understanding each other, sharing resources and trusting and promoting each other, rather than competing, were all thought important. Collaboration adds value, increases range and sparks creativity. A database for older people was proposed. The key message was that groups should meet up and find out who they are working with and what common connections are.

## 4.9 Premises

LBI set the scene for this discussion. Participants talked about how spaces can be multi-functional and have a community focus but also commercial arms. For instance, commercial hires can fund community spaces. The example of the Islington Youth Hubs was given, where the contracts to run them don’t cover costs so they still need to make money. Services such as finance, HR and facilities can be shared. The group heard that the Operational Research Society can provide volunteers to help organisations reduce costs and improve the use of limited resources, which would help to make the most of premises sharing. The key message was the need to better communicate opportunities to share space and resources within the sector and particularly between the private and voluntary sectors. Referring groups on is important.

## 4.10 Youth Provision

Isledon Arts, which runs the Islington Youth Hubs, led talk about youth provision. The problem of matching resources to need was a strong topic. It was recommended that organisations share resources and contacts. Apprenticeships were thought to be valuable to young people. The key message was the need to meet people, both networking in the sector so as to know what resources exist, and to meet the challenge of connecting with young people in need and who may not know what services are available to them. The group also agreed that collaboration shouldn’t happen just to bring in money.

## 5 Conference Panel



<b>Kathy Evans</b> Children England	<b>Mike Sherriff</b> Voluntary Action Islington (Panel Chair)	<b>Martin Machray</b> Islington Clinical Commissioning Group	<b>Liz Mercer</b> Islington Carers Hub	<b>Cllr Asima Shaikh</b> Executive Member for Economic and Community Development
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Each discussion group agreed on a key message and, as time was limited, a selection of these were considered by the Panel.

**5.1 Advice Key Message:** *Training, support and resources are needed for community and other local organisations around key advice issues.*

**Panel Response:** Islington is the largest funder of advice services in London. Some of this is spent on training smaller groups in advice and advocacy work but such funding may not be available in future. There must be more collaboration between groups to plug gaps. The value of small organisations and community groups must be recognised. Funds that are available should be spent on first tier groups alongside more corporate providers. We need to be better as a society about recognising the needs of individual children and provide more person centred services.



**5.2 Cross-Borough Work Key Message:** *Improved awareness, for instance through mapping, of cross-borough partnerships / areas is needed. It is hard to navigate how to work outside our own borough, e.g. with CCGs, ESF areas, bi/tri-borough commissioning, etc.*

**Panel Response:** Funders are moving towards sub-regional projects. Cross borough collaborations could exploit this. The challenge is about involving smaller groups who actually have the reach into the community. There is an element of competition. CVSs could have a role to play in bringing together more constructive dialogue. *Engage London* works across all boroughs with young people and might be a good reference point for others to look at. This is already being done by some partnerships in Islington but we need to do more. Big organisations do not always understand how things work at community level. Many small organisations have led the way in delivering innovative projects in Islington.

**5.3 Further & Higher Education Key Messages:** *Apprenticeships should be supported, e.g. through funding to employers and clarification on new standards, i.e. trailblazers. How can we challenge the government over youth policy and advance the educational attainment of our children?*

**Panel Response:** There are gaps in services for people around school leaving age. In schools we need to do more to address the gap between high and low achievers, not just ticking boxes about pass rates. Children should leave education with aspiration and hope, not just paper qualifications. People should be able to achieve educationally throughout their lives. We should aim to change the terms of debates. For instance young people should be seen as in need of opportunities rather than being seen as causing problems.

**5.4 Health Key Message:** *How can people get help? How can we identify early that people need help and link them to it? Can we use NHS resources for referral and outreach?*

**Panel Response:** Commissioning can divert the resources of organisations away from delivering services. We need to look at making systems easier for small groups to participate in. Signposting is a good idea but there are less and less organisations out there to do the signposting. NHS resources should be used for outreach and referral purposes. There is a real need to make sure that people get the help and services at the time they need it.

**5.5 Premises Key Message:** *We need to better communicate about sharing space and resources within the sector and particularly between the private and voluntary sectors.*

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**Panel Response:** We can be more efficient in how we use our premises and resources. Collaboration can be of great value in this. Provision of spaces and equipment to Voluntary Sector groups could be more generous and the Corporate Sector could be approached to support this.

**5.6 General Panel Comments:** We have to be prepared to resist government policy where it is unfair. There is already much lobbying of government about underfunding. Campaigners are preparing to make legal challenges to minimum wage and benefit discrimination against young people. Collaboration is more than just resolving your own problems. We start in different places but understanding is about listening and learning from each other, not just telling other people what we do. The future is not just a matter of talking about working together, but finding new ways of actually doing things together.



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