

Catalyst*

May 2019

For more Catalyst details visit:

<http://bit.ly/2XTITCd>

<http://bit.ly/2LcAvwo>



* **Small grants,
big difference**

What is it?

The Catalyst Programme awards up to £500 to people on low incomes to pay for opportunities that make a difference. It is a simple, special and effective programme that can be designed to support absolutely anyone.

In Islington, Catalyst was set up in 2009, funded by Cripplegate Foundation and then Cloudesley in 2011. It was expanded in 2016 and 2018 with funding from Islington Giving and Sir John Cass's Foundation. Together they fund 20 Catalyst partners in the borough to award Catalyst grants to people they work with.

Our evidence shows that small Catalyst grants unlock potential and increase wellbeing in people and provide partner organisations with a different and positive offer to those they support.



Catalyst grants are designed to help people pursue joy, grasp opportunities & unlock new possibilities



People are at the centre of Catalyst. With partner organisations, they explore what would make a difference to them



Catalyst partners give more than just money. They give people the space & permission to think about what they want

Catalyst Basics

Catalyst grants enable people to pursue opportunities and ambitions they otherwise could not afford, and create space for 'joy' in their lives.

The Catalyst Programme doesn't involve lots of rules. Simple criteria shape the spirit and boundaries of the scheme.

Catalyst partners...

- have a strong relationship with people they work with, so that together they can think beyond immediate challenges or needs and develop ideas around their ambitions and potential
- are given a budget of £10,000 over 2 years to pay for items or experiences identified by people they work with. Up to £500 can be awarded to one person
- have full control over their budgets, giving the ability and flexibility to respond quickly to ideas and "seize the moment"
- needn't refer a proposal or apply to the funder, and don't need to jump through hoops to make an award. Decisions are taken quickly, often within days

Catalyst Key Features

The context, criteria, and aims of a Catalyst Programme can differ, but since starting in Islington in 2009, some important key features have emerged.



It's a low-cost funding model based on trust and relationships



Puts people at the centre, with grants rooted in what they want



It doesn't involve lots of rules



Allows people to take risks, try new things, & improve their wellbeing



Makes grants quick & easy to award



Emphasises joy and allows people to realise their potential

Who is involved in a Catalyst Programme?



People



Partners



Funders

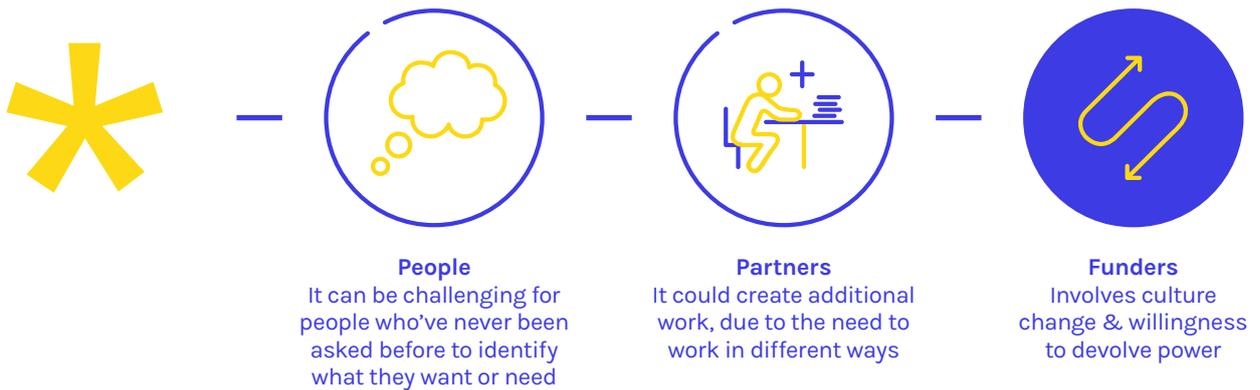
Benefits & challenges

From 10 years of people, partners, and funders working together on Catalyst Programmes, there have been clear benefits, and some challenges.

Benefits



Challenges





Benefits

For people

- Values and humanises people, seeing beyond problems and issues, and emphasising their needs, ambitions, talents, and dreams
- Focuses on what is important for people, and what would best support them
- Empowers people by giving responsibility, agency, and ownership
- Allows people to take risks and even fail
- Provides opportunities to connect, build self-confidence, get active, and pursue ambitions

For partners

- Changes the way partners engage with people - shifting focus from basic needs to personal goals
- Helps staff establish better relationships, by enabling them to say 'yes'
- Motivates staff and gives them hope. Staff can see people's lives shift for the better
- Provides control, flexibility and the ability to offer something different
- Shines a light on the poverty of opportunity people experience
- Encourages reciprocity. People receiving Catalyst grants have used newly acquired skills to offer free transport, art, yoga and Zumba classes in their community
- Offers a chance to learn and share learning with other partners

For funders

- A small amount of money makes a big difference, and can deliver tangible outcomes
- Directly addresses limitations imposed by financial hardship
- Small scale flexible funding, allowing for innovation, and a tailored approach to a location or issue
- Improves relationships with partner organisations
- Builds a network to share learning
- Can help to inform future policy and practice



Challenges

For people, partners, and funders

- It's not for everyone. Long term relationships between people and partners are key to Catalyst's success
- People can struggle to identify what their aspirations, needs, or desires are
- Offering money can change relationships between people and partners
- Offering grants to people in only one geographical area can create a fairness issue
- Some partners find it hard to spend Catalyst funds, due to: staff shortages/turnover, a focus on basic/crisis needs rather than aspiration, cautiousness in spending money, or risk aversion
- Partners' staff turnover, awareness and understanding of the programme can affect organisations' ability to fully use the scheme
- It can create additional work for partners e.g. supporting people to complete applications or arranging payments
- Partners need to manage expectations so that people know what they can use the money for, for how long, and what happens once it's been spent
- Can require a culture change - to devolve power, and allow people to make their own choices, and even mistakes

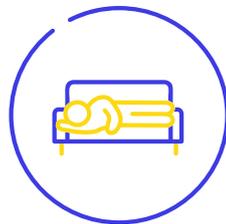
How it helps

Catalyst funding allows people to pursue their own aims, for joy, for personal development, to help others. Every person is different. What has been consistent over 10 years is that a small amount of money can make a big difference to people experiencing financial hardship.

David



£230



David had a ten-year drug, alcohol, & offending history. After release from a short custodial sentence, David had no official identification & was living on peoples' sofas



David received 4 Catalyst grants, totalling only £230. With these he could buy a passport, enrol in college & buy supplies to become a plasterer



With this funding, barriers have been removed. David is now working full-time, & remains drug-free

Shell



£500



After losing her mother & father in quick succession, Shell suffered a breakdown. She turned to drugs, felt claustrophobic in her own home, & didn't want to live



Shell had been riding on an old, broken & dangerous bicycle that she'd found in the street. A Catalyst partner offered to buy her a new bike

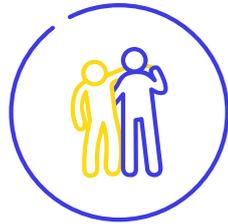


The bike made a huge difference to Shell's wellbeing. She says "I know it's a bike, but that bike gave me freedom"

Joan



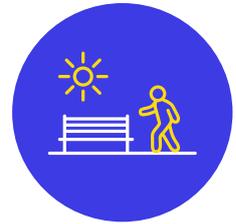
£500



Joan's former partner attacked her with a breadknife, breaking her nose and damaging her teeth



Confidence & wellbeing severely affected, & struggling to eat, a Catalyst grant paid for dental work not covered by the NHS



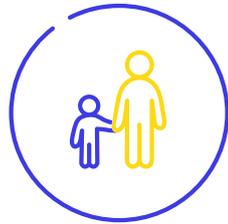
Joan is able to eat again. Her mental health has improved & she feels able to leave the house. She now has self-belief & hope for the future

Martha*

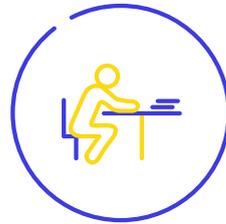
*Name changed to protect identity



£189



With an autistic son, Martha was finding life & continuous care stressful. She had "lost her sense of self"



Finding that she used to write as a teenager, a Catalyst partner paid for a writing course



The course is helping Martha feel "like a real person again", & in touch with who she really is

Gabriella*

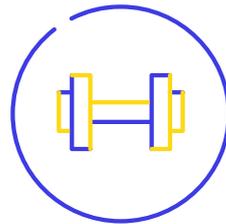
*Name changed to protect identity



£280



Gabriella was living with depression & finding it difficult to get out of the house & make friends



A Catalyst partner paid for membership at her local gym, & helped her sign up to classes



Gabriella is now a keen gym-goer, swimmer, & Zumba participant. She has made new friends and "feels really good"

How can we start one?

Any funder can replicate the Catalyst model. You can choose local partners, provide guidance, and set expectations for impact measurement in a way that suits you. Remember that the principles of Catalyst are flexibility, trust, and a focus on people.

Partners decide how to award Catalyst grants. Budgets devolved to Catalyst partners do not include administration costs. Experience shows that organisations value the way that the scheme allows them to build on their work with individuals.



Key pointers



Pilot your Programme



Organisations are partners, not grant recipients



Learn as you go, learn together

Acknowledgements

With thanks to all Catalyst partners for their continued commitment to people they work with and for their input into this learning report.

Organisations

- Blenheim CDP
- Body & Soul
- City and Islington College
- Hillside Clubhouse
- Help on your Doorstep
- Islington Bangladesh Association
- Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants
- Islington Early Help Services, Islington Council
- Islington Pause, Islington Council
- Mary's Youth Club
- The Maya Centre
- Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation
- No Recourse to Public Funds Team, Islington Council
- The Parent House
- Peter Bedford Housing Association
- Single Homeless Project
- School-Home Support
- Solace Women's Aid
- St Mungo's
- The Manna



Funded by



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Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving.

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