

Case Study

Hammersmith and Fulham – The Big Conversation



At the heart of PBGSs is local knowledge founded on local need and wide ranging consultation.

These are vital in ensuring effective giving is targeted at local priorities and aspirations. Hammersmith United Charities (HUC) and its sister charity Dr Edwards and Bishop Kings (DEBK) share a common heritage and will both celebrate their 400th anniversary next year. They became separate charities in 1863 to mirror local government boundary changes. DEBK took responsibility for Fulham and HUC took responsibility for Hammersmith. 150 years of separation has led to the two charities developing distinct identities and cultures.

The forthcoming 400th anniversary has prompted both charities to undertake some self-reflection. Both wanted to reconnect their activities to local people beyond the residents of HUC's sheltered accommodation and the beneficiaries of grants from both charities. Accepting that both existed because of the generosity of local residents in the 17th Century, they were keen to explore how that

sense of locally based philanthropy and community connection could be rekindled in the 21st Century. Both recognised that this new campaign would be stronger if they joined forces, pooled resources and recognised the modern identity with the borough. The new campaign organisation's name 'United in Hammersmith and Fulham' called for a renewed sense of solidarity at many levels.

Hammersmith and Fulham Council has confirmed that it will fund a three-year development programme and the City of London Corporation's charitable funder City Bridge Trust has invested for one year when it will review progress with possible further funding.

As part of the self-reflection in preparation for the 400th anniversary, HUC has undertaken an exhaustive programme of consultation and community engagement known as the Big Conversation. The team met with existing grantees, local council Cabinet members, and senior council officers, leaders of statutory and voluntary organisations, businesses and developers. The dialogue informs the charities on the diversity of local need and delivers a range of

perspectives on how those needs might be tackled. It clarifies HUC's contribution to that process and demonstrates the richness of community groups and their activities. The Big Conversation has laid strong foundations for partnerships to be forged and networks to be developed.

It was a two-way process. HUC despite being around for 399 years was little known except for its main business running almshouses. Its grant making (only re-introduced in 2012) was less well-known. The Big Conversation has changed all that, introducing the work of this endowed charity to a wide cross-section of community and business leaders, ensuring that its work and aspirations for the future are widely communicated. It has meant that ideas for the development of a PBGS have been widely tested on an informal basis. Some of the main themes of the 'United' campaign have emerged from the comments of those Big Conversation participants.

One exciting and engaging element of the consultation involved two graphic-centred events. The first delivered a visual translation of what a range of people thought was important about the borough community. The second resulted in an action plan for addressing issues and building on assets. The images, on display in HUC's offices, are a daily reminder to the team and to visitors of the issues, emotions, as well as hard information on what matters to the people of Hammersmith and Fulham.

► www.hamunitedcharities.org.uk

► www.debk.org.uk