

Voluntary**Action**Islington

Islington Voluntary and Community Sector Conference

13 July 2017

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1 Introduction

Well-established as a highlight of the borough's calendar, the Islington Voluntary Sector Conference in 2017 aimed to put fire in the belly of charity and not-for-profit staff, trustees and volunteers, re-igniting their passion for campaigning. As usual, the event was organised through the partnership of Voluntary Action Islington (VAI), Islington Community Network (ICN), the London Borough of Islington (LBI). London Metropolitan University (LMU) once again generously provided the venue.

Proceedings began with a range of speakers on campaigning policy and practice, from the national, through the regional and right down to grass-roots, street-level action. There was then energetic discussion of some real life examples of campaigning, with delegates brainstorming how they might have approached things, before the successful conclusions of the campaigns in question were revealed in the closing address.

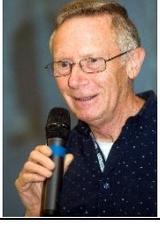
“Great coming together of voluntary organisations”

The conference was bookended by vigorous networking among individual delegates, and also by investigation of the many stalls showcasing local services, from charities, to community groups, funders and more. The full list of stallholders was:

- A Community Plan for Holloway
- Betknowmore
- Cloudesley
- Islington Advice Alliance
- Living Streets
- Manor Garden's Wellbeing Service
- Octopus Community Hubs Network
- Performing Production
- Peter Bedford Housing Association
- POhWER
- Solace Women's Aid
- Voluntary Action Islington

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2 Speakers and presentations

<p>Guljabeen Rahman, Chief Executive of Voluntary Action Islington, opened the conference and introduced the programme.</p>	
<p>Chris Lane, Head of Partnerships for the Schools of Social Professions and Social Sciences, welcomed everybody on behalf of London Metropolitan University.</p>	
<p>Phil Kelly, Chair of Voluntary Action Islington, challenged those attending to use people's instinct to volunteer, visible in the community response to recent crises, to make the voluntary sector stronger.</p>	
<p>Cllr. Kaya Comer-Schwartz, Executive Member for Community Development, was emphatic that civil society is absolutely NOT sleepwalking into obscurity and praised the voluntary sector and council's strong partnership and shared vision to make Islington a fairer place to live.</p>	
<p>Vicky Browning, Chief Executive of ACEVO, was concerned that the sector has slipped from 'changing the world' to 'steadying the ship' mode, as noted in ACEVO's Speaking frankly, acting boldly report. She told the conference that we must have a voice and carry on campaigning – our beneficiaries rely on us to speak out on their behalf</p>	
<p>Alice Woudhuysen, London Campaigns Manager for Child Poverty Action Group, drew attention to the situation in Islington, where 37.7% of children are living in relative poverty, and encouraged everyone to join the campaign to End Child Poverty.</p>	
<p>Mel Wright, of Kilburn Older Voices Exchange, showcased an approach to grassroots pressure for local level change: posting films online to campaign for improvements to road crossings, seating, lighting and paving to help older people to get about.</p>	

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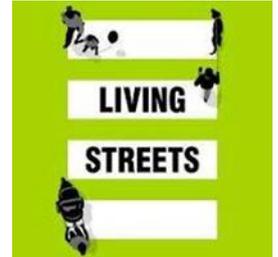
3 Workshop Discussions

Details of challenges encountered in successful campaigns were shared in three case studies, and those attending were asked to give their ideas of how to overcome those challenges. The full case studies are reproduced in the appendix.

“Felt welcomed – privileged to attend”

3.1 Islington Living Streets Group

The national charity Living Streets argues that our urban areas need more 20mph speed limits. Islington Living Streets Group wanted to lobby Islington Council to become the first borough in the country to introduce 20mph speed limits on all residential roads. However, car drivers oppose being slowed down; there was scepticism that the speed limit could be enforced; some councillors thought that it might be unpopular with the electorate; and there was a reluctance to embrace a novel idea. The question discussed was: *how can Islington Living Streets Group help to change local opinion?*



Many suggestions were about awareness raising and education of the local community: establishing the real facts; telling compelling stories; and speaking to residents about the issues. This could be done via a website, through presentations and public meetings, and also in a targeted way, e.g. focusing on councillors.

It was thought that being the first borough to make this change could be promoted as a good incentive.



Bringing together a wide range of potential beneficiaries was noted as important, both to raise the campaign profile and to get broad backing for it. In this case those could be schools, hospitals, families, people with disabilities, the elderly, and so on.

There were a number of suggestions to grow support for the campaign indirectly by reducing the appeal of car use, whether by promoting traffic calming measures, or encouraging walking, cycling and public transport use.

Lobbying decision makers at different levels was recommended: councillors, Transport for London and the London Mayor. Other boroughs could be encouraged to join the campaign.

3.2 Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation (IKWRO)



An MP announced, with coverage in the national press, the introduction of a new private members bill: the Crime (Aggravated Murder of and Violence Against Women and Girls). The bill proposed to ban the term “honour” based violence. IKWRO is a specialist organisation in the field of “Honour” based violence and treats it as a distinct form of violence from domestic violence, though many women experience both, with each carrying particular risks and requiring different safeguarding approaches. The question discussed was: *how should IKWRO oppose the bill?*

A number of the groups thought it important to first understand why the bill had been put forward, perhaps even by contacting the MP who proposed it, and to identify the government’s and opposition’s view of it.

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Informing and lobbying the relevant decision makers, in this case MPs, was recommended, through letters and meetings. Focusing on the local MP, or on MPs with a particular awareness of the issue, was suggested.

Working with others was considered useful, including specialists to provide data and expert opinion, and larger charities with more clout. A campaigning network of groups could co-sign appeals and advocate more effectively.



Getting the support of people who have suffered “Honour” based violence would have a strong impact and the discussion groups wanted to use their voices and stories, whether in person, by statements, or in case studies.

There was advice to get the message out in the media, including social media, where petitions can be easily set up, and by running events explaining the issues.

The opportunities and risks of the situation were noted. Taking a stand on a contentious issue could lead to some loss of reputation, so it would be important to have the support of the board. On the other hand, the high profile nature of the issue could be capitalised on to generate interest in and awareness of the group’s work.

More generally, it was thought that campaigners need to be prepared to respond quickly and so should have enough flexibility to do so. That may require organisations to be aware of the skills and capacity available among staff to provide cover.

3.3 Islington Borough User Group (iBUG)

In 2007, Islington Council opened a consultation on a review of day services for people with mental health needs. The members of iBUG, an organisation formed by and of mental health service users, responded that they did not want current services to change. Following consultation, the review proposed total closure of the Ashley Road Day Centre, stating it was not fit for purpose. A decision on the review and consultation was due to be made at a meeting of the Islington Council Executive. The question discussed was: *how can iBUG help to keep Ashley Road open?*



There was a desire to establish the reasons for the council decision before choosing how to run a campaign. Why was the centre considered ‘not fit for purpose’? What about previous reports? What other proposals, if any, had been made? What were the motives for the review (for instance, were they financial or linked to new development)? What is the council’s strategic plan for mental health services? What would the property be used for if the centre was closed?

It was suggested that if the reason for closure was related to finances, efforts could be made to fundraise to keep the centre open.

The possibility that service users may not have had a voice in the process was raised. Recommendations to remedy this included: creating case studies showing how people use and benefit from the centre; consulting service users to build evidence; mobilising service users to vote, picket, petition, attend council meetings, and generally use the power of their voice.

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Forming a coalition of mental health and specialist service providers was put forward. This could include other interested parties, such as GPs, council housing workers and other advocates, and could even look across borough boundaries.

Other actions discussed were: presenting a clear case for the unique value of the centre and the impact on the wider community, and other services, if it was to close; picketing outside Islington Council, or outside the centre; and lobbying local councillors and MPs. The less adversarial option of working with the council to secure an alternative space was also proposed.

A couple of potential difficulties were considered: that some services in the centre may not wish to join a campaign due to commercial sensitivities; and that the timeframe of the review and consultation may limit what any campaign could do.

4 Learning and Recommendations

Out of all the discussions of all three case studies, some common points emerged.

To launch an effective campaign, you first need to understand the reasons behind the existing situation or proposal that is in opposition to what you're campaigning for. What are the motives (financial, political, practical, etc.) behind opposition to your vision and how can you address these?



Engaging with the people who will make decisions on the campaign issue is key. You can use your expert knowledge, and data gathered from your work with those affected, to ensure decision makers are informed of all aspects of the issue. You can also persuade decision makers to take account of your views by writing letters, meeting with them, picketing and petitioning.

Inviting others to join your campaign will give it more credence and will broaden its reach. You can, for example: consult organisations and individuals that are expert on the issue; engage larger organisations with more resources and higher profiles; form a network of groups to campaign jointly; bring in stakeholders outside the voluntary sector; and inform and mobilise those who stand to benefit from the campaign.

The voice of those directly affected by the campaign issue is powerful and persuasive. You can amplify it, for example, by: helping their stories to be heard, whether through speeches, statements or case studies; gathering their views to provide evidence for your position; arranging for them to meet with decision makers; and empowering them to campaign themselves.

Raising awareness of the campaign issue will help it to succeed. There are many ways to do so, whether through traditional media, social media, public meetings and events, and so on. Targeting your awareness raising at a relevant community, or group of decision makers, may increase its effectiveness.

“It was amazing!”

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5 Appendix

5.1 Voice and campaigning case studies:

- [Islington Living Streets Group](#)
- [Iranian and Kurdism Women's Rights Organisation](#)
- [Islington Borough Users Group](#)



For questions or comments please contact:

Chris Taylor
Partnerships Officer
Voluntary Action Islington
020 7832 5803
christopher.taylor@vai.org.uk
200a Pentonville Road, London, N1 9JP

Guljabeen Rahman
Chief Executive
Voluntary Action Islington
020 7832 5802
guljabeen.rahman@vai.org.uk
200a Pentonville Road, London, N1 9JP