



Effective funders, thriving communities



Case study, June 2013: a local funder

Poplar HARCA: *We do things differently, 2012-13*

Poplar HARCA owns and manages more than 9,000 properties over 12 estates in and around Poplar. It prides itself on being much more than a landlord and the 2012-13 annual review describes through photographs, facts and figures and brief descriptions the range of work it undertakes. Some of that work (and the reason it is a London Funders Associate) is through funding and help in kind to many local organisations that benefit residents and to residents' own activities.

Small grants programme

Grants of £300-£3,000 are offered for local work that predominantly benefits Poplar HARCA's residents. Grants can support work related to employment, health, community safety, anti-social behaviour, youth and arts. The administration of the fund is done by East End Community Foundation (this arms'-length role offering the involvement of an experienced funder). Decisions on grants are informed by a Residents Panel whose members are drawn from the Estate Boards which help manage each of the housing estates Poplar HARCA owns. Grants can be made to community groups from outside the estates but able to show that at least 90% of the people who will benefit are Poplar HARCA residents. But grants also go to residents' groups, or even individuals with good ideas, who with a bit of support as well as funding, can pull other residents into a project. In the latter case, capacity-building support can include reviewing a good idea with a brand-new group to see how to make it work, and looking at practical issues such as checking whether liability insurance is needed or sorting out a constitution.

Supporting developing services

The Community and Neighbourhood Team has the capacity to offer funding from £10,000-£30,000 through service level agreements with local organisations needing core support or specific project funding. Most often they find that they are providing funding that helps act as a lever to bring in other funders, especially those which do not wish to be the main or sole funder of a project. Their support can often be a contribution to salaries, in conjunction with other funders. The decision to support is based on local community benefit. An example is Leaders in Community, a youth-led project to build the leadership skills of young people (13-25 years) and support them in key roles such as being school governors. Over six or seven years this project has blossomed to the point where it is now enterprisingly selling its services to other housing associations to train youth groups to use their model. Poplar HARCA's support has included money but also other help, like a connection to a Canary Wharf company, Barclaycard, which is offering all kinds of useful resources.

In supporting other local projects, many entirely run by volunteers, the Poplar HARCA team offer all sorts of practical support, depending on what they see as a group's key needs, for example in buying the time of a freelance fundraiser to help with preparing funding bids.

Developing social entrepreneurs

Start-up grants are offered where the services to be developed will be useful locally, either directly because of what they do, or through creating training and employment opportunities. Help offered includes shared facilities, e.g. through peppercorn rent or even rent-free periods in Poplar HARCA property. A recent example is Yummy Fungi, a mushroom-growing enterprise where Poplar HARCA has helped with the feasibility study into its potential profitability. Poplar HARCA is also offering start-up accommodation for the business— utilising unused building space. In return, the project is expected to employ some of the most vulnerable young people in the local community.

Impact

In all of these programmes, Poplar HARCA plays to its strengths in knowing its community intimately and being able to develop close and confident relationships with supported and funded groups. They know the value of reporting and evaluation and ask the groups they support for registers of attendance, other sorts of feedback and case studies but at the same time they have many other ways of knowing how effective groups are (including unprompted good and bad feedback from residents, of course!), so there is always a very full picture of impact and effectiveness (and of when there is a need to add some carrots or, maybe, sticks).

The published report has snapshots of a lot of this external work as well as Poplar HARCA's own projects and services. In addition, with the help of doctorate students and their supervisors at Goldsmiths University of London, Poplar HARCA has been able to use social return on investment (SROI) methodology to assess the value of its community investment and found an impressive £12 for every £1 put in. They have been inspired by these SROI results validating their community-development approach.

For more information and a hard copy of *We do things differently* (2012-13) contact

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