

# Providing the services

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## Children's Express

Children's Express encourages children and young people to express themselves and develop personally using the medium of journalism. It is open to all young people, but recruitment is targeted at disadvantaged areas and young people who are rarely given a voice. Children work in teams reporting and editing on issues ranging from racism to mobile phone theft – in fact whatever interests them, exposing them to new opinions and experiences. No expertise or particular skills are required to join but members develop a wide range of communication, IT and teamwork skills in the process.

More than 500 articles have been written and have appeared in a wide range of mainstream media, from national and local newspapers to more specialist publications. They also take on commissions from various groups including the Social Exclusion Unit where a younger perspective is needed.

The group has received a grant for administrative support. Fundraising Manager Liz Auton has found CPF very easy to deal with. "They are very approachable and supportive," she says. "The application process is easy and honest. You know where you are – they make it clear that, although supportive, you need to seek further funding elsewhere. Of course, it would be nice if they had more money to give away..."

"With other funders it can be a bit of a poker game – you don't always know what is going on."

She says CPF keeps close to what is going on but without relying on too much paperwork. And she is impressed by the "cutting edge" approach to new ideas including unpopular issues, "perhaps surprising from an old established philanthropic trust".

At the same time, Liz likes the non-stereotyping approach. She cites disadvantage: while black and minority ethnic groups are targeted, CPF also looks at others who fall through the net and who face serious challenges. She feels it is good that other disadvantaged areas, often predominantly white, have also gained recognition by CPF.

## Wandsworth & Merton Law Centre

One group that has benefited from CPF support in the past is Wandsworth & Merton Law Centre. Bob Nightingale, the Centre co-ordinator describes himself as a "big fan" of CPF.

In 1990, the Centre faced closure when its London Borough of Wandsworth funding was withdrawn. CPF and an anonymous donor provided seedcorn funding to create a new Law Centre service for Wandsworth. In that year, the Law Centre turnover was approximately £50,000 and it helped about 1,500 people. The support of City Parochial Foundation included funding and when that expired, assistance in persuading LBG to take on longer term funding. The Law Centre now serves Merton as well as Wandsworth, has an annual turnover approaching £750,000 and helped over 10,000 people last year.

Bob is also Chair of the Law Centres Federation. CPF funded the post of a Director and an administrator in the past three years. This proved

## Refugee Women's Association

Simin Azimi of Refugee Women's Association – which provides education, training, advice and guidance among its services – believes CPF and TfL are "quite unique" organisations, and others should look up to and learn from them.

"They really listen and support you, and give very clear and consistent messages," she says. "We are quite successful and have benefitted hugely from CPF. I particularly like the way the field officers get involved – it really shows care and attention."

the need for those posts to the satisfaction of the Legal Services Commission which has now agreed to take over the long term funding.

Changes that Bob would like to see in CPF funding criteria include adapting the “embargo” so that an organisation would not be excluded from applying within a year of refusal of funding in the case of an entirely different project. For instance, a failed application for an employment advice worker in Battersea should not place an embargo on an application for an education lawyer in Merton simply because the two applications derived from the same organisation.

The Law Centre has also found some difficulty with funding being restricted to charities. It is an Industrial & Provident Society and has therefore received its funding through its associated charity (Wandsworth & Merton Legal Resource Project). This is a cumbersome device and costly in administration and audit fees. He asks whether I&Ps could be directly funded.

She believes it is down to a culture of innovation that permeates throughout the organisation. “CPF takes up issues such as Employability and the Resource Centre – this is quite unusual for a funder. And when they set up a project they don’t simply leave it, but give support until it can stand on its own two feet.”

She also points out that if a project is turned down, “they don’t just say ‘no’ but make suggestions and help you find other support. This is the sort of extra activity funders don’t have to do.”

## Points of View Tower Blocks Group

Trust for London funding is directed towards groups which have at most two paid staff members or are entirely voluntary. Among the latter is Newham-based Points of View Tower Blocks Group, a resident-based community organisation set up in 1993 which has funding for running costs.

The group runs a range of activities including homework groups and an after school club, provides pick-up-from-school help and a holiday club. Associated with Newham College of Further Education and backed by SRB funding, it also provides flexible computer learning specifically directed at people who want to improve themselves and get better jobs but who have no qualifications and very often lack the confidence to take on the daunting environment of mainstream education. They can come and go as they like, working at their own speed, and can take Oxford and Cambridge Exam Board qualifications.

Chairperson of Points of View Tower Blocks Group is Karen Hall, though she describes herself as “just another volunteer – we all work together here”. She says the group would not have been able to move into their premises without the help of TfL funding.

“In a nutshell,” Karen says, “Trust for London caters for that niche of volunteers without expertise and experience but with passion, willingness and dedication. It literally gives groups a boost.”

In particular, she likes the permissive nature of the funding. “Obviously the money has to be monitored, but TfL’s monitoring is not like others. Some funders get really sticky and want to know every detail and to make sure the money is spent exactly for specific purposes. But Trust for London leaves it up to our discretion.”

The group has recently faced the dilemma of whether to take on paid staff, but at the moment has decided not to. “It might change things. We would also have to move to bigger premises outside our area, so we have decided to stay as we are.”

Sceptics might say that groups receiving grants will always praise their funders, but there can be no doubting Karen Hall’s sincerity when she says: “We love you. I’m serious. We can’t get enough of you.”

## Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations

The Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations receives CPF funding towards the costs of a London region manager. It works with a wide range of organisations many of who have also received CPF or TfL funding.

Krishna Sarada, chief executive, says that CPF comes across in a very positive light.

“Feedback from the people connected with us is about CPF’s approachability, understanding of the problems and needs, and its availability. They are not seen as putting hoops and hurdles in the way but supporting projects and the interests of groups. They are seen as having delivered.”

He adds that CEMVO research shows that CPF figures highly among funders in the support that goes directly to black and minority ethnic groups.

Krishna also has thoughts on how to take things forward. “I think all funders should look at what they have spent over a period and as what they have achieved for the people they fund. Would you say you have hit the major social problem on the head?”

What was your money designed to do?”

He points out that to a certain extent, a game goes on between funders and the funded because of the need to ensure project funding also helps contribute to core costs.

“Perhaps it is time to fund fewer organisations over a longer period and achieve more strategic outputs,” he suggests.

“There is an urgent need amongst funders to help build community assets so that we address the provision of common services to a range of organisations rather than duplicating backroom services and directing scarce resources towards such provision. Funders should try to give them longer term security.”

He says new thinking is needed in the new social climate and that CPF is in a good position to start discussions.

“CPF has empathy with the groups. They will not be seen as taking a hammer to crack a nut.”

## Keen Student Supplementary School

Keen Student Supplementary School has been in operation for 12 years in Tower Hamlets, and has benefitted from CPF funding from the start. Its support alongside other funders has helped it become fully established to the point where it has 600 students on its books and has 150 at each evening session – it also runs daytime classes. The school provides a wide range of support from Keystage through GCSE and A levels.

It is open to all, though most of the students are Bangladeshi from the immediate area.

Co-ordinator Iqbal Sharif believes the application process is “excellent. You are not asked to fill in an extensive application form. The field officers are extremely helpful and even after that it is just a three page application. It means you can concentrate on other things.”

Iqbal says that the initial support helped get the infrastructure right, since then funding has helped with the activities. “We now see CPF as friends,” he comments.