



**Octopus Community Network**  
Caxton House  
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 as a registered charity proactively seeks donations to make what we do amazing! You can simply TEXT WAWP12 (and the amount you wish to donate) to 70070. You can also visit our website to see a few examples of what money, time and resources means to us.

### Funders and Supporters



In partnership with



### Directors and Trustees

Colin Adams, MBE	Chair
Paul Furze	Treasurer
Robert Drinkwater	Trustee/Director
David Vandivier	Trustee/Director
Martyn Craddock	Trustee/Director
Irene Winter	Trustee/Director
Robert Hamilton	Trustee/Director

### Staff and Freelance Team

Julie Parish  
**Development Manager (Freelance)**

Anita Gracie  
**Wild Places Development Officer**

Hilary Taylor  
**Wild Places Development Officer**

Michael Bury  
**Wild Places Development Officer**

### Volunteers

Special thanks this year to the following people whose time and dedication has been very much appreciated.

Rosie Apperley, Marilyn Collins,  
Geoffrey Reeve, Gemma Wood,  
Gemma Dunn, Ana Toneato,  
Maria Elena Brady, Katrina Zaludkova,  
Mick Duffy and Jessica Kyriacou

### Members of the Network

Caxton House Community  
Centre Hub

Elizabeth House Blackstock Trust Hub

Finsbury Park Community Hub  
(Andover Community Centre)

Hanley Crouch Community  
Association Hub

Highbury Roundhouse Hub

Hilldrop Area Community  
Association Hub

Holloway Neighbourhood Group  
(The Old Fire Station)

Hornsey Lane Estate Community  
Centre Hub

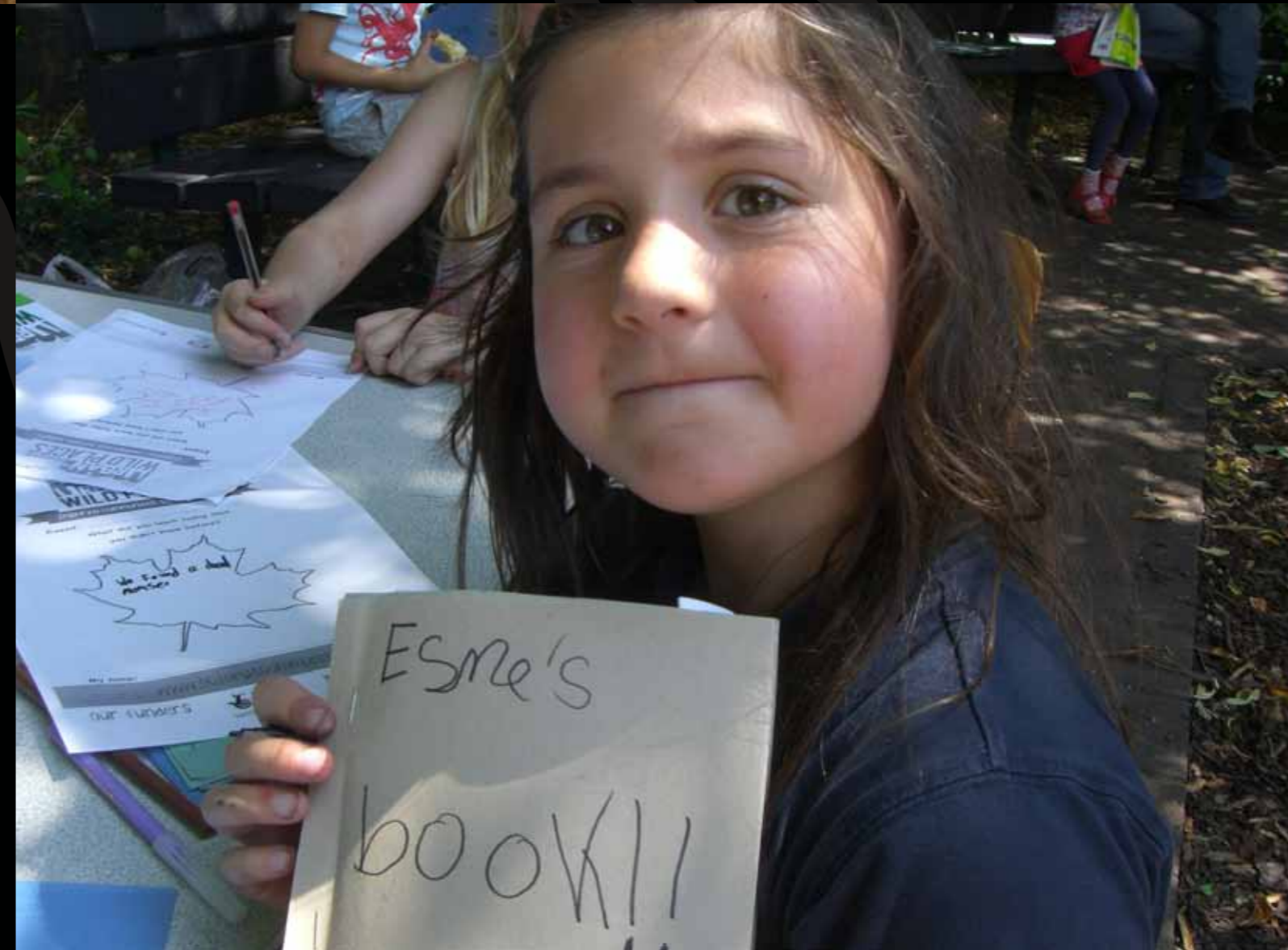
Mildmay Community Centre Hub  
(Mildmay Community Partnership)

The Peel Centre Hub  
(The Peel Institute)

St Luke's Community Hub  
(St Luke's Parochial Trust)

Community Hub Bemerton  
(Team Cally)

Whittington Park Community Hub  
(Whittington Park Community  
Association)





## Chair's Report

Since becoming Chair of Octopus in 2012, I've learned an awful lot about what makes Octopus 'tick' and how it differs, immensely so, from an umbrella or membership organisation. Over the past 4 years, it never ceased to amaze me how innovative, resilient and brilliant the team are, and how success is driven by the commitment and determination that they bring to the organisation. Basically, they all have a deep passion for multi-purpose community centres and the role that they play in our diverse and demanding community.

Over the past 12-months, Octopus has increasingly been recognized as an effective practice model in collaborative working but this is not to say that we can't do more if given the right support and resources. We need to make sure that all local residents are aware of the community hubs network and know what we do and how they can get involved in either using our range of services or volunteering.

This 'Hub and Spokes' model is one that is being considered by many others up and down the country, and some have drawn upon the Octopus team to better understand what works and does not work. In terms of the Community Hubs in Islington, the model Octopus has developed helps connect the Community Hubs (multi-purpose community centres) and fosters their coming together to share information,

exchange good practice, collaborate on projects, and jointly fundraise. It's an excellent example of what can be achieved if like-minded organisations work together.

We've had a good year in terms of project development and funding secured. Initiatives include involvement in the successful Community Buildings project with Voluntary Action Islington and with CENTA which led to the Marketing Strategies programme, with the aim of reducing spending and increasing outcome. As a result

- \* 33.33% said that their income had increased
- \* 22.22% said that their services had increased
- \* 22.22% said that they had increased the user groups/diversified their user groups

Through the Marketing Strategies programme, front-line staff were also invited to workshops with a view to developing a Customer Care approach which could be cascaded across the Hubs Network.

We've established a brand-new partnership with Islington Working for Parents (Islington Council), CENTA and St Luke's Community Centre to develop and deliver an ESF London Councils project to help parents start their own business which is well on the way to reaching the set target of

20 businesses sustained after 26 weeks; continuation of the highly successful Urban Wild Places project, which has seen the first year exceed all outputs, outcomes and milestones agreed with the Big Lottery and match funders (including Islington Council); collaborations with Islington's Resident Engagement Team to help residents get access to ICT facilities; and with Islington Law Centre to offer a brand-new model of advice services in the borough, which to date has provided 'Welfare Advice First Aid' training to 39 local organisations through training workshops held at five of Islington's Community Hubs.

Octopus would not be the success that it is without the on-going commitment of its Trustees, which drive the quality and on-going development of the organization. So, I take this opportunity to thank them for their time and efforts and I hope we continue to learn, grow and develop.

My biggest thanks goes to Julie Parish and the Wild Places team of Anita, Hilary and Michael for all their hard work and support over the past year. Without your "can do" attitude, flexibility and dedication, we would have not made the progress we have.

Thank you....

**Colin Adams, MBE**  
Chair, Octopus Community Network

## Treasurer's Report

The financial year April 2013-March 2014 has been an exceptional year for Octopus with success in securing funding that will enable the community-led Urban Wild Places project to be delivered across the Community Hubs Network. By fostering a strong and mutually beneficial collaboration with the Islington Council Parks team, the project will deliver against several of the key priorities set out in Islington's Fairness Commission report.

With the Natural England funded Wild Places project coming to an end, the financial year has seen the reconfiguration of the Octopus Staff Team, which has led to some cost savings during the year. However, with a successful bid to the City Bridge Trust (the City of London Corporation's Charity) and the Reaching Communities Fund (Big Lottery) the Urban Wild Places project has enabled key members of the core team to be retained, whilst creating one new post. We are delighted that this project is now funded through to September 2016, which gives the team, and Octopus, some stability, but also provides ample time to secure funding that will see this valuable project sustained in future years.

Islington Council has continued to provide Octopus with the financial means with which we fulfill the vital role of Community Hubs Network Coordinator. This funding is essential in our work with the Community Hubs, especially in terms of fostering greater collaborations between the Hubs, identifying and taking forward joint-working opportunities, and leading on collaborative projects that benefits the neighbourhoods in which the Hubs are based.

The future holds funding uncertainties for many groups with Octopus Community Network being no exception. We have a robust business plan and fundraising strategy however and whilst acknowledging the many challenges to be faced over the coming months, we will continue to work towards a sustainable funding base for our long-term development.

Octopus has now developed a Reserves Policy and will be working towards building our reserves over the next few years in order to cover its liabilities. However, it has been agreed by the Board of Trustees that there will be a 'working capital' balance in the next financial year.

**Paul Furze,**  
Treasurer



## Our Five Clear Goals

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

**Inspire:** a new approach to community development by 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 development with the skills, know-how and values to increase participation and foster strong sustainable communities.

**Support:** community centre leaders by facilitating routes to a range of expertise and peer-to-peer support.

We achieve this by:

Developing benchmarks to measure ourselves against so we can demonstrate impact and prove 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 best practice to facilitate community development, which is based on reflective practice.

Working together to actively avoid the duplication of services and establish strategic partnerships and joint-fundraising, income generation and cost-saving initiatives.

## Project Reports

This year, the focus of our projects has been on delivering against the recommendations and priorities set out in Islington's Fairness Commission Report, 'Closing the Gap'. In particular, the following:

- \* **Recommendation 10:** Giving time, giving money – encouraging businesses to help address inequality and challenge poverty by donating time and money; maximize the number of volunteers in the borough, and building community spirit.

- \* **Recommendation 11:** Public Space – Islington council and partners should identify all unused communal space in Islington, especially on estates, to free it up, make it accessible and use it.

- \* **Recommendation 16:** Health inequalities and

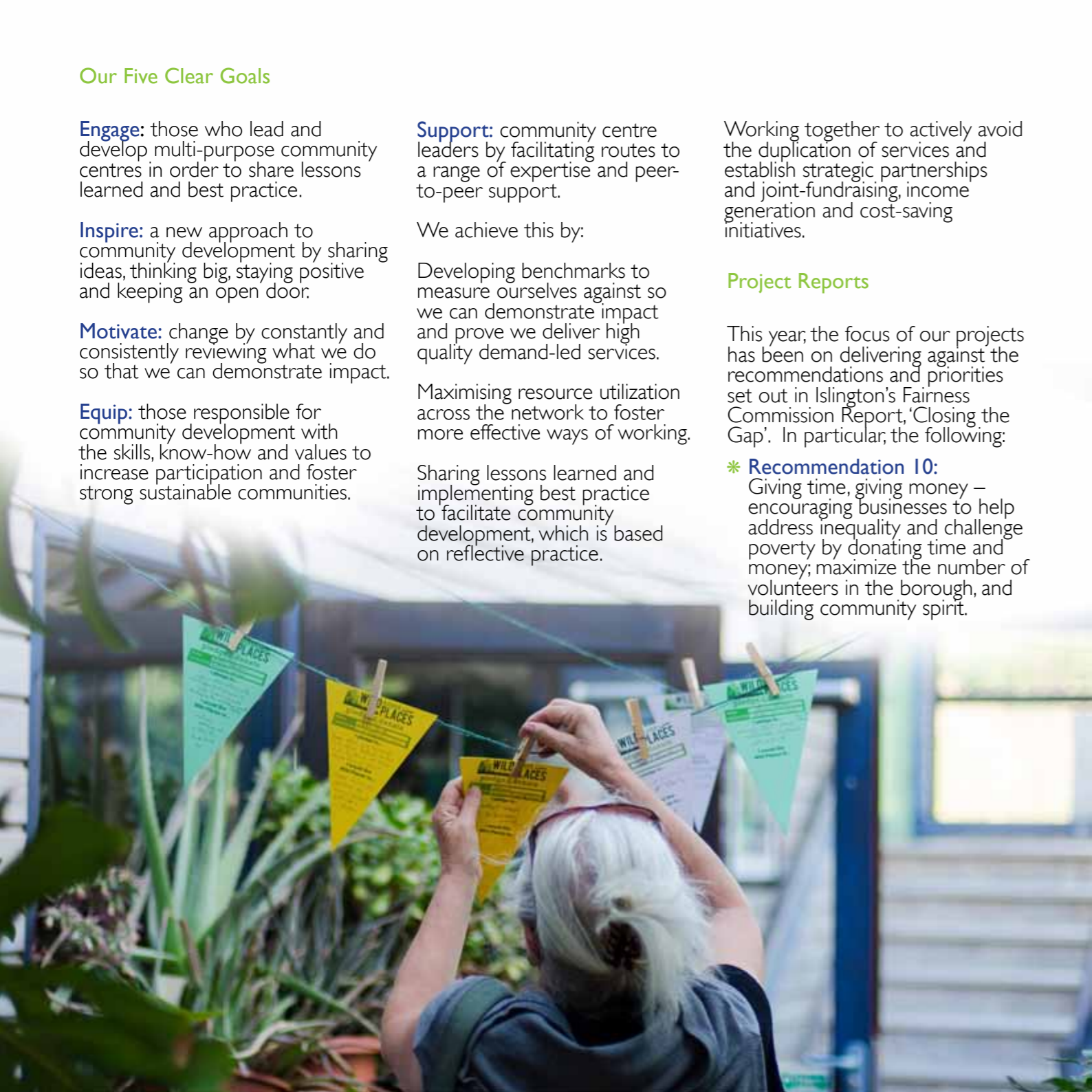
- \* **Recommendation 19** Exercise – to ensure there is a local, tailored response to health needs, and to make it easier for people to partake in regular exercise.

## Community Hubs Network

Over the past four years, Octopus has been the co-ordinator of the Community Hubs Network, fostering collaboration between 14 of Islington's largest multi-purpose community centres, 12 of which have been designated as 'Community Hubs'. By definition, in Islington, a Community Hub is a building that is accessible to all groups in the neighbourhood where they are located.

## Building Resilience

During 2013-2014, Octopus has focused upon 'Building Resilience'. This included helping members of the network towards achieving the Charity Commission recognized quality standard 'Visible Communities', which is founded on a set of seven core principles that underpin strong, sustainable community based organisations:



- \* **A voice** to represent issues of local concern
- \* **An independent** and politically neutral organization
- \* **A service** provider for local people
- \* **An initiator** of projects to meet locally identified needs
- \* **A builder** of partnerships with other local organisations and groups
- \* **A strong local** network of people and organisations
- \* **A way to engage** local people to become active in their communities

Working in partnership with Voluntary Action Islington, Islington Council and Community Matters, Octopus has facilitated peer-to-peer support across the network, provided briefings and presentations for Trustee Boards, and given coaching sessions to help organisations prepare for their VISIBLE assessment.

The past year has also focused upon helping individual Hubs review and renew their Human Resources Policies and Practices, which highly complemented the work towards VISIBLE. This work has been made possible by working in close collaboration with the Target HR Project Resources team at Voluntary Action Camden.

Another aspect of our Building Resilience programme, has been the focus upon sustainability, especially during such turbulent

times created by cuts to public spending. The tailor-made Marketing Strategies programme, included workshops on the importance of research and development, capturing impact and undertaking needs assessments to inform service development, creating strategic and business plans, full-cost recovery modeling, and customer service.

With buildings being the Hubs' major physical asset, our programme of support has also focused working with individual Hubs to transform their buildings in order to grow and diversify services.

- \* 119 hours of 1-2-1 business support was provided across the Network
- \* 70% of Hubs supported have explored ways to generate unrestricted funds
- \* 90% of Hubs were supported in taking a full cost recovery approach
- \* 100% of Hubs reviewed their environmental footprint and energy usage to save costs

“ *The help and support I received has been really useful and set at my organisation's pace. I have been able to reflect upon and set up new services by re-evaluating current services. The business-planning tool (the Marketing Toolkit) has been a great asset and has helped me to structure the business planning process. Thank-you.* ”

Reuben, Elizabeth House



## Joining up the Dots

Since the launch of our Four Key Themes at our last AGM (Sept '13), the main focus of our work this year has been to deliver against a number of the key priorities and recommendations set out in Islington's Fairness Commission Report.

Our Four Themes are:

- (1) **Inspiring Employability**, which is led by the joint Hub for the Hillrise Ward, which is Hornsey Lane Community Centre (Irene Winter), and Caxton House Community Centre (Paul Furze);
- (2) **Inspiring Volunteering**, which is led by Colin Adams, MBE of Hanley Crouch Community Association and Robert Drinkwater of Hilldrop Community Centre;
- (3) **Inspiring Older People**, which is led by Martyn Craddock (St Luke's Community Centre) and Rob Hamilton (The Peel Community Centre), and
- (4) **Inspiring Community Centres**, which is led by Octopus. These four themes have provided the focus for cross-sector collaborations, and joint funding proposals, which helps improve services and activities for local residents, and at the same time, provides an opportunity to improve cost efficiencies.

These four themes have provided the focus for cross-sector collaborations, and joint-funding proposals, which helps improve services and activities for local residents, and at the same time, provides an opportunity to improve cost efficiencies.

## Inspiring Employability

Our long history of delivering employment support both as individual centres, and collaboratively through Octopus, has resulted in the development of a unique method of delivery encapsulated in the following examples:

### Vision:

Community Hubs become a gateway to employability support for residents most in need of support.

- \* Number of services directly supporting access to employment across the Hubs Network 41
- \* Number of people referred or taken onto services delivered on site 345
- \* Number of people who have found work or gone into training as a direct result of coming into contact with Hub support 153

Career Orienteer is a 'tried and tested' life-coaching model that helps the long-term unemployed make a sustained transit into meaningful work.

- \* 94% of people attending completed the programme
- \* 81% secured and sustained the progression route they had identified as being the start of a desired career path – rather than just taking the first job offered.

## FUSE Project

FUSE is funded through the London Councils European Social Fund (ESF Objective 3, £95,000), and specifically relates to needs identified by Islington Council. The project will engage 70 local residents in exploring self-employment as a means to achieving financial sustainability as a result of Welfare Reforms. By the end of the project, 35 residents will become self-employed within 13-weeks, and 20 will have sustained their business for 26-weeks.

We have taken an innovative, cross-sector approach to its delivery, by working in collaboration with CENTA, St Luke's Community Centre, and their local corporate partner, Slaughter and May.

Since launching the FUSE project, many clients that have been engaged have had to deal with adversity whether it was a lack of confidence, results of the benefit cap on the household, lack of finance or difficulty with finding affordable childcare so that they could participate. However, with these barriers overcome, those engaged on the project have benefitted immensely.

“ I feel my progress has gone above and beyond what I even expected. I really feel like I am genuinely being supported which allows me to fully believe and apply all my energy in starting and developing my new business. ”

Opportunities provided by FUSE include facilitated access to Slaughter & May's Firm Futures programme, which helps start-up businesses gain access to a grant fund and mentoring. It provides access to the St Luke's Enterprise Hub offer, which provides subsidized office space for up to six months, giving an opportunity for fledgling businesses to find their feet. The project also provides help for those who want to start-up a market stall in the Islington area at reduced rates.

“ Fuse has helped by breaking down points and plans in an easier way for me to digest and understand and asking thought provoking questions which have helped me to better formulate ideas and ways to tackle every target. The to-do-lists with deadline dates are a particular helpful method in doing this. ”

## Inspiring Volunteering

### Vision:

Islington residents are more socially connected and take an active role in community development.

Launched at our AGM in 2013, the IT Mentoring project has been delivered across the Hubs Network in close collaboration with Islington's Resident Engagement Team. The purpose of the project is to foster greater

skills exchanges between local residents who have good ICT skills with those who do not. This is with a view to helping local residents gain access to FREE ICT facilities and Internet, but also, gain access to support for residents needing help when applying online for benefits or jobs, for example.

We've also been working closely with Voluntary Action Islington, which provides an excellent source of volunteers and resources for the management of volunteers. Our work with VAI has focused on improving how the Community Hubs promote their Volunteering Roles and opportunities, and how Volunteers are managed.

2013 has been a really good year for developing relationships with local and City-based businesses, which has mainly been due to the excellent relationship developed with organisations such as the BIG Alliance (East London Business Alliance) as a result of their collaboration with Islington Giving (in 2012). The Community Hubs have benefitted immensely from the relationships built with the BIG Alliance team, and local businesses involved. We've also developed mutually rewarding relationships with Business in the Community, which has resulted in relationships being established with BT Openreach and with NatWest Bank.



## Inspiring Community Centres

### Advising Islington Together

At the 2013 AGM, the Islington Law Centre team had the platform for announcing the news that the Advising Islington Together project would be delivered in Islington. The Advising Islington Together project is a partnership project, which brings together a range of community organisations in the borough to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of advice services, and to ensure that people who are facing problems know what advice services are there for them and how they can access help. The project does this in a variety of ways including training for front line staff and volunteers; developing volunteering and pro bono initiatives; producing resources and materials; an Advisors Forum; and exploring social enterprise.

Octopus sits on the steering group for the project, and with their help, in the last year AIT has trained over 233 volunteers and staff from 52 local community organisations as "Welfare Benefits First Aiders". This is creating a really strong network across Islington.

So far, 4 Octopus members have hosted training sessions, and have brought together smaller groups in their neighbourhood so that they can participate. A new form filling project is being set up at the Holloway Neighbourhood Group and feedback from participants shows the impact of the project.

“ A huge thank you is due to the Hubs for their work in hosting the training. ”

Lorna Reid

### Working with other Networks

On the run up to Black History Month in 2013, members of the Octopus Network worked closely with Islington's BME Forum 'Every Voice' to identify the location for hosting a lively festival of film screenings, youth workshops, an intergenerational oral history project, and a community conference. The theme for Black History Month was Leadership and those who have triumphed in the fight for equal rights. At the Old Fire Station (Holloway Neighbourhood Group) the British drama 'Sus' was screened, followed by a Q&A session with leading actor and Islington resident Clint Dyer. Hanley Crouch was the location for Guerilla Grannies, which was followed by African food and musical performances. The Peel Centre, in partnership with North London Carers, screened Pressure, which is hailed as Britain's first black feature film. Finally, the Mildmay Community Centre was the location for the screening of Fade – a distinctive film presenting an exclusive window into the lives of four barbers across the world. The screening was followed by Caribbean food canapés and a Q&A session with British Film-maker/Director Andy Mundy-Castle.

### Developing a Hub-wide Social Media Communications Campaign

During 2013, Octopus, thanks to Shoredich-based creative agency 'Crumpled Dog', set out a strategy for the new 'Octopus brand', which formed the foundation for a network-wide strategy to improve our online presence. At the same time, provided the basis for a pro-active social media campaign to connect and grow diverse communities within the Hub neighbourhoods. Helping us achieve this was Charity Chap – Matt Collins, who tailor-made and delivered inspiring social media workshops and masterclasses.

### Green Estates (Fairness Commission)

The Octopus team has worked closely with Islington's Green Space team to undertake community consultations on two estates in Islington (Spring Gardens and Hilldrop Crescent) to renovate and bring to life spaces on the estate that had fallen into disrepair. As a result, there's a brand-new and frequently used Games Area at Spring Gardens. At the Hilldrop site, an additional £20,000 was secured by Octopus to complement the Fairness Commission funding and completely transform a disused games area into a fantastic new multi-use games area. Funding



has also been secured to run a range of activities on-site at the MUGA for the next 12-months. The Urban Wild Places team is now working with a newly established growing group made up of local residents to design, create and maintain a brand-new community garden space.

### Active Spaces

Over the year, significant time has been invested in devising and testing out a community-based 'Energy Club' and 'Sports Leaders' model, not only to increase resident participation in community-led sport, but also to build links with Islington schools, and children's centres.

Hilldrop Community Hub has been the first to develop the model with the help of Octopus, securing funding from Islington's Active Spaces grant, which brings to life the Multi-use Games Area (MUGA) space. This model is being developed with Sports Leaders UK. With funding secured, this exciting new model, which will train up children, young people and local residents in games playing and sports, will roll-out over the next twelve months.

## Urban Wild Places (Wild Places)

“The Wild Places project has contributed immensely to building the social fabric of diverse communities, simply by weaving together an interest in improving unloved spaces on estates, the love of nature, the desire to make new friends, and building the community spirit that helps communities bond.”  
Anita Gracie

Octopus began delivery of the Wild Places Project in April 2013 after securing funding of £78,400 split over two years from City Bridge Trust complemented in October 2013 by a major grant of £217,858 from the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund (Urban Wild Places) spread

over three years, matched with capital funding of £200,000 from Islington Council Greenspace. Launched at last year's AGM, Andrew Bedford, Parks and Open Spaces Manager (Environment & Regeneration Department, Public Realm Division) commented on the partnership being the “perfect match” and a means of engaging communities that they had previously failed to engage with.

During the year, the Urban Wild Places team has established six new ‘living, learning environments’, transforming areas of public space into gardens or places of environmental learning. Biddestone Road Open Space, an unloved park that has been unused and invisible for years, will be revitalized through the involvement of 80 local

residents, children and families engaged in consultations about the redevelopment of the park. Archway Park, as with Biddestone, a neglected park which is now subject to major development has been the site of two community consultation events where 178 children, families and residents have contributed to design ideas for the park. Garden spaces at Hilldrop, Holloway Neighbourhood Group, the Peel Centre and St Luke's Community Centres have all been the site of environmental learning for groups of local service users. The project supported the Peel Centre in fundraising for a community gardener and resources to enable weekly gardening sessions where elders have grown food and herbs, whilst at Hilldrop young Mums attending speech therapy sessions with their children have used the garden there to plant some vegetables as part of a ‘garden to kitchen’ workshop programme.

Our Trailblazer programme saw the Wild Places team visiting Play and Youth Workers in those Hubs with Out of School Clubs, to explore how they could fund and embed outdoor wildlife growing and nature-based activities in their own delivery programmes creating young Environmental Detectives.

Dragon Day, held in partnership with Froglife, held on 26th July 2013 saw over 200 children and families, including those from five Octopus play schemes, descend on the Islington Ecology Centre for a fun-packed day of amphibian themed activities. The event brought many people to the Ecology Centre for the first time, so meeting one of ours and our partner Islington Council's key objectives to increase people's use of local parks and green spaces.

So far, the project has exceeded all of its set outcomes, outputs and milestones and has engaged 38 Volunteers and 29 Corporate Volunteers who have together donated a massive total of 813 volunteer hours to transforming unloved places in Super Output and Lower Super Output Areas into growing spaces – bringing the community together and increasing community gardening and food growing initiatives.

## Financial Report

### OCTOPUS COMMUNITY NETWORK LIMITED (A company limited by guarantee)

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2014

	Restricted Funds 2014 £	Unrestricted Funds 2014 £	Total Funds 2014 £	Total Funds 2013 £
Incoming resources				
Incoming resources from charitable activities:				
Charitable projects	97,056	28,688	125,744	142,660
Other income	-	115	115	79
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<b>97,056</b>	<b>28,803</b>	<b>125,859</b>	<b>142,739</b>
Resources expended				
Charitable projects	81,262	151	81,413	171,722
Governance costs	3,650	216	3,866	4,717
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<b>84,912</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>85,279</b>	<b>176,438</b>
Net income/(expenditure) before transfers	12,144	28,436	40,580	(33,699)
Transfers between funds	(5,013)	5,013	-	-
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	7,131	33,449	40,580	(33,699)
Total funds at 1 april 2013	31,712	825	32,537	66,236
<b>Total funds at 31 march 2014</b>	<b>38,843</b>	<b>34,274</b>	<b>73,117</b>	<b>32,537</b>