



Annual Review 2014-2015



Introduction

Islington People's Rights (IPR) is the leading agency in Islington delivering specialist welfare benefits and debt advice, with many years experience of delivering outreach sessions. IPR has operated as an independent advice centre since 1969, with a strong track record of support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in society.

IPR is continually developing and evolving its service provision to help local people maximise their incomes, enforce their rights, and develop their potential as equal citizens.

We advocate for some of the most marginalised people in our community. Most of our work takes place in community settings throughout Islington ensuring local impact and ownership of our services. We are particularly proud of our current services that focus on those with; mental health issues, disabilities, and drug and alcohol issues, as well as carers, ex-offenders, and those linked to certain Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee Organisations (BAMER) communities. These individuals particularly need the help of IPR and its experienced caseworkers. All IPR's caseworkers have over 5 years experience of specialist welfare benefits and debt work, including tribunal appeals and representation.

This Annual Review charts our progress over another challenging year for disadvantaged communities in Islington. IPR is a grassroots organisation that is working hard in Islington to alleviate the worst effects of poverty, inequality and austerity.



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IPR's Chair, Tim Aldridge addressing the 2014 AGM. Also featured are Maria Cripps, Service Manager of Cranstoun; Kristina Glenn, from the Keep The Safety Net Campaign (also Director of Cripplegate Foundation) and Gerard Omasta-Milsom, IPR Manager.

Photo by Clare Jephcott



Chair's Report

IPR has built on its strengths over the last year. We have supported more people, achieved improved outcomes and diversified our funding. These achievements did not come about by accident but through the commitment of a great team of staff and my fellow trustees.

Over the year we assisted well over 2,500 clients. Around 70% identified as being disabled, many with mental health issues.

The last 12 months have marked a period of consolidation for IPR. We have responded to funding reductions by developing new funding streams for our advice work, essential with further reductions possible. At the same time we have continued to provide a high quality service across a number of community venues with good outcomes and a high level of client satisfaction.

Our aims for the forthcoming year are to maintain and improve the quality of our activities. Thanks to a major grant from the Trust for London we have commenced delivery of advice services and capacity building to Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee organisations in the borough. This will enable IPR to support these groups and their clients more effectively.

I must of course thank all our funders without whom we would be unable to deliver the vital services that we provide; most evidently Islington Council. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the support of Nabarro LLP who have provided continued pro bono help to our clients as well as supporting IPR in other ways.

The demand for our services continues to grow, particularly in the current economic climate. Many of our beneficiaries have been affected by recent changes in the welfare system, notably in relation to disability benefits. Universal Credit is now being introduced, which will replace many benefits for those of working age. The excellent staff, trustees, volunteers and supporters of our work means that we look forward positively to 2016 and beyond.



IPR Core Service

IPR's Core Service is funded by Islington Council and provides free specialist welfare benefits and debt advice to residents of the borough. We offer a telephone advice line and appointments at both the Manor Gardens Centre in Holloway and the St Luke's Community Centre in the south of the borough. Over the year we received over 9,000 enquiries and supported 2,650 clients. We assisted over 100 residents with Welfare Benefit Appeal Tribunal cases, through submissions and representation, with a success rate of over 90%. Many others were assisted in terms of decisions being rectified and successful outcomes without the need for an actual appeal hearing.

Much of our Welfare Benefits casework currently relates to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) formerly Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and linked Work Capability Assessments, appeals and tribunals.

Our Specialist Debt Advice often overlaps with our welfare benefits casework. Many clients end up with high levels of debt as a result of problems with their benefits as well as those on low incomes. IPR assists with all aspects including Debt Relief Orders (DROs) and bankruptcy proceedings.

IPR is part of Islington Debt Coalition; a partnership of organisations led by Islington Council, working to tackle the issue of debt in Islington.

Mental Health Welfare Rights Service

This service providing specialist welfare benefits and debt advice is delivered by IPR through regular sessions of appointments at several community mental health venues. It includes weekly sessions in the venues listed on the back cover. This year we began delivering services to iCope clients, clearly a key service for many with mental health issues. We also began delivering a regular session to carers linked to mental health services, at Islington Carers Hub. Over 700 clients with mental ill health were supported in the year with their welfare rights and debt problems.

Evening Legal Advice Sessions

These take place at the St Luke's Community Centre with staff from city law firm Nabarro LLP, and at the Golden Lane campus of City University, with input from law students from City Law School.



Funded by

Access+

- ❁ Provides debt and welfare rights advice sessions to those in need within key Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) communities by working directly with community partners
- ❁ Delivers training and support to partners to develop their expertise whilst improving the overall quality of advice they offer

During the year IPR launched Access+ providing tailored support and advice sessions with local BAMER organisations. The aim is to help them improve the quality of the advice services that they offer to their communities.

Access+ is delivering fortnightly half day sessions of appointments at partner's premises, plus follow up casework to achieve successful outcomes for clients. We are working with 5 key Islington based partners; Arab Advice Bureau (AAB); Eritrean Community in the United Kingdom (ECUK); Islington Chinese Association (ICA); Islington Somali Community (ISC); and Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS).

By the end of two years we are aiming to directly benefit at least 1,500 people through the delivery of welfare benefits and debt advice. Many more people will benefit from the project indirectly as a result of the activities. The project will be evaluated to ensure that it makes a strategic contribution, well beyond Islington and the partners directly involved.

Funded by



IPR Advance

- ✿ Provides specialist support to ex-offenders leaving custody to boost resettlement with a focus on those with drug and alcohol issues
- ✿ Reduce high levels of re-offending amongst problem drug and alcohol users

Funded by City Bridge Trust IPR Advance is an innovative three year project working with ex-offenders. It is essential that those leaving custody receive specialist advice and support to ensure they receive the benefits that they are entitled to. Also many end up being chased in relation to debts built up prior to going to prison, and are not in a position to pay, and can lose their homes at this critical time. IPR Advance focuses on tackling one of the root causes of re-offending; lack of income. We focus our work on those with alcohol and drug misuse problems as they are far more likely to re-offend and return to custody.

IPR Advance delivers 3 regular weekly sessions, at; Cranstoun; Islington Drug and Alcohol Support Services (IDASS); and the Probation Office on St John's Street. It offers tailored advice sessions and casework to ex-offenders post custody, with a focus on those linked to drug and alcohol rehabilitation schemes. The sessions form part of a package of support that improves resettlement outcomes and reduces re-offending rates.

The project is delivering over 700 one-to-one appointments each year to ex-offenders, providing sessions for 500 ex-offenders per year and reducing re-offending amongst 500 problem drug and alcohol users.



*Funded by the
City Bridge Trust*

Case Studies

Nadia

Nadia suffers from severe anxiety as well as physical disabilities and is at risk of falls. She needed help and representation with an Employment and Support Allowance appeal. Nadia had been found “fit for work” through the original assessment process. Nadia was very anxious because the report from the Health Care Professional was not accurate and it had caused her to lose benefits including her Housing Benefit. We supported Nadia with her appeal and represented her at her tribunal. Once we submitted the appeal, she was awarded the basic rate of her Employment and Support Allowance and housing benefit was re-instated pending the outcome of the appeal. We obtained medical reports from her care providers and 6 months later her Tribunal took place which was successful: Nadia was awarded ESA and placed in the support group. Nadia said: *‘I had great advice and support from the IPR Caseworker and found them really helpful. I can’t think of how the service could be better.’*

Her case shows the difficulties disabled people face trying to access the benefits they are clearly entitled to. This case took many months to be resolved, in spite of the fact there was very strong medical evidence of her eligibility for disability benefits. Given the client’s mental and physical disabilities, it was key we helped her through the entire process.



Laura

Laura suffers from depression and came to IPR with Housing Benefit problems, included a large overpayment and rent arrears. This put her at risk of eviction and the stress of this was impacting on her mental health. IPR helped her to appeal the overpayment decision. It was a complex case involving business and accountancy issues as well as welfare benefits. The appeal took over a year and the case was adjourned numerous times. We gathered evidence, corresponded with the various parties and went to the tribunals with the client. Eventually the hearing took place and the outcome was positive: the Housing Benefit decision was rejected by the tribunal. As Laura was found to have no such overpayment, she did not have to pay back a large sum of money. Laura is now a lot more positive about her future and her financial situation. She said “thank you so much IPR for your help. I don’t know what I would have done without it. I can now look forward to continuing my recovery, being able to live independently without the threat of this debt hanging over me.”

Laura’s case illustrates the difficulties of disabled people trying to get back into work through self-employment and in finding relevant information and evidence.

Disability Focus

Disability Focus is a service that offers additional support for disabled residents. They have been some of the hardest hit in terms of the impact of welfare reforms. Disabled people are often confused by the scale of the benefit changes that have taken place and the lack of consistent, accessible information about them. All too often they are not receiving the help they need from JobcentrePlus and DWP staff. They simply don't have the time to help disabled people overcome the barriers they face in completing complex forms. Clients formerly receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) are now to apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Incapacity Benefit, has become Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). The eligibility criteria and application and appeal procedures have all changed however. There has been a marked increase in demand from those with learning difficulties, clearly linked to struggling to complete the necessary applications.

It is clear that this group face multiple barriers to employment, particularly those aged over 50, and who have been on disability benefits for over 5 years. In 2013, 41% of Islington residents receiving out of work benefits had been doing so for 5 years or more.

A Guardian report from 2013 looked nationally at how many individuals had come off disability benefits since the reforms. Since May 2010, 527,000 employment and support allowance claims have been closed and 414,000 found "fit for work". It seems clear that many in reality should not have been found "fit for work". It is noteworthy that in late 2014, the Government contract with Atos-Healthcare was cancelled over concerns about the quality of services provided. They were the ones responsible for assessments as to whether benefit claimants were fit to work.

It is highlighted that someone with severe disabilities has faced cuts 19 times greater than the average person; a combination of benefit, housing and social care cuts.

Disability Focus was run initially as a 6 month pilot, with funding from Islington Council, providing additional weekly appointments for residents with disabilities. Demand was very high and it delivered clear outcomes for those assisted. IPR has secured two grants from the Three Oaks Trust to enable this important service to continue. To date IPR has assisted over 300 disabled residents and additional funding is now being sought to sustain this essential service.



Who's Involved

IPR took part in the London Legal Walk for the first time in 2015, organised by the London Legal Support Trust; a pleasant evening 10km sponsored walk around Central London. £1431 was raised by the IPR team, made up of Helen Laker and Henrietta Cooke IPR Trustees, and Gerard Omasta-Milsom, the IPR Manager. Preparations are already underway for participation in the 2016 London Legal Walk on Monday 16 May 2016.



Manager

Gerard Omasta-Milsom

Casework Supervisor

Jacqueline Subryan

Specialist Caseworkers

Fereshteh Panah
John Spriggs
Gloria Hill
Michael Nwosu

Derek Jackson
Fisseha Habte-Mariam
Shalini Conn

Locum Caseworkers

Susana Arposio
Joanie Wilkinson
Maureen Bello

Richard Briden
Jayne Okacha

Administrator

Anna Reinoso

Support Workers

Trudy Tiernan
Valerie Spooner
Elaine Wallace

Trustees

Tim Aldridge (Chair)
Matt Brown (Vice Chair)
Kay Booth (Vice Chair)
Krishan Murari (Treasurer)
Michael Wüstefeld-Gray
Anna Murray
Henrietta Cooke

Christine Usher
Sandrine Palmer
Helen Laker
Arthur Ryser
Joanna Givens
Toyosi Akinfemiwa

Lindsay Owen (until November 2014)

IT Support
Accountancy
Fundraising Support

RJ Partners
Louise Alexander
Mike Butler, Pilot



Our Future

IPR continually reviews its activities and priorities to determine future strategy and ensure the relevance of its services. A key part of this approach is an annual AwayDay when we bring together trustees, staff and other stakeholders, to look at the ways in which the charity should develop going forward.

In 2015 the Strategy Day was held in July and hosted by London Metropolitan University. Against the backdrop of the Government's austerity programme and cuts the aim was to ensure that IPR retains its original purpose and continues to be sustainable. It began to develop the plans and strategy to achieve this.

Research and Social Policy Work

It was recognised that IPR's current work produces significant amounts of data about poverty and inequality in our catchment area. Based on this and our links with other organisations it was proposed that IPR would look to secure funding to take forward more formal research about the needs of those that we work with. It was agreed that we could look to potentially work with London Metropolitan University on this project, which could also mean external evaluation and social policy work.

IPR could also aim to campaign on key issues in order to influence policy makers and effect positive change for service users. IPR can use its expertise to inform public debate as well as engage directly with those responsible for making the decisions which have such an impact on so many local people's lives.

Islington Advice Alliance

Islington Advice Alliance (IAA) is made up of IPR, Islington Law Centre and Islington CAB. For 2 years, the 3 organisations were the key partners delivering the Advising Islington Together project, with funding from the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund. This undertook much valuable work in Islington, supporting training and capacitybuilding for the Advice Sector in the Borough. This supported the development of the report "It's no fun being on benefits: a study into experiences of Welfare Reform in Islington". This timely document was developed by Every Voice and Islington Community Network, and articulated the real impact of welfare reforms here in Islington. There are evidently further opportunities to apply for funding with key partners in Islington, and to undertake collaborative work for the benefit of Islington residents.



This Advising Islington Together conference on the 6 October 2015, celebrated the achievements of the project. It also acted as the launch event for the report "It's no fun being on benefits." Here Cllr Andy Hull from Islington Council speaks at that, with Megan Jarvie from Child Poverty Action Group and Chris Taylor from the Islington Community Network also on the platform.

Accounts Summary for the year ended 31 March 2015

	Total Funds 2015 £	Total Funds 2014 £
Incoming resources		
Investment income	663	624
Incoming resources from charitable activities	431,505	396,669
Total incoming resources	432,168	397,293
Resources expended		
Cost of generating funds	4,692	9,530
Charitable activities	420,782	346,717
Governance costs	4,546	10,156
Total resources expended	430,020	366,403
Net income/(expenditure)	2,148	30,890
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	165,650	134,760
Total funds carried forward	167,798	165,650
Funds of the charity		
Restricted funds		
Designated funds	15,000	20,000
Unrestricted funds	152,798	145,650

Copies of the full audited accounts for 2014/2015 are available on the Charity Commission website or from IPR

Key Funders

Islington Council	City Bridge Trust
HMP Pentonville	Richard Cloudesley's Charity
Trust for London	Three Oaks Trust
Working Links	

Thank you also to the following organisations for their support

Advice UK	City Law School
Legal Aid Agency	Nabarro LLP
Cripplegate Foundation	Manor Gardens Welfare Trust
DWP Access to Work	St Luke's Centre & Trust
LawWorks	Persula Foundation
Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust	



Photo by Clare Jephcott

Service Information

The Advice Line is open Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays 2-4pm on 020 7561 3685
Appointments are booked through the Advice Line and take place at the Manor Gardens Centre in Holloway, or St Luke's Community Centre in EC1

IPR provides outreach sessions including mental health, drug and alcohol and Probation services. Appointments can be directly booked by service users by contacting the venues direct. Most sessions are weekly, booked up to 2 weeks in advance.

Mental Health Services - appointment via centre

- * North Rehabilitation and Recovery Team, 1 Lowther Road N7 8US
- * South Rehabilitation and Recovery Team, 11 Southwood Smith Street N1 0YL
- * Complex Depression, Anxiety and Trauma (CDAT) Team, St Pancras Hospital, St Pancras Way NW1 0PE
- * Islington Crisis Resolution Team (ICRT), Highgate Mental Health Centre, Dartmouth Park Hill, N19 5NX
- * iCope, 10 Manor Gardens, London N7 6JS

Carer Services - appointments via Carers Hub

- * Islington Carers Hub c/o Age UK Islington, 6-9 Manor Gardens, London N7 6LA

Drug and Alcohol Services and Probation Services - appointment via centre

- * Cranstoun Drug Services, 28b King Henry's Walk N1 4PB
- * Islington Drug and Alcohol Specialist Services, 592 Holloway Road N7 6LB
- * Probation Office, 401 St John Street EC1V 4RW

Legal Advice Evening Session - appointment via centre

This session provides employment, housing and consumer rights advice, as well as welfare benefits and debt advice.

- * St Luke's Community Centre, 90 Central Street EC1V 8AJ - 020 7549 8181



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Company registered in England no. 1753440

