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## *Unlocking the potential: Volunteers in Islington*

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# Contents

		Page
<b>1</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Purpose of this report</b>	<b>8</b>
	- Research aims	
<b>3</b>	<b>An introduction to volunteering in Islington</b>	<b>10</b>
	- Background and context	
	- Volunteering in Islington	
	- Islington Community Chest Programme	
<b>Research findings</b>		
<b>4</b>	<b>The entry routes to volunteering</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Impact, value, benefits</b>	<b>16</b>
	- Introduction	
	- Well-being	
	- Career development and worklessness	
	- Social capital and reducing isolation	
	- Social cohesion and cultural capital	
	- Sustainable communities	
<b>6</b>	<b>Barriers to volunteering</b>	<b>25</b>
	- Introduction	
	- Respect, parity, voice	
	- Economic climate	
<b>7</b>	<b>Wider lessons</b>	<b>26</b>
	- The challenges for small groups	
<b>8</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>29</b>
	- Benefits and challenges	
	- Recommendations	
	- How will Cripplegate Foundation respond	
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>33</b>

This is an edited version of a report produced by the Institute for Volunteering Research in June 2009.

# 1. Executive Summary

*This society would collapse without volunteers.  
It just wouldn't be able to function.*

## 1.1 Introduction

**In November 2009 Cripplegate Foundation launched 'Invisible Islington: Living in Poverty in Inner London'. Islington is a borough of striking social extremes: London's richest and poorest residents exist side by side, living entirely different lives. Cripplegate Foundation commissioned the research to shine a light on the poverty that exists in Islington, to explore the factors that make it so entrenched – ill health, debt, isolation and lack of opportunity – and to rethink the actions needed to tackle it.**

Cripplegate Foundation is using the report's findings to inform the local and national policy debate about tackling poverty. We believe that volunteering is potentially a very powerful way to address isolation. Islington Community Chest (ICC), a small grants programme, involves over 1,500 volunteers who develop confidence, skills and networks through their involvement in grassroots organisations.

Cripplegate Foundation commissioned the Institute for Volunteering Research to assess the impact and value of volunteering in Islington's small community and voluntary groups, and to develop recommendations for the future support and development of volunteers in Islington. The research is based on volunteering activity in groups that received grants from ICC during 2007-2008.

Despite pockets of great affluence, Islington is home to entrenched poverty and the isolation and exclusion that so often accompany it. Islington is the eighth most deprived local authority area in the country. Recent statistics give a snapshot of the borough<sup>1</sup>:

- half of all the accommodation in the borough is social housing, much higher than the London and national averages.
- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups account for almost half of the residents of social housing.
- an estimated 5-10% of the population are refugees.
- 16% of residents describe themselves as having some type of disability.
- men in Islington have the second lowest life expectancy in London; women have the third lowest.
- 42% of Islington's children are raised in families dependent on benefits (national average of 16%).

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<sup>1</sup> Islington Strategic Partnership, 2008, Borough Profile.

- 20% of households are lone parents with dependent children, double the national average.
- nearly one fifth (18%) of the working population receive incapacity benefit – double the London average and three times the English average.
- levels of mental illness are significantly higher than elsewhere in London and the UK.
- levels of drug misuse are the worst in the country.
- the number of residents with no qualifications is much higher than both the London and national averages.

The voluntary sector in Islington is large, varied and active. Islington is supported by hundreds of small volunteer-based groups – almost three times the national per capita average<sup>2</sup>. More than one in every five people in Islington volunteers at least once a month<sup>3</sup>, many more volunteer on a less regular basis. Collectively, this volunteer community makes a unique and powerful contribution towards tackling the challenges faced by one of the UK's most deprived boroughs.

The aims of this research were:

- **to identify the impact and value of volunteering on:**
  - the volunteers themselves
  - the groups they helped
  - users of services
  - local decision-makers
  - the wider community
- **to identify lessons relating to the recruitment, management and support of volunteers** within small community organisations.
- **to identify any barriers** to volunteering.
- **to develop recommendations and new approaches** that will help Cripplegate Foundation and others foster and support volunteering.

This report is aimed at all those who would like to encourage and support volunteering in the community. It provides clear evidence of the many benefits of volunteering, particularly in small groups, exposes the challenges faced by these organisations and presents concrete recommendations for the future.

The research was carried out by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) in June 2009. It was a qualitative study that included focus groups with leaders and volunteers of ICC groups, interviews with stakeholders, case studies and background desk research.

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<sup>2</sup> Office of the Third Sector, 2009, National Survey of Third Sector Organisations, conducted by Ipsos MORI, London.

<sup>3</sup> This result (22.8%) is drawn from Q15 of Place Survey 2008: "Overall, about how often over the last twelve months have you given unpaid help to any group(s), club(s) or organisation(s)?"

## 1.2 Headline findings

### A. Why do people volunteer?

People volunteer with small groups for a number of reasons:

- to fill time due to a change in circumstances such as retirement, unemployment or ill health.
- to address a pressing need in their local neighbourhood or among friends or family.
- as a route to assimilation into, or greater familiarity with, British culture.
- as a form of reciprocity or ‘giving back’ to the society/community that has previously given something to them.
- because family or friends want or need them to help.

Many of these motivations are echoed by national research findings but some – in particular volunteering as a route to assimilation – are more specific to Islington and other areas with significant migrant communities.

*The volunteer establishes a base in this country where he can say yes those people know me. Every year we get one or two volunteers and they go out and get a job and we say we are happy because wherever they go they take a part of us with them.*

The data suggests that volunteers involved with small groups in Islington are not coming from ‘external’ communities but are found within communities, helping each other as neighbours.

*I have done no volunteering and didn't know any neighbours at all and I've lived here for 10 years before I joined and it's quite incredible that I can't leave the house now without bumping into people, which is lovely. And that's what I got from it more than anything else, the kind of community feeling, it's very nice.*

### B. The benefits of volunteering

Volunteering in small groups has many positive inter-related impacts:

- **For volunteers**, it increases well-being, provides skills and work experience, reduces isolation, and gives structure, purpose and a connection to society.
- **For users of services**, it offers cost-effective, local services that are provided by people who are passionate about what they are doing and knowledgeable about the community they serve.
- **For the most excluded**, it provides a route through which to connect to the wider community and access mainstream services and support.
- **For the community**, it brings different people together, breaking down cultural barriers and fostering equality, openness and a more cohesive and self-reliant society.

- **For local and national Government**, the improved well-being and increased skills generated by volunteering help to reduce state intervention and benefit dependence. Small groups also provide cost-effective services that meet needs that the public sector cannot cover.

Volunteering in small groups can have the biggest impact on people who are most vulnerable or most excluded in the community.

*After 6:30 until around 9:30, that is quite a tough time for a lot of people... being able to get involved in a community project has really helped fill their time so that they are not reduced back to being the way they often do feel at those tough times. Not only does it give them the chance to give something back to the community, it is meaningful to them.*

## C. The challenges faced by small groups

Despite the many important roles played by small voluntary groups, these organisations face considerable challenges:

- a lack of recognition
- a lack of legitimacy, voice or a seat at the table
- a lack of financial and organisational sustainability
- a lack of the right kind of support

## D. Recommendations

Four main recommendations emerged from this study which together would help to address these challenges, unlock the potential of small volunteer-based groups, and avoid the further marginalisation of the excluded communities they serve.

- **Recognition and voice**  
The wider voluntary sector, funders, local and national government can acknowledge and celebrate the varied role that volunteers and small groups play. From that recognition needs to flow legitimacy and a commitment to give these groups the opportunity to make their voices heard.
- **Support**  
The right kind of support would help volunteers to develop and flourish.
- **Understanding**  
Small groups have limited resources. Funders and stakeholders could simplify their requirements to make them more manageable.
- **Innovation**  
New models of volunteer recruitment, management and support need to be developed to ensure independence.

## E. Cripplegate Foundation's response

Cripplegate Foundation is committed to fostering volunteering and small volunteer-based groups that it supports through Islington Community Chest and other funds.

We will use the findings of this report to inform how we work in future, specifically:

- Intelligence gathered through small groups will shape and influence Cripplegate Foundation's grants programmes.
- We will celebrate and recognise the work of small groups. The Foundation will be launching an award to recognise those who make a difference.
- We will promote partnerships between small community groups and statutory services to improve access to health and council services.
- Volunteers and leaders of small groups will be involved in developing the Islington Community Chest programme.
- We will introduce a new small grants application form with all small grants funders in Islington. The application form will simplify the application process for small groups.
- We will actively promote employee volunteering in large public bodies such as Islington Council and NHS Islington as well as private companies.
- We will actively identify and promote opportunities for private sector organisations to offer volunteering opportunities in Islington for the benefit of their employees and Islington residents.
- Through a new campaign with other funders, Islington Giving, we will actively encourage new volunteers.

## 2. The purpose of this report

### 2.1 Research aims

**In November 2009 Cripplegate Foundation launched ‘Invisible Islington: Living in Poverty in Inner London’. Islington is a borough of striking social extremes: London’s richest and poorest residents exist side by side, living entirely different lives. Cripplegate Foundation commissioned this research to shine a light on the poverty that exists in Islington, to explore the factors that make it so entrenched – ill health, debt, isolation and lack of opportunity – and to rethink the actions needed to tackle it.**

Cripplegate Foundation is using the report’s findings both to inform the local and national policy debate about tackling poverty. We believe that volunteering is a potentially very powerful way to address isolation. Islington Community Chest, a small grants programme, involves over 1,500 volunteers a year who develop confidence, skills and networks through their involvement in grassroots organisations.

Cripplegate Foundation commissioned the Institute of Volunteering Research to assess the impact and value of volunteering in Islington’s small community and voluntary groups, and to develop recommendations for the future support and development of volunteering in Islington. The research is based on volunteering activity in groups that received grants from Islington Community Chest (ICC) during 2007-2008. The specific aims of the research were:

- **to identify the impact and value of volunteering on:**
  - the volunteers themselves
  - the groups they helped
  - users of services
  - local decision-makers
  - the wider community
- **to identify lessons relating to the recruitment, management and support of volunteers** within small community organisations.
- **to identify barriers** to volunteering within small community organisations.
- **to develop recommendations and new approaches** that will help Cripplegate Foundation and others foster and support volunteering.

This report is aimed at all those who would like to foster and support volunteering in the community. It provides clear evidence of the many benefits of volunteering in small groups, exposes the challenges faced by these organisations and presents concrete recommendations for the future that, in some cases, challenge current mainstream approaches.



## 2.2 Methodology

The research is qualitative and included:

- three focus groups with leaders and volunteers of funded groups
- seven interviews with stakeholders
- three case studies of groups
- background and desk research

More information on the methodology, case studies and stakeholder interviews can be found in appendix A.

All participants were assured anonymity and the quotes used in the report are unattributed.

Definitions of Volunteering and useful concepts in this report can be found in Appendix B

## 3. An introduction to volunteering in Islington



*A society without volunteers is probably a dead society.*

### 3.1 Background and context

**Islington is a borough of diversity and economic polarisation. An array of different communities and groups live side by side; a handful of them enjoy tremendous wealth, many more experience extreme deprivation. Despite pockets of great affluence, Islington is home to entrenched poverty and the isolation and exclusion that so often accompany it. Islington is the eighth most deprived local authority area in the country. Recent statistics give a snapshot of the borough's situation<sup>4</sup>:**

- half of all the accommodation in the borough is social housing, much higher than the London and national averages.
- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups account for almost half of the residents of social housing.
- an estimated 5-10% of the population are refugees.
- 16% of residents describe themselves as having some type of disability.
- men in Islington have the second lowest life expectancy in London; women have the third lowest.
- 42% of Islington's children are raised in families dependent on benefits (national average of 16%).
- 20% of households are lone parents with dependent children, double the national average.

- nearly one fifth (18%) of the working population receive incapacity benefit – double the London average and three times the English average.
- levels of mental illness are significantly higher than elsewhere in London and the UK.
- levels of drug misuse are the worst in the country.
- the number of residents with no qualifications is much higher than both the London and national averages.

Islington's population of 185,500 is increasing and its migrant minority population, in particular, is predicted to grow. Currently 40% of Islington's inhabitants describe themselves as non-white or from a minority ethnic background. This section of the borough's population changes fast so it is hard to pin down accurately with surveys and statistics.

## 3.2 Volunteering in Islington

Islington's voluntary and community sector is large and diverse. It includes groups of all types and sizes with remits that stretch from the local to the national and international.

There are almost 1,800 documented third sector organisations in the borough, almost three times the national per capita average<sup>5</sup>. This figure only includes groups that are incorporated and regulated. There are many more informally-constituted community/voluntary groups operating in Islington.

There are over 1,000 organisations registered with the local Council for Voluntary Service – Voluntary Action Islington (VAI), 300 of which are small groups<sup>6</sup>. VAI has recently merged<sup>7</sup> with the local Volunteer Centre which should raise the profile of volunteering in the borough. It will also inevitably bring some challenges, such as maintaining the key Volunteer Centre function of encouraging volunteering amongst traditionally excluded groups.

At 22.8%, Islington's official volunteering rate is below the national average but this measures only those engaged in regular (at least once a month) formal volunteering<sup>8</sup>. Another view of volunteering is gained from looking at the local volunteering infrastructure. In 2008, almost 2,600 volunteers registered with Islington Volunteer Centre. The centre had appointments with 1,200 potential volunteers and publicised over 300 volunteering opportunities<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Islington Strategic Partnership, 2008, Borough Profile.

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Third Sector, 2009, National Survey of Third Sector Organisations, conducted by Ipsos MORI, London.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with the Capacity Building Officer at IVAC on 13/5/09.

<sup>7</sup> April 2009

<sup>8</sup> Taken from Q15, Place Survey 2008: "Overall, about how often over the last twelve months have you given unpaid help to any group(s), club(s) or organisation(s)?"

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Volunteering Research (2008), London Volunteering Health Check: All fit for 2012? London: IVR with Greater London Volunteering.

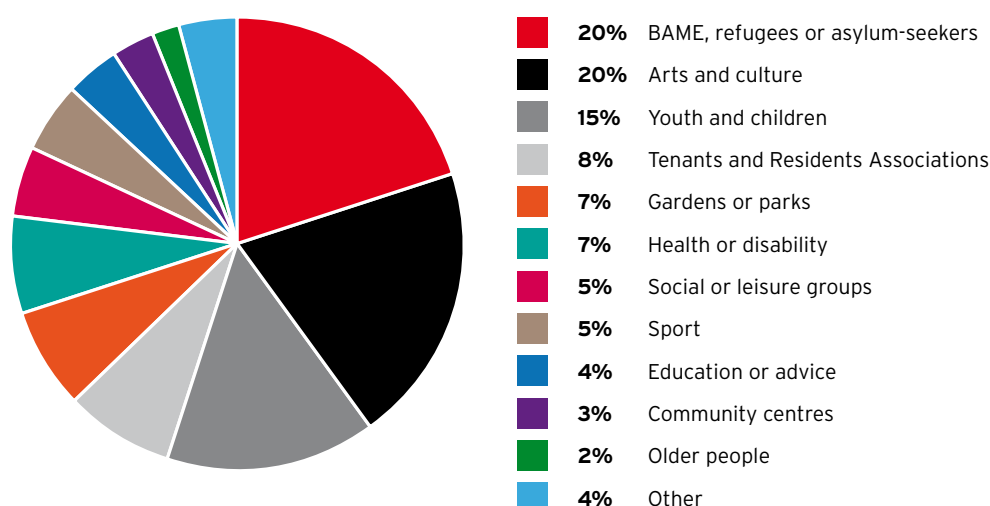
### 3.3 Islington Community Chest Programme (ICC)

Since 2006, Cripplegate Foundation has administered the Islington Community Chest (ICC) on behalf of the Islington Strategic Partnership (ISP). The programme is aimed at small groups: any Islington-based voluntary or community group with an income of under £100,000 can apply. In 2007/08 it supported 127 groups with almost £530,000.

Groups operate on very low budgets (mostly under £50,000 a year) and can struggle to find sufficient resources. Most of these groups depend on voluntary support and are run and/or led by volunteers. An estimated 1,500 volunteers were actively involved in ICC-funded work in 2007/08<sup>10</sup>. **Their time is worth over £2.5million each year<sup>11</sup>**. Those groups that do have staff employ them on a part-time or temporary/sessional basis. Some groups are newly-formed, others have been in existence for many years.

These small groups are generally focused on a particular area, a specific community group or a particular activity. Of the 127 groups who received ICC grants in 2007/08, most represented Black and Minority Ethnic Communities, were targeting children/young people, or were focused on arts and culture (Table 1).

Table 1: Groups receiving ICC grants 2007/08



<sup>10</sup> Cripplegate Foundation data

<sup>11</sup> This is calculated by:

- 1) Taking the number of volunteers (1,500).
- 2) Multiplying that by the average contribution in hours per volunteer per year (98.8 hours). That gives 148,200 hours in total.
- 3) Multiplying the total number of hours by the **average** wage for people working in Islington (£17.28: ONS).
- 4) **This gives a figure of £2,560,896.**

## 4. Our findings – how people start to volunteer



### Key findings

**People volunteer with small groups for a number of reasons:**

- **to fill time made available by a change in circumstances such as retirement, unemployment, ill health or the loss of a partner.**
- **to address a pressing need in their local neighbourhood or among friends/family.**
- **as a route to assimilation into, or greater familiarity with, British culture.**
- **as a form of reciprocity or ‘giving back’ to the society/community that has previously given something to them.**
- **because family or friends want or need them to help.**

Many of these motivations are echoed by national research findings. However, some – in particular volunteering as a route to assimilation – are more specific to Islington and other areas with significant migrant communities.

The data suggests that volunteers involved with small groups in Islington are not coming from ‘external’ communities but are found within communities, helping each other as neighbours.



## 4.1 Entry routes

Our interviews and focus group discussions identified different ways into volunteering. Whilst motivations often overlapped, the factors that drove participants to start a group or participate in a group all fell into one of the following areas.

- A. Having time available as a result of a change in circumstances**, such as retirement, unemployment, ill health or the loss of a partner. While available time was a common theme, specific motivations varied considerably. Recently unemployed people, for example, often wanted to bolster their experience or try new areas of work. People suffering from long-term mental health issues, or those who had recently retired, wanted to find ways to feel worthwhile and contribute to society.

*A friend of mine told me about Islington Volunteer Centre... There was a period when I was out of employment for quite a while so someone said to me why don't you volunteer but I said, "Well how do I get into volunteering?" So they told me about Islington Volunteer Centre, they actually took me there with them and... the world was my oyster!*

- B. Addressing a pressing need in the neighbourhood or among friends or family.** Respondents had often begun volunteering in direct response to a specific problem or issue with their family or friends, or in their neighbourhood.

*We started because my eldest daughter came in and said 'Mum, I'm fed up with people moaning that I'm outside their door', so I went to the local TA [Tenants' Association] and asked if I could start like a youth centre and I was told – "You do it and we'll give you a start up grant of £300". So that's what I did and we moved on from 80 children at a time in the community centre. We've made ourselves a charity, we then got premises on the estate and became a company by guarantee. But it all started from my daughter coming in and saying I've got nowhere to go.*

- C. As a route to assimilation** into, or greater familiarity with, British culture. Many respondents, particularly refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, come to volunteering as a way of getting to know British culture, improving their English, or making contacts and gaining work experience. People spoke of their need to seek out diaspora communities for support, to give back to their community and to help new arrivals if possible.

*I wanted to be able to take care of my children. I also wanted to take them to the under 5s centres so they can integrate. I also realised that speaking English was not so foreign to me but it was to a lot of Somali parents and they couldn't take their children to under 5 centres... they are not confident enough to do it. And then I negotiated with the under 5 centre, I said to them, "I've got these skills because I graduated as a textile designer and maybe I can help while you have my children"... They pay for the materials for art, I teach for free as a volunteer.*

- D.** Many volunteers were motivated by the **need to give back** to groups and communities from whom they themselves received support or assistance at some point.

*In Eritrea, when I was young, I was involved in politics because as soon as we were born, there was war. I left my country when I was 13. When we went to Sudan, we just fled, it was a woman looking after us while we were going to Sudan and she treated*

*us like if we were her own children... What did the lady say to me one day? She said, "Listen, you have a long journey, mine is now going to finish but yours is going to be long. You are in someone's country, we don't know what is going to happen, but make sure you pass on all this help. You have to be close and support everyone". So I said OK.*

- E. Because family or friends wanted or needed help.** People were often strongly moved by the requests for volunteering support from those to whom they are closest – friends and family.

One participant told her story of coming to London from the Congo at the age of 17 and starting a group to help Congolese children with their homework. Visiting the homes of relatives and friends, she found many children unable to communicate with teachers or to understand their school assignments. She began by helping one child. The group quickly grew by word of mouth and eventually found its way to a local church hall and ultimately its own premises.

*When I arrived here, it wasn't easy for me as a young girl. Sometimes if I'm around Congolese people I can see how it was very hard for them to cope with the situation: immigration issues, language barriers, different education system, different country – everything – everything is a pressure. One day I went to visit one family and the child sought help from the parent to do the homework. Both parents, they couldn't help their own child. It wasn't the fault of the parents, it was the situation they were facing.*

## 4.2 Conclusions

Paths into volunteering identified by this report echo those highlighted by national research<sup>12</sup>. However, some of the specific reasons – such as unemployment, assimilation and reciprocity – seem particularly prevalent in this study. New migrant communities, for example, are clearly using volunteering as a way to learn about the 'system', to improve language skills, and to aid their assimilation into British culture. People who have benefitted from services or support in the past are often motivated to give something back at a later stage. This creates an informal system of reciprocity that seems particularly common in the disadvantaged communities which such small groups often serve.

The data suggests that volunteers involved with small groups in Islington are not coming from 'external' communities. Instead they are being drawn from the local area and are helping their neighbours and fellow community members.

This has implications for volunteer recruitment and support for small groups. There may be a need to rethink how volunteer recruitment and support are targeted. **Focus should perhaps shift to within communities, to people who are in transitional circumstances, or new migrant communities. It might also be useful to develop new models of support which can help develop leaders based on needs within specific communities.**

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<sup>12</sup> Office of the Third Sector, 2007, Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving, prepared by the National Centre for Social Research and the Institute for Volunteering Research, London.

## 5. Our findings - the impact, value and benefits of volunteering



*There are three things you can say about volunteering:*

- 1) having a focus, a reason to turn up at things;*
- 2) the satisfaction in being involved in something that is successful, you feel you have contributed to something;*
- 3) you learn skills.*

### **Key findings**

Volunteering in small groups has many positive inter-related impacts:

**For volunteers**, it increases well-being, provides skills and work experience, reduces isolation, and gives structure, purpose and a connection to society.

**For service users**, it provides cost-effective, local services that are delivered by people who are passionate about what they are doing and knowledgeable about the community they serve.

**For the most excluded**, it provides a route through which to connect to the wider community and access services and support.

**For the community**, it brings different people together, breaking down cultural barriers and fostering equality, openness and a more cohesive and self-reliant society.



**For local and national Government**, the improved well-being and increased skills generated by volunteering help to reduce state intervention and benefit dependence. In addition, small groups provide cost-effective services that meet needs that the public sector cannot cover.

Volunteering in small groups in Islington can have the biggest impact on people who are most vulnerable or most excluded in the community.

## 5.1 Introduction

The benefits of volunteering – both for the volunteers and the organisations and communities they serve – have been well documented<sup>13</sup>. Less has been written about the impact of volunteering on service-users, or about those volunteers who are involved in small groups that are under the radar of the larger voluntary sector organisations. Our interviewees spoke enthusiastically about the benefits and value of volunteering, in particular its impact on:

- personal well-being
- career development and unemployment
- social capital and reducing isolation
- social cohesion and cultural capital
- sustainable communities

We address each of these areas and analyse how they relate to a number of user groups:

- service-users
- volunteers
- organisations funded by ICC
- communities in Islington
- Islington Council

The benefits and associated policy implications are summarised in Table 2 and discussed in more detail below.

A striking finding of this research was that volunteering can have the biggest impact on the most vulnerable or most excluded people in the community. Many of the volunteers with whom we spoke did not think of themselves as part of mainstream society and used volunteering in part to avoid the isolation that comes with exclusion.

Those who felt somehow less ‘valued’ by society reaped significant rewards from the feelings of inclusion and contribution that could come from volunteering. When people are able to make a contribution to something bigger than themselves – such as through a career, raising a family or volunteering – they feel valued and worthwhile. When people fall off that path, they can spiral downward into isolation and depression. For this particular group volunteering offers a way back in to being part of a community and feeling worthwhile – a way of triggering an upwards spiral.

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<sup>13</sup> Ockenden, N. (ed) (2007) *Volunteering Work*, commission on the future of volunteering: London.

Table 1: The impact of volunteering

	<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>Well-being</b>	<b>Isolation</b>	<b>Social cohesion</b>	<b>Sustainable communities</b>
<b>Service-users</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling valued and cared for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mutual support</li> <li>A way to combat isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better able to relate to service deliverers</li> <li>More representative</li> <li>Point of entry for mainstream services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free / affordable services</li> <li>People happy to go extra mile</li> <li>Out of hours services</li> <li>Cost-effective</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training</li> <li>Skills (e.g. project/financial management)</li> <li>Work experience</li> <li>References</li> <li>Networking opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confidence and self-esteem</li> <li>Structure and focus</li> <li>Satisfaction of seeing positive outcomes</li> <li>Flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased social networks</li> <li>Reduced isolation</li> <li>Enjoyable activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acceptance of different cultures and communities</li> <li>Knowledge of the British 'system'</li> <li>Greater assimilation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career path - first point of entry for jobs</li> <li>Training</li> </ul>
<b>Organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteers can bring a range of skills / talents</li> <li>A more diverse pool of people</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support and encouragement from other groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More co-operative activity</li> <li>Links and partnerships</li> <li>Better links to community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainability</li> <li>Responsive to individual needs</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More skills and knowledge available to the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on interests that benefit others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neighbourhood strengthened</li> <li>Greater cohesion and cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater understanding and appreciation of difference</li> <li>Greater interaction between communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting unmet needs</li> <li>More efficient and effective</li> <li>Community involvement in local decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Local Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A potential route to employment</li> <li>Experience and skills added to job pool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Happier and more involved residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthier and more engaged communities</li> <li>Reciprocity and self-help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less conflict among communities</li> <li>Greater interaction between communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complements mainstream services</li> <li>Links excluded communities to mainstream society</li> </ul>

## 5.2 Well-being

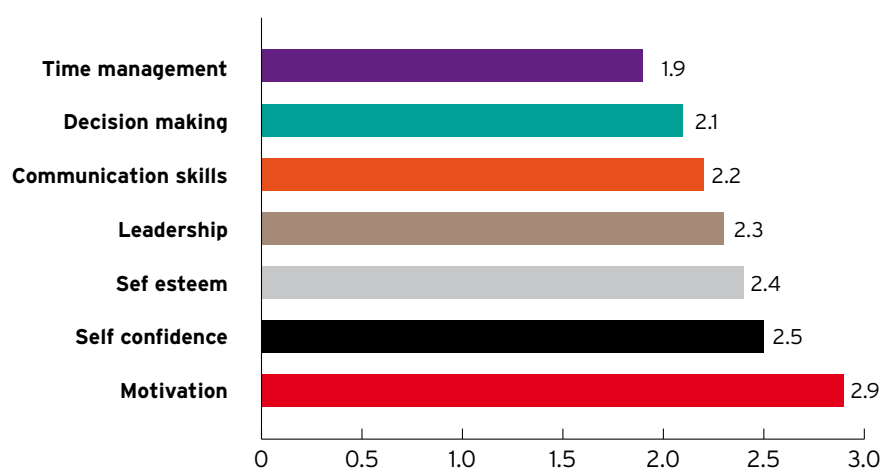
Whilst volunteers themselves gain most from the personal well-being associated with volunteering, the value of that increased well-being has significant indirect benefit on the local community, users of services and stakeholders such as the local Council. The ‘soft skills’ – particularly increased confidence and self-esteem – gained through volunteering were highlighted again and again in our interviews and focus group discussions. Volunteering also provided more specific skills (such as leadership skills, time management, social skills and networking capability) that were also judged to contribute to self-esteem and therefore increased well-being.

Volunteering often provided our respondents with a structure and a focus to their time. It is also a way of generating new interests for people. Respondents felt satisfaction earned from doing something worthwhile and saw a positive outcome from their efforts. They enjoyed experimenting with new opportunities, finding new talents and developing new skills,

These considerable benefits are passed on to users, who feel cared for and valued by the volunteers. Communities and local government also gain by having residents who are more fulfilled and engaged, and who can focus their interests, energy and skills to benefit others. This can have a knock-on effect of less need for state intervention as people are happier and healthier.

Impact can be difficult to attribute, and participants pointed out that it was not volunteering alone which contributed to their well-being, but a complex mix of experiences, behaviours and attitudes. Figure 1 shows how respondents rate volunteering impact in specific areas.

Figure 1: Focus group average scores for benefit areas<sup>14</sup>



*... it's boosted my confidence in a great way. The people that are on our board, a lot of them are not as confident when they go out, they find it difficult to engage... so it's impacted on them in a positive way. They can now go out and tell people about the group, raise the awareness.*

<sup>14</sup> NOTE: Figures are based on average ratings given by focus group participants. Each participant was asked to score the impact of volunteering on a number of areas, with '0' representing no impact and '3' representing a great deal of impact. The number of respondents ranged between 7 and 24.

*I had problems with alcohol and volunteering has been incredibly therapeutic for me. It's given me structure and focus.*

*In terms of mental health, volunteering is probably one of the most important things because generally people who've got mental health issues are thought to be a problem and a burden on society and unwelcome and it's quite hostile out there, so it improves people's happiness, being able to contribute to something even if it's relatively small... At its most basic level, it's something to do, but it's also more important than that because it gives people an opportunity to look at what they can do differently, rather than thinking of themselves as constantly needing other people for support, that they are worthwhile and can help other people.*

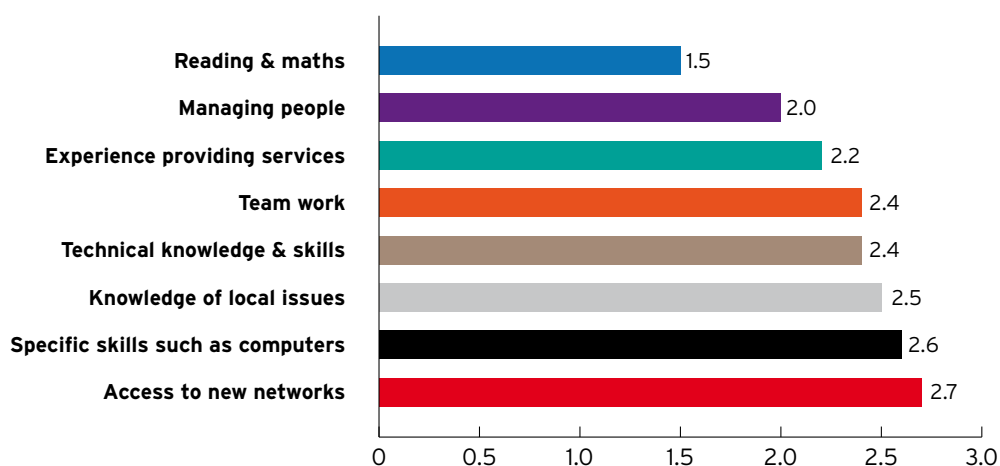
*I think in my situation, where I've just retired I could easily feel like I was on the scrap heap or my life was over and I'm just waiting to die and all those things that a lot of people feel when they retire but actually I'm feeling really excited, full of enthusiasm, I feel very valued as a member of this community. Then you see the children's faces and the old people's faces and so on and you get a reward that way, so it's good for your self-esteem, all that kind of stuff. I think a lot of volunteering is about the volunteers, the good that you feel about yourselves as well as what you do for other people.*

### 5.3 Career development and worklessness

Volunteering, whether it brings training opportunities or not, allows people to develop skills and experience that they can use later to gain employment or improve their career prospects. This includes developing specific skills (e.g. ICT or bookkeeping); gaining work experience; acquiring references, and picking up softer skills such as interview techniques, networking, teamwork and people and project management ability.

The chart below (Figure 2) shows how focus group participants rated the impact of volunteering in areas related to career development and unemployment.

Figure 2: Focus group average scores for benefit areas<sup>15</sup>



Small groups benefit from the skills and experience that their volunteers develop as it allows them to offer higher quality services and activities. Communities and the public sector also benefit from more skilled and knowledgeable residents.

*I've learned how to do something that I never ever thought, and my maths teacher never thought I would do and I've actually learned how to do a balance sheet... I've developed things that I never knew I could do... and I wish my maths teacher could see that I did that.*

*For me I think it's giving myself a great opportunity to learn if I can go to work because sometimes... your paid role is to do this one thing, you don't have a choice to do different things. As a volunteer... they can allow you to move around.*

*I don't work because of the illness but I would still like to go back to work at some stage and I think doing it [volunteering] allows me to continue with the skills, so that when I try to get another job I don't turn around and say I haven't done anything for ten years.*

*For me, I'm trying to change my career slightly and it's been fantastic for that, it's taught me how to use a computer properly and how to interact with members and take minutes and all that sort of thing... I'm helping to organise the event for next Saturday... I can write it on my CV now and say these are the project management skills that I've learned from doing this.*

*Volunteering gives opportunity because people with experience and expertise who want to get into the job market, it prepares them, it gives them... some experience and the much-needed reference... It really is a launching pad for many people to go into the job market. It also saves a lot of resources and money for the government and for communities that they would have otherwise used to hire paid workers who would do the same job... In times of economic crisis, this is when you need volunteering the most.*

## 5.4 Social capital and reducing isolation

This study identified volunteering in Islington as an impressive generator of social capital. The research participants highlighted the way in which volunteering helped to foster trust and reciprocity, to combat isolation, and to strengthen local networks that helped people feel more rooted in their local community. The role of volunteering in reducing isolation is particularly important in a borough like Islington where poverty and inequality are significant issues<sup>15</sup>. Figure 3 below shows how participants rated the impact of volunteering in relation to social capital.

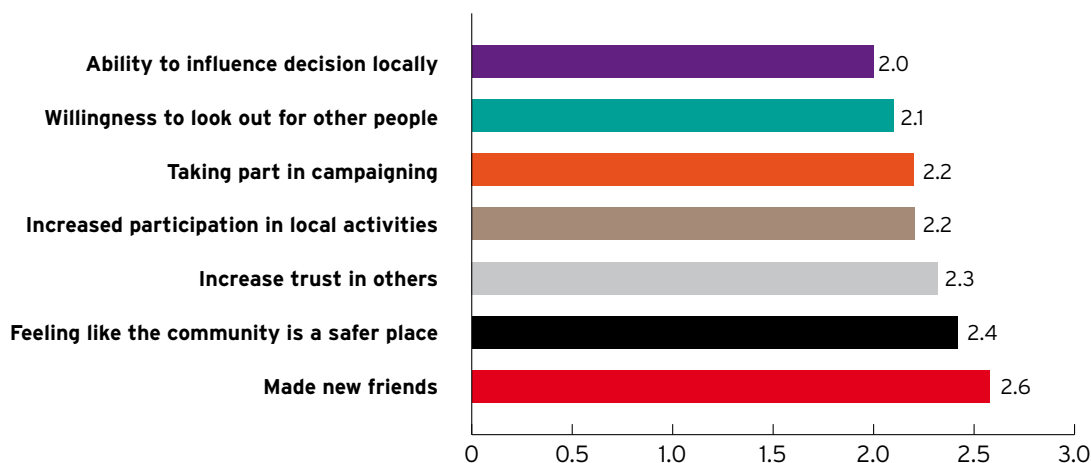
Service-users also benefitted from the social capital created by volunteering. They were able to tap into services provided by volunteers – a group they generally find easier to trust and relate to than government employees.

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<sup>15</sup> NOTE: Figures based on average ratings given by focus group participants. Each participant was asked to score the impact of volunteering on a number of areas, with '0' representing no impact and '3' representing a great deal of impact. The number of respondents ranged between 10 and 31.

<sup>16</sup> Rocket Science (2008), Invisible Islington: Living in Poverty in Inner London, London: Cripplegate Foundation.

Figure 3: Focus group average scores for benefit areas<sup>17</sup>



*I think it's [volunteering] got everything to do with combating isolation. I know that a few of our volunteers have their own personal issues and that has meant that rather than them sitting indoors, it's meaningful activity at a time that is quite tough for them because we are more of an out of hours service.*

*What I've found is that I know a much wider group of people than I used to which, towards the end of your life, is very exciting, to find things opening up instead of closing down.*

*One of the members passed away unfortunately last year and the group showed great support to her and visited her in hospital or in the hospice and in some stage gave more support than the relatives and a very nice emotional bond was created among the group members... they are a very happy group.*

*I'm at reception and last Friday night there were a lot of people there just helping... I'm sure they feel good about it and that's a big step to looking after themselves, looking after other people, getting a job, getting involved in the community reducing their isolation. It's a place to go to, it may not be formal work but it's a place where you're known, where you're valued, where you're doing something purposeful.*

*Most of our volunteers are like former trouble-makers and you ask them why they volunteer and it's always the same – because somebody did it for us.*

<sup>17</sup> NOTE: Figures based on average ratings given by focus group participants. Each participant was asked to score the impact of volunteering on a number of areas, with '0' representing no impact and '3' representing a great deal of impact. The number of respondents ranged between 16 and 27.

## 5.5 Social cohesion and cultural capital

Social cohesion and cultural capital can be seen as two sides of the same coin – one side being the appreciation of difference, the other being affinity with a group with shared culture or values. Volunteering can be a route to both, as it can foster understanding of different cultures whilst bringing people together who might otherwise not mix.

For service-users, small groups run by volunteers can provide a route through which to access mainstream services, which previously they may not have known about, or which they might have regarded as not for them. Services provided by volunteers can be more personalised and accessible and can provide a much needed link to community resources and support.

For volunteers themselves (particularly those from migrant communities), volunteering can serve as a route to assimilation, improved English, and a better understanding of the local community, and cultural norms and values. Volunteering creates familiarity among a diverse range of people and fosters acceptance of ‘difference’.

For communities and local government, volunteering helps to increase interaction in the community, by fostering acceptance and understanding of other cultures and communities.

*When we have an English or Scottish teacher doing a volunteer job, that is great: it breaks barriers within communities.*

*For the Somali community, a fairly new community in this country, many of us do not speak the English language and do not know the system... It's a real jungle for them when they walk into London, it is a completely different environment. So someone coming from Somalia... it's just unbearable, so this person needs to turn to somebody who can understand his needs and his worries, can help him.*

*The volunteering is what actually makes people talk to each other and work together. It's just that we've started to talk to people that maybe we wouldn't normally talk to... It's a catalyst.*



## 5.6 Sustainable communities

Volunteering also has financial and economic effects, generally delivering cost-effective services and activities that are local and sustainable and which serve the needs of a diverse community.

**For service-users and communities**, there can be several benefits: they gain access to services that are free; responsive to their needs; available at a convenient time, and provided by committed volunteers who are willing to go the extra mile for them. **For the volunteers** it can be a cost-effective means of gaining training, qualifications or experience.

**For small groups**, volunteering is a life blood that ensures their organisation's survival and effectiveness. For many groups paying staff is not an option and here volunteers are critical. For groups with paid staff, the costs of volunteering (expenses, training, support, additional desk space) need to be weighed against the benefits and, consequently, there are occasions where taking on volunteers is not a viable option.

**For local government and public services**, volunteering represents a cost-effective way of complementing mainstream services, and creates a vital route for excluded communities to link to those services. By their nature, small groups are more accessible, responsive and more 'in touch' than their mainstream public-sector and big voluntary-sector cousins. What they lack in resources and infrastructure they make up for in commitment, authenticity, local knowledge and personalised approach. This gives small groups the ability to reach the people and communities that are most neglected<sup>18</sup>, offering them a route to mainstream services, or meeting needs that are not met elsewhere.

Small volunteer-run groups are often the first point of entry to services for new migrants, refugees, long-term unemployed and people with mental health issues. For example, new migrant groups may not understand that they are entitled to benefits or know where to go for support, they may also have language barriers – all problems that a small group would be well-placed to help with. People suffering from mental health issues may not trust mainstream services and people with low self-confidence may feel that there is too much stigma attached to using some public services.

Small groups are often run by people who are similar to the people they serve, in other words, users of the group can be helped by 'people like them'. This builds trust and credibility and allows the organisation to help communities who could otherwise be isolated and neglected.

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<sup>18</sup> This idea follows on from arguments made by Billis about voluntary groups generally. Billis, D., 2001, *Tackling Social Exclusion: The Contribution of Voluntary Organisations in Voluntary Organisations and Social Policy in Britain*, edited by Harris, M. & Rochester C., London.



## 6. Our findings – the barriers to volunteering

### 6.1 Introduction

The volunteers we interviewed faced a number of barriers and challenges:

- expenses
- time
- respect and parity with paid staff
- economic climate

Some barriers – such as time and being paid expenses – reflect national volunteering barriers and are not discussed here as they have been analysed more fully in other publications<sup>19</sup>. We focus on the later two barriers of respect and economic climate.

### 6.2 Respect, parity, voice

Many of the volunteers we talked to had considerable responsibility and had taken on the equivalent of full or part-time work. Some had founded their groups, several had been in their roles for a number of years, and many had considerable experience and expertise in their field. It was common for them to feel that they didn't have a 'voice', and that they did not get the respect they deserved. A lack of respect was seen as an affront both to the volunteers themselves and their groups, and to reflect how little society values volunteering. **The volunteers wanted to have a voice in their organisations and the wider voluntary sector, along with greater legitimacy and respect within the public sector. We need to find new ways to facilitate and amplify these voices of volunteers so that they are heard.**

*I think volunteers are not looked upon, because we are not getting paid, at the same level as someone who is getting paid. It's unfair. In some organisations I think they need to recognise the skills and experience that volunteers bring.*

### 6.3 Economic climate

The economic climate was highlighted as both a challenge and an opportunity by volunteers. Those who were hardest hit by the recession felt that they would need to focus on earning money and potentially would have less time for volunteering. Those who were least affected by the recession saw it as an opportunity to take time out and volunteer, or take advantage of redundancy to do unpaid work.

*Because of the financial crisis, people are a bit scared to get involved because they've got bills, they've got things to pay for. As much as they want to get involved, their priority is their families, they need to get a job, sort out their finances... For us to get more volunteers, it takes funding, and the funders are tightening their belts too, unless you are a major charity; the small ones like ourselves the funders are saying no to.*

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<sup>19</sup> See Office of the Third Sector, 2007, Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving, prepared by the National Centre for Social Research and the Institute for Volunteering Research, London.

## 7. Our findings – the wider lessons

### Key summary

**For small groups to fulfil their potential, public and voluntary sector stakeholders have to recognise the challenges faced by small groups and help them to overcome them. Specially, small groups need:**

- **greater financial support**
- **recognition of their role and strengths**
- **tailored help and support**
- **understanding of the uneven playing field on which they compete for funding**
- **awareness of the burden created by the bureaucratic needs of funders**
- **support for volunteer recruitment that is based on informal community-based routes into volunteering**

### 7.1 The challenges for small groups

Despite the diversity of their remits, the small groups that formed the subject of this research shared many attributes and experienced many of the same difficulties. This chapter explores the challenges that stem from these common characteristics and develops recommendations that respond to them.

#### a) Financial sustainability, legitimacy and credibility

Like many in the voluntary sector, small groups face great challenges in terms of sustaining their financial resources. Budgets and funding can and do fluctuate significantly from year to year. One year a group might have a part-time worker, the next they might have no employees at all. Currently, small groups perceive small grants funds to be shrinking and fear that the economic climate may cause further problems.

Financial insecurity works with the related issues of credibility and legitimacy to create a vicious circle that often makes finding new or additional funding very difficult for small groups. Most groups involved in the research spoke about the difficulty of creating or maintaining credibility among public sector decision-makers. There was a particular problem with the local council, which was seen to be perpetuating stereotypes of small groups as offering poor quality services. This perception was reinforced in our interviews with public sector staff.

This credibility gap makes it very hard for small groups to compete with larger organisations for grants and contracts. When small groups compete with large organisations they struggle to combat preconceptions about the quality of their work. They can be judged on reputation, record and sustainability in ways that are appropriate for larger organisations while their strengths are often ignored. They are expected to operate in this formal environment but are given few resources to support this. Consequently, there is a tension between the public sector/funders and small volunteer-run groups which can hinder communication and collaboration.

**This tension needs to be addressed: the public sector and the wider voluntary sector need to recognise the unique and powerful role that small groups can play, and develop an understanding of the challenges that small groups face when they seek funding and support in a world that is dominated by larger, better-resourced organisations.**

## b) Organisational sustainability

As well as financial security, sustainability requires strong and consistent leadership and people who are willing to do the work (staff and/or dependable volunteers). Many small groups rely on the hard work of a founder, or a volunteer who is very passionate and charismatic. This can create an over-reliance on an individual who, if they leave for any reason, may cause the group to fold. Of course, many groups have minimised this risk by delegating responsibilities to a wider group or committee.

A related challenge for small groups is that of volunteer recruitment and retention. Most of the research participants did not experience significant problems recruiting volunteers but did face issues when it came to keeping them. Often the training, experience, confidence and support given by groups to their volunteers would lead them to find employment and leave volunteering behind. This is clearly a positive benefit for volunteers and society, it means groups constantly need to renew and train their volunteer pool.

## c) Making the most of blurred boundaries

Small groups often operate on a mutual aid model with a heavy reliance on social networks, informal structures and a passionate and dedicated volunteer corps. There are blurred boundaries between leaders, volunteers, staff and service-users. Volunteers often enter the organisation as a service-user and become a volunteer, organisational leader or staff, or switch between these roles over time. The distinction between these roles can be blurred and individuals have a high level of affiliation with each other.

Traditional methods of fostering and supporting volunteering are based on the formal model of external volunteers being recruited by a staffed organisation. This model is not relevant to Islington's small groups which are drawing their volunteers from inside their communities, and where often service-users become volunteers. **Future work on the recruitment and support of volunteers needs to be focused on informal routes into volunteering and should target specific groups, such as new migrant communities, residents living on estates, further education colleges and retired people. Existing informal networks could be tapped into more strategically for example by encouraging 'bring a friend' type schemes.**

## d) Getting the right support

Operating on a small scale, grassroots level, small groups are often deeply embedded in their local communities and the issues that they are addressing. They do not always lift their heads above their situation to link to other groups doing similar work with whom they could share best practice, or sources of support and development. They may not know about the local Volunteer Centre, Council for Voluntary Service, other second-tier support, similar groups in other neighbourhoods or national support organisations.

Small volunteer-based groups would benefit from having greater opportunity to share best practice and exchange information with their peers, and to tap into resources from funders, local government and infrastructure agencies. Infrastructure organisations, such as Voluntary Action Islington and the Volunteer Centre, are well placed to provide support to small groups, indeed this is part of their remit. Specialist infrastructure support such as second tier groups aimed at supporting refugee groups or Homes for Islington (which supports TRAs) can also meet some of the needs of these small groups.

Small groups want a tailored approach that engages with the group and its leaders – much like a community development model. This type of customised capacity building is time consuming. VAI now has only one advisor to assist groups across Islington. There simply is not the capacity to provide one-to-one support or in-depth training, which would require a team with expertise and the time to support groups over a long period.

**In order to fulfil their potential, volunteer-run groups need organisations to provide tailored advice and training. Small groups are frustrated by the lack of understanding, capacity and support displayed by the organisations whose job it is to support them. Public sector bodies and funders need to recognise the value of small groups, and the volunteers who run them, and be willing to earmark sufficient resources for supporting them.**

#### e) Diversity and representation

Diversity and representation present challenges to some groups in a variety of ways. Groups that are quite homogenous can struggle to engage other communities in their cause or activities. Some groups willingly take on the challenge to reach out and diversify, while others resent the equalities standards imposed on them by external stakeholders. For example, many Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) are seen to be run by older white people and not representative of the estates they serve. Yet many of the TRAs we spoke to were trying to reach out and involve a diversity of people but lacked the skills and resources to do so effectively. At the same time, some Black and Minority Ethnic groups struggle with how to involve non- Black and Minority Ethnic volunteers. For example, an African organisation spoke about the difficulty of its volunteers working with lesbian, gay and transsexual people and the equalities issues that this caused. The main diversity challenges that emerged from the research related to ethnicity and age, in particularly involving Black and Minority Ethnic volunteers into mostly white groups and bringing young people into volunteering.

#### f) Compliance with the demands of funders

A challenge that cropped up frequently in the interviews and focus-group discussions was that of satisfying funding requirements related to monitoring and paperwork. Small groups felt burdened by what they see as excessive bureaucracy. The time needed, for example, to complete funding applications and monitoring forms takes its toll on volunteers who would rather spend their time on activities that they see as more directly related to the group's mission. The participants spoke of the inefficiency and waste of this situation and struggled to understand why funders had the requirements they had. **There is a challenge here for funders of small groups to ensure accountability and yet maintain some flexibility for groups with very low capacity.**

## 8. Conclusion and recommendations

### 8.1 Benefits and challenges

This research revealed many benefits that derive – directly and indirectly – from the small-scale volunteering that occurs in Islington. Those benefits affect many different groups, from the volunteers themselves to the local authority and wider public sector.

As a result of volunteering in small groups:

- communities help themselves and each other rather than having initiatives developed for them.
- communities are brought together by a better and shared understanding of one another.
- services that government and others cannot provide are delivered locally and cost-effectively.
- volunteers develop skills and experience that improves their life chances.
- volunteers increase their self-confidence, well-being and connection with others, making them happier and more productive members of society.
- the isolation suffered by excluded individuals is lessened.
- excluded groups and individuals are linked to services that they did not know existed or which they felt they could not use.

Despite the critical roles played by small voluntary groups, and the support they give to individuals, communities and society, these organisations face considerable challenges:

- a lack of recognition for their essential work
- a lack of legitimacy, voice or a seat at the table
- a lack of financial and organisational sustainability
- a lack of the right support

### 8.2 Recommendations

Four main recommendations emerged from this study which together would help to address these challenges, unlock the potential of small volunteer-based groups, and avoid the further marginalisation of the excluded communities that they serve.

#### 1. Recognition and voice

The wider voluntary sector, funders and government need to acknowledge and celebrate the varied role that volunteers and small groups play. From that recognition needs to flow legitimacy and a commitment to give these groups the opportunity to make their voices heard.

## 2. Support

There needs to be better and more tailored help for small groups and volunteers, both in terms of financial resources and advice and support.

## 3. Understanding

Funders and stakeholders need to understand the limited resources of small groups and consider how they can simplify their requirements to make them more manageable.

## 4. Innovation

Funders, other supporters and stakeholders must continue to develop models of volunteer recruitment, management and support that meet the specific needs of volunteers and which support their autonomy and independence.

### 8.3 How Cripplegate Foundation will respond

Cripplegate Foundation is committed to fostering the small volunteer-based groups that it supports through Islington Community Chest and other funds. Cripplegate Foundation will use the findings of this report to inform how it works in future, specifically:

- Intelligence gathered through small groups will shape and influence Cripplegate Foundation's grants programmes.
- We will celebrate and recognise the work of small groups. The Foundation is launching an award to recognise those who are making a difference.
- We will continue to promote partnerships between small community groups and statutory services to improve access to health and council services.
- The Islington Community Chest needs longer term planning. The fund has so far run as a year-on-year project and there has been no shared strategic plan or small group involvement in deciding its future. Volunteers and leaders of small groups will be involved in decisions about its future direction.
- We will introduce a new small grants application form for all local small grants funders in Islington. The application form will simplify the application process for small groups.
- We will actively promote employee volunteering in large public bodies such as Islington Council and NHS Islington as well as private sector companies.

# Appendix A

## Methodology

The research was conducted between January and May 2009 and comprised:

- 7 structured interviews with stakeholders
- focus group discussions
- case studies
- informal interviews with service-users from each case study

All participants were given information about the research and its intended use and were given the opportunity to ask questions. Participants were also assured anonymity hence the quotes used throughout the report are not attributed.

### Stakeholder interviewees

- John Gilbert, Islington Community Chest
- Mohamud Gure, Islington Somali Forum
- Simon James, Homes for Islington
- Kevin Lloyd, Assistant Chief Executive of Islington Council
- Mike Sherriff, Islington Voluntary Action Council
- David Vandivier, Islington Community Network
- Lucy Watt, Islington Council Voluntary Sector Lead

### Focus groups

The focus groups included a total of 29 people, each representing a group that received an ICC grant in 2007-08. The participants were founders, volunteers, staff members or management committee members. The groups they represented were very diverse but all fell into one of the following categories:

- Groups serving a target community (e.g. Iranian women, Somali young people, blind people). These groups tend to be very targeted but can also be quite broad (e.g. a group providing services for those suffering mental health issues could span a wide range of people, whereas a group for young people from the Congo who need help with homework would be much more narrow and homogenous).
- Groups serving a local geographic area (e.g. community centres, tenants and residents associations and community gardens). These groups tend to be open to anyone in their particular catchment area.
- Groups serving a true membership (e.g. timebanks, community gardens, some sport/leisure clubs) where members pay a membership fee, volunteer, or do both in exchange for a benefit such as a garden plot or access to sports facilities.



## Case studies

Three case studies were completed with the following groups:

- **Community Language Support Services (CLSS)**

CLSS was established in 2005 to respond to the need of East African and other Arabic-speaking refugees and asylum-seekers for linguistic and cultural services. It provides advice, advocacy and support to disadvantaged and socially excluded refugees. CLSS advisors and volunteers provide interpreting/translating; advice on housing, welfare benefits, education and health; support escorting clients to appointments; counselling/emotional help; advocacy; referrals and signposting, and outreach to isolated and housebound women in particular. CLSS is a registered charity with a five-strong management committee and a budget of under £20,000 per year. Housed in a local church basement, the charity has no paid staff and is supported by a number of regular volunteers.

- **Friends of King Henry's Walk Garden (FKHWG)**

The group was established in 2004 to create a community garden and to foster interest in gardening, conservation and biodiversity. FKHWG has transformed a disused piece of land, leased from Islington Council, into a community garden with 80 allotment spaces and a building that is used by schools and workshops for local people learning about conservation and environmental issues. FKHWG has a management committee of 12, no paid staff and approximately 130 members who use the garden regularly. Allotment holders are charged £15 per year and keyholders £10 per year.

- **Stuart Low Trust (SLT)**

SLT was formed in 1999 following the suicide of Stuart Low, a young man with mental health problems. It aims to help those experiencing social isolation or mental distress by providing the skills, facilities and support they need to manage their lives. The Trust is run largely by volunteers and employs two part-time and one full-time staff. SLT offers a regular Friday night event, holidays, trips and training and runs drop-in sessions for users of mental health services, their carers and friends. It has recently started a Wellbeing project that includes exercise classes, a café, a cook and eat class, advice and complementary therapies. SLT provides opportunities for isolated people to enjoy different activities socialise and learn in a supportive environment. The group has over 200 members and its drop-ins and events are generally attended by 35-50 users. The SLT newsletter provides details of upcoming events and is sent to 550 individuals and organisations each month.



## Appendix B

### Definitions

For the purposes of this research, **volunteering** is defined as any activity that involves spending time – unpaid – doing something for the benefit of the environment, groups or individuals other than (or in addition to) close relatives. **Formal volunteering** refers to activity in conjunction with an organisation; **informal volunteering** is done on behalf of individuals.

**A volunteer** can be anyone who helps an organisation to forward its aims in any way, including serving as a committee member or trustee; helping to run events or projects; fundraising; providing services, or coordinating activities. Volunteers may not always refer to themselves as volunteers. They may instead identify themselves as members, founders, community workers, trustees or just people helping out as needed.

**A service-user** is anyone who uses the services, or participates in activities, provided by a small group.

While many terms can be used to refer to small, community-based organisations, this report focuses on ICC grant-recipients and uses the term small groups, by which we mean groups with few or no paid employees and an annual income under £100,000. This report focuses exclusively on formal volunteering within these groups.

### Useful concepts

There are a number of concepts that relate to the impact of volunteering which are discussed briefly below.

**Social cohesion** is defined as the process of creating a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunities. The Local Government Association and Home Office definition<sup>20</sup> of a cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities.
- the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued.
- those from different backgrounds have similar opportunities.
- strong and positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, schools and neighbourhoods.

Closely related to social cohesion is the concept of cultural capital. This refers to the assets shared by a specific community such as a common cultural or religious identity, language or heritage.

**Economic capital** describes the financial or economic value that may derive from volunteering. It includes things like unpaid labour for an organisation, or the value of volunteer experience in the job market.

### **Social capital**

Social capital refers to the collective value of social networks (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity<sup>21</sup>). The central tenet of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital theorists have linked robust levels of social capital to a wide range of positive outcomes, including increased educational attainment, reduced crime<sup>22</sup>, better health<sup>23</sup> and greater income equality<sup>24</sup>.

A society that is rich in social capital will have dense social networks – formal and informal – spread across friends, acquaintances, community groups, localities and areas of interests. This social capital has the ability to snowball, with interactions between people (in associations, self-help groups or with friends and neighbours) resulting in increased confidence, trust, collaboration and a growing sense of community and collective responsibility.

### **Different types of social capital**

Social capital can be divided into three types: bonding, bridging and linking capital.

‘Bonding capital’ describes the networks of trust within relatively homogenous groups such as families and ethnic minority groups.

‘Bridging capital’ describes the networks developed with external agencies and resources, such as links between acquaintances and colleagues; these ties tend to be weaker and more diffused but are important for upward social mobility<sup>25</sup>. Putnam suggests that bonding capital is necessary for ‘getting by’ and bridging capital is important for ‘getting ahead’.

Woolcock added a third type, ‘linking capital’ which is generated from ties across different groups, class and political lines where power and resources are accessed by different groups across the social strata<sup>26</sup>.

### **Different effects of social capital**

Different types of social capital have different effects. For example, bridging social capital may enable individuals to cut across social and cultural barriers to foster a common sense of belonging. Poor communities may have strong internal bonds, for example, but lack bridging and linking capital that would enable them to access wider sources of power and resources. Networks based on ethnic ties reduce some of the risks associated with international migration and are particularly important for migrants making their way in a new country<sup>27</sup>. However, in the long term, this type of bonding capital can be less positive, leaving bonded communities cut off from the wider society and fostering a culture of isolation and dependence.

### **The role of the voluntary sector in generating social capital**

Small community groups can provide the crucial link between ‘bonded’ or isolated communities and ‘bridged’ or ‘linked’ communities.

**Interaction with voluntary and community groups is one of the most powerful ways in which excluded individuals can be brought into networks of trust, support and social welfare.**

Participation performs a complex set of functions, from basic socialisation, informal education and the provision of services, through to the representation of community concerns. Local and national government tend to measure community involvement simply by what is visible and measurable in which few local people are directly involved. This leaves hidden from view the vast array of activities and ways in which community members interact with others, fulfil meaningful roles and build social capital.

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<sup>20</sup> Local Government Association, 2002, Guidance on community cohesion, London.

<sup>21</sup> From [www.bowlingalone.com](http://www.bowlingalone.com), accessed on 3/6/09.

<sup>22</sup> Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, pp 18-23

<sup>23</sup> Wilkinson, R. (1996). *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*, London: Routledge.

<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> Putnam, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Woolcock, M. (2001). The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes. *ISUMA Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2 (1):11-17.

<sup>27</sup> Massey, D. and Taylor, J., eds. (2004), *International Migration: Prospects and Policies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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