

An Introduction to Island House

WHO WE ARE

For over 50 years Island House has been a trusted community hub based on the Isle of Dogs in Tower Hamlets providing facilities and services for our partner tenants (Island Advice Centre, Island House Playgroup and Quaystone Church), local residents and other user groups.

Tower Hamlets is the tenth most deprived local authority in England and has the highest levels of pensioner poverty and child poverty in England. An estimated 40% of households are living below the poverty line, and the employment rate of residents is below the national average (Tower Hamlets Plan 2019-2023).

We aim to address the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual needs of those of all faiths and none, seeking to identify gaps in service provision and make partnerships to extend our impact and build a strong, healthy community. Roughly 300 people used the centre every week before the pandemic and numbers are increasing again as we seek to address loneliness and disadvantage, effectively improving the lives and prospects of our beneficiaries. Our work is especially valuable during the current cost-of-living crisis, which is the top priority in Tower Hamlets' current Strategic Plan.

OUR MOTTO

- Island House: Supporting our community for over 50 years.

OUR VISION

- Building a local community where everyone lives a healthy and fulfilling life.

OUR MISSION

- To support the wellbeing of our local people, especially the disadvantaged and marginalised, and equipping them to live healthy and fulfilling lives within a vibrant and thriving local community.

WHAT WE DO

We deliver our services according to our three community-focused themes:

- 1. Community Training** - our SKILLS project delivers an integrated selection of language, pre-employment, and computer training to disadvantaged people, often non-English speaking BME women, improving their prospects of employment or quality of living, as well as providing support and training for daily tasks that are now online, such as travel cards, pension credits, council tax reductions and energy rebates. This is especially needed during the current cost-of-living crisis.
- 2. Community Health** – offering a growing selection of activities designed to improve mental and physical wellbeing, including our projects REFRESH (offering a range of mindfulness and exercise classes to improve mental and physical health), SENIORS (providing a selection of classes and activities to address loneliness and improve health of older people), and BILLY'S PANTRY (offering emergency food bags).
- 3. Community Hub** - providing a base for our partner tenants (Island Advice Centre, Island House Playgroup and Quaystone church), regular community activities (e.g., gymnastics and yoga classes), and other individuals and community groups, as well a home for our portfolio of community projects.

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COMMUNITY TRAINING – OUR SKILLS PROJECT

Most jobs require some level of digital skills, and we believe it's very important to support people who are fearful of technology or feel excluded to gain skills, confidence, and access more opportunities. Our range of language classes, pre-employment and digital skills training have been very effective in moving people along the path towards employment, and also improving their independence and enjoyment of lives better engaged in the community and workplace. In recent months we have also provided increasing digital skills training to those who need to be better equipped for daily tasks that are now online, particularly applying for travel cards, pension credits, council tax reductions and energy rebates.

IMPACT: In 2022 our Projects Manager provided around 300 hours of one-to-one digital support to 200 clients teaching basic computer skills or supporting them with benefits claims, health appointments, or job applications, which included 45 referrals from Island Advice Centre. 10 clients regularly attended weekly digital skills classes and 29 completed accredited courses in social care. 50 clients were supported in job search, 25 with job applications, 4 clients were successfully supported into jobs and 5 into volunteer roles. 12 clients attended weekly conversations classes and in October 2022 we enrolled 19 students in 2 ESOL classes working towards a range of ESB listening, speaking, and writing exams. Not only do users gain confidence and experience in using the internet for daily tasks, but they also build supportive relationships for the future, and these changes benefit their families and the wider community. One participant responded *"I have met new friends and taken some online course with lovely Cathy. They recommended me to go to Island Advice Centre and now I am working as volunteer in Island House Community Centre. I really enjoy being there."*

COMMUNITY HEALTH – OUR REFRESH PROJECT

This project began in July 2020 as a direct response to issues we saw during the pandemic, providing a range of free classes to improve the mental, physical, and spiritual health of local people. Working with local tutors we provide a range of free classes each week, which currently include Mindfulness, 2 levels of Yoga and Boxercise.

IMPACT: In the last six months of 2022 we provided 76 free classes to 479 attendees. These were very well received, with feedback surveys demonstrating that 94% felt more positive about the future, 92% of attendees felt that their physical and mental health had improved, 90% felt more confident emotionally to deal with life, 87% made friends and increased their support network and 82% were sleeping better. One attendee commented: *"I signed up a couple of weeks ago for the boxercise classes and I can't tell you enough how great it has been. Obviously, there are physical benefits to exercise like this however I didn't realise how much I needed to join a group like this for my mental health. I can honestly say after each lesson I feel like I'm on a high for the next 48 hours. It's like my endorphins have exploded. The instructor is brilliant and the other ladies in the class are so supportive and just lovely people. Thank you for organising these lessons, they are really making a difference to my life!"*

COMMUNITY HEALTH – OUR SENIORS PROJECT

This project effectively addresses loneliness and isolation in local older people through a range of social and health activities to improve mental and physical health. Weekly activities currently include walking badminton, a choir, a craft club, a luncheon club, mindful movement sessions and monthly health workshops. Island House is in Blackwall and Cubitt Town ward, which is within the 10% most deprived areas according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015. Our neighbourhood

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is facing a local health crisis with high rates of life-limiting chronic illness in addition to an increasing level of transience resulting in social isolation. The overall population in Tower Hamlets is due to increase by 29% in less than a decade, which also means a larger proportion of older people. In Tower Hamlets healthy life expectancy is lower than the average for England, particularly amongst women, and by the time residents reach the age of 50 they are more likely to have long term health conditions which can reduce their ability to get out, be active and feel part the community.

IMPACT: In the last 6 months of 2022 we provided 77 sessions to 518 attendees. One attended said *"I really enjoyed the mindful movements class last week and came back again, they are such good fun and love that it's older people only, very empowering, and just such a good laugh. I wish there were more sessions in the week! Many thanks for organising these."*

COMMUNITY HEALTH – BILLY'S PANTRY

Although there are a couple of foodbanks on the Isle of Dogs, access can be difficult for many of our clients. In response to this we secured funding to provide bags of emergency food to those we identify as being in desperate need. We would, of course, like to do more, but are restricted by capacity.

IMPACT: Since January we have been providing up to ten bags of emergency food to those we have identified as being most in need.

OUR PRIORITIES

1. Clear Strategic Plan
2. Strengthened Board of Trustees
3. Maintain and extend current projects
4. Begin new projects to address different local needs
5. Increased partnership work
6. Greater stakeholder engagement
7. Increased marketing and publicity

OUR SUPPORT NEEDS

- Longer-term funding for projects and capital works
- Greater support from local and national stakeholders
- Increased work with local partners on shared vision
- Increased number of active volunteers