

Annual Report 2015-16



Voluntary**Action**Islington

Introduction from the chair



This year, we bade farewell to our former Chief Executive, Mike Sherriff after over nine years of service to VAI and the voluntary sector in Islington. Mike saw VAI through some difficult times and VAI owes its continuing existence to his efforts. VAI wishes him well in his future projects and his commitment to voluntary organisations, particularly in Bangladesh.

We welcomed our new Chief Executive, Guljabeen Rahman, formerly Chief Executive of Hopscotch, the Camden-based women's organisation. Guljabeen has already begun to meet member organisations and key stakeholders.

VAI has secured a funding agreement with Islington Council, though we were sorry that there will not be future funding for the Islington Community Network and we are exploring how this important work will continue.

Voluntary organisations remain at the centre of Islington's civic culture. Our contribution is recognised, but we have to be able, in present circumstances, to be able to justify our continued existence to funders, users, volunteers, trustees and other stakeholders.

VAI will continue to speak for the voluntary sector and to work with voluntary organisations so that we continue to make our essential contribution to our community.

Phil Kelly
Chair VAI

Introduction from the former Chief Executive



The first year of our new strategy and a change of Chief Executive

This has been the first year of Voluntary Action Islington's new strategy and, after nine and a half years in post, my final year as Chief Executive.

During the past nine and a half years there have been many changes at Voluntary

Action Islington, within the local voluntary sector, and in the Borough as a whole. We have moved from a time of increasing resources to austerity and it is a challenge for many organisations just to keep going. In the month that I left Voluntary Action Islington, at a national level, three organisations that I have known closed – Community Matters, the Community Development Foundation and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services. For organisations that remain it is even more important to find creative ways to support a civil society which can champion a fairer society in which everybody can participate, make a contribution and have their voice heard.

During the past year Voluntary Action Islington has continued to support its member organisations and play a leading role in developing the voluntary sector and volunteering in Islington. We were particularly pleased to start a new project, funded by the City Bridge Trust, working with local organisations to develop the ways in which they engage and support volunteers. We were also pleased that Islington Council, despite the level of cuts it has experienced, has continued with a voluntary sector grants programme. One of our new initiatives this year was to work with staff and students at London Metropolitan University on a small research project which demonstrated the value of grants to the local voluntary sector. We are pleased to have this partnership with the university, who also hosted the Islington voluntary sector conference in July.

During my time at Voluntary Action Islington two of the most significant changes have been the merger of IVAC with the Volunteer Centre, to form Voluntary Action Islington, and our move to the Pentonville Road Resource Centre, which we manage. The merger with the Volunteer Centre was important because of the increasingly vital role that volunteers play in sustaining and developing civil society. The Resource Centre, as well as being an important source of income for

Voluntary Action Islington, has been a place where very diverse organisations come together under one roof, share space and increase their understanding of each other and wider civil society. Interestingly at least one leading member of the Local Authority opposed both of these changes. This demonstrates the importance of voluntary organisations being able to act independently.

A further change over the past nine and a half years has been the significant role that social media now plays in civil society. Voluntary Action Islington has responded to these technological changes with a strong presence on twitter, and in the past year the adaptation of our web site so that it is compatible with mobile devices. This year, for the first time, I did a skype interview about volunteering for a podcast. Nine and a half years ago this would have been unheard of. Keeping up with these external changes is essential if civil society is to continue to be relevant to the communities we serve.

Voluntary Action Islington was re-accredited as the nationally recognised Volunteer Centre for Islington in 2015. This is valid until 2018. We were also re-accredited as an Investor's in People organisation. The assessor noted the inclusive and friendly culture of the organisation and our commitment to equality

and diversity. He concluded that it had been a very successful IIP assessment and, confirmed that Voluntary Action Islington has the potential and a solid framework in place to move forward.

One of the privileges of being the Chief Executive of Voluntary Action Islington has been meeting so many different people who are volunteering and organising to create a better society. Many struggle with health and other issues in order to make a contribution. In recent years our Volunteer of the Year Awards have celebrated the work of many Islington residents and last year we were again grateful for the support of Doubletree by Hilton, Islington who provided prizes for the Awards.

A special thanks to the volunteers, staff, funders and trustees of Voluntary Action Islington who make its work possible. I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to work with you and wish everybody playing a role in civil society in the Borough very best wishes for the future.

Mike Sherriff, Chief Executive. March 2016

Ensuring that our members are well informed about opportunities to sustain and develop their work

During the year our formal membership increased to 448. We have 513 members on our email news group and 2,371 followers on twitter. We have had positive feedback about the usefulness of information on our web site and about our briefings. Our role in providing information is always emphasised as important in feedback from members.

We ensure that our members are well informed about funding by publicising funding opportunities, including opportunities to tender for local contracts, as soon as we are made aware of them. We have held two briefings during the year about funding opportunities – one from the London Community Foundation and one from Localgiving. As a result of both these briefings participants attending indicated an increase in knowledge about the relevant funding sources on their evaluation forms. We produced a revised version of our booklet on funding for local organisations and continued to provide advice about funding at our surgery sessions for local organisations. As a result of funding advice provided as part of our project supporting the children and young people’s voluntary sector in Islington, from a survey of participants in the project, we are aware of 14 organisations successfully securing £247,200 through fundraising, and others successfully bidding for contracts.

We now provide our members with information about, and access to, a wide range of sources of pro bono support. This includes information on our web site about sources of pro bono help. During the year we held a briefing about pro bono operational research and as a result of this several members are making an application for a pro bono operational research volunteer. We also provided a briefing about the City University Global Citizenship programme. We work with the Big Alliance in Islington and others to provide pro bono expert advice on subjects such as human resources and pitching for success. We work with a small local private sector provider who is providing pro bono coaching to two of our members. Three members have also received coaching through the children and young people’s infrastructure support project.

Feedback from participants in coaching sessions:

‘I don’t usually get any time to think about everything that’s going on. It has helped me to think about my work plan and what’s going on.’

‘Everything’s helpful - it’s been a chance to think.....I’m less overwhelmed by what is needed - know where to start and it feels more achievable’

During the year we provided telephone and face to face advice to 107 local organisations about running their organisation. This included advice about registering as a charity, funding, recruiting trustees and starting a charity. Our web site provides a range of information and resources to assist with running an organisation and during the year there were over 4,000 page views of this section of the site. This year we adapted the site so that it is compatible for use with mobile devices and about 20% of users now access the web site in this way. Over 20,000 people used our site in 2014-15.

Feedback about our advice and information services

“....provided specific advice and information which was tailored to our charity, and followed up swiftly with templates and further advice.”

“Thank you so much for all your support and the support of VAI. I don’t know what us small charities would do without you!” Coordinator of small charity providing mental health services.

We would like to thank VAI team ...for providing all the wonderful support, valuable advice, excellent training sessions and amazing business development support. I found the VAI team very professional, organised, competent, skilful, and passionate in helping our new organisation to grow....Thanks again to ...everyone in VAI”. Organisation providing training and employment support.

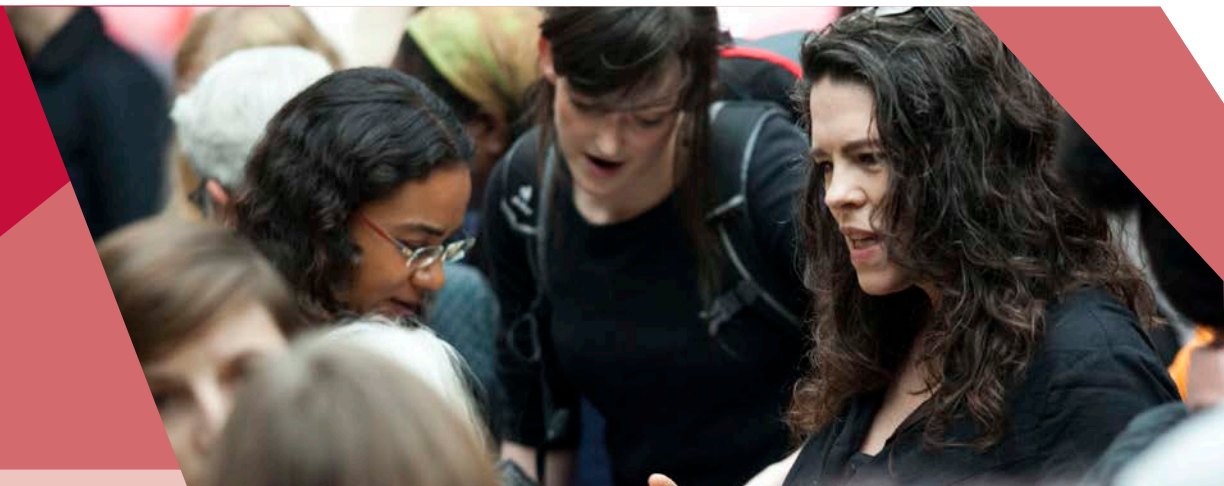
“Many thanks for your full and comprehensive reply, I’m sure we will be able to follow up on all that useful information”. Organisation working with children

We ensure that our members are well informed about national and regional developments relevant to their work through our links with National and Regional organisations. As part of their membership of Voluntary Action Islington organisations can get a discount if they join NCVO. We provide information about policy developments through the Community Network newsletter. During the year some staff and students undertook a pro bono research project on the benefits of grant funding to local organisations and we submitted this as evidence to National organisations that are campaigning to retain grant funding.

Volunteers play a vital part in enabling local voluntary organisations to pursue their charitable purposes. Voluntary Action Islington is the accredited Volunteer Centre for Islington, and in 2015 this role was assessed and we were re-accredited as the recognised Volunteer Centre for the borough until November 2018. During the year our Volunteer Centre provided information to over 4,000 people about volunteering. We promoted over 1,250 volunteering opportunities on behalf of 182 organisations. We recruited volunteers online, at our twice weekly drop-ins and by running stalls and taking part in over 22 community and local college events.

Feedback about the Volunteer Centre

“We are really happy to work with Voluntary Action Islington. Thanks to them we got to meet fantastic candidates and they helped us increase the numbers of volunteers in our organisation. At the moment 8 of our volunteers were referred by Voluntary Action Islington. 4 out of these volunteers have been volunteering with us for more than 6 months and 1 of them has been volunteering with us for more than one year”





Taking a leading role in developing the voluntary sector and volunteering in Islington

This year we started a new two year project funded by the City Bridge Trust working with local organisations to improve their volunteer management and maximise the potential from volunteer involvement. We will be working with 30 local voluntary organisations as part of this programme, providing one to one advice and workshops covering subjects such as volunteer induction and supervision. This year 14 organisations took part in the programme. In our first survey of participants organisations reported that they had developed handbooks for volunteers, that they had created new volunteering roles and recruited people to these, and that they had designated people within their organisation to take responsibility for volunteering.

- Feedback from participants in our project to maximise the potential from volunteer involvement
- “ Allowed me to discuss and share experiences of managing and working with volunteers”
 - “Had many opportunities to ask questions and felt well equipped after sessions to deal with any issues..”
 - “ Very insightful and tailored to meet the needs of our organisation”
 - “ The workshop was comprehensive and covered all issues I feel should be covered”

We continue to celebrate and promote volunteering. We have introduced a new section on our web site with examples of the difference that volunteers are making to life in Islington. This year there were 71 entries to our Volunteer of the Year Awards, which were again sponsored by Doubletree by Hilton, Islington, who provided the prizes. The Awards were covered in the local media, raising the profile of volunteering locally.

Over half of the people who use the Volunteer Centre are unemployed and seeking to gain experience through volunteering to improve their employment prospects. During 2015 we completed a project that was funded on a short term basis for 9 months by the Department for Work and Pensions. As a result of this project 49 people took part in volunteering, 15 gained employment and of these 10 people sustained their employment for over 3 months – 3 more than the target set by the DWP.

Case study of a participant in volunteering for employability project

“After being made redundant at the age of 36 I decided I needed help. I had been suffering from depression and anxiety since my early twenties, and had developed a drug and alcohol problem.

With the help of Narcotics Anonymous and Cranstoun Drug and Alcohol service, I was able to become abstinent. I was feeling much better and decided to look for help going back to work. After attending a Volunteering event I was successful in joining Voluntary Action Islington’s Volunteering to support Employability Project and after training I worked as a volunteer on their Brokerage desk.

Volunteering for 2 days a week was a fantastic way to get back into the swing of things. My confidence and people skills improved, and I was able to get my administration skills back up to speed. My anxiety lessened as the months passed and I decided to look for full time work and was successful in my application to join one of Britain’s major super market chains.

Volunteering gave me a route back into employment, back into society. The impact it had on my self-esteem is immeasurable. It gave me the confidence to go back to work. I would recommend it to anyone”

The Voluntary Action Resource Centre on Pentonville Road continues to generate funds to support the development of the local voluntary sector and provides a model of co-location and efficient use of resources. During the year several new organisations have started to rent desks at the centre and we continue with a full programme of bookings for meetings, conferences and training.

We have continued to develop Building Assets, our social enterprise providing support to charities, voluntary and community organisations and public and private sector bodies to get the very best from community buildings. This initiative is a successor to our well-regarded Big Lottery funded Community Buildings Project. It won tenders for 3 projects during the year, two of which were with Big Local initiatives, one in Islington and one in West London. Building Assets also ran a joint seminar with Russell Cooke solicitors on Community Buildings- what you need to know and where to find it.



Voluntary Action Islington encourages local organisations to collaborate with each other and with relevant statutory and private sector partners to improve local services. The theme of the annual Islington voluntary sector conference this year was Pulling Together: funding, resources and collaboration. Over 100 people attended the conference, which was held at London Metropolitan University who provided the venue at no cost. Delegates were able to find out about funders and discuss partnership opportunities. Recommendations from the conference are currently being followed up and included introducing pro bono operational research to voluntary organisations in the borough, ensuring local organisations have an awareness of the lead partners for Big Lottery European funded projects and undertaking further projects with London Metropolitan University.

Feedback from conference participants

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

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

During the year we held two networking events with the trustees of local voluntary organisations. This was an opportunity for trustees to find out about the new strategy of Islington Council and also about the services available from local corporate business through the Big Alliance. We also introduced trustees to our Directory of local voluntary organisations, which provides information to the public about services provided by 375 voluntary organisations in the borough. During the year our web site Directory of voluntary organisations and list of volunteering opportunities was integrated with the Map of Medicine used by GP's in Islington to refer their patients to services and opportunities.

Increasing awareness amongst local statutory and private sector organisations about the issues of concern and the opportunities to work with the local voluntary sector continues to be a priority for Voluntary Action Islington. This year we worked with London Metropolitan University to undertake some research on the value of grants to local organisations and have promoted this to the Local Authority and submitted it

as evidence to a National Campaign for grants led by Children England and the Directory for Social Change. In March we organised our first speed matching event with smaller local charities and businesses, enabling 9 businesses to meet up with 9 charities to discuss how they could offer pro bono help.

Annual Environment Audit at Voluntary Action Islington

We audit our environmental impact each year and promote action to protect the environment with our members.

In our office our electricity usage decreased during the year from 99,878 in 2014/15 to 91,556 in 2015/2016. Our paper consumption has increased; we used 417 reams of paper this year compared to 380 last year. We use paper which is FSC certified, meaning it comes from managed forests.

For our staff we encourage cycling and use of public transport.

For our members we provide a model environment policy, an advice sheet and an environmental footprint form on our website. During the year we moved to cloud based IT, so have been able to reduce usage of the communications room, with significant savings on electricity consumption as we decommissioned servers and air conditioning.

Finance Summary for the year ended 31st March 2016

The details on this page are a summary of information from the financial statements as independently audited by Goldwins Chartered Accountants, 75 Maygrove Road, West Hampstead, London, NW6 2EG.

This summary may not contain enough details to allow a full understanding of the financial affairs of Voluntary Action Islington. The full financial statements are available upon request from Voluntary Action Islington and can be downloaded from our website www.vai.org.uk

The financial statements are also submitted to the Registrar of Companies and the Charity Commission.

Bankers: Unity Trust Bank plc, Nine Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB.

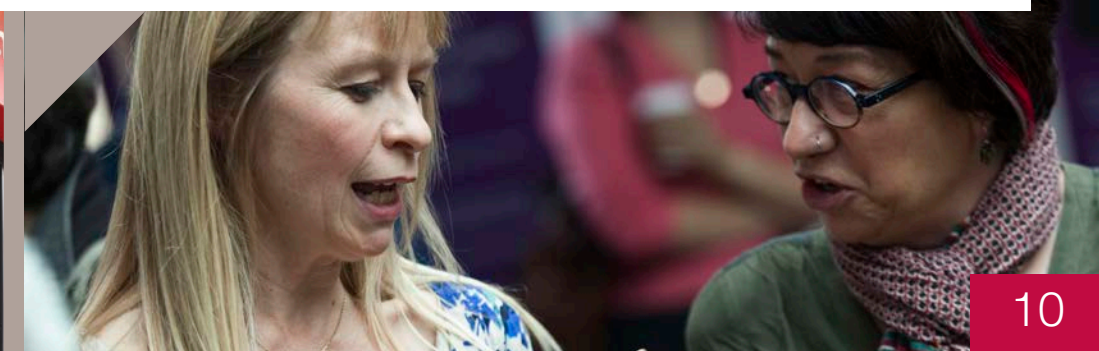
Statement of Financial Activities, year ended 31st March 2016

	Restricted funds £	Unrestricted funds £	Total £
Income from:			
Donations and legacies	3,824	41,312	45,136
Charitable activities			
Member Services and Support	70,000	100	70,100
Sector Development and Volunteering	56,000	308,295	364,295
Other trading activities	-	3,604	3,604
Investments	-	10,492	10,492
Total income	129,824	363,803	493,627
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds	-	3,966	3,966
Charitable activities			
Member Services and Support	72,885	40,684	113,569
Sector Development and Volunteering	75,185	342,967	418,152
Total expenditure	148,070	387,617	535,687
Net (expenditure) before net (losses) on investments	(18,246)	(23,814)	(42,060)
Net (losses) on investments	-	(16,828)	(16,828)
Net (expenditure) for the year	(18,246)	(40,642)	(58,888)
Transfers between funds	2,773	(2,773)	-
Net movement in funds	(15,473)	(43,415)	(58,888)
Reconciliation of funds:			
Total funds brought forward	102,821	452,725	555,546
Total funds carried forward	87,348	409,310	496,658

FUND BALANCES AT 31 MARCH 2016

	Total £
Restricted funds	87,348
Unrestricted funds	
Designated funds	162,060
General funds	247,250
Total unrestricted funds	409,310
TOTAL FUNDS	496,658

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www.vai.org.uk

Charity Number 291890

Company Limited by Guarantee Number 1913555