

## Case Study

### *Vital Signs – Taking the community pulse*

Three of London's PBGSs are delivered by The East End Community Foundation (EECF); Newham Giving, Tower Hamlets Giving and Hackney Giving in partnership with Hackney CVS.

These programmes bring together a range of partners and donors to work collaboratively, drawing on local expertise to achieve a greater social impact.

The funding priorities of these three PBGSs are determined by Vital Signs, a research report and local charitable giving guide which draws upon official statistics and the views of local people to provide a health check of social issues in each borough.

Vital Signs is defined by 10 social themes including Environment, Education & Learning, Strong Communities, Housing and Homelessness, and Work, which are graded from A-E as determined by a mix of community consultation and comparative data.

Everyone who lives and works in the three boroughs is invited to participate in a short survey. Last year 400 people took part. This year the EECF entered all respondents into a prize draw to win £1,000 for a community group of the winners' choice and received over 600 responses.

Alongside the survey, comparative data is drawn from multiple sources including the Department of Education, the Department of

Health and the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (see Useful Reports, page 50), and assesses how each borough and the East End as a whole is performing compared to London and the UK.

Vital Signs is updated annually, which ensures that the activities of the PBGSs can always be focused on current need and funders can be confident their money is being well directed. The community consultation can also uncover something statistics may not – how people *feel* about the place they live. Perception can be just as important as what is actually happening because it alters how people choose to live their lives and whether they are able to make the most of what their borough has to offer. For example, 'safety' has consistently been at the top of concerns in all three boroughs despite falling crime rates. The perception of unsafe streets, especially after dark, can prevent people from going out and compound problems of isolation and poor mental and physical health.

In 2015 Vital Signs revealed that residents felt very strongly about anti-social behaviour, particularly in Tower Hamlets. As a result EECF has committed £100k to the roll-out of a successful programme developed by housing association Poplar HARCA in partnership with the Metropolitan Police in Lansbury. It involves convening monthly problem-solving groups bringing together local youth groups and other community and voluntary organisations to plan and co-ordinate activity. As a result, anti-social behaviour in the area reduced by 40%. EECF has now established another problem-solving group

in Poplar in partnership with the Council, Metropolitan Police and Poplar HARCA and is carrying out a mapping exercise to establish where it is most needed next.

Vital Signs was developed by the Canadian Community Foundation and is licensed by the UK Community Foundation for use by its members. Although not available outside the Community Foundation network, it does show how data and community consultation can be combined to great effect, and uncover the real experiences of Londoners.

Tracey Walsh, Chief Executive of the EECF says: "*Vital Signs has been transformational for our work in the East End. It is a powerful tool with multiple functions. It defines what we do with our money, it gives a voice to the whole community and it shows funders that their money is being targeted where it is most needed. It also celebrates our communities; this year our consultation survey includes a question on what people love most about their borough, and it has become clear that people are passionate about their community and love its sense of connectedness.*"

► [www.eastendcf.org.uk](http://www.eastendcf.org.uk)

