

Lewisham Main Grants Appeal - Ageing Well in Lewisham

A large part of the critique of our Main Grant application seemed to focus on the assumption that we were unprepared for financial threats and relied too heavily on the Main Grant scheme. However, since the last award to Ageing Well in 2016, the organisation has made serious attempts to attend to its financial health by reducing its spending and diversifying its funding streams. In the 2017, the Board took a hard look at its financial situation and made the difficult decision to make the then current paid administrator redundant. From August to December, we hired a project manager (Sarah Watson) on very reduced hours who was able to focus on the new lunch club at Goldsmith's and also strengthen links with Carers Lewisham. Meanwhile, the Board assessed the strengths, weaknesses, and threats to the organisation. During this time Ageing Well relied on Trustees to run the programmes along with established volunteers and paid session leaders. We also used this time to assess the viability of the various projects and save resources for the future. For the duration, given the lack of staff there was no capacity for extra grant applications and the groups were held at a "status quo" level, with several of them suffering minor declines in attendance.

In the following financial year (2018-19), it became clear that for growth and stability it was necessary to hire a paid staff member to organise the groups and research and apply for grants. The main role was reassessed and the number of paid hours aligned to make it financially feasible for the organisation. Ann Howell was hired in May 2018 to fill this role. Since having a paid organiser we have been able to:

- Resume grant applications with a 40% success rate, amounting to just over £7,000 in the past 9 months (including a recent award of £3,500 from Goldsmiths' Company Charity). We are now pursuing several slightly larger grants to further diversify our income.
- Increase uptake at current programmes by 15%
- Introduce 2 new programmes (Mindfulness & Movement, Golden Age Coffee Morning) through targeted fundraising and development of a new partnership with South Lewisham Group Practice
- Organise or participate in several successful one-off events, including Lewisham People's Day, Sydenham Fun Palace, a Summer Tea Party at St Barnabas, and our very special 20th Anniversary Celebration.
- Work with VSL and VAL to recruit several new volunteers to support our programming

Since September 2018, we have also been able to hire a part-time office worker (5 hours/week), who has been essential in keeping our financial records and progress reports up-to-date, as well as process volunteer application forms and client referrals.

In short, with paid staff we have been able to do more with less and have become more stable through diversified funding and partnerships offering complementary support. We are motivated by the 50-60 vulnerable elders we engage with each week and listening to their stories, watching their friendships blossom, and being there to support them with everyday life issues is what spurs us to continue our work.

The Board is committed to building on the momentum of this past year and continuing to serve our clients with effective and responsive programming. We have a renewed commitment of support from Trinity Laban who will continue to work with us to strengthen The Befrienders singing group and be an active partner when pursuing funding. Given our already very streamlined budget and our reasonably healthy reserves, support of even £4-5,000 from LBL for 2 years would enable us to provide services until 2021 and in the meantime search for other sources of funding and ways of further economising through creative staffing and collaboration with our partner organisations.