



# Annual Report



**2021 | 2022**

# Chair's Report

## Chair Colin Adams, MBE

As we ever so slowly come out of the pandemic, the Network has focused on 'recovery and reset' from the damage caused over the last two and a half years. With this in mind, this year we have focused on the strategic development of the Network in terms of the following:



- **Social Action Hub:** many of the Community Centres involved in the Network have come about due to the social action of local residents. So, it seems a natural progression that Octopus collaborates with like-minded charities such as Community Organisers to establish the Network as a Social Action Hub and to work with other partners on projects such as the Local Wellbeing Networks to raise the voice of those generally unheard and those with lived experience. Through the dedication of hard work, study and practical application of learning, Octopus has also achieved the status of being an Affiliated Training Provider with Community Organisers.
- **Network Connections Map:** first developed during the first Covid-19 lockdown as a result of needing a dynamic space to list food banks, community food hubs and places offering wide-ranging help to struggling households, the map has emerged not only as a way to join up and connect collaborators, it has



provided the basis for place-based community development, fostering collaborations and networking opportunities to better join up services for organisations and people who tend to struggle to navigate complex communications, resource and information systems.



- **Health and Wellbeing programme:** continues to respond to the need to address growing health inequalities that have either been compounded or emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic. All Centres within the Network provide a rich programme of health and wellbeing activities that respond to the needs of the neighbourhood that they operate in and most importantly, the diverse people who make up those communities. A community-led development approach is at the heart of what we do to ensure that services and activities are shaped by local people, as does a co-design and production approach with cross sector collaborators. A brand-new collaboration with Voluntary Action Islington will realise Octopus's involvement in the creation of three Local Wellbeing Networks for the North, Central and South of Islington in collaboration with Islington Council.





- **Urban Growing programme:** continues to go from strength to strength by joining up a number of estate-based community-led food growing initiatives - taking a permaculture approach, the focus is on people, place and climate. A rich programme of learning and development activities help growing communities from across the borough to think differently about how food can be grown in a dense urban environment, and how that food can be grown for social good. Octopus has explored and will take forward the lessons learned and effective practice from the Action for Local Food development project through a brand new collaboration with Cranfield University's Science and Technology project 'Urban Cultivate', the result of which will take Octopus' Urban Growing programme to its next level.'



We are also so proud to be nominated for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service which is the highest national award you can receive. It was awarded to our fantastic volunteers who came to the fore during the pandemic and worked incredibly hard to set up and support the Community Food Hubs benefitting hundreds of vulnerable residents across Islington and still support them today.

The excellent work we carry out and successes we've achieved would not have taken place without the hard work, persistence, humour and dedication of our Network Coordinator, Julie Parish. She is the driving force that makes our Network tick and without her energy and determination and her constant nagging to make us the best we can be, we wouldn't have achieved half of what we have. She is also supported by a brilliant team of colleagues who have also worked so hard and who go beyond what they have to do so thank you Franie, Rosie, Tsigereda, Primrose, Caroline, Rachel, and all the very best to Anita Gracie who retired earlier this year – she will be deeply missed by me, the Team and the Network.



## Thank you ...



# Our Five Clear Goals

Octopus Community Network is an established Network of 15 of Islington's largest multi-purpose community centres, many of which are designated Community Hubs in Islington. By definition in Islington, a Community Hub is a building that is accessible to all in the neighbourhood where they are located.

Octopus is funded by Islington Council as a Capacity Building partner.

**Engage:** those who lead and develop multi-purpose community centres in order to share lessons learned and effective practice.

**Inspire:** a new approach to community-led development by involving all those who make up our local community, sharing ideas, thinking big, staying positive and keeping an open door.

**Motivate:** change by constantly and consistently reviewing what we do so that we can demonstrate impact.

**Equip:** those responsible for community-led development with the skills, know-how and values to increase participation and foster strong, sustainable communities.

**Support:** to reflect on and review how we support community leaders by facilitating routes to a range of development opportunities, routes to expertise, and peer-to-peer support.



## We achieve this by:

Striving to better understand what we do, how we can measure it and how we can improve how we demonstrate impact to prove that we deliver high quality, demand-led services.

Maximising resource utilization across the Network to foster more effective ways of working.

Sharing lessons learned and implementing effective practice to facilitate community-led development.

Working together to actively avoid the duplication of services and establish strategic partnerships, participate in joint-working and fundraising, and cost-saving initiatives to ensure longer-term sustainability.



# Health and Wellbeing



An underpinning feature of our Health and Wellbeing programme is our StayWell, LiveWell (SWLW) project, which is funded through the National Lottery's Partnership Fund. SWLW delivers prevention and early intervention services and activities in local neighbourhoods, has a targeted estate-based approach to reach out to and engage those most vulnerable, promotes healthy eating, and helps build community power by training up local residents as community organisers. Over the past year, the Community Centres involved in SWLW have continued to provide food and household essentials to support those either living or shocked into poverty during the pandemic. However, as restrictions began to lift, the Centres were able to address the resulting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health and isolation by delivering a rich and diverse programme of health and wellbeing activities.

**Families:** have improved and increased social networks that improve a sense of connectedness and belonging, have improved awareness of mental health problems, and are able to make informed choices in terms of health and wellbeing in terms of prevention and early intervention.

**60 households** (85 adults, 36 children) benefited and reported a positive impact on their wellbeing. They received essential food items, an opportunity to meet others weekly at the Food Hub, and welfare support, including referrals to specialist services.

**50 cooked meals per week** delivered and distributed to vulnerable residents in partnership with Food For All.

**260 Take and Make kits** with mood food recipes included in hampers delivered to 63 families during the Christmas holidays.

**1747 meals** were distributed and benefited 164 residents.





**Young People:** have told us they have a better understanding of the impact of social isolation, they have an improved awareness of



common mental health issues, and since being engaged with the project, feel they have improved their social connections. Many have improved their

confidence to a point they are starting to take forward their own community-led initiatives, including the following:

- Development of a Youth Offer programme for the New Orleans Estate, which is being taken forward by young volunteers, as they would like to open a youth-led project.

- Training for young people to become 'Street Doctors' after concerns were raised by young people and their families about the anti social behaviour and lack of activity on the estate. HLECA is working with young people and the Community Safety team to engage young people. 169 young people over the age of 8 have been engaged, with 3 young people now volunteering with the potential to become community leaders.

- Young people have engaged in sessions encompassing personal, social and emotional wellbeing, and in one-to-one peer mentoring, to help them be better equipped in terms of life skills to deal with social isolation and anxiety. This took place online, where young people were encouraged to decide what session they would like to establish and run themselves as a way of peer-support going forward. 16 young people benefitted from this programme.

- By working with young people, we have also been able to engage 28 parents to explore how to improve and take care of their own mental health.





**Older People:** have told us they have improved their social connections and networks, as a result they feel a greater sense of belonging, have a greater awareness of common mental health problems, participate regularly in social activities, and overall, have improved their mental wellbeing.

**25 older people (60+)** benefited through their food hub. All residents received a substantial weekly food box with essential items purchased by Elizabeth House, donated by the local community and from food surplus.

**144 older people** were supported through the telephone befriending scheme swiftly put in place by the team at Holloway Neighbourhood Group. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic the team of staff and volunteers were handling a great number of calls, which since the opening up of in-person activities and services has started to fall.

**Over 60 older people** received one or more of the following: food support, gentle exercise, regular welfare calls, referrals to relevant agencies.

**122 food hampers and goodies** to older people in place of festive activities.

**314 older people** took part in wide-ranging health and wellbeing activities.



Elizabeth House Director



The Blue House Club resumed in October, with 12 people registered by week 3 and continued to be popular with their older residents who are delighted to be back. The club has been successful in creating social hubs in the community, with members swapping numbers to arrange meet ups outside of the classes.



Group Member



A highlight has been a session led by one of the members, who had a very traumatic past, 'writing a letter to your younger self'. It was a very emotional session, with many members opening up about their past traumas. "When you start to open up, it takes the weight off of your shoulders".

**85 people** produced and published a bi-monthly community newspaper, ec1echo. This is one of their locally led initiatives, which now has a print-run of 7,500 and has been very well received by the community.





Section 2

# Social Action Hub

Becoming a Social Action Hub is a strategic development for Octopus Community Network and fits well with the charity's vision and values, especially in terms of social responsibility, accountability, and working collaboratively for a socially just and caring and cooperative society. Developing as a Social Action Hub over the past year has focused on learning the methods of community organising and a community organising approach to help people listen, be powerful and take action.



Community Organiser



"This role is very challenging work, but I really enjoy it and look forward to seeing all the different members of our community every week. I am proud of how our centre is making a positive difference to local people's lives. The food projects have had a huge impact on their community." The Community Organiser is now running a food co-op and engaging with local people regularly and is the main point of contact for people in the local community.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Octopus set out on a process to be a quality-assured Social Action Hub and an Affiliated Member of the Community Organisers Training Academy. As a result:



Two Octopus staff have now completed their training to become Community Organising Trainers and have been co-delivering with an experienced trainer to consolidate their learning and application.



2 Introduction to Community Organising Workshops have been delivered.



1 Listening Skills workshop has been run for the locally recruited Community Organisers.



25 Community Organisers have been recruited, out of which 5 are young people.

So far, there has been a strong emphasis on capacity building the Centres within the Network so that Community Organising can be integrated into their work programme and working culture. A good example of this is Elizabeth House who have now established a weekly women's group who are keen and eager to engage with local food growing activities. Initially there was a reluctance to get involved as they thought gardening/food growing was not for them or it was "too dirty". Through a community organising approach, the women are now fully engaged.

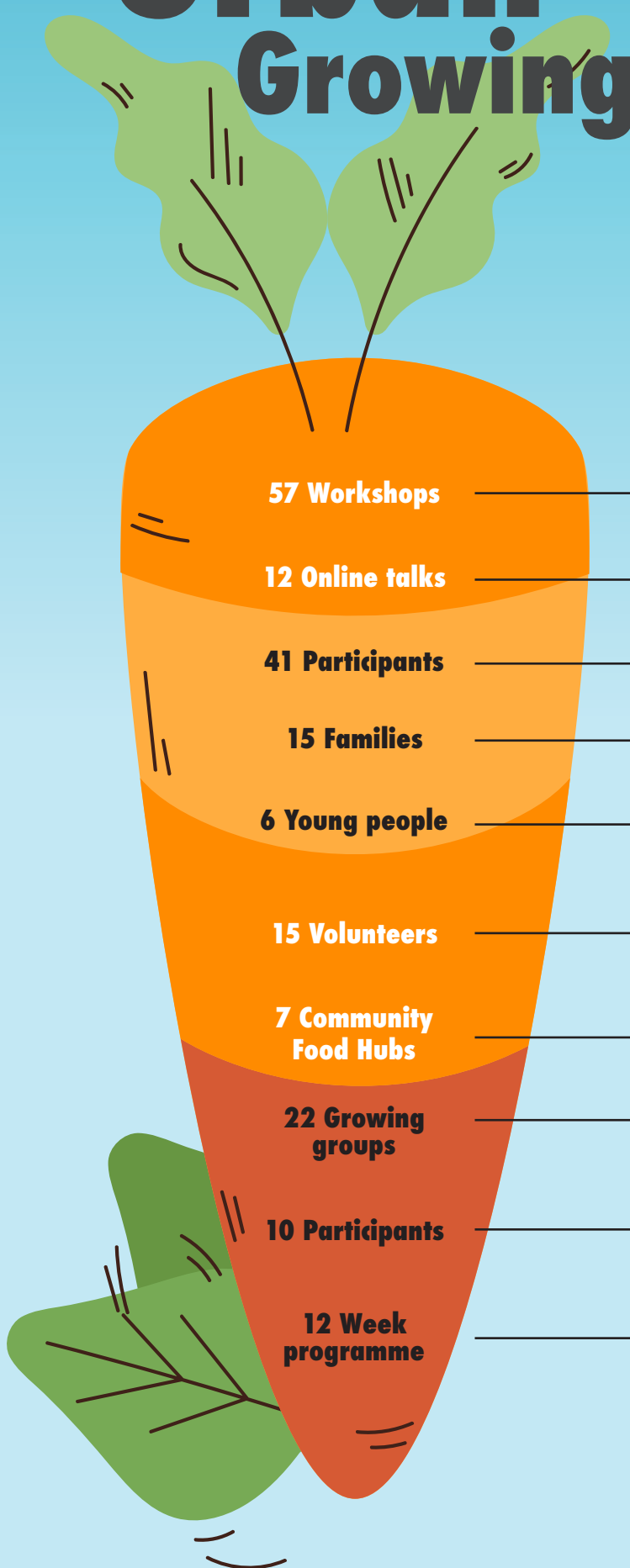




# Urban Growing Programme



Our Urban Growing Programme comprises a number of funded projects, featured below are two foundational projects that now take our growing programme to the next stage of development and sustainability. The first is the City Bridge Trust (Bridging Divides) project, and the second, the Climate Action Fund project, funded through the National Lottery.



hands on practical skills-based food growing learning for local residents and community gardening groups.

due to covid lockdown 157 participants took part in online weekly 'stay connected 'gardening talks.

attended the Urban Eats 'Harvest' Festival in September.

took part in the Summer Environmental and Climate Action Family Workshops.

from Beacon High School (SEND) took part in a week-long work experience programme as part of their Horticultural Programme.

regularly engage on site to assist with designing a community growing space, improvements and learning to manage a community food growing space.

benefitted from the produce of the Community Plant Nursery.

from across Islington benefitted from the integrated learning programme and the plug plants (vegetables, pollinators, and the like).

took part in a programme at the Mildmay Community Centre resulting in a brand-new produce garden being created.

supported the residents of the Highbury Quadrant Estate to create three brand-new designated gardening and food growing spaces, connecting with the Elizabeth House Community Centre to help engage children and families with nature, urban food growing, and environmental improvement.



**Rory**  
Community Organiser  
at Hornsey Lane Estate  
Community Centre



The support from Octopus team has been essential to growing our ability to support our community to connect into and access the network of growing spaces in Islington. Through the action learning training we were able to highlight where and how we can activate our local community. The sessions were invaluable in building up the tools necessary for a community led approach to create long term, sustainable and user driven projects. The action learning sessions increased our connections with other organisations and growing spaces, creating an inclusive peer learning and skill sharing environment whilst increasing the sense of a Borough wide support network as we develop our projects moving forward. Through working with Octopus's Food Hub project our confidence as an organisation to focus on the key areas of local food growing, green spaces plus nature and wellbeing has greatly increased. This has directly led to us applying to the Grow Back Greener Fund to develop a community led food growing and access to nature space.



**Community organiser**



The women's group participants have now started to lead sessions with enormous success which has proven great for building capacity and confidence within the group. Members are supporting each other outside of the group in the WhatsApp group and beyond, you can see a real-life support network developing.





# Climate Action

The Network has an established commitment to addressing climate change. Many of the Community Centre buildings have solar panels installed, have been through comprehensive environmental reviews, and continue to develop opportunities for addressing climate change. Mildmay Community Centre is award winning and was the first certified as a Passivhaus non-domestic retrofit building.

Collaborative projects across the Network include the Action for Local Food project, which is funded through the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund, and the Relish Embellish Café project, which was funded by the North London Waste Authority.

Through the Action for Local Food project, we measured growing capacity, water harvesting, food and green waste, bio-diverse habitats, training and learning, and networks created. As a snapshot we can report that the impact has included the following:

- 57 acres of land in Islington identified which could be used as estate-based growing space for communities.
- 381.15 m<sup>2</sup> new growing space created.
- 1905.75 kg of food produced.
- 13100 L of rainwater harvested.
- 2300 kg of food waste collected and transformed into compost.
- 53 different climate action topics were covered as part of the programme which engaged 694 people.



**Dominic**

Community Organiser at  
Mildmay Community Centre



The support from Octopus Community Food Hub project has been very helpful to me as a community organiser setting up a food growing project at the Mildmay Community Centre. Fran has been able to connect several community garden projects at different stages of their journeys together so that we have the opportunity to draw ideas and inspiration from one another. These meetings and site visits to urban growing spaces not only offered us insight into different approaches to community food growing, their challenges and successes, but also offered us the chance to meet people focused on addressing the same challenge. Through these meetings we have begun to establish cross-community centre relationships within Islington which may enable us to coordinate and strengthen our projects in the future. Fran and the Octopus Community Food Hub project was also able to provide a 6-week series of food growing workshops for residents interested in urban agriculture at the Mildmay Community Centre. Our focus here is not only on developing a food growing space, but also to offer free education to people to develop the theoretical knowledge and practical skills that will enable local people to transfer skills back into their own green spaces and start their own food growing projects. These workshops covered the food growing process from seed to plate. Finally, the Mildmay Community Centre has completed a proposal for the Grow Back Greener Fund 2021.



**Relish Embellish Café** focused on raising awareness of the impact that textiles and clothes production has on the UK, which is timely in terms of the movement towards Slow Fashion. Funded by the North London Waste Authority Waste Prevention Community Fund, Relish Embellish aims to creatively challenge textile consumption with a view to generating a greater level of understanding of the impact of textile waste on the environment, resulting in individual and household attitudinal and behavioural change. Delivered through five of the Community Centres, they will work in collaboration to design and deliver an integrated programme of practical and knowledge-building workshops. The project's objectives include to:

- Engage 50 local people, representative of Islington's diverse population, across a 10-week programme of 'textile transformation' workshops.
- Engage 2000 local people in a Festive Jumper campaign to reduce the number of such jumpers going to landfill.
- We expect that 3,600kg of textile waste will be diverted from landfill as a result of the Festive Jumper campaign.
- More generally, we expect to be able to divert 441kg of textile waste from landfill and save at least 69kg by reusing/upcycling.

When looking specifically at the work of individual Community Centres, in this annual report we highlight the work of the team at Caxton House who have looked at ways to improve their energy efficiency and reduce both their carbon footprint and running costs. A number of years ago they installed Solar Panels and in 2018 changed the lighting to LEDs. In 2021 they completed a Feasibility Study to look at decarbonising the building and this began with a fabric first approach, which led to the replace all external windows and skylights with triple glazed energy efficient ones; these actions have resulted in 52 tonnes of cumulative carbon savings, equivalent to annual emissions from 24 average households (Ofgem stats).





# Treasurer's Report

## Paul Furze, Treasurer

At the start of this financial year, like other organisations, we were still dealing with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, with on-going Government guidance on restrictions. As with the previous year, there have been numerous challenges in following this guidance and although restrictions then lifted, we have still faced a significant impact on the services we have been able to deliver, impacting on the potential for economic uncertainty and continuing to affect our ability to undertake work we would normally have been commissioned to do.

Our Directors have continued to meet frequently to regularly review our financial position and would have made prudent adjustments to expenditure, if that had been necessary. Through the hard work of the Octopus Community Network team and Directors, we have ended the financial year in a strong position and continue to have a robust, on-going fundraising strategy.

Octopus Community Network continues to be a going concern; we have a number of funded projects and reserves that will allow us to continue to deliver our services. We have also ensured we are current with funding opportunities, although we have noticed a significant reduction in the funding options that have been available in the past 12 months, as have all the Hubs within the Network.

We continue to work closely with our auditors, Preston & Jackson Partnership LLP, to ensure our internal controls and financial monitoring procedures are strong, including regular financial reporting to Directors. Our continued thanks to them for their advice and support. We regularly review our reserves policy to ensure it is appropriate and have assessed the major risks to which the organization is exposed, in particular those related to the operations and finances, and are satisfied that systems and procedures are in place to mitigate our exposure to any major risks.

We are grateful to all our funders, including The National Lottery, The City Bridge Trust, The Mayor's Office and Islington Council for their continued support. This funding is essential to our work with the Community Hubs, especially in terms of fostering greater collaboration between the Hubs, identifying and taking forward joint working opportunities, and leading on collaborative projects that benefit the neighbourhoods in which the Hubs are based. Directors are grateful to our funders and individuals for their continued support.

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 31.3.22	Total Funds 31.3.21
	£	£	£	£
<b>Income</b>				
Grants	42,016	394,231	436,247	476,937
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<b>42,016</b>	<b>394,231</b>	<b>436,247</b>	<b>476,937</b>
<b>Expenditure on Charitable Projects &amp; Activities</b>	47,439	360,863	408,302	399,165
<b>Net income (Expenditure)</b>	<b>(5,423)</b>	<b>33,368</b>	<b>27,945</b>	<b>77,772</b>
<b>Transfer between Funds</b>	43,948	(43,948)	0	0
Net Movement in Funds	<b>38,525</b>	<b>(10,580)</b>	<b>27,945</b>	<b>77,772</b>
<b>Reconciliation of Funds</b>				
Total Funds brought forward	94,992	229,404	324,396	246,624
Total funds carried forward	<b>133,517</b>	<b>218,824</b>	<b>352,341</b>	<b>324,396</b>

**Octopus Community Network**  
Caxton House Community Centre  
129 St John's Way,  
Islington,  
London  
N19 3RQ  
t: 020 7263 7095


[www.octopuscommunities.org.uk](http://www.octopuscommunities.org.uk)


Registered Charity Number 1128394  
Company Number 4490634

### Pledge and Donate

Octopus is a registered charity and pro-actively seeks donations to make what we do amazing! If you can Pledge your spare time and expertise or Donate money you can make a massive impact!

### Follow us on:

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### Directors and Trustees

Colin Adams, MBE	Chair
Paul Furze	Treasurer
Michael Ryan	Trustee/Director
Irene Winter	Trustee/Director
Elaine Maffrett	Trustee/Director
Teena Phillips	Trustee/Director
Adam Parr	Trustee/Director

### Staff Team

**Julie Parish**  
Network Development Manager

**Anita Gracie**  
Community Development Officer, Urban Growing

**Frannie Smith**  
Community Development Officer, Urban Growing

**Caroline Humphries**  
Community Development Officer, Urban Growing

**Tom Ball**  
Community Development, Climate Action

**Patrick Vickers**  
Community Development, Climate Action

**Jemima Presland**  
Community Development, Climate Action

**Nazia Jahan**  
Community Development, Climate Action

**Rosie Apperley**  
Projects Coordinator

**Tsigereda Teklesadik**  
Network Development Officer, Health and Wellbeing

**Primrose Christie**  
Network Development Officer, Health and Wellbeing

### Volunteers

Special thanks to all of our volunteers whose time and dedication is very much appreciated

### Members of the Network

Caxton House Community Centre

Elizabeth House Blackstock Trust

Finsbury Park Community Hub

Hanley Crouch Community Association

Highbury Roundhouse  
Community Centre

Hilldrop Area Community Association

Holloway Neighbourhood Group

Hornsey Lane Estate  
Community Centre

Mildmay Community Centre Hub

The Peel Community Centre

St Luke's Community Centre

Whittington Park Community Centre

Muslim Welfare House

Light Project Pro International

The Arc

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